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'WILL THAT GREAT POET COME SOON?': MESSIANIC THEMES, RELIGIOUS IDEATION AND MARXIST ZEAL IN THE 1905 REVOLUTION

The concept of messianism is a significant motif in Russian religious philosophy, which becomes more accentuated during times of crises, notably in the revolutionary period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While messianism is often purely metaphysical and abstract, with the personification of a Christ-like figure as its spiritual guide, this philosophy had also played a significant role in the political struggle for social justice, with revolutionary groups from the Narodniks to the Marxists being no exception. Indeed, messianism is significant in the writings of Lev Trotsky in 1905, where the failure of the revolution led him to envisage the coming of a future messiah to 'revive' and 'avenge' the dramatic end of such a movement. In critiquing the theoretical ideas of Russian Marxists and developing the Russian religious themes of messianism as defined by Nikolai Berdiaev, this article will demonstrate the religious themes and metaphors within Russian Marxist thought and argue for the socio-political interrelation between Marxism and religion that acts as an incitement for revolutionary social change.

> It was as though he had been born again for the life of the spirit. All his senses were tensed like strings on a musical instrument. New, immeasurable, radiant worlds opened up before him … Will he be born soon, the great poet who is to re-create for us the revolutionary resurrection of the working masses?
>
> *Trotsky, 1905*, 153

> The proletariat stood alone in this struggle. Nobody wanted or could support it. It was not about the freedom of the press this time, and not about the struggle against the arbitrariness of uniformed thugs, (*bashibuzukov*) not even about universal suffrage. The worker demanded a guarantee for his muscles, for his nerves, for his brain. He decided to win back for himself a part of his own life. He could not wait any longer – and he did not want to. In the events of the revolution, he

> first felt his strength and in them for the first time he knew of a new higher form of life. He seemed to be reborn for the life of the spirit. All his senses tensed like strings [of a musical instrument]. New boundless worlds opened before him … Will that great poet come soon (*pridet*) who will reproduce the painting (*kartinu*) of the revolutionary resurrection (*revoliutsionnogo voskreseniia*) of the working masses?
>
> Trotsky, *Nasha pervaia revoliutsiia*, *Chapter II*, 150[1]

> Messianism is the belief that new times will come, that the Kingdom of God will come, that the Messiah will appear in power. The expectation of a messianic consciousness is on the verge of two worlds, on the verge of this world and the other world, immanent and transcendent, earthly and heavenly, historical and superhistorical. Messianic expectations cannot be realized either in history itself or outside of history. This is a contradiction that is inherent in our limited consciousness (*ogranichennom soznanuu*), in our fallen mind (*padshem razume*). Every creative act of a person fails in the sense of realizing a creative product. But at the same time, every creative act, in essence, has an eschatological character, in which this world ends and another world begins. But the limited consciousness does not see this enough.
>
> Nikolai Berdiaev,
> *Ekzistentsial'naia dialektika bozhestvennogo i chelovecheskogo*, 218–9

Introduction

The concept of messianism (*messianstvo*) is a predominant motif in Russian religious and philosophical discourses,[2] which naturally developed into the field of social and political thought in the middle of the nineteenth century. Such socio-political conceptualisations mainly originated from the Slavophile school of thought, developed by one of its key founders Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov (1804–60).[3] Messianism refers to the socio-theoretical dimensions related to Russia's spiritual destiny in emancipating the people of both Russia and Europe through the teleological guidance of the Orthodox Church against the ideas of both Catholicism and Protestantism in the rest of Europe. Nikolai Berdiaev defines messianism as a more rationalised and historicist approach to the Jewish belief of the 'chosen people', where the Russians have been bestowed with the spiritual destiny of emancipating the world, or at least Europe, from the 'misleading' teachings of non-Orthodox Christian ideas.[4] On the surface, Russian messianism appears as a socio-political tool for justification for Russian autocracy, imperialism and to a certain degree even Marxism/Communism, an argument mainly supported by the conservative defenders of Russia's messianic eschatological duties.[5] However, such conservative understanding of Russian messianism is in fact more complex in both its political praxis and theoretical ideas. While several scholars have studied Russian messianism, I focus on the eschatological aspect of this concept, namely the phenomenon that incites hope in the people's struggle for social justice and equality, for which I will correlate its relevance to the messianic theme as expressed through the theories of Russian Marxism within the context of the 1905 Revolution.

While messianism in Marxist thought may not be as well studied as Russian messianism, it has been acknowledged in academic research, most prominently in the works of Igal Halfin, Andrzej Walicki, and Erich Lippman.[6] According to these authors, Marxist messianism is mainly defined by two principles that demonstrate that Russian Marxist eschatology is intrinsically related to the cultural ideals of the Russian Orthodox Church. First, Marxist philosophy is a secularised version of the original religious traditions, whereby instead of focusing on worshipping God, the focus turned instead towards humanity as the centre of human social and historical progress.[7] As Marx put it: 'Man makes religion, religion does not make man.' (*Der Mensch macht die Religion, die Religion macht nicht den Mensche.*).[8] Second, Marxist eschatology is driven towards the struggle for the emancipation of the masses as a philosophy for class struggle. In addition, even if Marx's intentions were purely materialistic and attempted to justify revolution through materialistic means, it also entailed a moralistic element that would explain the 'natural' appeal that the masses had when approaching the revolutionary ideas of Marxist thought. To put it in the words of Halfin, 'Marxist eschatology described history as moral progression from the darkness of class society to the light of Communism'.[9] From these two principles, Marxist messianism is to be understood as a form of emancipation that puts forward the importance of humans in their right to self-determination and freedom from any form of authority, be it the bourgeoisie, the monarchy, or even God. Furthermore, from a sociological perspective, messianism in Marxist eschatology resembles Russian messianism. Both focus on the struggle for the emancipation of the masses from the shackles of exploitation and oppression, and only differ in the spiritual and theological perspective in which Marxism places importance on humans over God.

Based upon the arguments of these three authors, I develop the concept of Marxist messianism within the prism of the 1905 revolution and its brief aftermath. As a case study, I argue for the messianic role that Father Georgii Apollonovich Gapon (1870–1906) played as the spiritual leader of the revolution that inspired the people during the procession pleading to the tsar-*batiushka* to give rights to his own people. Whatever the intentions of the priest, whether as a genuine believer in social justice, an agent for the *okhrana* or just an involuntary and 'unconscious instrument of this plan' (*bessoznatel'no orudiem takogo plana*),[10] it is important to emphasise that his role was pivotal in leading the masses in a procession to plead with the tsar for basic human rights. Indeed, his leadership had inspired the people in demanding these rights, even following the standoff that started with the Bloody Sunday massacre on 9 January. Father Gapon was interested in socialist ideas and knew Russian Marxists of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), having met them in Switzerland in February 1905. I conclude with Trotsky's personal account of the 1905 Revolution in his seminal work *Nasha pervaia revoliutsiia* (1909/1927). Trotsky ends his work with the rhetorical question as to whether the 'great poet' would come soon to 'resurrect' the revolution from the remnants of the past,[11] which offers an excellent religious metaphor that resonates with ideas of resurrection and the 'second coming' of a revolution. Trotsky follows with his view that end of the revolution was only the beginning, and that a potential future struggle would surely come. With these arguments in mind, this study offers a new understanding of the correlation between Marxism and religion through the concept of messianism in the tumultuous times of the 1905 Revolution.

The origins of Russian messianism and its historical destiny

Before discussing the concept of messianism in Russia as understood by Berdiaev, I would like to examine the key philosophical concept of *sobornost'* developed by Khomiakov that ultimately shaped Berdiaev's messianic thought, especially in relation to its historical goal. The etymology of this term derives from *sobor*, which translates as gathering but it can also be defined as a council or even unity, thus inferring a concept of unity and communal living under the spiritual guidance of God and the Orthodox Church.[12] In principle, *sobornost'* is 'superior' to Catholicism and Protestantism because it possesses the positive traits of both schools of thought but without their shortcomings, since in accordance with Khomiakov's arguments, Catholicism possesses unity but lacks freedom while Protestantism possesses freedom but lacks unity.[13] From this premise, Khomiakov argues that *sobornost'* can bring unity without the need for coercion from an external body or institution, whilst simultaneously avoiding the risks of isolating and secluding individuals from the collective.[14] Berdiaev would build his ideas on Khomiakov's ideas of Orthodoxy's distinctiveness to justify the struggle for freedom that is socially and psychologically engrained within the Russian cultural ideas of the Orthodox Church, for which Berdiaev predicates that humanity should strive towards.[15] Bearing this worldview in mind, Berdiaev presents *sobornost'* as 'the end of history',[16] where exploitation and oppression does not exist and social justice has reached its goals. However, in reaching this socio-historical goal Berdiaev paves the way for such destiny through metaphysical ideas that closely resemble the Hegelian dialectical[17] progress of history, for which humanity is expected to adopt as the ultimate achievement for full eschatological and spiritual emancipation. Additionally, while eschatology for Berdiaev is only possible through the philosophical framework of Orthodoxy as the guiding light for achieving *sobornost'*, Berdiaev stresses another paramount concept that is vital towards such emancipation of the masses–messianism.

Berdiaev understood messianism within its purely demarcated theological essence and posits it as a doctrine embedded with a historical role which delineates a dialectical progress towards the strive for the betterment of all of society.[18] Indeed, in Chapter XII of his work on *The Divine and the Human*, Berdiaev argues that:

> History is created by the expectation that in the future there will be a great phenomenon, which will be the manifestation of Meaning (*Smysla*) in the life of peoples. This is the expectation of the appearance of the Messiah or the messianic kingdom. The movement of history is a movement towards this messianic phenomenon, which will bring liberation from slavery and suffering, it will bring good. Messianic consciousness is born in suffering (*stradanii*). Suffering that does not crush turns into a terrible force. The messianic dynamic myth is directed towards the future. It is opposed by pagan myths, which are directed not to the future, but to the past.[19]

Berdiaev acknowledges the task of messianism as a historical phenomenon that arises when a desire for a better life is most desired, especially in times of suffering, exploitation, and slavery. Berdiaev also posits messianism as an ideology that looks into the future for hope and social change more so than into the past. It is a striking argument

not only because it defines messianism in such social revolutionary terms, but also because it distinguishes his religious worldview from traditional and clerical conservative thought that dominated Russia's political sphere.[20] Indeed, such interpretation not only debunks the left-wing and Marxist view of religion as an opium that lulls the working-class into submission in exchange for a better life after death, but it also debases the right wing and conservative views of supporting the almighty and autocratic rule of an absolutist tsar in the name of 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality'. It is for this reason that Berdiaev's philosophical outlook on messianism and religion offers a nuanced approach that adopts the revolutionary zeal of Marxist philosophy on one hand, and the socio-cultural values of equality and social justice from the religious philosophy of the Slavophiles on the other, thereby bridging the gap between the two otherwise ideologically incompatible schools of thought.

Berdiaev had a vision of messianism in Russia unlike other Russian conservatives and traditionalists of the l9th century. He envisioned a broad universalist dimension of human emancipation that goes beyond the borders of the Russian empire. Even though Berdiaev was in favour of messianism occurring in Russia,[21] he did not argue this position from a chauvinistic perspective of Russian superiority, nor for Russia's unique destiny in emancipating the world in which messianism could only be applied to Russia. Instead, Berdiaev acknowledges that the concept of messianism is also predominant in other cultures in synchronism with their historical eschatology, such as Israel, Ancient Egypt, Germany, and of course Russia, all of which are expressed in the philosophical teachings of each culture.[22]

> In Egypt there was a messianism associated with the divine character of the king. Messiah first of all means the Anointed One of God. The messianic idea of the king as the anointed one has also been preserved in Christianity, although it has nothing in common with Christianity. With messianism there is always an expectation directed to the future, but the expectation is not passive, but active, calling for action. This is historical activity, but it is inspired by the belief in the approach of the end of history. This is the apparent contradiction of the messianic consciousness.

> Messianism, as a religious phenomenon, is associated with the prophetic side of religion. An exclusively sacramental understanding of religion is not favorable for the prophetic spirit and for messianic expectation. There is no belief that light comes not only from the past, but also from the future. Prophetism is the beginning that leads to rebirth, to new life. It is wrong to view the prophet solely as a passive instrument of God.[23]

Regarding nineteenth century philosophy (and verging into the twentieth century), Berdiaev recognises Germany and Russia as the sole bearers of messianic ideas mainly due to their philosophical renaissance, for which he described German philosophy as pantheistic and cosmic and Russian philosophy as eschatological and related to Godmanhood (*bogochelovechna*). However, both are embedded with messianic passion (*strast'*) from their deep sense of dynamism and activism.[24] For Berdiaev, dynamism and activism are related to social struggles that concerned the everyday lives of people, alongside deep questions related to metaphysics overall, with

messianism and prophetism as the highest stage of the expression of such philosophical thoughts. Berdiaev cites the following philosophers: Henri de Saint Simon, Charles Fourier, Joseph de Maistre, Isidore Marie Auguste François Xavier Comte, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Avgust Cheshkovskii, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henrik Ibsen, Leon Blois, Fedor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev, Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov, and the 'Russian socialists and anarchists, especially religious anarchism'.[25] Therefore, whilst arguing against the mainstream Slavophile narrative of Russia's uniqueness for its historical destiny, Berdiaev bestows the messianic and prophetic duties upon Russia from a different perspective. Berdiaev's ideas were inspired from Christian thought that he supplanted with Hegelian and Marxist ideas adopted from Germany. From this, Berdiaev argues that messianism is inevitably manifested in the social activist circles of socialists and anarchists alike, mainly due to the common collectivist and emancipatory goals and ideals. Overall, Berdiaev's messianism is distinguished in its internationalism and connection to the social struggles of Russian everyday life that stood against the oppressive hierarchical system. Said messianism is also interconnected to the international struggle for the emancipation of the masses from the ills of exploitation and oppression.

Messianic ideals in (Russian) Marxism

Messianism is not a term commonly associated with Russian Marxist philosophy, except under specific circumstances where academics, philosophers, and political activists use messianism as a metaphor for the leadership of Marxists in revolutionary struggles.[26] Such limitations may be a result of the militant atheistic policies adopted during the Soviet period, or more so because of Marxism's propensity towards more secularised and materialist philosophical outlooks. Despite such features, messianism is also present in the original sources of Marxist philosophy, albeit not as much in the theological sense insofar as in its dialectical and historical sense of the word, which is akin to what has been previously argued in Berdiaev's ideas.

According to the late Polish historian Andrzej Walicki, messianism was prominent in the original ideas of Marx himself, when this messiah is understood as a metaphor for the proletariat. Marx agrees with Feuerbach regarding the 'divine being' as nothing more than a metonym for 'human being' per se, by which 'all attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature'.[27] In other words, Walicki argues that Marx reinterpreted Feuerbach's ideas, thus relating the Promethean 'religion of humans' by supplanting religion with the 'collective messianic role' of the working-class. Consequently, the messiah becomes the personification for the proletariat, which contradicts the stereotypical understanding of the messiah as an individual who would liberate the masses. Walicki also discusses the utopian socialist ideas of Saint-Simon's Christian eschatology in its struggle for the improvement of social and political life, to realise 'the Kingdom of God on Earth'.[28] In this instance, Walicki acknowledges the revolutionary zeal in Christian thought due to its active and dynamic tropes for struggling in the name of social change and inequality more broadly. Furthermore, this also demonstrates his arguments regarding the leap from Christian eschatology to Marxist revolutionary movement as being more similar

than anticipated, despite the materialist and secular ideals of Marxist thought. Overall, Walicki's premises are to a certain extent compatible with those of Berdiaev, particularly relating to the eschatological aspect of revolution, except that he does not view messianism within the context of its historicity, presenting it instead as a matter of debate between Marxists such as Karl Johann Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Georgii Valentinovich Plekhanov.[29] More specifically, Walicki argues for the complexity of 'historical necessity' within the context of dialectical materialism, for which he demonstrates how 'necessity' was arbitrary and dependent upon the historical development of each country, alongside their relations with other countries.[30] Walicki associates messianism specifically with its eschatological task, and does not define it according to a historical perspective in harmony with Berdiaev.

The historian Igal Halfin presents another interpretation of messianism in conjunction with Marxism. He argues that Marxism and Christianity both embrace an 'ur-eschatology' where the concern for emancipating the proletariat resonated with a secularised form of salvation.[31] Halfin argues that eschatology was an inherent trait in Marxist philosophy, since liberation was a goal for Marxist revolutionaries. While messianism was foretold in the original ideas of Marx and Engels, it was only in its Russian tributary where messianism would be expressed more vividly and practically. Indeed, according to Halfin, the revolutionaries in Russia were deeply concerned with their position relative what they believed to be the preordained trajectory of Russia's development.[32] It is for this reason that revolutionary men and women applied eschatological diagnostics in accordance with the temporality and environment of crises that occurred at the time.[33] Marxism in Russia was far more complex because its political participation had to be applied with greater discretion given the limited socio-political freedoms offered by the government and its elite.[34] Thus, while Halfin offers a dualistic East–West approach to the Marxist concept of messianism, which is also roughly delineated along the theory versus practice lines, he still places importance on the eschatological aspect of Marxist ideas, especially regarding the leap into the realm of freedom. Halfin argues that 'Marxist eschatology described history as moral progression from the darkness of class society to the light of Communism'.[35] Therefore, whilst Marxist philosophy is commonly understood as a materialist ideology void from idealist concepts motivated by moralistic intentions, Halfin accentuates the fact that the Marxist/Communist revolution was not limited to the realm of political action, as its eschatological motivations and desires were driven by a deeper moralistic sense of achieving social justice and equality for the masses. While it may be difficult to prove such statements and motivations, one cannot deny that the struggle for social change entails a moralistic dimension of liberating the masses from exploitation and oppression for the overall betterment of the society.

According to Walicki and Halfin, Marxist ideology is defined by desiring social change and prioritising human individuals over a deity. Most importantly however, is how this emancipation is ultimately defined by an eschatological desire for social change and revolution that is more akin to the religious messianic goals of Christian thought, as previously argued by Berdiaev. Additionally, these messianic goals also demonstrate a cultural connection between the masses and the revolutionary movement where, despite the lack of knowledge to Marxist theoretical ideas or texts, the masses and revolutionaries bonded over the common ideals they shared in the

moralistic framework shaped by Orthodox values of equality and social justice. Indeed, such values are demonstrated most vividly in the social movement that was defined by the 1905 revolution, where the social struggles of the masses, that originally started as a peaceful religious procession, would ultimately culminate into a revolutionary struggle.

Father Gapon and the 1905 Revolution: Messiah or provocateur?

The 1905 Revolution is a crucial event in Russia's turn of the century and has been hailed by Marxists as a dress rehearsal for the future October revolution. Marxists turned this failed revolution upside down and saw it as a justification for future social struggles. Lenin stressed that without this revolution the October revolution would not have been possible.[36] The 1905 Revolution highlights socialist and religious themes in a dialectical manner.

There has been a debate over the role played by Father Gapon in the 1905 Revolution. His leadership was received with mixed feelings. They ranged on one end from outraged Marxists who did not accept Gapon because of his religious beliefs (as was the case for Lenin who was suspicious of the priest and his intentions) and certain members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party who actually assassinated him, to revolutionaries on the other end who actually accepted Gapon as a fellow traveller in the struggle for social justice, as was the case for Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, and other key founders of the Emancipation of Labour Group (*Gruppa osvobozhdenie truda*). Whatever his intentions, and whatever he supported, Gapon's leadership encouraged the people to start off by peacefully pleading to the tsar for social change, only to be shot at in return. In other words, Gapon may have stood as a spiritual guide for the procession, but the failure of this procession caused the same religious people to turn from pleading to the tsar-*batiushka* to fighting against the royal guards and the okhrana.

Over 200,000 peasants and workers upset by the humiliating losses of the Russo-Japanese war, and exploitation and low wages in the factories,[37] decided to march in front of the Winter Palace to plead to the tsar for a better life.[38] Father Gapon and fellow worker Ivan Vasimov put forward a petition addressed to the tsar. The petition addressed the tsar as 'sovereign' (*Gosudar'*) and begins by explaining how the people are being suffocated by 'despotism and arbitrariness' (*despotizm i proizvol*) and that death is better than suffering any longer (*luchshe smert', chem prodolzhenie nevinositykh muk*).[39] The petition then puts forth human rights as the utmost task, since:

> there are thousands of us here; outwardly we are human beings, but in reality, neither we nor the Russian people as a whole are provided with any human rights, even the right to speak, to think, to assemble, to discuss our needs, or to take measure to improve our conditions. We are enslaved (*porabotili*), and enslaved under the auspicies of your officials, with their help, with their assistance.[40]

This statement demonstrates how the ills of exploitation and oppression are not viewed as a symptom of tsarism, as commonly argued by Marxists and most revolutionaries, but rather as an anomaly. Gapon and the religious masses see it as the tsar's

responsibility to purge any evils of society in the name of social justice under the righteous rule and will of God.

The petition turns to anti-capitalist statements regarding the legal and social system:

> Sovereign! Is this in accordance with divine laws, the mercy with which you reign? And is it possible to live under such laws? Would it not be better to die – to die for all of us, the working people of all Russia? To let the capitalists – the exploiters of the working class – the bureaucrats, (*chinovniki*) the embezzlers and robbers of the Russian people live and enjoy [their lives]. This is what stands before us, sovereign, and this is what has brought us to the walls of your palace. We are looking here for the last salvation. Do not refuse to help your people, bring them out of the grave of lawlessness, poverty and ignorance, give them the opportunity to manage their own fate, throw off the unbearable oppression of bureaucrats.[41]

Here Gapon asks whether such laws accord with the will of God, and answers by labelling the capitalist exploiters and embezzlers as the true exploiters of the Russian nation. The only salvation from the clutches of evil-doing exploiters was through the good will of the tsar. Moreover, the petition highlights a desire to end 'lawlessness, poverty, and ignorance', a goal of both religious people and Marxist revolutionaries, who were equally motivated in combatting unjust exploitation and unequal living conditions. The groups also aimed to combat low levels of culture and education, especially since education was considered the basis for bringing the masses from the dark ignorance of exploitation and inequality to the lightness of freedom and justice.

The petition lays out seventeen revolutionary demands divided into three categories: rights and the ignorance of the Russians; poverty; and the oppression of labour by capital. They all appealed to revolutionary socialists and religious masses alike. The demands are as follows:

I. Measures against the ignorance and lawlessness of the Russian people.
    1. Immediate release and return of all victims of political and religious convictions, for strikes and peasant disorder.
    2. Immediate declaration of freedom and immunity, freedom of speech, press, freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience in the matter of religion.
    3. General and compulsory public education in account of the state.
    4. Responsibility of ministers to the people and guarantees of government legitimacy.
    5. Equality before the law for all without exception
    6. Separation between the church and state.

II. Measures against the poverty of the people.
    1. Abolition of indirect taxes and their replacement with direct progressive income tax.
    2. Cancellation of redemption payments, cheap credit and gradual transfer of land to the people.
    3. The execution of orders of the military maritime department should take place only in Russia, not abroad.

4. Termination of the war by the will of the people.

III. Measures against the oppression of capital over labour
   1. Abolition of the institution of factory inspectors.
   2. Establishment of permanent commissions at plants and factories elected by the workers, who, together with the administration would sort out all the individual claims of workers. The dismissal of a worker cannot take place other than through the decision of this commission.
   3. Immediate freedom of consumer-industrial and profession workers' unions.
   4. 8-hour working day and normalisation of overtime work.
   5. Immediate freedom of struggle between labour and capital.
   6. Immediate normal wages.
   7. The immediate indispensable participation of representatives of the working-classes in drafting a draft for a law on state insurance for workers.[42]

The demands resemble elements that appealed to Marxist revolutionaries, with policies as radical as the separation between church and state, and freedom of parties to participate and organise democratically. The petition did not go through, and this procession ended on 9 January with Bloody Sunday, where the guards of the tsar shot at the protesters.[43] Ever since, this tragic event has left a blood stain on Russian history that would to a certain degree become the beginning of the end for the trust of the masses in the will of the 'benevolent' tsar.

In the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, Father Gapon got the opportunity to travel abroad with the help of an anonymous Lithuanian Social Democrat whom he refers to in his memoirs as 'X' and 'they' (*oni*).[44] After X helped him acquire a passport, Gapon fled to Berlin only to move shortly after to Switzerland in fear that the German authorities would arrest and extradite him back to Russia.[45] Once he arrived in Geneva in February 1905, he had the honour in meeting with Russian Marxist émigrés of all backgrounds and reputations, most of whom were in political exile due to the restrictive tsarist policies.[46] Some Marxists in Geneva were interested in meeting the man who fronted the procession leading up to Bloody Sunday. Lev Grigor'evich Deich (1855–1941), a Marxist of Ukrainian and Jewish origin, offers a nuanced approach to father Gapon as a person and especially how certain Russian Marxists would have regarded him:

> Meanwhile, one February morning in Geneva, in the apartment of G. V. Plekhanov, some unknown gentleman called. Plekhanov lay sick in bed and did not receive anyone, which was reported to the visitor, who refused to give his name, according to L. I. Aksel'rod who was visiting the Plekhanovs. But the unknown visitor insisted that it was extremely important for him to see Plekhanov immediately. When he was finally introduced into the sickroom, he called himself Gapon. Among the Russian émigrés there was great perplexity about this man. At first, when the first news spread that in St. Petersburg, with the permission of the authorities, some priest was arranging readings and various entertainments for the workers, the emigrants took this enterprise for provocateurism, like Zubatovism, but at the same time they did not doubt that, like the Moscow idea, The 'Workers' Union' may, after all, do some service to the

> development of the class consciousness of the workers, to the cause of their emancipation and the winning of political freedom for our country. … But the suspicious attitude towards the 'priest' (*pop*), who acted among the workers with the permission of the authorities, could not soon disappear. Only when the 9th of January broke out and the priest Gapon became the head of the procession, many, who until recently had not trusted him, changed their minds. But even for them, his past behavior, his connections with the well-known Minister of the Interior Pleve and with the St Petersburg mayors remained incomprehensible: first, Gen. Kleigel's, and then Fullon.[47]

Deich describes how various Marxists were eager to listen to Gapon's experience and ideas in relation to the idea of a socialist revolutionary struggle, especially given that the feelings were mutual. Gapon also expressed sympathy towards the socialist revolution. However, Deich also recalls reasons why other Marxists were correct in being suspicious of him. Gapon had personal connections with major tsarist officials, like the interior minister Viacheslav Konstantinovich fon Pleve (1846–1904), general Nikolai Vasil'evich Kleigel's (1850-1916) and general Ivan Aleksandrovich Fullon (1884–1920). It is difficult to assess how close he was to these officials, especially given that he may not have had a choice in refusing to collaborate with them given the bureaucratic structure of the system.

Lenin had a different perspective on Gapon's place in the mass movement. He argued that Gapon inadvertently but effectively helped the social struggles of the revolutionary movement. According to Lenin, Gapon was merely a 'provocateur'. He emphasised Gapon's role as a member of the Zubatov society,[48] which he considered a truly unredeemable trait. Nevertheless, Lenin acknowledged Gapon as an 'unconscious instrument' (*bessoznatel'niu orudiem*) in the outcome of the 1905 revolution,[49] thus concluding the messianic trope of Father Gapon as merely a coincidence, or even an 'accident' because the procession was originally a peaceful demonstration until Bloody Sunday. Despite Lenin's reluctant praise for Gapon, he still acknowledges Gapon's messianic role as a signpost for the masses in stirring their class consciousness in the name of social justice. While Gapon, in Lenin's view, might not have stood for class consciousness, he led the working masses and peasants who were demanding more rights regardless of the means. This would serve as further evidence for Lenin in justifying how it was the working-class instinct that represented the true force for social change over the individual role of the priest. To put it in his own words: 'The revolutionary energy and revolutionary instinct of the working-class broke through with unstoppable force, in spite of all police tricks and subterfuges.'[50]

It would be appropriate to end with Lev Trotsky's retrospective work, written only after the 1905 Revolution, entitled *Our Revolution* (1909) and later republished as *Our First Revolution* (1927). The importance of this work is partially to do with the author himself, given his participation in this intense struggle, where he even gave a speech to a crowd of about 200,000 people for the St Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies.[51] While Trotsky shared the same sentiments with Lenin that Gapon was an unconscious spiritual leader and a signpost for the masses in their struggle for social change, he also romantically viewed 1905 as a revolution that did not represent the end but rather the beginning of a future revolution. Trotsky yearned for a future revolution which he dream of as the second coming and return of the 'failed' revolution; thus, he

metaphorically describes the next revolution as the 'resurrection' of the working-class movement. To put it in his words: 'Will that great poet come soon (*pridet*) who will reproduce the painting of the revolutionary resurrection (*revoliutsionnogo voskreseniia*) of the working masses?'[52] In this instance, Trotsky's revolutionary messianism becomes more evident by using the 'great poet' as a metaphor for the collective messianic movement that will liberate the masses through the creation of a new society in the aftermath of the socialist revolution.

This text represents the epitome of Marxist eschatology, as Trotsky's literary style shaped the Marxist movement in accordance with a religious messianic revival of a cause that was not merely a departed relic of the past. In contrast, Trotsky defined such cause as a symbolic historical moment for how the revolutionary consciousness of the masses would only begin to struggle in view of the worsening conditions of social and political liberties. This prediction for the second coming of the revolution acted as foresight for how the movement of the masses had not ceased, and if it were to reappear, it would be even more intense than before. Trotsky also had his own assessment of the role of Gapon in the revolution. Unlike Lenin's sceptical and suspicious assessment of 'the priest', Trotsky regarded him as both a product of the tsarist system who desired change for the greater good of the Russian masses, and a 'supporter' of the status quo as a representative of the clerical strata that depended on the political and spiritual authority of the tsar. In other words, Trotsky acknowledged Gapon's role as the most suitable bridge for social change that could connect the mass movement between the Russian people and the tsarist ruling elite, mainly due to the class/mass consciousness of the Russian milieu that was interconnected to the loyalty to the tsar for social change.[53]

On a further note, Trotsky's seminal work also begs the question as to what he refers to as 'the poet', since Marxist philosophy does not bestow the leadership of the revolutionary movement upon a single individual, given its collectivist ethos of a proletarian revolution. The 'poet' is in fact a metaphor for the proletariat or the communist party itself, which is reminiscent of Lenin's concept of the vanguard party. Marxists argue that the proletarian revolution is a dialectical and historical process that can only be driven by collectivist efforts, which defy the single-handed role of individuals in history. Indeed, to put it in the words of the original ideological founders Marx and Engels in view of the communist party leadership:

> What is the relationship between the communists and the proletarians in general? The Communists are not a separate party from the other workers' parties. They have no interests separate from the interests of the proletariat as a whole.
>
> They do not establish any particular principles on which they want to model the proletarian movement.
>
> The only difference between the communists and the other proletarian parties is that, on the one hand, in the various national struggles of the proletarians, they emphasize and bring to bear the common interests of the entire proletariat, independent of nationality, and, on the other hand, that in the various stages of development through which the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie passes always represent the interest of the movement as a whole.

> The communists are therefore in practice the most determined, ever-moving section of the workers' parties in all countries; theoretically they have an advantage over the rest of the mass of the proletariat in understanding the conditions, the course and the general results of the proletarian movement.[54]

Marx and Engels define Trotsky's metaphor of messianism as inherent within the communist party leadership, and independent from the will of a single individual. The classical understanding of the messiah is of an individual who would liberate their believers from the oppressions of the world through their salvation, which is defined by the second coming of Christ according to Christianity or the arrival of the messiah according to Judaism.[55] With Marx and Engles, the definition of the messiah is supplanted with a collective character of the eschatological salvation against the oppressive conditions offered by the proto-capitalist system at the time. Despite the shift from an individual messiah to a collective one, the popular cultural and religious ethos of social justice and equality persisted, especially regarding social goals such as modesty, humbleness, and equality for all. Thus, while the messianic definitions differed, the goals were ultimately aligned in the struggle for social justice, especially when considering messianism as a philosophy of the future as argued by Berdiaev.

There is a final dimension to consider–the rationale behind using messianic motifs as opposed to more secular messages. While Trotsky's writings are known for his use of literary expressions and metaphors, he only partially explains his use of these motifs. Joshua Rubenstein, who wrote a biography of Trotsky, suggests that despite having had a secular upbringing, Trotsky's Jewish background shaped his social and political thought later in life.[56] Examples of such influences start from the will to freedom of the Jewish people in their emancipation for a better life, alongside their struggle for equality and justice in the Russian Empire. Additionally, the ever-present theme of the New Jerusalem was also crucial from this point of view; striving towards a better society that is free from exploitative and oppressive conditions of the material world, which can only be achieved through the collective effort of the people against social evils such as autocracy. According to the Marxist definition of messianic eschatology, the Jewish struggle for emancipation is no different from the Christian or Muslim peoples' struggles in the Russian Empire with shared goals of revolution and social justice. By this approach, Trotsky had always attempted to avoid the risk of favouring one ethnic or cultural group over another, as the core centre of unity has always been defined by the working-class movement. However, it is not to be understood that the Jewish faith disregards other peoples or believers, especially since for Marxists the struggle for Jewish emancipation was seen as part of the wider proletarian struggle.

In sum, Trotsky's assessment of the 1905 Revolution does not infer that the revolution was dependent upon Gapon's guidance, nor was it a spontaneous movement created by the priest himself. As a principled Marxist, Trotsky argues that the true heroes of this revolution were none other than the masses themselves. This demonstrates a communal interpretation of Russian messianism as a collective phenomenon where the masses determine the fate of history instead of specific individuals. Additionally, Trotsky's description of a poet that would lead the masses also insinuates a further dimension of Marxism in which it is either required to have a messianic leadership for success, or the messianic aspect of Marxism that would dialectically develop as a

precursor to the revolutionary struggle. In either case, Trotsky's definition of messianism offers a unique description of Marxist revolutionary philosophy that does not speak too romantically of the proletariat revolution, as it were the case for the earlier utopian socialists. It also speaks of the revolution using literary vocabulary, as was the case for most of his key contemporaries, most prominently Lenin.

Conclusion

The concept of messianism played a crucial role in Russian philosophical and religious circles and, most importantly, it expanded into political action and social struggles, albeit in a more secularised form. Indeed, the messianic trope of social change has dominated Russian philosophy in view of the struggle of the people for a society free from corruption, exploitation, and oppression. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the definition of messianism is not only limited to the nationalist and chauvinistic understanding of Russia as the 'chosen nation' due to certain traits that only Russia possessed from the Orthodox Church. On the contrary, messianism is firstly a historic phenomenon and certain cultures and societies have their own messianic historical events oftentimes expressed through social struggles for emancipation. Secondly, due to the universalist aspect of messianism, Russia can only be regarded as messianic within its historical context due to the eschatological event it was experiencing through the philosophical revival of the Orthodox ideas that longed for equality, freedom, and social justice. Therefore, messianism in Russia can be defined as a trait that is not inherent in Russia's history but rather to the coming of eschatology in Russian thought and consciousness.

At the same time, while Marxists in Russia adopted the secular ideas and goals of the original Marxists from Western Europe, the social and historical milieu of the Russian Empire did not permit the promotion of secular ideas directly to the people, who were mostly religious peasants. While this may have created a discrepancy between the revolutionary Marxists in Russia and the working masses and peasants overall, there was a commonly shared desire for social change within both groups. Even though the intentions differed slightly, where the Marxists desired the establishment of the communist social project whilst the masses desired equality and social justice, both desired social change in the system where the people would be put before the interests of the elite. This demonstrates an eschatological desire on behalf of the Marxists, as argued by Halfin, in which the goal of a communist revolution was an inherently moral and ethical struggle for promoting equality to most of the people over the needs of the elite few. However, it is also important to understand that for the Marxists, such eschatology is not defined by a messianic figure as an individual person, but instead as a collective struggle for the evolution of society from the realm of necessity into the kingdom of freedom.

In this case study, the revolution of 1905 demonstrates such a leap from the passive and peaceful protests for pleading for social change to the violent revolutionary struggle that would culminate after the tragic event of Bloody Sunday. Whatever the intentions or motivations Father Gapon had, his role in the revolution served as a gathering point for the demonstrators in furthering their wants for social change by following in the footsteps of the priest to plead to the tsar for social justice. However, the

escalation of the struggle also coincided with the diminishing role of the priest, whereby his messianic role would be replaced by the conscious efforts of the working masses. As a result, revolutionaries still held him in high esteem for his role in (unintentionally) initiating the struggle, but suspicions regarding his affiliation to the Zubatov society, alongside his personal connections with Russian officials and bureaucrats, caused a rift in his relationship with Russian revolutionaries at the time. Such a rift would come to a head with his assassination by members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party on 10 April 1906.

While the 1905 Revolution has been hailed by Russian Marxists as a socialist precursor to the 1917 Revolution, it is still important to specify the roots of religious eschatology inherent in Russian Marxist thought. As argued by Berdiaev in *The Origins of Russian Communism* (*Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma*) (1936) and *The Russian Idea* (*Russkaia ideia*) (1946), Russian communism entails values and desires that are inherent in Russian culture, particularly when discussing social justice, because the original teachings of Orthodoxy promoted tenets of humbleness and respect for fellow believers that is neither exploitative nor oppressive. Berdiaev also argues that despite how much someone might claim to be secular, there will always be a worldview by which the secular person would create their own understanding of the world. By this, Berdiaev posits that even the most militant atheist would create a secular form of religion, which he ultimately argues was the case for communism in Russia. This idea is especially insightful given the deeply religious population in Russia at the time that ultimately embraced the ideals of communism. Messianic eschatology is a significant key trope for both Marxism and religion, through which the realisation of the kingdom of freedom can be achieved through the creation of a socialist/communist society by the guidance of the messianic collective leadership of the working-class. The driving force for social change and social justice can be traced, at least in the Russian context, to basic questions of equality that predated Marxist thought.

Notes

1. My translation. Most English translations use 'be born soon' instead of 'come soon', including the 2017 Haymarket Books edition of *1905* translated by Anya Bostock. Nevertheless, the theme of 'revolutionary resurrection' persists in this translation, whereby the themes of birth and resurrection would be more appropriate translations for literary and linguistic purposes, especially in relation to the metaphor of 'resurrecting' the revolution.
2. Slezkine, *The House of Government*, 73–82.
3. Despite having developed the philosophy of messianic thought in relation to Russia's eschatological and theological destiny in emancipating the people of Russia and the world alike, Khomiakov never used the term 'messianism'. As a matter of fact, it was the Russian philosopher Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdiaev (1874–1948) who associated messianism with Khomiakov's ideas. From this, Berdiaev developed the concept of messianism to argue its importance within the Russian socio-political and philosophical context. For more details, see Berdiaev, *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*.
4. Berdiaev, *Ekzistentsial'naia dialektika bozhestvennogo i chelovecheskogo*, 203–20.

5. For further reading on the complexity and ramification of Russian messianism into various ideologies, see Siljak, 'Nikolai Berdiaev and the Origin of Russian Messianism'. Siljak, 'Nikolai Berdiaev', 763.
6. While Lippman's study mainly focused on the concepts of God-seeking, God-building, and religious consciousness within the ideas of Aleksandr Bogdanov (1873–928), Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875–933) and most importantly Berdiaev, he does acknowledge the importance of God-building as a metaphor for recalibrating the cultural 'worship' from God to humanity.
7. Lippman, 'God-Seeking, God-Building, and the New Religious Consciousness', 222–4, Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, 49.
8. Marx, 'Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie', 378.
9. Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, 40.
10. Lenin, '*Revoliutsionnye dni*', 212. That 'plan' being his instrumental role in the 1905 procession of pleading to the tsar.
11. Trotsky, *Nasha pervaia revoliutsiia, Chast II*, 150.
12. Khomiakov & Kireevskii, *On Spiritual Unity*, 15.
13. Losskii, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii*, 37.
14. Ibid., 35–8.
15. Berdiaev, *Ekzistentsial'naia dialektika*, 165.
16. I see the Hegelian and Marxist concept of the end of history as the historical goal where all contradictions, conflicts, exploitations, and oppressions have ceased to dominate the milieu and social consciousness of society. For a complex study on the role of the end of history in the philosophies of Hegel and Marx, see Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*.
17. Hegel, alongside other major German Romanticist philosophers of the early 19th century, deeply influenced Slavophile philosophers.
18. Despite agreeing with the eschatological values of Orthodoxy as presented by the Slavophiles, especially Khomiakov, Berdiaev is critical of the fact that Khomiakov 'does not have any clear methodology of historical knowledge', despite having an extensive understanding of religion and philosophy through and through. Moreover, this lack of historical knowledge and scientific evidence is ultimately what, according to Berdiaev, jeopardises the entire socio-theoretical spectrum, as it ultimately cannot be applied to political practice in relation to its historicity. To compensate such lacunae, Berdiaev argues for the concept of messianism as the historical manifestation of Orthodoxy in praxis in the real world. For more details on Berdiaev's critique of Khomiakov's philosophy of history, see Chapter V of Berdiaev, *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*.
19. Berdiaev, *Ekzistentsial'naia dialektika*, 203. My translation.
20. By conservatism I refer to what has been interpreted by academics as the ideology that advocated for tsarist autocracy. For further details, see Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and its Critics*.
21. Berdiaev, *Ekzistentsial'naia dialektika*, 220.
22. Ibid., 211–2
23. Ibid. 212. My translation.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 212–3.
26. For further details on such debates and discussions, see Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung, Vol. I-III;* Deutscher, *The Prophet*; Duncan, *Russian Messianism*; Chindin, 'Revoliutsiia ot sotsializma'; Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*; Lippman, 'God-Seeking, God-Building';

Lunacharskii, *Revoliutsionnye siluety*; Marsden, 'Bloch's Messianic Marxism'; McKenzie, 'The Messianic Concept in the Third International,'; Murvar, 'Messianism in Russia'; Siljak, 'Nikolai Berdiaev'; Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*; White, *Red Hamlet*.

27. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, 49.
28. Ibid, 137.
29. Ibid., 250.
30. Ibid.
31. Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, 3.
32. Ibid., 2.
33. At least in the aftermath of major struggles occurring in Europe from the 1848 revolutions to the Paris Commune in 1871, where social struggles diminished in Western Europe but increased eastwards into Russia. This was also the case for the Marxist internal debates during the Second International.
34. While intellectual debates occurred in Russian Marxist circles, censorship and tsarist political policies made Marxist participation in activism more difficult, except for the legal Marxists, which would explain the balanced importance placed upon political activism and theory at the time in Russia. Overall, it is not to say that Russian/Eastern Marxism was more limited than its Western peers, but its socio-political climate in view of the autocratic government on top of Russia's underdeveloped industry had made Marxists consider the application of their theories to an environment whose socio-economic development differed from Western Europe. Ibid., 4.
35. Ibid., 411.
36. Cited in Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, 1–2.
37. Defronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*, 40–1.
38. Boer, *Lenin, Religion, and Theology*, 60.
39. Kukushkina, *Gosudarstvo rossiiskoe: vlast i obshchestvo: sbornik dokumentov*, 251. My translation.
40. Ibid., 252.
41. Ibid. The term *chinovnik* refers to a specific title in tsarist Russia of a person who works in the civil or court service. In the eyes of Marxists and revolutionaries, *chinovniki* were bureaucrats who served the status quo in exploiting the masses.
42. Ibid., 253–4.
43. Boer, *Lenin, Religion, and Theology*, 61.
44. Gapon, *Pervonachal'nyi tekst rabochei petitsii*, 143.
45. Ibid.
46. The first Russian Marxist group The Emancipation of Labour Group was created in 1883 in Geneva.
47. Deich, 'Sviashchennik Georgii Gapon', 45.
48. Also referred to as Zubatovism or Zubatovshchina. It was a progovernment workers' organisation founded by the tsarist colonel Sergei Vasil'evich Zubatov (1864-917) for monitoring working-class circles and persuading the demands in being strictly economic and not political. Lenin, 'Revoliutsionnye dni', 210.
49. Ibid., 210–1.
50. Ibid., 211. My translation.
51. Deutscher, *The Prophet*, 128–36.
52. Trotsky, *Nasha pervaia revoliutsiia, Chast II*, 150.

53. As was the case for the emancipation of the serfs under Tsar Aleksandr II, whereby the Russian masses regarded the emancipation as being carried out by the 'good will' of the tsar himself, rather than a 'bottom-up' uprising of the people.
54. Marx & Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, 470. My translation.
55. The scope of this article does not cover the differences between the two, but for further details on the intricate differences between these religions, see Sheehan, Trüper, and Wimmer, 'Beyond Secularized Eschatology'. Chapters II and IV dwell on the topic of messianism through the theoretical frameworks of Walter Benjamin and Karl Löwith.
56. Rubenstein, *Leon Trotsky*, 213. Rubenstein recommends the master's thesis by Joseph Kester (available only in Hebrew) that discusses Jewish themes in Trotsky's theories and activism and analyses the Jewish influence in the struggle for social justice in late-tsarist Russia and the early Soviet Union.

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