

restrictions on religious practice, a change that the Orthodox Church met with an attitude of cooperation. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the government reluctantly solicited church support as it called upon every traditional patriotic value that might resonate with the Soviet people. According to witnesses, active church support of the national war effort drew many otherwise alienated individuals to the Soviet cause. Beginning in 1942, to promote this alliance, the government ended its prohibition of official contact between clergy and foreign representatives. It also permitted the traditional celebration of Easter and temporarily ended the stigmatization of religiosity as an impediment to social advancement.

The government concessions for the sake of national defense reinvigorated the Russian Orthodox Church. Thousands of churches reopened during the war. But the Khrushchev regime (1953-64) reversed the policy that had made such a revival possible, pursuing a violent six-year campaign against all forms of religious practice. Although the church retained its official sanction throughout that period, Khrushchev's campaign was continued less stringently by his successor, Leonid I. Brezhnev (in office 1964-82). By 1975 the number of operating Russian Orthodox churches had been reduced to about 7,000. Some of the most prominent members of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy and religious activists were jailed or forced to leave the church. Their place was taken by a docile clergy whose ranks were sometimes infiltrated by agents of the Committee for State Security (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti—KGB; see Glossary). Under these circumstances, the church espoused and propagated Soviet foreign policy and furthered the Russification of non-Russian believers, such as Orthodox Ukrainians and Belorussians.

Despite official repression in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, religious activity persisted. Although regular church attendance was common mainly among women and the elderly, special occasions such as baptisms and Easter brought many more Russians into the churches. An increase in church weddings in the 1950s and 1960s stimulated the establishment of secular «marriage palaces» offering the ceremonial trappings of marriage devoid of religious rites. When applications for seminary study increased significantly in the 1950s, the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) forced aspiring seminarians to endure interrogations that discouraged many and that succeeded, by 1960, in sharply reducing the number of candidates.

The general cultural liberalization that followed Stalin's death in 1953 brought a natural curiosity about the Russian past that especially caught the interest of younger generations; the ceremonies and art forms of the Russian Orthodox Church, an inseparable part of that past, attracted particular attention, to the dismay of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes. Historian James Billington has pointed out that in that period

religious belief was a form of generational rebellion by children against doctrinaire communist parents.

Although the Russian Orthodox Church did not play the activist role in undermining communism that the Roman Catholic Church played in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, it gained appreciably from the gradual discrediting of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the late Soviet period. In the mid-1980s, only about 3,000 Orthodox churches and two monasteries were active. As the grip of communism weak-

islature passed a new law on religious freedom, proposed by Gorbachev; at the same time, some of the constituent republics began enacting their own laws on the same subject. In the fall of 1990, a new deputy to the parliament of the Russian Republic, the Orthodox priest Gleb Yakunin, guided the passage of an extraordinarily liberal law on religious freedom. That law remained in force when Russia became a separate nation the following year. (Yakunin was defrocked in 1994, however, for criticizing the church hierarchy.)

According to the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Aleksiy II, between 1990 and 1995 more than 8,000 Russian Orthodox churches were opened, doubling the number of active parishes and adding thirty-two eparchies (dioceses). In the first half of the 1990s, the Russian government returned numerous religious facilities that had been confiscated by its communist predecessors, providing some assistance in the repair and reconstruction of damaged structures. The most visible such project was the building of the completely new Christ the Saviour Cathedral, erected in Moscow at an expense of about US \$300 million to replace the showplace cathedral demolished in 1931 as part of the Stalinist campaign against religion. Financed mainly by private donations, the new church is considered a visible acknowledgment of the mistakes of the Soviet past.

In the first half of the 1990s, the church's social services also expanded considerably with the creation of departments of charity and social services and of catechism and religious education within the patriarchy. Because there is a shortage of priests, Sunday schools have been introduced in thousands of parishes. An agreement between the patriarchy and the national ministries of defence and internal affairs provides for pastoral care of military service personnel of the Orthodox faith. The patriarch also has stressed that personnel of other faiths must have access to appropriate spiritual guidance. In November 1995, Minister of Defence Grachev announced the creation of a post in the armed forces for cooperation with religious institutions.

Among the religious organizations that have appeared in the 1990s are more than 100 Russian Orthodox brotherhoods. Reviving a tradition dating back to the

Middle Ages, these priest-led lay organizations do social and philanthropic work.

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Editorial article

1. Glenn E. Curtis, ed. *Russia: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996.
2. Chrestos Giannaras. *The Church in Post-Communist Europe 1998*
3. George Weigel. *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*. 2008
4. Jr. W. Cole Durham and S. Ferrari. *Law and Religion in Post-Communist Europe*. 2003



ened in that decade, however, a religious awakening occurred throughout the Soviet Union. Symbolic gestures by President Gorbachev and his government, under the rubric of glasnost (see Glossary), indicated unmistakably that Soviet policy was changing. In 1988 Gorbachev met with Orthodox leaders and explicitly discussed the role of religion in the lives of their followers. Shortly thereafter, official commemoration of the millennium of Russian Orthodoxy sent a signal throughout Russia that religious expression again was accepted. Beginning in 1989, new laws specified the church's right to hold private property and to distribute publications. In 1990 the Soviet leg-

A SENSE OF BELONGING TO SOMETHING HOLY

Throughout the nearly two thousand years of Her history, the Orthodox Church has continued to follow in the footsteps of the Apostles. The Orthodox Church guards the outpourings of the Holy Spirit down the centuries, always including new inspirations in what we call 'Sacred Tradition'.

So, Orthodox Christians keep the Apostolic traditions, creed and, as far as is possible, the Apostolic calendar.

Until a few generations ago, owing to persecution, Orthodox Christianity was confined to the peoples of the Biblical lands of the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. Today, however, the Ortho-

dox Church is multinational, having spread all over the world. From Jerusalem to Tokyo, Washington to Moscow, Athens to Shanghai, from India to Siberia, New Zealand to Argentina, Alaska to Kenya, Indonesia to Syria, China to Norway, we all follow our unchanging Orthodox Faith.

Orthodox Christianity strongly believes in the importance of prayer and fasting. This is in accordance with the Gospel teachings of Our Lord, Who stands at the heart of our Faith. Confession and Holy Communion are no less important. Orthodox clergy are married, just like the Apostles, and although the Orthodox Church is administrated by our bishops, there is no Pope. Another

difference is that worship is still Apostolic, so there are no pews in Orthodox churches, no musical instruments, and church walls are covered with frescoes and holy images, as in ancient times.

The Orthodox Church is made up of a family of freely associated Local Orthodox Churches, today with some 200 million followers worldwide.

A community and a sense of belonging to something holy, something far greater and far older than ourselves. These are what sum up our Orthodox Christian values and beliefs.

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Archpriest Andrew Phillips

