

Western barbarian intruder. Manifesting a capacity for wry perspective, Widmer inserts some dry wit into a generally tedious topic. To be sure, the peccadilloes of Russian churchmen in China—drunkenness, thievery, homosexuality—invite ridicule. What the reader is not prepared to hear is the summary announcement that these Russians were “heroic” (p. 147).

The Russian ecclesiastical mission is fascinating for its peculiarity. But its historical significance is elusive. Widmer’s study accordingly entertains the reader with its details but, in the end, leaves him as ignorant as the missionaries themselves of “the meaning of their existence” (p. 180).

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A PARTING OF WAYS: GOVERNMENT AND THE EDUCATED PUBLIC  
IN RUSSIA, 1801–1855. By *Nicholas V. Riasanovsky*. Oxford: Clarendon Press,  
1976. x, 323 pp. \$25.25.

Professor Riasanovsky’s new work combines the encyclopedic scope of his well-known textbook of Russian history with the intuitive grasp of his two previous studies of intellectual life under Nicholas I. It provides a comprehensive survey of political, social, and cultural developments, as well as of changing fashions in thought, from Catherine II’s accession (notwithstanding the date in the subtitle) to the Crimean War. The main theme is the breakdown of that tacit understanding which, the author convincingly shows, existed between the government and educated society during the eighteenth century. The first phase in this “parting of ways” began around 1815 and reached its tragic climax on the Senate Square ten years later: it was a limited disagreement among men who still shared the basic assumptions of the Enlightenment. The second phase originated in the late 1830s and culminated in the less dramatic but no less disastrous events of 1848, which inaugurated the bleak last years of Nicholas I’s reign. This experience created an unbridgeable gulf between any self-respecting *intelligent* and partisans of the autocratic regime.

Explaining the reasons for the breach, Riasanovsky rejects as too simple the common view that the government was to blame for its repressive policies, or that the educated class became significantly democratized by an influx of *raznochintsy*. The key lies rather in “the evolving structure of intellectual life”: in the growth of the universities and of journalistic enterprise, which encouraged a mature professional spirit to develop among Russian writers. No longer satisfied with shallow escapist literature, or the superficial moralizing of official propagandists, they sought to provide independent answers to the fundamental questions of modern civilization; and in their quest they turned naturally to the philosophical, aesthetic, and political ideas of Europe’s Romantic age. Foreign concepts were no longer accepted uncritically, as in the eighteenth century, but were creatively reworked to fit the Russian environment; later they could be transmitted back into the mainstream of European thought, a sign that the country’s cultural lag had been overcome.

This thesis, buttressed by wide erudition and a profound sympathy for the intellectual’s delicate predicament, is attractive and plausible. It does, however, obscure the fact that both the “official nationalists” and their critics were permeated by Romantic ideology. For Uvarov, and perhaps for Pogodin, the ideal organic Russia lay in the present; for Aksakov it was situated in the past, for Herzen in the future. All these men were devotees of the same fashionable myth, which we today might describe as “cultural nationalism”; their differences were of degree rather than of substance. If Riasanovsky tends to exaggerate them, this is partly because much of his argument is drawn (with due acknowledgment) from his two earlier monographs instead of being derived from a wholly fresh analysis.

On individual thinkers his judgments are uniformly benign, but sometimes questionable. It is odd to find Bakunin, for instance, described in the same breath as "an authentic titan" and as having "a mindless devotion to extremism" (p. 232). Petrashevskii's identification with the half-baked creed of Fourierism is characterized as "impressive," which is surely to mistake enthusiasm for intellect. Both Chaadayev and the Slavophiles receive even-handed praise, although their religious and historiographical ideas were diametrically opposed. Discussing two intellectuals of an earlier generation, Riasanovsky remarks that "if Speranskii represented best the *esprit de système* of the Age of Reason in the Russian government, Pestel' performed that service for the Decembrists" (p. 88). True, both men favored grandiose schemes; but the former's cautious legalism is far removed from the latter's dictatorial tendencies. This potential Russian Bonaparte is depicted here as a lily-white constitutionalist (although there is a vague hint of the contrary on p. 249). This interpretation leads Riasanovsky to contradict himself when he comes to assess the Decembrists' attitude to autocracy (p. 89): "Many of [them] remained psychologically so close to the government and so permeated by the concept of enlightened despotism that their position was ambivalent to the end"; "and yet the salient characteristic of the Decembrist movement was its rejection of autocracy and enlightened despotism." What is meant, perhaps, is that they objected to the autocrat rather than to autocracy; that if Alexander I had responded favorably to society's aspirations after 1815—as he surely could have done without endangering the monarchy—there would have been no Decembrism. Russia would have gained immeasurably; but then we should have been deprived of this gracious, thoughtful, and learned study, for which, whatever its minor shortcomings, every student of the period should be grateful.

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THE "CONFESSION" OF MIKHAIL BAKUNIN. With the marginal comments of Tsar Nicholas I. Translated by *Robert C. Howes*. Introduction and notes by *Lawrence D. Orton*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977. 200 pp. \$12.50.

Bakunin wrote his celebrated *Confession* in 1851, at the behest of Tsar Nicholas I, while imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Speaking as "a prodigal, alienated, depraved son before his outraged and wrathful father," he recounted his activities and impressions from his departure for Berlin in 1840 to his arrest in 1849 following the abortive Dresden uprising. The *Confession* is an important psychological as well as historical document. Apart from conveying Bakunin's state of mind as a prisoner of the autocracy, it reveals his deep-seated pan-Slavic and anti-German sentiments, his distrust of parliamentary government, and his plan for the creation of a secret revolutionary society. It is among the most absorbing of all Bakunin's writings, and the tsar read it with care, underlining the text and making marginal comments, which are reproduced in the present edition. Judging it a "very interesting and instructive" work, he gave it to the tsarevitch, Alexander II, for his edification.

For the next seventy years the *Confession* remained in the archives of the political police. Its existence, however, was not a secret, and on one occasion the government printed extracts from it to embarrass and discredit Bakunin. Yet the publication of the full text in 1921 aroused a flurry of controversy. Bakunin's self-abasing appeals for clemency were greeted with contempt by his detractors, while his defenders pointed to his criticisms of the Russian bureaucracy and his refusal to name accomplices. The *Confession*, however, must not be seen in simple terms. Neither an abject recantation nor a courageous gesture of defiance, it was a mixture, as Bakunin confided to Herzen, of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, fancy and truth. Entombed in the fortress, Bakunin was