

The Russian Orthodox Church has a thousand-year history of strong political as well as spiritual influence over the inhabitants of the Russian state. After enduring the Soviet era as a state-controlled religious facade, the church quickly regained both membership and political influence in the early 1990s.

Orthodox Church is Christianity's true, holy, and apostolic church, tracing its origin directly to the institution established by Jesus Christ. Orthodox beliefs are based on the Bible and on tradition as defined by seven ecumenical councils held by church authorities between A.D. 325 and 787. Orthodox teachings include the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the inseparable but distinguishable union of the two natures of Jesus Christ — one divine, the other human. Among saints, Mary has a special place as the Mother of God. Russian Orthodox services, noted for their pageantry, involve the congregation directly by using only the vernacular form of the liturgy. The liturgy itself includes multiple elaborate systems of symbols meant to convey the content of the faith to believers. Many liturgical forms remain from the earliest days of Orthodoxy. Icons, sacred images often illuminated by candles, adorn the churches as well as the homes of most Orthodox faithful. The church also places a heavy emphasis on monasticism. Many of the numerous monasteries that dotted the forests and remote regions of tsarist Russia are in the process of restoration. The Russian Orthodox Church, like the other churches that make up Eastern Orthodoxy, is autonomous, or self-governing. The highest church official is the patriarch. Matters relating to faith are decided by ecumenical councils in

ments expanded into larger population centers, making the monastic movement one of the bases of social and economic as well as spiritual life.

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, the Russian Orthodox Church evolved into a semi-independent (autocephalous) branch of Eastern Christianity. In 1589 the metropolitan of Moscow received the title of patriarch. Nevertheless, the Russian church retained the Byzantine tradition of authorizing the head of state and the government bureaucracy to participate actively in the church's administrative affairs. Separation of church and state thus would be almost unknown in Russia.

As Western Europe was emerging from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance and the Reformation, Rus-

monastic tradition produced a number of church elders who gained the respect of all classes in Russia as wise counselors on both secular and spiritual matters. Similarly, by 1900 a strong revival movement was calling for the restoration of church autonomy and organizational reform. However, few practical reforms had been implemented when the October Revolution of 1917 brought to power the Bolsheviks (see Glossary), who set about eliminating the worldly and spiritual powers of the church. Ironically, earlier in 1917 the moderate Provisional Government had provided the church a few months of restoration to its pre-Petrine stature by re-establishing the patriarchate and independent governance of the church. In the decades that followed, the communist leadership frequently

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which all member churches of Eastern Orthodoxy participate. Followers of the church regard the councils' decisions as infallible.

The Russian Orthodox Church traces its origins to the time of Kievan Rus', the first forerunner of the modern Russian state. In A.D. 988 Prince Vladimir made the Byzantine variant of Christianity the state religion of Russia (see *The Golden Age of Kiev*, ch. 1). The Russian church was subordinate to the patriarch (see Glossary) of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), seat of the Byzantine Empire. The original seat of the metropolitan, as the head of the church was known, was Kiev. As power moved from Kiev to Moscow in the fourteenth century, the seat moved as well, establishing the tradition that the metropolitan of Moscow is the head of the church. In the Middle Ages, the church placed strong emphasis on asceticism, which evolved into a widespread monastic tradition. Large numbers of monasteries were founded in obscure locations across all of the medieval state of Muscovy. Such small settle-

ments remained isolated from the West, and Russian Orthodoxy was virtually untouched by the changes in intellectual and spiritual life being felt elsewhere. In the seventeenth century, the introduction by Ukrainian clergy of Western doctrinal and liturgical reforms prompted a strong reaction among traditionalist Orthodox believers, resulting in a schism in the church.

In the early eighteenth century, Peter the Great modernized, expanded, and consolidated Muscovy into what then became known as the Russian Empire. In the process of redefining his power as tsar, Peter curtailed the minimal secular influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was functioning principally as a pillar of the tsarist regime. In 1721 Peter the Great went so far as to abolish the patriarchate and establish a governmental organ called the Holy Synod, staffed by secular officials, to administer and control the church. As a result, the church's moral authority declined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the

used the restored patriarch as a propaganda agent, allowing him to meet with foreign religious representatives in an effort to create the impression of freedom of religion in the Soviet Union.

Karl Marx, the political philosopher whose ideas were nominally followed by the Bolsheviks, called religion «the opiate of the people.» Although many of Russia's revolutionary factions did not take Marx literally, the Bolshevik faction, led by Vladimir I. Lenin, was deeply suspicious of the church as an institution and as a purveyor of spiritual values. Therefore, atheism became mandatory for members of the ruling Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). To eliminate as soon as possible what was deemed the perverse influence of religion in society, the communists launched a propaganda campaign against all forms of religion.

By 1918 the government had nationalized all church property, including buildings. In the first five years of the Soviet Union (1922-26), twenty-eight Russian Orthodox bishops and more than 1,200 priests were executed, and many others were persecuted. Most seminaries were closed, and publication of most religious material was prohibited. The next quarter-century saw surges and declines in arrests, enforcement of laws against religious assembly and activities, and harassment of clergy. Antireligious campaigns were directed at all faiths; beginning in the 1920s, Buddhist and Shamanist places of worship in Buryatia, in the Baikal region, were destroyed, and their lamas and priests were arrested (a practice that continued until the 1970s). The League of the Militant Godless, established in 1925, directed a nationwide campaign against the Orthodox Church and all other organized religions. The extreme position of that organization eventually led even the Soviet government to disavow direct connection with its practices. In 1940 an estimated 30,000 religious communities of all denominations survived in all the Soviet Union, but only about 500 Russian Orthodox parishes were open at that time, compared with the estimated 54,000 that had existed before World War I.

In 1939 the government significantly relaxed some

