



ISSN: 2158-7051

INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF
RUSSIAN STUDIES

ISSUE NO. 3 (2014/2)

MIKHAIL AFANASIYEVICH BULGAKOV, HIS LIFE AND HIS BOOK

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Summary

The *Master and Margarita* is a masterpiece of world literary production. Thus, the question is how the author managed to survive under the Communist regime he abhorred. The answer is to be found in Stalin's personality and more general in the way by which the Bolsheviks seized the power and exercised it. Another point, nonetheless, is the stance of the Orthodox Church. In spite of the numerous clergymen murdered by the Communists, the Church in Russia in practice recognised the atheist regime; and this very fact is essential in order to understand Bulgakov's work.

Keywords: Christ, Devil, Marxism, Russia, Ukraine, Lenin, Stalin, Russia, peasants, Patriarch Tikhon.

"The Master and Margarita? The most beautiful novel ever written!"

This is an opinion deeply rooted in the mind of the Russian Folk – especially the youth. And, of course, this is mine, too.

The novel describes the drama of a good, honest writer who is compelled to spend his life under an atheist, i.e. communist regime. The Novel is set in Moscow in the 1930s.^[1] It runs on two levels; namely the writer's tragedy in that he believes that Christ does exist, did teach, and was indeed crucified; and Jesus' story proper. At length, the writer, i.e. the Master and his beloved Margarita are delivered by the Devil who presents them with momentary death; thereafter with eternal felicity. For in Bulgakov's mind, Satan is not against Christ but for Him...

To understand, nonetheless, not only the masterpiece of Bulgakov but the milieu in which he spent his life, it is necessary to have in view two points: a) The Bolsheviks in general and Stalin in particular; b) the fate of the Ukraine during the last stages of the First World War and the opening

stages of the Communist regime.

Let us embark, therefore, on the exploration of these chapters in Russian and World History, which have so far been so poorly studied. For the moment, there is only one promise that can be made: that this will be a fascinating journey.

Marxism and Russia

The fate of Russia was sealed by Marx himself. Flying in the face of modern scholars who do not understand why Communism was victorious in rural and not in industrial countries, the Father of Communism soon realised that workers were neither a “social class” nor were they able to bring about the revolution themselves. Even in Germany, therefore, where the prerequisites for a successful proletarian uprising did exist, only the reoccurrence of the Peasants’ War could enable the proletarians to come to power.^[2]

Such an assertion by Marx was an intellectual legerdemain comparable to that of St Thomas Aquinas: As the latter had managed to marry up the thinking of Aristotle, a virtual materialist, with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, so Marx changed the “stupid peasantry”, abhorred by him and Engels,^[3] into the blunt instrument of World Revolution. Needless to say, such a radical change was the fruit of cunning rather than of scholarship, such as was the one achieved by St Thomas Aquinas. Still, the repercussions of the Marxian sleight of hand were spectacular and far-reaching; for now the target of Communist subversive activity was –tacitly- rural Russia and not industrial Britain or Germany. What is more, the Marxist regimes’ dominance throughout the world, during the twentieth century, may be explained only by means of Marx’s intellectual volte-face. Except for the countries conquered by the Soviet Army in the 1940s, Marxists seized power only in rural, underdeveloped countries.

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Tsarist Russia was marked out as the victim of the Marxist Revolution-to-come thanks mainly to the rural character of her society. Actually, the formation of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, a part of which was to evolve into the Communist party, was trumpeted in 1898. Yet no real Party was then created. For there were no party programme or party rules. Its Central Committee was arrested by the Tsarist police and never replaced, “for there was nobody to replace it”. What is more, “the ideological confusion and lack of...[Party] cohesion” became more and more marked from that fatal year on.^[4] Still, the economic and social postulate was to change speedily.

The end of the nineteenth century, in fact, was marked in several European countries by an industrial crisis, that spread to Russia, too. During three critical years (1900-1903), about 3,000 enterprises were closed down and 100,000 workers thrown onto the streets; whilst the wages of those still employed were “sharply reduced”.^[5] Russia’s Social-Democrats hastened to take advantage of the fresh conditions. On July 17, 1903 (Old Style) the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (R.S.D.L.P.) met secretly in Brussels, but the Belgian authorities smelt a rat and requested the delegates to leave the country. That is why the Congress transferred its sittings to London.^[6] It was then and there that Lenin made his influence felt by his foes within the Party. For thanks to the walkout of the “Bund”, an overtly Jewish group within the R.S.D.L.P.,^[7] he won over the majority of the delegates, and, subsequently, was able to build his own party.^[8] The latter party was first the Bolshevik and later the Communist one, which was to change, if not the

world, Russia at the very least.

Here is to be found one more ‘pirouette’, worthy of Marx on the subject of the reoccurrence of the Peasants’ War in Germany. As a matter of fact, the cajolement of the Russian People by a Jewish or even crypto-Jewish political party was not feasible. The Bund, therefore, the self-proclaimed “the sole representative of the Jewish workers in Russia”^[9] was not likely to attract the ‘rural masses of the Russian Folk’; neither were Lenin’s adversaries, known from 1903 onwards as “Mensheviks”, i.e. the ones in a minority within the R.S.D.L.P. For they were either of Jewish stock or crypto-Jewish.^[10] The Bolsheviks on the other hand, were thoroughgoing “Russian chauvinists”, Lenin himself had stated.^[11] Further, there were among them people notorious for their Christian ‘past’, such as Stalin, whose initial ambition was to become a good Orthodox clergyman.^[12] “Russian chauvinism” plus “Christian past” evidenced that the Bolsheviks would eventually be able to win the hearts of the peasants; and so pave the way for Revolution.

As for the Revolution itself, two points deserve detailed attention. The first is that the sole paradigm among the Bolsheviks who were neither a “Russian chauvinist” nor with a “Christian past” was Lenin. For –as it is now well established- he was of mixed Judeo-German-Mongolian stock. His father, Ilya Ulyanov was Kalmuk, viz. Mongol by origin,^[13] and his mother of mixed stock, namely Jewish and German.^[14] It was ‘hoped’ therefore, that he was competent enough to lead his “chauvinist” Bolsheviks to the ultimate victory, that is to the triumph of an internationalist Revolution that was intended to dismember the Russian Empire.

The second is the role of Stalin. It was vaguely and is still generally alluded to that Lenin died without political issue; and that Stalin, thanks to his “bureaucratic talents”, managed to usurp the supreme power within the Russian Communist to Trotsky’s detriment. For –it ran- the latter was too “intellectual”, too “brilliant” to “pick a quarrel” with the “vulgar” Stalin. Yet History repudiates all of these.

In point of fact, and unlike Trotsky, the “inane, diffuse and hypocrite” Menshevik,^[15] Stalin was Lenin’s *enfant chéri*. Not only did the “young man from Georgia” become “the main financier of the Russian Bolshevik centre”, thanks to the infamous “expropriations” (robberies and even piracies) he committed,^[16] but –for Lenin’s sake- he found a solution to the Russian peasantry ‘problem’ as well. In April, 1906, the fourth Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. was held in Stockholm. It was then and there that Stalin, the “brilliant-eyed young Caucasian”, put an end to the never-ending discussions on Russia’s peasants, the vast majority of the Russian Folk – and the main obstacle to the Marxists taking power. The Mensheviks proposed the municipalisation of land, contrary to Lenin who espoused nationalisation.^[17] Yet Stalin was prompt to retort: “No more discussions! The Socialists must promise the peasants what they want, namely land! And after we have seized power, we shall decide what is to be done.”^[18]

That is how the Bolsheviks came to power and maintained themselves in it. Immediately after the Petrograd coup of the Bolsheviks in October, 1917 (Old Style), Lenin proclaimed, during the deliberations of the Second Congress of the Soviets, that the seigniorial ownership of land would be “abolished forthwith without compensation”.^[19] It was something like a “Revolution from Above”,^[20] moulded on the precedent of Tsar Alexander II who had emancipated the serfs in 1861 and was subsequently known as the “Liberator”. Lenin was posing as a born again “Little Father” of the Russian peasantry.

Thus the “foolish peasants”, the “useful idiots” of the Russian Revolution, rushed ‘happy as kings’ into taking possession of the landed property of the aristocracy and the Church. They cherished the illusion that the seized property was their own “for ever”; and accordingly they backed

the Reds in Russia's Civil War. Whenever the White (= anti-Bolshevik) Danger approached, the result was the determined, unanimous and united effort on the part of the peasants "to defend their own [sic] land".^[21]

After the Civil War was over, the Russian peasantry prospered thanks to the New Economic Policy (N.E.P.) initiated by Lenin himself in 1921. The peasants felt no nostalgia for Tsarist autocracy.^[22] And to cap it all, as early as 1919 Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin, a typical offspring of Russian peasants,^[23] was given the –purely honorary- dignity of President of Soviet Russia. His 'rural physiognomy' was soothing the Russian peasants.

And almost everybody was happy in the "happiest of worlds", namely Communist Russia...ruled by Stalin, Lenin's favourite disciple...^[24]

...Until the comedy was over. The compulsory collectivisation ordered by Stalin in the 1930s had millions upon millions upon millions of victims among the peasants of the Ukraine and Russia proper...^[25]

...And unlike Dostoyevsky, our case study, Mikhail Afanasiyevich Bulgakov, was prompt to grasp not only the depth of the trickery wherein the peasants of Russia were ensnared but also the psychological reasons for their illusion. "These peasants, in whom Dostoyevsky sees the spirit of God, but they can easily crack your head as well...", he stated in *The White Guard*. And he was right.

Still, he was secretly admired by Stalin^[26] who, magnanimous in everything save politics, was always prompt to appreciate literary talent.^[27] And Bulgakov, in turn, cherished the ambition of writing a "romantic play about the young Stalin".^[28] Such a high ambition was never realised; but the inner, psychological bond between the Writer and the godlike Despot remained so strong, that some people saw in the Yohua ha-Nozri, viz. the Christ, as depicted in *The Master and Margarita*, a resemblance to Stalin.^[29]

* * *

There is one point more to make, before closing this chapter on Soviet Russia, where Bulgakov spent his whole life: the atmosphere that prevailed during the late 1920s and the 1930s. This is an important point because without taking into consideration the moral and economic ambience of those years, it is not possible to understand Bulgakov's supreme satire.

As aforementioned, N.E.P. was proclaimed as early as 1921; yet it was revoked merely a year later. Russia's industrialisation suffered greatly owing to this cancellation; and as a result a "neo-N.E.P." was heralded in 1925, viz. a year after Lenin passed away.^[30] In the framework of the "neo-N.E.P."^[31] peasants were given freedom of trade and the right to run small businesses.^[32] In short, economic life in the U.S.S.R. was somehow liberalised^[33] and, subsequently, it was the general impression among the diplomats accredited at Moscow, that "Communism was practically over".^[34] In point of fact, such an impression was not lacking in reason; for it was in 1924 that the "Currency Reform" was put into effect in Soviet Russia and the "Gold Rouble" re-established as the "expression" of the paper money. The main instrument of such a reform was the State Bank of the U.S.S.R., instituted on the 12th of October, 1921.^[35]

Thanks to a string of measures adopted in February, March and April, 1924, the issue of the old (Soviet) paper roubles was discontinued, the roubles themselves withdrawn from circulation, and replaced by "treasury notes" expressed in golden roubles. In addition, small silver and copper coins were put into circulation. Nonetheless, the issue of the "treasury notes" was limited; for it had to

correspond to the “demands of trade”.^[36] Further, on the of 1st May, 1925, the firm cover, i.e. gold, platinum and stable foreign currencies, amounted to “exactly 40% of the nominal value of the Soviet currency put into circulation”.^[37] So, late in the 1930s, i.e. a couple of years before Bulgakov died, the official (not the black market) exchange parity of the rouble was as follows:

1 U.S. dollar	=	5.30 roubles
1 U.K. pound	=	25.75 roubles
100 German Marks	=	212.17 roubles
100 Italian lire	=	27.86 roubles
100 French Francs	=	14.44 roubles
100 Japanese Yen	=	150.20 roubles ^[38]

No need to stress that the Soviet rouble had only “internal” buying capacity.^[39] Aged people of the ‘old school’ and peasants in particular kept running down the “Communist money”, and purchasing golden coins of the “old days” with the effigies of Tsars on them.^[40] Regardless of the abolition of ration coupons’ in 1935,^[41] moreover, and the subsequent everyday significant betterment of life, the Soviet government was in anguish over attracting foreign currency. Of course, individuals had no right to import either gold or foreign currency into the Soviet Union. Early in the 1930s, therefore, the State-run Torgsin stores were established, where goods of excellent quality could be purchased through payment in gold, hard currency or valuable objects (such as jewels).^[42] They were meant as ‘outlets’ for foreigners; but Soviet citizens “had the right” to buy things there, provided that they were in possession of either hard foreign currency, as the Communist upper echelons clearly were, or high-priced items, affordable to members of the pre-Communist era’s ruling social strata. This situation rapidly developed into a tragicomedy; for the “Soviet citizens” who had ‘access’ to foreign currency did not wish their nationality to be ‘discovered’ while doing their Torgsin shopping. And Bulgakov did not miss the opportunity to write some of his best pages highlighting such crass behaviour...

The Ukraine and Ukrainians

Mikhail Afanasiyevich Bulgakov was Russian by birth but Ukrainian by adoption. He was born in 1891, in Kiev, capital of the Ukraine and “mother of all the Russian cities”. His father was Afanasiy (= Athanasius) Ivanovich Bulgakov, son of a poor Orthodox priest in the Orel province. Orel (pronounced *Aryol/Oryol* in Russian) is situated south-west of Moscow. Afanasiy Ivanovich was born in 1859; and despite his humble origins, he succeeded in attaining to an important position in the academic world. In 1887, he was invited to teach “Ancient Secular History” at the Kiev Theological Academy, a prestigious clerical institution of higher education open to the offspring of Orthodox clergymen. Two years later, he occupied the tenured chair of “The History and Analysis of Western Creeds”.^[43] This very title was his preferred topic.

Afanasiy Ivanovich was a man of crystallised opinions. He believed that the Modern World had been spared the catastrophe suffered by the “Ancient Civilisations”, because the former, unlike Pontius Pilate, had recognised the “moral and spiritual height” of the Christian Religion.^[44] As a matter of fact, Afanasiy Ivanovich saw in the Roman governor of Palestine the embodiment of the Ancient World’s callousness, that was in sharp contrast to the Light diffused by the Christ and the belief in Him.^[45]

Such a conviction was typical of Afanasiy Ivanovich's own experience and time. From the provincial, obscure town of Orel, he managed to become a respected university professor in Kiev, the capital city of the Little Russia (= the Ukraine). It was the age of the impressive Tsar Alexander III (1883-1894) and his advisor, Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev. The Tsar was the Emperor of All Russia, namely Great (= Russia proper), Little (= the Ukraine) and White (= Belarus); he was the King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Finland as well. The Messianic Mission of the Russian Folk, trumpeted by Dostoyevsky during the reign of Alexander II (1855-1881) and tragically belied, owing to the latter's assassination in downtown Saint-Petersburg, was now rekindled. Russia was to save the entire world by means of Christian Orthodoxy, propagated by the Greeks but only "brought into completion" by Slavs. It was thanks exclusively to the Orthodox Church that the primordial ideals of Christendom were maintained "intact". For unlike the Orthodox Folk, the Christians of the West had grown "worldly",^[46] virtually secularised. Needless to emphasise that Afanasiy Ivanovich was not only a dutiful member of the Russian Church's flock but a convinced Slavophile as well. Only in the ritualism of the Old Catholicism and the Anglican Church did he see, up to a point, a 'rapprochement' with Orthodox Christendom.^[47] In other words, he might be regarded as a disciple of Dostoyevsky; yet his son, Mikhail, was soon to dismiss not only the ecclesiastical paraphernalia, either spiritual or material, cherished by his father^[48] but Dostoyevsky himself, too. If Russia had a truly "Messianic Mission", how could the Bolshevik/Communist absurdity be explained? For it was Communism and not Christian Orthodoxy that was to 'regenerate' the entire world: "Proletarians of the World Unite!" Be that as it may, Afanasiy Ivanovich led a happy family life in Kiev. Married to Varvara^[49] Mikhailovna, whose father was an Orthodox priest as well, they had seven children,^[50] Mikhail being the oldest of his boys. Afanasiy Ivanovich, moreover, was lucky enough to die in 1907, at the age of 48.^[51] It was then only two years after the 1905 uprising against the autocratic Russian Monarchy had broken out, first in Saint Petersburg and a little later in Moscow. Leon Trotsky and the hippopotamus-like,^[52] i.e. enormous, Israel Lazarevich Helfand,^[53] ironically nicknamed *Parvus* (= the Tiny one), the future sponsor of Lenin's Bolsheviks,^[54] were the ringleaders of the revolutionary mobs. Yet they grew famous in the bourgeois and aristocratic circles of Russia's worldly society attending spectacular shows in Saint Petersburg's... theatres.^[55] Lenin had overtly dismissed their "silly tactics"; and he did not lose the chance to proclaim his own motto: "in revolutionised cities, only the tramp of patrols on the deserted streets is to be heard during the night".^[56] And following the collapse of the 1905 revolutionary attempt it was the tsarist autocracy under a 'parliamentary mantle' that was restored.

Afanasiy Ivanovich's world collapsed utterly in 1917, that is after he himself died...

...And, consequently, it was his son, Mikhail Afanasiyevich, who experienced the 'inner', the 'full' meaning of the soldiers' tramp on the deserted streets of Kiev.

It was quite natural, therefore, to seek out the guilty; and having as the starting point in his thinking his late father's own view, he blamed Pilate. For he was the incarnation of the mortal sin, the worst sin to him, namely cowardice. The corollary was the espousal of his experience of living in a Russia under Communism with the Crucifixion story superimposed. That is how *The Master and Margarita*, his magnum opus, was conceived in his mind.

* * *

After his father passed away, the widow, Varvara Mikhailovna, turned to becoming their offspring's educational overseer. She was an intelligent and well-bred person; and it was chiefly

thanks to her that Mikhail Afanasiyevich had a good literary and dramatic culture. Nonetheless, he studied medicine at Kiev University. He was an excellent student and, as a result, was highly recommended to the heads of the military hospital of his native city.

Just prior to the outbreak of the First World War he took in marriage Tatiana Lappa, his first wife. After the commencement of hostilities between Russia and Germany he volunteered as a doctor with the Red Cross and was sent to the front. There he was injured several times and, in order to alleviate the pain, he became a morphine-addict.

As to his addiction to narcotics, opinions are divergent.^[57] The ‘official’ view is that he stopped injecting himself with morphine towards the end of the First World War. According to widespread rumours in Russia, nevertheless, he never quit taking the drugs – and thanks to this addiction lies the cause of his death –allegedly blind- as early as 1940.^[58]

Be that as it may, the point is that early in 1918 Mikhail Afanasiyevich came back to Kiev, and opened a private practice in his home. This was after the 1917 Bolshevik coup in Petrograd proved to be successful; while Ukrainians, the “Little Russians” were trying to escape the Communist scheming of their “Great Russian” brethren. At first, they did so under the virtual protection of the German Army that had taken over the Ukraine in March, 1918. A month later a Ukrainian National Government was set up by the Hetman (= Head of the State) Pavlo Skoropadsky, whose brother-in-law was the commander of the German troops in the Ukraine.^[59] Everybody saw that his government was a mere puppet one;^[60] in fact, it fell shortly after the Germans withdrew from the Ukraine following the end of the World War.^[61] It was superseded by a Directorate of Ukrainian Nationalists under Simeon Petliura.^[62] The “Democratic Ukrainian Republic” was proclaimed; and its armed force, under Petlioura, waged a “fierce struggle” against the Bolsheviks from December 1918 onwards.^[63] Petlioura’s administration was recognised by Poland and Romania;^[64] and it was backed if only surreptitiously by the French,^[65] who had sent a task force into Ukraine, which was considerably reinforced by Greek troops.^[66]

Mikhail Afanasiyevich Bulgakov’s two brothers joined the White Guard, i.e. the troops of the White Confederation that was struggling against the Bolsheviks. He himself was drafted as a military doctor to Petliura’s force. The times were harsh and sanitary conditions were terrible throughout Russia in general and the Ukraine in particular. Even Inessa Armand, Lenin’s lover, had died of cholera by then,^[67] and Yefrosinia, Nikita Khrushchev’s first wife as well – namely of typhus.^[68] In short, epidemics were decimating the Democratic Ukrainian Republic’s civilian population and Army.^[69] Unsurprisingly, Bulgakov himself was taken ill of typhus fever; as a result he could not emigrate from Russia as his brothers did in light of the Bolsheviks’ definitive predominance. He abandoned his medical career after he had recovered from typhus. And furthermore he left his native land of Ukraine: he settled in Moscow and fell to earning his daily bread as a writer.

His Kiev days were over. In truth, he did not suffer much nostalgia for his native city. And he did well; for had he stayed in the Ukraine, he would most likely have been liquidated in the purges that Nikita Khrushchev was to mount against the Ukrainian intelligentsia.^[70] In Moscow he was protected by Stalin, his whimsical admirer instead.^[71] Nonetheless, he recorded his Ukrainian experiences in his novel *The White Guard* that, unlike *The Master and Margarita* is by no means fictional. As a matter of fact, almost everything and everybody in his *White Guard* is real: The sudden, impressive collapse of Imperial Germany’s military strength...The hopes built on Petliura... The bravery and anti-Bolshevik passion of Ukraine’s golden youth... How such a youth had been sold-out by their elders...The dangers hanging over everyday life in Kiev...The memories of the Good, Old Times... And the general if latent nostalgia for the efficient, paternal autocracy of Tsar

Alexander III. Even in his novel's title, *The White Guard*, Mikhail Bulgakov defied Communist power and tradition; for it was in sharp contrast to the "Red Guard", viz. the armed workmen^[72] who, in the framework of the Bolshevik Myth, accomplished the 1917 "Proletarian Revolution" in Petrograd.

And Bulgakov concluded: Life is not good for sensitive people. But what is a person of feeling supposed to do in order to escape from the misery of our earthly life?

Most likely inspired by Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Bulgakov's answer was clear and emphatic: Just look at the stars.

And that is what he did during his entire time in Moscow.

Yet, while he was gazing at the stars (either literally or metaphorically), the *Days of the Turbins*, i.e. the dramatisation of his *White Guard*, turned out to be the favourite play of Stalin. The evidence? The "Red Tsar" saw it fifteen times!^[73]

Bulgakov under the Stalin's rule

Bulgakov abhorred Communism; it is curious, therefore, how he managed to cheat death until 1940. There are three explanations for such a paradox, namely:

- a) Stalin admired and protected him. When Mikhail Afanasiyevich was jobless, Stalin used to phone the appropriate people and at once... the miracle was accomplished! Though a dissenter, Bulgakov was amply hired again... and all the more in posts for which he was suited. He was never refused permission to live in Moscow. And Stalin is said to have come to the point of asking him whether he wished to emigrate; in which case, he would be issued with a passport by the Soviet authorities, Stalin assured him. But Bulgakov did not wish to desert Russia. He considered himself to be a "true Russian writer"; and "true Russian writers" resist leaving the Holy Russian Soil.^[74]
- b) As explained in *The Master and Margarita*, life-beyond-the-tomb is not a matter of course. Only people that prove themselves to be worthy of it during their earthly life, are entitled to look forward to a splendid afterlife in Heaven. And Bulgakov strove during his martyr's life in Communist Russia to be worthy of such eternal survival. He spoke the truth and only the truth – as Jesus Himself did.^[75] He did not see in himself, nonetheless, somebody deserving the Light that Jesus Christ actually is and diffuses. Still, he anticipated that he would be given the never-ending happiness that only Satan dispenses. No matter that Satan occupies a lesser position than Jesus.^[76] Wearing under a Communist regime he did not aspire to the Light; he just wanted peace – and he anticipated it in his Woland, viz. the literary embodiment of the Devil.
- c) In all likelihood, the Margarita of his novel (in spite of her superhuman grace) is patterned upon his second wife, Yelena Sergeyevna; and the manuscript on Jesus's life is modelled on his own novel *The Master and Margarita*. In point of fact, he was full of angst regarding the manuscript of his novel. He wanted it to survive him. By all means Yelena loved him. She was fearless due to her love; and it was thanks to her that Bulgakov passed away no sooner than 1940. His novel was not printed under Stalin; nor under Khrushchev; and it was not published until the 1960s under Brezhnev. Still, it was available in the West before being so in Soviet Russia. Be that as it may, in the 1970s Bulgakov was recognised as a Russian classic.^[77] By the 1980s he had become the cult author of the Soviet reading public.^[78] And it was in the Glasnost era that his

detailed biography, written by Yelena, was published.

Yes, Bulgakov was “sternly and neurotically” afraid of being put to death under Stalin.^[79] Still, harsh reality proved that Stalin was not his deadly foe. For his conduct vis-à-vis Mikhail Afanasiyevich proved at least that the motto of the *Master* answers to reality: “Manuscripts do not burn.” In other words, the suppression of literary merit is not within the bounds of possibility. As a matter of fact, it was not Stalin but Solzhenitsyn who tried to extinguish the splendour of Bulgakov’s masterpiece. He emphasised that Christ’s story as narrated in *The Master and Margarita* does not chime together with the Gospels. Instead it is Jesus’s earthly life and death as correlated by the Devil, Solzhenitsyn announced.^[80] Of course, he was right...

...So what? Bulgakov never claimed he was a conventional Christian (as his father was). For he did not trust the Orthodox Church; and in his very unconventionality is to be found the spring of his grandeur.

The Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church, instead of responding to the Communists’ atheism, seemed to be tacitly approving of it.^[81] Tikhon, the 1917 elected Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia (his secular name being Vasily Ivanovich Bellavin) was born in 1865; and, as a layman, studied in the Theological Academy of Saint Petersburg. In 1891 he took the monastic vows and was given the name Tikhon (from the Greek: Tychon<*tyche*=fortune). He taught in several ecclesiastical schools, and in 1897 was consecrated Bishop of Lublin, Poland. Merely a year later, he was made Bishop of Aleutians and Alaska, i.e. head of the Russian Orthodox Church in America. He spent several years in the United States and –what is more- was given American citizenship^[82].

In 1907 he was appointed Bishop of Yaroslavl, Russia, and in 1913 was transferred to Vilnius, Lithuania. In 1917, the first revolution was triggered off in Russia, and the Emperor Nicholas II abdicated. Even today the idea that the Russian Church was in favour of the Romanov Monarchy is widespread. It is quite the contrary that occurred: the relief among the Russian clergy was deep and sincere. Paradoxical as it may appear, the Russian Church was, in fact, the foe of Russian Autocracy. The reason is simple and clear: Peter I the Great had abolished the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Patriarchate of Moscow was created in 1589 by Jeremias II, the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople, in full legitimacy, i.e. by means of the publication of a Synodical Tome. The arguments that Jeremias II used in defence of his action were important: The First Rome, the “Papist” one, had fallen because of heresy, i.e. the 1054 Schism; the Second was captured by the Turks in 1453. Moscow, therefore, capital of a Kingdom “more pious than the previous Christian Kingdoms”, was undeniably the Third Rome^[83]. This was an assertion harmonized with the prophecy of Philotheus, hegumen in 1511 of the Yelizarov Monastery, Pskov: Instead of Rome and Constantinople, Moscow was now the “shining light in the firmament of Christendom”. For the two previous Romes had fallen, “but the Third one was standing and a Fourth one would never rise”. It was a somewhat apocalyptic Weltanschauung which had a considerable impact not only on Russian intellectual and spiritual life but on the Greek ones as well^[84].

Ironically enough, it was a Russian Emperor and not a Papist or Moslem one to deliver a severe blow to the Third Rome. Actually, in the beginning of the eighteenth century Peter the Great abolished the Moscow Patriarchate, because he saw in the Patriarch a danger to his Crown. The populace thought of the Patriarch as a “second Tsar”; and, of course, only one Tsar could exist in

Russia^[85]. A Synod was accordingly established which run the Russian Church under the “strict surveillance” of an Imperial Commissioner. The Orthodox Church was the main pillar of Tsarist autocracy; but it considered itself, too, to be subjugated to the despotism of the Romanovs^[86].

It was not accidental, therefore, that the 1905 workers’ uprising in Saint Petersburg was engineered by an Orthodox priest, the famous Georgy Gapon.^[87] It is well-known that “Father Gapon” escaped from the massacre of the “Bloody Sunday” (9th of January, 1905 [Old Style]) thanks to his friend Pinhas Rutenber. He fled abroad shortly after and contacted Lenin, with whom he had several important talks.^[88]

Lenin was impressed by him and, accordingly, assimilated some of Father Georgy Gapon’s ideas.^[89] For Gapon was hostile to both Romanovs and the “hierarchy”, i.e. Metropolitans, Archbishops and Bishops, of the Russian Church^[90]. Such feelings were shared by the vast majority of his fellow-clergymen.

In 1917, however, it was the turn of the ecclesiastical “hierarchy” to openly side along the foes of the Russian Monarchy. Bishops, Archbishops etc. saw in Nicholas’ abdication a unique opportunity for the Moscow Patriarchate to be restored. The head of the Synod therefore, Archbishop of Vladimir Sergius, summoned a Pan-Russian Synod in Moscow, the works of which began on August 15, 1917. On the 30th of that same month the re-establishment of the Moscow Patriarchate was decided and Tikhon was elected Patriarch^[91].

The Russian Church somehow had the naïve idea that, after the fall of the Monarchy, it could itself assume the spiritual power in Russia –and to a certain extent the secular one as well. For the “Pope” of the Orthodox People during the Romanov reign was not a clergyman but the Emperor himself^[92]. Yet Lenin was a convinced atheist; and in early 1918, by means of a decree, the separation of Church and State was promulgated. During the Civil War, a lot of Russian clergymen were ill-treated by the Reds^[93]; the peasants, nonetheless, who thanks to Lenin’s astuteness^[94] were supporting the Communist regime, saw in Patriarch Tikhon all but a guarantee that Old Russia was not to die. As a result, after the Emperor Nicholas II and his family were put to death, few were the Russians who felt nostalgia for the monarchy^[95]. Especially peasantry, happy with the NEP and the neo-NEP^[96] of the 1920s, saw in Tikhon its national leader^[97]. The Tsar was dead but the Patriarch did exist. So everything was OK.

As foreseeable, this “religious-rural comedy” was to end in a bloody drama. After Stalin seized hold of the State and Party machinery in late 1927, a free, prosperous peasantry was tolerated no longer in Soviet Russia. In the early 1930s, therefore, millions and millions of peasants were exterminated – and those who survived were compelled to toil only in the framework imposed by the Communist regime. For the industrialization of the country should be accelerated. The Old Russia peasant was not compatible with Stalin’s USSR.

Meantime, Tikhon had passed away. In his Testament, delivered to the Soviet and foreign Press by two Russian Metropolitans, namely Peter of Krutitsky and Tikhon of Urals^[98], he admonished his flock to co-operate with the Communist regime and repudiate any kind of anti-soviet propaganda. Resistant clergymen would be brought before the Synod of the Russian Church. The Workers and Peasants regime, i.e. the Communist one, was unshakable; it must be recognized, therefore, by the Christian Orthodox Flock in Russia. With regard to the Orthodox Faith, the problem was not the Communists but the... Catholics, Old Believers, and Protestants.

Nonetheless, Stalin kept watch on the Russian Church. It was no sooner than the 4th of September, 1943, that he allowed a successor to Tikhon to be elected. The new Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia was Sergius, the former Archbishop of Vladimir and Metropolitan of Nizhny

Novgorod. Being advanced in age he died the following year; his successor was Alexius I. Alexius had no major problems to cope with. For the Russian Orthodox Church was now the pillar of the communist regime. The Testament of Tikhon was fulfilled *ad litteram*.

As an Epilogue

Do you believe that Solzhenitsyn was right? Do you prefer conventionality to originality? Well, if you do, the next time you are in Moscow, just visit the Ponds of the Patriarch, Bulgakov's favourite place for reverie; and afterwards visit his flat, on the Bolshaya Sadovaya Street. Have a look at the graffiti that the Master and Margarita's young admirers have written on the staircase walls; and then proceed to his room. Imagine his anxieties, his fears, his disgust at Communism and every kind of illusion (Pushkinian fantasies and ones about democracy included), his love for his native soil, his psychological split and martyrdom. And then read once more *The Master and Margarita*... and only then you may realise that Russian youth is right: it is the best novel ever written.

Appendix

Testament of Patriarch Tikhon English Translation ^[99]

By the grace of God, we, Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, send you out a blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the years of civil collapse, the Soviet government was placed at the head of the Russian state by God, without the will of Whom nothing can be done on earth; it [=the Soviet Government] took upon himself the arduous charge of liquidating the dire consequences of war and a terrible famine.

Upon taking power, the representatives of the Soviet regime in January 1918 issued a decree recognizing the full religious freedom of citizens. Thus the principle of freedom of conscience [was] recognized by the constitution to any religious congregation and to our Orthodox Church as well: we are given the opportunity to lead our lives according to [the] rituals of our faith as they are not contrary to freedom of other citizens and to the established order. That's why we in time recognized the new order of things in our letters to our flock and pastors [priests] and we sincerely and publicly acknowledged the Worker-Peasant Government of the People.

It is time for the faithful to recognize the Christian point of view that says "everything works out for the divine" and adopt all that happened as God's will. While admitting no compromise with our conscience and not yielding nothing with regard to our religion, we must be sincere towards the government and the work of the USSR for the good of everyone and arrange our religious life in accordance with established order, condemning any reconciliation with the enemies of the government and the overt or covert propaganda against it.

Praying God to bless the work of the people, we call for all our flock well-loved to join [us] in our fervent prayer to help the Soviet government in its work for the good of everyone. We call on all our parishes not to allow anti-Soviet propaganda attempts to ill-intentioned people, not to toy with the hope of the monarchical government being restored and understand that the Soviet government is truly the government of the people and is, therefore, strong and unwavering. As far as the elections in the parishes are concerned, we recommend people not involved in politics and really sympathetic to the Soviet government. The activity of our Church has nothing to do with

politics; for involvement in politics is totally unsuitable for her spirit. Our Church aims at fortifying the Orthodox faith; for the enemies of our Holy Church, [such as] the sectarians [Old Believers], Catholics, Protestants, atheists and their ilk are trying to take any time to hurt Her [the Church]. The enemies of the Church resort to all kinds of deceptive means, [even] to the seductions to reach their goal. Let us take a look at Poland where there are [now] only 50 of 350 Orthodox churches: the rest is closed or changed into Catholic churches - not to mention the persecution endured by our Orthodox clergy.

Now that, after having recovered from illness, we return to the settlement of the matters of our Church, we condemn once more all rebellion to the [Soviet] authorities. We can not fail to mention those who, taking advantage of their status as clergymen, too often enter into harsh and even criminal politics; that is why we have a special committee summoned. [This committee] will examine these cases and, if necessary, will remove by canonical means [the] bishops and priests who persist in their error and refuse to bring their repentance to the Soviet government: these bishops and priests will be brought before the Synod [of our] Orthodox [Church].

It is pitiful for us to know that some sons of Russia, even bishops and priests, who have left the country for various reasons, are involved in matters that do not concern them and, and in all cases, harmful to our Church. By taking advantage of our own name and our [patriarchal] authority, they develop a counter-revolutionary and pernicious activity. We declare openly: contrary to what our enemies argue, we have nothing to do with them. [For they] are strangers to us; therefore we condemn their activities. They are free in their opinions, but they abuse against the laws of our Church – albeit they say that they act for the sake [of our Church]. The conclave [synod] in Karlovitz was not for the good of the Church and laity; thus, we reiterate our condemnation of them, and we declare that all similar attempts will result in severe measures [against them]: [we shall not hesitate] to prohibit them to celebrate the [Holy] Mass and bring them before the Orthodox Sobor [Council].

To avoid such punishments, we call on the bishops and priests who are abroad to break with the enemies of the people and to have the courage to return and tell the truth about themselves and the Church. Their actions must be investigated, they must clear [of their actions] before the conscience of the Orthodox Church. We entrust to a special committee to study especially the actions of the Metropolitans Anthony and Plato, who fled abroad, and provide immediate assessment of their conduct. Their refusal to submit to our call will force us to judge them in absentia.

Our enemies, who would separate us from our well-loved flock, spread false rumours about us, saying we are not free in our job, [that] we can not talk freely, that our conscience is chained up, [and that] we are oppressed by the so-called enemies of the people. We declare that all this [is] false, as there is no power on earth can chain our patriarchal word and conscience.

By asking God's blessing for our priests and our flock, we ask them to submit to the Soviet government sincerely without fear of sinning [in doing so] against our Holy Religion.

We think also that the establishment of a clear and sincere relationship [with the Soviet regime] will bring about the full confidence of the authorities to us; [so] we shall be given the opportunity to teach [our] religion to our children, to open [ecclesiastical] schools, and to publish books and newspapers for the defence of our Holy Orthodox faith.

Signed: Patriarch Tikhon

April 7, 1925

Moscow

^[1]See Anil Çiçek, « Moscow : More than a capital - The central place of Moscow in Russian Culture », *International Journal of Russian Studies*, 2013/2.

^[2]Lénine, *Karl Marx* (Pekin : Éditions en langues étrangères, 1970), p. 44.

^[3]Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Translated into Greek by Giōrgos Kottēs (Athens: Themelio, 1982), p. 48.

^[4]History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939, p. 30.

^[5]*Ibid.*, p. 27.

^[6]*Ibid.*, p. 39.

^[7]*Ibid.*, p. 43.

^[8]Robert Service, *Lenin. A biography* (London: Pan Books, 2002), p. 156.

^[9]History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, p. 43.

^[10]Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia*. Translated into Greek by M. Peros and D. Karatzas (Athens: Neoi Horizontes [no date given]), p. 123.

^[11]*Ibid.*, p. 215.

^[12]See mainly Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (London: Phoenix, 2007), p. 50ff.

^[13]*Ibid.*, p. 22; Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks*, p. 10.

^[14]R. Service, *Lenin*, p. 23; S. S. Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, pp.18-19.

^[15]Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks*, p. 201.

^[16]S. S. Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, p. 166.

^[17]*Ibid.*, p. 163.

^[18]Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks*, p. 246.

^[19]History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, p. 209.

^[20]Expression established thanks to Kerry Bolton. See his book *Revolution from Above. Manufacturing 'Dissent' in the New World Order*, London: Arktos, 2011.

[21]Parliamentary Archives (London), LG/F/206/4/10; Isaac Deutscher, *Staline*. Translated into French by Jean-Pierre Herbert (Paris : Gallimard, 1953), p. 273.

[22]Otmar, « La réalité soviétique exposée par les tchékistes », published in the Warsaw newspaper *Gazeta Polska*, January 24, 1938. (The French translation in the Archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs [hereafter: AYE], 1938, B/2/P [3].)

[23]1925, A/5/VII (1), I. Kokotakēs to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, dispatch No. 2961, Moscow, November 20, 1925.

[24]Cf. I. Deutscher, *Staline*, p. 309.

[25]See mainly V. – A. Kravchenko, *J'ai choisi la liberté! La vie publique et privée d'un haut fonctionnaire soviétique*. Translated into French by Jean de Kerdéland, Paris : Éditions S.E.L.F., 1947.

[26]S. S. Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, p. 100 (note).

[27]S. S. Montefiore, *Stalin. The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Phoenix, 2004), p. 101.

[28]S. S. Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, p. 100 (note).

[29]See *Slavic Review*, vol. 56, No. 2 (Summer 1997), p. 200. (Review of the work of Judith Mills.)

[30]AYE, 1925, A/5/VII (3), Report (not signed) entitled « La nouvelle politique économique du gouvernement des Soviets ».

[31]AYE, 1924-1925, A/5/VII (1), “La néo-NEP”. (Memorandum; not signed; no date given; written most likely early in April, 1925.)

[32]Dimitris Michalopoulos, « Peasants and Banks under Communism: Some early Soviet experiments according to the Greek Diplomatic Service», *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “A.D.Xenopol”* (Bucharest), vol. XLVIII (2011), p. 346.

[33]AYE, 1928, 65.3, I. Kokotakēs to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, dispatch No. 2778, Moscow, October 30, 1925.

[34]AYE, 1928, 65.3, I. Kokotakēs to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, dispatch No. 2706, Moscow, October 20, 1925.

[35]The State Bank of the U.S.S.R. (Moscow, 1925), p. 3.

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 9.

[37]*Ibid.*, p. 11.

[38]AYE, 1938, B/2/P (2), Spyros Marketēs, Greek minister at Moscow, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, dispatch No. 1742, Moscow, November 8, 1938.

[39] AYE, 1935, A/13/2/1, Iōannēs Stephanou, chargé d'affaires of the Greek Legation at Moscow, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, dispatch No.1850, Moscow, November 28, 1935.

[40] AYE, 1928, 65.3, "L'U.R.S.S. en 1927" (memorandum written in French by a Soviet agent of the Greek Legation at Moscow).

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Edythe C. Haber, "The Lamp with the Green Shade: Mikhail Bulgakov and his Father", *The Russian Review*, vol. 44 (1985), p. 333.

[44] Ibid., p. 344.

[45] Ibid., p. 343.

[46] Ibid., p. 346.

[47] Ibid., p. 346.

[48] Ibid., pp. 347, 349.

[49] Varvara, a Greek name, from the word *varvaros* (= barbarian). For there are several Saints in the Orthodox tradition, who were of "barbarian" stock.

[50] Edythe C. Haber, "The Lamp with the Green Shade...", p. 334.

[51] Ibid., pp. 333, 334.

[52] Literally: behemothian. See Soljénitsyne, *Lénine à Zurich*. Translated into French by Jean-Paul Sémon (Paris: Seuil, 1975), pp. 89, 90.

[53] Pronounced in Russian: Gelfand.

[54] Alexander Kerensky, *Russia and History's Turning Point*. Translated into Greek by Angelos Nikas (Athens: Papyrus, 1972), pp. 256-257; Soljénitsyne, *Lénine à Zurich*, p. 127ff.; AYE, 1917, A/5/II (2), Kōnstantinos Rentēs, chargé d'affaires of the Greek Legation at Stockholm, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, ciphered cable No. 66, Stockholm, December 3, 1917.

[55] Soljénitsyne, *Lénine à Zurich*, pp. 93-94.

[56] Ibid., p. 94.

[57] His biographical details are drawn on the Greek editions of his novels, *White Guard* and *Heart of a Dog*.

[58] Information gathered by the author in Moscow during the late 1990s.

[59]Richard Lockett, *The White Generals. An Account of the White Movement and the Russian Civil War* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 112.

[60]AYE, 1919, A/5/IV (5), “À tous les peuples et leur gouvernement”. Proclamation of the Ukrainian Directorate, Kiev, December 28, 1918 ; Isaac Deutscher, *Staline*, p. 244.

[61]R. Lockett, *The White Generals...*, p. 194.

[62]Ibid.

[63] AYE, 1920, 20.1, « Copie du télégramme adressé aux Puissances alliées et associées par le Président du Directoire ukrainien et Commandant en chef de l’Armée ukrainienne, S. Petlioura », Paris, January 21, 1920.

[64]AYE, 1920, 20.1, “À Son Excellence Monsieur le Président de la Conférence de Paix à Paris”. (No date given ; signed by Count Tyszkiewicz, chairman of the Ukrainian Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference.)

[65]A. Kerensky, *Russia and History's Turning Point*, p. 413.

[66]Eleutherios Venizelos Papers (Athens), I/39/1-2.

[67]R. Service, *Lenin*, p. 415.

[68]Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War. From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 176.

[69]AYE, 1920, 20.1, « Copie du télégramme adressé aux Puissances alliées et associées... ».

[70]Cf. V. Zubok and C. Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War...*, p. 177.

[71]S. S. Montefiore, *Young Stalin*, p. 100 (note).

[72]AYE, 1917, A/5/II (2), Dēmētrios Kaklamanos, Greek minister at Petrograd, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, ciphered telegram No. 1906, Stockholm, November 10, 1917.

[73]S. S. Montefiore, *Stalin. The Court of the Red Tsar*, p. 101.

[74]Information gathered by the author in Moscow during the late 1990s.

[75]Edythe C. Haber, “The Mythic Structure...”, p. 397.

[76]Ibid., p. 406.

[77]Vladimir Lakchine, *Réponse à Soljénitsyne*. Translated into French by Annie Sabatier (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977), p. 35.

[78]Stephen Lovell, “Bulgakov as Soviet Culture”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 76,

No. 1 (January, 1998), p. 28ff.

[79]Edythe C. Haber, “The Mythic Structure...”, . . . , p. 407.

[80]V. Lakchine, *Réponse à Soljénitsyne*, p. 35.

[81]Cf. D. Michalopoulos, “The Testament of Patriarch Tikhon”, in *Ab Aeterno* (New Zealand), No. 7 (April-May- June 2011), p. 32ff.

[82]Metropolitan Nestor, *Anamnēseis apo tēn Kamtsatka* (=Recollections from Kamtsatka). Translated from Russia into Greek, Ōrōpos, Attica, Greece: Monastery of the Paraclete, 1995²), p. 300 (note 25).

[83]D. Michalopoulos, “The Icon of Strategos Protector in the Capital of Russia”, *Mnemosyne* (Athens), vol. XVII (2006-2009), p.133.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Metropolitan Nestor, *Anamniseis apo tin Kamtsatka*, p. 288.

[86]Ibid.

[87]History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, p. 57.

[88]R. Service, *Lenin.*, pp. 172-173.

[89]Ibid., p. 8.

[90]Ibid., p. 173.

[91]Metropolitan Nestor, *Anamnēseis apo tēn Kamtsatka*, p. 289.

[92]Carl, prince de Suède, *Je me souviens... Souvenirs d'une longue vie* (Brussels : La renaissance du livre, 1936), p. 72.

[93]AYE, 1920, 20.3, General Staff of the Greek Army, II Bureau, to the Foreign Ministry of Greece, Bulletin No. 504, Athens, January 20th, 1920.

[94]On October 26, 1917 (Old Style), the Second Congress of Soviets adopted the « Decree on Land ». Private ownership of land was abolished forever, without compensation, and it was to be replaced by State or public ownership. The lands of the landlords, the Imperial Family and the monasteries were turned over the “toilers” for their free use. (*History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [Bolsheviks]*, p. 209.)

[95]Otmar, “La réalité soviétique exposée par les tchékistes”.

[96]NEP= New Economic Policy, adopted by the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party, which

opened on March 8, 1921. The point was that a tax in kind was substituted for the surplus-appropriation system. All produce over and above the amount of the tax was to be entirely at the disposal of the peasant, who would be at liberty to sell these surpluses at will. (*History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, p. 256.)

[97] AYE, 1924-1925, A/5/VII (1), the Press Office of the Greek Legation in Sweden to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stockholm, January 14th, 1925 (no number, no signature).

[98] AYE, 1924-1925, A/5/VII (1).

[99] The English translation was edited by D. Michalopoulos and K. R. Bolton. (D. Michalopoulos, "The Testament of Patriarch Tikhon", pp. 38-39.)

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