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ABSTRACT

Since the reign of Peter the Great, the Russian sovereign, be it Tsar, Soviet or Putin, has required demonstrations of 'loyalty' that evidence subjects' interior as well as exterior states. This article explores, through historical and current ethnographic examples, how Old Believers, a dissenting movement of Russian Orthodox Christians, have sought to reconcile this worldly demand with their overarching allegiance to the Kingdom of God, and their refusal to acknowledge a separation between the spiritual and the temporal. This dichotomy is particularly problematized around the swearing of oaths of fealty and the giving and receiving of decorations and orders that vouchsafe loyalty to state or sovereign.

KEYWORDS

Old Believers; sovereignty; Third Rome; oath; Hobbes

Introduction

From the time of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, when the concept of a Russian *imperium* first began to emerge from the cradle of late medieval Muscovy, loyalty, as Richard Wortman, Mikhail Dolbilov and other historians of the Russian empire have argued, became the central problem as well as the paramount value for the rulers of the Russian Imperial state.[1] But, as Dolbilov has pointed out in a recent departure from Wortman's focus on the ceremonies of loyalty, the markers, forms and the external accoutrements of loyal subjects were not enough to satisfy the Russian sovereigns' demands. From Peter the Great onwards, the Romanovs insisted that their subjects were loyal 'by conscience' (*za sovest'*), that is, that they held loyal emotions inside themselves (in their heart, souls, etc.).[2] That is why those particular material operators by means of which a subject's internal loyal or disloyal states were constituted and evidenced became an intense site of concern for Peter and his successors. The signifiers in this hermeneutics of loyalty were those same acts that anthropologists often single out as key to a culture's interpretive regime: speech acts (oaths, imprecations, congratulations) and gifts (the receipt, refusal and solicitation thereof).

During the four centuries of transformation of Russia's imperial formation (in this periodization we include the U.S.S.R.), there is arguably a relative continuity in the hermeneutic of loyalty by means of which the allegiance of subjects 'by conscience' has been read off certain behaviours. And during these four centuries, Old Believers have always been placed in a particularly ambiguous and difficult position in their relations with the state and its institutions. For while, on the one hand, Old Believers have an abiding conviction in the sanctity of Russia and its sacred-historical mission; on the other, their allegiance is

CONTACT Dominic A. Martin dominic.martin@cantab.net Higher School of Economics (Saint Petersburg), 17 Promyshlennaya Ulitsa, Room 105, 198099 Saint Petersburg, Russia

above all to the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth over which Christ reigns sovereign, where the Tsar only stands in as His vicar insofar as he possesses the charisma of divine election and lives as a model of superlative piety. To the extent that the worldly powers to which they are subject deviate from this divine ideal, Old Believers' covenant with God usually trumps their obligations to the temporal powers.

Over the centuries, partly the Old Believers' tragedy and partly the engine of their development has been that, for them, the worldly 'civil' realm must be placed second to God's domain, despite their earnest desire to live an all-encompassing Russian religious life in the service of a holy Tsar in a divinely elected kingdom, in which the two realms ceaselessly converge. The split between these two value spheres coincided with, and was exacerbated by, Peter's call for his subjects to ally themselves to the sovereign with a quasi-religious devotion, in their hearts and souls, 'by good conscience' (*za sovest'*). In this depth hermeneutic, the Old Believers became periodic objects of suspicion, even when they did their utmost to demonstrate their allegiance to the powers, reappearing in the governmental gaze as a 'state within a state'. These symbolic and historical divisions seem to have left Old Believers up to the present day with the abiding tragic dilemma by which they must choose to be either loyal to God or loyal to the emperor.

The group of Russian religious dissenters known as the Old Believers formed in the middle of the seventeenth century in reaction to liturgical reforms that accompanied the first attempt to transform Muscovy into the Russian Empire. Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich was advised that his colonizing ambitions, which were directed to the South towards Byzantium, would be helped if he enforced Orthodox religious unity by bringing the Slavonic liturgy in line with the Greek version. His reforms provoked a fierce protest amongst the higher echelons of the priestly clergy who held to the doctrine of Russian religious and national exceptionalism, a vision in which Moscow was the 'Third Rome', God's last chosen Kingdom. This priestly religious conflict also touched the Russian Orthodox masses, many of whom at the same time were facing enserfment and 'internal colonization'.

As a result of this historical conjuncture, during the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, the Old Belief became intertwined with most of the anti-state and anti-imperial causes, peasant rebellions and *jacqueries* that arose in the Tsar's lands in the early modern period. Old Belief as a fully fledged ideology of not only religious but also civilizational dissent crystallized during the reign of Peter the Great, the architect of the Russian Empire. Peter I self-consciously constructed his Empire as the mirror opposite image of everything that the Old Believers and the stalwarts of Old Muscovy held sacred. He abolished the office of Patriarch and, with the formation of the Synod, made the Orthodox Church a branch of the State; he held drunken, jesting synods that aped the sacred gatherings of the Church (Perrie 2014). He banned beards and traditional Russian dress and imposed on wearers of the latter (mainly Old Believers) a double tax, the collection of which was aided by a census that, pious Russians feared, entered them into the calculus of the anti-Christ.

Peter's reforms signalled a break at a symbolic level: if until the advent of his reign the tsar had been the representative of God on earth and called 'his most-gentle holy tsar' (*tishiyashii batushka*), then Peter billed himself as a mortal earthly God (*zemnoi bog*) and took on the conspicuously non-Orthodox title of 'Sovereign Emperor' (*gosudar' imperator*) (Cherniavsky 1959). Russia before Peter was referred to as 'Rus' or 'Holy Rus' (*svyataya rus'*); after him, it became the 'Russian Empire' (*rossiiskaya imperia*) (Cherniavsky 1961).

The ideological opposition between Peter and the Old Believers appeared at the level of material ritual practice. Peter took over the form of religious rites and technicalized them with a state-oriented function. For instance, the sacrament of confession to an Orthodox spiritual Father became a form of policing the population when, in 1721, Orthodox priests were obliged to report any 'words or deeds' that were uttered against the sovereign in the confessional (Smirnov 1913). Similar prayers for and oaths to the Tsar became key indicators of civil allegiance and obedience, as we will see further below.

The classical theorist of sovereignty, Thomas Hobbes, acknowledged that there are those peoples, such as the biblical Jews and God's elect, who make a compact not with a temporal sovereign, but with God's Kingdom on Earth: 'those that are loyal, and do not violate their allegiance sworn to God, then by circumcision, and afterwards in the New Covenant by baptism' (Hobbes 1981, 444). Hobbes identified the Eucharist as the primary mechanism by which God's loyal subjects signify their allegiance:

> because we have need of being often put in mind of our deliverance, and of our allegiance, the sacraments of commemoration [Eucharist] have need to be reiterated. And these are the principle Sacrament, and as it were the solemn oath we make of our allegiance. (Hobbes 1981, 451)

Hobbes, ever the materialist, was eager to point out that God's Kingdom is not some metaphysical abstraction, but a political government of God's people on Earth: 'the Kingdom of God is a civil common-wealth where God himself is sovereign by virtue first of the Old, and since of the New Covenant, wherein he reigneth by his vicar, or lieutenant' (Hobbes 1981, 484).

This overriding allegiance to God, the 'solemn oath' to whom is conveyed through the receipt of the Eucharist, presents Old Believers with a difficulty when they are required to show their loyalty to fallen worldly sovereigns. The paradigmatic arena in which this difficulty arises is the military rites that empires and their colonizing impulse depend upon. It was Peter the Great who turned Russia into a modern military power by reforming the army and navy on the model of the absolutist monarchies of Europe. Yet, the forms and rituals that embellished these forces took their inspiration from Ancient Rome. The central rite of loyalty that the armies of eighteenth-century Europe took over from Ancient Rome was the oath of allegiance. The main gift-giving ceremony that the absolutist militaries borrowed from both the Republic and the Caesars to reward and to evidence loyalty was the award of decorations, medals and orders. But Rome also passed down to the modern army, albeit in reformed guise, the kernel of those modes of discipline and comportment that turn a man, or a Christian, into a loyal soldier: from the way one stands and walks, what clothes are permitted on one's body, to whether a day's or a year's growth are permitted on one's face.

According to the classicist Teresa Morgan, in Greco-Roman societies the relationship between armies and their commanders was expressed in the language of *fides/pistes*. This keyword of antiquity was a multivalent and polysemous term that could be variously translated as trust, friendship or loyalty, and signified an institutionalized relationship, rather than necessarily a cognitive or emotional or internal state. In reference to military contexts, Morgan translates *fides/pistes* as 'loyalty', since it reflects 'the dominant aspect of obedience in military *fides/pistes,* and the fact that armies throughout antiquity swear oaths to their commanders' (Morgan 2015, 80). Morgan warns modern readers not to

impute to these sources the internal cognitive and affective aspects suggested by the use of this language. *Fides/pistes* is also the New Testament word for 'Faith', with all of the novel Pauline implication of what takes place in the heart and soul of a believer. But Morgan insists that for pagan Romans, when something more than loyalty was implied, the difference was not between sincere internal states and external ceremony, but between two types of relationship: 'that which is demanded by certain roles and that which can develop regardless of role, rather than between exterior and interior aspects of the relationship' (Morgan 2015, 81).

Such theorists as Giorgio Agamben and Émile Benveniste have identified the oath as a central operator between the putative 'inside' (thoughts, feelings, identity) of a subject and its 'outside' (speech, bodily postures, gestures), and thereby also the link between internal and external forms of loyalty. For the Ancients, the oath was a *devotio*, an act of self-consecration (Agamben 2011, 30). The efficacy of the oath did not depend on the internal intentions of the person who gave the oath, but actualized an automatic performative effect: by the very fact of pronouncing the oath, one became *devotio/sacratio*. An oath usually contains several components, including the name of God and a curse in the event of the breaking of the oath. Agamben has highlighted an ambiguity that runs through the Ancients' language of oath, curse and devotion whereby one can flip into the other, its antonym. The same ambiguity exists in the Russian language: to utter an oath (*klyatva*) is also to curse. This linguistic aporia suggests that there is the chance that, when one self-consecrates, one at the same time self-curses. The early Christians were aware of the possibility of rendering oneself accursed (anathema) by the technique of the oath/curse, and of using God's Name in vain. St James (James 5:12) reminded the faithful of the evangelical ban on the oath and the Lord's commandment (Matthew 5:33–37) that their speech should take the form of 'yes, yes, no, no', which in the original Greek appears as the symmetrically opposite formula to the oath (Agamben 2011, 42). The *fideo* of Christianity ('I believe … ') has therefore from the beginning been counter-posed to the 'I swear … ' of the Roman legions.

One sees the transference of the Roman techniques and ideas of loyalty even in a deeply Russian Christian context. In the correspondence between Ivan the Terrible and Prince Andrei Kurbsky, the issue of loyalty is discussed throughout. Prince Kurbsky had betrayed the Tsar by fleeing from Russia to take the side of the Lithuanians. Kurbsky justified his defection by sending Tsar Ivan a text from Cicero on the propriety and loyalty of rulers to the people in which the Roman idea of *fides*-loyalty is elaborated. This is rendered into Russian as *predanie* [devotion] (Fennell 1955, 213).[3] But the devoted loyalist can metamorphose with the slip of a phoneme into its opposite, the traitor (*predatel'*), by virtue of the inherent ambivalence in the technology of devotion, the oath. In the context of a Christian kingdom, sixteenth-century Muscovy, this antique pagan technique gets grafted onto Christian ceremony: hence, Prince Kurbsky's complaint that the oath of loyalty that Ivan extracted from him renders not the Prince into an accursed traitor, but the Tsar:

> And that which you write calling us traitors, for we were forced by you to kiss the cross, you have the custom that if someone doesn't give an oath he will receive a terrible death. I give you this answer: 'all the wise are agreed that if someone by coercion is forced to give an oath (*prisyagat'*) or to swear an oath (*klyanyat'sya*), then it is not the one who kisses the cross that commits the sin but the one who forces'. (Fennell 1955, 207)

This episode marks a turning point when the Middle Ages of Holy Muscovy start to move into the early modern era of Imperial colonization, a point at which the conflict between imperial ambitions and the demands of Christian brotherhood get condensed around the concern for the oath.[4]

In the remainder of this article, we will take three Old Believer case studies and describe how the dilemmas over to what, or to whom, these believers and congregations remain loyal are but the small fissures that run down the fault-line that for two millennia has stretched between the *imperium* and the *ecclesia*, between the state and Church, between that which is due to the Lord and that which is due to Caesar. We will first examine the history of the Chapel (*Chasovennye*) Old Believers, a historical recounting that is stimulated by the comment of a current follower of that tradition. We will then describe the conflicting loyalties of a young Old Believer as he underwent his compulsory Russian army service. This personal vignette will expand, lastly, into the broad historical sweep of the travails and tragedies of the Priestly Old Believers of the Belokrinits hierarchy as they have tried to accommodate minimally to the demands of the Russian imperial sovereign without renouncing their abiding loyalty to God.

Ambiguous oaths: The Chapel Old Believers

On an overnight bus journey to Arsenyev, North Primorskii Kray, I sat beside Ivan S, an Old Believer who belonged to the *Chasovennye* [Chapel] denomination, a group of strict and devout Old Believers that lives without priests. The town to which we were heading was named after Captain Arsenyev, the Russian officer who first explored and mapped this region with the aid of his loyal native guide, Dersu Usala. Arsenyev in his writings mentions that some intrepid Russian Old Believers had already started to settle in Ussuriysk Province, an area which later became known as the Maritime Province (Primorskii Kray). In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, more than 10,000 Priestless Old Believers settled in the North of Primorskii Kray in over fifty remote settlements along the Bikin and Samarga rivers (cf. Argudyaeva 2000).

Ivan S lived in Samarga, one of these original Old Believer settlements. But although his family and community was descended from the first Old Believers who migrated to this region, his community of eight Old Believer families had only moved from West Siberia to Samarga in the 2000s. It had taken almost 70 years for this community of Old Believers to return to Samarga. The reason for this prolonged gap was that Ivan S belonged to a group of Chapel Old Believers that, following a sustained peasant rebellion against collectivization, fled Soviet power in the 1930s and sought sanctuary in Northern Manchuria. These exiles had established a village called Romanovka within the territory of the Japanese puppet state. When the Red Army occupied this village in August 1945, many of the male population were arrested and sent to Gulags. The more fortunate inhabitants who escaped this fate proceeded on to Harbin whence, in the 1950s when the Chinese communist authorities began to take a dim view of the White anti-Bolshevik emigration, they emigrated onward to the Americas. This trip, which was sponsored by the Red Cross, led the *Romanovsty* to Brazil, and thence to Bolivia, where a community of Chapel Old Believers lives to this day. Yet, thanks to the Russian government's campaign to bring overseas Russians back to the 'homeland', these exiled *Romanovtsy* in Bolivia started to return

in 2009 and settled in the North of the Maritime Region (*Krasnoarmeyskii Raion)* (Argudyaeva 2008).

In 2016, Ivan S married his son to one of these recent returnees, and had been to Bolivia twice in the 1990s. But he himself was one of those *Romanovtsy* descended from the men who returned to the Soviet Union after the war. Ivan's grandfather had been sent to the *Dal-Lag* camp in Kolyma. The families of the sentenced Old Believers waited for them in Northern Kazakhstan and, once freed, had settled in Krasnoyarksii Kray. Born in 1963, Ivan had experienced some better aspects of Soviet power than his grandfather. He said that in the 1970s and 1980s, his people even lived well. I was further surprised to find out that Ivan had even served in the army. I could not imagine how it was possible to follow the strictures of Priestless Old Russian faith in such an environment as the communal barracks amongst the denizens of the *dedovshina*.[5] Chapel Old Believers classify non-members of their agreement as '*poganyi*' [worldly/contaminated] (Scheffel 1991). Visitors to their houses are given separate plates and cutlery so as not to mix with those used by householders. I noticed that, even while on the road, Ivan S tried to maintain a superior level of hygiene compared to the standard wayfarer: when the bus passengers ran quickly to relieve themselves in the wooden outdoor dug-out toilets, Ivan S upon exiting would pluck out a turf of grass to wash his hands. For Ivan, however, the greatest ordeal in the army had not been the metal slop-out buckets, but the oath of allegiance.

To explain why this was the case, he described how the *Chasovennye* Old Believers had originated. The Chapel Old Believer Agreement had grown out of a rebellion that had occurred at the Cossack station of Tara (current Omsk Oblast). The cause of the rebellion had been the order of Peter the Great on 5 February 1722 in which it was stated that the ruling Emperor could appoint by will any successor to the throne (Pokrovskii 2012). Russian subjects were henceforth compelled to swear an oath to the as-yet-unnamed successor. Near to the Cossack station was a hermitage (*skit*) whose senior was one Father Sergei, a priest who held to the Old Rite. Father Sergei started to publicize the idea that swearing an oath to this unknown successor was a way of hoodwinking believers into pledging themselves to the anti-Christ, whose name itself was unutterable and who was in all probability the grandson of Peter I. Seven hundred Cossack-Old Believers at Tara refused the oath. A wave of refusal spread swiftly across the Urals and Siberia. Peter's response was an onslaught of executions and torture, which culminated in many believers burning themselves alive *en masse*. The refugees that fled rather than swear the oath to the unknown successor became the core of what later became known as the *Chasovennye* Old Believers.

According to Ivan S, the main question that exercised his ancestors, and the Chapel Old Believers to the present day, in uttering the oath was: 'before/in front of whom' (*pered kem*). Before whom does one swear loyalty in the name of the Lord? Agamben has argued that the oath, when it is divorced from a known referent, becomes a curse: 'the formula of truth, when broken, becomes an efficacious curse, and the name of God separated from the oath and its connection to things, passes into a satanic murmur' (Agamben 2011, 43). Leaving the placeholder blank for the person or entity before whom one pledges loyalty gives an effective blank cheque for spiritual blackmail, and enacts the ever-present threat of perjury. Ivan S called the oath with an indeterminate object 'a trap' (*lovushka*).

Although Old Believers as a rule avoid oaths, it is possible that a more acceptable object of loyalty, rather than the impious Romanov Tsars, were those secular synonyms for Holy Rus' (*svyataya rus'*) which from the seventeenth century became 'an anti-state, anti-Tsarist slogan' around which the Old Believer cause gathered (Cherniavsky 1961, 110). One such secular substitute for Holy Russia that in Russian carries the same feminine gender is Motherland (*rodina*), even Soviet *rodina*. In this reckoning the oath (*klyatva*) of the Amur Cossacks, for instance, provides a more acceptable object of loyalty for Old Believers: 'I, Cossack of the Amur Cossack brigade, swear (*klyanus*) to be honest, brave and disciplined and to piously preserve loyalty (*vernost'*) to the Motherland (*Rodina)* … If I break this oath, let me be punished by God and my fellow Cossacks'. The form of oath required of a Cossack ataman leader, on the other hand, would likely be less acceptable to the Chapel Old Believers, insofar as the masculine and Imperial object of the oath (Russian Fatherland) has resonances with the demonic nature of Peter's anonymous successor: 'On the Christ's life-giving cross, on the holy writings I give an oath (*prisyagayu*) to loyally serve the Russian Fatherland (*verno sluzhit' Otechestvu Rossiiskomu*)' (Kryukov 2015, 75).

Nevertheless, Ivan S's loyalty pledged to the Soviet *rodina* was only conditional. He said that his ancestors had tried to avoid the state and never depend on it. His ancestors had thought it wiser to go deeper into the Far Eastern taiga rather than negotiate with the Soviet state. Those Wandering Old Believers (*stranniki*) in more easily reachable Siberia still tried to demonstrate their loyalty to Soviet power by including mentions of Lunacharsky and Lenin in their apocalyptic treatises:

> Showing loyalty even to the new Soviet dispensation, the Wandering Old Believers dedicated the next chapter of the 'Universe' [apocalyptic text] to the following theme: 'Christianity is not for the rich'. In it are quotes from Lunacharsky alongside the gospel writers and the Church Father.[6]

Collectivization marked the end of attempts by the Priestless Old Believers to show loyalty to the Soviet state. In 1932, a holy synod of the Chapel Agreement held in the Ussuriys k taiga concluded that: 'This time you have been entrusted with calling the Orthodox people to the defence of the True Faith (*pravaya vera*)' (Kobko 2004, 76). The synod code (*ulozhenie*) ended with a theological justification for armed resistance to forced collectivization, a document that was later used by the NKVD tribunals as proof of the Old Believers' anti-Soviet activities:

> a new power … that requires one to renounce God, the Trinity, the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, to renounce the only baptism … to take off the Cross of Christ. Which loyal (*verno*) Christian is not repulsed by such a godless state of law? (*bogotstupnoe zakonnoepolozhenie*). (Kobko 2004, 78)

A partisan peasant war then erupted on the Bikin river in Northern Ussuriysk Province in 1933, when a militant section of Chapel Old Believers decided that it was 'better to live with animals and put up with all sorts than to live with a power renounced from God' (Kobko 2004, 78). Yet, even when their way of life was facing liquidation, these communities' elders cited the Pauline doctrine of the divine origin of worldly power and the inadmissibility of rebellion. When a leader of the armed Old Believer opposition met with the

elders, the latter remarked that 'power is from God and it's necessary to subordinate oneself to it' (Kobko 2004, 78).

The futility of an armed resistance to the already well-established Soviet power was soon borne out when the rebels and other male non-combatants were arrested. Various reports exist as to the fate of the prisoners. At least 125 of 500 arrested men were shot. Those Old Believers who were spared or escaped became the source of the flood of emigration to Northern Manchuria that founded the Romanovka community; those adult male Christians who remained in Samarga were mostly liquidated in the renewed whirlwind of repression in 1937–1938.

Polina R told me her version of the Bikin uprising as she waited to depart on the helicopter on which Ivan S had arrived from Samarga. Her grandfather, she said, who had been a child at the time and had witnessed the rounding up of the rebels, had remained in lasting fear all his life and could only talk about the event after a drink. Yet, I found it strange to hear that her grandfather, Ivan S's relatives and many other Chapel Old Believers from the Northern Ussuriysk taiga had fought during the Second World War, had not only served but had distinguished themselves with their valour. How could men whose brothers and fathers had been shot or exiled during the 1930s serve in the army of a government that had relentlessly persecuted them? To answer the question of the Old Believers heroic war record, it is necessary to take again the perspective of the object(s) of loyalty (loyal to whom/what). The Second World War was not identified by most Russians, let alone Old Believers, as simply a defence of the Soviet state and government. The descendants of the Old Believer combatants rather recalled the war as a battle of apocalyptic proportions for the fate of humanity.

As we rode further on our bus journey, Ivan S described how the prophecy of St John the Revelator was being fulfilled, how another world war was imminent, the outbreak of which was augured by the recent altercation between Russia and Turkey. As we rode further, Ivan S wanted to convince me of God's work on earth. To evidence this sacred-historical progress, he relayed three accounts of miracles, all apparitions of the Virgin, all having taken place during wars. During the 1980s war in Afghanistan, for instance, Ivan S had heard of a Soviet soldier who had been left abandoned on a hillside after his comrades had all been killed. The soldier was surrounded by the approaching Mujahedin on all sides. Ivan recounted how this Soviet GI fell down on his knees, prayed to the Virgin, and was suddenly placed in a veil of protection by the Mother of God. After his miraculous survival, the soldier became a priest.

It is unlikely that it was sheer coincidence that the prophecies and miracles that Ivan described occurred in the army and during wars, for it showed that army service for Old Believers need not be a form of loyalty to a Godless atheist or imperialistic power. Ivan's testimony revealed that serving in an army and fighting wars can have an apocalyptic, prophetic or miraculous meaning, as it perhaps did for the *Chasovennye* who fought in the Second World War. Ivan stressed this messianic dimension of being in the army. The external form of obedience to army orders can thereby be the cover for internal spiritual battles and apocalyptic interventions, actions that take place within the battlefield of sacred history.

God's soldier: Elijah's military service

Ivan S's dual perspective on the modes of loyalty (worldly and messianic) that could be fulfilled in the army, whereby fighting in the ranks of a Godless state could realize

God's kingdom on Earth, reminded me of the travails of a young Old Believer who had recently been demobilized from the army. Elijah is the eldest son of an Old Believer priest. Elijah's father was part of the cohort of the 'last Soviet generation' (Yurchak 2006) who, having had a thoroughly Soviet upbringing, converted enthusiastically to ancient Orthodoxy in the 1990s. Elijah (b. 1994) was his convert-parents' attempt to raise a post-Soviet child in a totally Old Orthodox manner. To all intents and purposes, his parents' efforts to bring up Elijah in the faith have succeeded: the young man is a deep believer, who understands and can explain Orthodoxy and its history, who organizes his five younger siblings in prayer, who refuses alcohol and to go to the disco.

Elijah also grows out his beard, as Old Believer canon dictates. This pious comportment gave Elijah an ordeal when he entered the army, where a daily shave is compulsory.[7] On Elijah's first day in the barracks, when the drill instructor noticed the growth on his face, the young Christian was threatened with the 'towel treatment', a hazing whereby hair is removed from a young conscript's face by abrasion with a rough army-standard towel instead of a razor. When Elijah did not yield to this threat, he was presented with an ultimatum: either prison or the psychiatric ward. While this question hung in the air, he called his priest-father for a consultation, after which they both concluded, to the astonishment of the instructor: prison.

Elijah's sergeant did not follow through on an official court martial; instead, the young Believer was subjected to a sustained hazing, whereby he would be awoken in the middle of the night and called to the officers' barracks, where he would be asked each night the single question: 'Why don't you shave?' In fact, all of his fellow conscripts bombarded him with this question. He could recite his explanation according to the tenets of Orthodox Christian anthropology by heart: 'because man is made in the image of God, it is forbidden to change or deface that divine image'. Why, then, his interrogators followed up, did he not take up one of the stigmatized 'alternative services' in the army (in psychiatric wards, etc.), to which Elijah added the important *caveat* to his Christian anthropology, a coda that underlies the split loyalties of Old Believers. He told his interrogators: 'I am a Christian, an Old Believer, and a Cossack, I belong to a Christian estate/order (*soslovie*), for whom it is forbidden to shave but for whom army service is encouraged'. He could serve, only he could not shave. To hygienic rationalizations for daily shaving, he responded: 'a pig is hairless, but still dirty'.

Elijah was by all account a model soldier and commended at the end of his service. He became an 'authority' in his barracks, thanks to his physical prowess, mental toughness, and for standing up to bullies on behalf of his weaker comrades. But his one deviation from the required external comportment of a soldier undermined his superiors' belief in his loyalty. Although supposedly only an external form, a daily shave, like all the other forms of discipline to which the Russian army has subjected its recruits since Peter the Great onwards, is oriented towards making loyalty automatic; to use Foucauldian language, to 'subjectivizing' loyalty. Those classical forms of bodily discipline to which Foucault dedicated significant attention in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), by which 'an externality is internalized', are the daily routine of the Russian army recruit: one must stand with back completely straight, chess puffed out and chin up; each step one takes in hours-long marches should be a certain stipulated distance; one is permitted to go to the toilet to defecate only once in a 24-hour period and suspicion is immediately raised if the necessary ablutions take longer than 5 minutes.

The army sergeants were perhaps correct to be suspicious of Elijah's mixed loyalties, despite his sedulous execution of all of their commands. Try as they could to get under Elijah's skin, his internal convictions remained out of their control (see Humphrey, 2017). By his craft, Elijah even managed to skip jauntily around that most devious form of compelling internal loyalty by means of an external formality, that key operator between the subject's 'inside' and 'outside': the oath. The young conscript Old Believer was well aware of the nefarious 'performative' property of oaths, whereby they magically constitute what they utter. He described this performative process as 'a kind of self-hypnosis'. At the beginning of his year's service, Elijah was asked to pronounce an oath of allegiance. He read out the oath quickly: 'I promise (*obeshchayu*) to serve—' 'Wait, wait', the drill instructor interrupted, 'It's written "I swear" (*klyanus*)', the instructor bellowed. Elijah continued to recite the oath with his amendment, and the weary instructor relented.

Elijah thereby managed by his linguistic dexterity both to commit himself to his temporary service in the army, while refusing to transgress the apostolic commandment that one's word should simply be 'yes yes, no no'. His loyalty to God and to ancient Orthodox canons trumped his loyalty to the Russian army, yet without a complete rejection of and rebellion against the latter: he could serve, could keep up the appearance of even serving well and accurately. But did Elijah serve 'loyally', that is, faithfully, insofar as that the latter word suggests an internal sincere state and feeling? No. He refused to dishonour his faith by perjuring himself in front of God:

> *Not to swear by any but God,* is naturally a sign of honour; for it is a confession that God only knoweth the heart; and that no man's wit or strength can protect a man against God's vengeance on the perjured. (Hobbes 1981, 403)

He followed the Hobbesian line whereby, while showing outward obedience to the worldly sovereign, he preserved his heart as his own province. He defied the cunning of a 'subjectivizing' disciplinary regime by refusing to let outward and physical forms of obedience compel unconditional loyalty, when such loyalty usurps the priority of Orthodox Christian anthropology:

> As for the inward thought, and beleef of men, which humane Governors can take no notice of (for God only knoweth the heart) they are not voluntary, nor the effects of laws, but of the unreleased will and of the power of God; and consequently fall not under obligation. (Hobbes 1981, 500)

I asked Elijah what he would do if he were called up to serve again in the event of war. War was a theme that we often discussed, especially when we explored the abandoned Soviet bunkers in the forests that surrounded his Church. He said that the End of Days was approaching and that a World War would be the final act that preceded the Lord's Second Coming. In reply to my question of how he would react to a second call-up, he explained the nature of his service, how he had been based in a camp in Khabarovskii Kray on the border of China. The mission of this garrison in the event of a war with China was to hold off the Chinese forces for seven minutes until the nuclear weapons could be launched. In the bean-counting calculus of Russian/Soviet war planners, by the end of these seven minutes, all the soldiers, including the hypothetically called-up Elijah, would be killed. His conscript comrades in the camp were all 'canon-fodder' (*pushechnoe myaso*).

Elijah remarked that, in the final trial, the task of a Christian was above all to save one's own soul. He echoed word for word a conviction that Ivan S had also expressed: that every day for a Christian was a preparation for death; that the sole point and goal of a Christian's life was to reach heaven and avoid hell; and that whatever one did in the worldly interim between these two end points was of relative and secondary importance. He likewise echoed Ivan S's view that war was important because it raised the messianic and soteriological stakes of humanity: even non-believers had the chance of receiving God's grace through acts of heroic self-sacrifice during wartime, said Elijah.

After the salvation of one's own soul, the next priority was to save the spiritual family of one's close Christians. Elijah already had extensive plans for how he and his family could see out the forthcoming war, plans which involved the abandoned bunkers. Since early childhood he had been given survival lessons in the woods by his father on how to operate upon the advent of the apocalypse. If his '*Rodina*' was attacked by an invading aggressor and he survived the first strike, I asked (upping the hypothetical ante), would he undertake a partisan campaign to expel the occupier and defeat the enemy? Even this scenario could not garner Elijah's total loyalty. He would have to wait and see. If the occupier was 'loyal' (*loyalen'*) to the population, did not abuse its authority and treated it well (better than the current Russian government, of which he had a low opinion): 'Well … let us learn English or Chinese!' (the presumed language of the occupier). Elijah's loyalty rigidly stuck to the iron law of Hobbes, which Carl Schmitt called in a pithy phrase the '*cogito ergo sum* of the state' (Schmitt 2007, 83): namely, *protego ergo obligato* [protected, therefore obliged]. Elijah's obligation (*obligato*) to the worldly powers was conditional on those powers' ability to protect (in the broadest sense of the word) the population. His unconditional loyalty was reserved for God's kingdom alone.

Ministers and metropolitans: The Belokrinits Believers

It is true that Elijah was not receiving much in return for his demonstrations of loyalty to the worldly powers, other than a bread ration, a 6.00 a.m. wake-up call and a cold shower. He was also young, without property or status. For those Old Believers who are in a different position, who stand in elevated places and/or are rich, the Russian imperium has over the centuries developed a more refined strategy of testing and eliciting loyalty. Elijah belonged to the Priestly denomination of Old Believers whose organizational centre is the Rogozhskoe Cemetery in Moscow. This denomination, unlike the Chapel Old Believers, resembles the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchy since it has an ecclesiastical hierarchy, bishops and even, since 1988, a Metropolitan.

This hierarchy was formed in 1846 when the Metropolitan of Sarajevo, Ambrosius, defected to the Russian Old Believers, who were based in a monastery in the village of Belokrinits in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Bukovina, present-day Ukraine). The foreign links of the Belokrinits hierarchy immediately brought it under the suspicion of Tsar Nicholas I and his Ministers, who feared that these Old Believers had taken their inspiration from the 1848 revolutions and planned to export such liberalism to autocratic Russia. In the opinion of the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Lev Perovskii, these Old Believers with foreign connections were 'fanatics … who detached themselves from … a loyal subject's duties to the fatherland' (quoted in Marsden 2015, 53). The Tsarist authorities began to read the religious activities of these Belokrinits Believers through an optic of political

disloyalty. According to Thomas Marsden, after the creation of a hierarchy on foreign soil, the government flipped the political-economic gestalt switch on Old Belief and re-read the whole of Old Believer history as a political phenomenon (Marsden 2015, 53). The 'enlightened bureaucrats' who staffed Nicholas' régime feared the divorce between the Western-looking nobility (both authorities and the intelligentsia) and the *Narod* (the People), and concluded that Orthodoxy could provide the glue to bind national unity. The sheer obedience and compliance of Old Believers was not enough to receive Tsar Nicholas' tolerance once religious conviction was construed as the missing link between state, society and people. Instead, 'the civil sphere was extended to the internal life of the population' (Marsden 2015, 143), a depth hermeneutic of loyalty in which, to the tsar's ministers, Old Belief appeared as 'a perversion of the Russian spirit' (quoted in Marsden 2015, 142). Imperial Russia's state rejection of a secular, external form of loyalty left vulnerable the Old Believers, who had 'always defended themselves by separating their spiritual life from their worldly devotion to the tsar' (Marsden 2015, 154).

Yet, the authorities had trouble identifying any legal violations that would indicate such deviations from sincerely held loyal sentiment. The one form of non-compliance of which the Tsar could accuse the Old Believers was that they 'rejected the sanctity of the oath' on which the inclusion in the system of estates and public office was based (quoted in Marsden 2015, 204). This reputed inability to give a sincere oath was used as a pretext to exclude Old Believers from the merchant guilds in which, in Moscow, they formed the dominant group. This measure affected the millionaire industrialists of the Rogozhskoe Cemetery and the wealth of such famous Old Believer families as the Morozovs, the Ryabushinskys and the Tretyakovs. This extraordinary measure was only cancelled with the coronation of Alexander II, whose minister warned of the anger that the oath-based exclusion had caused to the owners of 'great wealth and large factories' and whose 'loyalty could not be counted on if the government took such measures against them' (Marsden 2015, 209).

Yet, despite the suspicion with which the Tsarist government continued to view the Rogozhskoe Cemetery, during the rest of the nineteenth century, the Priestly Old Believers tried to demonstrate their loyalty conspicuously to the Tsar. They sent to the Imperial court 'loyal congratulations' (*vernopodannicheskoe pozdravelenie*) accompanied by dozens of lavishly decorated eggs and icons on the occasion of the Tsar's birthday (Yukhimenko 2005, 60). They took particular pains to show their loyalty to the monarchy at the most crucial moment in the imperial cycle: the death of the Tsar. At the funeral of Alexander III, the Rogozhskoe Cemetery's commiseration read: 'We, Moscow Old Believers who accept the priesthood, live not only by the Old Belief and traditions, but preserve the centuries-old Russian loyalty (*vernost'*) to the throne and the Old Russian devotion (*predannost'*) to the monarch' (quoted in Yukhimenko 2005, 55). The Moscow Old Believers evidenced their loyalty through their explicit concern with the personal safety of the Tsar's household. When the Tsar and his family narrowly avoided death in a train accident, the Priestly Old Believers held special prayers to celebrate the narrow escape and built the Aleksandro-Mariinskaya hospital in honour of this miraculous event (Yukhimenko 2005, 57–58). They even took the step, after the assassination of the Tsar in 1881, of founding the personal 'holy bodyguard' (*svyatoi druzhina*) for the protection of the Tsar. In April 1884, for instance, on the occasion of the award of medals to the Old Believer members of the voluntary bodyguard, 'a blessed prayers for the health and benefit of his imperial

majesty, the successor Tsarevich and all of the Tsar's household' was held (quoted in Yukhimenko 2005, 57).

For all their attempts to show conspicuous loyalty, these Belokrinits Old Believers still received reproach and suspicion when their delegations reached the Tsar's court, such as from Grand Prince Sergei Aleksandrovich, who 'noted the shameless activities of their clergy and advised them to behave themselves more modestly' (quoted in Yukhimenko 2005, 62). The meaning and import of the congratulations that the Belokrinits Old Believers sent to the imperial court, which celebrated their 'Old Russian loyalty' and 'Old Russian devotion' to throne and monarch, always contained an ambiguity. It was well known that 'Old Believer monarchism', as Nikolai Pokrovskii and Natalia Zolnikova write, was 'turned toward the pre-Nikonian past' of Muscovy, a temporal orientation which gave rise to the possibility of Old Belief's 'monarchical antinomianism' (Pokrovskii and Zol'nikova 2002, 253), of lionizing a divine monarchy while undermining the current (impious) sovereign. This monarchical antinomianism appeared throughout the eighteenth century during rebellions such as those of Razin and Pugachev, which claimed that their peasant pretenders were the true Tsar, rebellions in which Old Believers and Cossacks formed the majority of the militia.

It was not until after the Religious Toleration Bill of Nicholas II that the Tsarist authorities sought a way to guarantee priestly Old Believer allegiance, to extinguish their foreign links and to eliminate the insincerity of their oath in one fell swoop. The reforming Prime Minister, Pyotr Stolypin, viewed the Belokrinits Believers living in exile in Austro-Hungary and Romania as the ideal human material to realize his project of colonizing the Russian Far East. Stolypin decided to coax these Old Believers back to Russia with the promise of 8000 free portions of good Far Eastern land (1320 square kilometres).

On 23 December 1908, a related bill was passed to fast track Old Believers into becoming Russian subjects. This bill significantly lessened the strictness of conditions surrounding the Oath of Loyalty. The new bill read:

> The taking of the loyalty oath (*vernopodannicheskaya prisyaga*) by Old Believers is permitted upon arrival at their place of settlement; moreover in digression from the rule inscribed in article 847, composed in those cases when the place of settlement is at a significant remove from Police Government, it is permitted for only one rank (*chin*) of Government official to receive the oath, who will be specially sent for this purpose. (quoted in Shevnin, n.d.,14).

In Spring of 1909, S. E. Kryzhanovskii, an official at the ministry of Internal Affairs, messaged the General Governor of the Amur region, P.F Unterberg, so that he should permit the Belokrinits Old Believers (subjects of Austro-Hungary and Romania) to become Russian subjects without the necessary packet of documents stipulated by Article 843.

In effect, these dispensations gave Old Believers a way around whatever oath of loyalty they had to take, whereby, like Elijah, they could employ various linguistic tricks (not using their baptized name, for instance) to short-circuit the oath's performative effect. It is not clear how many of the government officials who were entrusted with receiving the loyalty oath reached the remote Far Eastern outposts where the Belokrinits Priestly Old Believers settled; even if they did reach the communities, they had no records, Church or otherwise, to verify whether the names given in the oath-taking ceremony were genuine or not. In sum, Stolypin's government reversed the trap that Peter the Great had set for the Tara Old Believers when he tried to get them to swear fealty to an unknown entity.

This loophole in the demands of imperial loyalty gave the Priestly Old Believers two decades of unencumbered freedom along the Amur, where they flourished, built churches and farmsteads, much like their Priestless brethren along the Northern Rivers of Primorye. This growth again ended abruptly with collectivization. Once again, the political-economic gestalt switch was flicked such that all the previous efforts of the Belokrinits Old Believers to gain the trust of the Tsarist regime, and even their everyday religious practice, were reinterpreted as forms of 'counter-revolutionary' disloyalty. During the first wave of de-kulakization (*raskulachivanie*), the Belokrinits Irkutsk-Amur diocese was re-read through the hermeneutic of disloyalty as

> the All Russian Union of Old Believer Brotherhoods (*vserossiiski soyuz staroobryadcheskikh bratstva*), whose goal was 'to organize Old Belief, to set it against Soviet power in the further preparation of an armed uprising with the aim of the restoration of the monarchy in the person of Sergei and Kirill Romanov'. (quoted in Shevnin 2011, 83)

With this 'political epistemic' (Glaeser 2011) of disloyalty in place, even the most innocuous actions of Priestly Old Believers, insofar as they did not demonstrate an active allegiance to Soviet power, were recast as counter-revolutionary conspiracy and sabotage (see Peshkov, 2017). It is worth quoting historian Ivan Shevnin in detail because of his unique access to the relevant NKVD documents, which were only made available to him because his male relatives were repressed and rehabilitated Belokrinits emigrants from Romania. This archival trace gives a sense of the all-encompassing political-epistemological gestalt through which the Priestly Old Believers activities were refracted as disloyal:

> Even the mention of parish meetings, sometimes with the participation of the bishop, at which were discussed questions of Church income, Church decoration, heating, the upbringing of children—all this was understood as discussion of political order. Even when the Believers lived their lives, it was perceived as if they were undertaking an 'active battle with anti-religious propaganda and the measures of party and Sov-power'. In the beginning of the 1930s the reading of 'divine books in class', discussions of priests with laymen (where he called on them to zealously pray, preserve the old rites, honor elders and to be patient), and the unwillingness to send children to secular schools was interpreted as 'widely extensive counter-propaganda on anti-religious questions, in the main directed towards the creation of a united front of believers against Sov-power in the goal of mobilizing the mass of believers'. The organization of a theological course in 1926 was represented no less than as a 'school for future organizers and leaders of a counter-revolutionary Old Believer 'Brotherhood' on the periphery of the USSR'. (Shevnin 2011, 84)

Of the 53 priests and elders who were arrested for the case of the conspiratorial brotherhood of the Amur Old Believers, the Stalinist three-man tribunal (*troika*) on 17 June 1933 sentenced nineteen to death by firing squad and the rest to the Gulag. According to the KGB rehabilitation commission held in 1959, the Amur case was fabricated on the model of the Leningrad, Siberian, and other Old Believer regional 'brotherhoods', 'whose clergy and active laity met the same fate at the hands of the troika' (Shevnin 2011, 86).

In the Post-Stalin period, the Belokrinits Priestly Old Believers were subject more to Nicholas I-style administrative pressures than to the violent oppression of the 1930s. These obstacles prevented Church registration and organized worship, such that a generation of Old Believers were forced to pray 'in the cellar'. In the 1970s and 1980s, active Church figures such as Alexander Gusev, the future Metropolitan Alympius, were subject to intimidation and a 'call to the carpet' (*vyzov na kover*), that is, to a meeting

with the KGB. One of the channels through which administrative pressure was applied to these Christians was by way of the so-called Soviet Fund for Peace (*Sovetskii fond mira*), a 'civil' organization to which all registered religious organizations in the USSR, including the Moscow Old Believer arch-episcopate, had to make significant financial contributions. While the arch-episcope [bishop] of the Belokrinits Old Believers rendered his tax to the Soviet Caesar (his compulsory contribution to the Fund for Peace), as the Lord advised, he refused to countenance those forms of quasi-Roman loyalty that might suggest that he was a servant of a power other than God.

In 1984, the Soviet Fund of Peace attempted to award Old Believer arch-episcope Nikodim with its 'honorary medal' (*pochetnoi medalyu*), which was to be presented to the cleric by the Council of Ministers of the USSR. But, according to longtime secretary to the Metropolitan and overseer of the Rogozhskoe archive, Alexei Ryabtsev, arch-episcope Nikodim fled to his home village of Staraya Dobruzha in Moldavia rather than kowtow to the hated *apparatchiki*.[8] A Moldavian representative of the Soviet Fund for Peace was invested with the task of awarding the medal to the old monk. The Moldavian's mission ended in failure, however, when he was met at the wicket-gate by the arch-episcope's sister, who told him that the archbishop was not feeling well.

That year's Old Believer calendar recorded, in the 'Aesopian' language of Soviet officialese, that the arch-episcope and his secretary, Archpriest Alexander Berestnev, 'received a decree of the award of the honorary medal'; that Archpriest Berestnev 'accepted the medal and gave thanks', and that 'a member of the Moldovan Republic's administration of the fund went to Staraya Dobruzha for the delivery' of the medal to the arch-episcope. In other words, the monkish arch-episcope Nikodim, the leader of Russia's Priestly Old Believers, refused the medal and the mark of loyalty and subordination that this item represented.

In the ostensibly freer confessional environment of the 1990s, the post-Soviet Yeltsin régime tried again to award the next leader of the Belokrinits Old Believers a medal, a state order, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday in 1999. But Metropolitan Alympius, like his predecessor Nikodim, truculently refused to accept the medal. According to those who worked in the Metropolitan's Secretariat at the time, the wily monk saw that the administration of the President was largely composed of the same people (communists) who in the 1980s had presided over the deliberate ossification of religious affairs. The Metropolitan's brother, Archpriest Leonid Gusev, pleaded with Alympius to accept the medal and not ruin the community's relationship with the state apparatus, which had only started to relate to the Old Believers as 'normal' people. Alympius responded to his meddling, power-hungry brother with an ultimatum: 'How about I stand down and you sit in my place so that you can hang around your neck anything that you want!'.

The Metropolitan phrased his refusal of the medal on purely religious grounds: it was impossible for a monk to accept medals insofar as a monkish habit (garment) was delimited by rules that strictly forbade the appending of any additional marks onto the cassock. It was also noted that, since a state order was a mark of secular praise, its receipt was incompatible with the very essence of monasticism. The Metropolitan pleaded in his letter to the President:

> We request that you in no way consider our position as a expression of political protest. Old Believers in their long history have suffered for the conviction of the necessity of the separation of Church and State. The Old Believer Church hierarchy (*svyashchenonachalie*) loyally (*loyal'no*) supports the powers and does not allow itself to participate in political actions.

The Secretary to the Metropolitan received angry phone calls from the benefactors within the Presidential Administration who had organized the award, but Alympius insisted on standing in the long line of Old Believer refuseniks: 'Better to die in faith, than be a traitor (*predatel'*)!' Alympius' rejection meant that the loyalty of the Belokrinits Old Believers, even in the post-Soviet 1990s, was still in question. A government procurator, who at that time interrogated the chairperson of the Moscow Old Believer community on whether his community was intent on creating a paramilitary unit, said that it was his job to check up on 'suspicious' religious organizations, of such an organization that his interlocutor was a member.

In the 2010s, however, the Russian *imperium* finally seemed to have found an Old Believer leader in whom the modes of internal and external loyalty corresponded. The newly crowned Metropolitan Kornelius (Konstantine Titov) immediately began to pursue a policy of ecumenical *rapprochement* with the state-supported Russian Orthodox Church. Titov, although supposedly secretly baptized as a new-born, had received a secular Soviet upbringing, had become a member of the Communist Party and had been chairman of the Soviet culture section in a factory where he was in charge of 'working with people' (*rabota s liudimi*). According to the new Metropolitan's critics within the Church, this Soviet experience had endowed the cleric with certain habits in the exercise of power that had generally characterized the Soviet period, in particular, habits of 'impunity (*beznakaznnost'*), permissiveness (*vsedozvolennost'*), and servility (*rabolepvsto*) in the face of seniors'. Kornelius therefore ascended to the episcopal throne with certain expectations of subordinating and being subordinated, a slavish 'sovok'[9] mentality which his detractors caricatured as 'I'm the boss: you're an idiot. You're the boss: I'm an idiot'.[10]

In a ceremony in the Kremlin in 2013, President Putin pinned on Metropolitan Kornelius' cassock the medal for the 'order of friendship' (*orden druzhby*) in recognition of the hierarch's 'strengthening of peace and agreement, and the moral (*moral'no-nravstvennaya*) climate of society'. Kornelius' acceptance of the medal caused controversy amongst Old Believers, although most of his critics had been excommunicated from the Church when the canonical propriety of his Party membership had been judged in 2007. When, in July 2016, I canvassed Cossack-Old Believers on what this medal had been received for, they replied in unison: *za vernost'* [for loyalty].

Peter the Great instituted the regular award of medals and orders for distinguished service to the empire, the most common inscription on which was *za vernost'*. From 1811 onwards, the medal *za vernost'* was given specifically to those subject peoples such as Poles and Chukchii who had been recently assimilated into the Empire; to 'representatives of the national outlying districts (*okrainy*) for services shown to the Russian government' (Chepurnov 1993, 120). While the Metropolitan was given his medal for friendship, the Cossack-Old Believers' misrecognition of the honour conferred perhaps correctly intuited an imperial genealogy buried within these medals' core, in spite of their changing inscriptions.

The 'order of friendship' (*orden druzhby*) is the post-Soviet equivalent of the Soviet award the 'order of the friendship of peoples' (*orden druzhby narodov*). The 'friendship of people' was the master signifying term of Soviet imperialism that structured the relationships between the Moscow metropole and the national Republics, the Russians and the non-Russian nationalities in the socialist world. Awards for 'friendship' in the

(post-) Soviet empirical honours systems therefore served the same function that awards for *vernost'* held in the Tsarist epoch: they evidenced the loyalty and subordination of questionable ethnic and religious subjects to the Russian sovereign. Metropolitan Kornelius' receipt of the medal thereby signalled to his congregants their integration within the Russian state system and his personal loyalty to President Putin.

But although its origins may derive from Peter the Great's initiative, the wearing of a medal cannot perhaps index that internal state of loyalty 'by conscience' (*za sovest'*) that Peter and his successor sovereigns have craved from their subjects: a condition that seemingly only an oath, given in spite of religious conviction, could ensure. The critics of Kornelius' acceptance of the award said that, according to the Church Fathers, those who received the plaudits of this world diminish the treasures that they might receive in heaven. When Kornelius wore the medal, he had shown his flock that he valued worldly praise more highly than God's grace.[11]

The Metropolitan's detractors had also interpreted his Communist Party membership through the canons of the Church Fathers. To enter the Communist Party, Konstantine Titov had announced 'I recognize in full and am obliged to fulfill the Charter and Programme of the KPSS [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]'. A central obligation in this Programme was 'to carry out atheist propaganda'. The post-Soviet canon lawyers argued that such a declaration broke an ancient canon, which had been introduced to exclude backsliders who, in the early days of the Church, had renounced Christ at the command of the Romans. The Romans tested such early Christians by forcing them to utter verbal formulas, prayers and oaths and make various sacrifices to their pagan Gods. Even if a Christian had been forced to swear in front of the Roman idols, even if they had uttered the formulas in ignorance or unintentionally, the Church Fathers insisted that such people must be excommunicated.

On the evidence of such a canon, these ancient ecclesiarchs were clearly aware that intentionality or sincerity becomes irrelevant when dealing with such performative speech-acts as the oath. The 'inside' of a subject, and those objects to which such subjects become loyal, are constituted through the very performative act of taking the oath, of swearing upon an idol, or of declaring one's allegiance to the Party. The Metropolitan's pledge to the Communist Party had been an unalterable act, whether it was done in good faith, insincerely, or had been a mere formality. On the charge of his critics, the Metropolitan had made a renunciation of Christ (*otrechenie ot Khrista*), an unforgivable crime of disloyalty to God. The Russian *imperium* had finally found in Kornelius an Old Believer who had demonstrated externally (medal) and constituted internally (oath) his unswerving allegiance to the state that Peter the Great built, finally an Old Believer whose loyalty was beyond question.

Conclusion

Old Believers were the heirs of the sixteenth-century messianic-statist political theology of Moscow, the Third Rome. This doctrine never acknowledged the separation of a spiritual and a temporal power, but instead understood Muscovy as the glorious embodiment of God's Kingdom, with the pre-Nikonian Tsar as God's vicar on earth. The caesaro-papist heritage of Muscovy has meant that Russian Old Believers have sought a different dispensation from Latin Christendom's 'separation of the estates', which interprets Christ's

commandment to 'render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's' (Matthew 22:20–22). The separation of the sovereign-imperial and pastoral-religious estates in the West led gradually, according to Alexander Pizzorno (1987), to the formation of a civil political domain that was set in opposition to a separate religious sphere, from which the West has inherited a peculiar configuration of the 'the secular' (Asad 2003). But in Russia, the notion of a pure political power without a sacred envelope only appeared when Peter the Great violently declared himself an earthly God. Peter separated the Russian church from state, but in this act of separation, in the eyes of the Old Believers, he committed the diabolical crime of usurping the pre-eminence of God's kingdom and subordinating it to his own. After this splitting of value spheres between temporal and spiritual domains, whereby one could only but stand in relation of hierarchical encompassment to the other, the loyalties of the Old Believers were irreparably split.[12]

The Old Believers continue, up to the present, to face an abiding dilemma by which they must choose to be either loyal to God or loyal to the emperor. For them, the worldly 'civil' realm must be placed second to God's domain, despite their earnest desire to live an all-encompassing Russian religious life in the service of a holy Tsar in a divinely elected kingdom, in which the two realms ceaselessly converge. This dichotomy has simultaneously been the source of their unique tenacity and resilience and the cause of the depth hermeneutic, casting them as the objects of suspicion, even as they do their utmost to demonstrate their allegiance to the powers, reappearing again and again in the governmental gaze as a 'state within a state' through the various avatars of the Russian imperium.

Notes

1. 'The central value of Nicholas' [the first] reign was loyalty, which Official Nationality defined particularly as distinctively Russian. The loyalty of the people was displayed in ceremonies of devotion to the monarch. The people were recognized and then engulfed in demonstration of loyalty to the sovereign' (Wortman 2006, 144).
2. The so-called Ecclesiastical Regulation (*dukhovnyi reglament*), issued by Peter the Great to reform the administration of the Orthodox Church, solemnly stated what was bound to become one of the most famous definitions of the Russian autocracy's nature:

> The All-Russian Emperor is an autocratic and absolute Monarch. God Himself commanded to obey His supreme power not only out of fear, but in good conscience (*povinovatsya ne tol'ko za strakh, a za sovest'*). Reverberations of this maxim can easily be found in later foundational pronouncements of the Russian autocracy, crucial for its relationship to the noble elite. For example, Peter III, 'emancipation' Manifesto of February 18, 1762 honed the Petrine notion 'za sovest'' in such a florid way: 'We hope that all the well-born Russian Nobility … will remain in their most submissive loyalty and devotion to Us, and not seek to escape from service, but rather enter it willingly and zealously … ' (Dolbilov, n.d., 5)

3. We will see that the other main Russian word for loyalty, *vernost'*, does not appear in common usage until Peter I.
4. The concern over the bindingness of oaths had filtered into even the highest ranks of the Soviet army at the dawn of the post-Soviet era. Boris Yeltsin's personal bodyguard recounts an episode during the vacuum of power that followed the August coup of 1991 when a Soviet general insisted on the obligation of his oath:

> I cannot not follow the order, because I gave an oath (*prisagu*)' answered the General, 'but I gave the oath to Gorbachev. Now there's no Gorbachev. It's not even clear where he is. But

there's a way out. If you Boris Nikolaevich [Yeltsin] give an order that appoints yourself as Commander and Chief (*verkhovnym glavnokomanduyushim)*, then I will subordinate myself to you. (Korzhakov 2004, 129)

5. Literally 'rule of the uncles': the term for the violent hierarchy by which fresh draftees are hazed by older recruits.
6. 'Literatura novogo vremeni v strannicheskikh sbornikakh postoyannogo sostava 'svet' i 'univers': novatsii i traditsii v XX v.' http://starajavera.narod.ru/Zolnikova1.html accessed June 2017.
7. Even while travelling to their barracks on the Trans-Siberian railway, I noticed, conscripts are not exempt from this rule, as the long line outside the cramped wagon toilet testified.
8. This account and the quotations in the two paragraphs below come from a transcript of an interview that Vladimir Oyvin conducted with Alexei Ryabtsev in 2013 published http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=99230 accessed June 2017.
9. A derogatory slang term for a Soviet-style way of thinking.
10. Quotes taken from an interview with a Belokrinits priest, July 2016.
11. Interview with the above Belokrinits priest, July 2016.
12. '[T]he recognition of the alter qua alter. I submit that such recognitions can only be hierarchical … Here to recognize is the same as to value or integrate' (Dumont 1994, 20).

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