

Towards an Historiography of the  
Millennium of Orthodoxy in Russia

IN THE SUMMER OF 1988, in the middle of perestroika, the Russian Orthodox Church publically celebrated the 1,000-year anniversary of Orthodoxy in Russia. The government not only permitted the celebrations but actively participated in them. Gorbachev, politburo members, and the heads of the Politburo's Council of Religious Affairs (CRA) sat among such religious luminaries as the Patriarchs of six of the world's autocephalous Orthodox Churches, Cardinal Glemp of Poland, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Billy Graham.

The Millennium was both the outcome and harbinger of a sea change in Soviet policy not only towards the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), but towards religion as such. To give an illustration, when Gorbachev took power in 1985, "only slightly more than 2,000 functioning churches could be found in all of the vast Russian republic."<sup>1</sup> By 1989, the number of active ROC churches reached 9,734.<sup>2</sup> While this upsurge had certainly not brought church numbers back to pre-revolutionary levels, it was nonetheless a dramatic reversal of the attenuated decline they had suffered under Brezhnev, to say nothing of the 14,000-church wipe out sustained under Khrushchev (one of the lesser known legacies of the so-called "Thaw's" inaugural 21<sup>st</sup> Party Congress<sup>3</sup>). To further underscore the reversal's suddenness, let us recall that as late as 1986 the imprisoned Orthodox activist, Alexander Ogorodnikov, had had his strict-regime labor sentence

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, Nathaniel. *A Long Walk To Church: A Contemporary History Of Russian Orthodoxy* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1995), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ramet, Sabrina P., "Religious policy in the era of Gorbachev," in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 39.

<sup>3</sup> Dunlop, John B. "Gorbachev and Russian Orthodoxy." *Problems of Communism* (July 1989): 107.

renewed;<sup>4</sup> three years later, not only was he free and publishing one of a slew of newly legalized Orthodox journals,<sup>5</sup> but Orthodox clergy were joining working groups in the Supreme Soviet!<sup>6</sup> All this serves to illustrate how radical were the changes in Soviet religious policy under perestroika. The Millennium celebration was the essential, centrifugal event, the anticipation of which influenced the direction of perestroika, and the celebration of which precipitated religion's definitive, legal emancipation.

Histories of perestroika are typically devoted to elite-level machinations, infrastructural collapse, nationalism and secession. The Millennium was of course interwoven with all of these processes. Yet its thus-far relegation to the niche publications of Christian historians has meant that it has not received the full spectrum of analyses that wider academia has devoted to the usual, "canonical" Soviet events. I will therefore attempt to trace the outlines of the extant historiography on the Millennium, as it exists in English, with the purpose of establishing the grounds for future historical work. The majority of the available accounts are by Christian academics, often in collaboration with the Keston Institute. These authors are as follows: Michael Bourdeaux, Jane Ellis, Sabrina and Pedro Ramet, Nathaniel Davis, Phillip Walters, Boris Orlov, Dimitry Pospelovsky, Christopher Marsh and John Dunlop. I have chosen a sample of the issues and paradigms that emerged in these authors' treatments of the Millennium (none of them analyze the Millennium exclusively, and some do not even mention it). The first of these issues will be the role the Millennium played in heightening the tension between the ROC and the Ukrainian churches. The ROC's relationship with Ukraine was paradigmatic of its attitude toward the profusion of heterodox denominations. I then cover the debates over the social value

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<sup>4</sup> Ellis, Jane. *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and defensiveness*. New York: St. Martin's Press in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1996), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Bourdeaux, Michael. *The Gospel's Triumph Over Communism* (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House Publishers, 1991), 90.

<sup>6</sup> Ramet, "Religious policy", 48.

of the Millennium beyond its publicity value, especially in light of the restrictions on attendance. Connected to this debate were arguments over the “success” of the Pomestnyi Sobor, the historic reform-minded gathering of the ROC, the CRA and various clergy that convened during the Millennium. Many long held hopes for change bore down on the sobor, but were stymied by an ROC leadership that had been controlled by the state since 1943. Lastly, borrowing from Alexei Yurchak, I do a preliminary survey of key actors’ public pronouncements, suggesting that a fruitful area for future analysis would be the authoritative discourse’s adoption of religious themes during perestroika, a time when Soviet “speak” still had some social purchase.

THE MILLENNIUM WAS OFFICIALLY AN ORTHODOX CELEBRATION, but all religious and nationalist groups naturally vied for their share of perestroika’s liberalizing policies. Christian, non-Christian, nationalist and dissident groups utilized the Millennium differently, and a full account of the histories of each is not possible here. I will thus focus on one example of the many axes of tension that emerged prominently, one that is still exists today: the relationship between Russian nationalism and the outlawed Ukrainian churches.

According to Michael Bourdeaux, the decision to site the main Millennium ceremonies in Moscow was consternating for Ukrainian Christians, both within the Ukrainian wing of the ROC as well as in the outlawed Catholic Greek Rite, or Uniate Church. Perhaps having in mind the 1987 Ukrainian publication “The Millennium: A Ukrainian Perspective,”<sup>7</sup> Bourdeaux asserts that Moscow’s centrality in the Millennium was salt in the Uniates’ wounds. The Uniate church had suffered one of “Stalin’s most grotesque acts,” namely, the enlisting of the ROC hierarchy in 1946 to force, “virtually at gun point,” Uniate priests to proclaim formally their church’s allegiance to the ROC. Those unwilling were “tortured, shot, or simply sent into decades of

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<sup>7</sup> Ellis, *Triumphalism*, 30, footnote 13

exile.”<sup>8</sup> Such macabre legacies notwithstanding, the fact of Moscow’s cooptation of the legacy of the Baptism of Kievan Rus’ reminded Ukrainian believers of Moscow-cum-Russia’s supremacy, though the celebrations would in fact entail satellite events in Kiev, Leningrad, Novgorod, Vladimir, Minsk and Lvov. Jane Ellis asserts that the decidedly more ecumenical atmosphere of the Kiev events (where Billy Graham preached, for example) spoke to the cultural gap between the insular ROC hierarchy and the western-influenced, heterodox groups encroaching on its periphery.<sup>9</sup> One yawning gap in all the extant literature, however, is what exactly transpired at all these other satellite celebrations.

Nathaniel Davis’s recounts a particularly portentous manifestation of Ukrainians’ ire that occurred a year prior to the Millennium. On the first anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, a Ukrainian village girl reported that she saw a vision of the Virgin Mary atop the ruins of a Uniate chapel. An alleged half a million people went on pilgrimage to the site in the following months, “interpreting the little girl’s vision as a sign of the Virgin’s concern for her suffering Catholic people, and interpreting the Chernobyl disaster as a divinely ordained punishment for the forcible incorporation of the Greek-Catholics into Orthodoxy in 1946.” A public campaign for the legalization of the Greek-Catholic Church began to swell in anticipation of the Millennium. The ROC leadership, for its part, remained impervious.<sup>10</sup>

The Ukrainian issue colored an otherwise positive outcome of the Millennium: the wave of religious registrations in the latter half of 1988.<sup>11</sup> Three quarters of all registrations processed in 1988 were of Orthodox parishes. The “overwhelming majority” of these were registered in

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdeaux, *Gospel’s Triumph*, 161

<sup>9</sup> Ellis, *Triumphalism*, 27

<sup>10</sup> Davis, *Long Walk to Church*, 64

<sup>11</sup> In the Soviet Union, all religious bodies had to be registered with the CRA. The state explicitly used the CRA to suppress the spread of religion, using such means as appoint clergy selected for their lack of religious fervor. See Phillip Walters on the Furov Report in Ramet (ed.), “A Survey of Religious Policy”, 25.

*Ukraine's former Greek-Catholic areas.*<sup>12</sup> There is a serious gap in the literature on how the ROC leadership and other Russian nationalist forces might have affected the CRA's choice of which groups to register. Konstantine Kharchev, the famous head of the CRA during this period, denied that the CRA had any interest in the ROC-Uniate conflict, and yet authorities on the ground apparently felt otherwise. There were reports in early 1989 of KGB-backed militias having to "open by force" a former Uniate building that Ukrainian Catholics were trying to prevent from being turned over to an Orthodox group.<sup>13</sup> The echoes of 1946 could not have gone unnoticed.

Gorbachev's de jure program for religion's emancipation was a decidedly universalist one, nationalism among lower level bureaucrats notwithstanding. For Gorbachev and Kharchev, in contrast to Russian nationalists and conservative apparatchiki, embracing the Millennium did not seem to suggest the exclusion of other religions from perestroika's embrace. Such intentions are borne out by Gorbachev's re-legalization of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church after his meeting with the Pope in December 1989. Furthermore, the self-proclaimed Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church would be registered a year later, a move that demonstrated plainly that Gorbachev was not beholden to the ROC's conservative leadership.<sup>14</sup> However, Sabrina Ramet sees Gorbachev's obliviousness to the Millennium's wider nationalist implications as naïve, and typically Bolshevik. She claims that Gorbachev's liberalizations "tautologically"<sup>15</sup> assumed that religious expression, if given free reign, would "slacken" its bonds to nationalism and become "depoliticized." Such an attitude is, for Ramet, a facsimile of Lenin's concessions in

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<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Long Walk to Church*, 69

<sup>13</sup> Ramet, Sabrina, "Religious policy", 34

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 49

the revolutionary period.<sup>16</sup> While I do not think Gorbachev's intention was to coopt religion in order to annihilate it (as Lenin had intended), perestroika was certainly an enlistment campaign. But it was a campaign directed towards all confessions, and Gorbachev's support for the Millennium—which was inescapably political for *all* believers—did not seem to account for the profusion of divisions that it would stir up.

It is an unfortunate coincidence that the great Church historian, Dimitry Pospelovsky, published the final installment of his three-volume *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, And the Believer* in 1988, just prior to the Millennium. However, his understanding of Russian nationalism's iterations in the late Soviet period could be useful for future historians analyzing the role they played in the Millennium.

A “cultural-preservationist” form of nationalism emerged in 1964 with the formation of the Rodina Society at Moscow State University.<sup>17</sup> Rodina and its offspring were characterized by a nostalgic reverence for Great Russian cultural history. This often entailed a concomitant reverence for Orthodoxy, if not outright conversion. The state began to crack down on these groups starting in 1970 once it was decided that they were not simply surrogate forms of Soviet patriotism but potentially deviant nationalist and religious organizations. These groups eventually divided into two subaltern types, Russian-chauvinist and neo-Slavophile. The latter was associated with the Vladimir Osipov's dissident journal *Veche*, samizdat religious publications, the politics of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and the underground Christian youth seminars that sprang up in the 70's (such as Aleksandr Ogorodnikov's in Moscow). Pospelovsky

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<sup>16</sup> Slezkine, Yuri. “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* Vol. 52, no. 2 (1994): 419; Pipes, Richard. *The formation of the Soviet Union: communism and nationalism : 1917-1923* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 44.

<sup>17</sup> Pospelovsky, Dmitry. “The neo-Slavophile trend and its relation to the contemporary religious revival in the USSR” in *Religion and nationalism in Soviet and East European politics*, ed. Ramet, Pedro (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 94.

terms these neo-Slavophile groups the *pochvenniki*, or “soil-bound.” What distinguished *pochvenniki* from Russian chauvinists was their rejection of Russian cultural imperialism, and their respect for non-Russians’ right to secede from the Union.<sup>18</sup> Such credos did not change during the turbulent Millennium years, even in the face of the rising numbers of foreign confessions and the aforementioned secessionist tendencies among the Ukrainians.<sup>19</sup> Pospelovsky urges historians to note that in as late as 1987, the Union of Soviet Writers was condemning Russification under the banner of patriotism, even criticizing Russians living in the Baltics for refusing to learn local languages.<sup>20</sup> In conclusion, future historians of the Millennium would be cautioned to bear Pospelovsky’s classifications in mind. Not all Russian nationalists supported the kind of cultural imperialism embodied in the Roc-Uniate conflict, Gorbachev being one of them.

The question of nationalism and the Soviet state, and of nationalism and the ROC, inevitably brings up the related question of the ROC’s collusion with the state since 1943. Pedro Ramet’s 1988 survey of Soviet religious policy<sup>21</sup> delineates six factors that determined the disposition of the Soviet government to any given religious body. The most salient with regards to the ROC were its “disposition to subordinate itself to political authority and its amenability to infiltration and control by the secret police,” and “the [lack of] allegiance to a foreign authority.”<sup>22</sup> That the ROC was used as an “instrument” in the 1940’s is certain, the case of the sham Kiev sobor in 1946 being the most blatant example. However, the Khrushchev government

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<sup>18</sup> Pospelovsky, “The Neo-Slavophile Trend”, 98-102.

<sup>19</sup> Pospelovsky’s essay on this matter was updated and re-published just prior to the Millennium, and his tone betrays the skepticism characteristic of the time. Gorbachev’s promotion of Alexander Yakovlev to Secretary of Ideology in 1987 was particularly worrisome for Pospelovsky. It was Yakovlev after all who had, as a member of the CPSU’s Department of Ideology and Propaganda in 1972, initiated the repressions against Osipov and *Veche*.

<sup>20</sup> Pospelovsky, “The neo-Slavophile trend”, footnotes 73 and 101

<sup>21</sup> Ramet, Pedro. “The Interplay Of Religious Policy And Nationalities Policy In The Soviet Union And Eastern Europe,” in *Religion And Nationalism In Soviet And East European Politics*, ed. Ramet, Pedro (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

suppressed *all* religious groups, including Russian ones. The aforementioned suppression of Rodina is a notable example, not to mention the closing of 14,000 ROC churches. Yet Ramet insinuates without evidence that the ROC was enlisted to suppress Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Baltic religious groups through the Brezhnev era,<sup>23</sup> claiming that the ROC was “more apt to serve as an instrument of Soviet nationalities policy than Catholicism.”<sup>24</sup>

Pospelovsky’s classification of Russian nationalisms aims precisely to defend late Soviet Russian nationalists (or at least certain categories of them) from being conflated with the Soviet state’s chauvinist policies. Future histories of the Millennium, especially those investigating the effect of ROC nationalism on the celebrations, will need to be careful to pay head to the heterogeneity of the church’s supporters.

THE WORKS OF MICHAEL BOURDEAUX AND JANE ELLIS contain the most detailed English-language accounts of the Millennium’s actual events. They are the only works that attempt to treat the Millennium events in their own right, as opposed to relegating them to the background in a wider discussion of perestroika-era religious policy. Each author grapples with the same fundamental question; namely, to what extent did the two key components of the Millennium, the triumphal ceremonies and the Pomestnyi Sobor, represent a genuine uncoupling of the ROC hierarchy from Soviet influences. Both authors appreciate the quantum leap represented by the ceremonies’ broadcast for the whole country. Bourdeaux is especially appreciative, due to his decades-long involvement in the Soviet Christian underground. Ellis is generally more skeptical, at least of the official ceremonies, choosing instead to focus on dissidents’ reactions to the events. Both authors concede that the Pomestnyi Sobor was a success, despite the fact that the

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<sup>23</sup> Ramet, Pedro, “The Interplay Of Religious Policy”, 30.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

church hierarchy, whose status vis-à-vis the authorities was still in flux, was especially cautious, perhaps unacceptably so.

Michael Bourdeaux lauded the symbolic resonance of the Millennium ceremonies. He personally attended the epic “solemn act” at the Bolshoi Theater on Friday, June 10. After congratulatory speeches by 17 different world leaders and an address by Metropolitan Yuvenali celebrating Gorbachev’s new era of openness, “no fewer than seven choirs, six orchestras and some of the stars of Soviet screen ...combined in a joint celebration of the Millennium by church and state.”<sup>25</sup> Bourdeaux was overwhelmed by triumphal joy at the concert, especially when, capping off several hours of choir performances and plays, “the blue sky above the stage set opened to reveal a carillon of real church bells which engulfed the Bolshoi in a peal of thunder. Before any audience this would have been a *coup de theatre*. In a country where the ringing of church bells had been outlawed for decades, this was more than symbolism: it was a pledge of a new beginning.”<sup>26</sup> Bourdeaux affirms that attendance was indeed primarily restricted to “official” guests. He stresses, though, that the fact that the events were broadcast was significant, all the more so in the Far East where many churches “had been closed for half a century.” Notable among broadcasts was the Party’s televised return of the Monastery of the Caves to the ownership of the ROC.<sup>27</sup> What is more, there seems to have been some flexibility in attendance at certain events. Ellis recounts the final day at the Danilov Monastery on June 10, where 10,000 people gathered as six of the world’s patriarchs concelebrated the Divine Liturgy alongside Cardinal Glemp of Poland, a rare example of Polish-Russian fraternity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bourdeaux, *Gospel’s Triumph*, 62.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, *Triumphalism*, 29.

The controversy over restricted attendance highlights the division in the ROC between its hierarchy and the dissidents. At least two “unofficial” Millennium celebrations occurred that spring and summer. One of these was arranged in conjunction with the production of a list of demands for the upcoming official Millennium, and was hosted by freed prisoner Alexander Ogorodnikov. A multi-denominational cross-section of the “persecuted church” attended the gathering, including Michael Bourdeaux. The group’s most urgent desire was to elicit from the ROC an official recognition of the new Soviet martyrs. Public acknowledgment of these repressions “took precedence over the resolution of any other problems,” according to dissident Deacon Vladimir Rusak, who had been in prison during the Millennium.<sup>29</sup> Jane Ellis recounts an even more successful unofficial Millennium event in Leningrad in April. The event, entitled “The Values of Christian Culture on the Eve of the Millennium of Christianity in Russia,” suffered no obstruction by the authorities, likely due to its temporal and physical distance from the Moscow celebrations. A cross-section of the Leningrad intelligentsia attended, and a city film crew televised the proceedings. Around the same time, the unofficial, anti-Soviet documentary *Khram* was showing in Leningrad cinemas.<sup>30</sup>

Crucially missing from these accounts are any details of the Millennium celebrations planned for Leningrad, Novgorod, Vladimir, Minsk and Lvov. Ellis briefly mentions the June 14-16 liturgies and open-air events in Kiev, where, notably, the authorities allowed Catholics and Baptists, including Billy Graham, to give public sermons. This was technically illegal, and the Ukrainian authorities’ leniency was yet another example of the Ukraine-Moscow cultural divide. Save for the vocal pronouncements of dissidents (Gleb Yakunin famously requested Patriarch

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<sup>29</sup> Bourdeaux, *Gospel’s Triumph*, 92-95.

<sup>30</sup> Ellis, *Triumphalism*, 31.

Pimen's resignation at a press conference<sup>31</sup>) and Bourdeaux and Ellis's brief accounts of unofficial ceremonies, there have yet to be written comprehensive histories of Soviet laity's experience of the Millennium. Of course, the dissident/hierarchy polarity centered on Leningrad and Moscow, and so histories of that summer have limited their purviews accordingly.

Besides the ceremonies, the other significant "official" event of the Millennium was the Pomestnyi Sobor, held from 6-9 June at the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and St Sergei in Zagorsk. The Pomestnyi Sobor's success, or lack thereof, has been controversial. Both Ellis and Bourdeaux (the latter attended) attest to the atmosphere of excitement and optimism that surrounded this first freely convened sobor since 1917. Though the public was not allowed to attend the main sessions, the sobor produced daily reports and speech transcripts that the eager press published immediately. There is general agreement among historians that the sobor's triumphs were moderate, but significant. Ellis's account centers on three sobor reports (out of 8 that were published)<sup>32</sup> which demonstrated that at least some of hierarchs in attendance were unafraid to criticize the Church's morally compromised relationship to the state. The sobor's major achievement was arguably the passing of the new *ustav*, prepared under the leadership of the dynamic Archbishop Kirill of Smolensk (as of 2013, the current patriarch). The *ustav* did away with the eviscerating policies that been forced upon the ROC in the 1961 sobor.<sup>33</sup> Chief among the discarded amendments was one that, in effect, "excluded the priest from the administration of his own parish."<sup>34</sup>

The sobor did not satisfactorily fulfill what Boris Orlov claims was society's demand for immediate, public recognition of the victims of Stalin. "Cautiousness was ingrained," and the

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<sup>31</sup> Bourdeaux, *Gospel's Triumph*, 93.

<sup>32</sup> Ellis, *Triumphalism*, 37-41.

<sup>33</sup> Lane, Christel. *Christian Religion in The Soviet Union: A Sociological Study* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), 33.

<sup>34</sup> Bourdeaux, *Gospel's Triumph*, 51.

Pomestnyi Sobor did not elect a single Soviet martyr for canonization. Instead, anomalous Russian historical figures such as Dimitry Donskoi were nominated, an attempt, in Orlov's assessment, to satisfy "society's demand for national revitalization" as well as a means to "fuse church traditions with national cultural and military patriotic traditions."<sup>35</sup> Bourdeaux and Ellis both concur that the ROC missed a critical opportunity to acknowledge publically Stalin's religious victims, especially given that even the CRA felt perfectly free to do so.<sup>36</sup> In a speech at the Bolshoi Metropolitan Yuvenali claimed that the "time was not yet ripe,"<sup>37</sup> and in an interview after the sobor stated that the issue was avoided in order not to politicize and thereby tarnish the Millennium's sacramental purpose.<sup>38</sup> Such casuistry was abhorrent to dissidents, for whom it was "considered an essential matter of public conscience to begin the process (of canonization)...but this did not happen and the sobor was the poorer for it."<sup>39</sup> The Millennium no doubt lost much of its sacramental resonance among the laity precisely on account of this decision.

Within a year, however, the Holy Synod *did* end up forming a new canonization commission for Soviet martyrs. "A torrent of letters and inquiries regarding the rehabilitation of particular individuals was pouring into the offices of the commission," and by 1990 another Pomestnyi Sobor instigated the multi-tiered process of legal rehabilitation, canonization, and memorialization of Soviet victims.<sup>40</sup> Orlov's analysis of the 1988 sobor shares the era's exhaustion with the leadership, but it bears noting that the CRA and the full gaze of the state was still on the church at this time. The church's subsequent swift, comprehensive reassessment of its Soviet past—in no small part abetted by the death in May 1990 of Patriarch Pimen, who had

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<sup>35</sup> Orlov, Boris; Kotzer, Sophia. "The Russian Orthodox Church in a Changing Society," in *Russia at a crossroads: History, memory and political practice*, ed. Schleifman, N. (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 155.

<sup>36</sup> Bourdeaux, *Gospel's Triumph*, 98,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 55,

<sup>38</sup> Abdulgani, Abdulla; et al. *Na puti k svobode sovesti* (Moskva: Progress, 1989), 115.

<sup>39</sup> Bourdeaux, *Gospel's Triumph*, 55.

<sup>40</sup> Orlov, "The Russian Orthodox Church," 155-159.

"belonged to a generation of clergymen who spent their lives in a period of frightful oppression and painful accommodation to the state"<sup>41</sup>—demonstrates that many churchmen at the 1988 Pomestnyi Sobor, despite their checkered histories, were eager for change.

THE FACT THAT THE ROC ENJOYS A PREEMINENT RELATIONSHIP with the Russian government today has resulted in a dearth of scholarship on the evolution in late Soviet discourse that made this church-state reunion possible. The tendency to conceptualize the Soviet collapse as an essential break rather than as a process<sup>42</sup> reinforces this omission. In 1989, ROC hierarchs sat on the Supreme *Soviet*, that is, before the legal break-up. The church-state relationship was evolving *within* the Soviet milieu, not after. Soviet discourse was thus mixing, albeit haltingly, with religion. Traces of people's negotiation of this tense transformation pepper the literature on the Millennium: for example, Konstantin Kharchev's ideological battles with regional administrators over religious registrations, or journalists' growing polarization over the issue of state-enforced atheism. Personal convictions were emerging more candidly than before, and demanded negotiation vis-à-vis authoritative discourse. Alexei Yurchak's *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More* argued that late Soviet ideology functioned on performative and constative levels that were mutually productive, asserting that, "every genuine speech act is both."<sup>43</sup> With Yurchak in mind, I will now take a preliminary sample of the public pronouncements of two key historical figures—Gorbachev and Kharchev—as they appear in the literature on the Millennium. By analyzing these utterances we can begin to trace the evolution

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<sup>41</sup> Orlov, "The Russian Orthodox Church," 159.

<sup>42</sup> On this tendency, see: Young, Glennys. "Fetishizing the Soviet Collapse: Historical Rupture and the Historiography of (Early) Soviet Socialism", *Russian Review* 66, no. 1 (2007): 95-122.

<sup>43</sup> Yurchak, Alexei. *Everything was forever, until it was no more: the last Soviet generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 21. For discussion of the constative and performative dimensions of speech, see pages 19-25.

of authoritative discourse around religion, reveal gaps in our understanding, and ultimately illuminate areas for future historical research.

Accounts of the Millennium generally assume that Gorbachev's rapprochement with the Church was a pragmatic decision, motivated in the first instance by the need to shore up public support for perestroika and re-legitimize the communist party at home and abroad.<sup>44</sup> The parallels with Stalin's cooptation of the ROC in 1943 certainly were not lost on keen observers, and were a reason for skepticism.<sup>45</sup> But how did Gorbachev negotiate the tension between Leninism and the fact of religion's perseverance? Skeptics at the time certainly did not presume he felt any differently toward religion than did Lenin toward nationalism; that is, many felt his intention was to "to ingest and ultimately to absorb the church."<sup>46</sup> Especially representative of this early skepticism is an essay by John Dunlop. Dunlop's article "Gorbachev and Russian Orthodoxy" was written in 1988, before such critical turning points as Patriarch Pimen and Metropolitan Alexei's appointments to the Congress of People's Deputies (spring of 1989<sup>47</sup>), or the death of the all-important 1929 Law on Religious Associations (September 1990<sup>48</sup>). Dunlop is thus a skeptic, and therefore sees a Soviet purism in Gorbachev's frequent Lenin citations. Dunlop consequently assumes that Gorbachev's rapprochement with treatment with religion was purely pragmatic, much as Lenin's strategic concessions to nationalism had been.<sup>49</sup> He argues that Gorbachev felt compelled to make these concessions because the intelligentsia was turning away from "dogmatic atheism," because Kharchev had claimed the USSR's religious population

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<sup>44</sup> Ramet, Sabrina, "Religious policy", 32

<sup>45</sup> Bourdeaux, *Gospel's Triumph*, 43; Ramet, Sabrina, "Religious policy", 33; Dunlop, "Gorbachov and Russian Orthodoxy", 96.

<sup>46</sup> Dunlop, "Gorbachov and Russian Orthodoxy", 101

<sup>47</sup> Ellis, Jane. "Some reflections about religious policy under Kharchev", in *Religious policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 96. See also: Kotkin, Stephen. *Armageddon averted: the Soviet collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 146.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>49</sup> Pipes, Richard, *Formation of the Soviet Union*, 45.

was approaching the 100 million mark,<sup>50</sup> and because the state needed the logistical help of religious charities' labor forces, especially after Chernobyl.<sup>51</sup> The Millennium presented the perfect opportunity to coopt these constituencies. This conclusion echoes Jane Ellis's: Gorbachev was trying to harmonize God and Party in order to "motivate people to work towards a desired end."<sup>52</sup>

The problem with this cynical view is that it presupposes that Gorbachev's Leninism was, to use Yurchak's words, "constative." Yurchak has demonstrated that an aspect of glasnost was a period of nostalgia for "the pure word of Lenin," that is, a harkening back to mythical core principles in the face of the system's deterioration.<sup>53</sup> Gorbachev's Lenin citations were very much in keeping with this trend. "Performing" such core tropes of authoritative discourse was not only a means to legitimize perestroika's radical program within the still-dominant socialist paradigm, it was also therapeutic (Kharchev was still upholding the purity of Leninist religious principles during an interview in London in late 1989<sup>54</sup>). Notions of "real" Leninist principles had little to do with the Millennium, despite what Gorbachev said. After all, the Millennium was a restoration of the ROC as *social* institution, and, as Sabrina Ramet elsewhere points out, Lenin had intended for religion to be, at most, a *private* affair.<sup>55</sup>

Another figure whose relationship to religion has come under much scrutiny has been the embattled head of the CRA, Konstantin Kharchev. Jane Ellis's work on Kharchev, which she based on his famous three-interview cycle in Ogonek from 1988 to 1989, opens up the possibility of seeing his "personal Damascus road experience"<sup>56</sup> as an index the Millennium's effect on

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<sup>50</sup> Dunlop, "Gorbachov and Russian Orthodoxy", 102-103

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 116

<sup>52</sup> Ellis, *Triumphalism*, 22

<sup>53</sup> Yurchak, *Everything was forever*, 294.

<sup>54</sup> Ellis, "Some reflections", 92

<sup>55</sup> Ramet, Sabrina, "Religious policy", 34

<sup>56</sup> Ellis, *Triumphalism*, 43

public discourse. Kharchev's first interview was in May 1988, and reflected the cautious and conservative, "two-pronged approach" to the Millennium that the state had adopted five years previously. Celebration would be permitted but counteracted by propaganda debunking the ROC's claims to cultural prominence in the development of Kievan Rus's.<sup>57</sup> Atheist editorials in state papers abounded accordingly. Kharchev's citation of the "70 million believers" figure was at least a sign that the state recognized religion's purchase on the population. However, his blunt speech at the Higher Party School that same month underscored the fact that authoritative discourse was still decidedly resistant to concessions to religion beyond the purely pragmatic.<sup>58</sup>

Kharchev's second interview, in December 1988, reflected a discursive breakthrough inaugurated by the Millennium. Kharchev openly cited religious policies needing repealing, and even recounted the resistance the CRA was facing from regional officials in registering religious bodies. This interview highlighted the heightening tension between society's increasingly vocal pro-religion sectors and staunch party conservatives (which, as would become clear in Kharchev's third interview, mixed unsavorily with the ROC's own hierarchy).<sup>59</sup> By Kharchev's third interview, in October 1989, the statization of the ROC was underway.<sup>60</sup> Kharchev revealed that he had been fired from the CRA and, shockingly, that the Supreme Soviet might have dismissed him after the ROC hierarchy reported that he was becoming an annoyance (Ellis speculates that their annoyance might have been due to Kharchev's frequent dalliances with Orthodox dissidents).<sup>61</sup> We recall that as of summer 1989, one year after the Millennium, the Supreme Soviet counted high clergy amongst its members. Kharchev's lamentations regarding his conflicts with the authorities between summer 1988 and summer 1989 could thus be taken as

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<sup>57</sup> Ellis, "Some reflections", 87.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 104, footnote 7.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 96; Ellis, *Triumphalism*, 49.

a marker of a seminal period in the rebirth of church-state synergy. By 1990, government officials were “performing” their Orthodoxy—in Yurchak’s sense—in order to gain public legitimacy.<sup>62</sup> And though the unprecedentedly liberal Law on Freedom of Conscience finally got passed in 1990, the ROC was already lobbying the government for special legal status.<sup>63</sup> In sum, it would seem that Kharchev’s career in the CRA, in so far as we can piece it together from his interviews, was an index of three or more processes: the releasing of public discourse on religion, the emergence of vocal true-believers on both sides, and the emergence of Russian Orthodox religiosity as an aspect of authoritative discourse. Jane Ellis’s are among the few systematic accounts of these processes. The story of religion and late Soviet ideology awaits its Yurchak.

IN THIS PAPER I HAVE TOUCHED ON A FEW of the myriad tensions bearing down on the celebration of a foundational Christian event by history’s greatest communist state. Key among these were nationalist and religious resentments unleashed by glasnost. The Moscow Patriarchate and Gorbachev did not necessarily see eye to eye on the issue of heterodox denominations, particularly as regards the legalization of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. Gorbachev certainly intended to appease nationalists and faithful alike by endorsing the Millennium, but his subsequent liberal policies towards other groups showed that his intentions had less to do with promoting exclusivist Russian nationalism as they did with a program of liberalization. I then reviewed the two largest descriptions of the Millennium in the English-language literature, that of Michael Bourdeaux and Jane Ellis. Ellis was the more critical regarding ceremonies, especially in light of the restricted public attendance, though Bordeaux’s account actually

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<sup>62</sup> Ramet, Sabrina, “Religious policy”, 49.

<sup>63</sup> Marsh, Christopher. *Religion and the state in Russia and China: suppression, survival, and revival* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 124.

provides more detail on dissident and unofficial reactions. Both authors praised the successes of the Pomestnyi Sobor, though lamenting that the ROC leadership not to go further to acknowledge the new Soviet Martyrs. I then addressed the understudied topic of late Soviet authoritative discourse on religion, suggesting that a more detailed investigation of the comingling of Soviet and religious ideology during the Millennium might serve to illuminate better the Soviet-era foundations of the post-Soviet *synergia* between the Russian Government and the Orthodox Church.

The majority of the historians surveyed here are professed Christians, some of which, like Michael Bourdeaux, worked passionately for the liberation of all faiths under Communism. These historians' concern for everyday believers is refreshingly non-quantitative, as accounts of the Soviet Union's collapse often are. However, now that the USSR is gone, Christian historians' efforts have been largely devoted to century-level surveys of Soviet religious policy. Conspicuous antipathy to the Soviet Union colors these surveys, rendering them more as tracts than as histories.<sup>64</sup> Such partisanship, combined with secular historians' tendency to analyze religion only within the early Soviet context, has meant that the Millennium has been overlooked in the canonical debates making up the canon of English-language historiography on the Soviet Union. My hope is that this preliminary survey might encourage its inclusion.

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<sup>64</sup> For example, Paul Froese's *The plot to kill God: findings from the Soviet experiment in secularization*, or Olafs Bruvers's *Communism versus religion: Soviet experiment: theory and practice in historical retrospection*.