

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY, IMPERIAL STRATEGIES, AND
THE ISSUE OF FAITH:
RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN EARLY MODERN RUSSIA
IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

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Since the 15th century, Western Europeans had been coming to Russia in ever-larger numbers to do battle for Muscovy, to trade, or to serve the tsar at court or in his administration. In the first half of the 17th century, in the decades following the Time of Troubles, as the state embarked on a substantial, Western-inspired reform of the military and the economy rebounded and diversified, the flow of Europeans grew stronger and the alien resident population mushroomed, especially in Moscow, the heart of the realm.¹ As wary as it might have been about allowing growing numbers of foreigners to settle in the country, the Muscovite state ultimately welcomed their presence and even facilitated it through various incentives. It is clear that those formulating state policy believed

¹ One estimate places the Lutheran/Calvinist foreign population in Moscow at one thousand men, not including their families, in the 1630s. A more complete figure, counting Anglicans, Catholics, and possibly others is unavailable, as is a total for those foreigners who resided in the provinces, many of them in the tsar's military. The latter alone appear to have numbered some several thousand by the end of the 16th century. See Tsvetaev, *Protestantstvo*, 246–250; and Baron, “Moscow’s *Nemeckaja Sloboda*,” 2.

that the potential risks—to national security, popular order and morality, and Church-state relations—associated with allowing foreigners to live in Russia among Russians and to enter and exit the country on business were outweighed by the benefits they brought with them: specie for a treasury totally dependent on outside sources; capital, entrepreneurial skills and techniques; and commercial networks that could help stimulate Russian trade, boost customs revenues, provide technological know-how in developing new products, mining, metallurgy and weapons manufacture, military skills and manpower, scientific knowledge, languages, etc.² Sustained Muscovite awareness of Russia's shortcomings in these areas and its need to improve if it were to increase its strength geopolitically (versus Poland and Sweden in the west and the Ottomans in the south) fueled the "first" wave (i.e., pre-Petrine) of Western European migration to Russia.

Muscovy was not alone in recognizing that foreigners could make important contributions to its state power. The world over, throughout the ages, from Europe to Asia, rulers have sought to use outsiders to better promote their interests. In return, they have granted these strangers rewards to anchor and nurture the relationship. Beyond remuneration and other material incentives, those who lived and worked in foreign lands were most concerned about two core issues. First, how, by whom, and according to which law they would be judged in disputes, and second, the extent to which they could practice their religious beliefs—concerns essentially about the safety of body and soul. On the question of religious liberty, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the policies adopted in various settings show a clear dichotomy between East and West, with Ottoman, Mughal, and Southeast Asian rulers displaying a more accommodating inclination, while Western European states generally exhibited a rigid, often aggressive drive towards uniformity in the religious sphere.

The Muscovite stance on the issue vis-à-vis Western Europeans can be situated somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, less liberal than the Eastern model, but considerably more tolerant than was the norm in the West in the period. Although the latter

² Some useful discussions and assessments of the role of Western Europeans in Muscovite Russia are provided by: Lappo-Danilveskii, "Inozemtsy"; Pypin, "Inozemtsy"; Tsvetaev, *Protestantstvo*; Muliukin, *Priezd inostrantsev*; Platonov, *Moskva i zapad*; Esper, "Military Self-Sufficiency"; Phipps, *Britons*; and Fuhrmann, *Capitalism in Russia*.

point is not entirely new, it has not been the subject of much reflection, and certainly not of any broad comparative discussion. Rather, it has been buried under numerous, often disparaging depictions of Muscovy, by contemporaries and scholars alike, as a den of xenophobia. While not denying that 16th- and 17th-century Muscovites were ethnocentric, probably xenophobic (at least in the decades following the Time of Troubles, when the scars left by invading Polish Catholic and Protestant Swedish armies and the Polish occupation of Moscow had yet to fade), this study shifts the analysis away from popular attitudes that are difficult to trace, to state policies, which are not only more accessible to the historian, but also the single most important force in setting the parameters of religious expression and practice for foreign communities in Russia. These parameters were relatively wide because the particular ethno-cultural space that made up early modern Russia and the perceptions that formed around it, coupled with the exigencies of state building in an imperial setting combined to favor a pragmatic and flexible approach to the religious question.

Ethnocentrism and Xenophobia: Muscovite and Other

You strangers that inhabit this land!
 Note this same writing, do it understand;
 Conceive it well, for safety of your lives,
 Your goods, your children, and your dearest wives.³

One can well imagine the chilling effect these non-too-subtle threats must have had on those who first saw them affixed one morning to the front gate of their church, back in the early 1590s. The place was not Moscow, but London, and the church belonged to a Dutch parish, by far the largest resident alien community in the English capital at the time. London was also home in this period to a sizeable French community, which, like the Dutch, was often the target of insult and abuse, including daily harassment in the streets, at the hands of the English. The Archbishop of Canterbury bemoaned the behavior of his flock, lamenting Londoners' habit of referring to resident Frenchmen and their kin as "French dogs," while another contemporary rebuked his fellows for the "inveterate fierceness and cankered malice" they held for foreigners living in their midst.⁴ Blunt warnings of violence, verbal

³ Yungblut, *Strangers*, 42.

⁴ Yungblut, *Strangers*, 12, 43–44.

harassment, and dishonest business tactics aimed at hurting the livelihood of those not English were common occurrences in the daily lives of resident aliens in Elizabethan England. In the early 17th century, the situation was not much improved, the chaplain of the Venetian ambassador in London observing that foreigners were well-advised “to avoid strangeness in dress” lest they fall prey to the hostility of officials and tradesmen who were “apt to ill-treat and rob them.”⁵

By the time the good chaplain penned his remarks, the English had long been perceived by their continental brethren as ethnocentric, prone to flaunting their superiority vis-à-vis other peoples and states, sometimes veering into outright xenophobia. Foreigners commented “with almost monotonous regularity” on the intense English dislike of outsiders, describing them as “inimical to strangers,” “great lovers of themselves . . . [who believe] that there [is] no people equal to them and no other world but England.” One Italian observer noted disapprovingly that “they have an antipathy of foreigners and imagine they never come into their island but to make themselves masters of it, and to usurp their goods.”⁶ No doubt, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Austrians, Venetians, Florentines, Dutchmen, and other Europeans displayed their own brands of self-satisfaction and insularity, viewing themselves in the most shining of lights, while looking down on others with distaste ranging from mild condescension to suspicious hostility.

So, apparently, did the Muscovites. While 19th- and early 20th-century anthropologists and sociologists were honing their understanding and definition of “ethnocentrism” and “xenophobia,” historians of Russia were busy writing about, among other related topics, the negative attitude of Muscovites towards foreigners and all things foreign. In the works of these scholars, Russia in the 16th and 17th centuries was depicted as a place where people at all levels of society were “wary” and “suspicious” of foreigners, “intolerant” of the non-Russian and non-Orthodox, “unwelcoming,” “highly distrustful,” and even “hostile” to anything or anyone from “the outside.” Russians supposedly “hated” foreigners, whom they sometimes referred to as “dogs” or “snakes,” refusing to have any physical contact with them or to enter their homes.⁷

⁵ Yungblut, *Strangers*, 47.

⁶ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 1; and Yungblut, *Strangers*, 47.

⁷ See, for instance, Pypin, “Inozemtsy,” 55–256; Tsvetaev, *Protestantstvo*, 329–334, 341; and Liubimenko, *Istoriia torgovykh snoshenii*, 62–63, 131.

Foreign visitors to Russia in the period provided much of the material for these assessments. Sixteenth-century accounts, for instance those penned by Ulfeldt (1575) or Possevino (1586), contain many references to Muscovites shunning contact with foreigners. Similar observations were made in subsequent works as late as the turn of the 18th century. Petrejus, writing in 1615, noted the “pride” of the Muscovites and the low view they held of “others,” while a few decades later, Olearius described a people that regarded itself as superior.⁸

Foreigners who described Muscovites as self-important, proud, and contemptuous of others attributed these sentiments to a sense of religious superiority: the belief, in fact ardent conviction, that Orthodoxy was the one true faith and its adherents the only real Christians. Catholics were, at best, “besprinkled Christians” and, at worst, along with everyone else who was not Orthodox (Protestants, Muslims, Jews, and non-Christians) “unclean” and “sinful,” “heretics” or “heathens.” According to certain observers, Muscovites were especially scornful and intolerant of Catholics, which some believed stemmed from the influence of the Byzantine/Greek Orthodox tradition,⁹ as well as Jews, whom the Russian clergy referred to as the “killers of Christ.”¹⁰ Historians have observed that, for Muscovites, being Russian was synonymous with being Orthodox. One could not be of another faith, whether Christian or non-Christian, and be Russian. Command of the Russian language, the wearing of Russian dress, a physiognomy similar to that of Russians, or even an oath of loyalty to the tsar—none were sufficient to “make” one a Russian, only adherence to the Russian Orthodox religion.¹¹ Conversely, a person of non-Russian origin or physiognomy who barely spoke Russian or did so poorly, was considered Russian if he/she was Russian Orthodox, even if only in name. If ethnocentrism “is really the sentiment of patriotism in all its philosophic fullness ... in both its rationality and its extravagant exaggeration,”¹² then, by believing and declaring their religion to be “the best,” Muscovites were simply being patriotic, waving the flag, so to speak. Pride in the Orthodox faith and,

⁸ Poe, “*Born to Slavery*,” 46; Petrejus, discussed in Birgegard, *Sparwenfeld’s Diary*, 264; and Baron, *Travels of Olearius*, 232.

⁹ Fletcher, *Russe Commonwealth*, 94.

¹⁰ Poe, “*Born to Slavery*,” 46; Baron, *Travels of Olearius*, 277, 282; and Dunning, *Grand Duchy*, 123.

¹¹ Tsvetaev, *Protestantstvo*, 341; and Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 42–43.

¹² Sumner, *War*, 12.

conversely, the belittling of other religions, was for Russians in the 16th and 17th centuries pride in Russia, in being Russian, and in being the subjects of the mighty Russian tsar, even if these sentiments were not articulated or even perceived as such.

In a recent discussion of Russian attitudes towards foreigners in the early modern period, Lindsey Hughes correctly, and refreshingly, cautioned that the negative Russian perception of outsiders needs “to be viewed in a comparative perspective.” As I have done here, Hughes also used the case of the English, usually depicted as a sensible and progressive-minded people, to make her point. “Englishness,” in this era, was suffused with xenophobia, hatred of Catholics, the Scots and the French, displaying, as Linda Colley has brilliantly revealed, “a vast superstructure of prejudice.”¹³ So what do we make of the Muscovites, the English, and others so fond of themselves? It seems that we should not be too harsh in our assessment, however offended our modern sensibilities might be by such overt displays of cultural smugness. The work of sociobiologists has persuasively shown that ethnocentric tendencies, prejudices, and xenophobia appear to be universal. They occur to some degree or another in all cultures, although the specific content and articulation of these attitudes differs from one group to another and within the same group over time, depending on socio-economic and political circumstances. Simply put, they are an expression of the age-old human striving for “group identity,” for “belonging to a group which accepts us as individuals, takes care of us, and protects us,” in a word, promotes our “survival.”¹⁴ Moreover, the need to view the world in terms of “us” and “them” is strongly rooted in all cultures not only because of its inherent nature, but also because such attitudes, while easily learned (beginning in childhood), are very difficult to unlearn.¹⁵

Historians have developed a similar understanding of popular perceptions of self and “other.” In an insightful piece on religious intolerance in Reformation Germany, for instance, Robert W. Scribner discussed the universality of stereotypes or social labels, which are “continually being formed, modified, forgotten, revived, revised, and discarded” within any society, serving as a “cultural fund to be drawn upon ... available for mobilization at any given moment.”¹⁶

¹³ Cited in Hughes, “Foreigners,” 17.

¹⁴ Flohr, “Social Prejudices,” 197–200.

¹⁵ Reynolds, Falger, and Vine, “Conclusion,” 270.

¹⁶ Scribner, “Preconditions,” 44–45.

The key word here is “mobilization”: the notion that prejudices, xenophobic perceptions, and tendencies present in all cultures can be activated, brought out of mumbled obscurity into the glaring blaze of daylight and articulate expressions, sometimes violent, of hatred and intolerance. History has shown that often, the mobilizing agent or trigger is economic stress in the guise of a real or perceived shortage or unequal distribution of essential resources (food, land, housing, or employment).¹⁷ The case of England is instructive once again. A recent study shows that almost every decade of Elizabeth I’s economically challenged reign saw “actual or planned attacks” on foreigners in various parts of the English realm, and with increasing frequency.¹⁸ Particularly serious attacks took place in the first half of the 1590s in London. Merchants and tradespeople incensed with the government’s refusal to meet their demands concerning foreign competition issued highly inflammatory pamphlets against the resident foreigners, the “bestly brutes the Belgians,” “drunken drones and faint-hearted Flemings,” “fraudulent ... Frenchmen,” all “treacherous serpents ... [who] sting [the English] to the very harte.” Fighting words were accompanied by riots and the looting of the homes and businesses of those foreigners that heeded the warnings to leave England or else suffer the consequences.¹⁹ As elsewhere in conditions of economic hardship and uncertainty, frustrations were assuaged and the incomprehensible understood by pointing an accusing finger or a hard fist at outsiders.

Religious Toleration in Muscovy

Fundamental concerns about physical sustenance and security set off strident vocalizations and overt acts of popular antipathy towards foreigners in early modern England. The religious issue exacerbated the situation. In an environment where people’s core beliefs and allegiances were shaken to the bone by deep and widespread religious strife brought on by the Reformation, the position of outsiders in England and other parts of Europe was made more difficult if they had the misfortune to adhere to a

¹⁷ Flohr, “Social Prejudices,” 213. Studies suggest that an equitable distribution of resources would work against racism and violence between groups. Reynolds, Falger, and Vine, “Conclusion,” 271.

¹⁸ Yungblut, *Strangers*, 40.

¹⁹ Yungblut, *Strangers*, 41–44.

religion or church other than that of their host ruler and society—even worse if that affiliation was associated with an enemy power. The latter point underlines the important role played by the ruler or state, as opposed to society at large, on issues of faith in the age of confession. *Cuius regio, eius religio* (“whose realm, his religion”) was the mantra of the moment and, as Scribner rightly observed, it was above all “the conjuncture of politics and religious fervour” that was “fateful for the development of intolerance.”²⁰ For stranger communities in Europe, popular attitudes towards Catholics, Protestants and sectarians, Jews, Armenian Christians, or Ottoman Muslims for that matter, certainly made themselves felt in day-to-day encounters. However, policies emanating from the top ultimately had the most decisive and deleterious impact on the religious life of outsiders.

While Muscovy certainly experienced tumultuous upheavals and catastrophes—natural and man-made—in the same period, it was spared the tribulations of the Reformation. This is not to say that the religious turmoil generated by the bitter struggle between Catholics and Protestants did not seep into Russia at all. In fact, it did from neighboring Poland, the ancient foe, where the Counter-Reformation, aggressively advanced by the Jesuits, was aimed not only against Protestants, but also the Orthodox co-religionists of the Muscovites, most disturbingly the East Slavic populations (Ukrainians and Belarusians) of the contested borderland region. In the first two decades of the 17th century, during the Time of Troubles, the Catholic threat emanating from Poland assumed its most menacing form in the guise of the invading armies of the False Dmitrii and his Polish supporters and, later, of the Polish monarch himself, Sigismund III, intent on placing his son Władysław on the Russian throne. Both attacks were launched with the blessings of the Jesuits, whose proselytizing aspirations at this time included a *missio moscovitica* (“Moscow mission”), which they explicitly hoped to prosecute in conjunction with Polish military enterprises, prompting one recent study of the subject to observe that the interests of the Jesuits and the ruling house of Poland “were so closely identified that they were in fact inseparable.”²¹ The Russians ultimately rallied, regained Moscow from the Polish occupiers, installed a new ruler and dynasty (Michael Romanov, 1613–1645), and began the painful process of

²⁰ Scribner, “Preconditions,” 47.

²¹ Santich, *Missio Moscovitica*, 39–40.

reconstruction. The ominous shadow of Catholicism, however, continued to hover in the Ukrainian/Belarusian borderlands controlled by Poland, as well as in Smolensk, seized from Russia by the Poles during the Time of Troubles. There the Jesuits lost no time in founding a mission (1611; elevated to a collegium in 1622) that sought to convert the local population.²²

Despite clashes with Catholic forces, Western Europeans who chose to make Russia their home in the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries generally found themselves in a remarkably accommodating religious environment compared to what they knew in their native lands. Official Muscovite toleration of religions other than Orthodoxy, Christian or not, practiced by non-Russian groups living under the tsar's sway was striking. Even those who had little praise for the Russians, their rulers, or their culture expressed pleasant bafflement at this odd Russian openness. Olearius, who was far from generous in his appreciation of Muscovite culture, could not deny that they "allow freedom of conscience to everyone, even their subjects and slaves" and "tolerat[ed] and [had] dealings with people of other nations and religions, Lutherans, Calvinists, Armenians, Tatars, Persians, Turks," although he was quick to add that, nevertheless, they were "very intolerant" of Catholics and Jews.²³ Margeret, generally more favorable in his assessments of Russia and Russians, was more specific in his treatment of this subject, and more direct. According to Margeret, in Muscovy, everyone enjoyed "freedom of conscience" and could "exercise their religious devotion publicly, except Roman Catholics." The Frenchman could hardly mask his amazement in describing how:

Even Tatars, Turks, and Persians, besides the Mordvinians and other Mohammedan peoples, are found under the domination of the Russians, each retaining their own religion. There are also Siberians, Lapps, and others who are neither Christian nor Mohammedan, but rather worship certain animals according to their fancy without being forced into [the Russian] religion.²⁴

The picture painted by Margeret is not a totally accurate reflection of Muscovite policy towards non-Christian groups under Russian rule, but not too far off the mark. The Muslim populations

²² Santich, *Missio Moscovitica*, 163.

²³ Baron, *Travels of Olearius*, 248, 277.

²⁴ Dunning, *Grand Duchy*, 22–23, 24.

of the former Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, conquered by Ivan IV in the mid-16th century, witnessed the destruction of their mosques and the erection of Orthodox churches in their places soon after their defeats; prisoners in Russian custody were forcibly converted to Orthodoxy. Priests were sent out from the Russian heartland on a conversion mission, which was carried out through “intimidation, force, and the revocation of traditional privileges,” as well as material incentives, depending on circumstances, efforts becoming more systematic in the course of the 17th century.²⁵ In the far north and Siberia, however, where there was no psychological or strategic need to demonstrate the “political and ideological supremacy of Orthodox Muscovy over former Muslim overlords” and security concerns were minor, unlike along the steppe frontier,²⁶ the state not only left the local religions unmolested, but repeatedly instructed officials “not to baptize any foreigners by force” and not to offend their religious sensibilities. In this part of the expanding empire, at least in the Muscovite era, practical considerations prevailed, the “unbaptized” population of the region providing valuable revenue for the state in the form of fur tribute, or *iasak*. Those who converted to Orthodoxy were regarded as Russian, and thus not subject to tribute.²⁷

Western Europeans who settled in Muscovy were also left largely unmolested in matters of faith. They were free to hold their own religious views and worship according to their own customs and rites. Under Ivan IV in the latter half of the 16th century, the number of foreigners swelled, many recruited by the tsar, and thousands more were captured during the Livonian War and forced to resettle in Moscow and beyond.²⁸ The large foreign influx prompted a clarification of the type of worship permitted. According to one foreign observer at the time, Catholics and Protestants were required to worship in their own languages and behind closed doors only, presumably, so that Russians would not hear and see the other religions and be corrupted or lured away from Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the foreigners were strictly enjoined

²⁵ Khodarkovsky, “Conversion,” 120–125. For a vivid contemporary description of the treatment of Tatar prisoners, see Fletcher, *Russe Commonwealth*, 94.

²⁶ Khodarkovsky, “Conversion,” 120; and Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 223.

²⁷ Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, 43.

²⁸ Tsvetaev, *Protestantstvo*, 29–45.

to refrain from proselytizing among the tsar's subjects.²⁹ The degree to which Europeans could practice their faith freely in Muscovy depended, to a large extent, on whether they were Catholic or Protestant. As several foreign accounts of the period record, although Catholics were permitted to work and live in Russia, they were not allowed to worship publicly, since the establishment of Catholic churches was forbidden. Catholics were thus restricted to private worship.³⁰ Presumably some had private chapels at home, which, as far as can be ascertained, were not banned. There was a ban, though, on the importation of calendars and crucifixes from abroad, at least in the late 1630s, which must have impinged somewhat on Catholic worship.³¹ More importantly, Catholics in Russia were sometimes deprived of their priests. According to one source, while Patriarch Filaret co-ruled (1619–1633) during the reign of his son Tsar Michael (1613–1645), Catholics were not permitted to keep priests in their employ. Towards the end of Filaret's life, however, in 1630, a Russo-French commercial treaty granted French merchants the right to have and employ Catholic priests in their homes.³²

To have allowed resident Catholics in Muscovy to assemble in large gatherings in churches headed by priests, perhaps Jesuits potentially sympathetic to Polish interests, would certainly have been generous, but conceivably risky from a security standpoint. In an era when religion and politics were inextricably intertwined, the suspicion and caution displayed by the Muscovite state vis-à-vis Catholics was not exaggerated, rather quite typical, and even restrained compared to actions taken in other settings "threatened" by Catholicism, for instance England and the United Provinces. What ultimately matters is the Muscovite perception at the time, whether accurate or not, and this perception was one of suspicion, especially in the decades following the Time of Troubles, during which Poles played no small part in wreaking havoc and destruction in Russia for over a decade, subsequently threatening the newly installed Romanov dynasty by refusing to give up Polish

²⁹ Liechtenhan, *Les trois christianismes*, 37.

³⁰ Public worship for Catholics (in Moscow) was not sanctioned until the late 17th century (1691) under Peter I. A later 1705 decree permitted Catholics and Protestants to build churches in St. Petersburg.

³¹ Szeffel, "Foreign Merchants," 339–340.

³² Pypin, "Inozemtsy," 282; and Kirchner, *Commercial Relations*, 114.

claims to the Muscovite throne. If we add to this the age-old animosity between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, exacerbated by aggressive proselytizing efforts by Jesuits and Polish-Lithuanian clerics among Orthodox populations under their control (in modern-day Ukraine and Belarus as well as Smolensk), which were disturbing, to say the least, to the Russian Orthodox Church, the result is a potent recipe for anti-Catholicism among Muscovite state and church hierarchs that could not but impact negatively somehow on Catholics in Russia. That it did not impact more forcefully is what is truly striking, particularly in the 1620s and early 1630s, when Patriarch Filaret (Tsar Michael's father), who had spent several years in Polish captivity and was therefore particularly hostile to Poles and Catholics, was the de facto ruler of Russia.³³ Despite his personal feelings and the traditional antipathy of the church he headed to all things Catholic, Filaret, in his capacity as secular ruler, ultimately adhered to the Muscovite tradition of tolerating Catholicism within Russia, albeit cautiously, to further state interests. Thus, although he initially prohibited Catholics from keeping priests in their homes, he relented in 1630 to secure a Russo-French commercial treaty on the eve of Russo-Polish Smolensk War (1632–1634), when Russia was courting French support against Poland. In 1628, he had also banned the use of Russian house servants by foreigners, Catholics and Protestants alike, allegedly because they prevented their Russian domestics from practicing their religion properly; it was difficult for Russians in foreign employ to observe the Orthodox fasts and feasts. However, when Charles I of England—still regarded as a potential ally against Poland, or at least, a source of some financial or military support—asked that his subjects, the merchants of the Muscovy Company, be exempted from the ban for convenience's sake, he was not denied, and neither were various Western Europeans who petitioned for exemption.³⁴ Apparently, the contributions Europeans could make to Muscovy, real or imagined, were more important than the risks to the eternal salvation of Muscovite domestics.

For Protestants, the parameters of religious freedom in Russia were considerably broader. Under Ivan IV, Protestants were permitted to erect a church (1575–1576) and practice their faith publicly

³³ For more on Filaret, see Keep, "Filaret."

³⁴ Baron, "Moscow's *Nemeckaja Sloboda*," 7; and Szeftel, "Foreign Merchants," 348–349.

(although invisibly, “behind closed doors”). In an unsurprising outburst from Ivan IV against this Moscow community in 1580–1581 (who was *not* attacked by the hypersensitive tsar in these years?!) the Protestant church was demolished, but a new one went up under Boris Godunov (1601) to serve the needs of the growing number of Western Europeans coming to Russia to enter the tsar’s service, a trend that continued throughout the 17th century. This second church was razed by the supporters of the second False Dmitrii during the Time of Troubles (1610), but was restored by 1620 and enlarged in subsequent years, serving Protestants of all professions, nationalities, and stripes: Lutherans, Anglicans, Calvinists; Germans, Dutch, English, Scots, Irish; doctors, apothecaries, craftsmen, military men, and merchants. Fire, the bane of Russian cities, destroyed the church in 1626. However, it was soon resurrected as the “Church of the New Foreigners” or “Officers Church.” In 1629 the same section of the city (Belyi Gorod) saw the establishment of a separate Calvinist church referred to as the “Dutch Church,” and later, an additional small chapel. Because of the large concentration of English merchants residing in Vologda, one of the main trading posts along the Moscow-Archangel route, the Muscovy Company had a church attached to its enormous commercial yard there. Another church in Archangel served the spiritual needs of the many merchants and mariners who flocked there annually during the trading season, as well as others in the lively commercial centers of Nizhnii Novgorod and Astrakhan, on the Volga.³⁵ The only restriction I have encountered on public Protestant worship in Russia in this period applies to the subjects of the Swedish monarch, who were forbidden from erecting their own church and assembling there for worship, according to the terms of the Treaty of Stolbovo (1617), which ended years of hostilities between Russia and Sweden connected to the Time of Troubles.³⁶ Like the Catholics, this group of foreigners was restricted to practicing their faith in private. The wounds of war and occupation still raw, the prohibition is not surprising; nor is it as severe as it might first appear given the existence of other Protestant churches in some of the most important trading cities of Russia that were open to all foreigners.

³⁵ Tsvetaev, *Protestantstvo*, 29–72, 163, 222; and Hughes, “Foreigners,” 4.

³⁶ Shaskol’skii, *Stolbovskii mir*, 104–105.

As one historian noted, “the Russians somehow never learned to hate Protestantism quite so much as they did the Church of Rome.”³⁷ Unlike Catholicism and Catholics, which, like steppe Islam and Muslims, were perceived as threatening by both the Muscovite state and the Russian Orthodox Church, Protestants, as distasteful as their faith was to the Russians, were regarded as relatively benign, like the non-Christian “small peoples” of the north. They were *not* associated with proselytizing, Jesuits, or Catholic Poland, but rather with territories—England, the United Provinces, northern German principalities and commercial centers—at the cutting edge of mining, metallurgy, weapons manufacture, military technique, and international trade, all key components of any successful state-building project. Moreover, Muscovite policy since Ivan’s time had been to court the support, whether military/political or monetary, of Protestant powers (for instance England, Sweden, and Denmark) in the ongoing struggle against Catholic Poland. On several occasions, these efforts to secure Protestant favor and assistance involved possible marriage alliances with the Muscovite dynasty.³⁸ The undeniable and preponderantly Protestant contribution, real or potential, to Muscovite state objectives helped to ensure that Protestants in Russia, more so than Catholics, would generally be indulged with considerable latitude in matters of faith.

The Western European Model of Religious Intolerance

Valerie Kivelson’s insightful reflections on the Muscovite imperial project in Siberia bring nuance to the story of the Russian conquest of Siberia by arguing convincingly that, while eschewing a “concerted missionizing campaign” among the pagan population of this perceived “El Dorado,” the Russians nevertheless regarded their Orthodox Christian presence and church-building activity in Siberia—“Christianizing the landscape” rather than the people—as God’s work.³⁹ However, as godly as the Muscovites might have imagined their actions in Siberia, the fact remains that they tolerated paganism in a Christian state. Fiscal concerns prevailed over religious zeal.

³⁷ Florinsky, *Russia*, 1: 273.

³⁸ Kurilo, *Ocherki po istorii Liuteran*, 33–35. For example, in the final years preceding his death, Tsar Michael was negotiating a possible marriage between his daughter and Prince Waldemar of Denmark.

³⁹ Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom*, 149–170.

Far removed from the age and the relationship that people and rulers had with religious faith, we might view the Russian approach as obvious. It was not. But for a few exceptions, throughout Europe in the same period, religious fervor and intolerance were the norm *even* when it would have been economically more expedient to practice toleration. A few examples suffice to show that this was so. A case in point is Denmark, where, despite official pronouncements recognizing the economic utility of welcoming foreigners into the realm, successive governments from the 16th century on banned non-Lutherans from settling in Denmark, banishing many and threatening those who sought to surreptitiously stay (as well as those who harbored them) with execution. A persistent “preoccupation with confessional issues” undermined the mercantilist policies pursued by the government of Christian IV in the early 17th century, a central component of which was the recruitment of Dutch, that is, non-Lutheran, specialists in mining and metallurgy as well as weapons manufacture, fields crucial to both economic/industrial development and state-building. In 1607, Danish recruiters were authorized to promise interested parties freedom of religion in Denmark, but a second drive a decade later withheld religious rights. Denmark thus reverted to the old status quo, requiring all foreigners who wished to settle in the realm to pass an examination administered by lay and church officials proving their adherence to the Lutheran faith.⁴⁰

Throughout the German expanse in the same period, instances of tolerance were “very meagre,” “ad hoc,” and unstable, liable to collapse at the whim of changing circumstances. This situation prevailed even in commercial centers whose life-blood depended on the activities and resources of a multiplicity of individuals and groups, whether Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Jew or other, including trading diasporas long active in these commercial settings. Pragmatic secular authorities in many of these cities did attempt to accommodate the various faiths of foreigners to some degree, but their efforts were stiffly resisted by the clergy and bore limited fruit, and this only after several generations of struggle.⁴¹ Lutheran Hamburg, for instance, a declining Hanse town anxious to recapture some of its former prosperity, drew growing numbers of Italian Catholics, Sephardi Jews, and Dutch Calvinists in the 16th

⁴⁰ Grell, “Exile and Tolerance,” 166–173.

⁴¹ Scribner, “Preconditions,” 37–39, 46–47; and Guggisberg, “Tolerance and Intolerance,” 149.

century whose wealth and skills served as valuable economic stimuli. Despite the obvious benefits they had to offer, the opposition of the Hamburg Church worked to stem the flow of these groups by denying them the right to public worship (finally attained by non-Lutheran Christians in 1785 and by Jews only in 1849) and attempting to expel them from Hamburg entirely into the 17th century. Nonetheless, sustained secular resistance to these efforts helped maintain the foreign presence, which contributed to transforming Hamburg into the most important German commercial center by the beginning of the 18th century. Cologne, by contrast, which remained staunchly intolerant, wallowed in economic decline and stagnation, the obvious benefits of religious toleration—even of a limited nature—provided by Hamburg notwithstanding.⁴²

Larger polities with a substantial and highly developed merchant class and a strong appreciation of the centrality of trade to fiscal health and overall economic prosperity (not to mention social order) also balked on the issue of religious freedom. The Dutch Republic, for instance, long held up as a “haven of toleration” in the 17th century, was much less liberal than once thought. Catholics in the newly forming Calvinist state in the late 16th century were denied the right to assemble for worship, either privately or publicly, while non-Calvinist Protestants, although not excessively molested by the secular authorities, were staunchly opposed, thwarted, and pressured by church leaders at least until the mid-17th century in a long “uphill battle” for religious liberty.⁴³ Portuguese Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition, many with substantial financial resources and commercial contacts that could clearly help the Dutch in their state-building project and ongoing struggle with the Hapsburgs, attempted to establish themselves in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and several other commercial centers of the United Provinces. Although anxious to tap into their resources and networks, as was pointedly evident in negotiations with Jewish leaders, in the end, the Dutch proved unable to accommodate Jewish merchants and entrepreneurs on the religious question. At first insistent on restricting worship to the private sphere, Dutch authorities did eventually relent and allow public worship, but only if a minimum number of “distinguished families” settled (30 in Rotterdam, 50-100 in Haarlem), which effectively under-

⁴² Whaley, *Religious Toleration*, 6–11, 206.

⁴³ Pettegree, “Politics of Toleration,” 182, 185–198.

mined the right in practice. By the second decade of the 17th century, the law also allowed for the segregation of Jewish communities at the discretion of municipal authorities, sternly warned against “corrupting” Christian servants to Judaism, and imposed the death penalty on Jews who had sexual relations with, or married, Christians.⁴⁴

In England, Catholics, Calvinists, and sectarian Protestants not approved by the Church of England all faced an official policy that relentlessly sought to impose religious uniformity. Under Elizabeth I and her Stuart successor James I, a slew of “hard and unforgiving” recusancy bills were issued, aimed at suppressing Catholicism, even at the private level, while sectarians, who poisoned the social order with the evil of heterodoxy, were ruthlessly suppressed.⁴⁵ Since the Middle Ages, English state policy welcomed, even encouraged, the trade, entrepreneurial activities, and settlement of foreigners in England, first accepting Germans associated with the Hanse as well as Italians from the more economically, financially, and technologically advanced city-states of the South. Later centuries saw a growing influx of individuals from the Low Countries and France. Some sought economic gain in commerce, the trades, or banking, while others (Dutch Calvinists, French Huguenots), especially under Elizabeth I, fled religious persecution at the hands of Catholics on the continent.⁴⁶ The flow of Protestant refugees, many of whom were highly skilled, wealthy, and networked, grew dramatically in the second half of the 16th century and was a boon for a state that was industrially backward in key sectors such as arms manufacture and metal extraction, as well as dangerously dependent on foreign (read: hostile, Catholic) sources for specie. That foreigners represented a “potent economic force” was not lost on Elizabeth and many of her policy-makers, nor was the fact that these invaluable human resources could only be kept in England securely and for an extended time by indulging them with religious freedom.⁴⁷ The strength of these realizations notwithstanding, England awarded religious rights grudgingly and with important restrictions. Under Elizabeth and her successors, Protestant foreigners were officially permitted to worship publicly in

⁴⁴ Huussen, “Sephardi Jews in Holland,” 20–30.

⁴⁵ Questier, *Conversion*, 102–108.

⁴⁶ Postan, *Medieval Trade*; Lloyd, *German Hanse*; and Yungblut, *Strangers*, 10, 12–17.

⁴⁷ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 134.

“stranger churches,” but had to endure persistent pressure by the authorities to join local English parishes. They also had to cede ultimate authority in their religious affairs to the Bishop of London, adapt their rites and ceremonies to the English model, and eventually adopt the English Prayer Book and give up the use of their native languages during religious services.⁴⁸ Moreover, these communities endured increasingly intrusive official enquiries concerning their persons and religious beliefs from 1561 on, when municipal censuses or surveys of resident aliens, particularly in London, were introduced.⁴⁹

The Sway of Eurasia and the Imprint of Empire

While Muscovite actions aimed at suppressing Islam in the Volga region in the 16th and 17th centuries mirror the age’s drive towards religious uniformity in the wider European space in the interests of moral order, social harmony, and national security, its willingness to tolerate, even preserve (at least for a time), the pagan spiritual beliefs and practices of the Siberian natives under Russian control does not—nor does its religious policy vis-à-vis the growing number of Europeans settling in Russia in these years. Although the parameters of the religious freedom accorded them by the Muscovites did vary, both Protestants *and* Catholics, the latter increasingly suspect because of the Polish/Jesuit connection, lived, worked, and worshipped in early modern Russia relatively unmolested. As far as we know, until the early 1650s, when young Tsar Alexis was heavily influenced by a group of hyper-zealous, xenophobic Orthodox hierarchs, nobody was pressured to abandon their faith for Orthodoxy, or harassed by officials on the basis of religious conviction.⁵⁰ Like the Siberian pagans, the Europeans were useful to Russian strategic interests, and in a much larger and substantial variety of ways, from bolstering revenues and quickening the flow of specie to a mine-deficient state, to establishing new industries and modernizing an outmoded army in a traditionally hostile and belligerent environment. But, as the quick overview of European religious intolerance above demonstrates, the mere usefulness of a religious minority was not sufficient to ensure that it would be

⁴⁸ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 131, 295.

⁴⁹ Yungblut, *Strangers*, 87, 89.

⁵⁰ On the “Zealots of Piety,” in particular, their relationship with Aleksei, see Pascal, *Awakum*, 35–73 and passim; and Longworth, *Alexis*, 31–35, 54–61, 68–91.

admitted into a given territory or allowed to practice its faith, publicly or privately, in the early modern era. From this perspective, Muscovy stands out as a striking exception to the prevailing model.

If we shift our focus from the context of a Western European culture of slowly but steadily emerging national states with their stark intra-Christian dichotomies, struggling bitterly against the collapse of the once unifying force of Latin Christendom, to the ethnically and religiously diverse spaces under Ottoman and Mughal rule, we see that the Muscovite ability to place practical considerations above religious anxieties and spiritually inclined motivations aligns neatly with the pragmatic imperial strategies employed in culturally mixed settings. Across this vast Eurasian space, criss-crossed for centuries by caravans, trading diasporas, and other migrating communities, the landscape was rich with peoples, languages, religious beliefs and practices: a panoply of difference embedded in the region for millennia that forged an “appreciation of unfamiliar values.”⁵¹ Prejudices and animosities between groups, awareness of the “other” certainly existed,⁵² but the cultural *mélange* was too ancient, too common, and the recognition of the harm xenophobic actions could cause to trading emporia too generalized to be attacked or challenged by exclusionist policies unless economic or political necessity demanded it.⁵³ In this world, imperial integrity was best assured and promoted not by the single-minded pursuit of religious uniformity, but by differential religious policies tailored to specific groups and contingencies. Thus, while the Islamic faith of the Mughals inclined them towards intolerance of the polytheistic Hinduism practiced by the majority

⁵¹ Chaudhuri, *Indian Ocean*, 165.

⁵² This awareness, which appears to have been stronger in Ottoman territories than under the Mughals or in Southeast Asia, translated not into hostile actions or policies aimed against foreigners, but into the “almost universal” physical segregation of foreign groups or diasporas. In some cases, this segregation was required by the authorities; in others it simply happened. As P. D. Curtin observed, it seems that both host societies and alien communities throughout the region felt most comfortable with “a slightly distant contact.” Masters, *Western Economic Dominance*, 78; and Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, 38, 132, 198.

⁵³ Japan’s highly restrictive policies towards foreign merchants in our period, particularly from the 1630s on, is a notable exception. The Japanese attitude towards foreigners, heavily laced with suspicion and hostility, has been described as “peculiar in the extreme,” representing “a significant deviation from the norms that characterized the mechanics of Asian trade.” Prakash, “Hostile Environment,” 244–245, 252.

of their subjects, it did not prevent Mughal rulers from allowing Hindus to practice their religion, although the degree to which they could do so varied from reign to reign, depending on the perceived expediency of the policy at a particular point in time.⁵⁴ Further, the Mughals did not interfere with the religious life of non-Muslim aliens, for instance Western Europeans, Catholic and Protestant alike, who established trading operations and settlements in their territory in the 16th and 17th centuries.⁵⁵ In the Ottoman Empire in the same period, religious freedom for both subjects and stranger communities was extensive, under the dual influence of the “egalitarianism and inclusive traditions of Central Asia and the religious tolerance of Islam.” Muslims, Christians, and Jews were all “People of the Book” according to Muslims. As such, all three groups were permitted to practice their religions freely. Asserting Muslim superiority in theory, the Ottomans simultaneously displayed a “near absolute but effective disregard” for difference, religious or other, creating an inclusive environment where “the various religions, ethnicities, and aliens within the empire co-existed and co-mingled virtually at will.”⁵⁶

Shaped by the dual heritage of the polyphonous and pantheistic medieval Rus’ and of the Tatar Golden Horde that succeeded it, for centuries a space settled, inhabited, visited, and ruled by a host of peoples—pagan, Christian, Muslim, European, and Asian—and straddling East and West culturally, economically, and politically, the emerging empire of Muscovy in the 16th and 17th centuries was a world of many worlds, past and present. It was a universe where, decidedly more like Asia than Europe, diversity was not just accepted, but as Kivelson observes, *expected*.⁵⁷ In this culturally fragmented environment, the pursuit of religious uniformity was not an obvious course, at least not as far as the non-Russian populations, indigenous or alien, were concerned. In early modern Western Europe, religious toleration could be used as an instrument promoting economic or political ends, but much more frequently and systematically, it served as a weapon of persecution in the name of the one true faith or church. In Muscovite Russia, the inverse was true. While the instrumentality of toleration could

⁵⁴ Srivastava, *Great Mughals*, 82–87.

⁵⁵ Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*, 129–132; and Arasaratnam, “Indian Commercial Groups,” 44.

⁵⁶ Goffman, *Ottoman Empire*, 9, 15, 46–47, 170–171, 186–187.

⁵⁷ Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom*.

go either way, it tended towards pragmatism, rather than religious fervor. The ethno-cultural foundation of diversity embedded in the Eurasian expanse of which Russia was a part coupled with a practical approach to rule characteristic of imperial strategies combined and reinforced each other. The result was a flexible framework within which the supremacy of Orthodox Christianity was proclaimed and enforced among the core Russian population, an elastic policy of religious toleration was applied to conquered peoples and resident aliens, and state interests, particularly in the fiscal and military spheres, were vigorously pursued, all simultaneously.

Had the Reformation and the counter-movement it spawned not been as peripheral to Russia as they were, the picture might well have been different, at least as far as the toleration shown to Catholics and Protestants was concerned. Developments in the neighboring kingdom of Poland-Lithuania, the largest state in Europe at the time, are instructive. Like Russia, the 16th-century Polish-Lithuanian state was home to many peoples, Slavic (Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians) and other (Armenians, Jews, Germans, Tatars, Roma), as well as religions. Religious diversity here was “prolix,” including “all the religious beliefs known in Europe”—Catholics, Orthodox, Armenian Christians, Lutherans, Calvinists, Czech Brethren, Antitrinitarians, Mennonites, Judaizing Christians, Jews, Muslims, and pagans; all were represented. And, in the inclusive traditions of Eurasia, at whose westernmost extremity the “Catholic” kingdom stood, the religious beliefs and practices of many of these groups were tolerated, at least in practice, according to limits and arrangements worked out locally with secular and religious authorities.⁵⁸ The struggles triggered by the Reformation, however, and the aggressiveness of the Counter-Reformation in a polity with exceptionally strong and longstanding ties to Rome proved too strong a force for the regional inclination towards pragmatic religious toleration—evident in Muscovy and buttressed there by the dictates of empire to survive. By the first half of the 17th century, during the “new wave of intolerance” sweeping across Europe, religious pluralism in Poland-Lithuania was extinguished.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Santich, *Missio Moscovitica*, 41; Müller, “Protestant Confessionalisation,” 264–265; and Guggisberg, “Religious Toleration,” 45.

⁵⁹ Guggisberg, “Religious Toleration,” 46.

In Sweden, not part of the Inner Eurasian world, but close enough to its western extremities to be influenced by it, the opposite prevailed. For centuries, Swedes, Poles, and Russians had waged war on each other in the Baltic's waters and hinterland for control of land, ports, and trade routes, vying for regional supremacy. Each warily eyed the other's every move, assessing the potential impact of neighboring developments on its position and options.⁶⁰ Christianized relatively late, never as fully integrated into the medieval church or Latin Christendom as other European states, Sweden was a weakly Catholicized space where the lurking presence of paganism was the greatest concern to local churchmen when the Reformation started in the 16th century. Situated on "the far edge of Christendom" with a church whose "pulse beat sluggishly," the lack of Catholic vigor on the one hand, and a correspondingly passionless, "tortuous" Reformation on the other, Sweden vacillated, "remarkably indecisive in religion, dithering between Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Catholicism."⁶¹ More importantly for our purposes, the religious vacuum gave Swedish rulers a freer hand than most others in the period on the religious question, allowing them, like the Muscovites whom they watched so closely, to use religious toleration to further state interests. Although the subject requires fuller research, one could argue that the active, sustained Muscovite drive from the end of the 15th century to bring skilled foreigners to Russia to help strengthen the state by, among other policies, beefing up the military and modernizing arms production and supply, was one of the factors inducing successive Swedish monarchs to pursue a similar strategy from the 1550s on.

Beginning with Gustav Vasa (1521–1560), who laid the foundations of the mercantilist policies that helped shape the "economic and political conditions for Sweden's emergence as a European power in the early seventeenth century," Sweden periodically sent recruiters to German territories, England, or the United Provinces, and especially aggressive efforts were made in the 1590s and subsequent decades.⁶² In these years, Sweden and Russia were both

⁶⁰ Useful discussions of relations in the region include Attman, *Baltic Markets*; Roberts, *Early Vasas*; Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*; Floria, *Russko-pol'skie otnosheniia*; Shaskol'skii, *Stolbovskii mir*, and Porshnev, *Tridtsatiletniia voina*.

⁶¹ Roberts, *Early Vasas*, 59–62; and Grell, "Exile and Tolerance," 173–174.

⁶² Grell, "Exile and Tolerance," 175–179.

after the same kind of people, the same kind of skills, and, most probably in some cases, the very same individuals. To effectively compete with Russia for these valuable human resources, given the great wealth, and, therefore, wooing power, of the Muscovite purse and the tolerant attitude of Russian rulers on the issue of faith, Sweden needed to make its pitch to foreigners as attractive as possible. Given the Muscovite factor, to have denied desperately needed foreigners religious freedom would have undercut the entire project. Consequently, foreigners who settled in Sweden in this period were accorded religious rights, in some cases formalized in writing, provided they were of the “Evangelical” (i.e. Protestant) faith, and were even assisted by the authorities in the construction of houses of worship and provision of preachers.⁶³ The flexibility on the religious question afforded Swedish rulers by the weakly developed religious identity of both church and state and by an internally muted Reformation made it possible for Sweden to adopt the model of tolerance provided by Muscovy. And Muscovy was a concern—with the steady expansion of its territorial and revenue base through conquest as well as its rapidly developing White Sea trade, and the increasing centralization of its state apparatus, it projected growing, ominous strength. To counter it and project Sweden onto the European stage, all weapons were necessary, including the age’s most cynical: religious toleration. In turn, the dynamic of competition or “emulation” inherent in the state system could not but further bolster the existing Muscovite paradigm.⁶⁴

Concluding Remarks

“It is quite obvious,” observed one scholar, “that the creation of pluralistic orders was generally unwelcome in the age of confessionalism.”⁶⁵ Throughout Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, both native and alien populations endured the consequences of an almost universal, often violently aggressive drive by secular and spiritual authorities towards religious uniformity, be it of a Catholic or Protestant (Anglican, Lutheran, or Calvinist) face. Ironically, only on the easternmost fringes of the continent, the “backward” backyard of Europe, was religious pluralism a possibility. In

⁶³ Grell, “Exile and Tolerance,” 175–176.

⁶⁴ On the competitive nature of the state system, see Hall, “Economic Development,” 154–176.

⁶⁵ Guggisberg, “Religious Toleration,” 47.

Muscovite Russia, Orthodox Christianity, the religion of the rulers and core Russian population, was practiced side by side with Siberian paganism as well as Catholicism and Protestantism, in all its varieties, in a space traversed and cohabited by innumerable peoples for millennia. In this environment, cultural diversity and religious heterogeneity were familiar and, except in the isolated case of the Muscovite attack on Islam, essentially non-threatening to Russian rulers. The exigencies of the emerging Russian empire in the second half of the 16th century, as under the Ottomans and the Mughals in the same period, only strengthened the largely *laissez-faire* Russian approach to the issue of religious freedom. Much more so than in the evolving national or culturally homogeneous states of Europe, “the pragmatics of secularized power politics” and the awareness of “the dysfunctional as well as functional aspects of intolerance,”⁶⁶ resonated sharply in imperial spaces faced with the formidable challenge of effectively holding together and exploiting a *mélange* of territories and peoples that were not naturally or necessarily connected otherwise, all with very limited resources or coercive options.

The dual influences of Eurasian cultural diversity and the *realpolitik* of imperial rule provided solid bedrock for relatively broad religious toleration in Russia in the interests of the early modern state-building project. In an age of intolerance, the foundation was solid enough to withstand the tremors of the Counter-Reformation, which shook with increasing force the western borderlands that separated Orthodox Muscovy from Catholic Poland, reaching within the tsar’s realm itself by the first half of the 17th century. Intimately associated with Rome, culturally and dynastically linked for centuries to Latin Christendom, and thus part of the larger European battleground pitting Catholicism against the evil forces of Protestantism, Poland ultimately succumbed to the Western European paradigm of religious intolerance. By the first half of the 17th century, the sway of Eurasia ceded to the pull of the Counter-Reformation. From this perspective, Muscovy’s place in the Orthodox rather than Catholic world and the peripheral impact of the Reformation in Russia added another layer of support to the “liberal” Russian attitude towards religious pluralism. Similarly, the limp hold of Catholicism in neighboring Sweden, at the far northern edge of Europe, and its relatively fuss-free Reformation allowed rulers there to act along much the same lines as their Muscovite

⁶⁶ Scribner, “Preconditions,” 43.

counterparts in pursuit of the same secular, state-oriented goals, with startlingly successful results by the mid-17th century.

Over a century ago, the Russian historian A. Pypin underlined the dichotomy between the apparent xenophobic bent of Muscovite culture and a purposeful official effort over time to bring Western Europeans to Russia. More recent scholarship too has noted “the disconnect,” the “conflicting claims of *raison d'état* and Muscovite traditional culture,” and the contradiction between popular and religious attitudes and state needs.⁶⁷ As hostile and suspicious as they might have been towards Catholics and Protestants, the Muscovites, at least those who ruled, understood with growing clarity that the West had much to offer Russia to help it survive geopolitically and even dominate. While 19th-century Slavophiles liked to downplay the extent and importance of the West’s contribution to Russia, the Muscovites knew which course to take. As Pypin put it, had they denied the necessity of Western knowledge, skills, and assistance, they would have been guilty of no less than “national treason.”⁶⁸ Fortunately for Russia’s policymakers they operated in a milieu that afforded them, unlike most of their European counterparts, the luxury of tolerating more than one religion and of adopting differential religious policies to suit specific groups at specific junctures.

In light of Muscovy’s long-standing tradition of cautious tolerance and its successful contribution in one way or another to Muscovite advances in numerous spheres, particularly those connected to the vital areas of technology and the military, state actions against Western Europeans impinging on their religious life, first in the early 1640s and more dramatically a decade later, are incongruous.⁶⁹ Muscovite deviation from the paradigm of

⁶⁷ Pypin, “Inozemtsy,” 255–256; Baron, “Moscow’s *Nemeckaja Sloboda*,” 17; and Hughes, “Foreigners,” 4.

⁶⁸ Pypin, “Inozemtsy,” 256.

⁶⁹ In 1643, a decree was issued ordering the destruction of the Protestant churches in Moscow. Shortly thereafter, permission was given for the resumption of public Protestant worship, but only in churches erected beyond the city core. In 1653 foreigners were accused of, and tried for, sorcery and “profaning” the Orthodox religion, harassed by the authorities for keeping Russian Orthodox servants in their employ, and threatened with the confiscation of their landed property if they did not convert to the Russian faith. These actions culminated in the famous expulsion of the Western European community from Moscow and the establishment of the “Foreign Quarter” outside the city. For details, see Baron, “Moscow’s *Nemeckaja Sloboda*,” 8–17.

toleration, under the influence of “spiritual activists” who were impelled, in Weberian terms, to construct “a community of faith and a common ethical way of life”⁷⁰ at the possible expense of Western expertise, wealth, and connections—and on the eve of a new showdown with Poland in the shadow of a now powerhouse Sweden to boot—was neither an obvious nor inevitable development. That such an uncharacteristic and risky path would be adopted, that the “eschatological moment” as Scribner observed it time and time again, in Europe during the Reformation⁷¹ would effect a shift in the rulership’s traditional, secular-oriented perception of state interests, is not easily explained. It is this disconnect more than any other that needs to be addressed by scholars.

⁷⁰ Scribner, “Preconditions,” 43.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

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RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN EARLY MODERN RUSSIA

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