

SPIRITUALITY OF PROTODEACON AND EMPEROR PETER I

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That Peter I was a religious man is not in doubt; however, the nature of his religiosity is quite another matter. The vast body of his writings – his letters, notes, and ukases – can give us some insight into his religious beliefs, particularly when compared and contrasted with his actions.

Letters

His letters, private and official, are from the very beginning to the end of his life full of religious interjections, constant references to God, to His will, mercy, protection, etc. For example, in 1696 he asked Vinius to pray “so that as our Lord God conquered the devil, their Mahomedan father, it may please Him for us to have victory over his [Mahomedan father’s] children” (PiB 1.60).¹ In 1706, he wrote to prince Menshikov

I cannot leave you without explanation in what way the damned Astrakhanians after confessing their guilt acted insolently, those whom God miraculously humiliated since there were over 10,000 men and around three [thousand] of ours, and they beat them so much that they even have taken the town after an attack, about which you’ll learn from a letter from the field marshal [George Ogilvie] written to the admiral [Fedor A. Golovin], from which I am sending an excerpt with this [letter]. Here, thank God, everything is fine and joyful, only one thing will never stop, that we hear from you what didn’t happen for a long time; may God grant that we hear good things from you

¹ The following references will be used: PiB – *Письма и бумаги Императора Петра Великого*, СПб., Государственная типография 1887-1912; М., Изд-во АН СССР 1946-1964; М., Наука 1973-2003. PSZ – *Полное собрание законов Российской Империи*, СПб., Печатано в Типографии II Отделения Собственной Его Императорского Величества Канцелярии 1830, vols. 2-7. R – *The rites of electing and consecrating bishops and archbishops, according to the use of the church of Russia from the form printed at St. Petersburg, A. D. 1725*, in: John Glen King, *The rites and ceremonies of the Greek Church, in Russia*, London, W. Owen, 1772, pp. 289-303. S – М. И. Семевский, *Слово и дело: 1700-1725*, СПб., “Русская старина”, 1884. ZAP – *Законодательные акты Петра I*, М., Издательство АН СССР 1945.

and about you. After thanking Lord God and after shooting in honor of the Astrakhan enterprise, all people dined and were merry in your house. By God, I ask you that you write more often, and why, you can judge by yourself (there were not more than 3 letters from you up until today). At that hour, the entire fleet goes West to the sea. Bless, God, this enterprise just as [you blessed] the past [enterprises]. Your sister and other domestics are, thank God, healthy (PiB 4.226).

To his sister Natalia he wrote in 1707

Although you already know, I didn't want to leave you without a message that the Lord God gave into our hands the traitor [Kazimierz] Si[e]nicki and turned against him the venom trickling out from him, which outcome gave us not a small joy. Besides, thank God, all are healthy here and there is no news yet about the enemy (5.332).

His letters could be very touching. In 1711, he wrote to Archil II, king of Imereti and Kakheti (in Georgia), after the death of his son Alexander:

How can we help you with this irretrievable loss? For your consolation, we present to you, a rational man, three things, which are magnanimity, reasoning, and patience, since this insult is not from man, on whom we can avenge ourselves or pay back, but from the Almighty God, who appointed this lasting end. We count in this on your magnanimity and more so on solid Christianity that you will recognize in this matter the will of the one God and accept from Him by [your] wise Christian patience and magnanimous heart the cross sent from on high, not doubting that His right hand will help you in carrying this cross, since you can surely console yourself with this that your son now is in the eternal kingdom, disdaining this uncertain life and dwelling there, where we all hope to be when our time comes. We hope that God of all mercy and joy will fortify you in this grief. I commit you to His, our Father's, protection (11.1.241).

Religious references in Peter's letters are largely formulaic and by frequent use of the same phrase they lose the flavor of spiritual intimacy.

Theological ruminations

In spite of constant use of religious language in Peter's written *corpus*, there is only a very small number of letters or notes that could be considered as reflection of a theological nature, and because they apparently have been written on the spur of the moment, they are not always entirely comprehensible.

In a long list of things to do there is a cryptic remark: "Against atheists. If it is thought that laws are made up, then why animals eat one another and so do we. Why such a misery was done to them" (ZAP 69). This appears to be an argument of atheists advanced against believers and apparently Peter would like to have an answer in the form of a positive theodicy.

In 1722, having read Prokopovich's book on beatitudes, Peter recommended adding a summary at the end for easy memorization (ZAP 110) and it

appears that he also intended this remark to be included in the book as a preface, the remark that is given after the words “First print”:

Since many [people] do not know the path to salvation and do not value highly their calling, [which] they even ascribe to the vanity of this world and not only to the will of God, so there is a proverb – who takes vows, as they say, has worked for the earthly tsar, and now he went to work for the heavenly [Tsar] – and hypocrites interpret it in many ways: some – if you don’t abandon the world and don’t become a monk, you won’t be saved; others – one has to the end of his days participate in the church service or even two or maybe even three a day; others – if anyone has to travel, he should first recite in two, three, or more voices the entire church service; others – bow many times, [even] neglecting the task they got [to do] or neglecting their household, seeing in [their] salvation (ZAP 119).²

If it was really intended as a preface to Prokopovich’s book, it is rather loosely connected with its content. Prokopovich gave a rather ingenious interpretation of the eight beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount: in his view, the first four beatitudes constitute the four steps leading to salvation and the last four are the four main virtues that are the fruits of genuine conversion to Christianity. Peter’s intended preface would hardly give the reader any idea about the content of the book. However, this preface does show Peter’s impatience with some rituals that may even reach the level of superstition which sometimes had been considered as effective ways of salvation.

The longest theological reflection is from 1722, in which Peter outlined an interpretation of the ten commandments by showing which sins correspond to which commandment: 1st commandment: idolaters and atheists; 2nd: “who does not have a fear of God and treats everything lightly, other [sins resulting] from not knowing teachings”; 3rd and 4th: as in the 2nd, plus the disdainful and lazy; 5th: robbers and the like; 6th: comes from those without fear of God, from need, from great desire; 7th: thieves; 8th: the heartless; 9th and 10th: slanderers (S 333).

² In 1722, Prokopovich’s book, *Христовы о блаженствах проповеди толкование*, СПб., Троицкий Александр-Невский монастырь, 1722, appeared twice, only one edition having the summary and a preface, but not Peter’s, see П[етр П.] Пекарский, *Наука и литература в России при Петре Великом*, СПб., Общественная польза 1862, vol. 2, pp. 551-553. There is a considerable overlap between the discussion of the eighth beatitudes and the ukase *On the invalidity of willful suffering caused by illegal acts* of 1722, which concerns itself with the fact “that there are many people who from ignorance or stupidity, or from their extreme malice, as [their own] worst enemies, voluntarily wish themselves evil, and in vain deprive themselves of health and life, seduced by the name of suffering, from this alone they take pleasure in bitter torment and death, not considering that irrational and illegal suffering by itself does not crown anyone [with martyrdom] but only causes exceptional spiritual and physical, temporal and eternal damage” (PSZ 6.4053, p. 742).

Peter wondered, why the sin of hypocrisy is not prohibited by any of the commandments, and he concluded that this is because it is a super-sin of sorts since it contains all other sins.

There are different commandments and different sins – against each [commandment]; this sin [hypocrisy] includes in itself all sins listed above, (and it is such that other sin cannot have it in it, even if [someone] wanted, this one very comfortably has all [of them].” How can it be?) 1st commandment: “the sin is atheism, which is the foundation in hypocrites, since their main task is to say that visions, orders from God and miracles are all made up; and after they themselves made that up, then they know that God did not do it; what faith is in them? and when there isn’t any, then they are truly atheists. 2nd: those having no fear of God; {there is no need to interpret it} since if they lie about God, what fear of God can be found in them? 3rd: as in 2nd along with: sanctify it [the Sabbath day], that is, pray {since you got 6 days for work and the seventh for prayer}; but is prayer of hypocrites pleasing to God as it comes from false miracles and pharisaic dreams and atheistic conscience? 4th: it’s possible that some honor their natural fathers, which is for luck, but do they honor shepherds, whom God made their second fathers after the natural ones? When their principal mastery is in deceiving them to the extreme and trying to bring a trouble onto them by smearing subordinate shepherds before their superiors and superiors by sowing among people blasphemous words about them, inciting them to rebellion as witnessed by many heads on stakes. 5th: {don’t kill. Everyone can understand from the 4th answer that man can’t be destroyed so quickly by a weapon as by the tongue;} a robber in this world can only destroy people as a leader of rebellion {as clearly stated in the 4th answer} and doing all of it in the figure of holiness in the form of a lamb covered with its clothing. 6th: {don’t commit adultery.} How could a husband allow an unknown man to come close to his wife, particularly a vivacious and good [man], but a hypocrite; and taking him under his arm he pulls him away for blessing and prophecy and after bringing him back, kisses his hands and bows, considering this to be a great honor, that he accepted such a son of hell as his own. 7th: {don’t steal.} All [people] steal not only with their hand, but also with their soul and with both of them. 8th: {don’t lie.} Their mastery lies only in what is described above. 9th and 10th: {don’t covet what is your neighbor’s.} This is without interpretation, since with what would they properly feed themselves? They will say, that an icon appeared someplace in a forest or some other place and there was a vision to build on this place a monastery or hermitage and there shouldn’t be a monastery without villages as recently something like it happened in Preobrazhenskoe where two peasants came and spoke about such a vision to build a monastery and give it the village of their master. And so such a sin contains in itself all [sins] and among other sins not every [sin] can [contain hypocrisy], for instance, if a robber became a hypocrite, who would take him to his company? If one of drunkards came to a tavern all holy and didn’t drink and carouse with them, all would get away from him; if a hypocritical young man would approach the company of maidens to court [them], he wouldn’t win over any of them. If a thief made himself that way, he wouldn’t find friends since they’d think he investigates them. {And so, not each sin can use hypocrisy along with itself, but hypocrisy – [can use] all.} Finally, Christ the Savior commanded

the Apostles not to be afraid of anything and He also commanded: ‘beware,’ he said, ‘of pharisaic yeast, which is hypocrisy’ [Lk. 12:1].³

It is not very easy to see what led Peter to particular conclusions. Let’s assume that hypocrisy is the greatest sin or a sin of all sins, a sin from which other sins are derived, although this is not a common view according to which pride would be on top of the list. To begin with, the first commandment: it is unclear why atheism is supposed to be the foundation of hypocrisy; it is quite possible, even common, that hypocrites are believers, although some of their actions are for show. Is really the major preoccupation of hypocrites to show that visions, orders received from God, and miracles are human inventions? That would be what atheists would like to do; the case could be made that hypocrites would be rather in favor of visions, voices, and miracles since that would enhance and make more believable their hypocritical behavior. Also, even if they invented some of such supernatural elements, this invention would not necessarily lead to atheism. Many miracles have been invented by deeply religious people.

Honoring fathers (never mind mothers) seems to be the central preoccupation in all these interpretations. Peter considered himself the father of all people. Actually, his official title was the father of the fatherland as enacted in 1721 by the Senate (PSZ 6.3840); therefore, he expected respect or rather obedience from all subjects; not just pretense of obedience, but sincere submission of everyone’s spirit to his own will. Any deviation from such full submission could lead to rebellion, as it not infrequently happened in Peter’s Russia, which, to be sure, was promptly and brutally suppressed, after which heads on stakes – and other atrocious reminders – were left for people as a loving encouragement for them to honor their father, the father of the fatherland. It is doubtful whether obedience to authorities was an intended meaning of honor-your-parents commandment, but Prokopovich vigorously argued that it was and Peter wholeheartedly embraced this interpretation.

In discussion of the don’t kill command, the reference to the 4th commandment is unclear: quick destruction by the tongue may be a reference to smearing superiors, but smearing superiors hardly destroys them. As Peter

³ Semevskii (S 333-334); also И[ларион А.] Чистович, *Феофан Прокопович и его время*, СПб., Императорская Академия Наук 1868, pp. 125-127; both Semevskii and Chistovich used the same manuscript; however, Semevskii did not include parts shown in curly brackets; this includes some redundancies and obscurities, but also the reason may have been that Semevskii, an apologist of Peter, did not want to make too conspicuous that Peter used wrong numbering of commandments: Peter was using, in effect, the Catholic Decalogue which combines the first two commandments of the Orthodox (and Protestant) Decalogue into one and splits the last commandment into two.

subtly indicated, the head of the smearing can end up on the stake, which points to the effectiveness of the weapon rather than the tongue. Also, why can robbers only destroy people by leading rebellions and that as wolves in sheep's clothing, unless any leader of any rebellion against authorities – Peter in particular – is by definition a robber and he somehow misleads the participants of the rebellion by giving different reasons than the reasons sincerely harbored by them? Those opposed to Peter did not really hide their reasons and even if these reasons by secular standards are not quite strong, many people sincerely considered Peter to be the antichrist, no pretense here on their part.⁴

The point of the comment on the 6th commandment is difficult to fathom. Peter seems to scold a husband who allows a hypocrite to come close to his wife, presumably enabling the hypocrite to have an illicit access to his wife. Does Peter want to say that the husband should screen the hypocrite before he allowed such an access to his wife? However, the entire discussion of the decalogue is about hypocrisy, but in the case of this commandment, Peter speaks about someone duped by a hypocrite effectively shifting blame from the hypocrite to the possibly cuckolded husband.

The point of the comment on the 7th commandment is equally obscure: people steal with their hands, but their souls, or with both. Never mind the meaning of stealing with the soul. What does this statement have to do with hypocrisy? Is stealing really always the result of hypocrisy?

The series of examples at the end of Peter's ruminations are inconsistent and do not quite make it clear what the point is. They could be summarized as situations in which a perpetrator acquires a holier-than-thou attitude thereby driving away his accomplices. However, the example of a young man trying to score among maidens does not quite fit this picture: maidens are hardly accomplices, unless these maidens are to be understood as experienced women. Also, a drunk who begins to preach to fellow drunks would surely estrange them, whether this preaching is sincere or pretended, but a preacher – sincere or otherwise – who would become a drunk would certainly estrange many of his flock, so how does the example prove that hypocrisy includes or uses all sins, and that no sin includes or uses hypocrisy?

The only thing that the reader of Peter's interpretation of the ten commandments can clearly see is Peter's discontent with hypocrisy. However, his theological argument is at best puzzling if not simply inept. He fares much better in stating his theological case without attempting to justify it. This can be best seen in the most important topic for him, the theological grounding of autocracy.

⁴ A. Drozdek, *Peter I as the antichrist*, "Limes", 9 (2016), pp. 41-51.

In the *Military Statute* of 1716 and in the *Naval Statute* of 1720, we read:

if someone sins against His Majesty with insulting words, despises His action and plans and makes judgment about them in an unseemly way, then his life should be taken by cutting off his head. [This is] because His Majesty is an autocratic Monarch who should not give account for his actions to anyone in the world, but as a Christian Sovereign, he has the power and authority to govern his State and [its] territories by his own will and discretion (PSZ 5.3006, p. 325; 6.3485, p. 59).

A mere disagreement with the words of Peter may end up with the death penalty because Peter is responsible only before God as His anointed, and thus, apparently questioning Peter's judgment amounts to questioning God's judgment and this is an outright blasphemy. Interestingly, the very same statutes say that who blasphemes against the name of God or mocks the church services and the word of God and sacraments even when being drunk, then his tongue should be burned with [hot] iron and then his head should be cut off; who blasphemes against the Mother of God, should receive corporal punishment or even be sentenced to death (p.321/p.49). It appears the punishment for blasphemy against Peter could be harsher than blasphemy against the Mother of God.

The divine provenance of the monarchical rule extended to other countries as well, at least when it suited Peter's goals. When Polish king Augustus II was in danger of being dethroned, Peter wrote a letter to the Polish Republic in which he castigated it that this is "an act that is unbecoming of a Christian nation". So, "on account of the common duty, by which we and each Christian potentate are obligated before God and the entire human society", Peter considered himself obligated to oppose those who "destroy peace in Christendom" and "to defend common good and the right of kings and monarchs" so that "the majesty of the royal and crowned heads, which comes without mediation directly from the only God", would not be overthrown by some hot-heads, whereby "the main and fundamental rules which come for the organization of the human race from nature itself would be destroyed and consequently humans created in the image of God would turn into wild animals that live without God nor laws (PiB 2.142).

Since Peter was the chosen of God as also he was repeatedly assured by sycophantic preaching of such ecclesiastics as Prokopovich, Iavorskii, Bratnovskii, and Lopatinskii, there was no limit to how far he could go with his political ambitions. If these ambitions extended to wars of aggression, there was no problem if they could be theologically justified. And thus, the territory of the Ottoman empire could and even should be invaded since Turks as Muslims were enemies of Christianity and, as such, fare game. Therefore, we read in a 1696 letter to the patriarch Adrian about "the pagan land of the damned Mahomedan nastiness" (PiB 1.41); in a 1696 letter to Apraksin that

“giving glory to the Creator of all, we took up again arms against the enemies of the holy Cross, in which [enterprise] may the Lord God help us” (PiB 1. 61); in a 1697 letter to the Roman emperor Leopold he wrote, “may omnipotent Lord God glorified in the Holy Trinity bless for the future Christian arms so that the nasty and blasphemous Arab generation be always defeated with a similar victory” (PiB 1.206). Although the Swedes were from a wrong denomination of Christianity, Peter could not justify the costly war with Sweden just by considering them pagans, so he presented Charles XII as being motivated only by pride and “because of [his] enflamed desire only to prolong this war and to spill innocent Christian blood and to destroy stronger provinces of this country” he rejected any invitation for peace coming from “other Christian potentates” (PiB 3.130).

Church policies

Peter’s theology is reflected in his church policy, which is a subject that has been extensively researched. The policy culminated with the *Spiritual Regulation* penned by Prokopovich under strict supervision of Peter. However, Peter’s heavy-handed attitude toward the Orthodox church had been visible from the very beginning of his rule.

To induce foreigners, particularly specialists in various fields, to come to Russia, Peter allowed them “free exercise of religion of all other Christian Sects even if they disagree with Our church” (PiB 2.41; PSZ 4.1910), since “we exercise no power of conscience of man and gladly allow that any Christian should be responsible to care for his spirituality” (PiB 2.42). In newly conquered (sometimes considered reconquered) territories the population was allowed to maintain their faith, churches, and priests, e.g., in Dorpat (PSZ 4. 1985), Riga (4.2277), Pernov (4.2286), Revel (4.2287; 4.2297).

However, this regard for the conscience of others was far from comprehensive. After a Catholic priest was allowed in 1690 to join the one in Moscow, they were prohibited to do things that do not belong to them and “should not do anything contrary to the Greek-Russian faith nor convert Russian people and do services in the houses of the Roman faith” (PSZ 3. 1388),

This respect for conscience did not extend to Peter’s own subjects, which was clear right from the beginning of his reign. Already in 1689 a ukase came out to behead or burn several “thieves and apostates” for their wrong beliefs (PSZ 3.1362). If Tatar and other Muslim landlords do not convert to Orthodox Christianity, peasants from their estates should be taken to the treasury and they can keep what remains (mills, etc.) (5.2920). “The great Monarch has ordered to send to Bishops in all Eparchies/dioceses and to Governors in Gubernias ukases ordering to announce in cities and in districts to all people of

male and female gender that they make confession to their spiritual fathers each year. If anyone does not confess within a year, spiritual fathers and parish priests should submit lists of names of such people to Bishops and spiritual courts in cities and to senior priests in districts, and they should forward these lists to Governors and from districts to Landrats, and Governors and Landrats should impose fine on them: three times as much as their income and then they should make confession. Also, where there are schismatics [...] of male and female gender”, double their present taxes and send the lists of names and taxes levied to the Senate chancellery (5.2991, 5.2996, 5.3232; 6.3662). Schismatics or Old Believers had it particularly hard. Among others, they could not be supervisors nor witnesses, except among themselves, but only exceptionally (7.4586). It was required of every citizen to go to church every Sunday and every holiday and to confession at least once a year; otherwise, offenders were fined according to their position and frequency of offence. Responsibility for it landed on the shoulders of the clergy and so priests who did not report those who do not confess were to be fined for the first two times and defrocked for the third time (5.3169), whereby priests became spies for the state, that is, for the tsar. And thus, lists provided by priests were to be checked to see “if those who have not confessed are registered as those who did confess, or opponents of the Church (or schismatics) are not so registered as those who are opponents of the Church”. Priests who lied would be defrocked, their property would be confiscated, they would become subjected to corporal punishment and sent to hard labor (5.3183). Expectedly, some schismatics did not want to pay double tax, so they feigned conversion; however, they should reveal it and pay double tax; those who didn’t and those who did not convert, “they will be detected: and these transgressors will be subjected to severe civil punishment and required to pay a double fine in addition to the double tax” (6.3547). And this was what really mattered to Peter; schismatics were a convenient source of additional revenue. He reportedly once said that as far as beliefs of Old Believers, “if they are really the way they are, then, as far as I am concerned, let them believe what they want and wear their patch; and when they cannot be converted from superstition with reason, they surely neither fire nor sword will do; and to be a martyr because of stupidity: they do not deserve such honor, nor the State will benefit from it”.⁵ Old Believers were forced to wear patches (6.3944; 7.4596) – what does it have to do with tolerance? – and the state did benefit from it by imposition on them of additional taxes. Truly, Peter’s tolerance

⁵ И. [И.] Голиков, *Деяния Петра Великаго: мудраго преобразителя России*, М., Николай Степанов, 1836, vol. 4, p. 111.

dictated by needs of the state – his needs, that is – “never extended to free thinking”.⁶

In the *Military Statute* and in the *Naval Statute* it was announced that “although each Christian without exception should lead a Christian and honorable life and remain in un hypocritical fear of God, soldiers and military persons should respect and follow it with particular zeal; for God has called them to the place in which it often happens that not even for one hour they can hope that they are not exposed to the greatest life dangers in the service of their Sovereign. And since every blessing, victory, and good fortune come from almighty God, as the true Source of all good things and the just Giver of victories, to Him we should pray and in Him we should trust to always have, most of all, in all dealings and enterprises, good fortune. Therefore, all idolatry and wizardry are in strongest terms forbidden” (5.3006, p. 320; 6.3485, p. 49); wizardry and magic were forbidden under the penalty of flogging or even being burned “if through wizardly some harm was done to anyone or truly a pact with a devil was made” (p. 321); if someone paid a wizard to do harm to anyone, he also should be burnt (p.321). The most important part in this lofty statement is that soldiers are in the service of the tsar, not even in the service of their country or their people, and by being un hypocritical about their beliefs they would sincerely believe that Peter’s authority came from on high and thus would exercise utmost obedience, the only thing Peter cared about. Interesting is the remark about the pact with the devil, in reality of which pact Peter apparently believed, although the remark does not appear in the *Naval Statute*.

Peter saw churches as a source of revenue to finance, in particular, wars he constantly waged and he issued an unending series of ukases concerning ecclesiastical policies, some very general, concerning all churches, some very specific, concerning a particular church or monastery. He prohibited erecting unneeded buildings and also keeping money and grain revenues by metropolitans and bishops requiring these revenues to be sent to his treasury (PSZ 3.1613). Army priests should be supported by money collected from churches (4.2070). From secular and ecclesiastical lands, one recruit should be taken from 20 estates and clothing, bread, and money should be provided for him (4.2082). Sometimes, when in particular need for new recruits, church people – “judges and Clerks from Archpriest houses episcopal, monastic servants, sons of priests, cantors, sextons, and other clergy and their old enough

⁶ L.R. Lewitter, *Peter the Great’s attitude towards religion from traditional piety to rational theology*, in R. Bartlett et al. (eds.), *Russia and the world of the eighteenth century*, Columbus, Slavica Publishers 1988, p. 65.

children and relatives” – were drafted or, when too old, they had to pay a special tax in return for exemption from the military service (4.2130). One horse should be taken from 150 estates in Moscow churches, 200 in city churches (4.2154). Sometimes a precise quota was given, e.g., recruit 3000 people in the Moscow area, 80 or 100 from ecclesiastical estates (4.2171). Peter’s legislation even affected the families of priests, e.g., it was ordered that children of the clergy should go to Greek and Latin school and if they didn’t want to become priests, they have to, but they only could join the army (4.2186; 4.2308). Ostensibly, out of concern that sons of the clergy become priests to avoid military service, which harmed the church because of their number and their insincerity, Peter imposed several conditions when someone could become a priest (4.2352). The real reason was to make more sons of priests joined the army.

Peter used particularly venomous legislation against monks. Interestingly, he apparently believed in the power of prayer. For instance, he asked patriarch Adrian in 1695 to pray for him and for his army “so that He could give us victory over His enemies, Hagarians/Muslims and [thereby] glorify His holy name” (PiB 1.42); but he did not see anything useful in devoting one’s life to meditative exercises and so he viewed the monastic life as parasitic and wanted to end it, as expressed in a 1724 ukase, because “the life of monks today is of such a kind and shame [stemming] from other laws [and] much evil comes from it since the greater part are idlers and because idleness is the root of all evil”. They say they pray, but “how society benefited from it? True is the old proverb: nether to God, nor to people; since most of them, motivated by laziness to eat bread for free, evade taxes” (7.4450, p.230). Early on, in 1701, the Monastery Prikaz was formed to handle suits from all classes of ecclesiastical persons, lay and clerical (4.1829); to decide what church buildings should be built or even repaired; to handle, in particular, all financial matters of monasteries (4.1839). In 1701, confirmed in 1723, monks were prohibited to write any letters in their cells or have any paper and pens; there would be a place for writing designated in a common room, not secretly as dictated by tradition of the fathers (4.1834; 7.4146). “Monks and nuns living in monasteries [and convents] should get a fixed amount of money and grain for their maintenance and shouldn’t own land or any immovable property [ostensibly, this was done] not to destroy monasteries, but to better fulfil the monastic oath; since the monks of old loved to work with their own hands to produce food for themselves and they lived together and fed many poor people with their hands, but today’s monks not only don’t feed the poor by their work, but themselves consume the fruit of someone else’s work; the senior monks have fallen into luxury, whereas they drove subordinate monks into poverty and caused quarrelling and murder and many bad outrages because of land.” And for these reasons all monks, regardless of rank, were to

receive an annual stipend of ten rubles in cash, ten quarts [30 liters] of grain and any amount of firewood, while all other revenues collected by their monasteries were to be sent to the Monastery Prikaz and then transferred “for the care of the poor in [urban] almshouses and to poor monasteries that have no land” (4.1886); actually, more and more of this money was used for military purposes; for instance, new cannons were to be made and paid for by the money from the Monastery Prikaz (4.2185).

All of it culminated in the *Spiritual Regulation* that permanently replaced the patriarchate – vacant since 1700 with Iavorskii playing the role of the patriarchal caretaker⁷ – with the Synod, which in spite of its exalted name, the Most Holy Ruling Synod, was simply a state institution controlled by the tsar to control the church, whereby the church became one of the departments of the state.⁸ All affairs of the church were supervised by the Synod, and, as specified in the opening pages of the *Regulation*, the members of the synod swore allegiance to the tsar promising to do their best in their service for the benefit of the tsar and acknowledging him as the final judge of the Synod. Truly, “The Emperor PETER having thus caused himself to be acknowledged Sovereign Pontiff, or Chief of the *Russian Church*, and of Consequence first President of the Synod”.⁹

For those dissatisfied with the new ecclesiastical arrangement, Peter had a simple answer devoid of any subtleties: when bishops once expressed the desire of the restoration of the patriarchate, as it was sometimes done by the clergy, “he pulled out with one hand from his pocket prepared for such an occasion the *Spiritual Regulation* and he told them in a menacing tone, ‘you ask for the patriarch; here is your patriarch, and who is opposed to it (and he pulled out with the other hand his cutlass and struck the table with it) here is damask/steel patriarch!’”¹⁰

There was only one power and no incursion on this power would be tolerated. This was because “the authority of monarchs whom God Himself

⁷ Iavorskii’s title was, in fact, “a pitiful decoration behind which secular powers did what they pleased”, С. Г., Рункевич, *История Русской церкви под управлением Святейшаго Синода*, СПб., Типография А. П. Лопухина 1900, vol. 1, p. 76.

⁸ And yet one of Peter’s apologists having presented Peter’s church reforms stated that these reforms “did not disturb the independent foundation of the church,” Н.И. Кедров, *Духовный Регламент в связи с преобразовательною деятельностью Петра Великаго*, М., в Университетской типографии 1886, p. 240.

⁹ J. Mottley, *The life of Peter the Great, Emperor of all Russia*, London, M. Cooper 1755, vol. 3, p. 296.

¹⁰ А.К. Нартов, *Разказы Нартова о Петре Великом*, СПб., Типография Имп. АН, 1891, p. 71.

commands to obey out of conscience is Autocratic (Самодержавная)” (PZS 6.3718, p. 316), which was the only aspect of theology that Peter treated in any seriousness. This allowed Peter (and Prokopovich) not to be afraid of any inconsistencies. It is argued that in the church a conciliar administration is better than that by one person (p. 316). Why not apply this principle to Peter? Also, a conciliar administration would allow avoiding errors that could happen when “one autocratic (самовластный) pastor governs” in the church (p. 318). Why was such a concern not exercised for one autocratic tsar imposing his will on the entire country? Presumably, as Peter saw it, it was because his rule came directly from God, whereas the patriarch’s apparently did not.

The *Regulation* was concerned about the low level of education among clergy. Priests had to be properly schooled before they assumed their pastoral duties, one part of which was preaching the central point of which was preaching “on respect for the authorities, particularly the supreme authority of the Tsar” (p. 338), not even the supreme authority of God. It would also be inappropriate to mention in sermons “sins of the authorities” (p. 338). Moreover, priests should see to it that each parishioner received communion at least once a year. Violators, considered to be schismatics (p. 341), should be reported to become a subject of various sanctions (p. 342). People were encouraged to report the priests who did not report schismatics by promising them half the property confiscated from schismatics (PSZ 6.4022, p. 705). Priests also were obligated to report any semblance of opposition to authorities that they had heard during confession (pp. 700-701) and the *Regulation* went into theological gymnastics to justify divulging confessional secrets.

It is interesting to see that according to chapter 10 of the *Regulation or Act of the Main Magistrate* of 1721 on police affairs:

the police has its own special standing, namely: it maintains laws and justice, brings good order and morals, assures security to all from robbers, thieves, bullies, cheaters, and the like, drives away disorderly and useless life[style], and forces everyone to [do] work and honest enterprise, makes good inspectors, careful and good servants, creates cities and regular streets in them, hinders increase of prices and brings satisfaction in all that is needed for human life, guards against all illnesses that happen, brings cleanliness to the streets and houses, prohibits excess in house expenditures and all public sins, cares for beggars, the poor, the sick, handicapped, and other disabled, protects widows, orphans, and strangers according to the commandments of God, educates the young in wise purity and in honest teachings; in a word, the police is for all these [people] the soul of the citizenry and of any good order and the fundamental support of human security and comfort (PSZ 6.3708).

It is remarkable that many of these functions are also assigned to the church, whereby, the police acquired ecclesiastical functions. Because the church was obligated to turn in fugitives, reveal what was said in confession, and the like, the church acquired a good share of policing functions. This

was brought to logical conclusion in Shcherbatov's Ophirian utopia in which the policemen were at the same time priests.

The most-drunken council

Arguably the most interesting and puzzling spiritual aspect of Peter's rule is the most-drunken council – its full name was mad, all-joking and all-drunken council (сумасброднейший всешутейший и всепьянейший собор, S 282) – a group of close associates of Peter that organized orgiastic parties and bizarre ceremonies on various occasions. It is possible that, to some extent at least, it was modeled on the *sviatki*, the season between Christmas and the Three Kings, a big part of which was caroling or *slavlenie*.¹¹ There was a hierarchy of offices in the council, with the two top offices being the prince-pope or the most holy patriarch, and prince-caesar; with a few exceptions, all these mock offices were of ecclesiastical character: abbot, metropolitan, deacon, etc. During the lifetime of the council, there were four prince-popes (Naryshkin since 1692, Zotov since 1693, Buturlin since 1717, and Stroev since 1724). Interestingly, Peter himself held a rather low-level title of proto-deacon (S 283; PiB 4.184) or just deacon (PiB 1.28).¹² The beginning of the council goes back to at least year 1691 when Peter was 18,¹³ to the rest of his life. The council convened fairly frequently since the life of Peter was filled with drunken orgies that went on sometimes for days. Drunkenness by itself, heavy as it was, was not a distinguishing feature of the council. One such feature was ceremonies sometimes on a very large scale requiring long preparations and expenditures.

The first elected patriarch was boyar Matvei Naryshkin,

a foolish man, old and drunk. [...] The clothing [of all participants] was made to look funny, and not like real [vestments], for instance, the patriarch: iron miter, in the form of the miters of Catholic bishops, on which it was the figure of Bacchus on the barrel, also, on the clothing there were sewn parties of players; also, in place of the pectoral

¹¹ R. Wittram, *Peters des Großen Verhältnis zur Religion und den Kirchen*, "Historische Zeitschrift", 173 (1952), p. 364; R. Zguta, *Peter I's "Most Drunken Synod of Fools and Jesters"*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas", 21 (1973), pp. 19-20, 24, 27; Л.А. Трахтенберг, *Сумасброднейший, Всешутейший и Всепьянейший Собор*, "Одиссей: Человек в истории", 2005, pp. 98-99.

¹² A list of members of the council is helpfully provided by Ernest A. Zitser, *The transfigured kingdom: sacred parody and charismatic authority at the court of Peter the Great*, New York, Cornell Univ. Press 2004, pp. 186-191.

¹³ On 1 Jan. 1692, general Gordon wrote about "finding himself in Preobrazhenskoe, where the patriarch [Naryshkin] was installed": P. Gordon, *Tagebuch*, SPb., Köhler 1851, vol. 2, p. 360.

panagia, he wore clay flasks [trimmed with] little bells. Instead of the Gospels there was a book that contained several phials of vodka. And all of it constituted there in ceremonies the celebration of Bacchus. Also, on Palm Sunday, after dinner, a procession was organized in the pleasure palace. This mock patriarch was carried on a camel to the waterside garden toward Frankish/wine cellar. And there, after drinking to the fullest they left to their homes. Also, the ordination of this mock patriarch and arch-priests was in the city of Pressburg, where a ceremony took place in such a way that we find it necessary not to repeat; we only briefly say [that there was] drunkenness, debauchery, and all types of scandalous behavior.” After Christmas, this patriarch and his company were caroling in many estates, then feasted until late at night; “many [people] have been beaten, dowsed, and scolded.”¹⁴

On 21 Feb. 1699, an Austrian ambassador witnessed the following spectacle: “a sham Patriarch and a complete set of scenic clergy dedicated to Bacchus, with solemn festivities,” marched to consecrate the house of Peter’s favorite Lefort.

He that bore the assumed honors of the Patriarch was conspicuous in the vestments proper to a bishop. Bacchus was decked with a mitre, and went stark naked, to betoken lasciviousness to the lookers on. Cupid and Venus were the insignia on his crozier, lest there should be any mistake about what flock he was a pastor of. The remaining rout of Bacchanalians came after him, some carrying great bowls full of wine, others mead, others again beer and brandy, that last joy of the heated Bacchus. And as the wintry cold hindered their binding their brows with laurel, they carried great dishes of dried tobacco leaves, with which, when ignited, they went to the remotest corners of the palace, exhaling those most delectable odours and most pleasant incense to Bacchus from their smutty jaws. Two of those pipes ... being set crosswise, served the scenic bishop to confirm the rites of consecration. Now, who would believe that the sign of the cross – that most precious pledge of our redemption – was held up to mockery?¹⁵

There was no secret made of the existence of this council, of the roles played by particular persons in it, and all excesses were performed openly for all to see. In one feast to which a French ambassador was invited, he reported this image:

the prince-pope or patriarch, was at the high end [of the table] with all his pretended cardinals and the rest of the table was occupied by [dignitaries with their] blue sashes, other minister of the Tsar and generals. As usual in such kind of occasions, people drank prodigiously and the room was filled with the smoke of tobacco and of confusion of voices, so it was impossible to hear [anything] and to breathe. The pope and the car-

¹⁴ Б.И. Куракин, *Гистория о царе Петре Алексеевиче и ближних к нему людях, 1682-1694 гг.*, in *Архив князя Ф.А. Куракина*, СПб., В.С. Балашев 1890, vol. 1, pp. 71-71.

¹⁵ J.G. Korb, *Diary of an Austrian Secretary of Legation*, London, Bradbury & Evans, 1863, vol. 1, pp. 255-256.

dinals sang and because guards didn't allow anyone to leave, never in my life did I have such a terrible ordeal.¹⁶

In 1715, Peter organized a mockery of a wedding for Zotov, already in his seventies, with a woman half his age. Zotov was not successful in his attempts to avoid it and so the ceremony took place.

The four persons, who were inviting [guests] to the wedding, were the greatest stammerers that could be found in Russia. Very old men who could not stand nor see any more were chosen as masters of ceremony, the so-called stewards, bridesmen, and other service people, and as four footmen, persons so fat were taken that because of their great weight they had to be guided and who had been struggling with gout almost all their life. The mock-tsar of Moscow [Romodanovskii] who represented King David in his clothing, and instead of a harp he was given a lyre covered with a bear-skin that he had to twist around. As being of highest rank, he was carried on a large sled with a frame [on it], to the four corners of which there were tied many enormous wild bears, which were goaded by appointed people with sharp spikes to make horrible roaring, while the king David and, by his example, the entire company struck up coarsely and frightfully sounding music. The tsar himself was dressed like a peasant of Friesland and skillfully beat a drum next to three generals; in this way with the ringing of bells, the mismatched couple was taken by the masks before the altar of the main church and joined [in matrimony] by a hundred year old priest. Since the latter had lost his eyesight and memory, two candles were held before the eyeglasses put on his nose and words were shouted into his ears that he had to repeat to the couple. From the church the procession went to the tsar's palace where the merriment went on for several days.¹⁷

The remarkable thing about all this is that Peter was not just a spectator or his subjects' buffoonery tolerating with his benevolent paternal eye the frolicking of his children. The fact is that he was the main architect of the entire enterprise, the producer, the author of the script, the stage director, and an active participant. There are very seldom referenced documents which show the painstaking process of the preparation to the election of the new prince-pope after the death of Zotov in 1717, probably caused, we may add, in no small measure by the humiliating public spectacle Peter made with his just described wedding. The process had two phases, first election and then consecration (S 298-310).

¹⁶ Dispatch of Campredon to Dubois, 28 March 1721, *Сборник Императорскаго русскаго историческаго общества* 40 (1884), pp. 191-192; see also pp. 167-169.

¹⁷ [F. Chr. Weber], *Das veränderte Rußland*, Franckfurth, Nicolai Förster, 1721, vol. 1, p. 63; [Id.], *The present state of Russia*, London, Printed for W. Taylor, W. and J. Innys, and J. Osborn, 1722-1723, vol. 1, pp. 89-90; P.H. Bruce, *Memoirs*, London, Printed for the author's widow, 1782, pp. 149-150. This was viewed as "a little innocent recreation" and, at the same time, "as sorry a jest as we ever heard of" by J.L. Motley, *Peter the Great*, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1895, pp. 90, 92.

First, this is how Peter envisioned the election process. I. [Mock] priests gather together and sing the song of Bacchus; the prince urges them to ask Bacchus to make proper choice, and they retire for election in the procession for which Peter exactly specified the order which reversed the order used during the Orthodox consecration; Peter also added some mocking ranks to it (cf. R 292) (S 298). II. In the place of election, the conclave locked itself and for 24 hours, the participants should “diligently apply themselves [i.e., drink] so that the father Bacchus reveal the chosen imitator for himself and a shepherd for us. Three candidates should be chosen”. III. The conclave would come back and people would sit at their designated places. IV. A request was sent to arch-igumena/abbess to send eggs to prince-igumen. V. The prince-igumen came with the eggs. VI. The candidates sit on special chairs with holes in them (S 300). VII. A person designated by the prince-tsar should “feel [candidate’s] likeness” [allusion to Gen. 1:26], i.e., check through the hole if the candidate was a male, which is a mockery of the legendary ceremony that used *sedes stercoraria* to rule-out the possibility that the pope could be a woman as it was in the legendary case of pope Joan VIII. After that, archpriests would take two eggs, black and white, from princess-igumena after kissing her breasts (301). IX. Eggs were distributed to all, including priests who would sit in their cloaks secretly holding their [swearword]. For each candidate a vote would be taken by casting a white egg for “yes” and votes are counted. X. The candidate with the largest score was brought in. XI. The elected price-pope would be ceremonially dressed. XII. Priests would kiss the price-pope’s hand and [swearword] under bosom and drink from the eagle¹⁸ in his hand as the sign of loyalty (302). XIII. Eggs were consumed, the pope was brought to his house, put in a vat filled with beer and everyone would drink from this vat. After election, there was a ritual of installation/consecration. 1. All participant took their places, the master of ceremony (MC) would come in with two flasks carried before him, golden and silver, and two dishes, cucumbers and cabbage (303). 2. These gifts were given to the consecrated. 3. The MC would ask: “brother, why did you come here, and what do you require of our non-humility (немѣрность)?” which is the phrase used during consecration of Orthodox bishops and archbishops except that it used the word мѣрность (R 293). 4. After this the prince-pope would say, “I want to be the ultimate priest and the first son of our father

¹⁸ Орел кубок, the eagle-cup, a large cup contents of which had to be drunk as a punishment for some infractions, Н.П. Ламбин, *История Петра Великаго*, СПб., Ф.К. Эльснер 1843, p. 644; also Dal’s dictionary under орел; it was to be a funny allusion to a one-head eagle that was drawn on the floor before consecration of an Orthodox bishop, in words of Simeon of Thessalonica, a symbol of “gifts of grace and theology” (R 292).

Bacchus”. 5. The MC would say, “The drunkenness of Bacchus be with you”, which is a parody of “The Grace of God the Father, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit be with you” (R 293), and would ask, “will you keep the law of Bacchus [parody of the Orthodox phrase, laws of fathers, tradition and church rules (R 294)] and fight for it?” 6. which should be answered with a prayer that said, “Yes, imitating the eagle and the most drunken father! Getting up in the morning, when it is still dark and light barely begins, and also at midnight, I drink two or three cups [parody of Ps. 55[54]:18]. And the remaining time I spend no other but the same way. When the time of dinner comes, I drink a cup, not a small one; also, with changing dishes, the whole array of various drinks; most of all, with wine as the best and favorite Bacchic drink I fill well my belly like a barrel; so that sometimes (304, 308) I cannot get my food to my mouth because of the trembling of my hand and because of fog in front of my eyes. And I always do this way [такo всегда творю, J. 8:29]. And I promise to teach it those given to me [R 294]. I reject those who say otherwise and pronounce them as alien and anathemize [a vulgar prefix is used instead of anathe-] all fighting with drunkards [parody of Gal. 1:8 and of phrase used in consecration of bishops, R 294]. But I promise, as I have said, to do so [i.e., to drink] to the end of my life [R 294] with the help of our father Bacchus, in him we live and sometimes we do not move and whether we are or not we don’t know [parody of Acts 17:28, again on p. 315]; which I wish for you, my father, and for our entire counsel. Amen.

7. The MC says: The drunkenness of Bacchus be with you bringing darkness and trembling to you and tumbling you down and making you mad for all the days of your life [parody of Gen. 3:17]”. 8. The prince-pope prostrated before a barrel and priests sang the song of Bacchus: “Oh, all-drunken father Bacchus, born of burnt Semele and preserved from Jupiter’s [a swearword, it should be: thigh]! You press joy of the vine, bring it through fire and water for greater pleasure of you followers! We all ask you along with this all-drunken council: multiply and direct the steps of this ecumenical prince-caesar Ioann [Romodanovskii] so that he can drag his feet following you! [parody of Mt. 16:24] Likewise, may all follow your footsteps! And you, most glorious Venus, multiply from your [swearword]! Amen!” 9. Archpriests put on the pope garment except for a hat [R 303] (S 305, 309); when putting on a particular piece of vestment, an archpriest said something, for instance, “he puts on the robe of his ignorance,” “may the heart full of wine be in you!” and “may your hands tremble!” On handing in the [pastoral] staff, he said: “I’m handing you a club, so that you can disperse your people” [R 303]. 10. Eyes, hands, and four fingers are anointed with wine [parody of Ex. 29:20; Lev. 8:23, 14:14] with blessings, e.g., “may your hands tremble all the days of your life.” 11. Archpriests lay their hands on the prince-pope and the first of them read: “being drunk, I’m laying my hands on this intoxicated: in the

name of all taverns, in the name of all nicotine, in the name of all vodkas, in the name of all wines,” etc. in this vein. 12. Afterwards, a hat would be put on the new prince-pope’s head with the words, “I put on your head a wreath of Bacchus’ needle. May you not recognize your right hand nor your left hand in your drunkenness! [parody of Jonah 4:11]” which should be followed by saying “axios” [ἄξιος, which is an acclamation of the faithful made at the conclusion of ordination of the Orthodox clergy (R 301)]. 13. The prince-pope would sit on the throne, drink from the eagle and give it to others (S 306, 309-310).

The entire ritual was a mockery of the Orthodox ceremony of consecrating the clergy¹⁹ and pulled some punches against Catholicism; it used generously Slavonic language, the hallow language of the Orthodox liturgy and the language of the Bible used then in Russia, incorporating words and phrases from liturgical prayers and from Biblical verses sometimes twisting them and sprinkling them with vulgarisms.

The ritual prescribed by Peter, and dutifully executed almost to the letter (S 308-310),²⁰ was carefully prepared; Peter went through four different drafts (S 298), modifying and amplifying his creation. Incidentally, this was done right before his son Alexei was brought to Moscow to be tried for an alleged treason and tortured with Peter’s active participation.²¹ Alexei soon died in prison even though in a letter to him Peter swore “before God and His judgment that there will be no punishment”.²² Peter was appalled when, for example, Turks broke their oath and promise (PSZ 4.2322, p.629, 4.2347) or when Mazepa did the same (PSZ 4.2210-2212, 2243) and yet he did just that, no less, to his own son.

The activities of the all-drunken council have frequently not been even mentioned, particularly by apologists of Peter, and if they were mentioned, they were variously explained away as done to cope with stress,²³ “to amuse

¹⁹ Cf. А.М. Скабичевский, *Очерки истории русской цензуры (1700-1863 г.)*, СПб., Ф. Павленков 1892, p. 470.

²⁰ See also Weber, *Das veränderte Rußland*, vol. 2, pp.189-193, repeated in Ламбин, *История Петра Великаго*, pp. 715-718.

²¹ One witness said that “the monarch tortured the tsarevich at his son’s estate,” Г.В. Есипов, *Люди старого века*, СПб., Типография А.С. Суворина 1880, p. 136.

²² Н.Г. Устрялов, *История царствования Петра Великаго*, СПб., В Типографии II-го Отделения Собственной Его Имп. Величества канцелярии 1858, vol. 6, p. 389.

²³ “The tsar needed wild orgies to overcome his uncertainty/mistrust and fear, to relieve stress, to release unbridled devastating energy,” Л.И. Бердников, *Шуты и остроловы: герои былых времен*, М., Луч, 2009, p. 43.

the spirit” of overworked Peter,²⁴ as done because he was asked to do this “to dispel his pensiveness and fuzzy anxiety”,²⁵ or because getting people drunk allowed Peter to spy on others.²⁶ Today scholars try to instill some air of respectability into the all-drunken enterprise by using the professorial language of semiotics, semantics, tropes, etc., by considering the council as a form of semiotic violence, as a parodic institution, as a discourse, as a manifestation of a new cultural topography or of polyvalent complexity of Peter’s political theology, even viewing the drunken binges as having some mystical meaning, etc. However, in spite of this scholarly terminology, it is difficult not to wonder how not just an adult man, but the monarch could devote so much effort to such immature enterprises, choreographing them to the smallest detail. And maybe here is the answer, we are dealing with an adult who remained immature all of his life²⁷ – within a month of Peter’s death the last bizarre election of the new prince-pope took followed by a harlequin wedding of some servants²⁸ – who never grew up, which with disregard to people’s

²⁴ Weber, *Das veränderte Rußland*, vol. 1, p. 64; rendered as “for Relaxation of his Mind,” in Weber, *The present state*, vol. 1, p. 90.

²⁵ Ламбин, *История Петра Великаго*, p. 718.

²⁶ Peter walked among the drunk revelers and made a note on a table when he heard something which “required getting deeper into after sobering up”, F. de Villebois, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l’histoire de la cour de Russie, sous les règnes de Pierre-le-Grand et de Catherine I^e*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1853, p. 41 note 1. “The czar listened eagerly to all this ribaldry, not forgetting in the midst of his glee to note down on his tablets any hints of which it might be possible for him to make a vindictive use,” W. Keating Kelly, *The history of Russia from the earliest period to the Crimean War*, London, Bohn, 1854, vol. 1, p. 338.

²⁷ “By certain traits of his character and his temperament, he remained a child until mature age with some naïve cheerfulness, with the need of letting out, and with the simplicity of the young age”, K. Waliszewski, *Pierre le Grand: l’éducation – l’homme – l’oeuvre*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1897, p. 126; “he remains a kid and a tease to the last days of his life, delighting in gross pleasantries and fond of farces,” p. 127. When it is said that only [his wife] Catherine could “treat Peter like an overgrown boy,” R.K. Massie, *Peter the Great: his life and world*, New York, Knopf, 1980, p. 376, maybe it was because she clearly saw that he was but an overgrown boy. Cf. the statement that “her ability to mother Peter was one of the strongest points on which their relationship was founded”, Ph. Longworth, *The three empresses: Catherine I, Anne and Elizabeth of Russia*, New York, Hart, Reinhart and Winston 1973, p. 13. “Peter, like his namesake Peter Pan, never grew up,” L. Hughes, *Playing games: the alternative history of Peter the Great*, London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies 2000, p. 5.

²⁸ E. Schuyler, *Peter the Great, Emperor of Russia: a study of historical biography*, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons 1884, vol. 2, p. 507-508; such farces were, according to Schuyler, “incongruous with his character and his position”; they were incongruous with Peter’s position but very much congruous with his character.

feelings,²⁹ and with a strong psychopathic streak³⁰ produced a result so sophomoric and at the same time so dangerous to all around him. This was not accidental. Consider his childhood and early youth, when Peter, a young tsarevich, had all his whims fulfilled, and his whims could be fulfilled only by someone very rich and powerful, like his monarchical parents. From the early childhood Peter had an aggressive streak which manifested itself in his bellicose interests. At first, in the Kremlin, from the age of 5, he drilled boys on a parade ground prepared to that end. At the age of 11, he had in Preobrazhenskoe near Moscow his own cannon from which he frequently fired. With time, an army of 600 play soldiers, armed and in uniforms, was organized for Peter's war games. Also, a fort was built to practice taking fortresses, which grew into a small fortified town of Pressburg with a working administration in it. In 1688, his interests extended to the navy after a chance discovery of an old boat.³¹ Although after the death of his brother and co-tsar Ivan and after ending the regency of his sister Sophia, Peter became a fully-fledged tsar in 1689, he continued for five more years his life of mock soldiering in Preobrazhenskoe (108).

A transition from mock battles to real battles was almost imperceptible; Peter simply continued doing what he was doing from the early childhood: waging battles and wars through his entire reign. For example, when marching with his army to Azov, he wrote in a letter, "we joked at Kozhukhovo [where a mock battle took place], now we go to play at Azov" (PiB 1.28). The transition from the playful to real was hardly noticed also because the same people surrounded Peter in his playful endeavors and then in running the country. Prince Fedor Romodanovskii was the mock king of Pressburg, the prince-caesar of the all-drunken council and also privy chamberlain, Governor of Moscow and as Chief of secret Police; Patrick Gordon consulted

²⁹ He had an "uncontrollable desire to make a man do what was most distasteful to him," and relished in "clownish and brutal ... amusement which seem necessary to men of a certain coarser fibre", E. Schuyler, *Peter the Great...*, p. 451. "The forceful tsar was like a surgeon who wielded a rough, dull knife and was not always sober during operation", R. Wittram, *Peters des Großen Verhältnis zur Religion und den Kirchen*, p. 274.

³⁰ It is quite telling that Lenin, himself not the gentlest of people, said that "while speeding up adopting Western Europeanism to Russia, Peter didn't refrain from barbarism when fighting with barbarism", В.И. Ленин, *О "левом" ребячестве и о мелкобуржуазности*, in his *Полное собрание сочинений*, М., Издательство политической литературы, vol. 36, 1969, p. 301. It was even said that Peter's "inherent sadistic barbarism overruled the creative and civilizing forces in his nature, precluding any rational behavior", M. Curtis, *A forgotten empress: Anna Ivanovna and her era, 1730-1740*, New York, Ungar, 1974, p. 10-11.

³¹ R. Massie, *Peter the Great*, cit., pp. 67-70, 72.

Peter in the use of artillery and fireworks in Preobrazhenskoe and he was also a general in Peter's army; drinking sessions took place in the house Peter gave to Francis Lefort and he was also a general; Ivan Baturlin was a mock Polish king, the third prince-pope and also general and vice-admiral; Nikita Zotov, Peter's tutor, was the second prince-pope and also longtime personal secretary, and chief financial administrator; Alexander Menshikov, one of the first participants of Peter's mock army, his favorite and field marshal and a senator. There was no way to oppose Peter in anything; the slightest sign of opposition could be punished, which was not infrequently done by Peter himself. Not only was opposition impossible, but every action was always hailed by adulatory retinue, even divinized considering how ecclesiastics extolled his real or imaginary achievements in religious term to the extent that not only was he called an anointed of God but Christ of God, which was even enacted in the *Spiritual Regulation* (PSZ 6.3718, p. 318; also, the Christ of the Lord, 6.4053, p.744). His childish arrogance was supported from all sides and he simply could not resist any limitations of his bulliness. Some of restrictions could come from the church, and the memory of attempts of patriarch Nikon were still in the national memory. To diffuse it, Peter organized his council of which primary goal was the denigration of the church and its authority. He did not want to depose the church; it was much too valuable since it was the church which infused into his rule the divine authority and the voice of the church still counted for much among Russians, notwithstanding the Old Believers' movement. The church should be retained, but it also should know its place, as a subsidiary of Peter's rule that should buttress this rule. However, all the ritual niceties of the church counted for little and no effort was spared to deride them.

It was very clear from the very beginning for the outside – and some inside – observers that the activities of the drunken synod were a crude mockery of the Orthodox rituals and faith.³² Religion, the most sacred for most Russians, was irresponsibly derided in a foul and off-putting manner in the most public way. This was simply an expression of the true soul of Peter, sophomoric behavior flaunted in front of the public because he could – and remarkably, he could. There were occasional rebellions motivated by Peter's irreligious be-

³² “All these comical ceremonies made an allusion to some ceremonies that we can observe in Rome which he wanted to bring to derision to mock thereby the ones that were practiced in [election] of the patriarch of Russia of old,” F. de Villebois, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la cour de Russie*, cit., pp. 39-40. French envoy Campredon wrote in his telegram, 14 March 1721: “The patriarch about whom I spoke above who is also called Prince-pope is a drunkard by profession whom the Tsar chose to ridicule his clergy”, “Сборник Императорскаго русскаго историческаго общества”, 40 (1884), p. 168.

havior,³³ but they were suppressed and to the last breath, quite literally, Peter reveled in his excesses.

It seems that the all-drunken council should not be pushed aside as a curiosity, but it should be considered as the primary key to understanding Peter's reign. There was no borderline separating adolescent military exercises from the expedition against Turks or Swedes. There was no borderline between crude frolicking of the all-drunken council and making policies for the country. The rule of Peter as an adult was simply a continuation of his adolescent games and whims. Russia became not the country in which service to the tsar was divinely established, but a playground to do whatever catches the fancy of an adult monarch who never grew up. This even goes beyond the Sun King's "the state, it is me"; for Peter, it would be "the state, it is mine", my property, my toy along with all its vast territories and people of different cultures and languages, a toy with which any game can be played, any desire can be fulfilled with complicit participation of laity and clergy. All social, political, and religious policies of Peter were motivated by his childish fancies. And there was no outrage for which he was not copiously praised by a sycophantic surrounding,³⁴ which included the clergy; there was no reason for Peter to grow up and see the reality from other perspective than his own. It was also his arrogance, sense of superiority as being protected by the divine power,³⁵ the sense of invincibility which unopposed by anyone led to his imperial decisions. The boy who early on became a tsar (a co-tsar at first) became a tsar who remained a boy. Undereducated with a smattering of reading, writing, and memorization provided in early childhood by the ama-

³³ One reason for the Astrakhan rebellion in 1705 was the fact that "the tsar, to mock the church, instead of singing carols (Slavlenie) to the glory of God, made a masquerade and games in which he gave to a court jester the title of patriarch and to 12 of his companions the name of archbishops," Ph.J. von Strahlenberg, *Das Nord- und Ostliche Theil von Europa und Asia*, Stockholm, [Self-published], 1730, p. 249. Cf. Н.И., Ивановский, *Руководство по истории и обличению старообрядческого раскола: С присовокуплением сведений о сектах рационалистических и мистических*, Казань, Типография Императорского Университета 1892, vol. 1, pp. 104-105; А.Н. Пыпин, *История русской литературы*, СПб., Стасюлевич 1907, vol. 3, p. 319.

³⁴ After describing some of Peter's orgies, a comment was made: "It is dangerous to have fun at the expense of religion. Pleasantries that harm decency find apologists only among adulators and courtesans", J.B. Schérer, *Anecdotes intéressantes et secrètes de la cour de Russie, tirées de ses archives*, Londres, Buisson, 1792, vol. 2, p. 167.

³⁵ It was this sense of superiority which led to all the excesses rather than the sense of alienation, as suggested by J. Cross, *The church of reform of Peter the Great*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1971, p. 19.

teurish tutoring of Zotov, with poor command even of his own Russian language, disinterested in any intellectual pursuits, he showed in his infrequent theological ruminations his inaptitude and even ignorance in theological matters that went beyond simple memorization of biblical verses; he remained on as superficial a level of religiosity as possible participating in church rituals when it was entertaining (reportedly, he liked to sing church hymns), most frequently violating church rituals and by his life-long commitment to the most-drunken synod manifesting his disdain to the church of his times, not only to rituals but also to its doctrines; can otherwise be seen his delight in twisting scriptural references and liturgical formulas and infusing them with vulgarities to make them, in his mind, sound funny? And thus, it is not that his outward spirituality somehow infused some deeper, mystical meaning into the antics of the drunken synod, it is rather the other way around: Peter's lifelong commitment to the cause of the synod shows his lack of respect to the official dogmas and rites, disdain to deeply felt beliefs of his own people of whom he claimed to be the father, and his profoundly distorted spirituality.

Abstract

Spirituality of Protodeacon and Emperor Peter I

Judging by the frequency with which Peter I used religious language in his numerous letters, it could be argued that the tsar was a deeply religious man. However, his legislation points to the strength with which he tried to subordinate the official Orthodox church to himself, the culmination of which was the *Spiritual Regulations* that replaced the patriarchate with a collegial Synod subordinated to the tsarist government. However, the best image of Peter's attitude to religion is the Most-Drunken Council, which he established at the beginning of his rule and which existed until the end of his life. The activities of this Council consisted of frequent revels and numerous ceremonies which were not devoid of vulgarity mocking imitations of the rituals and doctrines of the Orthodox Church.

Keywords: Peter I, religion, Orthodoxy, the Most-Drunken Council.