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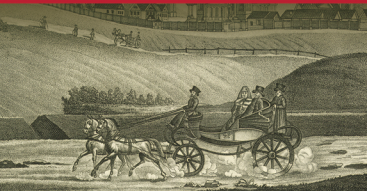


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THE CRISIS OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA

BIBIKOV'S SYSTEM FOR THE OLD BELIEVERS, 1841–1855

THOMAS MARSDEN



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IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA

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The Crisis of Religious Toleration in Imperial Russia

*Bibikov's System for the Old Believers,
1841–1855*

THOMAS MARSDEN

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In memory of Ronald and Marion Hope

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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
<i>Note to the Reader</i>	xv
Introduction	1
I. ORIGINS OF THE CRISIS: 1841–52	
1. The Belaia Krinitza Hierarchy	33
2. The Preobrazhenskoe Cemetery	56
3. The <i>Beguny</i> Commission and the Statistical Expeditions	83
II. THE CRISIS UNFOLDS: 1853–55	
4. Bibikov's System	121
5. The Failure of Legality	148
6. The Crimean War and the Domestic Enemy	169
7. The Offensive against the Capitalist-Fanatics	190
8. The End of Bibikov's System	213
Epilogue	244
Conclusion	255
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	261
<i>Index</i>	271

List of Illustrations

1. *I. S. Aksakov v gruppe chlenov komissii po delam sektantov. Neizvestnyi litograf po risunku A. V. Popova 1850 g. Otpechatano v Iaroslavskoi Gubernskoi tipografii*, Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii Dom) Rossiiskoi akademii nauk (IRLI RAN), Muzei, И.18055 32
2. *Portret Dmitriia Gavrilovicha Bibikova (1830-e gg.). Neizvestnyi litograf*, Otdel estampov, Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka, NLR: Э ЛадГП/5-6591 120

List of Abbreviations

ARCHIVES

GARF	Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii
IRLI	Institut Russkoi Literatury (Pushkinskii Dom) (Rukopisnyi otdel)
NART	Natsional'nyi Arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstana
RGIA	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv
RNB	Rossiiskaia Natsional'naia Biblioteka (otdel Rukopisei)
TsIAM	Tsentral'nyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv Moskvu

ARCHIVAL NOTATION

f.	<i>fond</i> (collection)
ek.	<i>ekspeditsiia</i> (department)
op.	<i>opis'</i> (inventory)
d.	<i>delo/edinita khraneniia</i> (file number)
l., ll.	<i>list, listy</i> (leaf; leaves)
ob.	<i>oborot</i> (verso)

PUBLISHED WORKS

Kel'siev, <i>SPS</i>	V. Kel'siev, <i>Sbornik pravitel'stvennykh svedenii o raskol'nikakh</i> , 4v. (London, 1860–2).
Mel'nikov, <i>PSS</i>	P. Mel'nikov, <i>Polnoe sobranie sochinenii P.I. Mel'nikova [Andreia Pecherskago]</i> 7v. (St Petersburg, 1909).
<i>PSZ</i>	<i>Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii: sobranie vtoroe</i> , 66v. (St Petersburg, 1830–84).
<i>Sbornik Mel'nikova</i>	<i>Sbornik v pamiat' P.I. Mel'nikova</i> , Deistviia Nizhegorodskoi Gubernskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Komissii, ix, 2v. (Nizhnii Novgorod, 1910).
<i>SP</i>	<i>Sobranie postanovlenii po chasti raskola</i> , 2v. (London, 1863).
<i>SZ</i>	<i>Svod zakonov rossiiskoi imperii poveleniem gosudaria imperatora Nikolaia Pervago sostavlennyyi</i> , 15v. (St Petersburg, 1835, 1842, 1857).

Note to the Reader

In most cases I have used the standard Library of Congress system of transliteration, with the exception of the names of individuals and places that are well known by their English equivalents; for example Emperor Nicholas, rather than Nikolai, and St Petersburg, rather than Sankt-Peterburg. All dates are given in the Old Style Julian Calendar, thirteen days behind the New Style Gregorian Calendar that was used in Western Europe.

Introduction

The political history of the last century of Imperial Russia tells of a succession of tsars—three Alexanders and two Nicholases—struggling, and ultimately failing, to preserve their divine, absolute, and imperial power within a European world whose peoples were increasingly denying their governments the use of such epithets. The tsars' resistance to political reform was so great that their inhabitation of Europe's long-nineteenth century can seem a matter of doubt. Were they and their governments not relics from the age of the *ancien régime* who, in turning their backs to the west after the defeat of Napoleon, shut themselves off from the course of its history? Of course they could not; and their struggles are most manifest in their attempts to give the autocracy the modern foundations that could keep it standing in the modern age. In contrast to the westernizing reforms of the eighteenth century, these were not just the personal projects of the autocrat, but were undertaken by a modernizing bureaucracy or in collaboration with an educated elite who sensed, and feared the consequences of, their isolation from the peasant population which constituted the majority of the Empire's inhabitants. That these efforts never gathered the necessary momentum to ensure the regime's survival or peaceful transformation was due to the vagaries of a system rooted in personal power—the capacity of which for innovation was, in any case, structurally and ideologically limited.

It was limited by the mixture of traditional and modern upon which the tsars hoped to preserve their divine, absolute, and imperial power. To face the challenge of popular sovereignty, they had increasing resort to the idea that they were divinely anointed to rule.¹ This bound them to the official state Church, whose worldly power and spiritual authority had been consistently undermined since Peter I had, in the cause of secular rationality, divided the civil and religious realms—confining the activities of churchmen to the latter realm, while ensuring their subordination to the former.² In the nineteenth century, the general trend was to further

¹ Engelstein, *Slavophile Empire* (Ithaca, 2009), pp. 8–11.

² Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 140.

exclude the Church from the civil sphere. Thus inhibited, there was also a large proportion of the Empire's subjects who the Orthodox Church could not claim as its own: Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Animist, and Shamanic communities characterized the outer reaches of the Empire, while in the historic Russian heartlands the prevalence of the dissent of the Old Believers created a national religious divide comparable in significance to the greatest in Europe.³ Neither state—imbued with ideas of secular rationality—nor society—to whom the Church was either completely alien or to whom its weaknesses were glaringly apparent—could be united on the basis of the regime's religious foundations.⁴

The tsars' absolute power, then, had to rest on the primacy of the state as an instrument of the imperial will. Here, too, a modern challenge confronted the regime in the form of constitutionalism; the arbitrariness of the autocratic state being the most constant charge of its opponents. In response the regime tried to demonstrate that the rule of law was compatible with unlimited autocracy. Nevertheless, as the tsars continued to see the value of the law in its ability to enhance their personal power, the inevitable development of a legal consciousness among an increasingly professionalized bureaucracy, and within an infant civil society, could not but prove limiting if the regime was to retain its pretensions to modern European legality. Moreover, in the act of state-building that was required to implement the rule of law—even in its most arbitrary sense as an extension of the tsar's personal will—an independent bureaucratic ethos was born. The tsar thus came to share his absolutism with the bureaucrat who sought new forms of legitimacy that did not necessarily correspond to the interests of the autocratic imperial polity, and which aroused new antagonisms in society.

Yet the growth of the state, and its ever greater intrusion into the lives of its subjects, was the only way to maintain the tsar's imperial power at a time when nationalism was shaking Empires and forming nations. So, while state-building and nation-building often went hand-in-hand, in Russia the one dominated and retarded the other.⁵ The regime attempted to rejuvenate the old bonds of dynastic loyalty by injecting them with nationalist content: as the century progressed it identified itself more

³ The revelations of the statistical expeditions of 1852, examined in Chapter 3, can be compared to the 1851 census of religious worship in Britain. Both seemed to show the greater vitality and growth of dissent in comparison to the state religion. Norman, 'Church and State since 1800', in Gilley and Sheils (eds.), *A History of Religion in Britain* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 272–82.

⁴ Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire* (London, 1997), pp. 236–45.

⁵ This is the argument of Hosking, *Russia*, pp. xix–xxv, and *passim*.

closely with the Russian people.⁶ However, as it continued to restrict popular political participation, to avoid both the demand for popular government and the disintegration of the Empire, nation-building could only remain a superficial statist endeavour imposed upon the population. It could not provide the mass support that was needed. Instead, these feeble attempts demonstrated that it was impossible 'for a traditionalist, conservative regime to equip itself with an ideology in the modern sense of the term.'⁷

This book is about the peculiar mixture of traditional and modernizing impulses that made up Russia's autocratic government in the nineteenth century, and how their interaction prevented it from finding solutions that could unite state and society behind the autocracy. Rather they led it to exacerbate divisions and engender crises; threatening the very powers whose preservation had become the tsars' sole rationale. This is what happened in the case of religious toleration and the Old Believers. From being an act of imperial discretion or 'condescension' (*sniskhozhdenie*)—to grant indulgence to the superstitions of an ignorant population—the toleration of Old Belief emerged in Russia in the 1840s as a question of legal right under the European influence which borders could not restrain. Without accepting modern liberal principles, which might threaten its political powers, the regime could not concede toleration on this basis. It therefore redefined and reinforced traditional religious policies and prejudices on the basis of modernizing impulses which not only excluded a liberal solution but demanded new heights of persecution. In the short term this led to crisis when, in 1853, a new 'system' was introduced by Nicholas I's authoritarian, but modernizing, Minister of Internal Affairs Dmitrii Bibikov to determine the government's policies towards the Old Believers. In the long term, it made Old Belief one of Russia's most pressing internal political questions. It remained so until 1905 when full religious toleration became a platform in the programme for revolutionary change.

That the toleration of the Old Believers should be a separate dilemma from the toleration of the other non-Orthodox faiths of the Empire was a result of the unique position of Old Belief from the perspectives of political legitimacy—religion, law, and nation—that have been outlined above.⁸ First, in claiming to be the true bearers of Russian Orthodoxy, the

⁶ See Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy* (Ithaca, 2002), pp. 124–5.

⁷ Ræff, *Understanding Imperial Russia* (New York, 1984), pp. 147–8.

⁸ There are numerous works exploring toleration in relation to the sects and foreign faiths. These include: Erkind, *Khlyst* (Moscow, 1998); Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom* (New York, 1999); Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation* (Washington D.C., 2004); Breyfogle, 'The Historical Parameters of Russian Religious Toleration', *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research* (July, 2001), 1–34; Stanislawski,

Old Believers posed the greatest challenge to the authority of the ruling Church.⁹ It would not countenance the existence of two competing Orthodoxies and looked upon the Old Believers as members of its flock who had temporarily fallen into heresy. The autocracy could not, then, grant Old Belief established status without alienating the Church and compromising its own claims to rule by divine decree. Secondly, while the Old Believers lacked the established legal status of the Empire's foreign faiths, they were granted a degree of civil and religious acceptance that was denied to the smaller, and more radical, dissenting sects. They thus constituted the only large proportion of the population whose relationship to the state was not defined by law. Finally, the vast majority of the Old Believers, the number of whom were estimated to be between one and twelve million in the mid-nineteenth century, were ethnic Russian peasants. Their presence was the most notable schism in the popular nation with which the regime increasingly sought to identify.

Bibikov's system—whose origins, implementation, and failure are the subjects of this book—aimed at nothing less than the eradication of Old Belief—the existence of which uniquely obstructed the development of a unified state and nation under the God-given authority of the tsar. In his system, state-building and nation-building briefly coalesced in an unprecedented attempt to bind together autocrat, state, and people. It demanded not passive obedience, but conscious acceptance of the regime through a neo-absolutist insistence that the divinely ordained pretensions of the tsar be universally recognized. It introduced a series of laws that criminalized the Old Believers' way of life and deprived them of their civil and economic rights. These were accompanied by innovations that allowed the state to intrude into the lives of its subjects as never before. Lastly, it centred the might of the Empire in the Russian heartlands, requiring that religious unity be enforced among ethnic Russians on the moral grounds of protecting the national spirit. The result was a period of religious persecution without parallel in the final century and a half of the Russian Empire. It was introduced with a fervour and arbitrariness that aroused such discontent among the Old Believers, and such condemnation from within government, that it could not last. Bibikov and his system were abandoned shortly after the death of Nicholas I in February 1855.

Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews (Philadelphia, 1983); Werth, *Margins*, and 'The Emergence of "Freedom of Conscience" in Imperial Russia', *Kritika*, 13.3 (2012), 585–610.

⁹ For the Church's constant fears about Old Belief, see Freeze, *The Parish Clergy* (Princeton, 1983).

Its duration of only two years—coming within the most reactionary period of the century's most reactionary reign—may explain why Bibikov's system has never been adequately examined or explained.¹⁰ It was implemented in the utmost secrecy, its existence known only to a select number of officials. Soon after it was revoked, the government began to look upon the system as an embarrassing aberration which was all but written out of official histories. The historian of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), I. Varadinov, devoted a whole volume to the treatment of religious dissent (which came under the MVD's jurisdiction), yet he declined to go into details about the cases of the 1840s or 1850s, writing that, as these investigations went beyond the normal sphere of the Ministry's actions, they would 'not be completely understandable to us.'¹¹ Nevertheless, he acknowledged that a change had occurred. From 1841—the year in which Bibikov's famously progressive predecessor Lev Perovskii became Minister—the government had, he argued, begun to look upon Old Belief as a political rather than a religious phenomenon.¹² Based on the conclusions of Perovskii and his officials, Nicholas I met with Bibikov in February 1853, and together they decided that Old Belief was not a sickness of the Church but a sickness of the state. This was the interpretative shift that led to the initiation of Bibikov's system. The bureaucrats of the MVD who went on to implement it accused the Old Believers at various times of being socialists, communists, and conspirators who plotted the assassination of the tsar and awaited revolution. Having rejected the idea that they were motivated by religious feeling, Bibikov prosecuted the most prominent Old Believers as political criminals who sought to undermine the state.

In the age of religious toleration, the association between religious divergence and political sedition has often been made in the cause of policies of intolerance. In the years after the Restoration, the idea that the English dissenters' rejection of the established church concealed a more sinister aversion to the civil powers and the monarchy drew strength from their historical connection with the parliamentary cause.¹³ In France, in

¹⁰ There are two studies devoted to the politics of Old Belief in this period and these have not adequately recognized the fundamental shift that occurred with the introduction of Bibikov's system, nor utilized the documents that could explain it. Vasil'evskii, *Gosudarstvennaia sistema* (Kazan', 1914) and Ershova, *Starobriadchestvo i vlast'* (Moscow, 1999). Pyzhikov's recent study of Old Belief touches on many of the episodes that are examined in this book; however, he does not examine their relation to the policy changes that occurred. Pyzhikov, *Grani Russkogo raskola* (Moscow, 2013).

¹¹ Varadinov, *Istoriia*, v.8 (St. Petersburg, 1863) pp. 2–3.

¹² Varadinov, *Istoriia*, p. 57.

¹³ Marshall, *John Locke* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 442–9.

the early decades of the nineteenth century, both liberals and conservatives who sought to restrain the Jesuits made use of an anti-Jesuit myth rooted in history that associated the order with anarchy and regicide. The acceptance of this conspiracy theory served to reconcile its propagators with the revolutionary past and to engage with broad modern-day dilemmas.¹⁴ In Russia too, a past in which religious and political conflict were interwoven was utilized to create a contemporary image of the Old Believers that was moulded more by the features of modern revolutionary threats than by historical continuity. The accuracy of this image in its relationship to the real aspirations of the Old Believers, political or otherwise, is not the subject of this book. The aim is to explain why the bureaucrats of the MVD saw a new relevance in the Russian Orthodox schism, *raskol*, that had originated exactly two hundred years before the implementation of Bibikov's system, and why they presented the modern-day schismatics, *raskol'niki*, in such threatening political terms. It is necessary, however, to briefly examine the history of Old Belief, in order to show that the image of the Old Believers that lay behind the crisis of religious toleration did not correspond to the objective reality, but was partially rooted in a distant past.

THE ORTHODOX SCHISM

In the 1650s Patriarch Nikon, supported by Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, attempted to increase the prestige of Russian Orthodoxy by initiating a series of reforms to restore Russian liturgical practice to its original purity. Assisted by Greek and Ukrainian clerics, Nikon sought to eradicate mistakes and innovations that had crept into the Russian prayerbooks over the course of centuries. The changes he introduced were mainly ritualistic in character, affecting the practices of worship such as the method of making the sign of the cross and the number of alleluias said during the praising of the Lord. Nikon's opponents accused him of innovation and associated the new practices with foreign influences. This gave seemingly minor changes a huge importance; they represented the fall of the Russian Church to the heresy of the west. No longer could Moscow be viewed as the third Rome, or claim to fulfil the word of God on earth. The reforms thus led to schism. Those who attempted to preserve the pre-reform practices were anathematized in 1667, they were denounced as *raskol'niki*, schismatics, and heretics. They saw themselves,

¹⁴ Cubitt, *The Jesuit Myth* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 56–65; 311.

however, as Old Believers, the true bearers of Russian Orthodoxy in its original form.¹⁵

Condemned by Church and state, and fiercely persecuted by both, the first decades of the schism saw the Old Believers take part in a number of violent uprisings in which they joined forces with the regime's political opponents. Even then, however, the mood of the dissenters was primarily eschatological, not political, and rather than seeking to confront their persecutors they fled and found support among the peasantry—establishing dissenting communities in the wilderness. They believed that, with the fall of the true Church in Russia, the reign of the Antichrist had begun, and they were now living in the last times. When they came into contact with the forces of the state, their most militant response tended to be self-immolation. Their apocalyptic expectations could not, however, last interminably and the Old Believers began to adapt their beliefs to the prospect of a more permanent existence on earth.¹⁶

This adaptation split the Old Believer movement into two distinct branches: the priestly, *popovtsy*, and the priestless, *bespopovtsy*.¹⁷ The eschatological beliefs of the Old Believers were most strongly preserved among the *bespopovtsy*. Their teachings gave permanent shape to a Church existing in the last times. It could not, they argued, have a clergy for, with the fall of the Orthodox Church, a true clergy had ceased to exist. They therefore rejected those rites that required a priest: communion and marriage, and their spiritual elders taught celibacy. The idea that the reign of the Antichrist had begun remained an important part of their faith. They sought to preserve their separation from his world through rituals of purification, and most significantly through their refusal to continue the Orthodox custom of saying prayers for the tsar. They argued that to do so was against the will of God since, consciously or not, the tsar worshipped the Antichrist and fulfilled his will.

This dogma brought the unwanted attentions of the secular powers and the most frequent accusations of political disloyalty. As the *bespopovtsy* adapted to a worldly existence, however, this 'political' teaching came under increasing pressure. From the 1730s, the Old Believer leaders began

¹⁵ For a detailed history of Nikon's reforms, see Kutuzov, *Tserkovnaia reforma* (Moscow, 2003). For an English language history, see Michels, *At War with the Church* (Stanford, 1999). An excellent introduction to the complex cultural, theological, and social world of the Old Believers is Crummey, *Old Believers in a Changing World* (DeKalb, 2011).

¹⁶ Robert Crummey has examined this process among the *bespopovtsy* of northern Russia. Crummey, *The Old Believers and the world of the Antichrist* (Madison, 1970).

¹⁷ The question of priests became crucial once the initial generation of clerics who opposed Nikon's reforms had died out. The only bishop to have joined the dissenters was killed in captivity before he could ordain further priests.

to compromise with the state over the question of prayers.¹⁸ Although this led to new divisions, by the last decades of the eighteenth century, the most successful branches of the *bespopovtsy*—the *Fedoseevtsy* and the *Pomortsy*—had modified their beliefs. They stipulated that their followers must say prayers for the tsar, although in a modified form, and rather than rejecting marriage altogether they permitted various forms of partnership among their followers.¹⁹

The *popovtsy* made even less likely political dissidents, although their relative proximity to official Orthodoxy ensured that the Church perceived them as a still greater threat. Among them, the eschatological teaching of the early Old Believers was increasingly insignificant. Rather than recognizing the need to adapt the Church to the last times, they sought to give the old faith a permanently established basis. This required the fulfilment of all the old Orthodox rituals, and most importantly it demanded a functioning clergy. Without a bishop to ordain priests, the *popovtsy* could only obtain clerics by persuading those who had been ordained in the Orthodox Church to join them. In order to justify their use of these ‘fugitive priests’, it was decided that the fall of the Church had not been so severe as previously thought. This decision not only eased the Old Believers’ consciences in their use of the priests, but also enabled them to say prayers for the tsar in the usual manner.²⁰ They hoped that he might grant their faith official recognition under the supervision of the state.²¹

RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

As it became clear that the Old Believers did not seek to undermine the state, the early years of fierce persecution gave way to a more regulated repression under Peter I. His division of the religious and civil spheres enabled him to make allowance for the fact that the Old Believers’ enterprising communities could play a beneficial economic role, and he

¹⁸ Crummey, *The Old Believers*, pp. 159–83.

¹⁹ Gur’ianova, *Krest’ianskii antimonarkhicheskii protest* (Novosibirsk, 1988), pp. 17–76. See also the rules of the *Fedoseevtsy* in Moscow and Riga. Podmazov, “‘Pravila Pauluchchi’ kak istoricheskii istochnik”, in Ivanov (ed.), *Rizhskii Staroobriadcheskii Sbornik* (Riga, 2011), pp. 50–8.

²⁰ Subbotin, *Istoriia tak nazyvaemogo Avstriiskago ili Belokrinitskago Sviashchenstva* (Moscow, 1895), pp. i, 7–39; Mel’nikov, *Kratkaia istoriia drevlepravoslavnoi (staroobriadcheskoi) tserkvi* (Barnaul, 1999), pp. 13–157.

²¹ This was the common appeal of the *popovtsy*’s petitions, see, for example, from the Ekaterinburg Old Believers in 1838. *SP*, pp. 195–8.

introduced a system in which registered Old Believers could practise their faith in return for paying a double poll tax.²² This system was abandoned under Catherine II who, guided by the ideals of the enlightenment, looked upon the Old Believers not as a subversive element but as the victims of superstition.²³ The Old Believers were now granted the same general rights as all the subjects of the Empire. Although this did not amount to full religious freedom—as previously, only registered Old Believers were free to practise their faith without harassment, and the law still prohibited the building of chapels or open manifestations of faith—the new conditions of tolerance encouraged the dissenters to assert themselves throughout the Empire. The number of registered Old Believers increased dramatically. They appeared in the cities, taking advantage of the new freedoms to establish a notable presence in trade. They requested and received permission to build chapels and, as a result, the focus of their spiritual life shifted from the concealment of the Empire's borders to its interior.²⁴

Most important in this regard was the foundation in Moscow of the *bespopovtsy* Preobrazhenskoe Cemetery, belonging to the *Fedoseevtsy* branch, and the Rogozhskoe Cemetery of the *popovtsy*. Called cemeteries due to the circumstances of their establishment in the 1770s at the time of the Moscow plague, they were in reality much more than this. Chapels were built to serve the cemeteries and around them monastic communities developed. Over the following decades, Old Believer settlements formed around these religious centres, populated by thousands. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, they were the spiritual, social, and economic foci for rapidly expanding communities, and had become the most influential religious centres of the two most successful branches of Old Belief in Russia. To the outside world they were symbols of the increased civic acceptability and religious power of Old Belief.²⁵ They represented the *modus vivendi* that had developed between the Old Believers and the state.

By the first decades of the nineteenth century, indulgence or 'condescension' had been established as the government's official attitude towards

²² Crummev, *The Old Believers*, pp. 58–70.

²³ de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London, 1981), pp. 516–17; Dixon, *Catherine the Great* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 79–80; Paert, "Two or Twenty Million", *Ab Imperio*, 3 (2006), pp. 80–2.

²⁴ The official number of dissenters grew from 42,972 in 1764 to 827,721 in 1826. Paert, *Old Believers: Religious dissent and gender in Russia, 1760–1850* (Manchester, 2003), p. 61; 'Schislenie raskol'nikov', in Mel'nikov, *PSS*, vii, p. 392.

²⁵ On the Rogozhskoe cemetery, see Mel'nikov, *PSS*, vii, 204–49; Iukhimenko, *Starobriadcheskii tsentr za Rogozhskoi Zastavoiu* (Moscow, 2005); The foundation and growth of the Preobrazhenskoe cemetery is described in Popov, *Materialy dlia istorii* (Moscow, 1870); and Ryndziunskii, *Gorodskoe grazhdanstvo* (Moscow, 1955), pp. 455–88.

the religious dissenters. Alexander I described this form of toleration as 'an unalterable law'—one which lay at the heart of the regime's modern European identity.²⁶ Even the Church realized that it could no longer agitate for persecution on the basis of religious truth alone.²⁷ Nevertheless such a toleration was not backed up by firm principles of religious freedom; rather, in the case of the Old Believers, it was understood as the endurance of a temporary evil rooted in popular ignorance, which would die out with the spread of enlightenment.²⁸ For all of Catherine's and Alexander's indulgence towards the Old Believers' spiritual needs, they did not countenance giving Old Belief established status on its own terms. Thus, while the Old Believers' religious structures had become increasingly open and organized, the inability of the government to rethink Church–state relations meant that their faith could only be integrated into the state through the medium of the ruling Church's authority.²⁹

This led to the contrivance of *edinoverie*—the unified faith—a proposition that allowed the Old Believers to have their own churches if they appealed to the ecclesiastical authorities to supply them with a priest. The church would come under the authority of the Orthodox hierarchy, but the priest would carry out his duties using the pre-Nikonian liturgical books. *Edinoverie* was not, however, an attractive prospect for the Old Believers who were not prepared to place themselves in the care of the Church that branded them heretical.³⁰ Once within its power they could have no hope of preserving the faith of their ancestors. As a result, *edinoverie* made little headway after it was officially approved at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It would, however, become increasingly significant as the regime's attitude towards Old Belief changed once again, and the conditional endurance that had been granted to the dissenters' religious organizations began to be withdrawn.

²⁶ *SP*, 1, pp. 44–6.

²⁷ See a report prepared for the Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod in the 1830s. It recognized that 'intolerance of the *raskol* does not correspond to our present convictions according to European monarchical principles.' Filaret Drozdov—Mitropolit Moskovskii, 1782–1867', *Russkaia Starina*, 51 (August, 1886), pp. 292–4.

²⁸ On the distinction between these types of toleration, see Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration came to the West* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 1–13.

²⁹ For a more detailed analysis of the shortcomings of Catherine's toleration, see Riazhev, *Prosveshchennyi absolutizm* and I.D. Bochenkova, 'Gosudarstvennaia politika v otnoshenii staroverov v poslednii chetverti XVIII—nachale XIXv' (Moscow, Candidate thesis, 1999).

³⁰ The most detailed history of *edinoverie* is S-ii, *Istoricheskii ocherk edinoveriia* (St. Petersburg, 1867).

This turn against the principles of toleration has generally been located in the last years of Alexander I's reign. Just as he abandoned his plans for political reform, and looked with new suspicion upon the westernizing influences he had once encouraged, so he became more susceptible to the conservative arguments of the Church about the harm of the Old Believers, and began to rescind the freedoms with which he had previously favoured their communities. In this way, it has been argued, he set off a repressive trend that would gain momentum in the hands of the more famously reactionary Nicholas I.³¹ There is much truth in this interpretation. The measures which Alexander introduced in the last years of his reign—increasing supervision over the Old Believers and limiting their civil rights—certainly helped to shape the religious politics of his younger brother. This has led, however, to the false impression that the religious policies of Nicholas I merely followed the inexorable logic of events that had been set in motion in the early 1820s. In this interpretation, the final excesses of Bibikov's system merely appear as the denouement of a policy introduced some three decades earlier.³²

Alexander I's turn against toleration has, however, been exaggerated, and it was during the reign of Nicholas that the fundamental shifts, which have so far been overlooked, occurred. Religious toleration was an important part of Russia's modern identity. It was deeply, if awkwardly, embedded in the values of the central agencies and the governing elite, and it should not be assumed that the autocratic regime could shrug it off with ease. Alexander's restrictive measures demanded that more attention be turned towards the harmful social and moral consequences—considered civil crimes—that were attributed to the Old Believers' faith. They were not directed against the beliefs themselves. The idea that the Old Believers should not be persecuted for reasons of faith remained sacrosanct. Indeed, towards the end of his reign, in 1822, Alexander introduced the measure of indulgence that most offended the Church: he ordered the authorities to allow fugitive priests to serve the *popovtsy*.³³ Just before he died, new directives were being prepared by the Committee of Ministers to ensure that the Old Believers were not persecuted for carrying out their religious rites.

³¹ The arguments for Alexander I's turn away from toleration can be found in Vasil'evskii, *Gosudarstvennaia Sistema*, pp. 5–16; Pera, 'The Secret Committee on the Old Believers', in Bartlett and Hartley (eds.), *Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment* (London, 1990), pp. 222–41; Paert, *Old Believers*, p. 187; and Nichols, 'Old Belief Under Surveillance', in Michels and Nichols, *Russia's Dissident Old Believers* (Minneapolis, 2009), pp. 183–95.

³² Paert, *Old Believers*, p. 225.

³³ *SP*, 1, pp. 52–3.

NICHOLAS I

Nicholas confirmed this as law in 1826, and in 1832, with the publication of the Digest of Laws, the idea of toleration was given a still firmer foundation as one of the 'Fundamental State Laws.' At the same time, the formula which was to serve as the general rule for the Old Believers' toleration for the rest of the century appeared for the first time.³⁴ Even the provincial secret committees, established from 1831 to coordinate the authorities' dealings in the affairs of the *raskol'niki*, that are generally taken as evidence of Nicholas's determination to suppress the Old Believers, were intended, rather, to ensure the consistent application of the law. The committees were sometimes introduced in defence of religious toleration; a response to the misplaced zeal of the local powers.³⁵

Yet, that the accession of Nicholas I did lead to the increasing restriction of the Old Believers' religious life is not in doubt. Unlike his predecessors, he refused to indulge their spiritual needs. This meant that their unofficial religious organization, which had not been legally sanctioned, was newly vulnerable. Nicholas immediately abandoned Alexander's permissive attitude to the fugitive priests, and extended the long-standing prohibition on building chapels to making repairs to those already in existence. As the *popovtsy's* supply of priests and chapels diminished, so *edinoverie* was placed before them as the only means of satisfying their needs. It was also enforced on some of the largest Old Believer monasteries, which fell foul of the new restrictions in the 1830s and 1840s.

At work were two trends which have long been associated with Nicholas's rule: the urge to regulate the operations of the police state, and to reassert the alliance between Church and tsar. One inclined towards the west: the creation of an educated bureaucracy that was guided by secular laws. The other to native tradition, and a path rooted in the Orthodox faith.³⁶ The urge to regulate and define by law threatened an Old Believer organization that had thrived under the unofficial indulgence of the imperial powers; while Nicholas's attempt to re-sanctify the autocracy—an endeavour that derived from a deep personal piety—precluded legal

³⁴ It stated that the '*raskol'niki* should not be persecuted for their opinions of faith, but are forbidden to corrupt anyone into the *raskol* or commit any impertinence against the Orthodox Church.' *SZ* (1835), v.14, z.46.

³⁵ See cases in Kharkov and Vitebsk, 1845–6. RGIA, f.1473, op.1, d.27, ll.108–9, 243–4.

³⁶ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power* (Princeton, 1995), v.1, pp. 380–1.

solutions that might stabilize the position of the Old Believers but would threaten the integrity of the Church.³⁷

It may not seem surprising that this resulted in new excesses of persecution. The urge to regulate by law was tempered by Nicholas's determination that the law would not impede the moral or political rights of the autocracy. On the most important matters, he showed little inclination to follow the legal order or to create new laws via the established consultative process. Instead, he ruled by secret committee and personal adjutant: a method that might have the same end of regulation, but which opened the way to whatever arbitrary means were deemed necessary to achieve it.³⁸ So, when it proved difficult to regulate the Old Believers' organizations by lawful means alone—in part due to the legal foundations that Nicholas had given to toleration—new solutions were sought and applied.

As to the notion of the Old Believers' political dissidence, this has rightly been associated with the development—in correspondence to Nicholas's own faith in his divine calling, and due to the need for an ideological response to nationalism—of an 'Official Nationality' that defined religion through a political prism.³⁹ The famous trinity of 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality', which was devised by the future Minister of Public Instruction Count S.S. Uvarov (1786–1855) in 1832, was a hollow political faith which valued nationality (*narodnost*) and Orthodoxy by their commitment to, and therefore according to their legitimization of, the dynastic autocratic order.⁴⁰ Under its influence, the rejection of the ruling Church could be seen both as a denial of the tsar's legitimacy, and as a reason to look upon the Old Believers as a group who must be excluded from the national body.⁴¹ When the revolutions of 1848 brought further resort to the traditional idea of 'Holy Rus' as a means to distinguish its path from that of the west, Nicholas became ever more susceptible to those officials who sought promotion by presenting Old Belief as a dangerous political threat.⁴² His statesmen, meanwhile,

³⁷ On Nicholas's personal piety and attempt to surround the autocracy with a religious aura, see Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, pp. 385–9; and Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality* (Berkeley, 1959), pp. 83–91, 226.

³⁸ Lincoln, *Nicholas I* (London, 1978), pp. 76–92.

³⁹ On Official Nationality as a response to western nationalism, see Engelstein, *Slavo-phile Empire*, pp. 1–11; Zorin, *Kormia dvuglavogo orla* (Moscow, 2004), pp. 337–74.

⁴⁰ Hosking, *Russia*, pp. 146–8.

⁴¹ On the relationship between Official Nationality and the government's increasing intervention into the lives of the Old Believers see: Ershova, *Staroobriadchestvo*, pp. 9, 133; Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I*, p. 224; Zorin, *Kormia dvuglavogo orla* (Moscow, 2004), p. 366; Paert, *Old Believers*, pp. 184–6.

⁴² For cursory arguments along these lines, see Ershova, *Staroobriadchestvo*, pp. 139–40, and Crummey, *The Old Believers*, pp. 211–15.