

“Creation not Destruction”

An interview with the Russian Orthodox artist Vitali Linitsky*

A number of works by the Orthodox religious artist Vitali Dmitrievich Linitsky were displayed at the exhibitions of so-called “non-conformist” art held in recent years in Moscow. † These include the cycles “Apocalypse”, consisting of seven canvases, and “The Seasons”, consisting of four canvases. A serious attempt to work with religious subject matter, to interpret the most complex book of the New Testament by means of the painted canvas, is itself an extremely important phenomenon, but especially so in our country in these times, and in view of the fact that the artist had no hope that his work would ever be shown to the general public.

Vitali Dmitrievich Linitsky was born in 1934 in Sumy to the family of a military serviceman. On finishing school he entered the Theatrical Arts College in Alma-Ata. In 1955 he was admitted to Moscow’s Surikov State Art Institute. He graduated in 1961 as a literary illustrator. For several years he worked as a teacher in Kalinin and at the Stroganovsky College in Moscow. Since 1965 he has worked as a commercial artist. He had already begun his serious painting and drawing while a student. His thesis work was to illustrate a number of the works of Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *White Nights*, *Poor Folk* and *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. The physical and artistic approach employed in these

*This interview was taken in April 1977. The Russian original appeared in *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniya* No. 122, 1977, pp. 166-178.

†From September 1974 to July 1981 Moscow’s non-conformist artists were allowed to arrange public exhibitions of their work under the auspices of the “Amalgamated Committee of Moscow Artists and Graphics Workers”, which was organized for this purpose. The exhibitions were censored and Vitali Linitsky’s work, which the Communist authorities considered “religious propaganda”, were invariably at the centre of the negotiations and controversy which would follow the censors’ decisions. In March 1980 the censors discovered only after an exhibition entitled “Twenty Moscow Artists” had opened to the public, that one of Linitsky’s paintings contained a portrait of Fr Dmitri Dudko, the popular Russian Orthodox priest who was, at that time, under arrest in Moscow’s Lefortovo prison. The censors ordered that the priest’s face in the portrait be obliterated. Linitsky’s works were censored entirely from the March 1981 exhibition of the “Twenty”. Finally in July 1981 the cultural authorities abolished the “Amalgamated Committee” entirely. (Tr.)

illustrations mark them out as significant works in themselves. Reproductions have been published in the journal *Soviet Union*, in a section of *The Children's Encyclopedia* dedicated to Dostoyevsky, and in a publication entitled *F. M. Dostoyevsky in Portraits, Illustrations and Documents* (Moscow, izd. *Prosveshchenie*, 1972) p. 354 (the illustration "Alyosha and Ilyusha" was mistakenly attributed to another artist). Some of these illustrations are to be found in the Leningrad Museum, and in the Moscow and Leningrad Dostoyevsky museums. As an artist depicting monastic life, Linitsky was asked to take part in the making of the film "The Brothers Karamozov". In 1969 his works were displayed at an exhibition of graphic art in Lugano, Switzerland. His paintings may be seen, however, only in a few private collections. State galleries do not buy contemporary religious art for purely ideological reasons.

The following is an interview with the artist.

Q. Why is it that you paint religious subjects and consider yourself a religious artist? What do these concepts mean to you?

A. Insofar as I, like any other Soviet citizen, was brought up in an atheist school, I knew nothing of religion and never even imagined that anything of this sort could exist. I came to faith in God and to religious conviction as an adult. I was baptized at the age of 24 and became a novice at the Trinity-St Sergius Lavra. This was during my final year at the Institute. I spent my novitiate at the Trinity monastic house in Peredelkino. Dostoyevsky brought me to religious belief. While studying his works I began to think seriously about the existence of a Higher Force, a Creator of the world, and a Saviour. My internal conversion was swift; I was already a believer when I entered the Lavra, though I had not yet been baptized. It is only natural that after baptism my whole life, including my creative life, should be connected with Orthodoxy. I think it is strange, to say the least, to confess one thing and do something else entirely different. Therefore, I try in my work to be a Christian. That my character is far, perhaps very far indeed, from the Christian ideal is another matter. All the same, in my work I struggle to fulfil this ideal. Moreover, my spiritual fathers at the monastery sent me out into the world as an artist. They believe that in this way my life will be of greater use. This serves as my novitiate, my service of obedience.

Any sort of artistic activity, whether it involves representational art, literature or music, frequently estranges man from God. It often happens that an artist's pride as a creator becomes a danger to him. It may become his undoing; a man begins to compete with God. It is well known that the Holy Church Fathers and ascetics were cautious in their approach to art, considering it a complex, difficult phenomenon, and one often fraught with temptations. There are three stages of a prayerful state of mind. The lowest and crudest of them is that of the creative nature, when it confuses

what it desires with reality. The creative nature begins in this way to create its own personal world and to live by dreams and fantasies, which in turn overwhelm it and bring about its estrangement from God. Such a state is really very dangerous; and knowing this, a man must be careful to escape from such captivation as quickly as possible. It is never justified to set up something an artist has done as an absolute. If one has a vision or receives some revelation, one must test it to whatever extent this is possible and re-test it as strictly as one can, if only so as not to mislead others. If by your art you mislead others, not only will you perish yourself, but you will bring about the ruin of others, who have trusted you in all innocence. In this lies the danger and the complexity of religious art. Moreover, the artist must adhere to the Church, because freedom from these temptations is to be had only through the Church. If one sets Christ at the centre of one's art, and trusts in Him, and rather than depending on oneself asks humbly for His aid, then if it is Christ's will, He will direct the artistic nature along the true path. To listen to oneself is to fall into delusion, and delusions are always ruinous. In art there can be no question of some kind of "saving egocentrism". Man cannot create anything of true value unless he is controlled by Christ. There is no intermediate position—an artist is led either by Christ, or by Satan. Unfortunately, there are many who do not know this, or who do not want to know. But this is the real complexity of religious painting, especially in our time. The ideal path for the artist is the training and work of the monastic icon-painter—fasting, prayer, vigil, and seclusion.

Q. What in your opinion is the difference between religious art and iconography?

A. Fr Pavel Florensky defined this well when he said the Saints paint icons. That is, the artist/icon painter creates not from himself, but finds his prototype in canonical tradition. Religious painting, to a certain extent, is not connected with the canons, that is, with the iconographic canons. It is for this reason that the religious artist can employ a purely subjective understanding of his literary sources. It goes without saying, however, that he ought to comprehend fully what he does. Naturally he ought to be religious—otherwise his art cannot be religious. There are practically no really serious icon-painters at the moment, even in the monasteries. We have no serious contemporary school of iconography for certain obvious reasons. Attempts to find a new iconographic style, if I may so put it, are impossible if only for practical reasons: no new churches are being built here. Icons painted in accordance with the canons but employing new and experimental techniques are not to be found in our churches. On the one hand people are not prepared for them, and on the other hand they would clash with the now traditional. Vasnetsov-Nesterov style, which also bears little relation to canonical iconogra-

phy. Furthermore, there is virtually no one conducting a systematic study of the religious symbolism of Russian iconography. The religious artist is not painting a prototype, but expressing his notions, his opinions. This is not iconography, it is easel painting. And that is why I have chosen easel painting, although I am also trying to paint icons in a new vein.

Furthermore, religious painting must be, especially at this time in our country's history, informative in the positive sense of the word, because people are denied religious education, have no possibility to read much, to know much, or to grow spiritually.

Q. Is there, in your opinion, a tendency toward religious painting in contemporary Russia?

A. I would not say there is, as yet, a definite tendency. There is an interest in religious subject matter, a most positive and important interest, even though this may seem rather strange. In spite of all the persecutions and prohibitions, in spite of the unprofitability of this subject matter from the standpoint of an artist's well-being, this interest is very great indeed, and not only on the part of the public, but amongst artists themselves. I can think of several artists, whom I consider to be really serious in their pursuit of this difficult but life-giving source, that is, religious painting. There is A. Kharitonov. One might mention a significant improvement in the quality of the work of D. Plavinsky. His "Cross" at the (February 1977—Tr.) exhibition is a very serious effort. One hopes that this is more than just an episode, a flash of intuition, and that he will continue to develop further this really inexhaustible theme of Golgotha, of the Cross. V. Kalinin has done some original work on this theme, with a great deal of difficulty and at some cost to himself. His last work, "Lazarus", is very controversial, but interesting. Judging by recent exhibitions, a number of artists are moving in this direction. However, alongside these very positive developments there is one highly negative trait. There are certain artists, who under the guise of religious themes are doing things I consider quite unacceptable. For example there is the work of O. Tselkov. O. Kandaurov's position is complex and not very sound. He has taken religious themes as a basis in his most recent works, and it is especially strange, even terrifying, to see him depict the Saviour at Epiphany with hooves rather than feet, and instead of a dove, something like a Latin cross. Such false information pouring out on the public from the works of certain artists does even more harm than ordinary, straight-forward, anti-religious propaganda. Unfortunately, many artists fail to understand this, but others do understand and carry on quite consciously. For these consider that, as Artists (with a capital "A", of course) they are free to do as they please. Of course, each will one day be called to account for this, that is, for his art, for seducing people from the true path of Christ.

Q. Your paintings convey a feeling of brightness and festivity. Why is it that you do not paint razed churches, or the Church as devastated and oppressed?

A. The question is somewhat misleading. After all, what is the Church and what are churches? The church building is a piece of earthly architecture, a house of God. There is no need to confuse it with the Church, the Bride of Christ. The Church is the historical continuation of the incarnate Jesus Christ, a sign of Grace in the world. Despite the fact that the Church here is persecuted, that religion is enemy number one, the Church, the Bride of Christ blossoms (as it says in the Apocalypse and in its interpretations) and gives off a sweet fragrance during the reign of the Antichrist, because she is in God's hands and not in man's. And while the active power of evil increases, this does not mean that darkness is going to cover the world. On the contrary, it means that somewhere people are seeing the light. It is this that so terrifies the enemies of the Church and her main enemy and tempter, Satan. Therefore, I make a point of not painting razed churches and broken crosses—this is fodder for journalists and is competently done. The task of religious art is creation and not destruction. More important for me is the blossoming Church, which transcends all that is human, the Church, the Bride of Christ as an eternal hymn of Salvation.

Q. Would you tell us something, please, about your cycle of paintings, "The Seasons"?

A. The idea of painting a series of pictures under this general title, "The Seasons", occurred to me quite a long time ago. Of course, there are a great many similar cycles both in Russian and world art. As a rule, the seasons are associated with various allegories of the reaper and the sower and with female figures. Originally I had chosen a purely pagan approach, painting allegorical female figures. However, I abandoned this approach rather quickly, and decided to paint the Orthodox and pagan feast days, which fall in the given quarters of the calendar. The basis of the cycle is the liturgical calendar, which begins on 1 September. Of course, to paint all the feast days would be practically impossible (there are 12 major feasts and many more minor ones in the Orthodox year—Tr.), and in fact I did not consider that necessary. So I chose a number of the major feast days, but not necessarily the whole twelve. Citizens of the USSR are rather sarcastic about Soviet "saints' days": fishermen's day, chemist's day, construction worker's day . . . These are all the handiwork of the new religion—atheism. And now we see amidst the discord and general dissipation, amidst the unbelief of a debased *Rus'* the feast days are once again appearing. But what sort of feast days are they? How does one communicate to non-believers our sense of the Church? After all belief in

God is for many now entirely admissible, but belief in the Church—that is something else. That is where the doubts begin, the confusion and the darkness. Belief in the Church is considered hopelessly old-fashioned. Therefore the central idea of my whole cycle is the conception of the Church, of new life in the Spirit.

The first canvas is called “Autumn, or *Bab’e leto*”. *Bab’e leto* (“Indian Summer”; literally “Old woman’s summer”), according to pagan beliefs, is a time when the Mother of the Damp Earth (name for the earth deity in the pagan belief of Eastern Slavs—Tr.) and the Sun god bid farewell. This is the sadness, the languor before separation. The Mother of the Damp Earth dons her golden, farewell apparel. She does not die when the Sun god abandons her, but she goes to sleep, knowing that she will wake again, renewed. This is what the painting is based on: the expanse of the picture as the body of the Mother of the Damp Earth, on which everything stands (her facial profile is visible in the left half of the canvas). The basic idea of this work—the connection between the Mother of the Damp Earth and the feast days of the Virgin—has to do with the primordially of the Church and her identity with the principle of the eternal Wisdom of God. “If Wisdom is the Church of the Saints”, wrote Fr Pavel Florensky, “then the soul and conscience of the Church of the Saints, the Mother of God, is chiefly Wisdom. And she is in fact . . . the True Church of God, the True Body of Christ, . . . The Virgin Mother of God, the Holy Spirit’s Favour: from Her, after all, comes the Body of Christ . . . She is . . . the Church”.

Moreover, the principle of the Eternal Wisdom of God comprises not only the primordial connection between the Mother of God and the Church, but also the connection between Her and the Mother of the Damp Earth. Berdyayev, Trubetskoi, Florensky, Bulgakov, Askoldov and others wrote about this at the beginning of the century. Furthermore, I was moved by a problem, which was introduced by the Slavophiles: the connection between ancient Slavic paganism and Orthodoxy. And in fact, the thought of painting “The Seasons” came to me while studying the Slavophiles.

One of the first autumn feasts is the Dormition of the Mother of God (upper left), which begins after the summer’s work in the fields and after the harvest celebration. Right after that is the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God (the icon is to the right, surrounded by churches). In the centre is the all-embracing feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Under the cross is the figure of His Holiness Patriarch Alexi, surrounded by monks. I have often been asked why I particularly chose the Patriarch-bureaucrat. The point is that this is a symbol of the Patriarchate. For if I were to paint the human aspect of the Patriarchate, I would have chosen His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon. But then the painting would have been addressed to the years 1917-1918, though I had painted it during Alexi’s

Patriarchate, that is, at the end of the 1960s. The painting concludes with the figure of Our Lady the Protectress (above and to the right of the Exaltation of the Cross). The seasonal meaning of the Protectress is the covering of the first snowfall. The spiritual meaning is the Mother of God gathering all the faithful under Her Holy Veil. The painting is executed in Autumn colours. As in the other canvases of the cycle, there are many lighted candles here symbolizing prayer.

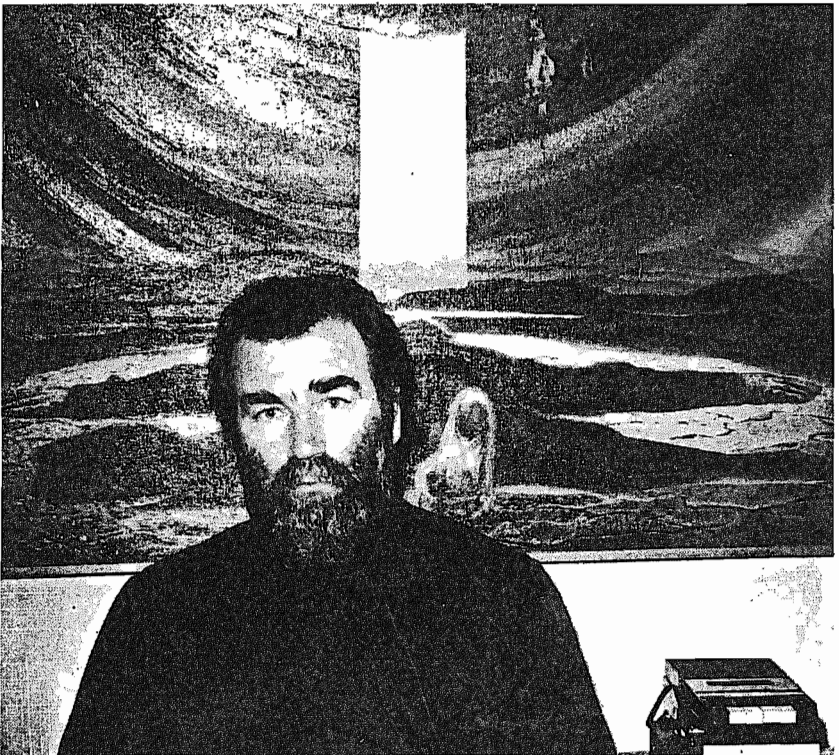
The second canvas is "Winter". The system is the same: pagan and Orthodox feast days. The first of these (a little above the lower left-hand corner) is the feast of St Seraphim of Sarov. Above him is the icon, "The Sign of the Mother of God". Further (top, right of centre) is the Christmas star, one ray falling on the icon, "The Nativity of Christ", which is standing in front of the menorah (top centre), and the other ray falling on the Epiphany and Baptism of Our Lord. In the lower right-hand corner is the figure of a monk with a *kolyva* (*kutiya* in Russian—honeyed, cooked wheat eaten in conjunction with services for the dead in the Orthodox Church—Tr.), representing the commemoration of All Souls (celebrated four times in the Orthodox calendar—Tr.) on the Saturday before the beginning of Lent. Among the pagan celebrations depicted are the Solstice (represented by seven idols above the menorah), and in the lower left-hand corner is the tree with its attendant masqueraders and *kolyada* carollers (the festival of the pagan god, *Kolyada* was celebrated by young carollers who sang their wishes for a good harvest—Tr.), a custom which was brought to us during the reign of Peter the Great in the eighteenth century. *Maslenitsa* (a carnival celebration formerly held around Shrovetide—Tr.) I have not painted, inasmuch as it is a purely pagan and rather nasty celebration, fraught with gluttony, drunkenness and depravity. The Church has always taken a decisive stand against this celebration.

The next canvas is "Orthodox Spring". There are no pagan celebrations here. After the Nativity of Christ paganism exhausts itself. As I said before, not all the feast days are depicted. This canvas shows the end of Lent, Passion Week, which begins with the Raising of Lazarus. Our Lord's Entry into Jerusalem on Willow Sunday is represented by the willow branches in the lower left-hand corner. Next is the Lord's Passion: the Crucifixion (to the left, below the bells), the Deposition from the Cross (to the right, below the bells), and the Interment—the Veneration of the Shroud (below the Deposition from the Cross). Further is the consecration of the Easter cake and the Bright Matins (the Easter midnight service). In the centre of the canvas is a red egg. Within it the Cross is formed by beams of light and the Crucified Saviour is blessing us. On the bells is inscribed the Easter troparion: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing Life".

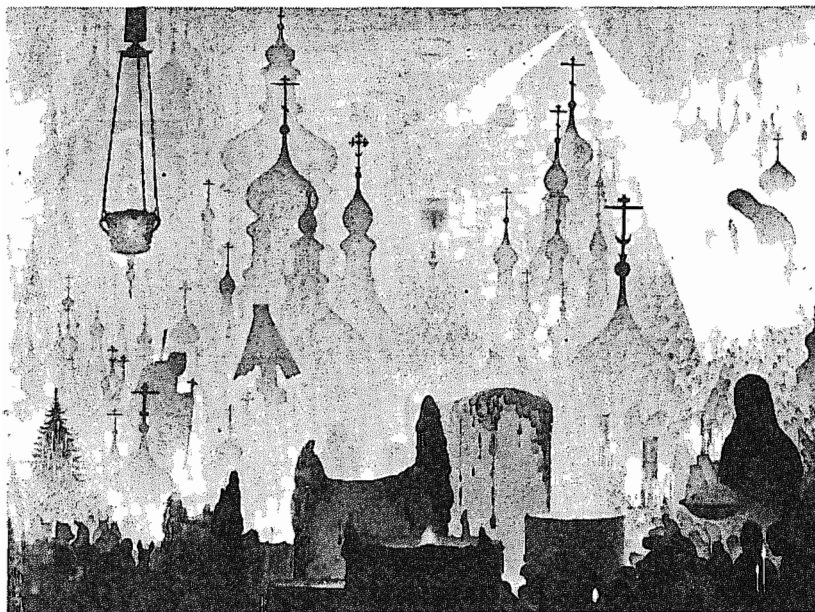
The last canvas is "Orthodox Summer", in which the main summer



Autumn, or Indian Summer.

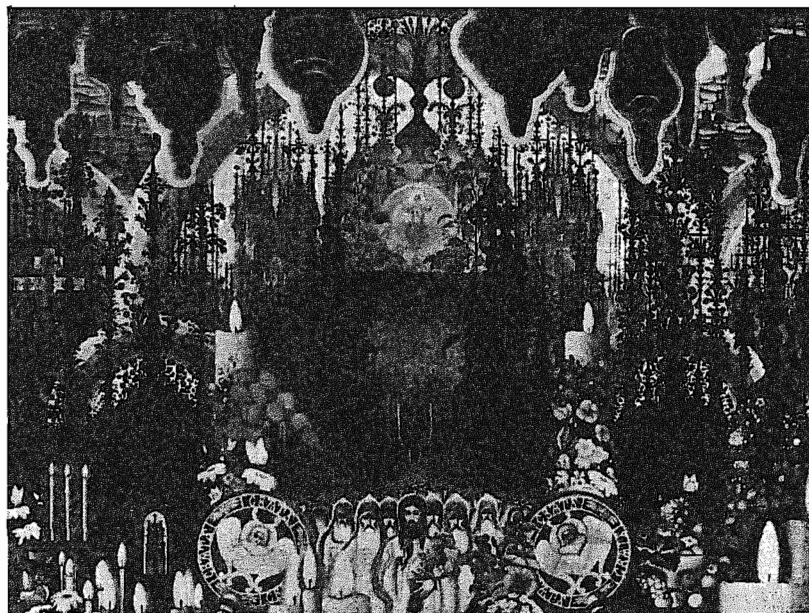


Vitali Linitsky in his Moscow home.



Winter.

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Orthodox Summer.

feast days are depicted. The picture is divided into three parts, as though there were three altars (a central and two side-altars) under three rainbows. On the left is the Altar of the Cross with the icon, "The Finding of the Wood of the True and Life-giving Cross", and the baptismal font. On the right is the side-altar of the Transfiguration with fruit, which has been consecrated. The central altar is open and the summer feast days begin here: the icon of St George the Dragon-slayer (in the centre), below, the feast of All Saints Who Shone Forth in Russia, above and to the left, the Ascension of Our Lord, after the Ascension, the icon, "The Fatherhead" (above St George) and "The Coming of the Holy Spirit" (further to the right). Some of the feasts are on the icons, among the figures in the centre and on the icon-lamps above. This canvas and the cycle as a whole concludes with the figure of Christ, Who as the Head of the Church comes to us carrying flowers and accompanied by the assembly of the righteous, and Who will give us His blessing. The crosses and cupolas, which had already begun to blossom in "Orthodox Spring", are in full bloom; the Church blossoms and rejoices in the Lord. The colour spectrum is an integral part of the painting. And in general, the spectrum is a uniting feature of all the canvases of the cycle. The spectrum is to be understood as the symbol in colour of the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is why the spectrum is fully disclosed in "Summer", the most energetic, the most festive of the canvases, but only suggested in the others. In "Autumn" there are spectral aurora around the candles in the foreground; in "Winter" the same thing. And in "Spring" the spectral aurora are suggested around the figures of the priests, the bells and the Easter egg.

The cycle as the whole also represents the path of nature, from the time of its subsiding in "Autumn", through the icy quiescence in the frost and cold of "Winter", to the blossom of "Spring" and the full flower of "Summer" with Christ as the head, the Living God, the One coming to us and blessing us. This is, if you will, a summary of the contents of "The Seasons".

Q. Would you please tell us something about your work on the Apocalypse?

A. I have been working on the Apocalypse for ten years now and I am still working on it. It would seem this is to be my life's work, and I am worried that I might never finish it. The theme is a profound one and extremely complex, and of course it is very difficult, and probably impossible, for one man to understand it.

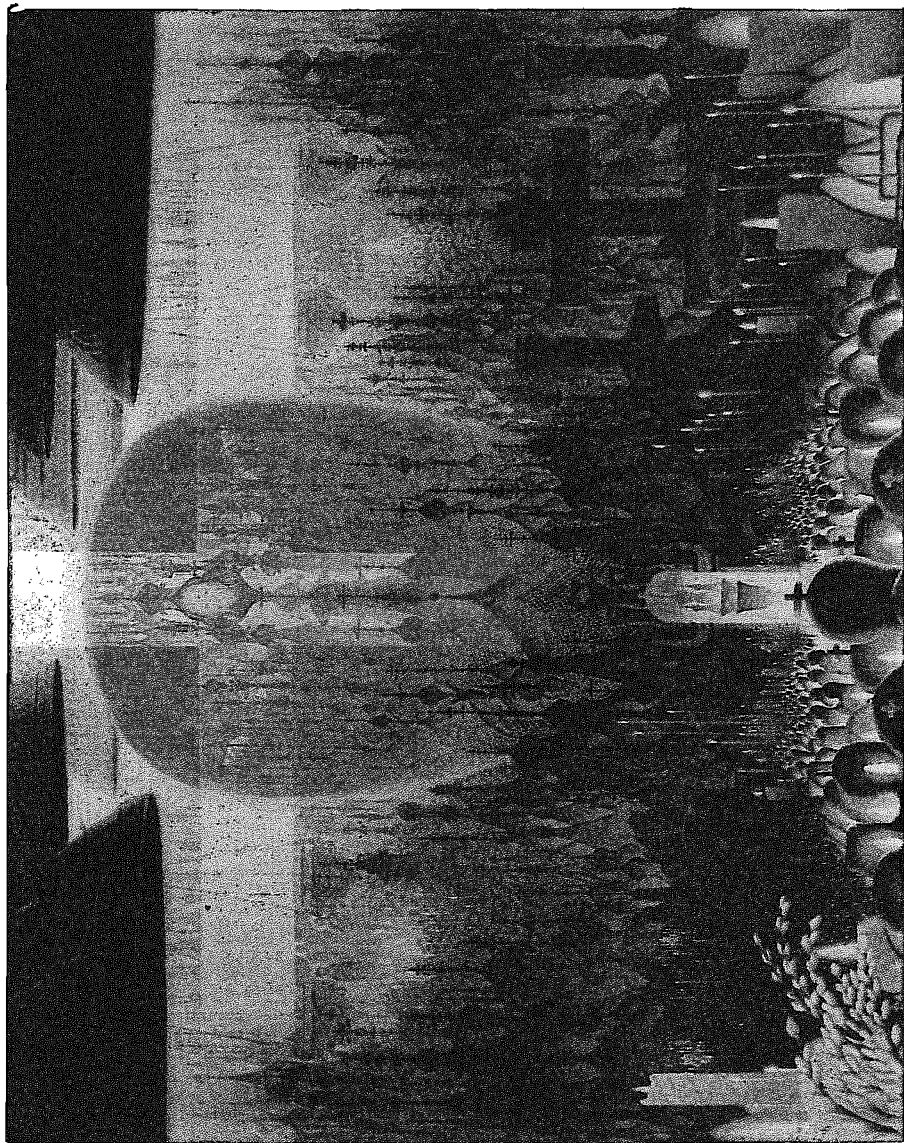
There are a number of examples in the history of world art of attempts to depict the Apocalypse as a whole. The symbolism of the Apocalypse has become part of the liturgical and iconographic fabric of church life. Almost every church has an illustration of the Last Judgement, a composition of "The Church, the Bride of Christ" (especially in the Yaroslavl

churches), and the iconostasis, which is a prototype of the New Jerusalem. Many western artists have dealt with the Apocalypse: Dürer, first and foremost, and among contemporary artists, Dali, who created for the Vatican a book of the Apocalypse, with the whole text on animal hides, and with a jewelled lifting mechanism to turn the pages. In Russia the icon of the Apocalypse of the Cathedral of the Dormition in the Moscow Kremlin and a 17th century illuminated text of the Apocalypse are especially famous. But unfortunately these are all frontal illustrations, based on a literal and superficial reading of the text. Such a reading seems to me incorrect, inasmuch as the Apocalypse is a book written in cipher for fellow believers in hostile surroundings. The symbolic language of the Apocalypse must therefore be deciphered or translated for a contemporary understanding, that is, interpreted. My cycle is an interpretation of the Apocalypse in paint. It is, as far as I know, the first time in Russia that easel painting has been done, not just based on the Apocalypse, but interpreting it in a manner approaching an Orthodox understanding of the Apocalypse.

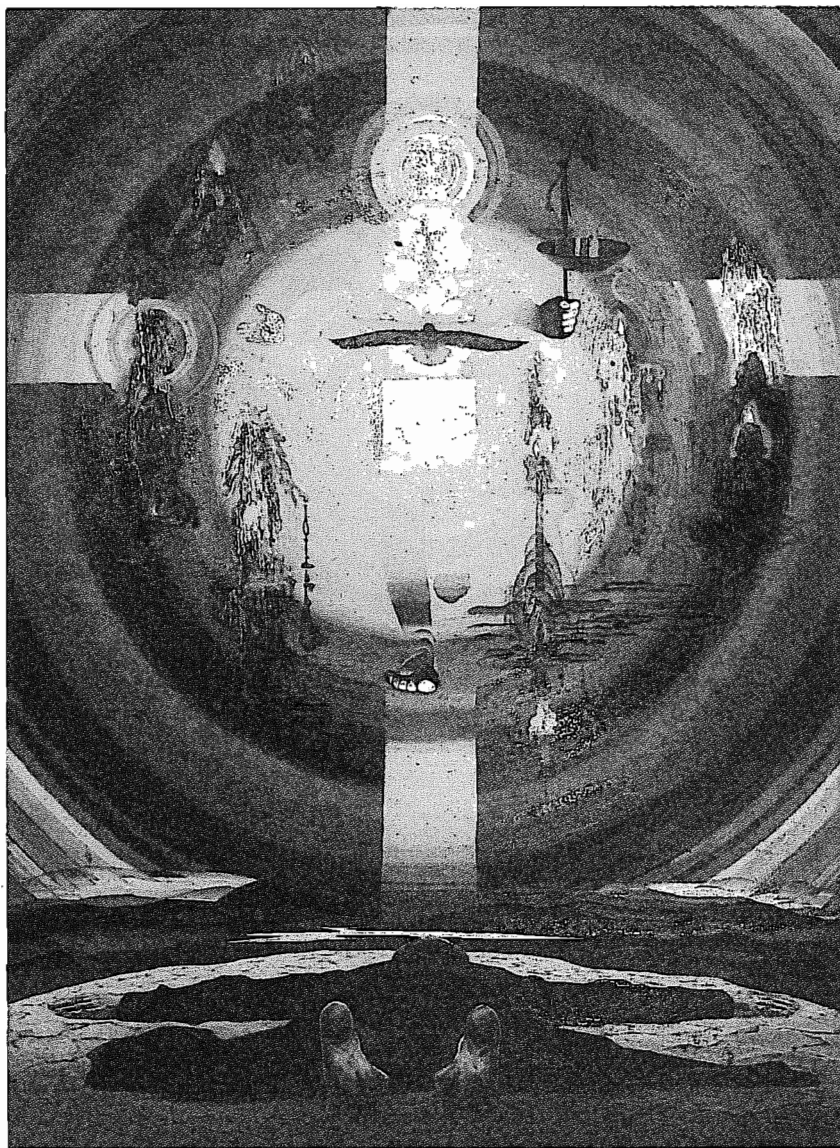
Before beginning to paint, it was necessary to go through a good deal of literature, firstly the interpretations of the Apocalypse. I read everything by Russian theologians I was able to obtain, including those living abroad (we have great difficulties obtaining such literature). I studied Catholic and Protestant interpretations (and found these to be the weakest, by the way). Unfortunately, I read far from everything I would have wanted to, since really a very meagre amount of literature gets to us. The Orthodox interpretations were the most satisfying and encouraging. They were the most helpful and continue to be. As I said, I was trying to approach Orthodoxy in my interpretation in paint, inasmuch as I am myself Orthodox and Orthodoxy is more accessible, more comprehensible to me. Furthermore, it would seem that the key to the Apocalypse and a proper understanding of it is possible only in Orthodoxy. My basic guide was the interpretation of the Apocalypse by Andrew of Caesarea, which I found to be the most iconographic and most clearly expressed.

Immediately the question arose, just exactly how and by what painting techniques one might depict the world of the Apocalypse. After an extended period of experimenting there appeared on one of the canvases, quite by chance (although perhaps it was not by chance, perhaps it was predestined), the colour spectrum. Representation of the other world, of cosmic order, seemed to be implicit in this aureole broken down into its elements, in the transitions from violet to violet. This is how my "spectral series" of six pictures came into being. They serve to introduce my approach to the colour spectrum as a means of conveying a worldview.

This is how I found a coherent language for the Apocalypse. For an understanding of colour spectra I depended on Patristic literature and on the tradition of spectral (bi-colour blue-red) halos of Byzantine and old



Easter Springtide.



Apocalypse I:
The Seven Lamps and the Tri-hypostatic Image.

Russian icons. The spectrum, white light broken down into its elements, is a symbolic synonym for gold in the icon. This is the radiance of eternity, God as Light, a living halo of grace. The seven-fold rhythm, penetrating the life of the Church (seven days of creation, seven gifts of the Holy spirit, seven Sacraments, the seven-tone musical scale, seven colours of the rainbow), this is the rhythm of the colour spectra of the Earth. The colour in the paintings of the Apocalypse is converted into light, symbolizing a state of blessedness, radiance in the Light of God's favour. In the Apocalypse this spectral rainbow or aureole character arises from the certainty, joy and peace of the Holy Spirit. The key to the Apocalypse is a conception of the colour spectrum as expressing a worldview. This is not a kaleidoscope of apocalyptic horrors (though these are present). The horrors ought not to overwhelm the most important thing: a hymn of Salvation. The Apocalypse is in a major key from St John's first vision right up to the last and most important vision—the New Jerusalem, the Tabernacle of God with Men. Our temporal life on earth ought to involve the attainment of the next life, the Kingdom of God. To be saved, to obtain joy eternal, to obtain the Light of truth, to be born into eternal life—this frame of mind, this idea, I tried to put forward in all the canvases of this cycle.

The Apocalypse begins with St John's vision on the isle of Patmos, "The Seven Lampstands and the Trihypostatic Image". This is mentioned in the messages to the seven Churches of Asia Minor. Seven lampstands—these are seven temptations, from which the Christian Church is to be saved. To represent the Saviour I have used the image from the Shroud of Turin.

The second canvas is "The Throne". Around the Throne are twenty-four elders: Old Testament Patriarchs and the Apostles of the New Testament. The Throne itself is positioned in an upright triangle. "God is Love", here the Trihypostatic image comes on the wings of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Life is sealed with seven seals. The seven lampstands on the spectral ring are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, received at baptism. The four-fold Gospel is represented by crosses ("singing, shouting, exclaiming and speaking") made up of eyes, which represent the external and internal vision of the Gospel. Below is the assembly of angels, glorifying the Throne. Above them is the golden arch of the rainbow, the grandeur and glory of the Throne. In the centre is God's Right Hand of Blessing.

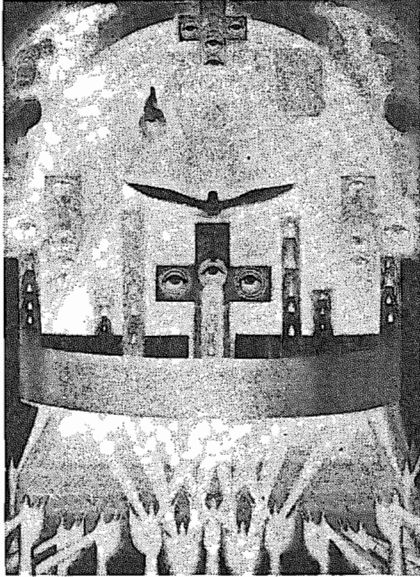
The Book of Life, sealed with seven seals, is open in the third canvas, "The Opening of the Book of Life". Here, above, we have the same Throne, below, all seven seals. According to the interpretation of Andrew of Caesarea, the horsemen of the Apocalypse symbolize the saving Apostolic teaching. For this reason the first four seals do not resemble the horsemen, which we are accustomed to in the engravings of

Dürer. The Good News only saves, it does not punish. These seals are concerned with Salvation: in the first is a figure of an Apostle with a book; in the second is the sacrifice and Golgotha; in the third is the Cup, behind it is the Saviour with the scales of repentance and redemption; in the fourth is the Resurrection of Christ. The fifth seal (under the throne of God) is the sacrificial altar with the souls of the righteous, martyred for the Word of God. They have received white apparel and await the time when the number of their brothers is complete. The sixth seal, the largest according to the number of its inhabitants, signifies those marked by God, who have not received on brow or hands the seal of the Antichrist. The canvas is divided into two parts; the sixth and seventh seals are directly related to the earth. The first five seals relate to the Throne. The background is filled with the figures of the saved. Of them the Visionary says, "and they shall be counted and they shall be multiplied more than the grains of the sand".

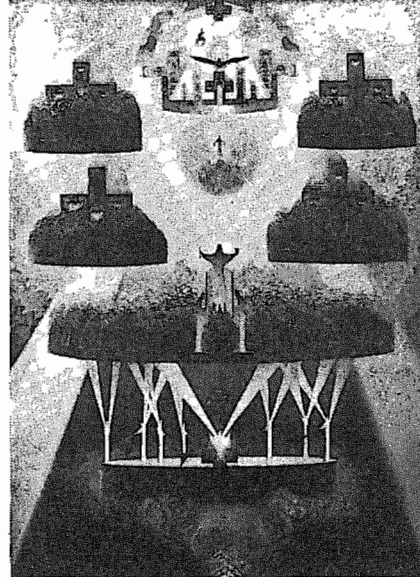
The seventh seal, with angels prepared to sound their trumpets, is still to be opened. This is a separate canvas, "The Opening of the Seventh Seal". There are seven angels with trumpets on the feet of God; the seventh angel has sounded his trumpet. Below is the Beast, having seven heads and ten horns. Above the feet is a symbolic representation of the Church in Bloom, Christ's Bride: the Throne and twelve cupolas, signifying the full Apostolic Church. Deep in the background is the blessing of the Mother of God.

In the next canvas, "The Prince of the Earth, the Prince of Darkness, Satan" an X-ray of a diseased skull is depicted, replete with cancerous lesions and polypi, the symbolic attributes of the satanic host. The Prince of Darkness knows he is doomed. This is the reason for his hatred, implacability and mercilessness toward the people of God. I have painted him in his most recognisable manifestation, inasmuch as he is able, as is well known, to assume the most unexpected forms, even that of an angel of light. Only the righteous, the zealous, are able to discern such apparitions.

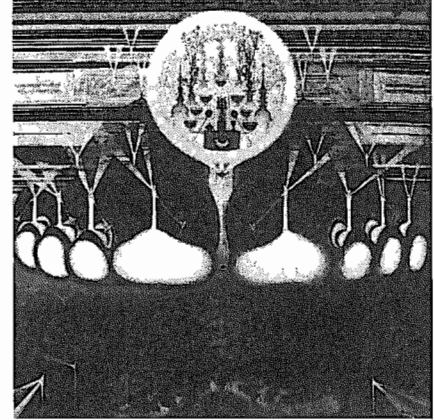
"Armageddon, or God's Battle with Satan" is the penultimate canvas. The Visionary did not see the battle itself. He only heard a noise as if from great running waters. He saw the Church Militant's preparation for battle and the very end of the battle: the triumph of the Church. In the centre of the canvas, temporarily encircled by darkness, is a symbolic depiction of the Church Militant on the wings of the Holy Spirit. Below, the Antichrist, Satan and the False Prophet, along with their associates, are burning in the fiery lake. All that remains of them are three mushroom-shaped clouds. To the right is the angel with the key to the abyss and the chain with which Satan was shackled. To the left is the angel who has ordered the extermination of Satan. And below are the angels heralding the victory of the Church.



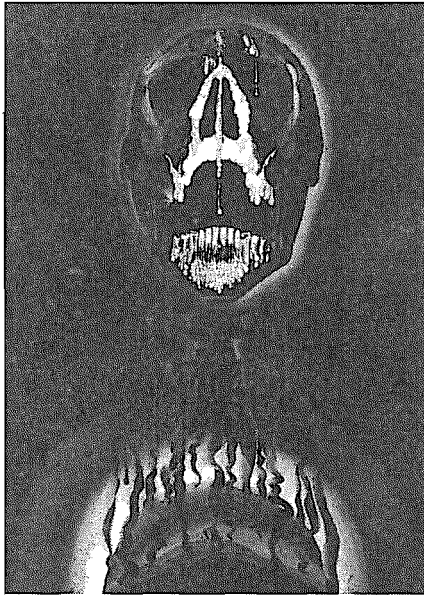
**Apocalypse II:
The Throne.**



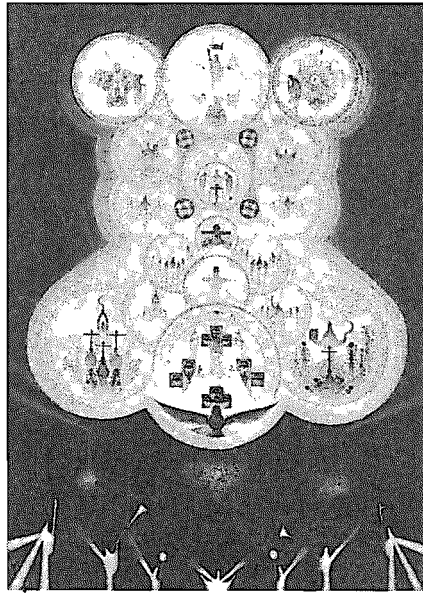
**Apocalypse III:
The Opening of the Book of Life.**



**Apocalypse IV:
The Opening of the Seventh Seal.**



**Apocalypse V:
The Prince of the Earth,
the Prince of Darkness,
Satan.**



**Apocalypse VI:
Armageddon, or God's
Battle with Satan.**



**Apocalypse VII:
The new Jerusalem or
the Tabernacle of God with Men.**

The cycle concludes with the picture “New Jerusalem, or the Tabernacle of God with Men”. Here, the ever-blossoming, Apostolic teaching is the Tree of Life, the Eternal Spring of Life, a river flowing from the Throne, i.e. the grace which is coming out of and received from the Holy Spirit, the Blessing of the Father and the Son, uniting all with Christ in the New City.

Now that the seven canvases are finished, I have found it necessary to supplement the cycle with five non-figural, object-less paintings of light. This is the result of an involved search. There is repeated reference in the Apocalypse to John “being in the Spirit”, that he had the grace of the Holy Spirit, How can one show this in paint? The whole Apocalypse, as has been said, was done in spectra in order to show the singularity of the visions themselves and the abundance of grace granted by the Holy Spirit. It seemed to me essential that this be expressed more plainly and concisely with the help of the spectral light paintings, which will alternate with the figural paintings to introduce and conclude the whole series. The first canvas will introduce the Apocalypse with a full spectrum of bright colour to symbolize John’s illumination by the Holy Spirit. Just before the vision of the Throne the Scriptures say, “behold, I looked, and the heavens were opened, and in the opened heavens, a Throne”. The “opened heavens” are conveyed, naturally, by a breach in the spectrum, a burst of white light. This belt of white in the spectrum is increased in the following canvases, until in the twelfth and last one, which comes after the vision of the New Jerusalem, almost half the canvas is flooded with white light.

The symbolism of light is worked out in one of my most recent paintings, “The Pure, or Jesus, Prayer”. Here an earthly formulation of the spectrum is used for the desert hermits. Crosses and flowers are depicted in the lower part of the picture, whereas above, Christ is seen through white light, symbolizing His heavenly nature. The picture’s frame resembles a monk’s habit with the text of the Jesus prayer written on it.

Q. How would you describe your style of painting?

A. Religious symbolism. This is, if you will, not a style; it is the form customary for religious painting.

Q. Have your works been evaluated by professional theologians from the point of view of their faithfulness to Apostolic Tradition?

A. An overwhelming majority of the clergymen who have seen “The Seasons” have responded favourably to it. The interpretation on which “The Apocalypse” is based has, on the whole, also been favourably appraised, and not only by our theologians. Catholic and Protestant viewers have remarked on the work’s proximity to Orthodox understanding, which of course I was very glad to hear. On the other hand, I certainly do not pretend to have attained universality or perfection. I have tried to

express only that which it is within my powers to do. Generally speaking, we have virtually no specialists on the Apocalypse, who could not only study it, but could systematize interpretations of it, and possibly work out a new interpretation of the Apocalypse for the future. Unfortunately, this is related to the general situation of the Church in an atheist state, and is beyond our control. I have not yet had the opportunity to give my work a wide showing among professional theologians.

Praise God, that it has had a relatively wide showing among a Soviet public, for whom generally the very existence of this field of art and activity has come as a surprise. Apparently this is the way I am to be serving the service of obedience, assigned me by my spiritual fathers at the monastery.

Moscow, April 1977

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