UNDERGRADUATE THESIS PROPOSAL

TO [THESIS MENTORS]: Katherine Brown, Greg Jackson, Frederick White

FROM: [redacted]

DATE: 12/5/2023

SUBJECT: Proposal to complete an undergraduate capstone/thesis paper on the treatment of and impact of the Romanov Tsarist legislature on the Doukhobor and Molokan peoples.

STATEMENT OF THESIS AND PROJECT SUMMARY

For hundreds of years, Tsarist and Soviet scholars have described Russian sectarian groups as harmful, hateful, and dangerous against the united regime of the Romanov Dynasty and Orthodox Church. These dissenting groups faced severe punishment, torture, and exile for their profession of a faith different than that of the official Russian Orthodox Church. This long standing narrative of immense suffering and the evil nature of the crown continues to penetrate into modern-day discourse and oral tradition within two particular sectarian groups, the Doukhobors and Molokans. While one cannot deny the overwhelming evidence of the brutal treatment early martyrs, prophets, and worshippers of these faiths experienced, it should be acknowledged that actions by the government at the peak of these spiritual movements during the nineteenth century actually aided Doukhobor and Molokan socio-political and economic prosperity, which may have permitted both sects to outlast their oppressors.

The body of this work serves primarily to increase the English academic study of the Doukhobor and Molokan peoples--which has been noted by several leading scholars as lacking--while also illuminating faults of the age-old blanket stereotype of Russian tyranny, oppression, and authority by exemplifying elements of Western-style democracy, freedom and equality within these naturally Russian religious movements. In order to achieve these goals, this paper

will focus on the history of the Doukhobor and Molokan sects, their origins and beliefs, and their growth as a result of government intervention during the nineteenth century. The significance of the close-knit relationship between the Church and State in Imperial Russia will follow in order to demonstrate how the contrasting Doukhobor and Molokan sects elicited their harsh treatment. Each groups' persecution will be highlighted. This paper will then undertake an examination of one of the most notable government actions that both directly and indirectly impacted the Doukhobor and Molokan people: the Emancipation Manifesto of 1861, which changed the dynamic of these mostly peasant sects and inspired further acts of rebellion against Church and State authority.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Within the greater Russian historical narrative, religious dissension from the Russian Orthodox Church characteristically holds a negative connotation. Since 988 C.E., Orthodoxy has played a critical role as a source of unification for the Slavic peoples. Those who split from the mainstream belief faced severe criticism, persecution, and even torture. Russian scholars particularly from the Tsarist era, but also those of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, have commented on the supposed harmful and hateful nature of these groups towards Russian national unity and the legitimacy of the Orthodox Church. Local, regional, state, and church authorities made many attempts to stop the development and growth of religious dissension groups by all means possible; however, certain actions carried out by the Duma, the Tsarist legislature, inadvertently hindered their purge. The following short essay will discuss the historical analysis and significance of the origins and development of Russian sectarianism, delving deeper into that of the Doukhobor and Molokan sects, and how state actions in Russia affected their congregations during the nineteenth century.

The Origins of Religious Dissention and Sectarianism

While the majority of this review focuses on the development and growth of the Doukhobor and Molokan sects, it is necessary to first briefly describe the scholarly interpretation of Russian religious dissension and sectarianism. In the Soviet study of Russian religious dissension, it is widely accepted as broken down into the following three groupings: Old Ritualists or Old Believers, Rationalists, and Mystics.[1] With this distinction, Dr. Serge Bolshakoff adds the Uniates -- a merger of the Russian Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church -- Russian Catholics, and religious nonconformists under the Soviet Regime as their own unique groupings.[2] When placing the history of Russian religious dissension on a timeline, it often begins with the word "*raskol*" *(раскол)* or schism. As Frederick C. Conybeare describes, "*Raskol*, implies, like our own word 'nonconformist,' the existence of a dominant and established Church against whose doctrines, rites, and oppressive tendencies (inherent in every such Church) the dissenters are permanently in revolt."[3] However, in echoing the words of Valdimir Bonch-Bruevich, the leading Soviet scholar of Russian sectarianism at the turn of the twentieth century, A. I. Klibanov points out the greatest misconception of Russian sectarian study lies with equating the initial schism of the Old Believers to other dissenting groups who are fundamentally different in all aspects including their origin and significance.[4] Scholars, such as I. Uzov, consider the latter group to be "Spiritual Christians," as they reject all rites, sacraments, icons, and rituals in favor of free interpretation of the scriptures and of their faith.[5] Even Tsarist legislation reflected the distinction between the Old Believers and Spiritual Christians.[6] This

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[1] Frederick C. Conybeare, *Russian Dissenters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 5.
[2] Serge Bolshakoff, *Russian Nonconformity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 14.
[3] Conybeare, *Dissenters*, 3.
[4] A. I. Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism in Russia (1860s-1917)*, ed. Stephen P. Dunn, trans. Ethel Dunn (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 14.
[5] Conybeare, *Dissenters*, 7-8.
[6] Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Foraging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 2.

difference between the original *raskol* and the continued break of other religious groups from the Russian Orthodox Church is necessary in the understanding of the development and growth of the sects discussed within this paper.

In understanding this difference, we must look towards the foundations of the *raskol* and other subsequent religious sects. The *raskol* began in 1653 with the reforms of Church Patriarch Nikon. In his studies, Nikon had found several mistakes and misspellings within the Russian Bible in comparison with the original Greek Septuagint, the first translation of the Hebrew Bible. Nikon, with the approval of Tsar Alexis, undertook the task of revising the Bible and changing everyday Orthodox rites to match those of their Greek counterparts. This caused a great disturbance within the Russian people. The main point of interest to this story, however, as Bolshakoff discusses, is that in order to assert his authority, Nikon excommunicated his adversaries from the Orthodox Church, effectively making a distinction between those who accepted his reforms and were true Orthodox Christians, and those who did not and became Old Believers.[7] As Conybeare argues using the work of Professor N. Ivanovski, the Old Believers "acted as if orthodoxy was bound up with the preservation of certain rites, and precluded all change in matters unessential;" they argued that the reforms of Nikon were *new* rights.[8] In essence, the main difference between proponents of the Russian Orthodox Church and Old Believers stemmed from superficial services and dogma. It is widely accepted that the actual beliefs of both groups are the same. The stories of other Russian sectarian groups, however, are not as easy to describe.

Both the Doukhobors and Molokans fall into the category of Rationalists who appeared in Russian history during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It has become

[7] Bolshakoff, *Nonconformity*, 52-57.
[8] Conybeare, *Dissenters*, 5-6.

traditional in both Tsarist era and Soviet scholarship to analyze these sister sects together, as N. M. Nikol'skii points out that the two are closely related in regards to their belief structures and only bear minor societal differences.[9] Here, we will undertake a scholarly examination of how these sects came into being. Further details regarding the tenets of faith, rituals, and dogma of each group will be discussed at a later point. Beginning with the formation of the Doukhobors, Pavel Ivanovich Sumarokov described in a travelogue in 1803, that the Doukhobors either were a product of European Protestantism and Quaker belief which penetrated into Ukraine around the 1740s and spread throughout Southern Russia, or an indigenous product of Russian thought from the Tambov province.[10] Bolshakoff details the Doukhobors as having formed due to the need of a faith that upheld "the doctrine of the inner guiding light and the indwelling of God in the human soul" prominent among the Khlysty and Skoptsy sects without their level of extremism.[11] Bolshakoff also alludes to the fact that the Doukhobors accepted and integrated teachings from heterodox Protestantism, Freemasonry, and Khlysty teachings.[12] About the Molokans, Bolshakoff begins his discussion with a man named Simeon Uklein, son-in-law to the prominent Doukhobor leader N. Pobirokhin, who was dissatisfied with the Doukhobors' treatment of scriptures and communal leadership.[13] From that point, different factions of Molokans were created from the different influences of the Judiaizers, Subbotniks, Khlysty, and Baptists.[14]

Bolshakoff chooses to label both the Doukhobors and Molokans as "Protestant sects," to which Matthew Spinka vehemently rejected in his review of Bolshakoff's work, claiming that Western Protestantism had no impact on either group, and that the two are sole creations of their

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[9] Klibanov, *History*, 151.

[10] J. Eugene Clay, "Russian Spiritual Christianity and the Closing of the Black-Earth Frontier: The First Heresy Trials of the Dukhobos in the 1760s," *Russian History* 40, no. 2 (2013): 225-6, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24667202.

[11] Bolshakoff, *Nonconformity*, 97.

[12] ibid.

[13] ibid., 105.

[14] ibid., 107-112.

own right.[15] Again, in quoting the work of Ivanovski, Conybeare discusses the erroneous original historiographical thought of the creation of the Doukhobors and Molokans being from an influx of Western ideologies around 1700.[16] To debunk the myth of Western influence, Conybeare returns to the time of Tsar Peter I and the appearance of the Russian *intelligentsia*. Peter I openly embraced Western thought and embarked on a campaign to "Europeanize" Russia. Some of his endeavors included mandating a change in the style of dress for the autocracy to mimic the latest trends in Europe, as well as the construction of a new capital city, Saint Petersburg, in the west on reclaimed marshy lands from the Swedes with the employment of Italian, French, and German architects to create a true European city. When the Russian *intelligentsia* under Peter I first heard of the dissenting Rationalist groups, they immediately jumped to the conclusion that they were a Western importation like themselves.[17] Conybeare asserts that due to the nature of the *intelligentsia*'s claim, this statement carried on throughout history without being checked against the true reasoning for the creation of the Doukhobors and Molokans being of moral circumstances and a call "back to Christ" rather than of intellectual grounds.[18] Furthermore, Conybeare contends that the moral crusade of the Spiritual Christians to return to an apostolic-style religion has been a distinctly Slavic characteristic that echoed even within the movement of the Old Believers.[19] J. Eugene Clay reiterates that by analyzing early heretical cases of Spiritual Christians, no foreign origin for these groups can be found and that they are a distinct product of spiritualized interpretation of Orthodox beliefs, texts, and practices.[20]

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[15] Matthew Spinka, Review of *Russian Nonconformity* by Serge Bolshakoff, *Church History* 20, no. 1 (Mar. 1951): 78. doi: 10.2307/3162063.

[16] Conybeare, *Dissenters*, 7.

[17] ibid., 261.

[18] ibid., 262

[19] ibid.

[20] Clay, "Spiritual Christianity," 227.

Klibanov's approach, with his unmistakable Marxist-Leninist lens, is quite different in explaining the origin of all Russian sectarian groups. He describes:

> "Religious sectarianism in Russia was a peasant movement arising on the basis of contradictions in the feudal-serf structure sanctioned by Russian Orthodoxy. In the form of opposition to the ruling church and its ideology, sectarianism expressed peasant protest against the institutions of serfdom, being thereby one of the tendencies of democratic protest (in the bourgeois sects)."[21]

This conclusion is drawn mostly on the fact that the Orthodox Church was one of the largest feudal land-owning institutions in the entire Russian nation.[22] If the peasants were unhappy with their current lot in life under the repression of the Church, then their outward form of protest occurred under the adoption of a different belief system. Klibanov also states that this unique style of protest against the socio-economic conditions of the peasants in the form of religious protest during the seventeenth century and beyond is a distinctly Russian product.[23] From the initial outbreak of sectarianism, Klibanov begins his discussion with the Khlysty, and describes that sect's divergence into the more extreme Skoptsy sect, and those of the Spiritual Christians, notably the Doukhobors and Molokans.[24]

How can these Sects be Viewed as a Product of Rebellion?

As mentioned above, one of the unique interpretations introduced by Klibanov of the origin of religious dissension stems from a protest of authority. In addition, Bolshakoff makes reference to protest in his overall summary of nonconformity stating that it was "not merely a protest against State intervention in the affairs of the Church; it is also a protest against the

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[21] Klibanov, *History*, 2.
[22] ibid., 40.
[23] ibid., 44
[24] ibid., 45, 62.

secularization of the Church and the clerical support of social injustice."[25] Bolshakoff's interpretation of this protest effectively describes sectarians as upholders of democratic ideals, utilizing the natural Russian inclination to favor factions and anarchy to his support.[26] Religious dissension, in essence, was how "the Savlonic popular masses resisted for a very long time the new scheme of the Government with its serfdom, suppression of democratic institutions, and centralized bureaucracy."[27] Breyfogle also makes reference to how the Doukhobors and Molokans were perceived as anti-tsar and democratic, "imbued with a threatening ideology of Christian equality, freedom, and communism."[28] Klibanov, while also supporting religious dissension as a product of protest against serfdom, however, qualifies it within a socialist context and characterizes it as a principle form of support for Vladimir Lenin and his desire to recreate the Russian nation. In his "Draft Program of Our Party," Lenin describes, "we know of the growth of sectarianism and rationalism among the peasantry, and the appearance of political protest in a religious guise…. The presence of revolutionary elements in the peasantry, thus, is subject to no doubt whatsoever."[29] Klibanov then progresses further in detail regarding how Lenin attempted to capitalize on this peasant protest for his own gains by attempting to connect to these dissenting groups and intellectually enlighten the peasantry as to the other avenues of protest against the central authority of the Church.

Attempts at socio-political and economic reforms to satisfy the demands of the agitated peasants occurred under the rule of the tsars of the nineteenth century, such as Alexander I and Alexander II. The word "attempts" is used in the context that while there were reform efforts, they were not successfully carried out with the desired results. The main issue in addressing the

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[25] Bolshakoff, *Nonconformity*, 18.
[26] ibid.
[27] ibid., 20.
[28] Breyfogle, *Heretics*, 20.
[29] Klibanov, *History*, 2.

plight of the Russian peasantry was the emancipation of serfs. Susan McCaffrey argues that, unlike most contemporary scholars, the political debate of emancipation should begin with the early 1800s and Tsar Alexander I, even though the actual Emancipation Manifesto was not issued until 1861, and most scholars began their research in the 1840s.[30] Under Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801-1825), the Russian government initiated the conversation of emancipation and the rights of serfs. The task proved daunting to carry out as anxiety of what the newly freed serfs would accomplish rattled the upper classes.[31] However difficult, the tsar did manage to enact new policies at the beginning of his reign which granted the majority of societal classes in Russia the right of private land ownership and "established the new social category of free agriculturalists, for peasants voluntarily emancipated by their masters"[32] With these basic principles in place, Alexander I laid out a roadmap in which the future tsars could utilize to enact their own laws and policies that would grant serfs their freedom, with the hopes that their rebellious spirits would be satisfied.

Despite the honest efforts of the tsars to increase equality amongst the lower classes as a means to appeal to their socio-economic dissatisfaction, their works only led to a desire for further change. In conducting a study as to how reforms lead to further rebellion utilizing the Emancipation Manifesto as their main point of reference, Evgeny Finkel, Scott Galhback, and Tricia D. Olsen point out that the unrest continued due to grievances that were altered as a result of reform and a rise of expectations from the peasants regarding the achievements of collective action.[33] The additional fact that these reforms were committed by the nobility without the input

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[30] Susan P. McCaffray, "Confronting Serfdom in the Age of Revolution: Projects for Serf Reform in the Time of Alexander I," *The Russian Review* 64, no. 1 (Jan. 2005): 1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3664324.

[31] idid., 5.

[32] ibid.

[33] Evgeny Finkel, Scott Gelhback & Tricia D. Olsen, "Does Reform Prevent Rebellion? Evidence From Russia's Emancipation of Serfs," *Comparative Political Studies* 48, no. 8 (2015): 991, doi.org/10.1177/0010414014565887.

of the peasant class who demanded change also increased peasant animosity.[34] Furthermore, with peasant-serfs dissatisfied with how emancipation reforms were being conducted, McCaffrey describes that the reforms also provided serfs with socio-economic freedom, opportunities for "local self-government, a reduction of military obligations, geographic and social mobility, and education."[35] In particular to the Doukhobor and Molokan sects, who required pacifism of their adherents and rejected military service, this proved to be an important piece to their protests.

Required military service was one of the most damning events to the life of a sectarian. As it is written within the Molokan's spiritual book, the prophet M. G. Rudometkin, in quoting the Biblical prophet Isaiah, proclaims that the Molokan people should "never know fear, nor military service to any earthly kings; and my people will never take up the sword of arms in their hands for all eternity.[36] The founders of the Molokan faith strictly advised their descendants to "observe the holiness of faith according to the teaching of Christ, and to be watchful in expectation of the judgment upon the world, and to avoid military service and war itself as matters not characteristic of Christian law."[37] For the Molokans, the act of military service lent itself towards breaking Mosaic law and the ten commandments of God. In knowing this, authorities used military conscription against dissenting faiths as a means to punish sectarians for rejection of the Orthodox church. In light of the Ottoman empire's declaration of war against Russia under the reign of Catherine II, Clay describes that "by 20 May 1769, the Senate decided that the Dukhobors were dangerous enough -- and the exigencies of war great enough -- that these heretics should be placed in military service."[38] In consideration of McCaffrey's conclusion above, regarding the weakening of military service requirements with the

[34] ibid., 1008.
[35] McCaffrey, "Confronting," 3.
[36] John William Volkov, trans, *Spirit and Life--Book of the Sun*, 1st ed, edited by Daniel H. Shubin (USA: Daniel H. Shubin, 1983), 437.
[37] ibid., 748.
[38] Clay, "Spiritual Christianity," 241.

emancipation of serfs, and Finkel's team's realization of reforms creating a greater expectation amongst the peasantry for further change initiated by government institutions, the boom of sectarianism during the 1860s can be correlated to a protest of authority and product of rebellion.

Conclusion

By investigating the positive impacts of government legislation on the Molokan and Doukhobor peoples, the depth of this study can be increased, as opposed to using only works of church officials and state authorities who have for years claimed sectarians to be both harmful and hateful towards the overall Russian nation. It is important to study these groups to understand that there was and is a class of Russians who are against the extreme authority of the Church and State, and reveal their convictions through professions of faith. As S. F. Rybin, a Doukhobor figure who emigrated to Canada at the end of the nineteenth century, described in 1952:

> "They (the Doukhobors -- A. K.) have turned the sect into a nation. When they meet an unknown person they ask: and who might you be? I am a Doukhobor, one answers. Ah, a Doukhobor. And I thought you were Russian. It turns out that the Dukhobors are not Russians, but Dukhobors."[39]

While Rybin qualifies religious dissenters as their own cultural group, they are still a cultural group within the larger Russian historical narrative who possess a reality alternative to that of the past and current regime.

METHODOLOGY

Given the interesting nature of the topic of Russian sectarianism, the Russian tradition to remove pieces of history which do not conform to the current political narrative, and the lack of Western study for Russian sectarians aside from the Old Believers, most of the analysis of the

[39] Klibanov, *History*, 110.

Doukhobor and Molokan sects will be completed in light of English or English-translated works from the twentieth and twenty-first century. Primary sources will include the spiritual books of both the Doukhobor and Molokan peoples, other written accounts of the trials and tribulations of both groups, translations of church officials' commentary on the sects, and government laws. Leading scholars from the early to mid twentieth century whose monographs will be mostly relied upon are those of the British scholar Frederick C. Conybeare, Professor of Theology at the University of Oxford and authority on the Armenian Church, as well as A. I. Klibanov, Soviet scholar of the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences, USSR.

PRELIMINARY OUTLINE

- **INTRODUCTION**
  - Opening Statement
  - Literature Review
  - Introduction of thesis and overview of the paper
- **WHO ARE THE DOUKHOBORS AND MOLOKANS**
  - History of the Doukhobors
    - Why they disagreed with Orthodoxy
    - Main Tenants of faith
    - Significant prophets
      - Include Bronch-Burevich's work
  - History of the Molokans
    - Why they disagreed with Orthodoxy & the Doukhobors
    - Main Tenants of faith
    - Significant prophets
      - Include Maxim Gavrilich Rudometkin's work
- **CHURCH & STATE IN RUSSIA**
  - State and Church Power in Russia/history/overview
  - Why the Doukhobors and Molokans posed a threat to State and Church Authority
  - Persecution
- **EMANCIPATION MANIFESTO OF 1861**
  - Philosophy of Reform movements
    - Finkel's article
  - Peasant reaction to emancipation
  - Religion as a means of socio-political protest
    - Vladimir Lenin
- **IMPLICATIONS OF TODAY/CONCLUSION**
  - Why is this important? / How is this relevant?
  - Future Implications?

SCHEDULE FOR COMPLETION

November 9th: Draft of Literature Review

November 14th: Literary Review Completed

November 21st: Thesis Statement and Outline

November 28th: Updated/Revised Thesis Proposal

December 5th: Literature Review finished, Presentation of Thesis

December 15th: Completed Proposal, Advisory Approval Sheet

December 31st: Introduction

January 15th: Chapter 1 Draft

February 1st: Chapter 1 Revisions and Chapter 2 Draft

February 15th: Chapter 2 Revisions and Chapter 3 Draft

March 1st: Chapter 3 revisions and Conclusion Draft

March 15th: Revisions and Final Draft

End of April: Thesis Defense

May 1st: Thesis Completion

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