

## ABRAHAM KUYPER ON RUSSIA AND THE "FILIOQUE" CLAUSE

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Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)--pastor, theologian statesman--was throughout his life a keen student of history. What he learned he used, in a practical and pastoral way, to instruct fellow Reformed believers how to understand the world in which they were living.

Stimulated by what he read and was taught at home, his studies were channeled in scholarly research by the Leiden professors. De Vries introduced him to the riches of the Dutch language in its origin and development. Rauwenhoff taught him to see the close connection which church history sustained to that of the world at large. But no one more than Scholten with his insistence on logic and systematization cast for a season a spell on the eager young student. Here was an insistence that all the "facts" had to be uncovered, analyzed and carefully systematized before they could be rightly evaluated. By such an intellectual process the "truth" could be established and defended. Only the fruits of such study had any right to claim objectivity.

The influence of these men on Kuyper, even long after he consciously embraced the classic Reformed faith, may not be swept under the rug. All his major contributions in several fields evidence this repeatedly. Positions were chosen only after meticulous research, especially of the primary sources, and buttressed with argumentation. Few opponents successfully resisted him on his own grounds.

This study of history led him to develop what he regarded as the biblical, the Christian, the sound Reformed understanding of what happened, what was happening and what would still happen to men and nations as long as the world in its present form continued to exist.

In this light he also took a long look at Russia, one of the many countries which never failed to fascinate him.

The course of its historical development, so he was convinced, stemmed from several operative factors. But not the least of these was a tenacious rejection of the "filioque" clause in the *Nicene Creed*. This for him set an indelible stamp on the soul of the Russian people, even though not all the adherents of Russian Orthodoxy were self-consciously and intellectually aware of this position and its implications for their daily lives. But Kuyper insisted that this conviction worked as a leaven in the lump of Russian society to influence to a significant degree the course of its historical development. For him Russia would remain, to put it in Winston Churchill's words, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" if that rejection of the "filioque" clause were lightly dismissed. What a people (tribe or race or nation) believed deep within its subconsciousness controls, according to him, the responses to events fully as much and even more than do such factors as geography, climate, and economic conditions.

Our intention is not to investigate Kuyper's thesis thoroughly and critically. All we offer is a modest inquiry into how and why he saw Russia in his day as he did. This may have some value in our day when even professing Christians engaged in scholarship seem tempted at times to interpret history largely by economic interests. On this subject Kuyper for more than one reason deserves a hearing.

## 1.

How did this champion of the Reformed faith view the course of history, therefore also that of Russia?

Here some elaboration is necessary.

Never was man's history to be regarded as a series of unrelated and chaotic events. As did Calvin, he recognized it as the "theater" in which God, by awakening within mankind some sense of responsibility for personal and communal acts, directs everything which comes to pass. This development is to be thought of not as cyclical but as linear. Nor are

there "brute" facts which people are free to endow with meaning or not according to their own predilections. Wholeheartedly Kuyper as believer would agree with Cowper's hymn of faith:

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan God's work in vain.  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

But this conviction does not leave the believer in the dark. Scripture as God's infallible address to mankind is the true guide and norm for all that takes place on earth. By faith man can begin to understand events. Unrenewed and unaided natural reason for him never discloses the meaning and direction of what has taken place.

On this basis he developed, also for those "common folk" who read his works assiduously, what we may call his "philosophy of history."<sup>1</sup> Although it shines through in many of his writings, it comes to clearest and fullest expression in his three volume *De Gemeene Gratie*,<sup>2</sup> without doubt his most original and creative but also his most vigorously questioned and attacked contribution to Reformed theological scholarship.

All existence, other than that of God himself, owes its inception to that divine creative act "in the beginning" by which all things were made. All was originally fashioned "good," including man who, as a distinct creature and yet related in many respects to the rest of the created order, was fashioned "in the image, after the likeness" of God himself. Of the world and man God is not an absentee landlord. Immediately upon bringing the world into existence, God by his providence continues to preserve and govern all things, so that these serve the purpose which he intends.

The world, however, did not retain its originally "good" condition. By their disobedience to his command Adam and Eve fell into sin with fearful consequences for themselves, their descendants and creation itself. But God did not forsake the works of his hands. In a double way he at once displayed favor to mankind, while at the same time inflicting a measure of judgment. By his "common grace" (*gemeene gratie*) sin's power in its full effects was to a degree restrained and men enabled to perform, apart from a saving renewal of their lives, deeds in external conformity to his will. By that ongoing work, according to Kuyper, God rendered possible the continuation and development of human life on earth.

Concurrent with and yet clearly to be distinguished from this was God's work of "saving grace" (*particuliere genade*). This alone renewed the life of man from within ("the heart"), enabling him in thought, word and deed to grow in a life of obedient service to the God of his salvation.

For Kuyper the decisive point in all history is the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the light of his person and work, now to be confessed as Lord over all, the events of history begin to make sense. His significance for common as well as for saving grace is repeatedly stressed. But the *telos*, the climax of this historical development of men and nations, will be reached with Christ's return at the end of this present age. Then the struggle between sin and grace, unbeliever and believer, world and church will be successfully concluded by the living God. The "antithesis" operative and intensified since the entrance of sin into the world will be resolved to the glory of this God.

Man's life in all its manifestations, therefore, must be regarded as religiously conditioned and religiously oriented. No one, no matter how hard he tries, can successfully escape the presence of God who gives and sustains life. And what holds true for man individually is also true for his communal and corporative life in families, societies and nations.

Always the radical distinction between the saved and the lost is upheld, but with several important nuances. The *life-principle* operative in the first class stands in opposition to that according to which the second group learns to think and speak and act. Unless this distinction is rigorously remembered and applied (which not a few who claim to champion his "common grace theory" fail to do) Kuyper is misinterpreted and misjudged.

2.

But let us listen to what the man himself has said on some of the matters involved. Here we offer only a few salient quotations, aware that these alone do not do full justice to his perspectives on history.

Discussing mankind as it lives and labors on earth, he has this to say:

A twofold principle is operative: the principle of *sin* against God, and the principle of *grace* in opposition to *sin*. There is a twofold life: a life proceeding from *sin* and a life proceeding from *grace*, or if you prefer according to the natural on the one hand and according to the supernatural on the other.

But while this contrast must be maintained as absolutely as possible, it does not actually show itself so clearly, because *both* life-principles are impeded. In *sin*, *sin* does not show itself so strongly, because *common grace* holds it in check; but also in God's child the life of *grace* does not express itself so clearly, because it is still impeded in its development by the *body of sin*.<sup>3</sup>

Here he calls attention to three factors which he deems irrefutable.

The first is wide variety in the lives of both believers and unbelievers. Often it seems difficult upon observation of their lives to see much difference in their everyday responses to life. Sometimes the latter may seem more attractive, more honorable in several respects than some of the former. Nor has God been miserly in endowing those who do

not receive his saving grace with intellectual and cultural "gifts" which far outshine those bestowed on the believing community. Yet the two life-principles which will determine their final destiny are always radically divergent. But in both, the glory of God will be fully revealed: in the one, divine justice unto condemnation, in the other, divine and effectual grace unto salvation.

Repeatedly he also calls attention to radical differences among the world's peoples. By no means are the same gifts and opportunities given to all. In this, too, God is sovereign and owes no one an explanation. Examples which he cites include the differences in their cultural achievements between the Babylonians and the Elamites, the Greeks and the Carthaginians, the British and the Portuguese.

Never, however, is this sovereignty in arranging the development of nations to be regarded as capricious or arbitrary. In each something of divine purpose can be discerned in biblical light. God plays favorites with peoples no more than he does with individuals. Each is evaluated and blessed or cursed in accordance with the opportunities afforded.

In the history of the human race there is plan. In history an imposing structure is erected according to fixed specification. All the parts fit together. Here is no endless repetition of the same but a steady advance. Through it all runs a golden thread to which everything is woven.<sup>4</sup>

Without this operation of God's general favor in human life there could be no history. All would be chaotic, since sin like a corrosive acid always destroys relationships. Development of those potentialities which God placed in man and nature would have been cut off. Nor is God's providence by which he effectuates his divine decree(s) a cold, impersonal and natural law which orders all things; it reveals also for those who do not receive his saving grace (and this is crucial in Kuyper's view) something of favor. To this he added:

And this is now to be admired in God's work through common grace, that its action on individuals in their various ages, and the action of that same common grace upon a people, a generation and a family, and also its action

upon the spirit from century to century is so intertwined and interwoven, that always the one operation is suited to the other, and that out of the whole of these operations *the history of humanity* arises.<sup>5</sup>

This biblical, Christian and what he deems correct Reformed view of history he set sharply over against those which prevailed in his time. Neither deism nor pantheism, much less a naturalistic determinism or indeterminism, can do justice to the questions posed by the relationship of a sovereign God to a sinful but fully responsible mankind. Fate and chance are equally idols fashioned by those who reject a personal God. Without the God of the Scriptures all becomes meaningless, a chaos in which nothing can make sense.

With his conception of history as development, controlled by God in the face of all the ravages of sin and evil in this present world, Kuyper taught his reading public to "read history."

In this construction he found meaningful place also and especially for the church. It is the creation of God's special and saving grace in Christ. To it is committed the charge of proclaiming the Word which by the Spirit's operations renews and restores men's lives. It is to serve as a leaven in human society. While maintaining an antithetical relationship to the "world" under sin's control, it may never live in comfortable isolation. Nor may its influence, even apart from leading sinners to salvation in Jesus Christ, be regarded as of little account. Common and special (renewing) grace, while to be sharply differentiated in nature, effect and purpose, sustain according to him a seemingly strange but nonetheless fruitful relationship. They are not two parallel lines of development which never touch.

Wherever Common Grace misses the factor of Particular Grace, it falls into decline and produces only a defective result. In contrast where the factor of Particular grace influences Common grace, and in so far as it does this more powerfully and intimately, common grace comes to fuller and richer development.<sup>6</sup>

To illustrate this he compared China with the Netherlands as these two peoples had developed over a period of centuries.

The result is now that in China for centuries there was only Common grace, while among us (there was both) Common grace and Particular grace. The difference and consequence is that in China Common grace indeed attained formally to a rich development but essentially remained on a *low* level, and that in contrast in our country the unbelieving sector of society adopted a humanitarian and moral position, which in a civic sense towered high above that of China.<sup>7</sup>

The greater the influence of the gospel of God's saving grace is among a people or nation, according to Kuyper, the richer will also be its civilization. Here, among much else, he pointed to personal freedoms, widespread education and medical as well as technological advances.

Against this background of his view of history we can understand why he wrote about Russia as he did. For him the rejection of the "filioque" clause played a significant role, one which to a far larger degree than other writers of that history recognize helped to shape the "soul" of its people.

### 3.

Kuyper wrote about Russia comparatively late in his life. When his cabinet fell in 1905, he decided to take a long and leisurely trip to the lands surrounding the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

Russia as a nation had long fascinated him. Its impact on European and world history had grown measurably since the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. From time to time it fell under his purview as a leader in the Dutch government. Its repeated intervention in the quarreling Balkan principalities, its stunning defeat by the Japanese in 1904 and its disturbing internal and social problems had to be recognized by the Western powers. No longer did it live on the fringes of international relationships. But to every western European it remained a riddle which defied explanation despite its

professed adherence to Christianity in Orthodox form. How could such growing wealth exist complacently in the face of abject poverty among the masses? How could one begin to explain a strange but vibrant culture in a country where the vast majority were not only illiterate but even abysmally ignorant, as many writers insisted? Did Russia belong to the West or to the East, to Europe or to Asia? Or was it, perhaps, a hybrid nation and people, so elusive that foreigners would always fail to comprehend it?

Such questions were by no means new in his day. They haunted travelers and diplomats as early as the sixteenth century when Muscovy first began its rise to power. Dutch, German and English merchants, attempting to establish firm commercial ties with that people, were without exception baffled. Here under a seemingly placid surface lay ever-present stirrings of violent upheavals. The system under which the people lived was violent and cruel; the people themselves often kind, hospitable and eager to establish contact. And this had changed little in the years which followed. Even now, long after the cataclysmic Revolution of 1917 and World War II, little of this has changed despite rapid expansion and industrialization. Russia with its large majority of Great, Little (Ukrainian) and White (Byelo-) Russians continues to defy the understanding of westerners.<sup>8</sup>

Its immensity still daunts the imagination. Its culture with a rich literary tradition continues to fascinate. Its many and widely divergent nationalities remain somehow united under one all-controlling and far from benevolent government. Its technological advances, combined with international intrigues and world-wide ambitions, strike fear into the hearts of all but the most superficial. Russians, to be sure, are not a super-race; they share with all of us a common humanity. But undeniably they are different.

Already in 1905 Kuyper, convinced that Russia would play an increasingly significant role in world history, realized this. He therefore set himself to try to understand and explain, as far as humanly possible, this nation and its people. It would be manifestly unfair to judge what he wrote by what has transpired since his day. Nor is it our interest to

defend the accuracy of his every statement. Instead we would inquire into how his understanding of history led him to assess circumstances and events which he to some extent saw before his eyes.

Of this he wrote in his *Om de oude Wereldzee*.<sup>9</sup>

It is far more than a travel journal. Nor was he primarily interested in monuments of the past. His was an attempt to understand the peoples of those lands which he visited in the light of their historical, social, cultural, political and thus also their religious development. To that end he did far more than draw conclusions from what others had written. Wherever possible he sought the closest possible contact with individuals and groups on several social levels. Here his ability to converse in French, German and English as well as Dutch stood him in good stead. Days spent on shipboard between port-cities enabled him to keep a detailed account together with lengthy reflections on what he had heard and seen.

Early in this long series of travels he arrived in Russia.

The time was far from propitious.

Only by finding place on the last train to Odessa from Rumania was he able to enter that country. The first Duma, which had presented to the Czar and his councillors impossible idealistic demands for immediate reform, had just been summarily dismissed. Conditions throughout the country had at once become chaotic. Riot and revolution spread everywhere and reached serious proportions, especially in the south. Railway strikes prevented Kuyper from reaching Kiev and Moscow which had been original objectives. Food in most places was now in short supply. Military police patrolled the streets by day and night. During his short stay of only a few weeks most people remained behind locked doors and shuttered windows. All this prevented a longer and more intimate acquaintance with the Russian people than he had anticipated. But his Dutch-reading public needed more than brief newspaper accounts of what had transpired; they should try to grasp why such violent upheavals occurred so frequently and with such far-reaching consequences there. Only so would they be able to know

Russia and the Russian people in more than a superficial way.

In his relatively long chapter on that country Kuyper addresses himself at the outset to the underlying issues. These are set in the context of his "organic" conception of historical development with both its sunshine and shadow. In events he recognized cause and consequence, yet never in a simplistic manner. For this far too many and complex factors were woven over long periods of time into the soul of a people.

First of all, then, he called attention to Russia's geography and climate.

Here was an immense land which stretched from the Arctic on the north and the Black Sea with the ranges of the Caucasus on the south to the far reaches of the Pacific on the east. Here were tundras and woodlands, steppes and mountains. But for the most part the vastness was level to the point of monotony. It was a land in which people soon felt lost and lonely; hence their clustering together in villages, towns and cities with great distances separating each from the other. And then the cold, the long and dark and harsh winters so unimaginable to those who lived in more temperate climes.

Kuyper likewise addressed himself to the disparate ethnic groups which inhabited this country. Yet under the Czars a strong sense of national cultural unity prevailed. Even dissidents of several kinds did not deny their Russianness. The Great Russians as the dominant group were always identifiable, whether they lived in the north or the south or the wide reaches of Siberia. Also their language was one; Russian had never spawned a variety of dialects as had so many less widely spoken languages.

Fully as important for understanding the people was, according to him, the *Mir*, the socio-political organization of village life. In his day eighty-six percent of all the people were peasants. Here, rather than in such large cities as St. Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev with their western influences, the true Russian could be found. He was a cooperative,

friendly and hospitable person. Every stranger coming to live in such a village, except the Jew, was soon readily assimilated into its society. This pattern, he was convinced, had been too largely minimized or ignored by many western writers. It set its stamp even on those who had left to live in the cities. Full well was he aware of its defects. Often the people suffered extreme poverty because of famine or flood. Nor did the villagers enjoy educational and medical facilities taken for granted in most other lands. But in many respects its life deserved praise.

This life in the *Mir* is indeed a strong and healthy corporative life which misses the bright side of individual life, but also remained free from the dark side which disintegrates by stimulating egoism and competition. Corporate life heightens the feeling of solidarity and evokes the strength which lies hidden in all organic society.<sup>10</sup>

In such a society the individual could find room for self-expression and development.

As a person one feels less free and unbiased, but as member of the *Mir* and *by the Mir* as the organ (spokesman) of everyone, the Russian peasant possesses a corporate sense of freedom which makes him a worthy person, obligates him to concern himself with communal activities and interests, trains him in debate, and compels him to reflect within his own group on the principles upon which the entire arrangement of his life rests.<sup>11</sup>

Such communities were relatively independent of outside control. Life was regulated by common consent rooted in a long tradition. In the vast expanses all who belonged to the *Mir*, even outsiders who were assimilated felt safe and strong. Here little except natural catastrophes could harm them and their families.

To this must be added outstanding events in Russian history which helped to shape the soul of the people. Originally the Slavs had been groups of wanderers who slowly infiltrated the fertile steppes of the south and at a later date into the forests of the north. For protection they huddled behind rude palisades. Trade was possible because slow-moving

rivers crossed in every direction. Out of this towns and cities drew together with a sense of racial unity. This was immeasurably strengthened with the coming of Christianity and its priests, rituals and monks. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries Russia was slowly being fashioned into a nation.

All this was rudely interrupted by the advance of the Tartars who raided and ruled by exacting heavy tribute for more than two centuries. During this dark period dukes and counts fought with each other to add to the miseries of the common people. With its frontiers unprotected by natural barriers and thus open to attack Russians withdrew into themselves and found in the rituals of the church those consolations which drew their lives heavenward. Fear of foreign influence became endemic. Only by drawing closer to God who came to them in the unchanging ceremonies of the church did they feel safe. Here the glories of that other world transfigured their lives in even the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. Through the direct intervention of the Virgin and the saints the all-powerful God would mysteriously and marvelously come to their aid. To be Russian therefore was to be Orthodox. The one true and changeless faith alone could save them and their "Holy Russia."

4.

But what has all this to do with the rejection of the "filioque" clause?

Why and how could the repudiation of such an apparently innocuous word, incorporated by the Roman church into the *Nicene Creed*, set off Orthodoxy so sharply also in its Russian form from the rest of Christendom? To many a modern historian this seems little short of ludicrous. But this land and its people, Kuyper was convinced, would remain largely a riddle unless this was taken into serious account. For him a people is not so much what it eats or buys or does as what it is in the deepest levels of its life, that is, what it instinctively feels and believes. For the Russians, fully as much as for the Greeks, but in somewhat different way, rejection of "filioque" became the battle cry for their one, true,

divinely-revealed and therefore unchangeable faith.

To this controversy and its implications for the development of Russian life and history Kuyper devoted a large share of his chapter.

As is well known, it helped produce the final schism between Eastern and Western Christianity. In 1054 delegates from the Roman pontiff laid on the high altar of Sancta Sophia in Constantinople a bull excommunicating the patriarch and all who supported him. More, to be sure, was at stake. This was part of a power struggle between two princes of the church. Political intrigues also were involved. But by its gradual endorsement of "filioque" Rome had become not simply schismatic but heretical. Its glory had departed. Now Constantinople with its Orthodoxy could rightly claim to be the true defender of the faith. Sound doctrine had been handed down faithfully from the time of the apostles through seven ecumenical councils. To add to what had there been decided without approval by all the churches of Christendom was not merely high-handed; it was palpably heretical and therefore apostatizing and antichristian. Despite several attempts by Rome to heal the breach, it only widened. On no subject have Eastern theologians spilled more ink than on this. To them it became the source of all the heresies which corrupt both Romanism and Protestantism, including individualism, rationalism and secularism. Only in the East and then especially in Russia after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 has true Orthodoxy been preserved.

To us the doctrinal issue may seem quite minimal.

It involves the mystery of the relationships among the three persons of the Trinity. All agree that the Son is eternally generated by the Father. But while we with Rome confess that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, Orthodoxy with unshakeable persistence affirms that he proceeds from the Father alone. This has become the "shibboleth" of the Eastern churches. Nor does the difference live solely in the minds of theologians as in the West; even common folk like peasants, dock workers and peddlers

hawking their wares in the marketplaces insist that the third person of the Trinity proceeds always and only from the first. Even the modified formulation which Rome was willing to propose, that "the Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son," meets with stubborn resistance. Only that doctrine is sound and saving which as expressed in the rituals of the church has the imprimatur of the seven ecumenical councils.

But the difference, and here Kuyper takes pains to explain, is not simply one of doctrinal formulation. In it the differences between the "soul" of the East and the West come to clear and sharp expression. Each person in both churches, whether with full awareness or not, intuitively feels and therefore thinks and speaks and acts differently when responding to the mystery of God's coming to men. He describes this with some care:

Viewed more deeply however, in this seemingly insignificant dispute the basic characteristic of spiritual life came to expression, as this developed in the East in a radically different way than in the West, so that Greek dialectic saw itself overshadowed by Eastern mysticism. This involved the question of principle whether the divine operation upon the life of the spirit came directly and suddenly, without the intervention of historical life, from Above as direct, entirely *unvermittelt*, occurring apart from human assistance and ecclesiastical intervention; it is this which speaks directly to the serious-minded peasant and keeps alive within him his deeper religious life.<sup>12</sup>

No people develops its identity in a single century; this is the fruit of a long historical process. Nor can it be grasped without some knowledge of its dim and distant past. Deeply imbedded in the Slavic "soul" was mysticism which acknowledged the presence of unseen spiritual forces everywhere in the world around it. By the time early Russian principalities began to organize themselves, Orthodoxy, as congenial to that temper, was added to this to supply that cohesion needed to unify the people into a nation. Other factors contributed their share to this process for almost a

millennium. To all those Kuyper attempted to do justice. But inextricably interwoven into them, in what the Russians accepted or rejected, was attachment to the mysterious with its direct and overpowering appeal to the self. In its unchanging liturgy Orthodoxy brought God and the divine immediately into the lives of those who shared in the ceremonies. The Spirit in all his presence and power was always at hand. Nothing in history could ever change this.

With this in mind he now traced Russian history with its long periods of comparative submission to circumstances and its frequent, unexpected and violent eruptions.

As those Slavs who became the majority of the Russian people entered the land, they were soon contacted by missionaries from Constantinople. One of the first to be baptized was duchess Olga in 955. Under her grandson Orthodoxy was deliberately chosen by the court and imposed by force upon a largely heathen population. But in less than two generations it had won most hearts, no matter what superstitions still lingered in many lives. Churches and cathedrals were soon erected in many places, above all in Kiev. But side by side with these and often exerting an even greater influence on the people were the many monks, often solitary hermits, from whom they sought counsel. This Orthodoxy set the Russians sharply at odds with Poles, Czechs and other Slavs who had embraced the Roman form of Christianity. To the former the latter were heretics who, because they had forsaken the true faith, had to be turned from the error of their ways. Nothing has aggravated and angered the Russians more than Rome's continual proselytizing among the Slavic peoples throughout the centuries since the schism of 1054. With such a faith they were ready to suffer long, if this were God's mysterious will. But with that faith of Orthodoxy they also went into battle with every foe, assured that somehow victory would be theirs.

The first break in that unity appeared with the rise of the "old believers."<sup>13</sup> This occurred about the middle of the seventeenth century. Here the issue was clearly and profoundly religious. Those thousands upon thousands who broke with the Orthodox Church did so for the sake of

preserving unimpaired their faith which, so they believed, had been seriously compromised by the clergy.

Again the differences appear insignificant to most of us today. In 1654 patriarch Nikon of Moscow, then head of the Russian Orthodox Church, changed several of the ceremonies in the liturgy. The need for this seemed to him apparent. For centuries during the overlordship of the Tartars this church had lost much of its contact with Constantinople. And when printing was introduced into Russia, liturgical and other writings were often corrupted. After careful study of the best Byzantine manuscripts he ordered minor changes. Among these was the decision that from now on the people were to "make the sign of the cross" with three instead of two fingers. Immediately a storm of protest surged throughout the land. Many refused any longer to attend divine worship. To them the changes constituted a forsaking of the true and only faith. Soon they were called *raskolniki*, that is, schismatics, although to themselves they were the "old believers."

Fearing that the unity of the nation would be destroyed, the Czar ordered severe measures against the dissidents. But floggings, heavy fines, imprisonment and even the death sentence failed to produce the desired fruit. Multitudes remained adamant in their conviction as they fled into forests and sought refuge in caves. In small groups they assembled to strengthen each other in defense of their Orthodoxy.

The consequences of their intransigence were profound.

As schismatics they no longer had access to the sacraments. No longer could they receive the Eucharist or have their children baptized. Even more, with no civil ceremony available, they could not be married. New patterns of life had to be adopted. Some turned away from marriage altogether. Others lived in concubinage, deeming this less of a sin than to defect from the divinely-ordained faith and its ceremonies. Still others castrated themselves. In all this they claimed for themselves the guidance of the Spirit. After some years many did return to the church and its priests

under protest and came to be called *popovstzy*. Those who refused were the *bez-popovstzy*, believers "without a priest." This group split into many strange sects during the centuries which followed. Some of them advocated burning their homes and farmsteads, even immolating themselves as a baptism by fire; others at times ran naked in the village streets and fields. The more restrained, however, soon came to be recognized as among the better class of Russians. Among them copies of the Bible could be found. In sharp contrast to the rest they did not take to strong drink. Many became merchants known for their honesty and generosity. Often their children made good use of what education was available. But during the centuries which followed they did not swerve from the convictions of their forebears.

Dissension in Russia was fostered to fully as great a degree when Peter the Great turned to the West and its influences. Now a "window" was opened to that world to which the Russians had long been strangers. Not only was the capital shifted from Moscow to St. Petersburg; also the polity of the Orthodox Church was transformed by the institution of the "Holy Synod" which soon became a tool of the state.<sup>14</sup> Westernization of the upper classes increased especially under Catherine the Great whose love for French writers made liberal ideas popular in court circles. Lavish expenses on their city palaces and country estates produced, together with the earlier imposition of serfdom, a growing estrangement between rich and poor, the urban and the rural population. And the latter throughout, led by some members of the upper classes, stedfastly resisted those pernicious ideas which robbed Russia of its unique place and calling among the nations. Out of this arose the "Slavophiles" who during the 19th century came to influence Russian national and international policies. To them the land was still "Holy Russia," the last bastion and defender of the faith of the forefathers.

All this was immeasurably complicated by the Napoleonic wars and their aftermath. No longer could that land and its people live in isolation. Many Russians had been exposed as soldiers to that civilization which had grown up in such a

different form in the West. Education especially in the growing cities became more widespread. Young people dissatisfied with social and political conditions in Russia turned to the West. Among these were those who upon their return became "terrorists." They were ready to sacrifice themselves even in death for immediate and far-reaching changes. Among the peasantry they found little if any following despite the poverty which clamored for change but to which the church paid far too little heed. And Kuyper attempts to explain this with these words:

A true Russian cannot think anything other than that all who live on the holy soil of Holy Russia wait for the *moment psychologique* to be incorporated into the Russian mother-church. He believes in the valid right of that spiritual conquest, and precisely from that faith springs the mystical power of those who strive for that goal.<sup>15</sup>

But, and this he would not have his readers forget, the same mystical trait among the peasants can be discerned among those who became revolutionaries.<sup>16</sup> This movement, while divided into many often antagonistic groups, spread especially in the cities. Here were industrial workers whose wages were insufficient to assure even the shabbiest livelihood. After the disaster of the Crimean War and even more after the stunning defeat of the country in the Russo-Japanese conflict, calls for immediate and thorough-going reform became far more strident. No halfway measures would provide satisfaction. This accounts, at least in part, for the assassination of Alexander II whose reform measures sharply contrasted with the tyranny of his father. In the decade before Kuyper visited Russia riots and other revolutionary activities had become widespread. These affected not only the workers but also the army and the navy. As a result even harsher measures came to be applied. Thus while the Czar was still widely acknowledged as "the little father" of his people, anger and antagonism against swollen and often corrupt and inept bureaucracies increased. Small wonder that westerners in those years saw the government sitting on a powder keg ready to explode at any time.

In this tense situation Kuyper, having read and seen much, recognized an almost insoluble contradiction. Not only growing dissatisfaction among such conquered peoples as the Poles, the Lithuanians and the Georgians, but even more the alienation of large numbers of the common people from both the church and especially the state (seen now by many as embodiment of "antichrist") boded ill for the future of that nation.

The contradiction which appears here is that on the one hand the organization of Russian life in the *Mir*, and even more clearly among the Cossacks, is quite autonomous and almost democratic, but that in the centralized organization of the Empire the most absolute autocracy prevails. To join organically a bond between the autonomous life below and the autocratic power above is almost impossible. Let the autonomous life of the lowest levels of Russian national life work itself upward, then the autocracy bursts asunder together with the Russian Empire. And conversely, let the autocracy penetrate more downward, then all autonomous life is at an end.<sup>17</sup>

This contradiction reached its nadir in the Revolution of 1917. Now glorious promises were held up to the people. Large numbers refused for a season to follow the lead of the revolutionaries. But all early attempts at moderate reform failed. In the Civil War which followed with such disastrous economic and social and religious consequences, the extremists gained the day. And for most in the West who cherish what freedoms they enjoy, Russia remains, despite its technological and social advances, a land filled with riddles. Far less freedom is accorded the masses than the peasantry enjoyed in the *Mir*. Life is controlled by the small group in power whose cruelties in some decades far exceeded those inflicted under the Czars. Yet the majority seem somehow to look for better days. One cannot help but wonder if, possibly, despite decades of religious suppression and oppression the Russian "soul" has remained basically unchanged.

## 5.

Kuyper's theory of historical development, set forth in his *De Gemeene Gratie* and in a more practical way in *Om de oude Wereldzee*, has been with justification subjected by many Reformed scholars to criticism. He, too, was child of his times and placed such strong stress on the "organic" that his views seemed reminiscent of Hegel. At the same time he stressed factors too frequently neglected by influential teachers of history in that day. Far more than a naturalistic sequence of "cause and effect" was at work in the course of man's life on earth. Here the sovereign God engaged in accomplishing his purposes with nations as well as with individuals. Nor did this God leave himself without a witness to himself in the created order and especially after Pentecost in the Word of redemption through Jesus Christ. The response of men and nations to this divine self-revelation determined, for good or ill, the lives of themselves and their descendants. To neglect the religious factor (in its deepest and broadest sense) when inquiring into man's life could only produce the misreading of history.

This approach, as we have seen, he took also when concentrating on Russia. Hence he linked rejection of the "filioque" clause to the original and deep-seated mysticism which characterized the early Slavs. Their adoption of Christianity in its Orthodox form was, according to him, determinative for nearly all that has occurred in that land since 988. Hence the profound differences which ever since have distinguished the Russians from nearly all western Europeans. This difference haunts us even now.

Scholars in recent years corroborate much of Kuyper's thesis.

Steven Runciman insists that "right worship was really more important in the Eastern Churches than right belief. . . . No one in Byzantium thought that theology was the exclusive concern of the clergy."<sup>18</sup> To which he adds this discerning statement:

The liturgy was something in which the whole congregation played its part, and even the decoration of the church

buildings was involved in it; the icons and the mosaic figures, too, are participants. They grew to resent very bitterly any criticism of their ritual and their practices, and were suspicious of attempts at innovation or alteration.<sup>19</sup>

Much the same has been affirmed by George Florovsky, an Orthodox theologian eager to acquaint the West with the spirit of the church which he served.

When divine truth is pronounced and expressed in the human tongue, the very words are transfigured. . . . Those words become sacred. . . . This signifies that in the adequate expression of a Divine Truth certain words, i.e. definite conceptions or ideas or a definite train of thought, have become eternalized and stabilized.<sup>20</sup>

Nor should the instinctive fear of and resistance to influences from the West by Russians on the daily level of their lives, even when eagerly adopted by some, be minimized. For generations Russian leaders especially in the church but also in the state have accused the West of destroying the human mind and soul. Of this O. Clement asks in "A Misunderstanding of Chalcedon?":

Is it not characteristic that after the schism of the eleventh century the Eastern Church was marked by a free prophetic spirit which (where necessary) reformed the Church from within; whereas in the West throughout the Middle Ages more and more heresies were claiming freedom in the name of the Holy Spirit?<sup>21</sup>

Kuyper was not straining at a gnat to swallow the camel in ascribing profound significance for Russian life and history to the stubborn rejection of "filioque," if we take seriously what also Adrian Fortescue has written. This Roman Catholic apologist, shortly after Kuyper's volume appeared from the press, insisted:

The Filioque is still the great shibboleth. This is the most obnoxious Latin heresy; we shudder to think what rivers of ink have flowed because of this question since Photius' happy thought of making this grievance against us.<sup>22</sup>

Nor--and here again we see how deeply this rejection has affected even the common people--has the distinction, puerile as it seemed to Fortescue and many today, between Eastern and Western theology been forgotten. He adds the following:

And they all know about it. Schoolboys even at the very beginning of their Catechism learn about this horrible heresy of the Latins on this point. . . . The young men of Athens who have dabbled in higher criticism and Darwinism are shaky about many points of the Christian faith, but on one point they never swerve: the Holy Ghost does not proceed from the Son.<sup>23</sup>

Russia together with its federated republics is by no means what it was in Kuyper's day. He already prophesied that changes of a profound kind would shake that nation to its foundations. It has taken a giant leap into the modern world. In technology, science, education, medicine and housing we recognize changes as profound as its political revolution. Hardly can it be questioned that it stands together with the United States as a dominant world power.

But has the "soul" of that people changed?

To answer this question attention must be paid to more than such externals as military hardware, medical advances and the adoption by its urban young people of western styles of clothes and music.

Seventy years of Communist repression and persecution of the Christian religion have not obliterated its influence. Even now millions faithfully adhere to the Orthodox Church, cherishing their icons and attending worship especially at Eastertide. Increasingly young people, too, are attracted to its mysterious liturgy. Reports of Communist officials participating in worship far from their own residence to escape detection are not infrequent. Nor could Stalin, in the horrendous days of World War II, consolidate his war effort against German invaders without recognizing the influence which the Orthodox faith wielded among the people. To fight for the motherland was to defend "Holy Russia," a mystical appeal completely foreign to peoples of

the West.

Far too often has this strange combination been ignored; hence some of the great difficulties which appear whenever the West attempts to deal with Russia.

This accounts for the disenchantment with Alexandr Solzhenitsyn of many in the West who first eagerly embraced him as one of them in their antipathy to present-day Russia. Of this Hedrick writes:

It was a shock that when his manifesto appeared, it offered not a model of an open, urban, scientific society joining the modern world but a mystic vision of a future-past, a dream of Holy Russia resurrected by turning inward into itself and pulling away from the 20th century.<sup>24</sup>

He regards him as "a mystical apostle of Holy Russia, a religious fundamentalist. . . . back-to-the-unspoilt-village Russian patriot."<sup>25</sup>

Fully as much as his spiritual and historical predecessors Solzhenitsyn regards the West as the source of every evil importation, including scientific technology as well as Marxism. He reminded the Kremlin (this was his "heresy") that Stalin rallied the people not around Communist imperialism, but called it back to its three roots: the village, the people and the Orthodox Church. That appeal to the "soul" did much to strengthen the stubborn resistance of old and young to the rapacious invader from the West who threatened the destruction of all that they and their forefathers had held dear. In those years, after terrible purges and persecutions, the Christian religion was still a mighty force in the land. Icons long sheltered in homes, monasteries and churches were again publicly displayed and venerated. It comes as no surprise, then, that Hedrick concludes:

No ancient smell is more vividly unforgettable than the exotic incense of an Orthodox mass and no institution more central to reascent Russianism than Orthodox Christianity. . . .It astonished me to see that it was primarily young people in their late teens and twenties who

congregated outside the old cathedrals for a glimpse of the rich pageantry within. But anyone who knows Russia understands that churches are her artistic glory.<sup>26</sup>

This, more than all the industrial complexes and military machinery, still stirs the Russian heart.<sup>27</sup>

In the light of the above (and much more that can be added to it) Kuyper's understanding of that land and its people does not seem wide of the mark.

He reminded his readers that no nation and its history can be understood apart from its religious impulses and convictions. Even something seemingly as insignificant as the rejection of the "filioque" clause, when placed in proper perspective, plays its role. Far too little attention is paid to this deepest dimension of human life in our homes, our churches and our schools when attempting to understand the significance of the events of our own time. Even if this is all we remember from Kuyper as an interpreter of history, we will have learned something which is invaluable for a Christian understanding of men and nations.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Here "philosophy of history" is not to be understood in a strictly scholarly sense; rather, as "life-and-world-view" which can be grasped apart from highly technical terms. For Kuyper this was "Calvinism, rooted in Scripture and the Reformed confessions." This he set in sharp distinction from modern secularism, Roman Catholicism and the Islamic faith in his Stone Lectures on that subject, given at Princeton University in 1898.
2. A. Kuyper, *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vol. (Leiden: J. H. Donner, 1902, 1903, 1904). All translations in subsequent notes are own own.
3. *De Gemeene Gratie*, 2:19. "Er werkt tweeerlei beginsel: het beginsel der *zonde* tegen God, en het beginsel der *genade* tegen de *zonde* in. Er is een tweeerlei leven: een leven uit de *zonde* en een leven uit de *genade*, of wilt ge uit het natuurlijke eenerzijds en uit het

bovennatuurlijke anderzijds.”

“Maar terwijl nu die tegenstelling zoo volstrekt mogelijk moet worden vastgehouden, komt ze in de werkelijkheid daarom niet zoo uit, omdat *beide* levensprincipiën in hun openbaring belemmerd worden. In de zonde komt de zonde niet zoo sterk uit, omdat de *gemeene gratie* haar stuit; maar ook in het kind van God komt het leven der genade niet zoo sterk uit, omdat het nog in zijn ontwikkeling belemmerd wordt door het *lichaam der zonde*.”

4. *De Gemeene Gratie*, 2:23-24. “Er is plan in de historie van ons menschelijk geslacht. Er wordt in de historie naar vast bestek een monumentaal gebouw opgetrokken. Al die deelen passen en sluiten ineen. Het is niet een eindelooze herhaaling van hetzelfde, maar een gestadige voortgang. Er loopt door alles een gouden draad, waaraan alles wordt voortgesponnen.”
5. *De Gemeene Gratie*, 2:24. “En dit is nu het aanbiddelijke in dit werk Gods door de gemeene gratie, dat haar werking op de enkele personen, in hun verschillende leeftijden, en de werking dierzelfde gemeene gratie op volk, geslacht, en gezin, en evenzoo haar werking op den geest van eeuw tot eeuw, alegader zoo ineen worden gestrengeld en dooreengeweven, dat altoos de eene werking op de andere past, en dat uit geheel dier werkingen *de historie der menschheid* voortkomt.”
6. *De Gemeene Gratie*, 2:660. “Overal waar de Gemeene Gratie den factor der Particuliere Genade mist, kwijnt ze en leidt ze slechts tot gebrekkige uitkomst. Overal daarentegen waar de factor der Particuliere genade op de Gemeene gratie inwerkt, en naarmate ze er krachtiger en meer intiem op inwerkt, komt de Gemeene gratie tot hare volle en rijker ontplooiing.”
7. *De Gemeene Gratie*, 2:660. “Gevolg is nu, dat men in China, die eeuwen lang niets dan de Gemeene gratie had, ten onzent Gemeene gratie en Particuliere genade. En het verschil en resultaat is, dat in China de Gemeene gratie wel formeel tot rijke ontwikkeling kwam, maar

- dat ze zakelijk op *laag* standpunt bleef staan; en dat daarentegen in ons land ook door het ongeloovige deel der maatschappijen menschelijk en zedelijk standpunt werd ingenomen, dat, in burgerlijken zin, bergen hoog boven dat van China uitsteekt.”
8. These three ethnic groups, closely related, still constitute a large majority of the population of the U.S.S.R. Over seventy percent despite declining birth rates. In 1900 nearly all the great Russians professed Orthodoxy, while among the Ukrainians and White Russians many were adherents of Roman Catholicism and Judaism. Cf. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, ed. David R. Barrett. (Nairobi, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 689.
  9. A. Kuyper, *Om de oude Wereldzee*, 2 vol. (Amsterdam: Van Holkema and Warendorf, 1907). The chapter on Russia is found in 1:102-163.
  10. *Wereldzee*, 1:123. “Dit leven in de *Mir* nu is een krachtig en kerngezond corporatief leven, dat de lichtzijde van het individueele leven mist, maar dan ook vrij bleef van de schaduwzijde door zijn ontbindenden, het egoïsme en de concurrentie prikkelenden invloed pleegt uit de oefenen. Het corporeele leven verhoogt het gevoel van saamhoorigheid en dit wekt de kracht, die in alle organisch saamleven schuilt.”
  11. *Wereldzee*, 1:123. “Als persoon voelt men zich minder vrij en onbevangen, maar als lid van de *Mir* en door de *Mir* als aller orgaan, bezit de Russische boer een corporatief vrijheidsbesef, dat hem tot een waardige figuur maakt, verplicht zich met de gemeenschappelijke bezigheden en belang van nabij in te laten, hem went aan debat, en dwingt om binnen zijn eigen kring over de beginselen, waarop heel de inrichting van zijn leven rust, na te denken.”
  12. *Wereldzee*, 1:125. “Dieper bezien echter sprak zich in dit schijnbaar nietig geschil metterdaad de verschillende grondtrek van het geestelijk leven uit, gelijk zich dit in het Oosten op geheel andere wijze dan in het Westen

ontwikkelde, zoodat de Grieksche dialectiek zich door de Oostersche mystiek overvleugeld zag. Het gold namelijk de principieele vraag of de goddelijke inwerking op het geestesleven rechtstreeks en plotseling, zonder tusschenschakel van het historisch leven, van Boven als plotseling, geheel *unvermittelt*, buiten menschelijke hulp en kerkelijke tusschenkomst omgaande, dat is 't wat den mystieken, den ernstigen Mouyik toespreekt, en het diepere religieuze leven in hem wakker houdt."

13. Cf. Robert O. Crummy, *The Old Believers and the World of Antichrist* (Madison, Milwaukee and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); also Frederick C. Conybeare, *Russian Dissenters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921); and Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1967) 28-30.
14. On the influence of the state on the church, see *Russian Orthodoxy and the Old Regime*, ed. Robert L. Nichols and Theofanos George Stavrou (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978) 142-169.
15. *Wereldzee*, 2:145. "Een echte Rus kan het zich niet anders voorstellen of al wat op de heilige aarde van het heilige Rusland leeft, wacht steeds op het *moment psychologique* om in de Russische moederkerk te worden ingelijfd. Hij gelooft aan het deugdelijk recht van die geestelijke verovering, en juist uit dat geloof komt de mystieke kracht op die het voorgestelde doel treft."
16. On the characteristics of the revolutionary movements in Russia Kuyper wrote: "De revolutionaire woeling in Rusland beweegt zich in gelijken mystieken tooverkring, en draagt daardoor een geheel ander karakter dan in het Westen" (*Wereldzee*, 1:145).
17. *Wereldzee*, 1:153. "De tegenstrijdigheid waarop men hier stuit, is dat eenerzijds de inrichting van het Russische leven in de *Mir*, en nog sterker onder de Kozakken, zeer autonoom is, en bijna democratisch is ingericht, maar dat in de concentratie van het Rijk de

autonome leven beneden en die autocratische macht van boven een organischen band te leggen, is bijna onmogelijk. Laat men het autonome leven uit de onderste lagen van het Russische volksleven naar boven doorwerken dan spat de autocratie, maar daarmee ook het Russische Rijk uiteen. En laat men omgekeerd de autocratie dieper naar beneden doordringen, dan is het met alle autonome leven omlaag gedaan.”

18. Steven Runciman, *The Eastern Schism: A Study of the Papacy and the Eastern Churches during the XIth and XIIth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) 7.
19. Runciman, *Schism*, 8.
20. Quoted by Methodios Fouyas in *Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) 122.
21. Quoted by Fouyas, *Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism*, 81.
22. Adrian Fortescue, *The Orthodox Eastern Church* (New York: Burt Franklin, repr. 1957) 372.
23. Fortescue, *The Orthodox Eastern Church*, 373.
24. Hedrick, *The Orthodox Eastern Church*, 417.
25. Hedrick, *The Orthodox Eastern Church*, 425.
26. Hedrick, *The Orthodox Eastern Church*, 432.
27. Religious statistics on the U.S.S.R. can hardly be called reliable. Over fifty percent of the people, according to *World Christian Encyclopedia*, claim to be either atheists or agnostics. Yet the Russian Orthodox Church, despite repressions, still claims over 70,000,000 adherents, more than a fourth of the total population of the U.S.S.R. (689-697).