

**Question: Determine and analyze the roles that both religion and violence played in the development and then continuance of the Russian Revolution, 1905-1924.**

**Document A**



Valentin Serov. *Coronation of Emperor Nicholas II of Russia (Church of the Dormition, Kremlin, Moscow, 1896)*. 1899, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SerovV\_MiropomazanNikolAlek.jpg.

**Document B**

There was much activity and many reports. Fredericks came to lunch. Went for a long walk. Since yesterday all the factories and workshops in St. Petersburg have been on strike. Troops have been brought in from the surroundings to strengthen the garrison. The workers have conducted themselves calmly hitherto. Their number is estimated at 120,000. At the head of the workers' union some priest-socialist Gapon. Mirsky came in the evening with a report of the measures taken.... A heavy day! In Petersburg there were serious disorders as a result of the workers' desire to reach the Winter Palace. The guard had to shoot in various areas of the city, and there were many killed and wounded. Lord, how painful and heavy!

Czar Nicholas II, "Diary of Nicholas II. 21-22 January, 1905", *Bloody Sunday*, <http://spartacus-educational.com/RUSsunday.htm>

### Document C

We were not more than thirty yards from the soldiers, being separated from them only by the bridge over the Tarakanovskii Canal, which here masks the border of the city, when suddenly, without any warning and without a moment's delay, was heard the dry crack of many rifle-shots. Vasiliev, with whom I was walking hand in hand, suddenly left hold of my arm and sank upon the snow. One of the workmen who carried the banners fell also. Immediately one of the two police officers shouted out "What are you doing? How dare you fire upon the portrait of the Tsar?"

An old man named Lavrentiev, who was carrying the Tsar's portrait, had been one of the first victims. Another old man caught the portrait as it fell from his hands and carried it till he too was killed by the next volley. With his last gasp the old man said "I may die, but I will see the Tsar".

Both the blacksmiths who had guarded me were killed, as well as all these who were carrying the ikons and banners; and all these emblems now lay scattered on the snow. The soldiers were actually shooting into the courtyards at the adjoining houses, where the crowd tried to find refuge and, as I learned afterwards, bullets even struck persons inside, through the windows.

At last the firing ceased. I stood up with a few others who remained uninjured and looked down at the bodies that lay prostrate around me. Horror crept into my heart. The thought flashed through my mind, And this is the work of our "Little Father, the Tsar". Perhaps the anger saved me, for now I knew in very truth that a new chapter was opened in the book of history of our people.

George Gapon, *The Story of My Life*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1906

### Document D

To Penza

To Comrades Kuraev, Bosh, Minkin and other Penza communists.

Comrades! The uprising by the five kulak volosts must be mercilessly suppressed. The interest of the entire revolution demands this, for we are now facing everywhere the "final decisive battle" with the kulaks. We need to set an example.

1. You need to hang (hang without fail, so that the people see) no fewer than 100 of the notorious kulaks, the rich and the bloodsuckers.
2. Publish their names.
3. Take all their grain from them.
4. Appoint the hostages — in accordance with yesterday's telegram.

This needs to be done in such a way that the people for hundreds of versts around will see, tremble, know and shout: they are throttling and will throttle the bloodsucking kulaks.

Telegraph us concerning receipt and implementation.

Yours, Lenin.

PS. Find tougher people.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. "Telegram to Comrades Kuraev, Bosh, Minkin, and Other Penza Communists." trans. Richard B. Day, Library of Congress, *Revelations from the Russian Archives: Collectivization and Industrialization: "Hanging Order"*: Washington, D.C.: 18 August 1918.

### **Document E**

Violence generally made good theoretical sense. All Bolsheviks expected it as part of the revolution, and no one could possibly object to it in principle. Marxism was an apocalyptic movement that looked forward to the times of woe on the eve of the millennium, and the Bolsheviks, of all Marxists, defined themselves in opposition to appeasement... Lenin called for civil war long before October; and, in June 1918, urged the workers to launch "that special war that has always accompanied not only great revolutions but every more or less significant revolution in history, a war that is uniquely legitimate and just, a holy war from the point of view of the interests of the toiling, oppressed, and exploited masses."

Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017: 151-152.

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## Document F



Aleksandr Deineka, “Without God” and “Life Under the Lord God”. Lithograph, 1926. *Revoliutsiia Demonstratsiia!: Soviet Art Put to the Test*, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

## Document G

[Upon Lenin’s death, January 21, 1924]: According to the Central Committee obituary, “everything truly great and heroic that the proletariat possesses... finds its magnificent embodiment in Lenin, whose name has become a symbol of the new world from east to west and from north to south...” This meant that Lenin was, by definition, immortal:

Lenin lives in the soul of every member of our party.

Lenin lives in the heart of every honest worker.

Lenin lives in the heart of every poor peasant.

Lenin lives among the millions of colonial slaves.

Lenin lives in the hatred that our enemies have for Leninism, Communism, and Bolshevism.”

But Lenin was immortal in another sense, too. He was immortal because he had suffered and died for mankind in order to be resurrected with the coming of Communism.

Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017: 212-213..

## DBQ Response

Given the emphasis that Marx and Engels, Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks placed on the necessity of atheism within a just and communist society, it would seem that religion--that antiquated, bourgeois institution--would have no role whatsoever in the developing Russian Revolution from 1905-1924. And yet, the historical evidence suggests the opposite; the problem for the revolutionaries was not with religion *per se*--and, to be sure, the zeal of religiosity was certainly not to be eschewed--but rather it was all about who was to be worshipped and the necessary effects of the new faith. Violence existed as a fundamental vehicle to bring people to new convictions coupled with the old, if not enhanced, devotion. The wheat would be separated from the chaff, as it were, through scrutinies focused on just how much radical fervor each and every person possessed for pursuing what Bolsheviks referred to as the "just day". Thus it was that religion and violence were deployed to create a new Russia, one freed from the autocratic, divine-right emperor Nicholas II, who used both to maintain power, and one freed by Lenin and his minority party who wielded power, utilizing violence and transforming religious practice so that Lenin would become not just czar, but the new Christ.

Bloody Sunday in late January 1905 illustrated just how a divinely anointed emperor ought to act in the face of open, coordinated, and above all "socialist" defiance. It is important to note that Nicholas II perceived Father George Gapon as a rabble-rouser and not an honest man of God attempting to broker a deal or some sort of compromise between the czar and his desperate subjects. (doc. B). His tone is flippant and at points within his diary entry he comments about a friendly lunch and dismisses out-of-hand the fact that an estimated 120,000 protesters were marching in St. Petersburg against him (doc. B). But again, from the Czar's point of view, he seems unable to help himself from drawing a natural comparison and an accompanying conclusion; namely, that he is the Godly, rightly appointed ruler over all the empire (doc. A) and those 120,000 in the streets are not. Therefore, while it was in his mind lamentable that the crowd be repulsed by troops and hundreds lay dead, violence was the only means by which to bring about a just conclusion, that of the people being put back into their rightful places--as subjects as opposed to agitators.

Father Gapon had a grasp of just how Bloody Sunday displayed not so much the czar's power but rather Nicholas's desperation. As a priest, Gapon detracted from the czar's identity as acting in accordance with the will of God, and he played this identification up in his recollection of the events a year later (doc. C). He commented on how peaceful, heroic and just the protesters were, and furthermore--given that they carried ikons and images of the czar himself--how the men and women in the streets were good, Christian, loyal subjects. This could not have been lost on those reading his account, in and out of Russia, in 1906. That last line is most powerful, however; for Gapon, by the czar killing the righteous and ultimately pitiable souls in crowds on that fateful day, Nicholas had abdicated the throne. Nicholas had obviated his power over his people (doc. C).

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect regarding the unfolding of the Bolshevik Revolution was just how quickly and openly Lenin, Trotsky, Sverdlov and Stalin were able to pivot, shift and direct violence to advance the new Bolshevik regime's own legitimacy; after all, was it not similar

bloodshed that ended the czar? Modern historian Yuri Sleskine helps us to understand why Bolshevik violence was a different species. Indeed, Bolshevism itself was a religion. It possessed an apocalyptic vision. It had its own saints and martyrs. And beyond all that, Bolsheviks engaged in a holy war--in Lenin's own words--to bring about true justice in which the parasitic bourgeoisie would be subject to the productive proletariat (doc. E). The wait was over: No equivocation or compromise was to be had. The immediacy of all of it called for unwavering violence, a purging of sorts. That is why kulaks and cossacks and any White counter-revolutionaries who stood in their way were to be eliminated. Swift justice. And, no effort of the Soviet regime should be diminished of possible utility--the suffering of the enemies was directed toward intimidating any others, Bolshevik opponents and the milquetoast alike (doc. D).

So as to further the narrative of just what the "just day" would resemble, Soviet propagandists sprang to action. Aleksandr Deineka's lithograph displays the all-encompassing nature of the ultimate effects of the Revolution. Gender was no obstacle; instead, whereas in the old regime, women tended to be brutalized and misogyny was justified by Christian doctrine, on the left of the lithograph, women enjoy work, independence and dignity. The revolution then, brings women--and for that matter all of the dispossessed, the abused--into a state of justice and modernity (doc. F).

It was Lenin, from that train in the dark of night in 1917, who deserved much of the credit for bringing about the "just day". So, upon his death, it was only logical to deify him and create a cult around him. Just as in the French Revolution when Robespierre worked to simultaneously de-christianize France while holding Festivals of Reason, so too surviving Bolsheviks called for increased devotion to Communism, to Lenin (doc. G). They did not eliminate religion so much as rewrite its scriptures and doctrines. In fact, Lenin's unwavering and violent devotion to the cause of liberty of the have-nots stood as his most lasting achievement, his most indelible legacy. Because of him, Soviet communism has its own religion and violent legacy.