

‘Cast Thy Burden upon the Lord, and He  
Shall Sustain Thee’:  
Consolatory Letter Practices at the Muscovy  
Tsar’s Court in the Second Half of the  
Seventeenth Century



Anastasia A. Preobrazhenskaya  
National Research University Higher School of Economics  
Moscow, Russia

*Abstract: Consolation in Orthodox Christianity, tightly bound with the idea of death, was traditionally included within the scope of religious and church practices, and constituted a distinct consolatory discourse. Preachers and parish priests consoled relatives of deceased persons with their sermons, quoting verses from the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 9.24, Phil 1.23, Jn 11.25, etc.), and by engaging laity in oral consolation discourses in private conversations. Ecclesiastic authorities created consolatory epistles<sup>1</sup> that functioned as a written substitute for spoken dialogue and were addressed to tzars and princes, sometimes to fellow clergymen, and in later periods — to laity. However, consolatory discourse was not solely a verbal practice, though the verbal aspect constituted a large part of it. In general, consolation encompassed icons (icons depicting the Virgin Mary, mainly of the Eleusa type, Ἐλεούσα), accompanying liturgical texts (kondaks, acathistoses, troparions), and corresponding parts of the Old and New Testaments, read during liturgies and included in sermons and literature. In the canons and decrees of the Sixth Ecumenical*

*Council it was stated that, 'Depiction is inseparable from the Gospel, and vice versa the Gospel is iconic [...] What is communicated by a word through hearing, iconography shows silently, through depiction.'*<sup>2</sup> *The verbal part of the discourse being the most powerful and the most commonly used was built upon three principal biblical figures and associated motifs: God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Virgin Mary. By referring to 'God the Father', the inevitability of death and its necessity in accordance with the divine plan was explained; Jesus Christ was referred as an example of a positive aspect of death for a faithful Christian; and the Virgin Mary was probably the most important figure for Orthodox consolation, symbolizing protection and comfort.*

Beginning in the fifteenth century, two major literary forms of consolation were sermons and letters, or epistles. In the seventeenth century, Russian private correspondence did not form a homogeneous genre: it included a broad variety of letter types from short notes to oratory epistles. Existing letters functioned as samples and guidelines for authors. Monastic letters, preserved until today in vast quantities, presumably composed the core of Russian correspondence of the time. This correspondence had many types, with the 'spiritual letter' (one of the most common topics of such letters was consolation) being one of them. Spiritual letters were closely connected with the religious sphere, forming a part of religious prose. Up to the seventeenth century, the border between oratory prose and spiritual letters, which resembled sermons and public addresses, remained vague. The second half of the century saw the emergence of completely new types of letter practices in Russia, the etiquette letter among them. The principal function of the etiquette letter was not to communicate a message, but to show respect and to support social bonds. The genre of a consolation letter, though preserved in the new pattern, was among those epistolary types that underwent transformations.

The nature of those changes was not literary or linguistic, rather it had to do with a new pragmatic function that the letter acquired during this period. From being a means of spreading God's word (oratory prose) or being a practical

tool for conveying pieces of information (private letters of lay persons) the letter slowly turned into a form of social interaction. From this point on the letter was intended to show respect, maintain an acquaintance, or to thank a patron — that is, to fulfill a social function indispensable for eighteenth and nineteenth-century society. Furthermore, the letter — even its spiritual type — began losing its connection with orations and became more and more personal. The Belarusian monk and court poet Simeon Polotskii (1629–1680) was the first in Muscovy who treated letters according to this long-standing practice of European epistolary etiquette and who played a significant role in establishing the Russian epistolary genre.

Simeon attended the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and then finished his education in one of the Polish-Lithuanian academies (presumably in Vilnius).<sup>3</sup> Having moved to Moscow in 1664, Simeon was accepted to the Tzar's court as a poet, preacher, and teacher of the royal children. Writing provided his income, and he could not avoid preaching due to his status as a monk, but education in a broad sense was regarded by Simeon as the main purpose of all of his activities. At that time changes in the institutions of education in Muscovy could be achieved through influencing the political elite: the Tzar and his court. Simeon's struggle to cultivate a taste for European culture at the Muscovy Tzar's court took the shape of a professional literary work that served the needs of the court. Given the elite's inclination toward the European way of life and that Polish culture was coming slowly into vogue,<sup>4</sup> it was easy to introduce new genres of prose, poetry, and epistolary writing which were based on European traditions.

Many scholars consider Simeon's poetic legacy to be his most significant contribution to Russian literature; as such, his private letters were usually overlooked or discussed in a solely historical perspective. A recent attempt to catalogue Simeon's epistolary corpus (approximately 200 letters) was made by

Irina Podtergera.<sup>5</sup> Her dissertation contained an index of Simeon's letters and epistles from the following manuscripts: Manuscript #130 from the former Synodal Library (presently the Synodal Collection of the State Historical Museum in Moscow), Manuscript F.XVII.83 from the Russian National Library in Saint-Petersburg, and Manuscript #390 from the Fund #381 of the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts. Podtergera added some philological and historical commentary to the letters, while the theoretical part of her work focused on seventeenth-century rhetoric. Another approach to Simeon's letters was presented in two articles by Peter Rolland, a Canadian Slavist, who focused on letters written in Polish and addressed to Varlaam Iasinskii and Lazar' Baranovich.<sup>6</sup> Rolland did a meticulous job of specifying the dates of the letters and providing detailed historical background. Still, no attempt was made to conceptualize the epistolary culture in early modern Russia or to connect Simeon's innovations in this field to the further development of the genre.

Simeon's four consolatory letters are found in the so-called *Simeon's Letter-book* (manuscript #130, ff. 136<sup>v</sup>–137<sup>r</sup>; 137<sup>v</sup>–138<sup>v</sup>; 136<sup>r</sup>, fair copies) and in Manuscript F.XVII.83 (ff. 188<sup>v</sup>–189<sup>r</sup>; 189<sup>v</sup>–190<sup>r</sup>; 22<sup>r</sup> respectively), which contains drafts, or rather real copies of the same letters. My principle goal in this article is to describe these four letters as a new literary phenomenon born from the crossroads of the Old Russian epistolary tradition and European secular court epistolary culture. Epistolary practices, as they existed in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, only developed in Russia during the rule and reforms of Peter the Great (1672–1725). However, Simeon Polotskii introduced these practices a century earlier. With his *Letter Book* unpublished and his letters scattered through a number of manuscripts, it would be unjustified to look for a direct influence of Simeon's letters over the eighteenth-century Russian epistolary genre, especially given the strong French and German literary influence in the age of Peter the Great. However, Simeon's work was an initial step in this process and played a

role in preparing Russian society for the changes to come. Consolatory letters can serve as a reliable indicator of these changes, for they existed in the Russian literary tradition in more or less stable form and closely related to social structures (i.e. they marked relations between different social grouping such as clergy and laymen). Since my research objectives involve a partial comparison of letters contemporary to Simeon with those written a century or two later, I will also provide a short comparative overview of consolatory letters from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as well as of those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to demonstrate Simeon's innovative literary activity. Early letters primarily come from the metropolitan's archive found in Manuscript #562 from the Synodal Collection. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are represented by a number of "letter books" — edited collections of letter templates for various occasions: *Ancient Little Russian Letter Book: The Book Named Listownia*,<sup>7</sup> *Examples of How to Write Various Compliments*,<sup>8</sup> *Full Letter Book* by Grigor'ev (1869),<sup>9</sup> *Home Secretary Letter Book* by Miropoliubov (1879),<sup>10</sup> and several others.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

As was stated earlier, Simeon's consolatory letters come from two sources: *Simeon's Letter Book* and a manuscript collection of letters that belonged to Simeon and was in large part composed by him (Manuscript F.XVII.83). Such a type of literary work as a letter book deserves special commentary. Letter books could contain epistolary guidelines, but Old Russian letter books usually contained an only introductory formula, with no informative subscriptions. In some cases, letter books included only 'characteristics of addressees'.<sup>11</sup> This latter sort was well established in Russian literary tradition and the texts that they contained were closely connected with oratory prose.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that old letter books primarily provided letter templates for distinguished clergymen and laymen,

such as princes, boyars, metropolitans, and other high members of the clergy. Though Simeon generally employed the same selection criteria, he also paid attention to the degrees of acquaintance between the author and addressee (in his letters we find samples of different levels of formality, from highly official letters or documents, only slightly related to the epistolary genre, to intimate notes. In this respect, Simeon's *Letter-book* can be seen as a literary phenomenon coding newly emerging social relationships and the character of social interaction in higher classes of Russian society in the second half of the seventeenth century.

In terms of genre, Simeon's consolatory letters are highly peculiar because they show the Russian epistolary form in the process of its development; they belong to a letter-book sample type while also being actual letters that were sent to their addressees.<sup>13</sup> Written in the second half of the seventeenth century, at a point in Russian culture, when the Early Modern literature was gradually replacing the Medieval writings, Simeon's consolatory letters simultaneously follow the old Russian tradition while also breaking with it: the letters demonstrate a vivid connection both to oratory prose and to European epistolary etiquette. They do not go beyond the framework of established topics yet at the same time fulfill a new social function. Thus, the genre of Simeon's letters becomes hard to define in distinct terms. The most appropriate category in which Simeon's letters could be fitted into is that proposed by Ol'ga Zueva and called *spiritual epistles*:

[The] spiritual epistle is a correspondence of religious and moral character, exchanged between clergymen and their fellows or laypersons. This type of a private letter differs from others by a special modeling of figures of author and receiver (the type of real relationship is offset by the demonstration of close bonds between a spiritual parent and spiritual children).<sup>14</sup>

The statement that real relationships were offset seems doubtful since Russian society in the seventeenth century was highly hierarchal and social status

could not be neglected. In addition, she claimed that such epistles were written only to produce an impact on the reader and 'did not assume receiving an answer'.<sup>15</sup> At this point, Simeon's spiritual letters greatly differ from their predecessors. When writing his letters, Simeon acted not only as a clergyman and spiritual father but also as a lay person and a friend. While consolation as a topic *models* a special relation between an author and addressee (spiritual father to spiritual child) and Simeon, being a hieromonk (or a monk-priest), perfectly suits the role, the addresser to addressee pattern in his consolatory letters slightly changes. He wrote using a first person singular (not plural) and addressed his interlocutor directly, excluding general impersonal sentences. In further sections I will examine Simeon's four consolatory letters in detail and will discuss each of them separately, showing how they exemplify the above-mentioned points.

## CONSOLATORY LETTERS: GENRE AND STYLISTICS

*Simeon's Letter Book* contains four consolatory letters: one short note to an unknown person, which is closely followed by two letters addressed to the *dumnyi djak*<sup>16</sup> Dementii Minich Bashmakov (year born not known; died in 1705), and one official formal letter from Metropolitan Pavel (year born not known; died in 1675) to Metropolitan Pitirim (year born not known; died in 1673).<sup>16</sup> There is one more consolatory letter composed by Simeon that was included into Manuscript #390, Fund 380 in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts. The letter was addressed to an unknown woman and for some reason was not transferred to the *Letter Book*.

The first three letters are presented in a bundle under the chapter entitled 'From Laypersons to Laypersons',<sup>17</sup> while the last one is situated in the chapter entitled 'From Hierarchs to Hierarchs' of *Simeon's Letter Book*.<sup>18</sup> This reference to

correspondents' social status, indicated in the title, is typical of Russian letter books, which were lists of people's ranks and their characteristics rather than a collection of letter texts. Such type of letter books was called *Tituliarnik* — a collection of appropriate forms of addressing people with high social ranks. This changed only in the eighteenth century with the social reforms of Peter the Great: in letter books of the time, there were separate chapters for consolatory letters with a title stating letter topic (e.g. 'Consolatory Letters').<sup>19</sup>

Apparently, the three other letters under discussion were not chosen randomly and, from Simeon's point of view, differed from each other in a certain way. As the chapter title indicates, these letters were meant to be sent from a layperson to a fellow layperson, probably a person of a similar or higher social status. The first short letter is neutral in its stylistics; it lacks appropriate inscriptions and etiquette formulae. The other two clearly state the addressee (name and rank are indicated).<sup>20</sup> The only visible difference between them seems to lie in the salutation and the term used to name the wife of the addressee. The more informal pair 'uncle – lady' is opposed to the more formal letter where the term 'spouse' is supplemented by a common salutation without any special additions (or the addressee's name and the polite vocative 'gracious benefactor' are present). The three letters are clearly arranged in order of increasing formality and deal with the same topic — consolation over the death of a wife.

The first letter is written from an unknown person (probably a clergyman, despite the title, as it will be shown below) to an unnamed person (a man of nobility, as can be deduced from the vocative)<sup>21</sup> with a child. Together with the letter, the author sends an icon of the Virgin Mary in order to comfort the addressee.<sup>22</sup> The letter is quite short and I reproduce it here from Folio 136 recto of the Manuscript #130<sup>23</sup>:

I pray thy Noblesse: by submitting your will to the Will of God to put a limit to the



extremity of thy tears and withdraw from the immoderacy of your sorrow. Appealing to your good sense, as you are not the first nor the last to experience the separation produced by the scythe of death, as it is common to humankind to enter the land of eternal life through the gates of death, and now [we] kindly ask you in the name of God the Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ not to mourn about the deceased [the addressee's wife] as others who are untrusting do. But do take courage and strengthen your heart in God, His holy icon with His Holy Mother I send thee as a blessing, let Him, who has wiped the tears of all the world and brought joy to humankind, wipe your eyes from the source of salty tears and bring thee heavenly joy, as by expressing a blessing on you and your noble child, as by receiving health, long life and all things good. I, struggling to serve your Noblesse, wish you to have joy in name of God.

Both verbal and visual consolation are present in the letter. First, the author advises the addressee to cease his sorrow since death is an inevitable transition from the mortal world to eternal life. Secondly, the letter is accompanied by the icon of the Virgin Mary. She played a great role in consolation since she was considered to be both a mediatrix in the war against all kinds of enemies ('visible and invisible') and a patroness in grief and sorrow. This role of the Virgin Mary in this instance was based not on the Scripture, but on the sacred tradition in Orthodox Christianity, derived from the intercession of the Theotokos, one of the most important celebrations in the Orthodox Church after the Twelve Great Feasts. The feast is rooted in a story from the hagiography of Andrew of Constantinople (died in 936) that tells about the Virgin Mary entering a church in Constantinople and spreading her veil (*omophorion*) over all the people in the church as a sign of her protection. In pre-Petrine Russian literary tradition, the Virgin Mary's *omophorion* became a widely used symbol that was also employed in consolatory letters (an example of this symbolic usage of the Virgin Mary's veil can be found in the next section). It is interesting to note that earlier consolatory letters (from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) did not use this motif at all and did not mention the Virgin Mary, concentrating primarily on God the Father and

Jesus Christ (e.g. letters ## 25, 32, 63, 68 from manuscript #562). Seventeenth-century letters (and other writings, private and public) actively addressed the Virgin Mary as a patroness in sorrow. In the eighteenth century, icons depicting the Virgin Mary were still used in war discourses as a patron image and were referred to in letters. Nineteenth-century consolatory letters did not use the iconography of the Virgin Mary, referencing only God in general (and presumably meaning God the Father) and very seldom referring to Jesus Christ.

### CONSOLATORY STRATEGIES

The two remaining letters in *Simeon's Letter Book* are addressed to *dumnyi d'iak* Dementii Minich Bashmakov (died in 1705). They complete the 'Consolatory Chapter' in the book and occupy folios from 136 verso to 138 verso. The letters contain names in their salutations but lack subscriptions and dates. As was stated earlier, the letters represent two degrees of formality in addressing a person with a higher social rank — a close acquaintance or even a friend of the author. Regarding these letters, it is necessary to touch upon some biographical facts about both the addressee and the author.

*Dumnyi d'iak* Dementii Bashmakov is one of those figures in seventeenth-century Russian history whose significant impact on political and social life is beyond doubt, but whose biography is so highly fragmentary and one-sided due to the limited amount of available sources. We know nothing of his early years; he first appears in sources as already a man 'in close personal contact with the Tzar and his family'.<sup>24</sup> Personal and epistolary relations between Simeon and Bashmakov, and the network that connected them are difficult or near impossible to discover because the available sources have nothing to disclose on the matter. Still, indirect references allow us to make several assumptions. According to Kharlampovich, Simeon could have known Bashmakov because the poet

prepared several young *pod'iachii* (the lowest administrative rank in Russia in sixteenth-seventeenth centuries which fulfilled functions of a secretary) for an upcoming diplomatic mission to Poland, with one of them, Vasilii Repskii, having lived in Bashmakov's house.<sup>25</sup>

The absence of any historical or biographical details in the letters hinders our ability to date them. Nevertheless, the earliest probable date seems to be 1664, the latest 1680 (the year of Simeon's death). By 1664, Bashmakov had reached a certain social status (he became a *dumnyi d'iak*) and thus had to be addressed by his first and middle name (Dementii Minich), as was done in Simeon's letters.

The first informal letter starts with a quotation from Psalm 42.1 (41.1) which opens into an expanded analogy: 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God'.<sup>26</sup> The name of God is substituted for the name of the addressee; the author states that he, as the one who panteth, longs to see the addressee happy and in good health. This analogy serves as an introduction and allows the author to state that he knows of the addressee's misfortune. Then Simeon moves directly into consolation discourse. Here he employs four separate but mutually reinforcing motifs.

The first one refers to God the Father and treats death as God's visitation. In the second motif, God is said to punish those whom He loves (periphrasis of Heb 12.6) so that death should be seen as a sign of His grace. The latter interpretation was not used in later epochs, but the former was used widely, also in the form of a precise quote. Saint Ambrose of Optina in his consolatory letters also refers to this verse in the same context.<sup>27</sup> He writes in Letter #83 'To parents mourning over their son': 'And the God does it [causes sorrow and grief] due to His immense love for humankind, as the Apostle says: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"'.<sup>28</sup>

The third motif is built upon the opposition of the natural and human

versus Christian in a person. It is the rightfulness of sorrow, on the one hand, and the power of reason given from God to overcome this sorrow, on the other. Simeon says, 'This is true, that a man deprived of his spouse cannot but mourn since his very self forces him'.<sup>29</sup> 'Not only men', — he continues, — 'but even doves [...] mourn' (f. 137 r.). Thus the sorrow over the dead becomes somewhat legitimate, common to all living creatures. In Simeon's time, this rightfulness of sorrow was considered to be natural and was treated from a religious point of view; in later consolatory letters, (written by laypeople) this motif tends to acquire more juridical terminology. In the nineteenth century, for example, sorrow is directly called 'legal' and is described in juridical terms: 'It [your sorrow] is too legal' or 'You have a right to abandon yourself to grief when deprived of your spouse'.<sup>30</sup> However, clergymen tended to keep to tradition and emphasized the *natural* aspect of this sorrow: 'Due to human infirmity it is impossible not to mourn for parents, who were deprived of their only son so untimely'.<sup>31</sup> Developing the motif, Simeon continues: 'But we, enlightened by the light of reason, should not take after speechless birds, we should overcome our nature with the help of reason. And we shall obey God's will' (f. 137 r.). The phrase attracts the attention of Christians to the fact that human beings, unlike birds, have reason that was given to them by God and that should be used to overcome sorrow. The motif of reason helping to console the sorrow was also in use in the nineteenth-century epistolary writings, but a boundary between secular and clerical consolatory discourses was still clear and precise. While secular authors simply ask their addressees to 'call reason to help' or to consider that 'God works in strange ways' or 'Ways of His Providence are past finding out', clerical correspondents appeal, as Simeon did, to the Christian qualities of the addressee: 'But we are not pagans, who do not have any hope for future life. We are Christians, who have comforting reassurance behind death about the acquisition of future eternal blessing'.<sup>32</sup>

The terminal consolatory motif, that includes final wishes, is based on the summons of God and the Virgin Mary: 'Let God, who gives strength to His people, firm your heart to overcome this sorrow. Let the Virgin Mary, the comforter of those crying, wipe your tears with the *omophorion* of spiritual joy'.<sup>33</sup> The references to these key figures conclude the points made above. The letter then closes with appropriate etiquette formula (the date and name of the addresser are usually included, but in his *Letter Book*, Simeon sometimes leaves them out). Both clerical and secular letters written in the nineteenth century grow more detailed and refer primarily to the daily life of the addressee: usually, the addressee's attention is drawn to the necessity of caring for children or relatives after the death of a spouse, child, or friend.

In his second formal letter to Bashmakov, Simeon draws upon more abstract and general concepts, avoiding analogies and comparisons, as well as detailed explanations. The salutation and subscription are lengthy and elaborate, amounting to approximately half of the text. Bashmakov, in this instance, is addressed only by his first and middle name. Quotations drawn from the Scriptures and liturgical texts are not sporadic, as in the previous letter — here they constitute a significant layer and a foundation for consolation. There are eight adaptations in the text, including two full verbatim quotes (from Psalm 54.22 and 2 Thes 2.16–17), two truisms from canons ('death is an honest sleep before God' and 'God is the originator of joy and pleasure'). It is difficult to define the exact canon that this language is drawn from since many of them use the same verses. It could be from a supplicatory canon to the Virgin Mary, or from any of four variations based on biblical texts (*heavenly throne* — from Mt 5.34, Psalm 10.4, Psalm 102.9, Is 66.1; *vessel of heart* — from 2 Cor 4.7; *the hand of God* — in various books of the Old and New Testaments). These highly symbolic variations were very common in orthodox discourses: thus, *hand of God* in orthodox iconography

stands for God's protection of the faithful; *the heavenly throne* in various contexts can be seen as a source of (sun) light, or as the most holiest of places, or as metonymic name of God (in the letter we read: 'I raise my hands to the heavenly throne'). Simeon skilfully plays with these meanings in building a consolatory discourse. Death is treated as a touch of the hand from God that marks a faithful believer and is supposed to test the receiver's faith and patience, not to destroy him: 'Truly has the hand of God touched upon Thee, but tempting your courage and valour in patience, and not destroying the feeble vessel of your heart'.<sup>34</sup>

The 'consolatory chapter' that Simeon included in his *Letter Book* is very important in terms of the development of Russian epistolary etiquette and culture. Drawing upon European court epistolary, Simeon makes an attempt to introduce the Tzar's court to a completely new practice. This chapter, as the title indicates, contains letters from, and to, the laity, while still including letters on purely clerical topics. Simeon consciously breaks from rigid epistolary relations (i.e. those between a social status of addresser and the letter's topic) thus establishing a new epistolary etiquette. Secular consolatory letters would become common only later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and interestingly, would almost lose its consolatory potential, developing into a token of respect and a means of maintaining social connections.

## CONSOLATION 'FROM INSIDE': CLERICAL CONSOLATORY LETTERS

Consolatory letters were an indispensable part of epistolary communication in the early modern clerical community. Preserved archives of the metropolitans' chancelleries reveal that the letters saw active use in everyday life. Manuscript #562 of the Synodal Collection holds a clear representative corpus of such documents and templates for various types of letters, dating from the fifteenth to

seventeenth centuries.<sup>35</sup> Among these documents are five templates of consolatory letters (with names and inscriptions preserved). All of them were meant to be exchanged by members of a particular social group — the elites, both clerical and feudal. The addressers and addressees were metropolitans, *kniaz'ia* and *kniagini*, and bishops and archbishops. Only one addresser and one addressee seem to be of a lower social rank: one letter from a monastery elder to his spiritual son, a *kniaz'* (prince); and one letter from a Metropolitan to an unnamed widow. In both cases, it is possible to suggest that the persons with seemingly lower social rank could still have possessed some social influence (a widow could be a *kniaginia* as the spiritual children of metropolitans tended to be of high social status).

In respect to textual form, these five consolatory letters differ from each other slightly in terms of length, use of biblical texts, and consolatory strategies. Letter #32, sent from a Metropolitan to a *kniaz'/kniaginia* on the subject of 'the deceased', is rather short and formal, lacking ample arguments and lengthy quotes from the Bible.<sup>36</sup> The text follows a very simple pattern: the author states that he has learned of the addressee's grief; the *locus communi* follows ('all our kind is subject to death'), and in the last statement the author advises the addressee to pray to God. No consolation strategy, quotations, or references to sources of spiritual authority are provided. By contrast, Letter #69,<sup>43</sup> from a metropolitan to a grief-stricken widow over the death of her husband, is an example of quite a different type of consolatory letter: vast, elaborate, and highly detailed.<sup>37</sup> The structure of consolation in this instance is close to what was employed by Simeon, though some motifs common to earlier letters had faded out of use by the seventeenth century. Just the opening statement alone reveals a consolation strategy: 'I have come to know that the divine visitation came to you from God' (p. 240). Death, represented here as an unavoidable command and traced from Adam, is thus treated as an inevitable. The author invites the

addressee not to mourn, but to use her reason to strengthen her thoughts and her fair heart. The addressee is advised against resisting God's command and possibly enraging Him. These points are supported with numerous biblical quotes as well as extended borrowing from or attributed to John Chrysostom.

In *Simeon's Letter Book* there is one elaborate and lengthy consolatory epistle resembling in form the letter #69 from the Metropolitans' archive (Manuscript #562). Simeon wrote it on behalf of Metropolitan Pavel to Metropolitan Pitirim.<sup>38</sup> The letter was written on 23 September 1671, three days after Pitirim's son died (the date is stated in the text). In this letter, an inscription with names, titles, and a subscription with the date and place are preserved. It is no coincidence that this letter is found in Simeon's collection: Metropolitan Pavel was a good friend and patron of Simeon. Konstantin Kharlampovich listed Pavel among people with whom Simeon corresponded and for whom he composed: 'He [Simeon] composed for Tsarevich Aleksei Alekseevich, Fedor Alekseevich, Patriarchs Makarii, Paisii, Ioasaf, Ioakim, metropolitans' Feodosii from Belgorod, Ilarion from Riazan', Pitirim from Novgorod, Pavel Sarskii [...]'.<sup>39</sup> Another nineteenth-century historian, Ierofei Tatarskii, the first biographer of Simeon, also pointed to close friendly relations between Simeon and Metropolitan Pavel. Tatarskiy thus commented on the nature of these relations:

Though the letter to Pitirim has the only principal topic of consolation, it was not included in the 'consolatory chapter'. When composing his *Letter Book*, Simeon relied on principles of social hierarchy rather than a topical organization. For this reason, the status of the addressee and addresser turned out to be more important than the topic of the letter. This particular letter shows the formation of new types of social relations. The interlocutor pattern here is different from that of earlier epochs: both correspondents have the same social status and thus are equal, while earlier consolatory letters were sent primarily from father to son/daughter, that is, from superior to inferior. One biographical detail in the



letter deserves special attention — the deceased person is referred to as 'your son and my friend and acquaintance'.<sup>40</sup> Since metropolitans belonged to regular clergy and could not marry, it is reasonable to suggest that *son* here stands for a spiritual child.

The consolation strategy featured in the letter is close to those used in both the above-mentioned metropolitans' letters and in Simeon's previous texts, with the only notable difference being the number of biblical quotations and metaphors. As in the second letter to Bashmakov, the salutation and inscription are long and sophisticated. The smooth flow of motifs is built on analogies and comparisons. The author states that he would like to see the addressee in a constant joy, but the world is volatile, and since a man is a small world, he is also subject to changes: 'sometimes he [a man] is in good health, sometimes he is ill. Today he is alive, tomorrow he is put in a dark coffin' (#130, f. 107 v.). In consolation discourse, the emphasis is made on the addressee's clerical status: 'but I pray you in God's name not to shed a lot of tears since their excess can't be praised even in laymen' (f. 107 v.). Biblical quotations in the letter are drawn from 1 Thes 4.13, Job 1.21 and Wis 4.7, 13.

## CONCLUSION

The second half of the seventeenth century in Muscovy witnessed dramatic changes in culture and society. With the secular sphere slowly growing in prominence, religion no longer played such a dominant role in people's lives. Court culture was often the first to embrace new cultural practices, epistolary etiquette being one of them. In his consolatory letters, Simeon acted both as a clergyman and as a layperson. While drawing upon the Old Russian literary tradition of consolatory discourse, examples of which are found in metropolitan

archives, Simeon also introduced a completely new type of letter to the Moscow Tsar's court — a letter as a token of social interaction and structure.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Here by an epistle I mean an epistolary piece of writing (a letter) addressed to a wider public and thus not requiring an answer, while the term *letter* stands in the article for a piece of private correspondence.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts of the Sixth ecumenical council* [Деяния 6-го Вселенского собора], 7 vols. (Kazan': Central Typography, 1908), VI, 787.

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Robinson. Simeon Polotskii i ego knigoizdatel'skaia deiatel'nost' [Симеон Полоцкий и его книгоиздательская деятельность]. (Moscow, 1982). p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> See Liudmila Chernaia, 'A Polish pattern in Russian culture of the 17<sup>th</sup> century' [Образец «на польское дело» в русской культуре XVII века], *Tekst slavianskoi kul'tury*, (2011), 344–355. URL: [www.inslav.ru/images/stories/pdf/2011\\_Tekst\\_slav'anskoj\\_kul'tury.pdf](http://www.inslav.ru/images/stories/pdf/2011_Tekst_slav'anskoj_kul'tury.pdf) [accessed 10 October 2015].

<sup>5</sup> See Irina Podtergera, 'Letter and epistles of Simeon Polotskii' [Письма и послания Симеона Полоцкого] (unpublished doctoral thesis, Saint-Petersburg State University, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Rolland. "Dulce est et fumos videre Patriae" — Four Letters by Simiaon Polacki', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1/2 (June 1985), pp. 166–181.

<sup>7</sup> *Old Malorussian Letter Book 'The Book Named Listovnia'* [Старинный Малорусский письмовник: «Книга глаголемая листовня»]. (Chernigov, Tipographia gubernskfgo zemstva, 1901). pp. 38–39.

<sup>8</sup> See *Samples, as various compliments are written*, [...]. [Приклады, како пишутся комплименты разные на немецком языке то есть, писания от потентатов к потентатам, поздравительные и сожалетельные, и иные: такожде между сродников и приятелей]. (Moscow, Moskovskij pechatnyi dvor, 1708).

<sup>9</sup> See Grigorjev. *Full letter-book, or a Skill to go without a secretary and accountant* [...]. [Полный письмовник, или Уменье обходиться без конторщика, бухгалтера и письмоводителя: Новый указ., как писать письма, вести контор. кн., писать векселя]. (Moscow, Manukhin, 1869).

<sup>10</sup> See Miroliubov. *Home secretary letter-book* [...]. [Домашний секретарь-письмовник, или Вот как нужно писать письма, записки и деловые бумаги на все случаи общественной и частной жизни: С присовокуплением писем и записок: Пушкина, Лермонтова, Гоголя, Тургенева, Никитина, Кольцова и др.]. (Moscow, Ioganson, 1879–1880).

<sup>11</sup> Anatolii Demin, 'On the literary significance of Old Russian letter-books', *Russkaya literatura*, 4 (1964), p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Anatolii Demin, p. 166.

<sup>13</sup> I assume that the three consolatory letters from Simeon's Letter-book were composed by Simeon and then rewritten by his disciple Silvestr Medvedev. The hand of both is well-known to researchers, and the style of Silvestr's letters differs from that of his teacher. Simeon is not known to have worked in a chancellery of any kind, so there is no sufficient ground to suggest that Simeon could come into possession of letters that were written by other persons and generally had nothing to do with him.

<sup>14</sup> Духовные послания - переписка религиозно-нравственного содержания церковных служителей с лицами, принадлежащими светскому миру или церкви. Данный вид частного письма отличается от прочих специальным моделированием образа автора и получателя (характер фактических взаимоотношений нивелируется демонстрацией близости духовных отцов и духовных «чад») и ритуальностью выражаемой эпистолярной ситуации. Ol'ga Zueva,

'Russian works of an epistolary genre of XI–XVII centuries as a subject for linguistic research', *Vesnik Belaruskaga dziazrhawnaga universitjeta*. Ser. 4, Philologiya. Zhurnalistyka. Pedagogika, 3 (2007), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Ol'ga Zueva, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Dumnyi d'iak was a rank and a position in Boyar Duma, the higher state council including the feudal aristocracy but not only aristocracy.

<sup>17</sup> Moscow. State Historical museum. Synodal collection №130 [Синодальное собрание №130]. ff. 136 r–138 v.

<sup>18</sup> Here an eparch is used to name a member of Orthodox clergy higher than a priest (bishop, archbishop, metropolitan), as an equivalent to Russian *владыка*.

<sup>19</sup> In the nineteenth century, such consolatory chapters could also include letters related to various life situations, not only to death but also to the loss of fortune or loss of a job.

<sup>20</sup> Letters with preserved names and ranks or real addressers prove that Simeon did not finish his *Letter-book*. It was presumably something like a final draft: not all the necessary changes were made, not all chapters titled, no list of contents provided (it was inserted later by Silvestr Medvedev), no introduction to open the *Letter Book*. Introductions were very important for Simeon because he used them for educational purposes: to explain his work, its purpose, and desired impact.

<sup>21</sup> The vocative *благородие* roughly equals to *Noble Lord* or *Noblesse*.

<sup>22</sup> The practice of sending icons with consolatory letters or blessing letter before war campaigns was kept in the eighteenth century.

<sup>23</sup> Молихомъ благородие Твое да воли Бжией подчинивъ твою волю, предель положиши безмерию слезъ твоихъ, и престанеши от излишества печали ти. Разсуждая то благоразумием твоим, яко ни первому ниже последнему тебе сие разделение от смертныя косы прилучися, но обще есть всему роду человеческому смертными враты во страну безсмертия преходити. и ныне паки прилежно просим, имене ради Господа бога и Спаса нашего Иисуса Христа да не скорбиши о умершей, яко же прочии неимущии упования но да мужаешися, и да крепится сердце твое о Господе, Его же честный образ со Препетою Его богоматериею твоему Благородию посылаю на Благословение, да он отерый всего слезы мира, и подавый вечное веселие роду человеческому, отрет и твоя зеницы от горких слез источника, и дарует тебе свыше радование, Тако благословения си изливанием на тебе самаго и на благородное ти чадо: яко же здравия долгоденствия, и всяких Благих сподоблением. их же аз Вашему благородию усердствуя, радоватися вам выну о госпode желаю.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Crummey. *Aristocrats and Servitors: The Boyar Elite in Russia, 1613–1689*. (Princeton, N.J., 1983). p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Konstantin Kharlampovich. *Malorusskoe vliianie na velikorusskuiu zhizn'*. 2 vols. (Kazan', 1914), I, 321.

<sup>26</sup> The number in brackets stands for the Psalm number in the Bible written in Old Church-Slavonic. This difference is explained by sources that were used in Bible translation into English and Church-Slavonic: the first was translated from Greek version and the latter – from Hebrew. Thus the mark Psalm 42 (41) should be read as Psalm #42 in an English version (unless it is a Catholic Bible) and #41 in Church-Slavonic.

<sup>27</sup> *The full collection of letters of RP Amvrosij of Optina in 3 vols.* [Полное собрание писем преподобного Амвросия Оптинского в трех томах]. [URL: http://www.optina.ru/starets/amvroisy\\_letters\\_content\\_chart3/](http://www.optina.ru/starets/amvroisy_letters_content_chart3/). [Accessed 25 September 2015].

<sup>28</sup> *The full collection of letters of RP Amvrosij of Optina in 3 vols.* [Полное собрание писем преподобного Амвросия Оптинского в трех томах]. [URL: http://www.optina.ru/starets/amvrosiy\\_letters\\_content\\_chart3/](http://www.optina.ru/starets/amvrosiy_letters_content_chart3/). [Accessed 25 September 2015]. Letter #83.

<sup>29</sup> Moscow. State Historical museum. Synodal collection 130. f. 137 r.

<sup>30</sup> ...безграничность Вашей скорби. Она слишком законна. Grigor'ev, p. 2; Вы вправе предаваться горести, лишившись супруга. Miroljubov, p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> *The full collection of letters of RP Amvrosij of Optina in 3 vols.* [Полное собрание писем преподобного Амвросия Оптинского в трех томах]. [URL: http://www.optina.ru/starets/amvrosiy\\_letters\\_content\\_chart3/](http://www.optina.ru/starets/amvrosiy_letters_content_chart3/). [Accessed 25 September 2015]. Letter #83.

<sup>32</sup> Miroljubov, pp. 90–91; Grigorjev, p. 5; Grigorjev, p. 5; *The full collection of letters of RP Amvrosij of Optina in 3 vols.* [Полное собрание писем преподобного Амвросия Оптинского в трех томах]. [URL: http://www.optina.ru/starets/amvrosiy\\_letters\\_content\\_chart3/](http://www.optina.ru/starets/amvrosiy_letters_content_chart3/). [Accessed 25 September 2015]. Letter #83; Moscow. State Historical museum. Synodal collection 130. f. 137 r.

<sup>33</sup> Moscow. State Historical museum. Synodal collection 562.

<sup>34</sup> Moscow. State Historical museum. Synodal collection 130. f. 137 r.

<sup>35</sup> Russian feudal archive of XIV – first third of XVI centuries [Русский феодальный архив XIV – первой трети XVI века]. (Moscow, 2008). p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> Russian feudal archive of XIV – first third of XVI centuries, p. 69.

<sup>37</sup> Russian feudal archive of XIV – first third of XVI centuries, p. 234.

<sup>38</sup> Moscow. State Historical museum. Synodal collection 130. Ff. 77 v–79 v.

<sup>39</sup> Konstantin Kharlampovicz. *Malorossiyskoie vliyanie na velikorossiyskuyu zhizn'*. 2 vols. (Kazan', 1914), I, 388.

<sup>40</sup> Ierofej Tatarskiy. *Simeon Polotskiy* [Симеон Полоцкий]. (Moscow, Volchaninov, 1886). p. 109; Moscow. State Historical museum. Synodal collection 130. f. 107 r.



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