

A NEW QUEST FOR THE OLD RUSSIA

“Almost instinctively, as if facing a hard winter, the Russian people are reaching back into their past for spiritual and intellectual nourishment.”

by GEORGIE ANNE GEYER

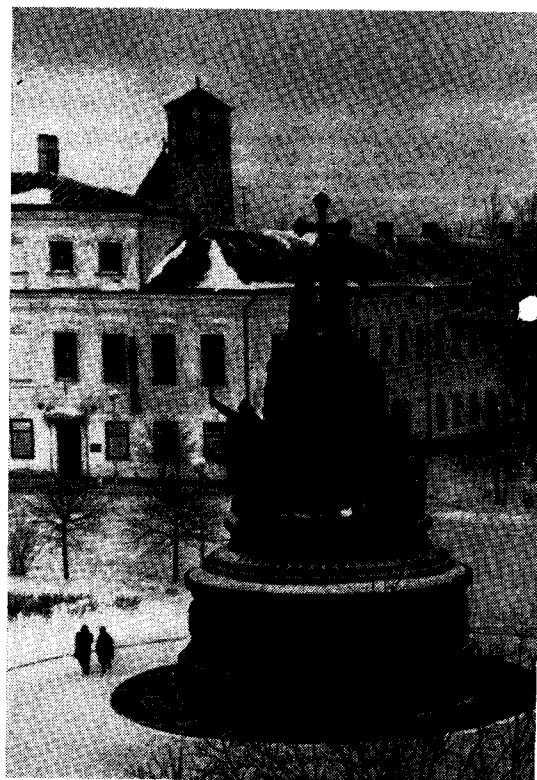
Returning after four years to the Soviet Union—the country that aimed to destroy religion and replace it with Marxist internationalism—I could at first barely believe what I was seeing. At the Smolny Institute in Leningrad, my guide pointed to the beautiful adjoining blue-and-white church and said smartly, as if it were the most normal thing in the world, “We just put the crosses back on the church this year.” The golden crosses gleamed in the sun—the same sun that, since 1917, has seen churches burned, looted, and used as pool halls, storage warehouses, and museums of atheism.

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In Novgorod, when I walked into the Cathedral of St. Sophia in that ancient city's kremlin, recorded Orthodox church music was playing, as Russian tourists sat and stood listening intently. Church music has rarely been heard in the U.S.S.R. since the Revolution.

In Moscow, I visited the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Landmarks and found that no fewer than six million Soviet citizens of all ages are now deeply engaged in the work of this *voluntary* organization to restore and save the symbols of the old Russia. “Voluntary” organizations are practically unknown in Russia.

And at *Yunost*, one of the country's most popular magazines for youth, an editor told me, “One of the differences in the young people today is they are reading the reactionary Orthodox phi-



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Renewing faith in Russia: (top left) volunteer worker with Society for the Preservation of Ancient Landmarks; (bottom left) Moscow's Cathedral of the Znamensky Monastery during restoration; (below) St. Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod, where "Orthodox church music has rarely been heard since the Revolution."

losophers from before the Revolution. The idea is they should know what they are against in these works." This has *not* been the idea of the state over the past fifty years.

What is happening? It is one of the most fascinating and broad-reaching currents of spiritual and intellectual development in Russia today: a return to Russian nationalism and even to nineteenth-century Slavophilism (what Leon Trotsky, always the internationalist, ungenerously called "the messianism of backwardness").

"It is Russian nationalism," says Dr. Edward Keenan, leading Sovietologist of the Russian Research Institute at Harvard University. "It tends to be a conservative and anti-industrial movement that has enormous affinity for the old days: for peasants and for things unspoiled by politics. And one

of the wonderful things about the old Russia, of course, is that it's not Marxist."

This phenomenon has arisen out of what many young Russian writers and even officials acknowledge as a "spiritual emptiness" in Soviet life. And, although, at least at this stage, it does not point to any return to religion in a traditional sense, it does signify a deep and profound search for values in life in a post-Marxist, industrialized, dull, and spiritually vacuous society.

Cut off from the tentative modern answers being put forward by the rest of the world, the younger Russians are searching in the only place open to them: their own past. Here the only voluptuous spiritual ideas they come on besides those of the "Westernizers," which are closed to them today, are the God-seeking ones of the nineteenth-century Slavophiles, those apocalyptic Russians who stoutly believed in the spiritual superiority of the Slavs, the moral bankruptcy of the West and the mission of Muscovy, the "third Rome."

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the "movement," if it can be called that, is that it was in no way formed or forced by the state. On the contrary, it arose spontaneously, on many levels and in many places at once, and always in an individual and voluntary manner, which obviously reflects some great need felt—across age and cultural and professional groups—by masses of Russians. Once its popularity became too obvious to ignore, it was co-opted by the Komsomol (the Young Communist League) as well

as by other agencies of the government.

If there is one watershed date of the public beginnings of this new phenomenon, it is probably 1965, when a group of the cultural and scientific intelligentsia, having become concerned about rescuing Russia's cultural heritage from the growing voraciousness of the Soviet Marxist bulldozer, started the remarkable Society for the Preservation of National Monuments. Today, with six million members (almost all from the Greater Russian peoples) who pay 30 kopecks, or about 30 cents, a year, the organization works with the government on restoration projects but actually operates on a private basis. It raises millions of rubles a year for restoration work, mostly on old churches and monasteries, inspires children to seek out historical ruins and legends among the populace, and sends students and specialists all over the country to help on projects.

The home of the society in Moscow is itself a lovely nineteenth-century monastery. Like so much of old Russia, it is somehow unfinished and neglected, but also wild and free. The courts behind the facade facing the street are lined with age-mellowed buildings and high-growing grass and wildflowers.

Inside the building, Vladimir Ivanov, a soft-spoken, white-haired art historian and a member of the society's presidium, explained the origins of the society. "People living in the big cities want to learn the sort of life of other times," he said, leaning back in his chair. "The new construction, too, is



somehow a contradiction of nature, whereas the old monasteries are allied with nature and the old churches do not deprive you of a feeling of the trees. Many of the admirers of the old monasteries are scientists. They have found that physics is not enough to satisfy man—they need something to excite the mind and the soul."

Something to excite the mind and the soul might be the description of one project in Novgorod. For the past six years, an art historian, Aleksandr Petrovich Grekov, aided by thirty-five students sent out by the society, has been piecing together 440 cases' worth of tiny pieces of frescoes from the fourteenth-century Monastery of the Savior on Kobolyov Hill, destroyed by the Nazis in World War II. The pieces were deep in the ground and have been dug up, matched, and newly placed together; soon a new church will be built to house them.

The mysticism surrounding this project is typical of the mysticism latent in all of these restoration efforts. "There is a mystic communication between the artist and this work," Grekov said, sitting in his studio amid these living ruins. "Sometimes I think I am getting a bit crazy. I will take two pieces of the frescoes and they seem to unite, to go together by themselves. The students tell me they experience the same feeling."

A similar phenomenon is happening in the field of music. Here, the stellar figure is the famous pianist Andrei Volkonsky—a romantic figure to many young Russians because he is the grandson and namesake of the immortal Prince Andrei of *War and Peace*. A commanding and memorable individual, Volkonsky six years ago launched what has now become a wildly popular renaissance of early pre-Peter the Great (and thus pre-European influence) Orthodox church music. He organized a performing group called the Madrigals, who now give a hundred totally sold-out concerts a year all over the Soviet Union. He personally had searched out and decoded the music, which had lain untouched in old libraries and monasteries.

Volkonsky, a spare young man with long black hair, sat in the National Hotel restaurant in Moscow one day recently and told me, "For thousands of people, particularly students, this ancient classical music has replaced pop music. In a way, it's a kind of social experiment."

However, perhaps nowhere is the "social experiment" or the "search" so interesting as in the literary realm. In the underground *samizdat* (literally, "self-published") press, which consists of hand-typed carbon copies passed from hand to hand, there are now

underground Slavophile "magazines," such as *Vecher* (the word the early Slavophiles used for their town meetings) and *The Word of the Nation*, the contents of which typify the blood nationalism of the extremist Slavophiles.

On a far more important level is the debate in the official press. The youth journals have been so filled of late with references to white stone churches, golden domes, and Christian saints (many portrayed for the first time since the Revolution as national heroes) that the more sedate magazine *Sovietskaya Rossiya* warned recently: "This undue emphasis on gilded cupolas detracts from the display of what Russia has achieved during fifty years of Soviet rule. . . . We must treat [patriotism and pride] from only clear Marxist positions."

The major weight of the debate, however, has proceeded in a most unlikely vehicle, the Komsomol's popular magazine *Molodaya Gvardiya* ("Young Guard"). Here, two popular young writers, Vladimir Soloukhin and Viktor Chalmayov, have sparked the debate.

In 1968, Chalmayov, the more controversial, printed an article entitled "Inevitabilities," in which he declared that the great, crude, industrialized society was getting into trouble because it lacked spiritual values. Coming from a man whose idols are Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, and Joseph Stalin and for whom Peter's merit was not that he opened a window to Europe for closed and secretive Russia but that he gave Europe a window to "virtuous Russia," it was obvious where his ideas were leading.

Not surprisingly, trouble followed. "His theme was that if it was old, then it was good," Igor Zaharoskho, an editor of *Molodaya Gvardiya*, told me in the journal's office. "He wanted to take everything old and use it today. He forgot that first you have to have a class position."

Others soon reminded him. At one point, the discussion reached such a pitch nationally that Soviet Party Chief Leonid Brezhnev warned that patriotism was good but that extremes of patriotism represented the dangers of a departure from class consciousness. But the real attack has been waged by the state's atheistic journal *Nauka i Religii* ("Science and Religion"), which attacked the implicit religiosity of Chalmayov and much of the new Slavophilism; by the Western-oriented liberals of the magazine *Novyi Mir* ("New World"), who opposed its backwardness; and by party ideologist Mikhail Suslov himself, who has talked about it as being inimical to party creed.

Here, of course, is the inevitable core of controversy in such ideas. The Soviet Union is established in its ideology

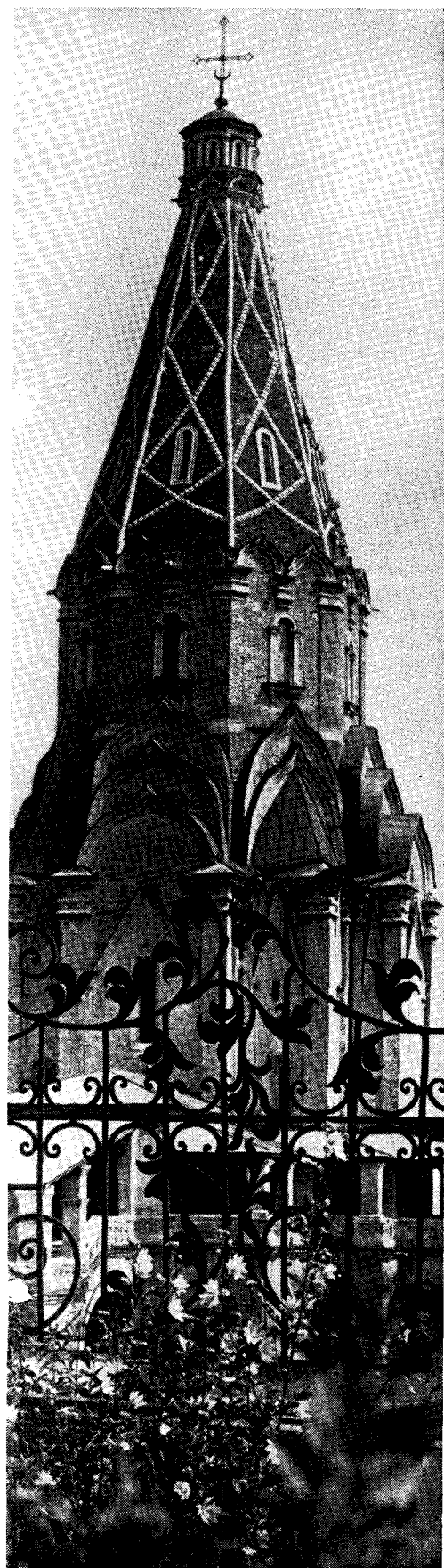
as a Marxist internationalist state, embracing all peoples and negating the need for any further search for meaning in life, while the new Slavophiles would carry the state back to the ingrown, purely Russian nationalism of the past. What's more, the Russian nationalist position brings together some of the most unlikely bedfellows, thus confusing the whole picture: Nobel Prize-winner and "out" writers Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (a believer in God and in the Russian mission), dissident writer Andrei Sinyavsky (who described himself in his trial as a Pan-Slav), and, to a lesser degree, the Nobel Prize-winning, conservative writer Mikhail Sholokhov.

But is all of this controversy really important? Will "the movement" significantly influence the development of the future of the Soviet Union, or will it simply be absorbed eventually into the massive authoritarian pillow that is the Soviet state?

The numbers of Soviets influenced by this "discussion" or by the movement itself are enormous. Aside from the members of the society, millions read the magazines involved in the debate and fifty million Soviet tourists (a number that has doubled since 1964) this year scoured the U.S.S.R.'s historic spots in their dogged Russian way. And in terms of restoration, the preservationists have been extraordinarily successful.

The society, through its persistent efforts, was able to save such valuable landmarks as the six old churches surrounding the big (4,000 rooms) new Hotel Rossiya in Moscow, the Romanov Palace, the English court built by Ivan the Terrible, and Kolomenskoye, the thirteenth-century village near Moscow that was the site of the summer residence of the Czars. "We got our backs up and fought to preserve these areas," Professor Pyotr A. Volodin, the Ministry of Culture official in charge of preservation and a leading member of the society, commented recently.

As to the literary scene, the fact that young Russians are now permitted to read such formerly forbidden pre-Revolution writers as the anti-Slavophile Vladimir Solovyov (who once wrote that "Russia must not allow herself to be seduced by those who call her saintly merely to prevent her from becoming just"), the brilliant Orthodox philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, and the ardent Slavophiles Ivan Kireyevsky and Ivan Aksakov indicates a general reaching out beyond the intellectual prison walls of the Soviet period. Since they cannot reach out around them today, they are reaching out to the past, and the Soviet state, for reasons not entirely clear in the West, is permitting them to do this. Three years ago a Russian translation of the Polish



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The newly restored sixteenth-century Church of the Ascension at Kolomenskoye, former site of the Czars' summer residence—"the preservationists have been extraordinarily successful."

author Zenon Kasidowski's *Tales from the Bible* was even issued (and immediately sold out). "The first break in the exorcism of silence surrounding the Bible in Communist countries," *Novyi Mir* editorialized.

If all these signs do not point toward a renewal of interest in religion per se (although almost surely they *would* if there were real religious freedom), what do they mean?

First, they are an indication of the intellectual and spiritual (though not the economic) vacuity of fifty years of Marxism. Materially, the country has progressed, and it has progressed to a point where new needs now come into play—needs for which the system has few answers.

Interestingly enough, the two phenomena that have developed spontaneously in the past five years—the reawakened quest for spirituality and the dissident political movement—almost exactly parallel the two major trends of the last century: the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. The first, that which looks inward to everything mystic and Russian, and the second, that which looks outward to everything rational and Western. In terms of food for real spiritual thought, clearly there has been little since then.

These phenomena have probably occurred now, not only because the material level in the U.S.S.R. today is high enough to permit such intellectual meanderings and because there is enough freedom to muddle about a little more, but also because there is a sharp resurgence of the primeval Russian fear of threats from outside. "Czechoslovakia had a lot to do with it," one Sovietologist said, referring to the threat from the West, in particular West Germany, that many Soviets genuinely (if mistakenly) felt from the 1968 liberalization there. "And China does, too. They know they're not reproducing."

He was referring to the fact that the purely Russian birth rate is so low that the Russians are not maintaining their numbers while the Soviet Asiatic populations, almost all lying dangerously on the perimeters of Mongolia and China, are reproducing at such a heady rate that some demographers estimate that in from thirty to fifty years "Russia" will be a predominantly Asiatic country. Considering these predictions, plus the increasingly obstreperous claims for more independence by various nationalities (such as the Ukrainians, the Moldavians, the Jews, the Armenians, and the Crimean Tatars), it is clear that the Russian people, who have totally controlled the levers of power since 1917, are reacting by partially retreating into their old cocoon. Almost instinctively, as if facing a hard winter, they are reaching

back into their past for spiritual and intellectual nourishment.

What Slavophilism—an archaic and amorphous philosophy by any measurement—will or could mean to modern Russia in real terms is not nearly so clear as are the reasons for its resurgence. In their time, the Slavophiles advocated emancipation of the peasants, but they totally rejected the Western-style constitutionalism and laws that the Westernizers wanted. They celebrated Russia's closed qualities: its dark peasant masses, its familial clans, and its *sobornost*, or "togetherness," in the church.

Yet, ironically, this archaic philosophy, by the historic quirk of a great leap backwards, is today serving to open the Soviet age, to break the taboos of reading books of the non-Soviet era, and to initiate a search. While the search is, at this moment, into the past, one has to remember that, muddling about in the past, the curious are also going to find the Westernizing philosophers and even the pure communists, who are quite different from the Kremlin-style of today.

"This generation is more free," the famous Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky told me one day. "It wants to find answers to everything, and it needs philosophical answers. It is more quiet than my generation. It is reading the old philosophers, whereas we read only popular writers. It is even reading Marx. In our age, not many read Marx. We read *about* Marx." He went on to say that only poetry would change his country or any other country. "If something changes, poetry has to do it," he insisted vehemently. "What else will do it? Poetry connects people with ideas. What else? The trade unions? Who? Who?"

Perhaps this sums up the situation. In its essence, the search through the old Russia is a metaphysical, poetical search, with an undoubted magic about it. It takes you into deep, dark woods that have always had a quiet sense of doom about them. It takes you to the White Sea, where the summer sun draws a white film between you and the world. And it takes you into the Dostoevskian, Tolstoyan passions of the past, and away from the fleshless, tiresome, utilitarian passions of the present. It restores beauty and mystery to a country whose system thought it could squeeze the need for them out of people.

A Russian sculptor-friend of mine, when asked why so many of his friends and colleagues were hanging icons in their apartments, said simply, "Because they're beautiful. We want things made by man, not by a machine, something that someone put love into, something human. We're tired of machines. We've become machines ourselves."

SCENARIO FOR AN AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

"Sometimes it is easier to solve ten interlocking problems simultaneously than to solve one by itself."

by HARRISON BROWN

Throughout history nations have risen from obscurity to greatness and have remained dominant for a time, only to dwindle in importance as other nations have in turn reached their own levels of greatness. Is this sequence of birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death inevitable for nations, as it is for people? Historians have debated this question for many decades but cannot agree. The temptation is strong to conclude that because nations have always died in the past, it is inevitable that they will continue to die in the future. Perhaps this is so. Yet the condition of the world is today so dramatically different from what it has ever been in the past that such a forecast might well be wrong.

When we examine the full spectrum of horrendous problems confronting America today, it is easy enough to get the feeling that we are headed on the downward path that will lead us eventually to oblivion. Yet, upon examining our assets on the positive side of the ledger—our cultural and political heritage, our industrial base, our vast resources, our capacity for innovation—I sometimes find that my pessimism, which is deep, is offset by a feeling of optimism that is difficult to describe, but that is nevertheless there. Many things are happening in America today, often too rapidly for us to fully comprehend their significance. It might well be that we have reached a turning point, that after years of downward drift we are paving the way for a new level of civilization, unprecedented in man's history.

I am convinced that the problems confronting us today, both domestic and international, are soluble from a purely technological point of view. In spite of their formidable nature, I even

suggest that they are soluble from a political point of view. Deprivation, misery, and ugliness are inexcusable, not only in the United States but in the world as a whole.

During the past few years, we in the United States have engaged in a great deal of soul-searching, and I suspect we might soon be ready to accept some major political innovations. Given leadership in both political parties determined to bring about a miracle, we can initiate an American renaissance in which our vitality and ingenuity would be mobilized for the peaceful reconstruction and revitalization of our own country and for the peaceful creation of a world in which all people could lead free and abundant lives.

A precondition of our doing this, however, is a realization that we live in a rapidly changing world. For example, not so very long ago the United States produced considerably more steel than did all other nations of the world put together. Today, the rest of the world produces three times as much steel as we do. Some persons look upon such changes as ominous. Rather, we should look upon them as being healthy as long as they are reflections of changes for the better outside the United States and not reflections of stagnation within. It is highly unlikely, however, that we can remain top dog forever. But if we handle ourselves properly, we can remain a viable and strong world force far into the future.

A second precondition for solving our problems is a realization that all of them are interlocked, with the result that they cannot be solved piecemeal. They must be approached as a *set* of problems, each of which interacts with the others. Sometimes it is easier to solve ten interlocking problems simultaneously than to solve one by itself.

A third precondition is the existence of leadership that has the determination to solve these problems and that is willing to modify institutions within the federal government so as to better

enable us to experiment, to change, and to develop new approaches.

It seems clear that the problems now confronting us are of such magnitude that major surgery is required if they are to be solved in time. There are, of course, no unique solutions. The examples of possible approaches cited below are simply illustrative of the types of surgical operations that I believe to be both necessary and possible.

In the first place, the problems of our cities, of poverty, of our environment, of health, of education are so vast that we should look forward to mobilizing our resources much as we would mobilize them in time of war. The situation is such that virtually every dollar that can be made available to this end could be absorbed. The deficit is great, and the absorptive capacity is enormous. To a certain extent, the necessary funds might come from increased taxation. But a far more effective route, considering our entire complex of problems, would be for us to engineer a dramatic decrease in our level of military expenditures.

I like to dream of a moment in history when, in a major policy statement, the President of the United States would make the following points:

For years we have tried the classical system of negotiation with respect to armaments. In large measure, negotiation has failed because, for good reason, there is no trust. The Soviet Union and the United States have made their plans on the basis that each nation expects the other to behave in the worst possible way. Perhaps the time has come when nations should take unilateral steps designed to make trust a believable concept. A series of unilateral steps designed to increase trust is not the same thing as unilateral disarmament.

It is our intention to decrease our military expenditures by a factor of two, in constant dollars, over the next

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