Holy Foolery as Salvation in the Russian Orthodox Church

Jessica Nevolo

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By: Jessica Nevolo

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Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Christine Jamieson

_____ Examiner
Marie-France Dion

_____ Examiner
Andre Gagné

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)
Lucian Turcescu

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)

Approved by   _____
         Marie-Franco Dion   Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____
Pascale Sicotte   Dean of Arts and Sciences

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the various interconnected theological aspects present in the Eastern Orthodox phenomenon known as the *holy fool* by bridging 2 notions; feigned madness and salvation. It will begin by addressing the inception, and scriptural origin of holy foolery. Moving from presenting the definitions and ideologies from a rather widespread perspective, this research will come to focus on the holy fools of Russia, attempting to address the factors which have contributed to the strength and duration of the presence of holy fools in Russia over the centuries; far outlasting that of other Eastern Churches, and impacting its theological, socio-cultural, and literary history. In analyzing this phenomenon particularly within the Russian context, it is essential to address notions of Russian mysticism and several central ideologies of theologian Vladimir Lossky. Within this discussion, the concepts of salvation and deification will emerge. Ultimately, the goal will be to assess the ways and reasons for the unicity and duration of the holy fools' existence in Russia and to convey the deeply rooted connection between this practice and the Eastern Orthodox understanding of theōsis as salvation.

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Introduction

Like other religions, Christianity, from its inception, has been fragmented despite the founder's urge to maintain unity; separations manifested according to theological, cultural and doctrinal differences among groups of individuals. The more general, overarching distinction based on political, spiritual, and historical aspects is the division between the Eastern and Western Orthodox churches. The practices and beliefs which have culminated into what is referred to as Eastern Orthodoxy differ and become unique in their own right, depending on location and cultural influences. One such phenomenon, which will be the focal point of this research, are the holy fools of Russia.

The very concept of holy foolery raises a multitude of questions, the foremost queries being *what are the theological processes, reasoning and implications embedded in the holy fool? What is the function of holy foolery in Russian Orthodox salvific theology?* With regards to the methodology, this work will traverse the subject in a systematic fashion, utilizing more than one approach, in order to allow for the consideration of historical and theological factors, among others. Firstly, I will be implementing the Systematic Model, which endeavors to correlate and join specific topics by first addressing them in a slightly more isolated fashion and then exploring their interconnection.[1] This is how the research will be approached: specific areas being the history and definition of holy foolery, Russian mysticism, deification and salvation, focusing on the connection between them. This historical approach is essential in order to trace the emergence and propagation of holy fools in the Eastern church over the years. The second approach is the Integral-Developmental Model as this method encourages a wider, interdisciplinary understanding of how historical events or doctrine unfolded, permitting acknowledgement of social and political concerns of the time.[2] Developments in theology and philosophy will undoubtedly play a role in comprehending the ideas and philosophies behind the phenomenon of holy foolery, deification, and salvation.

While the discussion at hand places Russian Orthodox holy fools at its center, it is essential to begin by addressing the base definition of holy foolery as a spiritual phenomenon overall. Among scholars, the core of holy foolery is understood as the reality of an individual who voluntarily "feigns insanity" or madness, though "what lies beneath is sanity and high morality, even pious intent".[3] Ultimately, several sources come to the consensus that the exterior madness of the holy fool is undoubtedly theatrical and false, which is meant to serve a greater spiritual purpose. In fact, multiple sources suggest that while the aim of the holy fool is not to convert, their behaviour is

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[1] James E. Bradley and Rich Muller, *Church History; An Introduction to Research Methods and Resources* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 54.

[2] Bradley and Muller, *Church History; An Introduction to Research Methods and Resources,* 57.

[3] Sergie Arkad'evich Ivanov. *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/reader.action?docID=422429

predominantly intended to aid others in their spiritual understanding and awareness, inciting reflection.[4] Moreover, the notion of holy foolery is deeply imbedded in the concepts of wisdom, scandal, humor and humility, among others. In fact, the fool is understood to possess "foolish wisdom" which is interpreted as a gift of intuitive knowledge.[5]

Historically speaking, holy foolery is rooted in scripture, monasticism, and hagiography. While not strictly a canonical or doctrine concept, the holy fool is still born out of scriptural inspiration, deriving from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians.[6] Beyond scripture, the early unfolding of the holy fool in Byzantium begins in remote monasteries, and moves outward. As Ivanov expresses, this is very much entangled with the stories of "insane saints" such as St. Isidora of Egypt, as well as St. Symeon of Emesa who is considered by many to be the first documented holy fool. Theologically and philosophically, several scholars detail elements of cynicism and aestheticism in the existence of the holy fool, thus tying the concept of holy foolery to the cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope. Within the realm of Russian Orthodoxy, one of the eldest holy fools figures remains to be St. Nicholas.[7] For a time, from the 6th to approximately the 14th century, holy fools held the status of martyrs in Russia and were canonized by the church, but their relevance long exceeds this timeline.[8]

Partial explanations for the longevity of holy foolery in Russia, whether it be religiously, culturally or literarily, can be found in the exploration of Russian mysticism, deification, and the notion of salvation (both theologically and in the Russian literary canon). After having addressed the unique linguistic terms, influences, and key holy fool figures of Russian history, the discussion extends to the Russian Orthodox Church's view of the holy fool over time. Given the role literature has played in the relation to Russian holy fool, presenting portraits of holy foolery as denoted by 19th century authors will assist greatly, and correlate directly to the salvation story arch common to Russian literature.

As previously stated, Russian mysticism and mystic theology are integral, as they ultimately act as a binding between salvation via deification and the practice of holy foolery. This discussion will hinge itself on the ideas of theologian Vladimir Lossky. But as with all complex discussions, the correct place to begin is terminology, definition and inception.

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[4] Peter M. Antoci, "Scandal and Marginality in the Vitae of Holy Fools," *Christianity and Literature*, 44, no. 3-4 (Spring-Summer 1995): 283.

[5] C. Peter Phan. "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 738.

[6] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 19.

[7] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour." *J Relig Health* 53, (2014): 100.

[8] Geroge P. Fedotov, "The Holy Fools." *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 3, no. 3, (1959): 2.

Chapter One

The Holy Fool: foolery, virtues, and origin

<u>Holy Foolery</u>

At first glance, the word *fool* tends to conjure certain images and notions, from the Shakespearean court jester, to the buffoon of the Russian literary canon. The *holy fool* however is a rather particular theological concept which distinguishes itself from other literary characterizations of a person with seemingly lesser wit. Moreover, when addressing this concept, Russian theologian Sergie Ivanov rejects the terms "folly" and "foolishness", instead opting for "holy foolery".[9] The holy fool is diverse not only because it uniquely has a spiritual inspiration at its core, but because its role and true identity are not the same as the others. Meaning, that unlike the Russian literary buffoon, the holy fool is not truly unintelligent, but only appears to be so on the surface. Phan explains that the fool as it is intended here possesses "an inspired wisdom" which the literary buffoon does not.[10] With regards to the Shakespearean fool, there is an important duality which despite bearing marks of similarity with the holy fool, is still divergent. Within Shakespearean plays, the fool engages in clever, trickster-like comedy meant to function almost as satire so as to provoke reflection among the characters of higher status; a privileged position to provide perspective.[11] While the holy fool too is meant to cause others to be contemplative, their behaviour is far more akin to outright madness than skillfully crafted and witty banter. To fully comprehend the function and meaning behind the holy fool, it is essential to begin by addressing what makes a holy fool, their behaviour, the theological notions and virtues involved, as well as an introduction to when and where the holy fool first emerged.

As intimated in the introduction, the holy fool, quite simply, is an individual "who feigns insanity, […] provokes shock or outrage by his deliberate unruliness […] however what lies beneath is sanity and high morality".[12] Although the word for fool, *salos*, in the Greek tradition, first appeared in 5th century, it did not refer to feigned madness but real and true madness.[13] The holy fool is not exclusive to the Eastern Orthodox Church, as what Georg Feurestein refers to as "crazy-wise adepts" can be found in various religions baring different titles. For instance, the Hindu Avadhātas as well as the Buddhist and Taoist adepts of China and Japan.[14] In fact, the Sanskrit word *avadhuta* refers to "one who has cast off all concerns" and the word *mast*, another Hindi figure,

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[9] Svitlana Kobets, "Folly, Foolishness, Foolery," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 50, no. 3-4 (2008): 493

[10] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 738.

[11] Robert, H. Bell, *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools.* Firsted. (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2011): 12.

[12] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 1.

[13] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour.", 97.

[14] Georg Feurestein, *Holy madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment* (Prescott: Hohm Press, 1990, 2006): 37-87.

means "numskull".[15] Veneration of spiritual fools also occur with the *badhan* in Judaism, and a similar such personage in the Islamic mystical tradition.[16] Regardless of location and faith, what remains central to the notion of the holy fool is twofold; (1) the motivation behind the fools' behaviour is of spiritual inspiration and (2) that while the fool behaves like that of a madman, he does so with the utmost intention and is completely sane in reality. To begin with the latter component requires acknowledging the importance of the word *feigned* in the term *feigned madness*. Typical behaviours of the holy fool include engaging in uncomfortable acts such as shouting, laughing, and mocking passersby, relieving one's self in public, wearing unseemly and impoverished attire, as well as violence on occasion, among others.[17] In addition to silly behaviour, another common characteristic of the holy fool is clairvoyance and prophecy.[18] All this comportment out of context is widely accepted as insane, however the holy fool is born of complete sound mind, and actively chooses to pretend to be mad; autonomy of the behaviour is an integral component of what sets the holy fool apart from the regular madman. It is perhaps because of the paradoxical nature of this practice which causes holy foolery to have been studied from a variety of disciplines, such as psychiatry, ecclesiastical conspiracy against the masses or vice versa, or of course mythology through the lenses of sacrifice and self-care.[19]

The Holy Fool's Purpose

Having emphasized the masquerade of the fool's madness, questions emerge regarding the holy fool's motivation; why choose this life? To what end? As previously mentioned, false insanity is not the only necessary requirement in defining the holy fool, but the presence of a spiritual calling and "pious intent" as well. What is the fool's purpose and how is this purpose achieved? This notion is far more complex, as it weaves humour, scandal, the virtue of humility, and divine wisdom eloquently together. The holy fool has agreed to live a life pretending to not be of sound mind, and it is rather easy to overlook the power and sacrifice required in such a decision. The holy fool is understood to be selfless, as he plays this charade not for himself, but for the benefit of others. However, such behaviour for the sake of others is not to be interpreted as the holy fools working to convert others, but to help them.[20]

In watching the holy fool make a complete, public mockery of himself, the onlookers can experience laughter or perhaps revulsion and even pity. Whatever the emotion may be, in this moment, a connection is forged between the audience and the holy fool, thus creating a relationship of sorts, and it is that tether which allows the holy fool to be impactful. Let us begin with the experience of laughter. As Houck explains, there is an undeniable parallel to be made between humour and holiness or spirituality. Firstly, humour and holiness are similar as they both operate on the basis of

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[15] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 741.

[16] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1283.

[17] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 117-119.

[18] Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 5.

[19] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 3-4.

[20] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 9.

relationship and connection with others, given that nothing is funny or holy on its own; these characteristics come to fruition through the audience's experience of them, thus bringing them to life.[21] This is an idea which resounds that much more profoundly when reflecting on the experience of praying in Church among other believers, or laughing in a comedy club. In each case, the individual is embraced by the shared experience and ultimate truth of the event; both humour and holiness "involve the individual's responsiveness to something beyond him or her".[22] Secondly, humour is the product of a creative and witty mind, and in this way can fuel one's divine imagination, assisting in "fresh theological reflection and ethical action".[23] This concept hinges itself on the premise that humour provides an opportunity for self-reflection, most prominently noted in self-deprecatory humour and satire, the very comedic tools utilized by the holy fool.[24] It is also important to remark a characteristic similarity between the holy fool and the comedian, as they both possess an impressive amount of courage engaging in their acts as they both "risk isolation and reproach" as a result should their performances not be well received.[25] Although Christianity has a rather long history of looking down on the use of humour, there are religious figures over time who have stood against the current, such as 18th century St. Sabin laughing in the face of her captors, and St. Lawrence's particularly dark humour against Roman persecutors.[26] Teodor Baconsky addresses the notion of humour and laughter as seen by the Greek Patristic fathers. In doing so, he mentions that laughter among the pagans was combative, it was then understood as evil in the Homeric era (an expression exhibited by enemies), and post-exilic Judaism viewed laughter in opposition to respectability.[27] With regards to Christianity, Evangelicals popularised the notion that "Jesus never laughed", which Baconsky rejects.[28] The interpretation of laughter begins to change with the introduction of Hellenism, which accepted laughter as an expression of freedom.[29] Continuing in this positive understanding of humour, Baconsky presents *sophia gelosa*, which can be understood as a happy wisdom very much connected with the holy spirit, that marks optimism and faith.[30] Moreover, Baconsky's presentation of *sophia gelosa* is deeply reminiscent of holy foolery.

Though just as the holy fool can elicit laughter, so can he cause his audience to regard him with distain and disgust, as "the holy fool is nothing, theologically or otherwise, if not strange and disturbing".[31] However, much like how humour serves a

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[21] Anita Houck. "Holiness and humour," *Theological Studies 72, no.4* (2016): 2.

[22] Houck, "Holiness and humour," 5.

[23] Houck, "Holiness and humour," 6.

[24] Houck, "Holiness and humour," 1-2.

[25] Houck, "Holiness and humour," 3.

[26] Houck, "Holiness and humour," 3.

[27] Teodor Baconsky, *Le rire des Pères; Essai sur le rire dans la patristique greque* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1996), 17-21.

[28] Baconsky, *Le rire des Pères; Essai sur le rire dans la patristique greque,* 20.

[29] Baconsky, *Le rire des Pères; Essai sur le rire dans la patristique greque,* 21.

[30] Baconsky, *Le rire des Pères; Essai sur le rire dans la patristique greque,* 38.

[31] Peter M. Antoci, "Scandal and Marginality in the Vitae of Holy Fools," *Christianity and Literature*, 44, no. 3-4 (Spring-Summer 1995): 277.

holy purpose, so does invoking such negative feelings in others. Similar to humour, feelings of discomfort and pity are felt due to the power of the relationship forged between audience and holy fool, as well as the effects of scandal. By the holy fool engaging in eccentric and at times repulsive behaviour, he is creating a scandalous, and therefore shocking spectacle, thus socially ostracizing himself in the process. When audience members feel such discomfort, they are almost reflexively reflecting in judgement with regards to the holy fool's behaviour. Though perhaps involuntary, this mental process is a natural response in which the individual compares themselves to the fool. The objective, is that having ignited this introspection, the onlooker is pushed to assess and even improve themselves, "as holy folly accomplishes its work of awakening consciousness, it also necessarily stirs to action".[32] Inspired by the hope of moral change, it is "through their scandalous subversion of conventions that holy fools attempt to direct the community's attention".[33] Scandal, like a gripping performance, is a tool which the holy fool embraces to captivate their audience, fueling the efficacy of their practice.[34] As Antoci expresses, willingly entering into this scandalous behaviour results in their social and cultural marginalization, which other scholars have connected to the expression of humility.

As aforementioned, the fool can be viewed as selfless in his endeavor to present himself as lesser in order to aid others in their philosophical and spiritual self-reflection. In making one's own life a revolting spectacle, the fool extends a gesture of great sacrifice and renunciation of pride. It is in this way that the holy fool in the Christian tradition embodies "Christ-like humility", as Christ too quietly accepted a great deal of social reproach, ultimately being put to death, a fate he accepted for the sake of others.[35] The give and take nature of the connection between holy fool and audience is slightly more complex, as "they pretend to be stupid or ignorant so as to learn humility from the contempt of others".[36] The virtues of selflessness and humility are connected to Christ's overall character, but the eccentric behaviour is also correlated to the famous passage in John in which Christ, rather shockingly, enters into a fit of rage and begins to violently flip over all of the merchant tables in the temple.[37] In this moment, Christ's behaviour mirrors that of a madman and according to Mark 3:21, some of those close to Christ feared for his sanity.[38] Furthermore, the strange behaviours of the holy fool can perhaps more easily be paralleled with early biblical prophets whose demeanor would "appear foolish, if not mentally ill, to their contemporaries", such as Isaiah walking naked, Ezekiel sleeping exclusively on his left side for 12 months, and John the Baptist's experience of feeding on locusts and honey.[39] But the tendency to compare

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[32] Belden C. Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," *The Christian Century* (1982): 1284

[33] Antoci, "Scandal and Marginality in the Vitae of Holy Fools," 281.

[34] Antoci, "Scandal and Marginality in the Vitae of Holy Fools," 283.

[35] LeMasters and Swenson, "St. Symeon, Fool for Christ and Exemplar of Humility," 268.

[36] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 740.

[37] John 2:13

[38] Phillip Lemasters and John-Eric Swenson, "St. Symeon, Fool for Christ and Exemplar of Humility," *American Benedictine Review* 64, no. 3 (2013): 267.

[39] Lemasters and Swenson, "St. Symeon, Fool for Christ and Exemplar of Humility," 267.

the holy fools to Christ becomes far more comprehensible when one considers this phenomenon's inception and scriptural roots, as well as the fact that Jesus was born in Nazareth, which was "the proverbial home of fools in first century Palestine".[40]

Genesis and metamorphosis of the Holy Fool

While the practice of holy foolery is not strictly canonical within the Eastern Orthodox Church, it like many other religious concepts, nonetheless finds its birth in scripture. In truth, holy foolery in Eastern Christianity, is a phenomenon composed of scriptural inspiration, socio-cultural influence, and theological as well as philosophical ideas. In exploring the latter, an important concept immediately surfaces; *foolish wisdom*.

As discussed in the prior section, the holy fool is intertwined in the use of humour, scandal, and humility. However, these notions derive from what is referred to as *foolish wisdom*. When philosophically considering the routes to acquiring wisdom, scholars fall on the terms of *mythos* and *logos*. The first step in understanding the holy fool's unique wisdom is by exploring mythos; a method of reflection and understanding that is achieved through imagination which "conveys truth too deep to be communicated adequately by means of discursive reasoning", often expressed verbally and physically.[41] Mythos is undeniably the method employed by the holy fool, in order to execute their foolish wisdom, given the story-telling and make-believe they engage in when convincing the world around them of the farce that they are insane. In doing so, the holy fool, rather uniquely, utilizes the power of story-telling "which presents the wisdom of a community […] as a dance of metaphors that guide the community's thinking and acting".[42] *Foolish wisdom* or *morosophia*, is "a source of knowledge that is more akin to supernatural and inspired wisdom".[43] What is crucial, is that unlike classic mythos and logos, *morosophia* cannot be attained through formal learning and rigorous thought, but rather is a sort of intuition which is "granted and revealed" as "a gift of knowledge from God".[44] Essentially, the wisdom of the holy fool is granted by the divine and executed via mythos. Moreover, foolish wisdom has its philosophical and theological foundations in the mystical traditions of Thomas à Kempis and Nicolas of Cusa, who refer to "stultitia" or "holy simplicity".[45] A correlation can be drawn between holy simplicity or foolish wisdom and apophatic theology which, acknowledges how little can be truly known about God through classic rational reasoning, thus calling for something more.

Delving further into the philosophical notions which played a key role in the inception of the holy fools, several scholars suggest the phenomenon was influenced by

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[40] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1283.

[41] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 734.

[42] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 734.

[43] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 738.

[44] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 738.

[45] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 743.

the cynical philosophy of Antiquity, such as notions of "voluntary frugality".[46] Greek Cynics endeavor to reveal "superficiality and cast down false idols" much as the holy fool seeks to offer others enlightenment with regards to their true selves and faith, tearing down their illusions.[47] When considering particular figures, the infamous behaviour of Diogenes of Sinope must be considered. Though Diogenes predates the theological movement of the holy fools in Orthodox Christianity, in retrospect his madman-like behaviour is textbook foolery; from voluntarily living in a barrel, to lack of appropriate sociability and even relieving himself in public.[48] In addition to the Cynics, it is noted that the principle of a rare and unique wisdom being masked by a front of stupidity is something that was, at least partially, adopted by Socrates.[49]

Beyond the philosophical aspects, holy foolery is ultimately based on theological ideas and scriptural inspiration. For instance, the holy fool has been understood by some to be a "radical manifestation of Christian kenoticism", as the holy fool empties themselves of nearly everything, devoting themselves entirely to God's divine will and their foolish wisdom.[50] However, the overarching consensus on the theological ideology behind the holy fools is the practice of *Imitatio Christi*, deriving from the main scriptural inspiration which is the phrase "we are the fools for Christ's sake", found in section 4:10 of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.[51] Moreover, this overall phenomenon is frequently referred to as "the fools for Christ's sake", or "fools for Christ", a term which was coined by the 7th century biographer Leonitus of Neapolis.[52] While this phrase operates as the scriptural epicenter, other sections of Paul contribute significantly to the discussion. For instance, the later part of 1 Corinthian's 3:18, "let him become a fool so that he may become wise". While Paul himself was not cognisant of holy foolery, as he predates the phenomenon, this passage very much evokes the notion of *morosophia*, foolery as a means by which to attain a higher divine wisdom. Overall, Paul's passage, in context, refers more so to an ironic argument.[53] In addition, the following passage "for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" through the lens of holy foolery suggests that non-spiritual knowledge such as what is attained through logos is entirely different than God's divine wisdom.[54] Furthermore, to even begin to comprehend this divine understanding, perhaps one must embrace foolishness to a certain extent, to allow for this other truth. The holy fool's constant endeavor to keep vainglory at bay and remain humble as well as aiding others in their spiritual journey can be associated with Corinthians 1:27, "but God has chosen the foolish things to put to shame the wise". This

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[46] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour.", 97.

[47] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 17.

[48] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour.", 97.

[49] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 15.

[50] Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 2.

[51] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 19.

[52] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour", 97.

[53] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 19.

[54] 1 Corinthians, 3:19

echoes the idea that "Eastern Orthodoxy understands the fools for Christ to be people called by God to a unique form of ministry that speaks prophetically both to the church and the world".[55]

While Diogenes of Sinope may be the first unofficial holy fool, or perhaps a precursor to, the consensus among most scholars is that the first "authentic, classic holy fool" was St. Symeon of Emesa of the 6th century.[56] According to the accounts of Leonitus of Neapolis, Symeon's Christ-like humility was evident from the onset, as his "foolishness stems from a desire to hide his holiness […] so as not to receive praise".[57] Not surprisingly, St. Symeon began his holy journey as a monk, practicing asceticism as he "lived under the open sky, wore a minimum of clothing, and nourished himself with herbs and roots".[58] This minimalist lifestyle included a combination of time spent out in seclusion to attain tranquility and reflection, followed by returning to the city to engage in open foolishness.[59] The infamous behaviours of St. Symeon align entirely with the archetypal actions of the fools for Christ, such as playfully slapping people, tripping them, throwing stones, and breaking fast in plain view of the faithful; provoking them with the aim of translating "people's anger and disdain on himself […] with the single aim of saving his neighbours' souls without being praised".[60] Even more blatantly, Symeon's most revolting display of madness marks his entrance into the second half of his holy life, away from the monastery and entirely embracing his folly, "by dragging a dead dog by his belt as he entered the main city of Emesa".[61] Another characteristic of the holy fool which is denoted in the accounts of the first fool is an absolute form of celibacy in which even temptation does not surface, as in his mingling with prostitutes and entering women's baths, "he does not become contaminated by their ways".[62] St. Symeon is the first, and in being so becomes a pivotal figure in the fools for Christ movement, but he is certainly not the only one.

The Byzantine era (330 CE – 1453), saw both the emergence and growth of holy foolery in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Holy foolery, as can be understood from St. Symeon's story, originated in monastic life, and likewise spread from monastery to monastery, from Greece, to Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor.[63] Beyond St. Symeon, another early figure in holy foolery is St. Isidora, a nun of the Tabennisi nunnery in Upper Egypt, who earned the title of *mad* based on her peculiar behaviours in the kitchen and her vow of silence. Her sanctity however is ever pronounced in her

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[55] Lemasters and Swenson, "St. Symeon, Fool for Christ and Exemplar of Humility," 269.

[56] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 104.

[57] Bryn Geffert and Stavrou G. Theofanis, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: The Essential Texts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016): 120.

[58] Alexander Y. Syrkin, "On the Behaviour of the Fool for Christ's Sake," *History of Religions* 22, no.2 (1982): 152.

[59] Syrkin, "On the Behaviour of the Fool for Christ's Sake," 153.

[60] Syrkin, "On the Behaviour of the Fool for Christ's Sake," 153.

[61] Lemasters and Swenson, "St. Symeon, Fool for Christ and Exemplar of Humility," 272.

[62] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour", 98.

[63] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 64.

obedience, and modesty.[64] In the 6th century, there are also the youthful holy fools Theophilus and Maria, who shocked passersby by pretending to be a dim jester and a prostitute in Antioch.[65] In doing so, they accepted their own degradation to renounce any "false sense of pride", which the Orthodox Church, beyond humility, recognized as holy fools challenging "the identification of the Christian faith".[66] The 10th century brings the fool St. Andrew of Constantinople, who "voluntarily adopted the life of a seemingly insane beggar […] to walk about naked in all seasons and to sleep under the open sky with the dogs".[67] Though he lived in Constantinople, it is stipulated that Andrew the Fool was a foreigner of Slavonic origin, and his bizarre behaviours of drinking from puddles and stealing fruit from markets was initially interpreted as possession prior to foolery.[68] In 6th century Byzantium, several monasteries were moved to urban settings, taking holy foolery along with them.[69] While it is certain that holy fools display false madness for a greater, spiritual purpose, and thrive on social marginality and scandal, they were in fact acknowledged by the church. Predominantly, but not exclusively during the 3rd to 6th century, the Eastern Orthodox church venerated holy fools, attributing them the same status as virgins and martyrs, even having them canonized as saints.[70] Though it was first discovered in a 9th century calendar, St. Symeon, the first true holy fool, was evidently canonized.[71] Like other spiritual and or socio-cultural practices, the popularity of holy foolery rose and fell several times over the course of the Byzantine centuries, for a variety of interconnected reasons. However, it is unclear as to how holy foolery left the confines of Byzantium and spread outwards, but it took root in Russia and transformed through cultural and historical factors.

Chapter Two

History of Holy Fools in Russia: philology, church, and literature

Foolery: from Byzantium to the Slavs

As the first chapter has detailed the fundamental premises and ideas on which holy foolery was founded in Byzantium, the subsequent section will pivot and narrow its focus to the Russian Holy Fools. In doing so, it is necessary to address the specific Slavonic terminology which grew alongside this spiritual practice, as well as its origin and development overtime within Russia.

As previously stated, it is unclear as to precisely how holy foolery expanded beyond Byzantine borders. However, Ivanov speculates that the concept initially

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[64] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 51-53.

[65] Lemasters and Swenson, "St. Symeon, Fool for Christ and Exemplar of Humility," 269.

[66] Lemasters and Swenson, "St. Symeon, Fool for Christ and Exemplar of Humility," 269.

[67] Feurestein, *Holy madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers, and Enlightenment,* 14.

[68] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 158-159.

[69] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 67.

[70] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1283.

[71] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 142.

entered South Slavic countries via translations of Byzantine hagiographies of insane saints and direct contact with, and therefore influence of, the empire.[72] Over time, the phenomenon traveled from South, East, and finally to the North Slavonic countries, primarily Russia. Given the historical trajectory of its development, it is fitting to first explore the South Slavic emergence, beginning with the unique terminology.

Very similar to the term *salos* in the Greek tradition, the South Slavs began with the word *bui*, *buiak* or *buiav*, referring to *stupidity* first noted in the Cyrillo-Methodian translation of the famous passage which inspired the fool's for Christ's sake movement found in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians.[73] Though this may be the beginning of the Slavic embrace of this practice, the terminology continues to transform and change. The first Slav translation of the vita of St. Andrew brought about the term *pokhab*, deriving from the notion *to ruin*, yet scholarly revision overtime introduced the more widespread and accepted title of *ourodiv*, from *urod*.[74] Within Russia specifically, holy fools eventually came to be referred to as *iurodivyi*, originating from the Church Slavonic term meaning *defective*, usually in a congenital manner; an important detail as it allows a certain fluidity for the term to be applied to perceived physical and mental difficulties.[75] Beyond its more literal significance, the term *iurodivyi* or *yurodive* begins to specifically refer to the holy fool with the 11th century translation of the *Pandektai* of Antiochos, which uses the term for the word *fool* in the passage "we are the fools for Christ's sake".[76] The prefix *iurod* was favored in this discourse as it came to denote madness and lack of sanity, both genuine and feigned.[77] An adjacent Slavonic term of this time which is relevant is that of *blazhennyi*, which has been understood as meaning "blessed"; a marker of sanctity which eventually came to be applied to holy fools.[78] Though not considered proper holy foolery due to political motivations, feigned madness also entered the South in 11th century Bulgaria, via the extreme behaviour of the *soothsayers*.[79] While the holy fool's intention is purely altruistic and divinely inspired, the soothsayers used sacred location and ludicrous behaviour as a vehicle for political change, thus separating them from the holy fools, but this event is still a demonstration of feigned madness entering the Slavic world. A pivotal hagiography for holy foolery in the South, in fact the only original South Slav recount which entirely qualifies as holy foolery, is the 14th century story of the Despot Stefan.[80] According to the vita written by Konstantin of Kostenets, Stefan would behave foolishly in public and then be seen distributing gifts to the poor (Konstantin specifically uses the word *urodiva*).

Moving to the Eastern Slavic countries, the first recorded authentic holy fool is found in Kiev, as a member of the Caves Monastery, hence his name Isaakii the Cave-

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[72] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 244.

[73] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 245.

[74] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 245.

[75] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 246.

[76] 1 Corinthians, 4:10

[77] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 247.

[78] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 247-248.

[79] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 250.

[80] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 252.

Dweller.[81] The tonality of Isaakii's foolery over the course of his ministry seems to shift from playful and passive, to abrupt and arguably aggressive, both of which are known to holy foolery, as addressed in our first chapter.

The Holy Fools of Russia

As the previous sections have suggested, holy foolery migrated through the Slavic countries, to the north, and flourished in Russia for a variety of reasons which shall be addressed moving forward. This portion will begin by exploring the history of holy foolery within Russia, presenting key figures, and delving into the implications and influences of theological ideas, the Russian Orthodox Church, and literature.

Just as it grew in Byzantium, the holy foolery of Russia was also born in the monasteries and, moreover, its introduction was not singular and clear-cut. Rather, holy foolery very much trickled into Russia gradually; ideas, figures, and particular events occurred sporadically and then eventually became more coherent and common. This partial stability of the phenomenon occurred from the 14th to 17th centuries in Russia, though as intimated, certain events and holy fools predate this timeframe.[82] To this point, Russia's first holy fool emerges during the Kievan Russia era, a time which "was not familiar with this form of ascetic life" and thus did not yet know of true holy foolery.[83] The first Russian holy fool was Isaac, a monk of the Kievan Caves monastery. According to Isaac's story, a traumatizing event caused the man's behaviour to spiral, but Isaac is not to be seen as a common madman. After his experience, his behaviour became "a general object of mockery" in the monastery, but after having completed an odd task when ordered, his foolishness became expressly deliberate, embracing his calling.[84] Another curious figure is that of St. Abraham of Smolensk, a 12th century monk who is fabled to have voluntarily relinquished his property to the poor, and according to his biographer, lived a vagrant life of "foolishness".[85] Very much like Diogenes of Sinope, Isaac is the first Russian holy fool based on his story, characteristics and what he embodies; however, given that he predates the official entry of holy foolery in Russia, he is but a precursor. The first official Russian holy fool appears in the 13th century, known as Procopius of Ustiug, though his vita was not written until the 16th century, and some events of his life are documented as having occurred in different centuries, thus complicating the document's historical significance.[86] Issues of documentation are unfortunately rather rampant with regards to the history of the holy fools of Russia, as many hagiographies have been lost over time or possess chronological inconsistencies.[87] That being said, common threads and patterns are woven through the fragmented stories, one of particular significance being that of the city of Novgorod. Veliky Novgorod is not only one of the oldest cities in

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81 Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 253.

82 Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 2.

83 Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 2.

84 Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 7.

85 Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 7.

86 Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 8.

87 Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 258.

Russia, but it is considered to be the epicenter of Russian holy foolery, being the birth place of the first holy fool, Procopius.[88] Moreover, Novgorod was understood to be a place which allowed for a more unrestricted expression of the Russian mind[89], and eventually came to be starting point for several other Russian holy fools from the 13th to the 15th century, such as Zakhariia of Shenkursk, Nikolai Kachanov, and Isidor Tverdislov of Rostov.[90] This trajectory was no doubt also influenced by the decision to construct a church in honour of St. Andrew of Constantinople in Novgorod sometime around the 13th century.[91]

      As time went on, the *iurodivye* became increasingly prevalent and began to refine their ideologies. Several scholars assert that the peak of *iurodivye* activity in Russia occurs around the 16th century, during the reign of the Tsar Ivan the Terrible.[92] In fact, it is during this time that the legend of St. Nicolas the Fool is born; a holy fool which is held in high esteem in Moscow, as he is known for having selflessly protected the city of Plevskov.[93] While the Slavic holy fools were initially met with some reproach, contrary to the holy fools of Byzantium, the *iurodivye* in Russia came to forge bonds with political rulers and royalty for a time, such as Tsars and princes.[94] Upon analysis, this practice should come as no surprise, as religious figures, possessing a certain authority, have often been called to leaders' sides to offer council and at times prophecy. In fact, according to Russian folklore, the prophetic insight of the *iurodivye* is said to have played a role in the appointment of the Tsar Ivan himself, as a holy fool claimed that a candle at the Kremlin gates would light itself when in the presence of true Tsar, and then came to light as Ivan approached.[95] While later on, prophecy became an accepted and common component of holy foolery, the very first Russian narrative in which the *iurodivye* in particular is associated with it is the account of Mikhail of Klopsko, as he foretells the role of the archbishop Iona.[96] Across these various vitas, the relationship and interaction between the *iurodivye* and commoners, as well as individuals of higher status (be it politicians or members of clergy) is made clear, although little is recounted with regards to the Russian Orthodox Church's perspective on the holy fools. What is known, is that from the 14th to the 17th century in Russia, the Church officially recognized holy fools by canonizing them as saints with equal status of sanctity as others, a practice that was likely adopted from the Greek Orthodox Church.[97]

      Returning to scriptural roots, the Russian *iurodivye*, like the other Slavic salos and holy fools of Byzantium, gain inspiration from Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians

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[88] Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 14.

[89] Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 14.

[90] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 259.

[91] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 257.

[92] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 740.

[93] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour.", 100.

[94] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 285.

[95] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 290.

[96] Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 271.

[97] Fedotov, "The Holy Fools," 2.

and adopt an overall Christo-centric theology.[98] In addition to these previously explored biblical passages, the Russian fools seem to also consider Jesus' thanks to God in having "hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes".[99] In the context of Slavic foolery, this passage has been understood as the glorification of childishness; a simplicity and authenticity which connects to the freedom and fearlessness needed to be a *iurodivye*.[100] In addition, holy fools are known for revealing difficult truths in others and in society, and children are often viewed as unabashedly honest.[101] As expressed in the introduction of the practice of holy foolery, beyond scriptural interpretation and Christlike emulation, the *iurodivye* too leans on notions of humility and introspection through stirring strong emotions in others. The notions of scandal and marginality as tools are no different, if not perfected by the holy fools of Russia.

Holy foolery had its highs and lows in popularity throughout other countries and denominations of the Eastern Orthodox Church over time, but the phenomenon thrived and remained present far longer in Russia.[102] At least part of this reality can be explained through the consideration of the Russian historical circumstance and the additional abilities of the holy fool, beyond their ultimate calling of demonstrating "the madness of the world"[103] in order to "unite oneself with the divine, […] reach enlightenment […] and to lead others to wisdom".[104] Embracing the concepts of scandal and voluntarily entering a marginalized social status, the holy fool is capable of breaking "down structures of political order […] and social propriety".[105] Revelations of political and social functioning occur quite simply through the eccentric disruption of the daily routine and status quo, causing the onlookers to reflect on their overall situation. Within imperial Russia specifically, the holy fools shook the foundations of what was otherwise a very clear-cut classist society by embodying a liminal social class in which they simultaneously are subject to alienation and reproach but are also held in high esteem for their sanctity.[106] In Russia's continuing endeavor to resist external influence and to redefine what it truly means to be Russian, adhering to social convention and conforming was essential to achieving this perceived national solidarity. The very existence of the *iurodivye* on the other hand, challenges this plan as well as socially prescribed roles and allocations of power. In addition to these secular considerations, another theological component which undoubtedly influenced the progress and presence of the *iurodivye* is Russia's proclivity for mysticism and mystical theology.

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[98] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1283.

[99] Matthew 11:25

[100] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1283.

[101] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour.", 102.

[102] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour.", 102.

[103] Poulakou-Rebelakou, Liarmakopoulos, "Holy Fools: A Religious Phenomenon of Extreme Behaviour.", 102.

[104] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 742.

[105] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1282.

[106] Antoci, "Scandal and Marginality in the Vitae of Holy Fools," 281.

While according to scholars, the height of Russian mysticism occurred in the 19th century alongside the canonization of the first Russian mystic St. Seraphim of Sarov, the seeds of mystical thought long predate this era.[107] As will be explored in greater detail in the subsequent chapter, Russian mysticism deals with embracing the odd and inexplicable, and in many ways is understood as being indivisible from overall Russian theological thought. In addition to indulging the unusual, mysticism and holy foolery both possess an origin in monasticism, which itself has had a long history within Russia. Moreover, much like Old Testament prophets and holy fools, St. Seraphim, like other mystics, became known for engaging in the realization of miraculous acts, including several "authenticated cases of clairvoyance, prophecy, and healing of the sick".[108] Similarities aside, the point remains that in tandem with political and social factors, a people whose theological approach is predisposed to accepting non-mainstream displays of sanctity, like Russia, facilitates the prominence and longevity of a practice as peculiar as holy foolery. Particularly across the mystical theology of Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky, the interconnected nature of mysticism, salvific theology, and the *iurodivye* becomes ever-apparent; notions which will be investigated in the following chapters.

<u>19th Century Literature; The Second Life of the Iurodivye</u>

As previously mentioned, the golden-age of the *iurodivye* is considered to be the 16th century, and alongside the halting of the canonization of holy fools by the Russian Orthodox Church, the everyday presence of the *iurodivye* in Russia began to gradually dissipate after the 17th century.[109] But more so than the holy fools of Byzantium and other Slavic countries, the *iurodivye* were shaped not only through theological ideals, but influenced through socio-cultural factors, a reality which permitted the holy fools to become something truly unique in Russia, and to live on culturally, despite rejection from the Church. This can be noted by the appearance of other figures of foolery emerging sporadically later on, such as St. Pelagia of the 19th century. According to her vita, Pelagia was a tragic figure of foolery, who exhibited odd behaviours as early as childhood, although they only truly flourished in her adulthood; a textbook episode being her "watering" the flower of her dress at a tea party.[110] The tragic component of Pelagia's tale is the physically and emotionally abusive marriage she was subjected to as well as the loss of her child, prior to running away to the convent, where she continued to break social expectations and engage in the fools for Christ movement.[111]

Though the *iurodivye*'s overall popularity and presence diminished once they were shunned from the religious scene, society continued to accept them, and centuries later, were given new life via literature. The 19th century Russian literary canon features holy foolery to different degrees in different forms; from incorporating actual holy fools in

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[107] Serge Bolshakoff and Thomas Merton, *Russian Mystics*. (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 123.

[108] Bolshakoff and Merton, *Russian Mystics*, 128.

[109] Phan, "The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity," 740.

[110] Antoci, "Scandal and Marginality in the Vitae of Holy Fools," 278.

[111] Antoci, "Scandal and Marginality in the Vitae of Holy Fools," 278.

the story, to characters which can be interpreted as executing the role in unconventional ways. Beginning with the presence of true *iurodivye*, a classic example is the story *Childhood* by Leo Tolstoy. The fifth chapter of this tale, entitled "The Holy Fool", recounts the narrator's memory from when he was a young boy, and a local holy fool named Grisha came to visit his home:

> He was dressed in a ragged garment that resembled both a peasant caftan and a cassock. In his hand he held an enormous staff. Once inside the room, he banged the staff on the floor with all his might, and then, scowling and opening his mouth extraordinarily wide, he guffawed in a most terrifying and unnatural way. […] His voice was gruff and hoarse, his movements hurried and jerky, and his speech nonsensical and disjointed (he almost never used pronouns), but his intonation was so moving.[112]

Although a very brief chapter in his work, Tolstoy paints an extremely archetypical image of not only the Russian holy fool himself but the social-cultural customs surrounding them. Within the context of the story, the *iurodivye* Grisha was not invited to the home, but spontaneously presents himself, and yet the family welcomes him inside and serves him food.[113] As previously addressed, holy foolery is rooted in monasticism, as well as the practices of asceticism and radical renunciation of material goods, hence the necessity to live off of the charity of others. Radical anti-materialism can also be noted in Grisha's practice of walking "barefoot winter and summer".[114] Holy foolery continues to be noted through the several examples found in the great literary work of Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. One such instance being the peculiar character of Lizaveta. While it is not expressly stated whether Lizaveta's odd behaviour is a manifestation of genuine or feigned madness, she is introduced as "stinking Lizaveta", referred to as a "holy fool" by locals in the village, and was adored by "all the pious people in town".[115] Moving on to what can be referred to as *holy fool type* characters, the protagonist of *The Brothers Karamazov* is fascinating to analyze. The hero of the story, Alyosha, is undeniably a Christ-like figure, and Dostoevsky's most successful attempt at creating the "perfectly beautiful person". Alyosha is entirely sane and does not engage in any behaviour that would remotely suggest feigned insanity. While Alyosha himself is not a holy fool, there is a particular scene in the novel which is very much reminiscent of the tales of the first holy fool St. Symeon. As explored in the first chapter, one of the most well-known accounts used to emphasize St. Symeon's pious behaviour is that of him frequenting the company of prostitutes or entering women's baths, but never falling to sexual temptation. This anecdote is echoed in book seven of *The Brothers Karamazov*, when a character attempts to corrupt Alyosha as he is mourning the loss of his Elder and brings him to Grushenka, a woman of loose

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[112] Leo Tolstoy, *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*, trans. Judson Rosengrant (London: Penguin Classics, 2012), 21.

[113] Tolstoy, *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*, 20 – 23.

[114] Tolstoy, *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*, 22.

[115] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Peaver and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 97.

character. As Grushenka is seated "on his knees and embracing him", Alyosha's thoughts reveal "that he was now wearing the strongest armor against any seduction and temptation".[116] Not only does Alyosha behave like Symeon in this scene and remain celibate, but in listening to her hardships, he is filled with pure love and pity for her, calling her his sister, which deeply moves her and inspires life-altering change.[117]

Another, and slightly more complex literary presence of holy foolery in literature can be found in the works of Anton Chekhov, particularly his short story entitled *Ward No 6*. Before analyzing this story, it is important to acknowledge that overall, Chekhov's stories are somehow both exactly what they appear to be, and possess deliberately ambiguous endings, contributing to a wide variety of interpretations.[118] Moreover, in regards to the stories' contents being exactly as presented, it is necessary to bear in mind that prior to becoming an author, Chekhov studied and worked as a physician, therefore most of his medically themed stories (such as *Ward No 6*) may be interpreted in many different ways, but they are first and foremost often intended as a poetic critique of the way the field of medicine was being approached in Russia at the time. In short, *Ward No 6* details the story of a doctor's decent into madness while working closely with a patient in an insane asylum. Setting aside the primary discussion of medical critique, analysis of the patient who is admitted to Ward No 6 in the story reveals parallels with descriptions of historical holy fools, mentioning "his moral purity and his shabby coat, his frail appearance".[119] The story also mentions that "in spite of the severity of his judgments and his nervousness, he was well liked in town and […] awakened a kindle, warm, sorrowful feeling", which evokes the duality and liminal space the holy fool inhabits within Russian society; being both outcast and venerated.[120]

Many other Russian writers explored holy foolery in different ways to varying degrees in their work during the 19th century. Literature, the Church, and socio-cultural components come together to create the full and complex identity of the *iurodivye*.

Chapter Three

Salvation as Deification in the Eastern Church

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are several secular and theological factors which contribute to the unique longevity of holy foolery in Russia, one theological motif being salvation. Prior to exploring the relationship between salvation and the *iurodivye*, it is essential to first address it in a more focused manner, particularly in the context of Russian mysticism. The notion of salvation is an intricate idea in Christianity, with distinctly different understandings of what it is and how it is to be achieved according to each tradition and denomination of Christianity. Differences in

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[116] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 349.

[117] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* 350.

[118] Cathy Popkin, "Introduction," in *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories,* ed. Cathy Popkin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), xviii.

[119] Anton Chekhov, "Ward No 6," in *Anton Chekhovs' Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 238.

[120] Chekhov, "Ward No 6," 238.

interpretation of scripture, liturgical practices, theological perspectives and dogma cause salvation to be a concept of many faces. These diversities, in tandem with historical contexts have caused salvific theology to transform and develop across Western and Eastern traditions. A salvific element of particular interest is that of deification, a multifaceted theory of its own. While the history, difficulties, and definition of deification will be explored in the subsequent section, it is important to initially note that deification as a salvific practice is understood and accepted to varying degrees between Western and Eastern Orthodox Churches. With regards to the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Christianity in 12th – 20th century Russia specifically, the doctrine of deification seems to be indivisible from the components of mysticism and Christ. In pondering this subject, questions immediately emerge, such as *how can deification function as an act of salvation*, *under what historical context did such a practice flourish in the Eastern Church,* and *what is the relationship between deification and Russian mysticism?*

To this end, this chapter will endeavor to explore the idea of deification as a means of salvation within the Russian mystical theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church. As previously stated, after having established a foundation of defining deification, mysticism, and salvation, including the history, characteristics, and correlations between them, the chapter will progress by exploring the works of 20th century Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky in order to demonstrate that deification as a salvific practice flourished exponentially in Russian Orthodoxy because of Russian mysticism.

<u>Deification: Translation, Definition, and Origin</u>

Deification is fascinating when one considers its textual roots, origin, the diversity of responses from different traditions, and the larger theological implications it raises. The following paragraphs will strive to address the aforementioned elements, beginning with its origin and definition. Like all doctrinal and dogmatic practices, the notion of deification takes inspiration from several different pieces of scripture. Interestingly, no scholar seems to utilize a single story, chapter, or parable in its entirety, but rather seemingly unrelated verses, from Exodus 34:30, to Peter 1:4, and John 14:17, to name a few.[121] The verse which seems to have greatly inspired the imaginative view of Eastern deification is Psalm 82:6, "You are gods. And all of you are sons of the Most High".[122]

Deification is the most apt English equivalent for the root Greek word for the concept, *theōsis*, which refers to "the transformation of believers into the likeness of God".[123] This definition is deceptively simple, as scholars have noted complications with translation, followed by theological disagreements with regards to interpretation. Ben Drewery defines *theōsis* as entering in a "union" and "similitude with God".[124] Other

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[121] Chia, "Salvation as justification and deification," 129.

[122] Chia, "Salvation as justification and deification", 125.

[123] Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 1.

[124] Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 6.

linguistic equivalencies exist, however each scholar seems to have their own preference and discrepancy in frequency of usage is great. The word "union" is an appropriate choice linguistically speaking given the frequent presence of the word *koinonia* in Greek deification terminology, which rightfully translates to "communion" or "union".[125] Analysis of several of the Greek terms reveals the repetition of the English equivalent for being "deified", commonly translated as "becoming a god"; however it is important to note that "not all Greek words for deification connote a strong literal meaning".[126] Rather than express that an individual's essence is shifting from mortal to divine, deification is frequently understood as one possessing god-like qualities. Finlan and Kharlamov support this view by emphasizing the detail that the word "god" in the translations remains written with a lower case "g", which is indicative that the individual in question "never stops being human".[127] Literal and metaphorical understandings of the term have contributed to many theological discourses on the matter.

While the original writings of the Apostolic Fathers did not contain the term deification, roots of the concept can be noted through the introduction of relevant themes such as salvation, and incorruptibility, as well as contrasting binaries of light and dark, life and death.[128] The term deification seems to be directly utilized for the first time by Gregory of Nazianzus in the 4th century,[129] though a formal definition was not published until the 6th century with the work of Dionysius the Areopagite.[130] The concept has undergone quite a transformation, as it began as a metaphoric notion which then became conceptual and dogmatic.[131] While the presence of deification can be noted both in the Latin and Greek Patristic traditions, its validity and clear definition have been debated and challenged for some time. As Roger Olson expresses, contrary to popular belief, the West has had several theologians embrace deification to different extents,[132] though it is difficult to deny its larger presence in the Eastern tradition. There are a variety of possible reasons which play into this divide. The propagation of deification in the East will be explored in later sections, however Roland Chia asserts that one of the contributing factors to its lack of popularity in the West rests in their theological tendency to favor *justification*. Although justification and sanctification are not viewed as two distinctly different notions in the Eastern tradition, justification in Western soteriology seems to be paramount and primarily addresses the question "where in history is the justice of God"?[133] Chia suggests that deification being "alien" to the Western tradition "may arguably be attributed to its historical entrenchment in Roman

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[125] Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 6.

[126] Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 7.

[127] Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 6

[128] Vladimir Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 51.

[129] Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1.

[130] Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

[131] Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 1.

[132] Roger E. Olson, "Deification in contemporary theology" *Theology Today* 64, no. 2 (July 2007): 186-188

[133] Roland Chia, "Salvation as justification and deification" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 2 (2011): 126.

law".[134] While the West was torn with regards to deification, the doctrine of theōsis was entirely embraced by the East, becoming integral to Eastern Orthodox soteriology. The most diligent and all-encompassing definition of deification in the Eastern tradition is expressed by Orthodox Bishop Kallistos of Dioklei, who defines it as "an exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort [...] the total transformation of the human person by divine grace".[135]

Deification as Salvation

Having accentuated the roots and intricacies surrounding the doctrine of deification, the ensuing paragraphs will demonstrate how theōsis is understood as a salvific practice. This reality is embedded in the Eastern Orthodox perception of theology and the centrality of Christ.

Beginning with theological perceptions, Paul Negrut emphasizes the principles at play which greatly impact Eastern Orthodox theology. The two theological approaches often placed in opposition to one another are that of apophatic and cataphatic theology. Apophatic theology is an approach of negation, as it "refuses any attempt to form concepts about God", but rather operates around statements of what God is not, emphasizing the inadequacy of the human mind to comprehend His nature.[136] Contrarily, cataphatic theology, also referred to as positive theology, functions via affirmative statements about God, placing significance on a dual-directionality between God and human beings.[137] As an aside, the notion of dual-directionality will be revisited in greater detail in the theories of Vladimir Lossky. What is rather unique and central to eastern soteriology is in realizing the limitations of the exclusive use of either approach, "a synthesis between apophasis and cataphasis" is sought after.[138] Moreover, unlike, the West, the East does not draw clean borders between soteriology and theology, but once again strives for a synthesis as "theology has one goal – salvation".[139] Negrut echoes this position in quoting McDaniel in that "salvation is what Christianity is all about".[140] The prominence of deification is simply a logical extension of the premise that salvation is the goal of both Christianity and theology. For the Eastern tradition, theology is the path to achieving theōsis as "the whole purpose of theological epistemology and ecclesial practice is to help the faithful to attain deification".[141]

The final component which is integral to deification as salvation in the Eastern tradition is Jesus Christ, through incarnation, reconciliation, and imitation. The acceptance of Christ's nature as being divine in human form is indispensable to deification. His incarnation is the penultimate symbol as it demonstrates the "human

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[134] Chia, "Salvation as justification and deification," 126.

[135] Chia, "Salvation as justification and deification," 125.

[136] Paul Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis" *Churchman 109*, no. 2 (1995): 163.

[137] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 157.

[138] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 156.

[139] Nicolas Lossky, "Theology and Spirituality in the Work of Vladimir Lossky" *The Ecumenical Review* 51, no. 3 (1999): 288.

[140] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 154.

[141] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 155.

potentiality to incorporate the divine".[142] Kharlamov highlights that Christ, "the Incarnate God", demonstrates "the salvific unity of flesh and spirit […] is significant of redeemed humanity".[143] Reconciliation as a concept is demonstrated to be possible and something to believe in through "Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection".[144] Beyond the symbolism and hope of joining in union with God and attaining redemption, Christ holds the practical and concrete key to deification via imitation. In Christianity, "the goal of a believer is to emulate the life and actions of Christ as much as possible", which is in itself an application of the imitation of Christ.[145] The idea of imitating Christ as a way of attaining theōsis is most clearly expressed in the writings of Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky, which will be explored in due course.

The metaphorical and symbolic understanding of theōsis in Christian soteriology is congruent with Christian dogma and brings about an intelligible way for the faithful to work towards their own salvation.

Russian Mysticism

Mystical theology, particularly that of the Russian East combines religiosity, imagination, and enlightenment. The following section will provide a brief overview of the definition and history of Russian mysticism before delving into the works of Vladimir Lossky, as it is undeniably intertwined with deification and salvation in Eastern Orthodoxy.

Much like the origin of holy foolery, mysticism in Russian Orthodoxy is predominantly monastic in nature, especially in its novice days. Greatly influenced by St Gregory Palamas, Russian mysticism finds its birth in 11th century Mount Athos, the Eastern monastic epicenter of the time period.[146] Although the approaches to mysticism seem to change per mystic and era, it is very much a theological practice wrapped in spirituality "which expresses a doctrinal attitude", focusing on revelation and embracing "the divine mystery".[147] At its core, mysticism requires the individual to be open to accepting moments which may initially seem unclear or "out of the content of the common faith" so as to gain a new and more profound understanding.[148] When one considers the hagiography of the Eastern church, elements of mysticism and the presence of unique expressions of spiritual enlightenment can be noted in the practice of holy monks, monasteries, and canonized mystics as well as our previously explored and defined *holy fools* or "fools in Christ".[149]

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[142] Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," 52.

[143] Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," 62.

[144] Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," 52.

[145] Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," 52.

[146] Serge Bolshakoff and Thomas Merton, *Russian Mystics*. (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1977), ix-x

[147] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. (Crestwood, NY.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976): 7.

[148] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 8-9.

[149] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 19.

Unfortunately, first-hand accounts of Russian mystics such as journals and biographies are incredibly rare, leaving much unknown. The reason for this is not entirely clear, though it is partially due to the scarcity of spiritual literature with an intimate perspective of personal experiences within the Christian East.[150] However, even if such texts were common, Lossky asserts that the experiences of mystics are true moments of union with God which are "nearly always a secret between God and the soul concerned […] what is published is the fruit of this union".[151] Despite the overall lack of mystical memoirs, several prominent figures in Russian mysticism have been documented and held in high esteem in Russia, the first of which being 15th century St. Nilus of Sora. Returning to the notion that Russian mysticism was born in the monasteries, St. Nilus was a calligrapher, then monk at the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery in northern Russia.[152] While St. Nilus was the first Russian mystic, St Seraphim of Sarov is arguably the most popular of the 19th century, and the first to be canonized.[153] In many ways, St. Seraphim embodies the core of Russian mystical theology. Beyond accounts of his healings, predictions, monastic studies, and hermitage, St. Seraphim holds the title of *staretz*, which "designates a spiritual person of great maturity and possessing special gifts for guiding others".[154] Evdokimov stresses that the *staretzi* were not spiritual academics such as theologians, but were mystics who engaged in cardiognosis, contemplation of hidden or unclear spiritual thoughts and at times prophetic insight.[155] Most importantly, St. Seraphim is the quintessential representation of positive and optimistic mystical theology, as he is often associated with "light, joy, and resurrection".[156] As formerly intimated, Russian mystical theology changes with each mystical figure. This notion can be noted in that Bishop Ignatius Bryanchaninov's approach is often held in contrast to St. Seraphim; no longer revolving around the light of the Holy Spirit, Bishop Ignatius' mystical theology centered on the concepts of sin, vanity, and suffering.[157]

The emphasis that mysticism places on revelation and divine mystery is perhaps one of the most evident connections between deification and mysticism in the Russian tradition. Vladimir Lossky so eloquently states that "revelation teaches us that man was made in the image and likeness of God", which very much evokes the previously established concept of the imitation of Christ being a method of attaining theōsis and salvation.[158]

Vladimir Lossky: Mysticism, Deification and Salvation

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[150] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 20.

[151] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 120.

[152] Bolshakoff and Merton, *Russian Mystics*, 18.

[153] Bolshakoff and Merton, *Russian Mystics*, 122-123.

[154] Paul Evdokimov 266.

[155] Paul Evdokimov 266 – 267.

[156] Bolshakoff and Merton, *Russian Mystics*, 122.

[157] Bolshakoff and Merton, *Russian Mystics*, 144.

[158] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 114.

Twentieth-century theologian Vladimir Lossky has written many essays and books on the Trinity, salvation, and mysticism generally. The two works that will be the focal point of this analysis are Lossky's *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* and *In the Image and Likeness of God*. Lossky very poignantly and most effectively synthesizes mysticism, deification, and salvation in his approach to Christian theology.

Firstly, one of Lossky's most important premises is that theology and mysticism are essentially one in the same practice as "in a certain sense all theology is mystical", referring to the weight of revelation and divine mystery in both fields.[159] This assertion is crucial as it is in contrast with the reality of the Eastern tradition prior to the 20th century. Nevertheless, despite the fact that "mysticism is frequently opposed to theology", Lossky will proceed in his contemplations without drawing a distinction between the two, which will result in an overall harmony and strengthening of his discourse.[160] In addition to the indivisibility of theology and mysticism, Lossky asserts that there are two routes to acquiring human knowledge, generally: *episteme* and *gnosis*. *Episteme* refers to scientific and philosophical approaches to reasoning, possessing characteristics of epistemology.[161] Contrarily, *gnosis* is not a human process, but rather "a divine gift"; theological understanding imparted via revelation.[162] With these two definitions, it is clear that each yield different types of knowledge, and Lossky concludes that considering the inherent component of divine mystery in theological inquiry, *episteme* is ultimately inadequate when dealing with questions of God.[163] The knowledge attained by *gnosis* can be equated to revelation, which is a realization made even more significant through the claim that "the purpose of revelation (gnosis) is deification (theōsis)".[164] Ultimately, *gnosis* and theōsis are symbiotic as "the divine unity is certainly a part of the divine revelation".[165]

Entering the discussion on deification, Lossky presents a distinction between essence and energy, which is integral to the Eastern Orthodox, therefore Russian religious tradition. As alluded to in the deification portion of this chapter, arriving at a definition is not so simple in practice. Although the original Greek terms surrounding deification mainly refer to a metaphorical understanding of "becoming a god", as in acquiring god-like qualities, some that reject deification have done so on the basis of interpreting it as a literal transformation, which goes against Christian monotheism and the creatureliness of the human being.[166] Lossky clarifies this misconception by drawing on Palamas' division of *ousia*, *hypostases*, and *energeiai*, which refer to the ineffable divine essence, the three divine entities of the Trinity, and the uncreated energies and forces, respectively.[167] Paul Negrut makes it plain that "mystical union with God

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[159] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 7.

[160] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 7.

[161] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 158.

[162] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 159.

[163] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 158.

[164] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 159.

[165] Dom Illtyd Trethowan, "Lossky on Mystical Theology" *The Downside Review* 92, no. 309 (October 1974): 243.

[166] Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1.

[167] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 164.

according to essence is impossible"[168] and Lossky states that, "God […] remains inaccessible to us in his essence".[169] To this end, the relevance of the Trinity and the indispensability of Christ in the process of theōsis cannot be refuted. While God may be in some ways far beyond us, Christ bridges that distance in his humanly incarnation by making God more accessible.[170] In both his *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* and *In the Image and Likeness of God*, Lossky cements the role of Christ in the salvific doctrine of deification through the notion of directionality: *katabasis* and *anabasis*. *Katabasis* refers to descent, as God in a sense descends towards humanity through Christ.[171] Lossky surmises that it is this descent which allows for *anabasis*, "making human persons capable of an ascent" towards God.[172] In his work *In the Image and Likeness of God*, Lossky fittingly quotes St. Irenaeus "God made himself man, that man might become God".[173]

Another positive element of Lossky's merging of theology and mysticism can be noted in the complexity of the above exploration of essence and energies. Not only does the tradition of Russian mysticism deal with divine mystery, but it embraces the practice of attempting to change the self in order to better comprehend the mystery, rather than altering our understanding of the experience.[174] Lossky harnesses this strategy when detailing the method of joining in union with God through deification in suggesting that "this deifying union has, nevertheless, to be fulfilled ever more and more even in this present life, through the transformation of our […] nature".[175] This idea is also evocative of the belief that the foundation of one's salvation is to be actively built upon at the present moment. A central component of this direct and intentional effort given on the part of the faithful in attaining this union is undoubtedly the roles of grace and free will. While the relationship between grace and free will has been thoroughly contemplated by Pelagius and St. Augustine, among others, Lossky calls attention to the notion that the Eastern tradition seems to integrate them.[176] Lossky asserts that the union with God which lies at the heart of deification requires a "renunciation of the world" via "a re-entering of the soul into itself" and thus finding a meditative sense of concentration.[177] Simply, this is a readjustment of one's focus towards their connection with the divine in their road towards salvation. Willingly engaging in such a task is a demonstration of free will, through which grace can be experienced,[178] and which St. Seraphim has referred to as "the acquisition of grace".[179] The sum of this exploration is

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[168] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 164.

[169] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 70.

[170] Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," 53.

[171] Chia, "Salvation as justification and deification," 130.

[172] Vladimir Lossky, *In The Image and Likeness of God*, (Crestwook, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 97.

[173] Vladimir Lossky, *In The Image and Likeness of God*, 97.

[174] Bolshakoff and Merton, *Russian Mystics*, xix

[175] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 196.

[176] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 198.

[177] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 200.

[178] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 200 – 201.

[179] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 199.

most adequately expressed by nineteenth-century Bishop Theophanes who contends that "being assisted by grace, man accomplishes the work of his salvation".[180]

Through accepting God's ineffability, but partial attainability in Christ, the power of gnosis and the role of personal change in order to reach deification, Lossky harmoniously envelopes salvation, which as has been intimated by several scholars, is the culmination of the Eastern tradition.

Chapter Four

Russian Holy Foolery and Salvation

Thus far, the chapters have explored the origins of holy foolery, its unique expression in Russia through religious, cultural and literary components as well as deification and mysticism of the Eastern tradition. Having addressed the theological ideas which govern both holy foolery and deification exclusively, the current chapter will seek to unite the notions of foolery, deification and salvation in the Russian context. After outlining and solidifying the common ground between the *iurodivye* and deification, the subsequent section will traverse the notion of salvation in Russian culture.

Russian Holy Foolery as deification

As previously expressed, the core of holy foolery is understood as the reality of an individual who voluntarily "feigns insanity" or madness, though "what lies beneath is sanity and high morality, even pious intent".[181] Recalling the conclusions of chapter one, holy foolery ultimately operates through the eloquent and combined use of scandal, humour, and humility in order to inspire an enlightenment and introspection in others. Through evoking shock, disgust, pity, and at times humour, onlookers are brought to call themselves and their perspectives into question. The central elements of holy foolery as well as its reverberations share several commonalties with those of deification as presented in the chapter prior, specifically active choice, self-change, and the role of grace and Jesus Christ.

Beginning with the concept of active choice, it serves to reiterate the importance of the word *feigned* in the phrase *feigned madness* which is commonly used to describe holy fools. This emphasizes that the fool has not genuinely lost any of their mental faculties, as "a holy fool can be many things, but he is never simply simple".[182] In fact, Lane suggests that one detail which aids in distinguishing between unholy and holy fools is that the latter embraces the absurd with intention.[183] However, the voluntary nature of the fool's behaviour should not be confused with a simple, momentary choice. Rather, as noted in the previously presented historical accounts, holy fools typically experience some sort of life-altering event or undergo a sort of divine inspiration which

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[180] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 199.

[181] Ivanov*, Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 1.

[182] Ivanov*, Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond,* 9.

[183] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1281.

then leads them to willingly entering into the life of a holy fool. What lies at the heart of this occurrence is acknowledgment and acceptance; an individual could experience a moment of profound and spiritual reflection, but then choose to not undertake such a task. The *iurodivye* undeniably possess a degree of divine wisdom, though ultimately they are embracing as an expression of their own free will, rather than rejecting, a presented calling. Parallel to the *iurodivye*, so too does deification require a voluntary engagement to achieve their reality. As Lossky expresses, the union fulfilled through deification must be attained "ever more and more even in this present life".[184] Deification, therefore salvation in the Eastern tradition as explained by Lossky, does not occur by chance, but through active participation on the part of the individual in question. Both entail spiritual awareness, introspection, and an initial divine direction, as well as a deep and unwavering sense of commitment.

The commonality in these requirements is but the first point of connection between deification and holy foolery. Moreover, the established ties raise the question regarding the means by which the results are achieved, the key being that one must possess a degree of adaptability and open-mindedness. This adaptability is twofold in that it encompasses both the disposition towards the obscure and the capacity to change, when and as necessary. As described in the discussion on Lossky's view of mystical theology, deification is contingent on the individual being able and willing to change the way in which they govern their own life.[185] Contemplating the impact of one's actions on others and themselves is the first step towards being able to actively change the direction of their choices, and therefore their own salvation. In Lossky's writings on the way of union in deification, a foundation is built upon a joining of two notions which is ingrained in the basis of Russian Mystical theology overall. As it has done with other concepts, Russian mysticism harmonizes the "active and contemplative" methods of exploring spiritual acuity. Although presented in the context Russian monasticism, Lossky indicates that "active and contemplative" methods in seeking mystical union which have been traditionally independent, the Eastern practice unifies as "the two ways are inseparable".[186] Ultimately, deification in Russian mysticism requires self-change that is both active and contemplative, echoing the concepts of adaptability and open-mindedness. Similarly, the *iurodivye* too engages in a process of self-change by entering the reality and existence of pseudo madness as part of their spiritual journey. This synthesis of accepting obscurity and self-transformation executed in deification is perhaps most effectively conveyed in the following excerpt from Lossky's work:

> To put it another way, we must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which appears to us as an unfathomable mystery, in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery in our mode of understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling us to experience it mystically.[187]

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[184] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 196.

[185] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 196.

[186] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 18.

[187] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 8.

Not only does the *iurodivye* accept to change themselves and their behaviours, they make this metamorphosis in place of altering the perception of their experiences. Returning to the notion of open-mindedness, the *iurodivye* does not explain away their mystical revelations, but rather embraces them as they are. This disposition towards unconventional spiritual circumstances is a core tenet of Russian mysticism which encompasses deification, and given its equal presence in the *iurodivye's* process, it becomes a fundamental common ground between deification and holy foolery. Lossky calls on this directly, stating that Russian mysticism "knows also strange and unwonted paths to sanctification: that, for instance, of the *fools in Christ*".[188]

Furthermore, the epicenter of deification, both theologically and philologically, is the notion of "union with God"[189], which as has been previously established, cannot be attainted without grace and Jesus Christ. As the proceeding paragraphs have established, deification and holy foolery are both built upon the concept of active choice, awareness, and willingness to change, in addition to embracing the divine mystery. Another point of connection which will be explored is the role and presence of grace and Jesus Christ. Within the notion of deification, grace is integral as it ultimately allows for true union with God through the previously explored synergy between grace and free will, as "grace is a presence of God within us which demands constant effort on our part".[190] As mentioned in chapter 3, Jesus Christ is particularly important to deification as He shortens the distance between the believer seeking salvation and God; while God remains inaccessible in his essence, Christ's dual nature of divine grace and human essence emulates a joining of the eternal and ephemeral.[191] The bridging of divinity and mortality which is found in Christ is also an echoing of the necessary and delicate balance between Grace and free will. It is the combination of the gift and revelation of grace with the active imitation of Christ which makes deification possible. "The believer needs to reject corruption, learn about Christ, and take on his virtues".[192] In his analysis of the role of the divine, Stephen Finlan expresses the importance of "knowing Christ", drawing on Pauline traditions and several prophetic Biblical passages, such as Second Corinthians and the Epistle to the Ephesians, in order to convey the "understanding of Jesus as the doorway to knowledge of God".[193] Moreover, Finlan articulates that "deification is linked with sobriety, humility, piety, and morality", qualities which can be associated with Christ, further contributing to His importance in deification and unifies the notions of accepting, knowing, and emulating Christ.[194] In addition, returning to the *iurodivye*, the above mentioned Christly qualities are traits that have been explored several times when discussing and defining the nature of holy fools. Beyond this, the connection between Jesus Christ and the *iurodivye* is undeniable, first and foremost due

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[188] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 19.

[189] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 9.

[190] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 198.

[191] Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," 53.

[192] Stephen Finlan, "Second Peter's Notion of Divine Participation," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 46.

[193] Finlan, "Second Peter's Notion of Divine Participation," 47.

[194] Finlan, "Second Peter's Notion of Divine Participation," 47.

to holy foolery's scriptural roots "we are the fools for *Christ's sake*"[195] and that holy fools are commonly referred to as the *fools for Christ*. As previously addressed, just as the imitation of Christ is central to deification, so too is to it the *iurodivye*.

Based on the deliberations of this chapter thus far, it is clear that through the concepts of self-change, openness towards the divine mystery, grace and Jesus Christ, the *iurodivye*, and the entire phenomenon of holy foolery is a form and display of deification, seeking similar things across similar attributes.

The Salvific Russian Narrative

Thus far, the previous chapters have addressed holy foolery, deification, and how both are experienced and expressed uniquely within the Eastern, and particularly Russian, tradition. These notions, through certain components, have directly and indirectly been connected with salvation. Chapter 3 established how in the Eastern tradition, deification is undoubtedly an expression and extension of salvific theology. But within the Russian context, mysticism and deification are not the only concepts which contribute to the distinctive reality of Slavic holy foolery. Another idea which is deeply rooted in the Russian literary, religious, and socio-cultural milieu, is salvation.

The very essence of salvation in the Russian context is complex and multifaceted, as a spiritual lens is present even within the very linguistics. To begin with the philological foundations, it is significant to note that *spasibo*, the Russian word for *thank you*, is actually itself a shortening of the original phrase *Spasi vas Bog*, which translates to *May God save you*, effectively incorporating the notions of saving or salvation into daily interpersonal exchanges.[196] While the word *saviour* in the Old Russian vernacular made reference to Christ, the notion of salvation generally is present in many Russian adages, and it is common place within the Russian culture for salvation to be interpreted through the lenses of medicine and education in addition to theology.[197] As previously explored with the *iurodivye's* transformation journey and second life through the Russian Literary canon, salvation too is an ever-present motif in Russian literature. Particularly in nineteenth-century literature, salvation from physical danger is often understood as a metaphor for the transformation, and therefore restoration of the soul.[198] Overall, the salvation narrative operates on an equilibrium or disequilibrium of the state of harmony and disharmony within one's soul. When harmony is lost, the individual must attempt to overcome certain obstacles in order to restore it; a story arch which can be paralleled biblically in which disharmony equates the Fall of Mankind.[199]

In fact, Russian literature and hagiography share three crucial components with regards to salvation. Firstly, salvation is ultimately an inner transformation of the soul, followed by an altering of heart and mind (echoing the words of Christ), and finally

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[195] 1 Corinthians, 4:10

[196] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," *Literature and Theology* 20, no. 1 (March 2006): 31.

[197] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 31.

[198] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 31.

[199] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 32.

salvation requires suffering.[200] The first element of inner change is a concept which has been seen in both the discussion on deification and of the holy fools. In Russian fiction, the narrative of an individual transforming from evil to good or resisting evil is fairly common, thus utilizing the change in soul-heart-mind concept. The third component of suffering is very particular to the Russian notion of salvation, whether it be spiritual or secular. Russian Christianity has long since held the belief that "the more one suffers the closer one is to Christ".[201] This assertion is sound, especially when one considers the suffering Christ experienced in his life, leading up to and including the crucifixion. Just as emulation of Christ as a means of connecting with God is part of the process of both holy foolery and deification, so too is it an integral part of salvation. Furthermore, in Russian hagiography the concept of bearing suffering with Christ is perceived as "an expression of love towards God", and suffering itself is a means by which to purify the soul.[202] Suffering is also present, perhaps most clearly, in Russian hagiography via the holy persons known as the *strastoterpets*; a sort of saint unique to Russia, whose name means "bearer of suffering".[203] Returning to the notion of salvation in Christ, the *strastoterpets* are most known for radically practicing Christ-like nonviolence, the most extreme case being the two first *strastoterpets*, Dukes Boris and Gleb, who suffered their own deaths as a consequence of their resistance towards violence.[204] Willful suffering can be noted in both the true and fictional accounts of the *iurodivye* living as wanderers with minimal belongings, and often being subjected to the ridicule, disdain, and pity of onlookers. A specific notion which connects also Russian hagiography and literature is the concept of "innocent suffering"[205] and how that correlates to cleansing and transforming the soul, which as was previously mentioned is fundamental to the Russian understanding of salvation. True to its name, *innocent suffering* is the portrayal of an individual or character who has experienced or continues to experience great loss and tragedy. Within Russian literature, the sufferer character type seems to be most often divided in two: either a pure-hearted person who overcomes tragedy or a struggling individual who undergoes such suffering that it transforms their soul as a result.

   The nineteenth century Russian literary canon is full of salvific narratives, utilizing the components of the transformation of soul-heart-mind and both emotional and physical suffering, noted frequently in the works of writers such as Gogol, Chekhov, Goncharov, and most importantly Dostoevsky.[206] As with most Russian authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Dostoevsky's works nearly always seek to provide a certain socio-cultural, political or ideological critique first and foremost, although suffering and salvation are undeniably interwoven. This can be noted in one of Dostoevsky's earlier works, *Poor Folk*. While the primary dilemma of this epistolary novel is the toll St. Petersburg's classism takes on human dignity, told through an

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[200] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 32.

[201] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 33.

[202] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 33.

[203] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 33.

[204] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 32.

[205] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 33.

[206] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 33.

unlikely exchange of love letters, a point of connection between the characters is that they are miserable and seek restoration. The protagonist Makar Devushkin is very contemplative and self-aware as he endures many injustices which he describes as "mental agony".[207] Having been subjected to mistreatment for so long, when he is finally treated with dignity by a superior, Makar undergoes a secular salvation in which he states "by that action he has resurrected my spirit, has made my life sweeter for ever".[208] In the above example, suffering does not work alone to bring about a transformation of the soul, as it does in other writings, but Makar Devushkin certainly belongs in the first category of the *innocent sufferer*. In his later works, such as *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Idiot*, "Dostoevsky was willing to verbalise, to depict the divine image in humanity"[209] which he achieved in a variety of ways, though the present focus will remain on suffering and salvation.

Beginning with *The Brothers Karamazov*, there are two characters' stories which depict the Russian motif of suffering as a step towards salvation. Firstly, Alyosha is at once an innocent sufferer with a pure heart who resists corruption (often read as a Christ-like figure) and also experiences a transformation of the soul; throughout the novel, Alyosha's principles, ideals and faith come to be challenged through his many sufferings (inability to save his bother, the loss of his father, the loss of Elder Zosima, and the death of Ilyusha). Being naturally pure of heart, and a sincere empath, Alyosha not only feels his own suffering, but that of everyone around him as well, thus amplifying his misery. This is yet another connection between suffering and Christly emulation, as it alludes to Christ's final action of taking on the sins of all mankind. The second character in the novel whose soul is transformed via suffering is Dmitri Karamazov. For the vast majority of the tale, Dmitri is a pathetic man and a sensualist, who falls victim to all manner of temptation, be it women, drink or gambling, and is above all else reckless in his actions towards himself and others. In book 9, Dmitri is arrested and put on trial for his father's murder, a process with causes him much pain, and the result is foreshadowed in the subchapter being titled *The Soul's Journey through Torments*.[210] In the closing portion of the trial, Dmitri attains a sort of clarity and pleads very intimate truths:

> I am the lowest vermin! So be it! Every day of my life I've been beating my breast and promising to reform, and every day I've done the same vile things. I understand now that for men such as I a blow is needed, a blow of fate […] Never, never wouldI have risen by myself! But the thunder has struck. I accept the torment of an accusation of my disgrace before all, I want to suffer and be purified by suffering! […] I accept punishment not because I killed him, but because I wanted to kill him.[211]

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[207] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Poor Folk and Other Stories*, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin Classics, 1988), 109.

[208] Dostoevsky, *Poor Folk and Other Stories*, 109.

[209] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 34.

[210] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Peaver and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 457.

[211] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 509.

This confession is significant for several reasons. Firstly, Dmitri mentions suffering as a means of purification, therefore transformation of the soul, which as previously established is crucial to the Russian Christian notion of salvation. Secondly, the proclamations "I want to suffer" and "I accept punishment" indicate an awareness and willful acceptance of the process, another prerequisite which tracks from holy foolery, to deification, to salvation. Thirdly, the final sentence of the above excerpt reveals that Dmitri's father's blood is not on his hands, but he will accept the sentence nonetheless. This demonstrates the twofold salvific nature of his decision as he is agreeing to take on additional suffering as a form of penance in the hope that his soul may be transformed, but he is also engaging in "another biblical motif of salvation – substitution, the taking of another's sins and the subsequent punishment"[212], given that in truth it was his half-brother who murdered his father.

With regards to Dostoevsky's other renowned work *The Idiot*, connections are drawn between love, suffering, and salvation. As previously stated, Russian Hagiography views wanting to suffer with Christ as an act of love for God and to "love God with all your heart and your neighbor as thyself".[213] On this note, Dostoevsky "believes that it is love that makes people able to see the *Imago Dei* of one's soul […] to restore the ideal, iconic image of humankind".[214] In the novel *The Idiot*, the protagonist Prince Myshkin endures a great deal in addition to his medical condition, but is above all else filled with infinite love and empathy, particularly towards those who have suffered. When Myshkin meets Nastasya Filippovna, a tragic female character, the first thing he remarks upon is her suffering, saying "an astonishing face! […] it's a gay face, but she has suffered terribly, eh? It speaks in her eyes".[215] As the story unfolds, the Prince treats Nastasya with the utmost love and compassion, showing her a sort of reverence on the basis of her suffering, and though he was unable to save her, in death "her soul is presented as pure in the novel, having been transformed in the loving heart of the Prince".[216]

To recapitulate, the notion of secular and spiritual salvation is intertwined in the linguistic, religious, socio-cultural, and literary contexts of the Russian identity. In paralleling Russian Hagiography and literature, the core components of the salvific narrative emerge, such as transformation of the soul, then heart, and mind, as well as the necessity of suffering.

The *Iurodivye* as Salvation

Having established who the *iurodivye* are, their purpose, their connection to Russian mystical theology, and by consequence deification, drawing together the *iurodivye* and salvific theology is the next natural step. As explored in earlier chapters,

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[212] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 34.

[213] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 33.

[214] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 34.

[215] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Richard Peaver and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 2001), 36.

[216] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 34.

holy foolery operates on harmonizing humour, humility and scandal, while utilizing the qualities of willingness to change the self, adapt, and possess a proclivity towards the divine mystery. Based on the similitudes of active choice, self-change and accepting to emulate Christ as much as possible, holy foolery has been identified as an act of deification. In fact, the *iurodivye*, deification, and salvation all function on the basis of self-change, openness to mystical experiences, and emulation of Christ.

While the presence of the *iurodivye* in Russian 19th century literature has been noted in various forms, be it a literal holy fool or a holy fool-type character, the existence of holy foolery in classic folkloric tales is equally a reality of the Russian tradition. A pivotal character from Russian folklore and fairy-tales is the figure of Ivan the Fool, who is considered "a secular variant of the holy fool".[217] Throughout the story, Ivan is a simple man, who is pure of heart, but infinitely lazy which places him in contrast with his brothers which are active but also possess a capacity for malevolence and dishonesty.[218] The juxtaposing relationship between Ivan and his brothers, according to Volkova, poses a dilemma in which one must contemplate what is most important with regards to salvation "one's pure heart or his effective activity"?[219] It may seem odd to frame the narrative this way, considering it was previously noted how Russian mysticism marries active and contemplative approaches to spirituality, but the story of Ivan the Fool demonstrates the delicate art of balance, as well as when and where to make concessions. Through the salvific lens, Ivan's laziness is interpreted as engaging in the contemplative approach or "vita contemplativa" which at its core is about "staying away from evil", and in this way, Ivan is able to maintain his pure heart.[220] As discussed in the preceding section on the Russian salvific narrative, salvation is often placed in the context of a character seeking the inner transformation of soul-heart-mind through introspection and suffering, as either someone moving from bad to good, or a pure heart resisting corruption, and Ivan the Fool is very much an example of the latter category.

In reality, salvation within the practices of the Russian holy fool possesses a duality, as the *iurodivye's* existence unintentionally works towards the salvation of both him or herself and the faithful onlookers in the external world. As stated in chapter one, the holy fool is selfless in that he renounces everything, living in the discomfort of feigned insanity for the good of others. Recalling that Christian foolery was scripturally inspired by the passage "we are the fools for Christ's sake"[221], this extreme humility is one of many ways of imitating Christ, and thus being closer to God. Volkova directly proclaims that "holy fools sacrifice their private lives, their names, and their identities to God", all things in which Christ too chose to renounce in order to accept his divine role.[222] The scandalous behaviour of the fool ignites pity and introspection on the part of the observer, stirring them to ruminate on themselves and actively make choices which contribute to their salvation. While helping others is the main role of the *iurodivye*, they too consequently undergo the actions they seek to inspire in others. The very process of

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[217] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 36.

[218] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 36.

[219] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 36.

[220] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 36.

[221] 1 Corinthians, 4:10

[222] Elena Volkova, "The Salvation Story in Russian Literature," 35.

accepting the divine mystery, the gift of grace, and emulating Christ, requires having first examined themselves, cumulatively resulting in the *iurodivye* having taken steps towards their own salvation. The process of suffering as the *iurodivye* and shocking spectators into evoking self-change through "awakening consciousness"[223], there is a positive, transformative impact for all involved. Lane remarks that "many times in the history of divine and human affairs, holy folly has been the cause of deliverance and salvation".[224]

Recalling the assessment of Nicholas Lossky, "theology has only one goal – salvation. And salvation is naturally to be understood in the classical Orthodox terms of deification, union with God"[225], as well as Negrut's analysis that soteriology lies at the heart of Christianity[226], the notions are undeniably linked and arguably indivisible from one another in the Eastern, and particularly Russian, tradition. Beyond the various commonalities: philosophical, ideological, and theological connections that have been drawn, moving forward on the premises that (1) holy foolery is an act of deification, and (2) salvation in Eastern Orthodoxy should be understood as deification, then the logical supposition is that holy foolery too is an act of salvation.

Conclusion

The preceding four chapters have systematically separated, defined, explored, and drawn together holy foolery, deification and salvation. As intimated in the introduction, Russian holy foolery in and of itself, though particularly in the context of salvific theology inspires a multitude of questions, primarily *what is the function of holy foolery in Russian Orthodox salvific theology?* Through the individually assessed elements, the chapters have articulated that the Russian holy fools, the *iurodivye*, possess more than just a function within Russian Orthodox soteriology, but rather, that they themselves directly embody salvation. Stated more plainly, *the iurodivye demonstrate that their existence, and lifestyle are a viable means by which to attain salvation, as it is understood in the Russian religious tradition*.

Recapitulating the salient components of the opening chapter, the phenomenon of holy foolery is defined as one who feigns madness but what lies within is spiritual and pious intent. The efficacy of the holy fool is made clear when one considers the roles of scandal, humour, and humility. As expressed by the previously mentioned and quoted scholars, the obscure behaviour of the holy fool is meant to stir emotions of all sorts within onlookers, humour, pity, and disgust being the primary sentiments. The ridiculous behaviour breaks from the norm, inciting scandal and socio-cultural marginality, which undeniably creates spectacle, at the center of which resides the holy fool. Allowing oneself to be the target of such open disdain and ridicule, the holy fools is engaging in an immeasurable act of humility, sacrificing everything so that they may shock others

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[223] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1284.

[224] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1282.

[225] Nicolas Lossky, "Theology and Spirituality in the Work of Vladimir Lossky" *The Ecumenical Review* 51, no. 3 (1999): 290.

[226] Negrut, "Orthodox soteriology: theosis," 154.

into "awakening consciousness".[227] A partially reflexive gesture follows, as onlookers are inclined to compare themselves to the fool, engaging in introspection, assessing who they truly are and how they can and should change. The first chapter also addresses the long and complex history of the holy fool, expressing that the fundamental concepts and precursor figures long predate the first accounts of holy foolery as it is presently understood, drawing links to the ancient Greek cynics of Diogenes of Sinope. It is however important to reiterate the holy fools of Christianity are rooted in the Biblical passage "We are the fools for Christ's sake" thus inspiring the movement as it evolved.

Having paved the foundations of what holy foolery is, how it originated, transformed, and what interconnected components have contributed to its functioning, the second chapter explored holy foolery specifically within the Russian tradition. After having tracked the holy fools' voyage from the Byzantine, through the Eastern Slavic territories, and finally into Russia, once again philology is the starting point. As various scriptures and works began to be translated, terms such as *buiak* or *buiav, pokhab, blazhenny*, and the favoured *iurodivye* became more prevalent, drawing on notions of being blessed while embodying stupidity. Originating from the monasteries, the *iurodivye* came to be venerated by the Russian Orthodox Church for a time, and once the tides changed, the *iurodivye* survived across socio-cultural practices and literature. Writers such as Tolstoy, Chekhov and Dostoevsky incorporated holy foolery in one form or another, always with a touch reverence, thus sustaining and expanding the holy fool tradition.

Beyond socio-cultural and literary factors, the very nature of Christian theology in Russia is innately mystical, as revealed by Vladimir Lossky's works. Mysticism in Russia operates on the basis of *gnosis*, the proclivity towards the divine mystery, and the process of deification. Undeniably, the core of deification is striving to achieving union with God, which is something that can only be attained through the balance of *katabasis* and *anabasis* in Christ and accepting the divine revelation of grace. Not only does Christ's dual nature bring God closer to the believer seeking deification and salvation, but He is perhaps one of the paramount commonalities linking deification, holy foolery, and salvation together. The practice of *Imitatio Christi*, seeking humility, and possessing introspection, open-mindedness, and self-change form the congruence between deification and holy foolery. Both phenomena also require active and willing participation, as well as commitment to allowing the experience of divine mystery to change them, rather than the reverse.

Ultimately, it is the culmination of the literary and socio-cultural expressions of holy foolery, in tandem with the strength of mystical theology and the various sub-mechanisms at work within it which has allowed the *iurodivye* to become an unwavering execution of deification, and thus by extension, salvation. In addition, salvation in the Russian context extends beyond the elements of active change and striving for union with God via Christ, but the essence of salvation is deepened through the necessity of transforming the soul and the role of suffering. The plethora of characteristics and elements which unite in the reality of the *iurodivye* indicate that they

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[227] Lane, "The Spirituality and Politics of Holy Folly," 1284.

are a valid and unique pathway to salvation, as it is understood in the Russian religious tradition.

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