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Christ, Pilgrim on Russian Soil*

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'My native land, the King of Heaven in humble guise wanders your whole length and breadth, bowed beneath the weight of the cross, and blesses your soil'
– F. M. Tyutchev

According to ancient and hallowed Russian peasant tradition, every year, from Easter until Ascension Day, Jesus Christ wanders across the land, passing through villages, stopping beneath windows and listening to what people are saying. During this period you are told not to throw your dirty water out of your windows for fear of soaking the Lord. This idea of Christ making an annual pilgrimage across Russia stems from the image of the pilgrim Christ of popular moral legends. Dressed in the rags of a mendicant and begging for alms, the Son of God turns up at the doors of both rich and poor, the mean and the generous, the cruel and the compassionate alike, but people carry on behaving in their normal way. They don't realise that they are being put through the test of Christian love by God himself in a way which doesn't demand any special theological knowledge. They only have to welcome the pilgrim, share their food with him, allow him to stay the night in their homes. The consequences of the test are unexpected and yet precise: Christ will perform a miracle. The merciful who share their last crust will be rewarded not just at the Last Judgment and in the life to come but right away in the here and now. The cruel and miserly will be punished at once. The riches they have hoarded will be given to the good and generous poor; their homes will go up in flames; some awful disaster will strike them.

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According to the legends people here on earth are confronted with God's judgment through their encounter with Christ the pilgrim. The last judgment is seen not in the context of the terrifying splendour of celestial glory, but in a familiar village street, in tattered, dusty rags. In the legends the two great commandments – 'Love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your mind' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself' – are acted out in a concrete and also miraculous event. Christian dogma is reduced to a very basic concept which can exist only as myth, and active concern for your neighbour is revealed as love for the Lord God himself. The radiance of Christ's face is concealed beneath the shabbiness of a travelworn pilgrim.[1]

It is no accident that many of these legends are based on the theme of waiting for

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God's coming as a guest looking for splendid hospitality. The rich man, Mark by name, spreads out brocade carpets along the road to his house and prepares a sumptuous banquet. In the blindness of his pride he seeks to dazzle God by his wealth, but Christ arrives in rags, begging. The beggar is chased away. A text discovered in Tver' province in 1989 does not develop this theme exhaustively but totally grasps its moral significance.

> A woman spent her time waiting and preparing for the Lord to visit her home. One day a small girl arrived, shivering, begging in the name of Christ. But the hostess refused, saying 'I can't help you. I am expecting a really important guest, the Lord himself.' The child was sent packing. The next day a small boy arrived, soaked, badly cut and bleeding, trembling, begging for a little bit of charity. The hostess turned him away too with the excuse 'I can't waste time with you. I am expecting a much more important person – the Lord himself.' The third day a very old beggar turned up. He insisted 'Here I am. I've come.' But she protested 'I am expecting the Lord himself.' 'Very well, this is the third time I've been here,' retorted the old man, 'but you keep turning me away. Whatever you may think, this is how the Lord always arrives. The Lord is present in each person you meet. That way people can learn to see God in each other.'

In the mythology of the past God allots rewards and punishments; but even nowadays you can come face to face with Christ in dreams, in visions and in real life — in specific villages with living people. If the legend provides a particular narrative example of Gospel precepts, describing how human beings, good or bad, encounter God himself, accounts of the second type speak of a Christ who still heals, blesses and teaches. It is not an impersonal spiritual truth that these visions reveal, but the very presence of the Son of God who brings the Gospel to us through these visions. Just as Jesus Christ cured the sick and infirm while he was living on this earth, he still travels around and heals people today. It is as if popular tradition could prolong the Gospel story. The divine revelation in the New Testament is not yet complete. Gospel miracles still occurred in Russian villages throughout the era of atheist persecution and totalitarian tyranny. What is more important from the peasant's point of view is that Jesus Christ still does them in person. Through simple tales the peasants' own versions of the Gospel are transmitted from mouth to mouth.

> She was ill; she couldn't walk. She had been a cripple for years. One day people told her Jesus was passing by. He didn't look like Jesus; he was old.[2] Well, he came to their place. He went up to her, embraced her and asked, 'What's the matter with you?' 'I've been crippled for years. There's no way I can stand up on my feet.' The old man lodged there that evening and got ready for bed. He came up to her and said, 'Come on, get up, get my bed ready!' She said, 'But how can I – I told you, I can't get up. I'm a cripple. I've been lame for years.' He took hold of her by the feet. 'Come on, get up – you're only pretending.' He made her lift herself and the woman stood straight up on her own two feet. 'Look! I can walk!' 'Yes, and you can carry on walking.' He vanished and she never saw him again.[3]

Gospel narratives do not provide exact parallels with the popular accounts of Christ curing the sick. In New Testament texts miracles take place instantaneously. Christ's words stress tersely that the sick person's faith makes him whole. Gospel miracles

testify to the authenticity of Christ's teaching and his divine nature.

> Jesus stopped and asked them to bring the blind man to him and when he came up, asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Sir,' he replied, 'let me see again!' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you.' And, instantly, his sight returned and he followed praising God, and all the people who saw it gave praise to God. (Luke 18: 40–43)

The miracles carried out by Christ in the folk tales conform to the rhythms of normal everyday peasant life rather than to divine revelation. Christ spends the evening by the sick bed, asks the invalid to get a bed ready for him to stay the night. The Lord is tenderness and compassion incarnate. He is simple and human, like a peasant, even a bit abrupt with the woman: 'Come on, get up, stop pretending!' Christ appears to peasants in visions, predicting their future lot, whether for good or ill. In one story Christ, in the guise of an old man, comes across a pregnant woman working in the fields and foretells her death by a metaphor. 'Leave off working, little dove. Don't tire yourself out because you won't live to eat this bread.' God blesses people at key moments in their lives: 'Then I had a dream. It seems I was carting hay. Suddenly an old man appeared, I don't know how. He was as ancient as God. So I asked him, "Lord, bless me". And he blessed me.'

The sense of reality of God's divine presence on Russian soil (so well described in the Tyutchev quotation) has never left the peasants. This was especially important during the time of atheist persecution and destruction of the churches when the people were deprived of sacramental grace as well as the possibility of praying in the presence of God in their churches.

The legends about Christ the Pilgrim are only one facet of popular Christology. In peasant circles there survive the peasants' own oral variants of Holy Scripture, simplified to fit the canons of mythical beliefs and folk psychology. The contemporary 'Folk Gospel' treats Christ as victim enduring persecution in silence and begging for help. In these accounts Christ is not the Redeemer and Victor triumphing over death but a man undergoing trials and torture, arousing compassion and that particular tragic tenderness which is such a distinct feature of the Russian temperament. This very human concept of Christ is a result of the almost total absence for 70 years of the traditional canonical and liturgical sources in the peasant world, and also of their own experience of suffering in the twentieth century.

The 'Folk Gospel' also fulfils another essential role. It provides its own world view. Although one strand of concepts and analogies in the 'Folk Gospel' is rooted in ancient mythology, as a whole it is based on an idiosyncratic version of Christian ethics. Hence all the objects and creatures of the natural world are divided into pure or impure, pleasing or distasteful to God (classified as either clean or unclean), on the basis of the part they played in the events of the life and Passion of Christ. The aspen is cursed because Judas hanged himself upon it. The spider saved the Lord by weaving its web across the mouth of the cave where he was hiding. Since the spider is also popularly believed to bear the sins of mankind up to God, you must not kill it. The horse stripped off the hay which was covering the Holy Child, whereas the pig laid it back again. As punishment the horse is condemned to a life of unending toil and its flesh is not used for food; the pig, on the other hand, as a reward is given nothing to do! During the Crucifixion swallows tried to steal the nails intended for Christ whereas sparrows brought them back. So the swallow brings good luck to the home and it is a grave sin to kill it, while the sparrows were punished by being left to

freeze in the cold, unable to fly south during winter. The bee saved Jesus. When his executioners were about to pierce his heart with an awl (in which case, so peasants believe, he would not have been able to rise from the dead) the bee landed on the place. A gypsy who was standing nearby swore that he had already driven in the awl and pointed to the bee as if it was a nail-head. In peasant lore the bee is often known as 'God's little bird' and its image is surrounded with extraordinary love and tenderness. From that day on gypsies were permitted to swear falsely, so no one trusts a gypsy's testimony!

A Presence Which Controls Moral Life

On the basis of study of Russian religious poetry Georgi Fedotov differentiated between two opposing tendencies in folk Christology.

> Peasants seem to have two different images of Christ. The one who can be recognised and named is King of Heaven, Lawgiver and dread Judge of all. The other, hidden, lives on in the names and features of countless heroes of love and self-denial similar to the different faces of Dionysus in ancient myths.[4]

In my opinion this conception of the concealed, invisible Christ is indispensable for an understanding of Russian ascetism and spirituality. The presence of Christ permeates the whole of peasant morality and ethics.

During the Soviet era there was an attempt to fit peasant morality into the class system and into abstract theories of labour. There was also a tendency to 'paganise' peasant culture. The inconsistency of atheistic interpretations of folk culture is clear enough – and today the Christian basis of that culture seems to be its least known characteristic. Whatever the degree of pagan mythology within the popular ethical code, the overall structures of peasant morality are Christian in origin. The orientation and guiding criteria of peasants' behaviour are based directly or indirectly on the Gospel. The way they classify sins, though, is different from that of Orthodox theology.

Peasants' moral criteria are far distant from those of dogmatic formulations but nonetheless they do reflect the spirit of God's Commandments.

> It is a grave sin to steal other people's possessions, just as it is to wish them ill, injure them, judge them or envy them. Nowadays these sins aren't regarded as wrong. We all of us do many evil things. It is said that this should be one of God's laws, that only those who do nothing can avoid doing wrong. And God pardons seventy sins a day ... In itself death is not sinful. Murder and suicide are grave sins. So are lying and blaspheming. But the most terrible sin is the murder of our own babies (abortion) because we are destroying our own children. Previously such things never happened in our countryside.[5]

During the Soviet era folk morality provided the only foundation for behaviour in rural areas. It was a buttress which atheist propaganda tried to destroy, and it has in fact been thoroughly undermined by indoctrination; but instead of moulding the conscience of Soviet man (*'homo sovieticus'*) communist education has created a generation gap which is primarily a moral one. The elderly, culturally excluded from modern life, have become the last custodians of the precepts of a Christianity under siege which no longer constitutes the yardstick of daily life and behaviour. Even

though they are sometimes lacking in knowledge of Christian theology, or are even not practising Christians themselves, the old take stock of what goes on around them, and look at it from the point of view of morality, assessing sins as they proliferate. It is hard for their children to pay any attention to such judgments, however, and the result is a blurred conception of the potency of sin. In the world of popular fables the problem is faced in the form of an encounter between God and the devil.

> A man was sitting by the roadside doing nothing, with his legs dangling. An old man passing by asked him, 'What on earth are you doing, why aren't you at work?' The other retorted, 'We've nothing more to do; we've driven everybody to damnation.' He was in fact the devil and the passer-by was God. 'Oh yes,' the devil went on, 'At first when people believed in God we tried to drag them down into temptation but now there's no need. They are all of them devils already. They don't believe in God any more.' That's how things are today; that's the absolute truth.

This story has profound meaning. Here the traditional image of Christ the Pilgrim reaches its logical conclusion: God in the guise of an old man can no longer wander around the country side, healing, predicting the future, blessing, if the world is populated exclusively by devils. In addition, in peasant circles there is nowadays a belief that mankind is no longer granted visions and revelations and that the times of the prophets and seers are gone for ever.

Popular tradition similarly responds to the question why no one nowadays regards violence as wrong. 'Today evil no longer needs to exist as a force. We are all the devil's fodder. He was chained up and snarled, "Let men share my fate!" Christ got fed up and said, "Take them yourself then!"' What an abyss of despair this ingenuous fable indicates. Christ has turned his back on men; God has lost patience and is no longer concerned with the fate of the world he created. The portrayal of a Christ who has had enough of the devil's tricks is a reflection of popular Christology, which synthesises the grievous burden of Russian history.

The extraordinary geographical extension of Russian folk culture (from the Don Cossacks to the people of the White Sea, from the descendants of the former Krivichi tribe in Pskov province to the aborigines of the lower Indigirka) accounts for the number of regional variations in folk religion. Let us take some examples. An inhabitant of the central Russian plain, educated in the Stalinist era, aged about 50 to 60, will almost always be able to give one a reply to a question about Jesus Christ, but these replies are often far from church dogma and sometimes very odd indeed. For example, 'Jesus Christ was Russian, a genius, and the Jews put him to death'. Even this formulation contains two fundamentals of popular Orthodoxy, however: the self-sacrifice and the sanctity of Christ. The fundamental point is that the figure of Christ is inextricably part of the mentality of those people. If essential bits of knowledge are missing people of this generation will inevitably try to formulate a concept through the forms and stereotypes which are familiar to them. The mention of the name of Christ always calls up these images. In conversation peasants often pair Christ and Lenin: 'Jesus Christ is a saint, like Lenin.' Christ acquires the features of the champion of liberty for workers and peasants, while as a result of the coupling Lenin becomes a martyr. If we turn to the inhabitants of the Tikhvin and Podporozh'ye region in St Petersburg province, however, we find that the name of Jesus Christ arouses hardly any associations or attempts at explanation. People recall only the Easter greeting 'Christ is risen!' and names of feasts (such as Christmas), although they are unable to say what they mean. This could be taken as evidence of the devas-

tating effect of Soviet ideology in this region as well as of the persistent vestiges of paganism here. At the same time, however, other features of traditional Christian folk culture still survive and have even developed: for example, the icons of the Virgin Mary to be found in most homes – even though people cannot provide any explanation of them either!

It would appear that the most significant Christian saints are St Nicholas and St George. Often icons of Christ are termed 'Nicholas'. Researchers have heard the Trinity described as the three Nicholases – 'Nicholas the Wonder Worker, Nicholas the Merciful and Nicholas the Listener'. St George, whose icon at one time could be found in every house, is sometimes described as 'Chief of the Gods'. In one village researchers recorded this litany: 'Nicholas the Wonder Worker, George the Saviour, Medosi the friend of Vlas, have mercy upon us.'[6] The popularity of these saints in a particular locality is due, no doubt, to magical and ritualistic functions linked with its pastoral stockrearing economy.

Two opposing trends are evident in popular Christology. One involves knowledge based directly on books, a distinct spirituality found for example in the neighbourhood of monasteries. At the other extreme, images of Christ are understood only from remembered names of feasts and pagan stereotypes. The moral attitudes and dispositions of peasants, who mostly cannot even explain who Jesus Christ is, go far beyond their confused theology, however, being entirely shaped by the image of Christ hidden under another guise. The reflections of the noted Soviet writer I. S. Sokolov-Mitkov in his recently published diaries testify eloquently to this fact:

> In Russia nearly all the peasants, the best people I knew, were indifferent to religion ... They had no idea of Christianity ... they prayed only with their hands. They gave alms to the poor, succoured the weak, fed orphans, all without any knowledge of church texts and scripture. These naive, uncomplicated people, pagan through and through, are closer to God than our dogmatic and hypocritical theologians.[7]

While trying to explain as pagan the origins of peasant culture, Sokolov-Mitkov in fact proves how deeply-rooted are its Christian foundations.

... I Recognise our Heavenly King in the Icons

Traditional folk religion possesses a mystical awareness of God. The testimony of an old peasant woman from Tikhvin, utterly ignorant of the Gospel events, was characteristic. When asked who crucified Jesus Christ she replied 'How should I know? But what I do know about Jesus – from the icons – is that he must be the King of Heaven and that there must be also a Holy Spirit. We don't see him, but he wanders around the world.' This perception of the Divine Presence, granted through personal insight or through the remembrance of myth (as in the legend of the Pilgrim Christ), lies at the very root of folk consciousness which understands the words 'peasant' and 'Christian' as synonymous.[8]

This fragmentary account of folk Christology is based on contemporary interviews with Russian peasants over 50 who still preserve some elements of the solid, mature folk religion of prerevolutionary times. The years of social catastrophe and terror have of course transformed people's mentality. The integrity with which traditions have been maintained is therefore all the more astonishing. The number of devout country people may have fallen, but one still regularly comes across the old woman who can tell the story of the sufferings of Christ and the saints, who remembers her

prayers and who recognises the signs that the end of the world is near.

The whole subject of folk religion has been neglected, and not only by Soviet sociologists. The Russian Orthodox Church, too, has shown considerable disdain towards peasant beliefs, even though village priests are often on the same level as their parishioners. Even the movement for church renewal which began within the last few years has kept its distance from this strange phenomenon. The present generation has no interest in what it regards as a wasteland of primitive superstition.

Folk tradition has handed down to modern times residues of archaic mythology combined with characteristics of Russian Orthodoxy of the period before Peter the Great and the memory of obscure nineteenth- and twentieth-century ascetics, seers and 'fools for Christ's sake' (*'yurodivyye'*). It has kept alive all the cults of local saints, wonder-working icons and miraculous wells which the Church has come to regard with suspicion. One could compile a long list of aspects of our national spirituality which have survived as components of folk religion. Even today peasants produce and distribute almanacs containing lives of the saints, religious poetry and predictions of the end of the world. The tradition of 'foolishness for Christ's sake', which Peter the Great tried to stamp out, still lives on thanks to the respect the *'yurodivy'* has always commanded among simple people. During the tragic era of collectivisation in the 1930s the number of *'yurodivyye'* started to increase.[9] In 1908 Sergei Bulgakov recounted a telling example of the clash between popular beliefs and the modern political outlook of deputies to the Second Duma:

> I remember that on one occasion in the Duma my attention was drawn to a small group of smart St Petersburg deputies, members of the bourgeoisie, and newspaper correspondents. They had gathered round someone and every now and then burst into laughter. In their midst was an old man from Volynia, with a wonderful face lined with suffering. His head could have served as a model for the statue of an apostle or for an icon. I heard the old man recounting his vision in which God had sent him to declare his will to the people's representatives. His message was confused, but every time he returned to his mission and spoke of God, his words were drowned by laughter. Meek and patient as he was, he was upset by the mockery of these sophisticated people and went back to the beginning of his tale again and again.[10]

Ought one to regard popular Orthodoxy merely as an aberration of canonical Orthodoxy, reflecting the ignorance of the masses, or as a significant spiritual phenomenon in its own right? As early as 1876 Dostoyevsky was speaking about the salutary effects on Russian society of contact with peasant faith:

> For us, the People is not just a mysterious pilgrim but also a guide. Whatever fate awaits it in the future, whatever sufferings or uncertainties lie in its path, it could temporarily stray but could never completely lose its way; for what it carries with it – that is, Orthodoxy and the principles it enshrines – are very valuable and important, and are utterly indestructible, possessing also the power to protect those who bear them. Therefore, provided that we attach ourselves to the People at this very hour, we can save ourselves.[11]

The twentieth century seems to have brought into question the truth of these words of Dostoyevsky's on the infallibility of the Russian people's Christian path. In *Apokalipsis nashego dnya (The Apocalypse in our Day)* Rozanov describes the

appalling historical and spiritual devastation of Russia, especially of the 'People's *sobornost*'' (Dostoyevsky's expression).

> Russia has changed colour in just two or three days ... It is alarming to see how it has fragmented, all of a sudden, into the smallest units. Nothing remains, neither tsar, church, army, nor even the working class. This was the origin of the apocalyptic figure of the 'respectable' Nizhni Novgorod peasant who proposed making belts ... out of the skin of the murdered tsar.[12]

Rozanov asks a key question: what has become of the Russian nation's moral sense, illuminated as it was by the divine Son of Man? Has the Christian element in our people's consciousness vanished in the twinkling of an eye like a snake's cast-off skin, laying bare a yawning abyss of paganism? The erosion of the nation's spiritual integrity in practice would appear to confirm the correctness of that understanding of folk religion which sees it as a 'two-sided faith' formally uniting two belief systems. This conception presupposes a contradiction and struggle within each individual between paganism and Christianity. From it emerges a whole set of complex questions on how far the peasantry's understanding of the world has been responsible for our national catastrophes and on the exact role and nature of folk religion in Russian history. Most of these questions are still unanswered if only because there has never been enough detailed and reliable research into the nature of Christian survivals among our peasants.

Official Orthodoxy, Popular Faith and the Schism of the Old Believers

The enigmatic nature of the history of popular Orthodoxy stems from its origins in the interreaction between official faith and folk religion.[13] The first stage of Christianisation was completed between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and had the following consequences. Firstly, Christianisation promoted the growth of national selfconciousness, leading to the identification of the concepts of 'Russian' and 'Orthodox'. Secondly, the Christianity which was spontaneously absorbed into the nation split into two opposing currents, official Russian Orthodoxy and folk religion, so that by the time of the Council of a Hundred Chapters (1551) the official church found it necessary to intensify its struggle to stamp out pagan survivals. Thirdly, Christianisation led to the emergence of 'Holy Rus''. Obviously, this took place under the influence not only of ecclesiastical Orthodoxy but also of the creativity of folk religion which gave rise to its own characteristic image of 'Holy Rus''. Fourthly, regional variations appeared within folk religion under the influence of local legends and traditions rooted in particular social and economic conditions.

The seventeenth century witnessed the incorporation of new elements into the interreaction of the two components of the nation's Orthodoxy. The 'Friends of God' movement (*bogolyubtsy*) aimed at creating a particular type of Russian spirituality centred on the church, and set itself against folk religion, which was characterised by a rigidly ritualistic, often superstitious approach towards liturgy and holy relics on the part of the faithful. The attempts by the 'Friends of God' to overcome the crisis affecting the Russian Church and Russian spirituality immediately preceded the schism.

The ecclesiastical reforms of Patriarch Nikon aimed at unifying Russian Orthodoxy according to the 'Catholic' model. Characteristic national peculiarities

were regarded with suspicion. As fundamental criteria of religious life, habit and custom were to be replaced by church canons. The guardians of Orthodoxy were the Old Believers whose conception of 'true faith' was mixed up with their defence of ancient traditional Russian national customs, costumes, ways of life, thought, manners and expression. The Orthodoxy of the Old Believers may also be understood as comprising their experience of peasant faith. Only a short while previously, Archpriest Avvakum had been a 'Friend of God' and had tried with frenetic strictness to purge popular religious consciousness of dualism and layers of pagan distortions. During the period of exile at Pustozersk, Avvakum, having now become leader of the Old Believers, engaged in discussions with his fellow prisoner Deacon Fedor, his longstanding opponent on theological issues. As a fundamental criterion for the doctrine of the Trinity he cited the faith of simple peasants. 'Ask any countrywoman; say to her "my faith, mother, has led me astray in deep waters. I have lost the way which leads to God."'[14] It is difficult to imagine what Avvakum could have learnt on the essence of the Trinity from a peasant woman in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. We might be able to form an idea if we look at Russian peasant conceptions of the Trinity at the end of the twentieth century.

The predominance of tradition in peasant religious culture acts as a brake on the rate of its evolution. In cultural history since Peter the Great, moreover, the specific nature of popular tradition has reinforced conservative tendencies. When peasants today are asked what the Trinity is they rarely recite the canonical formula 'God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost'. For them the Trinity consists of three angels (as in the icon of the so called 'Old Testament' Trinity); or Nicholas, George and Vlas (as in the prayer cited earlier); or, according to one testimony collected in the nineteenth century, the Saviour, the Mother of God, and Nicholas.[15] Even more frequently, however, the Trinity is understood solely as the name of a festival, and the etymology of the word might indeed reflect 'pagan' ritual. The festival is called the Trinity, it is said, because of the custom of carrying the branches of three trees into the home (for instance, birch, maple and sorb-apple).

Despite all the absurdity of popular 'theology', the experience of peasant faith could nevertheless serve Avvakum as a model of purity and religious understanding. The methods Old Believers used to conserve Russian Orthodoxy led inevitably to a fusion with folk religion. Researchers today sometimes like to describe Old Believer spirituality as folk-Orthodoxy. The evident association of these traditions in the minds of the originators of the 'old faith' would appear to justify the legitimacy of this label. The Old Believers evolved in their own particular way, however, and in their case one ought to speak of an Old Believer variant of folk-Orthodoxy, and distinguish this phenomenon from that of genuine post-Nikonian folk-Orthodoxy. The need for such a distinction is proved by a comparison of imageries. The figure of Antichrist, so central in the Old Believer apocalyptic imagery of the 'end of the world', is practically unknown in the far more widely diffused popular Orthodox spirituality.[16]

By the end of the seventeenth century, then, what had been a single faith from the point of view of culture and of the Church was moving towards a 'plurality of faiths',[17] including the official post-Nikonian Orthodoxy, 'Old Belief' and the new sects (flagellants and so on), in all of which could be found a theological core (in the case of official Orthodoxy raised to the status of a canon) and a peripheral religiosity which could be described as a process of assimilation, adaptation and transformation of religious ideas reflecting geographical, historical, social, psychological and other influences.

Notes and References

[1] Christ as a pilgrim can also be seen as a mythological illustration of the echatological passage in Matthew 25: 34–45.

[2] The origins of the image of Christ as an old man with a beard are not clear. In one popular account of a vision the narrator says 'Suddenly an old man appeared, as ancient as God'. Old age is evidently regarded as a feature identifying Jesus Christ. It is unlikely that this image is derived from that of God the Father in icons. More probably it is St Nicholas who is the prototype of Christ as a pilgrim. The diffusion of the cult of St Nicholas in Russia is so widespread that it has often been claimed that St Nicholas is the God of Russian folk religion.

[3] Story recorded in 1989 in Tver' province.

[4] G. A. Fedotov, *Stikhi dukhovnyye (Russkaya narodnaya vera po dukhovnym stikham)* (Moscow, 1991), p. 19.

[5] Recorded in 1988 in Tver' province.

[6] Medosi is a local corruption of St Modest. Both Modest and Vlas (Blaise) were regarded as protectors of the herds and stock rearing.

[7] I. S. Sokolov-Mitkov, 'Iz karacharovskikh zapisei', *Novy mir* no. 12, 1991, pp. 176–77.

[8] In Russian the words for 'peasant' ('krest'yanin') and 'Christian' ('khristianin', commonly pronounced 'khrest'yanin') are practically identical.

[9] The Russian Orthodox Church once again officially recognised fools for Christ's sake with the canonisation of the Blessed Kseniya in 1988.

[10] S. N. Bulgakov, 'Religiya chelovekobozhiya v russkoi revolyutsii (Rech' v sobranii studentov v 1908 g.'), *Novy mir* no. 10, 1989, p. 213.

[11] F. M. Dostoyevsky, *Polnoye sobraniye sochinenii* (Leningrad, 1982), vol. 24, pp. 198–99.

[12] V. V. Rozanov, *Uyedinennoye* (Moscow, 1990), p. 303.

[13] For a treatment of this subject by a contemporary ethnographer see T. A. Bernshtam, 'Russkaya narodnaya kul'tura i narodnaya religiya', *Sovetskaya etnografiya*, no. 1, 1989, pp. 91–100.

[14] *Zhitiye protopopa Avvakuma, im samim napisannoye, i drugiye yego sochineniya* (Moscow, 1961), pp. 177–78. This saying of Avvakum's has often been compared to Savanarola's claim that any old woman understood more about religion than did Plato.

[15] B. A. Uspensky, *Filologicheskiye razyskaniya v oblasti slavyanskikh drevnostei* (Moscow, 1982), p. 7.

[16] Fedotov has pointed to the absence of apocalyptic tales of the Antichrist in Russian religious poetry – indeed, in these texts there is almost no mention of the Antichrist at all. G. A. Fedotov, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[17] T. A. Bernshtam, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

(Translated from the Italian by Janice Broun)