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One Exceptional Figure Stood Out

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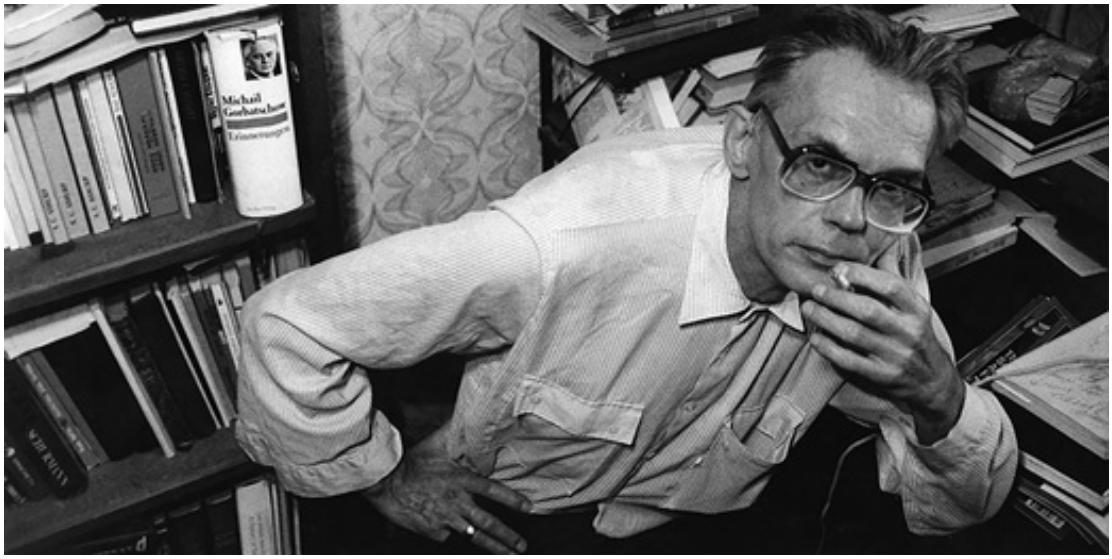
Famously, Russia gave the concept of an intelligentsia to the world. Though the term itself was first recorded in Poland, it was in Russia that it became common currency in the 1860s, reaching the West some two decades later. In historical memory, it remains the cultural marker perhaps most classically associated with the country to this day. The greatness of Russian literature in the 19th century, in a line of writers who so often appeared the conscience of their society, has much to do with that. But in Russia itself, the term in that period referred to a broader phenomenon: a passionate company of political thinkers and critics speaking out against the injustices of the established order, in the name of those it oppressed, and proposing ways to redeem or overthrow it – tribunes of the people who could not yet hear them. Belinsky, Herzen and Bakunin; the Aksakov brothers; Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov; Mikhailovsky and Kropotkin: these were among the emblematic figures of this tradition, which culminated in the leaders of the two wings, Bolshevik and Menshevik, of revolutionary Marxism. Journalists, exiles, editors, underground conspirators, this was by definition an intelligentsia without positions or place in the institutions of the state.



By the turn of the century, however, there had emerged another kind of intelligentsia in late tsarism. The creative explosion in the arts of the Silver Age, flaring across painting, music, theatre and ballet, as well as literature, is well known. Comparable, and scarcely less

remarkable, was the proliferation of original minds in scholarship, with the emergence of a major intellectual stratum based for the first time in universities, one of the most glittering constellations of the new century. Burgeoning before and during the Great War, its native development was largely cut off by the Russian Revolution. The Bolsheviks, who came from the earlier style of intelligentsia, had little understanding of the value of the newer one, and – in no mood to tolerate disinterested research or deviant ideas in the aftermath of the Civil War – drove most of it into exile, without realising the enormous loss they were inflicting on the country or their cause by doing so. If writers, reluctant to be separated from the land of their language, generally remained – Bunin, Aldanov, Nabokov were the exceptions, Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak the rule; not to speak of those who sided with the revolution (Platonov, Babel, Mayakovsky) – the human sciences were badly affected. Of those who stayed, the Formalists and their kin survived best: Shklovsky, Tynyanov, Eikhenbaum; Voloshinov and Bakhtin; Propp. Political science, sociology, economics, literary history were another matter. Ostrogorski died in time; Kondratiev and Chayanov were shot; Mirsky too. From those who were expelled or fled, Western Europe and America were the principal, though not exclusive, gainers: in linguistics, Jakobson and Trubetskoy; in history, Rostovtsev, Vernadsky, Postan; in economics, Leontief and Domar; in anthropology, Shirokogorov; in sociology, Sorokin; in philosophy, Koyré and Kojève. Other names could be added.

Once Stalin was gone, dissidents within Russia revived the 19th-century tradition of the *intelligent* as outspoken critic of the established order. Solzhenitsyn, Bukovsky and others attacked communist rule in much the same way as their forebears had tsarism; while with loosening controls in universities and (especially) research institutes, there was a modest recovery in academic life. The fall of the Soviet system undercut both. In the new Russia of oligarchs and fixers, in which money became the measure of all value, there was no place for old-fashioned moralism – Solzhenitsyn becoming an uncomfortable anachronism in his own lifetime, other dissidents not even returning from exile – while pitiable conditions of work in universities, starved of funds, forced many academics to make ends meet in murkier ways, or migrate. Politically speaking, widespread collusion with the Yeltsin regime lamed much resistance to its successor. In such conditions, it was now the corruption and commercialisation of the intelligentsia itself that became a target of the country's leading ironist, in Pelevin's scathing portrait of *Generation P*.

But in the flatlands of post-communism, one exceptional figure always stood out. Uniquely, in the mind and character of Dmitri Furman the two distinct incarnations of the Russian intelligentsia came together, at a time when both seemed to have all but disappeared. Virtually unknown outside the country, and little registered within it, he was a scholar of comparative religion and an anatomist of the aftermath of the USSR who joined political integrity and intellectual originality in a body of work that addressed the fate of his country,

and the past of the world, in ways that were equally and strikingly passionate and dispassionate.

An unusual family background accounted in part for his independence of spirit. Born in 1943, Furman was the offspring of a brief wartime liaison between his mother and an artist killed in the war. He was brought up by his grandmother and her sister, whose brother Boris Ioganson was a leading socialist realist painter of the time, and president of the Soviet Academy of Arts when Furman was a teenager. Of Swedish origin (Johanson), this line was from the service nobility: his great-grandmother remembered as dancing with the tsar at a Smolny prom, Boris himself fighting with the Whites under Kolchak in the Civil War, before switching sides to the Red Army and making his career under Stalin.

This was a family, Furman said, that 'naturally hated the Revolution but perceived it as a kind of periodically inevitable natural disaster'. For such people, 'revolution is always blood, chaos and the "rule of louts". But once it's over, everything calms down and life becomes normal again. Russia had become a bit weird, with a ridiculous Jewish ideology' – but Russia remained Russia, and 'Russian artists have to celebrate Russian rulers and the ideology they preach.' His mother, however, went on to make two marriages with Jewish husbands, the first an artist who gave Dmitri his surname, the second a scion of the original revolutionary elite, whose father had been a militant of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) under tsarism, later shot by Stalin. His son fought with Smersh in the Second World War, supposedly with some role in the surrender of Von Paulus at Stalingrad, before coming home damaged from the battle for Budapest in 1944. After the war this stepfather remained a fervent believer in communism, but not in Stalin, in time befriending others – mostly Jews like himself – who had returned from the camps. Observing such incompatible outlooks, Furman said, he felt from the beginning 'ideologically detached from all that was said and done around me. This detachment never became anger. It aroused curiosity in me, not faith.'

At school, he realised that he was being taught Marxism because he was in Moscow, as a boy in Cairo would be taught Islam – an established creed like any other. When he got to university, he chose ancient history as his subject, a field too arcane for much interference by officialdom, in which he could study the theological disputes of early Christianity with the quarrels of the early RSDLP, whose minutes he was also reading, in mind. In 1968 he completed a level-headed dissertation on Julian the Apostate, a ruler psychologically unbalanced but programmatically more coherent than he was often given credit for being, whose correspondence he translated. A year earlier, he had published his first piece in *Novy Mir*, remarking of a recent discussion of the 'Asiatic mode of production' that the strong disagreements it aroused were to be welcomed as normal and natural in the development of any science, the absence of which could only be a morbid symptom.

It had never been his intention to be confined to ancient history. Disciplinary divisions being less rigid in the Soviet system than in the West, he could transfer without difficulty from the history to the philosophy faculty at Moscow University; thereafter first to the Institute for Study of the Labour Movement, and then – at the end of the 1970s – of the United States and Canada, at the Academy of Sciences. Making his way through these institutions, he was urged to cast off the misleading handicap of a Jewish surname. Loyal to the memory of his first stepfather, he declined. By this time, he recalled, there were virtually no Marxists left in the humanist intelligentsia to which he belonged: a milieu contiguous with déclassé dissident circles on one side and the upholstered nomenklatura elite on the other, it was generally amorphous in outlook but united in dislike of Soviet power. He believed in the official ideology even less than those he frequented, and had done so for longer: an unconditional *zapadnik*, he was convinced that the future of the country lay in the achievement of the type of orderly and durable freedom responsible for the success of Western societies. But he felt less repressed rage – virtually none – against the communist system than most of his friends or acquaintances. He neither feared the CPSU, nor expected anything particularly bad from it. Confident that Russia would eventually become a democratic society, he viewed democracy simply as a normal attribute of a given age of humanity, as literacy, firearms or railways had been of other ages. There were grounds for apprehension about the transition to it, which might even see a weak kind of anti-communist fascism – he imagined the change of street names: Prospekt Solzhenitsyn, Vlasov Avenue, White Guard Boulevard – but it would pass. He felt no impulse to political action. Ambition for power or money was foreign to him. Academic by temperament, he loved books, shunned clamour, and was averse to meetings of any sort. There was research to be done.

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Comparative religion would be his field. That had formed the most continuous, consolidated block of inquiry in Weber's vast sociological enterprise, producing his most achieved monographs – starting with Protestantism and proceeding through Confucianism and Hinduism to ancient Judaism – and generating the leitmotif of his life's work; pursuit of the economic logic of extra-mundane beliefs that had given birth to a rationalised modern capitalism, and its existential consequences, in the West rather than in any other part of the world. Combining extraordinary erudition of detail – his later writing on China, India and ancient Israel is much more impressive than his relatively thin early sally on Protestantism – with a battery of novel theoretical concepts, the range and depth of Weber's undertaking compose the greatest single monument of classical sociology.

If we consider the field since, however, it is striking how limited in horizon, and regressive in direction, is much of what has appeared. While the history of singular religions – principally, but not exclusively, of Christianity and Judaism – has registered remarkable advances,

comparison of them has not. One reason for that, no doubt, is simply the weight of Weber's precedent itself, intimidating enough for any posterity. It is noticeable that the one outstanding exception, the remarkable work of Jonathan Zittell Smith, a brilliant mind by any measure, should avoid so much as a mention of Weber's name in connection with his subject. In it comparison alters focus, completely. Taking not only an expressly anthropological approach to the study of religion, but anthropological fieldwork from pre-literate societies for much of its material, it parallels findings from the Moluccas or the Congo with texts from the ancient Near East or Mediterranean Late Antiquity in a series of bravura demonstrations. The polemical motive behind this strategy is explicit: to shun what Smith terms the 'unprincipled nature' of the list of so-called 'world' religions associated with large geopolitical entities, in favour of 'minor' religions lumped together with the 'primitives' who exemplify them. In practice, Smith's scope includes Judaism and early Christianity. Standard biblical studies of these are robustly attacked as products of an arrogant Protestant hegemony.[1] Weber's problematic, and its range, are pointedly ignored.

If the exceptional nature of Smith's gifts has made him not only an eminence but something of an isolate, his work has given a quirkish lustre to a turn in the field that has been much more general, and equivocal. That derives from two inter-related sources, one stemming from Frazer's *Golden Bough*, the other from Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, each taking preliterate practices and beliefs as the keys for understanding the phenomenon of religion at large. Frazer's magpie compilations were soon discredited, but his methods had a sequel in the prolific output of the Romanian mystagogue Mircea Eliade, an adept of Indian tantrism who instructed the Iron Guard in the insights of Gandhi, and went on to produce a torrent of more or less arbitrary morphologies of assorted rituals and myths held by 'archaic man', presented as an antidote to the 'terror of history'. More soberly, Durkheim's argument that religion, defined by its separation of the sacred from the profane, was at bottom society's worship of itself in a set of collective representations assuring it moral cohesion, survived his handling of Australian totemism and hope that the Third Republic would find some equivalent to secure it against revolution, to become a background inspiration for a good deal of later French thought. Falling in line with a Gallic tradition stretching from Robespierre's Cult of the Supreme Being through Tocqueville's conviction that political stability always required a transcendent faith to Comte's Religion of Humanity, Durkheim's approach took its place in what might be called a multi-authored pendant – or riposte – to Weber, a kind of 'Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Solidarism'. Whatever the merit or otherwise of these meditations on the need for a civil religion, not a few from distinguished minds, an insistence on common presuppositions of any collective life inhibited much taxonomic thrust.

If such was, roughly speaking, the state of the art in what always remained a relatively recondite branch of learning, the last decades have seen religion move sharply up the public

agenda, as an object of political preoccupation. In a context altered by increased immigration in Europe and Kulturkampf in America, and increased imperial operations by both, four anxious tendencies now populate the field. On the one hand, postcolonial postures have generated a considerable literature rejecting the very idea of 'religion' as a figment of the Orientalist imagination, confecting an imaginary Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or Confucianism for the colonial purposes of the West.[2] Counterpointing these, earnest Western denials of any necessary connection between modernity and secularisation – there is a Protestant and a Catholic version of this – hail the persistence or revival of assorted brands of Christianity as proof that faith in the divine is, thankfully, as strong as ever.[3] In a third variant, at a loftier level where Taylor and Dworkin join hands, a philosophy of belief assures readers that whatever they may think, religion still provides the spiritual springboard of their lives, while a philosophy of disbelief informs them of the vital need for religion, even if they can dispense with god.[4] Last but not least is the contention – Rawls and Habermas resonant, official pronouncements galore – that all major religious creeds are basically at one, sharing a treasury of common values with liberal humanism in a 'post-secular age': a celestial *pensée unique* to match the terrestrial version below, enshrined in countless eirenic textbooks on Faiths of the World.[5] A sub-variant joins the sociology of Parsons with the philosophy of Jaspers in wonder at the simultaneous emergence of transcendent creeds – Greek, Jewish, Chinese, Indian – in an Axial Age of religious awakening, an evolutionary leap forward in mankind's journey to modernity, of which we are still the fortunate heirs.[6]

Religion is thriving; religion is everywhere; religion is one; don't even call it religion. All in one fashion or another are impeccably right-thinking, all protective of their object. Only the second allows of any comparisons at all. But these typically amount to little more than registers of the degree to which the various Western societies have clung to their denominations, and the reasons that some – the United States commendably the most – have done so more stoutly than others.[7] That secularisation continues unabated across the advanced world is now so disregarded, if so obvious, a truth that a level-headed demonstration of it in unanswerable detail – it includes the United States – should have to be subtitled *In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*.[8] In such a landscape, it is no surprise that Weber's legacy should be at a discount. In effect, serious contrastive scrutiny of the major world religions is now all but taboo; risking analysis of differences of outlook is incompatible with the political correctness – limp or strident, as the variant may be – of the period. The maxim of an apprehensive prudence has become the tic of an unspoken phobia: comparisons have never been more odious.

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In Russia under Brezhnev, of course, none of this obtained. Nor, however, did easy access to Western scholarship in the field, classical or contemporary. In conditions of isolation, as

Furman himself remarked, Russian thinkers of his generation were inevitably in some degree autodidacts, always liable to reinvent the bicycle. Furman was also, as his friend and best commentator Georgi Derluguian noted, by temperament a pragmatic researcher, little interested in intellectual genealogies or engagement with parallel bodies of work.[9] So it remains unclear how far he started writing, consciously or otherwise, in the wake of Weber, and indeed how much he knew of his work at the time. At all events, probably by happenstance rather than influence, his opening choice of topics coincided with Weber's. His first book, *Religion and Social Conflicts in the USA* (1981), focused on the role of Protestantism in American history and society, flanked soon afterwards by an essay on the ideology of the Reformation in early modern Europe. Weber's *Protestant Ethic*, written just before and after his trip to the US in 1904, set out to show that the inner-worldly asceticism of Puritan doctrines had been a decisive condition of the rise of capitalism in the West – in effect, though he would later deny this, the critical *differentia specifica* separating Occidental development from the rest of the world. For Furman, this was too narrow a vision: the implications of the split in Latin Christianity were not merely or even principally economic, but of much broader scope, and the relevant canvas for considering them was not capital as such, but modern bourgeois society as a whole. Where Weber essentially whittled the drive of Protestant theology down to the notion of 'calling' – a biographically rooted obsession of his own that he overextended backwards – Furman located its explosive dynamic not in the realm of will, but of knowledge.

Historically, specific to Christianity as a world religion was the extreme 'anti-formalism' of the teaching of its founder. Jesus left no written texts, and no more than a handful of parables. Not his preaching, but the miracle of his death and resurrection was the revelation that defined the new faith. Once, however, the community of believers had grown to a point where they encompassed the rulers of the empire, the construction of a universal church required a codification of the faith that over time produced the extreme opposite of its original anti-formalist simplicity – an exceptionally ramified formalisation of doctrine overlaying the artless gospels themselves, its very rigidity at once precautionary lid on a cauldron of primordial impulses still simmering below, and psychological compensation for them. As in every major religion, Furman argued, this formalisation eventually detonated a revolt calling for a return to its initial inspiration. Distinctive of Protestantism was that its turn to the past unlocked a logic of the future. For in rejecting the institutional authority of the church in the name of the scriptures, the Reformers – scholars without charismatic authority, neither saints nor prophets – involuntarily opened the door to their interpretation by anyone.

Epistemologically, the medieval church's synthesis of ancient philosophical rationalism and Christian mythology had never been entirely stable, but it had supplied a comprehensive

account of this world and the next, and the path of the believer from one to the other. Protestantism, in discarding this sophisticated cosmology for the bare letter of the scriptures, was ostensibly regressive. But from its irrational premises issued non-dogmatic conclusions. For since the Bible itself said relatively little about the natural world, empirical science could proceed unchecked by Aristotelian axioms, and since it had even less to say about many problems of contemporary life, a zone of ethical indeterminacy arose, where the individual conscience alone could be the guide – Puritans clinging to a handful of biblical prescriptions with such intensity because they had so few safety rails otherwise. The unwitting result was an immense liberation of human energies, leading in due course to a reconstruction of every sphere of social life. Weber's conception of the Protestant ethic offered a psychology of the capitalist entrepreneur, but alteration of monetary drives was at best a peripheral aspect of the Reformation. Capitalism itself was a far more complex phenomenon than an economy based on private enterprise, comprising a unitary socioeconomic formation whose relations of production could not exist without forces of production that included new levels of science and technology, popular education, national consciousness, legal and political guarantees of private property.

Protestantism was connected with all these interacting elements. It was enough to think of its insistence that the Bible be translated and read in the vernacular to see its impact on the growth of mass literacy and national identity. Critical in the last resort, however, was its role in enabling the emergence – before factories, laboratories or elections – of a new type of person, trusting his own judgment yet treating his conclusions as fallible and allowing for his own moral errors. This proto-bourgeois individual was the cultural-historical premise for all the processes of capitalist development. Not that the Reformers themselves ever envisaged these. In seeking to give new form to the anti-formal impulses of early Christianity, they could not help repeating in some fashion the trajectory of the Catholic Church, soon dividing in dogmatic disputes themselves. But the crust of their formalisations was much weaker, the magma below it erupting more easily. New sects arose on one side, and sceptical religious indifference on the other. Under dual attack, the Protestant centre could not hold, and toleration arrived.

In the New World, what were the consequences? Furman's book on the United States offered a detailed empirical sociology of American churches, denominations and sects in the 20th century. Its focus became the hallmark of his comparative work henceforward: the influence of religion on not the economic but the political life of society.[10] During his trip to the US, Weber had taken some note of the role of Protestant sects in sustaining civic associations in the country, but it was a passing interest: such springs of active life were doomed, he thought, to be overtaken by the same general processes of bureaucratisation that were proving so relentless in Europe. Furman's concern was framed very differently. Why, he asked at the

outset, had France known four revolutions since the 18th century, and some 15 constitutions, and the United States just one of each? Could religion have something to do with it?

Bourgeois society in America, he argued, had from the beginning combined exceptional dynamism with extreme stability: a combination that could not be understood apart from the peculiar salience of Protestantism in its formation. For, on the one hand, there was the unfettering of a drive for knowledge (Harvard founded within 16 years of the landing of the *Mayflower*, nine colleges and forty printing presses by 1769, when there were still just two universities in England), yet aversion to abstract thought – practicality becoming the measure of cognition, and success the material sign of it, in an open-ended process of development whose very flexibility insured the social order against shocks to it. On the other hand, there was biblical respect for the immutability of the constitution, treated as if it were not only the law of the land but of the Lord, at once trumping the will of the people and supplying compensation for the emotional emptiness of the revolution, whose tasks were politically limited in a settler society without feudalism or absolutism. This had remained a country still so saturated with religion that at the height of the Cold War more Americans identified communism with atheism than with the abolition of private property. Though officially church and state were separated, the reigning ideology of the nation mingled religious rituals and symbols with secular forms and themes in a promiscuous potpourri whose very lack of clear divisions or borders was permissive of continual economic and social change.

In these rapids, the churches had themselves evolved, not only adapting to but even at times (the Civil Rights Movement) quickening them, if typically in a pragmatic style neutralising more radical transformations. Sects aside, membership of the principal denominations was now a question of family tradition more than doctrinal differentiation. If the higher the class affiliation of a church (and so its educational level), the more liberal its orientation, with the clergy usually in advance of the laity, that lay in the logic of religious reform itself, which having unbound the dynamic of scientific knowledge could not escape the consequences for its own belief system. After the shattering of so many inherited moral precepts and myths in the 1960s, a conservative reaction set in during the 1970s, bringing a political and theological swing to the right, along with an assortment of countercultural fads of every kind. But by now the secularisation of values – polls showed most Americans already accepted the idea of a black president, if not yet imagining gay marriage – could not be halted. The immanent development of faith was destroying the foundations on which it rested. If the bourgeois order was to persist in the United States, new forms and means of integrating the individual and society would have to be found.

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After *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber embarked on the first of his comparative studies of

religion, with a work on its forms in China that ended with an extended contrast between Confucianism and Puritanism. Here too his focus was economic: why had imperial China failed to develop capitalism, as the West had done? Confucianism, he argued, lacked the vital imperative of a salvation religion to observe a 'methodical conduct of life' that had produced the ascetic devotion of the Puritan entrepreneur to accumulation in Europe. Its form of rationalism was too low-pressure and ritualistic, failing to free itself sufficiently from the magic rampant in the subculture of Taoism, a popular supplement it could never suppress. Still – here Weber conceded what he bracketed in Europe – the limitations of Chinese religion were not prime movers, but the product of a social configuration. Blocking the emergence of capitalism structurally, not just psychologically, was the perpetual dominance of a patrimonial bureaucracy amid the absence of feudal lords, free towns and an autonomous church.

Reversing the order of their inquiries, Furman had in fact written on Confucianism before he tackled Protestantism, co-authoring a remarkable essay – more systematically comparative than Weber's – in 1974, when he was in his early thirties. He was familiar with *The Protestant Ethic* by the time he was working on the Reformation and US religion, but it is less clear whether he knew of Weber's writing on China. At all events, his analysis of Confucianism, matched point by point against Christianity, was quite distinct. Historically, the two creeds were each responses to crises in an anterior order. In Palestine, Judaism always rested on an antinomy: God was universal, yet had picked out just one small community as his chosen people. Conquest by Rome dealt a huge blow to this pretension. Political resistance proved futile; three times Jews rose in revolt against Roman rule, and each time were crushed. But there was a religious route out of the crisis in the teaching of Jesus, an ecstatic who believed in his own divinity, which Paul could transform into a faith beyond Judaism, no longer defined by the relation between God and his people, but God and the individual: a religion in which not observance of the Law, but love of the Almighty was the sole commandment.

In China, during the only period of prolonged internal division in the country's history, when the late Zhou realm was wrenched apart into rival states descending into war, Confucius – a sage, not an ecstatic – offered a solution to the widespread sense of moral and social decay with a vision of order, based like Paul's on the reworking of an earlier tradition, but a very different one. Absent from Zhou religion was not only any fetishisation of objects in nature, or anthropomorphic pantheon of gods, but any personal deity of a Judaic type. The impersonal order of heaven was alone divine: the seat of truth, wisdom and justice, but cold and indifferent to human beings. Inhospitable to any mythology, its worship generated no specialised body of priests, its rituals assigned to officials as an ancillary function of their work. On earth, reverence was due above all to ancestors.

Confucius – as represented by disciples long afterwards – altered this heritage much less than

Paul would bend the Torah. The abstract conception of heaven and the cult of forebears remained. But what was already the drift of ancient religion towards a moral-ritualistic rationalism, in which society was conceived on the model of a patriarchal family, was developed and codified in the ethical doctrine he would preach. The highest values were knowledge (as opposed to understanding), duty and self-control, in a harmony of which music was the ritual expression. The basic duty was consideration for others, according to their rank. Rulers were owed obedience by their subjects, as parents by their children, and husbands by their wives. But should they fail in their duties of good government, they forfeited the mandate of heaven and could be removed. In this cosmology, the priorities of existence were terrestrial. Distrustful of metaphysics, Confucius declined to speculate whether there was an afterlife. There was no revelation, and the flesh was not sinful. The time was out of joint, but its remedy was plain: a 'rectification of names' to restore the true relation between words and things, rules and deeds, as they had existed thousands of years before, under the legendary sage-kings Yao, Shun and Yu. With this doctrine, a decisive twist was given to the cult of ancestors, enormously strengthening intellectual orientation to the past, in fixing an imaginary social order at the beginning of time as an immutable standard of right living. What a redemption to come would be for Christians, an age long gone became for Confucians.

In both cases, the runic sayings of the founders required an institutional machinery for conversion into formalised creeds: the church in Europe, the examination system in China, each a limited channel of social mobility, but opposite in their attitudes to belief and power. Armed with an elaborate theology that claimed absolute truth, Christianity could tolerate no alternative system of religious belief. Confucian doctrine was meagre by comparison, not only scanting ontology, let alone gnoseology, but also lacking much purchase in the sphere of emotions, or response to existential problems. To meet the psychological needs it could not satisfy, masses and literati alike – the one openly, the other more privately – resorted, at differing levels of sophistication, to Buddhism or Taoism. Once it no longer faced any challenge as official doctrine, after the Tang, Confucianism could coexist with these unruffled. The scholar-gentry who ran the state were first administrators, and only secondarily ideologues: their energies were not concentrated on issues of belief. There were no quarrelsome Church Councils, and only sporadic persecution of witches. They could afford to be less rigorist.

In matters of state, the roles were reversed. Early Christianity was not concerned with the affairs of this world. Jesus enjoined acceptance of whatever political authority there might be, and left scarcely any social teaching. The Confucian system of ethics, on the other hand, was before all else a social doctrine. Political authority was only acceptable if it conformed to that. In practice, to entrench itself as the official ideology of the state, Confucianism had to

compromise with Legalism – a body of thought in principle anathema to it, which separated the exercise of power from morality and custom – and over time came to emphasise duty at the expense of sympathy rather than as an instruction to it, in an authoritarian syncretism that tolerated no dissent. In Europe, vice versa, lacking any developed juridical or political axioms of its own, Christianity could get along with secular power in any number of shapes – Germanic codes, Roman law, French absolutism – without undue strain, so long as it enjoyed a monopoly of religious faith. Conflicts between belief and power arose in both systems. But in China they were inherently more limited. Officials had a duty to criticise rulers who – corrupted by eunuchs or courtiers – strayed from Confucian norms, if necessary paying with their life for doing so; and if degeneration went too far, scholars might join or even lead peasant uprisings against them. But in the absence of any coherent political alternative, the cyclical overthrow of dynasties strengthened rather than weakened the Confucian monopoly of legitimacy, becoming a mechanism not of social change but social regulation, whose effect was rather to stabilise the established order. In the West, clashes between church and state – not to speak of wars between states of opposite confessional allegiance, once Christianity divided – were far more consequential.

Historically, Confucianism was a more rational belief system than Christianity, and for long a more tolerant one, closer to a modern humanism. But that tolerance was also an expression of the practical cast of its reason, its indifference to abstract truth. For Christianity, on the other hand, truth was a transcendent value: the revelation of a personal God. Christian intolerance was rooted in the absolutism of this conception of truth, whose intransigence proved more favourable in the long run to the emergence of science. So too was a soteriology of the future, rather than an idolatry of the past. Psychologically, answering not to the external dictates of custom but the inner voice of conscience, the personality ultimately emergent from the Reformation was more fraught and less integrated, but also freer than the Confucian scholar bound hand and foot by ritual and etiquette. In these respects, Furman concluded, Christianity proved in the end more hospitable than Confucianism to cultural creativity and social change. No value judgment was involved, just one of the relative weight of their ideals in the development of their lands of reference.

Composed during the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, at a time of maximum tension between the Soviet Union and China, Furman's essay abstained from comment on the political legacies of Confucianism. He had not the slightest sympathy for Maoism, but was also wary of the sinophobia rampant in Russia at the time, in this case – his debut – withholding the contemporary deductions that feature in all his subsequent work on religion. When he came to write about India, more than a decade later, these had pride of place. Weber's study of Hinduism and Buddhism, reflecting period fascination in Wilhelmine Germany with Indian mysticism, was much broader in scope and richer in detail than *The*

Protestant Ethic. Its organising preoccupation, however, remains the economic ethics of subcontinental faiths. Furman refers to it, but his reconstruction of Hinduism was once again sui generis. The oldest of all major religions, it had a uniquely long history that bore no resemblance to the path from polytheism to monotheism in the Near East and the West. What distinguished Hinduism was instead the combination of profound philosophical reflection within religion (not, as elsewhere, distinct from it) at elite level, with the crudest forms of magic and promiscuous polytheism at folk level. Metaphysically, there was no singular God, but rather an impersonal Absolute underlying at once the soul and the world, of which the material universe was no more than an illusory manifestation. The highest value was the liberation of the self from the cycle of birth and death in *moksha*: the merging of the deep basis of personality with the deep basis of the world, attainable only by perfection across successive incarnations, traversing the hereditary castes into which the social order was ritually divided. Religious truth was hierarchical and esoteric, impervious to rationalist critique or literalist incongruity, accessible only to a Brahmin elite but accommodating any number of popular cults and deities.

So structured, Hinduism was at once benignly tolerant of different worldviews, which could be folded into its embrace, and savagely intolerant of any breach in ritual practices or the segregation of the population by phobias of purity and pollution. Indian society, divided by caste, was thus by and large exceptionally stable; rebelliousness was rare. As closed endogamous groups incapable of unification, castes could rule themselves without need for intervention by the state, conflicts between them remaining local. At the top end of the hierarchy, since the highest caste of Brahmins was defined by esoteric knowledge rather than worldly authority, political and military power could be exercised with all ruthlessness by a warrior caste beneath them, but never sacralised. Its annals were scarcely worth recording. History was of little interest: true time – unimaginably long – was extra-mundane.

If such was the schema of Hinduism, a term unknown to its adepts before the 19th century, the reality of customary beliefs and practices in India was always more heterogeneous and dispersed. The arrival of the British compressed this sprawling congeries into a more unified system. Under pressure from the West, revivalist reformers at once modernised and intensified traditional attachments among the elites, while sanskritisation became a form of upward mobility among the masses. The result was a new measure of convergence between elite and folk faith, as strains of popular fundamentalism were injected into the former, impulses of Western democratisation into the latter, gradually producing a more homogeneous religious system on which a movement for national liberation could build. Drawing its strength from religious symbols, the Indian National Congress won the kind of sedate independence to which its leaders aspired, marred by Partition, but without any social cataclysm, thereafter presiding over a steady parliamentary democracy.

This was a configuration in pointed contrast with the pattern in China, to which Furman returned in comparative reflections on the two systems some fifteen years after his essay on Confucianism. Hinduism had survived as a universe of esoteric doctrines and popular cults where scriptural Confucianism had collapsed, partly because it had greater philosophical depth, but also because it was articulated to caste, rather than embodied in the state, hence insulated against the division and weakness of the polities in the subcontinent that had allowed swift British conquest, with so little sustained resistance. In China, on the other hand, the state was strong enough to withstand outright colonisation, but when the dynasty went down to internal revolt and central power dissolved, Confucianism crumbled with it, leaving an ideological vacuum that would come to be occupied by revolutionary Marxism. But though it was destroyed as a scriptural system, its cultural legacies objectively persisted in communist – and more stridently, but far less effectively, in Nationalist – China. The unity of a single powerful state, instilling a unitary moral-political teaching, had lived on as the normal form of government. So too had age-old traditions of popular protest against corruption of rule and social injustice, visible in the Liberation of 1949, the mayhem of the Cultural Revolution, and the retribution against the Gang of Four that followed it. In Confucian times, such upheavals had been homeostatic mechanisms of the social order, as the self-regulation of castes had been of Indian society. But now that China was successfully achieving high-speed growth accompanied by widening inequalities, the demand for social justice – still deep-rooted in the population – was no longer a mechanism of stabilisation. The Chinese expected a great deal from their state, and the communist regime had yet to reconcile the two.

The interpenetration of new institutions and old convictions was equally, if quite differently, marked in Indian parliamentarism. The forms of this institutional achievement were Western, but their content was not. Ideological and organisational principles that looked as if they came from Europe had other foundations. Congress was the vehicle of ‘a highly specific Hindu secularism and highly specific Hindu democratism’. For the real strength of Indian parliamentarism lay in the power of traditional structures it concealed. The key to its stability lay in the doctrinal fastness of Hindu anti-egalitarianism, which protected its routines from radical ideologies of social change – as it had once traditional Indian society from peasant upheavals – by stifling the class struggles that produced one-party regimes elsewhere in the ex-colonial world. The same Hindu value system was a prophylactic against other dangers too – military dictatorship, since warriors lacked moral authority, reserved for Brahmins or ascetics, and theocratic rule, in the absence of any real orthodoxy or clergy. It was enough to consider Pakistan or Bangladesh to see, by contrast, the legacy of martial ideals in Islam.

In these conditions, Furman thought, Indians accepted their parliamentary government less out of ideological conviction than consecration of it by non-parliamentary sources of

authority – traditional respect for an upper caste elite, the founding role of a charismatic ascetic, the dynastic family presiding over it – and the want of any alternative. Secularisation was weakening some of these props. For in eroding the boundaries between castes, it by the same stroke sharpened the boundaries of all-Hindu identification, threatening Indian parliamentarism with the rise of 'ethnic' conflicts – in Kashmir, Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram, Punjab – that were difficult to manage within the legal norms of liberal democracy. Communalism surged where caste retreated. Nowhere was this clearer than in Punjab, to which Furman devoted a further essay.

There Sikhs had lived peacefully with Hindus, as one of the semi-breakaway sects that Hinduism traditionally encompassed and tolerated, albeit under Muslim persecution one less polytheist and more militant than others, but with no sharp boundaries between the two. When anti-caste movements arose in the late 19th century, however, competition for the allegiance of Untouchables developed between Hindu and Sikh movements of reform, leading to the creation of the Akali Dal, a Sikh party allied with Congress in the struggle against the British, but seeking to maximise its share of seats and power in Punjab. Twenty years after Independence, under pressure from the creation of linguistic states elsewhere in India, Congress conceded a division of Punjab, giving the Sikhs a state in which they were a majority and two others with a Hindu majority. But as secularisation blurred the religious frontiers between the two communities, and migrations crossed state lines in both directions, Sikh fears of being 'drowned in an all-Hindu sea' did not fade, but intensified, generating demands for an independent Khalistan, and armed conflict with the centre.

In this process, as caste identities declined, confessional antagonisms sharpened, each side seeking to unify its community with religious appeals. Sikh Untouchables, once supporters of Congress, assassinated Indira Gandhi; Hindu Untouchables led the pogroms of revenge. Yet viewed historically, the communalism unleashed by secularisation was a disease of growth, which would pass as it went deeper. Indian parliamentarism had begun in deference to pious tradition and custom, but in persisting was gradually becoming a popular attachment of principle. The objectively Hindu character of the Indian state remained, but democracy had more and more taken root in it.

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Something like the opposite configuration, Furman argued, could be seen in the relation between religion and politics in Israel. Formally speaking, the state proclaimed the principles that defined any democratic government, upholding freedom of conscience and banning religious discrimination. Yet in practice it defied these norms with a mass of religious rules imposed on believers and non-believers alike, submitting daily life to the precepts of a rigorist Judaism. Work, transport and public services were restricted on the Sabbath; business, food,

even archaeology were subject to other taboos. Most flagrant of all was a ban on civil marriage, and a prohibition of any wedding in which one partner was not of Jewish faith. Only Orthodox rabbis had legal status, and it was they who had laid down the definition of a Jew. Any Jew abandoning Judaism for another faith could not apply for Israeli citizenship. All this looked more like Saudi Arabia or Iran than any Western state. Yet the clericalism of the state was at variance with the secularism of society: as many Jews never set foot in a synagogue as visited one weekly. How could an Orthodox minority, amounting to little more than a quarter of the community, have such disproportionate weight?

The conventional answer was that the Israeli system of proportional representation made religious parties essential to the formation of most governments. 'Our hands were tied,' Ben-Gurion would say in justification of Labor's role in creating a confessional state. But why did he accept clerical 'blackmail', if it could have been avoided by alliance with parties to the left of Labor? In reality, Mapai's embrace of clerical parties was a question of principle – a government without them, said Ben-Gurion's colleague and successor Sharett, was unthinkable; national unity was at stake in their inclusion, declared Peres. Behind this stance lay more than mere party calculation. Polls regularly showed there was wide acceptance among non-religious Jews of the degree of clerical control of Israeli life. National unity, conceived as the in-gathering of Jews in Israel, was the highest value for parties across the spectrum, in a context where perception of external threats created a permanent sense of crisis overshadowing all other questions, reducing clericalism to a side issue for the majority of the population. Yet this hardly explained why its acceptance could be felt a matter of principle. Even invocations of the need for unity were less than convincing, given that the powers conceded to Orthodox Jews meant a standing rebuff to Reform Jews, a majority of the community in the US.

The true reason clericalism retained such a grip in Israel lay elsewhere, in the nature of Judaism itself. An ethnic religion, it was the only bond connecting the dispersed groups of Jews in Russia, Germany, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, who otherwise had virtually nothing in common. Secularisation was therefore a threat to Jewish identity in a way unlike that for any ordinary nation. Zionist nationalism was hostile to the passive ghetto outlook of Orthodox Judaism, yet fear of assimiliation meant it could never mount its drive for Palestine without the Orthodox. Nor, after it created the state of Israel, could Zionism resolve intractable issues like the definition of a Jew without delegating these to the Orthodox, keeping its hands ostensibly clean by shifting the responsibility for religious discrimination to rabbinical authority, in a division of labour allowing its leaders to grace the Second International. The reality was that Zionist objectives and democratic principles were in contradiction from the start, since the Zionist programme could only be implemented by ignoring the will of the Arab majority in Palestine, and driving it out of its lands. Israel was

built on an exclusionary structure like that of South Africa, or the American South of old. External threats were functional to the maintenance of this structure, and the masking of its inner crisis. Sooner or later – Furman was writing this a quarter of a century ago – Israelis would have to choose between consequent democracy and consequent Zionism. The two could not be reconciled.

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Furman came to Islam chronologically last, in a style symmetrical with his first study on Confucianism, setting out a systematic comparison of it with Christianity in an afterword to *Towards an Islamic Reformation*, by the Sudanese thinker Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im. The foundational difference between Christian and Muslim beliefs lay in the contrast between Jesus and Muhammad as bearers of a new religion. For early believers, the content of Jesus's teaching was secondary to the message of his death and resurrection as a divinity, in a highly organised Roman Empire to whose authority he taught obedience. Muhammad, on the other hand, was a human prophet who created a new set of laws and inspired a warrior following to unify a hitherto formless Arabian Peninsula. Not belief in a Son of God, but in a text left by a man who founded a state, defined the faithful. If the Quran fell into two parts, verses from Mecca not that different from tenets of Christianity or Judaism, and verses from Medina more sharply demarcated from them, laying down detailed laws for a proto-Arab state and calling for war on unbelievers, tradition came to hold that where they diverged, the second superseded the first.

So when the inevitable time of formalisation came for Christianity, what was subjected to dogmatic discipline were theological doctrine, organisation and ritual, not the sphere of government, which it left unregulated. In Islam, by contrast, formalisation occurred not in a setting of recent persecution, but of victorious power, based on written instructions for its government. Early Christianity split over quarrels about the Trinity, early Islam over conflicts about who should be caliph. Muhammad died before the Arab conquests of the Middle East and North Africa, which required settlement of many questions with which he had never been confronted, for which scholars in due course developed a body of rules in the sharia. But the status of these religious professionals was more modest than that of the clergy in Christianity, the status of government more sacred. Here not the church but the state was the vector of dogmatisation: the first religious dispute, dividing future Shia from future Sunni, was a civil war over succession to the caliphate.

If medieval Islam were to be compared with medieval Christendom, it is clear that the world governed by the sharia was rather closer to norms of contemporary Western life. Muslim societies were more egalitarian: there was less religious persecution, oppression of the lower classes was often milder, the position of women better, and the cultural level higher. But with

the advent of Renaissance and Reformation there was a reversal: in Europe, a dynamic development of spheres of life relatively unregulated by religion – technology, market, law, government – weakened the formalisation of belief itself, while in the Muslim world all social forms and changes had still to be judged by a timeless model of government codified by the sharia, departures from which could be stigmatised as *bida* – heresy. Whereas in the West, centralised religious authority made alteration possible even in matters of dogma, allowing for developments like scholasticism, the informal consensus of the *ulema* led to fear of innovation.

Not that in due course Islam failed to produce movements of reformation, calling as in Christianity for a return to the pristine purity of the scriptures. Certainly, there was no such dramatic contrast between the life of the founder and the worldly degeneration of the Renaissance papacy – the caliphs might be slack or corrupt as rulers, but Muhammad himself had after all enjoyed 11 wives. Yet movements of religious reform were actually easier psychologically in Islam than in Christianity, since there was no massive church to fight against, and a ready-made model of government was to hand to which the pure could revert. For the same reasons, they were less consequential, since they opened no path to a freer thought or society. Between Lutheranism and Wahhabism the distance was wide.

When the balance of political forces changed all too visibly in favour of the West, the first reaction in the Islamic world was to acquire the weapons needed to resist it, with reforms of the army in Turkey, Egypt and Iran (as earlier in Russia). Then came engineering and technology, railways and training institutions. Finally, ideas too began to penetrate – the first constitution arriving in the Ottoman realms in 1876, the first republic in Azerbaijan in 1918. But still today, the mass of believers remains attached to the sharia, even if they do not live by it. If movements of social protest once again call for a return to it, cultural protests in its name against Americanisation have now joined them. Out of their fusion arose contemporary Islamic fundamentalism. Yet at the same time, the advance of secularisation was plain to see in mores everywhere, not least in Khomeinist Iran.

Between the two forces of fundamentalism and secularism, there was an impasse. Proposals like those of Ahmed An-Na'im and Mohammed Taha to trump the Medinan portions of the Quran, as conditioned by the circumstances of their period, with the timeless principles of the Meccan portions presented as fully compatible with contemporary democratic norms, sought to break this deadlock with something like the same operation as the Reformers of 16th-century Europe. They were a sign among others that it was wrong to exaggerate the problems of the Muslim world. Some of these were, of course, specific to it, but the road to modern democracies in Europe itself was strewn with convulsions – Nazism in Germany, fascism in Italy and Spain – as extreme as anything to be seen in the Arab world. There were no grounds for Western pharisaism in the Middle East.

What, finally, of religion in Russia itself? In the tenth century, the legend went, four envoys arrived in Kiev to persuade its pagan prince of the merits of their faith – a Jewish emissary from the Khazar empire, a Muslim from the Bulgar Khanate, a Catholic from Rome, a Greek Orthodox from Byzantium. In choosing the last, Vladimir brought Russia its form of Christianity. The story, Furman noted, was half-myth, half-literary artefact. But it expressed a historical reality. Religions, once adopted, were exceptionally durable. Ottoman rule did not make Serbs, Greeks or Armenians Muslim, nor did European colonisation make Indians, Burmese or most Indonesians Christian. Whatever the reasons for the decision in Kiev, perhaps quite contingent, its consequences lasted for nearly a thousand years. Critical was the option for the Eastern rather than the Western branch of Christianity. For by that time the structure of each differed fundamentally. The Eastern was decentralised, consisting of a number of churches whose patriarchs were jealous of their standing, but all subject to the imperial state in Byzantium, whereas the Western was centralised under the authority of the bishop of Rome, and faced a plurality of states, but was subject to none of them. In these conditions, the former became politically pliable but doctrinally rigid – the efforts required to reach agreement between the different churches being so exhausting that the decisions of the first seven Ecumenical Councils became final, permitting no further alteration – while in the latter, theological innovation was at papal discretion. Such intellectual change was blocked in the East.

By the early Middle Ages, moreover, the Catholic Church covered a much larger geographical and cultured space than Orthodox Christianity, and communicated across it in Latin. Russian Orthodoxy, on the other hand, resisted even the use of Greek, the language of its scriptures and liturgy remaining Church Slavonic. Cultural isolation reinforced ideological closure. No counterpart to the universities or the scholastic thought of the West, no interest in scientific knowledge or education, ever emerged. Eventually, after the fall of Byzantium, Muscovy – contemptuous of attempts at last-minute compromise with Rome by the Greek clergy to stave off conquest by the Ottomans – became the only Orthodox state left in the world. The outcome was a Russian Church that gave unquestioning support to Russian autocracy, so long as its theology was left untouched. Tsars could any commit any crimes or atrocities – see Ivan IV – without the slightest rebuke, but if the holy books were updated, virtual civil war broke out. In the 17th century the Old Believers who rebelled against the impious patriarch that did so were marginalised, and when in the 18th century Peter I, totally uninterested in religious quarrels and scruples, made the church into a straightforward department of the state, there was no resistance. Catherine II could even appoint Voltaireans to the synod in charge of it.

By the 19th century, the result was a Russian Orthodoxy that dominated popular imagination and tradition, but played virtually no part in the spiritual life of most of the intelligentsia.

What the church's combination of a formal monopoly of belief and an actual weakness in society came to encourage was the spread of disbelief. For Old Believers, a blessing with three fingers rather than two might be blasphemy, but for non-believers neither gesture meant anything. Complete rejection of religion had become easier and more normal than the smallest change in the sphere of belief. Voltaire or Marx could be published when a Russian translation of the Bible was banned. In no other country in Europe was religion so unalterable, yet so extrinsic to the real life of the community, the prestige of the church so low that the sons of a priest could want to conceal their father's occupation out of shame for it. So it was that nowhere else lay buried such potential for mass atheism. The Revolution of 1917 drew the balance sheet of nine hundred years of Russian Orthodoxy. The moral of this history, Furman thought, spoke for itself. 1989 was just a few months away.

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The advent of perestroika in 1986 came as a pleasant surprise to Furman. In the remote future, he had always expected a path to democracy in the Soviet Union, if one that might have to pass through a phase of right-wing reaction in a 'flabby fascism', so he was delighted that the country looked as if it would be spared that, and could move towards an orderly liberalisation more proximately and painlessly than he had ever thought possible. The political changes of the time did not deflect him from the comparative study of religion – his writing on Hinduism, Judaism and Orthodoxy dates from 1988-89 – but he now brought the conceptual tools he had developed for its study to bear on them. At stake was the role of the CPSU and its ideology in the future of Russia. Marxism was a scientific theory, subject to empirical controls like any other, that had become the object of a faith for which people died and killed on a scale comparable to Christianity or Islam. From the start, it had a religious dimension, since the titanic scientific work of Marx was accomplished not just for the sake of knowing the truth, but also of finding the ultimate meaning of life and history that religion had obscured. In their combination of prophetic passion and encyclopedic ambition, Marx and Engels were by nature – like the founders of every major religion – non-conformists. But as with every other innovative system of belief, in the next generation creative inspiration was followed by dogmatisation.

In the West, this was relatively mild and rapidly eroded. In Russia, however, the misery of the masses, the tyranny of the autocracy, the spiritual vacuum left by Orthodoxy, intensified dogmatisation to the utmost, transmuting revolutionary eschatology into iron party discipline, the evolution from early Marxism to Stalin resembling that of primitive Christianity to Ivan IV. If the process was much faster, the reason lay in the speed at which the beliefs of a small minority became those of a whole people. Revolutionary Marxism answered to the thoughts and aspirations of masses who had lost faith in divine justice and resurrection, who hated their oppressors and dreamed of heaven on earth. Their new beliefs

gave them the strength to achieve the unthinkable, and inflict the unbearable. It was Platonov who understood them: these were the villagers of *Chevengur*. The sacralisation of Lenin sprang spontaneously from that soil, on which Stalin could readily erect his own cult.

But unlike Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, which lasted for centuries, this religion was over very quickly – because it was never just a religion. Marxism as a science exploded Marxism as a faith: subjectively, once its predictions of communism did not come to pass, and the two available defence mechanisms of 'deferment' or 'paradise has arrived' wore thin, and objectively, as the huge social changes it wrought – urbanisation, education, industrialisation – transformed Russia, superseding the semi-literate fanatics of Platonov's bitter heroism. Martyrs and executioners were no longer needed. Bureaucrats and careerists took over. Institutionalised, Marxist ideology became a hardened shell around an inner vacuum, into which a traditional great power chauvinism seeped under Stalin. Krushchev tried to revive it with reforms in the name of Lenin, but the impulse was weak, and soon exhausted. After 1968, its degeneration was complete. Perestroika was an attempt to take up the line of reform interrupted in the 1960s once again, in something like the spirit of a Leninist version of the Second Vatican Council. But it faced great difficulties and dangers.

There was an urgent need, Furman argued, to clean out the Augean stables of this dogmatised ideology, but now little interest in doing so: it was easier to cast it out as nonsense. But Marxism was not just a set of outdated answers to sundry problems – it remained a set of questions that in some sense were immanent to contemporary humanity. Just as ideas deriving from Christianity retain their meaning independently of their mythological formulation (no Adam and Eve, but certainly imperfection of human nature), so the deep need of contemporary human beings to explore the logic and stadiality of world-historical processes – where we came from; where we are going – persists, regardless of a bygone canonisation of the 'five modes of production'. So too socialisation of the means of production might not have led to anything good, and Russians now dreamed only of importing capitalism. But human beings cannot cease to strive for a social order in which they are no longer subject to the inhuman necessities of a society investing them as if it were a second nature, nor seek to relate that effort to an understanding of the logic of world history.

Politically, even, there was reason not simply to discard, but to analyse the dogmas of the Soviet system, and to extract their rational kernel, on pain of repeating what they represented – not in a return to Stalinism, but in the adoption of antithetical ideologies born of an inability to bear the disarray that freedom from it might bring. As the role of Protestantism in Christianity had shown, for the steady progress of a society a faith reformed was better than a faith destroyed. Ideologies could play different roles at different stages in their history. In the epoch of John Paul II it was easy to forget that in the time of its total power, Roman Christianity was the religion of the Inquisition and the ethnic cleansing of the Jews and

Moors from Spain. Likewise in Russia, what had been the ideology of the gulag could also become an instrument of democratisation, whose revival might be the only way of ensuring there would be no new gulags. But for it to have life again, it would have to undergo root-and-branch critique.

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The essay in which these reflections appeared in 1989, 'Stalin and Ourselves from a Religious Point of View', was Furman's first political intervention. Till then he had welcomed perestroika, but without any active participation in public life. A sense of guilt at his quietism had now impelled him into it. But he remained the bookish humanist he had been, whose passivity was also a certain disconnection from the political realities around him. As he later observed, after having always been least concerned with it, 'I began giving some credit to Marxism when everybody had already stopped doing it.' The change was prompted by the hopes aroused by Gorbachev. But as he noted in the same retrospect, perestroika – 'a belated Soviet version of the Prague Spring' – had arrived too late. The prospect of an evolutionary democratisation of the USSR through a Marxist reform 'required some minimum amount of people capable of embracing these ideas literally, rather than as a cover or an outward form. There were plenty of such people in the 1960s; in the 1980s there were none.' Among his contemporaries, those who had once – devotees or dalliers – conformed with scientific socialism were plunging into orgies of admiration for capitalism. This was not a spectacle to encourage him to abandon his life-plan of work in the field of comparative religion. He was writing grammatical comments on the Sanskrit of his handwritten copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* when perestroika collapsed in the coup of 1991.

After a convivial evening at Furman's place, where he stayed the night, Alexei Pankin was woken up by his friend on the morning of 19 August with the words 'They've taken Gorbachev,' and before Pankin had quite grasped what had happened, Furman told him that it was all over: whoever won, democracy was already lost. Whether the victors were the State Committee on the State of Emergency or Yeltsin and his followers, they would crush opposition and cling to power at all costs. It was a turning point for Furman. From now on, out of a sense of civic duty, he moved – with an effort of will – from comparative religion to contemporary politics. Over the next twenty years, he would write prolifically on the political scene in Russia. A selection of his articles, published in two books separated by a decade, covers a thousand pages. These were 'analyses on the run', as he called them, with all the pitfalls of ephemeral commentary on current affairs to be found in the journalism of Marx and Engels or Pareto, as distinct from their theoretical work. Such interventions should be dispassionate, objective and long-range in vision. But that was difficult, he observed, when the fate of your country, of yourself and your friends, was at stake.

In the Yeltsin era, he later confessed, Furman was sickened by the new rulers of the country. For Yeltsin himself, whom he viewed as morally and intellectually a pathological figure, he felt only fear and repulsion; and for the intelligentsia that idolised him – his own layer – disgust at their opportunism. They had turned on Gorbachev, who had freed them, 'like dogs sitting in a cage and whining till they were let out by someone they immediately attacked'. Most had been party members, and this was their revolution. 'At last the time is right for our generation' – the 40-year-olds – an acquaintance told him, and it was true. In Russia, unlike in Eastern Europe, youth played no active part in the overthrow of the USSR or what followed: student presence was conspicuously missing. All these were private opinions that he expressed long afterwards. At the time his public interventions were incisive enough, but their tone was typically calm and reflective: *ad rem*, not *ad hominem*. With them, he came to occupy a strange position in the Russia media: very few agreed with him, but none cared to tangle with him. Isolated in an apprehensive respect, his views were a consistent affront to the consensus of the period.

The verdict that Furman immediately delivered on the overturn of August 1991 established the key for what was to come: 'The victory of the democrats is the defeat of democracy.' The way Yeltsin and his followers took power ensured that an authoritarian regime lay ahead. A minority coup had once again been pulled off, which as in 1917 would compel its authors to batten down the hatches to cling to their power, while promising a brighter future to the masses. Russian liberalism had no popular appeal, but Russian nationalism did, and Yeltsin had used it without scruple against Gorbachev to lever his way to the Kremlin. How little he and his group cared about the means of cementing their power was promptly displayed by the deal in the Belovezhskaya forest that dissolved the USSR without even a pretence of popular consultation in Russia, where it would undoubtedly have been rejected. When they met opposition in the elected legislature, these were democrats who did not hesitate – as the putschists of 1991 had – to shed blood to crush it, shelling the parliament with tanks and causing many more deaths than publicly admitted; nor to fake the results of the referendum with which they then rammed through a constitution for the presidential autocrat. Like their predecessors, these were people who believed that it was permissible to suppress democracy now to build a better democracy in the future.

The ideology they adopted in its name was no more than a crude inversion of the historical materialism they denounced, accepting the communist image of the West and reversing its value-signs. Private property and the market were the fount of all that is good. The basis of democracy could only be a class of property owners, so if a bourgeois stratum could be yanked into being by handing the nation's assets to a vulpine minority, a path would be cleared to ultimate freedom and riches for all. In this world turned upside down, Stolypin was romanticised as a hero of the capitalist path to democracy, while the Mensheviks subverted

democracy by struggling against capitalism, and Pinochet was a better architect of liberty than Allende. In no other post-communist society did 'intellectual capitalism' gain such sway than in the country least culturally and psychologically prepared for a capitalist market.

In reality, Furman observed, capitalism succeeded only where pre-capitalist traditions were woven into it: the Protestant conscience in Anglo-America, feudal conceptions of loyalty and duty in Japan, Confucian morality in Taiwan or China. In Russia, the comparable resources would have been the peasant-to-socialist sense of the dignity of labour, and the prestige of a high level of science and education fostered in the USSR. But these were utterly squandered by a regime dominated by intellectuals who had jettisoned the best legacies of Marxism, and bureaucrats who rejected any reformation of it as a return to early Bolshevik asceticism, preferring instead to wallow in their own enrichment. So not hard work or enterprise, but fraud and theft were given ideological sanction, confirming popular caricatures of capitalism and bourgeois democracy from Soviet days. The result was a thoroughly criminalised capitalism, whose mafia gangs, mass disillusionment and anti-democratic sentiment were likely to outlast the regime itself. This was the third time in our history, Furman told his compatriots, that we thought by grasping what we took to be the 'key' to Western success, to make a radical break with the past, only to preserve its worst features. Each time we got it wrong. The market was just one aspect, not the foundation, of a modern society, which required a rule of law inseparable from democracy, and wealth created by labour that was honest and creative. The dictum of a *perestroichik* had got it right: 'As we work, so shall we live.'

The unfolding of Yeltsin's rule corresponded to Furman's predictions of it. Yet looking back, he could say that towards the end of the decade he felt less fear than relief, since the worst – a violent disintegration like that of Yugoslavia – had been avoided. Nationalist reaction to the dissolution of the USSR and an imperialist transformation of the ruling elite had proved weaker than might have been imagined. In fearing these, he had underestimated two factors: the dependence of the upper layer of the regime on the West, and the reflex obedience of the Russian masses to power. Both were at work in Yeltsin's fraudulent re-election in 1996, applauded in the West, but also accepted by ordinary people, despite acute social discontent and widespread dislike of him. Paradoxically, popular nostalgia for the stability of late Soviet society actually helped Yeltsin, who destroyed it. For the masses, there was already chaos enough in the Russia of the 1990s: fear of a change of power proved greater than anger against power. A strongman, however discredited, was preferable to the risk of not having one. Contrary to much opinion, and to his own wishes, Furman never doubted Yeltsin would stay put in the Kremlin.

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Was all this inevitable? In thinking about it, Furman developed a notion at which his reflections on Vladimir's choice of Orthodoxy in Kiev had hinted. There were certain moments in history when a fan of possibilities opened, allowing for quite different outcomes. These were infrequent and often brief conjunctures, before the fan clacked shut. The advent of Gorbachev had been one of them. The USSR could have continued in decline for twenty years, or undergone a sudden implosion and swing to the right of the kind Furman had sometimes envisaged. The course taken by Gorbachev was the least probable of scenarios, a happy gift of history that was 'a kind of winning of the lottery'. How had such a figure ever risen to the top in the CPSU of Brezhnev's time? The answer certainly lay in part in his provincial background. He arrived in the corrupt and worldly capital of Moscow very late, only in 1978, retaining the freshness and naivety of his origins. There his simplicity and sincerity must have helped him, because they were so rare at the time – unthinkable in the Muscovite intelligentsia but appreciated by cynical party elders, reminding them of their youth and perhaps hinting that they had, after all, been serving a great cause. What they could not have realised – no one could – was his courage, and the boldness of his ambition, once power passed to him by biological default. The ambition was a Marxist Reformation to liberate Soviet society from its bureaucratic incarceration. Gorbachev was not the first ruler in Russia who sought to use his power for the benefit of the country and its people. His greatness lay in his willingness to restrict it for their benefit, and run the risk of losing it rather than renounce his principles. In that he was historically unique. He was a communist who voluntarily – under no compulsion – lessened his own power, preferring compromise to dictation.

His simple-mindedness did not leave him when he occupied the Kremlin, and was always a limitation. He had no real plan for perestroika, only a series of images of what he would like to see or do. He was a poor judge of people, far too trusting of others, most of whom would betray him. To boot, he developed two reference groups that could only damage his enterprise. The first was the intelligentsia, whom – out of a great respect for culture and awareness of the modesty of his own – Gorbachev overvalued, but who least of all had any time for his socialist ideals. The second was the West, whose enthusiasm for him diverted his attention from problems at home, and whose advice he took too seriously. Both eroded his confidence in the goals for which he set out. By the end, as his faith in them dwindled, Thatcher had stronger convictions than he did.

Most critical of all, perhaps, was his overestimation of the 'good sense' of everyone, including the Russian people. He said the most important thing in politics was to be 'measured', but he continually took the presence of that quality in others too much for granted. He could not bring himself to see that a people just released from totalitarian confinement could not be expected to act in normal, sensible ways. Within a couple of years, they had been given as

much freedom as they could handle. They were not ready for more, but Gorbachev pressed on. For as a ruler he retained a Leninist faith in the creativity of the masses, and a Leninist haste in his actions. History had delayed too long in producing Gorbachev, but he then rushed too quickly, accelerating the dynamic he set in motion even as it needed braking. When the crisis of 1988-89 came, he still sought to solve it by talks and negotiations, trying to reason with opponents who saw mere weakness in his approaches. To rely on the good sense of all concerned was to clutch at a straw. At that point magnanimity became self-deception. Had he acted firmly against those bent on overthrowing him, he would have preserved the support of the people, and could have avoided the debacle of 1991, when if it had been Gorbachev who declared an exceptional situation, Furman would have supported him. Yet the dignity with which he bore his fall was a mark of the same character. In the end, his failure was not personal: the social forces needed to carry through perestroika no longer existed.

[1] *Relating Religion* (2004), *Divine Drudgery* (1990), *On Teaching Religion* (2013).

[2] See, inter alia, Talal Asad's *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), Russell McCutcheon's *Manufacturing Religion* (1997), Richard King's *Orientalism and Religion* (1999), Daniel Dubuisson's *The Western Construction of Religion* (2003). For temperate versions: Lionel Jensen's *Manufacturing Confucianism* (1997) – shorn of this element, an impressive work of philological scholarship – and Sharada Sugirtharajah's *Imagining Hinduism* (2003).

[3] For the Anglican variant, David Martin, *On Secularisation* (2005); for the Catholic, José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994).

[4] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (2007); Ronald Dworkin, *Religion without God* (2013).

[5] Religion properly construed, of course, not 'fundamentalism'. For Rawls, see *Political Liberalism*; for Habermas, 'Secularism's Crisis of Faith: Notes on Post-Secular Society', *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Fall 2008, and the round-up of ensuing discussion – 'Habermas's view of religion's potential as a remedial cultural resource for contemporary social ills is shared by many religous leaders' – in Philip Gorski et al, *The Post-Secular in Question* (2012), complete with a chapter on '"Simple Ideas, Small Miracles": The Obama Phenomenon'.

[6] See Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011), where the great Axial breakthroughs to higher forms of piety are presented side by side, with no attempt at comparison between them. Bellah was a troubled Episcopalian.

[7] This is the burden of David Martin's first venture into the field: *A General Theory of Secularisation* (1978). For the political tenor of this body of writing: 'If you want an example of genuinely Christian heartwork you can find it in the occasion when Bill Clinton repented in tears before a large company, including his wife, and was tearfully forgiven' – 'When Prime

Minister Blair said he would face his Maker over his decision to send soldiers to kill and be killed in Iraq, he showed something of the specific gravity resting on those bearing political responsibility' – 'Luther King also had sight of the Promised Land of full citizenship according to the promise of the American covenant before his exemplary death; and Obama entered into that inheritance, like a veritable Joshua': *On Secularisation* (2005), *Religion and Power* (2014).

[8] See Steve Bruce, *Secularisation* (2011).

[9] See Derluguian's fine introduction to the selection of Furman's writings on comparative religion – the indispensable starting point for reflection on their author – which he edited in 2011.

[10] Since the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, a short-winded literature has proliferated on the contemporary role of assorted faiths in politics, in collections like *God's Rule: The Politics of World Religions*, whose rabbinical editor, Jacob Neusner, boasts more than 900 books published under his name. Its introducer explains that 'in a particular and wonderful way, this is a profoundly American exercise'. Output of this kind adds little to the subject.

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