

Collective Crystallization Dynamics III: Russia — Three Crystallizations, One Mechanism

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Supplementary Study 3 — a companion case study to Coşar (2026a), Protodizm: İçimizdeki Gizli Din [Protodism: The Hidden Religion Within Us]

Abstract

This study applies the Protodik Hypothesis to the last five centuries of Russian history. Where Appendix 1 (Turkey) analyzes a single, ongoing crystallization and Appendix 2 (Germany-Poland-India) analyzes three independent cases, Russia offers a different kind of value: on the same territory, among the same people, history itself has recorded **three complete crystallization cycles** — Tsarist Orthodoxy, Soviet communism, and the Putin-Kirill era's nationalist Orthodoxy. The content changed radically each time (theist → atheist → theist again); the mechanism stayed constant across all three. Russia is the clearest historical record available that collective theolepsia's object need not be divine — that ideology can occupy exactly the same functional slot.

1. Introduction: Why Russia?

Appendices 1 and 2 applied the Protodik Hypothesis to current, still-unfolding cases. Russia offers a different kind of test: **completed cycles**. Within a five-hundred-year window, on the same soil, the theory can be tested start to finish three times over — crystallization, fracture, new crystallization, fracture again, crystallization again. This repetition provides something a single case cannot: the ability to hold variables fixed. The people are the same, the geography is the same, the language is the same, and even much of the institutional architecture (centralized authority, a vast bureaucracy, a security apparatus) remains the same — the only thing that changes is the *content* of the crystallization. This sets up an extraordinary natural experiment for testing the Fractal Mechanism's claim that the mechanism operates independently of scale and content.

A second, more striking reason: Russia's middle cycle — the Soviet period — is explicitly an *atheist* crystallization. The state effectively banned religion, killed or imprisoned thousands of clergy, and demolished churches. And that very atheist regime spontaneously reproduced every structural component of religion (a sacred text, a founder cult, confession, excommunication, apocalyptic expectation, saints). This is the sternest possible test of the book's definition of collective theolepsia: the definition already covers capture by "an ideology, a leader, or an institutional belief system"; the Soviet case shows strongly that this scope is empirical, not merely theoretical.

2. Coordination Note

This study uses the core concepts defined in Appendix 1 (collective theolepsia, collective metaxima, collective MADAD, theolysis, crystallization, the Fractal Mechanism, Content/Form Asymmetry, Lateral Shift) directly, without redefining them. It should be read alongside Coşar (2026c).

3. First Crystallization: Tsarist Orthodoxy and the Third Rome

Russia's founding narrative begins in 988, when Prince Vladimir of Kiev declared Byzantine Orthodoxy the state religion. But the decisive constitutional moment of crystallization comes in the sixteenth century. Around the 1520s, the monk Filofei of Pskov, writing to Grand Duke Vasili III, formulated the Third Rome doctrine: the first Rome fell to Latin heresy; the second Rome (Constantinople) fell to the Ottomans in 1453; Moscow is the third Rome — and there will not be a fourth. This is not a purely theological claim but a political document of crystallization: it declares the Grand Duchy of Moscow the final, unrepeatable carrier of universal Christian history.

Symphonia, the Byzantine inheritance of church and state as two separate but harmonious authorities, increasingly tilted toward the state in Russia. In 1721, Peter I abolished the Patriarchate outright and replaced it with a Holy Synod subordinate to the state; the church was no longer an independent institution but a department of it. In the nineteenth century, Count Uvarov, Nicholas I's minister of education, crystallized the empire's official ideology into three words: *Pravoslaviye*, *Samoderzhaviye*, *Narodnost* — Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality. The Tsar was God's anointed authority; to question him was treason against both faith and state at once. This is collective theolepsia in classic form: religion and state fused into a single, inseparable mold.

4. Theolysis I: 1917 and Forced Dissolution

The October Revolution of 1917 set off one of history's fastest and most violent instances of theolysis. The Bolsheviks declared religion "the opium of the people"; churches were destroyed or converted into warehouses, clubs, or museums, and tens of thousands of clergy were killed or sent to camps. The League of Militant Atheists (*Soyuz voinstvuyushchikh bezbozhnikov*), founded in 1925, was a state-backed institution that went village to village aiming to eliminate religious practice outright.

But theolysis departs from the classic pattern here. In individual theolysis, as the book defines it, the mold dissolves and thumos is released — sometimes scattering, sometimes toward a new search. Here, although the mold was shattered by state force, *the theogenic drive itself never closed* — only its object emptied out. And that emptiness did not last long.

5. Second Crystallization: When Ideology Becomes the Object

Soviet communism is the clearest historical demonstration that collective

theolepsia's object need not be religious. The structural isomorphism is striking:

- **Sacred text:** the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin corpus became mandatory, unquestionable curriculum in Party schools.
- **Founder cult and physical relic:** since his death in 1924, Lenin has been displayed embalmed in the Mausoleum on Red Square — literally a sacred relic, a shrine that visitors queue to see. This is not a metaphor; it is, in the theological sense, an actual cult of relics.
- **Confession:** "samokritika" (self-criticism) sessions and forced confessions at show trials functioned as an institutionalized rite of penance.
- **Excommunication:** expulsion from the Party was a secular *excommunicatio* — not merely political but social death.
- **Apocalyptic expectation:** the inevitable arrival of full communism supplied a teleology within which the Five-Year Plans were sanctified.
- **Saints and martyrs:** heroes of the revolution became exemplary figures commemorated in an official cult.
- **A priestly class:** political commissars (politruks) served as an interpretive and supervisory intermediary class for doctrine.

This list is not an analogy; it is a direct application of the book's own definition of collective theolepsia: the theogenic drive was captured by "an ideology, a leader, or an institutional belief system" — the definition never required the object to be divine. The Soviet case moves this from a theoretical possibility to an empirical reality.

6. Theolysis II: 1991 and the Second Dissolution

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union triggered a second major theolysis — this time not by external force but through the system's own internal contradictions. The result was a vacuum of meaning structurally similar to 1917's: the period remembered as the "wild nineties" combined economic collapse, oligarchic plunder, and ideological vacuum all at once; foreign sects, mystical movements, and nostalgic nationalism all rushed to fill the gap — the societal-scale, millions-strong version of what the book defines as metaxima.

7. Third Crystallization: The Putin-Kirill Symphonia and Russkiy Mir

The turning point began when Gorbachev marked the millennium of Christianity's arrival in Russia with a state ceremony in 1988 — restrictions eased from there. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, demolished by Stalin in 1931, was rebuilt on the same site between 1995 and 2000; symbolically, it showed that a shattered form could still be restored.

Kirill, elected Patriarch in 2009, built a modern version of the classic *symphonia* with Putin: the church supplies the state with a language of legitimacy, and the state supplies the church with institutional protection and resources. The doctrinal core of this alliance is the concept of "Russkiy Mir" (Russian World) — a civilizational claim defining Russia not merely as a state but as the spiritual center of Orthodox-Slavic civilization, one that encompasses Ukraine as well.

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine became the most visible test of this crystallization. Kirill framed the war as a metaphysical struggle against the West's "moral decay" (especially the acceptance of LGBT rights), declaring that soldiers who died at the front were cleansed of their sins by that sacrifice. As late as April 2026, even

immediately after Russian forces shelled an Orthodox cultural center in Dnipro, Kirill continued praising Russian troops for their "glorious accomplishments" — a striking demonstration of the mold's capacity to absorb its own contradictions. This stance produced an unprecedented split within world Orthodoxy: at least twenty Moscow-linked dioceses in Ukraine removed Kirill from their prayers, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine formally declared independence, and the United Kingdom and Canada placed Kirill under sanctions.

8. What the Fractal Mechanism Predicts: Comparing the Three Cycles

Placed side by side, what changes and what does not becomes clear:

	Tsarist (16th c.–1917)	Soviet (1917–1991)	Putin-Kirill (1991–)
Object of the mold	The Orthodox God	Dialectical materialism	Orthodox God + nationhood
Sacred text	The Bible, Church tradition	The Marx-Engels-Lenin corpus	The Bible + Russkiy Mir discourse
Source of legitimacy	God's anointment	The scientific law of history	Sanctity of civilization/lineage
Penalty for heresy	Excommunication, exile	Expulsion, the camps	Exclusion, discrediting

The content changed radically three times over — theist, atheist, theist again. The structure stayed the same all three times. This is the book's central claim — that crystallization is a mechanism operating independently of religious content — tested through repeated natural experiments within the borders of a single country, a kind of test Appendices 1 and 2 could not by themselves supply.

9. System Dynamics: Where Does Russia Stand Now?

The third crystallization is accumulating strain under the pressure of a prolonged war and the economic weight of sanctions. From the book's framework, the critical question is this: among the urban, the young, and those directly affected by the war, has the Russkiy Mir narrative genuinely *crystallized* — or has it merely been *imposed*? The two conditions look identical from the outside — professions of loyalty, attendance at ceremonies — but they diverge sharply in how people behave at the moment of fracture. Viewed through the book's fracture-trigger framework (economic pressure, elite fracture, and the partial but real availability of outside information), it is reasonable to expect that the third cycle, too, will not remain frozen forever; when and how it fractures remains uncertain.

10. Limitations

This case carries three serious limitations. First, data access: independent polling is of contested reliability under authoritarian conditions, and official figures on religiosity may fail to distinguish performative compliance from genuine belief. Second, summarizing five centuries in a single study inevitably simplifies; the internal diversity within each cycle — regional, ethnic, confessional — has necessarily been left in the background here. Third, an analysis written while the war is still underway sits in the middle of a process whose outcome is not yet known; how the third cycle will close falls outside the scope of this study.

Fourth — and theoretically the most important — this study's central claim (three cycles, one mechanism) is a hypothesis, not a proven result; it weakens under two conditions. First, if the structural similarities (a sacred text, a relic, confession, excommunication) are not specific to crystallization but a general feature of any powerful totalitarian/authoritarian system — explicable by the plain logic of power consolidation without appeal to a theogenic drive at all — then what is operating may be a more general organizational dynamic rather than this specific mechanism. Second, whether the three cycles are truly *independent* is open to dispute: some historians argue that Soviet practice inherited directly from Orthodox cultural habits (icon veneration → portrait cult, saints → revolutionary martyrs) — if that reading is correct, what is at issue is not three separate crystallizations but a single cultural continuity wearing different labels.

11. Conclusion

Russia offers a case for the Protodik Hypothesis found nowhere else: the same people, the same land, three centuries, three crystallizations — one of them explicitly atheist. The mechanism operated independently of whether the content was theist or atheist, reproducing the same components each time — a sacred text, a source of legitimacy, a penalty for heresy, the ceding of MADAD to central authority. This is the book's boldest claim — that the theogenic drive runs the same mechanism regardless of its object — tested not once but three times within the history of a single nation.

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