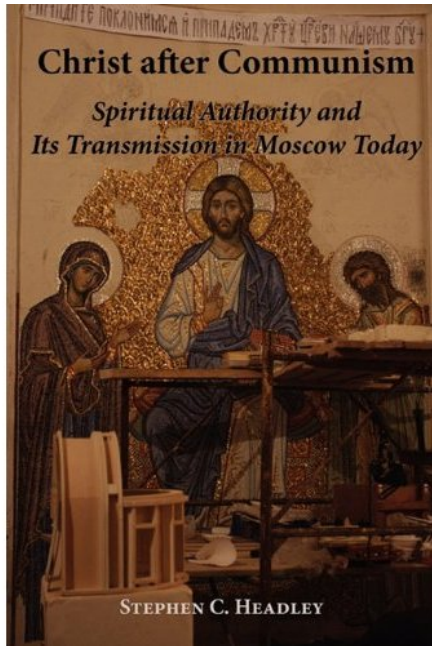


Stephen C. Headley, *Christ after Communism: Spiritual Authority and Its Transmission in Moscow Today*, Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2010, pp. 559.
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By Dn. Lasha Tchantouridze

The collapse of the Soviet Union some 20 years ago signaled yet another dramatic change in the long and tumultuous history of Russia. The quick demolition of a pseudo-progressive Soviet social edifice has brought Russia back to its

brutish and backward self, but it has also liberated the Orthodox Church in Russia, the only institution in that country truly devoted to spiritual and physical well-being of its people. Throughout centuries of persecution and oppression by deeply corrupt or outright godless regimes, the Church of Russia has managed to maintain its spiritual identity, integrity, and the vision of its central place in country's cultural heritage. Stephen Headley's current book investigates transmission of Church's spiritual authority from its pre-communist period through the seven decades of the Bolshevik persecution to the contemporary Russian society. Three parishes from Moscow, the current capital of Russia,¹ are selected as case studies.

¹ The Bolshevik regime transferred Russia's capital from St. Petersburg to Moscow in 1918.

The book consists of two parts and ten chapters. The first part investigates "Contemporary Orthodox Culture in Moscow." The second part of the volume is devoted to "Moscow Parishes." The discussion on Orthodox culture extends beyond Moscow, and this is helpful – very few good things in Russia have come out of Moscow alone. Among other things, three northern Russian monastic communities, Valaam, Solovky, and Bielozersky, and the institution of eldership in the Russian Church are addressed here. In fact, the institution of 'the elder' is paramount in understanding the phenomenon of transmission of spiritual authority in Russia.

The author uses such themes as memory, prayer and popular culture, faith, social relations, iconography and church chant to draw a portrait of contemporary Orthodox culture in Moscow. The "memory" chapter briefly describes Orthodox praxis to the uninitiated reader, outlines the meaning of the Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy, and various rituals and practices. It even provides a schematic description of "remembrance of beliefs and a transmission of faith" to the more conceptually oriented reader. A chronology of important events in church-state relations in Russia in the last 50 years or so is also helpful. Of especial interest in this part of the book is the chapter devoted to iconography and choir work in parishes – these two crucial pillars of the Orthodox Church in Russia were primarily nurtured and preserved by women during the harsh Soviet times. It would be no exaggeration to argue that in the struggle of will and endurance the Russian Babushka soundly beat the KGB, and allowed the Church to regain its glory.

The second part, "Moscow Parishes," is based on Headley's extensive anthropological field work in three parishes in and around Moscow. The themes of restoration, preservation, and creation of parishes serve as the organizing principles of chiefly historical review

of the lives of three Moscow parishes: St Nikolai Klenniki, St. Nikolai Kuznetsky, and the Tsaritsino parish of the Mother of God of Lifegiving Spring. The author who is a trained anthropologist systematically examines experiences of these parishes, and as an Orthodox priest himself, approaches the subject matter with great love and humility.

Father Headley's work is very interesting as he handles his investigations both as an experienced anthropologist, and a practicing Orthodox Christian. Many themes discussed in this book oscillate between social science and practical faith. Further, *Christ after Communism* is an excellent study of relations between faith and politics, church and the state. The book also provides many different and extensive appendices, including: sources for Russian liturgical music, a special order for the service of baptism, a Russian-English glossary, and an extensive bibliography.

Some repetitions and spelling errors in transliterating Soviet names (rather a common occurrence in English-language books) aside, the book is well written and composed. Headley's style allows the reader to experience vividly both joyful and tragic events in the lives of clergy and faithful of the Russian Church. Stephen Headley's book will appeal to a wide audience, including academics from various academic disciplines, students and watchers of Russia, and of course, Orthodox Christians.

About the Reviewer: Deacon Lasha Tchantouridze, PhD, of St Nicholas parish in Narol, MB, teaches church history at the St Arseny Institute, Winnipeg, MB.