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ON *POMORSKIYE OTVETY*

Abstract. *Pomorskiye otvety* is a presentation of the doctrine of the Old Believers in form of answers to 106 questions presented by a representative of the Synod, hieromonk Neofit. In this work written primarily by Andrei Denisov, major points of disagreement between the Old Believers and the official church are discussed: the 2-finger sign, the number of the sung alleluias, the representation of the cross, the Eucharist, the spelling of the name of Jesus, the wording of the creed, and many others. The article briefly presents these points and responses to them. It also discusses the problem of viability of sacraments among Old Believers and focuses on the Eucharist and the sacrament of marriage.

Key words: Orthodoxy; Old Believers; sacraments.

After Nikon, the seventh Russian patriarch—who occupied the seat for a mere six years (1652-1658)—introduced textual modifications in church service books and ritual modifications in execution of some elements of church service, the reform met with vehement resistance that led to the internal schism of the Russian church resulting in the split between the official, state backed, Orthodox church and the Old Believers who, with time, divided themselves into innumerable groups. These groups can be divided into two categories: priestly and priestless, where the former recognized the sanctity of the clergy of the official church and the possibility that the priesthood could be passed by the laying on of hands to a new priest, and the latter rejected such a possibility ending up with no priesthood. One of the most important centers of priestless Old Believers was the Vyg community.

The Vyg community, Vygovskaya/Vygoretskaya Pustyn', was established in 1694 in Russian Karelia, next to the Vyg river, close to the White Sea, hence the name of the region, Pomoriye (by-the-sea), and then the name of the group, Pomortsy. They were at first under the leadership of Daniil Vikulin/

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Vilulich and then under the Denisov brothers, Andrei beginning in 1702 and Semon beginning in 1730.

In August 1722, the Synod sent hieromonk Neofit to Olonets to discuss points of religious disagreement. The landrat Grigoriy Murav'ev summoned the Old Believers from Vygovskaya Pustyn' for a debate (PO i).¹ When Neofit arrived at Petrozavodsk, the Old Believers wanted to know about the nature of his visit, and he sent to them 106 questions demanding that they must be answered and that they should come with the answers to Petrozavodsk for disputation. These questions were answered by Andrey Denisov with the help of his brother Simeon and Trifon Petrov (iii) and in June 1723, ten representatives came with written answers and presented them to the landrat (viii). Neofit wrote a brief satisfactory report about the questions and answers and the Old Believers returned home (xiv). These massive answers are known as *Pomorskiye otvety* (*Pomorian answers*), and they have been hailed as the best presentation of the Old Believers' theology. *Pomorskiye otvety*, it is said, are "a work which by its dialectical skill and sophistication was a powerful weapon for the Old Believers" and they had "become the cornerstone of Old Believer apologetics"; they are "a remarkably erudite and devastatingly effective rebuttal to the attacks of Neofit."² They are "the most successful, full, and well-done presentation of the basic views of the Old Believers and their differences with the ruling church" and in this work Denisov showed himself as "a thinker with profound and well-made system of views of fundamental problems of philosophy of church history, theory of cognition, interconnection between the material and the ideal of principles."³ 140 years after *Pomorskiye otvety* were written, the book is still in high respect among the Old Believers who respect Andrey Denisov as much as they respect Chrysostom.⁴

¹ The following references are used:

PAVEL — archimandrite ПАВЕЛ [Петр И. Леднев-Прусский] [PAVEL (Petr I. Lednev-Prusskiy)]. *Замечания на книгу Поморских ответов: с приложением замечаний на 21-й ответ в книге "Щит веры"* [Zamechaniya na knigu Pomorskikh otvetov: s prilozheniyem zamechaniy na 21-y otvet v knige "Shchit ver'y"] (Moskva: Братство св. Петра митрополита [Moskva: Bratstvo sv. Petra mitropolita], ²1891 [1890]).

РО — [Андрей Д. ДЕНИСОВ] [Andrey D. DENISOV], *Поморские ответы* [Pomorskiye otvety] (Moskva: Типография П.П. Рябушинского [Moskva: Tipografiya P.P. Ryabushinskago], [1911]).

² Robert O. CRUMMEY, *The Old Believers and the world of Antichrist; the Vyg community and the Russian State, 1694-1855* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 89, 94.

³ М[ихаил] О. ШАХОВ [M(ikhail) O. SHAKHOV], *Старообрядческое мировоззрение: Религиозно-философские основы и социальная позиция* [Staroobryadcheskoye mirovozzreniye: Religiozno-filosofskiyе osnovy i sotsial'naya pozitsiya] (Moskva: Издательство РАГС [Moskva: Izdatel'stvo RAGS], 2001), 64.

⁴ [Петр Аггеев] ПАРФЕНИЙ [(Petr Aggeyev) PARFENIY]. *Книга, возобличение на Помор-*

1. PRINCIPAL ISSUES

The Old Believers were conservatives to the extreme: what was old was good and sacred and all Nikon's reforms were devilish novelties and thus all who accepted them were Christians no longer and thus only the Old Believers by preserving the traditional rituals were true spiritual descendants of the church of the times of Christ and the apostles. As Denisov stated, "We did not embark on any novelties, we did not introduce any new dogmas invented by us, nor do we cling to self-willed traditions, but we hold on to existing traditions of the old Orthodox church and we perform for God [church] service according to existing old sacred books. Thus, we remain in the existing old Orthodox church according to godly Chrysostom: The church is not [only]⁵ walls and roof, but faith and life, not church walls, but church laws" (PO 3). "We observe old laws of the Orthodox church so that we can receive eternal salvation; therefore, we hold on to old traditions of [our] fathers so that we don't fall away from eternal participation with them." Like our fathers received salvation through old books, so we also want to gain it through old books. By observing traditional laws, we did not become schismatics. We don't join the Russian church, but "since we remain in the old Orthodox church, we didn't create any schism, ... we remain in old laws, thus we are not schismatics. We are afraid of joining the [official] Russian church of today not because we despise church meetings or not [because] we reject ecclesiastical hierarchy or not [because] we hate church sacraments, but because we are afraid of novelties introduced in Nikonian times and we are afraid that while we observe old ecclesiastical principles, we will not become a subject of old ecclesiastical prohibitions and [thus] we are afraid we cannot agree with newly introduced anathemas and with censures against old ecclesiastical substance (содержания [soderzhaniya])" (4-5), anathemas that were issued during 1666-1667 council.

There are a number of new ritual elements that the Old Believers found objectionable, but, arguably, the most important was the sign of the cross,

ские ответы Андрея Денисова с сотрудниками [Книга, vozoblicheniye na Pomorskiye otvety Andreyu Denisova s sotrudnikami] (Москва: В Синодальной Типографии [Moskva: V Sino-dal'noy Tipografii], 1867), 1, 43. This remark can be as much a grumbling recognition as it can be ironic considering a hostile tone of Parfeniy's attitude toward Denisov.

⁵ Denisov left out "only" whereby he made the quotation more fitting to his purpose, Johannes Chrysostomus [BLASHKEVICH], *Die "Pomorskie otvety" als Denkmal der Anschauungen der russischen Altgläubigen gegen Ende des 1. Viertels des XVIII. Jahrhunderts* (Roma: Pontificale Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1957), 80-81 note 58.

that is, the configuration of fingers used to make the sign of the cross while crossing oneself. The Old Believers held to the 2-finger sign: the index finger and big finger are stretched out, whereas the last two fingers are bent and the thumb is put on them, the stretched-out fingers symbolizing the dual nature of Christ, the remaining fingers symbolizing the unity of the Trinity (PO 57, 116, 141, 247, 268). Nikon, on the other hand, opted for the 3-finger sign: the last two fingers are bent and the remaining fingers are touching one another by their tips, the former symbolizing the dual nature of Christ, the latter the unity of the Trinity; that is, the symbolism is retained, only different fingers are used to the same end. The church decided to use three first fingers together as more appropriate for a representation of the Trinity (PAVEL 10, 12, 143). Denisov offered lengthy historical proofs for the validity of the 2-finger sign using quotations from old books and depictions in iconography showing 118 examples of what he viewed to be representations of the 2-finger sign.⁶ He even claimed that Christ Himself introduced the 2-finger sign blessing apostles while being elevated to heaven (Luke 24:50) and that apostle Luke's icons show that Christ used two fingers during His ascension (31, 136, 251, 263).

Any possible references in old books to the 2-finger sign must be reconciled with one another to argue for the validity of this sign. And so, the *Great catechism* says that two fingers "should be bent and not stretched," the *Kirillova kniga* states that only the middle finger should be slightly bent; Neofit asked: how to reconcile it? (PO 256). According to Denisov this means that "two fingers should be stretched with slight bending" or "to have [them] bent in stretching" (257), which contradicts both statements quoted in the question and it is rather puzzling how stretching can be reconciled with bending; it also shows the level of legalistic minutia the discussion very frequently reached. Attempts to infuse this discussion with theological relevance led to the statement that the 3-finger sign tries to show equality of

⁶ Denisov copied color images of 118 hands on margins of the *Otvety*; however, the 1911 Riabushinskiy's and 2004 published versions of the *Otvety* do not include these pictures. The reader would have to refer to a manuscript, for instance, the one preserved in Sviato-Troitskaia Sergieva Lavra. See also depictions of fingers on icons on the insert between p. 9v and 10 in Феофилакт [ЛОПАТИНСКИЙ] [Feofilakt (LOPATINSKIY)]. *Обличение неправды расколническия показанныя в ответах выго[ре]цких пустосвяттов на вопросы честнаго иеромонаха Неофита, ко оувещанию и призыванию их к святей церкви* [Oblicheniye nepravdy raskolnicheskiya pokazannuya v otvetakh vygo[re]tskikh pustosvyatov na voprosy chestnago iyeromonakha Neofita, ko ouveshchaniyu i prizyvaniyu ikh k svyatey tserkvi] ([Москва: Синодальная типография] [Moskva: Sinodal'naya tipografiya], 1745).

the Trinity, but, unlike the 2-finger sign, it is using unequal fingers (274, 282), and thus the 2-finger sign signified the same honor for all three hypostases (285). To be fair, responses to such objections are theologizing on the same level of fingery detail (PAVEL 153).

If the 3-finger sign was a good enough reason to separate from the church, it must be heretical. After all, God gave a sign for those who fear Him (Ps. 60[59]: 6) (PO 263) and presumably this was the 2-finger sign. However, when asked directly about the heretical aspect of the 3-finger sign, Denisov answered, “We, the least of people, dare not to condemn the 3-finger sign” (56). This is not really an answer, but ducking the question. On the other hand, such evasiveness very frequently used in the *Otvety* was understandable considering the fact that the fate of the entire community hinged upon satisfying the inquisitiveness of Neofit without offending him and consequently without offending the Synod.

The second point of disagreement was the number of alleluias sung at the conclusion of psalmody: before Nikon, there were two of them, after Nikon who followed the Greeks, there were three alleluias. Singing “alleluia, alleluia, glory to You, God” was, in Denisov’s view, the proper way of singing (PO 152), whereas “alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, glory to You, God” he considered to be “a new creation of the Roman pope” (154, 159, 174, 185), “a Latin heresy which does not glorify the Trinity but some quaternity” (157). It was “a Latin tradition” (167) and thus unacceptable since the Old Believers agreed with the official church in their rejection of Catholicism (and Protestantism) as a legitimate Christian faith.

The third point of disagreement was the representation of the cross: the Old Believers argued that this should be the 8-pointed cross: two beams, a footrest, and the titulus, whereas since Nikon, the 4-pointed cross was used, just two beams. The Old Believers argued that the 8-pointed cross was prophesized in the Old Testament since Isaiah at one point mentioned three kinds of wood, cypress, oak, and cedar (60: 13), which the Old Believers, as also some liturgical texts (PO 451), took as kinds of wood used for the cross (iv). These three kinds of wood represent the Trinity (451). Denisov did not ban the 4-pointed cross outright, but rather carefully stated that the Old Believers “doubt in acceptance” of the 4-pointed cross (444) and they “beware of honoring” this cross (445). He said, we don’t question calling the 4-pointed cross a cross, but we question that it should have the same honor as the 8-pointed cross; we cannot call it the life-giving cross of the Lord (460). Besides, how can such a cross represent the Trinity? There is no 3 in the 4-pointed cross (461): it has 2 logs and 4 ends (462).

The proper image of the cross was important for the Eucharist, the next point of disagreement. The prosphoron, the communion bread, depicted before Nikon the 8-pointed cross inside a circle, where the circle symbolized the divinity of Christ without beginning and without end (PO 296), which was changed to the 4-pointed cross inside a square (119, 295). Since the mystery of transubstantiation takes place, it is important that the seal of prosphoron has the proper depiction of the cross. Otherwise, the legitimacy of the sacrament is put into doubt (454). Moreover, the Old Believers found it unacceptable that the number of prosphora used in liturgy was changed from seven to five (427).

The fifth point unacceptable for the Old Believers was the spelling of the name of Jesus. Denisov opted for the spelling Іс̄ (PO 300, 309), which is an abbreviation of Ісус (Isus), whereas Nikon's reform used the spelling Іӣс, an abbreviation of Іисус (Iisus).

The sixth point of disagreement was the modifications in the wording of the creed: a change from saying that Christ was "begotten but uncreated" to "begotten, not created" (PO 489), supposedly weakened by the removal of "but" the contrast between being born and being created; a change from "there is no end" of the rule of Christ to "there will be no end" (489) suggested that the Kingdom of God did not begin with the incarnation.⁷ There was also an omission of "true" in the reference to the Holy Spirit.

There are more, many more points of disagreement listed comprehensively in the *Pomorskiye otvety*,⁸ but they are of much lesser importance than the ones just listed, many—even most of them—rather insignificant and quite pedantic.

2. RESPONSES

It is rather interesting that responses to the *Pomorskiye otvety* were rather slow to come. Probably, their significance was not at first appreciated by the official church and probably the already existing criticism of the Old Believers may have been deemed sufficient.⁹ True, Feofilakt Lopatinskiy

⁷ М.О. ШАХОВ [M.O. SHAKHOV], *Старообрядческое мировоззрение* [Staroobryadcheskoye mirovozzreniye], 90.

⁸ It is thus justified to consider the *Pomorskiye otvety* a *summariu*m of teachings of the Old Believers. J. Ch. [BLASHKEVICH], *Die "Pomorskie otvety,"* 34.

⁹ There have been already six works aimed against the Old Believers: *Скрижаль* [Skrizhal'] published by initiative of patriarch Nikon (1656), *Жезл правления* [Zhezl pravleniya] of Simeon

wrote a book on the *Otvety* very soon after the latter was handed to Neofit in 1723; however, it appeared in print posthumously two decades later, in 1745.¹⁰ It is an erudite answer to some of the points raised in the *Otvety*. The book was prepared for publication by Arsenii Matseevich who also wrote a long addition to the book, which was a criticism of the preface of the *Otvety*.¹¹ However, this addition was not included in the publication of Lopatinskii's book, which is not a great loss since there is little substance in Matseevich work that is very rich in harsh language. In 1867 appeared a book of igumen Parfenii that concentrated only on the few last questions of the *Otvety*;¹² however, there is little that the reader can learn from it beyond a variety of ways of scolding the Old Believers. In 1890 came out by far the most

Polotskiy (1666), *Увет духовный* [Uvet dukhovnyy] (1682) of patriarch Ioakim, *Щит веры* [Shchit very] (1690) of Athanasii, archbishop of Kholmogory, *Розыск о раскольнической Брынской вере* [Rozysk o raskol'nicheskoy Brynskoj vere] of Dimitriy Rostovskiy, and *Пращица духовная* [Prashchitsa dukhovnaya] (1721) of archbishop Pitirim. [Андрей Н. МУРАВЬЕВ] [Andrey N. MURAV'YEV], *Раскол, обличаемый своею историею* [Raskol, oblichayemu svoeyuistoriyeu] (Санкт-Петербург: Типография II Отделения Собственной Е.И.В. Канцелярии [Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiya II Otdeleniya Sobstvennoy Ye.I.V. Kantselyarii], 1854), 232; Феофилакт [ЛОПАТИНСКИЙ] [Feofilakt (LOPATINSKIY)], *Обличение неправды раскольников* [Oblicheniye nepravdy raskolnicheskaya pokazannuya], 2v.

¹⁰ Феофилакт [ЛОПАТИНСКИЙ] [Feofilakt (LOPATINSKIY)], *Обличение неправды раскольников* [Oblicheniye nepravdy raskolnicheskaya pokazannuya]. In fact, a ukase was issued by the Synod during empress Elizabeth's reign to publish this book, *Полное собрание законов Российской Империи* [Polnoye sobraniye zakonov Rossiyskoj Imperii], Санктпетербург: Печатано в Типографии II Отделения Собственной Его Императорскаго Величества Канцелярии [Sanktpeterburg: Pechatano v Tipografii II Otdeleniya Sobstvennoy Yego Imperatorskago Velichstva Kantselyarii] 1830, vol. 12, #9046. The ukase also ordered republication of Rostovskiy's *Rozysk*.

¹¹ Арсений [МАЦЕЕВИЧ], [Arseni (MATSEYEVICH)], "Дополненное обличение неправых и лжесловесных ответов раскольнических, пустосвятами, Выгоцкими пустынножителями имянуемыми, честному иеромонаху Неофиту, от Святейшаго Правительствующаго Синода ради увещания к ним посланному в 1723 году, предложенных, составленное благословением того-ж Святейшаго Синода в нынешнем 1744 году" [Dopolnnoye oblicheniye nepravyykh i lzheslovesnykh otvetov raskol'nicheskikh, pustosvyatami, Vygotskimi pustynnozhitelyami imyanuemyymi, chestnomu iyeromonakhу Neofitu, ot Svyateyshago Pravitel'stvuyushchago Sinoda radi uveshchaniya k nim poslannomu v 1723 godu, predlozhennykh, sostavlennoye blagosloveniye yem togo-zh Svyateyshago Sinoda v nyneshnem 1744 godu], in *Описание документов и дел хранящихся в архиве Святейшаго Правительствующаго Синода* [Opisaniye dokumentov i del khranyashchikhsya v arkhive Svyateyshago Pravitel'stvuyushchago Sinoda], t. 1 (Санкт-Петербург: В Синодальной типографии [Sankt-Peterburg: V Sinodal'noy tipografii], 1868), cols. ccccxviii-ccccxxvi; t. 3 (Санкт-Петербург: В Синодальной типографии [Sankt-Peterburg: V Sinodal'noy tipografii], 1878), cols. cclxxxvii-cdii.

¹² ПАРФЕНИЙ [PARFENIY]. *Книга, возобличение на Поморские ответы* [Kniga, voblicheniye na Pomorskiye otvety].

comprehensive answer to the *Otvety* by Pavel Prusskiy, a former Old Believer who joined the church as part of Edinoverie. It contains erudite and detailed answers to each question, whereby it is about twice the size of the *Otvety*.

Very briefly: the principal problem with Denisov's proofs of the antiquity of particular elements is the selective use of his sources. Although the number of sources is impressive, it is not comprehensive by including what verifies his theses and disregarding what disproves them. First, the 3-finger sign is not a pure novelty introduced in Russia by Nikon as Denisov claimed (PO 56, 59, 61). It appears in old iconography and references are made to it in old books.¹³

The three alleluias are not a new invention, either. Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus said that an alleluia should be sung three times to signify the Trinity and once *Lord* to signify unity in the Trinity. True, the Stoglav council considered this to be anathema, but this was not the ecumenical council and its statements are a subject to modification by a larger council such as the one of 1667 (PAVEL 15), but even Stoglav recognized that singing three alleluias is very old. In any event singing two alleluias is also acceptable, although it is considered not having the fullness fitting the praise of the Trinity (16).

The official church recognizes both 4- and 8-pointed cross (PAVEL 14). The use of the 4-pointed cross is not arbitrary: Christ carried *His* cross (J. 19:17), thus, the cross of Christ, but at that time it did not have titulus (19:19) nor a footrest. Also, the 4-pointed cross was recognized by some Greek fathers; references to it are made in old church hymns and in old books (PAVEL 359-363) and it is depicted on old icons (377).

Old books do say that prosphoron should be stamped with the 4-pointed cross (not 8-pointed) (PAVEL 13). In fact, the Synod left it to the priests which cross to use on the prosphoron (14).

As to the name of Jesus, in his list, Denisov left out old books that use the spelling Iisus (Иисус, иѣс or иѣс) and did not mention this spelling was used in the same books along with the spelling Isus (PAVEL 237).¹⁴ Also, the

¹³ See, e.g., *Свидетельства о древности перстосложения именованного и троеперстнаго* [Svidetel'stva o drevnosti perstoslozheniya imenoslovnago i troyperstnago] (Москва: В Синодальной типографии [Moskva: V Sinodal'noy tipografii], 1884.

¹⁴ Cf. игумен ВАРЛААМ ([Василий] Чернявский) [VARLAAM ([Vasilii] Chernyavskiy)]. *Об измененіяхъ в чинѣ литургій: Иоанна Златоустаго, Василія Великаго и Григорія Двоеслова, указанныхъ в Поморскихъ отвѣтахъ и Мечѣ Духовномъ* [Obizmeneniyakh v chine liturgiy: Ioania Zlatoustago, Vasiliya Velikago i Grigoriya Dvoyeslova, ukazannykh v Pomorskikh otvetakh i Meche Dukhovnom] (Кишинев: В типографии Архиперейскаго Дома [Kishinev: V tipografii Arkhiipereyskago Doma], 1860), 325-328.

abbreviation Ιϛ̄ was used both for Ιϛ̄ϛ̄ and for Ιϛ̄ϛ̄ (246). The Greeks used the abbreviation ις̄ [is] along with full form, Ἰησοῦς [Iēsous] (257).

As to the wording of the creed: “but” in the phrase “begotten but uncreated” is not in the Greek original; “there will be no end” is from Lk. 1:33 (PAVEL 395). In fifteen manuscripts from 14th-16th centuries, it says “the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giving life,” and in ten of them from the same period it reads “the Holy Spirit, true and giving life,” in which the original τὸ κύριον [to kyrion], “the Lord,” was replaced by “true.” Since the 15th century the two readings were merged into “the Holy Spirit, the true Lord and giving life,” which may have been influenced by the expression “the Spirit of truth” (J. 15:26).¹⁵

The age of books as the source of Orthodoxy appears to be the primary factor for Denisov: “old printed books—as shining with Orthodoxy, as agreeing with old parchment books, as checked by very wise men of old, as held/kept by holy miracle workers—they are good for salvation and [they are] Orthodox.” New books not only are not in agreement with old ones, but “they also include statements in translation that have been condemned by holy men” (PO 393). Old books “do not have heresies, but they contain the holy Orthodoxy” (395). New books, on the other hand, are doubtful and dangerous (396, 400). Old teachers warn about novelties as a source of possible heresies, and thus as a means of avoiding heresies, all novelties should be rejected (397). Therefore, “We beware of novelties introduced in newly printed books since Nikonian years and we, the least of hermits, dare not pass judgment on your teaching; remaining in old church traditions of the holy fatherland, we observe the principles [found] in old printed books of the holy fatherland not to judge your reasoning, but for the salvation of our souls” (400).

However, Denisov did say that the old age of books is not enough. They have to agree with the holy fathers and with the old Orthodox church (PO 123). In the Florence council, Catholics showed an old book where procession of the Holy Spirit was from the Father and the Son, but Eastern fathers

¹⁵ А[вгуст М.] ГЕЗЕН [A(vgust M.) GEZEN], *Очерки и заметки из области филологии, истории и философии* [Ocherki i zametki iz oblasti filologii, istorii i filosofii] (Санкт-Петербург: Типография Императорской Академии наук [Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoj Akademii nauk], 1884), 57-60. The last phrase was probably overlooked while voicing a complaint that in the popular prayer to the Holy Spirit, “the true Soul” is changed to “the Soul of truth” suggesting that there is something higher than the Holy Spirit and, consequently, than God. М.О. ШАХОВ [M.O. SHAKHOV], *Старообрядческое мировоззрение* [Staroobryadcheskoye mirovozzreniye], 92. See also Paul MEYENDORFF, *Russia, ritual, and reform: the liturgical reforms of Nikon in the 17th century* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991), 178-179.

did not believe it since this book “is not in agreement with old Greek Orthodox books” (124). That is, the age of books was a decisive factor after all along with their quantity—one dissenting old book was trumped by many old books already accepted as Orthodox.

Not denying the existence of discrepancies in the church traditions, Denisov tried to use them in favor of the unity of this tradition. “There are variations in allowed church rituals transmitted from *various* holy Eastern ritual writers, but [they all] glorify one Orthodox piety,” and Denisov listed the liturgy of Studite, Jerusalem liturgy, liturgy of Mt. Sinai, and liturgy of Mt. Athos. “However, the church does not accuse of contradictions all these various rituals of the saints, but adorned like with *various* precious stones it shines with one light of piety” (PO 232). Granted, this is true, and yet it is puzzling why Denisov did not consider singing three alleluias to be a stone as precious as the stone associated with singing two alleluias.

An opposition to Nikon’s reform was from the beginning treated with a heavy hand. Avvakum, the best known opponent of Nikon (and an ally before Nikon became the patriarch), described his fate and that of others, which included defrocking and exile. Another example is a bloody suppression of the opposition of the Solovki monastery. Denisov had to tread lightly when answering Neofit’s questions and frequently resorted to evasive answers not to offend Neofit, the Synod, and the tsar. Thus, to the point-blank question, whether Peter I, the Synod, and all Orthodox Christians are Orthodox or heretical, Denisov answered, to Caesar what is Caesar’s, so people “owe respect, humility and gratitude and loyal service at all times to the autocrat put [here] by the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honor, most illustrious, most majestic imperator, our most gracious ruler” (PO 401). We dare not say anything against the tsar, the Synod, said Denisov; we should not judge but pray for people (402). And again, “It is not for us to investigate and judge the Orthodoxy of a monarch.” We should only honor the tsar and watch what our own life is (474, 476). Considering the sociopathic behavior of Peter I, the closest call appeared to be the question of whether Peter in all his wisdom and care for salvation of people (504) was unable to see heresy in all this. Do you think you are wiser than the tsar and the Synod?, asked Neofit. After praises given to Peter (505), Denisov stated, “we don’t institute our own dogmas, we don’t create our own invented rites, but in the simplicity of the heart we keep most loyally and most humbly rules of the holy apostolic councils, we observe the existing Orthodox substance (готовое содержание [gotovoye soderzhaniye]) of the saints,

which is not some kind of elevating oneself through inventiveness, but the most humble following of the old Orthodox church,” which was followed with a clever repartee: Do you, Neofit, that is, think you are wiser than the tsars who followed old rules? (506).

Similar evasiveness is exercised when asked about the orthodoxy of faith of any believers. Will good Orthodox believers now be saved or perished?, asked Neofit (PO 476). Judgment about who is saved belongs to Christ and such a question should not be asked, responded Denisov (477), and yet, he apparently slipped when stating as to those who abandoned old rules, “none of them will be honored by God with imperishability of the body, ... none will be honored by God with miracles and signs” (479), and yet, “we dare not judge others” (480), “we don’t take upon ourselves the judgment of God and do not dare judge the way you do: we care about our own salvation” (481), “we are concerned about preserving our salvation, not in accusing your new teaching as separation” (523).

The point of Nikon’s reform was to bring Russian liturgy more in line with the liturgy of the Eastern church that was exercised outside of Russia. Bad move, according to the Old Believers. Reports from a visit of the East right before the patriarchate of Nikon indicated that many old rites had been violated: the 3-finger sign; baptism by pouring; the 4-pointed cross; a different time at which transformation of bread and wine takes place; Greeks sing in the sitting position; they stand with hats on their heads (PO 524-526). This indicated in Denisov’s eyes that outside of Russia the purity of Orthodoxy was seriously compromised, and in spite of the disclaimer that “we dare not judge the ecumenical patriarchs,” we just convey our reflection (517) it appears that for Denisov there was nowhere Orthodoxy in the world (527), that is, the Old Believers were the only true Orthodox believers in the entire world. Denisov stated that there are many beliefs in the world and each one elevates itself over other beliefs. However, the Old Believers rely on old dogmas and beliefs of those whose bodies were preserved and whose lives were accompanied by miracles sent by God (529), which amounts to the statement that there is no Christianity outside the Old Believers – and considering the multitude of disagreeing factions among them – no Christianity outside the Vyg community.

3. SACRAMENTS

The Orthodox church recognizes seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, chirotonia (ordination by the laying on of hands), repentance, marriage, and anointing of the sick. The Eucharist is the culmination of the church service when the bread is transformed into the body of Christ. The sacrament can only be performed by the priest consecrated by a bishop. What is the stance of the Old Believers in respect to sacraments, in particular, the priestless groups such as the one represented by Denisov? Rejection of official Orthodox priesthood meant that no Eucharist was possible among the Old Believers and, in a sense, the entire discussion in the *Pomorskiye otvety* concerning the proper way of handling the prosphoron and the mystery of transubstantiation was vacuous since none of it could take place among priestless Old Believers. This, of course, raises the problem of how Orthodox their Christianity can be if crucial elements of the Orthodox doctrine and practice are absent among the Old Believers. Neofit did not miss that point and asked Denisov about it. Denisov's answer was that most of the sacraments are disposable, at least in unfavorable circumstances. As to the Eucharist, if it is impossible to take the Eucharist, then the ardent desire to take it and good works can replace it (PO 559). Interestingly, priestless that they were, Pomortsy at first tried to solve the problem by getting the Eucharist from some priests and mixed it into dough to bake a large batch for many people to share.¹⁶

According to Denisov, only two sacraments are necessary for salvation: baptism and repentance (PO 547). For instance, anointing with oil which is proper to be used during baptism (556) as a stamp of salvation is not necessary and in the absence of a priest baptism can take place without oil and in the time of need, salvation is possible without anointing with oil. Even the apostles baptized in such a way (557). James said (5:16), confess sins one to another (570) and apparently apostles confessed sins to one another (571). Also, monks take confession although they are not priests; as Denisov stated, "taking *pomysl* is confession of human sins" (552). According to the Ortho-

¹⁶ PAVEL 470 note 1; see also Федор В. Ливанов [Fedor V. LIVANOV], *Раскольники и острожники: очерки и рассказы* [Raskol'niki i ostrozhniki: ocherki i rasskazy], vol. 3 (Санкт-Петербург: Типография М. Хана [Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiya M. Khana], 1872), 29-30. Sharing the Eucharistic bread by the Vyg community was condemned in one of Elizabeth's ukases. *Полное собрание законов Российской Империи* [Polnoye sobraniye zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii], vol. 12, #9155.

dox doctrine, a priest has also a power of absolving from sins, the power not possessed by monks. Therefore, confessions of sins in their presence is a preparatory step, *pomysl*, for a confession and absolutions by a priest (cf. PAVEL 464-465), the step which is missing in the Old Believers' doctrine. Apparently, confession means also absolution, which places the Old Believers dangerously closely to Protestantism which they considered heretical. Denisov elsewhere defined repentance to be "the call of baptism, reform of life, salvation from eternal death, purification from sin, confession of all lawlessness, escape from the will of the devil, coming to God, liberation from eternal suffering, receiving the [entry to] the Kingdom of Heaven." Repenting person "confesses to Lord God and to the qualified/competent man (искусный муж [iskusnyy muzh]) as to a physician."¹⁷ If this competent person acts as a physician, does that mean that he can absolve sins the way an Orthodox priest can? Denisov would not go that far, but confessing sins to one another he interpreted as confessing them to a designated person, a person with a priest-like status. And so, every member of the community in Vyg and Leksa should have a spiritual father and confess sins four times a year. Incidentally, during confession, these spiritual fathers would ask a lot of questions, presumably in the interest of the penitent's spiritual purity; for example, he would ask if someone had money which should be given to the community, if a person gave something to his relatives and if so, this should be taken back and given to the community.¹⁸

Another problem for the Old Believers was marriage. This was a problem for the priestly factions since by the decree of the Synod, marriages performed by Old Believers' priests were not recognized by the state.¹⁹ For priestless factions it was even a bigger problem since the sacrament of marriage was effectively abolished. Denisov's solution was to require universal

¹⁷ Елена М. ЮХИМЕНКО [Yelena M. YUKHIMENKO], *Выговская старообрядческая пустынь. Духовная жизнь и литература* [Vygovskaya staroobryadcheskaya pustyn'. Dukhovnaya zhizn' i literatura], vol. 2 (Москва: Языки славянской культуры [Moskva: YAzyki slavyanskoj kul'tury] (Москва: Языки славянской культуры, 2002), 363-364.

¹⁸ Е[лпидифор В.] БАРСОВ, [Ye(lpidifor V.) BARSOV], "Уложение братьев Денисовых (Материалы для истории поморского раскола) [Ulozheniye brat'yev Denisovykh (Materialy dlya istorii pomorskogo raskola)]," in *Памятная книжка Олонетской губернии за 1868-69 год* [Pamyatnaya knizhka Olonetskoj gubernii za 1868-69 god], edited by Олонетский Губернский Статистический Комитет [Olonetskiy Gubernskiy Statisticheskij Komitet], (Петрозаводск: В Губернской типографии [Petrozavodsk: V Guvernskoj tipografii], 1869), часть III [chast' III], 105, 107-108.

¹⁹ Issued on 15 May 1722, "oath given in schism is not valid." *Полное собрание законов Российской Империи* [Polnoye sobraniye zakonov Rossiyskoj Imperii], vol 6, #4009.

celibacy. He did say, “we do not prohibit marriage, but we consider virginity to be better than marriage”; however, in the present situation the former was required: with the end of clergy, the sacrament of marriage disappeared and thus all people who wanted to please God should live in virginity. Men and women lived in separate buildings and they should not meet and even see one another. Even during the burial of Andrey Denisov men and women stood separately and there was a curtain put between them so they did not see one another but could only hear one another’s singing. Semon Denisov wrote in rules of conduct that married couples who live in skits “when they begin to live not in the way of the desert, but according to the custom of the world,” if they do not mend their ways, should be expelled from the skit and separated from the church until they correct their lives. Although sometimes it was claimed that there was “the destruction of the sacrament of marriage in the entire world,” for priestless Old Believers it was certain that there is no clergy in Russia. However, one Mikhail Vyshatin suggested that there may be some clergy in the East, in Palestine. Vyshatin even traveled to Palestine, but in 1732 he died after a long and unsuccessful search.²⁰ The requirement of celibacy turned out to be too stringent and led to the emergence of various priestless factions with sometimes ingenuous justification of avoiding celibacy. As rather delicately stated, “the doctrine of enemies of marriage turned out not only to be inapplicable to *life*, but also led to immoral *teaching*.”²¹

4. OLD BELIEF AND ORTHODOXY

Before Andrey Denisov launched into an interminable discussion of ritual minutia, he stated that the Old Believers believe and worship the holy Trinity, without beginning, always existing, inseparable and tri-hypostatic, of equal power, inconceivable: the true Father God without beginning, the Son without beginning and coexisting Son born of God and the Holy Spirit,

²⁰ И[ван Ф.] Нильский [I(van F.) NIL'SKIY], *Семейная жизнь в русском расколе* [Semeynaya zhizn' v russkom raskole] (Санкт-Петербург: Типография Департамента уделов [Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiya Departamenta udelov], 1869), vol. 1, 21, 101, 26, 27, 29, 103, 105. See also R. CRUMMEY, *The Old Believers and the world of Antichrist*, 115-125, 203.

²¹ П[ётр] С. Смирнов [P[yetr] S. SMIRNOV], *Внутренние вопросы в расколе в XVII веке: исследование из начальной истории раскола по вновь открытым памятникам, изданным и рукописным* [Vnutrenniye voprosy v raskole v XVII veke: issledovaniye iz nachal'noy istorii raskola po vnov' otkrytym pamyatnikam, izdannym i rukopisnym] (Санкт-Петербург: Товарищество “Печатня С.П. Яковлева” [Sankt-Peterburg: Tovarishchestvo “Pechatnya S.P. Yakovleva”], 1898), 181.

creator of life proceeding from the Father (PO 8). They believe in the Son, the Son of God and the Son of man, God and man, they accept all sacraments, all laws and prohibitions, all traditions of the church (PO 9). A similar confession of faith was also made by his brother, Semon.²² This is a very Orthodox confession of faith. Why the schism? At the end of his confession of faith, Semon spoke about their belief in the 2-finger sign. And thus, it appears that one detail of a ritual is treated on equal footing with grand theological statements about the nature of God. That is, the 2-finger sign was treated as a dogma and thus departure from it necessitated the schism from the official church which became heretical by violating this ritual dogma. A bit harsh statement that the 2-finger sign became a magical sign²³ was not entirely unjustified. There was an attempt made to add some profundity to it through philosophy by stating that for the Old Believers each outward form has inner, symbolic essence with which it is not connected by convention, but it is an inner, objective union.²⁴ However, this type of philosophical justification pointed to the Old Believers' magical thinking.

The reaction of the official church to the Old Believers' reticence to accept Nikonian ritual and textual reform was unduly harsh and cruel. On a few occasions Denisov justifiably lamented over the fact of "persecutions, torment and burning by fire" of the Old Believers (PO 261). St. Meletii said that "rumors and differences, bringing heresies and ecclesiastical confusion" result from introducing new customs; and so it is with "new customs introduced by Nikon: what woes, persecutions, blood-shedding and tormenting people they brought to Russia; this is testified by those tormented and immolated and those who died in prison; this is witnessed by all inhabitants of the Russian land" (435). When monks in Solovki said, "we don't accept new rituals and books and we don't want to hear and we are all unanimously ready to die" (9), they were simply exterminated. Small wonder that in the face of such cruelty, the Old Believers fled to far away places and abroad, particularly to Poland. Their statement that they were ready to put down

²² Е.М. ЮХИМЕНКО [Ye.M. YUKHIMENKO], *Выговская старообрядческая пустынь*. [Vygovskaya staroobryadcheskaya pustyn'], 472-473.

²³ Феофилакт [ЛОПАТИНСКИЙ] [Feofilakt (LOPATINSKIY)], *Обличение неправды расколничества* [Oblicheniye nepravdy raskolnicheskaya pokazannuya], 4.

²⁴ М.О. ШАХОВ [M.O. SHAKHOV], *Старообрядческое мировоззрение* [Staroobryadcheskoye mirovozzreniye], 110. "Since faith and baptism are inseparable, violation of form of baptism discloses the violation of the essence of faith, but violations of essence can be disclosed in many different verbal and nonverbal forms. This can explain the fact that unchangeability of outward forms of a sacrament of baptism is sometimes associated with the lack, with the loss of its ideal essence," 125.

their own lives for their old beliefs was not vacuous as testified by numerous self-immolations: they burned themselves rather than give up crossing oneself with two fingers. Did they really believe in God who would be offended by using three fingers in crossing oneself rather than two fingers or that He would send someone to hell for praising Him with singing alleluia three times rather than twice?

The official church's reaction in rebuttal of the Old Believers' arguments was no less violent. Frequently very harsh name-calling and insulting almost outweighed counterarguments (e.g., Matseevich and Parfenii). Lopatinskii called schismatics stubborn fools, rogues, devils, and the like and with his tone shows the insufficiency of Christian love.²⁵ It is hardly feasible that dissenters could be won over to the official Orthodoxy by preponderance of scurrilous verbal attacks.

For decades neither side relented. However, time mollified some passions and compromise came at the end of the 18th century when concessions were made to the Old Believers. The old ritual became canonical and priests were ordained to officiate it and willing Old Believer became a part of Edinovertsy. In this, the Orthodox church followed an example of the Catholic church that accommodated Orthodox believers as Uniates. Truly, "had a similar step been taken when Alexis was on the throne it might have stifled the Raskol at its birth."²⁶

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²⁵ As observed by А[лександр Л.] СИНАЙСКИЙ [A[leksandr L.] SINAYSKIY], *Отношение русской церковной власти к расколу старообрядства в первые годы Синодального управления при Петре Великом (1721-1725 г.)* [Otnosheniye russkoy tserkovnoy vlasti k raskolu staroobryadstva v pervyye gody Sinodal'nogo upravleniya pri Petre Velikom (1721-1725 g.)] (Санкт-Петербург: Синодальная Типография [Sankt-Peterburg: Sinodal'naya Tipografiya] 1895), 135.

²⁶ Albert F. HEARD, *The Russian church and Russian dissent* (New York: Harper & Brothers 1887), 231-232.

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О ПОМОРСКИХ ОДПОВИДЗИАХ

Streszczenie

Pomorskie odpowiedzi to prezentacja doktryny staroobrzędowców w formie odpowiedzi na 106 pytań przekazanych przez przedstawiciela Synodu, hieromnicha Neofita. W tej pracy, napisanej głównie przez Andrzeja Denisowa, omówiono główne punkty niezgody między staroobrzędowcami a oficjalnym kościołem: żegnanie się dwoma palcami, liczba śpiewanych *alleluja*, prezentacja krzyża, Eucharystia, pisownia imienia Jezusa, sformułowanie credo i wiele innych. Artykuł przedstawia krótko te kwestie i odpowiedzi na nie. Omawia również problem żywotności sakramentów wśród staroobrzędowców i koncentruje się na Eucharystii i sakramencie małżeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: ortodoksja; staroobrzędowcy; sakramenty.