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Edited by William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovic
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Christianity and the Arts in Russia is based on essays presented at a symposium held at the Library of Congress in 1988 to mark the millennium of Russian Christianity. Examining various aspects of the relationship between Christianity and the visual arts, architecture, and music, it concentrates on specific topics rather than attempting a broad survey of the subject. The range of material extends from the introduction of Byzantine art forms in Kievan Rus to the use of Christian and folk decoration and iconography in art works created immediately prior to the Revolution. It culminates in an examination of the use of religious imagery in the work of the late contemporary filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky. Representing the works of twelve Russian and American scholars, *Christianity and the Arts in Russia* also suggests the breadth and depth of the spiritual richness of the Russian Orthodox tradition that is playing a renewed role in the cultural and religious revival within the Soviet Union.

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Kiosk for the sale and distribution of the Holy Writ. *Motifs of Russian Architecture*, 1875. Architect: Viktor Hartmann.

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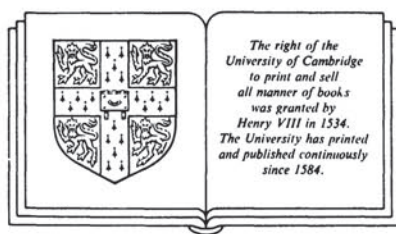
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Foreword

THE CELEBRATION of the millennium of the Christianization of Russia coincides with a period of profound change and self-examination in the Soviet Union and its Russian Republic. In the transformation now underway, the revival of the Russian Orthodox church and its teachings seems destined to play a guiding role – as during the troubled times of medieval Russian history. Not only has the Orthodox church been an essential component in the Russian national identity, but its positive moral force also offers the possibility of reconciliation and regeneration.

Within these developments, which have the broadest possible spiritual and social significance, we should remember that painting, music, and architecture are central forms of expression in the Russian church. The legacy from Byzantium, brought to Kievan Rus during the tenth and eleventh centuries, provided the inspiration and the motifs for a millennium of creative endeavor. The iconographic system of the church has been a major component in the visual arts of Russia, not only in icon painting but in the work of modern secular artists. The great tradition of Byzanto-Russian liturgical music re-emerged with stunning effect in Russian music – both sacred and secular – during the nineteenth century. The reappraisal and study of medieval church architecture also stimulated an architectural revival at the turn of this century. Although the church seemed less visible in the increasingly secular environment of the modern age, its spiritual and artistic treasures suffused many aspects of the Russian cultural renaissance during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – from writers such as Dostoevskii and Leskov to philosophers such as Vladimir Soloviev and Nikolai Berdiaev to artists such as Mikhail Nesterov and Vasily Kandinsky.

This volume, based on a symposium at the Library of Congress, represents the efforts of Russian and American scholars who have specialized in some of the many aspects of the relation between Orthodoxy and the arts in Russia. The chapters display specialized scholarship on topics from early medieval music to contemporary cinema. But the material presented here also suggests

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FOREWORD

the breadth and depth of the spiritual richness of the Russian Orthodox tradition that is playing a renewed role in cultural and religious revival within the USSR in more recent times.

James H. Billington
The Librarian of Congress

Preface and Acknowledgments

IN MAY 1988 the Library of Congress held a symposium dedicated to the millennium of the baptism of Rus in 988, the year of the official acceptance of Orthodox Christianity by Prince Vladimir of Kiev. The present volume is based on, but not limited to, the symposium papers that examined various aspects of the relationship between Christianity and the visual arts, architecture, and music in Russia. In encompassing such a broad theme, our goal has been to present the research of specialists on specific topics rather than to attempt a comprehensive survey of the impact of one thousand years of Christianity on the arts. There is no special emphasis on the theological aspects of this relationship, and there are other chronological and thematic areas that do not appear in the volume.

Nonetheless, the range of material presented in the book extends from the earliest stages of the introduction of Byzantine art forms in Kievan Rus (the realm of the Eastern Slavs before the Mongol invasion and the rise of Muscovy) to the use of religious imagery in the contemporary work of filmmaker Andrei Tarkovskii. In addition the related interests of the contributors have created a concentrated and multifaceted view of the arts in certain periods of Russian history, such as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The book is organized around this concentration of interests, beginning with the development of church music and painting in Kiev and Novgorod before the Mongol invasion of 1237–41. Indeed, Edward Williams's discussion of the Russian church bell as an aural icon takes as its point of origin the clarion call to worship in ancient Israel and offers a concise analysis of predecessors to the bell in the early Christian period. The apocalyptic and messianic connotations of the use of the bell in Russia are here related to the call to judgment and the sounds of the angels' trumpets as interpreted in Russian religious texts and in the Bible itself. Within the context of the bell as a sonic representation of the heavenly hosts, Williams demonstrates how an idealized vision of Jerusalem not only was transplanted and integrated into Russian art forms such as the Cathedral of the Intercession (popularly known as St. Basil's) and Patriarch Nikon's founding of the New Jerusalem Monastery near Moscow

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in the seventeenth century, but also returned to the physical location of Jerusalem. As Russians extended their influence into Palestine during the nineteenth century (represented by the establishment of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Jerusalem in 1858) and assumed protection of sacred monuments, the building of bell towers in the Holy Land became a symbol of the Russian commitment to protect the Orthodox faith.

Tatiana Vladyshevskaja adopts a similarly broad approach to the introduction of Orthodox Christianity from Byzantium and the development of distinctive art forms among the Eastern Slavs in the medieval period – both before and after the Mongol invasion. The aesthetic synthesis surrounding the Orthodox liturgy engaged the senses and the artistic media in an expression of religious devotion that relied not only upon the word, but also upon visual and aural imagery. It is in the relation between the icon and church music that Vladyshevskaja finds profoundly characteristic features of medieval Russian religiosity, relying on an intuitive grasp of the mysteries of faith. While noting the means by which the musician and painter approached religious themes (including examples of iconographic representations of choirs), the chapter also gives examples of religious imagery in social and even political aspects of medieval Russian culture.

The introduction and adaptation of religious art forms from Byzantium is the subject of specialized examination in chapters by Natalia Teteriatnikov and Kenneth Levy. Teteriatnikov focuses on the pragmatics of religious imagery in early medieval Rus, the ways in which the images were assimilated and used in the daily life of individuals as well as social entities such as communities and cities. Among the most prominent of these images was that of the Archangel Michael, patron saint of princes, whose origins in Byzantine iconography are linked with the importance of the archangel in the process of legitimizing princely power in medieval Kiev and Novgorod. This and other parallels in the veneration of images between Byzantium and medieval Rus are here described with extensive documentation.

Kenneth Levy's treatment of the introduction of Byzantine musical notation among the Slavs (possibly as early as the ninth century) is an aspect of the broader process of the transmission of musical forms, and particularly the religious chant, from Byzantium to Rus. Indeed, the chapter argues that music and text were inextricable and that a considerable body of hymns translated into Church Slavonic, and perhaps notated, accompanied the assimilation of Byzantine church music. The development of church music in medieval Rus is also discussed by other contributors to this volume, including Tatiana Vladyshevskaja's chapter on the relation between church music and icon painting, and Vladimir Morosan's survey of early church music as a prelude to a discussion of the new style in choral singing at the beginning of this century.

From an examination of Byzantine origins and Slavic ramifications in the first four chapters, the book turns to a different thematic area: the relation between Christianity and folk culture. The astonishing rapidity with which Orthodox Christianity spread through the vast lands of Rus at the end of the tenth and eleventh centuries is a tribute to Greek missionary efforts and to the

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decision to translate church texts into Slavonic. Nonetheless, the new religion was inculcated from “above,” at the command of the princes of Kievan Rus, and consequently had to contend with local resistance in areas that adhered to the pagan beliefs. Although the Christian church triumphed without reservation, the persistence with which old customs and beliefs maintained themselves can be noted in folk culture even until the twentieth century in rural Russia.

The manifestations of this *dvoeverie*, or dual faith, and its impact on Russian folk art and traditional music are examined by Alison Hilton and Margarita Mazo in Part Two of this volume. Hilton explores the relation between the ornamental patterns applied to the decoration of objects of everyday use in the rural household and the symbolism inherited by a Christianized people from their dim pre-Christian past. In describing ornamental motifs and their significance, Hilton notes the reverence for nature that, in an agricultural society, informs folk culture and its decorative arts with a year-round observance of natural events. It is assumed that pagan rituals among the Eastern Slavs (as elsewhere) were absorbed into certain Christian observances and feast days, with a concomitant influence on symbolism and religious motifs in Russia’s rich folk culture.

Margarita Mazo uses extensive field research as a basis for her examination of the mutual influence of Russian liturgical music and the music of traditional folk rituals, with an emphasis on rural regions (such as the area around Vologda, in northern Russia) whose isolation has preserved such rituals relatively intact. Although the Orthodox church has condemned certain practices described by Mazo, social and cultural realities have led to a coexistence between Orthodoxy and the observance of ritual forms that, although not consciously devoted to pagan beliefs, lie outside of accepted church practice. The examples here include certain wedding rituals, the commemoration of the dead, and ceremonies associated with the agricultural calendar. Through the use of ethnomusicology, folk and church rituals are here compared from both a musical and cultural perspective. Both Hilton and Mazo emphasize the importance of the mother figure – the Orthodox Mother of God and the mother goddess – as a personification of the eternal creative force of nature. In this context it would seem that folk custom and symbolic representation operate within a structure that draws upon Christian as well as pre-Christian elements. The creative results of this process of combining symbols and images from such disparate sources can be seen not only in peasant wood carving, but much earlier in the carved ornaments of twelfth-century limestone churches in the Vladimir–Suzdal area – which in turn reappear in the decoration of peasant houses.

The sustained gathering of material on folk customs and art began in earnest in the nineteenth century, as Russian intellectuals entered upon a prolonged attempt to define the national identity and their own relation to the Russian people. No area of the arts was left untouched by this ferment, which inevitably included a reexamination of the role of the church in Russia. The central images of Orthodox Christianity and the portrayal of the church – as a historical force

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and a contemporary institution – occupied the attention of many of Russia’s most accomplished artists (in the broadest sense) during the latter half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

Part Three of this volume explores several facets of the complex interaction between the church and art, architecture, and music in the modern age. That this interaction could be hedged by official restrictions on the portrayal of the Orthodox church before the twentieth century is amply demonstrated by Richard Taruskin. The very notion that opera – so firmly derived from Western musical forms – could be used to portray the Russian church seems a contradiction, in musical as well as ideological terms. Indeed, the three exceptions noted by Taruskin either depict the church as an arm of imperial Russian nationalism or, as in Musorgskii’s opera *Khovanshchina*, ignore the church altogether in a sympathetic portrait of the Old Believers, unyielding opponents of the reforms promulgated by the official Orthodox church in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

If the secular medium of opera proved inappropriate as a means of conveying the significance of the Orthodox church in Russian history, the art forms more closely related to the church itself were undergoing a period of reexamination and renewal. The intensive pace of new church construction not only followed “officially” sanctioned styles such as the neo-Byzantine and the Russian Revival (based primarily on seventeenth-century decorative motifs), but also led to the development of innovative, freestyle interpretations of Russia’s architectural traditions. In the chapter on the revival of church architecture at the turn of this century, the dissatisfaction among certain architects with the historicist designs of the nineteenth century and the search for alternatives are illustrated with examples of church construction during the two decades before 1917. It should be noted that, after 1905, Old Believer communities in Moscow and Petersburg, previously forbidden from constructing houses of worship (with the exception of a period during the reign of Catherine the Great), became a leading source of support for new church architecture.

Attempts to revive other art forms associated with the Orthodox church – in particular icon painting and liturgical music – are examined in chapters by Vladimir Morosan and Robert Nichols. In his analysis of the growing influence of Western musical forms on Russian Orthodox liturgical music after the seventeenth century, Morosan draws a distinction between sacred music and liturgical singing, whose proper form was the subject of discussion and calls for renewal at the end of the nineteenth century. As in the debates surrounding church architecture, the various factions often shared similar goals but differed on the means of achieving them. The restoration of a meaningful relation between the text and music of the liturgy enjoyed considerable success (due in part to the efforts of historical scholarship, which also played a part in the reexamination of church architecture); yet the music of the “new Russian choral school” also gave rise to criticism for the liberties that it presumably tolerated. Attempts to resolve differences of opinion over the relation between aesthetic questions and the proper presentation of the liturgy were cut short by the events of 1917.

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In the matter of icon painting, it is particularly ironic that the fervent desire of Nicholas II to effect in the Russian Empire a religious (and patriotic) revival should have been thwarted by the mundane economic and political concerns of his own ministers. As Nichols points out in his examination of efforts to restore icon painting to its former spiritual level, the work of the private Sheremetev Committee to assess the contemporary state of icon production and ensure some measure of integrity could not hold sway against the mass demand for religious images and their mass production by firms (often foreign) that had no connection with the church. Even the Holy Synod proved unsympathetic to requests to limit the “industrial” production of icons. The irony is compounded by the fact that the Old Believer sects were perhaps the most devoted to the reverent preservation of the old, pre-eighteenth-century methods of icon painting. The chapters of both Taruskin and Nichols would suggest that the Russian Orthodox church had only limited control over matters that affected some of its most venerable traditions. The major force behind such decisions lay with various bureaucratic agencies – including the Holy Synod – whose prerogatives and inertia hampered the exercise of the church’s own authority – conservative as it may have been.

The Orthodox church and the bureaucracy associated with it did not, however, exert control over the portrayal of religious subjects by secular painters, a number of whom – including Aleksandr Ivanov, Nikolai Ge, Victor Vasnetsov, Ivan Nesterov, and Mihail Vrubel – devoted a considerable part of their careers to the depiction of events from the life of Christ as well as the lives of Byzantine and Russian saints. Although this volume does not deal with the work of the above artists (active primarily in the second half of the nineteenth century), John Bowl’s chapter illustrates the renewed vitality of religious themes in secular painting on the part of Russian avant-garde artists, who balanced an appreciation of aesthetic qualities in traditional religious art with an interpretation of its symbolic significance for the Christian faith. The distinction, noted in Morosan’s chapter, between liturgical music and compositions on sacred themes by modern Russian composers is paralleled in the visual arts by the attempt to purify icon painting (described in Nichols’s chapter) and the use of religious motifs in the work of Goncharova, Larionov, Malevich, Chagall, and other painters of the Russian avant-garde. Bowl provides examples illustrating the entire range of artistic response, from the largely aesthetic interpretations of characteristics associated with medieval religious painting, to the actual painting of icons by Filonov and Tatlin.

The events set in motion by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 ultimately led to the persecution, with varying degrees of intensity, of the Orthodox church in the Soviet Union. Yet despite the official intolerance for both the church and the artistic depiction of Christian themes (in anything other than a negative manner), the underlying premise of the transcendental significance and purpose of the arts in Russian society has continued to exist. At the conclusion of his chapter Bowl alludes to the paradoxical persistence of these attitudes toward art in Socialist Realist painting.

But contemporary art in the Soviet Union has produced other, worthier

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manifestations of the spiritual in art – even to the point of a deeply sensitive approach to the church and to Christian beliefs. Anna Lawton's chapter provides both a general appreciation of the films of Andrei Tarkovskii and an analysis of the pervasive manner in which religious symbolism appears in his work. Indeed, so concerned is Tarkovskii with the search for ontological principles, that virtually his entire opus could be seen as a religious as well as philosophical meditation. From the images of the half-ruined Russian churches in the background of his first major film, *Ivan's Childhood* (set in the Second World War) to the majesty of the Gothic ruins that frame the concluding sequence of *Nostalgia*, references to the church and the symbolism of Christian art are never distant. His depiction of the life and work of Russia's greatest painter, the monk Andrei Rublev, is his most explicit treatment of the relationship between religion, national identity, and art (they are virtually inseparable). But even those films in which Christian themes and symbols do not overtly appear – such as *Stalker* – are ultimately about questions of faith.

The revival of the Russian Orthodox church in the Soviet Union during our own time seems not only possible but inevitable. Yet only a determined optimist would assert that the revival will occur without dissent and disagreement over the ways in which the church fulfills its mission and, not coincidentally, the relation of the church to its art, architecture, and music. The proliferation of religious motifs in contemporary Russian secular painting is obvious, but the church must still encourage – and implement – a revival of icon painting, just as it must someday resume the thoughtful discussion of liturgical and sacred music, as well as both tradition and innovation in church architecture. A number of the chapters in Part Four conclude with the hope that the celebration of the millennium of the baptism of Rus might stimulate the resumption of the creative relation between art and religion that flourished in the two decades before 1917. In exploring, albeit selectively, such an extensive range of material on the arts and the church in Russia – from the liturgy introduced by the early missionary efforts among the Slavs in the ninth century to the arts of the twentieth century – we have proceeded on the assumption that the objects of our study represent an enduring and vital force in Russian culture.

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Editors' Note

IN TRANSLITERATING Russian terms and names into English, this volume adheres to the Library of Congress system (with the elimination of the apostrophe-designated soft sign in the text). Exceptions have been made in the case of Russian names that have become widely known under a different system of transliteration. Every attempt has been made to standardize terminology and documentary references in the chapters, but this does not exclude the possibility of exceptional usages in the style of individual authors. Although the term “Mother of God” is an accepted translation of the Greek *Theotokos* or the Russian *Bogomater* (*Bogoroditsa*), the Western term “Virgin” is more familiar to many readers and has been used by a number of the authors.

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