

Mother Russia by Luba George

Optina Pustyn monastery reopened

It's part of the same preparations for 1988 millennium celebrations, as the canonization of Dostoevsky's mentor.

Last Dec. 21 the newspaper *Moscow News* announced that the Russian Orthodox monastery at Optina Pustyn will be reopened. The famous monastery, founded in the 14th century on the Mount Athos monastic model, and located near Kaluga, northwest of Moscow, played a central role in spawning anti-Western Russian literature in the 19th century. It was the flagship of the monastic revival in Russia, launched from Venice and Mt. Athos in order to build the cult of irrationality there, into a mighty weapon against Western civilization. The expansion from 300 Russian monasteries in 1762, to over 1,000 in 1917, was indispensable preparation for the oligarchy's Bolshevik project.

After the Bolsheviks came to power, Optina Pustyn was temporarily closed. Now, after 70 years, it is being reopened, in time for the 1988 Russian Jubilee.

Keston College in the U.K., which specializes in East bloc religious affairs, reports that the Moscow Patriarchate will use the millennium celebrations of the Christianization of Kievan Rus in June to glorify (canonize) new saints. These include Starets ("Elder") Amvrosi (Ambrose) of Optina Pustyn; Prince Dmitri Donskoy, the hero of the 1380 Battle of Kulikovo against the Mongols; the icon painter Andrei Rublov, and others.

Exiled members of the Russian nobility view the reopening of Optina Pustyn and the canonization of Starets Amvrosi as signs of dramatic growth in the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian cultural-spiritual life, and as an institution in the Soviet

Union. These sources stress what *EIR's* historical research has otherwise demonstrated, that the elders of Optina Pustyn were the shadowy gurus of 19th-century Moscow. They exerted almost singlehanded control over Russia's literary-cultural life, up to 1917 directly, and beyond 1917 indirectly.

The most important was Starets Amvrosi (1812-91). Pilgrims came from all over to consult with him, including the leading literary proponents of Russian racialism, Pan-Slavism, and Eastern mysticism: from the leading Slavophile Ivan Kireevsky (who later came to live in the monastery) to writers like L. Tolstoy, F. Dostoevsky, V. Solovyov, M. Gorky, V.V. Rozanov, K.N. Leontyev, and Bazarov. All either belonged to the Russian aristocracy or were patronized by powerful oligarchic families (Volkonskis, Turgenyevs, Ignatievs). As Optina Pustyn acolytes, all spoke of the need to create a "new religion," a "New Jerusalem," that would purge the "contaminated" Russian soul of pro-Western ideas.

Two outstanding literary products of the Optina Pustyn school, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, led Muscovite cultural warfare against Western ideas. Fyodor Dostoevsky, the darling of the violently anti-Semitic, anti-Western Pamyat Society on the rise today, in his *Diary of a Writer*—all but unknown in the West—proclaimed the "superiority" of the "Great Russian Aryan Race." The character Starets Zosima in his *Brothers Karamazov* was modeled on Amvrosi.

Count Leo Tolstoy—the scion of

a family that exerted a powerful influence over czarist policy and the (KGB predecessor) Okhrana—promoted the idea of "founding a new religion . . . Christianity purged of dogmas." He rejected the Trinity, the Resurrection, and immortality of the soul. Tolstoy's disciple, Maxim Gorky, shared Tolstoy's gnostic world view. After the Bolshevik revolution, he defined communism as a transitional path to establishing the "New Jerusalem . . . the one true path to a Universal Fusion (*sliyanie*) for the sake of the great cause, the cause of universal god-building (*bogostroitelstvo*)."

Another Optina Pustyn guru to be canonized is the Mount Athos-trained starets Paisi Velichovsky (1772-94), who trained a force of 1,000 monks to disseminate his Russian translation of the *Philocalia*, the compendium of manuscripts from the irrationalist school of hesychasm, first assembled in Venice in 1782.

As a member of one of Russia's 12 leading noble families has written, in preparation for the upcoming millennium, concerning Optina Pustyn: "It built the basis for the teachings of the Slavophiles, who were of the conviction that the Russian people must not follow the Western path proscribed by Peter the Great, rather that it, in order to exist as a nation of culture, should develop its own (non-Western) way, based on its own cultural principles; these stood in stark contradiction to the fundamentals of West European culture."

Reopening Optina Pustyn will mean the recreation of its cultural policy-shaping priesthood, a true "Council of Elders," in the clerical side of the Russian elite. For the post-Gorbachov succession fight, the Russian Orthodox Church's institutional clout will increase tremendously.—*To be continued.*