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

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_sbct-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php)

## **An Old Cathedral for a New Russia: the Symbolic Politics of the Reconstituted Church of Christ the Saviour**

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Moscow today resounds with the noise of hammers and heavy equipment. Market oriented reforms, not surprisingly, have sparked a boom in the construction of private housing, modern office space and retail outlets. Meanwhile, political reform is driving another real estate trend – the return of prerevolutionary religious sites to believers. Under new laws protecting religious freedom and private property, religious communities are reclaiming and restoring their former places of worship.<sup>1</sup> In the hope of attracting tourist dollars some local governments are also investing in conservation or restoration of religious and secular architectural landmarks and historical sites. Businessmen have also recognised the potential value and prestige of historic buildings in city centres when their interiors are converted into modern office space. In Moscow the city government, the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy and the new rich all have a hand in the most massive restoration project in Russia today – the rebuilding of the Church of Christ the Saviour from scratch. This cathedral, which once dominated the Moscow skyline, was completely demolished by the Bolsheviks in 1931 to make way for a planned ‘Palace of Soviets’ that would have commemorated Lenin and celebrated the Communist International. Ultimately the costs deterred the Soviet government from building much beyond the foundation. Today, however, at the cost of millions of dollars, the reconstruction of the cathedral is proceeding at a breakneck pace.

Given Russia’s dire economic situation, why is so much state and private money flowing into the rebuilding of a single cathedral? After all, federal and local authorities must cope with the fact that ‘even by official statistics one-third of the population lives in poverty, and one-quarter lives below the boundary of what is necessary for physical survival.’<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile the Orthodox Church is struggling to find the means to restore or build parish churches for its faithful all across Russia. Industrial cities created during the Soviet period, for instance, have no church property to be reclaimed.<sup>3</sup> Even in Moscow, where many churches in the city centre have been reopened, not a single wholly new Orthodox church has been built to serve the vast dormitory communities surrounding the city.<sup>4</sup> Nor is the reconstruction of the Church of Christ the Saviour part of a general state programme of financial support for various religious confessions. The idea of reconstructing the cathedral was raised by religious believers and conservative Russian nationalists in 1989 to symbolise the rebirth of a strong, Orthodox Russia. Five years later the ‘democratic’ president of

Russia Boris Yel'tsin and the self-proclaimed economic pragmatist (*khozyaistvennik*) mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov together with Patriarch Aleksii took over the construction project with the intention, I will argue, of sending their own symbolic message to the Russian people.

Today's political and church leaders, however, cannot entirely control the meaning vested in the new cathedral. In the process of making its rebirth a reality they are both deliberately and unintentionally changing the cathedral's symbolic content. Certainly recreating its external form cannot simply reawaken old sentiments because the cathedral's viewers have themselves changed. The current authorities may be seeking to usurp the mantle of Russian patriots – like the civic activists they preempted, they recognise the cathedral's potential to link the prerevolutionary and the postsoviet past – but their heavy personal involvement, especially on the part of Luzhkov, cannot help but affect the public's perceptions of the cathedral's status and message. Meanwhile, church officials may also be biding their time until the building is handed over for their exclusive use – at which point they may be able to alter its image further.

### **The Birth of a Cathedral: the first Church of Christ the Saviour**

On Christmas Day 1812 Tsar Alexander I signed a manifesto announcing his intention to construct a cathedral dedicated to Christ the Saviour in Moscow in gratitude for God's help in defeating Napoleon. Five years later, on the anniversary of Napoleon's expulsion from Moscow, the tsar laid the cornerstone for the church in the Sparrow Hills, overlooking the city centre. The tsar's chosen architect, Aleksandr Vitberg, proved to be a poor manager, however, and his construction project soon became mired in charges of carelessness and theft. After the death of Alexander in 1825, his successor Nicholas I chose a different site and a different architect to build the cathedral. He selected the architect Konstantin Ton who had been a driving force behind the rebirth of the 'Russian style'. Ton had worked on many restoration projects, and as rector of the Imperial Academy of Arts for Architecture introduced classes on Russian architecture and icon painting.<sup>5</sup> Thus Nicholas counted on Ton to create a distinctively Russian monument.

Ton's design was conceived in the new Russo-Byzantine style, drawing on the five-cupola Kremlin cathedrals; but his cathedral stood 102 metres high and hence towered over the nearby Kremlin. He divided the interior space between the church area (altar and iconostasis) and a gallery which ran around the perimeter and housed memorial plaques listing fallen officers and major battles of the war of 1812. The gallery area contained icons with special links with the war. In keeping with Nicholas' dictate that the decor show God's special kindness to the Russian autocracy over the centuries, interior murals and exterior sculptural compositions recounted episodes from both the bible and Russian history. The tsar meant the cathedral to be 'a visible manifestation of the credo of "Official Nationality", (that is) "Orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality"' – thereby linking the notion of one god and one emperor with the idea of the distinctiveness of the Russian people.<sup>6</sup>

In 1883, as part of the general celebration of the coronation of Alexander III, the first service was held in the cathedral. It had taken 44 years to build, partly because of delays in the allocation of money from the imperial treasury. Despite the current prevailing myth that the cathedral was raised on the basis of small contributions from ordinary Russians, the state provided by far the major part of the funding.<sup>7</sup> The cathedral became the site for many important church ceremonies and assemblies,

including the extraordinary meeting in 1917 when the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church decided to restore the office of patriarch. It also served as a working church where leading clergy held daily services. It hosted famous singers, concerts, and occasional special cultural gatherings. As the largest war memorial in Russia, it also became an important site during the Russo-Japanese war and the First World War: people travelled to Moscow to pray there for Russian soldiers and sometimes to add in chalk the names of the newly fallen to the marble slabs listing the names of the heroes of 1812.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the original cathedral held several meanings and served different functions simultaneously. For the primary agents behind its construction it sent a message of gratitude to God and reinforced among the Russian people the notion that they had a special destiny. The grandeur and scale of the cathedral also reminded foreign visitors of the might of the Russian state and of its triumph over western invaders. The Orthodox Church used the cathedral for daily contact with its parishioners, who would no doubt be awed by its huge size and opulent decorations. For the few surviving veterans and for the many descendants of soldiers of the war of 1812 the cathedral was a memorial to their specific experience and sacrifice in the battle to liberate Russia from foreign invaders. And for those who visited the cathedral during Russia's later military campaigns it was a place to seek divine help or to register their personal losses.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the addition of a monument to Alexander III and plans for statues of Alexander I and Nicholas I for their services in presiding over the construction of the cathedral arguably made it a monument to its political sponsors as well as to a specific military victory.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Death of a Cathedral**

The coming to power of the Bolsheviks in 1917 marked a new era in urban planning and in church–state relations in Russia. Moscow was to become the exemplar of the modern socialist city – graced with monumental art that celebrated the goals of the revolution, and free of reminders of past social inequalities. The Bolsheviks' desire to rid Russia of its traditional religions, combined with their need to enshrine their own heroes, led to the destruction of the Church of Christ the Saviour.<sup>11</sup> The first strike against the cathedral came in 1918 with the destruction of the monument to Alexander III located on the church's terrace.<sup>12</sup> The cathedral remained in the hands of the Orthodox Church, however, and continued to function for several years after the revolution. A group of believers banded together to support the cathedral, but they could not scrape together enough money to heat it consistently during the winter, and its murals began to deteriorate.<sup>13</sup> The cathedral continued to dominate the Moscow skyline, however, and its profile made it a prime target for antireligious city planners who saw it as a reminder of former close ties between state and church. They strove to depict the cathedral as a monument to militarism and national chauvinism, to denigrate its aesthetic quality and to deny its popular status. As the head of the Association of New Architects (ASNOVA) wrote, 'It has religious value only to an insignificant minority of outmoded merchants. Up to 90 per cent of workers and peasants in the RSFSR do not know it or treasure it.'<sup>14</sup> Several architects lobbied to have the site of the cathedral selected for the new Palace of Soviets which would honour Lenin and the creation of the USSR.

In December 1931, having dismantled some of the cathedral's bas-reliefs and removed fragments of its most famous murals, city workers used explosives to reduce it to rubble. Only much later was Boris Iofan's design of a neo-classical

building housing a conference hall topped by a gargantuan statue to Lenin finally selected to occupy the site. The Church of Christ the Saviour was only one of many churches and historical monuments purposely to be destroyed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but its dramatic dynamiting and the identity of its intended replacement made it a particular martyr in the eyes of believers and of those who disliked the new regime. The event was later compared to the Bolsheviks' brutal murder of the Russian imperial family and to the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>15</sup> When the Palace of Soviets failed to rise in the cathedral's place, some believers took this as a sign of God's displeasure with the new regime.

The Soviet government intended to build the palace in two years, to open at the end of 1933, but the design competition alone stretched until the spring of 1933. The cement base was finished only in 1939 and some work on the building's steel frame was completed before the outbreak of the Second World War. The need for steel during the war, however, led the Bolsheviks to dismantle what little framework they had completed. After the war the plan to build the palace was taken up again, and in 1957 Khrushchev even announced a new design competition for a site in the Lenin Hills (formerly Sparrow Hills) – the same site, ironically, where Vitberg had begun to build the original Church of Christ the Saviour. In 1960, however, the government abandoned the competition for the Palace of Soviets and instead opened a large outdoor swimming pool on the place where the cathedral once stood.<sup>16</sup>

### **A Cathedral Mourned**

Even before Mikhail Gorbachev initiated political liberalisation in the late 1980s some spontaneous civic activism had emerged in the USSR. One popular area for civic initiative was architectural preservation. The Soviet regime had demonstrated indifference at best, and hostility at worst, toward many remnants of prerevolutionary architecture. Some scholars and amateur historians defended the conservation of Russian architecture and the natural landscape on the basis that they promoted a positive form of national pride. As the writer Vladimir Soloukhin explained:

A feeling for one's native surroundings has always entered and still enters into a concept as important as love for one's homeland, along with a feeling for the history of one's own country and its people ... this appreciation for our native environment is not spontaneous. In apprehending nature, we involuntarily stir up emotional reserves accumulated from reading our poets and writers, contemplating paintings, listening to music. In other words, our very sensitivity to nature is organized, learned, and traditional – in short culturally determined.<sup>17</sup>

Only by making pilgrimages to ancient monasteries and the former estates of great Russian creative figures, Soloukhin averred, could people today understand the roots of their national culture. As elsewhere, key historical sites having been 'symbolically transformed by the events that took place there, are visited by those who seek environmental intimacy in order to experience patriotic inspiration'.<sup>18</sup> Not accidentally, the prerevolutionary Russian landscape that Soloukhin so admired and longed to recreate was characterised by its multitude of churches.<sup>19</sup> For Soloukhin and others, polemical writing in defence of decaying estates and abandoned churches served as a surrogate for expressing strong feelings of religious faith and Russian nationalism. By asking people to consider how acquiescence in the Soviet regime's neglect of Russian cultural treasures reflected on them as citizens, Soloukhin in effect placed

popular pride in Russia above Soviet patriotism.

In 1988–89, when Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* allowed the airing of many controversial subjects, the idea of rebuilding the Church of Christ the Saviour occurred simultaneously to various different people. The sculptor Vladimir Mokrousov proposed that a continuing dispute over how to commemorate the Second World War in Moscow could be solved by rebuilding the cathedral, either alone or together with a new smaller cathedral dedicated to St George, 'as a memorial to two patriotic wars'.<sup>20</sup> When his model of the cathedral was displayed at an exhibition in 1988 it attracted other like-minded people, including Father Grigori Dokunin. A community of believers (*obshchina*) formed around Dokunin and began to seek the return of the sacred space where the cathedral once stood and to collect funds towards its reconstruction. Dokunin, however, failed to win the blessing of the patriarch, and in 1990 an *obshchina* led by Father Vladimir Rigin was officially registered. It adopted a more modest short-term goal: to build a chapel to an icon of the Mother of God near where the cathedral had stood.<sup>21</sup>

All the believer-activists conceived of the reconstruction of the cathedral as an act of repentance. Moreover, they insisted that the cathedral was first and foremost an Orthodox church dedicated to the resurrection of Christ and only secondarily a historical monument or architectural landmark. The second source of civic initiative to rebuild, however, came from Russian nationalists, working through the newspaper *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, who initially made the case for the cathedral as a monument to military sacrifice. They stressed its significance as a monument to the war of 1812 and recalled that visitors to Moscow had once felt morally obliged to pay their respects at the cathedral.<sup>22</sup> The slightly different interpretations by the various writers in *Literaturnaya Rossiya* of the cathedral's status as 'sacred space' may in part reflect a loss of belief in the role of divine intervention in military conflicts, or it may simply reflect a perception of what reasoning would be better tolerated by communist officials. Such fine distinctions, however, did not hamper the union of religious, patriotic-military and literary social organisations in 1989 into a single foundation to promote the cause of the cathedral's resurrection. At its inaugural conference the foundation elected a governing board which included proponents of a positive, relatively inclusive nationalism like Soloukhin, extreme nationalists like the dissident mathematician Igor' Shafarevich and the monarchist sculptor Vyacheslav Klykov.<sup>23</sup>

Although *Literaturnaya Rossiya*'s first publication carefully argued that the Church of Christ the Saviour was a fully international memorial because it was not Russian but 'Christian' in character and dedicated to a victory of the multinational Russian empire (as opposed to the Russian people as an ethnic group), the newspaper soon began to feature the views of more extreme nationalists. Drawing on the myth of its populist origins, nationalists averred that the construction of the cathedral was a defining moment in Russian history:

It arose and was built in those times when our people were still tightly united by Orthodoxy and autocracy. Consider just the fact that money for the construction of the cathedral was collected literally from all of Russia – it literally came by the kopek, except for some large donations. This phenomenon already in and of itself was proof that the people were Orthodox, that the Russian state (*derzhava*) was Orthodox.

Reconstruction of the cathedral, therefore, offered Russians an opportunity to reassert themselves in the present day as religious subjects of a strong state.<sup>24</sup> The extreme nationalists, who regarded all of Russian history in the light of a perceived battle

between Russia and the West, saw the cathedral as a martyr from the beginning of its existence. Several contributors blamed Jews, namely the main Moscow city planner Lev Kaganovich and the architect of the Palace of Soviets Boris Iofan, for its destruction.<sup>25</sup> Nationalists even attributed the criticism of Ton's architecture by his contemporaries to the Russian, as opposed to classical, style of the cathedral. Similarly, they promoted a rebuilt cathedral as a bulwark against western capitalism and artistic taste. Indeed, nationalists cited western businessmen as a real threat, claiming that they sought to preserve the swimming pool and to develop it as a complex of shops and exercise facilities.<sup>26</sup> Activists, on the other hand, depicted themselves as having sacrificed to do God's work the energy that others had used to become rich through business ventures.<sup>27</sup>

The cathedral did not originally lack admirers among the liberal intelligentsia. They too perceived the cathedral as a victim of Stalinism. Thus in 1991 the democratic civic movements marked the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution by marching from the KGB's Lubyanka headquarters to the site of the cathedral, where they held a prayer service for all the victims of communism.<sup>28</sup> For many liberals, however, the destruction of the cathedral was just one of many outrages committed by the Soviet regime against citizens of all nationalities and religions. An architect analysing the competition for Moscow's monument to the Second World War harshly criticised 'Orthodox' projects like Mokrousov's plan to rebuild the cathedral with an additional new small church dedicated to recent veterans. Although recognising the merit of Mokrousov's plan in its own right, the critic argued that it did not suit the all-national commemorative purposes of the competition. Moreover, like several other liberal publicists, he rejected the idea of trying to recreate the original cathedral. He preferred to recall the history of its construction and destruction. Thus he praised Yuri Seliverstov's model of a small chapel devoted to repentance set in the centre of a towering metal skeleton that outlined the dimensions of the original cathedral, another design that emerged in the competition for a memorial to the Second World War. Such a project would remind viewers of their loss and provide a place for believers to pray without the costly and perhaps technically impossible process of duplicating the old cathedral.<sup>29</sup>

During *perestroika*, liberal politicians in general approved of civic initiatives like the drive to rebuild the cathedral, but they recognised the danger of national chauvinism and of state favouritism toward particular religious groups. The first democratic mayor of Moscow, Gavriil Popov, prided himself on helping all religious denominations in the city. In fact, he noted with evident satisfaction that he had paved the way for the reopening of a mosque that, like the cathedral, had been built with the blessing of Alexander I in honour of the War of 1812 – a historical fact that today's Russian 'patriots' had forgotten.<sup>30</sup> Despite Popov's warning about the perils of the state favouring one religion over another, however, Boris Yel'tsin endorsed the rebuilding of the cathedral and in 1994 together with the present mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov and Patriarch Aleksii took over the fundraising and planning for the project.<sup>31</sup>

### **A Cathedral Reborn: the Second Church of Christ the Saviour**

Yel'tsin provided a straightforward rationale for the cathedral's rebirth: 'It is a Russian national sacred place and must be reborn.' At the same time he invested the task with great significance, arguing that 'With it, it will be easier to find the path to social harmony, the creation of goodness, and a life in which there will be less room

for sin.<sup>32</sup> Thus Yel'tsin linked a larger civic goal – social harmony – with religious and nationalist values. Luzhkov and Aleksii, meanwhile, settled the practical matters: the cathedral would be rebuilt with donations from private citizens and businesses on its original site and in its original form – with the exception of some decorative sculpture that would be difficult and astronomically expensive to replicate. Moreover, using the concrete foundation of the Palace of Soviets as a base for the cathedral engineers could add an extra floor below street level to house offices for the patriarch, a parking garage for 600 cars, and a conference hall with seats for 1000.<sup>33</sup> A new social council and fundraising apparatus attached to the mayor's office would replace the older civic groups which had so far managed the collection of donations. The composition of the new council demonstrated the mayor's seriousness and his interest in supporting some form of Russian patriotism: it was dominated by city government bureaucrats and professional construction engineers, but also included three members of the creative elite well known for their Russian nationalist sentiments – the writers Vasili Rasputin and Vladimir Soloukhin and the painter Il'ya Glazunov – and only one outspoken liberal, theatre director Mark Zakharov.<sup>34</sup>

Since he adopted the idea of reconstructing the cathedral in 1994 Yuri Luzhkov has devoted considerable time, attention and political and financial resources to the project. He reviews the blueprints, visits the site, chastises the builders and exhorts donors. Given that the cost of the cathedral is estimated to run to around 400 million dollars, fundraising is a continuing struggle. Luzhkov has used his position to coax and coerce donations from private and state-run businesses. The administrator of the cathedral fund admits that good relations with the city government help in the solicitation of corporate contributions. After all, the mayor's office still controls access to much of the office space in Moscow.<sup>35</sup> Officially, the city government offers tax concessions to organisations involved in construction.<sup>36</sup> Despite its frequent public statements to the contrary, the cathedral council has also asked for and received federal subsidies, including tax concessions for big donors. In the course of the 1995 budget debate a close Yel'tsin advisor even labelled the money set aside for the cathedral as one of two 'sacred subsidies' that could not be reduced. (The other was the 'Victory Fund' to provide special veterans' benefits for the 50th anniversary of victory in the Second World War.)<sup>37</sup> The amount of so-called 'non-budget' revenues directed to the cathedral from city coffers remains a well-guarded secret, but one city legislator who investigated the question estimated that only one tenth of a day's expenditure at the site was covered by charitable donations.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the rapid progress made in reconstructing the cathedral there has been plenty of time for a debate in the press about the merits of the project. The continuing disputes between the cathedral's supporters and its opponents reveal first and foremost a consensus that it is an important symbol, and second a division over its meaning and appropriateness. By examining the chief complaints of the cathedral's opponents I will trace the process whereby the symbol of 'repentance' dreamed of by civic activists has taken on other connotations and messages.

The most frequently voiced complaint about the reconstruction of the cathedral is the cost, especially to citizens. Even some outspoken nationalists have protested about the use of state funds for the cathedral given that social programmes are so clearly in need of resources.<sup>39</sup> The '*khozyaistvennik*' response is simply stated by Luzhkov's deputy Vladimir Resin. Though Jewish himself, Resin considers the cathedral a 'world-class achievement' and argues:

First, man does not live by bread alone. Second, surely the situation with

housing wasn't better when they first built this cathedral. And it was quite bad when they blew it up. And who blew it up? Our relatives, our grandfathers. Together we bear full moral responsibility. ... We didn't ask the believers when that was done. And the church is being built from donations and non-budgetary sources. ... So what's better? A non-budget cathedral or a budget swimming pool in place of fifty homes?<sup>40</sup>

The cathedral's religious defenders also point to the small cost when considered on a per capita basis, but even they admit that the Orthodox Church as a whole has other pressing financial responsibilities. Only a project of such scope and grandeur, however, would attract such generous contributions, contends the deacon and religious scholar Andrei Kurayev. Hence, he insists, the church would not have the money that is going to the cathedral to spend on anything else.<sup>41</sup> City officials, however, cannot claim that the restoration of the cathedral has brought the city new revenues. Indeed, potential income from tourism is rarely mentioned – perhaps because it is understood that the cathedral will genuinely become church property and any future earnings it brings will presumably belong to the church alone.

In general, both liberal intellectuals and nationalist activists have complained about the loss of popular control over the reconstruction project. Several liberal critics have urged that the question of using public money for the cathedral be put to a referendum:<sup>42</sup> in other words, let the tax payers articulate their financial priorities. A conscious donation might be seen as a sign of a desire to repent, they have argued, but the same could not be said of passive contributions via tax payments. Nationalists generally accept the myth that the original cathedral was built on popular contributions, and hence some have also expressed discomfort with the shift of fundraising efforts to focus on wealthy businesses. Moreover, even among supporters there is an awareness that original civic activists have been pushed aside to make way for high officials and engineering professionals.<sup>43</sup> As one observer notes, having become 'udarny' (high priority) and 'vsenarodny' (all-national) the project has ceased to be 'narodny' (popular). The public, then, she suggests, is both literally and figuratively left to peer through the cracks in the fence around the site and to wonder at what is happening.<sup>44</sup>

The tempo and style of Luzhkov's construction contractors in fact evoke unpleasant memories: they are reminiscent of Soviet-era construction projects and feed the longstanding concern of some artists and aesthetes that the 'copy' will be unworthy of the original. Ever since the idea of rebuilding the cathedral arose in the 1980s professionals have warned that the construction techniques and especially the craftsmanship of the painted interiors and sculptural exterior decor – which ironically were the cathedral's most praised and most 'Russian' aspects – could not possibly be replicated.<sup>45</sup> Even Luzhkov has at times suggested that some artistic features of the original would be too costly to attempt today.<sup>46</sup> Several details of the new plan, moreover, directly contradict any pretence of authenticity – namely the concrete instead of brick shell, the underground office and garage complex, and the work of contemporary realist artists who are competing to paint the interiors. As the art historian Aleksei Komech points out, Luzhkov has adopted a principle of restoration and preservation that values appearances, façades, not authenticity. The mayor boasts that he is not just preserving but adding on to old buildings; and indeed, though he can cite the merits of lifts and a modern ventilation system as adding to the durability and comfort of the new cathedral, these changes clearly mark it as a 'novodel' (new model).<sup>47</sup> Kurayev rebuts such criticism of the building by noting that from a reli-

gious point of view what matters is the sincerity of the worship that takes place within the cathedral and not its age or appearance.<sup>48</sup> And yet Russian Orthodox church officials want a replica of their old cathedral badly enough to invest their own funds and prestige in it.

In part, the protest over construction techniques stems from the novelty of the church–state partnership itself. It strikes people as odd to hear construction engineers setting deadlines around religious holidays and to see a church built with the Soviet ‘storming’ methods used to build secular communist monumental projects. The gigantomania and haste typical of Soviet construction has led sceptics to refer to the new cathedral as a Palace of Soviets with a cross on top and workers to label themselves ‘shock workers of Orthodox (as opposed to socialist) labour’.<sup>49</sup> In fact, at least one architect has complained that the city’s construction contractors are ignorant of ‘*khramosozdatel’skaya kul’tura tserkvi*’ (religious architectural traditions) and hence have suggested at times such inappropriate measures as locating the garage directly beneath the sacred altar.<sup>50</sup>

One serious complaint about the reconstruction of the cathedral raised only by liberals has to do with its perceived symbolic content. A television spot for the cathedral depicts an elderly woman, a motorcycle gang member and a wealthy businessman all converging on the cathedral and donating according to their means – the message: devotion to the church crosses age, class and gender barriers.<sup>51</sup> But what about barriers of race and religion? Whereas nationalist critics acclaim the Russian-ness of the cathedral’s style and the significance of its dedication to military victory,<sup>52</sup> some liberals reject these very values. They see chauvinism in the boasts of today’s construction bosses who echo their tsarist-era predecessors in claiming that not a single ‘foreigner’ is labouring on the cathedral.<sup>53</sup> Contributing to the cathedral is clearly understood as a means of signalling one’s inclusion in Russian society; thus, members of the Armenian community in Moscow have attempted to stress their belonging by collecting donations for it.<sup>54</sup> Liberals, however, reject the idea that a Christian place of worship can unite all the citizens of Russia.<sup>55</sup> Ignoring the implications of the state extending privileges to Russian Orthodoxy, deacon Kurayev responds that no public project ever serves everyone’s interests equally. He, for instance, received no benefit from state spending to upgrade St Petersburg’s athletic facilities for the Goodwill Games. Defenders of the cathedral also ascribe criticism of it to ‘western tastes’. In other words, those who attack it are culturally alien intellectuals who do not appreciate Russian style and especially realist artistic traditions. Jealousy that patriot-painters like Glazunov will receive big commissions to decorate the cathedral, according to Kurayev, lies behind the liberal intelligentsia’s antipathy towards it. But Kurayev does not answer charges about substance with a defence of form: he accepts the premise that the cathedral is a demonstration of state power. Indeed, he warns government officials that the world will think their new democracy is insincere or weak if it cannot rebuild Russia’s national holy sites.<sup>56</sup>

The final bone of contention between supporters and opponents of the cathedral is the project’s moral significance. A few observers from both ends of the political spectrum have argued that reproducing the external form of the cathedral again rewrites history by in effect sending a false signal that the traces of the communist period can be quickly erased. As the art critic Boris Kuz’minsky observed, ‘With a single act, admittedly fairly complex and lengthy, but purely mechanical, the psychological traumas linked with the long and confused history of Soviet rule are supplanted in the collective subconscious.’ In other words, ‘the city of an ideal bourgeois democracy’ can be constructed rapidly and painlessly by changing the

backdrop against which politics is played.<sup>57</sup> Papering over the sins of the past may contradict the ideal of atoning for them. And yet the cathedral's strongest defenders all look upon reconstruction as the ultimate act of repentance. But repentance by whom? Arguably the transformation of the symbolic landscape affects all who see it, and not just pilgrims seeking some personal moment of transcendence – but the cathedral's builders cannot entirely control that effect. Will the cathedral be seen as the clergy would have it, first and foremost as a monument to Christ and as a sign of return to an old faith? Or will it be perceived as another monument to a powerful state? As the head of the fundraising campaign admits, the cathedral 'will become a monument to us, to those living today, a monument to our times'.<sup>58</sup>

After his cooptation of a civic cause, Mayor Luzhkov has been accused of building a monument to himself and his powerful construction bureaucracy. If the cathedral is perceived as a monument to Luzhkov, then what are the implications? Luzhkov claims to be without ideology, but his actions reveal him to be both an anti-communist and a Russian patriot. Though not raised in a religious family, Luzhkov supports the Russian Orthodox Church as an important, though not the sole, source of values. According to him, city government should orient itself on 'religion together with culture, family traditions, sport and morality'.<sup>59</sup> The cathedral appeals to him both emotionally, because the original was grand, Russian and a victim of communists, and pragmatically, because it presents just the kind of managerial challenge that suits his past '*khozyaistvennik*' experience.<sup>60</sup> In sum, Luzhkov shows that he is more powerful than past communist leaders by undoing their handiwork. He also demonstrates that he is more capable than the tsars or the Bolsheviks by building his showplace in just a few years. He restores the old order – giving the capital a cathedral worthy of international admiration – and yet improves on the original by adding modern conveniences. But, as in the original, the end result is a monument to the ruler. The populist roots are lost or sacrificed along the way.

## Conclusion

Luzhkov's interest in reviving a 'Russian style' of architecture and his support for patriotic projects such as the construction of Victory Park at Poklonnaya Gora and the reconstruction of the Iverskiye gates leading onto Red Square have led one architectural critic to describe the mayor's urban planning record as 'realising the imperial idea'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, it would be naive to take at face value Luzhkov's claims that he is without ideology. The past cannot be reproduced or presented in a purely objective fashion, without some interpretation. Proponents of recreating or preserving cultural heritage everywhere point to the potential of that heritage to foster feelings of common cause and of rootedness in historic traditions. But, as David Lowenthal points out in his study of the worldwide heritage movement, the negative aspect of 'heritage' is that it can just as easily 'glamorize narrow nationalism'.<sup>62</sup> Democratic politicians seized upon the Russian nationalists' project of rebuilding the Church of Christ the Saviour to try to inspire some positive form of patriotism in the citizens of their new state. But whose version of the Russian past will colour perceptions of the cathedral and inform contemporary patriotism? So far, the dominant impression is that the new Russian state, like the old, will use its patronage of monumental architecture to glorify military sacrifice, exclude religious minorities, and raise monuments to its leaders rather than to its citizens. The reconstruction of the Church of Christ the Saviour signals the casting off of communism, but it also reflects the

return of rulers who are ready to use their ties with the Russian Orthodox Church to try to prove their own Russianness.

## Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> On the return of church property, see William van den Bercken, 'The Russian Orthodox Church, state and society in 1991–1993: the rest of the story', *Religion, State and Society*, no. 2, 1994, pp. 166–8.
- <sup>2</sup> Yuri Rytov, 'Sredny klass – ne dlya nas?', *Novoye vremya*, no. 22, 1996, p. 39.
- <sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to the Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy* (Westview, Boulder, 1995), pp. 55–56.
- <sup>4</sup> The only totally new Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow is the Church to St George built as part of the monument to the Second World War at Poklonnaya Gora. Father Vladimir (Novikov), the pastor of the Church of SS Boris and Gleb located in a dormitory community in southern Moscow, observes that his tiny church (built 1688–1702) serves a region of 300,000 people. Personal communication, 27 October 1996.
- <sup>5</sup> Aleksei Butorov, *Khram Khrista Spasitelya: istorii stroitel'stva i razrusheniya* (Yuny khudozhnik, Moscow, 1992), pp. 4–11.
- <sup>6</sup> Butorov, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–26; Franklin Sciacca, *The Iconography of Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior: The Merging of Military and Spiritual Podvigi* (paper presented at the AATSEEL Conference, December 1993), p. 8.
- <sup>7</sup> Butorov, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 34; Irina Ilovayskaya-Alberti, 'Vstupitel'naya stat'ya', *Razrusheniye Khrama Khrista Spasitelya (Samizdat)* (Overseas Publications, London, 1988), pp. 8–10.
- <sup>8</sup> Ye. I. Kirichenko, *Khram Khrista Spasitelya v Moskve* (Planeta, Moscow, 1992), p. 5; Butorov, *op. cit.*, pp. 34, 37.
- <sup>9</sup> Note that fundraising efforts for a museum to the War of 1812 failed. I would argue that the lack of state support stemmed in part from the fact that with the cathedral Tsar Nicholas had already enshrined the memory of the war in a celebratory, non-critical format. Tat'yana Savarenskaya, 'Memorial'ny ansambl' 1812 goda', *Moskovsky zhurnal*, no. 5, 1991, pp. 59–64.
- <sup>10</sup> Butorov, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- <sup>11</sup> On the transformation of Moscow, see Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995), pp. 255–70.
- <sup>12</sup> During May Day celebrations in 1920 communist enthusiasts laid a cornerstone for a monument to 'liberated labour' on the site of the former monument to Alexander III. Kirichenko, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
- <sup>13</sup> Vladimir Kozlov, 'Gibel' khrama', *Moskovsky zhurnal*, no. 9, 1991, p. 12.
- <sup>14</sup> V. Balikhin cited in Selim Khan-Magomedov, 'K istorii vybora mesta dlya Dvortsya Sovetov', *Arkhitektura i stroitel'stvo Moskvy*, no. 1, 1988; Kirichenko, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
- <sup>15</sup> V. P. Mokrousov, 'Blagoye delo', and Vladimir Potapov, 'Narodnaya svyatynya', in *Khram Khrista Spasitelya: Sozdaniye-razrusheniye-vozhrozhdeniye* (a special edition of *Pravda*), April 1992, p. 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Kirichenko, *op. cit.*, pp. 256, 267–68.
- <sup>17</sup> Vladimir Soloukhin, *A Time to Gather Stones* (translated by Valerie Z. Nollan) (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1993), p. 230.
- <sup>18</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and their Battlefields* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1991), p. 3.
- <sup>19</sup> Soloukhin, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
- <sup>20</sup> Yelena Alekseyeva, 'Spasitelya simvol nashei very' (interview with V. Mokrousov), *Rus' derzhavnaya*, nos. 5–7, 1996, p. 4.
- <sup>21</sup> Alla Bossart, 'Teatr vremen Luzhkova i Sinoda', *Stolitsa*, no. 2, 8 January 1995, p. 12.
- <sup>22</sup> Vladimir Sidorov, 'Pamyatnik pobedy – khram', *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, no. 14, 1989, p. 7; 'Pod klyuch? Net, pod krest!' (interview with Appolos F. Ivanov), *Literaturnaya Rossiya*,

- no. 38, 28 September 1989, pp. 10–11; Vladimir Soloukhin, 'Yeshche raz o vozrozhdenii Khrama Khrista Spasitelya', *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, no. 5, 2 February 1990, pp. 8–9.
- <sup>23</sup> Yu. Borisov, 'Khamu byt'!', in *Khram Khrista Spasitelya* (Stolitsa, Moscow, 1996), pp. 221–24.
- <sup>24</sup> Vladimir Zamansky, 'Eto khram nashego pokoyaniya', *Rus' derzhavnaya*, no. 5–7, 1996.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Pod klyuch? Net, pod krest!'; Zamansky, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- <sup>26</sup> Letter from S. Yu. Rybas, vice-president of the governing board of the foundation for the restoration of the Church of Christ the Saviour to Patriarch Aleksii II, in *Khram Khrista Spasitelya*, p. 240.
- <sup>27</sup> Alekseyeva, *op. cit.*
- <sup>28</sup> 'Ot Lubyanki k Volokhonke', *Pravda*, 9 November 1991, p. 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Sergei Kavtaradze, 'Pamyatnik pobedy', *Arkhitektura i stroitel'stvo Moskvyy*, no. 3, 1989, pp. 9–13; Otto Latsis, 'Poddel'naya Rossiya: ne pomozhet dukhovnomu vozrozhdeniyu obshchestva', *Izvestiya*, 24 November 1994.
- <sup>30</sup> Gavriil Popov, *Snova v oppozitsii* (Galaktika, Moscow, 1994), pp. 124–25.
- <sup>31</sup> In a July 1992 decree Yel'tsin put the cathedral at the top of his list of objects to be built and rebuilt for the rebirth of Moscow. Also in 1992 the patriarch blessed the project and dedicated a wooden chapel on the site of the cathedral. A. F. Ivanov, 'Taina Khrama Khrista Spasitelya', in *Khram Khrista Spasitelya*, p. 219.
- <sup>32</sup> 'Obrashcheniye prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii k chlenam obshchestvennogo nablyudatel'nogo soveta po vossozdaniyu Khrama Khrista Spasitelya' (8 September 1994), in *ibid.*, p. 214.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Khram Khrista Spasitelya budet vosstanovlen uzhe v 1997 godu', *Segodnya*, 22 April 1994, p. 6.
- <sup>34</sup> 'Ob obrazovanii obshchestvennogo nablyudatel'nogo sovete po kontrolyu za vossozdaniem Khrama Khrista Spasitelya', *Vestnik Merii Moskvyy*, no. 18, September 1994, pp. 4–6.
- <sup>35</sup> Chrystia Freeman, 'Moscow puts its faith in capital project', *Financial Times*, 24 August 1995.
- <sup>36</sup> 'O vossozdanii Khrama Khrista Spasitelya v g. Moskve po ul. Volokhonke', *Vestnik Merii Moskvyy*, no. 14, July 1994, pp. 37–38.
- <sup>37</sup> Vladimir Gromov, 'Pokayaniye za schet byudzhet?', *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 6 January 1995, p. 8; Richard Lein, 'Cathedral reconstruction to begin in weekend ceremony', *Moscow Tribune*, 6 January 1995, p. 17; 'Khram Khrista Spasitelya poluchayet kommissyu', *Segodnya*, 9 June 1995, p. 12; Anatoli Veslo, 'Tserkov' prosit nemnozhko nefiti na vozrozhdeniye dukhovnosti', *Segodnya*, 24 February 1996, p. 2.
- <sup>38</sup> Sergei Varshavchik, 'Chto khram gryadushchi nam gotovit', *Ogonek*, no. 45, November 1995, pp. 28–29.
- <sup>39</sup> For instance, Il'mira Stepanova, "'Kadilo blagodarnosti pozdneishikh rodov'?", *Russkaya mysl'*, 12–18 January 1995, p. 16; regarding nationalists, see Lein, *op. cit.*
- <sup>40</sup> Nikolai Zyat'kov, 'Kto stroit nash dom?', *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 34, 24 August 1995, p. 3.
- <sup>41</sup> Diakon Andrei Kurayev, *Razmyshleniya pravoslavnogo pragmatika o tom, nado li stroit' Khram Khrista Spasitelya* (Otdel religioznogo obrazovaniya i katekhizatsii Moskovskogo Patriarkhata, Moscow, 1995), p. 12.
- <sup>42</sup> Latsis, *op. cit.*; architect Mikhail Tumarkin cited in Lyudmila Lunina, 'Tsentr novoi utopii? Snova yeshche raz pro vosstanovleniye Khrama Khrista Spasitelya', *Segodnya*, 18 February 1995, p. 10.
- <sup>43</sup> Bossart, *op. cit.*
- <sup>44</sup> Tat'yana Nikitina, "'Odnomu Bogu oni vedomy, eti sroki ...'", *Russkaya mysl'*, 12–18 January 1995, pp. 16–17.
- <sup>45</sup> Yuri Gnedovsky, 'Ne draznite Konstantina Tona', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 11 March 1994, p. 6; Kavtaradze, *op. cit.*
- <sup>46</sup> 'Khram Khrista Spasitelya budet vosstanovlen uzhe v 1997 godu', p. 6; Maksim Trudolyubov, 'Sliskom dorogoi simvol', *Moskovskie novosti*, 10–17 March 1996, p. 15.

- <sup>47</sup> Yelena Gureva, 'Novaya staraya Moskva: Aleksei Komech: "My ponimayem gorod fasadno"', *Itogi*, 8 October 1996, pp. 58–59; Bossart, *op. cit.*, p. 11; 'Stolichnaya дума razbirayetsya s khranom', *Segodnya*, 28 June 1995, p. 12. An example of how technical improvements will change the experience of visiting the cathedral is the use of electric light in the form of the original candelabras but with the allegedly beneficial effect of making the art more visible 'as in a museum'. A. M. Denisov, 'Ot Rozhdestva do Rozhdestva', *Arkhitektura i stroitel'stvo Moskvy*, no. 1, 1996, p. 26.
- <sup>48</sup> Kurayev, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- <sup>49</sup> Bossart, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11; Gromov, *op. cit.*; Yelena Lebedeva, 'Udarniki pravoslavnogo truda', *Moskovskiyе novosti*, no. 31, 4–11 August 1996, p. 23; Peter Ford, 'In Moscow, a grand cathedral may rise again', *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 September 1994.
- <sup>50</sup> Viktor Shevegeda cited in Nikitina, *op. cit.*
- <sup>51</sup> The author is grateful to Gavin Helf and Theresa Sabonis-Chafee for recounting the contents of this advertisement.
- <sup>52</sup> See especially Ye. Kirichenko, 'Khran Khrista Spasitelya – pamyatnik arkhitektury 1830–1850kh gg.', in L. D. Polinovskaya (ed.), *Khran Khrista Spasitelya: Sbornik* (Moskovsky Rabochi, Moscow, 1996), esp. pp. 23–26, 33.
- <sup>53</sup> Viktor Litovkin, 'V Khrame Khrista Spasitelya ...', *Izvestiya*, 12 July 1995, p. 2; Steven Erlanger, 'Moscow resurrects icon of its past glory', *New York Times*, 26 September 1995.
- <sup>54</sup> Masha Gessen, 'Kavkaz v Moskve', *Itogi*, 3 September 1996, p. 23.
- <sup>55</sup> Tumarkin in Lunina, *op. cit.*
- <sup>56</sup> Kurayev, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 12, 32.
- <sup>57</sup> Boris Kuz'minsky cited in Lunina, *op. cit.*; see also comments by Fr Ioann Krest'yakin cited in Yuri Seliverstov, 'Zapechatlenny khran', *Stolitsa*, no. 18, 1994, p. 30.
- <sup>58</sup> Appeal from Archimandrite Petr (Polyakov), president of the foundation for financial support for the recreation of the cathedral, in *Khran Khrista Spasitelya*, p. 252.
- <sup>59</sup> Andrei Kolesnikov, 'Moskovsky upravdom', *Novoye Vremya*, nos. 18–19, 1996, p. 17.
- <sup>60</sup> St Petersburg's mayor Anatoli Sobchak, a lawyer, criticised Luzhkov for running around construction sites instead of sitting in an office signing important decrees. Shortly thereafter Sobchak lost his reelection bid to his deputy who adopted Luzhkov's self-description of *khozyaistvennik*. Luzhkov, meanwhile, easily won reelection. Nikolai Troitsky, 'Nizenki, v kepke, no ne Lenin', *Itogi*, 11 June 1996, p. 34.
- <sup>61</sup> Dmitri Shvidkovsky, 'Samoye pravdivoye iz iskusstv', *Itogi*, 18 June 1996, p. 75. Even in the realm of fast food the mayor has promoted the creation of 'Russkoye Bistro' to compete with McDonalds.
- <sup>62</sup> David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (The Free Press, New York, 1996), pp. ix–x.