

## RUSSIA, SWEDENBORG, AND THE EASTERN MIND

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Anders Hallengren

Spring returns to Prague and Václav Havel declares that we can no longer say one thing, think another and do a third. “Openness” is the keyword in the era of Change.

The New Church minister Christopher Hasler returns to Czechoslovakia after 43 years exile to ordain his compatriot Samuel Mařík into the priesthood.

The years of threats, persecution, forced secrecy were followed by a sudden and unexpected freedom when the communist power was broken in the autumn of 1989 in Czechoslovakia, along with other East European countries. During the moving ceremony, when the pastor could for the first time be officially recognized, the ordaining minister felt that perhaps that day in Eastern Moravia he repaid something to the Czech nation where he first learned of Swedenborg before the war. This time revolution meant revival.

In the Baltic states, as in Poland, Serbia, and Ukraine, religion and politics suddenly became one: the church—Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox—is a symbol of freedom or identity. But there is also a general longing for spirituality. The Swedenborg Societies report on contacts received from Hungary, the Soviet Union, Poland, Latvia, East Germany, and from the association in Yugoslavia. Old Swedenborgian circles are revived or searched for, new are in the melting pot. Russian translations are in demand, and are under way. This way too Change is symbolized. The new, seen from one angle, takes form of a renaissance; and there is a long history behind all this leading up to the moment when everything erupts.

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\* Swedish writer, correspondent, and historian; visiting fellow in the department of history at Harvard University in 1980 and 1987. Member of the P.E.N. In 1990 he lectured on “Détente and Disruption: Antipoles in the Age of Unity” at the International October Writer’s Meeting in Belgrade—“The End of Utopias, and the World Spirit”—where he also appeared at several public poetry readings, some of them broadcasted live, together with Russian and East-European poets. Has published more than a hundred papers and essays in the cross-cultural field of comparative literature and international relations, his major work being *Cuba in Africa: A Turning-Point in Great-Power Politics—Decolonization and Détente in Conflict* (Almqvist & Wiksell International: Stockholm 1984). Forthcoming: *Religion and Politics: An Inquiry into the Emersonian Mind*.

Everything that is now happening was triggered off by the introduction of Glásnost and Perestroika into the Soviet Union five years ago. In 1988 a conference on the "Christian and Marxist Views on the Meaning of Being Human" was held in Spain, one in a row in the new Christian-Socialist dialogue, with participants from Hungary, Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, East and West Germany, India, the USA, the People's Republic of China. In January 1990, in Moscow, a "New Age" Conference was held in which Mikhail Gorbachev participated. There was a reception in the Kremlin, and Gorbachev expressed his sympathy with the spiritual endeavors, and his own understanding of the metaphysical aspect of reality, the sphere of the *Nous*, the Mind of humanity. That conference was arranged by Global Forum, which aims at bringing together religious leaders and politicians all over the world. The conference in Moscow opened with a Hindu prayer. The Soviet leader attended together with his friend the metropolitan Pitirim, one of the hosts of the conference.

In its own way, the Era of Perestroika or "Reconstruction" is indeed a New Age, and contrary to what is often said regarding the fall of utopias in the East, a new Utopian thought is the motive power. Discussing this idea in his own book on Perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev finally calls the aim a "Golden Age"—an era of peace and international cooperation. In a longer perspective, his dream coincides with the conception of universal disarmament proposed by Czar Nicholas II, (which was praised in *New Church Life* in 1898). Perestroika is, in Gorbachev's terms, a "New Thinking For Our Country and the World." A major theme in that thinking is Pluralism. Gorbachev and his government have not specifically used that term to refer to religious matters, faiths or the creeds in the union. There are a few major indications however. One is Gorbachev's stress on the importance of preserving cultural and national identities, the genuine and the individual, which, according to him, comprise the richness of human nature. The fact that the national problem is at present the greatest problem facing the central power, the federal government which is far from democratic, does not contradict that point of view, but hold back its political realization within the union and may cause serious backlashes and still more misery. Some of the most powerful counter forces, actually aim in the same direction, but primarily by means of decentralization.

The problems regarding the standing of the Galician Metropolitanate of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine (Ukrainskaya SSR) have not been solved, due to the national problems facing the Union. But Gorbachev's meeting with Pope John Paul II on December 1, 1989, symbolizes a rapprochement between the Kremlin and the Vatican. Responding to the Pope's reiterated desire of freedom to use both Latin and Eastern rites, Gorbachev gave an assurance that under the forthcoming law on the freedom of conscience "all believers would enjoy religious freedom." That draft law "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" was approved by the Supreme Soviet and finally promulgated by the President on October 1, 1990. This means in practice a more liberal stand on religion, but there is much left of the old system of registration for those groups who seek the status of a juridical person, including property rights. But the old obligatory registration of all local groups of believers, has been repealed.

There will be no turning back. The shaking days of August 19-21, when the world caught its breath, only showed that it is too late to turn the clock back, since people know what time it is. The Eastern mind will move forward, and unlike Orpheus, looking back will be allowed. Focusing on the conflicting attitudes to the cultural heritage in modern Russia, Boris Thomson in *Lot's Wife and the Venus of Milo* saw that deep disaffection with the past has coincided with Utopian hopes for the future. The case against all pre-socialist culture paralleled the lamentable fate of Lot's wife. The young would never be allowed to look back at the old world with its seductive antiquities. Even supposing that Sodom and Gomorrah had created the Venus of Milo, "was it really advisable to look back?" Or is it necessary to look back with an open mind in order to proceed?—instead of submitting to that programmatic cult of optimism Walter Vickery perceived as the most problematic trait in the modern Soviet mind?

In the editions of the *Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, published in Moscow, characters and events appear, disappear, but may reappear—in a way reflecting the capricious currents of history. A name which we are certain to find in the "Great Soviet Encyclopedia," however, is the name of "Swedenborg." He has survived all censorship. We learn that "the first design for a vessel that would glide on a layer of compressed air between the underside of the vessel and the surface of the water was proposed by

Emanuel Swedenborg in 1716." Swedenborg is not only presented as a scientist, however. Already in the Stalin edition, he was presented as both a "scientist" and "a theosophical mystic." In the latest edition we also learn that,

Swedenborg studied at the University of Uppsala. He spent most of the period from 1710 to 1714 in Great Britain. From 1716 to 1747 he was an assessor at the Royal Bureau of Mines in Stockholm. In 1734 he was elected an honorary member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. Swedenborg wrote many works on mining, mathematics, astronomy, and other subjects (*Opera philosophica et mineralia*, 1734). Among his many technical designs was one for a flying machine with fixed wings.

In his quest for an explanation of the system of the universe, Swedenborg initially developed a mechanistic conception influenced by Descartes, Newton, and Locke. Later, this conception gave way to a spiritualistic natural philosophy similar to Neoplatonism. During the 1740s Swedenborg wrote a number of works focusing on the relationship between spirit and matter and touching on a wide range of problems in anatomy, physiology, and psychology (for example, *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, vols 1-2, 1740-41). The evolution of Swedenborg's world view culminated in a spiritual and religious crisis (1743-45). He had 'visions', and he heard 'voices'. As a result, Swedenborg became a mystic and clairvoyant. In his many subsequent works he endeavored to provide a 'true' interpretation of the Bible (*Arcana caelestia*, vols. 1-8, 1749-56; abridged Russian translation under the title *On the Heavens, the World of Spirits, and Hell*, 1863) and he expounded a doctrine of precise 'correspondences' between earthly phenomena and those of 'the other world,' at times sharply criticizing the church. Swedenborg's theosophy was strongly criticized by Kant in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (1766). Swedenborg had an appreciable influence on romantic writers, including W. Blake (Great Britain), and R. Emerson (the USA). Communities of Swedenborg's followers became common in various countries, particularly the USA and Great Britain (about 30,000 members in 1970). Since 1810, the

Swedenborg Society in London has been concerned with the publication of Swedenborg's works.

This entry is longer than those of the earlier editions and has been updated with new literature, including Inge Jonsson's major work *Swedenborgs korrespondenslära* from 1969, and A.G. Myslivchenko's account, in his survey of Philosophy in Sweden, *Filosofskaya mysl'v Shvetsii*, published in 1972. Unlike the "objective" style of the encyclopedia, Myslivchenko's dogmatic Marxist analysis of Swedish philosophy is a critical one, and when he writes about the second part of Swedenborg's life, Immanuel Kant, Bertrand Russel, and Ralph Waldo Emerson set the key. But Myslivchenko is critical of Swedish philosophy in general, and of modern philosophy in particular, (he praises Erik Gustaf Geijer as having achieved the highest point in this history: Geijer influenced Karl Marx). But Myslivchenko nevertheless devotes five pages to Swedenborg, and in general sticks to facts. And, it should be added: today Myslivchenko's perspective is no longer current.

### **The Meeting between East and West**

Leonid Brezhnev started the process in the 1970s, when he began to swear allegiance to pre-revolutionary Russian origins, and called attention to the old history of the *Rus*. At the same time, mainly for economical reasons, he left the door ajar to liberal Western winds, which corroded centralism and opened the way for a revival of pre-Bolshevik traditions. In a way Brezhnev was then bridging the gap between socialist internationalism and 19th century Slavophilism, which was to be reborn in the various Eastern nationalisms during the 1990s. Russian avant-garde "westernism" is, on the other hand, almost traditional.

Peter the Great once breached the wall of Greek Orthodoxy and Russian isolation, but even before his time Western literature had entered Russia, often via Poland and the Ukraine. Thus for instance Thomas à Kempis' *De Imitatio Christi* and writings of Jakob Boehme were translated and circulated as early as the 17th century. Toward the end of the 18th century, many translations of religious literature came from a circle led by the publisher Nikolai Ivánovich Novikóv—works such as those by Ange-

lus Silesius and the Swabian mysticist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (Swedenborg's well-known German correspondent and translator). In the beginning of the 19th century, Alexander I became interested in the writings of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, who was published in various Russian editions. (Author of *Scenes from the Spiritual World* and similar works, the spiritualist Jung-Stilling is well-known for his many accounts of Swedenborg's powers of paranormal perception and communication.) Western transcendental philosophy and mysticism increasingly attracted influential writers, philosophers, theologians, scholars and critics—the Aksákovs, Bakunin, Herzen, Belinsky.

This interest was focused upon writers like Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, but no less upon Franz von Baader, G.H. von Schubert, Boehme, Saint-Martin, Jung-Stilling, and Swedenborg. There was a manifoldness of secret circles and movements, and in many of them, political, mysticist, or literary, the spirit of Swedenborg was present. A member of the westernist circle around Semyón Egórovich Ráich ("Amfiteatrov"), and also member of the radical decembrist society 'The Union of Welfare' (which was founded and led by Aleksandr Muravyóv), and, furthermore, President of the "Society of Wisdom lovers," (1823-1825) was Prince Vladímír Odóevsky (1803?-1869). This central figure of the movements of Russian philosophical romanticism and humanism, was especially drawn to science and mysticism, and studied Swedenborg, Saint Martin, Boehme, and Baader. After the Decembrist uprising in 1825, the members of the Society of Wisdom Lovers destroyed the protocols of the society, and partly became a dispersed underground movement. Odoevsky moved to St. Petersburg, and would, as a public servant, contribute greatly to public education and musical culture in Russia. He is also known for stories with a mystical bent, like "Cosmorama" (1840), "The Possessed" (1842), and his utopian vision "The Year 4338." Other influential figures of the westernist currents of the century were Nikolai Strakhov, a philosophical mentor of Dostoevsky and Tolstoi; the spiritualist Aleksandr Aksákov, who translated Swedenborg into Russian; and the great philosopher from the Ukraine, P. D. Yurkevich, who called Boehme, Leibniz, and Swedenborg the last great philosophers of the West.

Yurkevich was the teacher of Vladimir Solovyóv (1853-1900), who appears in the fictional shape of Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The

visionary eclecticist philosophy of Solovyóv is reflected not only in Dostoevsky but as much in the religious thinking of the 20th century anti-utilitarian Russian exile Nikolaí Aleksándrovich Berdyáev (1874-1948); in the modern symbolism of Bulgákov, Bély, and Blok; and in the influential ideas of the essayist Dmitry Merezhkovsky, and in the variety of the modern religious revival: Pavel Florensky, Evgeny Trubetskóy. Solovyóv drew much from Boehme, Paracelsus, Swedenborg, gnosticism and the Kabbalah for his organicist dualism, where the material things are conceived as reflections of an eternal reality, and where love is the prime force of being.

The supernatural and spiritual elements in the writings of the “national poet” Aleksándr Sergeévich Púshkin (1799-1837), are obvious. It is an important fact that he actually quotes and cites Emanuel Swedenborg in his prose work *The Queen of Spades* as early as 1833. That short story impressed Dostoyevsky deeply; to him the leading figure Hermann was a ‘colossal figure’ who later on inspired him to create Raskolnikov.

If Solovyóv served as model for Dostoevsky’s Alyosha, and echoes from him perhaps are audible also in Ivan’s trenchant debates with the Grand Inquisitor, Emanuel Swedenborg partly seems to have been a prototype for another leading figure in *The Brothers Karamozov*, namely Alyosha’s holy mentor Zosima. The profound influence of Swedenborg on Dostoevsky has been shown in essays written by for instance the Nobel prize winner Czeslaw Milosz, one of Swedenborg’s many perceptive academic readers in Poland, where Swedenborg influenced various Romantics and Symbolists those days, ranging from the mysticist Towiański to the national poet Adam Mickiewicz.

Dostoevsky, like many of his contemporaries at home and abroad, was interested in all the mystical literature he could get his hands on, and his library included the Russian translations of Swedenborg, Aleksandr Aksakov’s classic work on spiritualism, studies on animal magnetism and other psychic and spiritual phenomena. For example, in one of Aleksandr Aksakov’s seances, we find Dostoevsky attending; Solovyóv and Nikolai Leskóv were also there. Yet Dostoevsky saw himself as a realist in literature and an orthodox Christian in belief. To him, that was no contradiction.

### The Radical Humanism

When Aleksandr Herzen died in 1870, Dostoevsky wrote of him in a letter to Nikolai Strakhov, that he was “a poet without peer.” Tolstoï and Leóntiev are mentioned among those who were influenced by Herzen’s ideas. Until his departure from Russia in 1847, Herzen belonged to a group of young writers which included Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Goncharóv. Their education combined Western and Russian culture. At Moscow university Herzen became a member of the radical circle of students which was inspired by Fourier, Saint-Simon and other radical utopian philosophers. These students were arrested in 1833, and Herzen served a sentence of internal exile in the cities of Perm and Vyatka in Siberia. That kind of punishment was not invented by the Revolution. In the next decade a similar fate befell Dostoevsky, who also had gone through a phase of admiration for Fourier and membership in an underground organization. One of Herzen’s friends in the exile was the architect and mysticist Aleksandr Vitberg. A Swede by origin, Vitberg was born in Russia. His artistic talent and the mystical tinge of his convictions impressed the emperor Alexander. Vitberg inspired Herzen with the visionary symbolism of Swedenborg, Paracelsus, and Masonic literature. Thus in Siberia too, convicts pondered upon Swedenborg, as can be seen from Herzen’s memoirs.

Underground movements and samizdat literature have very ancient roots in Russia. They are as old as repression itself.

Nikita Mikhailovich Muravyóv, a member of the supreme дума, early had drafted the constitution of the future Russian state, and had written a tract, *Curious Conversation*, in which he used quotations from the Bible, and the Gospels especially, to argue the need for an uprising against despotism. After the Decembrist uprising he was (like Dostoevsky later on) imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg, and sentenced to death—rerieved to 20 years of hard labor in work camps, which in the event ended his life. He died in Irkutsk in 1835. Ivanovich Muravyóv-Apostol, still another radical born in the early 1790s, was among the five leaders of the Decembrist uprising who were hanged in 1826. Nikolai Nilolaevich Muravyóv, (later remembered as the heroic “Karskii”), another member of that prominent *dvorianstvo* family of nobles and landed gentry, supported the emancipation of peasants and protected



Decembrist exiles, and was discharged from the army and fell into disgrace.

His brother Aleksandr Nikoláevich Muravyóv (1792-1863), known by Herzen, also had to spend years of his life in Siberia. Muravyóv was the most prominent and active New Churchman in Russia. He graduated from Moscow university in 1810, served in the war of 1812 and in the military campaigns of the following years and became a colonel, was a founder of the Union of Salvation in 1816. More and more turning to radical and humanitarian political activism he was one of the founders of the "Union of Welfare" in 1818, and became the leader of the union's Moscow branch. That secret society was the fire's center in the Decembrist uprising of 1825. In 1826 Muravyóv was sentenced to exile in Siberia in the aftermath of the revolt. From 1828 on he held a succession of administrative posts in different parts of the country, and under supervision of Alexander II was actively involved in the drafting of the peasant reform of 1861, which abolished serfdom and meant allotment of land to country people and farm workers. The losers were the proprietors, and among them the reformers themselves. The Muravyóvs, for instance, maintained ancient boyar traditions. This radical humanism is a central theme in Dostoevsky and Tolstoi. Jonathan Bayley, a personal friend of Muravyóv, at that historical moment sadly compared the events in Russia to the contemporary Civil War in the USA: "How grand is the contrast of Russia freeing her 25 millions of serfs peaceably, bearing the burden and patiently working to make the glorious effort successful, to the frantic efforts of the slave-holders of America, by rebellion, by war, by universal wreck,...Nothing could surpass the joy of Mouravieff on the glorious morning of the emancipation day, though it took away probably half his property."

Aleksandr Muravyóv had devoted himself to the history of the Russian church after his exile to Siberia, and had resumed, quietly but persistently, his activity for the heavenly doctrines of Swedenborg, employing two persons in producing samizdat copies of Swedenborg's writings, which he distributed among family members, relatives and friends. For that reason the name Muravyóv is paramount to the history of Russian Swedenborgianism and New Jerusalem humanism. At the same time Muravyóv held an administrative post as a layman in the orthodox church.

To him that was obviously not a contradictory attitude. On the contrary the creeds supported each other. That can be seen from a perspicacious pamphlet, printed in London for distribution among Russian readers, *Introduction au Journal: "Orient et Swedenborg"* (Londres: F. Pitman, 20, Paternoster Row). There were no indications as to the author or any year of publication. It was humbly signed a "Lecteur Orthodoxe des Écrits de Swédenborg." The journal never actually appeared, but an annotated translation of the introduction appeared in *The Intellectual Repository* (London) in 1872, and the same year a translation was also published in the Swedish journal *Ett Kristligt Sändebud* ('A New Church Messenger,' Uppsala), edited by Anna Fredrika Ehrenborg. As can be seen from a communication published earlier the same year under the heading "Miscellaneous" in the *Repository*, it is obvious that the author of the pamphlet was the Princess Cleopatra Mikhailovna Shakhovskaya (1809-1883), Aleksandr Muravyóv's devoted sister-in-law, one of numerous Swedenborgians among his relatives.

### Ex Oriente Lux

Shakhovskaya regards Swedenborg from an Eastern point of view, *ex oriente*, perceiving a convergency between New Church and Orthodox theology. She points out that to study the writings of Swedenborg—

that protest, as sublime as it is profound, against the West, may show the East precisely in what the corruption of the Western world consists...If regarded from a point of view neither Protestant nor Catholic, Swedenborg would be a real acquisition to the whole Christian world. He would conjoin that which is still new in the West with that which is already old in the East. This manner of considering Swedenborg would revive the languishing life of brotherly love amongst Christians, divided as they are by all kinds of religious disputes, polemics, and hostilities. There would arise from the East and from the West worthy representatives of this new Christian love, not from the narrow official and despotic forms of an impossible union amongst religious professions, but in the spirit of mutual and universal love—that beneficent and

overflowing love without which all languishes and dies...The West has turned away from the ancient Christian simplicity and clearness, and confirmed this deviation by every species of casuistic and scholastic argument. The man of the West, be he Catholic or Protestant, brought up in these vitiated principles, sucks in with his mother's milk this destructive leaven...This incurable evil of the spirit, not having given away to the offered remedies of science, and advancing with frightful rapidity, first reached on the one hand the so-called Œcumenical Council of Nice, and on the other moved onwards towards destruction in *faith without works*, free inquiry, predestination. In this last extremity, the West lost all true faith, retaining only a blind faith, a belief in rationalism, that negation of all faith...Swedenborg, is as the East itself, a high protest against the West...The principles of the New Church, as it is so called by Swedenborg, are entirely the same as those of the Eastern Orthodoxy, with the difference only of the particular tinge which these principles borrowed in passing through the mind.

Cleopatra Shakhovskaya furthermore points out,

(1) That Eastern orthodoxy is as far from being inclined in favor of Tritheism as in favor of that incredulity [*incrédulité*] which denies the tri-hypostatic unity of the Incarnate Divinity, with which Swedenborg so vehemently reproaches the West. (2) That Eastern orthodoxy has never separated faith from love, more especially as it has never made a blind faith the leading principle of the church. (3) That active repentance and amendment of life have always been considered as forming the fundamental basis of salvation, according to the two great commandments of the law of love manifested in good works, without which all faith is dead. (4) That the Holy Scriptures, as well as the two Commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets, were always considered by the Eastern orthodoxy as divine revelation, containing a high and divine meaning deeply concealed under the letter, which the Lord alone from time to time reveals to some just and holy men, and it is precisely on this knowledge that the whole tradition of

the church reposes... The false Western interpretation of the Cœumenical Symbol, explained in the sense of Tritheism, was condemned in the East as early as in the fourth century, in the anathema pronounced upon the heresy of John Philopone, who came from Athens to the West at the time of Boethius...(5) That eternal blessedness or eternal misery is the lot of those who live conformably or contrary to the precepts of orthodoxy, as stated above, and without which there is no salvation for the Christian—is it not in effect what the New Church of Swedenborg teaches?... If any one desires to refute the doctrine of Swedenborg in its very basis, he must begin by destroying the very fundamental principles of the orthodox doctrine.

Now, she proclaims, “the ferment is cast in, the impulse is given, and freedom of thought, speech, and conscience—that true and powerful companion of this new era—opens the very depths of the human mind for the reception of regenerative truth.”

The Princess Shakhovskaya passed away at the end of 1883. That year was in reality a centennial, since the first circle of Swedenborg readers in Moscow was formed as early as 1783. Information on that circle was first given in the Swedish Swedenborgian journal *Samlingar för Philantroper* in 1787, the source probably being Bénédict Chastanier. The *New-Jerusalem Magazine* (London) reported in 1790 that “a society of the friends of the New Doctrine had begun about the year 1783 to meet at Moscow, but the tyrannical and impious principles of the Empress have given rise to some persecution.” Thus also another tradition was alive. The journal continued, however: “Certain accounts are received from Poland, that a great number of professors of the New Doctrine are to be found in that country, and some also in Constantinople...”

The Oriental Church, with its original center in that city, the old Byzantium (today Istanbul), had gradually parted from the Western Christianity by the breaking-up of the Roman empire into a western and an eastern part. The divorce became final, resulting in mutual anathemas, at the close of the first millenium after Jesus had sent out his apostles. The Orthodox church keeps firmly to its own interpretation of the first theological extension of the Apostolic church, the *symbolum nicæno-constantinopol-*

*itanum*, and the church is rather built on tradition and cult than on sophisticated theology. The name "Orthodox" indicates its ancient character, its roots in primitive Christianity. Somewhat in concord with that attitude, Swedenborg according to his outline of a new church history in 1770, meant that the creed of the ancient church had gradually been corrupted by theological dogma. To one of his closest contemporary followers among theologians, Gabriel Beyer, he declared: "I keep to the Apostolic church."

The Russian orthodox monk "Oronoskow" whom Swedenborg met according to the documents concerning Swedenborg's life, was in reality Joaniki Goroneskul, the influential pastor of the Russian Orthodox Church in Stockholm 1764-1769. Carl Robsahm recalls a dinner with the French-speaking Goroneskul, Swedenborg and the diplomats Edvard Carleson and Carl Reinhold Berch, who had both travelled widely in Russia. Goroneskul had read Swedenborg and was moved to tears when Swedenborg reported to him on the celestial state of the late empress Elisaveta Petrovna, so dear to this imperial representative. Goroneskul was not only an orthodox reader of Swedenborg in Latin; he obviously believed in Swedenborg. Goroneskul is probably the first Russian receiver.

In 1769 Goroneskul went back to St. Petersburg, where Swedenborg's *Opera Philosophica et Mineralia* had long ago been met with such academic enthusiasm. In that capital a circle of readers, or something of a society, was in existence in the beginning of the 19th century. This is known, since these readers are known once to have ordered as many of the works in French that were obtainable.

A few years afterwards, about 1808, St. Petersburg was visited by the Metropolitan Philaret (1782-1867), who later became so famous. He is well known for his fight against serfdom and for his works in defence of the oriental church. In the holy synod people approached him and asked him to read Swedenborg. In fact he did read Swedenborg's writings, but he said that he could not find anything in them that contradicted Greek-Orthodox views.

### **The Sense of Piety**

The metaphysical and visionary tradition from Odoevsky and Dostoevsky, Solovyóv and Shakhovskaya, where the Swedenborgian spirit was on a friendly footing with the orthodox faith, is reflected even in modern

Russian poetry and essays, from the deep soundings of Merezhkovsky (1865-1941) and Berdyaev (1874-1948) to the epiphanies of our contemporary Dimitry Vasilievich Bóbyshév, born in 1936 in Mariupol. Bóbyshév's mystic vision experienced in Leningrad in March of 1972 was the most important event in his life, according to his own testimony. The message of his Neo-Baroque metaphysical poetry is a this-worldly, positive Christianity with a pantheist trait: the revelation of a transcendent God and a flowering of creative Goodness. Bóbyshév's bright optimism is very different from both the nihilism and conservatism of many other Soviet dissidents, and from the other worldly Christianity of the thinkers of the so-called "new religious consciousness," Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Lossky, and many other heirs of the pious individualism and universalism of Dostoevsky and Solovyóv. Like most of them, Bóbyshév is orthodox in a traditional sense though, and a passionate lover of Russia and slavic culture—even as an exile: he moved to the USA in 1979. Behind modern Leningrad, he has always perceived St. Petersburg, and behind that historical layer of the onion-like imperial roofs he envisages St. Xenia, who is venerated as the heavenly patroness of the city, the guarding angel of St. Petersburg.

When I travelled in the Soviet Union during the days of Brezhnev, I observed that many people I visited in for instance Leningrad and Moscow had crucifixes in their homes. The crucifixes were often inherited from earlier generations, and so was a spirit of piety, a sense of wonder before the ineffable, if not faith—that great question mark beyond the domains of Marxist-Leninist interpretation and dogma. I was warmed and deeply moved by the visit I paid to a little country church about sixty miles from Novgorod. A religious atmosphere lay over the place like a soft veil of peace, and the friendly peasant women who took care of the sacred place were content, despite their poverty, which was after all only in material things. The peasants said "We are all right—we have food and clothing." The low but beautiful Russian-Orthodox church, all the candles in the dim light, the tender odor of incense, the solitary shapes of people praying silently—all had a life of its own. The church was self-supporting.

The East has had enough of inquisition, dogmatism, absolute confession, submission to last for a long time. What is now in progress is not only the winding-up of communism, and the disintegration of an empire, but

the collapse of much older traditions, and this process will be very painful and turbulent. However, political authority will hardly be succeeded by religious authority. In this age of longing, the closed society will be replaced by an open mind. □

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