

As one in an irregular series of occasional papers, the editors publish the following essay in tribute to the late Vladimir Kabo, an appreciation of whose life and work appears elsewhere in this number.

Vladimir Kabo

The Eternal Present: The People and Power

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. Eccl. 1:9–10

It happened in Leningrad, in 1926, during a dinner in honour of Stalin, Party general secretary and member of the Politburo, who had come from Moscow. The dinner was being held in Kirov's apartment in a relaxed, comradely atmosphere. Kirov gave a few words of welcome, saying how difficult it was for the Bolsheviks to live and build socialism without Lenin, but that they were sure of success because they were led by the Party's Central Committee and his Politburo. Then Stalin spoke. The Central Committee and the Politburo are wonderful things, he said, but don't forget that we live in Russia, and the Russian people need a tsar. They are accustomed to having an autocrat at the head of the country.¹

It was strange for the Bolsheviks, participants in the revolution which had destroyed the monarchy, to hear these words. But we must give Stalin his due: he understood the psychology of the Russian people better than they. And not only understood it: he himself wanted to become tsar. And he would become an absolute sovereign, one whose brutality and treachery had no equal in Russian history. He would destroy millions of people, among them rivals real and imagined, including Kirov.

Russia's past still hangs over it like a nightmare. Stalin's legacy left a deep imprint on the life of the country and the consciousness of its people. It is alive

¹ I. Kurilov and N. Mikhailov, *Tainy spetsial'nogo khraneniia – o chem rasskazali sekretnye arkhivy 1930-1950-kh godov* (Moscow, s.n.: 1992); 102–3. A. Knight, *Who Killed Kirov? The Kremlin's Greatest Mystery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 159. A. Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization – A Cultural History* (New York: Arcade, 1990), 108.

today and confirms his point: Stalin proved to be a better social psychologist than many contemporary democrats and liberals. I don't know if Stalin read Spengler: 'Primitive Muscovite tsarism is the sole form of government which even today best corresponds to the Russian spirit'.² I don't think he needed to: he understood this himself.

There is probably some truth in the idea that historical epochs do not repeat themselves, and are in many aspects incomprehensible to their descendants. As much as we might wish otherwise, it is difficult and at times impossible to comprehend people of epochs distant from our own and the motives for their actions, to fathom the mysterious well-spring of distant events. Understanding history as an irreversible process is one of the main features of historical consciousness; and in this way it differs from mythological consciousness, which perceives the world as a repetition or reproduction of a mythological precedent. We are immersed in history, as we are in the irreversible flow of time. The past has gone forever, the bridges between it and us are burned. Nevertheless, we are prepared to admit that there is an element of history that does repeat itself. But what, and for what reasons?

In 'Why the Monarchical Order was Destroyed', the émigré philosopher Ivan Ilyin wrote: 'In 1917 the Russian people descended into a mob, and humanity's history shows that the mob is always restrained by despots and tyrants'. Ilyin thus recognised that in history there are phenomena which are repeated and have a regular character. 'It is as if history has uttered a certain law aloud: autocracy or chaos alone is possible in Russia. It is incapable of a republican system.'³ Ilyin saw the profound reasons for one of the greatest events in Russian history not in politics or economics, but in the sphere of the spirit: in a spiritual crisis of the people. The catastrophe which befell Russia in 1917 was provoked, in his opinion, by a crisis in Russian religiosity. Ilyin expressed this thought in different works, for instance in the articles 'The Rise of Bolshevism from Modernity's Spiritual Crisis' and 'The Spirit and Essence of Bolshevism', where he asserts that Bolshevism is a 'mass condition of the soul', a 'spiritual sickness'.⁴ Conse-

² O. Spengler, *Zakat Evropy – Vsemirnoistoricheskie perspektivy* (Minsk: Popurri, 1999), vol. II, 245.

³ I. A. Il'in, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1993), vol. 2, 93.

⁴ I. A. Il'in, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1998), vol. 7, 116–41, 141–88.

quently, Bolshevism was not thrust upon the Russian people, but has its roots in the depths of its spiritual life.

The Russian Revolution was also understood as a spiritual phenomenon by other Russian thinkers. Nikolai Berdyaev characterised the political order which established itself in Russia after the Revolution as an ideocracy: a form of political domination based on the ideology summoned to take the place of the abolished religion. The most important function of the ideocratic state is its intrusion into all spheres of society's spiritual life and the government of its spiritual culture. It controls people's thoughts and souls. The communist state, Berdyaev writes, 'understands itself as the Church and replaces the Church'. Christianity, in his words, 'does not tolerate state power over human souls and spiritual life'. The individual, in the Christian understanding, is 'higher than the state'.⁵

Soviet power was, in essence, the power of the official ideology which had become a new religion, and that of the ruling social stratum as its bearer and guardian of its purity. In it, a person was 'lower than the state': he was the state's servant, and moreover, its slave. Such an attitude to the state was not new: it was fostered in the Russian people over centuries, successfully cultivated by the Soviet state, and survives even today. In Russian mass consciousness, the state, as in earlier times, is higher than the person: state interests are higher and more important than individual interests. As before, the Russian person feels himself a servant of the state; or, at the very least, looks upon it like some force of nature beyond his control, like the weather or a natural disaster.

'Russia never decisively left the Middle Ages and the sacral epoch', Berdyaev wrote elsewhere, 'and somehow passed almost directly from the remains of the theocracy of the old Middle Ages to the satanocracy of the new Middle Ages'.⁶ For Berdyaev, the concept of theocracy – power which combines political and religious functions, surrounded by a halo of religious mysticism – was equivalent to the concept of ideocracy. But he realised that God's power – the literal meaning of the word 'theocracy' – was not a very suitable description for a state in which Satan had taken control of the lives and souls of people.

According to Berdyaev's thinking, in any event, it follows that the sources of what occurred in Russia are to be sought in its socio-political, cultural and

⁵ N. Berdyaev, *Tipy religioznoi mysli v Rossii* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1989), 663.

⁶ N. Berdyaev, *Novoe srednevekov'e – razmyshleniia o sud'be Rossii i Evropy* (Berlin: Obelisk, 1924), 34.

intellectual traditions, which bear the imprint of the epoch in which they were formed: the Kingdom of Moscow, perhaps, and the Grand Duchy of Moscow. The epochs in which the titles of ‘tsar’ and ‘autocrat’ first came into use, and when such concepts as ‘His Majesty, God’s anointed sovereign’ appeared. God’s blessing lay upon him and his powers: hence ‘Moscow is the third Rome’, heiress of the holy power of the Byzantine emperors.

A sense of the succession of power linking the inhabitants of the Moscow Kremlin – Moscow’s tsars and their heirs – is conveyed well by Anna Akhmatova:

Streletsky moon. *Zamoskvorechye*. Night.
 The hours of Holy Week move in procession.
 I have a terrible dream. Is it really so
 That no one, no one, no one can help me in my plight?
 No need to live in the Kremlin: the *preobrazhenets* is right.
 There microbes of ancient atrocities still teem:
 Boris’s wild terror, the Ivans’ spite,
 The Impostor’s arrogance in return for the people’s rights.

And although the *preobrazhenets* reference undoubtedly has Peter the Great in mind, the succession of power which extends to our day was also felt by the Soviet censors: the poem had still not appeared in my two-volume edition of Akhmatova published in 1987. Indeed, just who is this Impostor?

This same sense of the succession of power is conveyed in the dramatic scenes of the second half of Sergey Eisenstein’s film *Ivan the Terrible*: scenes of political intrigues and murders, the bloody outbursts of the *oprichnina* – behind which it is easy to guess at a different, Stalinist *oprichnina* – and the sinister parodying of Orthodox ritual. It is conveyed with all the candour of genius: the film was made, after all, during the years of Stalinism. It was not only the film’s author who felt and strove to express this sense of succession, but also the film’s commissioner, who sat on the throne of Moscow’s tsars. But he was dissatisfied with the way it turned out. He was, after all, an impostor who needed a different film, which simply confirmed his right to the throne, free of dangerous allusions.

Imposture is a very typical phenomenon in Russia. Russian impostors have been ridiculed in fiction more than once: from Gogol’s Khlestakov, to Ostap Bender in the role of Lieutenant Schmidt’s son. However, it seems that impostors sitting on the throne were never the object of satire. There is, however, one

exception: A. K. Tolstói's *A History of the Russian State from Gostomysl to Timashev*. As in distant times, Russians feel the need for a true tsar. Their expectations have almost always been shattered.

Throughout the centuries Russia was a peasant country. The mentality of the Russian people, including a significant part of its intelligentsia, formed historically as a peasant mentality. Aspirations for a utopian society and faith in a just tsar are characteristic of the Russian peasantry's social psychology.⁷ In a certain sense, Russia's history is the replacement of one set of lost illusions with another. There has been constancy in just one respect: faith in the ideal of a monarchical state. The people may become disillusioned in a particular subject of popular expectations, but not in the very principle of absolute power. In the mass consciousness, the bearer of the monarchical ideal – the last tsar, Nicholas II – is even ascribed with supernatural characteristics. An icon representing a canonised Nicholas II recently travelled throughout Russia and, people say and the church itself confirms, the icon performed numerous miracles.⁸

Stalin succeeded in more than merely assuming the throne of Moscow's tsars: he managed to put himself, in the popular consciousness, in place of God. He seemed a superhuman being: omnipotent, omniscient, immortal and, at the same time, an impenetrable enigma. He understood that power ought to be mysterious, that the force of power lay not only in authority, not only in the ability to accomplish the impossible, but also in mystery. It is well-known that he read Machiavelli, but he may well have had another mentor. We recall the Grand Inquisitor from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and his words: 'There are three forces, three forces alone on Earth, for ever able to conquer and enslave the conscience of these weak-willed rebels for their own happiness. These powers are miracles, mystery and authority'.

Of course, Stalin primarily made use of the secret police, of the machinery of repression. But he wanted, and achieved, something more: he succeeded in surrounding his power with a halo of religious mysticism. In this way, his power continued a tradition of the distant past – not only of the Russian or European Middle Ages, not only of Byzantium, but also its prototype in the Ancient East: the power of the deified kings of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

⁷ For instance, K. V. Chistov, *Russkie narodnye sotsial'no-utopicheskie legendy XVII–XIX vv.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967).

⁸ V. Hammond, *Letters from St Petersburg* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2004), 160–1.

In the words of a direct witness to the era, the Soviet Union lived in ‘an atmosphere of mass psychosis’, in ‘the realm of demonic powers’.⁹ Stalin’s power showed the people its dark and light sides, sinister night then festive day. The cult of Stalin and other Bolshevik leaders had a religious – or, more accurately, pseudo-religious – character, bordering on spiritualism. Incidents of Stalin posthumously appearing to various people are well known; Andrei Sinyavsky tells us about it. Someone else to appear to people was the long-dead Lenin. The old Bolshevik Dora Lazurkina, proposing the transfer of Stalin’s body from the Mausoleum at the 22nd CPSU congress, justified it in this way: ‘Yesterday I consulted Ilyich. He stood before me as if he were alive, and said: “It’s unpleasant for me to be next to Stalin, who has brought so much harm to the Party.”’¹⁰ I think that the words ‘as if...’ were added by the editors of Lazurkina’s speech. She had heard her inner voice, just as distinct as that of a deeply faithful person conversing with God; and, possibly, saw her very interlocutor. Of course, Lazurkina was a materialist, just like Lenin, but deification of leaders has no common ground with materialism. In the consciousness of Party members, and in the public consciousness in general, deification was capriciously combined with materialism and atheism. Even materialists enter the realm of mysterious and irrational forces where deified leaders and heroes are concerned.

Vadim Rogovin calls the Bolsheviks’ attitude to Stalin’s leadership during the years of Stalinism as ‘fetishistic’.¹¹ Does the resolution of the Party congress to remove Stalin’s body from the Mausoleum not verge on primitive fetishism, on the punishment of the fetish which fails to justify hopes?

During the Stalinist era the Soviet country was transformed into an enormous enchanted kingdom – like that of Koschei the Immortal – ruled by the chief magician and wizard, Stalin. Here, word became deed. Dialectical materialism, derived from theory with scientific pretences, was transformed into a set of magical formulae which allowed the performance of miracles and casting spells over nature. The boundaries between the possible and impossible were blurred. Soviet science changed the very rules of nature, the laws of cause and effect, and created new forms of life. The figure of Stalin, thanks to his supernatural qualities

⁹ A. Sinyavskii, ‘Stalin: geroi i khudozhnik stalinskoi epokhi’, in Kh. Kobo, ed., *Osmyslit' kul't Stalina* (Moscow: Progress, 1989), 124.

¹⁰ *Pravda*, 31 October 1961, 2.

¹¹ V. Rogovin, *Partiia rasstreliannykh* (Moscow: s.n., 1997), 264.

and universal genius, pushed God himself into the background. In his magical kingdom, the labours of biologists G. Boshian and I. Lepeshinskaia created life itself from dead matter. Although Soviet scientists were still not able to promise people eternal life, they considered extending it to 200 years at the very least entirely possible and achievable in the Land of the Soviets.¹²

There is nothing surprising about Leonid Leonov, classic author of Soviet literature, elatedly announcing on the pages of a newspaper at the time: 'There are two suns in the sky: one of them is the sun of Stalin's ideas'.¹³ The deity assumed cosmic characteristics. Leonov even proposed the introduction of a new chronological era starting from Stalin's birth date, as the new Saviour of humankind.

The ancient thirst for the miracle of eternal life is ineradicable. Several years ago a certain doctor of technical sciences and clairvoyant, Grigorii Grabovoi, published a book in Russia entitled *Resurrection and Eternal Life Are Henceforward Our Reality*. The book describes 'real' instances and methods of resurrection. Its author's name became very popular. It is symptomatic of the Russian philistine's troubled state of mind: the understanding of where science ends and charlatanism begins has been lost. And even if resurrection and eternal life in the material, physical sense were possible, it would be a catastrophe for humanity. Why discuss eternal life at all, if people are not even morally prepared for the short life given to them by God? We need only recall the twentieth century which just ended. In the new century, judging by everything, new calamities await us.

From an historical perspective, Bolshevism is not only a national phenomenon, but is also archetypal, reproducing several ancient archetypes of the universal human consciousness. Amongst these archetypes, one of the most important places in many of the world's mythological systems belongs to the archetype of the Saviour, incarnated in the form of heroes or humankind's deity-saviours. The Jewish Messiah was one such saviour. The eternal human need for a Saviour is also answered in the figure of Christ.¹⁴ It is for this reason that the two great myths of the twentieth century, German Nazism and Soviet

¹² For further details about Soviet science of the time: N. Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹³ E. Demaitre, 'Stalin and the era of "Rational Irrationality"', *Problems of Communism*; 1967, vol. XVI, no. 6; 82.

¹⁴ R. Gvardini attempts to demonstrate, however, the theoretical distinction between Christ and mythological saviours. R. Gvardini: 'Spasitel' v mife, otkrovenii i politike – teologo-politicheskie

Communism, created through people's need for a saviour, rejected Christ, in order to put other saviours in his place: Hitler and Stalin. Christianity was replaced by other religious and mythological paradigms. Interestingly, one of the chief documentary artefacts of the modern mythological consciousness is called *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, its author being the German Nazi A. Rosenberg. Well-known fundamental shifts occurred in society's consciousness in post-war Germany, but in Russia the archetype of the saviour continues to dominate the collective consciousness, ever seeking new incarnations.

In Soviet times a type of personality which sociologists call 'totalitarian' was formed.¹⁵ It was the bearer of the totalitarian consciousness, believing in a simple, comprehensible world divided into the forces of good and light on one hand, and evil and darkness on the other. The first was associated with the Soviet Union, and the second with its numerous internal and external enemies. Dictators need an enemy: and if they don't have one, it has to be invented. It is easier to govern people in an atmosphere of hatred, fear, mass hysteria, and a murky mythologised consciousness. 'The Soviet Union' is interchangeable with 'Russia' or 'the Russian people' – there is no substantial difference. This personality type is evidently still wide-spread throughout Russia. Its characteristics are a love for an authoritarian ruler, chief and dictator. The people may hate and despise ministers, civil servants, and even a bad tsar unworthy of his high vocation, but the people's fury will not be directed towards the sacred person who bears authoritarian power for as long as he continues to satisfy their need for a saviour.

In the words of Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, 'the Russian Revolution is not of politics but religion, and this is hard to understand in Europe, where religion became politics long ago'.¹⁶ The religious aspect of the impending Russian Revolution was foreseen by Dostoevsky. Marxism, transplanted into Russian soil and assimilated by the Russian national consciousness, was transformed from a scientific theory into a subject of religious faith, a pseudo-religious ideology upon which the authoritarian Marxist church established itself. It merged organically with state power, harshly persecuting the heretics who strayed from its true teachings. Marx was predominantly perceived as a prophet of social revolution, like the

razdum'ia', in: P. S. Gurevich (ed.), *Kul'turologiia: Khrestomatiia* (Moscow: Gardarika, 2000), 307–340.

¹⁵ L. Gozman and A. Etkind, 'Kul't vlasti: Struktura totalitarnogo soznaniia', in Kobo, 337–71.

¹⁶ Sinyavskii, 10.

Biblical prophets; and the coming thousand-year communist kingdom echoed the Christian eschatology deeply embedded in the people's consciousness. In Stalin's time, retribution against 'enemies of the people' took on the character of human sacrifice, which had occupied such an important place in the religions of many ancient societies. Mass gatherings where people demanded the physical extermination of 'enemies of the people' became a necessary ritual for linking the people with the act of sacrifice, condemning the devil, and for their identification with the deity in the person of the supreme bearer of state power.

William Robertson-Smith asserted that in prehistoric society, the act of sacrifice was the most important rite uniting the deity and its worshippers, ritualistically joining them through the victim's flesh and blood. In this sacred act, firmly linking the members of prehistoric society with each other and their god, people periodically affirmed their unity.¹⁷ Ethnography doesn't completely corroborate Robertson-Smith's hypothesis, but then his model has been realised in our epoch: with the difference, it is true, that Soviet people did not of course eat the meat of 'enemies of the people', and did not drink their blood in the literal sense of the word.

The ritual killing of 'enemies of the people' has one more analogy in humanity's distant past. It is very reminiscent of the one-time universally widespread rituals of parting with the past, the world's renewal and life's rebirth, which were accompanied by the symbolic destruction of the past in forms which personified darkness and death. As with 'enemies of the people' much later, all the world's evil lay upon – and must disappear with – them. The origins of these customs lie even deeper: in the rituals of archaic hunters and collectors directed toward the rebirth of life in nature and society.¹⁸

If anyone doubts the existence of archetypal phenomena stretching back into deep antiquity and capable of coming to life in diverse times and cultures, which have nothing in common, let them consider Lenin's mausoleum. Its architecture harks back to Sumerian ziggurats, the temples of one of the most ancient states of Mesopotamia. It symbolises the leader's posthumous deification and the revival of ancient Eastern despotism. If Lenin was deified after his death, then his successor, Stalin, was deified in life. Like a deified ancient Eastern king,

¹⁷ W. Robertson-Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (Edinburgh: Black, 1889), 345.

¹⁸ For further detail see V. Kabo, *Krug i krest: Razmyshleniia etnologa o pervobytnoi dukhovnosti* (Canberra: Alcheringa, 2002).

hecatombs of human victims were brought to him, and millions of slaves toiled in his state. After this, who can talk about history being irreversible? In favourable circumstances, ancient archetypes from the universal human consciousness, and archetypal phenomena of cultural and social life, revive over and over again. Ancient myths hidden in the depths of social consciousness again rise to the surface. The debunking of the cult of Stalin by his successors only resulted in the need – dimly sensed by both the high rulers and the broad masses – to substitute lost myths and beliefs with other myths and beliefs.

The collective consciousness possesses the contradictory qualities of not only carrying ancient strata hidden in its depths to the surface, but also forgetting the elements of the recent past it would like to forget. And one can understand Russian society's troubled desire to attempt to forget its past. After all, to keep millions of prisoners behind bars, as in Stalin's time, other millions were also required to put them there, to guard them and, beforehand, to denounce them of their own free will to the organs of state security. The country was deluged with informers and 'stool-pigeons', and writing denunciations became just as much an everyday, routine activity for an enormous part of the population as letter-writing. Millions of people were drawn into the colossal crime which was the Stalinist regime, and this attraction into crime of a significant part of the country's population was a reliable buttress of his power.

A network of concentration camps crept like a spider's web across the entire expanse of the Soviet Union, spanning twelve time zones. According to Anna Applebaum, author of the most recent research, 18 million prisoners passed through these deadly slave labour camps. It was, in her words, a state within a state, a special civilization with its own laws, customs, literature, folklore, moral code and language. Along with its people, these went free and became the moral code and language of the entire country.

Our understanding of twentieth-century history will remain incomplete unless we take into account the history of political repression in the Soviet Union. But just like many of its dark pages, Russia is striving to forget this page in its recent past. They throw a shadow over its national conscience. The history of the twentieth century will also be incomplete without taking into account the history of opposition to the Stalinist and post-Stalinist regimes. But Russia's population – or at the very least, a significant part of it – not only doesn't know its recent past, but doesn't want to know it, though it still lives in it spiritually.

Russians love their heroes and are proud of them. They remember the heroes and victims of the Great Patriotic War, but why do they not remember or know the heroes who opposed Stalin's regime, the members of the underground, schoolchildren and students who disappeared in his prisons and camps? If only we remembered those about whom Anatolii Zhigulin has written.¹⁹ After all, these people numbered many more. What about the heroes of camp insurrections? Why does the country strive to forget the millions of victims of its own, home-grown regime?

The last Russian tsar and his family members who died at the Bolsheviks' hands have been canonised by the Orthodox Church: but there were millions of such holy martyrs from all walks of life. In Russia there is no national memorial dedicated to their memory, like the memorial to the memory of the victims of the Great Patriotic War on Poklonnaia Hill. Or the memorial museum Yad Vashem in Jerusalem dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. Or the memorial to the victims of the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan. In Russia there is no national day of remembrance celebrated by the state for the victims of Stalin's regime, in memory of the heroes who sacrificed their freedom and lives in opposition to him. There is such a day in the Germany once ruled by Hitler. On that day, 20 July 1944, an attempt was made on his life.

The words of Olga Berggol'ts, engraved on the memorial to the victims of the Leningrad Blockade, are well-known: 'No-one forgotten, nothing forgotten'. But in fact many and much have been forgotten. People's memory, like that of those who rule them, is selective. I don't know if there is a memorial to the victims of Stalin's regime in Saint Petersburg, erected by the city's leaders or residents. But I know of one such monument, albeit raised by one person: the poet Anna Akhmatova. It is not of marble or bronze. It is her poem cycle 'Requiem'.

My friend in Kargopol'lag,²⁰ the writer Aleksandr Gladkov, wrote this poem in 1952 while still in the camp:

I had a dream. Centuries passed
And in the centre of the familiar, round ground

¹⁹ A. Zhigulin, *Chernye kamni* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990).

²⁰ *Kargopol'lag*: abbreviated form of *Kargopol'skii lager* (Kargopol labour camp), named after the ancient northern town of Kargopol, which lies in a heavily forested region approx. 600 km east of Saint Petersburg. The author spent four years of his imprisonment in these camps, which were chiefly involved in lumber production. (MB)

The grave of an unknown *zek*:

You, me, comrade and friend.

We died ages ago.

Our remains rotted in the forested, swampy earth,

But a calloused, sweaty fate

Gave us anonymous immortality.

A competition was announced for a monument.

All the laureates strove madly,

And for their glory in bronze

Someone received a medal with a whiskered face.

No, away with these dreams! Sleeplessness I summon

To reckon my grief's account in the night's silence.

For him no oblivion. He is both great and detailed.

We have no need for bronze: just sow grass there.²¹

Both Stalin's regime and the Great Patriotic War are objective historical facts. Their significance is equally tremendous, and the victims of the first no less numerous than those of the second. The people who opposed the Stalinist regime were few in number, but the heroism demanded of them was no less than in war time. But the public consciousness and collective memory are so constituted that it is as if the regime's dead millions are deep in the shadowy recesses, almost forgotten. Though it doesn't notice it, society's memory is deformed. Some might say that over the course of many years the authorities manipulated the public consciousness for their own ends. One can object by saying that society allowed itself to be manipulated only too willingly.

The past may return, precisely for the reason that people want to forget it. Anna Applebaum warns that, like Pandora's box, Russia's past awaits its hour.²²

Totalitarian ideology still exercises a strong pull on very many people. In 1956, Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski published their book *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*. Among the hallmarks of a totalitarian regime, they name the following: power held in the hands of a single political party, specifically, those at its apex; a centralised economy; and powers which control the means of communication and make use of the secret police. The primary sign of

²¹ *Novyi mir*; no. 6, 1993, 158.

²² A. Applebaum, *Gulag – A History of the Soviet Camps* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 512–4.

a totalitarian regime is an official chiliastic ideology – the ideology of salvation. The authors contrast terrorist totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. I would add that the second precedes and leads to the first.

In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951, Hannah Arendt was primarily interested in the ideology of a totalitarian regime and its metaphysical thinking. The differentiating feature of totalitarianism is a certain high idea or goal which it serves. The Nazis were inspired by the triumph of the Aryan race and the coming thousand-year Reich; Soviet Communists, the idea of the future communist society. Both were essentially governed by the one chiliastic ideology, each with different content. Hannah Arendt was one of the first Western intellectuals to equate fascist and communist regimes, and to refuse to make a moral distinction between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. She was mistaken in just one respect: she supposed that totalitarianism was a twentieth century phenomenon and that it was born of the social crises of modern society. In reality, it has ancient and solid roots in the social consciousness, and will not disappear with the twentieth century. In favourable conditions it will again revive, and again the ideology of salvation will play a large role, around which different socio-political institutions will be erected, corresponding to the conditions of their place and time.

Totalitarian ideology knows boundaries of neither nationality nor creed. Is it possible to lead Iraq's people to democracy if they prefer theocracy? Is it possible to lead the people of Russia to democracy if – as shown twice in its twentieth century history, in 1917 and the 1990s – they prefer something different altogether?

In mid-twentieth-century books such as Eric Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, George Orwell's *1984*, and Arthur Schlesinger's *The Vital Centre*, the central idea was the same as Hannah Arendt's: 'totalitarian man' is the product of modern society. The idea is mistaken: this type of man is eternal. The roots of fascism lie not in economics, but in people's hearts, wrote the American philosopher Lewis Mumford. There is a little of the fascist in each of us.²³

²³ L. Menand, 'The Devil's Disciples – Can You Force People to Love Freedom?' *The New Yorker*, 28 July 2003, 85.

A genuine prophet of totalitarianism who sensed its approach and perceived in it the eternal, metaphysical characteristics of human nature was Franz Kafka. In his novel *The Trial*, I see a generalised metaphor of the totalitarian state, like the Stalinist state, historically the highest expression of the totalitarian state model. The protagonist's life passes under the power of a blind, soulless, anonymous force against which it is futile to struggle, in expectation of an inescapable and senseless end. He acknowledges his guilt not knowing what he is guilty of, and submissively follows his executioners like a herd being led to slaughter. In Stalin's torture chambers people died 'in the same sort of arbitrariness, senselessness and ignorance of their guilt', writes Georgii Adamovich.²⁴

Kafka's creation has a concealed religio-philosophical subtext, and *The Trial* is chiefly a parable about man facing God: there is in it something of the *Book of Job*. On the existential level, Kafka's novel is a metaphor for human existence itself. Just how did Kafka manage to foresee it all: the machines created for the destruction of man which were Stalin's and Hitler's states, the farcical court proceedings, the doomed sacrifice, the boundless absurdity? How was he able to see this 'wonderful new world', looming like a nightmare, which nobody had yet seen in his lifetime? Could it have been because this world accorded with the metaphysical meaning of human existence itself? In such a state as Stalin's, man was on the edge of a chasm. He stared in the face of the daily threat of losing the people dearest to him, and being deprived of his own freedom and life. It was not without reason that Boris Pasternak, when Stalin made a phone call to him, suggested they have a talk 'about life and death'. In the situation, nothing else came to mind. In fact, what else is there to discuss with a deity?

Having read Kafka, Soviet people felt that his nightmarish world had been realised in their lives. They altered a popular song by replacing the word '*skazka*' [fairy-tale] with the writer's name: 'We were born, that Kafka might become reality...'.

Much that seemed to have gone forever into the distant past again became 'reality'. I have already spoken of the kingdoms of the Ancient East: it turned out that even they were capable of revival. The Stalinist state repeated the salient features of the ancient Eastern monarchies almost literally: the centralisation of power, the deification of the tsar, slave labour, and large-scale human sacrifices.

²⁴ F. Kafka, *Protseess* (Torino: s.n., [1970]), 9.

Like Kafka, Osip Mandelstam sensed this, writing this about the twentieth century in 1922: ‘The heavy blood of extremely distant, monumental cultures, perhaps Egyptian or Assyrian, runs through the veins of our century’.²⁵

I will try to make my thesis more substantial with one further example, by attempting to compare the religious reforms of pharaoh Amenhotep IV, ruler of Egypt in the fourteenth century BC, in the epoch of the New Kingdom, with what occurred in Russia after the Revolution. Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton) abolished the cult of the supreme god Amun-Ra, as well as other gods, and proclaimed the cult of the one sun-god, Aton. Amun-Ra was patron of the reigning dynasty: symbol of the country’s unity, the people and royal power. The cult of Amun-Ra had deep roots in the traditional popular world-view, permeated by archaic magianism. These characteristics are shared by Egyptian religion of the Theban period and Orthodoxy as a national religion, in particular popular Orthodoxy as a unique product of Christian dogma reshaped by popular elements. The reforms of Amenhotep IV were accompanied by a struggle with an influential and powerful priesthood. In Russia, the official Marxist ideology – called upon to take the place of Orthodoxy and other faiths – turned into a new religion. Marxist ideologues became the priests of the Marxist cult. This process was accompanied by the persecution of the Orthodox and other churches, and the repression of the clergy. Both reforms – more accurately called ‘revolutions from above’ – were dictated by political and ideological notions, and both were prepared by shifts in the mass consciousness and an intensification of the spiritual crisis which had gripped the country.

At the beginning of this essay I spoke about what took place in Russia: Ilyin and Berdyaev have written about it, as have other Russian thinkers, writers and memoir-writers. Mainly with the events of his time in mind, Andrei Bely wrote: ‘A crisis in life or the world depends on a crisis of thought: the thought is effective’ (‘On the Meaning of Knowledge’). We will recall that Ilyin spoke of ‘a spiritual crisis’, ‘the crisis of Russian religiosity’, and he called the consequences of this crisis a catastrophe. Almost the very same words describe what happened in Egypt, I. G. Frank-Kamenetskii calling the reforms of Amenhotep IV ‘a religious catastrophe’.²⁶ Like the cult introduced in Russia after the Revolution,

²⁵ O. Mandelstam, *Slovo i kul'tura* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), 85.

²⁶ I. G. Frank-Kamenetskii, *Pamiatniki egipetskoï religii v Fivanskii period* (Moscow: Tovariščestvo skoropechatni A. A. Levenson, 1917–1918), vol. II, 5.

the new cult was not linked with any national tradition: it had a supernatural, cosmopolitan character and was not directed to the Egyptian people alone, but the whole world. In essence, Amenhotep IV's reforms were atheistic. He asserted that the gods were a product of the people's fantasy.²⁷ The cosmopolitan, universal, and atheistic character of Amenhotep IV's teachings makes him analogous to Marxism in its Russian interpretation.

Amenhotep IV's religious revolution was an attempt to artificially introduce monotheism into Egypt. Historically, his revolution was a distant precursor of Israelite monotheism, but ahead of its time. As a pseudo-religion, the cult of Aton was similar to Marxism in its exclusivity. Neither tolerated rivals and both laid claim to an exclusive position in the ideological firmament.

I will add to this such facts as Amenhotep IV's destruction of the name and images of Amun, and after Amenhotep IV's death, the destruction of his own name and images. Stalin behaved in the same way, striving to destroy in the people the memory of his stricken 'enemies'. Their portraits and books were destroyed, and the very uttering of their names was not allowed. Stalin's heirs were to do the same to him. In so doing, people were governed not only by pragmatism, but by motives of a mystical religious character not consciously realised by them in these two instances. This brings to mind the ancient habit, surviving amongst some peoples until recently, of not mentioning the names of the dead and destroying their images.

The organic merging of religion and politics, of religious and political life, was a characteristic feature of Ancient Egypt and other ancient Eastern monarchies. They also shared this feature with the Soviet state. Solemnities in the Soviet Union had the same religio-political character as the solemnities in honour of the gods in which the pharaoh participated in Egypt. In essence, they pursued the same goal: the uniting of the people around the king's power under the auspices of the state religion.²⁸ The Theban necropolis was a forerunner and prototype of Red Square in Moscow. Like the Theban necropolis, Red Square was simultaneously a necropolis, the centre of a religio-political cult, and a site for extravagant state festivities in which the Soviet pharaoh, his close associates, the army and people participated.

²⁷ Frank-Kamenetskii, vol. I, 18–9; vol. II, 7.

²⁸ Frank-Kamenetskii, vol. I, 50–8.

The fate of the Russian version of Marxism brings to mind the fate of the cult of Aton: both ended unsuccessfully. The attempt to replace Amun-Ra with the cult of Aton was even more short-lived: the cult of Aton prevailed for no more than two decades. In each instance, a particular combination of socio-political phenomena played a role in debunking both the cult of Aton and communist pseudo-religion. However, common to them both was the feeling amongst the ruling élites and the masses – of Egypt in one instance, and Russia in the other – that they had ceased to be ‘superpowers’ and had ceased to dominate their contemporary worlds.²⁹

The ideas of communism were not thrust upon Russia’s people by force. They contained something which resounded with the people’s aspirations: the hope for the establishment of a just social order. In traditional Christian consciousness this hope was vested in God: he was the embodiment of justice, defender of the poor and oppressed. The success of communist ideology can be explained to a significant degree by its ethical potential. In common with Christianity were communism’s ethical foundations and the faith placed in it for the establishment of a just social order, which helped enable its transformation into a new religion. At first, the communist religion even satisfied the main distinguishing feature of any true religion: it preserved an immediate religious feeling. The intimate bond between people and God was replaced by the bond between the faithful and its deified leaders, Lenin first and foremost. He was a supernatural being addressed to humanity, to whom people could turn as if to a higher, all-seeing judge. The slogans ‘Lenin is alive, Lenin will live’ and ‘Lenin is more alive than all the living’ were not empty words. We recall the Biblical psalms in which the intimate interrelationship between God and man is so vividly expressed. Here man converses with God, and the feeling that God is listening to him never leaves us. It was just the same at one time in the Soviet Union. But gradually, this religious relationship between people and their leaders disappeared, and it was not deified beings who looked at people but, in the expression of Aleksandr Galich, ‘the faceless faces of leaders’. This shift in the mass consciousness was the most important precondition for the demise of communism in the Soviet Union. The intimate bond between people and God was insufficient too in the cult of Aton

²⁹ Frank-Kamenetskii, vol. II, 10.

decreed by Amenhotep IV.³⁰ Both here and there, the rebirth of traditional national religions was predetermined.

In the Soviet Union, the archetype dating back to the ancient Eastern monarchies was fully realised; all that was necessary was the particular combination of conditions enabling its realisation. We do not know all these conditions: only specialised research is capable of revealing them. But one of them, perhaps the most important, is already clear to us: the people's mentality.

In Russia in 2003, in the towns of Sarov and Diveevo, festivities took place dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the canonisation of Saint Serafim of Sarov. President Putin also went to Sarov. Serafim of Sarov uttered a good many prophecies in his lifetime about the fate in store for Russia. As he had promised, pilgrims who came to the festivities expected him to arise as a saint and point at the future Russian tsar: most likely Putin.³¹ Since the time Serafim made his promise, Russia has endured several national catastrophes – revolutions, wars, Stalin's dictatorship – but the people's mentality has not changed. They want to have tsar as before, like the frogs in Krylov's fable 'The Frogs Ask for a King':

Once in the froggies' favour
 Democracy had lost its savour;
 Life somehow seemed to them to lack a certain flavour
 Without a lord, beneath no sway.
 Their discontent to allay,
 They begged the gods to send them a king without delay.

Every Russian schoolchild ought to know what comes next. First the frogs get a king they don't fear, which is not to their liking. Then the gods send a crane to their swamp, who swallows the frogs like flies. Things were even worse under this king:

It is not safe – we well may cry alack! –
 To show a guileless nose or give a harmless quack.³²

Stalin was right: we recall the words he spoke back in 1926: 'the Russian people need a tsar'. The post-Soviet state – if not in reality, then in the people's

³⁰ Frank-Kamenetskii, vol. I, 45

³¹ *Moskovskie novosti*; no. 30 (2003), 22.

³² Translation by Sir Bernard Pares. 'The Frogs Ask for a King', *Krylov's Fables* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1926), 57–9. (MB)

consciousness – is theocratic, in the same way as the Russian and Soviet empires. The state is a sacral category, as before, and many subscribe to the notion that divine grace reposes – or at the very least, ought to repose – in its supreme power.

The periodical major and fateful phenomena which repeat throughout history speak of the necessity to look at the content and meaning of the historical process anew, from a different perspective. Besides the conventional, arbitrary division of history into ‘ancient’, ‘the Middle Ages’, ‘modern history’ and so forth, one other criterion is possible in approaching historical processes, which draws our attention to the fact that in social life, spiritual culture and the collective consciousness, there are transparent phenomena which pass through centuries and continents. The manifestation of these phenomena bears the stamp of their time and milieu, and a combination of special socio-historical conditions and national particularities are reflected in them. There is something general at the basis of these phenomena which allows us to survey each of them as an expression of a certain universal human archetype, and set them out as if on the one historical plane. They are eternal, like the mythological Dreamtime.

There is much truth in Marxist historiography and its theory of social formations, although it doesn’t exhaust the entire contents of the historical process, leaving a lot not understood and many important aspects unrevealed. In Russia, alongside continuing speculations on Marxist philosophy of history, altogether different voices can be heard. They are a repudiation of the characteristic Marxist historiography of determinism, linear evolution and teleologism, which presuppose that humanity moves in one predetermined direction. This is the problem of non-linearity, of the alternative nature of the historical process. Too much of man was missing from Marxist historiography and sociology. Now we read that the time has come to humanise the philosophy of history, ‘not putting an accent on shifts in productive forces, but on shifts in the human spirit’.³³ We also read that history is being made by fanatical bearers of religious or pseudo-religious consciousness.³⁴ It is impossible not to agree with the idea that the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century were based on the submission of politics to myth.³⁵ I spoke about this earlier in the essay. The mythologisation

³³ A. S. Panarin, ed., *Filosofia istorii* (Moscow: Gardariki, 2001), 48.

³⁴ Panarin, 76–7.

³⁵ Panarin, 73.

of mass consciousness is one of the characteristic phenomena of recent history, although the significance of one particular mythological concept or another in the collective consciousness was also tremendous in other epochs, and in the most diverse socio-historical conditions. In this regard humanity does not change.

Speaking about the sacral origins of culture, Berdyaev wrote: 'A culture which has religious depth always strives towards resurrection'. He considered Ancient Egypt the greatest model of such a culture. 'It was founded utterly on a thirst for eternity and a thirst for resurrection: everything was a struggle with death'.³⁶ This is a characteristic of any archaic culture, and of the spiritual culture of any traditional society of hunters and collectors. The spiritual culture of these societies is concentrated around the mythological concept of the Eternal Present, expressed by the Australian Aborigines as the Dreamtime. This can be regarded as one of the leading concepts in the religious systems of other traditional societies, and even in later cultures.

Berdyaev's words about the striving of cultures 'which have religious depth' towards resurrection can be regarded allegorically: they strive to reproduce themselves throughout the whole history of humanity.

Traditional hunting and collecting societies were history's earliest bursts of spiritual energy. At the basis of every such culture as a whole was a certain creative idea. The totality of these ideas, in one combination or another, can then be felt throughout the entire course of humanity's history.

Translated from Russian by Matthew Bogunovich

³⁶ N. Berdyaev, *Filosofia neravenstva* (Berlin: Obelisk, 1923), cited in *Kul'turologia*, 49.