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An Orthodox Social Gospel in Late-Imperial Russia*

On Sunday morning, 9 January 1905, 150,000 workers and their families marched from various parts of St. Petersburg and converged upon the Winter Palace to present a “Most Loyal and Humble Address” to tsar Nicholas II asking him to improve the conditions of the workers. The marchers sang hymns and carried icons and crosses, and were led by a Russian Orthodox priest, Father Georgii Gapon, resembling a religious procession more than a labor demonstration. The workers, led by Gapon, believed in the benevolence of the Tsar, the *batiushka* (“little father”), and that he would listen to their troubles and help them. The day before, however, the government had ordered the march be cancelled and posted 12,000 troops in the city to prevent the marchers from reaching the palace, while Nicholas II had left Petersburg to spend the weekend at the suburban palace in Tsarskoe Selo. As the first group of marchers converged upon the Narva Gates, troops opened fire upon the unarmed crowd, killing forty and wounding hundreds. In other parts of the city soldiers also attacked the marchers, culminating in the attack on a large crowd that approached the Winter Palace in the afternoon. In all, some 150 people, including women and children, were killed. That infamous day, known as Bloody Sunday, destroyed the popular myth of the benevolent tsar and initiated two years of chaos, strikes, and violence known as the Revolution of 1905, which nearly brought the regime to its knees and forced it grudgingly to make significant concessions, above all the move toward establishing a constitutional monarchy with the October Manifesto and the Duma.¹

The march on Bloody Sunday was organized by the Assembly of Russian Workers, Russia’s first mass labor organization, which itself had been founded and led by Fr. Gapon. As a result, Fr. Gapon is probably the most well-known Russian Orthodox clergyman to western historians. There has, naturally, been significant attention paid to the Assembly of Russian Workers, and Fr. Gapon’s leadership has been the focus of historical controversy. Soviet scholars, followed by some western historians, focused on his ties to the police and portrayed him as a provocateur, a government agent whose activities were ultimately directed against the labor movement and the cause of revolution. Walter Sablinsky, who wrote the most extensive study of Gapon and the Assembly, demonstrated that the priest genuinely sympathized with the workers’ cause and sought to ameliorate their conditions. Despite the fact that Gapon

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¹ Walter Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon and the St. Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 229-71.

was a priest, however, virtually no attention has been paid to his relationship to the Russian Orthodox Church. Until recently, scholars ignored the Church's own role in shaping Gapon's values and aspirations. This neglect of Gapon's relationship to the Church stems from assumptions that historians have long held—and many continue to hold—about the Church, namely that it was a “faithful tool in the hands of the Tsar” and the “central ideological pillar of the tsarist regime.”²

The standard depiction of the Orthodox Church in the historiography of Imperial Russia portrayed a moribund institution, totally subordinated to the state and serving to uphold the tsarist political and social order. According to this interpretation, Orthodoxy preached to the masses a doctrine of resignation and acceptance of one's lot; its focus was completely otherworldly and concerned especially with ritual. Peter the Great's reforms reputedly eliminated any independence the Church retained and incorporated it into the state bureaucracy. The Church is portrayed as either wholly indifferent to social concerns, or worse still, as an instrument of repression and exploitation.³

Historians of Russia of virtually all persuasions have adhered to this view of the Church, and it was one of the few points upon which Soviet and western historians agreed. The Church, lacking any institutional or ideological distinctiveness, was deemed unworthy of study in its own right. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union younger scholars are asking new questions, and this research demands a dramatic reassessment of our understanding of the Church itself and its relationship to state and society. Many of the old stereotypes about the Church, however, continue to be repeated in surveys of Russian history. To begin with, misrepresentations of Orthodoxy stem from a lack of understanding of the nature of the “Church” itself; pronouncements of the Holy Synod are often taken as synonymous with “the Church” as a whole. It was not, however, a monolith, but a complex institution and social body that contained a breadth of positions and attitudes.⁴ This article, which synthesizes much of the recent research, focuses on the Church in St. Petersburg during the period of rapid urban growth and industrialization, surveying the relationship between the clergy and the urban population, particularly workers. It argues that the capital's clergy developed a powerful and effective social mission, which found expression in the efforts of Fr. Gapon and other clergy of the city, demonstrating that the Church did not simply seek to uphold the old order, but rather sought to re-make Russian society along Christian lines.

The concept of “Social Gospel” generally refers, of course, to developments in the United States. The Social Gospel movement, or Social Christianity, developed in America between the 1880s and World War I in response to rapid urbanization and industrialization, where unrestricted capitalism resulted in increased poverty and misery of the laboring classes who, for their part, grew increasingly alienated from middle class and mainstream Protestantism. Social Christianity emerged in part as an extension of

² Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (New York: Viking, 1997), 63, 69.

³ For a classic statement of this position, see Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York: Scribners, 1974), 221-45.

⁴ See especially Vera Shevzov, “Letting the People into Church: Reflections on Orthodoxy and Community in Late Imperial Russia,” in Valerie Kivelson and Robert Greene (eds.), *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 59-77.

developments in liberal theology, according to which theologians such as the German Albrecht Ritschl emphasized that the goal of Christianity was the moral integration of humanity into the Kingdom of God. By extension, American Social Gospel theologians such as Walter Rauschenbusch taught that the message of Jesus was directed not only toward the salvation of individuals but also toward the entire social dimension of human existence, toward the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. There were different tendencies within Social Christianity in America: conservatives such as Josiah Strong argued that the churches needed to minister to the urban poor, though the ultimate goal was still the salvation of the individual. Progressives such as Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden believed that the Kingdom of God could be realized on earth progressively through a spirit of cooperation that would replace the competition fostered by capitalism. As such, they sympathized with the labor movement and its efforts to improve conditions for workers, as well as advocating reform of social institutions. Radicals, such as W. D. P. Bliss, held that the Kingdom was to be realized through immediate change of the social and political structure, and as such sympathized with socialism. Not limited to Protestantism, after Pope Leo XIII issued *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 Catholics in America also called for social and economic reform.

The primary institutional expressions of the Social Gospel were city missions, which provided meals, lodging, and other services such as vocational instruction and day care for children; and the “institutional church,” which responded to social needs of urban workers by offering educational and recreational programs (the YMCA/YWCA movement and the Salvation Army also emerged in this context). Adherents of Social Christianity of all stripes were also actively involved in the temperance movement, which was aimed at improving the situation of urban poor that was aggravated by increasing consumption of alcohol. While the optimism of Social Gospel theology would be severely challenged by a new generation of theologians after World War I, concern with the social implications of Christianity left a fundamental imprint on mainstream Protestantism and Roman Catholicism in the twentieth century.⁵ While the Russian social, religious, and political situation was dramatically different from the American, many of the concerns, efforts, and tensions of the Russian clergy are comparable to their American counterparts.

Church, State, and the Social Order

Gregory Freeze was one of the first to challenge many of the stereotypes about the Russian Church. In a seminal essay, “Handmaiden of the State? The Church in Imperial Russia Reconsidered,” Freeze argues that the Petrine reforms were intended to modernize the Church and make it more efficient at its spiritual tasks by developing its institutional infrastructure in order to minister to believers—and did not make it a department of the state. Peter sought not to secularize the Church, but to “spiritualize” it, to reduce its involvement in secular affairs and concentrate its efforts on spiritual ones. The Church exercised exclusive authority in important spheres (such as marriage

⁵ For a handy summary, see Peter W. Williams, *America’s Religions from their Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 259-64, and Charles H. Lippy, “Social Christianity,” in Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (eds), *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience* (New York: Scribner, 1988), vol. 2: 917-931.

and divorce), retained its institutional distinctiveness, and continued to pursue its own aims.⁶

Freeze has also demonstrated that the Church did not act as either an ideological or institutional support for serfdom and repression in the pre-Reform period.⁷ The Enlightened hierarchy of the eighteenth century embraced Peter's effort to separate the secular and spiritual spheres.⁸ The Church adopted a view of its mission as serving the spiritual needs of its flock, above all through liturgy and the sacraments. Therefore the Church, on the whole, stayed out of active participation in social and political issues during the pre-Reform era. At the same time, the Church did not justify or defend serfdom, and in its sermons emphasized mutual reciprocity of duties of squires and peasants rather than simply obedience of the latter to the former. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, moreover, the Church grew increasingly critical of serfdom because it regarded the landlords as barriers rather than assistants in their spiritual mission to the peasantry.⁹

At the same time, the reforms of Peter and especially Catherine the Great undermined the Church's involvement in charity. Traditional Russian beliefs, according to Adele Lindenmeyr, regarded the poor as "unfortunates' deserving pity and aid, rather than as ne'er-do-wells, parasites, or threats to the public order."¹⁰ The poor and unfortunate were identified with Christ both in the Church's teachings and in popular beliefs. The Church particularly emphasized and idealized direct, person-to-person giving. Charity was not intended to eliminate economic disparity, but to transcend disparity by uniting rich and poor in Christian brotherhood. All goods were ultimately from God, and as Tikhon of Zadonsk wrote, "it is the duty of the rich man to give, and the beggar to accept gratefully, and to shower the giver with zealous prayers."¹¹ Since individual giving was emphasized, institutional forms of charity were less developed. Nevertheless, in medieval Russia monasteries, parishes, and brotherhoods often supported almshouses and other charitable services, and the Church was the primary source of institutional charity. Catherine the Great's secularization of ecclesiastical lands in 1764, however, "decisively eliminated the Church as the financial and institutional foundation of organized assistance." While Catherine organized charity under state

⁶G. L. Freeze, "Handmaiden of the State? The Church in Imperial Russia Reconsidered," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985): 82-102.

⁷ The Great Reforms comprised a series of social and institutional measures carried out during the reign of Alexander II (1855-81), most notably the emancipation of serfs (1861), but including military, judicial, educational, and ecclesiastical reforms.

⁸ For some of the ways in which the spiritual and profane spheres were separated, see Gregory L. Freeze, "The Disintegration of Traditional Communities: The Parish in Eighteenth-Century Russia," *Journal of Modern History* 48 (1976): 32-50 and "Institutionalizing Piety: The Church and Popular Religion, 1750-1850," in Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel (eds.), *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 210-49.

⁹ Gregory L. Freeze, "The Orthodox Church and Serfdom in Prereform Russia," *Slavic Review* 48 (1989): 361-87.

¹⁰ Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 23.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 11.

administration, this remained undeveloped before the 1860s, with serfdom serving as the primary social network.¹²

During the Reform era a new theology began to develop in the Church that challenged the old assumptions of the Church's role as restricted to its liturgical and sacramental functions, and embraced instead a vision of Church involvement in the world. In the late 1850s, this new theological perspective was developed by professors in the youngest of the four Theological Academies (the pinnacle of the Church's educational system) in Kazan. The most articulate and influential spokesman for the new theology was Archimandrite Fedor (Bukharev), dean of students and professor of theology at the Academy. Just as Christ, the Son of God, became human, so also the Church according to Fedor must enter into and Christianize the world. Though he was not politically or socially liberal, Fedor asserted that the Church must play an active role in the world. These teachings influenced others at the Kazan Academy, which led to the controversial requiem for the peasants killed during the uprising at Bezdna in April 1861. From that time increasing numbers of clergy came to regard the Church's role as not exclusively spiritual, but also as one that would have a positive impact on this world.¹³

St. Petersburg and the Social Gospel

While the official investigation of the Bezdna requiem put an end to the development of Social Gospel tendencies at the Kazan Theological Academy, Archimandrite Fedor had already transferred to the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and begun to have a dramatic impact on the development of the Church's mission to the world there. Local clergy in St. Petersburg began to experiment with a more active ministry, addressing both the spiritual and the material needs of their parishioners.¹⁴ By the 1880s, professors at the Petersburg Theological Academy developed a new theology of priestly service. They focused on the priest's responsibilities toward his flock, and preferred the term *pastor* to refer to his primary function, de-emphasizing the term *priest* (*sviashchennik*) with its connotations of liturgical service. The task of the pastor was to provide a broad moral leadership to the faithful, above all by presenting an example of service to others. Such a model of service entailed charity, helping those who suffered material want, and spiritual counsel. Thus the ideals of Archimandrite Fedor of the Church's mission to transform the world through Christian teaching were given concrete elaboration in a pastoral theology and training designed to form a new generation of clergy who would directly touch the lives of the faithful.¹⁵

¹² *Ibid.*, 7-47; citation, 33.

¹³ Gregory L. Freeze, "A Social Mission for Russian Orthodoxy: The Kazan Requiem of 1861 for the Peasants of Bezdna," in Ezra Mendelsohn and Marshall S. Shatz (eds.), *Imperial Russia, 1700-1917: State, Society, Opposition* (DeKalb, IL, 1988), 115-35. On Archimandrite Fedor, see Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

¹⁴ For the efforts of one early priest, Alexandr Gumilevskii (1830-1869), see Lindenmeyr, 132-34.

¹⁵ Jennifer Hedda, "Good Shepherds: The St. Petersburg Pastorate and the Emergence of Social Activism in the Russian Orthodox Church, 1855-1917" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1998), 148-214.

The development of new ideals of the pastorate had a significant impact on the clergy trained in St. Petersburg. In the post-Reform era, these new ideals found expression in the development of Church charity. After Catherine the Great's reforms, charity was left to local authorities, which did little, nor did the restrictive atmosphere of Nicholas I (1825-1855) help to promote the development of charity. The changes of the Great Reforms placed a new emphasis on local initiative, and this applied to the Church as well as to secular institutions such as the *zemstvo* (system of local self-government that was elected from all classes, introduced during the Great Reforms). In particular, the parish reform project of the 1860s allowed local initiative to develop at the grass-roots level.¹⁶ As a result, the majority of parishes of St. Petersburg organized charities in the 1860s and 1870s. The development of these parish charities typically involved the leadership of both parish clergy and laity working together, relying on the financial support of a wide array of people, including members of the royal family, nobility, merchants, and manufacturers. Directed primarily to the needy, some provided material aid (food, clothing and money), while others supported almshouses or schools.¹⁷

The development of charity was influenced by the Church's teachings with regard to Christ's commandment to love one's neighbor and to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick. For the Petersburg clergy, the charitable work of the second half of the nineteenth century was one of the most concrete means of realizing the new vision of the Church and its ministry in the world. They saw themselves as leading by example in the act of Christian love and in the creation of community. Their vision clearly found response among active laity within their parishes, and served significant numbers of needy in the capital, which were rapidly expanding with the growth of industrialization and the massive influx of peasant-workers.¹⁸ Many clergy during the era of the Great Reforms, particularly in St. Petersburg, understood their pastoral service to entail the building of the Kingdom of God as a moral endeavor. By teaching the Gospel and practicing it in their own lives through charity, they believed they contributed to the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. Church authorities allowed the Petersburg Academy to take a more active public role so that it would have a greater influence on society.¹⁹ The Academy, and the clergy of Petersburg, were allowed to continue their work even in the era of counter-reforms under Alexander III in the 1880s and 1890s, in part because conservatives such as K. P. Pobedonostsev, the chief procurator of the Holy Synod, believed that the Church's involvement would have a conservative, beneficial effect on society.²⁰

John of Kronstadt (1829-1908)

The most famous priest of post-Reform Russia was undoubtedly Ioann Sergiev,

¹⁶ On parishes, see Glennys Young, " 'Into Church Matters': Lay Identity, Rural Parish Life, and Popular Politics in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia, 1864-1928," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 23 (1996): 367-84.

¹⁷ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 215-75; Lindenmeyr, 129-36.

¹⁸ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 215-75; see also Simon Dixon, "The Church's Social Role in St. Petersburg, 1880-1914," in Geoffrey Hosking (ed.), *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 167-92, esp. 175-78.

¹⁹ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 262-73.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 276-98.

or John of Kronstadt. Fr. John was a product of the Petersburg Theological Academy on the eve of the Great Reforms, from which he graduated in 1855 and was ordained a priest, taking up his post at the cathedral church on the island of Kronstadt near St. Petersburg. Though he was a student in the period before Archimandrite Fedor and the new directions in theology, he developed his own pastorate in a way that expressed many of the same ideals of the Petersburg Academy. He had a very exalted conception of the priestly calling, and placed great significance on his service of the liturgy and the sacraments. He wanted to communicate the profundity of the Eucharist and the liturgy to his parishioners, and he developed a very personal style of serving, expressing his emotions (sometimes weeping or crying) in the service. In contrast to the norms of the day, he advocated frequent confession and communion. Fr. John was an exceptional confessor, and for this reason people flocked to him for confession. As his renown spread, he used to hear confessions for several hours a day, and during Great Lent he would receive thousands at a time in collective confessions.²¹ He also sought to make the Church's teachings and services more intelligible and comprehensible to his flock through instruction and preaching, calling for a personal, intellectual, and emotional internalization of the faith.²²

Father John took the Gospel injunction to serve the poor literally, and frequently gave all he had to the poor even in the face of his inclinations to the contrary (he himself grew up in, and therefore feared, poverty). He believed that Russia was an Orthodox Christian society and therefore it should live up to the Gospel. He did not, however, idealize Russia, but criticized contemporary society and political authorities in an effort to bring them closer to the ideal. Because he compelled himself to give, he thought that others should also be obliged to give. He was particularly critical of the wealthy, who bore a greater responsibility for society and yet were not rooted in Orthodoxy and did not share their immense wealth with those less fortunate. He railed against them for indulging in luxuries while the poor around them suffered. In his popular book, *My Life in Christ*, he wrote:

What is false gratitude to God? Gratitude is false when, having received bountiful, undeserved spiritual and material gifts from God, people thank God for them with their tongue, and use them only for their own advantage, not sharing them with their neighbors; when they obtain them and conceal them in their banks or galleries or libraries, or what have you, and thus deprive many of their brethren... of food, drink, clothing, of dwelling; or of healing; or of the means of moving in order to get a living. Such gratitude is false and ungodly.... But how many such 'grateful' men there are!... It is not just for the rich to keep excess wealth when there are many poor people in need of the means of existence, of necessary clothing and dwellings.²³

Indeed, he linked salvation to giving: Fr. John viewed all of the people as one body, and

²¹ Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 39-66.

²² *Ibid.*, 80-82.

²³ W. Jardine Grisbrooke (ed.), *Spiritual Counsels of Father John of Kronstadt* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 198-99; see also 200-3.

the rich were saved by giving, and the poor by praying. Thus he shared the traditional view of poverty and charity, but gave it a forceful articulation.

Because he thought in social, rather than individual terms, he came to view the solution as a civic one. He himself organized welfare and work assistance programs, which came to fruition in 1881 with the foundation of the House of Industry (*Dom Trodoliubiia*). In the late nineteenth century, Russia faced not only poverty, but also a new problem: unemployment. Therefore Fr. John's House of Industry gave food, shelter, and money to the needy in exchange for work, and also trained them in skills so they could find better employment.²⁴ The House of Industry also had a library, provided lectures and evening courses for adults as well as a school for children; it became a model for other such institutions. Fr. John supported a host of other institutions such as temperance societies, orphanages, and organizations for wounded veterans.²⁵ At the same time, Fr. John was no political liberal. While he remained apolitical until 1881, after the assassination of Alexander II he vigorously opposed the revolutionary movement. Despite his own censure of the rich and of social inequalities, he believed that the revolutionaries threatened the integrity of the kind of Christian society he envisioned. In the last years of his life, particularly after the 1905 Revolution, he became allied with right-wing forces and vociferous in his condemnation of the revolutionary movement.²⁶

The Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment

The most visible and effective expression of the Church's new vision was its largest voluntary association, the Society for the Spread of Moral-Religious Enlightenment in the Spirit of the Orthodox Church (SMRE), also founded in 1881. The Society was established on the initiative of both clergy and laity, and by the end of the century it developed into a full-fledged organization with its own clergy, churches, funds, and a wide array of activities and services. It was initially founded in response to the success that the English Protestant missionary Lord Radstock, together with his Russian disciple Colonel Pashkov, were having in Petersburg—particularly among the aristocracy.²⁷ The Society sought to educate the Russian faithful in a conscious understanding of the Orthodox faith to prevent them from being tempted into apostasy. Its aims were, therefore, predominantly educational in the beginning. Moreover, it sought to utilize some of the very same methods that brought Radstock success, such as Bible readings and discussions, prayer meetings, and lectures—all outside regular church services. However, the motives were far from merely defensive; the Society quickly came to embody the new sense of social mission developed by the clergy and Academy in Petersburg. Its first goal was to spread the Gospel message by means of lectures and discussion, but the Society also sought to demonstrate and exemplify how Christ's teachings were to be lived out. Ultimately it endeavored to transform the life of Russian society as well as the lives of individual believers.²⁸

²⁴ Lindenmeyr, 169-74.

²⁵ Kizenko, 67-80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 233-60.

²⁷ On Radstock, see Edmund Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy* (The Hague: Marinus Nijhoff, 1970).

²⁸ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 250-56.

The Society developed gradually from modest beginnings in the 1880s to much more expanded activities and membership by the 1890s and early twentieth century. It sponsored weekly lectures in a dozen locations in the center of Petersburg that were attended by an average of one hundred to three hundred listeners, though lectures in larger halls could attract as many as 1,500. It gradually expanded its activities to reach working-class districts further from the center of the city. In 1887, Antonii (Vadkovskii, 1846-1912) became rector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and supported the work of SMRE by encouraging students of the academy to participate.²⁹ The Society promoted cooperation among the capital's clergy by holding weekly meetings for those involved in its work to discuss methods and approaches, and these meetings broadened their focus to include pressing moral and intellectual issues of concern to contemporary society as well as the Church. Such discussions prepared the clergy for a series of lectures on topics such as Christian views of war, literature, family life, and the modern world more broadly, which were delivered in 1902 and aimed at the intelligentsia.³⁰

Between 1890 and 1906, the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment grew rapidly and its activities further diversified. At the turn of the century, it had amateur choirs and libraries, schools for children, Sunday literacy schools for adults, organized a Religious-Educational Union for women involved in teaching and hospital visitations, and opened a youth section for students of institutions of higher education. The Society also developed an impressive array of publications, including its own weekly journal, *S. Peterburgskii dukhovnyi vestnik (The St. Petersburg Ecclesiastical Herald)*, founded in 1895, as well as religious pamphlets that were printed in the tens of thousands. Membership ranged between 1,300 and 1,500 people in the early years of the twentieth century. By 1906, forty-one percent of the members were laymen and laywomen, most of whom were teachers in the Sunday schools, choir directors, or involved in youth outreach. According to Hedda, the active involvement of the laity was crucial to the success of the Society. The Society aimed to bring the Church into the world by involving the public and bringing together people from all levels of society, rather than remaining exclusively a clerical organization. Its ability to attract lay activists, in addition to those who attended its lectures and meetings, suggests that the ideals of the Petersburg clergy resonated with believers from different social groups who were dedicated to the same vision.³¹

Mission to the Working Class

While the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment initially focused on education and directed its efforts toward educated society, its focus was quickly redirected toward Petersburg's working-class population. Because of assumptions about the Church's subordination to the state and its inability to develop its own independent political and social views, historians have typically portrayed the Church's involvement

²⁹ Dixon, "Church's Social Role," 173; on Antonii (Vadkovskii), future Metropolitan of St. Petersburg (1898-1912), see Gerhard Simon, *Church, State and Opposition in the U.S.S.R.*, trans. Kathleen Matchett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 41-63; Sergei Firsov, *Russkaia Tserkov' nakanune peremen (konets 1890-x-1918 gg.)* (Moscow, 2002), 76-98.

³⁰ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 259-61.

³¹ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 261-64.

with the working class as aimed strictly at “ideological pacification.” In an oft-quoted passage, Fr. Filosof Ornatskii, the head of the SMRE, called on clergy to oppose “criminal propaganda” with “permanent preaching of the Christian ideas of obedience, submissiveness, order and legality” during the strikes of 1896.³² Thus, Gerald Surh argued that “the Church failed by and large to address itself to the social dimensions of workers’ needs.”³³ Rather, the Church supposedly taught submissiveness and obedience to authorities, and taught workers to “heed their own sins” rather than seek to improve their material situation. As a result, its missionary efforts “served as vehicles for the propagation of traditional and conservative religious views and for the suppression, rather than the encouragement, of worker self-organization.”³⁴ In the light of recent research, such assumptions need to be dramatically revised: while government officials no doubt wished to use religion as a means of social control,³⁵ the Church’s motivations were much more complex and varied and included a real defense of workers’ interests.³⁶

In pre-Reform Russia, according to Gregory Freeze, the Orthodox Church felt secure with its position in the cities and focused its efforts on the village, where the peasantry—though pious—needed to be educated in a conscious understanding of the faith. In the post-Reform period (when Russia experienced massive urban growth), however, this situation reversed; the Church came to identify more with the village, and regarded the city with antipathy, feeling alienated not only from the radical intelligentsia, but from educated society as a whole. Increasingly, ecclesiastical leaders also grew concerned with signs of dechristianization and moral decline among the lower classes, especially factory workers.³⁷ Page Herrlinger has noted that the clergy had a

³² *S. Peterburgskii dukhovnyi vestnik* No. 30 (26 July 1896): 588, cited in Simon Mark Dixon, “Church, State and Society in Late Imperial Russia: The Diocese of St. Petersburg, 1880-1914” (Ph.D. thesis, University of London School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1993) 418.

³³ Gerald D. Surh, “Petersburg’s First Mass Labor Organization: The Assembly of Russian Workers and Father Gapon,” *Russian Review*, Part I: 40 (1981): 241-62; Part II: 40 (1981): 412-41; citation, 437.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Surh attributes these aims even to clergy such as Grigorii Petrov (see below), citing only Soviet scholarship.

³⁵ As Reginald Zelnik pointed out in “‘To the Unaccustomed Eye’: Religion and Irreligion in the Experience of St. Petersburg Workers in the 1870s,” in Robert P. Hughes and Irina Paperno (eds.) *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs*, vol. 2: *Russian Culture in Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 49-82. While Zelnik explores the aims of officials, educators, industrialists, and revolutionary students in their attempts to “turn their [the workers’] faith to nonreligious goals” (p. 75), he assumes that the Church sought the same aims as government officials (52-53) without considering the clergy as separate actors (see especially p. 72).

³⁶ In addition to Hedda’s dissertation on the aims of the clergy, see especially Kimberly Page Herrlinger, “Class, Piety, and Politics: Workers, Orthodoxy, and the Problem of Religious Identity in Russia, 1881-1914” (Ph.D. diss. University of California at Berkeley, 1996).

³⁷ Gregory L. Freeze, “‘Going to the Intelligentsia’: The Church and its Urban Mission in Post-Reform Russia,” in Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West (eds.), *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in*

rather formulaic understanding of workers and their moral decline: young men went to the city to find work; there, disconnected from the village community and its ties to the parish, they were corrupted by bad influences (which, in turn, they sometimes brought back with them to the village). Church leaders viewed urban culture as inherently corrupt, and the factory environment itself as spiritually dangerous because workers were overworked and exhausted, having little free time and even less energy for religious duties.³⁸ “It is no secret,” according to S. N. Runkevich of the Petersburg Theological Academy, “that factory workers, exhausted by continuous work, rush to seek out amusement in their free time to make up for the labor that buries them daily, and that holidays, which are days off at factories, turn into days of revelry [*razgul*] for the majority.”³⁹ This resulted, according to the clergy, in excessive drinking; not only did taverns pull workers away from churches, but drunkenness also led to further immoral behavior.⁴⁰ In addition to the burdens of factory work and the temptations of urban diversions, clergy recognized that most of the workers lived in new parts of the city in which there was a shortage of churches. Workers were absent from church, therefore, for a variety of reasons.

Clergy feared that this disconnection from the Church would result in a further decline of workers’ understanding of the faith, which they regarded as “the primary threat to the spiritual health of urban workers.”⁴¹ Lacking an understanding of Orthodoxy, clergy feared that workers would be subject to various temptations, including sectarian movements such as the Pashkovites. Nevertheless, in contrast to the intelligentsia (who consciously rejected the faith), the Church regarded workers as members of the traditional *narod* (“folk”), vulnerable and corrupted by the influences of the city, but still redeemable—rather than as members of a new social class that was irredeemably alienated from the Church (and indeed the majority were recent or temporary migrants from the village). Since ignorance of and disconnection from the Church were regarded as the roots of workers’ spiritual problems, clergy believed that the salvation of workers lay through their fulfillment of traditional obligations, such as attending church services and fasting, but even more through religious education and spreading the Word of God.⁴²

The Petersburg clergy’s emphasis on teaching and preaching the Word of God as the cure for the spiritual ills of the city’s workers inspired the work of the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment. As its activities more grew directed towards the mission among the factory workers, the SMRE developed a vast network of its own churches, schools, and libraries; an extensive program of lectures and tea rooms in working-class districts of the capital; and the publication of books and pamphlets directed at a popular audience. The work was aided particularly by the participation of students from the Theological Academy, who were primarily involved in lecturing and preaching. In 1899 students from the Academy, for example, began lecturing at the Vargunin paper factory on themes such as Biblical and Church history, Scriptural

Late Imperial Russia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 215-32.

³⁸ Herrlinger, “Class, Piety, and Politics,” 24-42.

³⁹ Quoted in Herrlinger, “Orthodoxy and the Experience of Factory Life in St.

⁴⁰ Herrlinger, “Class, Piety, and Politics,” 50-57.

⁴¹ Herrlinger, “Class, Piety, and Politics,” 44.

⁴² Herrlinger, “Class, Piety, and Politics,” 57-69.

interpretation, and the explanation of the liturgy. The Society's most popular lectures focused on lives of the saints and Biblical stories. Large numbers of workers flocked to the lectures, which had a positive effect as evidenced by higher levels of worker church attendance together with fasting, confession, and communion.⁴³

The Society's efforts met with great successes. In 1887-88, some 50,000 workers came to 161 lectures in all parts of the capital, and by 1903-04 over two million people attended 6,000 lectures in 80 locations. Workers themselves frequently initiated the establishment of a lecture series. In the working-class district of Peskov, residents rented out a room for 60 rubles a month to establish a program of lectures. On the opening night, 350 people attended, including many workers still in their work clothes, having rushed directly from work.⁴⁴ In 1898, workers of the Shtiglitz factory held a ceremony to bid farewell to two student-lecturers from the Theological Academy; workers gathered in great numbers, a chorus of 100 workers opened the ceremony, and the main address was given by a worker who expressed his deep gratitude for the students' efforts.⁴⁵

Despite the successes of the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment, its mission to the workers faced great challenges. The rapid growth of the city, particularly of industrial quarters on the outskirts of the city, outpaced the growth of churches and number of clergy. Parish clergy frequently complained that, during peak periods such as Great Lent in particular, they were simply unable to devote sufficient time to the hundreds that came to each of them for confession. As the population of St. Petersburg more than doubled to 2.2 million between 1881 and 1914, only 85 new churches were built, and many of these were private or institutional chapels. The Church lacked funds to construct new church buildings. The social conditions of the capital, in particular workers' transience, were also significant hindrances. Not only were the majority of workers (around 70 percent) temporary peasant-migrants, but even those who were permanent residents frequently moved within the city. Further, the Orthodox Church had no formal system of registering parishioners, and Petersburg in particular developed no clearly defined parishes. As a result, parish priests were severely challenged in establishing any sense of parish community or developing a relationship with their flock. The situation had further consequences on workers' moral lives: law required priests to announce a marriage in the parish of the bride and groom, and clergy frequently found it difficult to determine whether the people involved were in fact their parishioners. The Church was even accused of refusing to marry workers.⁴⁶ In response to these needs and problems, the SMRE in particular worked to establish new churches in working-class districts, though the pace still lagged behind need.⁴⁷

The structure of factory life, such as strained living conditions and the indifference or resistance of factory owners, was also a significant challenge to the

⁴³ Herrlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics," 82-89.

⁴⁴ Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 55; see Herrlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics," 90-94, and Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 257-61.

⁴⁵ Herrlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics," 97.

⁴⁶ Simon Dixon, "The Orthodox Church and the Workers of St Petersburg, 1880-1914," in Hugh McLeod (ed.), *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities, 1830-1930* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 119-41.

⁴⁷ Herrlinger, "Class, Piety and Politics," 111-12.

Church's mission to the workers. In some factories, paternalistic industrialists promoted active participation in church life. The Vargunin paper factory, for example, had its own church, parish school, choir, library, shelter for the poor, and Sunday school. In a few cases, such as the Izhorsk ironworks, the parish clergy were part of the administrative staff and retained close ties to the workers, though workers who failed to attend church could be reported and fined. Such factories were, however, the minority in Petersburg.⁴⁸ Russian industrialists had an ambivalent attitude towards Orthodoxy. Some saw it as a useful means of maintaining social harmony and combating dissent, but others saw traditional Orthodox practice as a hindrance to modern industrial development and preferred to promote secular education. In 1870, Ludwig Nobel and other industrialists complained that the numerous holidays (and the festivities that surrounded them) resulted in low productivity. In the eyes of revolutionary workers, at least, the clergy were suspect for being too closely linked to the state and the capitalists, as opponents of labor protest, and even as spies within the factory.⁴⁹ In reality, however, the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment often met with lack of support from industrialists, many of whom prevented the Society from establishing meetings on factory grounds. Even state-run factories did not allow the Society's preaching circles into the factory until 1900.⁵⁰ The state belatedly came to the Church's support when the Ministry of Finance issued a circular to factory inspectorates that Orthodoxy clergy were to be allowed free access to conduct lectures in the factory.⁵¹ On the whole, clergy felt that industrialists hampered, rather than assisted, their mission to the workers. Most industrialists neglected religious life in the factory. Even some of the larger factories did not have their own churches, and some employers demanded work on Sundays and holidays.⁵² In the same article in response to the 1896 strikes in which he called for the preaching of obedience and submissiveness, Fr. Ornatskii criticized industrialists for neglecting both the material and spiritual needs of workers and blamed them for the growth of labor unrest.⁵³

In short, the obstacles to the Church's mission to the working class were many. Herrlinger argues that the Church's insistence on regarding the workers as the same *narod* as the peasants, rather than considering the distinctiveness of working-class identity, caused it to misunderstand and incorrectly address working-class life. While both Dixon and Herrlinger conclude (no doubt because of the ultimate triumph of Revolution both in 1905 and especially in 1917) that, as a result of external and internal obstacles, the Church's mission to the working class was a failure, its significant achievements should not be overlooked.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Herrlinger, "Class, Piety and Politics," 100-10, 332-34; Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 44. Such examples of social control were the ones most frequently cited by Soviet (and many Western) historians.

⁴⁹ Zelnik, "Religion and Irreligion," 53-58; Herrlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics," 334-52.

⁵⁰ Dixon, "Church, State and Society," 368.

⁵¹ Herrlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics," 115.

⁵² Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 44-45.

⁵³ Herrlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics," 110.

⁵⁴ Herrlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics," 69-74; 146-47; Dixon, "Church, State and Society," 439-47; in both of his articles, "Church and the Workers" and "Church's

The Alexander-Nevskii Temperance Society

As the Petersburg clergy became more involved in the mission to the factory workers, they grew increasingly aware of the damaging effects of alcohol abuse. In the post-Reform era, the Church began to combat the problem of drunkenness among the clergy itself as well as among the peasantry, and from the 1880s rural priests began founding temperance groups in the village. While some clergy were involved in efforts to form temperance societies in the late 1850s, the state's fiscal interests in its alcohol monopoly led it to discourage the Church from advocating abstinence. Only in 1889 did the state itself begin to address the problem of alcoholism, and in the same year the Holy Synod formally encouraged clergy to engage in temperance activities. Many clergy of St. Petersburg, as elsewhere in the Empire, responded immediately, and by 1900 the Church had 261 temperance organizations.⁵⁵ The Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment became involved in temperance work in 1891. The pivotal moment came in 1898, when Fr. Aleksandr Rozhdestvenskii founded the Alexander-Nevskii Temperance Society. Fr. Rozhdestvenskii (1872-1905), like the priests Grigorii Petrov and Georgii Gapon (see below), came to study at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy in the 1890s in part "to become acquainted with the many thousands of poor working people in the capital, to whom... he was already drawn [by the desire] to serve."⁵⁶ As a student-preacher for the SMRE, he lectured in various factories; after his graduation in 1897, he became a priest at the Society's church at Warsaw station where he became very involved in ministering to workers. Through his ministry, he came into contact with a group of workers who requested his help in giving up drinking, in response to which he founded the Nevskii Society. He believed that drunkenness was itself a vice that separated one from God, but it also weakened one morally and led to more serious sins and affected the lives of family members. Fr. Rozhdestvenskii believed that the first task for the clergy was one of enlightenment: to publicize the dangers of alcohol and combat the social acceptance of drunkenness. Once an individual became convinced of the need to give up alcohol, he would next take a pledge of sobriety.⁵⁷

Sobriety pledges were a customary part of temperance societies in Russia and consisted of swearing an oath to abstain at least for a set period of time, and of signing a certificate. The society offered its members the support they needed to stay sober and guide them in a new way of life. Members met twice a week in small groups for reading, prayer and discussion, as well as attending church services on Sundays. There were also monthly general meetings of the Society, and several times a year the Society organized pilgrimages to holy sites outside Petersburg. The Nevskii Society rapidly expanded: 10,000 joined in the first year and a half, and by 1905 the Society had 75,000 members. It established ten divisions in different parts of the city by 1906. A cleric, aided by lay assistants, headed each division. Each lay assistant was responsible for a

Social Role," Dixon has an ultimately negative assessment of the Church's achievements.

⁵⁵ Patricia Herlihy, *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 69-82.

⁵⁶ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 269.

⁵⁷ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 265-71.

certain number of pledges; these assistants, numbering 400 by 1906, attended training sessions that instructed them how “to act toward their weaker brothers not as spies or policemen but as brothers and sisters of mercy.”⁵⁸ The assistants visited those in their charge for encouragement and support.⁵⁹

As the Nevskii Society expanded, it also established four schools, two technical schools, libraries, and a printing press; in addition, it had an array of “temperance tearooms” where it received new members as well as sponsored lectures and discussions. The Society’s publishing activities rapidly expanded; by 1905, it printed nearly 800,000 copies of books and pamphlets.⁶⁰ The moral vision that inspired Fr. Rozhdestvenskii and other clergy who participated in the Society attracted wide support of the laity, from thousands of workers who made pledges to hundreds of educated laity who contributed by their activism to wealthy supporters who donated money. While the clergy organized and directed the Society’s work, the support of the laity was instrumental in its success. This cooperation of clergy and laity, according to Hedda, “suggests that these two groups were not as alienated and estranged” as is usually assumed by historians. The clergy saw the suffering of their flock and the social problems that ailed them and strove to ameliorate their condition. While the clergy, naturally, perceived problems predominantly in moral terms, they understood that the workers’ moral condition was related to their material circumstances. Their efforts, ultimately, were concerned not only with individuals, but aimed to create a sense of Christian community through preaching the Gospel and applying its principles in action. Much of the success of the movement was due to the charisma of Fr. Rozhdestvenskii, and when he died suddenly in July 1905 thousands of workers came out to mourn him.⁶¹ Not all clergymen were dedicated to the cause of temperance, however, because an excessive puritanism was suspected of sectarianism. Indeed, when the lay temperance activist Ivan Churikov and his followers gained a massive following, the Church hierarchy condemned the movement as sectarianism despite its protestations of Orthodoxy.⁶²

Working-Class Religious Life

Until recently, most historians—Western as well as Soviet—assumed that secularization was the inevitable result of industrialization. Only those workers who experienced a “deconversion” from religious belief to atheism (and, generally, Social Democracy) were regarded as “true,” “conscious” workers, while those who continued to adhere to traditional religious practices were viewed as “backwards,” essentially still peasants. Worker-biographies, written in the early Soviet period, were used to show the spread of atheism among workers in late Imperial Russia. However, even these autobiographies, such as that of the worker-revolutionary Semen Kanatchikov—while showing the alienation of many workers from religion—reveal that rejection of religion was not the norm, that Orthodox culture remained dominant.⁶³ Recent research suggests

⁵⁸ Herlihy, 76.

⁵⁹ Herlihy, 75-76; Hedda, “Good Shepherds,” 267-73.

⁶⁰ Herrlinger, “Class, Piety, and Politics,” 124-26; Herlihy, 75.

⁶¹ Hedda, “Good Shepherds,” 273-74.

⁶² See W. Arthur McKee, “Sobering Up the Soul of the People: The Politics of Popular Temperance in Late Imperial Russia,” *Russian Review* 58 (1999): 212-33.

⁶³ Semen Kanatchikov, *The Autobiography of a Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia*, trans.

that working-class religious life was much more complex than previously assumed, that there was intense interest in religion (sectarian as well as Orthodox), and that religious symbols and imagery remained powerful even for revolutionary workers.⁶⁴

To begin with, religious participation among workers remained fairly high. According to an ethnographic study conducted in the 1920s, 70 percent of male workers and 85 percent of female workers attended church before 1917.⁶⁵ Workers continued to observe the major sacraments that marked the Orthodox Christian's life, including baptism, weddings, and funerals. These ceremonies were often adapted to new circumstances. Thus, while village funerals and weddings were complex and elaborate events, lasting several days, in a factory setting they might be reduced to the church ceremony itself—so that, in fact, the Orthodox rite became more central there than in the village. Most workers also attended church services for the major feasts, and few failed to perform the basic religious duties of at least annual confession and communion, for which they prepared with a strict regime of fasting. Sunday observance, however, was less consistent. Female workers and those with closer ties to the village tended to be more observant. Lack of free time, the exhaustion of factory work, and the absence of nearby parishes were obstacles to regular church attendance. While church attendance may have been difficult for many workers, they found alternative expressions for religious participation; in many ways the factory shop acted as a substitute for the village community. The religious life of the shop was often centered on the shop icon: the workday frequently began with singing prayers before the shop icon, and workers donated their money to purchase icons or lamp oil.⁶⁶

The efforts of the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment and the Aleksandr Nevskii Temperance Society, according to Herrlinger, had a significant impact on urban religious life. She cites the example of the Petersburg worker A. P. Shapovalov who, in the late 1880s and early 1890s, became involved in the temperance movement as much for the community and an alternative to the routines of factory labor as for his struggles with alcohol. He grew close to a group of workers who became very involved in the Church. "My friends and I spent all of our free time attending church services [and] reading the Bible and the lives of the saints. We rigidly observed fasts, and all our money—the half-kopecks which we were able to spare—was handed over for icons and to the church."⁶⁷ Despite long hours and six-day weeks, they observed the weekend cycle of services, including Saturday evening vigil and Sunday morning liturgy, and spent Sunday afternoons attending lectures by local clergy and gathering afterward for religious discussions. Shapovalov became an activist, believing in the "possibility of realizing the ancient Christian ideal [of a world] free from [wealth] and [poverty]."⁶⁸ While Shapovalov later became a revolutionary, according to Herrlinger,

and ed. Reginald E. Zelnik (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986); Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 35-38.

⁶⁴ Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 224-81.

⁶⁵ Victoria E. Bonnell (ed.), *The Russian Worker: Life and Labor under the Tsarist Regime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 26.

⁶⁶ Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 35-51, 57-62.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 52-53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

His experience attests to the evolution of a new type of urban believer within the working population. Having committed himself to sobriety and joined an active community of believers, his spiritual routine actually became more intense and diversified than ever before. At the same time, he took advantage of the expanding network of opportunities for 'religious enlightenment' offered by the urban missionaries. As a result, he became more knowledgeable about scripture and more conscious of his Orthodox identity.⁶⁹

Indeed, the activities of the SMRE and temperance societies appealed to a growing number of workers who spent free time discussing religious questions and who had an active desire to learn more about their faith, as witnessed by the enormous numbers of attendees of the SMRE lectures.⁷⁰

Contrary to Surh's assertion that the organizations of the Church's urban mission served to suppress rather than encourage worker self-organization, these religious organizations fostered a sense of collective worker identity. Pilgrimages and icon processions, choirs, tearooms and discussion groups brought workers together, both for devotion and for socializing, and formed one of the few means for workers to gather outside the workplace. Indeed, religious issues often provided the grounds for some of the earliest labor disputes, particularly over work on religious holidays. A law of June 1897 reduced the number of legal holidays and cut out a number of popular feasts, which led to strikes in several of Petersburg's large factories—with such strength that employers were forced to grant concessions. In another instance, a factory's refusal to allow a worker a day off to baptize his ill infant, who died without being baptized, sparked unrest in the factory. In sum, the organizations and activities provided by the Church for the workers acted as vehicles for the organization of collective participation among workers as well as encouraging an increased involvement in the Church.⁷¹

Father Grigorii Petrov (1867-1925)

The clergy of St. Petersburg, through its missionary outreach and organizations like the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment, sought to transform the lives of their flock through teaching the Gospel and guiding people in living it in their lives. Not simply concerned with individuals, they tried to create a sense of Orthodox community among the workers. While hoping to have an impact on society, their efforts remained focused on teaching and moral transformation. By the 1890s, however, a new generation of clergy entered the Church's service through the Petersburg Theological Academy and work in the SMRE and, because of their close contacts with the working classes and their difficult conditions, embraced a vision that went beyond their predecessors. These younger clerics of the 1890s sought to transform society not only morally, but materially; not just to create a sense of Orthodox community among the workers through their organizations, but to transform society through political and social action—which, they believed, would lead to the transformation of the world into the

⁶⁹ Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 53.

⁷⁰ Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 53-57.

⁷¹ Herrlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics," 356-68; Herrlinger, "Orthodoxy and Factory Life," 58-63.

Kingdom of God.⁷²

One of the most well known of these priests was Fr. Grigorii Petrov, who served as chaplain of an artillery school in Petersburg in the 1890s. Born of a non-clerical family, Petrov chose to become a priest out of an intense calling. As a student at the Petersburg Theological Academy (1887-91), he preached and taught for the SMRE. Petrov became famous with the publication in 1898 of a little book entitled *Evangelie kak osnova zhizni* (*The Gospel as the Foundation of Life*), which went through seventeen editions by 1905. He followed this success with a number of essays and stories that popularized the idea of the Christian who was involved in society. While his stories were intended for a popular audience, Petrov also reached out to the intelligentsia, giving a series of lectures in 1902-1903, and later hosting gatherings of clergy and intelligentsia that included people like Sergei Bulgakov.⁷³ Indeed, Gorky enthusiastically recommended Petrov and his book to Chekhov:

Soon I will send you a splendid and strange little book. Splendid— [because] in it there is a lot of soul, bright and deeply faithful soul, and strange because it was written by a *pop* [pejorative term for priest], and written in a way that priests just don't write. It's called *The Gospel as the Foundation of Life*, its author is Grigorii Spiridonov Petrov, a catechism teacher in the artillery academy and among various grand princes. He's still a young fellow and—how splendid he is! How much faith is in this person, pure childlike faith! He's the son of a tavern-keeper or barman and in childhood heard nothing but cursing, saw nothing but drunks. And now—he's a torch pure and bright—isn't it great?⁷⁴

Chekhov later met Petrov and read the book, which he also liked and recommended to others.⁷⁵

The main focus of Petrov's book on the *Gospel as the Foundation of Life* was the notion of the Kingdom of God. In contrast to the focus of Russian Orthodox teaching since the eighteenth century, which interpreted the Kingdom of God in terms of heaven to be attained in the life to come, Petrov argued that the Kingdom of God was "perfect life on earth—life based not on the dominion of force, of crude egoism, but on the principles of universal love, full justice, the recognition of all the legitimate rights of persons... The Kingdom of God is the just, morally perfect life of people on earth, life awakened by Christ the Savior and structured according to His evangelical commands."⁷⁶ For Petrov, like American Social-Gospel theologians such as Rauschenbusch, the Kingdom of God was something to be realized in history in the world. He conceded that it might never be fully attained on earth, but it was an ideal to which humanity could strive, continually perfecting human society and life. He

⁷² Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 274-80.

⁷³ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 298-304.

⁷⁴ Letter of Gorky to Chekhov, 5 May 1899, cited in A. P. Chekhov, *Pis'ma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), vol. 8: 484-85.

⁷⁵ See Chekhov, *Pis'ma*, vol. 8: 206, 243.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Paul R. Valliere, "Modes of Social Action in Russian Orthodoxy: The Case of Father Petrov's *Zateinik*," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 4 (1977): 142-58, citation p. 147.

criticized contemporary social conditions, and also Social Darwinist and materialist approaches that promoted selfish competition and perpetuated injustice. Progress in the sciences, technology, and secular thought had not solved humanity's social ills. These problems could only be solved through love, through the moral regeneration of society.⁷⁷

In many of Petrov's subsequent articles and stories, he focused on individual transformation and participation in moral action. He thought that the starting point to eliminate injustice in the world was to eradicate it from the hearts of individuals, and therefore focused his attention on individual moral improvement. His stories presented models of individuals (clergy and laity) who were sober, active, self-reliant, responsible, reasonable, and liberal. They participated in individual and group Bible study, and took the initiative in performing charity.⁷⁸ By 1902-1903, Petrov turned his interests away from individual moral improvement directed at common people, toward a reconciliation of clergy and intelligentsia. He argued that the clergy and the intelligentsia aspired toward the same goals: to establish society on the basis of truth and justice, to create a better life for the common people. They should, therefore, overcome their mutual suspicions and work together. Petrov believed that the clergy knew the lives and needs of the common people better than the intelligentsia, and their experience through ministry and charitable activities could benefit the intelligentsia. At the same time, the intelligentsia had more experience and understanding of political action and public service, from which the clergy could learn. Other clergy also shared Petrov's interest in the intelligentsia, with whom they sought a rapprochement at the turn of the century—most notably in the activities of the St. Petersburg Religious Philosophical Society.⁷⁹

Petrov began to argue, particularly during the 1905 Revolution, that the only way to actualize the Kingdom of God on earth was through political action, and that the clergy needed to enter the political arena and side with those who called for reform. He himself joined the Kadet Party (Constitutional Democrats, the party of the liberal intelligentsia), and was elected as one of their deputies to the Second Duma in 1906. Petrov believed that the political goals of the liberal intelligentsia were compatible with the moral ideals of the Church. At the same time he did not want to leave politics to the liberals, but felt the Church should play a leading role. He further argued that the Church should be independent from the state, for only then could it act as a vital force in social reform. The Church did not need the state's support and protection, for the state was only using the Church for its own purposes. Moreover, if the Church declared its independence and sided with the forces for social change, the government would be forced to change.⁸⁰

Georgii Gapon (1870-1906) and the Assembly of Russian Workers

It is now possible to contextualize Fr. Georgii Gapon in his religious and ecclesiastical setting. The Petersburg clergy generally opposed the revolutionary movement and preached obedience and order in the face of labor unrest. At the same

⁷⁷ See Valliere, "Modes of Social Action," 146-47, and Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 304-6.

⁷⁸ Valliere, "Modes of Social Action," 148-58 (Valliere argues that Petrov presents a kind of "Protestant ethic"); Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 306-20.

⁷⁹ See Freeze, "Going to the Intelligentsia;" Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 334-65.

⁸⁰ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 320-30.

time, those involved in the mission to the working-class became acutely aware that the labor question had a material as well as a spiritual dimension, and felt frustrated that the conditions of factory labor made religious commitment difficult. In short, they recognized that for Orthodoxy to have an impact on workers, the clergy needed to acknowledge their poverty and the social injustice of their condition. Simon Dixon has argued that 1905 did not mark the beginning of the Church's social involvement, but rather the moment when its "inner contradictions" were exposed and its social and political involvement began to fragment. "The boundary between philanthropy within the existing system and the implicit advocacy of more systematic social and political reform is not easy to distinguish," but by 1905 "it had certainly been crossed."⁸¹ The men who founded the SMRE were certainly no political subversives, but the younger generation of clergy such as Petrov and Gapon operated in a different atmosphere and advocated a more radical position than their elders, at least implicitly. These two priests, together with others, drew attention to social injustice and made politically radical statements for their time and positions. Bloody Sunday, however, brought out into the open political positions implicit in the Church's earlier pastoral work.⁸²

Portrayals of Fr. Gapon have been very polarized. The most extensive study, by Walter Sablinsky, did not ignore the fact that Gapon was a priest. Yet Sablinsky emphasized other influences—such as Tolstoy and socialist revolutionaries—in the formation of his social mission, and portrayed him only in a negative, critical relationship to the Church. From the perspective of the developing vision of the pastorate in post-Reform St. Petersburg, most of Gapon's ideals and even actions were consistent with his contemporaries in the Church like Petrov, with the exception that Gapon took them one step further—with tragic consequences. To fully understand Gapon, he must be placed in this religious context. Like Petrov, Gapon was not from a clerical family: his father was a Ukrainian Cossack, and his mother a peasant. While he was critical of his mother's ritualism and attachment to external elements of the Church, the models of heroic self-sacrifice he found both in Cossack stories and saints' lives shaped his own life. As a boy in school, he caught the attention of a local priest, who arranged for him to go to seminary. There he came into contact with Tolstoy's radical anarchist and pacifist critique of established Church and state, and decided not to enter the priesthood. His future wife, however, convinced him that becoming a priest was the best means of serving the people. He was married and ordained in Poltava, and quickly attracted large congregations by his preaching, despite the fact that it was a cemetery church, not a regular parish. After his wife died, he decided to enter the St. Petersburg Theological Academy in 1898. At the Academy, Gapon became involved in the missionary work of the Society of Moral-Religious Enlightenment, though he resigned after the Society rejected a project for a mutual-aid society for workers he devised.⁸³

Gapon never devoted his energies entirely to his studies, preferring to throw himself into his missionary work. Throughout his life, he seemed to combine idealism with ambitious plans to realize his ideals. Strong-headed, he attracted the positive attention both of those he served and of those in high places, while alienating his co-workers. In the fall of 1899 the Director General of the Holy Synod, Vladimir Sabler,

⁸¹ Dixon, "Church, State and Society," 421.

⁸² Dixon, "Church, State and Society," 421-26.

⁸³ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 366-80; Sablinsky, *Road*, 34-45.

invited him to participate in missionary work in a church located in a port area of St. Petersburg, one of the poorest working-class districts. Pobedonostsev and Sabler headed the charity society of the parish itself. The missionary work, conducted under the auspices of the SMRE, entailed giving lectures and leading discussion groups among workers in industrial plants and shipyards. Gapon's lectures and sermons became very popular, drawing large crowds of workers; even Pobedonostsev came to hear him speak. Once again, Gapon was not satisfied with his level of activity and devised a plan to establish a large-scale mutual-aid society for the workers, which also did not receive approval because the authorities regarded it as redundant. He then accepted a position at an orphanage, and continued to attract large crowds to the services, not only because of his sermons, but also because of his expressive style of conducting the services. He was very popular among the working classes, and gained a reputation for his personal generosity, even giving away his own boots to a vagrant. He soon began to devise more ambitious plans to reach the city's criminals and unemployed through a system of workhouses, which would support moral improvement and develop work skills. In his expressive style of serving the liturgy, personal generosity, and his plans for workhouses, Gapon is reminiscent of John of Kronstadt, despite his own criticisms of Fr. John's "complete neglect of any radical proposals for the betterment of the condition of the suffering and toiling masses."⁸⁴ Gapon neglected his work at the orphanage and alienated its directors, so that he was dismissed in 1902 and his scheme for workhouses was denied; he also failed to take his examinations at the Academy, and would have been expelled but for the personal intervention of Metropolitan Antonii.⁸⁵

In the fall of 1902, Gapon came to the attention of the head of the secret police, Sergei Zubatov. Zubatov, recognizing Gapon's popularity among the workers, sought to enlist him in his project to found a workers' organization in St. Petersburg along the lines of those he had already established in Moscow and other cities. Zubatov planned to organize the workers under police control to keep out revolutionary elements. Gapon, according to his own account, did not fully embrace Zubatov's plan, and stayed on the sidelines. After Zubatov fell from grace in August 1903 as a result of his organization's involvement in a strike in Odessa, Gapon stepped in to pick up the pieces and found a new organization. The Assembly of Russian Factory and Mill Workers began meeting in the same month. By October, Gapon presented to authorities a draft statute and a justification for the Assembly's existence. He criticized the Zubatovist organizations for excessive police involvement, and argued that his organization, while clearly loyal to the government under his direction, would be more effective as a workers' organization. As it was to be explicitly a workers' organization, it was also distinguished from the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment. At the same time, its activities resembled the SMRE much more than that of a labor union: they focused on lectures, concerts, and other activities directed at the cultural development and moral improvement of the workers rather than seeking to intervene in labor disputes. The Assembly was officially accepted by the Ministry of the Interior in February 1904. The authorities placed a great deal of trust in Gapon as a priest, and granted the Assembly a significant degree of autonomy. The Assembly began to advocate a more active political program by the end of 1904, and entered into the political fray on 3 January by calling a strike of the Putilov

⁸⁴ George Gapon [sic], *The Story of My Life* (New York: Dutton, 1906), 114-15.

⁸⁵ Hedda, "Good Shepherds," 380-87; Sablinsky, *Road*, 45-55.

factory workers—an action Gapon felt compelled to take if the Assembly was not to lose its authority to defend workers' interests. This strike spread to other major industries—in the midst of the Russo-Japanese war—and the strikers made broad demands for better working conditions. It was to address this situation that the fateful march on 9 January was planned.

Both Church and state authorities supported Gapon's Assembly. Until the organization turned political at the end of 1904, Gapon's scheme was very much in keeping with the model of the Church's missions to the working classes in St. Petersburg and was supported by the Church precisely as an effective means of extending that mission. Official support of Gapon's Assembly rested, to a large degree, precisely on the fact that he was a priest. His clerical status allowed the authorities to trust him and allow him to conduct his work. From the Church's side, Metropolitan Antonii (Vadkovskii) generally supported Gapon's efforts. Antonii had actively backed the Church's urban mission since his time as rector of the Theological Academy, and as Metropolitan he recognized Gapon's abilities with regard to the working class. He also encouraged Gapon's participation in the Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society. Antonii backed Gapon's efforts because he believed that they held great promise for the Church's mission to the workers. Being uncomfortable with its more explicitly economic and social concerns, Antonii declined to become directly involved and warned Gapon against political engagement. The conversation Gapon reports in his autobiography is instructive of the differences in generational approaches; Gapon reports his words to the Metropolitan:

A servant of Christ must show the people, not by words, but by deeds, that he is their guide. You cannot deny that the life of our workmen is terrible: they have no joy, and therefore they take to drink.... We must also try to better their material conditions if we are to help them to a better life. In helping the people to help themselves the Church also has a great task. I must say frankly that if the Church will not go into the homes of the people, the shepherd will, sooner or later, be without sheep. Already nearly the whole of the educated class—those who have influence with the people—have left the Church; and if we do not help the masses now, they also will leave us.

The Metropolitan looked rather shaken, but spoke of the danger to the Church of its becoming vulgarized by mixing in political and social struggles. "Christ," he said, "tried to transform the souls of men, and our concern also is with the inner life of the people."⁸⁶

Despite his anxiety, Antonii tolerated Gapon's activities in the Assembly, in part because he understood the Assembly as a primarily religious organization.⁸⁷ Gapon's clerical status also permitted him connections with high-level government officials; in particular General I. A. Fullon, the governor of St. Petersburg, consistently supported Gapon's efforts until the very week preceding Bloody Sunday. Moreover, while Gapon succeeded in distancing his organization from direct ties to the police (in contrast to the

⁸⁶ Gapon, *Story*, 116-17.

⁸⁷ Dixon, "Church, State and Society," 423-25; Sablinsky, *Road*, 95-96.

Zubatovite organizations), the police were quite satisfied with the Assembly's activities.⁸⁸

Gapon's status as a priest, and the religious nature of the Assembly, also proved pivotal in the Assembly's success with such enormous numbers of workers, most of whom were alienated by radical students, revolutionary intelligentsia, and social democracy. Contrary to the historiographical stereotype that workers distrusted clergy, the workers trusted Gapon precisely because he was a cleric and often came to him with personal and family matters, for help in finding work, or to intercede with employers—all of which he was in a position to do.⁸⁹ The Assembly's activities, which resembled the popular activities of the SMRE, were in great demand, as workers "enthusiastically became involved in almost anything offered them. The clubhouse was filled during its open hours. On Sundays workers would arrive with their entire families and spend the day in discussions, lectures, and study groups, not returning home until the evening's entertainment was concluded."⁹⁰ The attitudes expressed in the Assembly's meetings, which met with support by both leaders and participants, included loyalty to the tsar, antagonism to revolution, and "faith in the possibility of evolving an independent labor movement in cooperation with the regime."⁹¹ According to Sablinsky, Gapon had much greater contact with and was much closer to the workers than revolutionary students and intelligentsia, most of whom were totally taken by surprise when the Putilov strike broke out.⁹² Even revolutionaries themselves recognized Gapon's appeal to workers because he spoke to the common people in a language imbued with sacred power that resonated with them.⁹³

Finally, even the Assembly's turn to political involvement, including the general strike and the march to the Winter Palace, had religious overtones. While both the authorities and the revolutionaries (and most historians) tended to associate the Church with the existing order and to associate revolution with atheism and rejection of the Church, both the Petersburg clergy and the majority of workers before 1905 connected their faith with their sense of justice and fairness. As recent research has demonstrated, the relationship between the radicalism and religion is far more complex than often assumed.⁹⁴ The very language of the petition prepared by Gapon was imbued with a religious tone of the search for justice.⁹⁵ During the meetings conducted by Gapon on 7-8 January 1905, according to one eyewitness, workers responded to certain provisions of

⁸⁸ Sablinsky, *Road*, 90-97, 109-112, 200-1, 286.

⁸⁹ Sablinsky, *Road*, 139-40.

⁹⁰ Sablinsky, *Road*, 108.

⁹¹ Sablinsky, *Road*, 114.

⁹² Sablinsky, *Road*, 143-97.

⁹³ See Gabriella Safran, "S. An-sky and Father Gapon: On the Russian Revolutionary Origins of *The Dybbuk*," in Lazar Fleishman, Gabriella Safran, and Michael Wachtel (eds.), *Word, Music, History: A Festschrift for Caryl Emerson* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 707-22.

⁹⁴ Surh, 438-41; Zelnik, "Religion and Irreligion," 49-52, 74-75; Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination*, 247-81; Dave Pretty, "The Saints of the Revolution: Political Activists in 1890s Ivanovo-Voznesensk and the Path of Most Resistance," *Slavic Review* 54 (1995): 276-304.

⁹⁵ The text is reproduced as an appendix to Sablinsky, *Road*, 344-49.

the petition by raising their hands and forming the sign of the cross “in order to indicate that these demands were sacred, and voting for them was like swearing a sacred oath.”⁹⁶ Other witnesses also attest to the “religious” atmosphere that reigned in the Assembly’s meetings on the eve of Bloody Sunday. “The workers were guided” in these Assembly meetings, according to the Menshevik S. I. Somov, “not so much by considerations of a material nature, as by a purely moral striving to structure everything ‘in a just way’.”⁹⁷ Gapon’s movement connected with those workers (the majority) who retained their traditional faith in the tsar and the Church, and it gave them a language to express aspirations for civil liberties and a better life and the impetus for unprecedented political action.⁹⁸

The Impact of the 1905 Revolution

The 1905 Revolution was a turning point for the Russian Orthodox Church, as it was for Russian society and politics; it brought out both the clergy’s deeper aspirations and its internal divisions. Events of 1905 opened the floodgates for discussion about the role of the Church in society, which had implications for questions of internal church life and reform as well. The period is very complex, and only a brief attempt will be made here to touch on threads already discussed.⁹⁹

The Holy Synod, prompted by Pobedonostsev, made an official pronouncement on 14 January 1905, declaring Gapon an “unworthy servitor of the Church,” and exhorted people to respect the authorities. It was only later in the month that Gapon was suspended (though he had already fled abroad to escape arrest), and he was defrocked in March. Pronouncements made by parish clergy were carefully worded: on the one hand, they could not condemn all of Gapon’s activities, which were closely associated with their own efforts to reach the working class of the city, but on the other hand they had to distance themselves from the disastrous consequences of Bloody Sunday. The clergy of St. Petersburg met in January 1905 to discuss Bloody Sunday; a group of younger clergy, while condemning Gapon’s final actions, declared that the Church needed to recognize the people’s suffering and respond to it. They called on the Church to engage in and guide secular affairs, and also called for reform within the Church itself. Later known as the “Group of Thirty-Two Petersburg Priests,” they continued to meet and finally made a public declaration (supported by Metropolitan Antonii), published in mid-March in *Tserkovnyi Vestnik* (“Church Herald,” the journal of the Petersburg Theological Academy). The primary concern of these “renovationists” at this stage was

⁹⁶ Quoted in Sablinsky, *Road*, 212.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Herrlinger, “Class, Piety, and Politics,” 370.

⁹⁸ Herrlinger, “Class, Piety, and Politics,” 368-86 (though Herrlinger incorrectly states that “the goals of the Assembly’s mission were radically un-Orthodox,” 380).

⁹⁹ See esp. Gregory L. Freeze, “Church and Politics in Late Imperial Russia: Crisis and Radicalization of the Clergy,” in Anna Geifman (ed.), *Russia under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion, 1894-1917* (Oxford, 1999), 269-97, esp. 278ff; Gregory L. Freeze, “Subversive Piety: Religion and the Political Crisis in Late Imperial Russia,” *Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996): 308-50; John Shelton Curtiss, *Church and State in Russia: The Last Years of the Empire, 1900-1917* (New York, 1940); S. L. Firsov, *Pravoslavnaia tserkov’ i gosudarstvo v poslednie desiatiletie sushchestvovaniia samoderzhavii v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1996); Firsov, *Russkaia tserkov’*.

to revitalize the Church itself so that it would be able to participate in and lead society rather than be left behind as an obsolete institution. The group favored religious tolerance and in particular the need for the Church to be independent of the state so that it could have an independent voice.¹⁰⁰ The article by the “Group of Thirty-Two,” together with the granting of religious tolerance in April 1905, sparked intense discussion within the Church on issues of reform. Even conservative hierarchs recognized the need for extensive ecclesiastical reform and greater independence from the state.¹⁰¹

The 1905 Revolution brought out tensions that were latent in the reform movement. Prior to the revolution, younger and older clergy in St. Petersburg alike could support the mission to the workers and some degree of social reform without directly addressing the issue of its political implications. The consequences of Gapon’s actions, and the revolutionary outbursts that followed from 1905 to 1907, polarized the clergy. Some, such as Fr. John of Kronstadt, condemned the revolutionary movement and embraced the forces of the right. The liberal clergy, such as Petrov, explicitly advocated direct support for the revolutionary movement. They feared that the workers would quickly become alienated from the Church, and argued that the Church had to get involved to realize social justice. In response to the October Manifesto, which established the Duma, the “Group of Thirty-Two” claimed that the clergy should play a role in the electoral process, not to pursue any “class” aims but to educate the people in self-government so that their voices could be heard. The group formed the Union of Zealots for Church Renewal, which included Petrov, the liberal Academy professor Archimandrite Mikhail (Semenov), and laymen such as Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, and Vasilii Rozanov. The Union published on church reform and on politics, supporting a liberal program of civil rights, democratization, and social justice.¹⁰²

The majority of clergy, however, were stunned by the events and responded with caution. Ultimately, they recoiled from the consequences of Gapon’s actions and advocated a withdrawal from politics. The SMRE clergy argued that the Church must do something to improve workers’ material conditions, but not by getting involved in politics. They rejected the efforts of socialists and revolutionaries, arguing that the path to justice could not be reached through violence; workers should aim for *pravda* (justice and truth), not power. They did not hesitate to criticize capitalists for exploiting the workers, and still advocated addressing their material needs. The priest Bogoliubov, for example, cautioned against sermons that amounted to “supporting the bosses against the workers” that would alienate the Church’s flock, advocating rather the reconciliation of

¹⁰⁰ Hedda, “Good Shepherds,” 448-59.

¹⁰¹ See John Meyendorff, “Russian Bishops and Church Reform in 1905,” in Robert Nichols and Theofanis Stavrou (eds.), *Russian Orthodoxy under the Old Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 170-182; Alexander Bogolepov, *Church Reforms in Russia, 1905-1918* (Bridgeport, Conn.: Metropolitan Council of the Russian Orthodox Church of America, 1966); James W. Cunningham, *A Vanquished Hope: the Movement for Church Renewal in Russia, 1905-1906* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1981); N. Zernov, “The Reform of the Church and the Pre-Revolutionary Russian Episcopate,” *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly* 6 (1962): 128-38.

¹⁰² Hedda, “Good Shepherds,” 430-97; Dixon, “Church, State and Society,” 425-30.

both sides.¹⁰³ Still embracing the idea of building a moral, Christian society, they preferred spiritual to political means and focused their energies on the moral regeneration of their flock. Thus, the SMRE responded by continuing its mission; since they still regarding the most fundamental problem as one of parish structure, they sought to establish more chapels in factories, hold more meetings, and engage parishes more actively in charitable activities. While they sought to understand and meet the needs of the workers, many individual priests felt unable to meet the challenges raised by the revolution and lacked experience in dealing with workers' culture, which was alien to them.¹⁰⁴

During the Revolutionary years of 1905-1907, many of the working class were indeed alienated from the Church, demanding that it take a more active stance in defense of their demands and disappointed that clergy continued to preach the same old "spiritual" answers. After the revolutionary years were over, however, the situation dramatically changed. While some were permanently alienated from the Church and religion altogether and continued to seek political and social solutions, many were disillusioned with the results of political struggle and renewed their interest in spiritual solutions. They returned, however, with a heightened sense of religious awareness, and sought not to simply to "observe" the faith but to understand it. Clergy reported an intense interest in Scripture and religious ideas. In 1908, *The Church Herald* (*Tserkovnyi vestnik*) reported that the people "not only wants to pray, but to understand the meaning of that prayer, to live a religious life consciously, and to understand the meaning and sense of the religious service."¹⁰⁵

However, at the same time that the SMRE meetings once again began to attract large crowds, the heightened desire for religious understanding led many to be critical of the Orthodox Church. Some left the Church altogether for "sectarian" movements such as the Baptists and Pashkovtsy, while others were at least attracted by movements on the fringes of the Church (such as that led by Ivan Churikov) that seemed to offer more.¹⁰⁶ Orthodox clergy apparently often held a more condescending attitude toward the laboring classes: they regarded workers as unable to read and understand Scripture for themselves and tolerated degenerate behavior (whether as helpless victims of social circumstances or simply hopeless sinners); these other movements offered a sense of empowerment by demanding true spiritual change.¹⁰⁷ In short, the last decade of the

¹⁰³ Dixon, "Church, State and Society," 430.

¹⁰⁴ Page Herrlinger, "Raising Lazarus: Orthodoxy and the Factory *Narod* in St. Petersburg, 1905-1914," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 52 (2004): 341-54.

¹⁰⁵ Herrlinger, "Raising Lazarus," 350.

¹⁰⁶ Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); McKee, "Sobering Up the Soul"; and J. Eugene Clay, "Orthodox Missionaries and 'Orthodox Heretics' in Russia, 1886-1917," in Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (eds.), *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 38-69.

¹⁰⁷ Gapon also critiqued the negative tendency of the clergy's preaching. In recounting his experience of one meeting of missionaries with workers, he argued that the workers "needed encouragement to new efforts; they needed more confidence in their own strength; but they left the church more depressed by terrible pictures of the revenge of

Empire represented a complex situation. Many left the church altogether. For one, as Herrlinger argued, “the clergy’s refusal to engage in the fight for social justice in any meaningful way contributed to a distancing, if not the outright alienation, of many workers from the Church.”¹⁰⁸ Many were searching for spiritual renewal; some were respondent to the Church’s efforts, while others turned to alternatives out of a desire to have a more meaningful spiritual life on the basis of Scripture, a sense of self-respect, and empowerment that those alternatives offered.

The triumph of reaction in 1907 had a significant impact on the Church. The Synod adopted a very conservative, anti-revolutionary stance. The most radical clergy, including Petrov and Archimandrite Mikhail, were suspended and, in their specific cases, ultimately defrocked as a result of their provocative words and actions. Clergy were regularly harassed by the authorities—usually by overzealous and suspicious government authorities and police; many were arrested simply for trying to explain the October Manifesto to their flocks. The civil authorities (unlike modern historians) were evidently more likely to regard clergy as potential subversives rather than loyal supporters of the state.¹⁰⁹ The liberal voice in the Church—at least with regard to social and political issues—was effectively silenced until 1917, only to erupt again after the Revolutions of 1917 in a more radical form, particularly in the Renovationist schism of the 1920s.¹¹⁰ While most clergy continued to advocate a quieter approach to social and moral change through their pastoral work and charity, the minority voices that supported the radical right and the conservative position of the Synod served to alienate educated society from the Church in the last years of the empire. Nevertheless, the clergy—including the conservative episcopate itself—grew increasingly disenchanted with the government, in large part because of its intrusive meddling in ecclesiastical affairs. Therefore, during the regime’s final hour, the Church failed to come to the support of the monarchy not because of its weakness, as is usually supposed, but because it had lost faith in the tsarist regime’s ability to defend and support the needs of the Church and its flock.¹¹¹

Conclusions

God. They needed the forgiveness and love of Christ; but they were spoken to in the awful language of Jehovah. How could they help being weak and sinful when their surroundings were deprived of any ray of light or hope?” (*Story*, 47).

¹⁰⁸ Herrlinger, “Raising Lazarus,” 353.

¹⁰⁹ Argyrios K. Pisiotis, “The Unknown Dissent: The Prosopography of Clerical Anti-Tsarist Activism in late Imperial Russia,” *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 18/19 (2002-2003): 63-94; Pisiotis, “Orthodoxy Versus Autocracy: The Orthodox Church and Clerical Political Dissent in Late Imperial Russia (1905-1914)” (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2000).

¹¹⁰ See Edward E. Roslof, *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905-1946* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), and my review in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49 (2005): 362-65; Scott M. Kenworthy, “Russian Reformation? The Program for Religious Renovation in the Orthodox Church, 1922-1925,” *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 16/17 (2000-2001): 89-130.

¹¹¹ Hedda, “Good Shepherds,” 497-543; Dixon, “Church, State and Society,” 430-37; Freeze, “Church and Politics.”

In the post-Reform era a significant segment of the clergy—particularly in St. Petersburg—developed new theological and pastoral tendencies. These tendencies, as articulated in the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, sought to bring the Church into the world in order to transform it, to reform it in the image of the Kingdom of God. Predominantly envisioned as a moral transformation in the post-Reform era, this new theology found practical expression first in parish charities, and later in the Society for Moral-Religious Enlightenment and the Alexander-Nevskii Temperance Society. These organizations, and others like them, established diverse forms of outreach to the workers of St. Petersburg, from lectures and discussions to tearooms and pilgrimages. These activities were extremely popular and were attended by millions of workers. While working-class religion was complex and varied—and many workers were attracted to trends as diverse as heavy drinking, sectarianism, and socialism—a significant portion remained devoted to Orthodoxy and became actively and consciously involved in the new forms of religious expression offered by the Church.

As a result of their close contact with the workers and their hardships, a vocal and active minority of clergy, such as Petrov and Gapon, came to advocate a more radical program of political and social change in Russia by the early twentieth century. While not unique in his outlook, Gapon took his ideas furthest in action by forming a workers' organization; this organization began very much like the SMRE, but ultimately took a more direct role in labor disputes and the political demonstration of 9 January 1905. Bloody Sunday revealed the inherent tensions within the Church itself, while at the same time giving impetus for wide-sweeping demands for Church reform and greater independence of the Church from the state. There has not been sufficient research yet to conclude whether the attitudes and positions adopted by many of the clergy of St. Petersburg were widespread outside the capital, though recent studies suggest that they were widely shared.¹¹² At the same time, the position of the Petersburg parish clergy was not universally held, particularly by the hierarchy, which opposed any involvement that came too close to politics—and understanding this diversity of viewpoints and approaches within the Church is necessary for any proper understanding of its role. The very ambivalence of the Church as a whole toward the social crises of late Imperial Russia may have prevented it from having a greater impact on society during the revolutionary years. The Church failed to meet the crisis of late Imperial Russian society in large part because the hierarchy remained inflexible, particularly after 1905, in its understanding of social transformations and as often not hampered or restricted efforts of the parish clergy to respond to the needs of society. The triumph of reaction after 1907 silenced the more vocal demands for social and ecclesiastical reform, but did not end the Church's mission to the working class and did not extinguish liberal tendencies within the Church. By February 1917, even the Church ceased to support the old regime, and its collapse set the Church free to pursue its own efforts for reform and renewal, though the Bolshevik Revolution cut short these efforts. Ultimately, one of the primary aims of the communists was to eradicate the public involvement and social influence of the Church, returning to the Church to the eighteenth-century preoccupation exclusively with ritual—a condition from which the Russian Orthodox Church is still

¹¹² On this, see particularly the work of Laurie Manchester, such as “The Secularization of the Search for Salvation: The Self-Fashioning of Orthodox Clergymen's Sons in Late Imperial Russia,” *Slavic Review* 57 (1998): 50-76, and Pisiotis, “Unknown Dissent.”

struggling to overcome.