

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

Postcommunism *avant la lettre*: Russia's Religious Thinkers on Communism in 1918

WILLIAM VAN DEN BERCKEN

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has vindicated many critics of Marxism. But to be proven right on this issue is not necessarily a demonstration of political discernment. The failure of communism was so obvious in recent years that it had become impossible for anyone to argue its political and economic superiority seriously. Well-conceived criticisms of communist thought of an earlier date, from André Gide's *Retour de l'USSR* in the 1930s or Arthur Koestler's *The God that Failed* in the 1940s down to those of the 'nouveaux philosophes' in the 1970s, did show a measure of foresight at a time when a major part of the progressive intelligentsia in the West was still feeding on the 'opium of the intellectuals', as Raymond Aron once characterised Marxism. Penetrating though many of these observations were, they were still observations *a posteriori*, resulting from the authors' personal disillusionment with once-held beliefs.

The events of the late 1980s have not vindicated the intellectual converts of the past 70 years as much as they have vindicated the early critics who, long before the Gulag Archipelago, the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall were aware of the inhumane character of communism. I am referring to those who, right in the middle of the events of 1917, and contrary to the spirit of the age and the tide of history, were already pointing out the intrinsic impracticability and the fatal ethical implications of the communist idea of man and society. They voiced their criticism not from the sidelines, but as people who shared responsibility for the future of their country. They were scoffed at by their fellow intellectuals, and finally silenced by the new leaders. They were the *avant garde* of post-communism.

The 'Vekhi' Group

A group of thinkers published a much-discussed critique of socialism in a volume called *Vekhi (Landmarks)* in 1909, and a sequel to it in 1918, half a year after the October Revolution, *Iz glubiny (From the Depths)*. These constituted the first criticism of communism in Russia and of the Soviet ideology *in statu nascendi*. The analysis demonstrated the untenability of communism, both economically and ethically, and also offered an alternative view of society based on Christian-human values and traditional civic virtues.

These thinkers are often referred to as the 'Vekhi group', after their 1909 book. Among them were some of the most renowned figures of Russian intellectual history, such as the philosophers Nikolai Berdyayev and Semen Frank, the economist and

later theologian Sergei Bulgakov, and the political theorist Petr Struve. In the 1890s they had belonged to the so-called 'Legal Marxists': young intellectuals who expressed sympathy with Marxism in their university lectures and publications. Lenin had no use for them, because of their critical, academic approach. Struve had also drafted the first Russian Social-Democratic manifesto in 1898, and later it was he who came in for much of Lenin's scorn. These thinkers' association with Marx was short-lived: in 1902, together with eight others, they published a series of articles in a volume entitled *Problemy idealizma (Problems of Idealism)*, in which they dissociated themselves from Marx's philosophical positivism and economic determinism. At this stage their involvement was still largely academic, without any practical social implications.

Social and political aspects came to the fore in 1909, when Berdyayev, Bulgakov, Frank, Struve and three others collaborated on *Vekhi*. The book created a considerable stir. Reading *Vekhi* one is immediately struck by the present-day relevance of the ideas of its authors. It is really quite remarkable how much of the ethical and philosophical criticism of *Vekhi* anticipates modern Soviet criticism of communism. The book upholds values such as the deideologisation of philosophy and science, the universal nature of ethical and religious norms, the autonomy of the arts and the necessity of the rule of law, which are all values that have rediscovered in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev.

The authors of *Vekhi* are time and again striving to expose the illusion that structural social change will inevitably result in man's moral advancement, and they warn of the ethical consequences of the negation of individual conscience and personal responsibility. They were, in fact, aware of what the spiritual and psychological impact would be of a materialistic ideology that gave exclusive significance to what may be called 'social engineering'. In those days, however, on the eve of the communist revolution, their analysis convinced few in the Russian intelligentsia, and until very recently the authors of *Vekhi* remained a target for vicious attacks in the Soviet Union, stigmatised as they had been by Lenin himself.

From the Depths

Although the commotion caused by the *Vekhi* authors in Russian society in 1909 was considerable, it had all but ebbed away a year later. The subject was not to be taken up again until after the Revolution, in 1918, and by that time the political situation had changed to the extent that a public debate in newspapers and magazines was no longer possible.

The Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 and the economic chaos and terror that ensued confirmed the worst fears of the *Vekhi* authors. The core of this group, Struve, Berdyayev, Bulgakov and Frank, together with seven sympathisers, once more put down their ideas in a collection of essays called *Iz glubiny (From the Depths)*. The title was taken from the first line of a psalm printed on the title page as a motto, in both Church Slavonic and Latin: *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine*. In the preface the authors confirmed their Christian outlook.

Iz glubiny caused nothing near the sensation of *Vekhi*. The authors had great difficulty in even getting it printed, and it was not commercially distributed. When employees of the publishing firm started handing out copies on their own initiative in 1921, the greater part of the edition was confiscated by the communist authorities and disappeared. Most of the authors were among those members of the intelligentsia forcibly exiled to the West in 1922. Here Struve, Berdyayev and Bulgakov published their contributions to *Iz glubiny* separately, but the book as a whole remained

unknown until 1967, when a reprint appeared in Paris.¹

At that time, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian revolution, the publisher remarked in a preface that the book had lost none of its original relevance. The book became a source of inspiration for the dissident movement, and in 1974 led to a new collective work by spiritual descendents of the authors of *Iz glubiny*, one of whom was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This work, entitled *Iz-pod glyb (From under the Rubble)*, in its turn gave rise to an extensive political and cultural debate in Russian *samizdat* on the fate of Russia.

Political Stance

The authors of *Iz glubiny* did not speak on behalf of any political party, church or social group, but as individual citizens motivated by a shared concern about Russia's present situation and future. Politically one might call them 'liberal conservatives' (just to the right of centre). They felt closest to the Constitutional Democrats, a moderate liberal party that advocated reforming Russian society gradually. Some of the authors of *Iz glubiny* had been in the Duma (the first Russian parliament) or had been active in the liberal press. Struve was the only full-blooded politician among them. After supporting Marxist social democracy for some years, he became a confirmed conservative; but throughout he maintained a critical or 'liberal' stance. As Richard Pipes put it aptly in his standard work on Struve, he was 'liberal on the left' and 'liberal on the right' respectively.

The terms 'liberal conservative' or 'conservative liberal' do indeed qualify as adequate descriptions of the *Vekhi* group. These terms clearly indicate the aversion these men felt to revolution, while at the same time distinguishing them from the reactionary conservative movements so conspicuous in Russia at the beginning of the century.

The *Vekhi* thinkers advocated a Christian humanist view of society, which was, however, not fully translated on to the political plane: they did not offer any concrete suggestions about Christian party politics. In the contemporary political context it would hardly have been realistic to do so.

The *Vekhi* writers did not engage in party polemics. They were not anticommunist in the ideological sense that this word later acquired. Rather they stood above party politics. To them it was clear that the Marxist understanding of man would ultimately prove unproductive and they advocated a return to the universal human values which had upheld civilisation for centuries. Communism to them was the negation of these traditional values, and a breach with civilisation.

That the authors were engaging in general ideological criticism, rather than partisan polemics, is also borne out by the fact that they were not addressing the Communist Party of Russia (called the Bolshevik Party until March 1918), but the 'revolutionary intelligentsia'. This included not only the Russian Marxists but also other left-wing intellectuals who advocated a radical form of socialism, such as populism (an indigenous Russian form of socialism) and anarchism.

The term 'socialism' in *Iz glubiny* refers first and foremost to Russian Marxism, communism, because the October Revolution and the first six months of communist power were what provided the impetus for the writing of the book. For all their censure of socialism, the authors of *Iz glubiny* did have an occasional word of praise for the western Social-Democratic tradition of Bernstein and others.

Iz glubiny is not a very systematic book and does not make as balanced an impression as *Vekhi*, but in the various contributions it is possible to distinguish six aspects

of the socialist view of man and society that are subjected to criticism. These are: (1) the illusory image of man; (2) the egalitarian concept of justice; (3) the utopian attitude of mind; (4) the negation of standards of law; (5) the rejection of religion; (6) the rejection of patriotism. These topics are not dealt with separately by the authors; neither can they always be separated from one another. Occasionally an author may favour a certain theme over others. Apart from the four *Vekhi* thinkers already mentioned, the contributors to *Iz glubiny* were: S. Askol'dov, V. Ivanov, A. Izgoyev, S. Kotlyarevsky, V. Murav'yev, P. Novgorodtsev and I. Pokrovsky. In the following analysis some of these themes will be dealt with, mainly on the basis of the contributions of the less well known authors of *Iz glubiny*: Izgoyev, Novgorodtsev, Pokrovsky and Askol'dov. The four classical thinkers — Berdyayev, Bulgakov, Frank and Struve — have expressed their ideas in many other publications, and are well known in the West.

In summarising the arguments of these authors I will strive to retain the terminology they use. If it sounds modern this is due not to my interpretation but to the power of the original text. I will not adhere to the original order of the authors' thoughts because, as I said before, the articles are not rigidly structured. Wherever a comment is added this will be obvious from the context.

An Illusory Concept of Man

The authors of *Iz glubiny* frequently point out the discrepancy between the idealistic pathos of socialism on the one hand, and socialism's materialistic understanding of the motivation of human behaviour on the other. What concerns them is not so much inconsistency between theory and practice as the unrealistic anthropological presuppositions of socialism. They appreciate western socialism for its realistic acceptance of 'bourgeois' elements, such as reformism, humanism, objective standards of law, patriotism and the admissibility of private property. They sometimes call this socialism a 'non-socialist socialism'.

Aleksandr Izgoyev begins his contribution 'Sotsializm, kul'tura i bol'shevizm' ('Socialism, culture and bolshevism') with the observation that the Russian socialists have completely misunderstood human nature and what motivates it, as well as the basics of social organisation. Events have proved the fiasco of the socio-economic and psychological ideas of socialism. Besides the term 'bankruptcy of the revolution', Izgoyev uses the expressions 'crash of the system' and 'collapse of the state'.

The Russian revolutionary intelligentsia has deformed European culture, including western socialist ideas, on the grounds that these are merely 'bourgeois' socialism. But it was precisely this bourgeois aspect that made socialism creative in Europe: 'That which is creative in European socialism is essentially bourgeois, and based on ideas that are in contradiction with socialism', says Izgoyev. European socialism acknowledges the right to private property and the national sentiments of workers.

Russian socialism has discarded many of the positive elements in western socialism, such as independent trade unions and workers' cooperatives, publishing and educational activities, and the parliamentary and social legislative experience that the German Social Democrats, for example, had gained. The Russians' aversion to this bourgeois socialism has led them to strive to create an egalitarian society. The result has been that levels of education, science and talent have dropped significantly, and religion has ceased to function as the basis of culture. This very impact of revolutionary socialism, says Izgoyev, had already been foreseen by Dostoyevsky in his novel *The Devils* (1871). It is noteworthy that this book of Dostoyevsky's is

repeatedly referred to by several of the *Iz glubiny* authors. Berdyayev in particular gives a penetrating interpretation of the *The Devils* ('a prophetic book') in the light of the revolution of 1917. *The Devils* was the first Russian critique of socialism in literary form. It depicts the levelling and dehumanising effects of the totalitarian concept of freedom. As such the book foreshadows the literary portrayals of communist anti-Utopia by Yevgeni Zamyatin (1921) and George Orwell (1948). At present – after 70 years of official oblivion – *The Devils* is Dostoyevsky's most popular novel in Russia.

Izgoeyev goes on to argue that socialism has reduced people to animals in a herd, or rather in a pack, fighting over the spoils like wolves. Socialism has set people against each other by dividing them into bourgeois and proletarians, and by institutionalising the practice of informing on one's fellow-citizens. For countless victims to be liquidated it was enough that they be named as exploiters or identified as rich men. All the sentimental verbiage about socialist and proletarian solidarity, about working together for the collective cause, has merely camouflaged primeval cannibalism. Freed of religion, socialist man has not entered into a state of reason, freedom and equality, but from a moral point of view has fallen back to the stage of the caveman.

The Marxist idea of man is fallacious in yet another respect. Not only is Marxism completely incorrect about the material motivation of human endeavour, it has also completely misjudged people's spiritual needs. The Marxist campaign against religion and national sentiments has produced a social vacuum. These phenomena have not been replaced by a legitimate individualism but rather by what Izgoeyev calls an anti-social solipsism that works according to the principle of 'every man for himself'.

This is an attitude that is aggravated by the antagonism of the class struggle. Izgoeyev attacks the Marxist concept of 'classes' head on. The division of society into classes is a philosophical fiction with fatal social consequences. It is a fiction because basically the workers are just as bourgeois as the bourgeois themselves: they are motivated by the same material stimuli. It is fatal because new groups of people are continually being branded as bourgeois and condemned as 'enemies of the people'. First it was businessmen, then the cooperatives, and after that the intellectuals and the farmers.

Psychologically, Izgoeyev goes on, there is no distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat: both groups are motivated by the same fundamental selfishness, which is in fact an essential aspect of human individuality. This trait, which is viewed by Marxism as typically bourgeois, is a universal human property, the dynamic force of life. What is essential is that this dynamic human force should be channelled in a sensible way, and this is exactly what history has done.

As well as discussing the ethical implications of the concept of antagonistic classes, Izgoeyev also points out its fatal influence on science and economics. The distinction between bourgeois science and proletarian science has led to a ludicrous situation in the universities. The reforms the socialists have proposed in higher education, including the introduction of obligatory ideological subjects, are a monument to human stupidity.

Izgoeyev is very specific about the negative influence of Marx on economic activity in Russia. Long after Marx's economic theory has been discarded by European and American academics, says Izgoeyev, it is here venerated as the pinnacle of wisdom. Only bitter experience has been able to teach us that socialising production is impossible, that Marx's concept of the surplus value of labour is pure invention, an unrealistic abstraction, and that the living realities of supply and demand are what set realistic prices. Thus in the only field where socialism claims to be scientific, its lack

of scientific method has been mercilessly demonstrated.

Izgojev cites facts and figures from the Russia of his day in order to prove his allegation that the most serious failure of socialism is in the economic sphere. The economic stupidities of the bolsheviks are many times more serious than those of the *ancien régime*, which had merely a rather muddled understanding of the subject. If millions of people have not yet been driven into mass famine by the socialist experiment, we owe this to the existence of an unofficial economy that does work according to bourgeois economic laws.

At the end of his article Izgojev rejects the argument – already heard in his day – that the failure of socialism in Russia is due solely to the mistakes and crimes of the bolsheviks, and that socialism itself is not to blame. Izgojev considers this to be a cowardly argument, and would rather commend the bolsheviks for their honesty in putting their socialist ideas into practice. It is this ‘socialism in practice’ that counts. There can be no other socialism, and this is the terrible lesson that Russia teaches us.

This is not his final word, however. What follows is an appeal to retain that which is good in socialism: gradual socio-economic reform, and a democratic humanism rooted in Christianity. These positive aspects, according to Izgojev, are what define socialism: anything else is nothing but literary fancy, with no basis in human nature.

The article by Semen Frank adopts the same kind of roundabout route in order to arrive at an appreciation of socialism. Frank claims that in the West socialism has not been as destructive as in Russia – has even led to improved conditions – because it has absorbed conservative elements. He calls this a non-socialist socialism. In the West socialism seems victorious, but really it has been vanquished from within through its assimilation of the existing political, ethical and scientific culture. In Russia, on the other hand, according to Frank, the socialist ideal has been ruined through simplicity and rigidity. This so-called pure socialism has in practice come down to little more than an appeal to the materialistic instincts common to all men. For all its pathos suggesting otherwise, socialism for Frank is just the satisfaction of material demands under another name. If this universal human materialism is not regulated by traditional ethical, religious, juridical and national-cultural values, human selfishness is given free rein.

In Petr Struve’s article we find a similarly sobering interpretation of socialism. He maintains that the socialist ideology does not derive its popularity with the masses from its abstract ideals of community and solidarity, but from its promises about the redistribution of wealth. It may sound paradoxical, says Struve, but so-called bourgeois structures like the state, the army, and the church are in fact better guarantees for the interests of society as a whole than socialism with its revolution and civil war.

Struve puts the case more plainly than his fellow authors, speaking of the army, the state and the church where the others speak of traditional values. But all the authors agree that at the core of socialist thought is an essentially illusory image of man. It is worthy of note that one of the fiercest critics of communism today, Aleksandr Zinov’ev, a satirist spiritually very distant from the Christian-inspired writers in *Iz glubiny*, likewise maintains that communism has given free rein to universal human selfishness by removing traditional ethical, legal, cultural and religious checks.

The Curse of Russia

The subject of Iosif Pokrovsky’s contribution is especially relevant to present-day Russia: the transition from a dictatorship to a parliamentary form of government.

This is difficult for Russia, according to Pokrovsky, since Russia has not developed any political traditions along constitutional lines. For this reason the revolution of 1917 precipitated the country from one dictatorship into another. Russia has always been ruled with a rod of iron. This is what the author calls the curse of Russia, referring to an ancient legend according to which Russia incurred the wrath of the pagan god Perun at the beginning of its Christian history.

According to Pokrovsky the transition to a parliamentary state involves cultivating a totally different concept of authority. Under the monarchy authority was based on irrational concepts and laws were made for psychological effect rather than juridical effectiveness. In a parliamentary state authority is freed of its mystique, and given a rational foundation in an *esprit critique*, which in its turn is fostered by civil and juridical awareness.

Such awareness has yet to be developed in Russia. The intelligentsia, however, with whom such a development should originate, has never been particularly interested in questions of law. The intelligentsia tended to dwell on abstract ethical concepts, which were supposed to make any legal system unnecessary. This is certainly true of Russian anarchism, the only movement in which Russian thinkers (Bakunin, Kropotkin, Tolstoy) made an original contribution to the history of ideas. Meanwhile, the Marxists among the intelligentsia have also consistently denied the autonomous status of law, and consequently also the necessity for fixed juridical norms and an independent juridical administration. Class interests, after all, transcend any objective notion of justice.

Pokrovsky points out the far-reaching socio-psychological consequences of this negation of justice. Spurred on by simplistic revolutionary slogans, the people allow themselves to be motivated by purely selfish impulses; at the same time neither the life nor the property of the individual has adequate legal protection. The Marxist concept of justice and morality as merely part of the ideological superstructure has eradicated any sense of objective, non-partisan standards. Other spiritual categories have likewise lost their meaning, such as personal conscience, honour, the search for truth – in fact all the distinguishing features of human intellect and civilisation.

Taken aback by the devastating impact of socialism in this respect, Pokrovsky notes, the moderates among the revolutionary intelligentsia have begun retracing their steps, and concepts such as fatherland, order and working discipline are in use again. As it turns out, however, the people are more effectively rallied by means of calls for the confiscation of other people's property or the execution of class enemies than by appeals for order.

Izgojev, too, examines the consequences of the absence of legal guarantees, of rampant confiscation of property and of the disappearance of the entrepreneurial spirit. The denouncing of common law as bourgeois justice has led to a revival of the *lex talionis*, with harsh penalties and random executions. Socialism, says Izgojev, with its special laws and its unequal treatment of citizens, has become a return to despotism, accompanied by verbal sentimentalities about freedom, equality and brotherhood.

After diagnosing the crisis in Russia as being chiefly caused by a lack of juridical awareness, Pokrovsky discusses the necessity for the socialist intelligentsia to develop a new legality, providing legal guarantees for the interests of capitalists and landowners as well as of workers and farmers. Clashing interests, inevitable in any society, should not be resolved by class struggle, but through a non-partisan legal order that reflects the rights of all participating groups.

Pokrovsky considers this legal order necessary not only to settle social conflicts but

also for the physical and spiritual well-being of individual people. Even if everybody conducted his life according to his own moral impulses – this idealistic supposition underlies anarchism – the multiple moral aims could still clash. Not everyone has the same idea of morality and ethics. Man may be sacred, but everyone has his own idea of sanctity. A legal system is quite simply a practical necessity.

Pokrovsky ends his essay without any illusions about the present. ‘How many tragic and shameful pages in our history’, he comments, ‘are due to our inability to get along with each other reasonably. . . . We may be writing the most shameful page at this very moment.’ He points to the despair and disintegration to which state and society are prone in Russia.

Nevertheless, Pokrovsky refuses to believe that this is the end of Russia. There will be a change for the better. But it will take ‘centuries to repair what has been destroyed these few days and months’. Some pages earlier he produces a slightly more optimistic formulation: ‘to wipe out the months of sin, long decades of repentance and laborious reparations will be needed’.

The Religious Dimension

The subjects so far dealt with are all aspects of a secular criticism of socialism. If criticism of socialism is possible from an ethical or political-cultural perspective, however, it goes without saying that there will be plenty to be said on the subject from an explicitly religious point of view. Although most of the authors in *Iz glubiny* do touch on the religious aspect, it is only Askol’dov and Murav’yev who select it as their central theme.

Valerian Murav’yev does not really do much more than repeat the traditional slavophile commonplaces, denouncing western influences, but Sergei Askol’dov offers an original religious analysis. He is in search of ‘the religious significance of the Russian revolution’, as his title tells us. He also uses slavophile arguments and his concept of the devil may appear religiously archaic, but his argument still leads to a critical evaluation of the church’s stance on social questions.

Askol’dov sees positive aspects to the separation of church and state brought about by the Revolution. This breach of the ‘organic unity of society’ he regards as a necessary illness that society has to go through in order to emerge the stronger for it. The catastrophic course this process has taken in Russia is due, according to Askol’dov, to an inability to cope with revolution. This inability, in its turn, is caused by the absence of a humanistic culture in Russia, which in Askol’dov’s definition is ‘science, ethics, arts, social awareness and technology that exist independently from religion; those things that distinguish man from animal’. Russian history is rich in examples of extreme sanctity and extreme bestiality, but has lacked the moderate human cultural dimension in between. Askol’dov goes on to illustrate this contention with slavophile arguments, showing that Russia is both holy and demonic, both Christian and Satanic, both mutinous and submissive. There is no lack of good impulses in Russia, but they tend to lead to contrary results.

A similarly contradictory nature is exhibited by the Orthodox Church. As a religious institution it should have constituted the unifying force in society, but instead became itself the source of religious decline. Its organisation through its hierarchy was tied up with the existing political order to such an extent that the church lost its role as the conscience of society. The church should have kept to a middle course between the intrinsically non-religious political scene and total political abstinence. As it was, the latter amounted to tacit approval of the politics of the

autocracy. Now there is a rift in the church between two extremes. On the one hand there is the hierarchy's conservatism, which, in an effort to fulfil the mystical role of the church, is actually slavishly blessing the current political structure. On the other hand a small modernist movement, like a fresh stream, proved incapable of stirring up the stagnant lake of clerical narrow-mindedness, and finally petered out in non-religious progressive-liberal politics. The church leadership is incapable of combining its mystical vocation with the creative approach of contemporary social reform, which is why the inner decay of the church goes on. The clearest example of this decay is Rasputin, who symbolises the spiritual decline of Holy Russia.

While Askol'dov acknowledges that an affirmation of the primacy of religious experience over religious activism is a specific feature of Orthodoxy, he considers it to have been deformed in the Russian state church into submission in the face of evil. The church used to bear serfdom like a cross, but it never resisted it. The church taught that the virtue of tens of millions of serfs would eradicate the sins of a few thousand exploiters. Servile submission was in effect regarded as a Christian virtue and this precluded the development in Russia of an awareness that human beings have rights they ought to claim. The church realised that serfdom was an anomaly but also justified it on religious grounds. This in Askol'dov's view is a typical expression of that 'holy-bestial Russia' that lacks the humanist dimension. The government and the church have long been misguided by this false religiosity. Only Alexander II, who abolished serfdom, acted correctly. Among Christian thinkers it was the philosopher Vladimir Solov'yev who systematically expounded the ethical significance of Christianity and the social task of the church; but the Russian Orthodox Church failed to respond to Solov'yev's prophetic vision.

Askol'dov claims that it was this failure that gave the Revolution its antireligious character. At the same time, however, he criticises the revolutionary intelligentsia for its disregard of religion and for showing the same lack of humanist understanding as the church. The intelligentsia was quite right to criticise the old order, with which the church had been implicated. But instead of going to the heart of the matter – the bestial-holy ambivalence in the Russian character – the intelligentsia had turned against Christianity as such. It had therefore sought only external, structural remedies rather than internal ones. Here, according to Askol'dov, we see the result of the underdevelopment of humanism in Russia: the humanism of the liberal intelligentsia scarcely reached beyond primitive materialistic concepts and this intelligentsia was therefore incapable of appreciating Solov'yev's religious humanism. And so it was that the Revolution achieved an incomplete victory over evil. The Revolution has failed. The wrongs of yesterday have been replaced by the wrongs of today, the former dictatorship by a new one. The human values asserted in the Revolution of February were lost completely in the October Revolution.

Askol'dov does not conclude from his exposition that there are fundamental objections to socialism as such: on the contrary, socialism is part of humanism. What is required is that a religious element should be added to it. He then proceeds to outline the ways in which Christian socialism would differ from revolutionary socialism.

The socialist sense of justice derives from utilitarian or biological-humanist principles: society functions better without poverty. Laws must enforce an equal distribution of goods by all necessary means. Socialism strives for equality by taking from the rich, and addresses its egalitarian rhetoric to the poor. Christianity, on the other hand, exhorts the rich of their own accord to share their affluence with the poor. The desired motivation here is not solely utilitarian, but also religious, in that wealth can never be an ultimate goal for a religious man. The practical outcome will be

similar, but the inner impulses leading to the achievement of this outcome will be the exact opposite.

The religiously motivated impulse will thus add a new dimension to social justice: the transcending of materialist craving and selfishness. If social justice is founded solely on self-assertiveness, however, the instinct of self-preservation will be given free rein, involving such phenomena as vengeance, hatred and greed. Here Askol'dov arrives at a position very similar to that adopted by the other authors in *Iz glubiny*, the idea that socialism fuels envy and hatred. According to Askol'dov the hatred that inheres in the class struggle is one of the most pernicious features of the Revolution.

Askol'dov employs terms such as 'devil' and 'antichrist' when referring to the most fundamental evil of revolutionary socialism. It is an evil that consists in striving to replace belief in the Kingdom of God – the aim of which is not material reward however fairly distributed – by belief in the earthly kingdom of utilitarianism. This is in fact what has happened to socialism in Russia: it has opposed God and become an instrument of the antichrist. And Askol'dov names Lenin as the personification of this anti-Christian tendency: as, in fact, the antichrist.

Askol'dov assesses socialism in Russia as a failure not only in Christian terms, but also on its own terms: for this is a socialism that has also fallen short of its own utilitarian aims. It has achieved only chaos. It is not so much the Revolution's counterproductivity in social and economic terms that Askol'dov censures as the worst evil, however – and not even the brutalities committed by the bolsheviks during the Revolution. Such atrocities are part and parcel of the historical process, which is cruel by nature. Man's destiny is never shaped by the white gloves of ethical innocence, Askol'dov says. The evil of the Russian Revolution consists in the lies and the wilful deception with which the bolsheviks have sought to justify their savagery. This relentless misrepresentation has done more harm than the cruelties themselves. It has damaged the consciousness of the people. 'Seen from this angle the millions of pamphlets, papers and exhortations that were circulated by the proletarian demagogues in the year of the Revolution are without historical precedent in terms of the intensity and quality of their spiritual poison.' It is an intensity that Askol'dov compares to religious fanaticism, turned inside out and directed against religion itself.

For Askol'dov this is the most important reason for rejecting bolshevist socialism. Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, one may conclude that Askol'dov's criticism does seem to have gone to the heart of the failure of communist ideology, from both the religious and the humanist point of view. His judgment, formulated after one year of communism, still holds true 74 years later. It is hardly surprising that resisting the dominion of the lie was to be the basic spiritual premise of later critics of the communist system, from Askol'dov's kindred spirit Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who exhorted his fellow countrymen 'no longer to live the lie', to the humanist Václav Havel and his 'attempt to live in truth'.

Patriotism

The themes in *Iz glubiny* discussed so far are of a socio-philosophical rather than of a strictly ideological nature. The socio-philosophical premises formulated by the authors provide the basis for such civic virtues as a sense of responsibility, political tolerance, the entrepreneurial spirit, respect for the legal order and cultural awareness. They belong to that category of phenomena that in the last years of Soviet Union were often called 'universal human values', and are deemed to be indispensable preconditions for any civilisation.

There is, however, yet another social virtue that the authors of *Iz glubiny* strongly advocate, and that is love for one's country, or patriotism. This is a more ideological theme. Patriotism is a rather ambivalent concept, which can all too easily be reduced to nationalism. It is also the most controversial feature of post-communist thought in the former Soviet Union. Now that the nationalist alternative in Russia is growing stronger it is worth our while to look at how the first critics of communism handled the concept of the fatherland.

The theme of patriotism surfaces in most of the contributions to *Iz glubiny* with and without a religious dimension. The latter is mentioned quite explicitly by Murav'yev and Askol'dov. Before going into the differences to be found among the various authors we will give a general characterisation of their patriotism.

The patriotism in *Iz glubiny* is a romantic russophile self-awareness. It is not aggressive and has nothing to do with a sense of ethnic exclusivity. It opposes the racism of the Black Hundreds, an extreme chauvinist and antisemitic movement in the latter days of tsarist Russia, comparable with the *Pamyat'* movement in contemporary Russia. As well as being non-aggressive and non-racial this patriotism displays no xenophobia or antiwesternism. The slavophile understanding places Orthodox Russia within a wider European context of Christian culture, which the communists – for all their internationalism – reject. It is significant that the authors of *Iz glubiny* constantly refer to Chaadayev, Dostoyevsky and Solov'yev as examples. In doing so they are asserting a balance between Eastern and Western Christianity, for Chaadayev and Solov'yev are perhaps the most 'European' and ecumenically minded thinkers in Russian history, while Dostoyevsky is quoted by the authors for his antisocialism rather than for his pan-slavism.

To the authors of *Iz glubiny* the Christian religion is, in its Russian Orthodox form, the basis of a patriotic sense of identity. On the other hand, as a world religion and source of European civilisation, it is a safeguard against narrow-minded nationalism.

The patriotism of the *Iz glubiny* thinkers is not to be explained simply by their slavophile background. It is also closely related to their criticism of two aspects of socialism: the antagonistic view of society and the idea of proletarian internationalism. As to the former, we have already seen that the authors repeatedly criticise the Marxist division of society into antagonistic classes and the policy of branding one population group after another as 'enemies of the people'. Patriotism, on the other hand, starts out from an organic concept of society and views the nation as a collective personality. Social development, too, is regarded as a process of organic growth, as an evolution, whereas a revolution disrupts growth. This concept of the nation as an organic whole is the slavophile version of the nationalism that sprang from European Romanticism.

In line with this concept of the nation as a living entity, the authors of *Iz glubiny* point out the impersonal character of socialist collectivism. Here it is not individuals that count, but 'the class', 'the proletariat', 'the working masses', 'the people'. Man is primarily viewed as a representative of a particular group or as its enemy. The authors take issue with the view that society consists of stray atoms and anonymous groupings, of human material that can be rearranged through structural procedures and changed in mechanistic ways. Social innovation requires more than structural changes applied from without. It requires individual moral self-education on the part of the people. This kind of criticism of the socialist collectivist concept of man is formulated several times in *Iz glubiny* but it does not receive particular elaboration. This had already been done extensively in the symposium *Vekhi* of 1909.

The other reason why those authors lay stress on patriotism is to be found in the

negation of the concept of fatherland by the Marxists of the day. ('Workers have no fatherland'). The bolsheviks particularly had nothing but contempt for Russian history and national culture. The authors of *Iz glubiny* do not accept the concept of a cultureless 'proletarian internationalism', advocating instead the cultivation of a national, historical and cultural sense of identity. This is the context in which we must understand terms like 'cosmopolitanism' and 'disloyalty to the state', which the revolutionary intellectuals were charged with: the authors of *Iz glubiny* use expressions that later, under Stalin, were to acquire sinister connotations; but the motivation of the *Iz glubiny* authors, themselves cosmopolitan in their deep knowledge and propagation of European culture, was of course entirely different from that of Stalin. Their antic cosmopolitanism was directed against the negation of national values by the socialist intelligentsia of the day.

The antihistorical bias of Russian communism continued after the October Revolution. There was a shift towards bombastic patriotism at the end of the 1920s; this was not Russian patriotism, however, but 'Soviet patriotism', an imperialistic form of nationalism that squarely rejected the Russian religious and spiritual values that the authors of *Iz glubiny* were so concerned to promote. Russian Marxism was a break with Russian history and considered itself to articulate the final phase in world history. Now that communism itself has come to an end, history is open again. The post-communism nationalism that is coming to the fore in Russia is thus a return to history, picking up the thread where it was severed 75 years ago.

Variations on the Theme

The question arises as to whether the nationalist alternative to the socialist Utopia advanced by the authors of *Iz glubiny* is not itself just another Utopia projected into the past. In this context it is important to look at the range and variety of nationalist alternatives discussed.

The patriotic options offered in *Iz glubiny* range from the very conservative to what might be called 'pluralistic'. Valerian Murav'yev represents the former: a naive romantic slavophilism that idealises Russian history and the mysterious Russian soul. His vision of the world and society borders on the mythical, where nature and culture, faith and reason, life and doctrine, individual and community, people and rulers, church and state are in perfect harmony. 'Wholeness', 'harmony' and 'community' are the key concepts. Murav'yev argues that a 'worldwide theocracy' would be better equipped to deal with major social problems than 'any modern Utopia or Atlantis'.

In line with the slavophile tradition Murav'yev blames western rationalism for the disruption of the harmonic unity of Russian society. (Incidentally, he argues that this primeval unity existed in the West too, before the rationalism of the Renaissance and the Reformation took hold in the Catholic and Protestant Churches, finally to develop into fully-fledged rationalist philosophy from the seventeenth century onwards.) Murav'yev is the only one among the *Iz glubiny* authors to be critical even of Chaadayev's pro-western stance. In other places, however, he quotes him approvingly. Murav'yev does of course argue that revolutionary socialism is doomed to fail as it tries to create a perfect society with imperfect people. However, this argument would also apply to his own retrospective Utopia of Christian Russia.

Among the other authors only Struve comes close to Murav'yev's nationalism, but without the nostalgic element. He arrives at his patriotic alternative by way of sociological criticism of socialism. Struve claims that the appeal of socialism to materialistic human instincts undermines the communal sense and renders people

selfish rather than inclined towards solidarity. Furthermore, according to Struve, the so-called socialist internationalism makes for a false sense of unity in that while it aims to dissolve national sentiment into a greater whole it splits up this greater whole again through the international class struggle.

Struve arrives at a Christian patriotic conception of society by viewing it as a collective personality. In this connection he uses the word *soborny*, which implies more communal sense and organic unity than the word 'collective'. On this basis, according to Struve, an international community could be build. Christianity, with its ideal of an ecumenical, all-embracing church in which each nation will retain its own spiritual and cultural identity, is, he argues, the matrix for genuine internationalism.

A more 'open' understanding of patriotism is to be found in Novgorodtsev. Although for him, too, church and state are related concepts, his patriotism does not have the religious exclusivity of Murav'yev's or the political implications of Struve's. The patriotism Novgorodtsev advocates is pluralistic: his ideal state is founded on religious and national values, but it is a state in which different religious and political movements as well as different ethnic groups and languages can exist side by side. The spiritual unity in this diversity comes from the mutually acknowledged priority of the well-being of the state as a whole, this common ideal prevailing over individual selfishness. Non-believers, too, would be able to share in such patriotism, according to Novgorodtsev, as long as the state refrained from forcing its citizens into a 'patriotic monocult', and as long as there were no question of one population group subjecting another. Each nationality within such a state would be able to pray for the state according to its own custom.

This is not traditional slavophile patriotism: Novgorodtsev makes this very clear when he blames 'old Russia' for failing to combine political unity with equality and freedom. The nineteenth-century tsarist slogan 'autocracy, Orthodoxy and the nation' indicated a dogmatic and isolationist political awareness. The Russian intelligentsia was quite right to fight this narrow-minded nationalism, but was wrong to reject all national and religious feelings. Novgorodtsev considers it of crucial importance for Russia now to find the basis for a new sense of political unity. He does not specify in concrete terms how this new national identity should express itself: he says only that it should not be ordained from above, but that at the same time it should transcend party affiliation and bridge the gap between the intellectual elite and the people. Again, the key words here are 'organic', 'integrating', and 'healing'. Novgorodtsev forecasts a major catastrophe in Russia 'if the new national leadership the country is waiting for were to lack the creativity and the strength to break new ground towards political and constitutional advancement.'

As well as Novgorodtsev, Semen Frank and Sergei Bulgakov also discuss their nationalism in a critical spirit. Frank has words of praise for the political culture of the West, but nevertheless ends up advocating a self-critical version of religious slavophile nationalism. According to Frank, Russia even in its failure serves as an example for the West. He states this in prophetic words: 'Russia indeed has carried out such an awesome and terrifying experiment of a comprehensive and immediate implementation of socialism that the evil nature and intrinsic moral perversity of this movement have been manifest not only to us but to the rest of Europe as well.' Frank thinks socialism failed in Russia for want of those ethical, juridical and religious-cultural values that are to be found in western socialism, and he blames the underdevelopment of these values on the conservative-liberal intelligentsia. He is here referring to the political movement embodied in the Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets) to which he belonged. Complacency and political inertia, Frank continues,

have kept the movement from establishing a moderate political course such as that followed by similar movements in Western Europe. In the absence of a liberal-conservative political centre extremism gained the upper hand in Russian politics. Right-wing 'black hundreds' despotism has now been replaced by left-wing 'black hundreds' dictatorship.

Frank recommends authentic liberalism and morally enlightened conservatism as the political precondition for progress in Russia. Even more important, he argues, is a spiritual revival based on the Christian and national cultural heritage; and this latter he holds to include not only Pushkin and Solov'yev but also Konstantin Leont'yev, a political and religious Byzantinophile (not Slavophile) and as such a promoter of antidemocratic and antiwestern views. Frank emphatically rejects the nihilist Tolstoy (as does Berdyayev).

Frank is aware of the desperation that the intensity of the crisis in Russia and the magnitude of the national catastrophe are giving rise to, and he already hears voices saying that Russia 'is fit only to serve as the manure for stronger and healthier cultures'. He nevertheless derives hope for the future from his confidence in Russia's powers of regeneration. His faith in Russia is not naive, and he does not seek to explain away the disaster as the result of external influences. How was it possible, he wonders, for God-bearing Russia to turn into a people of murderers, a nihilistic people that mocks its own sanctuaries? Russia has either turned away from its own religious consciousness or has practised it wrongly. Religious consciousness has become a source of passivity and submission, instead of an incentive to fight injustice. Religion in Russia has long ceased to have an ethical bearing on earthly economic and juridical circumstances. Russia has become schizophrenic: on the one hand there is the sentimental and ineffective idealism of the intelligentsia, on the other hand the ruthless energy of left-wing and right-wing extremism. Likewise, the submissiveness and meekness of the Russian peasant stands in sharp contrast to his capacity for blind fury during pogroms or revolts.

It is obvious from this realistic assessment of the Russian social situation that Frank's slavophile attitude does not imply a rosy picture of the Russian past. His observation that religion, which lies at the core of the slavophile conception of Russia, has failed on the social plane indicates that Frank's nationalism is of the critical kind. He ends his article on a similarly critical note, with the hope that Russia will be able to transfer the original slavophile idea of social solidarity from the realm of romantic speculation and implement it realistically in ethical and economic terms.

Sergei Bulgakov has a highly original way of treating the problem of the nationalist self-awareness of Russia. In his lengthy contribution to *Iz glubiny* he employs the form of classical dialogue. Six characters ventilate their various ideas about Russia and the revolution: a diplomat, a general, a writer, a politician, a theologian and a refugee. The discourse is entitled 'Na piru bogov: pro i contra' ('At the feast of the gods: pro and contra'), and sets conservative slavophile concepts against arguments for a state governed by law. The Russian Orthodox Church is not spared criticism for its social failure, but the discussions end with most of the participants expressing their faith in a Christian regeneration of Russia, although the diplomat, who is constantly coming up with matter-of-fact observations in the dialogues, reacts most sceptically.

Prophetic Vision

In order to demonstrate the continuing topicality of the analyses offered by the authors of *Iz glubiny*, let me conclude this article with the opening sentences from

three of the contributions. They need no commentary. Petr Struve, the editor of the collection, states that 'the Russian Revolution has resulted in national bankruptcy and disgrace before the world. Such is the indisputable political and moral outcome of the events that we have lived through since February 1917.' Semen Frank, the author of the article that gives the book its title, 'De profundis', writes as follows: 'If, only a couple of years ago, someone had prophesied the abyss into which we have plunged, thrashing about helplessly, nobody would have believed him. The gloomiest pessimists did not go to such lengths in their forecasts, and were quite unable to imagine that utter limit of despair where fate has now landed us.' In the same spirit, Nikolai Berdyayev writes: 'Russia has been hit by a terrible catastrophe. It has plunged into a dark abyss. To many it now seems that a Russia united and great was only an illusion, without actual reality.'

Notes and References

- ¹ *Iz glubiny: Sbornik statei o russkoi revolyutsii* (YMCA Press, Paris, 1967). In 1986 an English translation was published: W. F. Woerhlin (trans. and ed.), *Out of the Depths: a Collection of Articles on the Russian Revolution* (Charles Schlacks Publisher, Irvine, CA, 1986).