

SERMONS OF PROKOPOVICH: FROM ASCETICISM TO THE ALLURE OF POWER

(Sermones de Prokopovich: del asceticismo a la seducción del poder)

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ABSTRACT

In his early sermons entitled *orationes asceticae* Prokopovich presented a vision of the Christian life that should be the life concentrated on death as the threshold of eternity. However, in his estimation only extremely small number of people have a chance to be saved (3 Esdras 8:3). Also, from the earliest sermons he ascribed to the tsar extremely elevated status and the most important virtue of a subject was loyalty to the tsar. While extolling the position of the tsar, Prokopovich considered God to be the divine supporter of the tsar. Prokopovich's insistence that the person of the tsar should be as important in every person's life as the awareness of the presence of God meant that not only the afterlife was important in life, but also things of this life such as material goods, praise and fame. Gradually, in the Petersburg period, Prokopovich's sermons turn into political propaganda justifying every undertaking of Peter.

Keywords: Prokopovich, Peter I, Orthodoxy.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В своих ранних проповедях под названием *orationes asceticae* Прокопович представил свое понятие христианской жизни, которая должна быть сосредоточена на смерти как пороге вечности. Тем не менее, по его оценке, только очень небольшое количество людей имеют возможность спастись (ср. 3 Ездры 8: 3). Кроме того, с самых ранних проповедей он приписывал царю чрезвычайно высокий статус и самое главное достоинство подданных была верность царю. Прокопович превозносил положение царя и, в то же время, он считал Бога быть божественным поддержителем царя. Настойчивость Прокоповича что царь должен играть столь же важную роль в жизни каждого человека как осознание присутствия Бога означало, что не только жизнь после смерти играет важную роль в жизни, но и вещи этой жизни, как материальные блага, хвала и слава. Постепенно, в петербургским периоде, проповеди Прокоповича превратиться в политическую пропаганду оправдывающую каждое предприятие Петра.

Ключевые слова: Прокопович, Петр I, православие.

Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1733), educated in Poland and in Rome, became a lecturer in the Kiev Academy. In 1706, he lectured on rhetoric, on which subject he wrote a textbook, and as a lecturer of rhetoric, he was obligated to give sermons and speeches on the occasion of an arrival of some VIPs.¹ As an *ex officio* preacher,

1. Петр Морозов, *Феофан Прокопович как писатель*, Санкт-Петербург: Балашев 1880, p. 99.

he gave several sermons, six of them apparently in Polish.² Most of these sermons are of apologetic and devotional character devoted to some issues of Christian faith and Christian life.

God

God is the point of departure and the foundation of any religious thinking and living. Prokopovich had no doubt that God exists, God the author of the universe, an omnipotent being who cares for His creation and is present in its life. “Faith and natural reason itself teach us that God is not only good, but He is infinite goodness itself, not only beautiful, but also ineffable beauty itself” (M 256bis).³ In a rather faint physico-theological spirit Prokopovich stated that the beauty of creation reflects the beauty of God: celestial bodies, the earth, flora and fauna, seas, rivers, and mountains (257). Interestingly, “if God wanted to create throughout entire eternity, [He] could at every moment create more perfect and better nature” (258), which appears to mean that the world we live in is not the best of all possible worlds. Nevertheless, God loves us and His love incites our love in return. God showed His love for us in His creation, His salvation, His providence, His care for us, His mercy, and His promises (259).

God surely cares for His greatest creation, the human being. Man is a microcosm “equal in his perfection to the entire creation. The cause and the end of all creation is to be for the benefit of man in his earthly life. Man, on the other hand, was created in order to be an eternal friend of God and the participant in the kingdom” (M 260). Like a father, God cares for man on his way to fatherland protecting him from dangers and from swerving from this way providing guardian angels. Many things are created for his use, many for enjoyment and for recreation (261).

The greatest care God manifested in Jesus and His work of redemption. Who saw a monarch abandoning his throne for the love of his subjects? And yet God in the person of Christ did just that (M 264) not only to become Himself a human being, but also “to die the disgraceful death for us, for our salvation” (266).

God loves His creation, loves human beings He created, but this does not mean an unconditional acceptance of human actions. He rewards the good and punishes the evil. He is loving and also punishing. Couldn't He only manifest His mercy? He is also just and by treating the good and the evil the same way, God would have harmed the good (M 268).

2. They have been published in Polish with a Latin title, *Orationes asceticae* (M 231-298); it is very unlikely that they had been translated from Russian into Polish, Морозов, *op. cit.*, p. 113, note 1. They also appeared in Russian, SR 3.254-302.

3. The following references will be used:

M – Theophan[es] Prokopowicz, *Miscellanea sacra*, Wratislavia: Korn 1744.

S – Феофан Прокопович, Слово в день святого равноапостольного великого князя Владимира, *Киевская старина* 7 (1888), June, attachment 1, pp. 3-14.

SR – Феофан Прокопович, *Слова и речи*, Санкт-Петербург: При Сухопутном Шляхетном Кадетском Корпусе, vol. 1, 1760, vol. 2, 1761, vol. 3, 1765, vol. 4, 1774.

Christian life

Whether Prokopovich himself entitled the six sermons published in Polish *orationes asceticae* or not, the title quite adequately reflects Prokopovich's vision of the Christian life. This should be the life concentrated on the afterlife and thus on doing one's best to find oneself on the side of God there. This is the life of constant awareness of death as the threshold of eternity. Since even the greatest saints were afraid of death (M 253), so should be every person. The secret of salvation is: "do justice, love mercy, eagerly walk with your God," i.e., "always have God before your eyes" (241).

A Christian should stay away from sin and a sin is not a light matter. For Prokopovich, mortal sins are "common and usual crimes which almost daily are committed to our great peril. These are: theft, drunkenness, greed, debauchery, adultery, obscene words and thoughts" (M 272). Stupid are Calvinist theologians when they teach that human nature is so depraved that man cannot overcome natural desires, Prokopovich declared. However, since God's commands are not hard (1 J. 5:3), it should not be hard to stay sober, to avoid bad company (269), to set aside half an hour a day for prayer, to stand quietly and modestly in church, to help the poor, to avoid showing off; it should not be hard "to keep in mind, while fleshly desires are aroused, that the satisfaction is momentary, brief, vanishing, but the punishment for them is eternal, infinite" (270). In moments of weakness and temptation believers should think that God is near; when sinful thoughts are coming, they should always be aware that God is near (248) – the loving God who can help and, at the same time, the just God who can punish.

Divine rescue is always available for any person; however, people think only about honors, wealth, profit, about acquiring high learning, and not about their eternal salvation; they submit to their fleshly desires, anger, revenge, pride, not to reflection about God and about the end of life (M 295). As colorfully put, for a momentary satisfaction "people like swine wallow in dung [of sin]" (273). They do not realize, for instance, that if someone is for a long time among heretics, then even if he does not convert to their faith, he at least will have some doubts about his own faith (280). The same is true with any bad company. People do not realize that good deeds of a person who clings to a mortal sin – which for Prokopovich appears to be pretty much any sin – are worthless, "dead and do not earn eternal blessing" (281). It is said that man "often gives over his heart, his soul, his strength, and his thoughts to the love of the flesh and the world, to the care for empty praises, pomp, honors, great titles, to the gratification of the fleshly desires" (255bis).

Clinging to this life may lead to the conviction that salvation can wait, that this can always be done; in the meantime, let us enjoy our life to the fullest. However, "who delays penance to the end of his life, he will never do it, and who being healthy will purify through holy confession, deep sighing, bitter tears, his conscience from sin, he will truly receive a good end of his life and death and the infinite kingdom of heaven" (M 256).

Sometimes, encouragement for proper Christian life is not enough and instilling the fear of God can be just as – and maybe even more – effective since fear of the last judgment incites people to lead a good life (M 268). For this reason, Prokopovich spoke at length about hell, the place of sinners, including idolaters of the times before

arrival of Christianity to Russia, who went to eternal fire where they saw their error, but it was too late to correct it (S 10). However, in his discussion, Prokopovich greatly overplayed his hand.

There are three kinds of suffering in hell. 1. Fire, somewhat comparable to natural fever and to natural affects which are “like the unbridled beasts” (M 232). God in His anger uses fire, as, for instance, in Sodom. However, our earthly fire is to the fire of hell like painted fire is to our fire. The fire of hell is prepared for evil and condemned spirits. 2. Another fire is the memory of past pleasures; a person will be troubled by the fact that he ended up in hell because of “evil, fleeting, and vanishing delight of sin” (234-235). 3. The fact that suffering will last for eternity (236). In response to those who say that eternal suffering does not square with God’s mercy and that He could not look at such suffering, Prokopovich answered that just as He could look at human abominable sins and also at the death of His Son, he will be able to look at suffering of evil souls. He will even rejoice over perdition of sinners, according to Prokopovich’s rendition of Prov. 1:24-26 (238). Incidentally, this does not quite square with the statement that God turns away from a sinner since he sees unspeakable ugliness of his soul (282).

By Prokopovich’s understanding of God, there will be a great deal of divine rejoicing since, in the words of Christ, many are called but a few are elected, which means that the number of the condemned is larger than the number of the saved (M 285). Natural reason taught Prokopovich that “not only more, but much, much more [people] will go to hell than to heaven” (287) to be “condemned to eternal torture by the justice of God.” In an attempt to assess the ratio of the saved to the condemned, Prokopovich said that only seven people were saved from the flood, only three people from the destruction of Sodom (288), only Joshua and Caleb reached the promised land from among those who left Egypt (289). Therefore, in his view, from among many thousands only a hundred will be saved and even this is an overestimation. Chrysostom thought that there were 100 people saved in Antioch, the city of 100,000 inhabitants (296). With today’s mores, said Prokopovich, Chrysostom would probably say that there were only 100 saved in the entire world (297). Hardly a bleaker prospect was ever painted by a preacher and hardly could such preaching be effective considering the odds. Why even try to be a good Christian if from the entire population of the world only a hundred or so will be saved? A person has a much better chance to buy a winning ticket in a lottery than to be among the saved. What Prokopovich may have considered as an encouragement to leading an exemplary Christian life could just as well be an encouragement to making no such effort considering the odds of being saved.

In his later sermons, Prokopovich did not repeat his gruesome assessment of allowing only a hundred people from the population of the earth to be saved, but he did not quite give it up: the humankind was “a black and boundless sea of lawlessness” (SR 3.38); there is a larger number of the damned than of the saved considering heresy, schism and also the lands of “Mohammedan disgrace, Jewish faithlessness, and Tangutian/Chinese/Asian godlessness” (SR 2.254).

The New Zion

The six sermons in Polish speak about life from an otherworldly perspective with no allusions to specifics of the Russian or Little Russian life. In 1706, Peter I visited Kiev on which occasion Prokopovich preached a sermon. In 1709, he preached right after the Poltava battle and in the same period he preached about the legacy of the prince Vladimir. In these sermons, religion was viewed through a nationalistic lens.

In Prokopovich's words, Kiev was "the mother of [all Russian] cities, the glory and adornment of our entire spacious land"; it was "the city of salvation," which "is unanimously called by all Christians the second Jerusalem, the new Zion; thus, our entire Russian Orthodox church takes its origin from there and is present in the church spread over the entire world and can be called a precious pearl in the ring, a Zion within a Zion, a Jerusalem within a Jerusalem" (S 3; SR 1.2). As Orthodox believers and as Russians Prokopovich's countrymen were the sons of Zion (S 4).

Prince Vladimir "held firmly in hand single rule over all the Russian lands, it was not without strength" (S 5). He defeated three spiritual enemies: the world, the body, and the devil; he defeated the world by rejecting idolatry, accepting Christian faith, and looking for the right church (6). He humbly admitted that he needed help in knowing the truth. He defeated his body by renouncing all his 6 wives and 500 concubines. He defeated the devil by destroying idols (9). "Russia, enlightened by St. Vladimir, blossomed forth in virtue! Through what miracles did it become famous! To what God-loving men did it give birth and continues to give birth!" (12). "Before his death David gave to his son Solomon the entire description of the temple which Solomon was supposed to construct ... By similar care God erected the spiritual edifice of our Orthodox Russian Church. St. Andrew ... gave the description of all adornments of our church in his prophecy: Here, he said, will shine the glory of God." The plan was actualized by Vladimir. And there it is, the Russian land: "to which land does it cede in its praises? By which place will it be defeated in its glory?" (13). So, it appears, that the beacon of Christianity found its place in Russia surrounded by the sea of paganism. Elsewhere, there is only a pretense of Christianity. In particular, the Western church at the time of Vladimir separated itself from the body of Christ (6; never mind that the schism took place in the midst of the eleventh century). Therefore, Vladimir was "the founder of the new Israel" (14).

In the Kievan period, nationalistic pride was primarily motivated by the religious perspective: Prokopovich saw Russia's might as a manifestation of its religious heritage as the seat and defender of the true faith. Russia was great because it best represented the Christian religion on earth. It thus was only natural that in order to prop up the greatness of Peter I, Prokopovich tried to establish a link between Peter I on the one side and Vladimir and his immediate successors on the other. As Prokopovich addressed Peter, "you are an Heir [of Kievan princes] not only by blood but by love of the true Faith of the majesty of the Church, since in You not other but the same virtues [as the princes'] are revived" (SR 1.6). It did not matter much that there was no blood connection since the Romanovs were not at all related to Kievan princes.⁴

4. Cf. Олег М., Буранок, *Феофан Прокопович и историко-литературный процесс первой половины XVIII века*, Москва: Издательство "Флинта" 2014, p. 164.

The tsar

From the earliest sermons Prokopovich ascribed to the tsar a special status. “It is for two reasons that tsars deserve honor which bring joy to people under their rule. First, they defeat the enemies of their country [cf. SR 1.7]; second, they do good unto their subjects by safeguarding truth, raising the worthy to positions of honor, striking down the unworthy, commanding quietly, humbly and lovingly, in a word, ruling in such a manner that as a result of their reign people will enjoy a happy life” (S 4). However, when it came to Peter, the description was expressed in much stronger terms. The 34 year-old Peter “among the many earthly Tsars is the only one who with his truth/justice follows Christ, he shines not only with the rays of Majesty but also with the light of Orthodoxy” (SR 1.1). There is justice in Russia, “since on the Russian Throne seems to be not a man but truth/justice itself” (8). “Greatness of the Tsar lies not in shining purple [robe], not in golden diadem, but in strength, firmness, courage, in brave deeds worthy of admiration” (9) and, of course, Peter fit the bill. And thus, Peter was praised for freeing many cities from the Muslim yoke and from heretical bonds (5). Under his command, the Russian army defeated Goliath, the Swedish king who insulted Russians, the new Israel, regiments of the living God (42). Peter was the second Samson, since he tore apart the Swedish lion. Rather awkwardly, Prokopovich connected Peter directly to the Bible by saying that on him Samson’s riddle was fulfilled: “from the one that eats came out the edible” (Judges 14:14) since from the one who ate a lot of land (46) and goods of many nations, Peter took a lot of loot (47). In all this, God was present, God who gave Peter victory (46). And it was clear that Peter was under the special protection of God (37) since in the Poltava battle, a bullet went through his hat barely missing his head (38).

The subjects

Very early Prokopovich indicated that people should not be entirely heaven-oriented. There is the tsar, given and protected by God, and the awareness of the existence of the tsar should play the major role in people’s lives. In a 1709 speech given in honor of Aleksander Menshikov, one of Peter’s generals, Prokopovich stressed the necessity of loyalty to the tsar. Loyalty to the tsar is “the seed, the root, the source, the beginning and the head of all his efforts and successes” (SR 1.60). “Loyalty gives birth to all virtues beneficial to the fatherland.” Loyalty stems from ardent love for the monarch. Loyalty and love are the same (61). Disloyalty causes the fall of nations (62). Love of the head implies love of the entire body, so love of the tsar means love of the country (63). Menshikov’s was great loyalty to the tsar and perfect trust in God whereby great was the ardor of his faith; he wanted “to uproot the damned Union that invaded the holy Church in the territories under Polish rule and restore to its place happiness exiled from there and exile the wolves walking in lamb’s skin and introduce true and good shepherds” (67-68). Thus making the war of conquest into religious crusade justifies any bellicose action and any aggressiveness of Peter. Clearly for Prokopovich God was on the Russian side since under Menshikov’s leadership God gave victory, and pleading to

God of the enemy came to nothing: “all night in Kalisz heretical believers in streets and their houses of prayer asked for their victory acting like Balaamian priests” (65). And who will not be amazed by God’s blessing manifested by the victory in Baturin (67).

From the earliest sermons it was clear that when the tsar is included in the picture, the most important virtue of a subject is loyalty to the tsar. While extolling the position of the tsar, God was included in the picture as well, but almost as an afterthought, as a benevolent being smiling from afar at the close relationship between the subjects and their emperor. This became more and more evident in sermons from the Petersburg period. Also, now, that the tsar came to the forefront of Prokopovich’s awareness, the goal of life of Christian subjects became somewhat modified. True, in sermons from the Petersburg period the problem of eternal life, the question of personal salvation, did not by any means disappear.

There is a natural law established by God and mentioned by Paul (Rom. 2:14-15), the law found in the heart of each person to love and fear God, to protect one’s own life, not doing to others what one wouldn’t want to be done to oneself (SR 1.245), to honor one’s parents. Our conscience is a witness of such laws. The principal law says that “there should be higher authorities that have power among nations”; the reason is that “since, on the one hand, nature orders us to love ourselves and not do to others what we dislike ourselves, and, on the other hand, the evil of the deprived race will not hesitate to break this law, always and everywhere people wanted to have a guardian and protector and strong defender of the law – and this is the authority in power” (246). The highest authority comes from nature, thus from God since He created nature. The first authority comes from the human agreement; since the natural law written by God in the human heart requires a strong defender, and conscience prompts us to seek him, we must see God as the cause of authority (247). Therefore, people should submit to the authority; disobedience is a violation of the natural law. Not wanting authority is wanting the destruction of humankind. Disobedience to authority is disobedience to God.⁵ This is what atheists want. Conscience sees authority as coming from God and requires obedience to it on account of God (248). The Scripture requires it (249). There is no authority but from God; it is a servant of God (250). For this reason, obedience is due not only to good and gentle authorities, but also to overbearing, unreasonable, and surly (1 P. 2:18) which is not an advice, but a commandment (254) that was practiced by the apostles themselves since Peter and Paul taught submission to Nero (255). For this reason, subjects should obey without grumbling and without hesitation all that the authority orders even in most personal matters such as where and how to live, which profession to choose, what customs to follow, and which to reject (3.152).

The life of the Christian is thus led just as much under the rule of the tsar as it is under the authority of God Himself. “Who accepts God’s grace not for nothing,

5. “Civil obedience merits eternal salvation. By identifying the will of the tsar with the word of God he makes opposition to the decrees of civil authority tantamount to opposition to the commands of God. According to this reasoning, civil disobedience becomes punishable by eternal damnation,” Olha Tatiana della Cava, *Sermons of Feofan Prokopovič: themes and style*, PhD diss., [New York:] Columbia University 1972, p. 24.

who strives to keep the law of the Lord, who is loyal to the Monarch and the state, who is conscientious in the service of his calling, who does not seek his benefit at the expense of his neighbor, who worships God without superstition, not dispassionately, not slumbering, not living in deliberate blindness, but working for the Lord in fear, rejoicing because of him with trembling [Ps. 2:11-12] and when seeing his sins he confesses them and accepts forgiveness by faith and through repentance, he has the hope of the glory of God, he will attain the blessed and eternal age” (SR 2.123-124).

Prokopovich’s insistence that the person of the tsar should be as important in every person’s life as the awareness of the presence of God introduced a new accent into what was important in life: not only the afterlife, not only the matter of salvation, but also things of this life acquired some prominence.

True, “we roam about, we strive, we worry and through such worry we desiccate and exhaust our soul, trying to make our life better, [the life] which we won’t have for long.” And yet, is this a sin to concern ourselves with making our life on earth better? “It is not and it is even necessary only if it is right – why don’t we contemplate more eternal [matters], why at least we don’t care about them as much [as about earthly things]?” (SR 3.22). According to Mt. 6:31-32, “acquiring temporal necessities is not a sin, since our heavenly father knows [about it] and does not object to it. Also, the words of Christ indicate that it is not forbidden for man to seek the temporal, but [he should seek] first the eternal ... and possession of temporal necessities not only is not a sin, but is a blessing for those who first seek the kingdom of God ... God not only does not forbid to acquire justly temporal [things], but He even orders it. ... What answer will we give before the judgment of God that we did not seek his kingdom, when seeking it does not prevent us from seeking earthly goods: work, strive with every good means, seek whatever you need to live ... but seek the kingdom of God first and its truth” since who does not seek first the kingdom of God, he does not seek it at all (2.212-214). More than that: “praise and glory is not vanity when they stem from praiseworthy deeds” (3.9). This is particularly valid for those in power and so, in his opinion, the statement that “what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Lk. 16:15) does not refer to all authority (1.243). Pretended virtues are abomination before God. However, in this verse authority is not meant since God is pleased with humility even in kings when a king being sinful confesses before God and counts only on His mercy (244-245). In any event, acquiring material goods and expecting praise and fame become very Christian aspects of one’s life, only if the eternal perspective is not lost from one’s sight.⁶ In fact, this eternal perspective can manifest itself in the goods of this life, in which way prosperity gospel becomes a viable worldview.

6. From this perspective, “earthly concerns and eternal life not only to coexist amicably but to complement each other” without necessarily conflicting with one another, della Cava, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Peter I

In the Petersburg period when Prokopovich became the theological right hand of Peter, Prokopovich's sermons turned most often into political propaganda justifying historically and theologically every undertaking of Peter.⁷

There is no doubt for Prokopovich that the best political system was monarchy with inheritance, not democracy, not the rule of aristocracy or monarchy without inheritance but with election (SR 1.104), one reason being that the offspring of monarchs learn from earliest years the skill of ruling (105). Also, after the fall people were worse than animals and they would kill one another; to prevent it, royal rule was established by God as "a bridle for human evil passions and the fence for human cohabitation" (3.73). And thus, monarchical rule has the divine sanction. People do not realize that the authority of the tsar comes from God and by opposing it they sin, which deserves death not only on earth, but also "eternal death" (1.240).

Peter overshadows some of the most prominent Biblical figures. He was Russia's Samson (SR 2.128) since he made the country strong; he was Moses because of his legislature (129), he was Solomon because of his wisdom as seen in social order he introduced, in "honorable images of conducting life and the rules of beneficial customs and mores," whereby the country is incomparably better off than before. He was also David and Constantine of the Russian church by introducing the Synod (130).

Just like other adulating preachers, Prokopovich could not resist playing on Peter's name thereby linking him directly to apostle Peter. Peter means strength since it is a rock. Peter the First – he was the first in battle, as a citizen, in mercy, in justice, in rewarding people for their deeds (SR 1.181). He was like Caucasus rock at the shores of a sea that withstands all waves and winds; like a ship that can face any storm (183). Peter was the first among apostles, Peter I was the first among Russian tsars, he was a father of fatherland (203), an immovable rock among waves. Apostolic calling was one thing, Peter I's was another, different work, but what God ordered the apostle Peter in respect to the church, the tsar fulfilled in the blossoming Russian monarchy (204), which deserved an exclamation: "blessed you are by the most high God who works in/through you for our benefit!" (211). Strength of Russia rests on Peter as on an unshakable foundation and his spiritual temple rests on the rock. His name indicates that the creation of a monarchy by Peter is similar to creating the church by the apostle Peter (2.43).

If a comparison to the apostle Peter is not enough, comparison to Christ Himself is not far behind. When Christ entered Jerusalem, He was despised by Pharisees. In Russia, the tsar is honored. "So that no one thinks that our intention is to compare the earthly Tsar with the heavenly: no such folly; it is because the Jews greeting Jesus did not consider him to be the heavenly King," but only earthly (238); and yet, the comparison has just been made.

7. "Power always attracted Prokopovič, and all his life he remained a servant and ideological spokesman for the mighty. ... From an ideologist of Christianity using power as its instrument, Prokopovič is transformed into an ideologist of state power using Christianity as its instrument," Jury Šerech, On Teofan Prokopovič as writer and preacher in his Kiev period, *Harvard Slavic Studies* 2 (1954), pp. 222-223.

This goes even further. Considering the fact that the Orthodoxy recognizes the Septuagint as the canonical Scripture, Prokopovich referred to the fact that rulers were called gods and Christs, that is, anointed (SR 1.251, 2.278, 4.15). For this reason, Prokopovich prayed: “Lord, save your Christ and hear him, your saint, from heaven” (1.268). Prokopovich even called Peter II, a 12 year-old boy on the throne, a Christ (2.227). There is a tinge of scholarly dishonesty here. When discussing the meaning of baptism, Prokopovich admitted that *baptismos* meant originally immersion, but in the Scripture it signifies any kind of washing (4.15 – therefore baptism by sprinkling or pouring of water is also acceptable). Similarly, diadem meant originally a band (обвязка/обвязка) like in a head-band (9), but now it means a royal wreath (4.14). Idol means an image (образок, 1.78) and yet images (образы) had been used in the Old Testament; they were even made by the command of God (79). Prokopovich probably well realized that the word “Christ” is used in the New Testament only in reference to Jesus Christ, never to anyone else. Even a mention of false christs (ψευδοχριστοι, Mt. 24:24, Mk. 13:22) makes sense if the true Christ is meant. Therefore, calling today anyone a christ (even Christ with the capital C), is a flagrant violation of the meaning of this word as accepted today, where today also includes the 18th century in Russia.⁸

Having put Peter on equal footing with Biblical kings, with apostles, even with Christ Himself, elevated him over all humans to the extent that even if there had been a reason to condemn Peter’s behavior, no one on earth had the right to do it. When God is called the Lord of lords, it means that “only God has power/authority over them, that they are subject to no other authorities beyond [the authority of] God nor should they answer for their actions before any tribunal, since they are not to be judged on earth” (SR 2.179). Even questionable actions of the tsar turn out to be in accordance to God’s will. Bad things happen also with God’s permission (2.206) and actions not only of people but even of animals take place by participation of God (Prov. 21:1); however, “the will and heart of the ruling power is directed by a special act of God either to do works beneficial to the nation to show God’s mercy or to lead to woeful and unfavorable events as a punishment we deserved, but always for his glory” (182). In particular, elevating to the royal status a peasant woman was surely an eyebrow-raising event. And yet, it is not without sin to doubt that Peter crowned Catherine, his wife, by God’s providence. Peter crowned Catherine “not because of his personal inclinations or interests, but for the benefit of the entire nation and for protection from many woes” (185) such as bloodletting caused by the competition for the empty throne after his death.⁹

Untold suffering of people caused by Peter’s ambition of modernization never was a problem for Prokopovich. Peter found wooden Russia and made it golden with

8. Importantly, this way of addressing Peter found its way into official documents in which Peter is called the Christ of the Lord (*Полное собрание законов Российской Империи*, Санктпетербург: Печатано в Типографии II Отделения Собственной Его Императорского Величества Канцелярии 1830, 6.3718 (p. 318, *Spiritual Regulation*), 6.4053 (p. 744), in act penned by Prokopovich not without gracious consent of Peter.

9. See also Феофан Прокопович, *Краткая повесть о смерти Петра Великаго, Императора и Самодержца Всероссийскаго*, Санкт-Петербург: Глазунов 1831, pp. 16-17.

numerous buildings, fortifications, laws, and leaders (SR 1.113). The fleet, many fortresses, Petersburg, “expelling crudeness from the fatherland, introducing honest teachings, arts, crafts, all of it in spite of great oppositions from foreign and domestic [enemies], all of it done by one man in a short time; who would not call it the work of God?” (2.43-44). In this way, Russia became Peter’s statue, Russia restructured by his mastery (164). The important thing was that Peter’s wars of aggression were always justified by the good of religious faith and the fulfillment of the will of God. God protected Russia from the attacks of enemies and also blessed it with peace, riches, beauty, and extending its dominion: Little Russia came back under the strong hand of the monarchs from the Polish yoke (1.148); the Russians crushed strongholds of Nöteborg, Nyenskans, Dorpat/Tartu, Elbląg, Mitau/Jeglava, Riga, Pernau/Pärnu, Revel/Tallinn, Narva and others (153, 182), which was done for “the power of eternal happiness of his monarchy” (182). By protecting Peter from a bullet in Poltava (158), God showed that He Himself was fighting through Peter (159). In this, divine support was shown to be as much an expression of His love and providential care for Russia as it was an endorsement of Petrine political decisions.¹⁰

The Church

What is the position of the church under the autocratic rule of the tsar? It is not particularly different from the position of anything and anyone under his authority. “Authority is the first and highest fatherhood since on it depends the life, unity, and security not only of one man or one household, but of the entire large population” (SR 1.257). Priests and monks sometimes think they are excluded from such obedience, but such thinking is a thorn, a venomous sting, an expression of “the Papist spirit.” The fact is that “pastors and teachers and simply all clergy have their work to do, which is being servants of God and dealing with his sacraments, they are, nevertheless, obligated to submit themselves to the ruling authorities” (257). True, as to matters of eternal life, although the clergy is directly responsible for them, “the supreme control over them God put on the ruling powers.” “Although it is not tsars’ duty to preach the word to proclaim piety, it is their important duty to see that there would be Christian teaching and the proper governance of the Christian church” (153). Peter was concerned about the purity of Christian faith; he was fighting schismatics by persuasion (154) and by “some oppression.” He was fighting superstition by “waking up from slumber the pastoral order” so that they would fight superstition, prohibit idolizing icons and preach the message of salvation (155). Admittedly, the level of education of the clergy at the time of Peter was dismal and even some prominent ecclesiastics complained about it. However, Prokopovich tried to create an impression that if there was a measure of

10. “God for Prokopovich is not as much a decision-maker concerning human fate, as [He is] a patron of those who act according to the laws of reason and of duty where duty is understood as the submission of one’s personal interests to the interest of the government,” Н.Д. Кочеткова, Ораторская проза Феофана Прокоповича и пути формирования литературы классицизма, XVIII век 9 (1974), p. 58.

spirituality in the church, it was all due to Peter. Peter was apparently troubled by shamelessness caused by avoiding confession of sins and taking communion (2.156); he encouraged publishing spiritual literature and religious education of children. Peter, great hero and wise ruler, was also an apostle (157) since a Christian monarch has “an Apostolic duty” to care for the eternal salvation of his nation, and thus he watched for the rise of godlessness and heresy (2.256). “He was versed in Christian philosophy” (2.136), he liked theological discussions, he was talking people away from superstition, he led them to the knowledge of truth, he disputed with schismatics and skillfully used Scriptures, particularly the letters of Paul that he knew by heart (161). So, Peter was presented as a virtual saint. Expectedly, Prokopovich did not mention the crude jokes Peter liked to play on religion to mention only his Most Drunken Council.

Dismantling the authority of the church by abolishing the patriarchate and establishing the Synod that answered to the state, Prokopovich presented as one of crowning achievements of Peter. Spiritual leadership is needed (SR 2.65); otherwise, a Christian nation suffers without spiritual teaching and rule (66). God put on Peter’s heart the matter of the leadership of the church and created it through him (68). Peter was as good as other monarchs in what he built in Russia, but exceeded them by building “the spiritual building” (69). Praising Peter as a model of a Christian ruler and defender of the church Prokopovich, in a way, praised himself. After all, he authored the *Spiritual regulation* that turned the church into the service of the state, that is, of the tsar. And yet, shortly before that organizational transformation took place, he extolled Orthodoxy and its position in Russia. “What happiness that we have been born in the true church” (3.304). “Man who is by nature dust of the earth,” however, by God’s love, “although he would be of the lowest station, he is by his election in happier situation than all heretical Princes.” “What a joy to be the sons of the holy church” (305). The church is the spiritual Zion and the new Jerusalem, the place of God’s regiments from Jacob’s vision, the woman of the Holy Spirit from the Song of songs, the body of which Christ is the head. “What happiness of those whom the Lord called into such an elect regiment of His” (306). Alexander and Domitian demanded to be called sons of god. The Orthodox are true sons of the true God and have the same rights as Christ Himself. “It is much better to be born very poor in the holy Orthodox faith than the greatest, most famous and the richest among heretics” (307). “For us, the sons of this great Orthodox church, what can this deceptive world offer that would be greater than our happiness?” (309). “We are the regiment of God, they are a devilish gathering; we are the members of the body of Christ, they are rotten carcasses, we are in Jerusalem, they are in Babylon ... We are born in the church that is the one and only [church] in which there is hope for eternal salvation and outside of which we can nowhere be saved” (312). What if we were born into Judaism or Mohammedanism? Only by God’s inexpressible love and mercy we were born here, to be the sons of the Orthodox church (316).

If in 1717, when this sentiment was expressed about the status of the church and of Orthodox faith in Russia, why change it? Why depose it to a servile status? It is quite astounding that Prokopovich did not see incongruity between his high opinion of the Russian church and his actions to change its status. According to Prokopovich, the state offers the church its instruments of fear to fight evil deeds and instruments of defense for continuation of the church (SR 3.194) and yet he himself stated that in

the early ages, in spite of persecution Christianity was spreading, which was possible only by the power of God (2.39) since God used the weak and foolish to convert the world (40) and we need no other proof for the truth of the Gospel. That is, the faith was not only preserved but even grew in spite of hostility of the state. And yet, Prokopovich insisted that the state offers paternal supervision for the growth and improvement of the church (3.195). Even the history of Russia does not substantiate this claim and only enchantment by the tsarist power and authority could induce him to promote such a view.

In the end, the developments in Prokopovich sermons appear to reflect his own progress in life. He was noticed by Peter I very early in 1707 and again in 1709 when preaching in Kiev. In 1711, he was called by Peter to his camp in his expedition against Turkey. After his return, he became the igumen/abbot of the Bratskii monastery and the rector of the academy. In 1716 he was summoned to Saint Petersburg to become a bishop of Pskov in 1718, a vice-president of the Synod in 1721, and an archbishop of Novgorod in 1724. In 1720, he got from the tsar a village and two ships, and in 1722, two villages; he owned two houses in St. Petersburg, a house in Moscow and a house near Moscow.¹¹ All in all, under Peter I, his was a meteoric rise to the highest ecclesiastical positions, he became a right hand of the tsar himself and a rich man. More and more strongly he saw Peter as God's representative on earth and although he spoke disdainfully about Catholicism even though he owed his education to it, and about the pope, he ascribed to Peter a status which even surpassed that of the pope since Peter was not only an autocrat in the state, but he also had the last word in matters of the church.¹² He was captivated by Peter's successes – in his view, history of all princes and monarchs before Peter would be a small book in comparison with large book of Peter (SR 2.18) – regardless the cost of these successes, and it was easy for him to blur the distinction not only between Peter and the apostles but even between Peter and Christ. Having served such a divinely appointed messiah, Prokopovich himself acquired a divinely appointed status. The trappings of power more and more directed his theological eyes toward this earth and the enjoyment of life on it. The asceticism of the early Kievan period remained in the forgotten past.

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11. И[ларион А.] Чистович, *Феофан Прокопович и его время*, Санктпетербург: Императорская Академия Наук 1868, pp. 46, 143, 638-639, 650.
12. One assessment said that Prokopovich was right in requiring that the Russian clergy should not oppose the tsar, but he should have been able to “distinguish the rule of governmental supervision over the life of the church from the power of church legislation which in no way should belong to the monarch,” [Константин С. Стефанович], *Феофан Прокопович, как канонист*, Москва: Типография Штаба Московского военного Округа 1906, p. 125.

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