

Introduction

The Russian Idea: In Search of a New Identity

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“The morning that will break over Russia after the nightmarish revolutionary night will be rather the foggy ‘gray morning’ that the dying Blok prophesied.... After the dream of world hegemony, of conquering planetary worlds, of physiological immortality, of earthly paradise, – back where we started, with poverty, backwardness, and slavery – and perhaps national humiliation as well. A gray morning.”¹

This was the prediction of Fedotov, as early as the 1940s, and it has proven to be remarkably accurate. The transition has been slow, laborious, and painful. Turning the Communist USSR into a modern Russian state was far more difficult than most could have imagined. As numerous former satellite states declared independence, Russia was reduced to a pale shadow of the imperial USSR, and its role on the world stage diminished accordingly. Communists, though they will not easily return to power, continue to cast a strong shadow over every attempt at revising collectivist structures; nor is it easy to change attitudes deeply embedded in the 20th-century Russian mind. In a context of continuing economic and political instability it is not surprising that issues of Russian identity and the “Russian Idea” occupy a central place in public discussion.²

¹ F. P. Fedotov, *Sud'ba i grekhi Rossii: Izbrannye stat'i po filosofii russkoi istorii i kul'tury* [The fate and sins of Russia: Selected articles on the philosophy of Russian history and culture] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo "Sofia," 1991–92), 2: 198; cf. V. I. Mil'don, “The Russian Idea at the End of the Twentieth Century,” *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 35: 4 (1997): 24–38, esp. 36.

² See M. A. Maslin, ed., *Russkaia ideia* [The Russian idea] (Moscow: Respublika, 1992); V. M. Piskunov, *Russkaia ideia* [The Russian idea] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1994); A. Gulyga, *Russkaia ideia i ee tvortsy* [The Russian idea and its creators] (Moscow: Soratnik, 1995); Robin Aizlewood, “The Return of the ‘Russian Idea’ in Publications, 1988–91,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 71: 3 (1993): 490–99; and idem, “Revisiting Russian Identity in Russian Thought: From Chaadaev to the Early Twentieth Century,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 78: 1 (January 2000): 20–43; Wendy Helleman, ed. *The Russian Idea: In Search of a New Identity*, Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2003, 1–19.

Only a few short years ago names like Yeltsin, Zhirinovskii, and Ziuganov regularly captured the attention of journalists reporting on Russian affairs. Russia's problems were not only an internal matter. Yeltsin got international attention by jumping on the tank; he stopped a coup. His later antics are rather more forgettable. Zhirinovskii achieved center-stage by exploiting wounded pride for a nationalist backlash to Western-style economic reform. And Ziuganov found a more plodding revamp of the Communist Party rewarded by his near defeat of Yeltsin's 1996 re-election. Journalism gives instant news, but moves quickly from one "hot spot" to another. Once a country regains a degree of stability, however shaky, interest wanes. Political analysts have a little longer timespan in which to report, but philosophers rarely make it on the news. The materials of the present collection are an attempt to provide important background information on how Russians themselves perceived the events of those years in their own country; they also attempt to balance the focus on nationalism, and provide some necessary analysis from a philosophical and ideological perspective.

The Russian Idea

So, just what is the Russian Idea? What does the term mean? The words as such seem to be obvious enough, and need no further elaboration. Or do they? In Russian, first of all, there are two options for the adjective "Russian": *ruskaia* or *rossiiskaia*, and only the former is of concern. Why is "*ruskaia*" used here, and what is its significance? What is "Russia"? What does it mean to be "Russian"? What distinguishes Russia from the former Soviet Union, or the Russian empire of the 19th century, to say nothing about distinctions with respect to neighboring countries, to the east or south, and especially the west (Europe)? And what about the term "Idea"? In what sense are we to understand it, especially in combination with "Russian"? Are we talking about an Idea which has a Russian character, which happens to be Russian? Or about an Idea (conceptualization) of Russia, a Russian national principle? Where should such a principle come from? How should it arise? And who decides on the appropriateness of such a principle? Further, what does one exclude, or oppose, in affirming the Russian Idea? And finally, after we have come to grips with all these issues, we must still face the question: is it still relevant to discuss it?

Idea and Ideology

Ideas belong to human minds and human thought processes. They direct our thinking in two ways: to what is above and beyond us, or to what surrounds us

James P. Scanlan, "Interpretations and Uses of Slavophilism in Recent Russian Thought," in James P. Scanlan, ed., *Russian Thought after Communism: The Recovery of a Philosophical Heritage* (M. E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY, 1994), 31–61.

and forms our world of perception; they take us toward the divine, or to the world of our everyday experience. The ancient philosophers were not altogether wrong when they described the human soul as a bridge between two worlds.

Big and important ideas, like the Russian idea, take us back to Plato's Ideas: the timeless patterns or archetypes, objects of mental vision and perfect models for an imperfect world. Philo of Alexandria (1st cent. BC) posited these Platonic Ideas in the mind of God; they served as crucial blueprints for his creating the world. Philo's exegesis of Genesis deeply influenced the Christian Platonism of the Fathers in their analysis of creation.

In the West Descartes revived the ancient Stoic view of ideas as class-concepts of the human mind, to be analyzed logically. The emphasis of Berkeley and Hume on ideas representing sense-perception in turn influenced Kant's presentation of ideas as problematic extensions of reason in its judgment of sense-impressions. In affirming the limits of human reason, Kant also limited human knowledge of absolutes, like God, the soul and cosmos. The approaches of Kant and of Plato were much debated in late 19th-century Russia.³ Idealism continued to accent the primacy of the soul, spirit, or mind, whereas nascent materialism accented experience and the data of sense-impression.

Ideology as a political term takes us back to the Enlightenment, to the French intellectual and writer Destutte de Tracy (1754–1836), who used the term “*ideologue*” for someone tracing general ideas back to sense-impressions, thus rejecting metaphysical sources of knowledge. Although originally supported by Napoleon, it was later rejected as state policy and blamed for all the problems of the Revolution. Since that time for Europeans the term “ideology” has acquired negative connotations, especially in representing the 20th-century fascist dictatorial regimes of Germany and Italy. But in Russia, even today, “ideology” is free of such negative associations. Introduced with Bolshevism, it articulated a worldview differing radically from what preceded (tsarism and Orthodoxy); as an ideology it was based on philosophical assumptions, and provided the crucial legitimacy for exercise of power by the Communists, the basis of their authority. Its philosophically expressed worldview was oriented to implementation and action through political policies and programs. Once communist ideology was undermined, the regime fell.

Accustomed to an ideological underpinning for political action, Russians now feel lost without it. A pragmatic approach is unnerving, too arbitrary in an already unpredictable situation. And a deeply embedded distinction between an élite and the common people (with deep distrust of the latter), continues to pose

³ A recent discussion of this debate may be found in F. Nethercott, *Russia's Plato: Plato and the Platonic Tradition in Russian Education, Science and Ideology (1840–1930)* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), esp. 75–95, 106–21.

serious barriers to the egalitarian democratic thinking which equates *vox populi* with *vox Dei*. Russians, once thoroughly deceived by Communist promises, are also wary of new utopian proposals.

The *Russian Idea* as a patriotic nationalist attempt to fill the ideological vacuum continues to have significant appeal for national pride after the demise of imperial superpower status. Discussion of the Russian Idea from abroad has focused on the politically reactionary, if not dangerous, nationalist aspects of the Russian Idea.⁴ While these aspects are not negligible, and demand some attention, they must be examined in historical context for a balanced appreciation.

A Unique Russian Worldview?

Nationalism thrives on an affirmation of the *unique character* of the nation, affirming characteristics which constitute its identity, and differentiate it from the “other.” Scanlan has traced such a focus on “distinctive” characteristics to romantic concerns with ethnic identity, as the background to Chaadaev’s critique of Russian culture.⁵ While Russians have certainly been rediscovering 19th-century romantic and idealist thinkers, and have reacquainted themselves with a half-forgotten past,⁶ Scanlan’s critique of the Russian obsession with its unique character has focused on the dangers of retreat to isolationism and chauvinism. While not unjustifiable, such warning remarks sidestep the specific modern and contemporary factors which motivated renewed discussion of Russian identity in the post-perestroika context, when *Russia* once more gave its name to the bulk of

⁴ Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and J. P. Scanlan, “The Russian Idea from Dostoevskii to Ziuganov,” in *Problems of Post-Communism* 43 (August 1996): 35–42.

⁵ See J. P. Scanlan, “Is Russia Really in Need of Russian Philosophy?” published in Russian as “Nuzhna li Rossii russkaia filosofia?” *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 1 (1994): 61–65. J. F. Herder’s late 18th-century romanticizing description of the Slavs was well-known in Russia; Herder predicted that Slavs, because of their unspoiled rural and peace-loving character, would be the future leaders of Europe. Cf. Peter J. S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 10–11.

⁶ Of special interest today is the early role of Moscow in throwing off the Mongol-Tatar yoke, and the role of Orthodoxy in so much of Russian history. Even if a revival of such themes in Russian history is regarded as part of a process of mythification, as is argued by O. Volkogonova (“Est’ li budushchee u russkoi idei?” [Does the Russian idea have a future?], *Mir Rossii*, no. 2 [2000]: 28–52) and Michael Urban (“Remythologising the Russian State,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 50: 6 [1998]: 969–92), the healthy element of reconnecting with the past is not to be ignored. It is clear that the Orthodox Church, for one, cannot look ahead to the future without once more exploring and coming to grips with the role it had in Russian society at the end of the 19th century. If the process of rethinking its current role demands a reassessment of history, at least today there is an openness which allows for such rethinking as a basis for new strategies for the future.

the geographical territory making up the former USSR.⁷ If the outside world considered transition from the USSR back to “Russia” an almost automatic resumption of pre-1917 identity, for Russians themselves the move was not so obvious. In the late 1980s very few Russian citizens of the Soviet Union could actually remember the pre-revolutionary period; theirs was a Soviet identity. Nor had “Russia” ever assumed a role like that of other republics. Russian citizens had deliberately been scattered as a ruling élite throughout the republics; unlike other people-groups the identity of Russians, even if defined ethnically, was far more tied to that of the Union as a supra-national power.⁸ If these factors of ethnicity were not crucial while a strong Communist Party controlled the highly centralized government, they took on “monumental consequences ... when combined with the decision to grant sovereignty and a right of secession to the republics,” as Hough expresses it.⁹

While the USSR typically emphasized an internationalist vision together with its own multi-ethnic composition, after 1991 the focus of attention shifted to Russia as a singular nation-state, which must try to reincorporate the Russian

⁷ “Russia,” as such, played a somewhat ambiguous role within that Soviet “alliance.” See J. F. Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 214ff., on the unique problems faced by Gorbachev in decentralizing power from Moscow to the provinces, republics, and regions, advocating a voluntary renegotiation of the terms of alliance. The biggest problem was posed by Russia itself as a truly “superfluous” administrative link between the central government and the regions; Hough argues that Yeltsin, understanding the dynamics of the problem, took advantage of the situation to demand that the Soviet Union itself become the superfluous level of government (214–16). As a result, a *Russian* Communist Party was first created as the central authority of the party was disappearing. Yeltsin manipulated the situation by reminding Russians also of their need for “independence,” recalling the economic disadvantages which the Union posed to their own interests, while the the regions seemed to have all the benefits. Cf. *ibid.*, 238–45.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 238. The Russian republic had been absorbed within the central government of the Soviet federation far more than had other republics. Moreover, the boundaries of national units within the Soviet Union had been determined on the basis of ethnicity and language, e.g. as Ukrainian, or Belorussian. Nationality eventually was recorded on internal passports, initiated during the 1930s, making it even more clear that a Ukrainian maintained that ethnic identity even when living outside of the Ukraine, in Moscow or elsewhere (*ibid.*, 221–22). Communist thinking expected a withering away of the state, and fusion of its people groups (with economic integration). Of course, neither of these happened, and as early as 1917 Lenin made provision for a strongly centralized multi-ethnic state as an alliance (*soiuz*) in which the various nationalities had the right to secede (although the proletariat and its party would not exercise such a right); cf. Hough’s analysis of Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, *ibid.*, 217–19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 221. The reference is to Gorbachev’s decision to actually allow the independence of the Union partners under *perestroika*. As long as the party was in control, the right of secession was nothing more than a formality.

population left stranded in the “near abroad.”¹⁰ Would it re-create an “imperial” Union identity, focusing on linguistic, cultural and religious factors making up its ethnic Slavic identity, or turn to a more purely civic (*rossiiskaia*) identity, since it too contained within itself many ethnic groups variously related to the central federal state?¹¹ Within this context the discussion of the *Russian Idea* was no luxury; it actively addressed questions of present and future contours of the nation.

Nationalism and Neo-Slavophiles

Nationalistic motivation has evidently united the Orthodox and Communists, the two major components of the “authoritarian” bloc formed in the early 1990s.¹² For nationalists, the nation embodies a supra-temporal principle, functioning like a “national idea”; appeal to such a principle justifies rulers in demanding extraordinary devotion from subjects, especially in times of crisis. Since ethnically based nationalism often supports hatred toward “other” groups (neighbors, rivals, or enemies), and leads to violence, if not to pogroms, reference to nationalist tendencies in terms of a “specter” are not altogether unwarranted.

Twentieth-century awareness of Russia as a nation separate from the USSR goes back to the “ideological explosion” of the 1960s and 1970s, although incipient nationalism was quickly discredited by repressive KGB action and splintered into factions.¹³ The most well-known spokesman of resurgent Russian nationalism in modern times, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, has remained the outstanding

¹⁰ Cf. Nicolai N. Petro, *The Rebirth of Russian Democracy: Interpretation of Political Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), esp. 88–90, on the rise of nationalism, and the need for distinguishing between Soviet and Russian identity.

¹¹ A perceptive discussion of these challenges, and the varied answers given at present, can be found in Vera Tolz, “Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 50: 6 (1998): 993–1022, esp. 994–1006.

¹² Nationalism as a political phenomenon is usually thought to characterize historical movements of the 19th century, with the establishment of nation-states like Italy and Germany; the “nation” is defined as a community of people sharing a given territory and a single governing body, sharing ethnicity, culture, language, and/or history.

¹³ A helpful discussion of the rise of Russian nationalism as a dissident movement of the last decades of the communist regime, particularly from the 1960s, can be found in the account of the well-known Russian journalist and social historian Alexander Yanov, in *The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); the first part is called “The Historical Drama of the Russian Idea and America’s Soviet Debate” (17–88). This book pursues the theme of an earlier publication, *The New Russian Right*, warning against the rise of fascist elements together with nationalism taking advantage of a weakened communism during its final years.

representative of a neo-Slavophile approach in political thought from the time that he stood up to Soviet power in the 1970s.¹⁴

The political ideas of the Slavophiles can be traced back to the 1830s–50s, to the work of Khomiakov, Kireevskii, Aksakov, and Samarin, in their response to the official Uvarov trio (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality);¹⁵ attacking “official religion” as heresy, they appealed for secularization of power, and regarded official nationality as a perversion.¹⁶ Especially their view of (Orthodox) *religion* as the true basis of freedom led them to oppose what they regarded as “Western” safeguards of human freedom in parliaments, laws, and constitutions.¹⁷ Such typical Slavophile positions were repeated by Solzhenitsyn in his open letter to the Soviet leaders and the *samizdat* collection *From Under the Rubble* (166–73).¹⁸ But over the years Solzhenitsyn’s views have hardened into anti-democratic, anti-Western authoritarianism.¹⁹

¹⁴ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Pis'mo vozhdiam Sovetskogo Soiuzu* [Letter to the leaders of the Soviet Union] (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1974).

¹⁵ Within the present collection the most extensive discussion of the Uvarov formula for Russian identity may be found in V. S. Bibler’s “A National Russian Idea? A Culturological Hypothesis.”

¹⁶ Yanov faults the Slavophiles for underestimating the dangers of “totalitarianism” and being insufficiently critical of the despotic power of the state (i.e., the tsar as all-powerful and infallible). See *The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000*, 30.

¹⁷ Yanov argues that their critique was unsuccessful in combating the skillful combination of religion with despotism, reaction with patriotism, and serfdom with nationality in Uvarov’s formula (ibid., 20–21, 30–32). Slavophiles did have a limited appreciation of a democratic process in the *mir*, and worked hard to make the *zemstvo* a viable form of local democracy; cf. Petro, *The Rebirth of Russian Democracy*, 90 n. 10, where he mentions the pre-revolutionary attempts of D. Shchipov and B. Chicherin to foster a degree of democracy. Yanov recognizes the limitations of the Slavophile distinction between secular and spiritual *authority* within the nation, which they regarded as one big family, where love and goodness are operative, and no external guarantees are needed (*The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000*, 19–21; cf. 25–26); this he contrasts with the realism of American Calvinists who, assuming original sin, did not trust in human goodness and thus instituted balance and control to limit the *powers* of the various branches of government (23). Rather than advocating constitutional limitations on the power of the state, Slavophiles focused on separate secular and spiritual *functions*, not powers of state, and on *obligations*, rather than the rights of the people (25).

¹⁸ Yanov (*The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000*, 20–22) gives a detailed comparison between the views of Ivan Aksakov, in *Teoriia gosudarstva u slavianofilov* [The theory of the state in Slavophilism] (St. Petersburg, 1898), 31–32ff., 180, and Solzhenitsyn’s description of democracy in *Iz-pod glyb* (Paris: YMCA-Press 1974), translated by A. M. Brock as *From under the Rubble* (Boston: Little Brown, 1975), 21, 25. While not oblivious to the power of Russian despotism to destroy the soul, Solzhenitsyn attributes the origin of the problem (i.e., Marxist ideology) to the West, with its crisis of democracy and spiritual confusion; likewise, Aksakov speaks of the messianic significance of Russia, with Slavophilism saving the West from parliamentarism, anarchism, unbelief, and dynamite. For Slavophiles freedom is a spiritual phenomenon; a person must be free internally in order to become free politically. Yanov compares a quotation from V. Maksimov: “If we begin with poli-

Dissident groups helped prepare for the transition from an internationalist perspective.²⁰ A preoccupation with national identity does not inevitably degenerate to chauvinistic nationalism; a certain dose may even be healthy.²¹ The issue peaked with the election gains of the ultra-nationalist Zhirinovskii in the 1993 elections, but has not disappeared. For this reason it is imperative to discern a discussion of the Russian Idea as a legitimate aspect of the period of transition, and distinguish this from less healthy nationalist forms which arose at the same time.

Statism

Writing in 1990, Dmitry Pospelovsky recognized the collapse of Marxist internationalism as an important correlate of contemporary Russian nationalism.²² In

tical freedom, we shall unfailingly arrive at spiritual slavery. And that is what is taking place in the West at every step" (*The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000*, 21, quoting Maksimov, "Svoboda dukhovnaia dolzhna predshestvovat' svobode politicheskoi" [Spiritual freedom must precede political freedom], *Novoe russkoe slovo*, 18 June 1978). In the open letter Solzhenitsyn asked the Soviet leaders to keep for themselves "unshakable power, a single strong, closed power, the army, the police, industry, transportation, communications, natural resources, a monopoly on foreign trade, and control over the ruble – but give the people room to breathe, think, and develop!" (*Pis'mo vozhdiam*, 49). This Yanov compares with Konstantin Aksakov: "The people desires for itself one thing only: freedom of life, thought and word. Not interfering in the power of the state, it desires that the state not interfere in the autonomous life of its spirit" (Aksakov, *Teoriia gosudarstva* [1898], 41, qtd. in *The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000*, 168).

¹⁹ Already in the answer to Sakharov, published in *Iz-pod glub*, Yanov detects a more rigid turning to an authoritarian political solution (*The Russian Challenge*, 171).

²⁰ Some scholars, in their analysis of Russian nationalism in the late 1980s, go so far as to claim that the break-up of the USSR took place under the slogan of establishing a Russian state. Cf. Petro, *The Rebirth of Russian Democracy*, 88–90, on the need to distinguish between Soviet and Russian identity (the latter less coercive). See also Petro on the price paid by Russia in service to the USSR (96–101). Russian recognition that being part, or even the leading partner in the USSR had not worked altogether in its favor, that it was accordingly necessary to re-establish itself as a nation, is discussed by other authors as well, including R. Paradowski, "The Eurasian Idea and Leo Gumilev's Scientific Ideology," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 41: 1 (March 1999): 19–32, esp. 31.

²¹ This was certainly the expectation of Dmitry Pospelovsky, "Russian Nationalism, An Update" *Report on the USSR* 2: 6 (9 February 1990): 8–17.

²² *Ibid.*, esp. 11. Among the groups active at that time, he focused his attention particularly on *pochvennichestvo*, the nativist movement idealizing the rural communal village life of Russia. It is of interest that Pospelovsky included among nativists not only Solzhenitsyn, but the Byzantologist Fr. Ioann Ekonomstev, the medieval scholar Dmitrii Likhachev (editor of *Nashe nasledie*), Igor' Shafarevich (co-author with Solzhenitsyn in *From under the Rubble*), Vladimir Soloukhin, and others connected with Pamiat', a movement with strong Orthodox and monarchist connections. These he wanted to distinguish from the less acceptable group Patriot, a nationalist movement sharing Pamiat's clear opposition to the internationalist stance of the Communists, but in a more extreme, racist (anti-semitic) form, even combining neo-Stalinist or neo-Nazi aspects with statism.

1990, still within the context of the millennium celebrations of Russian Orthodoxy (1988), he regarded such nationalism as a healthy movement; like Solzhenitsyn, Pospelovsky looked to groups like Pamiat' and to the Orthodox church to restore Christian ethical values in society. But nationalist groups like the Patriots and other statists supported a far more extreme nationalist ideology aiming to re-establish superpower status, using a neo-messianic ideology.²³ If not constrained by state law-enforcement agents such groups certainly could pose a danger in exploiting problems of the transition period, like inflation, widespread unemployment and poverty, negligible wages, breakdown in the infrastructure of health care, social benefits, and communication.²⁴

Messianism

Is messianic imperialism also a component element of Russian nationalism?²⁵ Messianism points to a conviction of being chosen for a particular task or role in history. Dostoevskii, Solov'ev, and Berdiaev all recognized the messianic aspect of the Russian Idea; Solov'ev was especially critical of chauvinist, imperialist messianic attitudes expressed by Danilevskii and Leont'ev in their discussion of Russia's wars with Turkey.²⁶

²³ Cf. Igor' Torbakov, "The Statists and Ideology of Russian Imperial Nationalism," *RFE/RL Research Report* 1: 49 (1992): 10–16, on groups connected with the *samizdat Veche* of the 1970s, and more recently, those represented by publications like *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, *Den'*, *Molodaia Gvardiia*, or the All-Russian Socio-Christian Union for the Liberation of the People, known by its acronym, VSKhSON, a movement which arose in 1964, though it was all but crushed by the KGB in 1967; on this movement cf. Yanov, *The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000*, 178–79. Already in the early 1990s Torbakov observed various kinds of nationalism moving toward *statism*, the more extreme nationalist ideology aimed at re-establishing superpower status at a critical time of loss, using a neo-messianic Russian ideology to replace the vacuum left by the demise of communism (10–11).

²⁴ According to Torbakov, *statism* is fed by four concepts: an imperialism that does not recognize the liquidation of the USSR; an authoritarian, hierarchical neo-Eurasianism connected with L. Gumilev and S. Sankevich; anti-Westernism (like that of the neo-Slavophiles, or Limonov's *Manifesto*) affirming the sovereignty and priority of the state; and finally, promotion of a "third way" for Russia, with messianic expression of the Russian Idea, as in the work of film producer and writer N. Mikhalkov (12–15).

²⁵ On this issue, see also Yanov's discussion of Solzhenitsyn and his friends, *The Russian Challenge and the Year 2000*, 178–79.

²⁶ Indeed, the issue of a messianic vision, a sense of destiny and God-given mission, comes up repeatedly in articles included in this collection. Kantor speaks of the "nightmare" of messianism, which he connects with Russian isolationism (XXX). M. Il'in reflects extensively on imperialism and the "Third Rome" as part of the "rule of destiny," and a significant aspect of the Russian character (XXX 10ff??). He also discusses the messianic character of Marxism, with its rhetoric of a historic mission in service to mankind (XXX21ff??). For Bibler too the sense of a unique destiny, as a statement of a supra-national idea of sovereignty, can be traced back to "Moscow as the Third

But messianic views were not confined to pre-revolutionary times. Marxists expressed their historic, messianic role in terms of being progressive, well advanced in science and space exploration to be properly equipped for their task of “civilizing” the world.²⁷ And we may well ask, with M. Il’in, whether Russia is now ready to leave its “imperial” civilizing destiny behind? The evidence points to reluctance in abandoning former spheres of influence, accepting newly defined borders, particularly when it comes to Belarus and the Ukraine.²⁸

The issue of messianic vision demands consideration of the question of *religion in Russian culture*. Berdiaev’s interpretation of the Schism as a tragedy of messianic thought is now well-known in Russia. Berdiaev’s *Russian Idea* was pre-occupied with a messianic mission for Russia, starting with the crucial role of “Moscow as Third Rome,” to express a strong sense of a specifically Russian place and task in history. Among contemporary authors, K. Ivanov has focused quite explicitly on the problem of the nationalization of Orthodoxy, as it confuses the interests of church and state, and, in turn, opens the way for misguided utopian constructions.²⁹ Inasmuch as these are based on substitutes for religion they only lead to bitterness and disillusionment.

Ivanov’s analysis of Russia’s messianic calling is particularly significant for initiating a discussion of the respective spheres of authority of church and state, and distinguishing the conditions for being a faithful and responsible member of the church, from conditions for responsible citizenship. Issues of church and state, or religion and politics play a critical role in this context.

The Russian Idea and Russian Orthodoxy

Neo-Slavophiles like Solzhenitsyn, with their 19th-century predecessors, consider Orthodoxy to be the crucial factor for Russian identity. Orthodoxy, they argue, represents the key to holding Russia together. Indeed, Orthodoxy has been more closely tied to national identities throughout history than have most Protestant groups or Catholicism within their respective states. When religion and ethnicity

Rome” (XXX. 8–9, 16??), confirming Kantor’s approach on messianic nationalism; he also typically connects the Russian Idea with empire-building, with imperialism, i.e., rejecting democracy (XXX20–21??). In a similar vein Walicki has connected the temptation of messianism and totalitarianism with the “Russian Idea,” though he recognizes that messianism typically characterizes a time of chaos and uncertainty. Cf. A. Walicki, “Po povodu ‘russkoi idei’ v russkoi filosofii” [On the Russian idea in Russian philosophy], *Voprosy Filosofii*, no. 1 (1994): 68–72.

²⁷ Cf. Il’in, 21?? (XXX).

²⁸ The re-establishment of closer ties with Belarus has been an ongoing concern of discussions with its leader, Lukashenko, during the past years. Connections with the Ukraine were strengthened after Putin’s March 2001 visit; negotiation of energy policies reflects Russia’s desire to reassert its influence there.

²⁹ See his article “The Orthodox Schism and Schismatic Communism” in this collection,? XXX

coincide they give a powerful sense of identity. However, this strength in expressing identity can also hide a significant weakness. Nationalized religion is problematic when political power structures dictate priorities, or interfere in the appointment of leaders. Moreover, what unites a core segment in a nation can also serve to divide those alienated by it. Can the Russian Federation afford to alienate its Islamic and other ethnic component groups?

So we come back to an important question at the heart of the discussion of the Russian Idea, identity, and ideology. *Is Orthodoxy able to fill the current ideological void?* Is it the legitimate socio-political structure to do so? As a religion its prime concern is the relationship between God and human beings. Still, as Kuraev affirms, it has its own tradition of philosophy, and does express a religious worldview.³⁰ It certainly supports a system of ideas opposing the materialist and communist ideology which, even though it is no longer imposed as state ideology, has left its legacy in deeply engrained public attitudes and laws on property, to give but one example. And it can perform the crucial role of legitimizing contemporary political action, as with the patriarch blessing Putin and offering public prayers on his taking office.

What is *missing is the link from theory to practice and implementation*. What is the contemporary relationship of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Russian state? It is not well-defined, and this is not accidental. The ROC has privileges, a role in the army and education, and receives help in rebuilding churches, but has not resumed its former role as state church. It relies on indirect means of influence.

Orthodoxy as Ideology? The Philosophical Dimension

Ironically, in Russian history ideology was introduced as a replacement for Orthodoxy. But ideology also meant a rejection of the Christian Platonist approach, emphasizing rather a naturalist approach to knowledge. However, consideration of Orthodoxy as “ideology” clearly implies a broadening of that assumed base of knowledge to include transcendental resources, based on divine revelation.

Of course, the Platonist approach was not without its problems, especially on the issue of creation. *Platonic Ideas* were accepted in the Christian tradition, as we noted, to explain the divine plan for the creation. These Ideas have divine status, but the creation as such represents an inferior embodiment of those Ideas. The Platonizing explanation tended to conflate “creaturely” with “fallen” status. Christian philosophers following the Platonizing fathers would always need to clarify their understanding of our world and humanity as an originally good creation, yet fallen due to human sin and disobedience. It is therefore not surprising

³⁰ See Kuraev’s article in this collection, “Pantheism and Monotheism,” XXX.

that in the Platonizing sophiological thought of Solov'ev, Florenskii, and Bulgakov, the status of creation remained a contested issue – on which Florovsky's corrective must be heard.³¹

Ideas are after all not just divine absolutes, although they have a transcendental aspect; they are human constructs. They depend on input both from above and below. In terms of religion and politics “input from below” means a degree of democratic expression must be honored; in the political arena there must be room for a plurality of options. But the issue of authority must also be addressed. Russians are obviously looking for some way of reintroducing an ideology, as a transcendental perspective to give a framework for action and for useful judgments on events. Certainly the renewed publicly acknowledged role of Christianity can make a difference here, contributing its own perspective on the value of human labor (or its exploitation), giving prophetic statements on the corruption which pervades the government and military, or articulating a vision of a Christian society. If it is not the task of the institutional church as such to give direction on critical issues of Russian society and politics, certainly those scholars and intellectuals who are Christian can help provide the vital link between Christian principles and their practical application.³² The unfortunate 20th-century experience of over-reliance on utopian thought is by itself an insufficient reason for altogether avoiding imaginative deliberation on more perfect forms of social organization, business-arrangements or government, as an anti-

³¹ G. V. Florovsky's critical article on creation, “Tvar' i tvarnost' [Creature and creatureliness], was first published in *Pravoslavnaia mysl'* (Paris), no. 1 (1928), and reprinted in translation as “Creation and Creaturehood,” in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 3, *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Co., 1976), 43–78. It is discussed in Khoruzhii, “Neopatristscheskii sintez i russkaia filosofii” [A neopatristic synthesis and Russian philosophy]. See pp. XXX in the present volume. Florovsky affirms creation as an act of God's will, to be distinguished from divine generation as an act of his nature. This implies the heterogeneity of creation, and also allows for the freedom of the creature. It allows for history with an open outcome; death and finitude are not the only options, but are overcome in history.

³² In St. Petersburg, Fr. Veniamin Novik has explored the difficulties of Orthodox believers actively involving themselves with socio-political and economic issues in terms of a vision for creatively transforming life in its fullness, one that he says is rather unpopular among the Orthodox; see his “Social Doctrine: Will the Russian Orthodox Church Take a Daring Step?” *Religion, State & Society* 26: 2 (1998): 197–203. He recognizes that while in the Catholic Church priests also take no direct part in politics, that church has worked out a vision for a Christian society (198). At issue is the Orthodox attitude to social structures. A Platonist inclination influences them toward regarding “reality” as less important than the “ideal” construct. Lacking a concept of civil society, the Orthodox also regard as unnecessary any social initiatives through groups that could mediate government administration and the subject; according to Fr. Novik, the Constantinian model of imperial state Orthodoxy is still alive in popular psychology, considering a strong state, e.g. a monarchy, to be the most appropriate, even though democratic structures have been shown not to be in contradiction with the Scriptures (201).

dote to problems experienced in these areas. This remains a challenge for Russians, once more to dream constructively, to combine bold plans for the future with a sensible approach for implementation.

The Present Discussion: Authors and Issues

The articles included in this collection for the most part represent a reaction to the post-perestroika reaction. They are keenly aware of the nationalist backlash to the “democratic” reforms of the early 1990s, with the rise of Zhirinovskii, and the use of the Russian Idea by groups around him, and also by Ziuganov. They have observed the “red-brown” alliance of the early 1990s, and heard Yeltsin’s request to formulate a new Russian Idea appropriate for the time. While no quick solution could be produced, numerous authors evidently were stirred into writing on the subject, expressing concern over the request for a new (single) ideology to guide political action.

In the first section authors from various points of view deal with specific aspects of the renewed discussion of the Russian Idea, in terms of a so-called unique Russian mind, or mentality, a sense of destiny, and crucial choices made in service to mankind. They approach the topic from a variety of angles: linguistic, sociological, cultural (or culturological), and political.

With his article “Is the Russian Mentality Changing?” Vladimir Kantor argues that Russian attitudes *are* changing after the fall of communism. Reviewing typical Russian beliefs like collectivism (opposed to “Western” individualism), the “besieged fortress” psychology, messianism, and futurism, and dismissing most of these as myths, Kantor finds that many traditional attitudes are disintegrating and being replaced by Western ones. Since the 1950s, Kantor notes, the “apology for the private life” has had an impact which continues, even though the state still wishes to control the economy. Russian culture, according to Kantor, is coming out of a period of adolescence and entering one of adulthood.

Mikhail Il’in’s critical discussion, “Words and Meanings: On the Rule of Destiny. The Russian Idea,” begins with Belinskii’s 1841 (Westernizing) characterization of a “motivating principle in history,” Kireevskii’s (Slavophile) elaboration of the “fundamental Russian mind,” and Dostoevskii’s attempt to synthesize these in terms of external and internal aspects of a Russian national principle in history. For the historical roots of the idea expressing Russia’s self-awareness of its “imperial-civilizing” destiny, Il’in takes us back to epic heroes and legends of the forests and steppe, tales of passage and difficult choices. For the Russian formulation of Byzantine theocratic ideals Il’in examines the work of the eleventh- and twelfth-century thinkers Metropolitan Hilarion, Nikon the Great, and Nestor. Here he detects three foundations for the Russian Idea: 1) Hilarion’s “chrono-political” formula, connecting Russian history with the spread and pro-

tection of Christianity; 2) Nikon's geo-political formula, looking at Russia with its far-flung regions, its towns and villages as a system of "islands" separated by watershed ridges; and 3) the archetype of self-sacrifice presented in Nestor's tale of the brothers Boris and Gleb, also attributed to Peter the Great's activities by Belinskii.

A synthesis of these motifs can be found in the themes of enlightenment, holiness, and glory applied to Russia as the "Third Rome," a concept elaborated especially by the 15th-century monk Filofei (Philotheus) to express a special role for Russia as "God-chosen." The concept of sacrificial service to mankind was not missed by Marxist Messianism, and Il'in portrays Lenin as a modern-day version of the tenth-century prince Vladimir, once more making critical choices for Russia. Il'in resists the urge to create new myths for the architects of "perestroika," even though Russia does not appear ready to give up on its "gods, tsars, and heroes." He urges great caution for those desiring to create another single national ideology, given the diversity and plurality within contemporary culture.

In his article "The Russian National Idea, a Culturological Hypothesis" Vladimir Bibler challenges the political expression of the Russian Idea, suggesting instead that the national idea is a linguistic and cultural matter; it is discourse, thought expressed in speech. Interpreted politically, as in Kiva's contemporary reworking of the well-known formula of Count Uvarov, Bibler warns that it focuses on the state at the expense of other components, and is clearly opposed to democracy (sovereignty of the person), civil society (the right of contractual agreement), and the independent development of culture, literature, and the arts. Not only does the Russian national idea represent pure nationalism; it leads to totalitarianism or fascism.

Leonid Sedov, in "The Place of Russian Culture among World Cultures: An Invitation to Reflection," uses comparative cultural analysis to examine problems of contemporary Russian culture, looking for deep roots in Russian history. Sedov attempts to decipher a "modal personality" of Russian culture by comparing typical attitudes to death and mortality in major cultures like the Chinese, Indian, and Judeo-European. His conclusion, that Russians prefer the "here and now," or "this-worldliness," leads him to question the depth of Orthodox religiosity, and to re-interpret Dostoevskii's characterization of Russia as "God-bearing" in terms of a pagan nationalism. If insistence on correctness of teaching and nationalistic pride in the superiority of one's nation characterized Marxism, it characterized Orthodoxy no less.

This article ends with an interesting character sketch of the Russian "modal personality," that of the gambler, with a certain irresponsible fatalism allowing him to taking chances. Truth, in such a context, is not abstract but pragmatic. There is also a certain desperation which characterizes the gambler's situation, for

he cannot leave the game until it is over, and the unpredictability of the situation makes it hard to plan. Sedov similarly interprets “brotherhood” in terms of the cohesiveness forced upon those bound by the roulette wheel. Finally, he notes that this personality is characterized by a type of adolescence, one which can distinguish death from other kinds of leave-taking, but still regards it as a strange departure, in which the benefits are all for those left behind.

Sedov’s portrayal is balanced by Andrei Zabiako’s “Antinomies of Russian Consciousness: Labor and Leisure,” which presents a strong case against the traditional reproach of laziness as a basic Russian character trait. He calls attention to the rhythm of a capricious nature, its short intensive summers alternating with long winters; the expansive sweep of the Russian landscape is also noted as an influential factor for Russian views of labor, or form, and restraint, fate and chance (*avos*). He examines the worldview expressed in traditional monastic literature and the scheduling of the day by bells, funeral rituals, and fairy-tales which are as quick to mock the fool hoping for the sweets for which he did not work, as to glorify the clever rogue. Zabiako concludes that for Russians idleness is a temporary condition; labor is the norm.

In the article “Civil Society: A Religious Assessment of the Problem” Evgenii Rashkovskii begins by establishing a methodology for dealing with the religious aspect of civil society as a vital issue, particularly difficult to solve in rational discourse since it touches on spiritual reality. His introductory survey of the three basic principles of civil society (equality before the law, protection of property, and irreducible freedom of the person) gives clear evidence of the weight of responsibility carried by the individual in the context of civil society. In a historical survey he shows how Catholicism allowed more freedom for civil society, but especially the Protestant Reformation allowed for a more privatized sense of the covenant between God and man. Clear distinction between “what belongs to God and to Caesar” meant a powerful restraint on the ambitions of rulers.

The given analysis is helpful particularly when Rashkovskii applies it to the difficult transition period now experienced in Russia, where a totalitarian regime has collapsed; only civil society, and non-violence in settling differences, can prevent civil war. The liberalization of law, an unstable market economy, and the slow formation of new coalitions have added to an atmosphere of lawlessness, mafia presence, to which he adds two current problems: the traditionally large size of the state, with corresponding atomization of society, and a negative attitude to law, inherited from the Romantic views of the Slavophiles and passed on to *narodniki* and Marxists. Nonetheless Rashkovskii finds a source of hope in the revival of religion, from its negative (critical) role in the 1970s, undermining the atheistic basis of the state, to a more positive contribution in the last decade, encouraging the establishment of civil society and freedom of the person.

In the *second section*, which discusses the Russian Idea in terms of its foundations in Russian religious philosophy, authors approach things differently, from a more explicitly religious and Orthodox perspective, dealing once more with some of the topics introduced in the first section, but now with greater depth. The communist state was marked by its antagonism to religion, and by the assumption that religion would wither away, just as the state was to wither away, and all peoples would be fused in a single stateless paradise. Of course, communists reckoned too little with actual human nature.

Authors in this section take different approaches to the issue of the renewed presence of Orthodoxy in the public sphere; they use a historiosophical approach (Ivanov), look at the potential for interfaith discussion (Zhuravskii), re-examine cosmism from a religious perspective (Vasilenko), discuss the patristic factor (Khoruzhii), and finally, investigate the rise of syncretism and the occult (Kuraev).

In his essay “The Orthodox Schism and Schismatic Communism” Konstantin Ivanov recognizes the work of emigré writers on religious problems of Russian history, particularly the tragic 17th-century schism, and examines Berdiaev’s connection of that event with attitudes of the intelligentsia and Bolshevik ideology. Only by regarding the schism as a tragedy of the messianic vision of Moscow as the Third Rome can one explain the subsequent shaking of the theocracy which it supported. Analyzing the “disenchantment” of Russians at that time, Ivanov turns to “nationalization of Christianity” as the prior spiritual catastrophe, the basis of such false dreams and utopias as we could find also among communists. For Ivanov nationalization of faith takes us to the heart of the problem. The collapse of a utopia of power meant turning to its alternative, anarchic nihilism. False idealization of the nation as “God-bearing,” and false association of power and religion misled Russians to revolt against God, questioning his control over evil and suffering. Atheism arose from a false sense of compassion.

Aleksei Zhuravskii’s article on Islam, “P. Chaadaev and V. Solov’ev: The Discovery of Islam,” written against the background of current religious tensions in Russia, demonstrates that both Chaadaev (early 19th century) and Solov’ev (late 19th century) anticipated current positions on Islam held by noteworthy Catholic scholars like Karl Rahner. Discussion of Islam typically placed it in the context of the “opposition of East and West,” or the major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Chaadaev was ahead of his time when, in the *Philosophical Letters*, he recognized the positive historical role of Islam as one of the major forms of revealed religion.

Zhuravskii shows how Solov’ev built on Chaadaev’s position to develop an increasingly positive evaluation of Islam’s role in history. From a more traditional and typical position in the earlier works like *Three Powers* (1877), where he

emphasized the restriction of personal individuality in Islam, already *The Great Dispute and Christian Politics* (1883) recognized Islam as the capstone of a number of heresies going back to the Arians. Even more positive is the evaluation of *The History and Future of Theocracy* (1885–87), where Solov'ev recognized Islam as a religion tracing itself to Abraham. Finally, his scholarly article "Mahomet" in the Brokgaуз-Efron encyclopedia presents a culmination of his study of Islam, allowing it a providential significance, as a type of "preparation of the gospel," such as can also be found in the Catholic orientalist Massignon. According to Solov'ev, the difference between the three major monotheistic religions is not to be sought in morality but in metaphysics. Solov'ev thus called for a reconciliation which treats the opponent on "God's terms."

Russians are rightfully proud of their role in space exploration. Their cosmonaut Iurii Gagarin was the first man to travel in space. Leonid Vasilenko's article "Cosmism and Evolutionism in the Russian Religious Philosophical Tradition" introduces us to the central ideas of cosmism and surveys four significant thinkers who supported cosmist views: Florenskii, Solov'ev, Bulgakov, and Berdiaev. He begins by asking some critical questions about the self-sufficiency of the cosmos, the aim of its evolutionary process, and the human factor, or human freedom. Already in the opening definition of cosmism in terms of a "world which as a whole is harmonious and organized according to reason, with soul ennobling it and promoting spiritual growth for mankind," he positions himself in terms of the Platonist tradition characterizing the work of Solov'ev and Florenskii. The article points to the significance of Russian religious-philosophical cosmism as a response to Western thought which did not look beyond rational factors, and ignored spirituality. Insisting on the inner spiritual depth of soul, whether human or cosmic, and the cosmic mission of human beings in the world, these thinkers provide a basis for new ways of thinking on social and cultural issues.

Florenskii's positions are of interest not only for using a traditional Platonic dualistic approach to the distinction of our human world and the cosmos but especially for pointing to the crucial role of the church in allowing for man to become godlike, and thus overcoming dualism. Where Florenskii's view of life in the cosmos is static, Solov'ev has accented historical process and organic development, focusing on the role of the Logos and Sophia, or the world-soul, in the universal process of total-unity. Significant in this process is the primordial fall of man and consequent alienation from God, promoting fragmentation. In his discussion of re-integration, or unification, with a personal as well as a cultural historical aspect, Solov'ev pays attention to the question of East and West, and points to a special role for Russia in mediating between the brutal tyranny of the East and lack of spirituality of the West.

Bulgakov approaches cosmic issues from the perspective of the predominant social and economic problems of his time, recognizing our world as a field of struggle where human labor must help open up the future for life. Man has a crucial role in redeeming nature and transforming the world. And finally, Berdiaev, recognizing the end of an era of organic development signaled by technology and industry, emphasizes an eschatological view of our world, and accordingly focuses on human freedom and creativity as the answer.

With his article “Neopatristic Synthesis and Russian Philosophy” Sergei Khoruzhii takes a central concept of the work of Fr. Georges Florovsky, “Neopatristic synthesis,” and demonstrates how it can be used to integrate traditional Orthodox theological concepts in a new philosophical tradition. He begins by examining Russian philosophy from the Slavophiles through Solov’ev as a school (the metaphysics of All-Unity) within the Western classical tradition, accepting a Platonist essentialist ontology, and expressing authentic Russian themes like integrality (*tselnost’*) but ignoring the spiritual experience of the mystics and ascetics. The theme of “glorification of the name” (*imiaslavie*) which showed promise of correcting these omissions was not productive among Moscow-based successors of Solov’ev mainly due to disruptions after the Revolution.

Khoruzhii finds a better opportunity for applying the experience-related themes of hesychasm and Palamist thought within a new Eastern Orthodox philosophical tradition which is personal, dialogic, and true to the patristic discourse. He calls it a philosophy of “energetic ontology,” and demonstrates its potential from the theme of “Creation and the creature” as a helpful account of human status and human freedom. Recognizing the significance of Florovsky’s 1928 essay “Creature and Creatureliness,” Khoruzhii is confident that this direction of thought allows for valuable philosophical contribution in the future.³³

And finally, Andrei Kuraev’s “Pantheism and Monotheism” addresses the problem of popular syncretism combining Orthodox Christian belief with occult theosophical beliefs (like those of Mme. Blavatsky, the Roerichs, and Pomerants); the latter are typically based on pantheism, where God is indistinguishably intertwined with the world, and likewise to be sought in the depth of our souls. Kuraev begins his argument by contrasting the personal quality of God, versus the impersonal abstract divine Absolute of the pantheists; he then works out this contrast in terms of themes of creation, divine love, the presence of God in creation, human freedom, and evil.

How can the impersonal infinite Absolute create the relative and finite, he asks. While love is the strong point among Christian affirmations of God, the pantheist has no room for attributing love to the divine, for that would involve the impersonal principle in a personal interest for what is subordinate. For

³³ On this important article of Florovsky see also above, n. 31.

Christians God's love climaxed in his Son, Immanuel, God in human form. Among other things the incarnation means that created reality, though dependent and relative, is not an illusion; human beings are real, not just a microcosm, and have their own freedom of action. Finally, he argues that evil is not to be identified with God, nor with nature, as in the theory that harmony in the cosmos depends on the contrast of good and evil. Pantheism denies true freedom, has no room for the varied complexity of life as created, and makes no clear distinction between the relative and absolute, the perfect and damaged cosmos. Syncretism reduces major world religions like Hinduism or Buddhism to some variants of Christianity; distorting these religions, it also supports positions clearly incompatible with Christianity.

Thus the articles of this collection variously reflect the discussion of the "Russian Idea" which received considerable attention in the press of the early and mid-1990s. Although initiated mainly by nationalists and stimulated by Yeltsin's 1996 request of intellectuals to give a more balanced proposal, this discussion especially reflects political, ideological, cultural, and social concerns over the demise of communist ideology; the vacuum left by the long-imposed single ideological vision has not easily been filled. Nor is the discussion finished. Patriotic nationalism rose for some very specific reasons; a number of immediate historical conditions contributing to the loss of a sense of identity, like the question of borders, and of ethnic Russians living in the "near abroad," are slowly getting resolved. But there are also long-term cultural, ideological, philosophical, and religious factors, which are not as topical, and warrant ongoing attention. In fact, many of the issues raised by the discussion of the Russian Idea have a perennial character. The articles of the present collection have been translated to give a degree of balance to the discussion as it has reached the public outside of Russia.