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Development of Religious Dissident Movements in Russia Between the End of 1950s to 1981

Сажетак: Рад има за циљ да прикаже постепен развој дисидентства као комплексног феномена у совјетском друштву са нарочитим нагласком на његове религиозне аспекте и манифестације. Рад кроз свој интердисциплинарни приступ (теологија, историја, филозофија) анализира идеје и изазове са којима су се сусретали совјетски неконформисти и на којима се заснива њихов постепен преображај од *homo sovietikus-a* до *anthropos-a*. Примјери наведени у раду приказују сукцесивно формирање философско-религиозних погледа и стицање религиозног искуства међу совјетским дисидентима током транзиционог процеса.

Vox Populi Vox Dei

Religious dissident movements¹ represent only one aspect of dissident activities in the former Soviet Union. The Soviet dissident movement itself is a very complex and extensive phenomenon and, thus, it is difficult to define. This complexity includes its roots, ideology, methods as well as its social, political, intellectual and cultural influence and legacy in both Soviet and post-Soviet society.

The goal of this paper is to present various academic positions concerning the gradual development of the Soviet dissident movement and to discuss its interrelation with the religious sphere in the Soviet Union from the mid 1950s until 1981. The religious expression of the dissident movement is complex, dynamic and vast. It embraces all major religions in the Soviet Union. This paper, therefore, will primarily focus on the development of religious dissident movements among the Russian Orthodox Christians.

The use of the term *dissident* within the Soviet context announces the complexity of the term itself. The historian Philip Boobyer, describing the origins of the term „dissident” within the Soviet context, writes that Soviet authorities themselves labeled their opponents as dissidents because the word, according to the Soviet authorities, had anti-social and extremist connotations.² Michael Meerson-Aksenov³ points out that the term *dissident* is Anglo-Saxon, which initially signified a certain religious sectarian alienation of the minority from the ideological „monolith” of the majority. Thus, according to Meerson-Aksenov, one can question how well this term describes the various minorities of Soviet citizens, who in different ways represented opposition to official governmental policy.⁴ Liudmila Aleksee-

¹ I chose to use the term movements in the plural in order to emphasize the diversity of the religious dissident movement based not only on denominational differences such as Orthodox, Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, Jewish or Muslim, but also to emphasize their varied activities and perspectives.

² Philip Boobyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, BASEES/Routledge series on Russia and East European studies (London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 75.

³ In transliterating Russian names from the Cyrillic alphabet, I have used a modified version of the Library of Congress system. When citing translations I have kept the transliteration used by authors.

⁴ Michael Meerson-Aksenov is a current Russian Orthodox priest in New York (Orthodox Church in America). He was born in 1944 in Moscow. He was a member of the Moscow human rights movement until 1972 when he immigrated to Austria. Then he graduated from the Institute of Saint Sergei in Paris and Saint Vlad-

va, who like Meerson-Aksenov belonged to the dissident movement, used the term *inakomyслиe* (thinking differently) instead of dissident movement.⁵ However, Boobbyer, commenting on the term *inakoyislie* writes it does not reflect the entire meaning of the dissident movement. It fails to embrace the fact that dissidents sought to articulate their opposition to the Soviet authorities. He recommends the terms *inakoslovie* (speaking differently) or *svobodomyслиe* (thinking freely). According to him, the term *svobodomyслиe* is a more adequate description of the dissident movement since the tendency was to think freely.⁶

The next difficult task in the discussion of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union is to answer questions concerning the origins of this movement and who the participants were. Ronald Grigor Suny, writing about the origins of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union, mentioned that even in the time of Stalinism (1928–1953) when Soviet society was nearly completely dominated by the state and party, there were some informal associations of friends, relatives, schoolmates and colleagues that offered shelter from close governmental control. According to Suny, however, the earliest roots of the dissident movement go back to the „Secret Speech” made by Khrushchev during the 20th Communist Party Congress on February 25, 1956 when he openly criticized Stalin and his repressive actions.⁷ This historical speech is also known as the speech *On the Personality Cult and its Consequences*. Martin Malia, too, sees the *Secret Speech* as the source of the dissident movement.⁸ Boobbyer, writing about the beginning of the Soviet dissident movement, places its first seeds before 1956, even back to the 1930s. He also quotes Ludmila Alekseeva, who wrote that she was a part of a small group, which in 1953 regularly met in the smoking room in the basement of the Lenin Library. There the group read and discussed articles published in two official literary journals *Literaturnaia Gazeta* and *Novyi Mir*. After the death of Stalin in 1953, both journals expressed less rigid adherence to the Party line. According to Boobbyer, these small communities grew.⁹

There are, also, various positions concerning the question of who the Soviet dissidents were. Marshall Shatz, answering this question says that the dissident phenomenon included a large number of individuals who offered their support to these small groups of prominent individuals, and they put their signatures on various petitions and open letters defending these activists. Also, he states that almost all dissidents were highly educated people and represented the Soviet intellectual elite: artists, scientists, professors, and students. According to Shatz, the soviet intelligentsia represented the core of the Soviet dissident movement.¹⁰ The English peace activist and scholar, Alex Shtromas, however, writes that anyone living in a totalitarian state such as the Soviet Union is a potential dissident, though

imir's Seminary in New York. He is the author of *Pravoslavie i Svogoda* (Chalidze Publication, 1986). See Michael Meerson-Aksenov, „The Dissident Movement and Samizdat” in *The Political, Social, and Religious Thought of Russian „Samizdat” — An Anthology*, ed. Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shragin (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing Company, 1977), 24. Marshall Shatz, describing the term dissident in his work, says: „Term dissident refers to expressions of unofficial, unauthorized by the government — criticism of public policy. But I have preferred to call the agents of dissent ‘dissidents’, since term ‘dissenters’ is so closely identified with religious movement especially in English history. The Russian themselves seem to find the word dissidents a useful one, and the term *dissidenty* has recently to appear in the documents of Soviet dissident.” Marshall S. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 184.

⁵ Ludmila Alekseeva, „Predoslovie,” *Istoriia inakomisliia v SSSR*, (Vilnius and Moscow: Vest, 1992).

⁶ Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 75.

⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State* (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 429.

⁸ Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy, A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994), 323.

⁹ Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 56–57.

¹⁰ Marshall S. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective*, 138–139.

most conceal their private opinions.¹¹ Suny, writing about dissidents groups notes that Soviet students could be seen as the first organized dissidents who protested Soviet interventions in Poland and Hungary in 1956. Also, during 1957 and 1958 these student groups first published illegal works. They accused Soviet policy of being founded on lies and monolithic faith. Suny states that the new environment based on Khrushchev's process of de-Stalinization prompted a growing number of people, especially among the intelligentsia, to begin to think differently. Suny states that the dissidents were a small minority in Soviet society:

Most professionals and intellectuals, who directed the political, cultural and economic life of the country, had become a materially privileged subelite just under the top political leaders. The Soviet middle class was generally optimistic about the soundness and the radiant future of the Soviet system in the 1950s and 1960s. Though they complained about shortages and inefficiencies, lack of freedom, and the low quality of material life, they could observe that their own lives improved materially over time. They might blame individual leaders, but their faith in the basic principles of the system remained firm... But by the late 1960s intellectuals began to experience pessimism more widely, and the regime found it harder to pressure and manipulate the attitudes of intelligentsia. Pessimism spread quickly from the intelligentsia to the middle strata of Soviet society, and consumers lost their conviction that their living standard would rise.... By the 1970s the earlier idealism and humanism of many believers in the system turned perceptibly toward cynicism and frustration and was reflected in apathetic attitudes toward work and a laissez-faire attitude toward the illegal second economy.¹²

Regardless of slightly different views concerning the meaning of the term dissident, dates of origin of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union, and discussions concerning who should be called a dissident, historians agree that Khrushchev's Secret Speech was crucial for the further development of the dissident movement in Soviet society. The Communist leadership under Khrushchev initiated reforms attacking the cult and personality of Stalin; but the core of the socio-political system with the strong Party influence had to stay in power. Malia writing about Khrushchev's reforms of Communism in the Soviet Union says that they were initiated as an effort to humanize and liberalize the Stalin legacy without abandoning its integral socialist nature, which included planning, collective property, and the leading role of the Party.¹³

The Idea of Conscience and the Dissident Movement

Khrushchev through his reforms allowed the Soviet intelligentsia, especially Soviet literary circles to criticize certain aspects of Stalin's policy. However, these critics had to follow the official policy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Commenting on

¹¹ Alex Shtromas, *Who Are the Soviet Dissidents?* (Bradford, UK: University of Bradford), 2 Shtromas in his work distinguishes dissidents into several groups: „potential” who do not directly interfere with the Government's political performance; the „intrastructural” who do not usually wish to openly declare their beliefs, preferring to work for their ideals within the established social system; „over dissent” that can be called „unwilling dissidents” since the authorities themselves pushed them into the position of overt dissent. Thus, Shtromas writes: „Because of this it would be a mistake to assume that Soviet dissent is confined to the comparably small group of people acting as political dissidents. The western public must understand that important mass phenomenon and that the over dissidents are just a tiny exposed fraction of it.” Alex Shtormas, *Who Are the Soviet Dissidents?*, 4–16.

¹² Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 430–432. One of the first illegally circulated texts in the Soviet Union, according to Suny, was a badly typewritten translation of George Orwell's 1984, a political novel about a totalitarian regime and its party that controlled all aspects of life among its citizenry. This work, for Soviet readers, was a mirror of society based on lies. *Ibid.*, 430.

¹³ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy, A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*, 316.

the role of the Party over the work of the Soviet intelligentsia during the period of de-Stalinization Suny quoted Khrushchev himself: „The press and radio, literature, art, music, the cinema and theater are a sharp ideological weapon of our Party. And the Party sees to it that that weapon should be kept ready for action at all times and strike telling blows at our enemies.”¹⁴ According to Suny, at the beginning of these actual reforms, the Soviet intelligentsia believed in the prospect of creating a humanistic socialism eradicating the Stalinist legacy; but the Party was not prepared to accept further reforms.¹⁵ However, the social environment created after Khrushchev’s Secret Speech made possible the awakening of an individual sense of conscience.¹⁶

The idea of conscience among Soviet citizens became the core for the further development of the dissident movement in all of its expressions, including religion. Boobbyer interpreted Vladimir Bukovskii’s (one of the first dissidents actively involved in organizing alternative political and cultural events at the beginning of the 1960s) idea of conscience within the context of Soviet dissidence to be a personal responsibility and an inner freedom.¹⁷ In the process of de-Stalinization, however the Communist Party did not recognize the importance of conscience. Instead of reforms concerning this issue, the Party continued to present itself as the principle of conscience. This policy was officially presented during the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961 by saying that the party is the mind, honor and conscience of „our age,” and of the Soviet people. According to this policy, obedience to the state was a matter of conscience.¹⁸ The idea of conscience was tied to the concept of *anthropos*.¹⁹ According to this concept person is free and, thus he/she has the right to speak honestly and courageously. Boobbyer writes that some dissidents believed that those who agreed to collaborate with Soviet authorities lost touch with their true selves.²⁰ Boobbyer emphasizes the interrelationship between conscience and personality. He writes that these ties reflected a wider existential importance of conscience in dissident thought. As one of arguments, Boobbyer quotes Stalin’s daughter, Svetlana Aliluyeva, who in the 1960s belonged to one of human rights movements. She wrote in her memoirs that all that she had was her conscience.²¹

For most Soviet dissidents, who were highly educated, preserving conscience was the essence of *anthropos*: human conscience, personality and freedom. Another human rights activist and writer Boris Shragin (1927–1990), who, in 1970 wrote under pseudonym Lev Ventsov, said that spiritual disintegration, the loss of one’s own ego, and the dishonor of iniquitous service are more terrible for the human conscience than is bodily torture and even physical disappearance.²²

The idea of conscience and inner freedom challenged nonconformists to begin their resistance to the Soviet style of „double life,” which destroys *anthropos*. Dmirit Nelidov (pseudonym) in 1973 wrote about this idea of „double life” in the Soviet Union and resis-

¹⁴ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 404–405.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 407.

¹⁶ Marshall S. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective*, 151, Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 61.

¹⁷ Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 61.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹ The concept of *anthropos* is explained in the first and third papers. I chose the Greek term *anthropos* in order to embrace the entire concept of person: personhood, mutual relationship i.e., person as a spiritual and biological being.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

²² Lev Ventsov, „To think!” in *The Political, Social, and Religious Thought of Russian „Samizdat” — An Anthology*, ed. Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shragin (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing Company, 1977), 151.

tance against it. He stated that people in the Soviet Union had to learn to present a form of themselves „in the formal ideological display window” which differed from how they were in actuality. This caused a perversion of human nature and derogation of humanity. Thus, the importance of resistance lies in the fact that it challenged this double style of life. Nelidov wrote that resistance became a form of expressing the humane in an environment where human nature was suppressed and perverted. He further said that resistance was a „struggle for the liberation of spirit, which makes man’s personality.”²³

The above-mentioned examples present the fundamental source for the existence and development of the phenomenon of the Soviet dissident movement. These examples demonstrate why Khrushchev’s reforms failed: they failed to target the real problems of the system. Instead, Khrushchev tried to ignore only one part of the entire social picture, i.e., Stalin’s personal role in Soviet society; that had been integrally developed for more than twenty important years during the construction of the Soviet socio-political system. The Stalinist system had gradually changed *anthropos* to *homo sovieticus*. The following years showed that the policy of rejecting Stalin, but not reforming the system built under him eventually destroyed the entire Soviet socio-political system. Suny, writing about the failure of Khrushchev’s reforms and development of the dissident movement, says: „Sadly for his reforms and his tenure in power, his behavior was marked by rashness and hastiness, and he often interfered in matters beyond his competence. Ultimately his reforms were conservative rather than radical, preserving as much of the old system as possible, and he had more faith than clear vision of the future of Soviet society.”²⁴

In 1964 Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982) succeeded Nikita Khrushchev as the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This change, however, did not prompt a change within the dissident movement. Malia, writing about reasons for further development of the dissident movement during Brezhnev’s reign (known as period of stagnation), says that there were several reasons for the further development of the dissident movement. First, the dissident movement built itself as a movement of self-defense against the rehabilitation of Stalinism (after 1962). Second, the dissident movement became a sign of a deepening disillusionment with the possible reform of the system. The final reason for the further development of the dissident movement is tied with the more tolerant relationship of the Soviet authorities toward dissidents. Malia, however, emphasizes that the government did not become more liberal, but rather more pragmatic: it saw terror tactics used by Stalin to be destructive. Thus, the Soviet authorities during Brezhnev’s era used softer and less direct methods.²⁵

²³ Dmitri Nelidov, „Idiocratic Consciousness and Personality,” in *The Political, Social, and Religious Thought of Russian „Samizdat” — An Anthology*, ed. Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shragin (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing Company, 1977), 271, 276, 277, 290. Boobbyer writing about „double life” in the Soviet Union uses the term doublethink: „Doublethink was the normal pattern of life; Doublethink is a voluntary submission to the given mannequin, becoming accustomed to it, correcting oneself according to the mechanics of the reflexes elaborated in it and to the censorship prescribed by it.” See Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 94.

²⁴ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 395.

²⁵ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy, A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*, 355–356. Suny, writing about the development of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union, points to several stages: a) during the period of Stalinism (1928–1953) there were informal associations that provided refuge from the strict state control; b) from 1956 to 1964/65 more organized dissident groups asked for democratic-socialist reforms; c) from 1965 to 1970s first organized dissident movements concerning the human rights activities; d) from the end of 1960s there was increasing interest in nationalistic ideas in different Soviet socialist republics; e) by the middle of the 1970s the dissident movement was split between the chauvinist right and the liberal left. Also in 1975 a circle was formed to monitor the Helsinki Accords of human rights; and f) the beginning of 1980s presents the end of active dissident activities since the government forcibly deported or arrested its most influential participants. Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 429–434.

This extended description concerning the term *dissident*, participants of the phenomenon named Soviet dissident movement, and its crucial ideological reasons such as the idea of consciousness and governmental rejection of concrete socio-political, economic, and cultural reforms is important. Without it one cannot comprehend the creation and development of the religious dissident movements as a part of the whole Soviet dissident phenomenon was created and developed.

Social and Intellectual background: the Stalin Era

Before continuing further, it is necessary to describe the gradual historical evolution of the *homo sovieticus* as he/she appeared under strict governmental control. The creation and development of major religious dissident activities among Russian Orthodox believers was in many ways a response to the evolution of *homo sovieticus*; it explains the emphasis religious neophytes placed on *anthropos*.

Khrushchev's „Reform Communism” did not include the reformation of the Stalinist legacy in its integral socialist nature, but the limited humanization and the liberalization he did introduce opened the possibility for an environment of doubt and questioning among intellectuals. This new situation allowed people to begin to think differently.²⁶ Suny concludes his observations on this issue: „In a real sense the mid-1950s witnessed the resumption of the history of the Russian intelligentsia, which had been so brutally broken off during the Stalin purges.”²⁷

The creation of a Soviet ideocratic socio-political system was a long, complex and evolving process that began before the 1917 revolution. This process is connected to the development of the socio-political ideological views among the Russian intelligentsia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. This period of Russian philosophy named the Silver Age was the period of dynamic, multidimensional and gradual development of philosophical views. As Victoria Frede notes, Russian Marxism of the 1890s and 1900s was no exception:

„Attempts as systematic accounts of the trajectory of Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdiaev, Petr Struve, Semen Frank and other former Marxists in the 1900s and 1910s are especially striking in this regard. It is well known that these thinkers drew ideas from across political boundaries — notably from the neo-Kantian Idealism then dominated in Germany and Austria. Over time, their loyalties shifted dramatically.”²⁸

According to Frede, philosophy continued to evolve in the Soviet Union in the period from 1917 to 1930 and was influenced by various thinkers including Western and Russian émigrés philosophies.²⁹ David Joravsky, writing about Marxism and natural science of the same period says that until 1928/29 the Russian/Soviet intelligentsia enjoyed a certain freedom to express ideas, since the Soviet government was still in the process of its own socio-political, ideological, cultural and economic formation. Joravsky also mentions that the Soviet government before the Cultural Revolution, which was introduced together with Stalin's Soviet revolution in 1928, experienced a deficiency of educated peo-

²⁶ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy, A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*, 316.

²⁷ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 430. Elsewhere Suny writes the following: „Intellectuals were given more freedom, though restrictions on their work were maintained, and party leaders, especially Khrushchev, felt they had an absolute right to intervene in cultural affairs and dictate style and content to artists and writers.” Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 404.

²⁸ Victoria Frede, „Russian Intellectual History since 1991, Overcoming the Left-Right Divide,” *Kritika* 12, no. 4 (Fall, 2011): 811–812.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 813–814.

ple. Thus, Soviet authorities were forced to incorporate older intelligentsia into the system for as long as the Soviet government needed them.³⁰ Joravsky observes:

What was new was a fundamental transformation in the intellectual autonomy of these old specialists. In principle they had lost it altogether; to use a favorite expression of the day, they had „disarmed themselves” (*razoruzhilis*) before the Party’s Central Committee. In practice they still enjoyed almost unimpaired autonomy in their subject of matter, and immeasurable autonomy in ideology — immeasurable because of the mask of silence and possible hypocrisy that covered it. How long this incongruity of principle and practice would continue depended on the Central Committee’s assessment of changing necessities and possibilities. Aside from the ‘disarming’ of the old specialists (at least in principle), it had gained an enormous number of new scientists in training, most of them from social classes that would, the Central Committee hoped, produce great specialists who would also be genuinely Bolshevik in ideology.³¹

The next step in the process of the creation of the Soviet ideological system that was introduced by Stalin in 1928 was the attack on academic autonomy. This step allowed the Party leadership to control intellectual life within the Soviet Union and, through intellectual influence on other aspects of Soviet society, to indoctrinate the entire socio-political, cultural, and economic life of the country. Soviet philosophy assumed a major role in the implementation of the Party policy toward Soviet intellectual life. According to Joravsky:

V. P. Miliutin, the economist and member of the Party Control Commission at the Conference of Agrarian Economists fulfilling the prediction he had made in April that the use of conferences to establish „clarity” and „definiteness” in theoretical work would be extended from philosophy to other sectors of the theoretical front... it must be admitted that theoretical thought is not keeping pace with our practical progress and the development of theoretical thought. Whether or not he intended it, these few words were caught up in all fields of Marxist thought, in a cry for a turn to the actual problems of socialist construction.³²

At the beginning of the 1930s state control had been extended to all aspects of social and public life, including artistic and cultural expression. Artists had an important place in propagating Party policy and, as Suny writes, Soviet artists were seen as „engineers of the soul.”³³ Thus, in 1932 the government allowed the existence of only one union of artists that was under the control of the Soviet authorities. In the same year the new literary genre *Socialist Realism* was introduced. Suny quoted Stalin’s words concerning the role of the new genre in Soviet society: „If the artist is going to depict our life correctly, he cannot fail to observe and point out what is leading it toward socialism. So this is socialist art. It will be Socialist Realism.”³⁴

Katerina Clark writes that Soviet Socialist Realism received an especially important place in the Soviet novel. Clark compares the method of writing of the Soviet novel with the process of painting an icon. An iconographer has to follow certain dogmatic and canonical roles. While an iconographer paints an icon, he/she also has to use a prototype; he/she has to use certain colors, gestures, facial expressions, and symbols.³⁵ Clark mentions the following:

³⁰ David Joravsky, *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science 1917–1932* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1961), 238–249.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 248.

³² *Ibid.*, 250–251.

³³ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 269.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 270. Writing about Soviet Social Realism, Suny gives an explanation of the kind of cultural genre it is: „Social Realism demanded that an author depict reality in a realistic way, but that the depiction anticipate the socialist future. Thus, the doctrine contained elements of both literary realism and romanticism while it eschewed experimentation with form.” Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 271.

³⁵ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel, History as Ritual*, third edition (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 3–12.

If a writer wanted his novel to be published, he had to use the proper language (epithets, catch phrases, stock images, etc) and syntax (conventional ordering of events in according with master plot). To do so was effectively a ritual act of affirmation of loyalty to the state. Once the writer had accomplished this, his novel could be called „party-minded. But he had room for play in the ideas these phenomena expressed because of the latent ambiguities of the signs themselves.³⁶

The construction of the Party-controlled Soviet system introduced by the Stalin Soviet revolution gradually affected all aspects of social and public life within the state. During the 1930s the entire Soviet society was under Party censorship and any suspicious steps against the newly constructed socio-political and ideological system had to be sanctioned. This situation meant that literarily anybody could be arrested and sanctioned. According to Suny, the Soviet writer Boris Pilnaiak (1894–1937) who was arrested and executed in 1937, said to his friend that there was not a single thinker in the country who did not think he might be shot.³⁷ According to this position, during the time of Stalin’s great repressions in the second half of the 20th century, Soviet intellectuals, academics, artists, writers together with all other citizens of the Soviet Union were seen by the Party as potential apostates of the Party line.

Development of Soviet Religious Dissident Movements

With the death of Stalin on March 5, 1953 and later Khrushchev’s 1956 *Secret Speech* Soviet society faced the possibility of reexamining its past. Khrushchev’s Communist Reforms spoke about the Stalin era. Soviet writers became among the first in their society to use the new situation to witness their experience of Stalin’s torture.³⁸ Their witness, however, was not only a criticism of Stalin’s torture, but their stories implicitly criticized the whole system developed under the cult of personality.³⁹ Soviet writers at this time were conscious of their criticism, even though they stayed within the confines of Khrushchev’s Reform Communism.⁴⁰ As Malia writes, their intention was not to oppose the Soviet au-

³⁶ *Ibi.*, 13.

³⁷ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 277.

³⁸ One of the main themes concerning Stalin’s torture was the *gulag* experience. Aleksander Solzhenitsyn’s novel *One Day in the life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) is one of these works. About *gulag* literature Shatz writes: „In dissident literature, the prison-camp survivor is presented as a triumph of the human spirit over those who have sought to crush it, and affirmation of life over death. The prison and camp memoirs of purge victims, which like most of the novels on the subject, circulate in *samizdat* have supplemented fictional accounts in developing this theme.” Marshall S. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 105–109. Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 170.

³⁹ Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* was not approved to be published in the Soviet Union. It is one of the first well-known literary works that appealed to the Soviet authorities to introduce necessary socio-political reforms. Instead of being published in the Soviet Union, it was published in Italy in 1957. Boobbyer, writing about this, says: „Pasternak’s novel offered the regime an avenue for more open discussion of things, but the regime refused to follow the logic of the discussion further.” Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 70. Malia says about Pasternak’s work: „Even more important, Boris Pasternak in *Doctor Zhivago* undertook a reevaluation of revolution that came close to being condemnation.” Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy, A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*, 323. Shartz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective*, 105–109. Suny, *The Soviet Experiment, Russia, the USSR and the Successor State*, 406.

⁴⁰ Boobbyer writes the following: „On March 8, 1963, at a meeting with prominent representatives of the arts, Khrushchev stated that he welcomed the appearance of certain works which offered a truthful account of life during the period of the personality cult; and he cited approvingly Tvardovskii’s *Distant Horizons*, Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*... At the same time he expressed concern at the one-sided attention that was being devoted to „lawlessness, arbitrary reprisals, and abuse of power.” He noted that „art belongs to the sphere of ideology” and declared that the people and party would never tolerate those who advocated the „peaceful coexistence of ideologies.” Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 70.

thorities, but to support Khrushchev's reforms. They believed that the Party would demolish the system that is based on lies.⁴¹ Soviet writers at that time believed that the Soviet authorities would allow the rebirth of personal conscience in Soviet society.⁴² Only a few years later, (even from 1962⁴³) Soviet writers, together with other Soviet citizens would face the Party's unwillingness to introduce concrete socio-political reforms. However, new socio-political conditions introduced by Khrushchev's Communist reform could not prevent the further development of the dissident movement based on the desire to „return to the personal conscience.” From the mid 1960s until the beginning of the 1980s, when the major dissident groups were forcibly destroyed, the dissident movement affected many aspects of Soviet society. Religious life in the Soviet Union was directly tied to the entire process of the dissident movement. The idea of conscience influenced many members of the Church hierarchy and believers to actively demand their rights to witness their faith. Many dissidents in their search for alternatives ended up in the Church as neophytes.

It is not known how many religious dissidents or groups were in the Soviet Union. The secretive nature of these movements, lack of documents and unclear structure are important reasons why data concerning their number do not exist. Yet, it is known that religious dissident movements in the Soviet Union spread among all the major religions: Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists.⁴⁴ It cannot be seen as a monolithic process that affected only one particular group of people. Further, all dissident movements in the Soviet Union were interrelated on some level, since all were developing under the same socio-political, cultural, and economic conditions. The intensity of mutual influence among them, however, depended on particular ideological positions toward common issues, participants and governmental repression of these dissident groups. For example, some religious dissident movements were strongly influenced by nationalist aspirations such as dissident movements among Roman Catholics in Lithuania and Latvia.⁴⁵ Similar in-

⁴¹ Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy, A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*, 340.

⁴² Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 56.

⁴³ Boobbyer mentioned the 22nd Party Congress in 1962 as the official moment when the Soviet authorities proved that the Party associated itself with the principle of conscience. Boobbyer quotes the official Party statement from the Congress: „The party is the mind, honor and conscience of our age, of the Soviet people as it performs great revolutionary transformations.” Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 65.

⁴⁴ Small Buddhist communities also experienced Soviet oppression of religion. Under Stalin, of the 15,000 lamas who were initially exiled, barely 200 returned. After World War II, governmental policy toward Buddhism had changed to some degree, because the Soviet government wanted to use the Buddhist community in its international policy with Asian countries. Thus, the Soviet government allowed Buddhist communities in the Soviet Union to establish the Central Spiritual Directorate of Buddhism, which constantly endorsed Soviet policies. See Geraldine Fagon, „Buddhism in Postsoviet Russia: Revival or Degeneration?” *Religion, State & Society* 29, no 1 (2001): 9–22. The center of the Buddhist community in the Soviet Union was in Ivolginsk, 25 miles south of Ulan-Ude in Buryatia. In the 1960s there were about 300 lamas in the entire country, but according to Soviet policy, normal religious practice undertaken by the lamas was treated as illegal, which implied that village communities could not exercise their right and become registered. See Michael Bourdeaux, „Survival of the Buddhists,” *Religious minorities in the Soviet Union (1960–1970) Minority Rights Group, Report no. 1*, ed. Michael Bourdeaux (London, UK: Benjamin Franklin House, 1970): 30–32.

⁴⁵ Irina Ratushinskaya writing about repressions of the Soviet authorities toward the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania says: „The Roman Catholic Church in the USSR is strongest in Lithuania, although it also has sizeable communities in Latvia and many Poles and Germans in Central Asia and Siberia. Since 1969 a strong movement for religious rights has been grown up inside the Lithuanian Catholic Church, involving a majority of the clergy and large numbers of laity. Because of this and the Catholic Church's links with Lithuanian nationalism, the Soviet government treats it probably more harshly than any other legal church. The church-state conflict is documented in detail in the clandestine ‘Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church’, for production of which many believers have been arrested.” Irina Ratushinskaya, *Religious Prisoners in the USSR* (Keston College, Oxford, UK: Greenfire Book, 1987), 124–130. See also, Christel Lane, „Religion and Nationality II, The Roman Catholic Church — the Lithuanian Catholic Church,” in *Christian Religion in the Sovi-*

terrelations between religious and nationalistic movements existed among Greek Catholic communities in Western Ukraine,⁴⁶ Armenian Oriental Orthodox Christian groups, and among the Georgian Eastern Orthodox believers.⁴⁷ An analogous situation existed in Islamic communities.⁴⁸ The Jews in the Soviet Union constantly experienced anti-Semitism, and thus many of them wanted to leave and emigrate to Israel.⁴⁹

Evangelical and other small Protestant Christian groups (Baptists, Pentecostals), Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses stayed away from national or political groups. Instead, they kept strong religious beliefs and active missionary work and refused to take military oaths or to handle weapons. The Soviet authorities recognized this refusal as a non-patriotic and disloyal act that had to be sanctioned. Some Baptists, Pentecostals and other Evangelical Christian groups faced the problem of official registration of their communities. The Soviet government refused to register some of them seeing them as destructive entities whose target was a younger generation of Soviet citizens. Another reason for refusing to register was to avoid governmental control and missionary restrictions. Dimitry Pospelovsky, writing about the reasons for a refusal to register their communities: „In practice registration includes a virtual ban on the religious education of children, on youth and women's prayer meetings, on preaching, missionary work and charity, in addition to the practice of the most important rites.”⁵⁰ Persecution tied Evangelical groups to the human rights movements in the Soviet Union.⁵¹

Religious dissident movements among the Russian Orthodox believers went in several directions. First, there were two main divisions in the Russian Orthodox dissident movement. One was created among some clergy and believers of the Moscow Patriarchate, who criticized the collaborative official Church⁵² policy toward the Soviet government. The other religious dissident movement was created among the Soviet intelligen-

et Union, A sociological study, ed. Christel Lane (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1978), 207–217, Roman Solchanuk and Ivan Hvat, „The Catholic Church in the Soviet Union,” in *Catholicism and Politics in the Communist Societies*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 49–93. Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomisliia v SSSR*, 7–56. Pospelovsky mentions several letters that Catholic believers wrote to the Soviet authorities concerning arrests of clergy who kept their diocese or parishes religiously active. These are cases with Lithuanian Bishops Julianos Steponavichus and Vincentas Sladkiavichus and priest Prosperas Bubins in 1971/1972. Also, in many areas of the Soviet Union among the Catholic believers there was a custom to collect money from believers and then give a petition to the government to rebuild destroyed churches; however, the government mostly refused to allow reconstruction. Regardless of these obstacles, many Catholic priests held Sunday schools and lectures for adults. See Dimitry V. Pospelovsky, „Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions,” in *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice and Believer*, vol. 2 (London, UK: Macmillan Press, 1988), 150–154.

⁴⁶ Irina Ratushinskaya, *Religious Prisoners in the USSR*, 130–134.

⁴⁷ In this paper I will use the abbreviated term Orthodox when referring to Eastern Orthodox. This explanation is necessary in order to avoid any misunderstanding between Oriental and Eastern Orthodoxy.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 134–138. Irina Ratushinskaya, submitting information concerning the number of religious prisoners in the USSR for the Keston Institute in Oxford, UK as late as in the mid-1980s, wrote about seventeen Muslims, who were arrested for their religious views. Also, she wrote that in the Soviet Union there were 50 million Muslims predominantly in the regions of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Volga River. Their religious resistance was tied to their national resistance, since faith and national conscience are inextricably intertwined in Islam. She also mentioned that since the 1970s there were hundreds of imams, who were not officially registered and thus, according to Soviet law, all of them were liable to be arrested for illegal religious actions. Irina Ratushinskaya, *Religious Prisoners in the USSR*, 136–137. About Tatar's dissident movement see also Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomisliia v SSSR*, 93–111.

⁴⁹ Ratushinskaya, *Religious Prisoners in the USSR*, 134–135. Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomisliia v SSSR*, 115–133.

⁵⁰ Dimitry V. Pospelovsky, *Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions*. vol. 2, 162.

⁵¹ Ratushinskaya, *Religious Prisoners in the USSR*, 80–110, 112–120, 150–153. Alekseeva, *Istoriia inakomisliia v SSSR*, 141–151, 152–175.

⁵² In this paper I have deliberately followed the Orthodox Christian tradition of regarding the word *Church* as a feminine pronoun. Also, at times I will employ both official names for the Orthodox Church body in Russia: the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate.

tsia, who came to the Russian Orthodox Church in search of alternative views within Soviet society. Following conversion, these neophytes began to organize small circles in order to offer some kind of catechism among particular groups of people, mostly young Soviet intellectuals. These dissident movements among Russian Orthodox believers were closely tied to the idea of the rebirth of personal conscience, which began with the 1953 death of Stalin.

There were also dissident groups among Old Russian Believers⁵³ as well as in the Catacomb Russian Orthodox Church.⁵⁴ One more division was based on ties of the Russian Orthodox believers with their national consciousness. Thus, some of neophytes emphasized strong relationships between faith and Slavophile ideas of Russian *sobornost* (conciliarity), while the others were more supportive of Western influence and ecumenical collaboration.⁵⁵

One branch of the dissident movement among the Russian Orthodox believers was initiated by particular members of the clergy (rarely from the laity) who stood up and opposed the pro-governmental policy of the Moscow Patriarchate.

World War II brought new governmental policies toward the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest religious group in the Soviet Union. Stalin, in his postwar years, allowed the Russian Orthodox Church to reorganize her administrative structure including the election of the new Patriarch,⁵⁶ ordinations of new bishops, the reopening of eight seminaries and two theological academies. After World War II Soviet authorities also supported the unification of various groups within the Russian Orthodox Church which had been formed as result of Metropolitan Sergei's (Storogorodskii, 1867–1944) *Declaration of Loyalty* to the Soviet authorities in 1927.

However, Russian Church historians, Mikhail Shkarovskii, Dimitry Pospelovsky and Tatiana Chumachenko write that these governmental steps toward the Russian Orthodox Church did not alter its overall negative governmental course toward the Church. Rather the government sought to prepare the Church for Her new role in the international arena.⁵⁷ Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church would „witness” that religious freedom existed in the Soviet Union. Further, the Russian Orthodox Church was supposed to use her historical influence, especially among other Eastern Orthodox Churches, to propa-

⁵³ Old Believers originated in 1666 when several minor changes in the performance of ritual actions and service books initiated by Patriarch Nikon precipitated a major division in the Russian Orthodox Church. Those opposing these changes became known as Old Believers and led by Protopop Avvakum, went into schism. The Old Believers were the second biggest religious group in the Soviet Union. See: Christel Lane, „Old Believers,” in *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union, A sociological study*, ed. Christel Lane, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1978), 112–138. See also Paul Meyendorff, *Russia — Ritual and Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17th Century* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ Catacomb Russian Orthodox Church or True Russian Orthodox Church was established after 1927 from various groups of the Russian clergy and believers who did not accept the declaration of loyalty of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Soviet authorities that, at that time Patriarchal *locum tenens*, Metropolitan Sergei (Starogorodskii, 1867–1944) signed. Most of these separated groups returned to the Moscow Patriarchate in 1945, but some of these small groups exist even until today. See William Fletcher, *Russian Orthodox Church Underground 1917–1970* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1971), M. V. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov' pri Staline I Khrushcheve* (Moscow, Russia: Krutitskoe Patirarshee Podvor'e, 1999), 242–260.

⁵⁵ One of the most well known religious dissidents who supported Russian nationalist ideas was Vladimir Osipov (1938). From 1971 to 1974 he illegally published the journal *Veche*, but the Religious Philosophical Seminar #37 in Leningrad was open for ecumenical dialogue with other Christian denominations. Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church, A Contemporary History* (Indianapolis, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 295–304, 336–345.

⁵⁶ After the death of Patriarch Sergei (Storogorodskii) in 1944, the new Council in January 1945 elected Metropolitan of Leningrad Aleksii (Simanskii) as the new head of the Russian Orthodox Church.

⁵⁷ The international role of the Russian Orthodox Church was divided into several components: the Church participation in peace movement activities, inter-Orthodox relationships, and ecumenical dialogue.

gate the goals of Soviet international policy. Nevertheless, this new position of the Russian Orthodox Church had little effect on religious life within the Soviet Union. As before, only one ideology was allowed here.⁵⁸

With Khrushchev's Reform Communism came a new period of physical destruction of Church life (1958–1964), centering on the closure and/or physical destruction of churches.⁵⁹ One of the examples of the intensity of the attack on the Church during this period is the decrease in the number of active churches and clergymen after 1964. Vladislav Tsipin, Church historian and professor at Moscow Theological Academy, writes that in 1953, before the repression, the number of active churches was 13,555. However, after 1964, this number declined to 7,523 including sixteen monasteries.⁶⁰ Tsipin also mentions that in 1950, the Russian Orthodox Church had 13,483 clergy members of all ranks, but in 1967 this number declined to 7,347 clergy members.⁶¹

Officially the Russian Orthodox Church officially ignored, or pretended to ignore, the government's oppression and maintained Her relationship with the government and continued Her international role. At the same time, the Church did not issue any official letter condemning the government's repressive steps toward the Church and believers. The highest Church authorities were informed of attacks on Church properties and facilities, clergy members and believers, since many letters and appeals were written by both believers and clergy members. Shkarovskii in 1995 published a collection of letters, appeals and documents in which believers informed Church authorities of particular examples of governmental repression toward the Russian Orthodox Church from 1943 to 1964.⁶²

The official position of the Russian Orthodox Church was to preserve the institutional status of the Moscow Patriarchate in order to keep ecclesiastical life alive and passively wait for social and political changes. This passive position of the official representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church caused critics among clergy members to condemn the Church hierarchy for refusing to defend the elementary position of the Church Herself — to witness the faith in God in its fullness of the Church life. Therefore, those who criticized the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church toward the Soviet government could be seen through the prism of the entire dissident movement, which is based on the need to resurrect personal conscience. They openly showed their disagreement with the passive policy of the Church, seeing it as self-destructiveness and as a betrayal of the Orthodox faith.

The first known appeal concerning government repression of the Church was written by Bishop Ermongen of Kaluga (Golubev, 1896–1978). In 1962 he wrote to Khrushchev and, in 1965, to the Patriarch Aleksii I to change laws concerning direct governmental pressure on parish life accepted by the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1961. As a result of this step he was retired and sent to Zhirovatskii monastery.⁶³

Also in 1965, two Moscow priests, Father Nikolai Eshliman (1902–1984) and Father Glab Yakunin (b. 1934) wrote two appeals, one to Patriarch Aleksii I which chronicled in

⁵⁸ Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov' pri Staline i Hrushcheve*, 284–314. Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Russian Orthodox Church Under the Soviet Regime 1917–1982* vol. 2, 301–327. T. A. Chumachenko, *Gosudrstvo, Pravoslavnaia Cerkov', veruiuschie, 1941–1961* (Moscow, Russia: Airo XX, 1999), 108–173.

⁵⁹ Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov' pri Staline i Hrushcheve*, 359–364.

⁶⁰ Vladislav Tsipin, „Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov' v noveishii period 1917–1999 in *Pravoslavnaia Entsiklopedia, Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov'* ed. Vladislav Tsipin and A. V. Nazaernko (Moscow, Russia: 2000): 154–155.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² M. V. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov i Sovetskoe gosudarstvo v 1943–1964 godah* (Saint-Petersburg, Russia: Dean+Adia, 1995), 167–193.

⁶³ Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov' pri Staline i Hrushcheve*, 275–276.

great detail repressive measures, which were being used against the Church by the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs, which was established by Stalin in 1944. Another letter was written to Nikolai Podgorny (1903–1983), then chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. Once again they protested the actions of the Council of Russian Orthodox Church Affairs. According to Eshliman and Yakunin, this Council violated the principles of socialist law and the basic legislative requirements of the Soviet Government determining the relations of the Soviet state with the Church.⁶⁴ As a result of this action, both priest were forbidden to serve for more than twenty years.

These first steps by the Russian Orthodox clergy in their resistance for true religious freedom and the right to witness their faith and beliefs encouraged other clergy members to begin more active missionary activities (including spiritual leadership for newly converted members of the Soviet intelligentsia).⁶⁵ These clergy members deliberately ignored the consequences which these activities could produce, such as prohibitions or suspensions to serve, removal to small rural parishes, loss of certain civil rights or arrests. Among those nonconformist clergy members were priests Vsevolod Spiller (1902–1984), Dimitrii Duduko (1922–2004), and Aleksander Men' (1935–1990).⁶⁶

The second branch of the dissident movement among Russian Orthodox Christians is tied to the religious conversion of young Soviet intellectuals, who continued the resistance to the Soviet governmental socio-political and ideological system after Khrushchev's resignation in 1964. For most who belonged to the generation born after World War II, the path toward the Orthodox Church was not linear. For them, the Orthodox faith belonged to the Russian imperial past and, thus, they sought alternative ideological, social, or political thought and initially avoided the Church.⁶⁷ Philip Walters, who wrote about religious dissident movements, says:

Convinced Marxists in their youth, they became disillusioned first with Marxism as practiced in the Soviet Union and later with all attempts to reform Marxism. Frustrated in their search for an ideology, which would guarantee social justice, they moved on to various forms of nihilism, hippydom, or pop culture, attempting to follow Solzhenitsyn's injunction „do not live a lie.” Then, eventually they began to find answers in Christianity, and came to the Church. Perhaps inevitably, the Church they discovered was the Russian Orthodox Church.⁶⁸

At the beginning of the 1970s these young members of the Soviet intelligentsia experienced their own gradual development of the idea of conscience initiated by the previous generations at the end of 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. About this experience, Evgenii Sokolov, one of the members of an Orthodox student group formed in the mid-1970s at the University of Moscow, wrote: „When I read *Requiem* written by Akhmatova and then listened to the Western Radio *Gulag Arkhipelago* written by Solzhenitsyn my views changed and I finally understood everything.”⁶⁹

People searching for alternatives, entered into the Orthodox Church. They discovered, however, that the Church was restricted in many of Her regular missionary activ-

⁶⁴ Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church, A Contemporary History*, 292–293. Iurii Geras'kin, *Ruskaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov, veruiuschie, vlast', konets 30h–70e godi XX veka* (Ryazan, Russia: 2007), 157–158. Dimitry Pospelovskiy, *The Russian Orthodox Church Under the Soviet Regime 1917–1982* vol. 2, 417–422.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 309–315.

⁶⁶ Shkarovskii, *Ruskaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov' pri Staline i Hrushcheve*, 277–278.

⁶⁷ Tatiana Goricheva, *Talking About God is Dangerous, The Diary of a Russian Dissident* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987), 10–18.

⁶⁸ Philip Walters, „The Ideas of the Christian Seminar,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 9 no. 2 (1981): 111.

⁶⁹ Evgenii Sokolov, „Na putah k vocerkovenliu. O pit pravoslavnogo polupodpol'ia v moskovskoi studentcheskoi srede v sredine 70-h godov” (paper presented at the International Conference *Religious Underground in USSR* held at Shevchenko University in Chernigov, Ukraine on November 18–19, 2011).

ities and, thus, the Orthodox faith stayed unknown to large numbers of Soviet citizens. Through their own ecclesiastical experience, many of these young neophytes wanted to implement the Christian ideas in society at large. These ideas were based on two foundations: freedom and love.⁷⁰

Therefore, some of the neophytes began to organize missionary activities outside the sacramental Church life. Some of them, such as Zoia Krakhmal'nikova who together with her husband Feliks Svetov were baptized in the 1971 by Father Dmitrii Dudko, started to publish illegally the *samizdat* (self-published) journal *Nadezhda* (hope) from 1976 to 1977.⁷¹ In the journal she wrote about her religious experience and discussed teachings of Church Fathers, especially Saint Simeon the New Theologian and Saint Maximus the Confessor.⁷²

The other way to introduce Orthodox doctrines among particular circles in Soviet society (in this case among young Soviet intelligentsia) was to establish small gatherings on regular bases. These small groups of people who gathered weekly at particular „secret” places (mostly apartments) were named Orthodox Christian, or Religious-philosophical Seminars. At these gatherings participants presented their lectures, led discussions, read the Bible, literature, poetry, and organized exhibitions of second or underground culture.⁷³ An anonymous participant in one of these seminars said about the role of the Seminar in the Soviet society: „Do not imagine that we have exchanged the totalitarianism of communist ideology for the totalitarianism of ecclesiastical legalism... In this divided world we are trying to produce a community as the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace... It is not in isolated self-assertion, even if this involves creative activity, that we find the depths of our personality, but in fraternal love in the image of the Holy Trinity.”⁷⁴

Sokolov mentions that at the beginning of the 1970s in Moscow he belonged to one of these small student seminars. However, most written and accessible documents are focused on only two Orthodox Christian seminars established among the young Soviet intelligentsia in the 1970s. There are the Christian seminar in Moscow and the Religious-Philosophical Seminar # 37 in Leningrad.

The first known Orthodox Christian Religious Philosophical Seminar was established in Leningrad in October 1973. Its leader was Tatiana Goricheva. The name of the seminar as well as its *samizdat* journal was # 37.⁷⁵ The chosen name signified the number of an apartment where participants of the seminar held their weekly gatherings. Unlike the Ogorodnikov's seminars in Moscow and Leningrad, which largely explored the relationship between the Orthodox faith and Russian national tradition, Religious-Philosophical Seminar # 37 was focused on a cultural approach toward Christianity with its main focus on Orthodox Christian tradition and Russian religious philosophy. Participants of this Seminar read and discussed various religious, philosophical and cultural writings as well as works of Nikolai' Gogol', Fedor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov and Father Pavel Florenskii. They also read Philo of Alexandria, Tertulian,

⁷⁰ Walters, „The Ideas of the Christian Seminar,” 111. Goricheva, *Talking About God is Dangerous, The Diary of a Russian Dissident*, 35–36.

⁷¹ The journal *Nadezhda* was published again from 1978 until 1982 in West Germany.

⁷² Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 104–105. Zoia Krakhmal'nikova was arrested in 1982 and persecuted for her work and activism tied with human right movement. She spent five years in prison. Gorbachev pardoned her in 1987 when she returned to Moscow.

⁷³ Walters, „The Ideas of the Christian Seminar,” 112, Goricheva, *Talking About God is Dangerous, The Diary of a Russian Dissident*, 48–62.

⁷⁴ Walters, „The Ideas of the Christian Seminar,” 112.

⁷⁵ See more about this and other *samizdat* journals in Leningrad from the 1950s to the 1980s in V. Dolinin, B. Ivanov, *Samizdat Po materialam konferencii „30 let nezavisimoi pečati. 1950–80 godi”*. Sankt-Peterburg, 25–27 aprilja 1992. g. (Saint-Petersburg, Russia: Nauchno-Informacionnii Centr (NIC) Memorial, 1993). 74–81.

Saint Athanasios the Great, Saint Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. Tatiana Goricheva was arrested for her work in 1980 and was given the choice either to leave the country before the Olympics began in Moscow in 1980 or to go to prison. Following the advice of her spiritual father, Father Aleksander (Anisimov), she chose to be deported and she emigrated to Paris, France.⁷⁶ The Seminar continued to exist until the mid-1980s.

Another Orthodox Christian Seminar was created in Moscow in 1974 by Aleksander Ogorodnikov (1950). He studied at the University of Moscow, the Urals University and at the All-Union State Cinematography Institute in Moscow. However he was expelled after the Institute discovered that he was a Christian.⁷⁷ The Seminar also had subgroups in Leningrad and Smolensk.⁷⁸ The goal of the Seminar was to witness alternative views and positions in Soviet society based on the Orthodox Christian tradition and predominantly hosted lectures and produced publications based on the Church Fathers and then Russian philosophers such as Vladimir Solov'ev, Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Father Paul Florenskii, Petr Struve, Simeon Frank and Nikolai Losskii.⁷⁹ Participation in the Seminar included active Church life and pilgrimages to a few still-open monasteries. Also, the Seminar began to publish unofficially its journal named *Obshchina*, (Community)⁸⁰ which actually identified its traditional Russian Orthodox, which was important for Slavophiles in the 19th century. In 1976, the Soviet authorities began to persecute the members of the Seminar. Its leader, Alexander Ogorodnikov, was arrested, as were his closest collaborators, Vladimir Poresh and Tatiana Shchipkova.⁸¹

Both branches of Religious dissident movement grew from the desire of certain members of Soviet society to freely express their conscience in order to be able to understand themselves as complete persons and to develop their creativity. Rebirth of conscience led some representatives of the younger Soviet intelligentsia to the Church. They remained satisfied with solutions based on Orthodox theological tradition. The idea of rebirth of conscience moved certain numbers of clergy to demand reexamination of the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the government, which had a goal of showing the last priest on TV by the 1980.⁸²

Conclusion

The religious dissident movement in the Soviet Union was a gradual and complex phenomenon, which evolved from a broader intellectual resistance against the Soviet system in which life was based entirely the Party's interpretation of Marxism and dialectical materialism. The Soviet intelligentsia began its appeal to Soviet authorities when Khrush-

⁷⁶ Goricheva, *Talking About God is Dangerous, The Diary of a Russian Dissident*, 48–61. Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church, A Contemporary History*, 391–397.

⁷⁷ Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church, A Contemporary History*, 386. Shaposhnikov, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov' pri Staline i Hrushcheve*, 281–282.

⁷⁸ The leader of the Seminar in Leningrad was Vladimir Poresh (1949) and in Smolensk Tatiana Shchipkova (1930).

⁷⁹ Walters, „The Ideas of the Christian Seminar,” 113.

⁸⁰ Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church, A Contemporary History*, 388, Walters, „The Ideas of the Christian Seminar,” 117–119

⁸¹ Shaposhnikov, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov' pri Staline i Hrushcheve*, 281–282. Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church, A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 128. Iurii Geras'kin, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Cerkov, veruiuschie, vlast', konets 30h–70e godi XX veka*, 158. Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church, A Contemporary History*, 381–390.

⁸² „In twenty years I will show you the last priest on television” became Khrushchev's famous expression describing the policy of the Party not only toward the Russian Orthodox Church, but also toward religion entirely. He pronounced these words during the repression on the Church in 1960.

chev initiated the idea of Reform Communism in 1956. Initially, the Soviet intelligentsia believed in reforms, but gradually they realized the unwillingness or impotency of the authorities to begin concrete socio-political reforms.

In the process of de-Stalinization, the Soviet intelligentsia was able to define in-depth and describe the causes that produced the Stalinist revolution. According to this analysis, Soviet ideology under Stalin transformed a human being into *homo sovieticus* — a hypocrite lacking an elemental moral code — unrecognizable as human with fully expressed attributes such as conscience, creativity and freedom. The Soviet intelligentsia proposed a solution: an alternative way of life based on a strong and consistent code of morality, which could throw off *homo sovieticus* the hypocrite mask.

In this entire process of ideological resistance to Soviet ideocracy, which continued after 1956, religion, and or particularly the Orthodox Christian faith, gradually became a space within which many representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia started using their free conscience and will. They discovered and experienced the fullness of human nature as expressed in all its attributes. This religious experience of being a human being includes, among other aspects, a strong practical implementation of an ethical code.⁸³ Thus, for many of them religion became the alternative to the Soviet ideological system. According to Fletcher, when many believers were asked to name the single most important reason for their belief, they indicated that religion helped them find morality and its meaning in their own lives.⁸⁴

Religious conversion for many members of Soviet intelligentsia (especially for the generations born after World War II) was not simply a natural result of their research for alternative views and resistance to the Soviet ideology. This path, which led to the Church, was actually their positive response to God's calling. Their conversion, they said, represented the initial step toward their further mission in the Orthodox Church. One of these neophytes, A. Kolesov describes the process of religious conversion as following:

But no matter how it is expressed, and this must be stressed, God's call precedes human conversion. Every human call sounds only after, and in response to, God's call. All faith in God begins with God's faith in man. And in this faith in God, in this call, is the mystery of my personality; in His call, the sources of my anxiety; in His power, the depth of my submissiveness and freedom. In my conversion I first answer to God. The feeling of responsibility which flows out of this conversion serves, in some measure, as the criterion of its authenticity.⁸⁵

After their own religious conversion and initial experience of Church life, some of these neophytes such as Tatiana Goricheva, Aleksander Ogorodnikov, Vladimir Poresh and Tatiana Shchipkova established Orthodox Christian Seminars in order to offer other members of the Soviet intellectual and cultural world the opportunity to develop their own personal conscience and possibility to learn more about the Orthodox faith and eventually become Orthodox Christians. The establishment of Christian Seminars was a way to witness to God and the Orthodox faith.

⁸³ According to Orthodox theological tradition, implementation of a moral code is actually a ceaseless and dynamic process of struggle between passions and constant *metanoia*. About this unstoppable process of self-controlling Zoia Krahmel'nikova writes: „Men began to witness to God and confess his belief in God from the moment of his realization that he is a human being... The healing of mind and healing of the world begins with the cleaning of reason and through his reconstruction based on repentance. It must go away from lie, sin, transgressions, bad acts, ego-centrism, materialism, of bad thoughts and his attraction to the materialistic world.” Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, 104–105.

⁸⁴ William C. Fletcher, *Soviet Believers, The Religious Sector of the Population*, 165–167.

⁸⁵ A. Kolesov, „Gift and Responsibility,” *The Political, Social, and Religious Thought of Russian „Samizdat” — An Anthology*, ed. Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shragin (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing Company, 1977), 548.

The idea of rebirth of conscience influenced certain members of the clergy in the mid-1960s to ask the Church hierarchy to reexamine its relationship with the Soviet government, which remained hostile toward religion. They criticized the passive position of the Russian Orthodox Church toward the government which, at the end of the 1950s, introduced a new wave of religious persecution. The neophytes understood the negative consequences that these internal Church divisions could produce on their mission among other members of the intelligentsia in Soviet society. But their strong belief and trust in the Church as the body of Christ and place of salvation which is, according to their beliefs, the real meaning of human life, did not allow them to leave the Church. As Aksenov says:

We can go out and honestly say to all outsiders both well-wishers and enemies: „Yes, there is much that is wrong in our house, but we remain in it and invite you into it too because the Church is the only house deserving of man, for this is God’s house and we have nowhere to go outside of it. For here are the words of eternal life.”⁸⁶

Finally, it is important to note that the religious dissident movement in which members of religious-philosophical Seminars participated, largely arose from particular elite members of Soviet society. It was neither huge in numbers nor influential among Soviet citizens in all regions of the USSR. However, existing under very specific and hostile conditions in the atheistic Soviet society, this nonconformist movement represented one form of resistance of the Russian Orthodox Church against the Soviet ideocratic communist society during one of the most difficult times of religious persecution in the Soviet Union. With the Seminars as their vehicles, the activists helped influence the Soviet government to initiate changes in its religious policy. Their success can be seen in the governmental help and participation in the official celebration of the one-thousandth anniversary of the baptism of the Rus in 1988.⁸⁷

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⁸⁶ Michael Meerson-Aksenov, „The Problem of the Church in Samizdat,” in *The Political, Social, and Religious Thought of Russian „Samizdat” — An Anthology*, ed. Michael Meerson-Aksenov and Boris Shragin (Belmont, MA: Norland Publishing Company, 1977), 541.

⁸⁷ Robert Horvath writing about the influence of the entire dissident movement for the post-Soviet Russia says: „Dissidents had a profound influence upon the course of change, and upon the outcome of that change. Russia’s relatively peaceful transition from totalitarianism was facilitated by the dissidents’ repudiation of the violent revolution, by their preoccupation with human rights, and by the fact that they served first as the symbolic axis of the emerging democratic opposition, and then as a restraining influence upon the post-Soviet leadership.” Robert Horvath, *The Legacy of Soviet Dissident: Dissidents, democratization and radical nationalism in Russia* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 7.

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