

long as we have such primates and bishops, it is clear that the Church is not entirely engulfed in crisis.

The episcopate, clergy, and laity of the Church of Antioch are clearly showing their ability to preserve the faith against all odds. Recent years have been marked by the blood of new-martyrs such as Father Thaddeus Haddad, who gave himself up for torture and death in exchange for his parishioner. Observing the mission, witness, and cooperation of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, as well as Eastern Rite Catholic churches in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, one clearly realizes that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is as strong as ever in many churches of the Christian East. Their suffering, witness, and cooperation with one another, and their mutual sacrifice, are as far from the self-righteous, isolationist sentiments, “offended feelings,” and “pastry martyrdom” of post-Soviet and post-Evangelical Orthodox as one can imagine. Many of the great Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century have made their way into the twenty-first, working, publishing, and teaching, even though some are now resigning from active service due to old age (Metropolitan John Zizioulas, Metropolitan George Khodr). Orthodox theologians, historians, and artists take part in numerous academic conferences and museum exhibitions, from the Volos Academy to the universities and museums of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Minsk. Orthodox

scholars, many of them priests, are currently bringing new life to the study of an incredible range of subjects, from the Christian East to the Reformation, from the Celtic church to contemporary philosophy. We live in an age of great intellectuals, many of whom are also great pastors. To be sure, these men do not receive nearly as much attention from the press and the Orthodox public as Metropolitans Ilarion Alfejev or Tikhon Shevkunov. The search for a genuine form of liturgical art continues, clearly evident in such projects as *The Saints of the Undivided Church*, an international exhibition project organized by ARTOS, which won great acclaim. Modern Orthodox liturgical music goes beyond hierarchical watered-down versions of Bach’s *Saint Matthew Passion* to embrace the genius of Arvo Pärt. Modern Orthodox sculpture is defined by such names as Constantin Brâncuși and Sergei Antonov, not the countless post-Soviet bronze colossuses popping up here and there. Orthodox thought is not limited to the over-zealous sermons of traumatized post-Evangelical or post-Soviet pastors, but includes the works of a fascinating range of scholars, philosophers, theologians, and commentators, from Nassim Nicholas Taleb to Father John Chrysavgis, from Archimandrite Zinon Teodor to Father Peter Mescherinov. Look up these names and you will see that the Orthodox Church, despite all contemporary challenges and neo-fundamentalist tsunamis, is far from a cultural decline. ❀



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truth as one can get. They do not want thought and change; they yearn for simple solutions and clear paths. To these neophytes, hailing from either the post-Communist or the post-Evangelical world, any quotation from an imposing, bearded elder or heron, especially an Athonite one, is far more infallible than an *ex cathedra* conciliar pronouncement of the Pope is to Roman Catholics.

Of course I am not trying to compare all converts to radicals and fanatics. But there is a similar character that comes through when a group of vandals tramples sculptures, when a metropolitan bishop demands the closure of an opera, when Orthodox bloggers and critics are afraid to call out a horrible piece of iconography or a dangerous bishop for what they really are. Why? For fear of offending the “Orthodox.” As if our churches must be a harbor, where *everything is always right*, perfect, original, one hundred percent sacred, and beautiful. Collective self-justification, achieved through the construction of a self-righteous narrative, through the idealization of the Christian East, of Byzantium, of Holy Russia (or any other nation or state) turns Christianity into an ideologically biased, isolated subculture, into a sect. Is the Church a self-righteous sect, or is it a community of sinners, striving not only to come to Christ, but to tell the world of his love and sacrifice? The sad truth is that our religious beliefs must and should be offended and challenged. That is the way of any Christian. These challenges do not hurt us. They test us, they force our hearts and minds to function, so that they do not turn to stone.

What is contemporary Orthodox culture? Some would say it is listening to Ancient Faith Radio podcasts, read-

ing Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov’s book *Everyday Saints*, watching films such as *The Island* (2006), marveling at freshly-gilt churches in Eastern Europe, or attending weekly icon-painting classes, where one is taught to make parodies—that is, questionable “iterations”—of Saint Andrei Rublev’s Holy Trinity. Onion domes. Long hair and distinct attire. Imitative iconography. Photos of bearded elders in black Turkish-styled robes, with quotes from the fathers. But is that it, is that truly it? Then what are the criteria of “orthodoxy”? And can Orthodox culture be limited to this mainstream (I am tempted to say “Orthodox pop”) culture? In whom do the “Orthodox” actually take pride—someone who fits into the mainstream of our cultural stereotypes?

Or, perchance, the pinnacles of contemporary Orthodox culture are not “sweet” anti-historic novels nor fiberglass domes. Then what do we look for?

In the quiet enclosure of the Phanar, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew—one of the very few bishops who actually know the Psalter by heart—continues to serve and pray, and to lead the Church to conciliarity, despite physical and verbal attacks on his person. Theodore II, the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, along with a multitude of Greek and African-born hierarchs, lead the great Orthodox mission in Africa, a mission that brings not only the faith, but also medical aid and physical salvation to hundreds of thousands of Africans. The Orthodox Church of Albania is still led by the great Archbishop Anastasius (Yannoulatos), a man who re-vamped the Orthodox mission in Kenya before leading the greatest resurrection of the Christian faith, in the only fully atheistic state in Europe. As

closed, private space and had nothing to do with religious life.

"God's Will" similarly attacked the Moscow Arts Theatre during a staging of Oscar Wilde's *The Ideal Husband*, and later threatened the theater by placing a severed pig's head before the facade.<sup>5</sup> The Siberian city of Novosibirsk witnessed another attack on a theater and an implementation of the "religious feelings" law when the local opera was forced to cancel a production of Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* due to protests by "concerned Orthodox faithful," most notably Metropolitan Tikhon of Novosibirsk.<sup>6</sup> This production, unlike Sidur's sculptures, was in fact quite blasphemous. But it took place in a closed setting and no one was forced to attend. It is only strange how selective the "religious feelings" of Novosibirsk's metropolitan were. He never led his clergy or faithful to protest against corruption or things going on night clubs. Just against various manifestations of culture, against an "enemy" he felt brave enough to protest. The question that comes to mind is why, if some Russian Orthodox feel they have the right to seek out the "blasphemy" in theaters and exhibition halls, they are not afraid that their Muslim counterparts will enter their churches and call out everything that seems "blasphemous" to them, including icons and the recognition of Jesus as the son of God?

One thing that the post-Soviet and post-Evangelical fundamentalist factions of Orthodoxy have in common is their infatuation with their own religious feelings, feelings which, from their perspective, are constantly attacked and must be vigorously defended. The church fathers held quite a different view. Tertullian, who lived at a time of great persecution and genuine martyrdom, once witnessed an

anti-Christian caricature of the "Christian God" brought out by one of the gladiators at the circus. According to the Christian writer, "it had ass's ears; one foot was a hoof; it carried a book and wore a toga." What was Tertullian's reaction to this? Did he call out the blasphemy in his zeal? No. He merely laughed, "laughed at both the name and the shape."<sup>7</sup> Why? Because true martyrdom was not identified by the early fathers and future martyrs with self-righteous brawling in the public square—in the stadium, circus, or agora. It was undying and unyielding witness to the love of Christ for all mankind.

What else do the agora and the catcombs solutions have in common? Both offer a form of self-righteous ideological comfort. You either force public morality in the public square, or you flee from the "sinful" world (usually the West). One thing you do not do is engage. Engage in a conversation, in a peaceful form of co-existence with the sinner. As Christ did with the harlots, tax-collectors, and the Samaritan woman at the well, and as the Apostle Paul did when he came to the Areopagus. Some of the Orthodox in France and in North America (as well as a handful of those left in post-Soviet Eastern Europe) have sought to free their Church of past sins, to renew it, to bring it closer to Christ and to the early fathers. This task demands critical thinking, courage, self-consciousness, hard work, and change. It demands facing numerous challenges and tough truths. Many of the converts flowing in to the Orthodox Church, in both America and post-Soviet Europe, have come for a different purpose. They have come to a place they see as the one true place of salvation, the one place where everything is right. While the former is true, the latter is as far from

<sup>5</sup> Мария Лейва, "Православные активисты подложили к зданию МХТ им. Чехова голову свиньи," РБК, April 1, 2015, <https://www.rbc.ru/society/01/04/2015/551c22799a79473fe5f3ab88>.

<sup>6</sup> "Опера Вагнера в Новосибирске 'оскорбила верующих,'" BBC Russia, February 24, 2015, [https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2015/02/150224\\_novosibirsk\\_opera\\_church\\_case](https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2015/02/150224_novosibirsk_opera_church_case).

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* (AD 197), trans. T. R. Glover (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 85–7.





Detail of statue to Saint Savva of Storozhevsk, Zvenigorod, polished from the rubbing of "pilgrims," with a faded icon of Saint Matrona of Moscow. Photo by the author.

PLICITLY for) the trial of the band Pussy Riot, on June 29, 2013, Russia finally adopted Federal Law 136-F3, better known as the law "For the Offense of Religious Feelings." At the time of their trial, the Moscow Patriarchate organized massive demonstrations and prayer services against blasphemy and sacrilege. It is noteworthy that so many Russian Orthodox Christians, members of a church that made its way from persecution to freedom, now call for the state to impose restriction laws and censure on others. A political punk-band demonstration was openly compared to Stalin's destruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Any barrier between "offended feelings" and martyrdom is being effectively erased in the minds of the neophyte and indoctrinated faithful, just as it is being erased by Christian fundamentalists in the West. Being offended by something now gives one the right to attack.

While massive new sculptures are being erected, others are being destroyed by overzealous Orthodox

"guardians of morality," whose religious feelings seem to be permanently offended. Most notably, Vadim Sidur's brilliant work *The Taking Down from the Cross* was badly damaged by a group of Orthodox vandals, calling themselves "God's Will" (Божья Воля), who raided an exhibition in the Manege Museum in Moscow on August 14, 2015. The reasoning was simple: Sidur's work depicted Christ completely naked, with his genitalia exposed, and this was seen by some as a blasphemous insult to the Christian faith.<sup>4</sup> Luckily, these barbarians probably did not hear of the fifth-century mosaics at the baptisteries in Ravenna depicting Christ naked, with all of his human features exposed, not in a small sculpture but in the center of the dome. Barbaric actions are now justified, it seems, by one thing: being deeply offended by someone or something. In contrast to the Pussy Riot case, here the "faithful" fanatics who damaged Sidur's work were "offended" by something that did not invade their church or community. It was on display in a

<sup>4</sup> Елизавета Фохт, "В Манеже на выставке советского авангарда произошел погром," РБК, August 14, 2015, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/14/08/2015/55ce15b-b9a79474f19c056c8>.



memorial wreaths, and funerary red ribbons with the saint's name on them. Few things reflect the agony of the late Soviet Union as strongly as this particular combination of materials, which now marks the present cultural war for the "defense" of traditional values and Orthodox regions. Before the altar apse of the Dormition Cathedral in Yaroslavl stands a statue to . . . the Holy Trinity. Three vaguely humanoid figures sit in the traditional iconographic composition before the chalice. Coins are thrown by tourists into the chalice, while memorial red carnations are placed over it. At Saint Savva Storozhevsk Monastery, not only tourists, but also pilgrims and some priests come to the saint's statue, rubbing the bronze shoe for luck. The

gold-polished bronze shoe of Saint Savva, along with a withered paper icon of Saint Matrona nearby (the latter saint having become the center of an almost pagan form of veneration, with thousands flocking to her Moscow monastery hoping for *her*—not Christ's—miracles), offer perhaps the best illustration of everything that has gone wrong during the "Second Baptism" of the former USSR.

"Orthodox" statues emerged almost simultaneously with another phenomenon that took hold in post-Soviet Russia. Censure laws were actively promulgated by the Moscow Patriarchate in the wake of the 2012 Pussy Riot scandal in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Concurrently with (and ex-

Detail of statue to the Holy Trinity at the Dormition Cathedral, Yaroslavl, with memorial flowers and coins. Photo by the author.



the crowds and gold. Recently, one of Father Thomas Hopko's (!) students, a respected protopresbyter and chaplain, defended the separation of children and parents at the US-Mexican border. Why? Because of sincere love of a strong, protected state. Such attitudes are quite consistent with a chorus of equally protective Orthodox priests in Eastern Europe who are focused on propagating the ideals of their great state, a state that must be "made great again" and protected from all foreign influence and presence. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39) is replaced by a hostile, almost fascist ideology. Holy Russia, Georgia, Romania, Serbia, Greece . . . the past glory and traditional values of these countries occupy a central role in a multitude of sermons, texts, and interviews, pushing the gospel aside or turning it into merely *one* of the pillars (but not *the one and only pillar*) of the "traditional values" narrative. This is understandable, since the gospel is by no means a good source of quotations when one wants to turn Christianity into an ideology for a nation, a state, or a fundamentalist group.

Indeed, the Orthodox Church has not learned its lessons. Even after the greatest catastrophes of the twentieth century, many of the local churches are bound to the idolatrous worship of their states, preaching a fascist—nationalist or imperialist—myth instead of the gospel. In 2015, the Serbian Orthodox Church officially blessed and held a episcopal prayer service at the inauguration of a memorial statue to Gavrilo Princip, the terrorist whose murder of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophia led to the First World War. The statue was erected in Sarajevo, where the murder took place. Bishop Athanasius Rakita presided over the

blessing service. The inauguration was announced and praised by the official website of the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>2</sup> As many Serbs would say: he fought for our freedom. That is what counts. Of course, it is easy to point out that he did not fight but merely murdered a family. But there is no arguing when it comes to the pure and unmasked tribalism that flourishes—with the full support of the Church—in Orthodox countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. It is noteworthy that not a single bishop of the Orthodox Church—not one—dared to condemn the installation and blessing of Princip's statue in Belgrade publicly. War crimes conducted by the Georgian, Abkhazian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Russian soldiers during the past thirty years equally remain uncondemned by their respective local churches.

The memorial to Gavrilo Princip raises the issue of statues, a relatively new element in contemporary Orthodox culture, and equally bound to the themes of art and to the "protective" spirit of the post-Soviet Church. Statues to saints: a strange form of veneration. Of course, the Christian world has a rich sculptural tradition, from late antiquity to the Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque sculptures of the West. Russian Orthodoxy was also known for magnificent wood carvings placed over city gates, on roads, and in churches. But the new statues have nothing to do with liturgical decoration. They are bronze memorial statues, direct descendants of their Soviet forerunners.<sup>3</sup> The Trinity Sergius Lavra is now surrounded by three statues of Saint Sergius of Radonezh. Passing by the statue to Saint Patriarch Hermogen in Moscow's Alexander Gardens, one will be surprised to see the granite pedestal surrounded not by candles but by red carnations,

<sup>2</sup> "Николић и Додик на откривању споменика Принципу," website of the Serbian Orthodox Church, June 29, 2015, [http://www.spc.rs/sr/nikolits\\_h\\_dodik\\_na\\_otkrivanju\\_spomnika\\_principu](http://www.spc.rs/sr/nikolits_h_dodik_na_otkrivanju_spomnika_principu).

<sup>3</sup> On statues and other deviations in contemporary Orthodox liturgical art, see the extensive writings of art historian and theologian Irina Yazykova.



and the post-Soviet Church is already felt in the New World. A seminary which once published the brilliant and immortal works of Father Alexander Schmemman, Father John Meyendorff, Father John Erickson, Father Thomas Hopko (not to mention a multitude of church fathers and scholars) began publishing sermons of a highly controversial first hierarchy. A scholar cannot read these sermons without noting a multitude of historical inaccuracies coupled with theological and ethical controversies. Nor could he look at the written works of this particular bishop without imagining a host of ghost writers. Yet these works were voluntarily published by the seminary, with a praise-filled foreword.

This is hardly the only manifestation of the transformation taking hold in the Orthodox Church in America. This summer, the director of the Department of Evangelization of the OCA, Father John Parker, spoke at a conference in Crete about the “right” and “wrong” sources of information (websites, blogs, publications) on the Orthodox Church and its history, theology, and thought. Official jurisdictional websites, Ancient Faith Radio, and especially the podcasts of zealous convert priests such as Barnabas Powell and Josiah Trenham were praised by their fellow convert Father Parker. *The Wheel*, alongside the Fordham University blog *Public Orthodoxy*, made the shortlist of dangerous sources, which Father Parker dubbed “anti-catechist.” The danger? Their tolerance for informed discussion of complicated subjects, including sexuality. Not fundamentalism, hatred, or religious extremism. No. Simply a willingness to publish a range of thoughtful opinions. The obvious counterargument here is simple: blogs and journals dedicated to Christian

thought are supposed to evoke discussion, not to serve as Sunday school coloring books and catechism pamphlets. But that simple argument was not even uttered at the panel.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that an officer of the OCA dedicated a public presentation to condemning sources as dangerous, anti-catechist, and indeed “diabolical,” merely for asking questions and facilitating discourse—the fact that he emphasized their ostensible danger and even advocated for them to be monitored (by whom?) and explicitly identified as not blessed (is he to decide that?)—is evocative of Soviet ideological condemnation. It also underscores the cultural change taking place in Orthodox churches of the free world. A young, American-born priest uses Soviet arguments, which are as foreign to his education and upbringing as the Ottoman *kamilavka* hat on his head and his *à la russe* attire, to defend the “True Faith”—to defend it from questions and discussion. This defensive war is taking hold of churches and communities that have always been and still are free from any real persecution.

More and more praise is given by former evangelicals and Episcopalians to the “fight for traditional values” conducted by the Moscow Patriarchate, along with the Patriarchate of Georgia and radical branches of the Churches of Greece and Serbia. Packed and gaudily-decorated churches in Eastern Europe are mistaken for parishes. An authoritarian system, rooted in scandals, which effectively exploits thousands of clerics and laypeople, is deemed a “mighty” church, a resurrected and glorious survivor of martyrdom. The corruption, the deprived state of parish clergymen, the dwindling numbers of the faithful—all of that remains unnoticed among

<sup>1</sup> “The Living Water,” Second International Conference on Digital Media and Orthodox Pastoral Care, Orthodox Academy of Crete, Kolymbari, June 18, 2018.

*Option.* Instead of imposing morality in the public space, in the agora, the author offers Christians another form of escapism: forming their own communities, interacting only with one another, and ignoring the surrounding world, just as Saint Benedict and his monastic order did in the West during the Dark Ages. A brilliant idea indeed. Yet there are a few differences between medieval Latin monks and Mr. Dreher's followers. The true Benedictines preserved works of art and thought that were profoundly alien, if not hostile, to them. Virtually all of the Greek and Roman texts of antiquity—including such “questionable” texts as *The Golden Ass*, an erotic novel ending with a mystic hymn to Isis—were preserved by the Benedictines. I have some trouble imagining Dreher and his followers preserving *Brokeback Mountain* in their safe havens and catacombs. Looking at Dreher's writings and at his supporters, a different historic prototype comes to mind: that of the Old Believers.

The only difference here is that the Old Believers did, in fact, have a whole cultural layer to protect, against all odds and under terrifying persecution by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian State. Dreher's pseudo-Benedictines and American converts (turned into hierodeacons and matushkas) have merely to preserve a postmodern surrogate, cherry-picked from various layers of Orthodox history. What kind of persecution are Orthodox Christians living through in the United States? While Christians in Syria, Iraq, Africa, and China are actually being persecuted, American Orthodox converts and fundamentalists are merely suffering from self-imposed phobia. Whether one is a liberal or a social conservative, one should at

least acknowledge the breathtaking arrogance of comparing contemporary U.S. “pastry martyrdom” (refusal to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex couple) to the actual suffering of Christians who have lost and are still losing their lives, their loved ones, their churches, and their homes. Catacombs were places where Christians came several times a year to venerate the relics of martyrs, to celebrate the Eucharist on the graves of those who gave their lives witnessing to the love of Christ. The Church of Christ, the Eucharistic assembly, is hardly compatible with the self-constructed catacombs, catacombs of resentment and reenactment, that have spread like cancer in our communities and hearts.

In the Middle Ages, trade routes brought not only goods, but also death and disease. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, we see the same problem with the Internet, and social media in particular. Instead of a pathway to the Fathers, to original sources, to the treasury of Christian history and art, the Net is used to construct new bridges to isolation. One of the greatest dangers to contemporary Orthodox culture is the forging of a union between post-Soviet and post-Protestant neophytes. The union of two very different groups who seek one thing: a moral ideology that will provide the only true path to salvation and will separate them from the “fallen” world, or, to be exact, from the “fallen” West. I am by no means trying to question or undermine the sincerity and good intentions of these more “radical” converts. What puzzles me is their immediate willingness to embrace the most intellectually limited and radical branch of Orthodoxy. An aggressive promulgation of the union between the American convert

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as a long defensive war, a battle to defend the traditional Christian world against foreign invasions and equally foreign reforms and ideas. Crimes committed against the Orthodox Church by Catholics and Muslims are constantly emphasized. Crimes committed by Orthodox Christians, Orthodox states, and the Church itself against Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and Old Believers are, on the other hand, completely ignored. So are the crimes of Orthodox states and nations against one another, since acknowledging any of these crimes would undermine the self-righteous narrative of Orthodox infallibility not only in faith, but in almost every action. The perception that the Orthodox Church is unchanged ignores centuries of evolution in its liturgical rite and ecclesiastical structure, the various rises and falls of Orthodox theological thought and of the temporal state of the Church.

Numerous blogs and websites are being launched dedicated to Orthodox history, theology, and art. Unfortunately, these websites and blogs are often used not as instruments of discovery, research, and contemplation, but as vehicles of indoctrination. History (a long story of human actions) is used to justify theology, to justify the sanctity of the Orthodox Church—as if the Church of Christ, the mystery of Christ's love and sacrifice, needed to be “enforced” and “guaranteed” by the piety of emperors, czars, princes, popes and patriarchs, monks, or nations. This problem comes through in the way that both history and art are viewed. Orthodox art and iconography is *a priori* deemed “beautiful.” Even if it is a poor parody, a mockery of what Christian liturgical art (or any art, for that matter) once was and has the potential to be.

That is another problem. Most Orthodox—whether in the Americas or in the Old World—have a severe inability to call out poor and tasteless icons, monumental art, and church decoration. There is an almost superstitious fear of removing a badly painted icon, or calling it what it is. As if an honest word that will “hurt” the feelings and ambitions of one artist is worse than an ugly depiction, which could ruin or maim the reception of the faith by thousands. A word of criticism is usually deemed too dangerous and offensive to the pious and well-meaning public. Thus, instead of educating the public, many Orthodox art blogs and websites cultivate a meaningless and tasteless approach to the quality, history, and canonicity of liturgical art.

All of these problems involving Orthodox culture, art, and historical awareness can be traced to the protectionist and isolationist spirit which looms over the contemporary Church, even though there are practically no “Iron Curtains” or barriers left to separate its faithful. The choice being offered to Orthodox Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century is: the agora or the catacombs. One part of the Orthodox world (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Romania, and Serbia) is obsessed with imposing “moral” laws and “traditional values” in the public sphere, protecting its “civilization” from the corrupt West. This is the path of the agora, of proclaiming laws and defending morality by various secular means.

Simultaneously, another part of our Orthodox brethren—the one dwelling in the West—is fleeing to self-constructed catacombs. The latter solution was succinctly formulated by Rod Dreher in his book *The Benedict*

# Between the Agora and the Catacombs: Orthodox Faith and Culture in the Twenty-First Century

Sergei P. Brun

We stand at a major threshold. For the first time in our history, most of the population has virtually unlimited access to education and culture. Innumerable sources of information and communication are now available. Never before has the great treasure trove of Christian art and thought been so accessible. Yet one of the great mysteries of our time, of our church and culture, is: why do so many Orthodox Christians use these resources not for enlightenment, but for isolation?—isolation not only from the world as a whole, but isolation from our own history, our tradition?

Instead of studying history, we prefer to create a narrative of self-righ-

teousness, where the basic facts are either wrong or taken out of context. It usually comes down to the following: the Orthodox Church is perceived not only as “original,” but also as the *unchanged* Church of the East, from which the other “heretical” churches broke away. The Oriental Orthodox are seen as Monophysite heretics, who worship Christ as purely divine, repudiating his human nature. Catholics are seen as perhaps the worst enemy, with the *filioque* and the ideas of papal primacy and infallibility inflated and perverted into caricatures totally alien to actual Catholic beliefs. The worst is always presupposed in order to blacken the opponent. The history of the Orthodox world is seen



Soviet War Memorial  
in Yaroslavl near the  
newly-built Dor-  
mition Cathedral.  
Photo by the author.