A Revolutionary Gospel:
Orthodox Origins of Russian Socialist Literature

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A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia
Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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University of Virginia
April 2025

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how Maksim Gor'kii, figurehead of the atheist Soviet apparatus until his death in 1936, transposed Christian narratives onto a spiritual socialist image of Russia's future. He used recognizable symbols, characters, and stories to connect the soul of Russia's people with the revolutionary spirit he saw in Christianity. A Revolutionary Gospel details the Christian influence from the earliest of Gor'kii's works through the 1905 revolution, including The Three, The Lower Depths, Mother, and Confession. Looking forward, the dissertation seeks paths to understanding what came of Gor'kii's spiritual socialist passion for his homeland.

Preface

The city of Nizhnii Novgorod straddles the Oka river at its confluence with the mighty Volga, like nature plugging the tributary into Russia's national river. A fascinating hydrological phenomenon occurs at this intersection. Instead of mixing with each other, thereby becoming unrecognizable, the two rivers flow side-by-side for some time. The Oka's resistance against the Volga's titanic momentum is a result of a rich concentration of sediment picked up from the riverbed on the way. This suspension of earthen material makes the tributary's waters dense enough to change the Volga's appearance and behavior visibly after the Oka's arrival. Several kilometers south of Nizhnii Novgorod, having passed through what is known as the "mixing zone" downriver the confluence, the newly reconstituted Volga appears to go back to normal on the surface as the sediment disperses across the river's width. In reality, its essence below the surface is forever changed afterward.

This curiosity is an apt metaphor for Nizhnii-native Maksim Gor'kii and how his his life, work, and impact on readers so deeply fascinated me. Much like the Oka's intrusion into the Volga, Gor'kii changed the essence of Russia with his lifetime of work, which sought to concentrate the voices of the masses into a powerful rhetorical force. Monarchs across Europe feared him as a revolution-maker, and he was among the world's most-read authors of fiction in the twentieth century. To this day, his works are taught not only in countries of the former Soviet Union but also in China, Latin America, and the European Union—half of the world's population, if not more. With the ear of Soviet leaders, literary fame, and the loftiest of social connections, Gor'kii in his day exercised influence few others have before. Fame notwithstanding, my interests more accurately lay in his internal battle. On the surface, Gor'kii's resisted to the status quo around him while currents defiantly clashed within his identity, as well. Born in 1868 and immediately thinking about 1918, for a long time Gor'kii was a split personality of historical Russia and a nation yet to be born. This dissertation project seeks to capture

Gor'kii's "mixing zone" of his irreconcilable parts, as he becomes what the world knows him to be. Irrespective of whether you are connected to a particular "mixing zone"—I, too, grew up near one at the Missouri and Illinois rivers' junction—everyone goes through at least one in their lifetime.

Religion, faith, a higher power—whatever you wish to call it—is an inextricable aspect of *A Revolutionary Gospel*. Such is the case, because oftentimes belief plays a similar role in life. The importance of "religion" in the study has evoked an array of reactions. Usually the feedback has been supportively curious, though also at times contemptuously dismissive. In our contemporary, sensory-driven society, serious discussion of something beyond our immediate experiences may draw skepticism. Moreover, experience has shown that many can rationalize only a believer discussing issues of faith. After hearing about my interest in religion or the project, people reliably assume that I am a devout Christian—or something. This has been true for even those who know me best. The reality is somewhat different. From an anthropological perspective, religions of all sorts have contributed some of the most creative, beautiful, and moving cultural ingredients to human history. From a psychological perspective, our idealist tendencies in our faiths convey important information about how we view ourselves and what we understand about our world. Most importantly—for me, at least—is to approach religious thinking as an exercise of intellectual and expressive freedom. This autonomy to offer your interpretation of the world to the public sphere is the "alpha and omega" of human rights and bulwark of all other human interests. The Revolution of 1905 was thrust upon Russia for this reason, and with it, it tried to bring democracy of voices and diversity of thought. This truly revolutionary moment, forged by a marriage of labor and faith movements, was the closest Russia ever got to individual liberty and collective good. If we must repeat history, I choose to repeat these moments.

Chapter Preview

Chapter 1, “The Beginning at the End,” introduces the concept of change central to the study, post-Christianity, and its historical precedents back to the Peter I’s creation of the Holy Governing Synod, with a focus on the second half of the nineteenth century. The chapter argues that the Romanov dynasty, long before Gor’kii began writing, had created a secular religion around the tsar and by the time of Nicholas II’s ascension, the people had widely lost faith in the institution, but not their faith entirely. It is this, I argue, that Gor’kii recognizes and seizes upon. From there, Chapter 2, “Confronting Evil,” narrows the focus on the upbringing and early career of Maxim Gor’kii (né Aleksei Peshkov), who, I argue, understood the nature of change as stated above. He capitalized on his upbringing and talents to proactively create a bridge for the Russian people to traverse the uncertain future ahead of them. The chapter examines how his childhood and adolescent exposure to an unorthodox concept of the Christian God manifest as Gor’kii’s earliest post-Christian transpositions in an array of his prose and plays prior to the events of 1905 in Russia. These first two chapters demonstrate how national and personal history had laid the groundwork for the multifaceted revolutionary change that Gor’kii, as writer and politician, would set in motion.

The next two chapters seek to show how Gor'kii addressed the spiritual character of the Russian people in defense of what he saw as necessary, even inevitable reforms on Russia's horizon. Chapter 3, “Factories of Worship,” delves into his actionable suggestions for Russian believers based on the experiences he shared with labor and religious leaders during the events of “Bloody Sunday” in January 1905, which gave shape to his essay “9 January” and novel *Mother.* I argue that the two works collectively depose all three members of the Christian Trinity and replace the Son and the Spirit with socialist successors in Pavel and Pelageia, respectively. The pair fulfill a new righteous, just truth that will mark a novel paradigm in Russia, albeit poorly defined. Chapter 4, “A People’s Hagiography,”

shows how Gor'kii outlines that new absolute truth and thus replaces the final member of the Trinity, God-the-Father, in his novel *Confession*. A long and winding narrative filled with dozens of characters to summarily represent the Russian people, the story declares the supremacy of the *narod* as the one, true God who will rescue the country from the bedlam of the past and present. Gor'kii thus completes his post-Christian Trinity while simultaneously upending the monarchy's philosophy of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality." Therefore, we see how *Mother* and *Confession* form the core of Gor'kii's revolutionary gospel, a declaration of the next epoch in human history for the people and by the people. It would, however, not be that easy to change the world.

The final two chapters take the topic beyond Gor'kii and close reading. Chapter 5, "The Devil's in the Details," explores the added benefit of introducing computational methods to the investigation, which will have up to this point relied on traditional approaches exclusively. There I describe the creation and preliminary results of "Augmented Textuality," (AT) an original software package that functions as a pipeline from an input of multiple texts to a visual content comparison.[1] The algorithm behind AT uses modified versions of some of the latest Natural Language Processing technologies for Russian to transform plain text to machine-readable text in order to learn the linguistic features of the provided corpus. In addition to creating a searchable database for further exploration, the algorithm then finds and evaluates potentially overlapping pieces between individual texts. For *A Revolutionary Gospel*, I compared some of Gor'kii's works, including *Mother* and *Confession*, to the 1865 Synodal Translation [*Sinodal'nyi perevod*] of the Bible, the version Gor'kii would have read as a child. These data are presented in visualizations from a web interface for AT. In Chapter 6, the coda nevertheless named "An Intermezzo on Capri," I zoom out from Gor'kii's literary labor to consider the legacy of his ideological influence in the Party and Soviet Union. This conclusion, with more questions than

1 The author maintains that the coincidence of the acronym/initials are simply that, a coincidence. "Augmented Textuality" is an admittedly unimpressive pun on "augmented reality," the technology that overlays data on everyday life objects, spaces, etc.

answers, points toward a future path of inquiry along later writers and cultural movements. I highlight four other socialist-leaning authors' works, which were written under Gor'kii's guidance on the Italian island of Capri and show evidence of transposed Orthodox elements. The indication a mentorship between Gor'kii and younger writers represents a promising path for future research and additional chapters in the project.

Acknowledgments

Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Generally, when not translated, Russian has been transliterated using the Library of Congress system sans diacritics. Exceptions include well-known people with a recognizable name in English, e.g., Nicholas II. The Russian *ë* [*jɵ*] has been preserved in transliterations for clarity.

Chapter 1:
The Beginning at the End of the (Old) World

> "In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshiping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan Mother-Goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive."
>
> —David Foster Wallace
> "This is Water" commencement speech
> Kenyon College, May 21, 2005[2]

> "This 'orthodox' [*ortodoksal'nyi*] Marxism, which in actuality was Russified Marxism, adopted first and foremost not the deterministic, evolutionary-scientific side of Marxism, but its messianic, mythopoetic-religious side, enabling the exultation of revolutionary will, foregrounding the proletariat's revolutionary struggle, and commanded by an organized minority inspired by the conscious-proletariat idea. This orthodox, totalitarian Marxism always demanded confession of a materialistic faith, but it contained strong, idealistic elements. It showed how great the power of an idea is over human life if [that idea] is complete and corresponds to the instincts of the masses."
>
> —Nikolai Berdiaev
> *The Roots and Meaning of Russian Communism* (1937)[3]

Every paragraph of this dissertation works toward clarifying what "Gospel" means in its title, *A Revolutionary Gospel*—well, every paragraph except this first one. Before jumping in, I want to

2 David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion about Living a Compassionate Life*, 1st ed (Little, Brown, 2009).

3 Nikolai Berdiaev, *Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma* (Azbuka, 2018), 123-124. "Этот «ортодоксальный» марксизм, который в действительности был по-русски трансформированным марксизмом, воспринял прежде всего не детерминистическую, эволюционную, научную сторону марксизма, а его мессианскую, мифотворческую религиозную сторону, допускающую экзальтацию революционной воли, выдвигающую на первый план революционную борьбу пролетариата, руководимую организованным меньшинством, вдохновленным сознательной пролетарской идеей. Этот ортодоксальный, тоталитарный марксизм всегда требовал исповедания материалистической веры, но в нем были и сильные идеалистические элементы. Он показал, как велика власть идеи над человеческой жизнью, если она тотальна и соответствует инстинктам масс."

foreground the other half of the title. The word “revolution” often conjures valiant scenes of radicals storming and flags rising over barricades, but the reality is that the bulk of revolutionary change unfolds unceremoniously in everyday citizens far from the front lines, at some time anywhere between well before and well after a new national anthem is adopted. In the case of the Russian Empire, although 1917-1918 were the pivotal years when power recognizably changed hands, the identity crisis that spurred the country’s reorientation began long before. The so-called “dress rehearsal” revolution of 1905 is the next major event to come to mind.[4] It undoubtedly plays a central role in the historical trajectory from Empire to Union and consequently in this study. Ultimately, however, this dissertation focuses its attention to the less-commonly considered revolutions in thought that anticipated the political transformation. Above all, I am interested by the drawn out and intangible transformations that must take place within enough hearts and minds to enable a successful political revolution. Not all supporters begin as such, and someone or something must ferry them over the line. *A Revolutionary Gospel* recounts one attempt at psychological, social, and moral revolution that armed itself with literature and the promise of transcendence, despite protest of top Bolsheviks, to move the masses toward a new way of seeing themselves, their compatriots, their labor, and a brighter future to come.

While this research embraces the breadth of these sociopolitical, cultural, and philosophical revolutions, I focus most closely on the writings of Maksim Gor’kii (1868–1936), an author who became a central cultural figurehead and spokesperson of the revolutionary movement and later Bolshevik Party. Both pragmatic and intellectual reasons motivate this choice. Gor’kii’s close relationships with Lenin and other major figures, his authorial success in both sales and influence, and his radical socialist-Marxist political affiliations around the turn of the twentieth century elevated him to nearly unparalleled iconic status in the Soviet Union before World War II. Gor’kii’s titanic stature in

4 V. I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 5th ed. (PSS), vol. 41, 55 vols. (Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1981), 9. “Без «генеральной репетиции» 1905 года победа Октябрьской революции 1917 года была бы невозможна.”

twentieth-century Russian literature guarantees that those reading this introduction have access to many of the discussed works as well as some knowledge of Gor'kii's life and work. The other reason for choosing Gor'kii also comes from his prominence and the corollary that his curated status casts a suspicious doubt on nearly all knowledge about him should. The writer's decades-long association with Bolshevik leaders instigated the state's tight control over Gor'kii's writerly reputation, as it reflected the image Soviet Union's highest political echelon. It is namely those assumptions about his atheist alignment with the Bolsheviks that I hope to engage and prove mistaken. The present investigation aims to shine a spotlight on Gor'kii's revolutionary work in the Russian cultural sphere and, in doing so, exemplify how he offered his millions of readers the blueprints for a spiritual, yet secular socialist future society. The tantalizing irony of this research question arises from a provocative fact: what the socialists, communists, Marxists, Leninists, Stalinists so often and ardently decried—what we call "religion"—was precisely the medicine they needed to make the rest of their revolutionary ideas go down smoothly.

Goals of Research

This dissertation approaches its subject from a multidisciplinary perspective to learn more about both a particular facet of Russian cultural studies and broader humanistic trends of the past. The ensuing discussion focuses primarily on Gor'kii's development and usage of a literary method, wherein he integrates aspects of well-known Judaeo-Christian literature ultimately in order to project a revolutionized Russian consciousness. While examining his artistic interactions with religion, I consider how observations may help us better answer a number of questions from literary studies, intellectual history, and religious studies. These lines of investigation converge at a reverence for the social efficacy of the word. As Jacques Derrida wrote, "I only have one language, and yet it is not

mine."[5] Well-crafted communication can change individuals the world over more fundamentally and permanently than any law, weapon, or incentive.

The various disciplines are labels for the types of questions this study asks of its subject. Considering Gor'kii and his work through literary studies, I find and contextualize stories' engagement in wordplay and irony to convey a provocative message to readers. Straddling literature and intellectual history, my observations often lead to questions about how our conceptions of Gor'kii, both as historical man and propagandized myth, should change in light of my findings. For example, should he be considered among great Russian religious thinkers? I question how a work imagines a successful revolution, historical or imagined, in dialogue and imagery, in its minutiae. Regarding the history of Russian thought, my discussion regularly revisits the idea of how each work individually and all works collectively contribute to the rich religious discourse among intellectuals at the turn of the century. Gor'kii's surprising ideological sources and intriguing influences arises as a notable and intriguing trend while tracking his spiritual evolution. Questions about religion, beginning from its definition, shape a majority of the discussion. Bridging intellectual history and religion, I devote a significant amount of time to decoding Gor'kii's religious views and polemical opponents. Finally, significant space is made to consider Gor'kii's religious impulse and its capacity to enhance our understanding of both Russian Orthodoxy and spiritual secularism. These questions resonate throughout the dissertation, asking for further explanation, creating a need for conceptual tools, and framing the dissertation's structure.

5 Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre, Ou, La Prothèse d'origine*, Incises (Galilée, 1996), 15. "«Oui, je n'ai qu 'une langue, or ce n 'est pas la mienne.»"

Concepts and Terms

A Revolutionary Gospel builds on three central concepts: the anthropological "religious impulse," the sociological secularization of "post-Christianity," and the literary "transposition." In practical terms, these tools help explain the medium (religious impulse), motivation (sociological secularization), and method (literary transposition) of Gor'kii's contributions to the revolutionary cause. Each concept has its own scholarly baggage, which is necessary to review before applying any of them. This past use informs my applications of these methods to uncover meaning, but the following discussion is ultimately mine alone and claims no authority over framing transpositions, secularization, or religion in other circumstances. Insofar as they can help us better grasp human universals, however, I use them to speak about truths beyond the idiosyncrasies of pre-revolutionary Russia. In fact, the frameworks were chosen for their ability to help me best identify the many colorful through-lines in Gor'kii and others' spatiotemporal and sociopolitical contexts. Nonetheless, in analyzing the details, my purpose is to increase their saturation and sharpness while still viewing them in their enticingly messy historical entanglement.

First things being first, the most burdensome baggage of all, is "religion." These instincts are so fundamental and prevalent in human cultures across time and place that they resist confinement within a finite example or definition. Scholars of religion frequently bypass defining it altogether, while many others settle for broad categories of things, actions, or feelings.[6] For these purposes, I must at least attempt at a definition of religion. What I most commonly refer to as "religion" and humanity's "religious impulse" is meant to connote one or more commonly co-occurring practices and beliefs inherent in human culture that shape the experience of transcendence, the connection with the "other,"

6 Cf., for example, a classic article, Melford E. Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004). It has provoked responses for decades, e.g., Kevin Schilbrack, "What Isn't Religion?," *The Journal of Religion* 39, no. 9 (July 2013): 291–318.

divine, mortal, or otherwise. This innate desire is a phenomenon among modern humans regardless of time, place, and origin. Intimate experiences with agency beyond our own may include but are far from limited to, for example, centuries of traditional ritual and knowledge in any form, faith in the power of forgiveness, or the feeling of being called for a higher purpose. In other words, I speak of "religion" as that which we think, say, and do to understand and experience transcendence, which puts the self into communication with the other, the non-self. One may also say that "religion" is material things and divinities, but this is only true insofar as they facilitate connection. The impulse and its manifestations are the psychological and material cultural artifacts that provide meaning to interactions with the other. Theism, ethics, eschatology, and other constituent parts of this religious knowledge each help us further navigate other agents in the cultural world. "Religion," like "science" and "emotion," is a container of knowledge categories, one that specializes in knowing the other present in our cultural life.

My model of religious phenomena operates on the assumption that broadly what we call "culture" is a network of semantic confluences that cultivate meaning in relation to objects. Each intersection performs a give and take with connected concepts, which are put into relation with one another through human action, especially language. Shapes like crosses and sensations like the color red have multiple connections, which is to say potential meanings, but our understanding of these semantic phenomena relies upon situational context. This is to say that an object's significance arises from relationships between two or more nodes. For instance, a cross is realized only in light of its surroundings, such as at the end of a letter or as a part of a church's architecture. This view is informed by the work of Clifford Geertz and symbolic anthropology, which labels these semantic intersections as "symbols" and understands their meaning through their interrelations with semantically related symbols. This "semiotic web" in which humanity has trapped itself blankets our interpretations of the world, both interior and exterior.[7] Thus, in order to isolate and understand a single symbol's

7 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books, 1973), 5.

significance, its network of associations must be explored and analyzed. Geertz calls this method a "thick description" of culture, which becomes particularly useful for understanding the intersection of meanings expressed in "religion" and literature. Both are characterized strongly by their staunch resistance to summation, which by definition provides a thinner description with fewer semantic relationships to consider. "Religion" of all sorts, while not solely verbal, has a strong literary component that does much of the meaning negotiation over time.

Gor'kii's wide array of transpositions makes from one religious narrative or character yet another story or figure that is neither entirely the same nor entirely different, which is the only generalization one can make of his method with any confidence. In the context of semantic networks, transpositions strategically preserve certain connections while substituting other relationships around an agent, such as a character's name or the entirety of a parable plot. In analyzing Russian narratives, Caryl Emerson deployed the framework in her study *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme*.[8] Emerson's work focuses on the transposition in genre studies. I note that transpositions are instances of larger sociolinguistic phenomena underlying verbal and written communication: so-called inside jokes, the effect of nostalgia, the entirety of internet culture, and countless other examples of daily life testify to the role played by the relationship between the content and context of language use. Writers—and anyone who uses language, for that matter—constantly refer to precedents while choosing how to describe their present reality. Prior usage is how we know when an inside joke is funniest and objects of nostalgia the most poignant. In Gor'kii's case, the significance of when and how the Bible was employed in his life ultimately shapes how and when he transposed its contents to describe contemporary events. The premise of this research is that while the Bible is indeed one source of many past voices Gor'kii brought to his literary career, it is the dominant content *and* context to

8 Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme*, Indiana-Michigan Series in Russian and East European Studies (Indiana University Press, 1986).

which Gor'kii responds to current events. At least at the beginning of his career, the Bible offers the language with which he speaks about what matters to him most: personal purpose and actualization, collective ethics and fate. There is no understanding Gor'kii without understanding his relationship with the Bible and Orthodoxy writ large.

While Gor'kii's usage of the Bible is an example of a common sociolinguistic practice, it is unique for its claims to authority and integration of contemporary social issues. Understanding Gor'kii's transpositions will largely reflect how Emerson understands Boris Godunov's various transpositions but with strong distinctions between the two applications. Emerson's transposition framework seeks to identify what sort of broader understanding we can gain from inspecting how related narratives around historical events and people, for example, take form in varying contexts. She begins by establishing an authoritative, though unpresuming, base narrative before presenting generic translations in historical, poetic, and operatic forms. Each of these manifestations takes from the common knowledge pool about the tsar and spins off a unique representation of the story. It is difficult to disagree with her assertion that these transpositions are some of "the most vigorous commentary possible on another's work of art," as they directly speak to the veracity of others' interpretations, even point by point at times.[9] In a similar way, Gor'kii also transposes narratives to confront previous accounts' claim to authority, historical or present. Although Emerson brings into focus the transpositional methodology as a path toward evaluation and creative expression, but the similarities with Gor'kii largely stop there.

Gor'kii's transposition of Orthodox Christian written culture differs in two significant ways from Emerson's observations about the Boris Godunov history. Whereas within the context of Tsar Boris Godunov's life and reign there is tangible, traceable historicity, whether antique realia or written

9 Emerson, *Boris Godunov,* 8.

artifacts of his earthly presence, Gor'kii is speaking to a literary tradition that is transhistorical, which is to say that it belongs to no single historical actuality. Instead, it lays claim to all histories. In other words, the history told by the Christian Bible is not defined by its chronotope, Bakhtin's spacetime concept central to Emerson's understanding of the variations on her subject. One may even say scriptural texts, like the Christian Bible, are distinguished by their own unique, ahistorical, and omnipresent authoritative voice outside of a particular time or place, which further thickens the layered descriptions one can make of the contained texts. To quote the Bible is to claim authority over all times and places within and without the human realm. The claim to historical accuracy negotiated by Emerson's subjects lays claim in Gor'kii's transpositions instead to the authority of universal, capital-T Truth. His adaptations of narratives, characters, or motifs, for example, aim to not only speak to the borrowed contexts but also with the same biblical authority about human nature, good and evil, and other fundamental concepts in lifer. The history of Boris Godunov undoubtedly resounds throughout Russian history, but my analysis must take into consideration how Gor'kii spoke intending to co-opt Biblical righteousness. This maximalism has another consequence of its grand claims to Truth.

Emerson considers the subjects of her analysis as "co-authors," who built upon each other's work. That is not the case with Gor'kii, who once wrote "I came to this world to disagree."[10] A significant and unique condition of Gor'kii's claims to authority is that he seeks to destroy and rebuild precedents rather than the "yes-and" nature of Emerson's subjects. While Karamzin, Pushkin, and Mussorgskii contribute unique perspectives on the Godunov narrative, there is no expectation of rewriting history. The contrary is true for the twentieth-century revolutionaries, of whom Gor'kii is representative. The Russian Empire's radical activists sought to replace rather than reform their government, which has implications for their narratives. Transposing Biblical stories and saints' lives is more than an alternative view of some event; rewriting the sources of societal values is an aggressive,

10 Pavel Basinskii, *Gor'kii*, 2nd ed. (Molodaia gvardiia, 2006), 369.

existential offense against the status quo's most powerful cultural semantic agents. Writers' antagonism toward contemporary institutions takes form in substituent moral lessons that overwrite source texts. For example, virtue still exists as a positive character qualification, but it is demonstrated with different terms, or saints persist in the common mythology, but they are beatified on different accounts. Semantic networks of the past are dismantled and rebuilt with inconsistent or incompatible new relationships. Atheist Marxists and Leninists rebuilt the semantic power of a deity while replacing a small number of details, providing recognizable continuity but just enough difference for the change to be noticeable. Gor'kii's contribution to this effort is a martial art that weaponizes the transposed narrative or character against its source—today's revolt against yesterday.

That leads me into my third major concept, secularization, which I discuss in terms of "post-Christian" and "post-Christianity."[11] The name is somewhat misleading in that it implies the end of Christianity. In fact, as sociologist Charles Taylor defines the term, it is the change "which takes us from a society in which it was virtually *impossible not to believe* in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is *one human possibility* among others."[12] Christianity is not wholly absent or impotent but instead subject to the same semantic network negotiations as other worldviews. The transition from a Christian and post-Christian world, though it may seem nominal, cannot be understated. Post-Christianity describes a society which no longer relies cardinally on the theologically derived Christian definitions of its fundamental values and principles. As Taylor puts it, "Belief in God is no longer axiomatic" in the understanding and valuation of the world in and around us.[13] This distinction is important. Secularization, at least for the current purposes, is not necessarily the decline in faith in God or even a decrease of adherents to a particular religion, though a contraction of

11 Secularization and post-Christian(ity) are related but far from interchangeable. The latter is an evolutionary strand of the former relevant to some but not all cultures with Christianity as its primary faith system.
12 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Gifford Lectures (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3. Emphasis mine.
13 Ibid.

religiosity in the population and individuals often follows. Instead, it is when a set of beliefs is once again—because nothing begins free from skepticism—subject to questioning and therefore influence. From another perspective, the only Christians in a post-Christian world are those who actively wish to be Christian, rather than by circumstance or convenience. Indeed, in some instances, it is at the threat of injury. In these societies, faith builds on experience rather than belief, and, perhaps paradoxically, the lives of believers and unbelievers largely converge.

The Russian Empire was neither the first nor the last country to undergo secularization with a post-Christian transition, and each example of the phenomenon is unique in some way. The Warsaw Confederation of 1573 established rights for religious minorities and put checks on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's Catholic influence in daily life.[14] The concept of *laïcité* (from the Greek λᾱϊκός [*laikos*], 'of the people', i.e. the laity), dating to the late-nineteenth century or before, has separated French governmental and private affairs, especially religion, across its republics and constitutions since then.[15] Niceto Alcalá-Zamora and the Second Spanish Republic instituted a secular government for the first time in Spain with the Constitution of 1931, which survived until 1939 and Francisco Franco's implementation of National Catholicism in the country.[16] Sweden legalized conversion to a non-Christian religious denomination (including leaving Christianity for no religion) only in 1951 and cleaved from the Church of Sweden after the turn of the millennium in 2001.[17] A similar list could be made for Islam, Buddhism, and folk religions over the past few hundred years. The

14 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Compact of Warsaw." Encyclopedia Britannica, January 21, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/event/Compact-of-Warsaw.

15 Maurice Barbier, *La laïcité* (European Schoolbooks Limited, 1995), https://www-harmatheque-com.proxy1.library.virginia.edu/ebook/2738430635.

16 Cf. "Artículo 3" and "Artículo 26." Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, "Constitución de la República española de 9 de diciembre 1931," Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, accessed January 25, 2025, https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/constitucion-de-la-republica-espanola-de-9-de-diciembre-1931/html/eb011790-baf1-4bac-b9bd-b50f042667ad_2.html.

17 Maarit Jänterä-Jareborg, "Religion and the Secular State in Sweden," in Religion and the Secular State: Interim National Reports Issued for the Occasion of the XVIIIth International Congress of Comparative Law (Provo, Utah: The International center for Law and Religion Studies, Brigham Young University, 2010), 671.

Russo-Soviet post-Christian secularization is nonetheless notable for numerous reasons, which will appear throughout my investigation. In general, the sociological interest arises from just a couple facts: nowhere else did state-approved atheism arrive with such a violent and abrupt crusade against the status quo, and only in the Bolsheviks' Soviet Union was Christianity purposefully replaced with a novel belief system under the banner of atheism. As a result, the revolutions and the Russian Civil War become a *bellum sacrum* that led to a new era for human history.

Background

The authors and thinkers featured in this study were responding to frustrations with the economic, political, and cultural order of their day, but one may question if Orthodoxy was truly a primary target of their ire. Naturally, the answer is more complicated than a simple 'yes' or 'no' for a few reasons. On the one hand, far from everyone in the Russian Empire was a pious Christian or even very familiar with the mainstream Orthodox culture primarily promulgated out of Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and other major cities. Gor'kii himself was anything but a pious Christian. Those in socialist-leaning political circles denounced theology and religion, especially Christianity, as nonsense or, particularly in Marxist groups, as an anachronistic and deleterious vestige of the old way of life. I will argue that his opinions about the existence of a deity are also less binary than he and others would have us believe, but he was unquestionably an atheist by Orthodox standards. From what we can tell from records of his and others' thinking at the time, few, if any, of my research subjects were Christians by any traditional measure. At the same time, all things being equal, they spoke, acted, and wrote more like Christians than your average atheist.

That being said, the context of these writers' lives made it impossible for even atheists not to be Orthodox Christians in many ways. There is sufficient basis for nevertheless isolating religion, and specifically Russian Orthodoxy, as the ostensibly primary institution against which they were rebelling.

As educated littérateurs, Gor'kii's and those around him were intensely aware of the influence of Church power and influence in Russian life. More than just writers, anyone involved in production of meaning through acts of government, culture, and commerce had been educated in a system run by the Church. In their upbringing, they studied "Divine Law" [*Bozhii zakon*] that legitimized the Church's power and funneled it through the tsar. The Church's strong hold on the education system meant that anyone with a formal education was a member, even if only during the mandatory theology lessons. Religion's universal presence also begins to explain why the Soviets were obsessed with education and literacy: there is power and influence in telling stories—especially to children. However, it was this very dogma of mandatory liturgical attendance and Bible memorization that gave him his weapon, an intimate knowledge of the Russian Christian tradition, with which he would attempt to dismantle the system in which he was raised.

Not all scholars agree that there was a formidable Christian tradition against which nineteenth century Russians could rebel. John Givens, for example, argues in *The Image of Christ in Russian Literature: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Bulgakov, Pasternak* (2018), that the "century of unbelief" that unfolded in the 1800s had done much to diminish the Church's influence and Russians' religiosity well before Bloody Sunday and the 1905 revolution.[18] It was not the first or necessarily most significant period of decline for the Orthodox Church, either. Indeed, the literary tradition and broader culture had come a long way from their earliest roots in religion, and it had already been for many intents and purposes secular since eighteenth-century authors like Radishchev and Karamzin published. Givens' assertion that Russian culture and literature was no more religious than any other country is difficult to understand, however.[19] Like many past investigations, such conclusions only make sense when taking as narrow of a definition of "religious" or "Orthodox" as possible, or in other words applying the rules

18 John Givens, *The Image of Christ in Russian Literature: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Bulgakov, Pasternak* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2018), 5.

19 Ibid.

of Christian dogma to concepts beyond just Christianity. As I will argue, religion was still unmistakably present in material culture, literature, politics, and the Russian identity despite the decline of its relevance and legitimacy. Orthodoxy's cultural hegemony is the target of Gor'kii and others' post-Christian rhetoric.

Nicholas II's legitimization of his reign via the name and institution of Orthodoxy is precisely what made religion a primary focus of the revolutionary movements. Though the Church itself played a smaller and smaller role with time, the tsar co-opted its role as spiritual leader and divine middleman. The façade of authority remained while power changed hands in the background. Marxism, the dominant form of socialist thought in the late Russian Empire, was dogmatically anti-religious; Sovietization of the philosophy produced political actors and movements just as, if not to an even greater extent, focused on Christianity (and its eradication from public life). Even the 1905 revolts demanded reform of state religion, finally wrestling from the tsar the freedom of to choose one's faith, which perhaps had been the Church's final firm grasp on authority other than the tsar himself. The following section examines Orthodoxy's precarious position in society as an imposed cultural institution with declining legitimacy in the eyes of the people from the eighteenth through the turn of the twentieth century. As I will attempt to show, during this period the Church's influence faced increasing competition from rising social and cultural movements as it attempted to hold on to its position as incumbent and the power to define the official state ideology and censorial propriety, among other privileges. Either Orthodoxy would remain the Russian Empire's water, so to speak, or there would be a sea change on the horizon.

The struggle for dominance between church and state began nearly two centuries before any revolution. For clarity, I have divided the relevant history into three timelines to highlight the impactful forces and events that gradually chipped away at the Russian Orthodox Church's influence during this

period: restrictions of the Church's scope of political power in favor of the tsar, cultural and identity tumult among Russians, and the tsar's delegitimization as a political and spiritual leader. These are concurrent timelines, not successive, and thus their effects are additive and interactive. It is far from an exhaustive list, but these narratives collectively represent the most important transformations in the Russian Empire that contributed to its post-Christian secular turn following the turn of the twentieth century. Considering the stark difference in the position of the Church between 1700 and 1905, a more comprehensive list could be several volumes of history. The institution of Orthodoxy of Peter's time would never be able to recognize the pitiful puppet that was the Church at the end of the Empire, relegated to a useful façade under Nicholas.[20] The head of the Orthodox Church once had more power than the tsar, which is likely why some of the earliest reforms of church oversight happened after the 1701 death of Patriarch Adrian. Peter I, preparing for a war to capture the territory of his future St. Petersburg, had his eye on absolute power, and that meant taking on the Church. As Peter turned his battle campaign against Finland, he started the centuries-long campaign against religion for the power to rule the nation.

Political restriction of the Church's power is bookended by Peter's reforms (1710s) and Nicholas's signing of the freedom of religion after Bloody Sunday (1905). The first quarter of the eighteenth century was marked by sweeping changes to the structure of the Russian government. One of the most fundamental changes occurred in the lead up to the victory over the Finns. The creation of the Holy Synod in 1721 alongside the Senate codified and regulated the dual governments that had existed before and placed them both under his control. In the immediate term, Peter's position above the law and Lord elevated the tsar to unprecedented levels of power. He was able to change cultural norms like the beard tax and military regulations like clerical exceptions at the snap of a finger without

20 Vladimir Aleksandrovich Fëdorov, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' i gosudarstvo: Sinodal'nyi period 1700-1917*, Stranitsy rossiiskoi historii (Russkaia panorama, 2003), 209.

a patriarch or even God who could say otherwise. His successors used this reconfiguration of power repeatedly to degrade the official capacities of Church authorities. In 1764, Catherine II used this power to redistribute monasteries' material possessions and shut some down entirely. In the reign of her son, Pavel I (1796-1801) reallocated censorial powers from the Church to the state and began permitting Old Believers, a competitor to the official Church, to build their own houses of worship. Alexander I, Pavel's son, in 1816 transferred jurisdiction of social and behavioral regulation from the Church's judgment to the civil courts. Along with many other parts of society, Alexander II in his time on the throne (1855-1881) instituted myriad reforms restricting the Church's power, including matters related to education at local schools, further tolerance for Old Believers, property inheritance, and regulation of affairs at all organizational levels. Orthodoxy, as an institution, increasingly became relegated to official authority in a small, rigidly defined set of circumstances. The decisions of the Church mattered less and less to the public life of the Empire with each passing year.

Yet, religious identity was the topic in much of public life throughout the nineteenth century. In the wake of the previous century's western influences, time spent in the Patriotic War of 1812 against Napoleon, and an attempted revolution on the day of his coronation, a new era of Russian religious nationalism rose to its apogee under Nicholas I (1825-1855). His Ministry of National Education [*Ministerstvo narodnogo prosveshcheniia*], led by Count Sergei Uvarov, proposed a philosophy to reaffirm the hierarchy driving the Russian Empire, one which would ultimately drive it into the ground: "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" ["*Pravoslavie, Samoderzhavie, Narodnost'*"].[21] (The first Soviet successor to Uvarov as Minister of National Education would be Anatolii Lunacharskii, longtime friend of Gor'kii.) This slogan became known some decades later as Uvarov's "Theory of Official Nationality" [*Teoriia ofitsial'noi narodnosti*], a term coined in 1873 by literary historian Alexander

21 Lesley Chamberlain, *Ministry of Darkness: How Sergei Uvarov Created Conservative Modern Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

Pypin.[22] The formulation posited a perplexing order of priorities: though it was first, Orthodoxy was increasingly subservient to the second, the tsar's absolute authority, including over the operations of the Church. The remaining piece, nationality, which may also be translated as ethnicity or national character, beckons to something, though it is vague enough to apply to anything conceivably Russian. The result is blurred lines across several intersecting axes. In theory, the Orthodox religion was leading Uvarov's triumvirate, but both it and the secular mandate belonged to the tsar. Put slightly differently, no one came to God except through the Romanovs. All of their subjects, those making up the *narod*, would have to find themselves among the faithful hoping for salvation from their earthly existence.

Shortly following Uvarov's 1833 theory of national identity set in motion the greatly influential polemic with the Westernizers. The discourse, which unfolded between 1836 and the end of the 1860s, resulted in another schism in religious life and Russian identity. The collective title "Slavophiles" refers to a semi-organized group of thinkers and writers based in Moscow who emphasized conservatism and based Russianness primarily on the contents of Uvarov's Official Nationality, though that did not always confer agreement with Nicholas's actual policies. In their ranks were predominantly religious writers, historians, philosophers, and clergymen, but a few big names such as Dostoevskii, Gogol', and Tiutchev may be included in a list of their adherents. Opposite them were the Westernizers, a group of intellectuals who saw Russia's future largely in the civilizations of northwestern Europe. Much of their influence came from French and German Enlightenment thinkers, in particular. The Westernizers included many authors, publishers, philosophers, professors, and publicists of significant stature and clout in Russia at the time, including Vissarion Belinskii, Ivan Turgenev, Alexander Herzen, and others. As historian Peter Duncan details in his *Russian Messianism* (2000), the Slavophiles were deeply

22 Pypin, 1873, *Kharakteristiki literaturnykh mnenii ot dvatadtsatykh do piatidesiatykh godov*, appears in the chapter title "Glava II. Narodnost' ofitsial'naia."

interested in defining the *narod*.[23] Despite all that divides the Slavophiles and Westernizers, however, I assert that they share also their attention on the *narod* as a path forward.

The debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers did not invent the Russian identity crisis, but rather gave the population a clear decision to make. Duncan and others almost exclusively focus on the opinions dividing the two factions, and perhaps rightfully so, but in between analyses of opposing viewpoints and their minutiae, the topic of debate becomes vague. Each was a group of idealists that debated the nature of a better utopia for their country, and at the center of both desires was a collective laboring toward one ideal or another. Slavophiles upheld a fictionalized Orthodox community [*obshchina*] or pan-Slavic unity of the common folk with an optional tsar, while Westernizers championed romanticized socialist communes.[24] Regardless of individual political bent, nearly everyone saw the urgency in defining the Russian identity, and the primary task therein was organizing the *narod*. One of the few details they agreed on was the end of serfdom, allowing greater utilization of general labor.[25] Discourse spread through *The Muscovite [Moskvitianin]*, *The Contemporary [Sovremennik]*, and other political journals of the day expresses a growing concern about the fundamental social issues of Russia's body politic: "where are you heading, Russia?" to paraphrase the end of Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1844). As Isaiah Berlin describes, addressing this issue would become the primary function of the nascent intelligentsia, to whom he also attributes the 1917 revolution, emerging alongside the Slavophile-Westernizer debate.[26] This question of the *narod* asked the public to pick a future national configuration based on Russia's population, not its leader, as the public tried to understand who it was.

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23 Peter J. S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After* (Routledge, 2002), 20.

24 This is a gross oversimplification, but it hopefully shows the commonalities between the two opponents. Herzen is a notable exception.

25 William Wagner in Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Cornell University Press, 1989), 367, note 253.

26 Isaiah Berlin, "A Remarkable Decade," in *Russian Thinkers*, Second (Penguin Books, 2008), 131-132.

The political upheaval beginning in the 1860s gave these questions about identity a renewed tangibility while raising the stakes of political action. This additional pressure leads to the third timeline, the decline of the Russian throne's legitimacy and ability to exercise its power. As the Church becomes an organ of the government and the people engage in debates about Russia's future, eyes turn toward the tsar for answers. Alexander II took the throne in 1855 soon before Russia's definitive defeat in the Crimean War was formalized. The embarrassing loss, in addition to the resulting economic struggles, signaled just some of the many struggles he would face during his reign. The "Great Reformer," as Alexander became known, was also met repeatedly with great external and internal resistance despite his attempts at liberalizing the state. This trend would remain true through the end of the Russian Empire's existence. Around Alexander's ascension to the throne, the revolutionary movement began to take form, and members of the intelligentsia that evolved out of the Slavophile-Westernizer polemic filled its ranks. Anti-governmental sentiment had long been in the Russian air, most acutely in the capital St. Petersburg since the 1825 Decembrist Revolt, though never before as organized and articulate as in emerging populist groups [*narodnichestvo*] of the 1860s. In *Russian Populism: A History* (2022), historian Christopher Ely summarizes the movement as "the intelligentsia's attempt to envision a Russia that could transcend the divisions that defined it."[27] Ely's broad definition explicitly emphasizes the progressive intelligentsia's preoccupation with Russia's identity crisis as the catalyst for the populist and, by extension, later revolutionary movements. The divisions he speaks of are multitude: Slavophile-Westernizer, urban-rural, gentry-peasant, monarchist-collectivist, and even intelligentsia-*narod* itself. Interestingly, it implicitly reasserts transcendence, "religion" for my purposes, as the key to this crisis of self-understanding. Though uprisings of the second half of the nineteenth century were not religious, it was nonetheless consistently in the background.

27 Christopher Ely, *Russian Populism: A History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 8.

Though the populists started the season of tumult, they were not alone. In true Hegelian fashion, discontent and protest swung back and forth between anti-monarchist, the populists and socialists, and pro-monarchist, the religious nationalists and counter-reformists, factions. Divisions around the tsar's legitimacy, such as those along cultural and socioeconomic lines, play an increasingly visible and violent role in public life beginning with the seven assassination attempts, the final of which was successfully carried out in 1881 by the populist terror group The People's Will [*Narodnaia volia*]. The ascension of Alexander II's son, Alexander III, brought with it a renewed conservatism targeted at the perceived nihilism that killed the previous tsar. This period of counter-reforms reevaluated and pushed back against the Great Reformer's liberalizations throughout the country, but it was met with a more militant revolutionary wave, Marxism.[28] This policy change is summarized in Alexander III's proclamation "Manifesto on Unshakable Autocracy" [*Manifest nezyblemosti samoderzhaviia*] written shortly after the assassination by Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod. It outlines, in summary, a plan to fortify their power through the promotion of Russian traditional supremacism: Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and a feeble but surviving *narod*.[29] Like Uvarov's tripartite "Official Nationalism," Pobedonostsev hoped to retain as much power in the Church through the tsar, and, similar to the original, he would only be successful temporarily. Eventually, he will become the canary in the coal mine for Nicholas II. Before then, however, Alexander's tightening grip on power would continue to stoke the flames of division throughout the country.

Public discontent in the following decades drew from a multitude of social, economic, and political grievances held by the population under the Empire's final three tsars. The 1880s saw a resurgence of Russian religious nationalism as Alexander III expanded government power against minority ethnicities and religions, and in doing so was successful in quelling most protest throughout

28 Charles E. Timberlake and Donald W. Treadgold, *Religious and Secular Forces in Late Tsarist Russia: Essays in Honor of Donald W. Treadgold* (University of Washington Press, 1992), 20.

29 Duncan, *Russian Messianism*, 42.

his reign. There was a single assassination attempt in 1888, which did not immediately kill the tsar, but it marked the decline in Alexander's health that would ultimately lead to his death six years later. In that time, the tsar oversaw the disastrous 1891-1892 famine which caused the deaths of 400,000-650,000 people in the Volga region.[30] Though the tragedy was caused by natural phenomena more so than governmental incompetence, the death of over four percent of European Russia—a figure which does not include the additional deaths by illness—never left the minds of Russians.[31] The government's failed response has been described as the spark that reignited the revolutionary fervor that eventually led to Nicholas II's abdication of the throne.[32] The period of instability of Alexander's final years weakened the tsar's position in governance of the Empire, and Nicholas's continuous blunders did little to reverse that trend. Yet another instance of tsarist negligence with fatal consequences for the commoner happened on the day of his coronation in May 1896. The royal court set up a public reception in Khodynka Field outside of Moscow, to which hundreds of thousands of Russians flocked with the promise of gifts and food. When poor organization and insufficiently stocked buffets met the needy *narod*, a stampede killed anywhere from 1300 to 5000+ people according to various estimates.[33] While this bloodbath would have been enough of a stain on the coronation proceedings, Nicholas's response, which was to carry on as normal to his reception ball with foreign diplomats, sent victims and onlookers alike into an uproar. Like the famine, we can see the stampede at Khodynka echo throughout literature of the time, including Konstantin Bal'mont's "Our Tsar" (1906), Fëdor Sologub's "In the Crowd" (1907), Lev Tolstoi's "Khodynka" (1920), and Gor'kii's *The Life of Klim Samgin* (1936). The

30 Luke Kelly, "British Humanitarianism and the Russian Famine, 1891–2," *Historical Research* 89, no. 246 (2016): 824–45.

31 The famine struck a chord with those in the Russian intelligentsia. Vladimir Korolenko's essay cycle "In the Hungry Year" [V golodnyi god] (1893), Ivan Bunin's stories "On Another's Side" [Na chuzhoi storone] (1893) and "To the Edge of the World" [Na krai mira] (1894), and Nikolai Teleshov's "Bread and Salt" [Kleb-sol'] (1893) and "Moving On" [Samokhody] (1894) are a sample of literature that imprinted the tragedy of the famine onto Russian social consciousness.

32 Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The History of the Russian Revolution* (Viking, 1996), 15.

33 A.I. Utkin, "K voprosu o prichinakh padeniia samoderzhaviia" (Aktual'nye problemy istorii, Orekhovo-Zuevo: Gosudarstvennyi gumanitarno-tekhnologicheskii universitet, 2016).

tragedy continues to make an appearance in various artistic works of the twenty-first century as a great tragedy of the Russian people under the foot of Tsar Nicholas II.

The turn of the twentieth century also saw further internal strife and the destabilization of an increasing number of governmental and societal structures before violence engulfed urban Russia. Nicholas successfully broke up the major pro-revolution populist terror groups, but this lull in activity was only temporary as frustrations came to a head. The next major domestic disruption came as the first major pro-nationalist protests. in response to past anti-governmental political action and the tsar's failure to maintain his, and thus Orthodoxy's authority. Recent research in extreme nationalism like Stepanov (2020) and others has shown that radical monarchist groups, the most prominent of which were the so-called "Black Hundreds" [*chernosotentsy*] and "Union of Russian People" [*Soiuz russkogo naroda*], carried out vigilante justice for the traditional Russian way of life first in support of the Nicholas and, when even the tsar failed to sufficiently uphold the monarchist ideal, at all costs in support of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.[34] To these ends, conservatives and traditionalists spread their own terror in the streets of a divided Russia much like the populists of the 1860s-1880s did. The most notable manifestation of this expression of nationalism was the antisemitic pogroms that happened in a number of major cities. In the name of Orthodoxy, marauding groups stormed Jewish urban quarters and killed or destroyed whatever was in their path. The most notorious pogrom of the period is the 1903 multi-day terror brought to Kishinev in modern-day Moldova. Dozens of Jews were killed, hundreds were injured, and blocks of the city were razed by arson.[35] Once again, however, reactions to these horrors were preserved in the literature of the day, including one by Gor'kii himself. Now the tsar, his detractors, his supporters, and the groups in between have taken up arms for the right to dictate the Russian Empire's narrative of self.

34 S. A. Stepanov, "The Black Hundreds and the Russian Orthodox Clergy," *Russian Studies in History* 59, no. 1–2 (April 2, 2020): 124–36.

35 "Kishinev," in *Electronic Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 1988, https://eleven.co.il/diaspora/communities/12107/.

In the two centuries between the 1703 founding of Saint Petersburg, the beginning of modern Russia, and the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, the religious institutions of Russia suffered a great blow to their direct influence, but something undoubtedly remained in the people. However, historian Gregory Freeze notes that little changed in the public face of religion—that is, until Bloody Sunday in 1905, at least.[36] Perhaps more than ever, Russians needed an outlet for their religious impulses. As Laurie Manchester explains throughout her study on secular intelligentsia from clerical families, growing secularization of public life can heighten the importance of religious feeling for individuals, wherein it is "generalized or reoriented" and reincorporated into their lives.[37] I extend Manchester's argument to writers who preceded Gor'kii's own recasting of Christian narrative dogma. This final section offers a sample of the works that similarly took aspects of the Christian paradigm and secularized them for humor, social commentary, and personal expression. Briefly, I will outline the secular-yet-religious motivations/impulses of Russian Marxism, early revolutionary literature, the visual arts, and Orthodox scripture of the late-nineteenth century as a short history of the secularizing genre. Each of these predecessors echoes in the discussions of the other chapters of this dissertation. While each of these philosophical, anthropological, and artistic critiques may not have directly influenced the Gor'kii and the Capri circle, the proto-transpositions demonstrate that the Church's authority was fading while people looked elsewhere for their spiritual mana.

Scholars, philosophers, theologians, and others have long puzzled over the relationship between religion, especially Christianity, and Marxism. In theory, the two belong in separate realms of thought and therefore do not need to have any interaction. Simply put, Marxism is a system of understanding economic problems, while Christianity is a system of understanding theological problems. Moreover,

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36 Gregory Freeze, "Dechristianization of Holy Rus? Religious Observance in Vladimir Dioceses, 1900-1913," in *Orthodox Christianity in Imperial Russia: A Source Book on Lived Religion* (Indiana University Press, 2014), 209.

37 Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 8.

the mutual antagonism among the two philosophies' proponents problematizes any attempts to bring Christianity and Marxism closer together. Nonetheless many have set out to bring the ends of this political horseshoe into contact with each other. Much of this effort ultimately leads to the German anthropologist and philosopher of religion Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and his work *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*, 1841). Having prepared for the priesthood before studying under Hegel at the University of Berlin and renouncing Christianity for materialism, Feuerbach offers in his treatise an anthropocentric reformulation of God and religion:

> By his God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical. Whatever is God to a man, that is his heart and soul; and conversely, God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man—religion, the solemn unveiling of a man's hidden treasures, the revelation of his intimate thoughts, the open confession of his love secrets.[38]

Feuerbach's measured analysis of religion opens doors to further investigation because he finds value in the "self-consciousness of man" that religion fosters in adherents, which separates them from the brutes of nature.[39] The self-awareness of political philosophy (materialism) instead stands in for the supernatural power of prayer and other faith-based religious traditions, which do not interest Feuerbach in the slightest. This anthropological religion reached Gor'kii and his contemporaries through Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels themselves, who deeply engaged with Feuerbach while preparing their own writings.[40] Marxism from its origins was already concerned with "religion" and how it affected our conceptions of ourselves.

By that time, the exultation of humankind had been significantly Russified along with the rest of Marx's theories, as émigré religious and political philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev (1874–1948) attests in the epigraph above. In his essay collection *The Origins and Meaning of Russian Communism* (1937),

38 Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, His Gesammelte Werke, 5 (Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 12-13.
39 Ibid., 5.
40 Both philosophers have at least one work dedicated to Feuerbach: Marx's "Thesen über Feuerbach" (1845) and Engels' *Leudwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (1886). They co-wrote *Die deutsche Ideologie* (1846), a historical-materialist criticism of Feuerbach and other German "idealist" philosophy.

he goes as far as to argue that "Marxism is not just science and politics, but is also a faith, a religion. And on this basis its power is founded."[41] Belief in redemption of the proletariat forsaken by the state and society gradually took the place of a Christian religion, the leader of both found in the tsar. This was possible because Christianity and Marxism were not purely theological and economic theories. Marxism and Leninism, as it came to be, were accompanied by a moral system for self-other relationships, an absolute authority, a praiseworthy idol, an eschatology, foundational texts, and an array of other qualities that would compete with Christian beliefs and practices in the minds of the public. Numerous studies have discussed in detail the comparisons between Christianity and Marxism or Leninism, many of which are cited throughout this chapter. This is true in the most general sense, such as Andrew Collier's philosophical examination *Christianity and Marxism* (2001), as well in the most specific sense, such as *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (1983) by Nina Tumarkin. State-sponsored religion had stopped fulfilling the spiritual needs of the Russian Empire, and we can see Leninism (as well as the later Stalin cult of personality and present-day Russian Federation's restoration of relations with the Orthodox Church) as its successor in many facets of life.

Russian artists, especially writers, have used the Church and the Bible as objects of mockery and ridicule. A classic example is Alexander Pushkin's *The Gabrilead* [*Gavriiliada*], written in 1821 but unpublished in its entirety until 1917, a long poem that at once denigrates the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Lk. 1:26-38) and the tsar of the time, Alexander I. Pushkin's coded critique of the imperial leader further demonstrates that state and religion had been subsumed by the tsar himself. One major milestone in the development of the genre of Biblical transposition is Nikolai Chernyshevskii's utopian *What is to be Done? From Stories about New People* (1863), written while the author was in prison for agitating against the government. Chernyshevskii, as with many in this trend, came from a

41 Nikolai Berdiaev, *Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma* (Azbuka, 2018), 116.

clerical family, but Feuerbach was an equally strong influence.[42] A favorite of Lenin, other revolutionaries, and anyone who wanted to fit the New Soviet Person mold, the hastily written novel envisions a social revolution with modern young socialists in place of Christ, Mary, and the disciples. Christian typologies and symbols remain, however, both implicitly and explicitly. The heroine Vera Pavlova, whose name recalls faith [*vera*] and Saint Paul, takes on the role of Virgin Mary, who is called Chastity in the book. In the famous fourth dream, Vera is transfigured into a goddess while Chastity is anthropologized.[43] Even some Russian editions of the book have noted in the margins that the mysterious figure of Rakhmetov, while based on a real person, is shrouded in prophecy and linked to Judgment Day-like revolution.[44] The novel also features phrases borrowed directly from the Bible, such as "salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13), if none of the other examples were plain enough. Once called more important than Marx's *Capital* in inspiring the Bolshevik revolution, Chernyshevskii's *What is to Done?* was one of the first and strongest examples of how Christianity and socialist revolution came together in the arts.[45] In addition, there were also examples that spoke out against the Russian Orthodox Church directly.

In the visual arts, members of the troupe of "Itinerants" [*Peredvizhniki*], such as Il'ia Repin, Vasilii Perov, and Ivan Kramskoi, highlighted ordinary people's religious fervor and religious institutions' broken promises. Perov's *A Village's Easter Procession* (1861) shows the faithful *narod* leading Eastern celebrations outside a church while the priests fall over themselves drunk. Both Perov's *Tea Party in Mytishchi* [*Chaepitie v Mytishchakh*] (1862) and Repin's *Protodeacon* [*Protod'iakon*] (1877) feature obese, rosy-cheeked clerics who have clearly eaten more than their fair share of food and drink. To drive home the point, Perov contrasts the plump priest with an emaciated amputee

42 Derek Offord, "Dostoyevsky and Chernyshevsky," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 57, no. 4 (1979): 528.
43 William G. Wagner in Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 367, n. 253.
44 Soloman Reiser in Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevskii, *Chto Delat'?*, ed. Soloman Abramovich Reiser (Nauka, 1975), 860, n. 103.
45 J. Frank, "N. G. Chernyshevsky: A Russian Utopia," *Southern Review* 3 (1967), 68.

holding out his hand for crumbs. Repin's monumental *Procession in the Kursk Gubernate* (1883) shows officials towering over and beating a throng of pious commoners, lead by a pertinacious disabled boy. *Christ in the Desert* by Ivan Kramskoi depicts the Biblical Jesus in his forty days of wandering, but it is does not look like a Christ who can resist temptation: dejected eyes stare blankly downward, but they stay visible to show the sunken sockets that hold them; a face beaten by the elements expresses hopelessness and dejection; and tightly grasped hands point not to God but to the hard, gray rocks that surround. Kramskoi focuses on the humanity of the Son of God with no divinity to be found, much as Chernyshevskii anthropomorphized Chastity. A final example is Repin's *Before Confession* (1885), which was known as *Refusing Confession* during the Soviet years. It shows a populist revolutionary on the eve of execution, like many real people of Repin's day, who sits with his hands in his jacket while looking suspiciously at the priest offering the sacrament. Repin contrasts their systems of belief and elevates the revolutionary cause beyond the mortal concerns of the priest. The church is increasingly competing with belief systems for dominance over the soul of the nation and *narod*.

Upon realizing the importance of literature to Christianity, some authors decided to write their own. An underappreciated example of this literary reformulation is Vladimir Korolenko's "Makar's Dream (A Christmas Story)" [*Sviatochnyi rasskaz*] (1883), which predates Gor'kii's subtitled Christmas tale by over a decade. Korolenko was a publicist and writer who supported the revolutionary movement, serving several exiled sentences for his part, and considered Gor'kii a friend.[46] In the story, a young man dies and is undeservedly sent to hell because of a capricious, drunk priest who holds the keys to heaven. More than just a sharp rebuke of clerics' gluttony, we see elements of the secularizing doubt in God brought about by the question of evil, which Gor'kii discusses in length throughout his earlier works. The strongest example of rewriting the Christian tradition is undoubtedly Lev Tolstoi's

46 Anatolii Vasil'evich Lunacharskii, *Sobranie sochinenii. V 8-mi t. Literaturovedenie. Kritika. Estetika.*, vol. 2, 8 vols. (Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964), 20-21.

actual redrafting of the Bible to include only the New Testament Gospels with his own annotations. *The Unification and Translation of the Four Gospels* [*Soedinenie i perevod chetyrëkh Evangelii*], published first abroad 1891-1894 and finally in Russia for the first time in 1906, offers a meticulously annotated and reorganized version of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In the introduction, Tolstoi accuses the Church of dividing humanity along arbitrary dogmatic lines and propagating a "faith that is … not only just a lie, but an immoral deception" using Christ's teachings.[47] The most significant point Tolstoi makes in his reformulation is to deny Christ's resurrection. His motivation, that it muddles the Truth and may serve as a reason for disbelief in new followers, is an interesting theological position, but to focus on that would be to bury the lede. The most intriguing aspect of Tolstoi's conclusion is that God is only useful insofar as we can see ourselves in God as a human, that omnipotence and other supernatural qualities of the divine are of little worth to the average person. This radical disagreement over God's humanity and humanity's divinity put Tolstoi on trial excommunication from the Church in 1901. Despite public outcry, Tolstoi and his supporters lost the case, but, in all likelihood, the Church lost much more in the long term.

47 Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenie. Proizvedeniia 1880-1884*, vol. 24, 90 vols. (Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1957), 10. "И вот изучение это привело меня к убеждению, что та вера, которую исповедует наша иерархия и которой она учит народ, есть не только ложь, но и безнравственный обман."

Chapter 2:
Confronting Evil with Inverted Christian Narratives
in Gor'kii's Early Writing (1892-1902)

> "I know nothing greater, more complex, or more interesting than a person. He is everything. He created even God. Art is but one of the greatest manifestations of his creative spirit, and therefore it is just a part of a person."
> - Gor'kii in a letter to Il'ia Repin, dated December 5, 1899[48]

> "I therefore 'bow' before humanity because, except for realizations of reason, imagination, conjecture, I do not feel or see anything in our world. God is the same kind of human invention as, for example, 'photography' with the difference that a 'photograph' captures what truly exists, but God is a snapshot of a person imagining himself as a being who wants to be—and maybe can be—omniscient, omnipotent, and completely just."
> - Gor'kii in "On How I Learned to Write" (1928)[49]

In the final decade of his life, after nearly a half-century of unparalleled success in Russia and abroad, Gor'kii reflected on his childhood and formative experiences in the essay "On How I Learned to Write" ["O *tom, kak ia uchilsia pisat'"*] (1928). There he responds to readers' curiosity about his earliest literary influences, which included, beyond the two major nineteenth-century literary figures, Dickens and Chekhov, the Bible. Using the Christian Holy Scriptures as a pedagogical tool for literacy and grammar education was common in the theocratic Russian Empire, and thus Gor'kii's familiarity or even admiration of the Christian scriptures could be explained and—if so desired, dismissed—as a carryover from childhood. However, coming from a reputed cultural icon of the Communist Party,

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48 Maksim Gor'kii, *Polnoe sobranie sochienii: Khudozhestvennye proizvedeniia v dvatsati piati tomakh*, 25 vols. (Nauka, 1968, hereafter "PSS"), vol. 1, 377. "Я не знаю ничего лучше, сложнее, интереснее человека. Он — всё. Он создал даже бога. Искусство же есть только одно из высоких проявлений его творческого духа, и поэтому оно лишь часть человека."

49 Maksim Gor'kii, *M. Gor'kii o literature*, ed. I. Mikhailova (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1961), 405. "Пред человеком я потому «преклоняюсь», что, кроме воплощений его разума, его воображения, его домысла,- не чувствую и не вижу ничего в нашем мире. Бог есть такая же человечья выдумка, как, например, - «светопись», с той разницей, что «фотография» фиксирует действительно сущее, а бог - снимок с выдумки человека о себе самом как о существе, которое хочет - и может - быть всезнающим, всемогущим и совершенно справедливым."

Gor'kii framing his own experiences through Biblical narratives indicates an ongoing, indeed lifelong interest, one that may surprise his readers. The author's anecdotes could perhaps be attributed to childish imagination and considered irrelevant to the present, if one ardently sought to make sense of them within the Party's ideological bounds. Plausible deniability cannot explain everything, however. The most puzzling component of his essay "On How I Learned To Write" is his coda, when–apropos of nothing—the sixty-year-old writer ends his essay with a brief theological treatise on the "sacred" [*sviashchennyi*].

> And if we must speak about what is "sacred," then sacred is only a person's discontent with himself and his desire to be better than he is; sacred is his hatred for all sorts of common nonsense he created; sacred is his desire to eliminate envy, greed, crime, illness, war, and all harm among people; and sacred is his labor.[50]

Presumably, the quotes are referencing one or several past correspondences with fans. One is left to ponder what significance the "sacred" had for the author such that it would make him conclude his open letter to Soviet society with this impassioned non-sequitur, which was neither his first nor his last digression on the "sacred" and similar topics.

Why did Gor'kii, despite his persistent rejection of the Russian Orthodox Church, Christianity, religion, and (the Christian) God more broadly, so often return to the question of the divine? A most personal statement, this essay is only one late instance of Gor'kii steering secular conversations into the realms of faith and creed. Throughout a lifetime of atheism in his Orthodox cultural context, these and other spiritual concepts consistently appealed to at least one part of him: the impulse to remake the world he inherited into one that contemporary needs for a meaningful, dignified life. He read these values into Christian narratives and linguistic artifacts, and the effects of this thinking made an imprint on his writing until the end of his life. Disgust for the Russian Empire's sociopolitical status quo built

50 Gor'kii, *M. Gor'kii o literature*, 488. "И если уж надобно говорить о «священном»,- так священно только недовольство человека самим собою и его стремление быть лучше, чем он есть; священна его ненависть ко всякому житейскому хламу, созданному им же самим; священно его желание уничтожить на земле зависть, жадность, преступления, болезни, войны и всякую вражду среди людей, священ его труд."

on the power of the Orthodox Church motivated Gor'kii's desire to replace the sanctity of God once found in the traditional Russian Orthodox "sacred" with a materially and spiritually productive ethic for the masses. Offended by the failure of the Orthodox Church and its dogma to deliver sustenance, Gor'kii worked his whole life to redefine an inherited "sacred" in terms of revolutionary secular human ideals by recreating their literary embodiment, the new savior in new parables. Through his narratives Gor'kii recreated meaningful and coherent responses to the questions that religion once answered; he responded to the moral vacuum he saw in contemporary society by using the vocabulary, structures, and characters of traditional Christianity in order to replace its decadent, ineffective vestiges present in turn-of-the-century Russian society. From the beginning of this lifelong effort, Gor'kii relies on what he knows best, his reading, writing, and spiritual education—all closely interrelated—to frame his response to nearly a millennium of religious history and tradition. "If we must speak of the sacred," Gor'kii asks and answers his own question in one fell swoop. Indeed, we must.

This chapter investigates how Gor'kii's religious sensibilities evolved in light of his growing rejection of institutional religion. It explores how his works published between 1892 and 1904 anticipate what I call his post-Christian paradigm shift found in works written after the 1905 revolution. In order to do so, the present study builds on previous scholars' analyses of Gor'kii's biography with an explanation of how the individual Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov became the public multifaceted author and thinker Maksim Gor'kii who consistently rebelled against the environment into which he found himself. The writer's formative period lasted roughly a decade, the point marked by the formation of his definitive and sufficiently expressive style that would feature so importantly in *Mother* (1906/7) and later works through the Capri period (1907-1914). I take my conclusions about this transition from his changing depictions of people both in their material being and ideal aspirations. As noted in his quote from an 1899 letter to the painter Repin, there was little more captivating to Gor'kii than humanity and its ability to think, act, and create. This chapter examines his body of work before

1905 for its contribution to discourse about the anthropocentric sociopolitical, spiritual, and ethical issues that occupied Gor'kii. The post-Christian transpositions, which reformulated Christian narratives to discuss these looming humanistic questions, in this period are rudimentary. Nonetheless, they exhibit a clear arc of philosophical and literary maturation in the young author as he attempted to break free from inherited institutional passivity to improve his and others' future.

Approximately a dozen stories and novels written and published from 1892 to 1902 inform my observations on the psychological, ethical, and stylistic development Gor'kii underwent in his early career. I have divided his transpositions into a small number of categories: playful satires, critical re-imaginations, and theological expositions. This thematic trajectory roughly maps onto the present and following two chapters. Satire of familiar Christian genres, such as that found in "About the Boy and Girl Who Didn't Freeze to Death" ["*O mal'chike i devushke, kotorye ne zamerzli"*] (1894), "On the Rafts" ["*Na plotakh"*] (1895), and "Christmas Stories (A Christmas Story) [*Rozhdestvennye rasskazy (Rozhdestvennyi rasskaz)*] (1898), inverts Christmas and Easter stories' motifs to contrast the traditionally uplifting messages with the historically aloof indifference of the Church. Other works like "The Girl and Death: A Story" ["*Devushka i Smert': Skazka"*] (1892) and "Cain and Artëm" ["*Kain i Artëm"*] (1899) are jocular at times, but these works are more meaningful when viewed as critical re-imaginations of a particular part of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, for Gor'kii's circumstances. His reformulations discuss some of most fundamental human phenomena, like love, hate, and death. Finally, I examine Gor'kii's most serious works of that time, the story "Former People" [*Byvshie liudi*] (1897) and the novels *Foma Gordeev* (1899) and *The Three* [*Troe*] (1900). These philosophical, even theological narratives became the means by which Gor'kii posited questions about in search of something to call "God" in earnest. More complex and mature in their aim, these works incorporate recognizably Biblical yet notably transformed narratives and figures as Gor'kii begins to articulate his opinions about God's place in his world. The texts retell the Christ myth in such a way that both sets a

standard for exemplariness (divinity) and embodies them in an average Russian person, hinting at the divine *narod* of future works..

In order to understand any Christian influence in his early works, this chapter examines Gor'kii's autobiography, fiction, and personal letters for the use—with a creative license—of Christian literature broadly understood. I call the relationship between the source text (the Bible, hagiographies, Church Fathers' writings) and Gor'kii's texts a "transposition," a conceptual instrument that considers the sources' ideological and literary fabric in juxtaposition with the sociological context of the fiction works. Close reading of Gor'kii's works supported by biblical exegesis illuminates the nuanced application and significance of each borrowed textual component. This technique of highlighting transposition components in various works builds toward a nearly complete example of a transposition, which the next chapters on Gor'kii's "godbuilding" novels Mother and Confession (1908) examine in its entirety. Revisiting his early works for signs of the post-Christian paradigm shift demonstrates the increasing complexity and importance of transposing traditional Christian literature as the author came to find his own renowned style and personal convictions for the future he wanted.

Literature Review

A review of literature on pre-1906 works demonstrates that Gor'kii's relationship with his Christian heritage is an under-examined question, originally for political and ideological reasons. Until the fall of the Soviet Union, published critics took Gor'kii at his word about being an atheist, ignoring the explicit references to Christian doctrine and literature in his works, not even to mention the more subtle elements.[51] Naturally, the officially atheist Soviet critical apparatus had no interest in shining a light on the "religious impulse" of one of their most lauded, larger-than-life cultural leaders. For as long as the Communist Party controlled the image of Gor'kii through concerted propaganda and physical access to

51 A. M. Korokotina, "M. Gor'kii v sovetskoi kritike 20-x godov (Problema tvorcheskogo metoda)," in *Problemy metoda i genra*, vol. 7 (Izdatel'stvo tomskogo universiteta, 1980), 57-58.

historical materials, he would be considered from an atheist, if not antitheist, point of view. Without the need to propagate a strictly atheist Gor'kii, modern scholars have begun laying down the pieces for a clear picture of his spiritual side.

Post-Soviet scholarly investigations have begun to examine Gor'kii's allusions to Orthodoxy. However, the secular context in which those allusions appear often leads critics to miss their content and significance. Russian and Western critics alike repeatedly take issue with bringing traditional Christianity into conversations about Gor'kii. Biographers and historians are persuaded by his vocal rejection of the Church, literary scholars see allusions to Christianity only in a handful of works, and theologians are baffled by Gor'kii's confrontations with God. They have focused on the literary-intellectual relationships between Gor'kii and Nietzsche, godbuilding theorists Bogdanov and Lunacharskii, and other thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is true that Gor'kii aligns with these other thinkers. However, as I will argue, past studies on Gor'kii's religious sensibilities have failed to see the forest for the trees. Understanding the gestalt of his works' response to religion and God requires an interdisciplinary approach toward the author's life, works, and worldview.

Biographies about the writer leave the impression that Gor'kii eschewed traditional religion and the question of God more or less entirely both before and after writing *Mother.* Accounts by Pavel Basinskii (2006) and Dmitrii Bykov (2008), while thorough, restrict any mention of Christianity or any theistic thought to Gor'kii's childhood, when his grandparents compelled him to attend church, and to the aberrant period 1906-1908 when he was writing *Mother* and *Confession*. Basinskii asserts that Gor'kii ceased searching for God after his maternal grandparents died in 1887, after which no aspect of Christianity remained with the exception of those references in *Mother.*[52] Barry Scherr (2009), too, argues there was no part of Christianity that remained with Gor'kii following his rejection of the

52 Pavel Basinskii, *Gor'kii*, 2nd ed. (Molodaia gvardiia, 2006), 180.

grandparents' "approaches to religion" and God.[53] Even from scholars with a more capacious definition of religion and faith, like Lidiia Spiridonova in her comprehensive and insightful study *Nastoiashchii Gor'kii: Mify i real'nost'* (2013), recognition of a belief system outside historical materialism in Gor'kii is yet to be found. Spiridonova accurately highlights the concept of human divinity [*chelovekobozhie*] found in a handful of works, but she considers neither the early stories in which religion plays a role nor Christianity itself as a potential source for Gor'kii's model characters, once again save *Mother.* This chapter argues that Gor'kii was relentlessly occupied with what to do with Christianity and God, even in his non-Christian ideal world. In doing so, I will argue that Gor'kii not only sought a relationship with something called "God," he also used Christianity as a yardstick by which he could measure his replacement for Christ, who eventually became the model worker-citizen.

My approach is grounded in the conclusion that Gor'kii grew up in an Orthodox setting and thus possessed the same cultural knowledge as any bona fide true believer. For that reason, I agree with Igor Uriupin's (2015) claim that Gor'kii, like his contemporaries, relied on the "foundation of Christian axiology" as a way to find his bearings in the novel system of meaning he was creating.[54] My approach will expand Uriupin's observation about a single story, "The Matter with the Clasps" [*"Delo s zastëzhkami"*] (1905) and demonstrate that Gor'kii created his image of the model post-Christian comrade with sincere consideration of the Christian savior, clearly intending to supplant it. While I will not address point-by-point scholars' claims that philosophers like Nietzsche, Bogdanov, and Lunacharskii impacted Gor'kii's observations about the world, my argument that Gor'kii was foremost influenced by Christian paradigms will be more comprehensive and less circumstantial than previous explanations. It is important at this juncture to note that this discussion is not about Gor'kii,

53 Barry P. Scherr, "Godbuilding Redux: The Religious Impulse in Gorky's Childhood," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 2008/2009 (2009), 227-228.

54 I.S. Uriupin, "Novozavetnyi tekst v rasskaze M. Gor'kogo «Delo s zastezhnikami» k voprosu o khristianskom gumanizme v tvorchestve pisatelia," in *Maksim Gor'kii: Pro et Contra* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2018), 449-450.

Lunacharskii, and Bogdanov's "godbuilding" philosophy per se. There are numerous existing studies about the ephemeral movement that, although Gor'kii coined the name, belonged more to Lunacharskii and Bogdanov than Gor'kii. It is undeniable that Gor'kii participated briefly in godbuilding, though this chapter seeks to establish that well before *Confession* Gor'kii had his own concept of both God and the builders. What follows is not an attempt to dissuade readers from considering Gor'kii as an influential part of the godbuilding cadre. Rather, the present argument demonstrates that Gor'kii was, above all, responding to his Christian surroundings not just with a new concept for a supreme deity but with a new paradigm to replace Christianity as a sociological foundation. I will demonstrate that, as Igor' Uriupin claims, Gor'kii's characters were always searching for that "divine answer" [*bozhestvennyi otvet*].[55] In contrast to Uriupin, however, I intend to show that Gor'kii's works depict more than the pigeonholed Christ-like barefoot wanderer [*bosiak*]. Instead, they intend to replace institutions founded on traditional Christianity with a more relatable and useful exemplar.

The scholarly arch toward asking religious questions is a part of a slow evolution out of a post-Enlightenment tradition with an analytical theoretical framework. Since at least the 1980s, Gor'kii's Danko in "Old Woman Izergil'", "The Reader", and other characters have been traced back to Friedrich Nietzsche.[56] I believe this comparison only partially explains Gor'kii's worldview for a number of reasons. A few, such as Irene Masing-Delic (1992), have supported the claim that Gor'kii's characterization rejected more than adapted Nietzsche's superman in favor of a divine savior, but each has neglected to say why.[57] In summary, given the fact that Gor'kii agrees with the majority of what is available in his writings, I will show that Nietzsche's Übermensch, while fulfilling some of Gor'kii's

55 Ibid., 449.

56 For example, Hans Günther, *Der Sozialistische Übermensch: M. Gor'kij und Der Sowjetische Heldenmythos* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1993); Barry P. Scherr, "Godbuilding Redux: The Religious Impulse in Gorky's Childhood," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 2008/2009 (2009); Jutta Scherrer, "Maxim Gorky as Spokesman for Proletarian Humanism," in *Stalin Era Intellectuals*, 1st Edition (London: Routledge, 2022), 136–55.

57 Irene Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1992), 124.

spiritual needs, would not have actually prospered in the Russian author's proposed paradigm described in his literature. First, Gor'kii's heroes of this period live with the moral worldview that favors the collective over the individual to the point that others' needs eclipses an individual's freedoms. Progress toward their respective goals, vital for both Nietzsche and Gor'kii, occurs on different levels. In Gor'kii's stories, change is discussed on a societal level, whereas the individual is Nietzsche's focus. Second, at the same time, Gor'kii refuses to divide humanity into categories of power in order to remove any responsibility for humane treatment of individuals. Unlike Nietzsche, Gor'kii saw an inherent value in each and every person that did not need to be attained through actualization. Rather, his critique of power shone through in individual characters' inattention to the welfare of the less powerful. Third, Gor'kii saw religious feeling, despite its failures in reality, as an inextricable aspect of human nature. This is different from praising or even approving of religion as he understood it, but it does include borrowing metaphysical elements from extant religious traditions. Gor'kii never fully divorced his own savior than the one he was taught in Church. Ultimately, as Clark and Spiridonova once hypothesized, I will prove that the author wrote his heroes into a Christian narrative, including—but not limited to—the lives of saints.[58] The question of a new type of person propelled both Gor'kii and Nietzsche, but they went about answering that question with crucially different values and foci.

Growing up with Grandmother, Grandfather, and God

Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov, who would one day adapt the pseudonym Maksim Gor'kii, was born March 28, 1868 [N.S.] to the son of an Imperial Army officer and daughter of a local businessman in the dye industry. Aleksei's father, Maksim Savvat'evich, came from the provinces around Perm' to Nizhnii Novgorod in order to make a living. He and his wife, Varvara Vasil'evna (née Kashirina), married in October 1863, but only after the Kashirin family was convinced with the help of Aleksei's

58 Lidiia Alekseevna Spiridonova, *Nastoiashchii Gor'kii: Mify i real'nost'* (IMLI RAN, 2013), 13-14; Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Indiana University Press, 1981), 6.

maternal grandmother, Akulina Ivanovna, that the young man from the countryside would be a suitable husband for their youngest daughter (of ten total children). Maksim proved himself worthy and became a profitable carpenter shortly after his relocation, though he would not live long enough to find any great success. His and Varvara's first three children did not survive. The fourth born and only child to live into adulthood would be Aleksei.[59] Like all of his relatives before him, Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov was baptized in the Russian Orthodox faith on his fortieth day of life. He would carry that religious heritage in one form or another through all of his sixty-eight fascinating years of life.

Little is known about the Peshkovs compared to the Kashirins, and the reason for that likely comes down to location, temperament, and time in relation to Aleksei. In addition to being geographically closer to Gor'kii's maternal family, the men of his father's family were infamously violent. Gor'kii learned in childhood that, for example, his paternal grandfather once set dogs on his son, Gor'kii's father, as a punishment.[60] It is unknown if this event occurred before or after Savvatii Peshkov received the equivalent of a dishonorable discharge from the army after getting into a quarrel with his subordinates. In any case, it is clear from what little we do know about that side of the family that it was not an environment conducive to raising children. Another significant reason for the knowledge gap is that Gor'kii never got to know his father personally. In 1871, Maksim Savvat'evich died after a lengthy battle with cholera, which was originally contracted from his three-year-old son, Aleksei. From Gor'kii's retelling of his childhood, we may assume that Maksim Savvat'evich was not like his own father at all, which allowed him to marry into the respected Kashirin family in the first place. Particularly after the death of his father, the young Aleksei was raised by the Kashirins until the age of 12, when he was sent away to earn his own living "amongst the people" [*V liudiakh*, the second of his autobiographical trilogy], having completed only four years of schooling.[61] As a consequence, his

59 Evgenii Nikitin, *Sem' zhiznei Maksima Gor'kogo*, Imena (DEKOM, 2017), 13-22.
60 Nikitin, *Sem zhiznei Maksima Gor'kogo*, 15.
61 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 15, 204.

maternal grandmother and grandfather, who were also his godparents, exerted the most significant influence on the child. However, there remains much to investigate about the role that the Peshkovs played in his life. As an adult, despite lofty ideals of love akin to his grandmother, Gor'kii exhibits a destructive force deeply reminiscent of his paternal grandfather. Within Gor'kii two contradictory bloodlines and two conflicting worlds were born and would follow him throughout his career.

As his godparents, the Kashirins were responsible for Aleksei's spiritual education, and they took that charge seriously. The boy ended up in their household after his father's passing from cholera and his mother's subsequent estrangement from the lone child. Seemingly unable to cope with the responsibility, Varvara abdicated her responsibilities and left her son to her parents to raise. The godparents' took widely differing approaches to instilling Aleksei with the values they found most important. In his godmother, Akulina Ivanovna, he found the mercy and forgiveness emphasized in the New Testament.[62] His godfather, Vasilii Vasil'evich, taught him, on the other hand, the authority, laws, and enforcement embodied in the God of the Old Testament.[63] I am not the first to make such distinctions. Both Scherr and Basinskii have already noted the disparate impressions of God provided by each Gor'kii's maternal grandmother and grandfather. I join Barry Scherr in explaining young Aleksei's interactions with his grandparents as spiritually significant, but I disagree with his claim that Gor'kii rejected both his grandmother and grandfather's approaches to religion.[64] Rather, in support of Lidiia Spiridonova's hypothesis of inclusion, I show how each grandparent's philosophies would become part of Aleksei's and thus Gor'kii's future religious sensibilities.[65] In fact, as fate would have it, Aleksei may have never become Gor'kii if not for these particular individuals as godparents.

62 For example, Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 15, 85-86.
63 E.g., Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 15, 91.
64 Scherr, "Godbuilding Redux," 233.
65 Lidiia Alekseevna Spiridonova, "Tvorchestvo Gor'kogo i vozniknovenie sotsialisticheskogo realizma," ed. D. K. Bogatyrëv (Izdatel'stvo Russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2018), 9.

What came to form his sense of discipline Gor'kii saw first in Vasilii Vasil'evich's unrelenting observance of Orthodox tradition. Until his death, the grandfather represented to young Gor'kii the lawful order of experience and the brutality that would punish transgressors. More than once does Gor'kii remark on Kashirin's authoritarian approach to God and religious education. Consider, for example, a recollection in *Childhood*, in which Vasilii Vasil'evich compares the young Gor'kii himself characters from an Old Testament story.

> Quickly I was already reading the Psalter about the warehouses; usually we did this after evening tea, and each time I was supposed to finish reading the psalm.
> "Bee, ell, eh, bleh; ess, ess, bless; ed, blessed," I spat out, dragging my finger across the page, and out of boredom I asked,
> "Blessed is the man, is that uncle Iakov?"
> "How about I crack you on the back of your head and you'll find out which man is blessed," grandfather said angrily snorting, but I felt that he was angry just out of habit, for order. And I was almost never wrong: after a minute, apparently having forgotten about me, he grumbled, "W-yeah, playing and singing he's King David, but when it comes to business, he's poisoned by Absalom."[66]

Absalom, a figure of rabbinic literature more often than Christian literature, appears in verses 13 through 18 of the Second Book of Samuel, often titled in the West as "Kingdoms" or "Kings". The young prince is most popularly known for murdering his sister's sexual assailant before rebelling against his father, King David, an act that quickly resulted in his death. Rather than a death of retribution, however, 2 Samuel tells the story of a death of propriety, for it was David's soldiers who, disobeying orders and acting upon their own sense of justice, killed Absalom. This quote, a transposition of Biblical narrative itself, about his grandfather offers insight into the lessons of moral authority Gor'kii learned from Christianity as embodied by his godfather and the God of the Old

66 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 15, 70-71. "Вскоре я уже читал по складам Псалтырь; обыкновенно этим занимались после вечернего чая, и каждый раз я должен был прочитать псалом. -- Буки-люди-аз-ла-бла; живе-те-иже-же блаже; наш-ер-блажен, -- выговаривал я, водя указкой по странице, и от скуки спрашивал: -- Блажен муж, -- это дядя Яков? -- Вот я тресну тебя по затылку, ты и поймешь, кто блажен муж! -- сердито фыркая, говорил дед, но я чувствовал, что он сердится только по привычке, для порядка. И почти никогда не ошибался: через минуту дед, видимо, забыв обо мне, ворчал: -- Н-да, по игре да песням он -- царь Давид, а по делам -- Авессалом ядовит!"

Testament. Several years after the fact, Gor'kii connects all at once in this passage the literary utility of the Bible, his zealous and aggressive grandfather, and the authority found within both sources.

Aleksei's practice reading, though mentioned only briefly, also offers important information about Gor'kii's understanding of religion. The Book of Psalms played a highly influential role in the formation of Gor'kii's literary and spiritual education, as seen in his reference to the verses even in the excerpt from his 1928 statement above. Quotes from the Psalter appear throughout Gor'kii's works, but no single part of the book or perhaps even of the entire Bible appears more commonly than the words he quotes here. Sounding out the letters of the first word, Aleksei reads "Blessed is the man," the initial words (just two in Russian: бла́жен муж [*blázhen muzh*]) of Psalms 1:1 and a symbolic phrase for Gor'kii. The Psalter is undoubtedly connected to Vasilii Vasil'evich for the boy Aleksei and later the writer Gor'kii, for it was his grandfather who drilled the Psalms with him, particularly the first verse. The text itself holds significance as well. The full sentence (spanning Ps. 1:1-2) reads "Blessed is the man, who does not seek the counsel of the dishonest, does not stand on the path of sinners and does not sit in the company of those who corrupt, but whose will is in the law of the Lord and about the Lord's law ponders day and night!"[67] The meaning of Psalms 1 is in defining moral righteousness by the nature of thought, will, and action. Blessed are the obedient, those who are not "like dust that can be swept by the wind from the face of the Earth," explains Psalms 1:4. For Vasilii Vasil'evich, this obedience likely recognized God above all others, but in the context of teaching Aleksei to read, the imminent authority was ultimately himself. Disobedience, even in the form of a naive question, invited

67 Блажен муж, который не ходит на совет нечестивых и не стоит на пути грешных и не сидит в собрании развратителей, но в законе Господа воля его, и о законе Его размышляет он день и ночь!

punishment.[68] For Aleksei and eventually Gor'kii, Psalm 1 set the precedent for dividing people into moral and immoral, and Vasilii Vasil'evich, the precedent for making that morality one's own.

What good Gor'kii would come to see in humanity was primarily observed in the God that his grandmother, Akulina Ivanovna, described in their conversations. In contrast to the punitive God of the Old Testament, the grandmother's God was the Christ of the New Testament. Readers alongside Aleksei can observe the grandmother's affinity toward the merciful and intimately familiar God in her prayers as well as her indirect descriptions found within wistful stories and wandering melodic conversations with the deity. Akulina, unlike Vasilii, actually prays to Christ in particular when she asks for divine protection.[69] The grandfather, when actually heard praying, never mentions Christ by name, but instead always addresses God the Father. More than just to whom his grandparents pray, young Aleksei notices in his grandmother's words and actions that God is more than a source of law and order. In a way, the boy comes to see God as a friend, both for the emotional support and as someone not too dissimilar to Aleksei himself.

This relationship between Aleksei and a kind God takes form after an episode of childish indiscretion that Gor'kii describes in Chapter 7 of *Childhood*. He begins saying that he "very early on understood that grandfather had one God, but grandmother had another."[70] His path to understanding his grandmother's concept of God began with his decision to take revenge on his grandparents' neighbor, who, having picked a fight with first Vasilii Vasil'evich, involved Akulina Ivanovna in the quarrel with verbal insults and a projectile carrot launched in her direction. Aleksei stalked and waited for the tavern owner to descend into her cellar to grab something, at which point he locked her in the

68 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 15, 91. "Всяк, нарушающий непослушанием законы божии, наказан будет горем и погибелью! постукивая костями тонких пальцев по столу, внушал он. Мне было трудно поверить в жестокость бога. Я подозревал, что дед нарочно придумывает всё это, чтобы внушить мне страх не пред богом, а пред ним. И я откровенно спрашивал его: Это ты говоришь, чтобы я слушался тебя? А он так же откровенно отвечал: Ну, конешно! Ещё бы не слушался ты?!"

69 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 15, 86.

70 Ibid.

underground room, danced triumphantly on the door, and literally threw away the key onto a nearby roof. However, Akulina, in spite of her personal feelings, marched Aleksei back to the neighbors' residence to retrieve the key and liberate his prisoner of war.[71] The incident ended with laughter from both the grandmother and neighbor, perplexing Aleksei and upsetting his righteous vindictiveness likely learned from Vasilii Vasil'evich. Instead, Akulina Ivanovna creates out of this chaos a lesson in knowing God. Despite what may seem black-and-white, she explains, not even God can always answer who is more righteous among the fallen and sinful adults who wage such petty conflicts. What God feels most of all, according to the grandmother, is sorrow and pity for those who engage in such senseless matters. After her brief homily, Akulina Ivanovna goes to the corner to pray with eyes full of tears, presumably for her grandson and godson, having sinned in her name.

One piece of their conversation sticks out more than others, namely the question that Aleksei poses to his grandmother: "Does God really not know everything?" Her reply, if we are to believe historical actuality conveyed in the autobiographical novel, had permanent and resounding effects on Gor'kii, his career, and the worldview behind his writings. She says to Aleksei:

> "If [God] did know everything, then people likely would not be doing so much. He, hope oh Father, is looking from Heaven onto the Earth, on all of us, and at another minute how he will cry, how he will weep: 'You are my people, my people, my dear people. Oh, how sorry I am for you.'".[72]

Her—rather heretical—response left its imprint on her grandson's spirituality. It very well could be the primary reason for Gor'kii's resilient theism, albeit unusual. The grandmother's focus on the fallible humanity of God and Christ disrupted the image of God as an authoritarian enforcer of anachronistic laws. The shift brought the divine much closer to Aleksei's intellectual and emotional, or, "From that moment, her God became even closer and clearer to [him]," as Gor'kii himself says.[73] This watershed

71 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 15, 88.

72 Ibid. "Кабы всё-то знал, так бы многого, поди, люди-то не делали бы. Он, чай, батюшка, глядит-глядит с небеси-то на землю,— на всех нас, да в иную минуту как восплачет да как возрыдает: «Люди вы мои, люди, ми лые мои люди! Ох, как мне вас жалко!»"

73 Ibid. "С той поры ее бог стал еще ближе и понятней мне."

moment for Aleksei and Gor'kii's religious thinking could also provide further evidence for Mikhail Agurskii's claim that "Gor'kii's religious thinking can be understood only within the framework of Christian heretical thought."[74] However, this origin story would go much further back in Gor'kii's development than the author's exploration of modernist philosophy in the 1900s.

We know from repeated renunciations of Russian Orthodoxy that the author decidedly rejected the traditional institutions underpinning both grandparents' religious sensibilities. His motivation to oppose the Church and its traditions is one question that deserves careful consideration. It is worth briefly mentioning beforehand that young Aleksei walked away from the Orthodox Church with a wealth of knowledge about its texts, rituals, and history. Later in life, that knowledge would inform his anti-institutional views and themes found in stories and novels. In childhood, however, his religious education extended beyond stories from his grandparents. Interactions with the priests in the local Church-run school show that Aleksei possessed a deep knowledge of Christian literature, including the Bible, hagiographies, and church writings. Gor'kii recalls an exchange with Bishop Khrisanf in the schoolyard shortly after learning the headmaster intended to expel young Aleksei for poor behavior. The story retells their brief conversation like that of the manna from heaven. Khrisanf was so impressed with Aleksei's knowledge of the Sacred History [*Sviashchennaia istoriia*]—despite not having read it)—the Psalter and other parts of the Bible, and saints' lives like that of Saint Alexius of Rome (known as *Aleksei, chelovek bozhii* in Russian), that he stayed the boy's expulsion from school. This successful test also inspired Aleksei to go out and buy Sacred History, the authoritative history of the Old and New Testaments and the prophecy of a Christian Savior. In order to do so, however, Aleksei stole a ruble that his mother had been using as a bookmark. When he realized that he could buy not just the Sacred History but also a copy of Robinson Crusoe with that ruble, he could not help but take the money despite the consequences. One may extrapolate from both of these anecdotes that—

74 M. S. Agurskii, "Velikii eretik (Gor'kii kak religioznyi myslitel')," in *Maksim Gor'kii: Pro et contra*, ed. D. K. Bogatyrëv (Izdatel'stvo Russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2018), 81.

unsurprisingly—Gor'kii always approached the Christian literary tradition just like Robinson Crusoe or any other fiction literature, and, while he clearly had some interest piqued by the supernatural elements, it was the artistic and narrative elements of traditional religious literature that most attracted the secular author.

The remainder of this chapter shows why Gor'kii disavowed the Church's cultural heritage despite the time and effort spent learning it extensively and in detail. It would be difficult to prove that there is a single reason behind this decision, but I believe there is reason to elevate one primary motivating factor above the rest. Gor'kii struggled with theodicy, or the justification of God's existence. More than anything, this inner conflict came as a response to the problem of evil he found around himself. If God is good, as Christianity teaches, the heinous acts against humanity under God's observation presented Gor'kii with a puzzle he was never able to entirely solve. This nagging unanswered question permeates works written throughout at least the first half of his career, but the desire to find an explanation is particularly raw and piquant in the first decade of professional writing. Approaching 1905, the issue increasingly vexes Gor'kii as he continues to witness the impending humanitarian crisis described in the previous chapter. As I will argue, only at that point does Gor'kii truly gives up on the God and religion given to him by tradition. Until that time, he worked diligently to reconcile his knowledge of Christianity with the bleak world around him, which we will see in the nearly dozen works included in the following discussion. Gor'kii must try all available options before he can finally find the capacity—and urgency—to make the world anew.

The First Transpositions

The period before 1905 can be divided into two phases based on the complexity of Gor'kii's transpositions and his approach to the theodicean question. Initially, his rudimentary adaptations reexamine common foundational narratives from Genesis, which is followed by a more idiosyncratic

and philosophical conversation about the state of humanity. At the pivot between these two phases is fittingly Gor'kii's "Cain and Artëm" (1899). Using the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis 4 as a template, the story grapples with human self-interested apathy and inaction, which Gor'kii sees as an unforgivable, mortal sin above everything else. It is also important to note that with time these narratives transition from generalized social commentary to discussing Gor'kii's contemporary Russia. The primary tension within Gor'kii's worldview during this period is Christ's increasing estrangement from life in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Russia.

The first phase in Gor'kii's experimentation with Christian narratives lasted from 1892, when he published his first work, through approximately 1898 and is characterized by obvious, at times clumsily conspicuous, references to prominent Biblical figures and motifs. They are more transplants than transpositions at this stage. In this span of time, one can see Gor'kii's early writing was a period of artistic exploration and experimentation as he took from his literary knowledge and attempted to create his own style. Regarding the use of Christian themes and characters, these early stories feature Biblical elements taken directly and literally, without much intervention from the author. Gor'kii's go-to device was a simple inversion of expectations associated with the scenes and characters he copied from the original. Put another way, Gor'kii uses religious literary sources in a cut-and-paste manner and then changes them so that they are the binary opposite of their original purpose. This device is found in his works through 1898 and will be the subject of my analysis in this first phase. I will use examples from his early works, including "The Girl and Death" (1892), "The Matter with the Clasps" (1895), the so-called Easter story "On the Raft: An Easter Story" (1895), and the so-called Christmas stories "On the Boy and Girl Who Didn't Freeze to Death" (1894) and "Christmas Stories (A Christmas Story)" (1898), to illustrate Gor'kii's first attempts at these inversions. As time progresses, his treatment becomes increasingly nuanced and progresses into complexly crafted transpositions.

“The Girl and Death”

The fairy-tale verses of “The Girl and Death” (herein “GD”) were written in Tbilisi in September of 1892 shortly after Gor’kii finished his first published work “Makar Chudra.” It was not until 1917, however, that he could publish this story of a young girl meeting death in both literal and figurative ways.[75] The most likely explanation for the government’s censorship of GD is the role of the Tsar in one of the two levels of this frame story. The outer frame depicts a tsar racing back to his fortress from battle to re-enlist more soldiers for his war, as he was left with none after defeat. The ruler’s sprint is interrupted by a young couple, whose apathy toward matters of war enrages the tsar. Already frustrated with his previous losses, he uses his cavalry to stampede and kill the girl. From there, readers are transported to a world in which a personified Death lives on Earth and kills those whose time has come or even “sometimes, when angry, Death wipes out even those who need not have been.”[76] The girl, Love [*Liubov’*], through the remainder of the story convinces Death to allow her live while inspiring Death to “build joys for Love and happiness for Life.” That is to say, to become productive rather than destructive for humanity. Here Gor’kii entangles the fundamental signposts of contemporary culture, particularly as a Christian following the sacraments: birth, marriage, and death. Gor’kii puts them in conversation with his sources understanding them, the Judaeo-Christian story of Genesis and the Christian archetype of transgression, Judas Iscariot, to make his message.

The story is divided into seven parts and, as mentioned, features multiple levels of storytelling. The topmost frame, in which the girl is killed by the tsar, plays out in the first section. The remainder of the parts happen in Love’s psychology using Gor’kii’s metaphysics of life, death, good, and evil. Of those sections, one takes place in Death’s mid-morning dream. Part IV of GD describes Death’s nightmarish visions of God and the Archangel Michael deciding the fates of Cain and Judas, who

75 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 2, 512.
76 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 1, 28.

dangle over a swamp of fire. The two, themselves the parent and child of Death, are precisely the representations of evil and sin that anyone familiar with traditional readings of the Christian Bible would expect. In fact, Gor'kii here is writing what may be considered a continuation of the relevant Biblical narratives, and to do so he uses God, Michael, Cain, and Judas as they appeared in the original stories. The Archangel Michael guards the gates of heaven, deciding who may enter, and the two humans acknowledge and repent for their sins to the angel. Unconvinced, Michael denies them entrance, causing the sorrowful pair to ask for God directly: "Michael! Let the Lord say at least one word to us, even if he will regret it; after all, we are no longer asking for forgiveness!" At this point, we can see the first instances of a major device in early Gor'kii, the secularized inversion of Christian narratives and morality. In Death's dream, God, responding only to the angel's third request, denies even speaking to his creations, ignoring their pleas. As Cain and Judas are cast into the flames, Death wakes up from its nap, and the gruesome tale is over. Nonetheless, the inhumanity of God's rejection leaves an impression on Death and the reader.

Cain and Judas Iscariot, representing the original murderer and the ultimate traitor to God, respectively, are portrayed in traditional Christianity as morally and spiritually bankrupt. In GD, Gor'kii's earliest transpositions challenge the original narratives by shining a light on God's lack of forgiveness and the sinner's capacity for redemption. Refusal to even speak with Cain and Judas allows Michael to hastily cast them into the fiery underworld, and the reader is made, even if just for a second, to empathize with the arch sinners' vulnerability before authority. Gor'kii hopes we will correlate God's casual violence with the Tsar. To further his point, however, the God of Death's dream explains the circumstances which not he but another may forgive Cain and Judas. "As long as Death kills the living, / Cain and Judas have no forgiveness. / Let them be forgiven by the one whose power can / overcome the force of Death forever."[77] The end of GD reveals that Love can redirect Death's penchant

77 Ibid., 30. "Знай, доколе Смерть живое губит, / Каину с Иудой нет прощенья. / Пусть их тот простит, чья сила может / Побороть навеки силу Смерти."

for destruction into a creative, life-affirming foe. Love, an influential but otherwise unremarkable girl, plays the role of Christ, who is traditionally the one who can overcome death in Christian salvation rhetoric. The story demystifies and humanizes the standard Christian approach to major moments in life. Gor'kii simultaneously criticizes institutional religion and unchecked state power with this brief story, and he was able to do so adeptly because he used established representatives from the Christian literary tradition in a way to represent contemporary issues.

Transpositions of Popular Christian Stories

Christmas

There are no stories more integral to the Christian tradition than Christmas and Easter. Authoritative accounts of these highest of Holy Days circulated throughout the Church and were important in the proselytization of heathens and consequential growth of Christianity. These narratives became so dominant and influential in the religion that they became genres in the secular literary world. By the time that Gor'kii's Christmas stories [*rozhdestvenskii* or *sviatochnyi rasskaz*] appeared in the 1890s, Russian readers were well aware of the type of plot that is to be expected from such a story. Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol in Prose, Being a Ghost Story of Christmas* [*Rozhdestvennaia pesn': sviatochnyi rasskaz s prividenііami*] (1843) made a particular impact on public perceptions of Christmas. Gor'kii mentions his admiration for the English author's work on multiple occasions, such as in "On How I Learned to Write." Fëdor Dostoevskii also published a widely read Christmas story in 1876 entitled "The Beggar Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree" ["*Mal'chik u Khrista na ëlke*"]. The stories share the central figure of a panhandling, malnourished boy unable to keep warm and fed around Christmas time. Holiday expectations of joy in both works highlights the neediness of some parts of society, just as the pregnant Mary and her husband Joseph were helpless, as well, according to the Nativity narrative. The juxtaposition of society's poorest and most defenseless, particularly children, with the holiday's humanistic spirit of giving strikes a prominent chord in these and other Christmas

stories, though with varying tones and outcomes. For that reason, freezing and starving children became the subject of Gor'kii's own Christmas tales, his next polemics against the Russian Orthodox Church.

"On the Boy and Girl Who Did Not Freeze to Death" and "Christmas Stories (A Christmas Story)" were published in 1894 and 1898, respectively. The stories represent Gor'kii's attempt at a story to join the growing movement of narratives around the holiday. As one may predict, however, they do not have much in common with the others other than the title. I introduce these stories together not just because they belong to the same style, but also because, as I will argue, they are actually two parts of the same story arch within the same diegetic universe. They share a similar self-aware tone from the narrator, a writer with a novel approach to the traditional story form. Most importantly, the latter story provides a conclusion to the unresolved first, in which the narrator addresses not just the individual stories leading the genre, but the larger culture meaning with sociopolitical implications behind the literature. Gor'kii uses these stories as an opportunity to explore a novel literary style. However, the Christmas story becomes, more than anything for Gor'kii, a vehicle for subverting a cultural paradigm by exposing the rotten foundation on which it was built, the authority of the Church to stop suffering. Gor'kii adopts the religious theme in order to critique the very idea behind it.

Gor'kii commences his questioning of the Christmas story tradition with a straightforward address to the reader at the beginning of "On the Boy and Girl Who Did Not Freeze to Death" (1894). Acknowledging what he saw as the expected plot of a standard Christmas story, the story's narrator immediately announces his departure from what is expected of him. "In Christmas stories it has been long accepted to annually freeze a few poor boys and girls," he begins. "A boy or a girl of a proper Christmas story usually stands in front of some kind of large home, admiring through the glass a Christmas tree, glowing in elegant rooms, and then freezes, having felt a great deal unpleasant and

bitter things."[78] Immediately it is apparent that this is not another regular holiday tale. His intentions, however, are less expected. From the beginning, the narrator makes explicit his aim to avoid using the destitute to "remind wealthy children about their existence." The conscious focus on socioeconomic status separates Gor'kii's work from others from the outset. This narrator, "despite [other authors'] cruel approach toward their characters," wishes to tell of the boy and girl who did not freeze to death instead because how "awkward it is to kill one living creature for another." From the outset of the first story, the narrator vocally advocates for the dignity of the characters, in the form of a person, that are central to his message.

The young boy and girl of Gor'kii's 1894 so-called "Christmas Story" survive to the end, as the title promises, but the character's lives do not end there according to the first of two halves of the adaptation. That said, the ending presents more questions than answers about the role of the children at the center of "On the Boy and Girl Who Did Not Freeze to Death." Gor'kii wished to break norms by contravening expectations and addressing the audience directly. For better or worse, a character still living after the end of a narrative invites interest and speculation into the characters' fate. Gor'kii himself hinted at such an idea when he ended his first Christmas tale with such ambiguity: "In my opinion," he wraps up, "it is extremely absurd to freeze children who have the legitimate possibility of dying in a simpler and more natural way."[79] Here the author speaks through the narrator to remind readers that the cold and hungry children nevertheless have real needs to be met if they are going to persist beyond the chronological end of the story. Their natural and inconspicuous deaths are foreshadowed in the final words of the story. The uncertain circumstances under which they finish their

78 Ibid., 181. "В святочных рассказах издавна принято замораживать ежегодно но нескольку бедных мальчиков и девочек. Мальчик или девочка порядочного святочного рассказа обыкновенно стоят перед окном какого-нибудь большого дома, любуются сквозь стекло елкой, горящей в роскошных комнатах, и затем замерзают, перечувствовав много неприятного и горького."

79 Ibid., 188. "По моему мнению, крайне нелепо замораживать детей, которые имеют полную возможность погибнуть более просто и естественно."

meal and time in the story's plot lead to doubt as to whether these orphans will live to see a day in urban Russia with a reliable meal and place to sleep.

The title "Christmas Stories (A Christmas Story)" conveys a straightforward approach similar to "On a Boy and Girl Who Did Not Freeze to Death," but the story itself is deceptively complex. The narrator has finished another Christmas story and is admittedly tired of the style already shortly after its beginning. We hear about the characters of the newest work: another couple of beggars, an elderly man and his wife, who follow the legacy of the boy and girl from Gor'kii's previous Christmas story. In addition to sharing the life of pleading for food and money on the street, each of the younger and older pairs of are described as a two animate "rag heaps" that move throughout the snowy city asking for charity and hiding from civilization when possible. The older couple's life, however, can no longer rely on the pity that children elicit, and a life on the streets have weakened the destitute man and woman. Gor'kii describes their lot in life: "people, beaten down by life, timid, meek, and half-alive."[80] Not long after the story begins, the couple dies on their way to morning service while outside the church. As he is succumbing to the elements, the old man sees Christ, who does nothing but smile while the beggar slowly slips into unconsciousness. Readers are then transported out of the lower frame to the one of the narrator, who begins to ponder the meaning of his and all other Christmas stories similar to his. The night after finishing the story of the elderly beggars, the writer is visited by ghostly figures and a voice, nods to Dickens' classic. "Christmas Stories" highlights the cultural paradox of Christmas paupers: if celebrating the birth of Christ is a joyous occasion, why do authors sentence their characters, often children, to life and death on the cold streets of Europe and Russia?

Instead of interrogating the moral shortcomings of an individual like Scrooge in Dickens' novella, the incorporeal voice in "Christmas Stories" brings to the forefront apathy among the middle and wealthy classes toward those below them. This manifestation of Gor'kii's struggle with theodicy

80 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 3, 493.

brings into question the real meaning of “Christmas” in the title of this story and others. Gor’kii starts by referencing a less popular side of the Biblical nativity story. Questioned about his purposes, the author declares his belief in his stories’ capacity for sowing sympathy among readers, causing the ghosts of frozen children in the room laugh at his naïveté.[81] The voice then adds: “And if you would have frozen all poor children on this Earth in one of your stories, you would have inflicted these readers of yours with only pleasure.” The writer’s audience, he continues, “may have called you Herod as a joke, but they likely would have sighed at the thought that your story is just a fantasy.”[82] King Herod ruled the State of Judea under Roman direction for over thirty years until approximately 1 BCE and the kingdom’s dissolution. Accounts of him appear in the Gospels and Book of Acts, and he is above all known for the “Massacre of the Innocents” [*izbienie mladentsev*]: frustrated that the magi lied to him about where exactly the Jewish Messiah had been born, Herod ordered all male children under two years of age in Bethlehem to be killed.[83] Gor’kii’s author like King Herod was responsible for the death of innocent children. This joke, albeit a momentary ribald comment, contains a wealth of implications about Gor’kii’s message. The writer in the story, standing in for Dostoevskii, Dickens, and all others participating in the Christmas tradition, is compared to Herod, whose malicious jealousy of the Christian savior lead him to kill all local male children in an attempt to guard his power. However, this joke is targeted at the religious public more than anything, and it draws in close together the expectations of religious narratives and the pleasure they engender in their faithful readers. What Christianity teaches, Gor’kii implies, is the opportunity to ignore the reality of death and violence with the reasoning that there is something better waiting for the children Herod and authors had killed then and now.

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81 Ivan Andreevich Esaulov, *Paskhal’nost’ russkoi slovesnosti* (Krug", 2004), 44-45.

82 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 3, 500. “Да если б ты заморозил в одном из твоих рассказов всех бедных детей земного шара, — ты причинил бы этим только удовольствие твоим читателям. Они в шутку, быть может, назвали бы тебя Иродом, но, наверное, разочарованно вздыхали бы при мысли, что твой рассказ только фантазия.”

83 Mt. 2:1-18.

In “Christmas Stories,” Gor’kii describes writers as the prophets of their day. This attitude is most visible when the voice questions the writer’s ability to change the public’s capacity for empathy. The voice in the narrator’s dream directs readers’ attention toward the contradictory form and message in religious holiday stories.

> When reality does not touch people and does not offend people with its harsh torment and baseness, is it your fantasies that will ennoble a person? Will it be you who awakens the heart within them, telling him about those who are freezing, dying from hunger, about all of life’s gloomy aspects, to which all kinds of people close their eyes looking for peace and contentment in their life, muffling their conscious by handing out pennies? .... And you hope?![84]

Speaking through the ghastly voice, Gor’kii explains the reason for the continuation of death and suffering is not for lack of awareness but of concern and sympathy. Writers are not the prophets that they wish to be, a conclusion Gor’kii comes to when faced with the aloofness in those around him. “Can it be true that the stories of miraculous birth and overcoming death have deafened people to the gloomy reality around us,” he seems to ask himself. It is the power of narratives in religion and other institutions that enable people to construct their own lives and even entire universes, a fact that Gor’kii leverages heavily in his later works. In “Christmas Stories,” the crestfallen narrator wakes from sleep and, still tormented by the unanswered questions from his dream, he rips up the story he just finished, allowing the children he created earlier to live to old age on the cold streets, but, for better or worse, alive nonetheless.

Easter Story

The Easter story was another stylistic adaptation Gor’kii published in this early developmental period. Unlike its Christmas-themed predecessors, the Easter story did not have a consistent plot arc and

84 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 3, 500. “Когда действительность людей не трогает и их души не оскорбляет своей суровой мукой и пошлостью,— твои ли фантазии облагородят человека? Ты ли пробудишь в нем сердце, рассказывая ему о замерзающих, умирающих с голода, о всех мрачных явлениях жизни, на которые всякий закрывает свои глаза, ища себе в жизни и покоя и довольства, заглушая свою совесть подачкой грошей. Море нищеты и несчастия просасывается сквозь плотину бессердечия, и работе моря мешают тем, что бросают в него горошины... И ты надеешься?!”

structure in Gor'kii's time. Rather, as Ivan Esaulov argues in *Easter in Russian Literature* [*Paskhalnost' russkoi slovesnosti*] (2004), the most important holiday in Russian Orthodoxy has long taken various forms and played different roles in literary history, perhaps from the earliest of Russian written culture.[85] For Gor'kii, a recent reference for Easter stories could have been Aleksandr Khomiakov's russified remake of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* into the *Christ's Bright Resurrection* (1844); any of a number of works by Dostoevskii, including *Humiliated and Insulted* (1861) or *Crime and Punishment* (1866); Nikolai Shchedrin's "Christ's Night" (1876); or "The Figure" (1889) by Nikolai Leskov. V.N. Zakharov, whom Esaulov cites, mentions all of these as examples in his article "The Easter Story as a Genre of Russian Literature" while outlining a definition of the Easter tale.[86] The resurrection motif is integral to the Easter style, though it is employed throughout works more broadly as a fundamental change undergone by characters, particularly one that brings them into a more open and honest union with another person or other people. The story of the resurrection seeks to reunite what has been broken apart: Christ's human and divine natures, a murderer and his victim's souls, or a saint and her living child, for example. However, no scholar situates Gor'kii's "On a Raft" (1895) within the Easter tale genre tradition until now.

The reason for that lapse in analysis is clear; had Gor'kii not called it an "Easter story" in the subtitle, it is unlikely that anyone would have viewed at it as such. Christianity is the object of derision, like in previous stories, and the plot features none of the traditional elements transposed directly he included in the Christmas stories. Therefore, "On a Raft" is, if anything, just another anti-Christian story by Gor'kii. However, there is meaning in the subtitle. The author curiously changed it after the story's completion, until which it had been "A Picture" [*Kartina*].[87] By calling it an "Easter Tale," Gor'kii aims his critical gaze directly at the most important story within Christianity, the narrative that

85 Esaulov, *Paskhal'nost' russkoi slovesnosti*, 44-45.
86 Ibid., 46.
87 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 2, 559.

affirms millennia of prophecies about the transformative mystery of the savior figure and the divinity of the God the Trinity. Without the resurrection, Christ is only human and his miracles are deceptions. For that reason, my analysis of “On a Raft” centers around the genre’s intention of depicting transfiguration that Gor'kii leveraged to confront Christian dogma. If his message was that religion still has the power to effect deep-rooted moral improvement in a person, characters' transformation should be evident. If, on the other hand, Gor’kii is seeking to undermine the moral authority of the Church and Christianity as righteous arbiters of good and evil, as we may well expect, then personal refinement, if there is any, will be weak and to the detriment of believers. The added layer of an Easter story genre allows Gor’kii to juxtapose and criticize what is present with what is absent from the tale of Christ’s resurrection.

The short story “On a Raft” develops primarily through the gradual disclosure of characters’ lives in the course of their conversation. Floating down a river just before daybreak on a cold, foggy spring morning, Mitrii and Sergei beside each other on a raft while propelling it with oars. Mitrii, the boat owner’s son, is a “light-haired, frail, and thoughtful guy of about twenty” who only speaks in a whisper.[88] His rowing partner, Sergei, is “a worker, a gloomy and healthy fellow.” From the front of the raft, Mitrii’s father, Silan Petrov, screams orders and insults like a foghorn to keep their eyes on their murky surroundings and stay on course. The boat is surrounded on all sides by a thick curtain of gray clouds while floating on “a river [that] seemed like a bottomless abyss surrounded on all sides by mountains that reached the sky and dressed in fog,” so much that those in the back of the raft cannot see the front and vice-versa.[89] The imagery of characters forced to look at themselves suggests the characters are setting out on a soul-searching journey. As they move, Sergei’s teasing brings to light the central conflict: Mitrii, deeply pious and wanting to live a chaste life, recently called off his wedding out of fear and guilt, thereby spoiling his father’s efforts to find him a wife. Since the change in plans,

88 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 2, 61.
89 Ibid., 63.

Silan, who is standing on the other end of the raft the whole time, took his son's fiancée as his own lover. She stands by his side on their vessel. Though their relationship is ethically fraught, Silan continues with the affair, as it does not explicitly violate any laws or commandments. The story's exposition provides for multiple possible transformations among the main characters.

That said, Gor'kii's focus increasingly centers on the spiritual young man. Mitrii attempts to justify his decisions to Sergei between the deafening commands from the front of the raft. First, the choice to call off the wedding was the result of Mitrii's meekness, which left him unable to stand up for himself and voice his desires to his father. In his conversations with Sergei he recalls, "And I told her, 'I cannot marry you, Mar'ia. You are a healthy maiden, I am a sick, frail man. And I did not want to marry at all, but father, you know, forced me, "Marry," he said, "and that's that!"'"[90] Sergei responds by mocking his lack of sexual desire, saying that he forced Silan into the sin of *snokhachestvo*, the unspoken practice in rural parts of the Russian Empire of wealthy patriarchs forcing their daughters-in-law, or *snokha*, into a sexual relationship.[91] When Sergei asks Mitrii what other laws he has broken, the demure Christian responds with divine law, known to everyone familiar with their soul, "one law for all: do not do that which is against your soul, and you will do no harm to anyone on Earth."[92] By "soul" he explicitly means God. His reformulation of Christ's Great Commandments [Commandments of Love in Russian, *Zapovedi liubvi*, Mt. 22:37-40 and Mk. 12:28-31] shapes Gor'kii's polemic with Christian doctrine in this story. Despite what he said, Mitrii's choice to follow his soul did indeed bring harm, for his abandoned fiancée fled to Silan out of fear of social ostracization. His choice to leave Mar'ia also brought additional shame and weakness to Mitrii himself as he tries to deal with past deceptions. However, before his speech is done, Mitrii is interrupted by Silan's thundering commands:

90 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 2, 64. "Я и говорю ей: «Не могу я мужевать с тобой, Марья. Ты девка здоровая, я человек больной, хилый. И совсем я жениться не желал, а батюшка, мол, силком меня — женись, говорит, да и всё!...»"

91 V. B. Bezgin, *Pravovaia kul'ture v russkom sele (Vtoraia polovina XIX - Nachalo XX vekov)* (Tambov: FBGOU BPO "TGTU," 2012), 55.

92 Ibid., 65.

"Hey, you! Sleepy demons! Keep your eyes out!" [*Ei, vy! Deimony sonnye! Gliadi v oba!*] amid the opaque foggy river way.[93] Finally unable to stand any more criticism, shortly after Mitrii eventually yells, though still in a whisper, at his interlocutor while threatening suicide. His muffled pleas for mercy fade out to inaudible protest: "You are cruel people! I'm leaving. Leaving forever... I don't have it in me...", to which Sergei responds, "Yes, go away!..", and silence takes over the raft and its environs.[94] Animosity removes the devout Mitrii from the picture entirely.

The second part of the story begins symbolically: the early morning's gray fog gives way to day, and the clouds part to reveal a clear sky and path ahead. Whether Mitrii truly died due to suicide in the story is debatable, though there is reason to believe Gor'kii did mean some version of death to parallel the Christ story. The beginning of part II depicts a lively, robust Silan with Mar'ia in his arms while they watch the water flow past. The couple has a romantic moment as he kisses her, and immediately after roosters are heard crowing in the background. This scene, though only a handful of lines, demonstrates Gor'kii's effort to connect it to the Bible. In each of the Gospel accounts, Judas Iscariot kisses Christ to mark him for arrest by the Romans shortly, and the Apostle Peter denies that he knows Jesus on three separate instances, the final time being marked by the crow of a rooster.[95] As they lead to the death of Christ, so with these two strong symbols of betrayal Gor'kii transposes the Easter death element onto Mitrii. That being true, readers expect the triumphant return of our hero. Instead, the golden rays of the day's sun begin to shine down on Silan and his *snokha* while they discuss possible scenarios of Mitrii's death to their pleasure. Mar'ia even "prayerfully" wishes for him a swift death.[96] The inverted transposition of popular and meaningful parables from Christian literature once again characterizes the early stages of Gor'kii's portrayal of religion and evil. Instead of the believer

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 69. "Свирепые вы люди! Уйду я! Навек уйду... Не в мочь мне... — Да уходи!.."
95 Judas's kiss: Mt. 26:47-56; Mk. 14:43-52; Lk. 22:47-53; Jn 18:2-12; Prophecy and fulfillment about rooster crowing: Mt. 26:34, 26:74-75; Mk 14:30, 14:68-70; Lk. 22:34, 22:60-61; Jn. 13:38, 18:27.
96 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 2, 73.

Mitrii, impotent and hypocritical regardless, the unrepentant antagonists arrive to a lush, vibrant land where “the juicy scent of earth, newly sprouted grass, and resinous aroma of pine needles” waft in the air.[97] Enlivened by the surroundings, Silan once again yells “Keep a look out, guys!" and they continue on their way without Mitrii, almost to say that the bright future promised by resurrection is, in fact, brighter without it. Gor’kii’s continued use of anti-savior narratives signals a deepening uncertainty that good exists at all.

Cain as the Good Samaritan in “Cain and Artëm”

“Cain and Artëm” (1899), marks a turning point in Gor’kii’s treatment of Christian ethics. This tale of a Jewish merchant and a Russian thug features a recognizable inverted paradigm as in earlier stories. However, as Pavel Basinskii also notes, it is decidedly more complex than previous stories, including “On a Raft.”[98] This character study is remarkable for its aim to construct types founded on the theodicy question, and in doing so, foretelling the personal complexity of future pieces by Gor’kii. Like the previous examples, this story interrogates people’s amorality, but like the works after it, “Cain and Artëm” asks its questions in a decidedly Russian context. While previously examined narratives were surely set in Russia with Russian heroes and heroines, at this point Gor’kii begins integrating specific sociopolitical issues to draw doubt to Russia’s ostensibly religious government’s morality. More specifically, the story foregrounds the so-called “Jewish question,” which ignited Gor’kii’s sympathy. The issue came to a head in Russian politics following a series of widely publicized pogroms around the turn of the twentieth century. For that reason, “Cain and Artëm” denotes the beginning of contemporary, morally imitable character archetypes in Gor’kii’s works. The story evaluates particular sociopolitical issues of Russian populations, such as Jews and the urban poor, in Russia by creating an

97 Ibid.
98 Basinskii, *Gor’kii*, 179.

ethic from their interaction. Gor'kii's solution to these modern moral quandaries lies in realigning the "sacred" with the powerless masses.

There are multiple potential explanations for the increased intricacy and attention devoted to "Cain and Artëm." The most likely reason for the emergence of moral types at this juncture is the conflict between Gor'kii's admiration for the Jewish faith and people and the Russian Empire's persecution against Jews. While his feelings show through the story, the clearest explanation of Gor'kii's feelings toward Jews materializes in his speech "On Jews" [*"O evreiakh"*] (1906) when there was already distance between him and his country and compatriots, whom he was sharply rebuking. More than just a plea for Russians to act more civilized, though, Gor'kii discusses in detail the lessons he believes all of humanity can learn from Judaism. In the speech given to a crowd at Grand Central Station in New York, he recounts the impression the writings of Jewish sage and scholar Hillel (also called Hillel the Elder, Hillel HaBavli) left upon him. Gor'kii singles out Hillel's attention to the individual as especially estimable, generalizing "Jewish wisdom" as "more universally human and significant than any other."[99] Above all else, however, Gor'kii admired Hillel's—and by extension Judaism's—expansive interpretation of the golden rule: "If you are not for yourself, then who is for you? But if you are only for yourself, then what are you for?" as he recalls from his youth.[100] Loving one's neighbor is not just moral justice, it is a social imperative for survival and meaning. For that reason, the pogrom in his hometown, Nizhnii Novgorod, one of many attacks on the Jewish population in the southwest of the Empire, was particularly poignant for him. On 7-8 June 1884, several dozen citizens of the central district of Kanavino captured and killed local Jewish residents, events to which the sixteen-year-old Aleksei Peshkov was witness.[101] This would later become the basis for his story

99 Maksim Gor'kii, *O evreiakh* (Saint Petersburg: Petrogradskii Sovet Rabochiikh i Krasnoarmeiskikh Deputatov, 1919). "Я думаю, что еврейская мудрость более общечеловечна и общезначима, чем всякая иная."

100 Ibid. "В ранней юности я прочитал—не помню где—слова древне-еврейского мудреца—Гиллеля, если не ошибаюсь: "Если ты не за себя, то кто же за тебя? Но если ты только для себя—зачем ты?"

101 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 4, 81.

"Pogrom" (1901), a follow-up to "Cain and Artëm" to more explicitly challenge Russians' thinking about Judaism. Before then, however, an unknown impetus occurred in the summer or autumn of 1898 to spark Gor'kii's renewed fervor and sympathy for Russian Jews. The writing of "Cain and Artëm" in that year would become the first in many instances stretching beyond the 1917 revolution that Gor'kii advocated for Jews in the country. Even in his "Untimely Thoughts: Notes on the Revolution and Culture" of 1917-1918, he notes that "The equal rights of Jews is one of the greatest accomplishments of our revolution. Having recognized Jews as Russian equal in the law, we removed a shameful, bloody, and dirty spot from our conscious."[102] That expression of desire for equal treatment began to take form with "Cain and Artëm."

The story centers around two men in an unnamed town and their relationships with each other and society. One, Artëm, is the local "despot" whom Gor'kii describes as "a colossal fellow with a head of curly black hair in a thick cap."[103] When he is seen walking down the street, whispers of warning that "Artëm is coming" clear the streets.[104] The twenty-five-year-old thug is a friend of no one by choice, whether due to being an invincible threat to the men or an unattainable jealousy to the women. He makes his living from his looks by wooing female sellers or stealing from men, which puts him "on bad terms" with everyone.[105] He is presented as Russian throughout and hails from the Simbirsk Governate.[106] More than anything, Gor'kii describes Artëm as "apathetic to everything" [*ravnodushen ko vsemu*].[107] It is such indifference that Gor'kii labels as both "one of the most serious crimes of humanity" and "especially characteristic of [Russians]" in "On Jews".[108] The other character at the

102 Maksim Gor'kii, *Revolutsiia i kul'tura* (Berlin: Tovarischeshtvo I. P. Ladyzhnikova, 1918), 36. "Равноправие евреев — одно из прекрасных достижений нашей революции. Признав еврея равноправным русскому, мы сняли с нашей совести позорное, кровавое и грязное пятно."
103 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 4, 81.
104 Ibid., 84.
105 Ibid., 81-82.
106 Ibid., 82. "Промзино — село Симбирской губ., откуда выходят на Волгу лучшие, то есть сильнейшие, крючники."
107 Ibid., 82.
108 Maksim Gor'kii, *O evreiakh.* "Одно из наиболее тяжких преступлений человека -- равнодушие, невнимание к судьбе ближнего своего; это равнодушие особенно свойственно нам."

center of the story is the "small, nimble Jewish man with a sharp head and thin, yellow face," Haim [*Khaim*].[109] Though it is not his name, the townspeople call him Cain [*Kain*] because the moniker, shared by the Bible's archetypal murderer, is "more familiar to people, and in it there is great deal of insult."[110] More importantly, however, the crowd chose the name because, "it seemed to everyone that it wholly accurately depicts a Jew's body and soul while at the same time offending him."[111] While among the brash Russians, the character of a persecuted Jewish man transforms into a Christ-like figure who turns the other cheek and returns their hatred with a smile. "It was easy to offend Cain: when they made fun of him, he only guiltily smiled and at times even helped others laugh at him, as though paying in advance his offenders for the right to exist among them," Gor'kii explains.[112] Gor'kii's first inversion, that Cain and Abel of Chapter Four of Genesis are Cain and Artëm of Shikhan, challenges an acceptable social prejudice; Artëm (Gor'kii's choice for the closest ethnically Russian names to Abel [Avel']), is the hegemon, while Cain is the victim of humanity's inhumanity. Haim's true name, חיים, which means "life" in Hebrew, adds another layer of inverted symbolism: it is Cain's—not Abel's—life stolen in this story.

Gor'kii does not give many hints about their exact location and names only the street on which they sell and trade during the day, Shikhan (also a regional term for any one of the large grassy hills found in southern Russia along the Volga River and Ural Mountains).[113] It is far from a picturesque location, however. Shikhan is a hellish landscape where litter and grime cover the ground and the worst of society does business among the shadows, as the sun's rays rarely ever reach the street surface. It is perhaps then appropriate that a dictatorial figure like Artëm would rise to the top of Shikhan's social hierarchy, like John Milton's Satan ruling over Pandemonium. Gor'kii notes that, after hearing a

109 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 4, 78. "маленький юркий еврей, с острой головой, с желтым худым лицом"
110 Ibid., 78. "имя более знакомо людям, и в нем есть много оскорбительного"
111 Ibid. "всем казалось, что оно вполне точно рисует тело и душу еврея, в то же время обижая его"
112 Ibid., 78-79. "А обижать Каина было легко: когда над ним издевались, он только виновато улыбался и порой даже сам помогал смеяться над собой, как бы платя вперед своим обидчикам за право существовать среди них."
113 "Shikhany," Russian Geographical Society, May 31, 2017, https://www.rgo.ru/ru/article/shihany.

begging orphan asking for any change “for Christ’s sake, a kopeck,” it was even “the name of Christ sounds strange and foreign to everyone on the street.”[114] Its inhabitants are appropriately base and offensive. Cain, branded as a murderer by his neighbors for his type, a Jew, is not their only victim. In fact, he is but another target of their hate for their neighbors. The people, “offended by the fate” of being poor Russians, as Gor’kii describes them, regularly “insult a neighbor, and they know how to do it, for it is the only way they can avenge themselves.”[115] In this case, the Christian story is just one weapon of their ire toward others. Cain is largely impervious to their abrasive behavior and speech, however, and his archetypal role as moral standard-bearer is the locus of conflict with the typical Russian. In the story Russia and Russians are depicted as the place and people who would belittle, threaten, and wholly reject their savior if he returned to live among them.

The story arc, which follows the rise and fall of the short-lived friendship between Cain and Artëm, transposes the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable is Gor’kii’s most detailed transposition thus far and serves as the inspiration for the beginning of Cain and Artëm’s acquaintance with one another. As told in Luke 10:25-37, a Jewish man travels from Jerusalem to Jericho, where, like everyone else in the ancient sin city, he becomes involved in crime. One day, the Jewish man becomes the victim of his band of violent thieves and is left for dead. A Jewish priest and a Jewish man from another tribe pass him by but offer no help. Finally, a Samaritan, belonging to a group historically inimical to Jews, walks past and saves the man from death, putting him up in an inn with his own money. In Gor’kii’s story once again, the roles are flipped from what one would expect. We see transposed parallels of this parable, in which Artëm is the betrayed robber left nearly beaten to death and Cain plays the Samaritan. Immediately after once more seducing and stealing from the women of Shikhan, a group of local men attacks Artëm by surprise. “Drunk from the wine, he did not defend

114 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 4, 85. “— Подай-те, Хри-ста ра-ди, копе-ечку... си-ро-те одинокому... ни отца нету, ни матери... Странно и чуждо всему звучит в этой улице имя Христа.”

115 Ibid., 78. “Он жил среди людей, обиженных судьбой, а для них всегда приятно обидеть ближнего, и они умеют делать это, ибо пока только так они могут мстить за себя.”

himself well, and then these people for almost a whole hour took their countless grievances on him," before stealing from the unconscious Artëm and dragging his limp body away from the road. After some time, Cain walks by and finds the naked and bruised strongman, immediately offering assistance.[116] While the Samaritan offers the Jew wine for his pain, Cain is carrying a bottle of vodka that he is willing to share with Artëm—a much more likely Russian alternative to the original drink. To parallel the Samaritan's anointment of the beaten Jew with oil, Cain washes Artëm's body with water, a highly symbolic act found elsewhere in the Bible. The man whom everyone mocks and abuses comes to the aid of the powerful Artëm, whom, he mentions, he previously thought of as Samson.[117] In some Orthodox Christian icons, the Samaritan is depicted as Christ himself while caring for the injured Jew. This very Russian re-imagination of the parable definitively shows that Cain here is acting as Gor'kii's savior figure.

The parable of the Good Samaritan appears in the Gospel of Luke as Jesus is explaining his Great Commandments. Challenging Jesus to explain himself, a lawyer asks for an example of loving one's neighbor as oneself, and the Samaritan becomes the embodiment of this commandment to do good acts on account of one's beliefs. Gor'kii, though, foregoing the first statement of faith in God, redefines virtue by drawing a sharp contrast between that which is good and that which is Russian. He likens the Shikhan, which is exclusively Russian except for Cain, to Jericho, which is portrayed as the antithesis of Holy Jerusalem in the Bible. Jericho, like the setting of Cain and Artëm, is a place for material and sensual gratification. The Russia portrayed in the story is as inhospitable to virtue as Jericho. When goodness appears in Shikhan, it is an unwelcome foreigner. The Samaritan is more than just a virtuous passerby, however. Jesus, speaking to a Jewish audience at the time, spoke of Samaritans because they were a culturally and politically oppressed group in Ancient Israel. Like Cain, the Samaritan should have been the least likely to stop and help, had everyone been acting solely out of

116 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 4, 88-90.
117 Ibid., 91.

self-interest, as they do while engaged in business and pleasure on Shikhan. Readers acutely see this contrast when Gor'kii immediately pivots to the question of Jewish persecution after Cain finds and wakes Artëm. Cain gets the impression that Artëm does not believe the little Jewish man could have helped after so many walked past, and Cain assumes it is due to antisemitism like everyone else shows.

> "You know how well I live? You know that, yes? Haven't I–sorry–suffered beatings from you? And didn't you laugh at the lousy Jew? What? It's the truth! You will excuse my truth, you swore. Don't be angry! I'm just saying that you. Like all people, have chased a Jew... For what, eh? Is not the Jew the son of your god and has not the same God given a soul to you and him?"[118]

With that Artëm vows to protect the otherwise defenseless Cain from interference from other Russians while selling his wares, and Cain erupts in admiration and gratefulness toward his new keeper. Here Gor'kii more plainly repeats what his Good Samaritan transposition stated earlier: Russians must realize that Jews are their neighbors and not their enemies, and should act as Cain does.

Gor'kii experiments with the idea of a virtuous Russian, and for a while, Artëm's defense of Cain brings benefit to both parties. Cain could conduct business without harassment for the first time since arriving, and Artëm felt satisfied in a way he had not before. Asking himself why he offered to watch after Cain, he reminds himself that "he is such a kind and honest [person], he says everything directly and from the soul. Having had that thought, Artëm suddenly smiled; he had long been tormented by some undefined desire, and he finally now understood it."[119] Cain also teaches Artëm to pray directly to God as the Jews do and Artëm begins to transition into a meeker, happier version of his past self. One day, about a month after he was saved by Cain, Artëm finds himself in the Grabilovka, Shikhan's tavern. Turning to the owner, he asks, "Cain hasn't been by?" to which the proprietor

118 Ibid., 92. "Вы знаете, как хорошо мне жить? Вы знаете это, да? Разве — извините — я не терпел от вас побоев? И разве вы не смеялись над пархатым жидом? Что? Это — правда? А! Вы извините мне мою правду, вы поклялись. Не сердитесь! Я только говорю, что вы, как и все люди, гоняли жида... За что, а? Разве жид не сын бога вашего и не один бог дал душу вам и ему?"

119 Ibid., 94. "Артем чувствовал, что понемногу ему становится лучше, тело ноет меньше и в голове яснее. Нужно заступиться за Каина пред людьми что, в самом деле? Вон он какой добрый и открытый,— прямо всё говорит, по душе. Подумав так, Артем вдруг улыбнулся давно уже его томило какое-то неопределенное желание, и вот теперь он понял его."

responds “I’ should be soon... His time is soon.”[120] The phrase the owner uses, “His time is soon...” [*Ego vremia blizko...*], reminds one of Jesus’s warnings that he would soon die or, perhaps more apt, the instances in Saint John’s Revelations prophesying the Day of Judgment to happen soon.[121] While waiting for Cain, Artëm is confronted by a man known as the Ragged Bridegroom [*Dranyi Zhenikh*], who appeared once briefly earlier in the story, just before we learn that Christ was not a name heard on Shikhan. His name suggests that the Ragged Bridegroom is an anti-Christ figure. The parable of Matthew 25:1-13 compares Jesus to the bridegroom of Heaven, of whom people whisper when he walks down the street as they do with Artëm. The Ragged Bridegroom thus acts as the foil against Artëm and Christ’s divinity. When Cain appears at the Grabilovka, Artëm is finally confronted with an immediate need to defend Cain as he promised, a test for a moral Russian.

In “Cain and Artëm” the society is both the illness and symptom. For Artëm, the public represents all that is against an exemplary citizen, particularly if he is Jewish. Upon Cain’s arrival to the tavern, Artëm initially welcomes him to sit in an adjacent seat to share a drink, but the Ragged Bridegroom quickly goes on the attack against the Jewish man. Mocking tones of condescension pour out of the Bridegroom's mouth, but Artëm, despite the initial impulse to violence, only watches from his stool. The barkeeper applauds Artëm’s restraint, saying “You acted exemplarily and splendidly, Artëm Mikhailych... exactly according to the Gospels... Like in the parable about the merciful Samaritan. Cain was in the pus and scabs... But you didn’t disdain.”[122] Something in the Ragged Bridegroom’s teasing disturbs Artëm’s peacefulness, and a “strange heaviness laid on the heart of Artëm” from that moment. His mood takes a sharp turn for the worse as it is increasingly swayed by public chatter. Artëm begins accosting Cain for meekly and quietly sitting at the table next to him, but

120 Ibid., 97. “Каин не был? Должон скоро быть... Его время близко...”
121 Cf. Mt. 26:18, Lk. 21:8 for examples said by Christ and Rev. 1:3, 22:10 for warnings about Judgment Day.
122 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 4, 102. “Превосходно и великолепно поступил ты, Артем Михайлыч! говорил он, поглаживая бороду, Совсем по завету евангельскому... Как в притче о самарянине милосердном... Во гною и струпьях был Каин-то... А вот ты не побрезговал.”

the feeling passes and he returns to normal conversation upon Cain's expression of sympathy for Artëm's plummeting social standing. Things are never the same again, however. As a sneering crowd begins to form around the tavern to point and laugh at Artëm at the Ragged Bridegroom's behest, he begins to lose his resolve and walks away from the bar alone through the crowd and toward the mountains. After a similar scene happens again, in which the Bridegroom sings his insulting songs in public, Artëm invites Cain to talk with him. Readers see the degradation of decency within the Russian context as Gor'kii sees it; even seeds of good are culled before they can sprout.

What follows demonstrates how readily people will discard their morals in service of social standing. The thug Artëm appears for the first time to Cain nervous and demure, speaking in erratic, unfinished phrases and frustrated outbursts. "And I should tell you, that I can't anymore..." he begins. "What can't you do?" asks Cain, to which Artëm responds, "Nothing. I can't! It disgusts me... It's not my business..."[123] Eventually, he strings together enough thoughts for Cain to understand what is happening. Learning that Artëm will no longer protect him, he sits "quietly, like a corpse." Cain asks quietly, as he did when Artëm first doubted him, "Because I'm a Jew?" Artëm responds to him, saying "What is a Jew? We are all Jews before the Lord..."[124] Artëm uses for the first time the word "Lord" instead of "God", connoting a sense of reverence. Having prayed and spoken with Cain about religion, it would be reasonable to conclude that Artëm has become, at least in part, a man of faith. As such, he may be able to look past the reason why everyone else acts cruelly toward Cain, but in Shikhan. the Russians do not like each other much more than they like any Jewish person. Faith may have elevated Artëm from Russia's lowest lows, as we will see featured prominently in *The Lower Depths*, but the people's baseness, as represented by the Ragged Bridegroom, is nonetheless indomitable. Cain interrupts further attempts at an explanation with a quote from Psalm 93:16-17, saying to the world and no one at the same time, "Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will stand up for me

123 Ibid., 108.
124 Ibid.

against the evildoers?"[125] The psalm is King David's peak of doubt during an entreaty to God for defense and justice in a sinner's world. Cain finally loses all hope of retaining his keeper when he finds out that Artëm is preparing revenge against the people who beat and robbed him. When Cain realizes what will happen, he asks Artëm to confirm the evil deed as though he was the one "murdered" [*sprosil Kain ubito*]. Despite the brotherly relationship they had before, Artëm symbolically kills the innocence and faith in Cain like the Biblical Cain killed his brother Abel. Artëm's final words to Cain, "Farewell, brother!" [*Proshchai, brat!*], testify to the relationship they had as well as to the magnitude of casual cruelty Artëm shows his brother.[126] Though Cain continues to plead with him as he walks away, Artëm gives nothing more than grunts and glances to him. Indifference triumphs over good because of a social inertia, which must be broken before ushering in change.

Gor'kii continues to struggle with the seemingly insurmountable evil he sees in the people around him, as represented by Artëm. The story plays out like a thought experiment envisioning the battle between good and evil in a Russian arena. Virtue is so rare in Russia itself that it comes in the form of a foreign import. Gor'kii's admiration for the Jewish faith shines through in Cain's character, though Cain is undoubtedly Christianized through literary references to the Bible. The only character without sin or vice, Cain becomes an example of living virtuously, but not necessarily piously, as though a priest or monastic would. His selflessness, patience, and humanity become a moral standard that others, such as Artëm, want to emulate. In this experiment, however, Gor'kii still finds that even the second coming of Christ could not fully convince Russians to lay down their malice and avarice toward their neighbors. If anything, his unassuming moral superiority only aggravates the inhumanity in those around him. Cain, despite doing everything by the book, despite living according to the highest conceivable moral authority, was impotent in the face of Russians' dark impulses. More specifically,

125 Ibid., 109. "«Кто восстанет за меня против злобствующих? Кто постоит за меня против лиходеев?» тихо спросил еврей словами псалма."; this is psalm 93 in the Septuagint and 94 in the Masoric version.
126 Ibid., 110.

Gor'kii seems to suggest that contemporary economics play a significant role in forging modern society's moral fetters. The Shikhan is not just a Russian place, it is a marketplace in Russian hell. Residents purposefully interfere with Cain's attempts to make money. Artëm was attacked for his contemptuous behavior, which he undertook in order to feed and clothe himself for free. Orphans beg for kopecks alongside the road. The pursuit of money, its unequal distribution, and its weaponization against the already powerless underlie nearly all of the evils that beat good in the story. More so than "On a Raft," "Cain and Artëm" identifies poverty as the growing, festering root of Russians' cruelty toward others. This story of greed is only the beginning of Gor'kii's warnings of what kind of Shikhan awaits Russia if nothing changes.

Revelation and Day of Judgment in Foma Gordeev and Three Men

As the end of the century neared, Gor'kii increasingly struggled with the savior narrative informing "Cain and Artëm." A lingering question asked him if adhering to the principle of "love thy neighbor" was still useful advice for people like Khaim when they had to be neighbors with people like Artëm. The question of good and evil, which started with the playful re-imaginations of Genesis, has come to a critical point. In their interactions, Khaim discovered from Artëm that virtue cannot overcome modern people's self-interest, which represents a new social order for meek characters like Mitrii and Khaim. This new moral viewpoint colors the worlds of Gor'kii's stories, and broadly describes a distinct period in some of his early works. The author's feelings toward humanity are rarely clearer—or darker—around the turn of the twentieth century following "Cain and Artëm." For the following half-decade the characters, primary, background, as individuals, and as a population come to represent a source of vice and evil. Readers glimpse a preview of this world in "Cain and Artëm," where Russia is depicted as a shady back alley filled with pushers and gangs. Until Artëm's rejection of Khaim at the end, his moral

authority was obvious, even if it was a reason for ridicule. However, when the titular characters' relationship turned from spiritual to transactional, Gor'kii's depiction of the public took a sharp turn. As exemplified in his first novels and plays, the new century coincides with a loss of faith in Christian righteousness based on the Bible's tenets. More specifically, it is at this point when Gor'kii's belief in good to conquer evil surrenders to his observations of society around him. In these works, the most fundamental assumptions are in flux.

The following section marks the final stage Gor'kii's early struggle with the question of theodicy. Reading Gor'kii's first two novels side by side, I argue that *Foma Gordeev* and *Three Men* observe the decline of faith in the Christian social model and the vacuum of morality and religious sensibilities leading to the author's post-Christian transition. In that way, these works written around 1900 portray the conflict between the diametrically opposed Christian worldview of the past and the modern capitalist self-interest that Gor'kii sees as its primary threat. Both Foma and Il'ia experience this conflict in their inner selves, as they exist strongly within both Christian and merchant spheres of influence. Foma and Il'ia are directly involved in the trade as a part of their work for their families' companies on the Volga River. At the same time, the boys grow up with a Christian worldview, thanks in particular to their grandfathers and godfathers. They are products of the Orthodox Christian old world in thought and name.

A shift in the social structure is accompanied by a change in Gor'kii's thinking about the question of theodicy, the problem of evil in a world created by an omnipotent, just God. His views undergo an evolution similar to society, and that is more than correlation. The community, often historically tied together by the Church, no longer guards individuals against ills such as hunger and exploitation. This is where one can see the difference between Gor'kii's concept of community as the fundamental unit of life and Nietzsche's individualist approach. Beginning with *Foma Gordeev,* however, the we see relationship between individual and society is rejected and the premise of theodicy

is itself turned upside down. That inversion involves several reversals of what I call "old-world" thinking and practice. In the Christian world, theodicy grapples with doubt of God's role in a universe that experiences evil. The word itself comes from the Greek roots *theos*, or God, and *díkē*, a trial of justice. Theodicean questioning is thus a trial of God's goodness, of a legitimately divine righteousness. This raises an important corollary: engaging with this line of thinking is an inherently theistic endeavor. While many understand it as raising doubt of God's existence, we may only ask it in the context of God. For the very premise of theodicy is the justification of a God that already exists, whose restraint allows cruelty. Put another way, for Gottfried Leibniz to coin the term theodicy in his 1710 *Théodicée* treatise to justify God, the idea of God must have already been dominant in society because God was only put into doubt upon observing phenomena casting that very doubt. This new phase from *Foma Gordeev* to *The Lower Depths* presupposes no such God. In fact, when characters come up against a savior-like figure in works following "Cain and Artëm," society justifies the existence and authority of the evil, against which it once, even if meekly, defended itself. In the broader scheme of Gor'kii's transition, this theodicean inversion is a forebear of the post-Christian turn toward a new God.

One intrinsic quality of this evil is that it subsists on individual's self-interest, particularly when financial interests play a role, in opposition to existing social capital. As we have seen in the Christmas stories, more prominently in "On a Raft," and once more in "Cain and Artëm," the acquisition of money instigates and aggravates depravity among Gor'kii's characters. In those earlier works, economics is in the background, but nonetheless noticeable. The indigent orphan begs for kopecks in the Christmas tales and commerce brings the merchants to the river in the Easter story. During this period of theodicy's unraveling, the socioeconomic status of characters plays a leading role in Gor'kii's stories and becomes an indicator of characters' personality. Savior figures disappear from the world, and people, particularly merchants, are introduced and qualified by their ability to create and wield wealth in the form of financial capital. While until this point there were the faceless immoral onlookers,

here Gor'kii shows the face of those passersby from the parable of the Good Samaritan as merchants. Gor'kii seems to turn his attention to the wealthy fully and addresses the works around this period toward this rising power in Russian society. All of *Foma Gordeev* (1899), *Three Men* (1900), *The Philistines* (1901), and *The Lower Depths* (1902) bring into contrast a contemptuous self-indulgence among the prosperous and the pitiful plight of the impoverished in an economic zero-sum game. Labor, too, begins to appear as a measure of human effort, which will feature prominently later in the godbuilding years. Most importantly, we see the exploitation of labor as a point of contention between the laborers and owners of the products of labor, a predecessor to revolutionary arguments for socialism starting with *Mother.*

At the center of these narratives are the Russian merchant estate [*kupecheskoe soslovie, soslovie kuptsov*] and growing prominence of socioeconomics that are changed by the new concentration of wealth among the merchantry. The merchant estate had existed in the Russian Empire from its earliest years as a nation, and it was considered the highest estate with the exception of the nobles [*dvoriane*]. Outside of Saint Petersburg and Moscow, economic activity was perhaps no more evident than in Gor'kii's hometown, Nizhnii Novgorod, nested between Europe's biggest river, the Volga, and its largest tributary, the Oka river. Gor'kii himself was born in this estate—his father was a carpenter and his mother from the lower merchantry [*meshchantsvo*]—though he did eventually live and work with merchants. It was likely during his adolescence after leaving home around twelve years old that he first took notice of the Russian merchantry. The result was that, more than anything for Gor'kii, this stratum became associated with and metonymically represented by capital or money. Like "Cain and Artëm" the novels and dramas of the period negotiate Christianity's purpose in the Russian Empire in a distinctly commercial environment. Foma and Il'ia, the main characters of the novels, must navigate their religious search while consistently encountering the temptations of the merchant lifestyle.

Gor'kii's use of the Bible is unique during this period and no less important to understanding context and message. The coming of the post-Christian world is marked by the same moral lessons that Gor'kii has employed to this point, particularly the Psalms and the most fundamental verses of the Gospels, including the Sermon on the Mount. However, where the hopeful passages of the Good Samaritan and the Resurrection once set the tone, Gor'kii reorients toward Judgment Day and the end times. In more practical terms, this use is represented by a partial shift from the Gospels to two unexplored areas of the Bible, the Old Testament's Books of Wisdom and the New Testament's final book, the Book of Revelation. The ancient Books of Wisdom include Job, the Psalter, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Book of Sirakh, according to the Orthodox canon. These are the primary teachings on moral living of Tanakh and Old Testament, among which the Book of Job undoubtedly holds the most influence for Gor'kii. This great tale of doubt and questioning has long been seen as Gor'kii works to understand his circumstances. However, in this dark time, for example, Job's skepticism of faith is quoted to reinforce doubt among Russian merchants. In addition, books of the Old Testament not yet seen, such as Proverbs and Sirakh, appear to emphasize the severity of society's fall. The few Gospel excerpts that do in fact make an appearance likewise forebode reckoning. Revelation is introduced for the first time to Gor'kii's transpositions, another signal of significant change in the author's outlook. In *Foma Gordeev* and to an even greater degree *Three Men*, the impending Judgment Day becomes increasingly real for Gor'kii and his characters. End-times motifs remind readers of the consequences of heresy, even if the majority joins in on the evildoing. Before examining the details of *Foma Gordeev* and *Three Men*, we should consider the connotations of so-called "speaking voices" [govoriashchee imia] taken from the Bible.

Like Cain and Artëm, Foma and Il'ia carry the names of important characters from the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments in these works, which affirm in many ways the novels' themes of faithlessness and judgment. Foma, or Thomas, is one of the original twelve disciples that followed

Christ as pious students throughout the New Testament. He is most strongly associated with two descriptors: the "the twin" [*bliznets*] and "the doubtful" [*neveruiushchii*], namely of Christ's divinity. His original Greek name, *didymos*, means "one of twin children," which exegetical sources conceptualize as his two contrasting instincts. This inner tension expresses itself outwardly in the apostle's congenial fused pair of fingers and the transformation from skeptically curious to devoutly faithful. Chapter 20 of the Book of John speaks of Thomas's moment of transition to being a follower after publicly calling into question the divine nature of Jesus. John 20:25, "if I do not see the nail wounds in [Christ's] hands, if I cannot put my finger into his nail wounds, if I cannot lay my hands on his ribs, I will not believe," summarizes the open-minded skepticism Thomas embodies. Naturally, in the Gospels, Christ's divinity is immediately proven, and Thomas obediently joins the fold as promised. This transposition provides the character's arc for Gor'kii's Foma, likewise defined by an inner conflict that drives him to life-changing actions and consequences.

Foma Gordeev, whose last name comes from the Russian root for "pride" [*gord*], is host to both the Orthodox Christian and material worlds. These two conflicting value sets that we have until now seen only in separate opposing characters, like Mitrii and Sergei in "On a Raft" or Khaim and Artëm before. Throughout his adolescence Foma inherits these worldviews from his father, a wealthy merchant, and his godfather, Maiakin. The novel describes his vacillation between these two selves as the world pushes him to choose his priorities. The need to make money in order to feed and shelter oneself was no stranger to Gor'kii, though the spiritual lessons warning against the accumulation of individual wealth was often on his mind. Foma is a powerful character transposition for its representation of this tension, for beginning with a familiar doubtfulness, and for the existentially significant question that so strongly defines Thomas's role in the Gospel narrative. The novel culminates in the choice between diverging paths, either to this world or the other, decided in that moment of great doubt.

Elijah, the English equivalent of Iliia or the more modern Il'ia, plays a crucial role in tying prophesies of the Old Testament to their realization in the New Testament. His name, originally from Hebrew, translates to "My God" and contains the holy name YHWH. For Christians, he ranks among the most important OT saints because of his role in the Christ's Second Coming [*Vtoroe prishestvie Khristovo*]. This is first mentioned in the Book of Malachi, the final book of the Jewish prophets, though Iliia is also associated with a number of miracles throughout the Hebrew scriptures. All four Gospels as well as the Book of Revelations discuss Illia in the context of that verse from Malachi, that he is to "come before and prepare everything" for Judgment Day.[127] (This return to the human world is only possible because Iliia never died during his time on Earth according to the Old Testament book of 2 Kings, which describes his ascension into heaven.[128]) During his return, Illia travels around Jerusalem and neighboring regions to assure people of the messiah's imminent arrival and lead the people to purify themselves spiritually in preparation for Judgment Day. Failure to cleanse oneself would result in a limbo state, or in a broader reading of the Synoptic Gospels' description of Iliia's role, a sinning population cleaved from the divine and collectively sent straight to hell.

Readers find Il'ia in circumstances significantly worse than the simply tragic merchantry in Foma's experience. Rather, from the outset, Gor'kii describes a world near a moral rock-bottom. In the Russia of *Three Men*, sin is a way of life that is flaunted and celebrated by the public, particularly the merchant estate. The opening scene sets the tone with a description of Il'ia's paternal grandfather, Antipas Lunev. His name corresponds with the martyr Antipas of Pergamos, who appears once in the Bible—the second chapter of the Book of Revelation. The saint was an early Christian in the Roman city of Pergamos, which John describes as "the throne of Satan" that killed the faithful Antipas.[129] In a similar way, the novel describes that, having achieved financial success to become a "rich man," the

127 Mt. 17:11
128 2 Kings 2:11
129 Rev. 2:13

lack of spiritual fulfillment in merchantry life drove Il'ia's grandfather to become a monastic hermit in the woods.[130] He never says a word for the rest of his life, which lasts until local authorities tear down his hut and in the process also take his life. Il'ia's father, Iakov, gladly takes up the business his father left behind, and boasts that sin is as natural as a feather on a raven if he himself is that raven.[131] Playing the role of spiritual advisor is Il'ia's maternal grandfather, Eremei, much like young Peshkov and Vasilii Vasilievich Kashirin. Eremei is one of the weakest of Gor'kii's spiritual mentor characters, and notably makes up Bible stories to entertain Il'ia and other children.[132] The rest of the population Il'ia meets among the merchant estate is not self-serving like in *Foma Gordeev*, but also encourages and justifies offenses like theft and violence in pursuit of money. Il'ia therefore must choose between "love thy neighbor" and "exploit thy neighbor for financial gain" with the added urgency of Judgment Day's impending arrival. If he fails to lead those around him to a more righteous life, the end of old-world Russia will be damning.

Foma Gordeev and *Three Men* together reveal Gor'kii's decline into profound disillusionment, a result of the inability to rationalize his surroundings through theodicean arguments. His first play, *The Lower Depths* (1902), depicts a long-term projection of the world based on observations in *Foma Gordeev* and *Three Men*, namely the moral vacuum found in the merchantry and eventually everyone. Before looking at the apocalyptic dredges of that drama, however, it is first necessary to see how Gor'kii's main characters lost their faith in the authoritative goodness of Orthodox Christianity. I will begin by tracing how the transposition of Thomas the Apostle into Foma's character arc organizes the novel's plot. Gor'kii uses that arc to all but destroy previous arguments in favor of theodicy. Then, placing *Three Men* into conversation with *Foma Gordeev*, I look at how transpositions grow toward the Judgment Day scene at the novel's conclusion. In a twist of irony, I show how Il'ia's inheritance of the

130 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 5, 25.
131 Ibid., 26.
132 Ibid., 182.

Biblical story of Elijah is perhaps only Gor'kii's second narrative transposed without inversion. However, the character is never able to lead others to salvation as Elijah does.

Christian doctrine offers a path to salvation by modeling Jesus's behavior in preparation for the return of Christ to judge the Earth's inhabitants. Being both full human and fully divine, the dual nature of Christ was in conflict, and the response was to empty out human will in deference to God's will. Orthodoxy teaches *kénōsis*, from AG κένωσις, "emptying," which says that that Christ "emptied himself out" so that his human nature may surrender to his divine nature.[133] Having overcome his earthly fetters, he is able to carry out God's mission, an example that is taught widely in the Orthodox faith. This teaching has appeared in previous secular literature, as well. Numerous studies have examined how Dostoevsky's Zosima of *Brothers Karamazov* and Tikhon of *The Possessed*, for example, authentically demonstrate the spiritual power of kenosis.[134] The paradox of emptying oneself only to thereby be filled God's presence is central to Christian teachings, and this contradiction in words remains tenable because there is something to replace the ephemera that once governed a believer's will. Without God's will to take control, however, it is impossible to say which desires will drive a truly empty person, which is precisely the case with the novels' heroes. While Gor'kii's characters in *Foma Gordeev* and *Three Men* inch toward the apocalyptic Judgment Day, my analysis will focus on how Foma and Il'ia prepare themselves for the end of the world, as observed in their inner dialogues. On the one hand, they are increasingly doubtful about God's immanent existence. On the other hand, they are acutely aware of the imminent judgment, each character conveying this knowledge in their own ways. Foma and Il'ia share, however, this tension between what may be simply called good and evil impulses. Their virtuous sides come from old-world Russia as passed down by

133 Phil. 2:7. "но уничижил Себя Самого"

134 E.g., Margaret Ziolkowski, "Dostoevsky and the Kenotic Tradition," in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Diane Oenning Thompson and George Pattison, Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 31–40; Benjamin Jens, "Silence and Confession in 'The Brothers Karamazov,'" *The Russian Review* 75, no. 1 (2016): 51–66.

their spiritual advisors or godfathers; their virtues are offset by apathy and antipathy toward their neighbor. Between the two poles is a kenotic silence that reveals the inner true self and makes space for God's will, but only if one is receptive to it. If there is no God, there is only earthly pleasure and suffering, and barring that, only eternal emptiness remains.

Through this lens we will look at Foma and Il'ia's transpositions as they navigate a bleak survival in Russian Empire. After a tense childhood, the Foma's first encounter with deep silence occurs concurrently with the death of his father, Ignat, the merchant shipper. To his only son, Ignat was also a symbol of old-world Russia. Generally a serious, unemotional man, Ignat's most human of moments comes when he hears Foma reading confidently from the beginning of Psalms.[135] Until the death scene, Foma's influences are often similarly two-sided and balanced between the spiritual and earthly realms. Maiakin, Foma's godfather and other major influence, reads to Foma and other children from the Bible passages in Job. The book is the Bible's strongest theodicean argument. However, he is not reading the verses one would expect considering the overall message of the book. Instead of a justification of suffering for the promise of eternal grace, Maiakin quotes Job's weakest moments that highlight his faithlessness in times of gruesome suffering. This includes, for example, Job's body covered in worms as it wastes a way (Job 7:5) and a rebuke by a friend of Job, Eliphaz (Job 15:14), whom God later castigates (Job 42:7-9). Therefore, when Foma begins to doubt suffering's significance, his soul hears loudly the warring sides of his split nature in the silence. That first deeply silent moment occurs in a garden when Foma witnesses Ignat pass before his very eyes.

In *Foma Gordeev,* the father's death marks the beginning of Foma's struggles with his two natures: the spiritual and the material, the Father and his father's inheritance. Before long in the garden, Ignat and Foma fall into quiet meditation as "again a solemn silence enveloped the garden's mature

135 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 4, 201.

beauty."[136] Fear grows on Ignat's face as he, nearing death, takes turn crying out to "Lord Jesus Christ!" and his son to listen, his screams alternating with the church bells ringing for a morning mass. These two forces call back and forth to each other for Foma's soul. The father conveys to Foma amidst interruptions by the ringing church bells the summary of his life's wisdom: "Do not depend on people... Do not expect much from them... We all live in order to take, not to give... O, Lord! Have mercy on a sinner!"[137] In his final moments in life, he offers Foma a lesson diametrically opposed to Christ's teachings. After Ignat fully passes, Foma is left alone in the middle of an empty garden, a reflection of his internal state. Foma's primal screams now take turns with ringing bells to pierce the silence. A balance between the self and the other is straying from a harmonious medium. From here forward Foma is consistently brought back to this empty silence as he pours out his Christian tradition and personal ego.

Gor'kii's *Three Men*, on the other hand, begins from its very first sentence amidst a deathly vacant silence. The narrator underlines the lifelessness of the world: "There are many lonely graves scattered among the forests of Kerzhenets."[138] We meet Antip Lunev, Il'ia's grandfather, who, "having lived in earthly sin until the age of fifty," took a vow of silence. He appeared as though he was dead before the grave. Visitors, who arrive intentionally or by unlucky happenstance, call him "scary" and describe him as "dried up" from continuous fasting and prayer. Even when his wife and children visited to give him food, Antip "also did not say a word to them." The harsh extremes of Antip's life swing from material to spiritual absolutism, and silence is what remains after ideological counter positions stabilize, like matter and anti-matter canceling one another out and leaving nothing. The lesson of the Garden of Gethsemane is that a person may empty themself as Christ did, but the rest is in God's hands, so to speak. In other words, Antip and others can suppress their human will in order that they

136 Ibid., 259. "И снова зрелую красоту сада обняло торжественное молчание. Ужас всё еще не исчезал из глаз Игната..."
137 Ibid., 260.
138 Ibid., 25.

may be filled with divine will, but they can do nothing but wait to receive the Holy Spirit. One must sit —or kneel—and wait for God to arrive. Antip's death at the hands of state officials suggests that belief in God persisted for him. The police [*ispravnik*] campaign to loot monasteries reached Antip's secluded monastic cell, and in tearing down his shelter the officers killed him, who refused to listen or speak. In the final moments of his life, his only words in decades, "Dear God... Forgive them!" indicates Antip died with his faith intact, having been filled with God's spirit in silence. However, such prolonged, exhaustive kenotic emptying of the self also suggests that God lies only at the end of such extensive distance from humanity. His grandson, Il'ia, who desires so desperately to be included in the merchantry, will find an even more intractable separation between himself and God.

Il'ia Lunev rarely has moments of quiet in his life, which is instead full of conflicting influences and impulses. Like Foma, he grows up with a merchant father whom he loses during childhood, though in *Three Men* crime takes away the main character's role model for material wealth. Iakov Lunev, whom the other community members called a heretic, is arrested for setting fire to a local forest patch. Il'ia, in another parallel with Foma, is handed over to another guardian who prioritizes spiritual education. In this case, Il'ia has both the rag-and-bone man Eremei and his disfigured, hushed uncle Terentii. As a godfather, Maiakin in *Foma Gordeev* falters at times, for example his quotations against Job's faithfulness and justification of poverty run counter to Christian teaching. His influence upon Foma, however, is largely positive and in line with old-world Christian morals, and he may be the reason for Foma's spiritual resistance in the end. Unfortunately for Il'ia, even the wisest and most godly of men in *Three* Men are morally estranged from concept of loving thy neighbor.

In *Three Men* there are no truly good people. Therein lies Elijah's function in the Book of Revelation; the final prophet before Christ's Second Coming returns to a world of sinners in order to prepare them for Judgment Day. Antip Lunev's story establishes that time has begun, and so even the virtuous among Il'ia are deeply flawed. Eremei soothingly reassures Il'ia of God's righteousness in

judgment, which he explains will come when “the time will strike” at some unknown hour in the future.[139] That same assuredness in God shows its ugly side to Il’ia when faced with actual evil. The town’s blacksmith violently beat his wife to death. A crowd, including Il’ia and Eremei, attempt to confront him about it, but Eremei is unable to utter more than “A-ah you-u!” in the face of murder. This Eremei is in stark contrast to the Biblical Jeremaiah [Ieremiia], another major OT prophet, known for his “Lamentations” about God’s destruction of Jerusalem for its sins. Eremei later asks himself, “Did [the blacksmith] really kill?” to cast enough doubt on the situation to exculpate him of any guilt.[140] Immediately after Eremei retreats from the blacksmith, the silence is punctuated with the first of many anti-theodicean statements: “A villain! That also applies to God!..”[141] The outburst from the crowd both compares the murderer to God and excuses his actions as justified evil because God also has killed. Most significantly in this moment, Il’ia’s immediate reaction following this popular acquittal was to feel pity for the blacksmith. It is then not difficult to trace Il’ia’s decision to take someone’s life back to this moment of silence, imbued with apathy and absent of divine righteousness. In a similar way, Terentii, Il’ia’s uncle and other spiritual mentor, displays a spiritual and a selfish side, though only when beneficial to him. With Eremei and Il’ia he asks, “I, grandfather, praise God, what else can I do?” to win favor with the crowd. After Eremei’s death, Il’ia later finds Terentii looting the deceased’s wallet, taking every last savings Eremei gathered.[142] With such figures as his spiritual mentors, it is little wonder that Il’ia begins to lose his faith.

Belief in God is the dividing point between *Foma Gordeev* and *Three Men* and their central characters. If the young men are at all representative of Gor’kii’s own struggles with God and faith, the difference between belief and unbelief was a major turning point occurring sometime between the writing of the two novels. The tension in the Russia of the novels arises from the specious tenability of

139 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 5, 47.
140 Ibid., 49-50.
141 Ibid., 49.
142 Ibid., 58.

Christian faith and the ever-present force of financial capital, which has enabled the merchantry to dehumanize fellow Russians. Gor'kii goes so far as to lay out the problem in front of us in one of Il'ia's moments of internal dialogue. Daydreaming to the drone of a tavern chorus of voices, Il'ia is reminded that, "grandfather Eremei loved God and saved money bit-by-bit. And Uncle Terentii fears God, but he stole the money. Everybody always has a double inside themselves. In their chests it is as though they have scales, and their heart, like an arrow pointing at times in one and at times in a different direction, weighing the heaviness of the good and the bad."[143] Each novel gives money great importance for the main characters in the moments that decide their fates. Faced with the death of a father figure, Foma and Il'ia both spend the rest of their respective novels calculating the gravity of virtue and sin, which separates the two characters by the end. In this final section, I look at the figures' moral decision-making as I seek to understand how Gor'kii came to abandon the Christian God as a force for good.

Much of what makes Foma special stems from his status as an inheritor of the "millions" of rubles his father amassed, while the older merchants of Foma's father's generation had spent their lives in pursuit of such wealthy estates. His friendly relationship with the workers employed on the shipping vessels is possible because he does not engage in the role of their supervisor. Foma's wild bender with colleagues results in workers drowning due to his disregard for lives. Before the chaos, a silence descends upon Foma and the others, and then "a whole hurricane of noise few at Foma, shrill, full of animalistic fear, disgustingly plaintive" as people fall into the water. Once again a cacophony of primal sounds erupts. His apathy toward peers drowning is exemplified in his response to someone crying out for help saying, "Drowning... people are drowning..." Angered by the screams, he yells back, "Are you really people?!"[144] Gor'kii here once again shows the competing impulses in Foma as they exchange words and battle for dominance. In his worst moments Foma is unable to see others' humanity, a

143 Ibid. "Илья подумал, что вот дедушка Еремей бога любил и потихоньку копил деньги. А дядя Терентий бога бо ится, но деньги украл. Все люди всегда как-то двоятся сами в себе. В грудях у них словно весы, и сердце их, как стрела весов, наклоняется то в одну, то в другую сторону, взвешивая тяжести хорошего и плохого."

144 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 4, 336.

worldview with grave consequences. When confronted about it, however, Foma seeks to return to a quieter life.

His disregard for human life, which resulted in the death of at least two people, is only one part of Foma's complex nature. Having left his work behind after the accident on the river, Foma recedes from society and takes up prayer, which spurs a partial internal transformation. He asks himself, "What is happening with me?—Who am I?" and decides to live simpler like the people [*narod*].[145] This coincides with another significant act of emptying out his own will. Foma gives his inheritance, including his entire fortune and businesses, to Maiakin in order to "live freely" and search for a new life.[146] It is not a complete surrender of his will, however. In a prayer, Foma swears off money-making and people in general: "What's the use of business? Money?... The only lie is all of these businesses... I see businessmen and so what? They're purposefully spinning themselves up in this just to not see themselves... Free them from this fuss."[147] Not long after that, he concludes his prayer in a different tone, saying "The river flows so that people can travel on it, the tree grows for food, the dog guards the house... Everything in the world can find a justification. But people – like cockroaches – are entirely superfluous on earth... Everything is for them, but what are they for?"[148] Foma is split by the faith in a God that preaches compassion and misanthropy toward those around him, two forces that are diametrically opposed to each other. Eventually there is space for only one in his soul.

The final showdown between the material and spiritual within Foma begins to unfold shortly after his estrangement from the transport business. Initially, Foma and Maiakin discuss labor at home. To Maiakin's assertion that "a person's happiness is based on his relationship to his labor," Foma responds with strong disagreement.[149] "Everything doesn't sit well with me," he says, "Business...

145 Ibid., 347-350. "«Что это со мной происходит? — думал он. — Кто я такой?»"
146 Ibid., 364.
147 Ibid., 259.
148 Ibid., 359.
149 Ibid., 424:. "И, как видишь, счастье человека обусловлено его отношением к своему труду..."

work... people... If, let's say, I see that everything is a lie... It's not the work, but what it is to oneself—a plug.... We plug the emptiness of the soul... Some work hard, others just command and sweat... And they receive more for this... Why is this so? Eh?"[150] He recognizes material wealth as a filler for spiritual nothingness and in doing so questions the true usefulness of the merchant lifestyle. This declaration of spiritual dominance is further reinforced later when Foma confronts Maiakin and the other merchants and, in doing so, permanently severing his financial relationships. Later, at the tavern the argument continues after Maiakin leads a toast to fellow merchants in praise of building the Empire, owning the most expensive houses in town, and paying the highest taxes to the government. Foma's swears to God while offering a verbal rebuke on the decadence of merchants' accumulated wealth. The scene may remind readers of Christ's sermon and arrest in Gethsemane when the merchants restrain Foma with force, who shouts "You can't tie up the truth, you lie!"[151] He describes the human cost and hints at revolution, saying "You didn't make a life, but a prison... You didn't build order, but forged chains on people... Do you understand that you are alive only thanks to human patience?"[152] In the background, someone asks "What's with him? He is going by Scripture or off the top of his head?" Once more he addresses the crowd of merchants: "You didn't build a life, you built a cesspool! You spread filth and sultriness with your deeds. Do you have a conscious? Do you remember God? A five-ruble note, that's your God!... You live by other people's strength... you work with other people's hands."[153] The merchants laugh at Foma and call him the "thundering prophet" while he is bound to a chair and full of righteous anger before he finally shuts down. "You didn't bind my tongue..." he says, but silence takes over the room as "something burned up in him and his soul became

150 Ibid., 424 ."— Всё — не по душе... Дела... труды... люди... Ежели, скажем, я вижу, что всё — обман... Не дело, а так себе — затычка... Пустоту души затыкаем... Одни раработают, другие только командуют и потеют... А получают за это больше... Это зачем же так? а?"
151 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 4, 448.
152 Ibid., 446.
153 Ibid., 450.

dark and empty."[154] Having given up his personal pleasures, rebuking the merchants leaves Foma with only his faith, which remains tenuous itself.

The novel's conclusion raises more questions than it answers. Foma parts ways with his old life until learning of Maiakin's death, after which he returns home for an unknown reason. Foma lives as a pariah in town and frequently spends his time drunkenly wandering the streets while those who recognize him insult and sneer at him. He "very rarely approaches those who call him; he avoids people and doesn't love to speak with them," which shows that he has remained an outcast since his outburst in the tavern. Gor'kii concludes Foma's story with a peculiar phrase attributed to the townspeople who try to talk with the outcast: "Hey, give us a word about the end times [*svetoprestavlenie*], eh? He-he-he! Pro-phet!"[155] From this particularly religious language we can gather that Foma retains faith, but only that Judgment Day is necessarily imminent. The word *svetoprestavlenie* has a strong connection to Christian theology, but it has its own dual meaning. In addition to its religious significance, *svetoprestavlenie* also denotes an irredeemably muddled situation, which would accurately describe Foma's fate in the novel (as in, "the deadline is tonight and I have yet to write a thing—this is the end of the world!"). Gor'kii, at least for another year, leaves open the possibility for a faithful and a doubting Thomas because he never fully chose a side. Following *Foma Gordeev*, we see by the end of *Three Men* a distinctly apocalyptic answer to this ambiguity shown in Foma.

The exposition of *Three Men* resembles the final scenes of Foma's isolated monasticism, an overlap framing the novels, published in quick succession in 1900-1901, as two halves of a larger story about the soul and faith in God. For Antipa, Foma, and other Russian Christians, steadfast belief leaves room in one's personality for a bit of the divine, even if that divinity wills believers to live in seclusion for the rest of their lives. Il'ia's presence in the arc, on the other hand, depicts dramatically the emptying of wills both personal and supernatural. It is important to note that in *Three Men* Il'ia's own

154 Ibid., 451.
155 Ibid., 458. "— Ну-ка, насчет светопреставления скажи слово, а? Хе-хе-хе! Про-орок!"

agency is taken from him because he ignored the instructions of the divine voice inside him. This individual secularization did not occur in Il'ia in a day, and in fact there were multiple steps along the way. The one of the earliest and most significant moments in Il'ia's process of losing faith was the death and subsequent robbery of Eremei, who was a spiritual advisor to the young boy. In fact one may even say that Eremei was Il'ia's primary connection to God through Bible stories and moral preaching. When the two were talking immediately before Eremei's death, the old man says, "My Lord! A raven flies, it can smell a bit [of money]," jokingly warning Il'ia about Terentii's envy of Eremei's money.[156] This subtle reference to the ravens that God sent to test Elijah's faith in order to perform miracles is another transposed symbol Gor'kii inverted.[157] While Terentii purports to be a servant of God like the ravens, readers realize shortly after this moment he is another anti-Christ. Once Eremei dies, Terentii and Petrukha steal his savings, which had been set aside for donations to the church. The act marks the intertwining of material wealth and God for good. The connection between the two manifests for the first time in Il'ia's prayer for "everything [he] want[s]" in the world, as opposed to little Iakov's prayer for the sake of prayer.[158] Starting with this moment, Il'ia loses his faith in short succession and finally his life.

Il'ia's estrangement from the divine in *Three Men* begins and concludes in a church. Feeling God within him gives rise to his primal instincts. He senses "something special, alarming, and contradictory to his dreams of a pure life" is watching after him and fights to suppress it.[159] Il'ia is readjusting to a new set of guiding principles as the Christian worldview declines in significance for him. This new paradigm is unclear, but it is noticeably materially focused. When little Iakov asks Il'ia

156 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 5, 56.
157 3 Kings 17:6
158 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 5, 63. "А ты о чем хочешь молиться? Я о том, чтобы умным быть... И еще — чтобы у меня всё было, чего захочу!.. А ты?"
159 Ibid., 97. "Оно пугливо скрывается где-то глубоко, оно безмолвно в суете жизни, но в церкви оно растет и вызывает что-то особенное, тревожное, противоречивое его мечтам о чистой жизни. В эти моменты ему всегда вспоминались рассказы об отшельнике Антипе и любовные речи тряпичника: «Господь всё видит, всему меру знает! Кроме его — никого!»"

if he knows what God wants from him, “once again out of his mouth poured incoherent words.” Iakov tries to explain God with a metaphor of fire in a lamp that comes and goes but always hangs in the air, but Il’ia cannot imagine and does “not want to know” such a thing.[160] The only thing he cares about, as he explains in an outburst at his friends Iakov and Masha, is “that you can’t stick your hand in it and nearby you can get warm.”[161] Both of his concerns center around his physical experience above anything else. Yet when Il’ia is walking by the monastery grounds, we see that he has not quite yet lost his faith. In a scene similar to the death of Foma’s father, Il’ia’s finds himself in utter silence save the deafening ringing of a church bell, “the only movement in a deathly silence surrounding earth.” When Il’ia asks himself “who is leading him throughout life, who pushes all of its difficulties and struggles on him,” the “question flared up in Il’ia’s soul, ‘Is it you, Lord?’” In response, only “a cold horror sent shivers throughout his body.”[162] As Judgment Day nears, Il’ia is frightened to be alone in silence with God and himself.

Once more like Foma, Il’ia’s faith declines in the background of a murder. There are important differences between the two, however, which again point toward *Three Men* being the apocalyptic conclusion of the Christian worldview in Gor’kii. First among the dissimilarities is that Il’ia’s murder was premeditated as opposed to Foma’s drunken negligence leading to the workers’ deaths. Here we see again how Gor’kii views the search for private wealth. Il’ia planned the murder of the pawn broker Poluektov, whom he strangles in order to rob him of cash and expensive goods.[163] After Il’ia returns to his favorite bar, he sat in silence and “without thoughts, waited for what would come.” The other and arguably more important difference between Foma and Il’ia’s world is how other merchants react to their killings. Foma faced scrutiny, guilt, and ultimatums from Maiakin. In *Three Men*, Il’ia, whom the

160 Ibid., 104.
161 Ibid., 104.
162 Ibid., 118.
163 Poluektov is a speaking name/voice, from AG πολύευκτος, “long-awaited, desired” (lit. much of what is desired).

narrator begins calling by his family name, Lunev, receives jokes, congratulations, and pride after his murder-robbery. Society has forsaken its commandments with joy.

Gor'kii does not stop his criticism of the merchant class there. Lunev approaches the crowd and hears chatter among the townspeople. A merchant praises his inhumanity using Jesus's words: "It's the hand of God! As they say, all of the hairs on your head are numbered."[164] These words are said to Christian martyrs preparing for death to reassure them that God's will bends toward justice. This is part of Jesus's continuation of Elijah's work to prepare the world for the eschaton, the end of time. By using such a quote in order to justify Il'ia's killing of another person for gold and silver, Gor'kii highlights the depravity of the merchantry. This statement enlivens Lunev to such a point that he would fearlessly admit to the murder, so as to indicate the full dissolution of the Christian world.

Departure from old-world Russia and its Orthodox identity begins with separating from society spiritually, as Il'ia did. Among those around him, "a few lauded his dexterity and bravery, others regretted that he did not have time to take all the money, some were afraid he would get caught, and no one pitied the merchant [Poluektov], nobody said a good word about him," Il'ia notes to himself.[165] Despite the social boost, he is disgusted by their reactions and still expects God's punishment at any moment. However, time passes, and Il'ia begins to question if he will ever be punished for what he did, which begins troubling him. This anxiety comes to a head when discussing alternatives to the Bible, "heretical" books that "explain the beginning of things," Lunev becomes acutely frenetic and defensive.[166] He screams, "God exists! He sees everything! Knows everything!" echoing Eremei.[167] Iakov does not understand the reason for the outburst until Lunev uses the same quote the black-bearded merchant said: "All the hairs on your head are numbered! Have you heard? If I fell into sin,

164 Mt. 10:29-31, Lk 21:18

165 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 5, 158-159. "Некоторые хвалили его ловкость и храбрость, иные сожалели о том, что он не успел взять всех денег, другие опасались, как бы он не попался, и никто не жалел купца, никто не сказал о нем доброго слова."

166 Ibid., 148.

167 Ibid., 149.

then it is [God's] will! Idiot!"[168] Thereafter he quickly unravels into madness. When talking to an investigator on Poluektov's murder case at the police station, Lunev is preoccupied by a painting on the wall. He asks the detective for an explanation, which strikes him to his core: "It is a powerful visual aid... in order to show the discrepancy between our life and Christ's teachings."[169] The police believe him during questioning and begin to suspect another of Poluektov's clients for the murder. Lunev realizes that he can get away with the robbery and murder if he so desires, after which "he could only think about a single thing: how will he live?"[170] Without the punishment he was expecting to deliver justice, the idea of God quickly becomes untenable to Lunev.

In the end, four words break Il'ia's faith in God, hope for justice, and will to live. After speaking with Iakov, who had been his closest confidant before the conversation, Lunev is crestfallen in the meaninglessness he sees. Iakov's willingness to let God's will dictate his life leads Lunev to the conclusion that God, if truly watching all, "sees all [and] permits all," which renders God irrelevant to humans.[171] Justice is not guaranteed and therefore "a pig is looking for some luck, and a person all the more so, as they say." This novel nihilism in Lunev reverberates throughout the rest of the novel. Back in the tavern he entertains others with jokes about his innocence despite his actions. He starts, "But there you have it, God asks you, 'How did you live, human?' And I will say, 'Lord! I was born small, died drunk, and I don't remember a thing!' He'll have a laugh and forgive me."[172] He mocks the ideas he previously values and casually brushes off what was previously his primary concern, and Gor'kii continues to strike at the stereotype of the two-faced believer. At church Lunev found personal comfort about what he had done, and "feeling unexpectedly well, he failed to understand and didn't trust this

168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., 161-162. "Мм... Это написано для вящей наглядности... для того, чтобы показать несоответствие между жизнью и учением Христа."
170 Ibid., 168.
171 Ibid., 170.
172 Ibid., 182. "А я скажу: «Господи! Родился — мал, помер пьян,— ничего не помню!» Он посмеется да простит меня..."

feeling, but he sought within himself penitence and he did not find it."[173] Instead, Gor'kii adds, he worries he may not have hidden the money well enough, leaving it vulnerable to theft. Lunev declares his preferences and opens himself for criticism of valuing money over life. No longer is Lunev feeling God within himself with others or in church as before Poluektov's murder, he is utterly alone in his own world.

Lunev's world comes to an end at the after a long period of emptying himself of his past and present life. In conversations with Iakov and a hospital watchman, Lunev hears Job's lamentations about God's unfair treatment, though he can only repeat to himself, "Why did I live?" When the guard quotes Ecclesiastes 9:4, "For he who has fellowship with all the living has hope, for it is better to be a living dog than a dead lion," Lunev rushes off as he is unable to come to terms with his growing isolation from God and the rest of society. Driven mad by guilt but unable to address rectify his transgression, he finally comes to terms with his new life without a meaning beyond himself. He reflects that "Had I not strangled the merchant, living would be a lot better now," but then told himself, "What merchant? He's a misfortune of mine, but not a sin..."[174] Il'ia gives up not just being a good person, but he rejects good and evil as established concepts entirely. He makes this realization overlooking an expansive ravine adjacent to the Volga. Only the tiny flames of ships float in a black expanse. Gor'kii foregrounds the leitmotif of silent emptiness that has accompanied so much of his spiritual searching: "And not long before a bat crossed the twilight, dark thoughts and memories flashed in Il'ia's soul: they came and left without response, and the darkness became ever thicker in the soul." The last thread on which his faith hung broke, and "his chest at this moment was full of cold nonchalance and melancholic emptiness, which he saw... where he once felt God." Lunev has lost his faith in God, and where there was once hopes and dreams he has only a vacant space within himself.

173 Ibid., 197. "Чувствуя себя так неожиданно хорошо, он недоу мевал, не верил ощущению своему, но искал в себе рас каяния и — не находил его."
174 Ibid., 216.

Following that, Lunev tries to fit into merchant society, but he does not find much luck there either. After admitting his atheism to himself, he gathers money from investors to start his own shop. "Il'ia Lunev's dream finally came true" when he became a merchant himself.[175] He is unable to leave his past behind him, however, as reminders continually arise: he sees Poluektov in paintings, little Iakov comes to visit, and everyone in his new social circle is still plagued by the question of how to live. In the final scene of the novel, Lunev goes to court to support his friend, Faith [Vera], who has been arrested for prostitution. Asked to answer for her actions, her only response is that she "was not forced," but she "simply wanted to get rich."[176] Enraged more than ever by her imprisonment, Lunev finally breaks down and confesses to the court that he killed Poluektov for money. It may be surmised that Lunev's conscious finally got the better of him, though later he says to one of the guards who asks if it was his conscious that tortured him into confessing that he has no conscious.

Before Gor'kii draws away from the scene, he offers one final reminder. Namely, Lunev's chest held a growing "emptiness, which was dark, cold, and in which, like a pale moon in an autumn sky, arose the cold question: 'And what's ahead?' [*A chto dal'she?*]"[177] (The name Lunev is from the Russian for "moon," *luna*.) The moon, a lifeless surface that only is visible by reflecting its surroundings, here portends an answer incompatible with life. His final piece of internal dialogue asks, "And what now, Peter's court?" referring to the Saint Peter, the heavenly judge of the fate of the deceased. In his last moments, a guard asks Lunev to swear to God he will not try to escape. He replies, "I don't believe in God" and runs away, at which point the guards shoot and kill him, the shot ringing out through the black expanse of night.[178] Readers are left with only the final image of a match, lit by one of the guardsmen over Lunev's body, calling back to Iakov's failed explanation of God. Gor'kii's

175 Ibid., 227.
176 Ibid., 302-303.
177 Ibid., 314.
178 Ibid., 316.

most antagonistically atheist moments still hold out the smallest of hopes for the divine righteousness that only God can provide, but one has to find the truth in silence of the secular world.

In both *Foma Gordeev* and *Three Men*, Gor'kii depicts the characters' and Russia's souls embattled by good, evil, and the question of what is to be done following the long nineteenth century. At stake is the personal feeling of righteousness and a national sense of purpose. As the novels progress, their plots and main characters are gradually consumed by the vacuum of hopelessness ubiquitous in turn-of-the-century Russia. Foma survives to live a long life in seclusion, having accidentally killed a pair of workers, though he never finds communion with his merchant milieu again. Il'ia of *Three Men* also takes a life, but his fellow Russian merchants celebrate his self-serving crime. The community around Il'ia encourages theft and murder as a rite of passage for young members of the merchantry. The Christological (or Pneumatological) concept of kenosis, once a practice to bring one's actions in line with God's will, ceases to invite the divine. For Russians like Foma and Il'ia, however, who were brought up in the Christian tradition, finding God in oneself is all but impossible in their contemporary society. The alternative, one's personal will, leads to moral quagmires while navigating the zero-sum game of wealth accumulation. What then occurs in twentieth-century merchant characters with their first-century moral maxims is the hollowing of both moral and divine self, the result of which yields a cavernous moral abyss, such as where Il'ia finds himself at the end of *Three Men*. Though his life is over by the end of the novel, the rest of society lives to see another day, which raises the question of what happens to life, morality, and faith as time marches on into the vacuum.

Gor'kii's thought experiment to answer this question is his first drama, *The Lower Depths* (1902). The work begins already in that moral chasm: "A basement, similar to a cave. The ceiling is heavy stone arches, smoky and with crumbling plaster."[179] This underworld is society's dredges, picking up the worst of Foma and Il'ia's world. However, there is no Maiakin or Eremei to teach keep

179 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 7, 109;. Подвал, похожий на пещеру. Потолок — тяжелые, каменные своды, закопченные, с обвалившейся штукатуркой. Свет — от зрителя и, сверху вниз,— из квадратного окна с правой стороны.

alive the Christian tradition and advise those younger. As a consequences, moral questions no longer badger characters or entreat them to reconsider their decisions. Instead we are left with despair, decay, and disease as Gor'kii finally concedes the lost battle for theodicy. In the movement toward a post-Christian society, *The Lower Depths* plays a pivotal role in capturing the confusing chaos between an active Christian semiosphere and whatever is to take its place as the driving cultural dominant. The play does not mark the beginning of Gor'kii's godseeking or godbuilding, but it does signal the start of a period dominated by the search for a replacement religion.

In a letter to Leonid Andreev dated December 23, 1901, Gor'kii himself connects truth, faith, and fullness: "Over the course of my life, I have pounded my fists on many truths [*istinam*] in order to find what is inside them, and they all rang like empty pots under the strike of my fists. Only faith is that truth which lets out a lively and full sound when struck." Gor'kii goes on to tell Andreev that *Three Men* failed to properly ring true with his faith in the end.[180] He would say that about his next major works as well, but he would keep trying to get closer to the truth provided by faith. The examined narratives are the search for the most sonorous spirituality, so to speak, up to this point. What started as playful transpositions of isolated pieces of the Christian tradition has become a trial against God. Gor'kii's verdict on the theodicean question is clear: there is a God out there, but it is not the one from the Bible. The Christian God's existence is simply incompatible with the state of humanity. Thus, the following chapters accompany Gor'kii on his search for a new force to call "God" that can satisfy his needs. He topples the Holy Trinity and revolutionizes the Holy Scriptures to find the truth right that was in front of him all this time.

180 Gor'kii, *PSP*, vol. 2, 229. "В течение жизни моей я стучал кулаками по многим истинам, чтобы узнать, что у них внутри, и все они звучали под ударами моими, как пустые горшки. Только вера — вот истина, дающая при ударе по ней звук живой и полный. В „Троих“ это не показано. Вообще — эта книжка — как вообще все мои крупные задачи — не удалась мне."

Chapter 3:
Factories of Worship:
Forging a New Faith after Bloody Sunday

"The criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism."
Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (1843)[181]

"*You are about to read astonishing things, but believe them, these are the facts."*
Gor'kii's opening words in a letter to his wife, Ekaterina, 9 January 1905 [O.S.][182]

For a book so important to atheist Soviet propaganda, Gor'kii's *Mother* (1907) asks a striking number of theological questions. On the novel's surface, spirituality looks like organized religion. The novel's overt religious symbology and messianic central character both criticize Russian Orthodoxy Christianity in a variety of manners, so much so that publication led the Orthodox Church to make formal charges of heresy against its author.[183] At the same time, some noticed its religious undertones swinging in the opposite direction: Lenin spoke highly of *Mother* in public but in private expressed consternation for elevating spiritual over material concerns.[184] The story's mixed messages have left Gor'kii's attempt at his own gospel muddled and his questions without answers. Thus, Soviet ministers of culture and schoolteachers could confidently use *Mother* to edify the class consciousness of the reading public—a portion that expanded with "illiteracy liquidation" programs early in the Soviet era—because it unambiguously denigrated Russia's imperial and Orthodox institutions. On the other hand, we can be sure that this book has spread the message and spirit of revolution unlike any other, though it

181 "Marx, Karl, Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung," accessed December 15, 2024, http://www.zeno.org/Philosophie/M/Marx,+Karl/Zur+Kritik+der+Hegelschen+Rechtsphilosophie.+Einleitung.
182 Gor'kii, *PSP*, vol. 5, 8. "Ты прочитаешь удивительные вещи, но верь им, это факты."
183 Gor'kii, *PSP*, vol. 2, 351.
184 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 479.

is difficult to say exactly what made it such an effective medium.[185] Perhaps its weakness, an uncanny resemblance to the most important Christian narratives, was also its strength.

This chapter argues that *Mother* is Gor'kii's attempt to sketch a new anthropocentric credo, a post-Christian model of the Holy Trinity. The novel transposes Biblical accounts of Christ's resurrection and the Holy Spirit's gifts to form a new absolute truth, notably and curiously excluding the Father. The lack of a God-the-Father in Gor'kii's model represents the absence of a foundational narrative that moors a population in place. Filling that gap is the purpose of the novel *Confession*, which I analyze in the next chapter. *Mother*'s experimental spirituality reflects Gor'kii's own internal debates in the aftermath of the 1905 Bloody Sunday events. He and a hundred thousand others witnessed tsarist forces violently suppress a labor march outside the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg. To understand this new model of faith, we first read Gor'kii's sketch "9 January" (1906), where he depicts the destruction of the image of the Tsar-God, the result of two centuries of tsarist administration of the Church, as I argued in the first chapter. Losing faith in the tsar meant for Russian Orthodox believers losing faith in God's presence on Earth. In the novel *Mother,* Gor'kii reimagines a world reborn with a post-Christian body and spirit: collective labor, collective love, and collective minds. Using the Bible as one would use a cast for metalworking, *Mother* offers secular replacements for a savior figure and unifying spirit that will be at the center of socialist spirituality. Through transposed text, ritual, and ideology what was once old is renewed, and a revolutionary gospel is again brought to the masses.

Introduction

Both "9 January" and *Mother* were written in response to historical events that shook Russia and the labor movement of the nascent twentieth century. Gor'kii had become increasingly involved in

185 T. A. Nikonova, "Roman «Mat'» kak katekhizis revoliutsionera: Formirovanie revoliustionnoi etiki," *Acta Eruditorum* 31 (August 19, 2019) provides a succinct overview of the novel's immediate reception by Lenin, Lunacharskii, and other influential people in what would become Soviet cultural politics.

workers' organizations in and around Nizhnii Novgorod during the 1890s, which is reflected by growing preoccupations about economic disparities in his writings from the period. On January 9 [23], 1905 the tsar's guards around the Winter Palace of St. Petersburg violently suppressed a procession of workers and supporters, which left hundreds of injured, dead, and arrested. Gor'kii witnessed firsthand the day's events, commonly referred to as Russia's "Bloody Sunday," which elicited multiple recorded reactions, including the letter to his wife (quoted in the second epigraph above) and the sketch bearing the date as its title published the following year. The novel was also first printed in 1906, though its historical roots go back to 1902: one of the first large-scale political demonstrations in the Russian labor movement took place on May 1 of that year in the Nizhnii Novgorod suburb of Sormovo. As I will argue, however, Bloody Sunday greatly influenced *Mother*'s content and message. This connection to January 1905 positions the novel as a vision set in the world that Gor'kii sketches first in his sketch.

The Sormovo May Day demonstration of 1902 would have been no more than an early but unremarkable event in the timeline leading to 1917 had it been led by someone other than Peter Zalomov. His fiery character and behavior became the basis for Pavel Vlasov in *Mother.*[186] Zalomov's own mother also served as an inspiration for the novel's Pelageia Nilovna, though she was just one among many real-life examples for Pavel's mother.[187] The Social Democrats organized a demonstration with Zalomov and other laborers at Sormovo's largest factory. The year before, Gor'kii had been arrested for spreading anti-government propaganda in preparation for the 1901 May Day rally, but his role in the much larger 1902 demonstration is unknown.[188] On that day, Zalomov appeared at the front of the crowd with a red banner to lead the procession of workers, much like Pavel in the novel.[189] Zalomov and several others were arrested for their role in 1902, which Gor'kii took upon himself to

186 This has no direct confirmation from MG himself, but it is commonly accepted among scholars, such as (everyone). Also in Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 7, 556.
187 Gor'kii, *PSP*, vol. 8, 234.
188 Gor'kii, *PSP*, vol. 2, p. 351.
189 Lenin, *PSS*, vol. 7, 556.

solve. The author first financed the strikers' legal defense.[190] From this experience he also likely got the inspiration for Pavel's ardent speech in court from Zalomov's own in real life. Gor'kii himself had a hand in writing the original version, which would explain the similarities found in the fictitious exculpation.[191] His novel *Mother* recorded the Sormovo demonstration and Zalomov in stone with the stylized portrayal of Pavel Vlasov, Pelageia Nilovna, and their comrades. However, Zalomov was not his only inspiration.

The sketch "9 January" was published over a year after the tragedy itself, but there was no doubt as to which year was referenced. On that day in 1905, Father Georgii Gapon led a procession of approximately 100,000 workers to present Tsar Nicholas II with a petition for improved labor conditions, greater compensation, regulated hours, and elected representation in the government.[192] The bureaucratic apparatus that administered Russian day-to-day life, outside of the cities especially, had become by this time apathetically inefficient on its best days and maliciously obstructive and punitive on its worst.[193] Moreover, urban centers old and new answered the tsarist government's demands for military production to equip the navy embroiled in the Russo-Japanese War, and as a result Russia's growing urban populations were asking for improved material conditions in return after the prolonged economic struggles of the 1890s and early 1900s.[194] The march on the Winter Palace was organized as a broad show of support for a local strike, which had nevertheless drawn tens of thousands, at the Putilov (now Kirov) Works plant after four workers were fired for reasons deemed unjust by the other laborers.[195] Gapon and other participants later called this march a "holy procession" [*krestnyi khod*] in

190 Gor'kii, *PSP*, vol. 3, l. 68 (9 maia 1902, 54-55); l. 179 (31 oktiabria 1902, 115); PSP vol. 4, l. 87 (2 marta 1904, 55-56)
191 Text of speech: http://saint-juste.narod.ru/Zalomov.html; fact about MG's role in Zalomov's speech from n. 8 for l. 127 to Piatnitskii (vol. 3, 337).
192 Walter Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon and the St. Petersburg Massacre of 1905* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 187-188
193 Ibid.
194 Catherine Evtukov, *A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 532-533.
195 Sablinsky, *Road to Bloody Sunday*, 164-165.

defense of workers' rights.[196] Their ritualistic act transformed a localized issue into a city and eventually nation-wide movement on the momentum of labor organizing efforts already underway in the Russian Empire's major cities. This event and Gapon in particular, I will argue, became the second inspiration for *Mother*'s procession to the factory alongside the Sormovo demonstration. Neither the workers nor the government knew the deadly ramifications that would come from their meeting on Palace Square on that Sunday.

While the immediate fallout of the day was calamitous, the level of death and destruction was limited compared to the events in the year following. On January 9 itself, crowds of people were injured and killed by a Cossack regiment of palace guards as the workers led by Father Gapon approached the tsar's residential complex. Nicholas II was not at the Winter Palace, but had fled to Tsarskoe Selo south of St. Petersburg, away from his disgruntled but peaceful subjects. Despite forewarning and good intentions, the tsar ordered his guards to resist any advance by the crowd toward the palace and dispersed additional officers to suppress political activity around the city. When the throng approached the square in front of the Winter Palace, the guards "met them with nine shots" that injured several hundred, at least dozens fatally, according to Gor'kii himself, who sheltered a wounded Gapon later that evening.[197] The priest had spread the people's petition to domestic and western media in the lead-up to the day. Subsequent news of the tsar's violent methods spurred strikes throughout the Russian Empire in solidarity with the St. Petersburg workers. Major cities and middling provinces alike awoke to protests in the following days, and in the subsequent weeks, strikes took over industrial centers like Warsaw and Riga at the territorial edges of the empire.[198] Meanwhile, revolutionary organizations, such as the Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries, seized the opportunity by stoking additional strikes and protests among the worker and peasant populations.[199] This internal

196 Ibid., 238.
197 Gor'kii, *PSP*, vol. 5, 8.
198 Evtukhov, *A History of Russia*, 523-533.
199 Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-century Russia* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 14-15.

unrest, especially in the Russian Empire's acquired territories, even required the tsar to recall a significant contingent troops from his war with Japan in order to maintain sovereignty at home.[200] The eventual result was the first Russian revolution that gave subjects minor concessions at the cost of the many thousands more dead and injured. On that fateful Sunday afternoon of January 9, 1905, Russia became a nation on the brink of collapse as a state and identity. Father Gapon himself said in summary of the day: "There is no tsar! There is no God!"[201] Gor'kii's sets this tone in his sketch and novel, disappointedly and defiantly asking, "What do we believe in now?"

At the center of my analysis of both "9 January" and *Mother* is the concept of the Christian Trinity as a symbol and instrument of ontological grounding for ideological communities. In post-Christian thought, such concepts will be transposed into secular forms with similar functions so that meaning and reasoning can remain largely interrupted. A triune deity lies at the center of Christian dogma and worldbuilding, and its influence and function are multifaceted. In Orthodox belief, the deity referred to as "God" has three distinct persons or hypostases: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Collectively they share the divine *ousia* or essence of the Trinity. The Father exists outside of the bounds of space and time, and from the Father originates everything, including the other two hypostases of God. Thus, the Father is associated with the absolute authority of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. The Son, on the other hand, proceeds from the Father, is both divine and mortal, and speaks and acts as the "Word" of the Father. Of a dual nature and existence, the Son is associated with praxis, the embodiment and implementation of doctrine in the physical world. The Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Father and enlivens the vessel it fills by bestowing creative power. As a result, the Holy Spirit is commonly associated with its gifts to believers at baptism, revelation, and other significant spiritual moments: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing powers, miracle working,

200 Sablinsky, *Road to Bloody Sunday*, 240.
201 Sablinsky, *Road to Bloody Sunday*, 243.

prophecy, differentiating spirits, distinguishing tongues, and interpretation of tongues.[202] With a beginning, end, and vehicle of causation, Christian dogma explained how our universe came into existence and whence it is inevitably going.

There are a few reasons to take this analytical approach. First, Gor'kii's intimate knowledge of Christian teachings, both his instrument and object of recreation, suggests that he would have understood how and why the Trinity deserved its own detailed substitute in the post-Christian era. As recounted in previous chapters, young Aleksei Peshkov was raised fully immersed in Church teachings and scripture, largely due to his grandparents' influence during childhood. He had a deep knowledge base of not only the literary features but also the socio-cultural significance contained within the stories of the Bible and other religious narratives. Readers, at least those looking, see evidence of this in early transpositions, the instance in his short story "Cain and Artëm" being perhaps the most cogent example. Having observed the great meaning of Christian literature in others, Gor'kii knew how to craft his secular world; to truly replace God in the eyes of Christians required a believer's perspective, which meant accounting for all major components. In the Christian creed, there is no more pervasive, important doctrine than the Trinity. Second, there are hints to this disambiguating treatment of God in both texts. As I will show, exclamations of God's absence in both "9 January" and *Mother* refer not to the entire Triune deity called "God" but specifically to the ideological fundament that is the Father. At the same time in the novel, Gor'kii presents a new Son and Holy Spirit in the forms of Pavel and the revolutionary cause (as seen in Pelageia Nilovna), respectively. God-the-Father, on the contrary, is indeed excluded from Gor'kii's post-Christian gospel, at least while he tests concepts such as "logic" [*razum*] and "the people" [*narod*] as new foundations for post-Christian society, which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. Gor'kii's earnest attempt to find a spiritual substitute for Russian Orthodoxy must first of all consider its most central tenet, the Trinitarian God.

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202 1 Cor. 12:7-11

Literature Review

I offer this more nuanced approach to reconcile the tension in the commentary about the novel's uncanny religiosity. Its incomplete transposition offers a viable replacement, yet something is still to be desired, which conversations involving religion, Gor'kii, and *Mother* often reflect. Literary critics and intellectual historians have long recognized biblical quotations and didactic modeling in Gor'kii's writing, even going so far as to talk about *Mother* in particular as his "Gospel" bearing a new socialist religion.[203] There is general consensus that Pavel is a Christ-like figure, although making sense of this new faith beyond that interpretation has created more confusion than conclusions. Using source texts like the Orthodox Bible, I aim to provide a more complete model for analyzing the novel's many mythopoetic devices with religious origins. Moreover, transpositions open another dimension that has been largely absent from discussion so far: the setting that Gor'kii crafted for his "Gospel." More than just the text, transposed places demonstrate that Gor'kii considered the real-world application of his new faith and values system. Finally, working with the new theological models found in these texts, I speak to the small number of scholars having begun only recently to consider Gor'kii a serious and influential Russian religious-metaphysical thinker. Beginning with *Mother,* he offers complex arguments on the current status and future potential of Russians' deep-rooted spirituality, which places him among the likes of Nikolai Rozanov, Valerii Briusov, Lev Tolstoi, and Konstantin Tsiolkovskii.[204] Believing is not a requirement for understanding, and Gor'kii's position in between spirituality and secularism offers a unique perspective worth considering.

Maksim Gor'kii and his novel *Mother* are peerless in twentieth-century Soviet culture on account of their innovativeness and productivity in the Russian literary sphere. This liminality between

203 Lippman, "Co-Opting Orthodoxy," 183. G. A. Mitin, "Evangelie ot Maksima," in *Maksim Gor'kii: Pro et contra*, ed. D. K. Bogatyrëv (Izdatel'stvo Russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2018), 637–57.

204 M. S. Agurskii, "Velikii eretik (Gor'kii kak religioznyi myslitel')," in *Maksim Gor'kii: Pro et contra*, ed. D. K. Bogatyrëv (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2018), 89. Alyssa W. Dinega, "Bearing the Standard: Transformative Ritual in Gorky's Mother and the Legacy of Tolstoy," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 42, no. 1 (1998): 76, https://doi.org/10.2307/310053, 653.

past and future creates a variety of impressions about where our subjects lie in history. Katerina Clark's study *The Soviet Novel* (1981) endures as an authoritative voice on categorizing *Mother,* which she calls the "prototypical beginning" of the Socialist Realist genre that characterizes a great deal of later Soviet literature.[205] At the same time, Clark's description is less definitive than meets the eye. She labels *Mother* as a parabolic and hagiographic work, genres that resist comparison with any sort of Realism, Socialist or otherwise. More recent conversations have reopened the topic of the novel's form, such as G. Mitin's evaluation that *Mother* perhaps represents its own genre or a unique subgenre under Realism.[206] Still others have remarked on the gospel nature of the novel in reference to Pavel's story, though this focus on the first part overlooks the larger second part primarily featuring the mother, Pelageia Nilovna.[207] In response, I argue that transpositions of both content and authorial voice found in *Mother* make the case to consider the novel as both a Gospel of salvation (the good news of the socialist cause) in Part I and the apostolic acts of Pelageia Nilovna in Part II. My analysis leaves little room to consider the novel hagiographic for its lack of an origin or biographical story, a panegyric tone, miracles of any kind, and other elements of saints' lives in the Orthodox tradition, which do appear in other works by Gor'kii. Framing the novel's parts as gospel and apostolic acts brings into focus Gor'kii's primary message while he employs the new fatherless duality of Pavel as savior and Pelageia Nilovna as an everyday—though still laudable and imitable—martyr for the revolutionary cause.

Mother represents Gor'kii's most involved usage of Orthodoxy for its number of transpositions both with and without modification to the original. Nearly every discussion of *Mother* in the past few decades has commented on the role and contributions of Orthodox Christianity as a source for Gor'kii's creativity, but many connections and their meanings remain to be uncovered. Religion's presence is obvious, which was subject to quick interpretation by literary scholars, though its wholesale application

205 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Indiana University Press, 1981), 19.
206 Mitin, "Evangelie ot Maksima," 637.
207 Lippman, "Co-Opting Orthodoxy," 183.

has exposed numerous holes in past juxtapositions. As mentioned, Western scholars like Clark and Raimund Sesterhenn have noted broad correlations in *Mother* with the Biblical account of Jesus Christ made with the aim of advancing the socialist message in Russia. Sesterhenn even goes so far as to say that *Mother* interprets revolutionary phenomena through the Christian lens before moving onto a more general concept, which is another way to describe the post-Christian paradigm shift Gor'kii is seeking to accomplish.[208] This portrait of the novel's relationship with Orthodoxy, one which sees them as inhabiting different niches, needs further refinement. Before diving into the particulars, however, it is important to note that Gor'kii did not subvert spirituality in favor of socialism, as Clark claimed, nor did he forsake his Christian worldview, at least in the span of the novel, as Sesterhenn asserted.[209] On the contrary, as I will show, *Mother* is a spiritual text that heavily relies on Christian narratives, rituals, and symbols to develop a syncretic system of values and artifacts that is no less religious than the Bible and the system it espouses. New Testament components that Gor'kii borrowed for his novel are much like the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the original Gospels: historic and integral for understanding its successor.

Much of the focus in scholarly discussions about *Mother* revolves around the character of the son, Pavel, and the obvious references that connect him and Christ. As G. Mitin stated, it is as if Gor'kii went back and forth between Marxist sources and the story of Christ when writing the novel.[210] Readers seeing Pavel's placement of the icon depicting the story on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-35) in his home will begin to understand the parallels Gor'kii is trying to make, as many have done before.[211] His outspoken leadership on behalf of the downtrodden laborers and his sacrifices for the greater good often come after the icon to bring Pavel and Christ's narratives closer. However, there still

208 Raimund Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo bei Gor'kij und Lunačarskij bis 1909: Zur ideologischen und literarischen Vorgeschichte der Parteischule von Capri* (Verlag Otto Sagner, 1982), http://www.oapen.org/download/?type=document&docid=1003574, p. 253.
209 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 50. Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo*, 263.
210 Mitin, "Evangelie ot Maksima," 652.
211 Mitin, "Evangelie ot Maksima," 640. Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo*, 240. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 50.

remains much to extrapolate from Gor'kii's choice of the Emmaus appearance, which I will undertake below. Some, such as Eric Lippman, also draw attention to their contrasts, which are by and large a result of Pavel's entirely mortal nature or hyperrationality.[212] When seen as a transposed post-Christian savior, Pavel's shortcomings are not deviations from the Christ narrative, as Lippman argues, but a manifestation of the dual nature of the Son, which is paradoxically also present in Lippman's analysis. One can surely note differences, but ultimately the shortcomings lie with society, Gor'kii's primary object of scrutiny. Their numerous similarities notwithstanding, Pavel and Christ diverge at important moments to be explicated below, but these differences are in ideology rather than implementation.

To complement Pavel, many critics have likened Pelageia to Mary, the mother of Jesus, but that conclusion, though valid at times, passes over the integral role she plays in the novel. Naturally, Christ's own mother is the quickest and most common comparison made to explain Pelageia Nilovna's function in the novel. She is not just Pavel's mother, but she also considers herself a maternal figure to all the young revolutionaries working alongside her son.[213] Their relationship, as expressed boldly in the novel's title, is undoubtedly important. However, this analysis reduces the central character to a single facet. My reading, on the contrary, pushes back on that broad equivalence for its lack of continuity throughout Pelageia Nilovna's arc and, in doing so, investigates the full significance of the mother in Gor'kii's post-Christian theology. Beyond comparisons to Mary—who has strong connections with all of the Trinity's personas—I put forth the idea that Pelageia Nilovna's development, the true (and arguably only) axis around which the whole novel spins, is Gor'kii's post-Christian Holy Spirit in action. In *Mother,* the revolutionary spirit drives important character (personal) and plot (social) development while it retains the forms and functions of the Christian Holy Spirit. This transformation through transcendence is the "religious element" Sesterhenn refers to when discussing

212 Lippman, "Co-Opting Orthodoxy," 184.

213 Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo*, 263. Rossen Djagalov, "The Red Apostles: Imagining Revolutions in the Global Proletarian Novel," *Slavic and East European Journal* 61, no. 3 (2017), 407.

the mother as the "synthesis" of faith and reason.[214] In addition, I argue that this new Holy Spirit anticipates the spontaneity-consciousness dialectic that underlies Gor'kii's influential novel and those that came in its wake, according to Clark. The spirit's presence confers a "state of grace (albeit revolutionary rather than religious)" that will define a new era, which is to follow the novel's climactic conclusion.[215] Though the Trinity is traditionally seen as masculine—and perhaps that is reason enough to assume Gor'kii would make at least part of it feminine—it stands to say there is precedent for manifesting a Holy Spirit-esque character as a woman.

At the time of the novel's composition, Russian religious thinking appeared in diverse artistic portrayals, including those which depicted the supernatural wisdom of the Holy Spirit as a feminine figure, the Divine Sophia. The concept itself, which extends back to pre-Christian Judaism or earlier, is hardly exclusive to Russia, but Sophia's return to relevance in modern studies comes from a distinctly Russian mind. Philosopher and poet Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ëv (1853–1900) with his "Lectures on Divine Humanity" [*Chteniia o bogochelovestve*] (1878–1900) and later poetry, especially *Three Encounters* [*Tri svidaniia*] (1898) put Sophia back into circulation among intellectuals and artists. The concept comes from the Greek *Σοφία*, "wisdom," such as *Σοφία Σολομώντος* [*Sofia Solomuntos*], the book of the Wisdom of Solomon in the Old Testament, and is seen elsewhere, such as a root of the word "philosophy." We may assume that because both the original Greek and the modern Russian [*premudrost'*] words are of feminine grammatical gender, this divine wisdom appeared to Solov'ëv as a woman. Among his audience at the lectures sat many figures influential in their own right, including Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the overseer of the Russian Empire's Holy Synod on Bloody Sunday, and great authors such as Fëdor Dostoevskii and Lev Tolstoi.[216] Before Sergii Bulgakov and other theologians developed Sophia further as a religious concept, Russia's poets quickly adopted Solov'ëv's

214 Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo*, 254.
215 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 62.
216 Judith Kornblatt, "Visions and Re-Visions of Sophia," in *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 3.

feminine figure of Sophia for their own works. The most famous examples of Sophia in secular art likely belong to Alexander Blok, for his works *Verses on a Beautiful Lady* [*Stikhi o prekrasnoi dame*] (1904) and "The Stranger" [*Neznakomka*] (1906). Later in life, Gor'kii published a fictionalized recollection in which he meets Anna Schmidt, whom he calls "Nizhnii Novgorod's incarnation of Sophia" [*Nizhegorodckoe voploshchenie Sofii Premudrosti*] in "A. N. Schmidt" [*A. N. Shmit*] from *Mezhdu prochim* (1924). Then and now, the feminine Divine Sophia represents a strong Russian contribution to theology and religious influences in secular art. For the present purposes, we will see how Pelageia Nilovna represents the Sophia of the old world and acts as the transitional figure between Christian and post-Christian worldviews in Gor'kii's attempt to create a Russian spiritual socialist ethic.

In addition to the narratives and characters transposed from Orthodoxy with significant changes, there are religious elements that are replicated without much modification. For example, Sesterhenn and Alyssa Dinega have remarked on the workers' holy procession and its likeness to Christ's procession into Jerusalem celebrated on Palm Sunday.[217] In my analysis, I show in detail the similarities between the religious ritual and Gor'kii's version, though I assert it is much easier to draw comparison with contemporary processions during Easter celebrations. Likewise, religious icons play a role in the story.[218] Such aesthetic transpositions contribute to the mapping of old characters onto their replacements. While scholars of the past have noted these rituals and symbols as secularized direct imports, they are nonetheless still transpositions because they draw on other differences. Contrary to the meticulously modified contents of the post-Christian Trinity, I argue the transposed Orthodox rituals and symbols speak to broader issues by drawing on contrasts in setting. As I will show, these are religious elements stripped of their supernatural context and placed in the workers' world. The edifice

217 Sesterhenn, Das Bogostroitel'stvo, 255. Alyssa W. Dinega, "Bearing the Standard: Transformative Ritual in Gorky's Mother and the Legacy of Tolstoy," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 42, no. 1 (1998): 91, https://doi.org/10.2307/310053,

218 Lippman, "Co-opting Orthodoxy," 183.

of the church is replaced with the factory, Gor'kii's post-Christian cultural, economic, and spiritual center. As B. Kaigorodova notes, this and other uses of Christian symbols serve to highlight and comment on the differences between the ideal and the real.[219] Elucidating this religious commentary is a primary goal of this chapter. At the same time, this secular re-contextualization of religious images and behavior raises multiple questions about the relationship between religion, especially Christianity, and socialism in general. *Mother* is only one in a long list of fictional works that attempts to bridge Christian ideals with Marxist and similar socioeconomic ideological frameworks.

As time moves us away from Soviet censorship, scholars have increasingly considered Gor'kii and, at times, his fellow godbuilders as religious thinkers. Their acceptance reflects critics' growing eagerness to highlight the positive statements Gor'kii made both explicitly and implicitly about Christian values and ontology. Still, scholars of the past and present have been plenty justified in choosing subjects antagonistic to religion: the plot is blatantly written to supplant the hegemonic Orthodox system in name and image. Agurskii provides what may be the most accurate summary of Gor'kii's religious thinking in saying that they can only be understood in the world of Christian heresy.[220] Gor'kii's criticism of the Church should not be confused or conflated with criticism of religious feeling, however. *Mother* both rebukes and celebrates the Russian orthodox religious tradition by adapting and adopting Christian cultural elements for its imagined secular world. Said somewhat differently, the many religious artifacts that retain their place in Gor'kii's post-Christian era represent what he believes traditional Orthodoxy does best. The novel's more nuanced commentary, I argue, constitutes Gor'kii's early contributions to theological discussions about Christianity and faith in general. A small number of scholars only since the 2010s have begun to frame the discussion about

219 B. E. Kaigorodova, "Novyi chelovek i vechnye tsennosti v povestiakh M. Gor'kogo 1900-x godov," in *Maksim Gor'kii: Pro et contra*, ed. D. K. Bogatyrëv (Izdatel'stvo Russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2018), 661.
220 Agurskii, "Velikii eretik," 81.

Mother and Gor'kii around religion, and much remains to be discovered.[221] By the end, this chapter aims to shine light on the value of considering Gor'kii as a religious thinker—in exile, like the others—and moreover as one of Russia's greatest for his time.

The present argument asserts that, contrary to popular belief, Christianity and radical left thinking agree to a much greater extent than they disagree with each other. Moreover, for many Russian revolutionary thinkers, Gor'kii in particular, Christianity was the foundation of revolutionary thought. The basis for socialists' adoption of a worldview derived from Christianity is not well established. However, we know that Gor'kii, the godbuilders, and others saw socialism as the final religion.[222] I have suggested previously that for reasons of convenience, such that Gor'kii grew up in the Christian sphere of influence and knowing others came of age in similar circumstances, he used religious imagery as a common Aesopian language to champion anti-governmental sentiment. Here I argue that Gor'kii through *Mother* provides a comprehensive theological sketch of commonalities shared by Christianity and Russian radical politics. In other words, *Mother* is written as the marriage of the Orthodox faith and revolutionary thought in Russia at the time. There have been many studies done on how and where the two spheres of thought coincide and cooperate in general. Andrew Collier's *Christianity and Marxism*, for example, juxtaposes the two beliefs and examines numerous general shared interests: collective survival and success, critical look at human behavior, assigning moral acceptability and fate, and a dialectical model of reason, among others.[223] In addition, in his study of applications of Christian socialist thought, *Red Theology,* Roland Boer offers a rich collection of how

221 G. M. Hamburg and Randall Allen Poole, "The Humanist Tradition in Russian Philosophy," in *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.

222 Ruth Coates, *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions, 1905-1917* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 8-9.

223 Andrew Collier, *Christianity and Marxism: A Philosophical Contribution to Their Reconciliation* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2001).

the two systems have appeared in societies across the world.[224] Though Boer offers a glimpse of Gor'kii's contributions, the historian like others before him approaches *Mother* from the perspective of Lenin.[225] In the history of Russian religious thought and philosophy, scholars have published volumes on Rozanov, Tolstoi, Bulgakov, Berdiaev, and other Russians who have conceived of their own blend of Christianity and socialism.[226] It is my hope that the conversation on Gor'kii's contributions to this lineage takes its first major step here.

"9 January"

The major turns of history and their consequences are often only clear in hindsight, but there are perhaps a handful of days in a person's life that are obvious turning points. January 9, 1905 was a day like that for Gor'kii, and that night he began recording what he witnessed and felt as Tsar Nicholas II's guards killed hundreds and injured thousands on Saint Petersburg's streets. His letter on that day (quoted in an epigraph above) reads like a documentary account of the events of Bloody Sunday, and it served as the basis first for revolutionary agitation literature and, due to its strong rhetoric, later the sketch "9 January", which was to serve that same higher purpose.[227] Zinovii Grzhebin wrote to Gor'kii on Capri to request the longer work for his new publishing house *Shipovnik* with the goal of creating a "historical-revolutionary calendar to fix all of the more or less important moments of the liberation movement" for posterity—a socialist liturgical calendar, so to speak.[228] The sketch "9 January" was never published in *Shipovnik*, but it did eventually come to light in *Avanti!*, the daily newspaper of the

224 Roland Boer, *Red Theology: On the Christian Communist Tradition*, *Red Theology: On the Christian Communist Tradition*, Studies in Critical Research on Religion (Brill, 2019).
225 Robert Chadwell Williams, *The Other Bolsheviks: Lenin and His Critics, 1904-1914* (Indiana University Press, 1986), http://archive.org/details/otherbolsheviksl00will.
226 Of note, by author: Rozanov, Tolstoi: Pavel Basinskii, *Lev Tolstoi — Svobodnyi chelovek* (Molodaia gvardiia, 2016); Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoi: Resident and Stranger: A Study in Fiction and Theology, Sources and Translations* (Princeton University Press, 1986). Bulgakov, Berdiaev: Ruth Coates, *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions, 1905-1917* (Oxford University Press, 2019). and other
227 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 500.
228 Ibid., 502.

Italian Socialist Party, in 1907.[229] While it is called a "sketch" [*ocherk*], the contents of "9 January" are highly stylized. Literary devices and an artistic license toward history allow Gor'kii to dramatize an invisible sea change for the Russian psyche. With hyperbolic imagery Gor'kii pieces together one of the few eyewitness accounts remaining of that first day of the first Russian revolution.

In this section, I offer a reading of "9 January" that demonstrates Gor'kii's embrace of a post-Christian mindset as he and many in the Russian Empire came to understand the events of Bloody Sunday. Though it was written after *Mother,* "9 January" acts as a prequel to the revolutionary novel, I argue, by laying the ideological groundwork for Pavel and eventually Pelageia Nilovna's stories. The sketch takes a few major steps to that end. First, it establishes the figure of the "tsar-god," as I have called it in Chapter 1: the image of the tsar as the benevolent, almighty father of the Russian people. Other scholars, such as Nina Tumarkin, have called this the "naive monarchy" of the Romanov period, under which subjects assumed their good will toward the tsar was reciprocated.[230] Second, we see the dissolution of this idea as a result of Bloody Sunday, which causes a crisis of faith in God, in nation, and in identity. January 9, 1905 marked the end of the era of Russian subjects' naivete and propelled a critical mass into an antagonistic relationship with their monarch. Finally, a call to revolution follows and seeks to replace at once both tsar and the God he represented with a person or an ideal chosen by the people. In this way, *Mother* grapples with the revolutionary procedure set out in the sketch, whereas *Confession* (1908), the subject of the following chapter, seeks to identify that figure or concept to replace the Christian establishment. Before then, "9 January" set the stage for secular spiritual change to occur.

For hundreds of years, the monarch was a benevolent symbol of divine authority for the ordinary Russian, and then one January day that assumption died forever. Tsars and tsarinas ruled the empire as an agent of God-the-Father, which the government instituted in the Official Nationality

229 Ibid.
230 Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!: The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 11-12.

formula, “Orthodoxy. Autocracy. Narod.” and other cultural political artifacts. At the same time, the long prevailing image of the tsar as *batiushka* (which, like the Anglophone title of “father,” connotes both a paternal parent and Christian cleric) gave the tsar’s image a gentle, loving hue. As “9 January” commences, we immediately see that the tone is no longer warm. A crowd resembling a “dark wave” rising from the sea whispers among itself “about «him» more than anything.”[231] Gor’kii refrains from mentioning the tsar by name or title, instead only referring to him by the emphatic pronoun “«he»,” for the first couple pages, as though *he* is the default. The crowd discusses the tsar:

> They talked about «him» more than anything, assuring each other that «he» is kind, warmhearted and will understand everything. But there were no colors in the words that painted his image. It felt as though for a long time—and maybe never—they have not thought about him seriously, have not considered him a living, real person, did not know what this is, and even poorly understood why «he» exists and what [«he»] can do.[232]

Gor’kii brings readers’ attention to the tsar-god figure that loomed large over the morning of Bloody Sunday, but not without reminding us that, especially in hindsight, there was in fact nothing but belief supporting the facade. The issue of faith arises early and naturally in the sketch as Gor’kii strives to highlight the cracks in the tsar-god concept held so long and tightly by the Russian people.

As the crowd struggles with what and whom to believe, some godbuilding makes its earliest appearances in “9 January” of all Gor’kii’s works. The throng, representing the common Russian people, splits into two factions that seek to dominate the narrative about the tsar. The doubtful, led by an unnamed young man with a familiar red flag, square off against the believers following Gapon to the tsar’s palace. In a war of words for the hearts of the audience, the radicals win the first battle, but a defender of the tsar quickly parries. “And they gradually revived the corpse” of the tsar-god, as Gor’kii describes it, and “faith arrived, embraced people, and roused them, silencing the quiet whisper of their

231 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 349.

232 Ibid. “Больше всего говорили о «нем», убеждали друг друга, что «он» — добрый, сердечный и — всё поймет... Но в словах, которыми рисовали его образ, не было красок. Чувствовалось, что о «нем» давно — а может быть, и никогда — не думали серьезно, не представляли его себе живым, реальным лицом, не знали, что это такое, и даже плохо понимали — зачем «он» и что может сделать.”

doubts...”[233] So goes the group of people to petition the tsar with the last thread of trust keeping their mood aloft. Gor’kii here shows how, despite the disappointing lived experiences of Russians, well-spun words can miraculously keep hope alive for now. They proceed with one mind to their “father,” reminding each other “«he» loves us,” while Gor’kii lays bare the people’s “self-deception:” “And there is no doubt that the mass of people genuinely believed in the love of this being they just created.”[234] While the tone is critical, there is admiration in the description of Russians’ faithfulness, both in general and in particular toward their tsar. Belief, especially when shared among the masses, creates a force [*sila*] that overpowers even those behind the revolutionary flag. In this exposition of “9 January,” we witness how, regardless of what people know, a common belief can even raise the dead, and that capacity is in even the most cynical of us.

What happens next tells us that there is a limit to the faith that can be placed in one entity but not to our need to believe in something. The guards’ reaction to the “holy procession” of workers was the death knell of Russians’ naïveté toward its monarchy because it broke the tsar-god's narrative of mutual goodwill. As Gor’kii puts it, the bloodshed “violated the integrity of the created image” of the Russian tsar in the eyes of the public, for “«he» is the power above all power and he has no reason to push away his people with bayonets and bullets.”[235] Conflicted sentiments emerge clearly as Gor’kii juxtaposes two voices in the crowd, ironically also juxtaposing two related parts of official nationality. One person exclaims, “A murder is happening, Orthodox faithful!” Another asks, “Why?” And the first voice answers, “Such is the government!” [*—Ubiistvo idet, pravoslavnye! —Za chto? —Vot tak pravitel’stvo!*].[236] The Russian root *prav*—“right,” “rule,” “correct” in their various meanings—repeated here draws attention to the contrast between the people’s sense of propriety and their government’s sense of authority. The issue of “Why?” that physically divides the Orthodox faithful and the tsar in

233 Ibid., 351.
234 Ibid., 352.
235 Ibid., 356.
236 Ibid..

that exchange is the “terrible question” that “eliminated the image of the recently conjured hero, the tsar, the source of kindness and good” which originally had propelled the mass of people toward their monarch.[237] Gor’kii laments the crestfallen nature of the crowd, noting that, “admitting this [destroyed image] was difficult, as it meant depriving yourself of your only hope...”[238] Breaking free from this thinking, however, would mean liberation. Surveying the makeshift battlefield in front of the tsar’s palace, Gor’kii summarily observes that those with him mourned his murdered compatriots alongside the slain “slavish preconception” of the tsar as a source and vessel of hope. He concludes finally that the survivors’ silence was perhaps out of “fear of creating another [image] in the place of the dead one.”[239] As we know, a sacred space is never empty. Gor’kii recognizes the human ability and desire to worship someone or something, even while the sting of their loss is still fresh.

As a result of the violence on Bloody Sunday, the people’s faith once placed in the tsar is ripe for revolutionary change. The explanation for their lack of trust is reminiscent of the arguments against theodicy found in earlier works by Gor’kii pulling from the Book of Job. The tsar “was all-powerful and calmly showed the immensity of [his] authority, thoughtlessly scattering the city’s streets with dead bodies, covering them with blood.”[240] The senseless violence against his subjects “inspired a unanimous fear, a caustic fear that emptied out the soul.”[241] Gor’kii immediately announces with what he is seeking to fill the soul: “And it firmly roused the mind, making it create plans for a new defense of personhood and new structures for the protection of life.”[242] In this statement we see the rudimentary outlines of a post-Christian worldview drawn in terms of its fundamental building blocks. The anthropocentric value system Gor’kii will espouse centers on the dignity of an individual. The violence

237 Ibid., 356-7. “Рассматривали раненых взвеши вающими глазами, что-то молча измеряли, сравнивали, углубленно искали ответов на страшный вопрос, вста вавший перед ними неясной, бесформенной, черной тенью. Он уничтожал образ недавно выдуманного героя, царя, источника милости и блага.”

238 Ibid., 357. “Но лишь немногие решались вслух сознаться, что этот образ уже разру шен. Сознаться в этом было трудно,— ведь это значило лишить себя единственной надежды...”

239 Ibid., 359.

240 Ibid., 368.

241 Ibid., 369.

242 Ibid.

of Bloody Sunday shaped this worldview by demonstrating the consequences of devaluing human life. Sadly, Gor'kii financed a great deal of the Bolsheviks' projects that did exactly that later on. Returning to the story, we soon see the connection to revolutionary activity: "Above the crowd rose a person's figure, and in the gloom a call loudly roared, 'Who wants to fight for freedom? For the *narod*, for a person's right to live, to work? Who wants to die in the battle for the future, come and help!'"[243] The martyrdom heard in the call for revolution serves the new values that will underlie a secular Russian society to come. Finally, as night descends on the bloodied Saint Petersburg streets, we learn who will lay down their life for others when Gor'kii draws a distinction in the day's witnesses: "Those who did not have fire in their chest hurried quickly to their usual corners."[244] While the tone is hopeless concerning the majority who will not answer the call, he highlights amidst the darkness those who will. The martyrs who will go on the counterattack in the first Russian revolution carry the revolutionary spirit, much like the fires we see burn inside Pavel and the other radical youth of *Mother,* from January 9 forward.

When reflecting and recalling the events of Bloody Sunday, a day that changed the course of history for the country and his own life, Gor'kii wrote about the question of faith and doubt more than anything. The author casually mentions that "when people need faith, it comes" [*kogda liudiam neobkhodima vera — ona prikhodit*]—as though it is an obvious law of nature—right before the man reassures the crowd of the tsar's goodwill.[245] At first, though, the statement sounds condescending toward the tsar's supporters naively walking into harm. However, the notion takes on a different dimension as we learn that the optimistic believers become the only beacons of hope on days like Bloody Sunday, such as those leading the vanguard in *Mother.* Tsar Nicholas II's violence against the Russian people caused a crisis of faith for witnesses. For that reason, we see belief play such a

243 Ibid., 371.
244 Ibid., 371-2.
245 Ibid., 350.

significant role in both “9 January” and *Mother.* Suddenly, characters are not sure whom to believe, what to believe, and how to believe. In the sketch, Gor’kii affirms that faith persisted among a few, albeit crudely formed. Desperation or even need for change is not enough to inspire action, as we see in the defeated resignation of many of the witnesses in the story. The flame of belief in an actionable cause, in human agency to effect transformation in the world is what separates the wheat from the chaff in Gor’kii’s worldview. In the novel, he attempts to understand mechanisms for forming one’s faith and spreading it to others. If the people need something to believe in, Gor’kii will bring it to them.

Mother

The novel *Mother* follows from the premise it is human nature to believe and its corollary, “If not with Christianity as our tradition, then how do we move forward?” Gor’kii assumes his readers know the reasons for discarding Orthodoxy, and thus he spends little time explaining them further. Moreover, precisely what beliefs compose this futuristic faith are also mentioned only sparingly, as well. Rather, the novel’s purpose is to demonstrate how followers will come to a new and improved faith that fulfills the material and spiritual needs of the Russian commoner. In the journey back to belief, Gor’kii takes stock of his past. He uses the epistemological tools his Christian upbringing gave him, particularly Biblical stories and liturgical rituals, to answer the novel’s nagging question of how and what to believe again after Bloody Sunday. All this to note that, in a way, Gor’kii’s revolutionary solution looks much like the problem he is trying to solve. Specifically, I look at how Gor’kii transposed two of the three persons of the Trinity and the early history of the Christian Church’s founding onto contemporary Russian life and its problems. In this search for an answer, Gor’kii draws the road map toward a post-Christian Russian faith, even though he does not yet know the destination.

On a broad level, the novel has an antagonistic, competitive relationship with the Christian tradition and the authority of its surviving institutions. Early in the novel, the young socialists are

depicted as proponents of an alternative system that will fill a spiritual niche mutually exclusive with mainline Christianity. One of Pavel's comrades declares that their mission is to "build a bridge through the swamp of this festering life to the future kingdom of the kindness of the heart," suggesting a kingdom that is not God's but that of humanity.[246] Shortly after, when word of her son's activities reaches Pelageia Nilovna, we hear the young socialists compared to the Khlysty, religious sectarians that undermined centralized Russian Orthodox authority from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.[247] Pavel's growing revolutionary movement challenges not only the political establishment but the sociocultural status quo, as well. For their disagreement, the socialists and their literature are called heretical multiple times over.[248] The young socialists' role as a competing religious movement rivals the breadth and depth of their political activity. Pelageia Nilovna, moreover, representing the crude masses across the Russian Empire, responds positively to the proposed transformations of political power before any changes in religious authority. Gor'kii knew that Russians would likely sooner give up their allegiance to the state than to God. From what we know now, we can also say that he knew a revolution would require substitutes for the kingdom on Earth as well as in heaven.

The Trinity is the organizing principle from which the rest of religious doctrine emerges to form the Christian faith system. Though the three persons (hypostases) are otherwise co-equal, God-the-Father is traditionally understood to be the head of the Trinity due to a fundamental role in Christian worldbuilding. The Nicene Creed, the formula of faith Orthodoxy has confessed to believe since its adoption in 325 CE, begins, "We believe in a Single God-the-Father, the Almighty, Creator of everything visible and invisible" [*Veruem v Edinogo Boga Ottsa, Vsederzhatelia, Tvortsa vsego vidimogo i nevidimogo*]. These first words and dual procession of Christ and the Holy Spirit are the only qualities of God the-Father mentioned in the Nicene Creed, but they speak loudly. In particular,

246 Ibid., 30. "Мы должны построить мостик через болото этой гниючей жизни к будущему царству доброты сер дечной, вот наше дело, товарищи!"
247 Ibid., 40.
248 Ibid., 57, 74, 82, 155.

these attributes underline the Father's principality and describe his role as author of existence itself. When everything visible and invisible can be traced back to a single origin, that creative source becomes the backdrop for living and understanding, much in the way that history becomes the causal background for the present. This temporal metaphor also expresses the multi-dimensionality of the Trinity's personae. According to the teachings of St. Gregory of Nazianius [*Grigorii Bogoslov,* also known as *Grigorii Nazianin*], a prominent Orthodox Church Father, God-the-Father's timelessness is a component in the Trinity's Absolute nature in Christian dogma.[249] Gor'kii tests this notion of God-the-Father's radical position in the Trinity by removing him from the spiritual equation.

God-the-Fatherless

Reading *Mother,* one may be forgiven for not realizing that there is, in fact, a *father.* To wit, Mikhail, Pelageia's husband and Pavel's father, is the first character readers meet. The introduction is brief and unpleasant, however. If Mikhail Vlasov has a redeeming characteristic, it is his labor as the best metal worker in the factory. The rest of his time is spent as the town's bully [*silach*]—much like Artëm in the earlier story "Cain and Artëm"—and the Vlasov family's drunken tyrant. Mikhail beats his wife and neglects his son, curses everyone, and generally leaves destruction in his wake. Only his dog is immune from violence, aggression, and being called a "bastard, which was his favorite word," though he shows the loyal hound no warmth either.[250] Mikhail dies from an untreated hernia, a common injury resulting from strenuous physical labor, at the exact time of the factory whistle blowing for the morning shift. Here Gor'kii contrasts the wasted remains of a father's body and the crowds of other men that walk to their own deaths. The observation that Mikhail "did not die [like a person] but croaked [like an animal]" [*ne pomer, a izdokh*] further emphasizes the inhumanity of the working conditions.[251] The

249 Nikolai Vinogradov, "Dogmaticheskoe uchenie Sviatogo Grigoriia Bogoslova, A) Uchenie o Boge Ottse - sviashchennik Nikolai Vinogradov," Azbyka.ru, accessed January 4, 2025, https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Nikolaj_Petrovich_Vinogradov/dogmaticheskoe-uchenie-svjatogo-grigorija-bogoslova/1.
250 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 10.
251 Ibid., 12.

chapter's final scene emphasizes the point even further. Mikhail's loyal dog, who stayed by his side even after he was in his grave, is summarily killed while lying by his grave. The old world of the father, including everything he valued, is buried in the past; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust.

As the only father figure in the story, Mikhail becomes a stand-in for all paternal figures. Discussions of Gor'kii's own personal issues with his father aside, nearly all the young revolutionaries lack a dad for one reason or another: dead, drunk, or just a deadbeat. Their fatherlessness arises in conversation several times throughout the novel, but a silence lingers instead.[252] Natasha, a young socialist, introduces herself with her first name only after using a patronymic when referring to the mother: "Are you the mother of Pavel Mikhailovich? Hello, my name is Natasha..." to which Pelageia asks, "And your patronymic?" [*A po batiushke?*].[253] This generational divide is shown in starker contrast again at the end of the novel. When another of Pavel's peers, Aleksandra, introduces herself to Sizov, an older factory worker sympathetic to the cause, with just her first name, Sizov asks for her patronymic just as Pelageia does ("*A po batiushke?*"). Aleksandra responds, "I have no father," to which Sizov says, "So, he died..." The young socialist, with "something stubborn, insistent resounding in her voice," quips, "No, he's alive!" implying that her dad is nevertheless dead to her.[254] Andrei has a living father from whom he is estranged, as well. The older generation, even those who support the revolution, live according to an inextricable paternal authority. Pavel's generation of post-Christian world builders are "spiritual orphans," as Ivan Esaulov calls them, without fathers of any kind.[255] Mikhail's death signals the end of an era inside and outside of the novel.

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252 Patronymics, from Latin *pater* "father" and *onyma* "name", play an important role in Russian pragmatics. Formed from one's father's name with a binary gender-based suffix, these function as a middle name between given and family. Pavel's patrynomic is Mikhailovich because his father's name is Mikhail. If he had a sister, her patronymic would be Mikhailovna. In everyday speech, they are used when referring to or addressing a person with authority or someone unfamiliar to the speaker.

253 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 25.

254 Ibid., 326.

255 Ivan Andreevich Esaulov, *Paskhal'nost' russkoi slovesnosti* (Krug", 2004), 690.

The father's brutal demise concludes a brutish past dictated by the hegemons of tradition. What appears to be an ostensibly minor loss of a vaguely known character marks a fundamental redirection in Gor'kii's worldbuilding and, from a broader point of view, twentieth-century Russian (world?) literature and art. Mikhail is a lightning rod for Gor'kii's patricidal anger against the Russian people's collective patriarchs: the tsar, the Russian Empire's "Little Father" [*batiushka*], and God-the-Father, Christianity's "Our Father." They share in being the traditional pillars of authority and responsible for a long history of suffering, and they are dead to Gor'kii, much like Aleksandra. For that reason, they do not appear except to find their demise in *Mother.* Mikhail's story in this way summarizes Gor'kii's impression of Bloody Sunday and put Gapon's words ("There is no tsar! There is no God!") into literary form. Of course, in reality, when the Russian Revolution of 1917 comes, God and Tsar Nicholas II will perish in a manner much more violent than Mikhail. Patriarchal reign—earthly, heavenly, and everything in between—died with the peaceful Bloody Sunday procession participants, and *Mother* starts with a *tabula rasa* that reflects and preaches that conviction. Gor'kii's is a fatherless world; free from the chains of tradition, a new, brighter future is on the horizon.

The New Son

While the factory's whistle at daybreak focuses our attention on the exploitation of laboring bodies, Gor'kii hints that a new day has come. Following the father's funeral, Pavel and Pelageia, free of the yoke of the past for the first time, make a fresh start. The mother steps into the parent role and steers her son away from the alcohol that plagued his father. An internal transformation accompanies a physical transfiguration in Pavel: "... he noticeably began to take the road less traveled: he more seldom went to parties and, although he went somewhere on holidays, he returned home sober. The mother, vigilantly watching after him, saw that the swarthy face of her son was becoming sharper, his eyes

looked ever more serious, and his lips were pursed strangely austerely."[256] For the first time, Pavel recognizes his mother's dignity as a human, emphasizing Pelageia's unique personhood as his father never did: "... and in general he tried to ease her labor. Nobody in the town ever did that."[257] The teenager gets a job and soon takes up reading "forbidden" [*zapreshchënnaia*] literature—the "new Word"—though we do not yet definitively know the texts are of a revolutionary nature. Gor'kii leaves it up to the reader to connect Pavel's changes in behavior and appearance, time-consuming trips away from home, and mysterious influx of illicit ideas as signs that these changes, confounding though positive, are in preparation for something bigger.

The Gospel of Luke stands out as a powerful inspiration for *Mother.* Gor'kii adopts multiple themes and motifs from Luke, the most prominent of which is the Emmaus story, to rebuild the post-Christian messiah. The Book of Luke addresses a particular audience, a feature unique among the Gospels, which is integral to its tone and content. Specifically, as Luke explains in his preface, he writes to those who received instruction in their faith, the Christian converts or pagans.[258] For that reason, the Luke's Gospel emphasizes spreading Christ's message and the challenges and rewards therein. If one replaces the good news of the resurrection with the good news of socialism, the revolutionaries' "holy deed" as Pelageia later calls it, we see how Part I of *Mother* uses Luke's themes in furtherance of a post-Christian faith. Pavel and his comrades clandestinely distribute political pamphlets to proselytize residents, especially workers, for the revolutionary cause, much like the faithful in the Book of Luke spread the message of Christ. Similar to the Gospel's author, Gor'kii writes to an audience born in one faith in order to convert them to another, a new worldview sure to evoke backlash from above while trying to turn the world upside-down and inside-out.

256 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 16.
257 Ibid., 17.
258 Luke 1:1-4 [… чтобы ты узнал твердое основание того учения, в котором был наставлен.]

References to the Christian Gospels bring their revolutionary nature and revelatory tone to the forefront while blatantly claiming the right to succession. As Pavel begins bringing books home—his revelation and baptism in the new faith—the Biblical allusions begin with the parable of Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus. Gor'kii explains that, "One day Pavel brought and hung a picture on the wall [with] three people, talking and walking somewhere lightly and boldly." This image, Pavel declares, "is the risen Christ walking to Emmaus!"[259] The painting, likely an icon, depicts Gospel of Luke 24:13-31. The verses describe Jesus crossing paths with apostles Luke and Cleopas immediately after the resurrection on a road to Emmaus, a settlement, also known as Nikopolis, approximately thirty kilometers west of Jerusalem. As the story goes, upon meeting Jesus, neither follower recognizes God before them, but they invite the stranger to continue with them to Emmaus and dine together. While on the road, Luke and Cleopas resume their conversation, exchanging doubts about the resurrection. Only upon breaking bread at dinner does Jesus reveal to the apostles his identity. Gor'kii chose this story for more than just to transpose the resurrection; the story of the road to Emmaus introduces a question and theme that will dominate the rest of this novel and others.

When examining the events of the Emmaus story and Part I of *Mother,* we can make several comparisons between the Biblical text and Pavel's spiritual, political rebirth marked by the appearance of the icon. The story of Emmaus has long been and continues to be the centerpiece of writings and speeches across Christian denominations about discernment in one's beliefs. Luke and Cleopas's original inability to see Jesus demonstrates the difficulty of fostering faith in unprecedented circumstances, such as those many faced after Bloody Sunday. The apostles first hear of Jesus's empty tomb, but Christ's resurrection continued to cause them doubt and bewilderment.[260] Moreover, during their conversation with Jesus, both Luke and Cleopas feel the divine presence in them, described as

259 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 17.
260 Lk. 24:21-4.

"hearts burning inside us," though they still did not believe.[261] During Pavel's arrival as the post-Christian messiah, he too faces doubt and bewilderment from the nonbeliever in his world. In fact, *Mother*'s Part I is speaking directly and precisely to the disbelief of Pelageia Nilovna and others like her. Her doubt and bewilderment at the beginning of the novel is the inspiration and motivator to the novel's plot development. Upon seeing the icon, Pelageia exclaims to Pavel, "You honor Christ, but you don't go to church!"[262] That "but" introduces the mother's disbelief in her son, but it also puts the initial crack in her defense of tradition. In her mind, Pavel's reuse of the Emmaus icon divorces Christ and church, representing the Church, for the first time. Gor'kii leans on the Russian spiritual impulse to drive a wedge between active faith and static fidelity.

The third piece of the Emmaus transposition follows the customary inversion pattern Gor'kii employed in earlier works. While Luke and Cleopas doubt and wonder at the idea of Christ's resurrection, the ultimate reason for their disbelief is their hope to preserve the power structures of the old world. The apostles say amidst recounting evidence to the contrary that they "were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" and thus restore the political power of the Jewish state.[263] When revealing his true self to Luke and Cleopas, Jesus calls this expectation a "foolish misunderstanding" for its rigid attachment to earthly authority of the past rather than the spiritual kingdom to come.[264] Pelageia Nilovna, who occupies a disciple role in the first half of the novel, similarly refuses to see Pavel's messianic nature. Her attachment to the earthly authority of the old world embodied in the Church holds her back from seeing the "Truth" Pavel is purveying. In the beginning, this attachment manifests itself in the fear and pity she feels for Pavel. As the chapter progresses, when she finally begins to see a future through faith in the movement, she is unshackled

261 Lk. 24:32.
262 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 17.
263 Lk. 24:21
264 Lk. 24:25

from what once was her life: “She understood that she could love this life, despite its danger, and, sighing, she looked back, where her past stretched back like a dark thin line.”[265] The apostles and Pelageia Nilovna must leave their past conceptions of life behind them in order to have faith in the possibilities of the future, but only the son can see with new eyes.

The qualities and capabilities unique to Pavel distinguish him from the rest of the population and point to his capacity to effect revolutionary change. The first indication of Pavel’s special nature comes after his father’s funeral and immediately before he delivers the Emmaus icon. Pelageia Nilovna remarks about his transformation following Mikhail’s death that “in general he tried to lighten her workload. Nobody in the village did that.”[266] In addition to radical internal change, Pavel is already at work to help the laboring masses starting with his own home—those who live in exploitative domestic circumstances should not cast the first stone. Another comment testifying to Pavel’s uniqueness is heard shortly after Pavel’s arrest, this time from his disciple Andrei. In order to reassure Pelageia while Pavel sits in prison, he calls Pavel a “rare” [*redkii chelovek*] and “iron” [*zheleznyi chelovek*] person. Andrei’s message seeks to dispel doubt by emphasizing Pavel’s spiritual strength and commitment—the metaphorical use of “iron” to describe a person’s faith in an intangible ideal is not lacking in irony. There is no rational argument proven by these unique features, as Sesterhenn inexplicably argues.[267] It is personal redefinition for the good of others—socialism, in theory. Pavel’s monastic lifestyle, which made him “beyond his years” as well, prepared him to endure deprivation in prison. Demonstrations of steadfastness and refusal of material pleasures are scattered throughout the Bible.[268] Christ and Pavel are the literary embodiment of their respective dogmas.

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265 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 109-10.
266 Ibid. 17.
267 Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo*, 242.
268 Cf., e.g., 1 Tim 4:7-8: “Reject profane wives’ tales, and exercise yourself toward godliness, for bodily exercise is little useful, but godliness is useful for all things, having promise of this life and the next.”

More than anything, Gor’kii is interested in defining and expanding an ideological community, one that is bound by shared ideals, which he spends Part I of *Mother* explicating. In the first pages of the novel Gor’kii lays the cornerstone for a socialist post-Christian religion: a problem to be rectified by the savior. Describing the decrepit spiritual and material state of Russia, the narrator outlines a new original sin that has separated people from goodness and each other—exploitation of labor. Labor exploitation has debased Russian workers, as the father exemplifies. These inhuman conditions dispel the inherent dignity that Christianity preaches:

> Meeting with each other, they spoke about the factory and machines, they cursed at their masters—they spoke and thought only what is connected to work. … And, tightly hanging onto each opportunity to defuse this disturbing feeling, people, for the smallest of reasons, threw themselves at each other with the animosity of beasts. There were bloody fights. At times they finished with serious injuries and at times murder.
> In people’s relationships there was a feeling of lurking anger most of all. It was as old as the incurable fatigue of their muscles. People were born with this disease of the soul, inheriting it from their fathers, and it accompanied them to their grave like a black shadow, leading them throughout life to an array of actions revolting for their aimless cruelty.[269]

Gor’kii here transposes original sin, the presence of which separates humanity from God according to Christian doctrine. The "disease of the soul,” which began alongside their “incurable fatigue of their muscles” from work, has separated the individuals from the community—a post-Christian god. The focus on animalistic violence reminds readers of the story of Cain and Abel. By the time of *Mother*, Gor’kii seems to say, there were only Cains left. This social malady becomes a problem for revolutionary ideas to solve, much like original sin is a disorder for the savior to rectify in the Christian tradition. Without this fundamental disorder, there is nothing from which a savior will liberate

269 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 8. “Встречаясь друг с другом, говорили о фабрике, о машинах, ругали мастеров,— говорили и думали только о том, что связано с работой. ... И, цепко хватаясь за каждую возможность разрядить это тревожное чувство, люди, из-за пустяков, бросались друг на друга с озлоблением зверей. Возникали кровавые драки. Порою они кон чались тяжкими увечьями, изредка — убийством. В отношениях людей всего больше было чувства подстерегающей злобы, оно было такое же застарелое, как и неизлечимая усталость мускулов. Люди рожда лись с этою болезнью души, наследуя ее от отцов, и она черною тенью сопровождала их до могилы, побуждая в течение жизни к ряду поступков, отвратительных своей бесцельной жестокостью.”

humanity. Socialism in *Mother* is the remedy for the dehumanizing socioeconomic inequalities that Orthodoxy can no longer provide.

Pavel completes his transfiguration into a Christ-like savior by fulfilling the prophecies that result in his detainment and death at the hands of the state. Here Gor'kii takes from the prophetic tradition of the Bible, on which the entire New Testament relies for its legitimacy as holy scripture. Jesus's fulfillment of the Old Testament requirements became the spiritual authority for creating the Christian Church in his name. These prophetic signs include a virgin birth, performing healing miracles, and betrayal by a loved one, for example. The Gospels and Acts are therefore dedicated to recounting Jesus's deeds in order to prove, insofar as they can, that Jesus of Nazareth earned the title of "the Christ"—from the Greek Χριστός [*Khristos*], "the anointed one" or "the chosen one" of divine provenance.[270] In other words, early Christians could discern the identity of the true messiah through understanding and verifying that the prophecies, defined first by Jewish tradition (Old Testament), were in fact realized. To this day, believers rely on this method of establishing authority to assert Jesus's divinity, which Gor'kii undoubtedly understood about his audience. Pavel, the transposed Christ figure, therefore, completes his own test to demonstrate that he is the true post-Christian savior of Russia (and workers around the world).

Though Pavel is only a recent convert to the cause, he immediately becomes a leader amongst peers in their revolutionary cadre. His position as first among equals affords Pavel the influence to preach to those around him, thus forming a group of revolutionary disciples, much like Jesus's followers in the Bible. The Christian tradition presupposes the messiah to command a community of believers by setting an example of thought and behavior.[271] Jesus's proclamation of a new law and

270 We may take Matthew 5:17 (Не думайте, что Я пришел нарушить закон или пророков: не нарушить пришел Я, но исполнить. / Do not think that I came to defy the law or prophets; I came not to defy but to fulfill.) as our first argument.

271 Cf., e.g., Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a Child has been born, unto us a Son has been given; power shall be on His shoulders, and they will name Him: Miraculous, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

world order slowly builds a contingent that will form the body of the Christian Church in his absence. Similarly, Pavel's travels and speeches gradually bring into the fold workers and allies who will stand up against unjust capitalist exploitation. During the impromptu protest at the factory, a group begins to form around Pavel as he speaks. "We are always everywhere, the first ones at work and in the last place in life," he screams to the crowd.[272] The diametrical contrast between extremes, one of great toil and minimal reward and vice-versa, particularly in the context of justice, recalls Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes, as written in Mt. 5:1-16 and Lk. 6:20-26. There Jesus exalts the poor (Lk. 6:20: "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God") and rebukes the wealthy (Lk. 6:24: "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation"), much as Pavel does. Immediately after his own Beatitudes, Pavel appears different to Pelageia Nilovna. "[T]he crowd slowly approached him, coalescing into a dark, thousand-headed body," which, as it did in the original Gospels, marks the beginning of a new kind of church.[273] As the Christian prophecy demands, speaking truth to power becomes the reason for imprisonment. Pavel and Jesus knew to expect a prison sentence or even worse for challenging the dominant power of the time.

One of the strongest unifying qualities of early Christianity and Russian communism is their repression by the state in response to proposals for radically reforming secular and religious power structures. The illicit nature of Jesus and Pavel's missions connects them and undergirds a common disestablishmentarian theme throughout both texts. *Mother'*s savior figure, Pavel, predicts and peacefully accepts his arrest for subversive behavior, as Christ does when fulfilling another prophecy in the Gospels. Pavel sprints from the Emmaus icon to announcing his coming arrest for revolutionary activity. Of the pamphlets he spreads, Pavel remarks that "they are printed quietly, secretly, and if they find them on me, I will be put in prison."[274] When Pelageia expresses concern for his safety, Pavel

272 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 62.
273 Ibid.
274 Ibid., 17.

replies, “I cannot lie to you. It cannot be avoided!”[275] When the time comes for the protest that will lead to Pavel’s arrest—featuring the Beatitudes references—his attempt to organize ends in failure and betrayal. Calls for a strike are met with anger and, perhaps above all, doubt. When someone asks, “But who will work?” the name, used as an epithet, “Judases!” is returned. From this sequence of events, we can understand that the worker who reported Pavel was from this group. Pavel was arrested immediately after, which he was prepared for. He whispers to Pelageia Nilovna, “They are taking me away...” and the prophecy is once again complete.[276] Gor’kii takes the one sure principle of his post-Christian ideal, self-renunciation, from these significant moments Jesus’s narrative.[277] Pavel will spend seven weeks in prison before his May Day celebration, the number of weeks between Clean Monday [*Chistyi ponedel’nik*], the start of Orthodoxy’s Great Lent, and Easter Sunday.[278] Personal sacrifice for others' benefit as a common value brings socialist and Christian values into conversation, and Gor’kii is seeking to borrow the religious ideal for his brave, new post-Christian world.

Persecution by authorities is a major Biblical prophecy that echoes in *Mother* and other literature and movements around the world. *Mother*’s prophet attracts attention by exposing a new “truth” [*pravda*] to the public that contradicts the government’s established narrative and exposes injustices perpetrated by the state. Disruption of the status quo is found in religious and pseudo-religious traditions throughout world history that have sought the end of perceived discriminations. Liberation theology, an innately Christian approach to understanding religion’s role in society begun in the 1960s and 1970s, has at its center the anti-oppression message of Jesus’s teachings. Theologians, often coming from Black and Latin American backgrounds, such as James Hal Cone and Gustavo

275 Ibid., 32.
276 Ibid., 65-8.
277 Jesus predicts arrest and praises sacrifice in Jn. 6:64, 70-71; prophetic element from Psalm 41:9, Zech. 11:12-13; accepts arrest in
278 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, p. 100.

Gutiérrez, foreground the message of justice and freedom in Christ's preaching.[279] Advocates of liberation theology have often been criticized as disruptive Marxists for their antagonism against wealthy elite classes, particularly in Central and South America.[280] The Bible tells of Jesus's preaching for equality of everyone before the "truth" of God-the-Father, which ran counter to Roman rule over the Province of Judea, the Gospels' setting. In his own gospel, Gor'kii preaches through Pavel about equality of everyone before the "truth" of humane socialism, the details of which take form only in *Confession*. For now, Gor'kii is adamant that the fatherless take control.

Factories of Worship

Ideas need a place to live if they are going to persist in our physical world. The novel's first part primarily functions as a Gospel text about the new socialist faith and its messianic harbinger, Pavel Vlasov. The most important prophecy of the Gospels is the resurrection and redemption of the executed Christ, which marks the beginning of the Christian liturgical calendar—Easter. This most sacred springtime celebration reminds believers to have faith in the truthfulness of Jesus's prophetic claims. Triumphant songs and cheers fill the smallest chapels and the biggest cathedrals with the same confidence in the Christian message. Therefore, as Gor'kii builds his own religious tradition, he would want to capture the powerful physicality that a church lends to the survival of Christian traditions, particularly for the occasion of Easter. Before examining Pavel's own resurrection prophecy transposition, the following chapter takes a step back to examine how Gor'kii first transposes the social and cultural functions of a church onto the local factory. As the revolutionary youth disavow the town's churches, Gor'kii transforms the factory into a house of worship for his post-Christian, labor-centered religion. At the end of Part I, Pavel's factory becomes a sacred space when it hosts the socialist Easter-

279 Gutiérrez: *A Theology of Liberation*, orig. *Teología de la liberación: Perspectivas* (CEP, 1971). Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Orbis, 1970) was seminal in the black liberation theology movement.

280 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Liberation Theology," Encyclopaedia Britannica, December 17, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberation-theology.

like celebration on May 1, also known as May Day or Labor Day, not Palm Sunday as others have said.[281] Like the Christian Gospels, the novel's first part ends with the creation of an ideological community and its physical home, from which it can spread the good news of its founder.

The church buildings, representative of the old-world Church as a whole, are first divorced from the idea of God and any spirituality of the group of young revolutionaries, who will constitute the post-Christian congregation. Gor'kii hastens to note that youth's lack of church attendance does not indicate a lack of religious feeling. Pelageia's comment to her son that, "You revere Christ, but you don't go to church..." recognizes Christian elements in Pavel despite separation from the church. Pavel wishes to show his mother that he can continue Russia's "sacred deed," as she comes to call it while preparing for the May Day festivities, without inviting the Orthodox Church. In fact, Gor'kii says, church is precisely where anyone seeking God should avoid. Rybin, an elder community member who is sympathetic to but uninvolved in any revolutionary activity, says in a conversation with Pavel that "God is in the heart and mind but not the church. Church is God's grave."[282] Of all of *Mother*'s anticlerical discourse, this comment is mostly like to have earned Gor'kii his formal charge of heresy following the novel's publication. Pavel clarifies for Pelageia Nilovna that they are not talking "about the good and kind God, in which [she believes], but about the one that the priests threaten us with like a stick."[283] These sentiments and images are scattered throughout Gor'kii's writings prior to *Mother* as he struggled with questions of theodicy. For the young revolutionaries, God is still good, but hell is God's people.

As May Day dawns, the world takes a different hue while the revolutionaries prepare to inaugurate their house of worship, the factory, and celebrate a spiritual rebirth. Pelageia is particularly attuned to the "wonderful, bright celebration of the triumph of freedom and logic" that Pavel promised

281 Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo*, 255.
282 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 57.
283 Ibid., 56.

everyone the night before, using language traditionally associated with Easter.[284] Having not slept at all, she hears the morning factory whistle echo throughout the town, noting that it "seemed like today it is ringing longer than it ever has."[285] Instead of the celebratory church bell calling the faithful to prayer and worship, the factory beckons workers to labor and create. Pavel underscores this vital capacity, saying of himself and others, "We are the people who build churches and factories, forge chains and money, we are the living power than feeds and entertains everyone from cradle to grave."[286] The factory like the church is a celebration of human innovation and hard work, but only factories can make that which moves society forward. If readers need another sign to leave the church behind in the old world, the workers pass by one on their way to the factory. As opposed to the organic, joyful group of revolutionaries, they witness churchgoers performing Easter rituals with an obvious disaffection, a lack of communion, shown in their actions and words. Arranged around the church building, the "motley crowd" consisted of people, some sitting while others standing, many "raising their heads up and looking afar, impatiently waiting" with confused looks on their faces. Wives shy away from husbands, who curse at them, and neither wanted to be there.[287] With the past finally behind them, Pavel and his comrades advance to a brighter future.

Gor'kii integrates several religious rituals into the workers' travel to the factory square, much as marchers led by Father Gapon did on Bloody Sunday. The holy procession is a tradition at least as old as Christianity itself, during which the congregation moves as one giant body, often circumambulating around a church, performing burial rites at a graveyard, or visiting holy sites. Participants carry items

284 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 143-4.
285 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 144.
286 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, p. 62. "Мы — те люди, которые строят церкви и фабрики, куют цеди и деньги, мы — та живая сила, которая кормит и забавляет всех от пеленок до гроба..."
287 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 152. "Вокруг нее, в ограде густо стоял и сидел народ, здесь было сотен пять веселой молодежи и ребятишек. Толпа колыхалась, люди беспокойно поднимали головы кверху и заглядывали вдаль, во все стороны, нетерпеливо ожидая. Чувствовалось что-то повышенное, некоторые смотрели растерянно, другие вели себя с показным удальством. Тихо звучали подавленные голоса женщин, мужчины с до садой отвертывались от них, порою раздавалось не громкое ругательство. Глухой шум враждебного трения обнимал пеструю толпу."

of religious significance and sing hymns as they travel. Gor'kii's transposition spins off from there, setting up further contrast between the post-Christian and Christian practitioners. The traditional procession around the church went in circles—that is, nowhere—whereas Pavel's group is progressing with a direction—to the factory. Their banner, "flying above people's heads like a red bird," is reminiscent of the Orthodox *khorugv,* prominent symbols of Easter processions.[288] Instead of gospel songs, the revolutionaries sing lines from the "Worker's Marseillaise" [*Rabochaia Marsel'eza*]: "We'll renounce the old world... / We'll shake its ashes from our feet..."[289] Its lyrics, set to the tune of the French revolutionary anthem "La Marseillaise," are sung from the perspective of a "we" that saves the working masses from the rich and "Vampire Tsar" to live in a kingdom of "the sacred word."[290] It was originally known as "The New Song" [*Novaia pesnia*] and informally by its first line, "We Renounce the Old World" [*Otrechemsia ot starogo mira*]. The song's popularity during the events of 1905 undoubtedly compelled Gor'kii to include it in his socialist holy procession.[291] Personal experience at Bloody Sunday provided realistic detail and poignant imagery for the imagined revolutionary vanguard.

Gor'kii turns Pavel into an icon by composing common icon motifs, leaving behind a new ideological community in his image. Finally, we see the post-Christian savior, Pavel, at the head of the group, where an icon of Christ usually leads Orthodox processions. On January 9, 1905, Gapon led the procession.[292] In the span of a moment, Pelageia recognizes her son as the socialist messiah and begins

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288 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 152-153. "Древко, белое и длинное, мелькнуло в воздухе, наклонилось, разрезало толпу, скрылось в ней, и через минуту над поднятыми кверху лицами людей взметнулось красной птицей широкое полотно знамени рабочего народа. Павел поднял руку кверху – древко покачнулось, тогда десяток рук схватили белое гладкое дерево, и среди них была рука его матери."

289 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 154.

290 One can easily find lyrics and recordings online, such as "Rabochaia Marsel'ieza," in Wikipedia, December 18, 2024, https://ru.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%D0%A0%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%8F_%D0%9C%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B0&oldid=142143797.

291 The song was popular before 1905 and continued to be a favorite among revolutionaries even after the Bolshevik coup. It was temporary elevated to the status of national anthem after the February Revolution.

292 Gor'kii, PSP, vol. 5, 265.

her own mission to carry on his message: “Looking at the red banner in the distance, she—without looking—saw the face of her son, his bronze forehead and eyes aflame with the bright fire of faith.”[293] This flash of transcendence over the mother, I argue, is the crux of the novel’s development. It is a catalytic *kairos*, the moment when the divine and mortal meet, in Gor’kii’s post-Christian paradigm. It is undoubtedly an anthropocentric message, but it is one of faith, not skepticism. Other scholars consider Pavel to be the rational Christ-like figure, likely because Pavel himself talks about the “bright festival of freedom and logic’s triumph.”[294] Pavel’s actions for the cause directly contradict that thinking, however. His preaching of and sacrifice for a higher purpose were not rational; instead, they were to cultivate others’ belief in the same ideal. “There wouldn’t have been a Christ, had people not died for his glory,” the mother says as Pavel is taken away for the final time before judgment.[295] Her belief cost his life because he believed it would matter, not because it was logical. In turn, Pelageia’s coming to faith, which propels Part II of *Mother,* hastens the end of a man and the beginning of a myth.

The Revolutionary Spirit and the Acts of the Mother

Pavel is absent from the vanguard following his arrest at the May Day celebration, but his spirit is still very much present among his comrades. The novel’s second half shows the remaining revolutionaries, especially Pelageia Nilovna, use Pavel’s personal sacrifice as inspiration for tireless dedication to spreading his story. This plot, I argue, as the backbone of Part II, dictates that the latter portion of the novel be read as a transposed Acts of the Apostles. Immediately following the Gospels, Acts is a continuation of Luke and maps out the earliest days of the Christian community as “the Church” in the hostile Roman Empire. Christ's apostles disseminate the news of the resurrection—the Christian religion—with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the third persona of the Holy Trinity. Correspondingly,

293 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 156-7.
294 Lippman, “Co-opting Orthodoxy,” 184. Sesterhenn, Das Bogostroitel’stvo, 242.
295 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 165.

the revolutionaries of *Mother* take up Pavel's mission to convert additional workers to their radical cause, which is particularly true for the proselyte mother. Therein lies the new believer Pelageia Nilovna's purpose for the remainder of the story. Borrowing the Bible's pneumatological symbolism and function, *Mother*'s latter half traces how Pelageia Nilovna, a convert to the cause, carries the fire of the Revolutionary Spirit to others in order to build a community of believers—the "capital-C Church" of socialism. Much like the Acts of the Apostles, other localities establish their factories—"lowercase-C churches"—as a refuge for the fold. The final section of this chapter presents the Revolutionary Spirit, Gor'kii's post-Christian transposition and replacement of the Holy Spirit. More than a biological mother or ideological follower, Pelageia Nilovna becomes the bearer of the Revolutionary Spirit in her pilgrimages, and with Pavel she lives out the story of Saint Paul—the Russian Orthodox holy martyr *Pavel*—as told in Acts. At the novel's end, in *Mother*'s mother, Gor'kii finds his rock on which he will create a Church and spread his revolutionary gospel to the world.

Critics have often seen Pelageia Nilovna as the maternal figure Mary, mother of Jesus, and for good reason, though these comparisons fail to capture the character's entire trajectory. In addition to Pavel, the post-Christian Christ, Pelageia is motherly to all the young revolutionaries.[296] In fact, she develops "a mother's compassionate love for them."[297] Orthodoxy reveres Mary but lacks a concept of universal motherhood in relation to her. Viewing Pelageia as a disciple more fully describes the mother's role, as she does follow in the footsteps of Pavel. However, her special stature in the cadre pushes back against such a description. Pelageia not only continues Pavel's work spreading socialism, but she also comes to embody her son's mission, sacrificing her life for the cause. She becomes more than just another member, much like her son was before his arrest. In fact, as Rybin says, Pelageia takes

296 Cf., e.g., Sesterhenn, Das Bogostroitel'stvo, 263. Lippman, "Co-opting Orthodoxy," 183. Djagalov, The Red Apostles, 407. Mitin, "Evangelie ot Maksima," 640. Kaigorodova, "Novyi chelovek," 660.

297 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 76. "Она молча, низко поклонилась ему, ее трогали эти молодые, честные, трезвые, уходившие в тюрьму с улыбками на лицах; у нее возникала жалостливая любовь матери к ним."

the place of Pavel in his absence, which is key to understanding her role.[298] Without the messiah, the Church must have a way to continue the "sacred deed" and cultivate its presence on Earth: the new "Way," so to speak, is Pelageia and the Revolutionary Spirit.

Acts of the Apostles [*Deianiia sviatykh apostolov*], or just Acts [*Deianiia*], is the first book after the Gospels and fifth of the New Testament. Its stories describe the founding and growth of the early Christian Church immediately following the resurrection. Specifically, Apostle Luke, its author, writes again to Theophilus about disciples' missions to several settlements throughout the modern-day Middle East spreading the news of Christ. On the fortieth day after the resurrection, Jesus ascends to Heaven in preparation for the next stage of the Church's development.[299] The Holy Spirit succeeds Jesus on Earth, as he promises to the apostles, and leads building the Church—much in the same way Pelageia succeeds Pavel.[300] The day marking the Holy Spirit's appearance to Christ's earliest followers is celebrated as Pentecost [*Piatidesiatnitsa*], the most important holiday second only to Easter in Eastern Orthodoxy, where it is also known as the Day of the Holy Trinity [*Den' Sviatoi Troitsy*]. On that day, as described in Acts 2:1-4, the Holy Spirit descends from heaven as wind and flames that fills the disciples and reveals to them the truth of Jesus's preaching: baptism by fire. From a theological perspective, the book's opening chapters redefines the relationship between Christ and humanity. God-the-Son remains present in the Church by the power (proxy) of the Holy Spirit, who carries out Christ's will on Earth. Anyone who has received the sacrament of chrismation (from the Greek χρῖσμα for "anointing" or "myrrh," usually applied immediately after baptism), thus can receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit [*dary Sviatogo Dukha*], which may include wisdom, faith, prophecy, and speaking and understanding

298 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 191.
299 Acts 1:9-11.
300 Acts 1:1-8, esp. 1:5.

tongues.[301] The Book of Acts, emphasizing faithfulness and selflessness for the collective, shares many qualities with the second part of Gor'kii's *Mother.*

In addition to the overarching thematic commonalities shared by Part II of *Mother* and the Biblical book, the novel offers specific allusions that indicate Gor'kii's intention to transpose Acts. That shared theme is the global spread of a story of salvation to transform individuals into a community of interconnected the both the early Christian Church and the new revolutionary Church. In a conversation with Sofia, for example, Pelageia compares a political organizing meeting with morning service, daily orthros, in a church. Sofia responds affirmatively and adds that "only here God's house is the whole world!" [*Tol'ko zdes' bozhii dom – vsia zemlia.*][302] In the first chapter of Acts, Jesus's commandment to spread the story of his resurrection "even to the ends of the Earth" [*dazhe do kraia zemli*] (1:8) outlines this same crusade-like mission. Gor'kii further anchors Pelageia Nilovna's story in the Bible with prominent moments in Acts appearing at the start of Part II. Pelageia and Mar'ia return to the Vlasov house from a clash with authorities on May Day, and Pelageia, whom Mar'ia lovingly calls "my unfortunate martyr" [*stradalitsa moia neschastnaia*], instantly falls asleep at home.[303] In a dream, the mother sees Pavel standing above a burial mound [*kurgan*], as though floating. Here Gor'kii takes from Christ's ascension in Acts 1:9-11, when the apostles and converts watch Jesus taken from Earth into heaven, an affirmation of overcoming death. The inclusion of a burial mound below Pavel's suspended figure seems to say that the new savior has overcome his arrest in a similar way. When police in the dream suddenly begin running toward her and the baby now in her arms, Pelageia runs to a church, only to find the same persecution from the priest. She screams "Don't throw away the child!" [*Ne brosaite ditia!*] in response.[304] Recalling the persecution of Christ, an apostle in Acts 7:19 retells the

301 These are outlined differently in a few verses; 1 Cor. 12:8-11 is the most inclusive list.
302 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 206. "— Верно! — весело ответила Софья. — Только здесь божий дом — вся земля."
303 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, p. 168. "— Пелагея! Спишь? Страдалица моя несчастная, спи!"
304 Ibid., 169.

story of Herod attempting to kill Jesus by "forcing [our people] to throw away the babies" [*prenuzhdaia ikh brosat' detei*] of Jerusalem. Such connects are less transposition than simple echo, though they nevertheless clarify Gor'kii's intent. The dream sequence that begins Part II further connects both Pavel with Christ and the novel's latter half with Acts.

The vision, a baptism-like experience for Pelageia, shortly comes to an end and prepares her to accept the socialist cause as her new ultimate principle. In order to find Pavel and Andrei in the dream, Pelageia follows them down a dark chasm, which wakes her in a fright. Gor'kii notes that "she arose and, not washing herself or praying to God, started putting the room back together."[305] The mother makes a miniature red banner from items found around the house, which she hides in her pocket. The factory whistle blows once more, and she sits down to ask herself "What is now to be done?" [*chto zhe teper' delat'*]. While this phrase has precedent in revolutionary literature like Chernyshevskii's *What is to be Done?*, it also finds resonance in the Bible. Acts 2 describes Pentecost, which celebrates the arrival of the Holy Spirit seven weeks and one day after Christ's death, roughly matching Pavel's time in prison. After the Holy Spirit descends to baptize the three thousand Israelites at Pentecost with fire, the crowd turns to Peter and Jesus's other apostles to ask the same question: "What are we to do" [*chto nam delat'*] with this revelation?[306] Peter's answer is leave one's past behind and spread the news with others. Though she is not praying, Pelageia has a hesychastic revelation that inspires her to commit to a new worldview. Her post-Christian transition, as reflected in her actions: "Remembering that she still had not prayed, she stood before the icons and, having stood a few seconds, again sat—in her heart there was nothing."[307] Where the Holy Spirit once was, the Revolutionary Spirit will soon be.

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305 Ibid.

306 Acts 2:37. "Услышав это, они умилились сердцем и сказали Петру и прочим апостолам: что нам делать, мужи братия?"

307 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 170.

Gor'kii transposes the Christian symbol of the flame of faith among other gifts associated with the Trinity's third persona so that he may engineer a secular pathos for the masses. Naturally, something so fundamental as fire has more than just Christian connotations. Human fascination with combustion, especially with its byproducts light and warmth, is recorded throughout human culture. In particular, the Greek religious figure Prometheus, who famously stole fire from the gods to give to humanity, has been lauded by revolutionary thinkers—in the broader sense of the word—for millennia. Nietzsche, whose influence on Gor'kii is well-documented, often used the story of Prometheus as an example of a civilization's progress.[308] While one cannot deny the possibility of non-Christian inspiration Gor'kii may have had in his writing *Mother,* Gor'kii starts and ends the novel with the topic of faith, especially that of Pelageia Nilovna, punctuated by the image of fire. The Revolutionary Spirit's first appearance in the novel comes at a time of difference in belief in Part I. Shortly before May Day, when fellow revolutionary's death sends Pavel into a furor about the government's "most heinous murder of millions of people, the murder of souls," he challenges his mother's fidelity to the tsar, much like Bloody Sunday did to Gor'kii: "If you felt this whole abomination and shameful rot, then you would understand our truth, [you] would see how great and bright it is!" In response, Pelageia rises "flustered and full of the desire to merge her heart with her son's heart into one fire." At the time, that flame was of the Christian Holy Spirit, but she nevertheless agrees: "Wait, Pasha, wait! … I feel it, wait!"[309] Her desire to believe in something is the spark waiting to be lit.

By the time the workers' procession is over, the mother has finally merged hearts into a single fire, but this time it is the Revolutionary Spirit. Seeing Pavel's "eyes, burning with the bright flame of

308 About FN & MG: Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World*, From Nietzsche to Stalinism (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Nel Grillaert, *What the God-Seekers Found in Nietzsche: The Reception of Neitzche's Übermensch by the Philosophers of the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Rodopi, 2008); Edith W. Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche in Russian Literature, 1890-1914* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1988); Mikhail Viacheslavovich Ivanov, "Sotsial'nyi mif v kontseptskii bogostroitel'stva," *Nauchno-tekhnicheskie vedomosti SPbGPU* 1 (2012).

309 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 131.

faith" before his arrest brings her into communion with not only her son but the entire revolutionary movement. Pelageia at last truly feels the presence of the spirit that resides in Pavel's soul, creating a moment of real transcendence. This shared flame inspires her to preach the socialist faith. Reassuring the workers after Pavel is taken away, she beseeches everyone to "Believe them!"—much like Gor'kii in his letter to his wife following Bloody Sunday ("You are about to read astonishing things, but believe them, these are the facts."). Amongst the crowd, someone yells at the group to listen to their new idol saying, "The Holy One speaks! … The Holy One, good people! Listen!"[310] This moment can signify the inclusion of other gifts of the Christian Holy Spirit in addition to faith, such as wisdom or prophecy. It also opens the novel to Gor'kii's most spiritual side, the power of the word. Texts like the Christian Bible or *Mother* have an immortal, intangible presence in our mental faculties, and Gor'kii wishes to occupy the place held by Orthodoxy in Russian minds. Guided by the spirit of works like these, people build and destroy cultures and nations, moved by faith in their message. Pelageia Nilovna expresses these sentiments throughout the novel. As she comes to accept Pavel's imprisonment, she repeats several times, "Our Lord Jesus Christ would not have been, had people not died for his glory."[311] Later, plagued by doubt, Pelageia tells Tat'iana, "Regarding God, I don't know, but I believe in Christ... I believe his words, love thy neighbor as oneself, I believe in this!"[312] Gor'kii will show in the mother's development exactly how far faith in words—in an idea—can take an individual and, more importantly, a community.

In the second part of *Mother,* we see the factory operating as the cultural and social center of the town, as churches once did. To reflect this, Gor'kii immediately establishes the place as the community's revolutionary hub. In the part's first chapter, Pelageia Nilovna commits to continue

310 Ibid., 163.
311 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 165. "Господа нашего Иисуса Христа не было бы, если бы люди не погибли во славу его..."
312 Ibid., 273. Насчет бога — не знаю я, а во Христа верю... И словам его верю — возлюби ближнего, яко себя,в это верю!.."

Pavel's work spreading literature from the factory throughout the city. This is possible because Pavel succeeded in convincing everyone working to join the strike, thereby capturing the factory as a home base. The manual laborers, who had supported Pavel's campaign, assist and encourage her to disseminate disruptive information. Throughout the novel's second half, the factory is used as a location for revolutionary organizing as well as a refuge during times of fear of prosecution, a source of motivation about stories of a dark past, and other social good traditionally provided by the Church. In addition to the factory's diffused central role in the latter half of the plot, Gor'kii offers readers a concrete, striking image to underline the importance and influence of the factory church of this imagined socialist future. The second chapter of Part II begins thus:

> On the ground, blackened by soot, the factory sprawled like a large dark red spider, having raised its smokestacks high into the sky. Workers' single-story houses pressed against it. Gray and flattened, they crowded in a tight group on the edge of the swamp and looked pitifully at each other with their small, dim windows. Above them rose a church, also dark red to match the factory, its bell tower shorter than the factory chimneys.[313]

As the tallest building in the city, the factory casts a literal shadow over every other edifice, including the church. With growing connections thanks to the mother's pamphlet proselytizing, the red spider imagery connotes the long shadow of revolutionary thought over the city. The old Church and its churches now heed the socialist cause, represented by the looming factory. From this citadel, Pelageia Nilovna and the rest of the revolutionary cadre can carry out their mission of ushering Russia into a brave new world—and maybe one day the globe, as well.

Mother's Part II can be divided into two consecutive apostolic narratives: Pelageia as missionary and Pelageia as martyr for the revolutionary cause. This division correlates with the Book

313 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 173. "На земле, черной от копоти, огромным темно-красным пауком раскинулась фабрика, подняв высоко в небо свои трубы. К ней прижимались одноэтажные домики рабочих. Серые, приплюснутые, они толпились тесной кучкой на краю болота и жалобно смотрели друг на друга маленькими тусклыми окнами. Над ними поднималась церковь, тоже темно-красная под цвет фабрики, колокольня ее была ниже фабричных труб."

of Acts, which can be seen as having two halves as well, the first of which is the development of the Christian Church (ch. 1-8). In the novel, however, Gor'kii meditates on the power of doubt against faith. The mother's maternal feelings deter her from committing to Pavel's message, a strong argument against viewing her as a transposed Mary in this part. On the other hand, Pelageia's belief in the cause regularly takes two steps forward and one step back while these conflicting allegiances battle for her heart, as reflected in the flames of the Revolutionary Spirit in and around her. Gor'kii uses the Holy Spirit leitmotif to depict the mother's struggle with doubt, which may be comparable to what he and others experienced as the idea of revolution, both political and cultural, started to become a possibility. This first narrative of Part II, I argue, is Gor'kii's contribution to the persistent conversation about faith and doubt in Russian literary history. After feeling the Revolutionary Spirit for the first time at the May Day procession, she wakes up the next day eager to start her mission, though not without reservations. When asked to do a minor favor, Pelageia begs the revolutionaries to equip her with the necessary provisions for a whole mission, traveling "winter and summer, right up until the grave, like a wanderer," adding, "Is this really a bad fate for me?" Despite this, "she becomes sad" as she imagines herself dependent upon alms. Self-doubt notwithstanding, she nevertheless decides to dedicate the rest of her life to cultivating the revolutionary Church by preaching Pavel's message.

Pelageia's mission continues until Pavel's trial and first addresses her conflicting feelings for her son and her son's greater purpose. She "dresses as a nun, a lace and linen saleswoman, a well-to-do philistine, or [one of Repin's] pilgrims" while disseminating revolutionary literature.[314] Her choice of disguise suggests that faith is a business, one that she does well. After some success, Pelageia is confronted by her maternal instinct to protect Pavel, a spirit competing with her revolutionary side.

314 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 212. "По нескольку раз в месяц переодетая монахиней, торговкой кружевами и ручным полотном, зажиточной мещанкой или богомолкой-странницей, она разъезжала и расхаживала по губернии с мешком за спиной или чемоданом в руках." Here Gor'kii refers to Il'ia Repin's 1878 painting *The Pilgrims* [*Bogomolki-strannitsy*].

Thinking of her son's heroism, she says to herself, "Everything will be okay, everything!" but faced with the reality of Pavel's rebelliousness, her "maternal [heart] impeded the growth of her human [heart], burned it down, and in place of a great feeling, in the gray ash of distress, a melancholic thought sheepishly beat: '[He] will die... [He] will be gone!..'"[315] Gor'kii undoubtedly saw the internal conflict with the mothers of Peter Zalomov and other revolutionaries. The author asks if revolutionary change is worth such a great sacrifice by placing Pelageia's maternal interests in opposition to her growing revolutionary identity. The cause demands it, therefore she must yield. The collective, which will fill the God-the-Father role in Gor'kii's next book, *Confession*, begins to take form here. Though she does not say it outright, Pelageia readies herself to accept the consequences if revolution requires her son's life for the betterment of society. Her immanent transcendence, feeling both personal and collective allegiances, through the heart of humanity helps her push forward through the worst of times. Pelageia's loss is given meaning by the faith in a brighter future to come.

Now with an ideal and a keeper, Gor'kii is ready to spread his gospel. After seeing her son one last time before his trial, Pelageia commits to the cause and spreads her passion to those around her. Rybin announces that she has joined the party, which he calls "miraculous."[316] For the following gathering behind her, she becomes a font of confidence in the cause. She "collects everything bright and pure she has seen into a single flame" that whips her into a frenzy during her speeches, causing the public to hang onto her words attentively.[317] In an evening after a particularly forceful speech, Tat'iana confides in Pelageia Nilovna about her own doubts, knowing past adversity likely caused both to doubt the meaning of their lives: "You speak well, and your speech tugs at my You think, God, at least look at these people and life through this crack. What are you living for? Sheep! Here I am literate, I read

315 Ibid.
316 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 246.
317 Ibid., 268. "Бессознательно подчи няясь этому требованию здоровой души, она собирала всё, что видела светлого и чистого, в один огонь, ослеп лявший ее своим чистым горением..."

books, I think a lot, but you can't sleep at night because of your thoughts. What's the use? [If] I don't think, it will be in vain, and [if] I do, it's also in vain."[318] While she was speaking, "the flame in the lamp flickered, dimmed, but after a second flared up anew evenly and brightly." Tat'iana has already found a solution for her crisis in Pelageia, for she immediately adds, "they heard your speeches, and that is why people live! And how miraculous is it that I hear and see you, and I know this! Before you, I never had heard of or thought such things..."[319] Pelageia Nilovna's oratory—the Word propelled by the Revolutionary Spirit—has re-lit the fire in Tat'iana's heart and renewed the young socialist's passion for the cause. Once preoccupied with her personal cares, Gor'kii elevates the mother's role to become a beacon for those whose light flickers as hers once did.

As the mother comes to embody socialist spirituality, she becomes Gor'kii's emblem of a cleansed soul who can heal others. In a later scene, Pelageia meets with Chumakov, another revolutionary who was present at the May Day procession and "who had a flame burning for a long time."[320] Like Tat'iana, he exclaims to Pelageia, "You really touch [others] with your faith in people... I, in fact, love you like my own mother!.." Observing her and spending time with the cadre has effected spiritual change: "such a surprisingly healthy and clean feeling" to gather in his soul.[321] The cause has inspired faith that the country will survive its current troubles. He exclaims, "Russia will be the brightest democracy in the world!"[322] The Revolutionary Spirit has cured his spiritual ailment, another motif seen in the Book of Acts. For example, Acts 3:1-10 tells of Saints Peter and John healing a disabled beggar. Chumakov explains he had his year spent bent over "books and numbers" turned him

318 Ibid., 269-70. "Хорошо говорите,— тянет сердце за вашей ре чью. Думаешь — господи! хоть бы в щелку посмотреть на таких людей и на жизнь. Что живешь? Овца! Я вот грамотная, читаю книжки, думаю много, иной раз ночь не спишь, от мыслей. А что толку? Не буду думать — зря исхизну, и буду — тоже зря."
319 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 270.
320 Ibid., 254, 270.
321 Ibid., 279.
322 Ibid., 279. "И в душе накопилось такое — удивительно здоровое, чистое. Какие хорошие люди, Ниловна! Я говорю о молодых рабочих — крепкие, чуткие, полные жажды всё понять. Смотришь на них и видишь — Россия будет самой яркой демократией земли!"

sour and resulted in a "deformity."[323] From his description, we may assume this man was afflicted by Gor'kii's transposed original sin, valuing money more than humanity, which had left him spiritually lame. In Acts, Peter responds to the crippled man's requests for money: "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I will give you," before invoking Jesus to heal the beggar, who quickly and joyously skips away.[324] In the novel, Pelageia's demonstration of faith sends Chumakov to Pavel and the other young workers, who in turn cure his doubts. They remake him into someone "bright and alive" with the Revolutionary Spirit, and Gor'kii's Church takes another into its fold.[325] Beaming with the Spirit herself, Pelageia remains hopeful as Pavel's judgment approaches.

The conclusion of *Mother* pivots to the final narrative, the transposed martyrdom of Paul, at the revolutionaries' trial. Pavel—the Russian equivalent of "Paul"—and Pelageia share in this denouement, as though they were of one essence. Their collective experience maps onto the story of Saint Paul, which constitutes the remainder of the Book of Acts after Pentecost and the growth of the early Church. Like Paul, Pavel and Pelageia, having gathered a rebellious following, face imprisonment and then trial for spreading their "Truth," appeal to the judge with a fiery defense of their confessed beliefs, receive exile, and ultimately die for those very beliefs. For his part, Pavel—the revolutionary Word—does the speaking, while Pelageia Nilovna—beacon of the Revolutionary Spirit—does the praxis for hers. When the trial starts, Pavel leads twelve other co-defendants into the courtroom and speaks on their behalf. The dozen following Pavel naturally conjures Christ's apostles. The mother's exclusion from this list suggests that she is more than an apostle, as well. Pavel charges the judges with being "spiritually barren" [*dukhovno besplodnye*] and declares that they have brought the solution, socialism, which "joins the broken world in a single, great whole," the Revolutionary Church.[326] The defense speech,

323 Ibid., 279.
324 Acts 3:6
325 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 279.
326 Ibid., p. 316. "Вы оторвали че ловека от жизни и разрушили его; социализм соединяет разрушенный вами мир во единое великое целое, и это будет!"

though more forceful than Paul's in Acts, earns Pavel and his conspirators the same consequence, exile, to their delight. After the announcement, the revolutionaries leave the scene, and Pelageia is left alone to finish Paul's story.

The last chapter of *Mother* provides a coda to Pavel, Pelageia, and Paul's intertwined stories that draws on a source outside of Acts. Paul is exiled to Rome, and the Book of Acts ends shortly after his arrival. His fate is only recorded in histories of the Christian Church. Scholars estimate that Luke finished Acts of the Apostles shortly after the Gospels in the early 60s CE based on historical events that are present and absent in the narrative. Acts recounts Paul's life up to his first trial and arrival in Rome around 60 CE, but it fails to mention any subsequent arrest and execution ordered by Emperor Nero. Historians of the Church and Rome later recorded Paul's death, which occurred no later than 64 CE, after Luke finished writing his historical account.[327] The canonical version of Acts contains twenty-eight chapters, and perhaps for that reason *Mother*'s twenty-ninth and final chapter shows readers Pelageia's fate, which mirrors Paul's own death. With her son entirely out of the picture, Pelageia dedicates herself more ardently than ever before. At the same time, she feels a confident calmness that "always came to her after great stress and once upon a time slightly alarmed her, but now only opened her soul."[328] Pelageia, no longer needing to worry about her maternal instinct, is free to direct her passion toward the cause. To mark this moment, she undergoes a rebirth of spirit and identity:

> Standing in the middle of the room half-clothed, she got lost in thought for a minute. It seemed that the person she was, who lived with the anxieties and fears about her son and with thoughts about protecting his body, was no longer there; she left, went far away somewhere, and maybe, she was burned entirely by her worry, and this eased and cleaned the soul and renewed the heart

327 "AiO'P. Gerasimov. Muchenichestvo sviatogo apostolo pavla," September 24, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140924125656/http://aliom.orthodoxy.ru/arch/050/st-pavel.htm.
328 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 332.

> with a new power.[329]

Pelageia's transformation is accompanied by a peace and insight that rivals Pavel's prophetic demeanor. Born anew, her final mission is to give everything for her new faith.

Pelageia's personal sacrifice for the revolution dovetails with Apostle Paul's death, establishing her as the prototypical saint of Gor'kii's socialist spiritual tradition and example for the audience. She begins organizing the printing and dissemination of Pavel's defense speech, which makes her passion burn ever brighter. On a cold day, "in her chest it was also bright, but warm."[330] When talking to others, "she remembered words of a forgotten prayer, lit with a new faith, [and] she tossed them from her heart like sparks."[331] She tells the revolutionaries to go forth and spread the word like children, "clothe everything with new heavens and illuminate everything with an imperishable fire that comes from the soul."[332] Her own promise to deliver Pavel's words, running through her veins, brings her to an apogee. Like her son before her, Pelageia transforms into an icon, brilliant and transcendent:

> Her gentle, large face trembled, her eyes smiled radiantly, and her eyebrows fluttered above them, as though giving wings to their brilliance. She was intoxicated by grand thoughts, and she soaked in them everything that warmed her heart, everything that she managed to survive, and compressed her thoughts into solid, expansive crystals of bright words. They were born ever stronger in her autumnal heart, illuminated by the creative power of the spring sun, blooming and blushing ever brighter in it.[333]

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329 Ibid., 333-4. "Стоя среди комнаты полуодетая, она на минуту задумалась. Ей показалось, что нет ее, той, которая жила тревогами и страхом за сына, мыслями об охране его тела, нет ее теперь — такой, она отделилась, ото шла далеко куда-то, а может быть, совсем сгорела на огне волнения, и это облегчило, очистило душу, обновило сердце новой силой."

330 Ibid., 334. "Мать посмотрела в окно, на улице сиял холодный крепкий день, в груди ее тоже было светло, но жарко."

331 Ibid., 338. "Ей вспоминались слова забытых молитв, зажигая новой верой, она бросала их из своего сердца, точно пскры."

332 Ibid.

333 Ibid., 339. "Ее доброе большое лицо вздрагивало, глаза лучисто улыбались и брови трепетали над ними, как бы окрыляя нх блеск. Ее охмеляли большие мысли, она влагала в них всё, чем горело ее сердце, всё, что успела пережить, и сжимала мысли в твердые, емкие кристаллы светлых слов. Они всё сильнее рождались в осеннем сердце, освещенном творческой силой солнца весны, всё ярче цвели и рдели в нем."

Pelageia has now had her own *kairos*, her moment in a divine radiance, that has turned her into an iconic saint, as well. In a moment of religious ecstasy, she erupts with a declaration: “This is how a new God is born to the people!” The mother is ready to be with her son, this new God, once again.

When Pelageia goes for her next pamphlet delivery, the state forces her to make the ultimate decision: her faith or her freedom. This test of fidelity is a common signal of a saint’s blessedness and eligibility for sainthood found across Christian literature, including the Book of Acts. It will be Gor’kii’s final piece for his own post-Christian ideal, as well. The government, now suspicious of Pelageia, has sent spies to surveil her. On a delivery run, as one pursues her with pamphlets in hand, she knows she must get rid of the copies of Pavel’s speech if she is to have any chance of evading the fate that befell her son—or worse. When caught, “one thought after another flashed like sparks.” The brightest one of all, “Do I throw away my son’s word? To these people? … Or make away with them?... Run...” becomes her final, defining moment. Gor’kii adds that “these thoughts seemed foreign to her, like someone from beyond forcibly planted them in her”, so to say that the Revolutionary Spirit is at work.[334] Pelageia’s decision to resist the gendarme leads to a struggle, during which she yells to the crowd socialist-coded spiritual maxims, ending with “A resurrected soul will not be killed!”[335] The crowd rushes to try to prevent the guards from “spilling the blood of reason,” as one audience member screams, but they slowly close their hands around her neck. Despite her lifeless body in under the weight of the guards, “her eyes never extinguished and saw the eyes of many others; they burned with a familiar bold, keen fire, a fire that made a home in her heart.”[336] Putting word to action and sacrificing her life for the cause has lit the flame of the Revolutionary Spirit within every witness. She is a martyr, and her story will live on for generations to come.

334 Gor'kii, PSS, vol. 8, 344. “Но более ярко мелькнула другая искра: «Сыновнее слово бросить? В такие руки...» Она прижала к себе чемодан. «А — с ним уйти?.. Бежать...» Эти мысли казались ей чужими, точно их кто-то извне насильно втыкал в нее.”

335 Ibid., 345-6. “— Собирай, народ, силы свои во единую силу! — Душу воскресшую — не убьют!”

336 Ibid., p. 346. “— Душу воскресшую — не убьют! Но глаза ее не угасали и видели много других глаз они горели знакомым ей смелым, острым огнем — родным ее сердцу огнем.”

Pelageia's final words contain Gor'kii's most urgent message to readers, but they may get lost in the tale of her heroic deeds. Like the end of earlier stories such as "On the Raft" and *The Lower Depths*, Gor'kii reaches back into the Book of Revelation [*Otkrovenie*; also known as *Apokalipsis*] convey Pelageia's parting wisdom. As she's struggling to get air, Pelageia manages to break free temporarily and say that even "seas of blood cannot extinguish the truth..."[337] "Oceans of blood" is a well-known Biblical image unique to Revelation. Implying that seas of blood are symbolic of the Christian Trinity's judgment of humanity, Gor'kii emphatically resists via Pelageia Nilovna the assertion that the final word belongs to the Russian state. Faith in truth, Gor'kii's God, albeit ill-defined, will prevail. For now, however, he must use the Bible against the Orthodox powers that be. Pelageia's final word and dying breath, "wretched," directed at her oppressors, also plays a prominent role in Revelation. In the final book of the Bible, Saint John includes seven letters to seven new churches to convey their judgment on behalf of Christ. Not despite but because of their lukewarm attitudes toward justice, the Laodicean church received the most scathing rebuke. John writes about them, "So then because you are lukewarm and not hot or cold, I vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'; but you do not know that you are *wretched*" [*a ne znaesh', chto ty* neschasten].[338] Christ's harshest judgment is against the new church who believes in nothing but itself, for at least the vilest of us have convictions worth fighting for. Those who only serve themselves by remaining inactive are worth no more than water spat onto the ground. Gor'kii warns his readers in the Russian Empire to pick a side and prepare for judgment day on the horizon.

The tsar's guards took the lives of hundreds on Bloody Sunday, but their actions had wider consequences. Gor'kii's sketch "9 January" (1906) and his novel *Mother* (1907) demonstrate how

337 Ibid.

338 Revelation 3:16-17. "Но, как ты тепл, а не горяч и не холоден, то извергну тебя из уст Моих. Ибо ты говоришь: «я богат, разбогател и ни в чем не имею нужды»; а не знаешь, что ты несчастен, и жалок, и нищ, и слеп, и наг."

Bloody Sunday likewise killed the Russian conception of a loving, gentle "Little Father Tsar" forever. The sketch depicts the catastrophic conclusion of Russians' political naivete and the realization of a new fatherless era with no God and no tsar. The novel then re-imagines Russia following Bloody Sunday with a populace in need of a spiritual home more than ever before. Gor'kii's answer is in *Mother,* which transposes an array of scriptural narratives from the Christian tradition to renew the Trinity in the fatherless, messianic New Son and the Revolutionary Spirit. The novel's first half, based on the Gospel of Luke, projects Christ's prophetic deeds, first and foremost the resurrection, onto Pavel's revolutionary activity. Integral to the transposed Easter celebration is the factory, which becomes the local hub of radical community of believers in the cause. However, Gor'kii's primary focus is on Pelageia Nilovna, who reorients her religiosity toward the new "holy deed" of the revolution. Pelageia transforms from a skeptical onlooker to a martyr for the cause. Though not a part of the Trinity herself, she comes to embody its message and values while sharing them with others. Her own work unfolds over the second half of the novel, as she spreads the news of the coming revolution to workers in the surrounding areas, a theme that Gor'kii took from the Book of Acts. *Mother,* therefore, begins Gor'kii's revolutionary scriptures and establishes his Revolutionary Church for a new epoch.

Time and time again faith emerges as the bulwark to the torrent of doubts in the novel's background. Bloody Sunday and the bloody history that preceded it slowly eroded the Russian people's belief in the ruling institutions and figures, but the flame of the *narod*'s faith reignited elsewhere. The post-Christian world of "9 January" and *Mother* attests that even if we no longer believe in God-the-Father, we must have an idea or person in which we believe that answers the question of "What is to be done?" Irrespective of religion, faith is what moves us from the answer of that question to action, as Rybin says. Gor'kii's message is to have faith; it is the assurance that *good*—whatever that may mean

to you—will prevail in the end. *Mother* declares that tradition, particularly the tsar-god and his supporting apparatus, can no longer be the *good* in which we place our faith, but stops short of naming a successor. As a result, *Mother*'s ending, a mournful wail from an anonymous follower of Pelageia, sounds more like Gor'kii's own "What is to be done?" than an answer to said question. The novel, like all works that ask great questions, was censored by the authorities of tradition for the potency of its inquiry. Marx's remark, as quoted in the epigraph, that "The criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism," explains: to have one's own faith is to have one's own ideas and actions, and to control the faith of others is to control their ideas and actions. Is your faith, your "Truth," your own? If not, what are you going to do about it?

Chapter 4:
A People's Life:
Post-Christian Existentialism in Confession

"Homo homini deus est" [*Human is god to human*]
–Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (1844)[339]

When I was very young, I forgot how to laugh in the Trophonic Cave; when I grew older, when I opened my eyes and looked at reality, I began to laugh, and have not stopped laughing since then. I saw that it was the meaning of life to earn a living, its aim to become a council of justice; that it was love's rich desire to get a wealthy girl; that it was the bliss of friendship to help each other in money embarrassments; that it was the wisdom that the majority therefore assumed; that it was excitement to give a speech; that it was courage to dare to be fined 10 silver coins; that it was cordial to say welcome after a midday meal; that it was godly to go to the altar once a year. I saw that and I laughed.
–Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (1843)[340]

"Without God, everything is permitted" is a thought-provoking aphorism at face value, but that phrase is not quite what many believe it to be. Often falsely attributed to Fëdor Dostoevskii directly, the popularly quoted form comes from Jean-Paul Sartre's commentary about *Brothers Karamazov* in the French philosopher's foundational *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* [*Existentialism Is a Humanism*] (1946).[341] His words are part interpretation and part quotation of Dostoevskii's prose. In actuality, Sartre's "God" is of his own making, read in Miusov's apophatic criticism of Ivan's atheism, which mentions no such "God," as such: "you destroy humanity's faith in its immortality..., then nothing will

339 He writes this a couple times: "Der andere is per se der Mittler zwischen mir and der heiligen Idee der Gattung. Homo homini Deus est." (p. 278); "Is das Wesen des Menschen das hochste Wesen des Menchen, so muss auch praktisch das hochste und erste Gesetz die Liebe des Menschen zum Menschen sein. Homo homini deus est – dies ist der oberste praktische Grundsatz, dies der Wendepunkt der Weltgeschichte." (444)

340 Kierkegaard 1920, p. 21: "Da jeg var meget ung, da glemte jeg i den trophoniske Hule at lee; da jeg blev ældre, da jeg slog Øiet op og betragtede Virkeligheden, da kom jeg til at lee, og har siden den Tid ikke ophørt dermed. Jeg saae, at det var Livets Betydning at faae et Levebrød, dets Maal at blive Justitsraad; at det var Elskovens rige Lyst at faae en velhavende Pige; at det var Venskabets Salighed at hjælpe hinanden i Pengeforlegenheder; at det var Viisdommen, hvad de Fleste antoge derfor; at det var Begeistring at holde en Tale; at det var Mod at vove at blive mulkteret paa 10 Rbd.; at det var Hjertelighed at sige Velbekomme efter et Middagsmaaltid; at det var Gudsfrygt eengang om Aaret at gaae til Alters. Det saae jeg, og jeg loe." "To descend into the cave of Trophonios" became a way of saying "to suffer a great fright" or to lose one's innocence. This saying is alluded to in Aristophanes' Clouds.

341 This error shows up in even refereed literature, e.g. Kibalnik, Sergei A. "'If There Is a God, Then Anything Is Permitted' (Dostoevsky's Meta-Theme in Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Interpretation)." *Studies in East European Thought* 72, no. 3 (December 1, 2020), 227–8. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-020-09388-w.

be amoral, and everything will be permitted."[342] Sartre, an adamant atheist like Gor'kii, constructs a "God" where there were only people's collective beliefs. Dostoevskii's Miusov, on the other hand, describes "God" as many things, but never utters the name "God" itself. With that, when we argue about the existence of "God" and ultimately the idea that "without God, everything is permitted," is it Sartre's or Dostoevskii's "God" that is said—or unsaid—to be absent?

An Atheist Confession

The following chapter argues that Gor'kii's godbuilding phase, as exemplified in *Confession* (1908), constructs a post-Christian "God" to bridge the gap observed between religious and secular forms of existentialist thought, such as those seen in Sartre and Dostoevskii, or Feuerbach and Kierkegaard. Written in Italy at a safe distance from Lenin, the novel is Gor'kii's most complete profession of the revolutionary faith developed in *Mother* and previous works out of Orthodox symbolism and socialist fervor. "I saw her, my mother ... and I saw her lord [*vladyku*], the all-powerful, immortal *narod*," Matvei, *Confession*'s protagonist exclaims in the end, putting a name at last to "God."[343] The *narod*, which I transcribe rather than translate, is a culturally significant Russian term that attempts to refer to the native ethnolinguistic population. By co-opting pre-Christian and Christian elements, Gor'kii's post-Christian godbuilding is in some ways an ordinary instance in the "dual-faith" Slavic tradition, but the novel stands out in ways, as well. To be specific, *Confession* uses transpositions of Christian genres, narratives, and liturgy to make Gor'kii's ultimate revelation to his readers: "God" and the wonders ascribed thereto were the *narod*'s—the people's—making all along.

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342 Fëdor M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenie v tridtsati tomakh*, vol. 14, 30 vols. (Nauka, 1976). "Иван Федорович прибавил при этом в скобках, что в этом-то и состоит весь закон естественный, так что уничтожьте в человечестве веру в свое бессмертие, в нем тотчас же иссякнет не только любовь, но и всякая живая сила, чтобы продолжать мировую жизнь. Мало того: тогда ничего уже не будет безнравственного, все будет позволено, даже антропофагия."

343 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 390. "Видел я ее, мать мою, в пространстве между звезд, и как гордо смотрит она очами океанов своих в дали и глубины; видел ее, как полную чашу ярко-красной, неустанно кипящей, живой крови человеческой, и видел владыку ее — всесильный, бессмертный народ."

Instead of taking away from the miraculous nature of the divine, however, Gor'kii finds in this human capacity an equal if not greater source of awe. Bringing light to humanity's innate creative power with unlimited potential, Gor'kii hoped that he could halt the country's moral backslide and set the Russian people on a revolutionary divine mission.

The novel is framed as the spiritual autobiography of Matvei, an aged man who narrates his evolution from Orthodox Christian to a faith he calls "godbuilding." As an infant, he was found on the side of the road by a wealthy landowner and raised by the staff of his estate. As an adult, he marries and has a child, but his wife dies during the birth of their second child. The event unmoors him, and he embarks on a search for answers about the meaning of life and nature of God. Matvei begins his seeking with the institution of the Orthodox Church at the recommendation of a prostitute. He joins a monastery, but the abbot dismisses him shortly after for speaking out against the immoral behavior of the other monks. Still looking for answers, Matvei sets out on a pilgrimage across Russia. Along the way, he hears about the lives of numerous other people, opening his eyes to the broken and diseased state of society, including his own isolation from others. Hearing there may be answers in a factory, Matvei travels to find a different way of life. Though it looks like hell, workers labor together to build the physical and spiritual foundation on which the country will grow. The impression causes Matvei to study and preach ideas of collective labor to others, and Matvei finally finds a community to call home. After leaving the factory, he witnesses a miracle happen when a group of the *narod* cure a disabled person. This event testifies to Matvei that "godbuilding" is the Slavic peoples' righteous future.

Mother's focus on what the *narod* should do turns to the necessity and capacity to act in *Confession*. Revisiting unanswered philosophical questions from past works, here we find a treatise on justice, immortality, virtue, agency, truth—"God" by another name. *Confession* constructs the "God" missing from *Mother* with Gor'kii's most treasured resource, the people, to rewrite cultural

foundational narratives about good, evil, and reality itself. The novel's anthropocentric conclusion attributes to the collective renewed ideals of justice, immortality, virtue, agency, or at least their highest forms—"God" by another name. For these reasons, this chapter argues for *Confession*'s consideration among other existentialist works, such as those of Dostoevskii and Sartre. Gor'kii's godbuilding fundamentally concerns itself with the primary question of existentialism, the meaningful essence —"God"—and its development—"building"—to use Sartre's own definition.[344] Transposing Christian narratives onto contemporary social issues, *Confession* lays bare the role of religious thinking in a secular society (as Gor'kii sees it): holding certain ideas as inviolable Truth makes our individual and collective experiences possible, and together in faith, moving mountains is often as easy as deciding to do it.

As we have seen in previous chapters, social division had given way political turmoil as the Russian Empire approached the turn of the twentieth century. A revolution came, but instead of complete reformation of the Russian Empire's broken but predictable political apparatus, Bloody Sunday transformed the country into a patchwork state of conservatism and liberalism, autocracy and democracy, theocracy and atheism. Gor'kii, newly settled in Italy by spring 1907, was responding to all those trends in *Confession* with a blend of religious and secular questions to discern the "True" right path for Russia—what those who raised him and thus Gor'kii called "God." In other words, this chapter examines Gor'kii's response to the existential crises of the period while putting him in conversation with prominent existential philosophers before and after him. I argue that *Confession* presents the psychosocial case for a collectively constructed "Truth," which Gor'kii's confessed spiritual socialism is meant to fulfill as an outlet for the Russian people's presumed spiritual impulse. In its exposition, the religiously tinged secular claim to the "Truth" offers us a fascinating lesson on the subjectivity of perceived facts, such as those at the foundation of nation states past and present. Though

344 Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'existentialisme Est Un Humanisme*. Collection Pensées. Nagel, 1946.

Gor'kii's villa is ages and oceans away, the Capri School and *Confession* can nevertheless teach us about managing dueling realities in our present time and place.

Since the novel's publication in 1907, critics have scratched their heads at Gor'kii's religious sensibilities, and many have treated his godbuilding phase as an aberration or lark that he eventually overcame. Georgii Chulkov, a prominent figure in early-twentieth century Russian literary life, once said in response to reading *Confession*, "I am not afraid to assert paradoxically that Maksim Gor'kii is the strongest believer of modern writers. The object of his faith is another question, but the nature of his preoccupation is defined by faith."[345] However, as this chapter shows, *Confession* is the latest in a consistent trend of religious thinking. It is ironic that many see Christ in *Confession* when Gor'kii is not searching for but revealing God. As we shall see, the Russian *narod* makes its own saviors. In the role of a facilitator, Gor'kii is looking to produce self-realization—more specifically, *our* self-realization, in other words, realization of our self. Collective manifestation of our potential triumphs over any individual will, even that of the tsar, or so his thinking goes. My discussion also includes the essay "Destruction of the Personality," which explains that very concept as though he never wrote *Confession* in the first place. This chapter shows how Gor'kii's transpositions move almost entirely away from the Gospels—and thus away from the idea of a savior as a single person—to envision the Russian people as Matvei's God-the-Father. *Confession* is a post-Christian catechism for the Russian people to realize that the only "God" after Bloody Sunday can be found looking back at them in the mirror.

I suggest this idea of collective self-realization to frame the scholarly conversation about the "god" in godbuilding, for which scholars have yet to give a definition. Lidiia Spiridonova claims that these ideas are not truly religious, but simply what Gor'kii conflates with religion, though she is alone

345 Agursky, "Velikii eretik," 80. "Один из основателей так называемого мистического анархизма Чулков писал об Исповеди: Я не боюсь сказать парадокса, утверждая, что Максим Горький самый верующий из современных писателей. Каков объект его веры это иной вопрос, но природа его переживания опеределяется именно верой."

in that opinion.[346] Most others, such as Rowley, call it "religion." The majority conclude Gor'kii's is a "new Christ-based religion," putting it in the "godseeking" category, in Scherr's terms.[347] In a certain sense, Scherr is correct, for any post-Christian faith is per se based on Christ. In a truer sense, critics miss Gor'kii's intention to say that "God" was a human all along, begotten by Russians' collective belief in the idea of Christ: "Was it from the heavens that God came down to Earth or from Earth did the people's force ascend into the heavens?" Matvei reflects in a Feuerbachian manner during his conversion to godbuilding in *Confession*.[348] At this point, labels like "religion" become less meaningful, but I find precedent for Gor'kii's worldview elsewhere in religious philosophy. This chapter argues that *Confession* succeeds the Slavophiles' "ecumenicity" [*sobornost'*] and Vladimir Solov'ëv's concept of "syzygy" [*sizigiia*] as models of faith-based nation-building. The plain prose of "Destruction of the Personality" provides clarifying context to Matvei's transformation into a social thinker and believer, which was Gor'kii's solution like the Slavophiles and Solov'ëv to divinely inspired governance. Instead of an amorphous "God" like others of the past, Gor'kii's "God" was the shape of the community he was building.

The idea of a deity dwelling within the masses can be found in Orthodox thinking throughout history, most acutely in the concept of the Russian "godbearing *narod*" [*narod-bogonosets*]. In early Christianity, the "godbearers" (from AG Θεοφόρος [*theoforos*]) led holy processions carrying an icon of Jesus, and the term came to represent any individual metaphorically carrying God with them.[349] In the nineteenth century, conservative movements branded the Russian people with this epithet for an array of sociopolitical agendas. Slavophile-Westernizer debates brought to the forefront questions of national identity, which Orthodox nationalists like Khomiakov answered the godbearing folk destined

346 Spiridonova, *Nastoiashchii Gor'kii*, 100.
347 Scherr, "Godbuilding Redux," 455-462.
348 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 371.
349 Pavel Petrovich Vasil'ev, "Bogonosets," in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Brokgauza i Efrona* (1891).

to do God's work on Earth. Successors to the Slavophiles on the right repeated this idea, including Uvarov's Official Nationality ("Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality") and Nicholas II himself. That lineage also includes the so-called *pochvenniki* (a populist movement, from the Russian *pochva*, "soil") and, most prominently, Fëdor Dostoevskii. The godbearing trope can be found in varying intensities in a majority of his most significant novels, particularly *Brothers Karamazov.* This divine duty of the Russian people, which features in studies such as Peter Duncan's *Russian Messianism*, is a view common among traditionalists, but Gor'kii is perhaps the first revolutionary thinker to champion the view. Other socialist writers, like Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Chernyshevskii, found their solutions in collectivism while leaving God out of it. Thus *Confession*, despite its message of starting anew, finds itself in conversation with radical Russian conservatism in its pivotal moments.

Perhaps the most surprising conservative connection found in *Confession* is its praise of Old Believers and their figurehead, Archpriest Avvakum. The novel's original title was *A Saint's Life* [*Zhitie*] because, as the author himself remarked, the work aims to model the spiritual transformation of an individual.[350] The hagiographic genre often depicts the miraculous and selfless deeds done by those whom the Church has made saints. Each story, generally written by officials gathering evidence about a person's life after their death, serves as justification of a saint's eligibility for beatification and as a lesson to readers in Church-sanctioned lifestyles. Though he changed the name, the original choice of *A Saint's Life* provides valuable information about Gor'kii's thinking about his own story. In addition to reading *Confession* as a hagiographic work, the title makes connections with an unexpected religious influence. While there are many saints' lives in the Orthodox tradition, the *Life of Archpriest Avvakum, Written by Himself* [*Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma, im samim napisannoe*] is known in particular for its first-person perspective, such as that in *Confession* when it was called *A Saint's Life*. The text, written in 1672–1673, recounts the Avvakum Petrov (1620–1682) with a particular focus on the persecution he

350 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 535.

and others endured at the hands of the Tsar and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Though the Church censored any official publication through the end of the nineteenth century, the text was still clandestinely circulated among Old Believers—some of the earliest surviving independent publication [*samizdat*] in Russian.[351]

More than a title, Gor'kii has a documented history of celebrating Avvakum. Barry Scherr makes note of a couple "coincidental" commonalities between *Confession* and *Life of Archpriest Avvakum*, but I see sufficient evidence to argue that Gor'kii openly admired Avvakum's life, his practices, and the Old Believers' steadfast faith.[352] In addition to structural allusions in Confession, we see Gor'kii directly quote Avvakum's autobiographical hagiography in "Destruction of the Personality."[353] His *Life* would have been available to Gor'kii by 1882, when he began working as an assistant in an Old Believer family's icon shop, if not already present in his childhood.[354] Later in life, he praised the priest, calling Avvakum's fiery oratory the sole exception to the trend of cold-hearted Russian preachers. Like Avvakum, Matvei in *Confession* places great importance on speaking to the public with passion. In a memorial letter, Gor'kii even compared Lenin to Avvakum, saying that his dear friend and the founder of the Soviet state "was a Russian person through and through … with the iron will of Archpriest Avvakum." Those words did not survive Soviet editors before being published widely.[355] What could possibly cause Gor'kii to look up to a seventeenth-century religious leader considered radically conservative even by his own contemporary—i.e., seventeenth-century—standards? Avvakum Petrov was burned at the stake in 1682 by Tsar Fëdor Alekseevich for preaching his against the Orthodox Church's reforms in defense of the "Truth" as he saw it. In response, the Old Believers became a persistent thorn in the side of the Romanovs' caesaropapism despite the monarchy's

351 Avvakum Petrov, *Zhitie Protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe* (Werden-Verlag, 2003), 4.
352 Scherr, "God-building or God-Seeking?," 456.
353 Maksim Gor'kii, *M. Gor'kii o literature*, ed. I. Mikhailova (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1961), 57.
354 Nikitin, "Sem' zhinei Maksim Gor'kogo," 53.
355 V. I. Lenin and M. Gor'kii, *V. I. Lenin i A. M. Gor'kii*, ed. B. A. Bialik et al., 3rd ed. (Nauka, 1969), 595-7.

equally unrelenting persecution. The Archpriest represented a David against the Goliath Orthodox establishment, which Bloody Sunday had brought to its knees before Gor'kii's eyes. In fact, the Old Believers were finally granted leniency as a part of religious tolerance reforms in April 1905 immediately following the conflict.[356] At the time of *Confession*'s writing, there was perhaps no more potent symbol of prevailing anti-mainstream convictions than the Old Believers and Archpriest Avvakum.

Before Gor'kii finished the novel, however, he changed its name from *A Saint's Life* to another religious genre, the confession. The surviving title borrows from the Christian sacrament and signals certain authorial intentions, much like *Mother* sought to do with the gospel genre. The written declaration of belief began with Augustine's *Confessions* (completed 400 CE). Its description of an internal journey first away from and subsequently back to faith became an archetype for later iterations of the genre. The organization leaves readers with an instructive example to replicate the process themselves as needed. Augustine has profoundly impacted Western philosophy and religion, including religious existentialists like Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard. Alongside him is Lev Tolstoi, whose spiritual rebirth in the late-1870s precipitated his *Confession* (1880) in the Augustinian tradition.[357] Tolstoi's version was quite different, however. As William James explains in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1917), whereas Augustine writes openly and triumphantly, Tolstoi recounts his return to faith with resentment.[358] This sharp contrast in tone is primarily due to Augustine's submission to the Christian ideal and Tolstoi's overflowing skepticism of the human institutions around religion. The present chapter examines how Gor'kii's *Confession* is more than an angry response to Tolstoi, as others

356 Iu. V. Maslova, "Nachetchiki staroi very: istoriko-kultur'nyi aspekt," *Kulturnoe nasledia Rossii* 3–4 (2013), 32.
357 G. M. Hamburg, "Tolstoy's Spirituality," in *Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy,* ed. Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139.
358 This is a synthesis of the text, especially the end, and James's discussion of LNT's Confession, e.g. pp. 149, 187, 220 ("We must class him, like Bunyan and Tolstoy, amongst those upon whose soul the iron of melancholy left a permanent imprint.").

have said.[359] In fact, as I argue, it would be more accurate to see *Confession* as lesson to Tolstoi to embrace Augustine's focus on the present. Gor'kii's espouses Augustine's joyful redemption to tell thinkers like Tolstoi, and perhaps Tolstoi himself, to see God in the miraculous power of the people.

Finally, I look at *Confession*'s contributions to the "vagabond" tradition [*bosiachestvo*, from *bosiak*, "barefooted"], for which Gor'kii is distinctly known.[360] *Confession* is rarely mentioned as an example of his works featuring his trademark itinerant figures like Matvei, but the character fits the bill perfectly. Barry Scherr mentioned this connection in passing; his explanation, ascribing influence in the creation of Matvei to Nikolai Leskov's religious motifs, is a guess, albeit a good one.[361] At first glance, the shoeless vagabonds seen in Leskov's, Gor'kii's, and others' works resemble Christian pilgrims, accounts of saints' lives, and rituals. Gor'kii himself indicates his intentions in a letter to Konstantin Piatnitskii in February 1908, saying that he is "finishing a story about the pilgrimage of a certain person to holy sites [*khozhdeniia nekogo cheloveka po sviatym mestam*], about his existence in a monastery, and about his search everywhere for Lord God, whom he fortuitously finds."[362] He repeats nearly the same phrase in another letter to his publisher Ivan Ladyzhnikov when he calls Matvei "a wanderer to holy sites" [*strannik po sviatym mestam*] in his new story *A Saint's Life*. Interestingly, those descriptions bear a resemblance to the 1832 spiritual sketch "Travels to Holy Sites of Russia" [*Puteshestviia po svatym mestam russkim*] by Andrei Murav'ëv (1806-1874), an Orthodox historian, author, translator, and friend of Slavophile Aleksei Khomiakov. Like Murav'ëv, Gor'kii reached to Christian literature to instill a higher purpose in the Russian people.[363] Thus, I look at *Confession*'s role in Gor'kii's *bosiak* trend and potential religious influences in the development of the wanderer type.

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359 Sesterhenn, *Das Bogostroitel'stvo*, 266.
360 See, for example, the chapter "Gor'kii i bosiaki" in Pavel Basinskii, *Gor'kii*.
361 Scherr, "God-building or God-Seeking?," 457.
362 Gor'kii, *PSP*, vol. 6, 176. "Заканчиваю повесть о хождении некоего человека по святым мес там, о бытии его во обителех и о искании всюду Господа Бога, коего он благополучно и находит."
363 A subject of Leskov's *Trifles of a Bishop's Life* [*Melochi arkhiereiskoi zhizni*] (1878), to Scherr's credit.

Pilgrimages are sacred less because of the walking one must do and more because of the thinking one is left to do while walking long distances. We see this practice throughout world religions, and Christ's walks through the desert continue to inspire literary and physical transpositions through the present day. Written accounts of pilgrimages [as a genre, *khozhdeniia*, from *khozhd*, "walk"] played prominently in pre-modern Slavic literature and peaked in popularity by the late fifteenth century with the publication of *A Journey Beyond the Three Seas* [*Khozhdenie za tri moria*]. The business trip journal log, written by a merchant named Afanasii Nikitin documenting his commercial ventures to the Indian subcontinent and back, is also famous for being the first secular work of Russian literature.[364] According to I.V. Mokletseva, in *"Khozhdeniia"* in *Russian Culture and Literature in the Tenth-Twentieth Centuries*, such stories customarily carry both religious and intercultural significance for authors and audience alike: coming know to know oneself as well as the other are equal parts of the path to God. For the Russian people, she continues, this type of narrative has come to define ethnic and ideological boundaries between *us* and *them*.[365] Below I argue that Gor'kii draws on this religious storytelling tradition and a specific narrative, Mary's "Pilgrimage of the God-bearer among the Torments" [*Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy po mukam*], to gradually reveal the source of Russians' miserly state and construct an ideological pathway toward spiritual sovereignty. It is a snapshot of an entire worldview, as Mokletseva describes, which, in the case of *Confession*, always returns to seeing oneself in the other.

Gor'kii writes a pilgrimage narrative in contemporary Russia leading to Matvei's own descent into the hell of the factory. In what follows, I argue that Matvei's travels across Russian lands are in fact pilgrimages to the Russian *narod*. In this way, Gor'kii also depicts an alternative vision for the "Going to the *Narod*" [*Khozhdenie v narod*] populist movement of the 1860s and 1870s to

364 Serge A. Zenkovsky, ed., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, trans. Serge A. Zenkovsky, 2nd ed. (Meridian, 1974), 333-4.

365 I. V. Mokletsova, *"Khozhdeniia" v russkoi kul'ture i literature X-XX vekov* (MGU im. A.V. Lomonosova, 2003), 6-7.

propagandize rationalism and agitate among the newly freed serfs and others.[366] What Gor'kii calls "the holy sites of Russia" are not geographic locations but the holy people of Russia, each of which offers wisdom. Conversations with individuals, when assembled in a single narrative, argue for the sanctification of the *narod* to proceed the ultimate hagiographic proof, which is to say, the collective miracle. Conventional saints' lives present the case for beatification in much the same way, with an important exception: the same person, the saint, does everything. The first two-thirds of the journey unfold with Matvei's doubt and questioning of the Christian tradition. The month of May marks the middle of his spiritual metamorphosis as he moves back out into the lay world and among the *narod*. In this time, Matvei strikes up conversations with clergy, a prostitute, monks, and laity so that Gor'kii can first humanize Christianity and second deify the common Russian people. The visits convince Matvei, becoming a foundation for his new faith, and only once Matvei believes does he witness the *narod* perform a miracle to affirm its divinity. A montage of faces that we meet in these conversations is summarized in the *narod*'s icon-like collective visage that appears to Matvei after the crowd heals the crippled girl. Until then, snapshots of the Russian people embolden him to face the fire and brimstone to be found at the factory.

The meetings launch a spiritual journey that follows a period of sorrow in Matvei's life. After his wife dies in childbirth, he intends to commit suicide until a glance at his reflection frightens him into rethinking the choice. As Franco-Algerian existentialist Albert Camus said, "There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide."[367] Gor'kii himself attempted suicide in 1887, surviving a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the chest.[368] The fictional account is closer to the

366 Here I am referring to the populist movement that also used the same term, khozhdenie. The Khozhdenie v narod organized by Herzen, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, among others, is not called a "pilgrimage," however, likely due to its supporters. Those who went out "to the people" as Herzen ordered almost exclusively preached a worldview that was atheist, which was a factor in their failure to reach the "people," whom they did not understand. Interestingly, there was a small group noted for attempting to use the Gospels to get their message across.

367 Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai Sur l'absudre*, Les Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 2012). "*Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux : c'est le suicide*."

368 Nikitin, *Sem' zhiznei Maksima Gor'kogo*, 71-72.

temptations described in Tolstoi's own *Confession* than to Gor'kii's past, however. Like Tolstoi, Matvei's loneliness leads to thoughts of ending his own life but in the end begets the text's driving spiritual crisis-turned-transformation. His pilgrimage begins with two pairs of encounters. In each, a planned visit to an institution of the Orthodox Church ends in disappointment and leads Matvei to an outcast of Christianity who imparts wisdom about God to him: first, a visit with local clerical leadership leads to a lesson from a prostitute, and a trip to a monastery becomes meaningful only upon speaking with the abbot's opposition. These meetings are meant to cleave faith from the Church much like Pelageia Nilovna's exclamation to Pavel, "You revere Christ, but you avoid church!" in *Mother.*[369] From the beginning, Gor'kii argues for the separation of religion and the institution of the Orthodox Church.

Guilt was a very familiar feeling to Gor'kii from childhood. A three-year-old Aleksei passed along a cholera infection to his father; the boy recovered, but his father died as a result.[370] Recurring illnesses followed him for the rest of his life as a nagging reminder of his father's untimely and unfortunate death. His mother would also die of illness not long after Aleksei had turned eleven. The presence of guilt looms large in Gor'kii's early works, particularly the question of who, if not God, is to blame for the many tragedies that have befallen the world and young Gor'kii. Perhaps for that reason, his philosophical opus *Confession* attempts to provide an answer to that question. Matvei, too, carries with him the guilt he held as a child about his parents: "Why, Lord? Am I guilty for how my parents disowned me and, like a kitten, threw a baby into the bushes?"[371] When an older Matvei the Church demands admission of personal guilt from him even when conversation with a priest ends in mockery. Matvei responds, trying to rationalize what he is hearing, "Why on my knees? If I am guilty, then not

369 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 8, 17.
370 Dmitrii Bykov, *Byl li Gor'kii?* (Astrel′, 2008), 4.
371 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 239. "За что, господи? Виноват ли я, что отец-мать мои отреклись от меня и, подобно котенку, в кусты бросили младенца?"

before you but before God!”[372] His refusal to comply angers the priest, who threatens to call the police to enforce compliance, including exile to Siberia if necessary. Gor’kii seems to recount his memories of Bloody Sunday when Matvei recalls, “Then I came to my senses. It is clear that, if a person calls the police to support their god, it means that neither he nor his god has any kind of power, much less beauty.”[373] The sentiment is found in Gor’kii’s previous works, though in more emotional terms. A Feuerbachian tone pervades throughout the work which distinguishes it from others that comes to the forefront here in the phrase “his god.” In doing so, he distinguishes the “god” of godbuilding as another, to-be-defined deity. Feeling the burden of guilt nevertheless, Matvei flees the church grounds and sets out for a walk to find absolution elsewhere.

Sex workers occupy a peculiarly important place in the Russian Orthodox cultural sphere. Prostitution’s historical significance to Christianity and Russia, which are explored in a number of other scholarly investigations, converge in Matvei’s first acquaintance after the church.[374] Down the road, the innkeeper and prostitute Tat’iana gives the beleaguered traveler a room for the night. She gains Matvei’s admiration first through kindness and later through a shameless recognition of the facts: “‘Now,’ she says, ‘sometimes I have to take in a man for some bread.’”[375] When Christian moral standards enter the conversation, she rejects his transposition of Mary Magdalene, the sex worker among Jesus’s followers, onto her, asking, “What does God have to do with it? ... If I’m not doing any harm to people, what exactly am I guilty of? [If it is] because I’m unclean, who’s sorrow is that? Only mine!”[376] Here Gor’kii wants to redefine religious guilt toward “God,” which was Matvei’s original Christian outlook, as guilt toward the *narod*’s wellbeing. Material needs take precedence over beliefs,

372 Ibid., 262. “Зачем же,— говорю,— на колени-то? Ежели я виноват, то не перед вами, а перед богом!”
373 Ibid., 263 “Тогда я опомнился. Ясно, что, коли человек поли цию зовет бога своего поддержать, стало быть, ни сам он, ни бог его никакой силы не имеют, а тем паче красоты.”
374 About sex work in Russian Christianity, see Colleen Lucey, *Love for Sale: Representing Prostitution in Imperial Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021).
375 Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 267.
376 Ibid., 267-8.

but Gor'kii does not forsake the spiritual entirely. Matvei cannot fully comprehend what Tat'iana is trying to tell him, so she sends him to a monastery to further discover the truth about God. Tat'iana is Gor'kii's answer to the famous prostitutes who advised heroes of Russian literature of the past. A post-Christian sex worker who admits guilt exclusively to the people before her bucks the trend of penitent prostitutes—referred to in the Russian Bible as *bludnitsa*, from *blu(zh)d*, to wander (from a path)—before her. Those, such as Sonia Marmeladova in Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and Katiusha Maslova in Tolstoi's *Resurrection* (1899), were punished, found the Christian Way, and only then gained spiritual understanding. Tat'iana retains her connection with God not despite the sex but because of the work, which should never be a cause for guilt as long as it causes no one harm.

Joining the monastery is one step forward and two steps back for Matvei until he meets his next unlikely teachers. Hoping that isolation leads to spiritual fortification, which is the Orthodox monastic standard, Matvei instead finds out that his monasterial brothers are far worse off for their social estrangement. The monks around him, especially the leadership, use their privacy to conceal indulgence, abuse, and fraud among the ranks.[377] He is particularly disturbed by his mentor's rampant sexism, which directly contradicts the virtues he had just witnessed in Tat'iana. The elder monk, Mikhail or "Mikha" as Matvei calls him, agitated as a baseline, suggests the world would be better off with half of humanity: "If [Christ] had thrown the Samaritan woman into the well instead of talking with her, had this libertine gotten a stone to the forehead...—well, look, the world is saved!"[378] Mikhail refers here to the story of the Samaritan woman sitting at the well in John 4:4-42, who represents a beacon of truth in Christ's early ministry. Photine (from the Greek *Φωτεινή*, the "luminous [one]") is particularly revered in the Orthodox tradition, and the suggestion that Christ kill her is tantamount to

377 Ibid., 272-6.

378 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 275. "Молчи! Слушай опытного внимательно, старшего тебя с уважением! Знаю я — ты всё о богородице бор мочешь! Но потому и принял Христос крестную смерть, что женщиной был рожден, а не свято и чисто с небес сошел, да и во дни жизни своей мирволил им, паскудам этим, бабенкам. Ему бы самарянку-то в колодезь ки нуть, а не разговаривать с ней, а распутницу эту камнем в лоб,— вот, глядишь, и спасен мир!"

Judas's betrayal. Matvei invokes Genesis 1:28, "Go forth and multiply," to counter that Mikha's opinion, which is to say the Church's opinion, ignores fundamental facts of God-given human sexuality. Mikha's subsequent outburst that God "turned [humanity] over to the power of the devil" sets up a problem for which Matvei must find a solution.[379] When Matvei turns to the monastery's abbot about ongoing doubts, his surprise at the inquiry signals that spiritual edification is to be found elsewhere.

Before he has a chance to leave, more teachers in the unexpected forms of a would-be novitiate and a vagabond stop by the monastery. Grisha is a meek and conservative monk from the grounds who is dismissed by the abbot's as personal retaliation against his father, another monastery official. Despondent at his expulsion, the passive Grisha nevertheless comforts himself with the Old Testament story of Job. This voice echoes that of Gor'kii's past characters as they reassure on their searches, such as Maiakin speaking to Foma in *Foma Gordeev* as well as Iakov counseling Il'ia in *The Three*. What comes next, on the contrary, is new. Matvei responds with a transposition that defiantly rewrites Job: "I would have said to God in his place, 'Do not scare but explain clearly: where is the path to you? For I am the son of your power and created in your likeness; do not denigrate yourself by pushing away your child!'"[380] Matvei's rejection of the Biblical justification of God's righteousness demonstrates evolution in Gor'kii's relationship with Job. Decades before *Confession*, the story of Job was sufficient reassurance for Foma and Gor'kii such as it is for Grisha. As Matvei approaches the truth, the Christian theodicean argument, which is metonymically expressed in Grisha's invocation of Job, falls short. However, at this point, Gor'kii's discussion of the problem of evil that had so captivated him until now

379 Ibid., 276. "Как же,— мол,— господь сказал: плодитесь, множьтесь? Даже посинел мой наставник, ногами топает, ревет: — Сказал, сказал!.. А ты знаешь, как он сказал, ты, дурак? Сказал он: плодитесь, множьтесь и населяйте землю, предаю вас во власть дьявола, и будь вы про кляты ныне и присно и во веки веков,— вот что он ска зал! А блудники проклятие божие обратили в закон его! Понял, мерзость и ложь?"

380 Ibid., 282-3. "Иов,— говорю,— меня не касается! Я на его месте сказал бы господу: не пугай, но ответь ясно — где пути к тебе? Ибо аз есмь сын силы твоея и создан тобою по подобию твоему,— не унижай себя, отталкивая дитя твое!"

itself seems to grow cold. Going forward, another term, "lonely" [*odinok*], takes the place of "evil" in Gor'kii's religious sensibilities—it would follow, therefore, that "transcendence" or "connection" would take the place of "good." We see isolation in *Confession*'s conclusion as well as the essay "Destruction of the Personality" depicted as the primary enemy to humanity's prosperity. Like the Christian tradition, Gor'kii sees that which is separated from "God" as that which is against "God." Understanding that, Matvei is about to discover for the first time where that God resides.

Opposite Grisha is Serafim, a vagabond from the Caucasus region who speaks in riddles. In standard Gor'kii contrarian fashion, Serafim, whose name comes from the holiest order of angels in Christianity, is agnostic about the matter of God. He is the complement to Grisha's traditional dogma, worshiping the natural wonders of the present regional environs instead of an anthropomorphic deity. Serafim's paradoxical comments, such as "He who eats his bread is hungry," and eccentric character paint him as an offshoot of the Russian tradition of the holy fool for Christ [*iurodivyi Christa radi*]. This religious tradition describes individuals who broke social conventions to spread the central tenets of Christianity, intentionally or not using their so-called foolishness as a heuristic.[381] Most likely, it was the holy fools in Russian literary history Gor'kii's mind when writing *Confession*, namely Tolstoi's Grisha, the local fool in his 1852 semi-autobiographical novel *Childhood*. Scholarship like *Holy Foolishness in Russia* by Priscilla Hunt and Svitlana Kobets has shown how the phenomenon came to national literature to voice traditional spiritual values in opposition to contemporary deviance from a holy path.[382] Gor'kii transposes the tradition in his secularized world as a reminder to focus on humanity's most basic needs: food, rest, and ultimately community. *Confession*'s Serafim is a post-Christian fool for the *narod* who reveals to Matvei the solution to his existential woes.

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381 Ewa Majewska Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (University Press of America, 1987), 15.

382 Priscilla Hart Hunt, Svitlana Kobets, and A. M. Panchenko, eds., *Holy Foolishness in Russia: New Perspectives* (Slavica Publishers, 2011), 1-2.

Finally, Serafim and Grisha teach Matvei that there exists something worth searching for beyond what he already knows. Matvei makes note of Serafim and Grisha's spiritual connection with each other despite differing beliefs, though he cannot explain it: "Serafim against Grisha is like a clear spring day against an autumn evening, but they became closer with each other than with me."[383] Gor'kii wishes to suggest that a broader force was uniting the two very different people who had just met, a hidden connection that his protagonist was only just glimpsing. When they depart, Matvei is left to investigate further the missing piece in his spiritual journey thus far, a community that he will call "God." Gor'kii is imagining a broad spiritual community that includes everyone from the Grishas to the Serafims across Russia, which is to say the Orthodox and the agnostic populations of the country. Seeing the fraternity between the two extremes of Russian spirituality helped Matvei recognize that he is not party to the connection between that still unites them. When the pair disappear, Matvei is left with a goal: find "God" by finding community.

Matvei discovers his connection with other people by leaving the grounds of the monastery on a pilgrimage across Russia. Gor'kii launches his narrator directly in the middle of the flow among the *narod* and throws the death-like stillness of the monastery grounds into stark contrast with the rest of life's vitality. "They go—old and young, women and children, as though all called by one voice, and I feel in this transit of the earth down all its paths a certain force; it seizes me, alarms me, as though it promises to reveal something to my soul."[384] It is at this point that the pace of new characters starts to reach its peak. Each fellow pilgrim Matvei meets while traveling to and from Christian holy sites, which are never mentioned themselves, offers their own pieces of wisdom about God, faith, and humanity, which brings Matvei closer to the faceless crowds of the poor, beleaguered masses around

383 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 286. "Серафим против Гриши — как ясный день весны против вечера осени, а сошлись они друг с другом ближе, чем со мной."

384 Ibid., 309. "Идут — идут старые и молодые, женщины и дети, словно всех один голос позвал, и чувствую я в этом прохождении земли насквозь по всем ее путям некую силу,— захватывает она меня, тревожит, словно обе щает что-то открыть душе. Странно мне это беспокойное и покорное хождение после неподвижной жизни моей."

him. One question in particular interests Matvei. As a crowd gathers around to listen to him, readers see a preview of what is to come. Matvei recounts, “And then, I remember, all of the faces merged into one sad face; it seemed pensive and stubborn to me, poor in words but bold in hidden thoughts, and I saw an inextinguishable flame familiar to me burn in its hundred eyes.”[385] The scene reminds us of Pelageia Nilovna’s demise at the end of *Mother,* whose death lights the fire of revolution in witnesses. Moreover, it foreshadows the post-Christian icons later in the novel. In contrast, Matvei’s story continues and finishes the work Pelageia started.

The vision of a collective human face that appears to Matvei moves him to inquire about people’s lives and torments, which sets our narrator on the way to a godbuilding transposition. Matvei considers the sorry state of the world’s affairs he has seen since his wife died, the cause of which he pins on atomization in society: “People have no god while they live absentmindedly and in enmity. And why does a well-fed person need God? The well-fed one seeks only justification for the fullness of his stomach in the people’s general hunger. His life is ridiculous and pitiful, lonely and surrounded everywhere by the air of horrors.”[386] is confirmed by the first person he stops to talk. A woman, “silent, teeth clenched, with an angry face darkly tanned and sharp anger in her eyes,” gives Matvei what he wants. “I need your sorrow, I want to know everything that torments people,” he asks her. With the invocation of a word, Gor’kii calls to the foreground a story from Orthodox history to frame the mission he gives Matvei, find community and find “God.”

The story of the “Pilgrimage of the God-bearer among the Torments” [*Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy po mukam*] is an apocryphal religious text from the twelfth or thirteenth century describing Mary, the mother of Jesus, visiting hell as prepares to go to heaven. Accompanied by archangel Michael, Mary seeks firsthand knowledge of that which causes people to suffer, and she finds in hell an array of

385 Ibid., 314. “И тогда, помню, слились для меня все лица в одно большое грустное лицо; задумчиво оно и упрямо пока залось мне, на словах — немотно, но в тайных мы слях — дерзко, и в сотне глаз его — видел я — неуга симо горит огонь, как бы родной душе моей.”

386 Ibid., 315.

sinners' punishments, described in vivid detail for readers. Having witnessed people hung upside-down by their toenails, drowning in a river of fire, and other such torments, Mary begs her son for mercy on Christians. The story ends with Christ granting a temporary reprieve, but only after Mary enlists every servant in heaven's ranks to help convince him; any greater mercy would require a second coming.[387] Little is known about the story's Greek origins or how and when it arrived in the Russian cultural sphere. For centuries following the schism of 1666, the narrative was closely associated with the Old Believers, who valued the presentation of traditional Christianity in the story and thus regularly included it in collected volumes passed through the generations.[388] In the second half of the nineteenth century, "Pilgrimage of the God-bearer" gained popularity among broader audiences due to Dostoevskii's *Brothers Karamazov,* when Ivan compares his play *The Grand Inquisitor* to it in spirit.[389] We can assume that Dostoevskii included that unnecessary detail to draw parallels of heretical thought. For Gor'kii, the story was an example of taking matters into one's own hands to get a desired result from an obstinate God. He recreates the "Pilgrimage" with a twist in search of God's honest truth and mercy for all.

Gor'kii conceived of hell as a spiritual disease that erodes at a population from the inside out. While the effects on an individual are grim, society faces the more gruesome symptoms. In order to transpose the "Pilgrimage of the God-bearer," Gor'kii concocts a hell for his pilgrim to visit. References to "hell" [*ad*] begin to appear as soon as Matvei sets out to survey the woes of those walking alongside him, and they do not cease until he learns godbuilding from Mikhail, his post-Christian guide. The first response sets the tone, conveying to Matvei that the worst of times have already arrived. The woman, a single mother of two, is tortured by the cries of her hungry children,

387 L.V. Sokolova, "Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy po mukam," in *Literatura Drevnei Rusi*, ed. O.V. Tvorogov (Prosveshchenie: Uchebnaia literatura, 1996).
388 M. V. Rozhdestvenskaia, "Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy Po Mukam," in *Slovar' Knizhnikov i Knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, ed. D. S. Likhachev (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 1988).
389 Sokolova, "Khozhdenie Bogoroditsy po mukam."

whom she beats to silence her own guilt for not being able to feed them. “In hell it is no worse! There my kids won’t be with me!” she exclaims.[390] As he continues, Matvei increasingly hears and describes his surroundings as resembling hell. This is truer than anywhere else at the factory, which is repeatedly called a “dirty hell,” “hellish place” where workers “do their business confidently like demons in hell” full of “hellish noise and romp.” Put plainly, the factory is “hell on earth.”[391] This imagery may be familiar to readers. Contemporary Russia and the modern factory in particular have staged Gor’kii’s pandemonium before, such as *The Lower Depths* and more recently in *Mother.* The people’s suffering, as one would expect in hell, confirms that Matvei is heading in the right direction. Like Mary, Matvei will need some help navigating the descent into the fiery realm.

Before Gor’kii resumes the “Pilgrimage” transposition, he interrupts his narrative with an episode between Matvei and another pilgrim. Iegudiil is a physically feeble but spiritually vivacious man who catches up to Matvei on the walk from Perm to Verkhotur’e. His name was chosen with care. In Orthodox mythology, Iegudiil (also Jegudiel/Jehudiel, from Hebrew יַחְדִּיאֵל Yaḥdīʾēl, "praise to God") is one of the eight archangels, the rank atop the established angelic hierarchy. Archangels came to Christianity from the apocryphal Book of Enoch used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; nonetheless, Iegudiil is celebrated on November 21 in the canonical Russian Orthodox liturgical calendar. These traditions venerate Iegudiil as the patron saint of monastics, ascetics, and all who practice earnest labor, thereby praising God.[392] We can assume this association was Gor’kii’s reasoning for choosing the name for the figure who Matvei describes as the “person [who] showed me the true path to God,” by introducing the religion of the *narod.*[393] In Iegudiil’s words we hear echoes of the

390 Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 319. “А что мне в том? Не виновата я богу! Не про стит — не надо; простит — сама не забуду, да! В аду не хуже! Там детей не будет со мной!”

391 Ibid., 349, 366-367, 370.

392 L. V. Litvinova, “IEGUDIIL,” in *Pravoslavnaia Entsiklopediia* (Tserkovno-nauchnyi tsentr “Pravoslavnaia Entsiklopedia,” 2010), https://www.pravenc.ru/text/293567.html.

393 Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 334. “Как только заглянула в город весна, ушел я, решив сходить в Сибирь — хвалили мне этот край,— а по дороге туда остановил меня человек, на всю жизнь окрыливший душу мою, указав мне верный к богу путь.”

spiritual voices that spoke loudest to Gor'kii's sensibilities as well as the first mention of Gor'kii's own contribution to the conversation, "godbuilding," as he calls it. That Iegudiil sends the narrator to the factory, where people break their backs to produce the materials to build the country's future, tells readers exactly where they should seek counsel.

If *Confession* and Gor'kii's spirituality could be boiled down to a single line, it is Iegudiil's timeless wisdom disguised as contradictory ramblings. Eccentric, parabolic speech is a distinguishing characteristic of the Orthodox holy fool [*iurodivyi*], a favorite trope among religious didacts. As Matvei recalls how he began posing questions to Iegudiil, we can imagine younger versions of Gor'kii asking many of the same quandaries to the Gor'kii writing in 1907, finally confident in what he knows and believes. After several questions with unsatisfactory results, Matvei breaks down in frustration and, finally states his question with the utmost simplicity: "Why do you avoid [discussing] God?" which is to say, "What is God?"[394] Iegudiil's answer comes in the powerful pairing of two rhetorical questions that get at the heart of Gor'kii's entire worldview. The first, "Whoever is God, working wonders?" [*Kto est' bog, tvoriai chudesa?*] plays on the text of Psalm 76:15, which is also known as the "Great Prokeimenon" for liturgical purposes. On the evenings of Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas the Orthodox Church service reads aloud "Who is as great as our God? You are God, working wonders" [*Kto Bog velii, iako Bog nash; Ty esi Bog, tvoriai chudesa*] before the daily Gospel reading. A prokeimenon (from Greek *προκείμενον*, "that which proceeds") is a psalm or canticle sung to foreshadow the primary message in the text to be read in the day's liturgy. As the original Psalm text suggests, the Gospel readings for the days that Ps. 76:15 is also read testify to the Christian God's omnipotence to create and destroy the world at will. Gor'kii cleverly turns the prokeimenon, a famous affirmation of God's greatest miracles, into an invitation for a deity to demonstrate any miraculous

394 Ibid., 341.

powers in order to prove claims to divinity. What he says next is meant to testify to the even greater power we as humans possess to do God's job and more.

The second half of Iegudiil's answer exemplifies godbuilding thinking and strongly links the philosophy with the originator of post-Christian thinking, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). The Young Hegelian from Bavaria, who originally studied to become a Lutheran clergyman before changing to natural sciences, published multiple critical analyses of religion, including most famously *Das Wesen der Christentums* [*The Essence of Christianity*] (1841, originally published in Russian in 1861 and again in 1906).[395] Among many other impactful thinkers, Feuerbach's writings influenced the thinking of Mark, Engels, Chernyshevskii, Plekhanov, Avenarius, and others in Gor'kii's intellectual ecosystem.[396] A definitive link directly between Feuerbach and Gor'kii has yet to be found. However, there is no greater evidence of Feuerbach's influence on Gor'kii himself than the thinking we see in Iegudiil's second question, "[Is God] our father or the son of our spirit?" [*Otets li nash ili zhe — syn dukha nashego?*], which restates the thesis of *The Essence of Christianity.*[397] *Confession* takes Feuerbach's argument, that it was in fact humans who created God in our image, rather than the customary Abrahamic idea that God created humans in his image, as a starting point for nation-building purposes. This nation, ideally in Gor'kii's view, would be around the identity of "godbuilders," who take their collective fate into their own hands. In the essay "Destruction of the Personality," which was published in 1909, a year after the novel, Gor'kii further argues Feuerbach and Iegudiil's point, saying that, "Having created a hero, admiring his power and beauty, the people had to bring him into the arena of the gods, to contrast their organized energy with the numerous forces of nature, mutually hostile to themselves and humanity."[398] In other words, as he says through Iegudiil, further explaining his

395 Todd Gooch, Edward N. Zalta, and Uri Nodelman, "Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2024.

396 MG talks about reading M&E's work on Feuerbach in an article "Zasukha budet unichtozhena" (1831).

397 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 341. "Кто есть бог, творяй чудеса? Отец ли наш или же — сын духа нашего?"

398 Maksim Gor'kii, "Razrushenie Lichnosti," in *Maksim Gor'kii: Pro et contra* (Saint Petersburg: Russkii khristianskii gumanitarnyi institut, 1998), 47. "Создав героя, любуясь его мощью и красотой, народ необходимо должен был

thought, “God was not created by people’s powerlessness, no, but it was from an excess of strength.”[399] That strength, as we know, lies in the imagination. Gor’kii therefore faces a challenge in *Confession*, how can God inspire faith and help people if God is in all of us?

At long last, Matvei, who is plagued by loneliness throughout the novel, finds a new faith in the factory, where Iegudiil sends him:“‘You,’ [Iegudiil] yells, ‘open your eyes! Look with your heart, look with your soul! Am I telling you to believe? I am saying find out!’” Gor’kii stresses to his hero. Belief must be backed by evidence, and it is no surprise that Gor’kii so often chose factories as a place to work miracles in literature. He saw these places, where collective human capital comes together to create products in a way impossible for any single person, as cradles of humanity’s material and spiritual future. In a 1931 article entitled “The History of Factories and Plants” [“*Istoriia fabrik i zavodov*”], Gor’kii appeals to the general membership of the working class to educate themselves on the importance of industrial workplaces in the “successes of socialist construction” of society. In enumerating the important roles of the factory for modern society, he starts with the production of physical goods, but the remainder of the list concerns people’s inner wellbeing, calling factories “schools of revolutionaries” and “educators of consciousness.”[400] Out in the countryside, Matvei finds that strangers can read his thoughts when they answer the question he only thinks, “Where does this road go?” “To the Isetsk factory,” everyone responds to his thought. Matvei jokes, “Do all roads lead to this factory?” Gor’kii’s play with the common Italian proverb “*Tutte le strade portano a Roma*” [“all roads lead to Rome”]—which he likely heard more often than ever after moving to his Capri villa—hints at a giddiness in Gor’kii at just the idea of what the factory will bring. As I showed in the

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внести его в среду богов -- противопоставить свою организованную энергию многочисленности сил природы, взаимно враждебных самим себе и человечеству.”

399 Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 341.

400 Maksim Gor’kii, “Istoriia fabrik i zavodov,” in *Publitsisticheskie stat’i*, ed. I. A. Gruzdev, 2nd ed. (Lengikhl, 1933), 415.

previous chapter, the factory started as a workplace and became a church of socialism by the end of *Mother*; now in *Confession*, the factory will take its place as the seat of a new holy empire.

The pilgrim on his way to a socialist mecca is also the pilgrim on the descent into hell, as described in the apocryphal story about Mary and her guardian, the Archangel Michael. Naturally, not all is as it initially seems. Had Gor'kii included any fewer coincidences between his story and "Pilgrimage of the God-bearer," any argument that the overlap was, in fact, pure coincidence would have credence. The reality is that Gor'kii included just enough references to say the opposite. Matvei announces that he "arrived in some grimy hell" and he is immediately introduced to the worker who will show him the ropes, Michael. Our narrator remarks that "he speaks like a soldier playing a message on a horn."[401] This, in turn, signals him as the successor to the archangel, who is venerated as the "commander of heaven's army in his struggle against the dark forces of hell" and depicted in Revelations chapter 12 and various iconography blowing a trumpet in victory over evil.[402] This Michael is a leader in Gor'kii's "hell," however, yet he guides Matvei much like the angel Michael guides Mary. In fact, the worker Michael is the third person with that name in the novel. The first two mentored Matvei from a monastery, a place of isolation, which left Matvei's soul tormented. The third Michael offers Matvei the answers he has been seeking.

Like Pelageia Nilovna in *Mother,* Matvei undergoes the transition from Christian believer to post-Christian actor that Gor'kii wanted to complete in *Confession*. When Matvei decides to leave the monastery after meeting Grisha and Serafim, he cannot depart with them to the Caucasus because he has some final meetings to attend, including a series of visits with an aged monk named Mardarii and once again with Mikha. When Matvei met Mardarii, a senior monk in the cloister, he had been living motionless for four years in a tiny, dark underground cellar while dependent upon others for basic

401 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 350. "Говорит, как солдат на трубе сигнал играет, сказал, махнул рукой и пошел прочь."
402 "Mikhail Arkhangel," in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Brokgauza i Efrona* (Saint Petersburg), accessed February 23, 2025.

sustenance. When the monk dies after the fifth visit, Matvei feels that change is afoot.[39] This time, however, the transformation is to be radical. The final scene between Matvei and Mikha foreshadows Gor'kii's message that morality is possible without God. In their conversation, Mikha admits that he never believed in God all this time, which makes it all the worse. His affinities for wine, velvet bedding, and the many other luxuries available to him sketch a particularly evil caricature of the clergy in Gor'kii's view: clergy not only know that the God taught in churches is a lie, they use that lie to their personal benefit. Gor'kii describes this another way in the essay "Destruction of the Personality," saying, "In its grasps at power, individualism was compelled to kill the immortal god, its support and justification for existence; from this moment begins the quick destruction of the godlike, lonely 'I,' which, without support from a force outside itself, is incapable of creativity, which is to say, of being, for being and creativity are one in essence."[403] Mikha's denial of God is not a denial of theism, but a confirmation of the godlessness by which some believers live.

Matvei's guardian angel Mikhail is an improved version of past figures and Gor'kii's psychosocial model for the factory workers of the world. The elder monks at the monastery named Michael who served as spiritual advisors to Matvei before represent past, completely undeveloped or partially underdeveloped levels of consciousness. Mardarii, the eldest and most institutionally ingrained (schemamonk), who was once named Mikhail, lives motionless underground, as though he is already dead, and preaches only complete submission to the Christian God. The younger Mikhail was better in that he conducted his life among the living, but he was fundamentally afflicted by the greed that comes from isolation. His shortcoming was not denial of one "God" or another but rather the elevation of himself above all else. "Mikha," as his nickname suggests, had an incomplete view of the world.[404] Not despite but because of his youth, which Matvei mentions on multiple occasions, the third

403 Gor'kii, "Razrushenie lichnosti," 48.

404 The nickname "Mikha" is clever world play. The name comes from Michael, which is Hebrew, meaning "no/one like God." The nickname drops the "El" ("God"), which alternatively means "no one."

and youngest Mikhail has what Matvei needs, making him a proper successor to the archangel. In Gor'kii's rewriting of the pilgrimage to hell, the worker Mikhail guides Matvei through his own personal torments that have, as an example for readers, caused many of life's problems on account of an improper worldview. Young Mikhail's speech serves as a preview of the yet-to-be-published essay "Destruction of Personality," to the point that he recycles multiple phrases from *Confession* in the essay under his own name; out of the mouths of babes!

Gor'kii's fiction and journalism describes a new fall of humankind and the consequential collective hell each person experiences in their own way. Both *Confession* and "Destruction of the Personality" emerge thematically from a dialectic between the collective and the individual, through which Gor'kii considers creative power as a treatment for social maladies. The difference between *Confession* and "Destruction of Personality" can be seen in the side from which Gor'kii approaches and diagnoses the problem of social atomization. As we have seen, the novel seeks to understand and solve the problem through the lens of the individual, using Matvei as a stand-in for readers who see a similar path unfolding before the narrator. Thus, when Matvei seeks wisdom from the spry factory worker Mikhail, there is no hesitation in his answer:

> I am tired and ask fervently: 'With what and how do you treat a sick soul?' Mikhail, quietly and without looking at me, says: 'I do not consider you sick.' His uncle chuckles, making a noise like the devil falling out of bed. 'Sickness,' Mikhail continues, 'is when a person does feel themself, but knows only their pain and lives by it. But you, as it seems, did not lose yourself.' There you search for the joys of life, this is only available to the healthy.[405]

In this and Mikhail's later explanations, Gor'kii pathologizes the "I" or "the ego" as the root cause of modern woes, a consequence of the harmful misapprehension that "[your pain] puts you above people; you even guard it like something that makes you special, no?" Like the Christian idea that distance

405 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 353-354. "— Болезнь,— продолжает Михайла,— это когда че ловек не чувствует себя, а знает только свою боль да его и живет! Но вы, как видно, себя не потеряли: вот вы ищете радостей жизни,— это доступно только здоровому."

from God is ungodly, Gor'kii sees the desire to distinguish oneself from the *narod* as inherently morally degrading. In *Confession*, thus, he paints the *narod* as foundation of morality:

> This wretched life, unworthy of human reason, began, he says, from the day when the first human personality broke away from the miraculous power of the *narod*, from the mass, its mother, and shrank out of fear of loneliness and powerlessness into an insignificant and evil lump of petty desires, a lump named "I." This very "I" is a person's worst enemy![406]

Naturally, this view shades his feelings about capitalism, but before that he wrote about the spiritual concerns of any one person's power over another.

The essay, "The Destruction of Personality," approaches the problem of isolation through the lens of the collective, speaking of the whole *narod* with its own personhood. Gor'kii discusses the roles of relevant phenomena operating on a cultural level, namely our shared memory, imagination, and values. He begins by saying, "The *narod* is not only a force creating everything of material value, it is the sole, inexhaustible source of spiritual values, the philosopher first in time, beauty, and creative genius and a poet, having created all great poems, all of Earth's tragedies, and the greatest of them is the history of world culture."[407] The collective, he explains, formed the individual in fiction as an instrument to carry out its will, giving "such broad generalizations and brilliant symbols, such as Prometheus, Satan, Hercules, Sviatogor, Il'ia [Muromets], Mikula [Selianinovich], and hundreds of other gigantic generalizations of the *narod*'s life experience" as examples.[408] Gor'kii repeats his assertion from *Confession* that the individual, endowed with the collective's characteristics, began to mistake itself, a part, for the whole. In this essay, however, he paints the whole picture. Gor'kii draws a (noncausal) timeline between literature's accidental creation of the ego through the spread of private

406 Ibid., 354-355. "— Началась,— говорит,— эта дрянная и недостойная разума человеческого жизнь с того дня, как первая человеческая личность оторвалась от чудотворной силы народа, от массы, матери своей, и сжалась со страха перед одиночеством и бессилием своим в ничтожный и злой комок мелких желаний, комок, который наречен был — «я». Вот это самое «я» и есть злейший враг человека!"

407 Gor'kii, "Razrushenie lichnosti," 44. "Народ не только сила, создающая все материальные ценности, он — единственный и неиссякаемый источник ценностей духовных, первый по времени, красоте и гениальности творчества философ и поэт, создавший все великие поэмы, все трагедии земли и величайшую из них — историю всемирной культуры."

408 Ibid., 45.

property and competition, or "the drama of individualism," as he calls it, to the present day. Somewhere along the way, the population had been divided and conquered by the insidious "I" of its own making. As a logical consequence in Gor'kii's worldview, everyone suffered: "Russian individualism while developing takes on a sickly character and attracts a sharp decline in social-ethical inquiries by the individual and is accompanied by a general fall in the armed forces of intellect."[409] Gor'kii's new "fall," seen throughout earlier works such as "On the Rafts" and *The Lower Depths* and now his central fixation following Bloody Sunday, is our internal disunity—rather than humanity's separation from an external God. Reminders in *Confession* to know thyself are meant for us as a species as much as us as individuals.

Mikhail's guidance through capitalism's hellish landscape shows Matvei the truth of human suffering and how to rebuild grace through socialism. The wholeness of grace achieved through communion with the Christian God is instead found in solidarity with the unexceptional masses across world history. Staring up at the night sky, Matvei glimpses a contrast between a pre-existing natural heaven and the chaos introduced by human greed:

> "Two big stars patrol the heavens. Above the mountain in the blue sky, you can clearly see the jagged wall of the forest, and on the mountain the entire forest is chopped up, cut up, the ground is scarred with black holes. Below, the plant greedily bared its red teeth: it hums, smokes, fire rushes over its roofs, rushes upward, cannot break away, spreads out in smoke. It smells like burning, it's stuffy for me."[410]

The natural world—the tragically fated "commons"—Gor'kii depicts is being eaten away by the factory's consumptive desire, much like the human soul is degraded by the individual's attempts to accumulate resources. Capitalism in this way disintegrates what was once whole, whether it be the

409 Ibid., 75. "Это одна из иллюстраций положения, которое я формулирую так: русский индивидуализм, развиваясь, принимает болезненный характер, влечет за собою резкое понижение социально-этических запросов лично сти и сопровождается общим упадком боевых сил интеллекта."

410 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 355. "Две звезды большие сторожами в небесах идут. Над горой в синем небе четко видно зубчатую стену леса, а на горе весь лес изрублен, изрезан, земля изранена черными ямами. Внизу — завод жадно оскалил красные зубы: гудит, дымит, по-над крышами его мечется огонь, рвется кверху, не может оторваться, растекается дымом. Пахнет гарью, душно мне."

Earth or the Russian people, in Gor'kii's worldview, emphasizing equality as a precondition of community. Only once Matvei understands this message does he find what he is looking for: "My soul is not connecting with [Mikhail's] soul, it stands alone, like in the middle of a desert... And suddenly I see that I am thinking in Jonah and Mikhail's words and that their thoughts already live powerfully in me."[411] Matvei's failed connection with Mikhail exposes the holes in his communal life, eaten away by the egoism of his past life. The personal isolation is representative of the Russian, formerly Orthodox, people's disjunction as a unitary nation, to which Gor'kii attributed the country's many problems.

Newly cognizant of his social isolation, Matvei is ready to learn the "Truth" of the human condition. Nothing on the outside is different, but there is change underway on the inside. The next morning, he is greeted by Mikhail, draped in a white shirt like an angel, surrounded by smiling children and "noise, whistling, and racket like at a council of all devils."[412] The scene reminds readers of how Archangel Mikhail gathered the minor angels to assist Mary in petitioning God for mercy in "Pilgrimage of the God-bearer among the Torments." When Matvei joins them in the forest just outside the factory yard, he is pleasantly surprised by the children's playful creativity, but even more shocking is the worker Mikhail's child-like character. Children run around him in circles screaming and laughing, and then quickly disperse. Mikhail shares his "Truth":

> Were they really created just for labor and drunkenness? Each of them is a receptacle for the living spirit, and they could quicken the growth of their reasoning, freeing us from the bondage of our ignorance. But they will enter the same dark and dark trench, in which the days of their fathers' lives flow turbidly. They will be ordered to work and forbidden to think. Many of them —maybe all—will submit to a dead power and serve it. There is the source of the Earth's sorrow: the human spirit has no freedom to grow![413]

411 Ibid., 355-6.

412 Ibid., 357-8. "А проснулся — шум, свист, гам, как на соборе всех чертей. Смотрю в дверь — полон двор мальчишек, а Михайла в белой рубахе среди них, как парусная лодка между малых челноков."

413 Ibid., 359. "Разве они созданы только для работы и пьянства? Каждый из них — вместилище духа живого, и могли бы они ускорить рост мысли, освобождающей нас из плена недоумений наших. А войдут они в то же темное к теспое русло, в котором мутно протекают дни жизни их отцов. Прикажут им работать и запретят думать. Многие из них — а может быть, и все — подчинятся мертвой силе и послужат ей. Вот источник горя земли: нет свободы росту духа человеческого!"

It is noteworthy that Mikhail does not name any individuals in this or later speeches. The problem is collective, as is the solution. Whereas Mary and Mikhail in “Pilgrimage” describe sin and salvation as acts of the individual, Matvei and Mikhail in *Confession* see only what the collective can and must do.

The treatment for the described ruinous social isolation is a new religion that worships a “God” of persons equal amongst one other but subservient to the collective well-being. In theory at least, this could be mapped onto a social-democratic system, but Gor’kii’s intentions are more religious at this point, as we see in the vocabulary. Mikhail’s uncle, who is approximately Matvei’s age, interrupts godbuilding discussions in an attempt to shut down what he sees as “a dark forest: religion, the church, and everything alike; it’s a dark forest, and in it are our outlaws! [It is] a lie!”[414] A socialist, the uncle is depicted in a way similar to priests and monarchists: unwilling to accept plurality of thought, which is incompatible with Gor’kii’s concept of shared governance. Mikhail, the young worker comes to the defense of Matvei and his God:

> “Wait, uncle! God is a fundamental issue for Matvei! ... The God, about which I speak, existed when people created him out of the objects of their mind as one spirit, as if illuminating the darkness of existence; but when the *narod* was broken apart into slaves and masters, into pieces and chunks, when it tore apart its thought and will, that is when God died, God was destroyed! ... The primary crime of life’s masters is that they destroyed the creative force of the *narod*. There will be a time when the entire *narod*’s will once again will converge into one point, when there should arise an invincible and miraculous force, and God will be resurrected! That is the God whom you seek, Matvei!”[415]

Gor’kii is championing the agnostic argument here, as a part of his own godbuilding thesis, but his point is something else. Despite disagreeing on God’s existence, "they argue heatedly, but do not offend

414 Ibid., 361. “Не ври, Мишка! Ты пошли его к чёрту, Матвей! Никаких богов! Это — темный лес: религия, церковь и всё подобное; темный лес, и в нем — разбойники наши! Обман!”

415 Ibid., 361-2. “Михайла упорно твердит: — Бог, о котором я говорю, был, когда люди едино душно творили его из вещества своей мысли, дабы осветить тьму бытия; но когда народ разбился на рабов и владык, на части и куски, когда он разорвал свою мысль и волю,— бог погиб, бог — разрушился! — Слышишь, Матвей?— кричит дядя Петр радоство .— Вечная память! А племянник смотрит прямо в лицо ему и, понижая голос, продолжает: — Главное преступление владык жизни в том, что они разрушили творческую силу народа. Будет время вся воля народа вновь сольется в одной точке; тогда в ней должна возникнуть необоримая и чудесная сила, и — воскреснет бог! Он-то и есть тот, которого вы, Матвей, ищете!”

each other with anger or abuse." Their mutual respect allows them to contend on the battlefield of rhetoric rather than through physical or verbal violence. To Matvei they are "two people squaring off before me, and they both, denying the other's god, are full of sincere faith."[416] Gor'kii here illustrates the antithesis to the individual who uses her personal pain to elevate themselves above others. These tortured souls cast no stones, because they are without sin in the creation of their hell.

Seeing the believer and nihilist respectfully disagree about "God" sends Matvei on a crash course to join the godbuilding movement. Doing so changes the perspective of hell, such as it is depicted in the Marian pilgrimage narrative, into a post-Christian workshop for the human soul. He preaches for the first time in fewer than ten pages. Transformations are first expressed in the self-questioning that takes on a growing role in the novel's narrative. He reflects immediately after seeing Mikhail and his uncle argue, saying, "And in place of the question "Where is God?" arose another, "Who am I and what am I here for? In order to search for God?" He quickly catches himself, however, calling it "nonsense."[417] Yet, reading, conversations with Mikhail and young community members, and ultimately observing their work in action reinvigorates Matvei's capacity to hope for the future. As he begins to work alongside them, the hellish landscape, brutal though it may be, takes on a new shade:

> In fire and thunder, in a rain of fiery sparks, blackened people work; it seems that there is no place for them here, for everything around them threatens to incinerate with fiery death, to crush with heavy iron; everything is deafening and blinding, the unbearable heat dries up the blood, but they calmly do their job, fuss about with masterful confidence, like devils in hell, fearing nothing, knowing everything.[418]

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416 Ibid., 362. "Интересно мне слушать этих людей, и удивляют они меня равенством уважения своего друг ко другу; спо рят горячо, но не обижают себя ни злобой, ни руганью. Дядя Петр, бывало, кровью весь нальется и дрожит, а Михайла понижает голос свой и точно к земле гнет боль шого мужика. Состязаются предо мной два человека, н оба они, отрицая бога, полны искренней веры."

417 Ibid.

418 Ibid., p. 367. "В огне и громе, в дожде огненных искр работают почерневшие люди,— кажется, что нет им места здесь, ибо всё вокруг грозит испепелить пламенной смертью, задавить тяжким железом; всё оглушает и слепит, сушит кровь нестерпимая жара, а они спокойно делают свое дело, возятся хозяйски уверенно, как черти в аду, ничего не боясь, всё зная."

Instead of a hell that engulfs and tortures, the workers skillfully navigate the dangers using their knowledge to overcome irrational fears. The dedication to something beyond themselves allows them to put aside personal concerns in search of a greater goal. Moreover, among the chaos, "it is difficult to understand whose mind, whose will reigns," yet the work gets done.[419] In this way, shared labor ritualistically offers scattered souls to transcend themselves through unspoken yet coordinated production of both physical goods and community ties, much in the way Holy Communion is meant to provide daily and heavenly bread.

Shortly after this realization, Matvei perceives the first hints of godbuilding within himself as a connection to the Russian identity outside of Christianity. The factory's hellish industrial cacophony is overcome at times by the triumphant voices of workers singing cheerful songs while they toil. Matvei notes the chorus makes him smile as he remembers "Ivan the Fool on a whale en route to the heavens after the wonderful firebird."[420] The reference, highly uncharacteristic for the rest of the work, does double duty for Gor'kii. The narrator here refers to the Slavic folk hero Ivan the Fool [*Ivan-durak*, dim. *Ivanushka-durachok*] and the Firebird [*zhar-ptitsa*], two members of the pantheon of pagan characters in Eastern Slavic folklore. First, inclusion of these characters hearkens back to the Russian identity as it existed before the Christianization of Rus' and celebrates the lasting parts of pagan Slavic culture that survived through the present day. The concept of "dual-faith" [*dvoeverie*], a blend of pagan and Christian traditions, has historically defined the lived reality of Russian religious practice, particularly among the laboring peasant classes, which is to say, most Russians. Art derived from Russian pagan traditions began to reemerge in popular culture in the nineteenth century, due in large part to the poems of Aleksandr Pushkin and the folklore studies by Aleksandr Afanas'ev.[421] However, Gor'kii is not

419 Ibid.
420 Ibid. "Порою в этом адском шуме и возне машин вдруг победительно и беззаботно вспыхнет веселая песня,улыбаюсь я в душе, вспоминая Иванушку-дурачка наките по дороге в небеса за чудесной жар-птицей."
421 Jack V. Haney, *The Complete Folktales of A. N. Afanas'ev: Volume I* (University Press of Mississippi, 2014).

referencing any version of Ivan the Fool, but rather a particular adaptation by Pëtr Ershov, *The Little Humpback Horse* [*Konek-Gorbunok*] (1834). This reference's second function relies on Ershov's tale, which infamously used Ivan the Fool and other folk heroes to deride the Church and tsar by name, to highlight the paradoxically progressive nature of returning to the world of a thousand years ago.[422] Going back to a world—and worldview—without Christianity is no longer possible for Gor'kii; fortunately, there is a revolutionary solution.

Matvei is finally able to enter the community of godbuilding believers by publicly questioning Russian institutions of authority while re-enforcing values associated with Orthodoxy. With some factory experience under his belt, Matvei contemplates the *narod* that has surrounded and supported him. The closer he becomes to the workers, the more he begins to understand their essence:

> In the past I when did not think about the *narod*, I didn't even notice them, but now I look at them and still want to discover their diversity, so that they each stood before me separately. And I achieve this but also not: their speeches are different, and each has their own face, but everyone has the same faith and the same intention: slowly but diligently build something together.[423]

Curiosity and time give Matvei greater understanding of those around him, which in turn endows everyone with a greater sense of dignity. The unanimity of their devotion to work removes boundaries that would otherwise cause concern for the self to interfere with the progress of society. When not working, however, people return to their animalistic nature. One day, the other workers tease Matvei for being a monk, which changes him forever. Kostin, another worker, comes to his defense in the name of Mikhail's values, as any disciple of Mikhail would and should do, Matvei notes. He suddenly finds himself speaking to the community in defense of himself and, ultimately, the godbuilding dogma:

422 A. P. Tolstiakov, "Pushkin i 'Konek-Gorbunok' Ershova," in *Fundamental'naia elektronnaia biblioteka: russkaia literatura i fol'klor,* accessed February 23, 2025, https://feb-web.ru/feb/pushkin/serial/v82/v82-028-.htm.

423 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 368. "Раньше, когда я о народе не думал, то и людей не замечал, а теперь смотрю на них и всё хочу разнооб разие открыть, чтобы каждый предо мной отдельно стоял. И добиваюсь этого и — нет: речи разные, и у каждого свое лицо, но вера у всех одна и намерение едино,— не торопясь, но дружно и усердно строят они нечто."

> "I didn't become a monk because I wanted to eat well, but because my soul was hungry! I lived and I saw: everywhere there was eternal work and daily hunger, fraud and robbery, grief and tears, bestiality and all darkness of the soul. Who established all this, where is our just and wise God, does he see his people's primordial, endless torment?"[424]

As Matvei finishes his speech, he notices a crowd has gathered around him. He spoke on behalf of Mikhail's teachings and touched others' hearts as his own had been touched by his defender, and his place in the community is settled.

Matvei's launch into action appears much like Pelageia Nilovna's martyrdom at first, but Gor'kii interrupted Matvei's trajectory with the help of an archangel. Other workers warn Matvei after his speech that the state punished such performances with prison sentences, forced labor, or worse, and send him to Mikhail for guidance. The young worker uses police violence against socialist protesters as a lesson to Matvei in the stakes of their work, which only strengthens Matvei's convictions, as similar news did to Pelageia. Here Matvei compares the revolutionaries' political persecution with the New Testament story of Herod's Massacre of the Innocents [*Izbienie mladentsev*], wherein Judaean King Herod, upon hearing of the birth of a Abrahamic savior in Bethlehem, murders all Jewish infant boys in the town to retain power.[425] Matvei also asserts that martyrdom is the sign of a just cause when making the connection: "Then in my soul everything was elevated and illuminated differently; all of Mikhail and his comrades' speeches took on another meaning. First of all, if a person is ready to lose his freedom and life for his faith, that means he is a true believer and resembles the protomartyrs of Christ's law."[426] Pelageia had also said this, comparing her son, Pavel, with Jesus, in revolutionary

424 Ibid., 368. "Раньше, когда я о народе не думал, то и людей не замечал, а теперь смотрю на них и всё хочу разнооб разие открыть, чтобы каждый предо мной отдельно стоял. И добиваюсь этого и — нет: речи разные, и у каждого свое лицо, но вера у всех одна и намерение едино,— не торопясь, но дружно и усердно строят они нечто."

425 Ibid., 369-70. "Ушел. Остался я очень удивлен его словами, не ве рится мне, но вечером Михайла всё подтвердил. Целый вечер рассказывал он мне о жестоких гонениях людей; оказалось, что за такие речи, как я говорил, и смертью казнили, и тысячи народа костьми легли в Сибири, в каторге, но Иродово избиение не прекращается, и ве рующие тайно растут."

426 Ibid., 370. "Тогда в душе моей всё возвысилось и осветилось иначе, все речи Михайловы и товарищей его приняли иной смысл. Прежде всего — если человек за веру свою готов потерять свободу и жизнь, значит — он

Russia, just before she took up her mission to spread socialism at any personal cost. Her death is surely a moving, likely a convincing, but hardly a sustainable model for Gor'kii's readers to emulate. Instead, now that Confession has started down the path of the martyr, Gor'kii must use Mikhail to temper the flames.

The short few moments during which Mikhail prepares Matvei for the post-Christian world marks a similar milestone in Gor'kii's creative journey. From the "Massacre of the Innocents" Gor'kii segues to his main point, laying bare the nature of the transpositional apparatus as he prepares to leave it behind.

> "The whole world then appeared to me as Bethlehem, soaked in the blood of children. It became clear why the Godbearer, upon seeing hell, asked Archangel Michael [to help her bring mercy to the sinners]. Only here it wasn't sinners but the righteous ones [*pravednikov*] that I saw: they want to destroy hell on her, for which they are ready to take on all torments [*muki*]."[427]

Gor'kii here connects one of his earliest, isolated transpositions with his latest, novel-length use of the story of the "Godbearer Among the Torments" so as to draw a complete circle around his message that good and evil had been transposed by Church and state. What was right and "capital-T True" according to everything Gor'kii believed—which is to say, according to Christ and Marx—is now wrong, and what was wrong is now right. More importantly, the people must speak up and act out to effect change as Mary does. Mikhail's words are thus startling when he tells Matvei, raring to go on his own passion-driven mission like Pelageia to pause: "No, wait and think, it's still early for you! ... You have much undecided, and for our work, you aren't free!"[428] In the apocryphal story, it is important to note, Mary

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верует искренно и подобен первомученикам за Христов закон."

427 Ibid., 370. "Не хочу сказать, что сразу принял я их и тогда же понял до глубины, но впервые тем вечером почувство вал я их родственную близость моей душе, и показалась мне тогда вся земля Вифлеемом, детской кровью насы щенной. Понятно стало горячее желание богородицы, коя, видя ад, просила Михаила архангела: Архангеле! Допусти меня помучиться в огне! Пусть и я разделю великие муки эти! Только здесь не грешных, а праведников видел я: желают они разрушить ад на земле, чего ради и готовы спокойно принять все муки."

428 Ibid., 370. "Нет, отвечает. Подождите и подумайте, рано вам! Если вы, с вашим характером, попадете теперь же в петлю врага, то надолго и бесполезно затянете ее. На против — после этой вашей речи надо вам уйти отсюда. Есть у вас много нерешенного, и для нашей работы не свободны вы!"

presents a logical argument of compassion to persuade Jesus to relieve the suffering of those in hell. Gor'kii wishes to emphasize exactly that meek righteousness arising from a collective mindset, such as what the workers and Mary possess, which Matvei seeks in his pilgrimage, and which can be applied logically as in the literature. "Maybe, [says Matvei] to Mikhail, 'there are no saintly hermits in the world because they haven't left the world but joined it?'"[429] Sacrificing yourself for the solution by removing yourself from the problem, via martyrdom or isolation, is an irrational artifact of the past. Instead, socialism's insistence on public sharing of private burdens is the logical path to compassion, and worthy of worship. Gor'kii's hellish factory, in other words, is brimming with Maries, and Matvei is the sinner come to find grace.

Mikhail's final guidance places Matvei on a path to godbuilding by resolving his lifelong theodicean arguments with Feuerbachian thinking. The question of theodicy—of the justifiability of belief in God—arose from a presumed incommensurability of the existence of an all-benevolent God and the existence of evil among his creations. Gor'kii and Matvei pondered this question after tragedy struck, yet in *Confession*, neither surrenders the possibility that both can co-exist. Matvei's passion without firsthand experience, which may have delivered him to the same fate as Pelageia Nilovna, is extinguished until "the awareness in [his] soul of its connection with the spirit of the working *narod* arises" and he can "get back on the road and see the life of the *narod* with new eyes." These are conspicuous transpositions of religious phrases, "to see God with new eyes" and "union with the Holy Spirit," substituting God-the-Father with *narod*. They underline a dual system of empirical thinking and spiritual feeling that summarizes Gor'kii's socialist philosophy, to which Mikhail has been leading Matvei. Ultimately, however, one must witness for oneself the "Truth," such as that found in the "life of the *narod*," to understand and therefore build on it. This final of Mikhail's axioms washes over the

429 Ibid. "Может быть,— говорю я Михайле,— потому и нет теперь святых отшельников, что не от мира, а в мир пошел человек?"

apprentice, and Matvei at last has his first own original godbuilding thought: “Was it from the heavens that God came down to Earth or from Earth did the people’s force ascend into the heavens?”[430] Here Gor’kii channels German religious anthropologist Ludwig Feuerbach, who first argued in his work *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity,* 1841) that collective spiritual impulses created deities, a universal human practice perfected by Christianity, the religion that turned humanity itself into something divine through the figure of Jesus.[431] Like Matvei in his diegetic moment, Gor’kii in this exegetic moment moves beyond imitation to a new manner of thinking and expression. He brings Western philosophy into communion with Orthodox culture in his particular brand of godbuilding, which summarizes Gor’kii’s worldview well. Guardian angel Mikhail fulfills his duty, giving Matvei the godbuilding ideology he can use to go out “into the people” to not only witness but participate in the divinity of humanity.

Confession concludes establishing the godbuilding community of believers by demonstrating the miracles that mere mortal humans can achieve. Matvei tries to leave the factory, but he fears the police are looking for him. Mikhail’s even younger apprentice, Kostia, arrives to offer Matvei safe passage through the forest to another monastery. Kostia, only “fifteen years old, blue-eyed and blond” represents the future of Russia. Gor’kii gave him the diminutive of the Russian name Konstantin, referring to Constantine the Great (272 – 337), the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity and transformed the Empire into an earthly homeland for Christendom. Matvei observes Kostia, saying, “The boy is not afraid to speak the truth. No one from this lineage, beginning with Jonah, carries any fear in themselves.”[432] In this period of great transition for Matvei, Russia, and Gor’kii, Kostia is the kind of future leader that will find a home for godbuilding. Matvei realizes this miraculous promise in

430 Ibid., 371. “И рядом с этим — не борясь — другой вопрос жи вет: с неба ли на землю нисшел господь или с земли на небеса вознесен силою людей? И тут же горит мысль о богостроительстве, как вечном деле всего народа.”

431 Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, His Gesammelte Werke, 5 (Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 15.

432 Gor’kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 375. “Не боится мальчик правду сказать. Все люди этой линии, начиная с Ионы, не носят страха в себе.”

the adolescent's responses to questions about saints' lives, Gor'kii's primary didactic tool in *Confession*.

Readers receive a preview of godbuilding-dom when, upon Matvei's prodding, Kostia lists the hagiographies that had interested him: Saints Pantaleon [*Velikomuchenik Panteleimon*] (c. 275 – 305) and George [*Georgii Pobedonosets*] (c. 275 – c. 303). Both were martyrs for early Christianity who died immediately before Constantine's reign, which began in 306 and lasted until his death. In the pair we find a balance of Christian mercy and righteousness. Pantaleon (from Greek *παντελεήμων*, all-compassionate) was a pagan doctor, who, according to traditional narratives, came to believe in Christ when he invoked Jesus's name in a frantic attempt to save an infant from a fatal snake bite. For the rest of his life, Pantaleon traveled and healed people while refusing compensation. He voluntarily accepted his execution by decapitation for depriving other doctors of income, but his corpse never burned on the pyre, for which he was later beatified. Gor'kii shows us this part of godbuilding-dom at the novel's conclusion. Similarly, Saint George, called "George the Victory Bearer" ["*Georgii pobedonosets*"] in Russian, is said to have harnessed his Christian faith to return from death on a heroic mission. In his hagiographic account, Georgii decapitates a giant snake (sometimes "dragon" in English, but "*velikaia zmeia*" in Russian texts), a Biblical symbol of paganism, thereby saving a princess at the behest of the king. Witnesses take the monster to the countryside and burn its corpse—successfully, of course. Gor'kii never explains the beautiful symmetry found in Kostia's favorite saints' lives, likely due in large part because readers were well-equipped to make the connections between the same stories heard since childhood. Kostia finally adds rhetorically, "What joy would people have if ten of them became saints?" The question reminds readers that they, too, can be Pantaleon or George today for a better Russia tomorrow. In godbuilding, first comes mercy then justice.

Readers may wonder whom or which ideology the snake represents in Kostia's godbuilding interpretation of the saints' lives, but they need not ponder the question long. While Matvei is admiring his young comrade's thinking, Kostia erupts into a post-Christian critique of the stories just mentioned:

> "If," he says, "a king's or a rich man's daughter believes in Christ, they will torture her—after all, neither the king nor the rich man were kinder to people because of this. It is not said in the Lives that the kings, the tormentors, were corrected!" Then, having paused a moment, he says, "I also don't know what all of Christ's suffering was for. He came to defeat misery, but it left [without Christ]..."[433]

The Marxist deconstruction of the ancient Christian legend dictates that the powerful were obviously victims because of their power over others, and thus, relinquishing that unkind superiority for, it follows, a kind equality, would prevent future violence. Circuitous logic aside, we can easily decipher that Gor'kii here is thinking of the violence on Bloody Sunday of 1905 and the ensuing years, while also unconsciously foretelling the waves of violence just beyond the revolutionary horizon. Individuals who selfishly wield power over the masses are personae non grate in godbuilding, and if they do not yield to mercy, they will yield to justice.

Confession ends on a definitively hopeful *Mother.* Matvei leaves the factory with high hopes in the Kostia and other young people to remake the future, and the remainder of the novel is a series of confirmations of what Matvei has learned from his various mentors. In his travels, he encounters another young comrade worried about the Russian people's fate, further distressed by the lack of signs of a change. Matvei proclaims that "This boy looking for signs—he's the miracle if he can preserve love for the human amidst life's terrors!"[434] The experience launches Matvei into his first mission to preach to the *narod*, filled with the same fire that Gor'kii depicted burning in the hearts of Pavel and

433 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 375. "Ежели,— говорит,— царская или богатого дочь во Христа поверит да замучают ее — ведь ни царь, ни богач добрее к людям от этого не бывали. В житиях не сказано, что исправлялись цари-то, мучители!"

434 Ibid., 382. "«Парень этот ищет знамений,— он сам чудо, коли мог сохранить, в ужасах жизни, любовь к человеку!"

Pelageia Nilovna: “Earlier, words of sorrow and grief laid like ashes on my heart, but now, like a pointed spark, they ignite [my heart], for all current sorrow is my sorrow and the narod’s lack of freedom brings me closer,” Matvei proclaims as he prepares to address a crowd gathered around him. As he speaks about the injustices against the “the *narod*, the tsar of the Earth,” his fiery godbuilding aura spreads to the crowd: “People’s eyes blaze, from which an awakened human soul shines.”[435] Gor’kii portrays the masses as a collective icon enveloped in light, as he also does in Mother, but now he will create something with the religious image. Still, Matvei preaches “calling people to a new service, in the name of a new life, but still not knowing [his] new God,” So Gor’kii must show him. The novel’s final scene combines a traditional Orthodox icon with the icon of the *narod* to perform a miraculous healing, demonstrating to Matvei that the people have been God all along.

Confession concludes in a historically accurate location, which creates for readers a tangible sense of godbuilding’s potential to evolve from Russian Orthodoxy. Matvei arrives at the Sedmiozernaia Godbearer Hermitage [*Sedmiozernaia Bogoroditskaia pustin’*] just north of Kazan. The monastery is famous for the “miracle-making icon” [*chudotvornaia ikona*] around which it was founded. Depicting Mary and the Child Jesus in the common Hodegetric pose, the Sedmiozernaia (Old Russian: ‘sedmiezernaia’) icon is said to healed people for centuries. After the icon reportedly saved the local population from the plague in the seventeenth century, the hermitage was built around it, and people came from all around to be healed of their illnesses through Gor’kii’s time.[436] It is therefore no coincidence that he chose the return of this particular icon back to the monastery following a round of

435 Ibid., 384. “Говорю я хохлам, зная их ласковый язык: Века ходит народ по земле туда и сюда, ищет места, где бы мог свободно приложить силу свою для строения справедливой жизни; века ходите по земле вы, законные хозяева ее,— отчего? Кто не дает места народу, царю земли, на троне его, кто развенчал народ, согнал его с престола и гонит из края в край, творца всех трудов, прекрасного садовника, возрастившего все красоты земли? Разгораются очи людей, светит из них пробудив шаяся человеческая душа, и мое зрение тоже становится широко и чутко: видишь на лице человека вопрос и тот час отвечаешь на него; видишь недоверие — борешься с ним.”

436 “Bogoroditskaia-Sedmiozerskaia muzhskaia pustyn’,” in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Brokgauza i Efrona* (Saint Petersburg, 1891).

miracle making as the setting for Matvei's "final strike to the heart, the kind of strike that completes the construction of a cathedral."[437] That moment of creation of the Godbuilding Church in Matvei's heart—the pivotal moment Pavel is never able to reach—is when the narod rises as a unit alongside the icon to cure a lame girl at the monastery's gates:

> In the whole cloud of dust there are hundreds of black faces, thousands of eyes, just like the stars of the Milky Way. I see: all these eyes are like fiery sparks of one soul, greedily awaiting unknown joy. People are walking, like one body, pressed tightly against each other, holding hands and walking so quickly, as if their path is terribly far, but they are ready now to tirelessly walk to the end of it.[438]

Here Gor'kii pulls the wool from readers' eyes to reveal the truth of miracles: the people behind the icon are the miracle makers, not the icon. The syzygy of the *narod* acting as one and the "faith in its own power creates miracles."[439] All that to say, the *narod* is "God" and vice-versa; after all, its children are the prophets, and its spirit moves through those like Matvei and Pelageia to reveal the truth... "You are the one God, work miracles!"[440]

In *Confession*, Gor'kii sketches a pathway to unification of his two contradictory selves, an Orthodox Russian and a godless socialist, with the "godbuilding" philosophy. Through a series of meetings that gradually reveal the godbuilding worldview, that the Russian *narod* (people) is the source of everything good and holy. Godbuilding thus redefines the Christian "God" not just as an alternative "God" but as a new genre of spiritual knowledge. As I have shown, godbuilding applies anthropologist Ludwig Feuerbach's analysis of Christianity as the ultimate anthropocentric religion to an Orthodox

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437 Gor'kii, *PSS*, vol. 9, 385. "В Казанской губернии пережил я последний удар в сердце, тот удар, который завершает строение храма. Было это в Седьмиозерной пустыни, за крестным ходом с чудотворной иконой божией матери: в тот день ждали возвращения иконы в обитель из города,— день торжественный."

438 Ibid., 387. "В целом облаке пыли сотни черных лиц, тысячи глаз, точпо звезды Млечного пути. Вижу я: все эти очи как огпенные искры одной души, жадно ожидающей неведомой радости. Идут люди, как одно тело, плотно прижались друг к другу, взялись за руки и идут так быстро, как будто страшно далек их путь, но готовы они сейчас же неус танно идти до конца его."

439 Ibid., 388. "Помню пыльное лицо в поту и слезах, а сквозь вла гу слез повелительно сверкает чудотворная сила — вера во власть свою творить чудеса."

440 Ibid., 389. "Да не будут миру бози инии разве тебе, ибо ты един бог, творяй чудеса!"

believer, the narrator Matvei. Gor'kii strives in the novel to show how a Russian earnestly coming to understand Feuerbach's concept of "God" can naturally transfer knowledge of the past and hopes for the future to the Russian *narod*. In this way, *Confession* is the *Essence of Russian Orthodoxy*, according to amateur anthropologist Maksim Gor'kii. It is little surprise that such existential questions bothered Gor'kii enough to compel novel-length philosophical treatise, as the Russian Empire was facing existential problems at the time. Growing contingents within the country had diverging sets of facts that constituted radically opposed "Truths." To one faction, the country's leader was more akin to Archangel Michael, and to the other, he was closer to the devil incarnate; nevertheless, the vast majority of people, belonging to neither faction, simply worried about getting by, regardless of who was in charge. *Confession* is evidence that Gor'kii saw this divide in the country and wanted to suture the wound left by Bloody Sunday on the Russian people.

Despite the fact that he could not have known, Gor'kii knew that the societal rift needed mending—or else. Godbuilding was his way to invite the vastly different sides of the conversation to the table and find common ground. We see that in the extensive outreach to conservative ideologies from Avvakum, Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, Solov'ëv, and the religious content within an otherwise unashamedly anti-theistic socialist context. Gor'kii's solution is thus a reconciliation of various accounts of "Truth" from each side, with hopes that it will lead to a brighter future. The model of melding two opposing ideologies is admirable because it attempts to find a common tongue between differing populations. If your nation or community finds itself at odds between diametrically opposed choices, ask what commonalities can drive conversation forward. "True faith is always a source of action," as Mikhail says. If we do not hold common "truths," we cannot act together. If we cannot act together, we cannot survive. Though hard times make it seem impossible, there is always a road to reconciliation. You are the one God, working miracles!

Chapter 5:
The Devil is in the Details:
Digital Analysis of Gor'kii and the Christian Tradition[441]

> In distant antiquity when humans began to reason, they reasoned technologically, which is to say exclusively relying on and only on one's own labor experience. Technology is the logic of facts created by people's labor, and ideology is the logic of ideas, which is to say the logic of thoughts extracted from facts, from thoughts that dictate the paths, devices, and forms of the creation of new facts.
>
> Maksim Gor'kii, "On Formalism" (1936)[442]

Despite Orthodox Christian culture's obvious, profound impact on Gor'kii's worldview and creative imagination, the author categorically denied any such religious influence. Having demonstrated some of the qualitative evidence of this phenomenon, I believe there is quantitative proof to corroborate and expand past conclusions. This chapter discusses "forensic" Digital Humanities (DH) to foreground an empirical search for the truth of Gor'kii's well-known secret. The following describes how computational thinking and DH methods can strengthen the evidentiary basis for asserting the substantial role of religious literature in Gor'kii's work. Using Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools in Python, I establish a definitive connection between some of Gor'kii's major pre-revolutionary texts and the Christian literary tradition, especially the Russian Synodal Bible [*Synodal'nyi perevod Biblii*] (1885). These digital instruments allow me to show like never before the myriad parallels between his works, which the Soviets would weaponize against religion, and Orthodoxy in nearly all but name.

A machine-readable Biblical and literary corpus constitutes the primary product of the technical labor described. The underlying algorithm to discover textual crossover is under development and will

441 The underlying programming ("code") for this project as described in this chapter is available at https://github.com/kollektivminds/russian-literary-bible.

442 "В глубокой древности, когда человек начал мыслить, он мыслил технологически, то есть опираясь исключительно и только на свой трудовой опыт. Технология — это логика фактов, создаваемых трудовой деятельностью людей, идеология — логика идей, то есть логика смыслов, извлечённых из фактов, - смыслов, которые предуказуют пути, приёмы и формы творчества новых фактов."

also be a valuable outcome of the project. From plain-text files I created a fully indexed, searchable database of digital texts of the Russian Synodal Bible and Gor'kii's novels *Mother* and *Confession*. Each text has its own features, but more importantly, the database presents cross-text (shared) linguistic and semantic data. I extracted this data using a proprietary program created in the programming language Python and organized it in a mySQL relative database. On the front end, I created a user interface for querying the database using a "vanilla"—i.e. from scratch—combination of PHP, HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. The UI displays custom XML documents of the texts that are annotated or "marked-up" to allow for users' interaction with the intertextual elements, Gor'kii's secular transpositions, discussed elsewhere in the project. Visualized links show side-by-side how Gor'kii took from the Bible to create his own "revolutionary gospel." These are my methods and preliminary findings.

Background

Textual DH has a rich history and is currently taking exciting leaps thanks to recent technological advances. Cardstock punch cards and manual term counting of the past have evolved with general technological advancement alongside theories that push DH beyond simply numbering the vocabulary of a corpus, which is any collection of texts. Milestone works such as *An Introduction to Information Retrieval* by Chistopher Manning et al. (2009), *Mining Text Data* by Charu Aggarwal and Chengxiang Zhai (2012), and *Speech and Language Processing* by Daniel Jurafsky and Jacob Martin (2018) continue to serve as invaluable primers for computational approaches to texts and their meanings. Many instructional texts in the Russian NLP sphere are translated from English. A welcome Russian source is *Automatic Processing of Natural-Language Text and Data Analysis* [*Avtomatichestkaia obrabotka tekstov na estestvennom iazyke i analiz dannykh*] (2017) by E. I. Bol'shakova et al. which provides a similar introduction to computer-aided approaches for Russian-language NLP.

Although Russian-language NLP is developing more slowly other major world languages, some existing tools have proven useful. As a result of NLP's demand for expensive computational resources, work is often concentrated in Western countries where such demands can be met, and the English language is dominant. Thus, while the statistical principles underlying NLP methods are language independent, the quantity of pre-packaged NLP tools drops off precipitously as one leaves the languages of North America and Western Europe. Russian NLP is pushed forward largely by researchers at Yandex, who want to keep up with advancements made at their American counterpart, Meta (Facebook), and individual researchers.[443] Two such independently developed projects are DeepPavlov and Natasha.[444] DeepPavlov and Natasha both provide the basic tools for researchers to extract data from Russian-language texts. These programs are designed to give Russian speakers fine control over information gathering from texts.

The morphological and grammatical complexity of the Russian language has been a factor in its slow development, but it also presents exciting challenges to tackle. A highly inflected morphology and flexible syntax produce numerous semantic layers across a sentence or even single word. That is to say that between English and Russian utterances conveying the same idea for all intents and purposes, the Russian sentence will contain more information about the idea—and contain less "noise," or meaningless information—than the English. Grammatical rules dictate how to identify a word's part of speech and then dissect its attributes. Understanding this system offers a bevy of potential connections between texts and their parts in addition to the words' practical literary meaning. Although both DeepPavlov and Natasha allow researchers to access these linguistic features, Natasha's more economic approach to near identical results was sufficient reason to choose it as one of my

443 "Publications," Yandex Research, accessed March 1, 2025, https://research.yandex.com/publications.
444 DP: https://github.com/deeppavlov
Natasha: https://github.com/natasha

foundational tools. With this information, I could probe my corpus, the group of texts with which I am working, with questions that Gor'kii would not answer.

Methods

In search of common language use between literary works and the Bible, I employ a "sliding token-window" comparison technique at a granular level. A "token" is a particular instance of a word within a text. While a word potentially can be found in multiple places across a text, a token is by definition unique based on its location. A token window is a contiguous grouping of tokens. Each text is a series of tokens that can be viewed through a sliding, or moving, window of *n* tokens at a time. For example, a three-token window (i.e., three consecutive words) could be comprised of the first through third, second through fourth, third through fifth tokens, and so on. Any number of consecutive tokens can be arbitrary grouped to define a "string." The number of possible groups of *n* words in a set of *s* is . A ten-token string can be sliced into eight possible three-token windows. When measuring the similarity of substrings between two or more extended strings, which is how we may abstractly characterize transpositions on a multi-token level, the sliding token window allows for a high degree of accuracy in locating and quantifying borrowed language. For this reason, I devised a computational mechanism to compare the literary works and Synodal Bible by dividing each text into "*n*-token" windows (i.e., word strings of a given "n" length) and counting the coincidence of tokens between each window of the literary work with each window of the Bible.

The token-window method is facilitated by first determining the "lemma" of each token, which is the true object of comparison. The lemma is the standardized form of a token without additional morphemes. For example, the English words "[she] plays," "[he is] playing," and "[they] played" are all the verb "play." Thus, comparing only lemmas allows for the control of context-dependent information that represents noise for the purpose of counting shared tokens. This is particularly

important in Russian because of the high variance found in inflected forms of nouns and adjectives as well as conjugated verbs. Whereas English has a handful of verbal inflections and even fewer of those of nouns and adjectives, Russian features at least six verbal and twelve nominal and adjectival inflection forms each. The lemma reduces the dozens of forms to a single word and thus greatly simplifies the comparison process. Considering the lemma of a word is preferable to its stem, which is the minimal part of a word conveying solely its semantic significance, because the lemma preserves the syntagmatic and pragmatic qualities of a token. In other words, stemming would conflate the verb "starts," the adjective "starting," and the nouns “start” and “starter.” Lemmatization, the process of determining a token’s lemma, is a standard and important function of NLP software packages like Natasha. They accomplish this goal much as a human would: examining the token, considering its part of speech and other features, making appropriate morphological modifications, and comparing the result to a list of known lemmas of the language. Natasha is admittedly less capable of handling edge cases and exceptions compared to a scholar. However, though a person may be able to eventually produce a lemma list with 100% accuracy, Natasha can create a list of all the lemmas of the Bible’s tokens in under five minutes with greater than 99% accuracy. At the scale of data under examination, that <1% error rate is an acceptable loss to accomplish what would take a person thousands of hours of labor to accomplish.

The help Natasha and other technological tools provide is invaluable because of the sheer number of tokens involved in the task at hand, which also left me with a question of exactly what tokens my code should consider when comparing texts. However, not all tokens are equally meaningful. After considering other transpositions, I created a filter to remove a portion of the tokens from each text more efficiently to locate the overlapping tokens that are rich in content and lack noise to the extent possible. To that end, I leveraged Natasha’s part-of-speech (POS) tagger and distilled the

token lists based on their label. The tokens permitted to pass through the filter for comparison were those tagged as nouns, including proper nouns, adjectives, and verbs. These tokens in theory represent the most meaningful and least noisy of POS, as opposed to those excluded: adverbs, exclamations, numbers, conjunctions, determiners, and others.[445] From the total Bible token count, approximately 51.11% (345,090 of 675,068) tokens, to be exact were preserved. A slightly greater proportion of 54.46% (46,836 of 86,009) of *Mother*'s tokens passed through the filter. Whittling down these token sets has provided me with a more focused token set from each text in hopes of isolating windows demonstrating Gor'kii's use of Biblical language. At the same time, the numbers are nothing to balk at; with several billion comparisons to make, the possibilities are nearly limitless.

Getting to the actual counting of windows' overlapping tokens, it is important to explain what numbers are available. Each text is divided into n-token windows, which are then each compared against each other. A ten-token window methodology renders 373,398 windows from 345,090 total tokens from the Bible and 54,729 windows from 46,836 tokens from *Mother.* This example provides for 20.435 billion possible comparisons. Each window is assigned an identification number, and upon comparison with another window, a key-value pair is generated, in which the unique window-window identification is the key, and the similarity is the value. The key-value pair is a convention of Python dictionaries, which dictates that an unordered list of data can contain a unique set of keys, each of which corresponds to a value that is not necessarily unique. An additional consideration is the comparison of Bible words in their established sequence. The differences between the methods' results are drastic. On the token-window level, the question about how to measure similarity is straightforward. The sequence-dependent method counts matches if the position of a given token in Gor'kii's works matches the same position in the window from the Bible.

445 To compare the outcomes, we may look

Human intervention is nevertheless necessary to sift through the massive amount of data to find the true positive matches. The method, rudimentary as it is, functions as a binary probe of a lemma's existence in one window compared to another, sequential or otherwise. This process, particularly when parsing windows of more than a dozen tokens, produces a large number of false positives as a result. Said effect was a major influence in keeping the token window as small as possible while preserving the integrity of the transposition to the greatest extent allowed. The algorithm can both confirm what was learned from close reading and potentially find its own new transpositions. Finding a particular window of tokens based on its place is simple, though the remaining transpositions potentially to be found must be evaluated by a real person for their meaningfulness. Knowledge of the contexts surrounding particular words is thus still a necessary human-in-the-loop intervention. A fuller description and specific data are available in the Results section below.

These results and an interactive textual exploration are at the center of the project's "front-end" or user-facing interface, called here "Augmented Textuality" (AT). The web-based application offers users an interactive portal to the corpus via networked instances of biblical source of vocabulary in Gor'kii's works and Russian literature in general. These points of religious transposition have been determined through both close reading and the semi-automatic process described above. Each of these connections is home to a unique set of data, which adds to our understanding of both the Orthodox Bible and literature. Using an array of digital tools, we can see the texts jump off the page, so to speak, with multiple layers of historical, artistic, and religious context. When viewing the transpositions through the Bible, we see how each referenced segment, whether verse, name, or narrative, has been borrowed to various ends in Russian literature. Viewing them through the literary works, on the other hand, brings into relief the author's manipulation of the source and thus shines a light on the transposition's artistry and message. The data set's value quickly grows as I add additional the works of

other Russian authors, which will help us identify hot zones of inspiration from the Bible across literary history.

The AT interface stands atop a simple technical construction of basic internet building blocks. At its foundation is a custom Linux-Apache-mySQL-PHP (LAMP) stack of technologies, while the visual presentation is produced with straightforward HTML/CSS/JS.[446] The decision to create everything from the ground-up, while more time intensive, gives the project a better chance at remaining functional and thus useful as technology changes with time. Linux is an operating system that provides the server environment. Apache is a web server software, which works with other software to manage inputs and "serve" them to the user. The mySQL database is a repository for the transposition objects and their associated data. This input complements the texts themselves by providing analytical information about each instance. Finally, PHP is a programming language that excels at managing pages' contents on the server, putting them together in the correct format to respond to users' requests. In this way, a LAMP stack functions like a restaurant with its physical space (Linux) and a waitstaff (Apache), who run errands and information between the storage shelves (mySQL), the chefs (PHP), and the diners (users). The texts, including the Bible and Gorky's works, are in XML format.[447] This vehicle of information is, to extend the metaphor, the custom plate designed to make the food (the actual analytical content) look and taste its best. Using this file type, I am able to deliver an annotated version with instructions for when and where the computer is to overlay relevant information provided by the database. Success would therefore be like a classic comfort food made even better by

446 Technical jargon is vast and ever-changing. The particulars of each technology are not important for the present purposes. Nevertheless, a gloss: Standard Query Language (SQL), a database-oriented programming language; PHP Hypertext Preprocessor (PHP), a server scripting language for web development and recursive acronym; HyperText Markup Language (HTML), a language to structure webpages and their content; Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), a styling language to programmatically tag and design web elements; JavaScript (JS), a scripting language to dynamically manage data and page content.

447 eXtensible Markup Language (XML), a language in the same family as HTML, used to structure and integrate different types of data in a custom, transmittable document environment.

an ingredient that we did not know we wanted. Functions like the informational window with transposition analysis were created in standard JavaScript without third-party frameworks.

What I have called the "transposition object" is a central concept that emerges out of the creation of Augmented Textuality. It forms at the intersection of the origin text and its derived transpositions. Like a gem with many facets, the object is composed of multiple interpretations that begin to play off of each other. For example, the sex worker in *Confession* as a transposition shares an edge with the original referent(s) in the Bible while simultaneously sharing edges with preceding transpositions, namely Dostoevskii's and Tolstoi's penitent prostitutes. As such, we can characterize each transposition object by its name, type, textual inheritance, and historical-semiotic components. These components are "element," "continuity," "function," "religion," and "politics." "Element" refers to the nature of the borrowed Orthodox culture, such as a character, a narrative, or a symbol. "Continuity" refers to the extent the element underwent change at the hands of the transposing author. While each transposition object is likely to have its own unique combination of these qualities, as a collective they can be organized into a Venn diagram or force-directed graph to visualize their similarity to and difference from one another.[448] A complete vocabulary with definitions is available in the project schema (Appendix A). Collecting and recording a significant quantity of transposition objects will open avenues to asking questions about the Russian literary treatment of the Bible across centuries.

Results

Before discussing the more granular data, it may be useful to take a glimpse at the bigger picture of the overlap between Gor'kii's works and the Orthodox Bible. There are exactly 675,068 tokens in the

448 A force-directed graph is a computational method of simulating forces of attraction and repulsion to nodes (items) in a networked relationship. Elements are first spread out evenly, and then are "pulled" and "pushed" by other nodes based on a pre-defined set of criteria. This algorithmic abstraction allows researchers to examine a network's reactions to a variety of variables in a reproducible way.

Russian Synodal Bible, the forms of 20,933 distinct lemmas (~3.1% of tokens are unique). In *Mother,* we find 86,009 tokens and 8,197 lemmas (~9.5%). *Confession* contains 47,484 tokens consisting of 5,989 unique lemmas (~12.6%). The increased lexical diversity reflects both its varied subject matter and shorter, therefore less repetitive overall length. Among those sublists, ~49% is shared between *Mother* and the Bible, while *Confession* and the Bible share ~54% of a common language. In addition to being shorter, *Confession* directly addresses religious matters, so it produces an expected result.

In addition, I juxtaposed the top twenty-five lemmas by quantity of the Bible and each novel. *Figure A* shows the most common lemmas for *Mother,* the Bible, and *Confession,* respectively. We can see evidence of at least a broad relationship between the texts where there is a high level of correlation between meaningful co-occurrence of lemmas. As an example, "mother" [*mat'*], as the novel's top word is relatively unpopular (137th) in the Bible, but its twenty-second most common word, "son" [*syn*] is near the top (third) of the Bible's list. *Mother* is also notable for its relatively heavy emphasis on "hand" [*ruka*], the fifth most common in the novel but only twelfth in the Bible, a nod to the significance of manual labor for Gor'kii. Similarly, "person" [*chelovek*], "God" [*bog*], "land" [*zemlia*], and "being" [*byt'*] are numbers second, fourth, sixth, and thirteenth in *Confession*'s top lemmas, which are tenth, fourth, sixth, and sixteenth, respectively, by frequency in the Bible. By this metric, *Confession* significantly overlaps with the Orthodox Bible in its entirety, distinguished by its heightened focus on the human with some added interest in existence—or existentialism. A little down the rankings at number eighteen in *Confession* is "*narod,*" which is relatively much higher in the Bible at seventh. The *narod* and its religious importance in this context look like an unspoken connotation readers are expected to understand.

Compared to the Bible, both novels over-represent and under-represent a number of prominent symbols. Foremost is "person," which is tenth in the Bible, third in *Mother,* and second in *Confession*. The works also simultaneously feature "speak" [*govorit'*] (fourth in *Mother,* first in *Confession,* and

fifth in the Bible) and "word" [*slovo*] (sixteenth in *Mother,* fourteenth in *Confession,* and eighteenth in the Bible) more prominently, as well. A generous interpretation of this coincidence may be that the data indicate some semblance of a democratization being projected in Gor'kii's works. At the same time, both Gor'kii's works under-represent "tsar," the eighth most common lemma in the holy book. Individually, *Mother* represses "lord" [*gospod'*] (331st, as opposed to first in the Bible), "God" (130th, as opposed to fourth), and "father" [*otets*] (229th, as opposed to fourteenth). *Confession* deëmphasizes "son" [*syn*] (190th, as opposed to third), "home" [*dom*] (365th, as opposed to eleventh), and "city" [*gorod*] (184th, as opposed to seventeenth). In this choice, we see Gor'kii's earlier novel attempting to avoid fathers of all kinds, which I explained more thoroughly in Chapter 3. Similarly, *Confession*'s focus on God-the-Father and the *"khozhdenie"* motif shine through here.[449] *Figure B* shows these same trends in the negative by putting the light on the Biblical words that appear most commonly in the novels.

In the token window experiment, I could confirm known transpositions, but I was unable to discover a new instance with the help of the program. In the end, it was most effective to use a token window of seven to eight tokens. With higher quantities, false positives begin multiplying seemingly exponentially, and below that point, numbers begin dropping rapidly. With seven-token windows, the program identified 45,597 windows with at least 3 overlapping words, with the highest being six of the seven tokens matching. These were, however, examples of the noisiness often encountered in exploratory textual analytics. *Figure C* shows a parsing table I created in order to work through the data. Eliminating stopwords and reducing remaining tokens to lemmas renders windows that can be repetitive, senseless, and vague. The example in the figure demonstrates how simple it may be to have six word matches without actually meaning anything significant, like window #5232 from *Mother.* For future purposes in refining the program, more advanced techniques that include semantic context will

449 *Khozhdenie* is a genre that Gor'kii adapted as a productive mechanism for plot development in *Confession*. In Russian, the word means a "trip on foot," from *khodit'*, to go by foot.

be crucial to honing the algorithm's work. Relying on authors to use the exact language, even when adding some flexibility by deriving tokens' lemmas, creates more problems than it solves. Additional approaches can be implemented to consider matches between windows based on similarity in meaning rather than the word itself.

The barrier between programmatic analysis and textual complexity cannot be understated. The ability to understand the provenance of a text requires more than segmenting and counting lemmas. Recent developments in NLP and artificial intelligence (AI) offer promising new paths for tool development and analytical exploration. Neural networks (NNs) are mathematical models of information that take into account both content and context to perform "deep learning" of a concept. NNs can transform, categorize, produce, and otherwise process data to generate a form of AI. A specific kind of NN known as "recursive NNs" (RNNs) are particularly capable of working with textual data, as they can accept input of any length and equally distribute attention across inputs.[450] These models "learn" by establishing patterns between inputs and, considering their categories, can classify an input as belonging or not. I am currently developing an RNN that will accept a given text and determine, if relevant, the most likely Orthodox literary source, be that the Bible, apocrypha, or saints' lives. For my purposes, I will use this RNN to find the most likely transposition objects in various texts as they are added to the Revolutionary Gospel database. It is my hope that with time, the program will be increasingly acute in its assessment and enable future researchers to crack the code of Gor'kii's (and other Russians') affinity to Orthodoxy as a lens for the past, present, and future.

450 Richard Socher et al., "Parsing Natural Scenes and Natural Language with Recursive Neural Networks," in *Proceedings of the 28th International Conference on Machine Learning* (Bellvue, WA, 2011).

Conclusion:
An Intermezzo on Capri

> "The Russian people have forged a sacred union with Freedom. Let us believe that from this alliance, new strong individuals will be born in our nation that has been tormented both physically and spiritually. However, we must not forget that we are all people of yesterday, and that the great task of the nation's revival lies in the hands of those shaped by the harsh lessons of the past, in an atmosphere of mutual distrust, disregard for others, and grotesque selfishness."
> —Gor'kii, opening words of "Untimely Thoughts," (1917)[451]

> "The gift of all gifts is the truth... Now the vagabonds are shod, and now the private professors are destitute. Has it indeed become better in Russia? Have the sprouts, transplanted from under the blue Capri sky to the Russian soil, of the Social-Democratic School with Rector Gor'kii at its helm, grown as the conscientious gardener dreamed?.."
> –I. I. Aikhenval'd, "Maksim Gor'kii" (1918)[452]

Once the October Revolution had taken place, the transpositions Gor'kii had been trying to write into existence could also be realized, but would they? Since *Mother*—and likely before—he hoped that when the Empire was no more, the "people of yesterday" would become "new strong individuals," as Pavel does. As we know in hindsight, however, even if some in the RFSFR and USSR could and would rise to the occasion as Gor'kii wished, the most powerful individuals remained weakened by the "harsh lessons of the past" and thus prone to old ways. *A Revolutionary Gospel*'s first four chapters aim to define the "lessons" to which Gor'kii alludes here, his proclamations of "Truth"

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451 Maksim Gorʹkii, Nesvoevremennye mysli: Zametki o revoliutsii i kul'ture, ed. Iosif Irmovič Vajnberg (Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), 76. "Русский народ обвенчался со Свободой. Будем верить, что от этого союза в нашей стране, измученной и физически, и духовно, родятся новые сильные люди. Будем крепко верить, что в русском человеке разгорятся ярким огнем силы его разума и воли, силы, погашенные и подавленные вековым гнетом полицейского строя жизни. Но нам не следует забывать, что все мы — люди вчерашнего дня и что великое дело возрождения страны в руках людей, воспитанных тяжкими впечатлениями прошлого в духе недоверия друг к другу, неуважения к ближнему и уродливого эгоизма."

452 Iulii Isaevich Aikhenval'd, *Siluety Russkikh pisatelei: Noveishaia literatura*, 4th ed., vol. 3 (Berlin: Slovo, 1923), 233. "Подарок всех подарков - правда. ... Теперь босяки обуты, теперь приват-доценты обездолены. Стало ли лучше в России? Из-под голубого каприйского неба на русскую почву перенесенные ростки социал-демократической школы, с ректором Горьким во главе, так ли взошли, как об этом мечтал добросовестный садовник?.."

based on decades of witnessing history up close and personally. Such is "the gift of all gifts" about which Aikhenval'd wrote: change is possible, but there is no outrunning the past. What is more, people are incurably human. Gor'kii knew these truths better than most around him, though that did not stop him from trying to fundamentally change human nature. The Capri School and its "sprouts" were to be the new Soviet people Gor'kii had been hoping to sow across the country. Unfortunately, the Russian soil was simply too hostile for these ideas to take root.

At the beginning of this investigation, it seemed as though Gor'kii was trying with all his might to divorce Russia's future from its Orthodox past. However, as I pause at this inflection point, it feels more accurate to say that he was attempting to redirect the Russian Orthodox tradition away from its contemporary trajectory toward something new. In an array of works from small to big, minor to major, prose to drama, we see Gor'kii's active and—crucially—constructive engagement with his own and a collective Orthodox identity. Rather than discarding the religious impulse inherent in humans, he uses the literary medium to reinvigorate people's spiritual seeking, providing an outlet for enactment of the feeling in the revolutionary cause. In the end, his alternative future, to borrow from Roger Garaudy's *The Alternative Future: A Vision of Christian Marxism*, is as distinctly divergent from Orthodoxy as it is distinctly imitative.[453] We see not derivative parodies, as they may first appear, but ideological continuity from Christianity in "On the Rafts," "Cain and Artëm," *The Lower Depths*, *Foma Gordeev, Mother,* and *Confession*, among others in his body of work. Gor'kii's *narod*-centric spiritual philosophy is remarkable from past versions in that it takes Christianity to the Russian people in a way no leader, from Vladimir to Nicholas, would be willing to do. In its noblest moments, this faith puts the Christian God in everyone, discarding divinity and God Himself for dignity and God Ourself.

453 Roger Garaudy, *The Alternative Future: A Vision of Christian Marxism*, trans. Leonard Mayhew (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

A Revolutionary Gospel arose from two suppositions: first, that, as a rule, historical change—especially radical change—happens gradually with continuity to the past for the sake of the system under revision; and second, that surely, at least one of the major figures in the early Soviet system understood that first law of nature. The preceding chapters have demonstrated that Gor'kii indeed knew that Russians could not simply start from zero to build a completely new society. Instead, he led his readers along the path to Emmaus. His pre-revolutionary literature projects a vision for a renewed foundational narrative to serve Russia after the Romanovs and institutional Orthodoxy. In the body of *A Revolutionary Gospel*, I bring to light Gor'kii's spiritual humanism, a complex web of personal ethics, Christian pathos, political economics, and faith in Russians to evolve on command. My discussion points out how Gor'kii transposed elements of Christian literature, from names to phrases to doctrine to entire books of the Bible, to show his readers a distinct-yet-recognizable post-Christian way of life that could and should be the *narod*'s future. Perhaps most importantly, *A Revolutionary Gospel* offers scholars and readers a different, capacious avenue for understanding Gor'kii and his contemporaries. This study takes a heretical approach to analyzing its subject. Gor'kii may not have been lying when he called himself an "atheist" in many contexts, but his response did not tell the whole truth. He believed in the *narod* as his almighty. If they were not yet aware, he desperately wanted to prove it to them.

Having documented Gor'kii's deep concern about people's spiritual needs, I would like to finally suggest that he went on to spread that concern to other revolutionary writers and, to the extent that he could, to Bolshevik cultural politics. Archival research done in June 2023 in Italy lends insight into Gor'kii's intentions and actions following Bloody Sunday as he evaded the eyes of the Russian Imperial Guard—and fell under those of the Italian authorities. During that time, he mentored over a dozen up-and-coming authors at the Capri School and many more before and after the school doors were closed. In my concluding pages, I show how the spirit of his post-Christian transpositions

continued in the works of four such writers who wrote under Gor'kii's guidance on Capri. Finally, I suggest what likely became of this trend in Gor'kii's later career, including in his work with the People's Education Commissariat and the Soviet Writer's Union. As we have seen, though not always visible on the surface, the religious humanism that burned in Gor'kii's heart and mind after Bloody Sunday was never fully extinguished even in his final years.

The Capri School

Despite the Capri School's ephemeral existence, it had lasting effects on him and his thinking, not to mention the Bolshevik Party and revolutionary movement more broadly. The school itself lasted only a total of a few days shy of five months, from July 24 to December 20, 1909 [N.S.], and was thus a minor moment relative to Gor'kii's decades in Italy.[454] The exact nature of the Capri School curriculum is debatable, as nothing discovered attests to precisely what Gor'kii was organizing on Capri. Archival materials provide information, however, on the curriculum of a similar program, the Bologna Workers' School run by Lunacharskii, which received Lenin's continuing support. These courses included "Political Economics" (taught by Bogdanov), "The History of Russian Literature and the Workers Movement in the West" (taught by Lunacharskii), "The Woman Question and the Finnish Question" (taught by Aleksandra Kollontai, revolutionary and wife of Lenin), and "Practical Occupations, Propaganda, Agitation, Etc." (taught by Andrei Sokolov).[455] Rather, what remains from Gor'kii's Capri School is a police record of a propaganda campaign advocating for a Russian democratic republic.[456] One may extrapolate from this information—as well as from the fact that much else surrounding the School seems to have been destroyed—that Gor'kii was taking advantage of the distance afforded by the Italian island to conduct classes his own transpositional way. Despite the fact

454 Based on evidence in letters dated on those dates. Maksim Gor'kii, *PSP*, 150, 213.
455 Capri Propaganda, Nov. 9, 1909, Folder 1, Archivio Centrale di Stato, Rome, Italy.
456 Bolshevism School, Sept. 28, 1921, Folder 210, Archivio Centrale di Stato, Rome, Italy.

so little is left in the official record from the Capri School, we may nevertheless learn more from the unofficial record: the students of the school who studied directly under Gor'kii to become talented writers in their own right.

Not every visitor to Capri is recorded, but there is a small number of other writers' works attributable directly to Gor'kii's mentorship on the island. The purpose of the following, thus, is to establish for future research that Gor'kii used his time during and after the Capri School spreading, consciously or not, the post-Christian thinking and literary techniques at the center of the current study. My aim is therefore to seek further avenues of investigation into both the nature and purpose of such spiritual thinking resulting from Gor'kii's search for a moral post-Christian future society. While each of these authors addresses social ailments in their own way, their time spent with Gor'kii and a common search to make use of the past, rather than simply throw it away, unites them. I follow the throughline from Gor'kii's thinking to the works of Il'ia Surguchëv (1881–1956), Ivan Vol'nov (1885–1931), and Aleksei Zolotarëv (1879–1950), and Aleksei Novikov-Priboi (1877–1944) that were begun, developed, and or finished on Capri in consultation with Gor'kii in 1909–13. These works form a second generation of post-Christian transpositions elevating the common Russian to the role of liberator of the *narod* from a morally bankrupt ruling class.

Aleksei Zolotarëv

The first of Gor'kii's visitors was Aleksei Alekseevich Zolotarëv, a philosopher, naturalist, and writer raised on the church grounds of the Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Savior [Spaso-Preobrashenskii sobor] near Rybinsk. He originally studied at the Kiev Theological Academy [*Kievskaia Dukhovnaia Akademiia*] to follow in his father's footsteps, but transferred to the physics and mathematics department of Saint Petersburg University. Two years later in 1902, he was expelled for participating in student protests. Gor'kii had a predilection for the younger fellow "Volgan"

[*volzhanin*], whom he openly called his "Caprian protégé" [*kapriiskii protezhe*].[457] The two became acquainted prior to Zolotarëv's first arrival to Italy, but their friendship blossomed on Capri. Zolotarëv visited three times: autumn 1907, autumn 1908 to spring 1909, and summer 1911 through December 1913. Capri was a productive setting for him, see in the multiple works he wrote while on the island that would become his most popular. He wrote "In the Old Laura" [*V staroi lavre*] (1908) during the first trip and "On Another's Side" [*Na chuzhoi storone*] (1911) during the second.[458] It was during Zolotarëv's final sojourn when he finished "The Day after the Sabbath" [*Vo edinu ot subbot*], which he had begun shortly after his second stay with Gor'kii.[459] The novella is a semi-autobiographical account of Zolotarëv's life that serves as a prescient warning for pre-WWI Europe and pre-revolutionary Russia.

A schizophrenic tone pervades throughout "The Day After the Sabbath" that causes readers to feel the tension created by the protagonist emigre's lack of belonging. The salient anxiety reminds us of "Cain and Artëm," the conclusion of *Mother,* and the beginning of *Confession* by Gor'kii. Like those wayward heroes and heroines, Zolotarëv's leading character, Sorbonne student Ol'ga Tugarina finds herself at an intersection. The introduction of "The Day After the Sabbath" throws readers into Paris on Christmas Eve in the uncanny world of a Russian refugee living abroad. What was once a celebration of the birth of Christ becomes a whirlwind of contradictions:

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457 V. E. Khalizev and D. S. Moskovskaia, "Aleksei Alekseevich Zolotarëv (1879-1950). Na perekrest'e istorii," in CAMPO SANTO MOEI PAMIATI*: Memuary. Khudozhestvennaia proza. Stikhotvoreniia. Publitsistika. Filosofskie proizvediia. Vyskazivaniia sovremennikov* (Rostok, 2016), 3-5.

458 V. E. Khalizev and D. S. Moskovskaia, "Aleksei Alekseevich Zolotarëv (1879-1950). Na perekrest'e istorii," in *CAMPO SANTO MOEI PAMIATI: Memuary. Khudozhestvennaia proza. Stikhotvoreniia. Publitsistika. Filosofskie proizvediia. Vyskazivaniia sovremennikov* (Rostok, 2016), 11.

459 The book's title, *Vo edinu ot subbot*, is from John 20:1 (in Church Slavonic, the ancient liturgical language of Eastern Orthodox among Slavs): "Во є́дино́ѯ же ѿ сѯббо́тъ маріа магдали́на прїи́де заѯ́тра, є́щѐ сѯ́щей тьмѣ́, на гро́бъ, и᷾ ви́дѣ ка́мень взя́тъ ѿ гро́ба." [*Vo edinu zhe ot subbot" Mariia Magdalina priide zautra, eshche sushche t'my, na grob", i vide kamen vziat" ot groba*.] "The day after the sabbath, Maria Magdalene came early in the morning while it was still dark to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken from the tomb." The phrase is thus connected with auspicious beginnings.

> The global City greeted the longest and most fearsome night of the year—a night when primordial adversaries clash most fiercely: darkness and light, elemental chaos and reason, the shadowy forces of lawless Chaos luring backward into the abyss, and the luminous forces of creative Consciousness urging humanity forward—with an exultant, joyous symphony of fire and radiance. This ancient ritual, as old as humanity itself, unfolded as a creative celebration of Christmas and Rebirth, embodying the eternal struggle and cyclical promise of renewal.[460]

In Zolotarëv's novel, Christmas and the resurrection are understood as a single occasion for Russia to be renewed and save itself—from itself. Fate, in the form of a "betrothed" [suzhennyi], reigns in the background. "The Day After the Sabbath" takes the cultural significance of the holiest Christian holidays and transposes it on the Russian nation through the eyes of someone forced to leave her motherland.

Il'ia Surguchëv

The second of Gor'kii's visitors was Il'ia Dmitrievich Surguchëv, the son of a wealthy businessman, a graduate of the Stavropol seminary, and a fellow member of the *Znanie* publishing collective. Records of Gor'kii's mentorship of Surguchëv work start in April 1910, approximately when the younger author began publishing. Two years later, in the thirty-ninth volume of the *Znanie* almanac, Surguchëv's *The Governor* [*Gubernator*] (1912) saw light. The novel demonstrates several commonalities with Gor'kii's *Mother,* among other works. Its plot follows a provincial official's spiritual awakening in the last year of his life as he comes to understand the decrepit state of the Russian elite's values, including his own. Like Pavel and Pelageia, the governor's growing disgust with corrupt secular and religious authorities becomes an engine for internal change guided by a Biblically sourced sense of right and wrong. Psalm 90, a song praising God as "my refuge and my protection"

460 Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Zolotarëv, *CAMPO SANTO MOEI PAMIATI: Memuary. Khudozhestvennaia proza. Stikhotvoreniia. Publitsistika. Filosofskie proizvediia. Vyskazivaniia sovremennikov,* ed. D. S. Moskovskaia (Rostok, 2016), 244. "Восторженной и радостной симфонией онгя и света, старым, как сами люди на Земле, творческим праздником Рождества и Возрожденья встречал мировой Город самую долгую, самую страшную ночь года, когда всего яростнее бьются меж собой исконные враги – тьма и свет, стихия и разум, темные, влекущие назав в бездну силы разбойного Хаоса и светлые, зовущие вперед силы творческого Сознания."

[*pribezishche moe i zashchita moia*], is a transpositional leitmotif throughout the first two-thirds of *The Governor.* The psalm emphasizes the ability of one under God's protection to conquer evil, and the line of Ps. 90:13, “you will tread upon the snake and the basilisk; you will trample the lion and the dragon,” turns into reality more than once for the main character.[461] Elsewhere in *The Governor,* the local oil baron’s stockpile goes up in flames, engulfing the setting in a hellish fire. After the source becomes known, characters only refer to the baron as “the bourgeois.”[462] The fire only goes out once the governor’s young daughter dies, the event which becomes the ultimate impetus for his internal conversion.

Finally, throughout the novel but particularly after Sonya’s death, the familiar resurrection narrative plays an increasingly important role in shaping the plot. From the beginning, arguments about the possible existence of immortality are scattered among the governor’s obsessive thoughts about his impending death. After the daughter dies in childbirth, the governor is more certain than ever about both his own death and life after death. The novel ends during Holy Week. The governor’s final act is to pardon and free all the prisoners in his province before Easter by lying to the warden that the order came down from the Tsar. This mercy, he believes, will open their eyes to the truth. He has found liberation from human restraints and, in a Christly manner, wishes the same for others. The novel, while less politically motivated than Gor'kii's works, interweaves a humanistic interpretation of Orthodoxy and contemporary issues in an easily recognizable manner.

Il’ia Vol’nov

The third of Gor’kii’s visitors was Il’ia Egorovich Vol’nov, a revolutionary writer from a destitute peasant background. Rural poverty became a primary theme in his writings at Gor’kii’s

461 Luke, in chapter 10 of his gospel, quotes this very line between telling the Narrative of the Seventy Apostles and the Parable of the Good Samaritan. (10:19)

462 Il’ia Dmitrievich Surguchev, *I. D. Surguchev: Gubernator. Povesti, rasskazy* (Sovremennik, 1987), 147.

insistence. Vol'nov arrived in Italy in January 1911 by way of Paris after spending much of his time between 1905 and then in various prisons for agitating peasant workers for the SRs. On Capri, Vol'nov lived alongside and consulted Gor'kii regularly while composing his largest and most famous work, *The Story of the Days of My Life: A Peasant Chronicle* [*Povest' o dniakh moei zhizni: Krest'iankaia khronika*] (1913). The novel, a fictionalized autobiography, describes a boy, first Van'tia and then Ivan, from seven to thirteen years as he experiences the defining moments of his "Childhood" and "Adolescence," per the book's divisions. Vol'nov uses the main character's still-forming, childhood worldview to pathologize the village life's inhumane conditions, in which he and many others had grown up. Poverty, violence, drunkenness, crime, and hunger repeatedly inflict the residents, who deny others' humanity in the form of constant insults, property theft, child marriage, and physical fighting.

Like Gor'kii's past works and his own autobiography, which would appear just months later, the young male protagonist must find his own ethical compass in preparation for a brutish life as an adult. Fathers, in particular, are a perennial antagonist for Vol'nov, as well; Van'tia suggests murdering his father to make life easier.[463] God and religion play a primary role in the boy's development, but Christianity appears either in a symbolic manner or secondary to other ideas, not dissimilar to Gor'kii's early works. In one scene, an elder retells the Parable of the Sower reflecting the Russian spiritual landscape. Christ returns to Earth with St. Peter, Il'ia the prophet, and St. Nicholas [*Nikolai chudotvorets*]. They approach a farmer, asking, "What do you sow?" The destitute man responds humbly, which inspires Christ to promise a bountiful crop. The food he is growing, buckwheat, is a stereotypical peasant food among Russians and other Slavs in Eastern Europe. When they approach a rich farmer with the same question, he ignores Christ's question and spits on Peter the Apostle, leaving the trio nonplussed. Vol'nov takes the four types of ground, which are to symbolize people's receptiveness to Christ's message, and distills them into two socioeconomic populations: the poor and

463 Il'ia Egorovich Vol'nov, *I. E. Volnov: Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1983), 77.

the rich. Like Gor'kii's criticism of the merchant class, Vol'nov transposes a Biblical parable into the Russian context in order to publicly rebuke the attitudes of the ruling class, which, for him, is the wealthy villagers.

Aleksei Novikov-Priboi

The fourth of Gor'kii's visitors to be featured here was Aleksei Silych Novikov-Priboi (nom de plume of Aleksei Silant'evich Novikov), a sailor, revolutionary, and author. The son of a long-serving artilleryman and orphan raised in a monastery, Novikov-Priboi prepared to become a clergyman himself until he met a sailor who enchanted him with sea stories. In the Russian Navy he was known both for exemplary service and quoting Kant in casual conversation. He started work on his most famous work, *Tsushima* (1932) [*Tsusima*], an epic about the fateful 1905 Battle of Tsushima, the results of which embarrassed the Russian Empire on a global scale, struck a critical blow to the Romanov dynasty at home, bolstered the Japanese navy, and possibly contributed to the outbreak of WWI, while a prisoner of war after fighting in that very battle. After demobilization, Novikov-Priboi took up writing on a more regular basis and joined the writing community, making acquaintances with Ivan Bunin, Boris Timofeev, Semën Astrov and Gor'kii, among others.[464] Having sent the first draft of "Riding Black" ["Po-temnomu"] in 1911, Gor'kii saw such potential in Novikov-Priboi that he invited the younger writer to stay with him on Capri. There he stayed for a full year, renting his own apartment and finishing that and other works, which Gor'kii sent away to be published, often in *Sovremennik*. The story that so captivated Gor'kii likely did so because it touched something deep down in him. "Riding Black" centers on its protagonist's attempt to flee Russian police and the country entirely for safer shores after anti-government activities via a steamboat without leaving a trace, including a ticket.[465]

464 "Zhizn' i tvorchestvo | Aleksei Silych Novikov-Priboi," accessed March 25, 2025, https://novikov-priboy.ru/new/?page_id=1049.

465 As one of the ship hands explains in the story, "to ride black" [*ekhat' po-temnomu*] is a colloquial euphemism for traveling without a ticket. It appears in several European languages as verbs and verbal phrases, e.g., schwarzfahren (German), køre sort (Danish), and zwartrijden (Dutch). In modern Russian, it is "to ride as a hare" [*ekhat' zaitsom*].

However, once he, whom we know only as "[D]mitrich," gets onto the water, his trials and tribulations are only beginning.

Novikov-Priboi's story "Riding Black" is framed as a seven-day nautical journey into and out of hell, during which Dmitrich undergoes a fundamental transition from oppressed fugitive to liberated émigré. Gor'kii was a fan of this construction, as seen in *The Lower Depths*, *Mother,* and elsewhere. Forced to stay in the stokehold [*kochegarka*], known also as the "fire room," where stokers feed coal into boiler ovens on a ship, Dmitrich quickly finds himself in a hellish landscape:

> We descend the gangway into the very bowels of hell. We pause in the narrow passageway to check if there are any uninitiated men in the stokehold. The heat here is oppressive. Oil lamps flicker dimly; pressure gauge dials glow on the steam boilers. Hammers, crowbars, iron buckets and other 'spirit' tools lie scattered about. Several stokers stand watch. Among them is Grishatok, bent double as he 'tends' the furnace. Someone else, armed with a shovel, piles up slag.[466]

Throughout the week-long trip, a storm tosses Dmitrich about the fire room, where he sleeps on coals and waits for his death. More than once Novikov-Priboi makes veiled references to the story of Jonah and the animal that ate him: "What is this? A sea creature, having opened its jaws, stares at me. God, he is going to swallow me! I fall into its stomach. I'm surprised that its walls are hot and stiff like iron. I am beginning to suffocate…"[467] Both the hellish setting and Jonah's tale are transposed for the purpose of forcing change on Dmitrich. This shibboleth, not too different from Matvei's travel in *Confession*, allows the protagonist to rise above his past self. After his journey, Dmitrich proudly proclaims, "I conquer myself." He has become new again, a common refrain.

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466 Aleksei Novikov-Priboi, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, vol. 1, 5 vols., Biblioteka "Ogonek" (Pravda, 1963), 24. "Спускаемся по трапу в самую преисподнюю. На момент остановились в узком коридоре, чтобы посмотреть, нет ли в кочегарке людей, не посвященных в наше дело. Здесь жарко. Мерцая, тускло горят масляные лампочки; на паровых котлах виднеются циферблаты манометров. Валяются молотки, ломы, железные кадки и другие принадлежности «духов». Несколько человек кочегаров несут свою вахту. Среди них и Гришаток, который, изгибаясь, «шурует» в топке. Кто-то, вооружившись лопатой, складывает в кучу шлак."

467 Novikov-Priboi, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 40. "Что такое? На меня, разинув пасть, смотрит морское чудовище! Боже, оно меня проглатывает! попадаю в желудок. Меня удивляет, что его стенки горячи и тверды, как железо. Я задыхаюсь..."

For now

In these works—and likely others—we see traces of Gor'kii's writing hidden behind familiar criticisms of contemporary Russia's errant cultural-political trajectory. Alongside *Mother* and the following decade of Gor'kii's works, we see here the legacy of his Capri period. Gor'kii wanted to convince readers of their inherent humanity and—more importantly—their ability to change the world by changing themselves. The sprouts Gor'kii planted with his literature were trampled by the Bolshevik boot when the revolution actually came. With them, it seems, Gor'kii's idealism also perished. After so many years of using the name, Aleksei Maksimovich Peshkov's pen name became a self-fulfilling prophecy.[468] Thankfully, however, much remains to be learned about the Gor'kii that had hope for Russia's future while he was on that Mediterranean island with like-minded malcontents. The young Aleksei, who jokingly said his grandfather was poisoned by Absalom and learned to love people from his grandmother, was still alive on Capri. The possibility of a Pelageia Nilovna was still alive on Capri. Regardless of what would happen after 1917, there was a fire in Gor'kii on Capri that should be kept alive and guarded well. There is never a bad time to be reminded that the future is what you make it, one word, one comrade, and one action at a time.

468 That pen name, Gor'kii, literally means "bitter," as in the taste or personality trait.

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