The Atheist Director and the Orthodox Tsar Sergei Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible
Le metteur en scène athée et le tsar orthodoxe : Ivan le Terrible de Sergej Èjzenštejn

Charles J. Halperin

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/res/1272
DOI: 10.4000/res.1272
ISSN: 2117-718X

Publisher
Institut d’études slaves

Printed version
Date of publication: 30 December 2017
Number of pages: 515-526
ISSN: 0080-2557

Electronic reference
Director Sergei Eisenstein paid considerable attention to religion in his film *Ivan the Terrible* about Tsar Ivan the Terrible (Ivan IV, Ivan Vasil'evich, Ivan Groznyi, ruled 1533-1584), which did not go unnoticed in the officially atheist Soviet Union. In 1942 a letter from D. I. Eremin in Moscow was hand-delivered to Eisenstein in Alma Ata, expressing doubts about the prominence of Ivan’s “religious moods (nastroeniia)” in the screenplay. The Council of People’s Commissars Committee on Cinema Affairs criticized Part I for showing “too much religion.” The stenographic account of the Committee’s discussion does not record that anyone present raised the issue, so this criticism in the Committee’s report, written by its staff, originated either in the committee’s chairman, I. G. Bol'shakov, or its staff. Critic I. I. Iuzovskii advised Eisenstein that Part I should present a more complex relationship between Ivan and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Scholars have only rarely commented on the role of religion in the movie and its depiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. Kristen Thompson observed that Eisenstein emphasizes Ivan’s religious leanings. Gaston Roberge noted the overall religiousness of the film and referred to the presence of icons.

* I wish to express my appreciation to the two anonymous readers for RES for their useful comments, to which I have responded to the best of my ability.

1. Eisenstein had been evacuated from Moscow to Alma Ata after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, where he made the movie.
5. From the enormous bibliography on Eisenstein in general and on *Ivan the Terrible* in particular I have cited only those works which I found relevant to the topic at hand, not all those I consulted.

in twenty of its twenty-one reels.  


11. Eisenstein did not finish filming Part III, but its film script survives.

12. The metropolitan was the head of the Russian Orthodox Church.
Pimen’s supposed acolyte, Petr Volynets, did not murder Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia’s son, Prince Vladimir Andrejevich Staritskii, in a foiled plot to assassinate Ivan orchestrated by Pimen. Unlike Petr Volynets, who was an historical character, the priest Evstafii, a member of the Kolychev boyar family to which Filipp belonged who becomes Ivan’s confessor at Filipp’s instigation in order to hide from Ivan’s repression of his family and to spy on Ivan on behalf of the conspiracy to overthrow him, is an entirely fictional character. No son from a boyar family could possible “hide” from Ivan by spending time in his presence, because Ivan would have known all male members of boyar families on sight. There were holy fools in Ivan’s Moscow, but the holy fool Nikola is also a fictional character. Of course, paying attention to how Eisenstein “rewrote” history is crucial to understanding his vision of Ivan in *Ivan the Terrible*.

Whether there was “too much” religion in Part I, as the Cinema Committee report insisted, is a matter of opinion, but without question religion suffuses the entire film. Much of the action takes place in churches, including, among many other scenes, Ivan’s coronation, his grief at the bier of Tsaritsa Anastasiia, the performance of the Fiery Furnace play, and the murder of Ivan’s cousin, Prince Vladimir Andrejevich Staritskii, in a failed attempt to murder Ivan. The religious ambience of the film is not confined to churches. Roberge and Meliakh correctly judged the prominence of icons and frescoes, which decorated not only churches and ecclesiastical residences, but also secular palaces and living quarters, including the headquarters of the oprichnina at Aleksandrovskaya Sloboda. An entourage of black-clad priests attends then Metropolitan Pimen on all official occasions, including Ivan’s coronation, wedding banquet, and the interment of his wife, Tsaritsa Anastasiia, and accompany him to Ivan’s private quarters to pray for him as he supposedly lay dying. Monastic choirs chant in the background at these events. Church bells ring out at Ivan’s coronation and his wedding banquet, during prayers for his recovery from his illness, and at boyar executions. Ivan’s life took place in an environment saturated with religious art, music, and ritual, and populated by innumerable clergy.

However, that Ivan lived in a religious environment does not prove his religious beliefs. The best evidence of his religious consciousness is the dialogue that Eisenstein attributed to him. The same dictum applies to all characters in the movie. Detailed study of the film’s dialogue substantiates the conclusion

14. Ibid., p. 69, 189, 213; Joan Neuberger, “Eisenstein’s Angel,” *Russian Review*, 63, 2004, p. 390-393. The oprichnina was Ivan’s state-within-a-state, created in 1565, abolished in 1572, and his instrument of mass terror. An oprichnik was a member of the oprichnina.
17. For a comparable exercise in analyzing religious identity via religious allusions in written documents, see Charles J. Halperin, “The Culture of Ivan IV’s Court: The Religious Beliefs of Bureaucrats,” in *The New
that Ivan and his supporters, but also his opponents, shared belief in Russian Orthodox Christianity.

Ivan replies to a request by boyar Fedor Kolychev to take holy orders because he cannot support Ivan’s monastic policy by saying: “You prefer the heavenly to the earthly tsar? Very well, I shall not stand between you and Him. And pray for us sinners,”18 Kolychev becomes the monk Filipp, then abbot of the Solovetskii Monastery, and later metropolitan. On his sickbed Ivan holds a candle and pronounces “Lord have mercy!” three times. He curses boyars who refuse to take an oath of allegiance to his baby son Tsarevich Dmitrii: “You will all be cursed forever, Traitors to the Russian Earth, all of you will be cursed, cursed for all eternity.”19 These “traitors” had violated their oaths of loyalty to the dynasty, taken on the cross, and now face divine retribution. Ivan attributes his recovery from his near-fatal illness to the sacraments: “The Holy Sacrament has cured me!”20 At Anastasiia’s bier Ivan reacts to news of boyar defections by asking: “Have I done wrong? Is it God’s punishment?”, a reflection of the belief that death, illness, and failure constitute divine punishment for sin. Ivan, planning to create the oprichnina, declares his intention to use the support of the people against his enemies: “The call of the people will express God’s will. I shall accept the sword of vengeance from God’s hand.” Ivan proclaims Moscow to be the Third Rome.22 Ivan identifies the voice of the people with the voice of God. Ivan declares that he can carry the burden of power on his shoulders because “I hear the voice of God” through the people, whose will constitutes his strength. He authorizes his henchman, oprichnik Maliuta Skuratov, to execute boyars from the Kolychev clan by declaring: “By God’s will, be judge and executioner.” When Maliuta pronounces death sentences on those boyars, he quotes Ivan’s invocation of the religious legitimacy of their capital punishment. Ivan, Skuratov informs them, had declared the boyars guilty “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”23 When Ivan learns of the possibility, soon confirmed, that his aunt, Princess Evfrosiniia Staritskaia, poisoned Anastasiia, he declares: “God grant it was not she who was guilty!”24 Ivan ends the festivities of the oprichniki by informing them: “Enough of this ungodly revelry! Brothers, let us address ourselves to the Almighty! Let us think upon our last hour!” by proceeding to prayer.25

19. Ibid., p. 86.
20. Ibid., p. 89.
21. Ibid., p. 104.
22. Ibid., p. 117. According to the Pskov monk Filofei, when Rome and Constantinople (the second Rome) fell because of heresy, Moscow became the Third Rome, the only remaining Orthodox tsardom on earth and the guarantor of the possibility of salvation.
23. Ibid., p. 155, 160.
24. Ibid., p. 169.
25. Ibid., p. 208-209.
kills Prince Vladimir, Ivan gazes at the cathedral altar and crosses himself, as the choir sings Ivan’s political program: “I swear by God to accomplish in Russia my royal mission” to mercilessly purge savage enemies “for the sake of the great land of Russia.”26 Ivan expressed his intention, when he returns to Moscow after punishing treason in the city of Novgorod, to confess his sins to his confessor (dukhovnyi otets), the priest Evstafii, assigned to Ivan by Metropolitan Filipp.27 As Ivan lies prostrate before the Last Judgment icon listening to the reading of a list of his victims, he waits for the Celestial Father to approve his actions, but hears only silence.28 Ivan objects to the oprichniki’s singing ribald songs about the demise of his enemies by declaring that the oprichnik cause is “not a subject for laughter.” He criticizes some oprichniki who have betrayed the tsar’s confidence, violating for gold the “holy oath” they took when they joined the oprichnina.29

Without question, therefore, Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible is a “believer” (veruiushchii). Ivan endorses the efficacy of monastic prayer. He believes in heaven, hell, sacred oaths, sin, and divine punishment. He invokes divine patronage for his political policies and seeks divine absolution for his executions. He believes in Holy Scripture.30

Ivan is not the only good Russian Orthodox Christian in the film. His supporters share his devotion to the faith. Anastasia admonishes boyar Prince Andrei Kurbskii to obey his loyalty oath to Tsarevich Dmitrii because “God will be your judge!”31 An oprichnik recruiter accuses the boyars of being “indifferent to religion” because they shirk their responsibility for national defense against the Tatars and Germans. The boyars oppress the people, which makes them “bad” Christians. Therefore, the oprichnik summons those “good Christians,” who do not side with the boyar princes, to join Ivan’s bodyguard.32 After Ivan’s abdicates in order to muster political support for the establishment of the oprichnina, a procession sets out from Moscow to Aleksandrovskaia Sloboda to beseech him to return to the throne. They carry religious banners, and in the screenplay crosses and icons. A choir in the background enhances the religious pathos of the scene by singing: “Have pity, O Lord” and “Have mercy, O Lord.”33 In the screenplay, men joining the oprichnina swear five times “before

27. Ibid., p. 232. In the Russian Orthodox Church a “spiritual father” (dukhovnyi otets) played the same role as a Catholic father-confessor.
28. Ibid., p. 235-238.
29. Ibid., p. 249.
32. Ibid., p. 118.
33. Ibid., p. 119-121; Ivor Montagu, Herbert Marshall (tr.), Ivan the Terrible: A Screenplay by Sergei M. Eisenstein, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1962, p. 136; Iurenev, Сергей Эйзенштейн: замыслы..., v. 2: 1929-1948, p. 244 objected that this procession was not religious, and should not have been chanting hymns. Montagu and Marshall published the original screenplay, not as it was actually filmed. I cite this publication only when it contains material not found in the filmed version.
God” to renounce their kith and kin, to defend Russia, and to serve Ivan loyally. They swear on their drawn daggers that they should suffer death by those daggers if they violate this oath, and go to hell thereafter. Ivan closes the oath ceremony by saying “amen,” as if the oath were a prayer or religious service.\textsuperscript{34} To enable Ivan to keep his word to allow Filipp as metropolitan to intercede for the disgraced, Skuratov volunteers to go to hell himself as the price for executing Ivan’s enemies, Filipp’s Kolychev boyar relatives, before Filipp can prevent it. After saying so, Skuratov crosses himself.\textsuperscript{35} Demian, a former Staritskii supporter now helping oprichnik Aleksei Basmanov embezzle funds, tells him that “as sure as God is holy,” Aleksei’s son, Fedor, will betray their criminal activity to Ivan.\textsuperscript{36}

Therefore, Ivan’s supporters – his wife Anastasia, the oprichniki, and the people of Moscow – express their religious consciousness. However, even though salvation depends upon the administration of the sacraments by clergy, Ivan does not shirk from disagreeing with Metropolitan, then Archbishop Pimen, and abbot, then Metropolitan Filipp, when they oppose his policies. He feels no obligation to follow their recommendations if the policies they advocate would harm Russia. Skuratov goes even further. He objects when Ivan grants Filipp, an “ignorant priest,” the power of intercession on behalf of disgraced boyars, a rare articulation of anti-clerical sentiment in the film.\textsuperscript{37} In the screenplay Skuratov even swats Evstafii aside when he tries to stop those executions, proclaiming: “I am [Ivan’s] bodily advisor, not his spiritual advisor,” although Evstafii’s treason mitigates Skuratov’s disrespect for clerical status.\textsuperscript{38} Skuratov’s objections to a clerical role in politics do not impugn his belief in eternal punishment for sinners.

Ivan and his supporters have no monopoly of Russian Orthodox Christian piety in Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible. His lay enemies express the very same religious beliefs. Like Ivan, they expect divine support for their political agenda. Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia exclaims that “God is just” and “God is good” when she hears that Ivan is mortally ill.\textsuperscript{39} Just before Ivan recovers from his illness, Kurbskii swears loyalty “by the Holy Writ” to Ivan’s heir Tsarevich Dmitrii “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,” signified by his kissing the cross.\textsuperscript{40} Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia detects the “hand of God” in Ivan’s invitation to her son Vladimir to attend an oprichnik banquet, because

\textsuperscript{34} Montagu, Marshall, Ivan the Terrible…, p. 133-135, 201-203. No author seems to have noticed that the oprichnik oath fails to mention a cross. Instead, the oprichniki swear on their daggers, much as “pagan” Rus’ in Kievan times swore on their swords.


\textsuperscript{36} Eisenstein, Ivan the Terrible…, p. 239.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 155-156.

\textsuperscript{38} Montagu, Marshall, Ivan the Terrible…, p. 160-161.

\textsuperscript{39} Eisenstein, Ivan the Terrible…, p. 70, 72.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 89.
Petr Volynets can accompany him and carry out Ivan’s assassination. Kurbskii and Princess Evfrosiniia Staritskaia appear to be as devoted to Russian Orthodox Christianity as Ivan or Ivan’s supporters.

The depiction of Ivan’s clerical enemies is more complicated. Because of their clerical status alone, bishops, priests, and monks conceive of themselves as carrying out God’s will. However, the dialogue Eisenstein attributes to them suggests that they sometimes acted from less than holy motives.

The holy fool (iurodivyi) Nikola tells the Moscow mob that Ivan has been bewitched by the Glinskys, the family of Ivan’s mother, and the Zakharins, the family of Ivan’s wife, Anastasia, in order to incite them to riot during Ivan’s wedding. In the screenplay, according to Nikola, these relatives persuaded Ivan to lay hands of the treasure of the church and the monasteries. God, Nikola screams, will send fire to punish such sins. Aided and abetted by Demian, the Staritskys’ lackey, Nikola cuts the ropes of the bells on Red Square, whose fall he blames on sorcery perpetrated by Ivan’s relatives. Nikola is a political shill who exploits his religiosity on behalf of arrogant boyars and greedy monasteries.

The boyar Fedor Kolychev asks Ivan’s permission to take holy orders because his religious scruples preclude his endorsing Ivan’s plan to tax the church. Taking the cowl presumably represented not just a means of escaping his political dilemma, but also a genuine religious calling. Subsequent dialogue reveals the problematic nature of that calling. Abbot Filipp objects to the creation of the oprichnina. He tells Ivan that “these plans come not from God… but from the devil.” Ivan has defied ancestral traditions, and will not be tsar for long. Ivan calls upon his previous friendship with Filipp to elicit understanding and sympathy from him, but Filipp will have none of it. “I am not Kolychev,” he declares, “I am Filipp the monk. I carry out the will of God, not the designs of the Tsar.” Filipp instructs Ivan to maintain tradition and share his authority with the boyars. When Ivan refuses, he retorts: “You reject the counsel of your spiritual guide?”

In the metropolitan’s cell, Archbishop of Novgorod Pimen demands that Metropolitan Filipp stop Ivan: “By God’s power invested in you, bring the Tsar to heel. I charge you to excommunicate him.” When Filipp declares that he will return to his monastery, Pimen declares that if he does, he “will answer for it to

---

41. Eisenstein, Ivan the Terrible..., p. 79, 183, 189.
42. Holy fools were not clergy, but laymen with exceptional spiritual gifts. They went about naked, even in winter, or at most wore a loincloth or chains to cover their private parts, spoke in tongues, lived in the street, uttered prophesies, and excoriated the immorality of the time.
43. Eisenstein, Ivan the Terrible, p. 49.
44. Montagu, Marshall, Ivan the Terrible..., p. 61, 60.
45. Ibid., p. 68.
46. Eisenstein, Ivan the Terrible..., p. 44.
47. Ibid., p. 135-136, 147. Iurenev, Сергей Эйзенштейн : замыслы..., v. 2: 1929-1948, p. 257, 259 describes Filipp in this scene as gloomy, arrogant, cold, and unbending, all in all, a very unsympathetic character.
God!” Filipp changes his mind, saying “I take up the sword not for my executed relatives but for the boyars. … Justice must be done against the Tsar. Beneath my priestly robes beats the heart of a Kolychev. And a Kolychev… who is a prince of the church! Even the Tsar can do nothing against the church!” “I shall humble Ivan, I shall crush him with the weight of the church.”

The screenplay narrates that Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia “incites the great wrath of a mutinous warlike boyar beneath Filipp’s meek shepherd’s garb.” Filipp told Ivan that he objected to Ivan’s policies as a monk, not a boyar, that the boyar Kolychev had ceased to exist, but he later tells Pimen and Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia that he is not Filipp, he is Kolychev, a boyar, who will use the power of the church to defend boyar rights and church property. Pimen and Filipp object to Ivan’s creation of the oprichnina as the work of Satan because he has deprived the boyars of their political influence as much as because he wishes to deprive the church of its material resources.

Metropolitan Filipp arranges a performance of the Fiery Furnace play. He thunders at Ivan that an avenging angel descended from heaven to free Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednagoah from Nebuchadnezzar, implicitly threatening that another avenging angel will be sent against Ivan if he does not accede to Filipp’s demands. He then preaches to Ivan: “Submit to the authority of the church, Ivan! Repent! Dissolve the oprichnina! Before it’s too late!” In Filipp’s view, the tsar must submit to the church or it will be “too late” for him to achieve salvation, he will be doomed to hell as a sinner.

Archbishop Pimen informs Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia that Ivan has arrested Metropolitan Filipp. The opposition’s only recourse is to assassinate Ivan, a deed that can be accomplished “only [by] the pure in heart.” Pimen assigns that “sacred mission” to his acolyte, “God’s servant” Petr Volynets. Ivan must be eliminated because he has confiscated church property, he is the Beast (of the Apocalypse). Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia thinks that because Pimen will judge Filipp, he will be acquitted. However, to the contrary, Pimen declares that he will find Filipp guilty. Filipp is more useful to the cause dead than alive. “A corpse, a martyr, a saint is more valuable to our struggle.” A dead saint would be invincible against Ivan. In the screenplay Pimen makes the sign of the cross to shield his co-conspirator from the sin of plotting to commit murder. Even Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia is horrified at Pimen’s readiness to sacrifice Filipp’s life to undermine Ivan’s power. She exclaims: “His cowl is white, but his soul is black.” Regardless of her reaction to Pimen’s cynical plan, she does

51. Ibid., p. 176-177.
52. Ibid., p. 178.
54. Ibid.
not object, and later, with equal Machiavellian amorality, she plans, after her son Vladimir ascends the throne, to sacrifice Ivan’s assassin, Petr Volynets, so that, as tsar, Vladimir can claim to have punished the regicide. Princess Eufrosinia Staritskaia is obviously not averse to letting the ends justify the means; however, even she is taken aback that a prince of the church would share her lack of ethics in politics.

Playing his role as agent provocateur, the priest Eustathii urges Ivan to launch a “crusade” against treasonous Novgorod, the new Babylon, as part of Kurbskii’s plan to invade Russia to come to Novgorod’s aid after Ivan has incited the maximum domestic opposition to his rule. In Novgorod Archbishop Pimen declares to his boyar supporters: “Blessed by the emblem of the holy cross, we go into battle” against Ivan. He expected his spy Eustathii to warn him when Ivan departed Moscow on the punitive expedition against Novgorod. However, Ivan intercepts Eustathii’s message, arrives in Novgorod unexpectedly, and arrests Pimen and the boyar conspirators, who had not yet sent for Kurbskii’s aid. The priest Eustathii turns out to be youngest Kolychev, hiding from Ivan in plain sight as a provocateur and spy in the guise of Ivan’s confesser.

Bartlett was definitely on the right track in declaring Eisenstein’s portrayal of clerics in Ivan the Terrible as negative, but she underestimates the film’s hostility toward the Russian Orthodox Church. As no commentator on the film, to my knowledge, has ever noted, every cleric, every character in the film associated with the Russian Orthodox Church, without exception, is an immoral, duplicitous traitor, willing to sacrifice Russia’s national interest to boyar power and ecclesiastical greed. Metropolitan Filipp boasts of using the church as a political weapon. He exploits his ecclesiastical status for material and partisan ends. Archbishop Pimen plans murder. Holy fool Nikola and the priest Eustathii are frauds. The only partial exception is acolyte Petr Volynets, at first a willing church assassin. However, he reforms after Ivan spares his life for murdering Prince Vladimir Staritskii, names his accomplices, and contributes to the Muscovite conquest of Livonia. Because Part III was never completed or shown, only members of the audience of Parts I and II who had read the screenplay would have been aware of his change of heart. Eisenstein unmasked the clergy, the “professionally” pious, as politically suspect.

Eisenstein’s treatment of Metropolitan Filipp stands out. No Eisenstein or Ivan the Terrible scholar I have consulted has ever thought it appropriate to point out that in the middle of the seventeenth century the Russian Orthodox Church had canonized Filipp. In his depiction of Filipp as a conniving, reactionary boyar, Eisenstein committed sacrilege by defaming an authorized saint of the Russian Orthodox Church.

55. Eisenstein, Ivan the Terrible..., p. 231.
56. Ibid., p. 234-235.
57. Ibid., p. 240.
58. Ibid., p. 230-231.
The “cult” of *Ivan the Terrible* in Stalin’s Soviet Union did not dictate how Eisenstein could present the role of religion and the Russian Orthodox Church in his film. The role of religion and the Russian Orthodox Church in Ivan’s life and in Muscovite politics during Ivan’s reign in works of the Stalin “cult” of Ivan has not been studied adequately. In the 1930s and 1940s the government and the Communist Party failed to impose uniformity on this question on the works of historians, novelists, and playwrights. Neither Robert Wipper (Vipper), nor Ivan Smirnov, nor Sergei Bakhrushin, the authors of the three most prominent “popular” Stalinist biographies of Ivan, described Ivan as religious. They simply ignored Ivan’s personal religious convictions. Wipper provided the most extensive treatment of the Russian Orthodox Church and its leaders during Ivan’s reign. He attributed a positive role to the church as a “mighty ally” of the monarchy during Ivan’s minority. The church’s support was essential to Ivan’s retention of his throne. He praised Metropolitan Makarii for declaring Ivan of age in 1547 and performing his coronation and marriage, and placing him under the “guardianship” of the priest Sylvester of the Kremlin Ascension Church for six years. Wipper considered the priest Sylvester a member of the so-called “Chosen Council” of advisors who led the reforms of the 1550s. Ecclesiastical authority drove the reform process and patronized autocracy as Muscovy’s political system. Metropolitan Makarii’s leadership imparted “religious solemnity and ecclesiastical scholarship” to the reforms. Makarii also figured prominently in a positive light in the novels of Valentin Kostylev. According to Wipper, after Ivan had freed himself from Sylvester’s tutelage, the priest procrastinated in pursuing the Livonian War, incurring Ivan’s wrath. Wipper noted that the clergy joined the army and merchants in supporting the Livonian War at the “Assembly of the Land” in 1566. Novgorod clergy conspired with Moscow boyars in a great plot against Ivan in 1567. Metropolitan Filipp was put to death in 1569 for pleading for mercy on behalf of nobles guilty of treason. In 1580 Ivan exploited the enmity of the priesthood against rich monasteries to impose restrictions on monastic landowning and put fiscal pressure on the


61. Eisenstein’s 1938 film *Aleksandr Nevskii* ignored the religious beliefs of its title character, later canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church.


63. B. Verkhoven, *Россия в царствование Ивана Грозного*, Moscow, OGIZ, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literature, 1939, p. 15 referred to the priest Sylvester and Metropolitan Makarii, but advanced no judgment of their activities.

64. Perrie, *The Cult of Ivan the Terrible*…, p. 117-118.
monasteries. Even a monk, as Wipper explained, the author of the “Barlaam Discourses,” expressed shock at the predominance of secular interests among the higher clergy.\textsuperscript{65} Wipper’s analysis demonstrated that the hierarchy and personnel of the Russian Orthodox Church were not of one mind when it came to Ivan’s political program, some supporting, some opposing Ivan’s policies. At least one cleric, the priest Sylvester, changed camps.

Eisenstein chose not to emulate Wipper’s balanced understanding of the complicated position of the Russian Orthodox Church in Muscovite politics during the reign of Ivan the Terrible.\textsuperscript{66} He omitted Metropolitan Makarii and the priest Sylvester from the movie, which necessitated and permitted his making Pimen metropolitan before he became archbishop of Novgorod, because he needed a metropolitan to perform Ivan’s coronation, wedding, and Anastasia’s funeral.\textsuperscript{67} Eisenstein’s omission of any potentially positive clerics from his screenplay can hardly have been accidental. Of course, even in his short biography Wipper had space to include far more characters from Ivan’s reign than Eisenstein could incorporate into his film, but neither Wipper nor Eisenstein had to take the positions they did on Ivan’s religious consciousness or the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ivan’s Muscovy. Wipper chose to present a non-religious Ivan and a politically heterogeneous church, whereas Eisenstein chose to present a religious Ivan and a homogeneously traitorous church. Perhaps Iuzovskii had something like Wipper’s view of the church in mind when he criticized Part I of the film for its simplistic presentation of the Russian Orthodox Church, but we lack evidence to flesh out his comments.

In conclusion, the Soviet Cinema Committee were and some scholars are correct in concluding that religion infuses Eisenstein’s \textit{Ivan the Terrible}. Ivan lives in a religious world, surrounded by icons, frescoes, and religious murals, frequents churches, listens to church bells and choirs, invokes God, crosses himself, and fears the Day of Judgment. Ivan also engineers the deaths of clerics, a metropolitan, Filipp, and an archbishop, Pimen, with no more compunction that he arranges the deaths of his own relatives, his cousin, Prince Vladimir Staritskii, and his aunt, Princess Evfrosiniia Staritskaia, or of boyars, the Kolychevs. Ivan sometimes has doubts about the legitimacy of his executions, but always surmounts those scruples by invoking the need to protect Russia from its enemies. Ivan compartmentalizes his attitudes toward Russian Orthodox Christianity, to which he is devoted, and the Russian Orthodox Church, whose leaders are his enemies.\textsuperscript{68} Eisenstein’s presentation makes the obvious point that piety did not


\textsuperscript{66} Wipper’s book first appeared in 1922 in Moscow; revised versions appeared in 1942 in Tashkent and 1944 in Moscow.

\textsuperscript{67} Sylvester’s absence was noticed by Meliakh, \textit{Изобразительная стилистика…}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{68} Eisenstein’s image of Ivan’s religious identity contrasts sharply with that of Pavel Lungin’s 2009 movie \textit{Tsar’}, in which Ivan thinks he is religious, but in fact his religiosity is just a mask for his mental illness, depravity, and cruelty. Lungin’s Filipp is a saint, not a traitor. See Charles J. Halperin, “Ivan the Terrible
Eisenstein’s sole concession to religious identity consists in his implicit concomitant recognition that religious identity did not preclude patriotism either. The case of ecclesiastical opponents of Ivan’s policies is less straightforward. Of course the “professional” religious men in the film are religious, but Pimen, Filipp, the holy fool Nikola, a layman, Evstafi, and initially Petr Volynets, every character in the movie who is affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church, betrays Ivan and Russia. The Russian Orthodox clergy are reactionary, selfish, and treasonous, and just as unscrupulous, scheming, and dangerous to Russia as lay opponents of Ivan such as Kurbskii, Princess Evfrosinia Staritskaia, and Vladimir.

There is a final anomaly in Eisenstein’s treatment of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ivan the Terrible. At the time Eisenstein was writing and directing the film (Part I of Ivan the Terrible was released in 1944, Part II completed in 1946), the Soviet state, in order to garner church support for the war effort, had tempered its hostility toward religion by dissolving the League of the Militant Godless, authorizing the opening or reopening of churches, monasteries, and seminaries, and according the Russian Orthodox Church greater freedom of action. In 1943 the government even permitted the Russian Orthodox Church to elect a new Patriarch of Moscow. Eisenstein’s portrayal of the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church during the reign of Ivan was seemingly immune to any influence of this shift in official government policy. He impugned the patriotism of the institutional Russian Orthodox Church precisely when, with the approval of the Soviet state, it was demonstrating that patriotism on a daily basis. Given Eisenstein’s admitted sensitivity to the “relevance” of his films to current events, why he did so, as far as I know, remains an unasked and unanswered question, best left to the informed analysis of Eisenstein’s biographers and specialists in his films, rather than the speculations of a specialist in sixteenth-century Muscovite history who did not remain immune to the occupational hazard of all historians who study the reign of Ivan the Terrible, at least since 1958, an obsession with Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible.

---

69. Sixteenth-century Muscovites, including Ivan, did not draw a distinction between piety and patriotism. Heresy was unpatriotic, treason was heresy.

70. One anonymous referee drew a very plausible connection between the anti-clericalism of the film and the release of Part II in 1958 during Nikita Khrushchev’s violent anti-religious campaign. I had always vaguely tied the release of Part II to Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign.