

Moscow's Reborn Cathedral

"The Life, Death and Resurrection of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow" by Andrew Gentes, in *History Workshop Journal* (Autumn 1998), Oxford Univ. Press, Great Clarendon St., Oxford OX2 6DP, England.

Thirty stories high, with five gold (or imitation gold) domes, the rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Savior now stands imposingly in the center of Moscow. Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and others hail it as a symbol of pride and hope, while critics deride it as an expensive (\$300 million) piece of kitsch, a Disneyesque distraction from painful reality, present and past. Whatever the replica cathedral is, it is only the latest chapter in a history of efforts by Russian leaders to turn the site into a monumental expression of ultimate belief.

On Christmas Day 1812, as he was pursuing what remained of Napoleon's shattered army westward into Europe, Tsar Alexander I decreed that a cathedral would be erected in Moscow to thank God and mark the Russians' sacrifices, writes Gentes, a doctoral candidate in Russian history at Brown University. Five years later, ceremonies were held at a site on the Sparrow Hills, the highest point in the city. But a 10-year attempt to build the church on the unsuitable soil there failed.

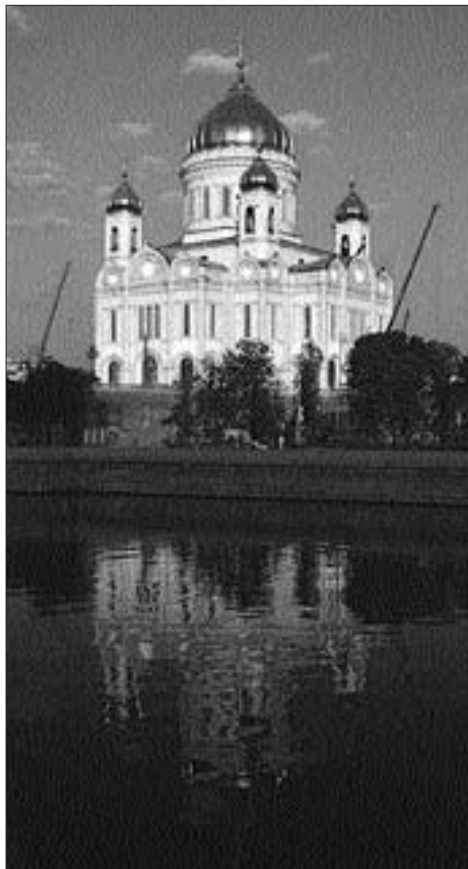
In 1838, under Tsar Nicholas I, construction began again, on more solid ground, at a site just southwest of the Kremlin, next to the Moscow River. The work was slowed by funding problems, but in 1881 the colossal edifice—nearly 340 feet high, with 2,500 square yards of interior floor space, and able to accommodate 7,200 worshippers—was finally completed. With huge wall murals, sculptures, and paintings by renowned artists, the cathedral was "as much an art gallery as a church," Gentes notes.

But after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the cathedral—standing for both the old monarchical order and the competing ideology of Orthodox Christianity—posed "a double threat," Gentes observes. The Bolsheviks deprived it of heat, damaging the wall murals, and ransacked the building for its art and other treasures. In December 1931, on Stalin's order, the cathedral was destroyed.

To replace it, the communist leaders envisioned a "Palace of Soviets," which would then have been the world's tallest

building, slightly higher than the Empire State Building; an enormous Lenin statue on top would have been three times the size of the Statue of Liberty. But construction was plagued by problems and halted in 1941 when Germany attacked the Soviet Union. After the war, the gigantic palace never got off the ground—a failure that has been likened to that of the communist regime itself. In the late 1950s, the site was made into a swimming pool.

Interest in rebuilding the cathedral surfaced during the late 1980s, in the glasnost era. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian leader Boris Yeltsin joined Mayor Luzhkov and Patriarch Alexei II in embracing the idea. Construction began in 1994, and the rebuilt cathedral was opened to the public last year. During Luzhkov's 1996 re-



The fully restored Cathedral of Christ the Saviour

election campaign, his billboards proclaimed the edifice “a symbol of Russian Renaissance.” Muscovites apparently agreed.

Critics, however, called it a waste of rubles, or worse. “With its marble-covered reinforced concrete structure, its projected fake-stone sculptured reliefs and its computer-outlined frescoes,” said one Western

academic, the cathedral “is the ultimate symbol of this Epcot-ization process, tragically erasing real historical understanding.” In Gentes’s view, the replica cathedral’s “inauthenticity” shows “the futility of trying to establish links with the imperial past.” The entire project, he concludes, reveals “a reluctance to come to terms with the Soviet period—to pretend . . . it never happened.”

Liberalizing Japan

“The Privilege of Choosing: The Fallout from Japan’s Economic Crisis” by Masaru Tamamoto, in *World Policy Journal* (Fall 1998), World Policy Institute, New School University, 65 Fifth Ave., Ste. 413, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Beneath Japan’s seeming indecision over how to revitalize its economy, sagging since 1990, is a society on the verge of a grand transformation, observes Tamamoto, a Senior Fellow at the World Policy Institute, New York, and a visiting professor in the Faculty of Law at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto.

During the “bubble” years of 1985–90, there was much talk of Japanese-style capitalism, supposedly superior to the U.S. brand. Now, Tamamoto says, Japanese pundits acknowledge there is only one basic type—and that Japan has an over-regulated version. Deregulation alone won’t solve the problem, however. The Japanese will be forced to give up the “protected life” and strong “sense of community” they have come to know.

Pointing toward this transformation, Tamamoto maintains, are many apparently discrete changes already in effect or in the works. Some are seemingly minor, such as letting superior students skip grades, and making taxi fare schedules more flexible. Others are clearly earthshaking. A plan to cut back government bank deposit insurance, for example, will likely lead to the government allowing more uncompetitive banks to fail.

An even more fundamental change concerns the powerful Japanese government bureaucracy. In the post-1945 order, that institution has acted not only in an administrative capacity but as the nation’s legislature and judiciary. Now, however, the bureaucracy is losing the Confucian “mandate of heaven,” Tamamoto writes. Recent arrests and indictments of Ministry of Finance officials and other bureaucrats have strengthened reform-minded politicians such as Naoto

Kan, who leads the opposition Democratic Party. Three years ago, Kan was appointed minister of health and welfare in a coalition government. For nearly a decade, the ministry had claimed it could not locate records pertaining to a criminal negligence suit brought against it by hemophiliacs infected with HIV. “Kan ordered that the records be found, and they were produced within a few days,” Tamamoto notes. “Resignations and indictments followed.” This affair “accelerated the demand for transparency and accountability”—two new words in the Japanese political lexicon.

The aging of Japanese society is another force for change, Tamamoto says. By 2020, one in four Japanese will be over 65. Despite its prowess in certain export sectors, the Japanese economy is full of inefficiencies, and the only way to make the economy grow will be to increase productivity by sweeping them away.

In Japan, lacking a tradition of liberal individualism, the social change will be profound. Corporate lifetime employment is on the way out; seniority is giving way to merit in fixing compensation. As “the community becomes less a source of protection, welfare, and an ordered life,” Tamamoto writes, the Japanese will become more individualistic—more concerned with individual rights, and more inclined to take risks. Inequality of results will become more acceptable.

Most Japanese remain oblivious to the direction in which their country is headed, Tamamoto observes, and “would be unlikely to approve the kind of society that is being forged.”