

# The Russian Family: A Study in It's Religious and Moral Tradition

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**T**HE RUSSIAN FAMILY in its patriarchal aspect, the patriarchal and at the same time dynamical family tradition, constitutes, not less but perhaps even more than in other countries, the backbone and the basic cell of the cultural and spiritual life of the Russian people. It possesses, at its best, an immense winning charm. There is an air of loving intimacy that permeates it (as it is more or less the case with all loving families), but there is also a certain sober balance and earnestness coming from the sense of nearness of the Holy. For the background of this family, its foundation, its inspiring force, as it is certainly the case also with other pious families in other countries, is the sense of the nearness of the Holy, of standing in the awe-inspiring and comforting presence of the Divine.

The family is built (like other Christian families) on parental blessing. The blessing of the parents plays an immense role in Russian spiritual and cultural life. You find it already depicted with great emphasis in the old Russian epical hero songs, the byliny. You see the son, before he starts on his career as a warrior, a Russian knight errant (bohatyr), kneeling down to implore the blessing of his mother or father.

Not a fresh green oak is bowing here to the ground,  
Nor small leaves are scattered on the earth:  
It is the son that kneels down before his mother (or father),  
As he begs for her (or his) parental blessing.

Even the indisciplined and ruthless outlaw Vaska Buslayev recognizes the moral authority of his venerable old mother and kneels for her blessing:

Vaska decided to travel to the city of Jerusalem,  
He began to beg his mother to give him her blessing,  
His impetuous head he bows down to the humid earth  
Not a white birch-tree is here bending down,  
Nor silken leaves are spreading on the ground:  
Vaska bows deeply before his mother.

The idea of the sanctity of the parental blessing is deeply engraved in the hearts of the Russian people. The mother's blessing "saves on earth and water", so runs an old popular saying. There are many stories from Russian life illustrating this. The son goes to war, Mother and Father bless him with a small ikon of Our Lord or of Our Lady with the Divine Child. It represents the incessant prayer which the mother pours out before the throne of

the Lord. And these prayers of the Mother, this blessing of the Father protect him amidst death and carnage on the battle-field. The small ikon hung on the youth's breast by the hand of the mother has sometimes deviated — so run these family tales — the enemy's bullet that was meant for him. The bullet strikes the ikon and bounces back. This happened to the great grandfather of Leo Tolstoy, Prince Sergei Feodorovitch Volkonsky in the Seven Years War. This has inspired Leo Tolstoy to that beautiful scene in "War and Peace" in which Princess Mary Bolkonsky (Tolstoy changed only one letter of the family name) blesses with an old ancestral ikon of Our Saviour, her noble minded, but unbelieving brother Prince Andrew Bolkonsky, a free-thinker, who goes to war against Napoleon.

"Even against your will, He will save you and will have mercy upon you and will convert you to Himself — because in Him alone there is truth and peace of mind," said Mary in a voice trembling with emotion and with a solemn gesture she lifted before her brother with both hands, an ancient small ikon of Our Lord with a dark face in a silver frame, attached to a small silver chain. She crossed herself, kissed the ikon and held it out to Andrew. "Please, Andre, for my sake". Out of her large eyes streamed forth rays of a tender and shy light. These eyes irradiated all her sickly, meager face and made it beautiful. The brother stretched his hand to take the ikon, but she stopped him. Andrew saw what she meant, crossed himself and then kissed the ikon."

The family ikon plays a great role in the old Russian family, it represents the religious link between the generations. As the family Bible in an old protestant home with all the dates of births and deceases written on a blank title-page, so also the family ikon represents the religious tradition of the family. When a young couple marries, it receives the paternal blessings and takes the family ikon, wherewith it has been blessed, embodying as it were this blessing, into their new home. We can quote a long series of illustrations of this custom. Very characteristic are the wedding ceremonies and rites observed for many centuries in the houses of the Russian peasants in different provinces of Russia and completing the Church ritual. So in the government of Smolensk, both fathers, the real and the "honorary" one (the last representing the idea of sacramental religious paternity, like the "god-father in the sacrament of baptism") impart all kind of admonitions and finally their blessing to the bridegroom. He bows deeply to them touching the floor with his head, and the women sing,

"Not a young black steed is here stamping the earth with his hoof  
It is our young prince — the bridegroom — begging for blessing  
From father, that begot him, from father that imparts blessing  
From mother that has born him, from mother that blesses him."

In the government of Nijni-Novgorod, when all the party is ready for

going to church, the bridegroom and the bride are each separately blessed by their parents in their respective home. This takes place in the following way: A table is set in the corner of honor under the holy images, it is covered with a white cloth, a dark rye bread with a salt-cellar is placed on the table together with a cake and white bread. Candles and an oil lamp are lighted before the ikons; all the members of the family are praying. Then the god-father takes the bride-groom by one hand and the best man takes him by the other and they lead him to the father and the mother who stand behind the table, the father with the ikon in his hand, the mother with a loaf of bread. The son falls thrice on his face before his father. The father blesses him with the ikon, making the sign of the cross, he kisses the ikon and the son kisses it, then they kiss each other. Then the mother does the same thing. Then both father and mother bless him with the loaf of bread, making also the sign of the cross.\*

Similar rites and customs lived in all classes of Russian people throughout the vast country. A detailed description exists which shows how the blessing of parents has been solemnly imparted to the first Tsar of the Romanoff dynasty Michael Fedorovitch, at his marriage on the 5th of February, 1623. After having assisted at the Divine Liturgy, the young Tsar begged for the blessing of his father—Patriarch Filaret Nikititch, in the following words: "Great Lord and Father! Holiest Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia. According to the will of the All-Bountiful God and to your permission and that of my mother, the nun and great Tsarina Marfa Ivanovna, our wedding is appointed for to-day, a day of great joy to me. Holiest Patriarch — bless thy son." The Patriarch in blessing his son said, "The almighty and unspeakable One — may He bless thee. Let Him vouchsafe to thee and to thy spouse long years and a numerous offspring. May thou see the son of thy son and the daughter of thy daughter..." And he blessed him with the ikon of the Holy Virgin.

We see from innumerable examples that the family ikon, representing the invisible blessing of God and the intercession of the members of the family for one another, was closely connected with various events of the family life. General D. S. Dokhturov who commanded the left wing of the Russian army at the battle of Borodino, 1812, in which the chief attacks of Napoleon were directed against this very exposed left wing of the Russians, writes to his wife on the night after the battle: "I thank you, dearest, for the ikon you sent me. I will at once hang it on my breast. I see God's mercy towards me, He saved me amidst the greatest dangers."\* A. N. Turgenev (1772-1863), one of the

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\* See Terestshenko, "*The Customs and Life of the Russian People*" (in Russian), Part II, Wedding Ceremonies, St. Petersburg, 1848, pp. 448, 269.

\*\* "*Russkiy Akhiv*" 1874, No. 11, p. 1096.

most cultivated Russians of the first half of the 19th century, tells us in his "Memories" (written in 1848) how as a boy of 14, he was sent in 1786 by his parents to St. Petersburg. "Before my departure my parents blessed me with the ikon of Our Lord. . . Apart of that, my mother hung a holy cross round my neck and gave me a bag with small coins, enjoining me in a most earnest way never to refuse an alm to a poor one."\*

There was a custom in pious Russian families, especially in those where a higher moral refinement was combined with patriarchal tradition, to impart mutual blessings by making the sign of the cross over one another before going to bed. A. S. Khomiakov, the great religious thinker and religious poet, recalls in one beautiful poem the blessing that he imparted every night to his little children — now, alas! dead — leaning over their little beds.

These rites and customs, manifestations of family tenderness, this blessing by the parents sanctified by the Church, lived throughout all Russia in the various classes, from the most refined to the uncultivated, until the coming of the Bolsheviks to power. The Bolsheviks tried to destroy the religious life and the patriarchal family tradition in Russia. They succeeded only partially: we will return to that. But they have eradicated many beautiful habits and forms of life and traditions and suppressed the normal background of family life: by ousting people of their homes — millions and millions of them!—by killing and deporting them, by making them live in compulsory conglomerations in mass-quarters, by tearing families asunder, by plundering and burning down homes and annihilating all kinds of family relics and remembrances, by violently outrooting people from their native soil and transporting them by force to a new, unfriendly surrounding, by trying to destroy all links between man and his past and all that he loved. The spirit of family cohesion, of love for tradition, of piety and reverence, they wanted — and still want — to kill, to exterminate throughout the country: and in many things they have succeeded. The outward frame of life is broken, the frame and order of family life with its rich heritage of customs and remembrances has also been almost shattered to pieces. But in the depth of the people's heart the inspirations of family love and piety and the voice of religious consciousness are not totally smothered; the success of the Bolsheviks — as we shall see — proved to be much less decisive than they hoped and expected. Perhaps they have even lost or are losing the spiritual battle on this ground. This gives us hope for the future of Russia.

## 2.

Let us return to the spiritual riches of Russian family tradition in the past, some of the most important ones are still alive even now, but are often hid-

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\* "*Russkaya Starina*," 1885, p. 375.

den. The greatest treasure of Russian family culture and the center thereof — as is the case in every Christian civilization — is the Christian mother. The mother is the living channel through which the religious element, the influence of the dynamic life of the Church streams into the family. As in other Christian countries, the influence of the mother is often decisive for the spiritual growth of the children. Her image has shone forth in a number of old Russian families of a high and refined culture, families that have combined a deep religious inspiration with this outstanding cultural level.

The great Russian thinker, Alexey Khomiakov writes about his mother, "The whole inspiration of my life and also my perseverance in this direction, I owe to my mother. Happy is he who had such a mother and such a guide from childhood." (Letter to M. S. Mukhanov\*) We have eloquent pages dedicated by the Russian philosopher, Prince Eugene Trubetskoy (1864-1920), a great thinker and scholar and a great Christian, to the memory of his mother. She knew how to influence and to mould the soul of her children and how to inspire them with the sense of the presence of God. It was like a sudden vision of the All-Seeing Eye, piercing into the depths of the darkness, that flashed upon the mind of the little boy — so he tells us in his "Memoirs", when the mother spoke once to the children of the omnipresence of God, seeing all, knowing all, so that nothing can be concealed from His sight. Such impressions remain for life, says Trubetskoy.

The true Christian mother is of course not peculiar to the Russian family. But nevertheless we must speak of her here, without her image, not only the picture of the family tradition would be incomplete, but even the spiritual center of the family would be missing. The Christian faith often becomes a reality for her children in her person. There are many examples of such Christian women; beautiful and touching are the words which Leo Tolstoy dedicates to Tatiana Alexandrovna Yergolaskaya, his aunt, who replaced the mother for him, his brothers and sister (as his mother died when he was only one and one-half years old). His Aunt consecrated her whole life and love to these children. "The chief feature of her life, which involuntarily influenced me, was her admirable, all-embracing kindness to everybody. I try to remember, and I cannot, a single occasion on which she got cross or pronounced an uncharitable judgement — for the long space of thirty years I cannot remember a single occasion. She never taught by words, she never imparted admonishments. All her moral struggle was achieved in the depths of her heart; what appeared outwardly, were her deeds — even not so much her deeds, as her whole life, peaceful, meek, obedient and loving — loving not with an unruly, self-complacent love, but with a love silent and unostentatious. She performed her interior work of love, and therefore she had no

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\* Dated Sept. 10th, 1857.

need to hurry. And these two features — love and unhurried calm — made her company so attractive and lent a special charm to an intimate intercourse with her. . . Not only was her love for me joyful, her whole atmosphere of love was joyful, love for those who were present and those who were absent, the living and the dead, all men and even animals.”

I know a mother that was not only the living center of the family life, but was like the presence of some higher reality among the family circle. Her kindness and love went far beyond the boundaries of the family; it was poured out on all people she met and who were in need of kindness, of moral and physical help, who were in sorrow. She felt the presence of the Lord in the least one among our brethren. But it was not theoretical, not abstract; it was a free spontaneous outpouring of bounteous love and compassion, giving — not reckoning. She wanted her children to learn to be compassionate. She wanted them to give away their favorite toys to poor orphans that had neither home nor joy. She loved children with a deep passionate love, during the Bolshevik period when they were torn away from her and put into a Bolshevik prison, she interceded for them before God in incessant prayer, full of burning trust and highest moral tension, in an untiring knocking at the doors of the Lord’s mercy and they were returned to her. This continuous prayer was characteristic of her. Even in her old age, she did a great deal of housework and then sat down for a while and took a book. But when left alone, she put the book aside and prayed for hours. It was a prayer of intercession, of buring, strenuous, undaunted intercession not only for her beloved ones, but also for all those whom she knew in need and anguish.

She was kind, humble and full of the most genuine and charming simplicity: so refined yet so natural. She had a great sense of humour, but there was an immense charity in this humour. She was full of indulgence for the weaknesses of other people, but she was also filled with indignation when she saw brutality and injustice and the trampling down of man by man. She had a refined mind and loved beautiful poetry. She was highly cultivated, spoke, read and wrote in four languages, was much read in history. But all her great gifts were dominated by the force of selfless love, helping, suffering, praying and hoping. This overstreaming charity was rooted in her religious life, in her life in Christ. For her, Christ was the central inspiring force. That made her a great pedagogue, not so much through words, but through her whole example, her whole being: she made one feel that the Lord was Someone very real and near. She was marvellous in the terrible period under the Bolsheviks, during the years of starvation. From her small ration, she gave nearly everything away to starving people asking for bread. On what she subsisted remains a mystery, but she did not think of herself, only of others. She lived in others, that was her natural life—to live in others and for

others and to stand in humility and simplicity of heart before the face of God. All this was done in such a natural way. It was a living stream of helping, of praying, of working, of comforting, of forgetting herself. It could not be checked, it was her life, a life already bearing the hidden rays of a beginning transfiguration on its face. There was no hysteria but a great balance and wisdom.

There were such persons among the Russian mothers and one could quote and name a series of heroic images, wise with love, meek in their great moral force, radiating love not only on their nearest ones, on the members of the family and household, but also on all those who came, as guests, as strangers, lonely and homeless, to sit down at their hearth and to inhale the cozy and friendly atmosphere of the home presided by such a mother. Such a personality was e.g. Avdotia Petrovna Kireyevsky, nee Yushkov, in second marriage Yelaguin (1789-1877), mother of the celebrated brothers Kireyevsky (Ivan, the great religious philosopher, and Peter, the ethnographer, the collector of Russian folksongs). Her house was a great cultural center, and she was the inspiring genius thereof. Her cousin, the famous poet Jukovsky, submitted his poems to her judgment and trusted her judgment and her critical taste. Poets, writers, historians and philosophers met in her hospitable house and especially many young men, young students, friends of her sons — the young Kireyevskys and the young Yelaguins — and here the young men found a motherly guidance, a wise and balanced judgement and an inspiration to all that is beautiful and good, and could participate in one of the most attractive and fruitful focuses of Russian intellectual life. The known Russian historian and jurist, Professor Kavelin (1818-1884), who was one of those young men, writes in his article dedicated to the memory of A. P. Kireyevsky-Yelaguin (1877), words of highest acknowledgement: "With love, deepest reverence and gratitude does the writer of these lines return in his thoughts to this happy period of his youth and with all his remembrances of this time is most closely connected the radiating, noble and attractive personality of Avdotja Petrovna Yelaguin, who always in regard to him and other youths, just beginning their lives, was full of boundless kindness, inexhaustible attention and solicitude. She was well acquainted with all the principal European literature, not excluding the most recent works, pursuing her study thereof with keen interest up to her death, but she loved especially the old French literature. Her favorite writers remained Racine, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Bernadin de St. Pierre, Massillon, Fenelon. . . There was no person more interesting, witty and agreeable to talk with. Talking to Avdotia Petrovna, one could spend hours without marking how the time went. Her lively, cheerful and kindly spirit united with an immense literary culture to a subtle power of observation and a personal knowledge of a great many of most

interesting personalities and events and supported by an extraordinary memory lent to her conversation and charm. All who knew her and visited her, have experienced her kindness and thoughtfulness. Avdotya Petrovna hurried to the rescue of everybody who was in need even if the person were completely unknown. Striking examples of her character are told by her relatives and friends." Kavelin concludes his pictures of Mrs. A. P. Yelaguin with the words, "Not only to children, but to us ourselves, it is difficult now to realize the peculiar life of our nearest ancestors. The best among them represented such a fulness and entireness of their personal life, intellectual and moral, that it is now difficult even to form an adequate idea thereof."\*

### 3.

In such personalities, as depicted in the previous sections, a kind of cultural synthesis operated. The most active and earnest participation in the life of the Eastern Orthodox Church was often combined with a high degree of secular culture and with a participation also in the rich fruits of the Western cultural tradition. Those cultivated patriarchal Russian families thus became the first cells of this marvelous synthesis between East and West, so characteristic for the great Russian culture of the 19th century. We shall dedicate a special essay to this synthesis. At the present moment, I would like to dwell on the religious aspect of this family tradition a little more.

The participation of the family in the fellowship of the Church. The children were led into it by their parents. Its central manifestation was the fellowship of prayer, the liturgical life of the Church. The participation of the family in the worship of the Church became especially intense during Lent and at Easter time. A spirit of sobriety, of moral endeavor and self-denial, the desire to make a fresh moral start, to cleanse oneself and to conform one's life to the ways of the Lord, permeates not only the church prayers, but also the atmosphere of the home. This is felt with special force during the first week of Lent. A strain of repentance, of self condemnation, the cry of the heart for the mercy of God reveals itself in those songs and prayers: "Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of life." "O unfathomable and invincible force of the glorious and life-giving Cross, do not abandon us sinners!" The children regularly went with their parents to the beautiful Vesper service of the first four days of the first Lent week. The church is lit only by a few wax candles of the faithful and the choir breaks in with the cry, "Save me O Lord, save me," repeated after each sentence of the beautiful poem of penitence of Andrew of Crete. But the hearts were especially moved by the whole atmosphere of Holy Week. It is as if the steps of the Lord, marching to His Passion, were heard through the church services. And

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\* K. D. Kavelin Complete Works (in Russian), Vol. III, pp. 1121 ff.

in the homes the atmosphere was that of earnestness and spiritual concentration, increasing with the growing solemnity and sanctity of the memories attached to those days. These days of the commemoration of the Lord's suffering and burial were also a preparation for the reception of Holy Communion. An earnest scrutinizing of one's conscience led to the recognition of one's shortcomings and sins and moral misery and weakness. And thus prepared, one confessed one's sins to the priest in order to be able to receive the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper. The children were helped in this preparation for Holy Communion by their parents. The necessity of mending one's life, of a new earnest effort to serve the Lord, was equally felt by parents and children. This spiritual fellowship with parents before the face of the Lord, in the common endeavor to approach worthily the most Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Table, and to attain "newness of life" — this spiritual fellowship engraved itself deeply in the heart of the children and became one of the greatest treasures which they took on their life journey from the parents' Christian home.

The crowning event of the whole church year and also of the religious life of this Christian home was the celebration of the Easter Feast. The exultation over the victory of the Lord embodied in a church service of incomparable, deeply moving and triumphal beauty, was united here with the most intimate experience of family fellowship, happiness and solidarity as it was expressed in the cozy and joyous family meal on the dawn of the morning after the church service. Here family love, and joy were deeply penetrated by the feeling of the blissful nearness of the Risen Lord, and the reality of His victory over death, the pledge of our own resurrection.

Before closing this chapter, I should like to make a few quotations from several letters written by the celebrated teacher of spiritual life Bishop Feofan (1815-1894) to certain pious Christian parents. In these letters he answers their questions and doubts, he meets their moral difficulties and shows them the way to illuminate their home and family life by standing untiringly before the face of the Lord, by a manful moral endeavour and continuous interior invocation of the Lord's mercy and assistance. "The mercy of God be with you. All what comes from the Lord, independently of our choice, is best for us. It is not only a matter of faith, it is not so in an abstract way, but when carefully considered, the circumstances of our life clearly show, it is always so. Take your present pressure from all sides — your sickness and that of your son, and these unpleasant things which you are alluding to — all that is the very best of you and for all your family. Only pray and in praying thank God — we have to kiss the hand of God that punishes and teaches us. Our blindness that does not see anything and our self-love, that is too exacting—are the real causes of our afflictions and of the

fact that we are pained in our heart when the circumstance are unfavorable. . . I wish you placidity of spirit — A heart that is devoted to the Lord, will always be able to find peace.” . . . (15, Nov. 1872).

He writes to the same lady in another letter, “The Lord is everywhere present . . . everywhere He is the same. No place brings Him near, no place makes Him distant. If He draws near to you, and you are conscious thereof, why should you be running hither and thither? It would be like trying to run away from the Lord. . .

You are seeking the Lord? Do seek Him, but within yourself. He is far from no one. The Lord is near those who invoke Him sincerely. Find a place in your heart and converse there with the Lord. This is the Lord’s reception hall. Who-so-ever meets the Lord, meets Him there. And He has appointed no other place for encounters with the souls.” (17 April 1872).

And to a family father that had regained his Christian faith he writes, “Nothing special is required from you now that you have been called to the faith by the Lord, except being sincerely faithful to your faith. And be grateful that the Lord has called you from the darkness to light. More than anything else, think of helping those who are in need; whosoever comes to you in tears, never dismiss him, without having dried them up. . . Behind the hand of the needy one, see always the hand of our Lord Himself who has converted you. He has said Himself, what you do to those poor ones, you will do it to Me.” (14 Sept. 1874)

#### 4.

What is the fate of the Russian family tradition, the foundation cell of Russian culture, now at the present moment? We already spoke of the attack that had been launched by Bolshevism against the Russian family with its faith, cultural and moral inheritance since their coming to power in 1917. We bring here a few facts taken at random, that illustrate those attacks. The Deputy Commissar for the People’s Instruction, Comrade Madame Kollontay (later Soviet Minister Plenipotentiary in Sweden and Norway) in the first years after the beginning of the Bolshevik sway, addressed boys and girls in mixed schools with an exhortation to start as soon as possible with sexual intercourse. These exhortations of the official authorities were followed to a large extent. We possess official Bolshevik statistics from the end of the twenties, concerning some Leningrad schools, the number of young mothers among the school girls of the age 14 and 15 amounted to 70% of the whole number. There is a very eloquent book published by the Bolsheviks themselves in 1927 under the title, “The ways and life of Komsomol” (i.e. of the Communistic Youth Union).\* The book includes a number of communica-

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\* “Komomolsky Byt”, 1927, Moscow.

tions coming from young people themselves, letters from members of the Communistic Youth, boys and girls — addressed to their leaders with questions, doubts and misgivings, especially related to the problem of sexual relations, of sexual morals and chastity. The life of the youth was contaminated and corrupted by the propaganda of unchecked freedom of animal instincts and as a result of an incredible laxity of morals and savage beastliness of conduct. The youth asked, what to do, how to combine the new freedom, the lack of moral restraint preached by the party ideologists with any amount of decent life. The answers given by the leading men of the Communistic Youth Movement and printed in the same volume, were absolutely inconclusive and could not help. For the moral situation acquired catastrophical dimensions: the youth came to such a degree of moral corruption, especially the students living in University dormitories run by the state on new communistic lines, the filth, physical and moral, became so great and influenced the health of the youth generation in such a devastating way that the Bolshevik state became alarmed and commanded to sound the retreat. A number of party-inspired novels appear in these years "The Dog's Lane" (Sobatchy pereulok), by Gumilevsky, "The Moon from the right side" (Luna s pravoj storony) by Malashkin and others which shed a terrifying, almost too vivid and too veracious light on this nauseous filth and degradation. This boundless unbridling of bestial lust was now to be considered as a danger to the state and had to be refrained. In the meantime, there were other deeper currents that helped and sustained the Russian family amidst those waves of moral disintegration. The family was one of the chief targets for Bolshevik attack from the beginning. This manifested itself in their divorce legislation. Divorce was simply a one-sided statement made by one of the spouses to the other in a quite casual way, without any further formalities, "From today we are divorced." One can imagine what havoc this unrestricted liberty of every day divorce, and that, completely one-sided, without even consulting the rights and wishes of the other party, brought into the lives of millions. There is a statistical survey (from the end of the twenties) of the divorces that took place in Moscow, the number of the divorces was twice as large as the whole number of population. One can easily imagine how the very existence of the family was threatened. Eventually the Bolsheviks were obliged to change their policy there too: the result of this campaign against the family and the home was too catastrophic from the point of view of national health and safety. This had to change, they began to proclaim (in the middle of the thirties) the necessity of a strong and healthy family and to restrict the unlimited facilities of divorce. Independant of the Bolshevik policy, the family in Russia in the midst of the most terrible ordeals, violent tearing asunder and killing of its members by Bolshevik authorities, began to gain in moral

strength. You can kill or imprison people, it does not kill the love that unites them, the bonds of affection and of common faith in God, this last resort, the ultimate source of hope and moral strength. And the family bonds grew even amidst the processes of physical destruction . . . and the family, the spirit of family affection, survived. And when the Bolsheviks were obliged to modify their line of conduct in regard to the family as an institution, the family could, so to say, take breath and develop on more peaceful lines, in an atmosphere of home, although not, of course, of security and freedom, for there is no security to be found in Soviet Russia. People from the West (civilians from the Baltic provinces, used by German military authorities as interpreters, or German officers and soldiers) that have been during the German Russian war (1941-1944) in the German occupied vast areas of North or Central or South and South East Russia, where the bulk of the population still remained on their seats, unanimously witness the high moral level of the Russian family, be it the peasant family or remnants of petty bourgeois class or intellectuals and of the strong bonds of family affection uniting its members. A friend of mine, a Baltic gentleman who was half Russian and spoke a beautiful Russian, was mobilized by the Germans against his will as an interpreter. He was taken by German troops as far as the region near Petersburg and told of the concentration camps in which many innocent Russian civilians were detained simply because they seemed suspicious to the Germans. Their families came from a distance of twelve and fifteen miles or more, on foot, on snow covered roads dragging along with them food, clothes and linen. It was a time of hunger. The families deprived themselves of the greatest part of their scanty food and brought it to their dear ones behind the German barbed wire. It was a scene of great distress and suffering, heart rending recognitions and partings, but also of manifestations of great heroic love. There was a boy of 12 years, so the witness of this scene told me, a peasant boy, who came from afar with a little sled that he dragged behind him in search of his father. He was not a bit afraid of the Germans, finally he found his father after he had already searched through many German concentration camps. He gave him the food and clothes he had brought with him. It was a deeply moving scene, even the German soldiers were deeply impressed. The same scene, but even in a more cruel atmosphere took place for many years at the gates of the innumerable Bolshevik prisons. Children, wives and sisters stood for hours in long queues waiting for the moment to present the parcel which they brought for the prisoner (father or other relative). They could only deliver it to the hands of the prison administration with no possibility to have a glimpse of the prisoner. The ties of family affection were strengthened in these sufferings and trials. The dynamic force of loving self-sacrifice and mutual service, creating and

permeating the real family life was reborn and gained new strength, unexpectedly, through the facts that were meant to destroy it. The paradox of heroic self-sacrifice revealed itself in full force here as it revealed itself in the persecution of religion in Soviet Russia, that on the whole, making of course abstraction of many cases of apostasy, strengthened and purified religion. But also another, more everyday life experience strengthened the family spirit: the family had become beside the Church (but church-going has been made, for many years, so difficult under the Soviets, so dangerous and in many cases impossible!) the only harbour of internal peace or the only oasis in the vast expanses of the cruel and ruthless Soviet system. Where all is being done to destroy the human personality, to reduce it to a mere number, a mere screw in the gigantic soul-less machine, here, in the family, the individual person counts as personality in its irreplaceable individual features. The destruction of human personality, the chief trend of Bolshevism, was hampered by the family, that poor family so helpless against the cruel waves that surround it, so easily crushed and rent asunder and physically exterminated. Still the family survived and at the beginning of World War II it was again stronger than in the beginning of the thirties. German soldiers and officers were deeply impressed, I know it from many sources, by the high moral level of Russian women, whether married or unmarried, of a much higher level, so they said, than those found in other countries.

The family, the family spirit, imbued with the traditions of Christian moral life and often rooted in religious reality, survived despite all its handicaps and was even strengthened. That was the first definite defeat of Bolshevism on the spiritual plane — in the soul of the Russian people. The other defeat was on the front of Religion.



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