

Thomas Marsden

**Afanasii Shchapov and the Significance of
Religious Dissent in Imperial Russia, 1848-70**

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Abbreviations

NART	Natsional'nyi arkhiv respubliki tatarstana, Kazan'
<i>ES</i>	<i>Etnograficheskii sbornik</i>
<i>OV</i>	<i>Obshchee Veche</i>
<i>ZhMNP</i>	<i>Zhurnal ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniia</i>
Kel'siev, <i>SPS</i> (1)	V. Kel'siev, <i>Sbornik pravitel'stvennykh svedenii o raskol'nikakh, vypusk pervyi</i> (London, 1860).
Kel'siev, <i>SPS</i> (2)	V. Kel'siev, <i>Sbornik pravitel'stvennykh svedenii o raskol'nikakh, vypusk vtoroi</i> (London, 1861).
Mel'nikov, <i>PSS</i>	P. Mel'nikov, <i>Polnoe sobranie sochinenii</i> (Moscow, 1898).
Shchapov, <i>RRS</i>	A. Shchapov, <i>Russkii raskol staroobriadchestva</i> (Kazan', 1859).
Shchapov, <i>GDRTs</i>	A. Shchapov, <i>Golos' drevnei russkoi tserkvi ob uluchshenii byta nesvobodnykh liudei</i> (Kazan', 1859).

Archival Notation:

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

I

Introduction

Russian society in the mid-nineteenth century is often depicted as being riven by unbridgeable gulfs, the final consequence of which was the creation of a small caste of revolutionaries determined to seize power: unbridgeable gulfs between educated and uneducated, between the radical intelligentsia and the bureaucratic regime, and within the intelligentsia itself. However real these schisms were, to the educated and to the uneducated, the radical and the bureaucrat, the word schism itself, *raskol*, had essentially a religious meaning. It denoted the schism between the Orthodox and the heterodox; a *raskol'nik* was first of all a religious dissenter. The word came to represent a way of life, as though those who belonged to the *raskol* constituted a separate society within the empire.¹ In the 1850s and 1860s when a clear and active opposition was emerging to Orthodox and autocratic Russia the political meaning, significance and allegiance of the *raskol* became important for both radical and bureaucrat in revolutionary terms.

The *raskol* emerged two hundred years earlier. The question of its political allegiance had always been pertinent for the government, hence the level of persecution of the *raskol'niki* varied depending on the political priorities of the regime in question. It was this persecuted history of opposition that gave it significance to the new political opposition which was attempting to find footholds in the rifts of Russian society. It is therefore significant that Afanasii Shchapov (1830-76), the most important thinker in the development of the radical opposition's relationship with religious dissent, was a historian.

This historical interest in the *raskol* corresponded to a practical endeavour. The writings of Shchapov are significant in their relevance to radicals before, contemporary

¹ In fact although it was common to examine religious dissent as a whole under the label of the *raskol*, dissent was made up of a multitude of different sects which were often as divided from each other as they were from the Orthodox.

with and after him, the latter under the influence of his works, who held the belief that the *raskol'niki* were their allies. It could be argued that attempts by political opponents to engage with the *raskol* date back to its very conception; certainly this was Shchapov's view. Yet it was in his own time that engagement with the *raskol* became an avowed policy of the political opposition. In 1848 the Petrashevtsy circle's most ambitious plan for revolution, which was never acted upon, involved the supposed amenability of *raskol'niki* working in the Ural factories of Perm' province. Similar hopes directed the efforts of Polish revolutionaries and the radical émigrés led by Alexander Herzen at the Free Russian Press in London. It was the hope of winning the support of the *raskol'niki* that made freedom of conscience so important a tenet to the platform of the atheistic opposition.

The political opposition saw the society of the *raskol* as the society of the repressed simple people expressing their true desires and beliefs. It was therefore given central importance in their endeavour to understand the simple people, the *narod*. Their concern was not with the theological dimension of dissent, a dimension they were often keen to devalue or discount. What mattered was that popular religion, in its antagonistic relationship to the state, meant a ready source of popular opposition which existed among the often too docile *narod*. It could be contended that the revolution of the *raskol*, another of Russia's failed revolutions, failed because of the radicals' misunderstanding of popular religion.

While it is tempting to adduce this failure to the theoretical parochialism of the radicals when it came to their attempts to reconcile with the *narod*, this assumption overlooks the wider significance of the issue. An examination of Shchapov's works suggests that the political significance of the sects was more complex than a radical pipe-dream. Closer inspection of the discourses with which Shchapov engaged shows this to be the case. His education was ecclesiastical and in his early works the influence of the Orthodox denunciatory interpretations of dissent are clear. Later he worked shortly for the Ministry of Internal Affairs and while his sympathies widely differed from his colleagues, the influence of official concepts of the *raskol* are also in evidence. A third discourse from which he borrowed, with which he engaged, and which in his later works he

contributed to, was scientific ethnography, in which dissent was used to evaluate the relationship between the people and progress.

All this suggests that the unbridgeable gulfs between radical, bureaucrat, and ecclesiastic were neither decisive nor static. But what of the *raskol* itself? Was it beyond the reach of the atheistic opposition? Shchapov tried to understand the *raskol* using sources of their written culture. Similar sources have been used by modern historians attempting to address questions of popular religion and peasant mentality. Shchapov politicised religious dissent, banditry, and vagrancy, which have recently been analysed as examples of everyday, resistance, protests against the existing order and therefore political. His interpretations should be evaluated in this context of understanding peasant resistance. This is especially true of the period of social ferment surrounding the emancipation decree of 1861. The response of the dissenters to this is unknown, although they have been credited with playing an important role in interpreting the decree and contributing to disturbances, such as the Bezdna rebellion of 1861 when peasants resisting the authorities were massacred by government troops.² Shchapov was directly involved in the aftermath of this event when he delivered an eulogy for the peasants. He interpreted the disturbance as arising from dissent, from pious strivings to democracy and equality.

Shchapov moved away from such religious interpretations in his later works but it seems clear that his journey towards radicalism was inspired in part by his religious education and interests. If Shchapov felt that popular religion was closely connected with popular revolt, was there a parallel connection between religious and radical thought among the radical intelligentsia? Although mostly atheistic, a high proportion of radicals were educated for the priesthood. Therefore, the significance of Shchapov's works and the politics of religious sects is connected to the subversive nature of piety, popular or otherwise. Whilst a gulf certainly existed between elite and popular cultures the study of the *raskol* suggests that greater understanding of their relationship to one another is needed, that in various ways the educated responded to the intellectual development of the *narod* and that in questions of piety there may have been convergence.

What then was the meaning of religious dissent? An expression of popular piety

² F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (St Ives, 2001), pp.212-3.

and the real spirit of the people or a protest which encompassed the political and social inclinations of the people and linked it with the aims of the radicals? For Shchapov the meaning of dissent changed as he engaged with different discourses. To understand the relevance of his interpretations it is necessary to examine concepts of dissent at all levels in the 1850s and 1860s: the works of the educated about the *raskol*; the attempts of radicals to engage with it; the efforts of the government and church to deal with it; and how dissent was understood at a popular level.

The development of Shchapov's thought, and the different discourses with which he engaged, can be seen in his major works relating to the *raskol*. His Master's dissertation, which became the book *The Russian Raskol of the Old Ritualists*, published in Kazan' in 1858, shows the influence of ideas concerning *raskol'niki* which had been prevalent in the last years of Nicholas's reign and also the influence of his ecclesiastical education. *Zemstvo i Raskol* and *Zemstvo i Raskol II - Beguny* both published in the journal *Vremia* in 1862, show a far more radical viewpoint. Politically they deal with ideals of social organisation which prevailed in populist circles, most notably among the London émigrés led by Herzen. They developed a more complex thesis on *raskol* society which was accepted by radicals but which did not correspond to the reality of the *raskol* in the new political climate of post-emancipation Russia. *A Historical Essay concerning the philosophy and superstition of the narod* printed in the *Journal of the Ministry of People's Enlightenment* in 1863 and *The Mental Direction of the Russian Raskol* which appeared in the *Journal Delo* in 1867, demonstrate the ethnographic significance of Shchapov's studies, corresponding to the prestige of science in Russian society at this time.

Major studies of populism by Venturi and Gleason have placed Shchapov in the radical lineage of pre-revolutionary Russia. For Venturi he is one of the major figures in the intellectual movement of the sixties. In contrast to the more famous radicals Chernyshevskii and Dobroliubov, who wanted to reconcile the aims of the intelligentsia with the people by providing guidance, Shchapov started with the people, hoping to learn

from their traditions and institutions.³ He contrasted these popular institutions with the institutions of the state, and in emphasising this anti-thesis was ‘preparing the ground to be covered some years later by revolutionary populism right up to the time of Bakunin.’⁴ Gleason has argued that the works of Shchapov show the intellectual kinship between the conservative Slavophilism of the 1840s and 1850s with the radical populism of the 1860s. The Slavophiles encouraged the study of popular life and extolled its communal institutions and Orthodoxy as the basis for a mystical unity and freedom. The Slavophiles were not opposed to autocracy, but opposed the Western alienation of the elite from the people which had occurred since Peter I’s reforms. In common with the Slavophiles, the populists idealised the people. However, as their ideal was revolution, ethnographers and historians including Shchapov, searched for the germs of revolt in the life of the *narod*.⁵

The political rather than mystical conclusions that Shchapov drew from examining peasant institutions, together with his hatred of serfdom and autocracy, places him closer in thought to Herzen, the most important figure in early Russian socialism. Herzen left Russia in 1847 and soon after settled permanently in London. He continued to influence public opinion in Russia through his newspaper *Kolokol*. Following the failure of the European revolutions in 1848, Herzen began looking for a specifically Russian socialism. He argued for freedom of development for the individual which could not be achieved with the existence of serfdom and arbitrary government. Contrary to the centralising force of the ‘Byzantine-German government’ Herzen saw the political future of Russia in another direction: ‘Centralisation is contrary to the Slav genius; federalism...is its natural form of expression.’⁶ The peasant had only submitted to the centralised state from despair; he had never believed in its authority. The only thing that the peasant accepted was the commune. This rural communism could be made sacrosanct by a social revolution. Herzen saw in the commune hope for future development and he specifically mentioned the communes of the *raskol*, stating that the bonds were closer

³ Ibid., p.196.

⁴ Ibid., p.201.

⁵ A. Gleason, *Young Russia* (Chicago, 1980), pp.180-224.

⁶ A. Herzen, *From the Other Shore* (London, 1956), p.175.

due to solidarity in persecution.⁷ As Etkind has noted, the socialist potential of the commune, and in particular of the sectarian commune, was first indicated in the work of the Prussian traveller Baron von Haxthausen.⁸ His ideas about the natural communal inclinations of the Russians and the necessity of preserving them strongly influenced the political thought of both Herzen and Shchapov.⁹

The most important demand of both radical and liberal in the 1840s and 1850s was the abolition of serfdom. This made the question of the peasants central. Even tsar Nicholas I had examined ways of freeing the serfs, but his fear of peasant revolution and of landlord discontent prevented any meaningful measures. After 1848 public discussion of the question became impossible. Concerned by the threat of socialism and constitutionalism faced by his European allies, Nicholas initiated a period of absolute intellectual repression.

Shchapov's first works come from the period immediately following Nicholas's death in 1855 when hopes for change were high. Alexander II ended the extreme censorship and in 1857 declared his intention to free the serfs. Shchapov's historical works of this period, which examined incidences of peasant revolt and the importance of Peter's reforms, were published when the shadows of both Peter the Great and Pugachev, the famous peasant rebel, loomed large over public opinion. Hope was placed in Alexander II as another reforming despot, without whom another Pugachev was inevitable.

Shchapov's second works on the *raskol* appeared in 1862, after his removal from Kazan' to St. Petersburg for his participation in the requiem for peasants shot at Bezdna. They are more explicitly political in content, examining the socialist and democratic aspirations of the people. This reflected the change in mood following the emancipation. The publication of the edict at the beginning of 1861, which aimed only to preserve the existing hegemony, destroyed the illusion that radicals and tsar were working together. Without reform from above the autocracy remained intact and could only be changed by

⁷ Ibid., p.184.

⁸ A. Etkind, 'Whirling with the Other: Russian Populism and Religious Sects', *The Russian Review*, 62 (2003), p.571.

⁹ A. von Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire, its People, Institutions, and Resources* (London, 1856), p.160.

revolution. In this increasingly revolutionary climate contact with the people became imperative. Having seen the isolation of the people and their inability to interpret the statute Herzen began both to urge the educated to go to the people and began to appeal directly to them. This became the basic call of the populist movement as it attempted to bridge the gap between the educated and the peasant whilst emphasising their common goals.

At this time the first practical efforts by populists were made to link their aims with those of the religious dissenters. Herzen's first paper aimed at a popular readership *Obshchee Veche*, The General Assembly, was primarily directed towards *raskol'niki*. Moreover, with the help of the émigré revolutionary Vasilii Kel'siev (1835-72) the London émigrés attempted to establish links with Old Believers and Kel'siev published collections of documents concerning them for distribution in Russia. The alliance between political and religious dissent was not realised. After the Polish Revolt of 1863 it became more difficult for the paper to be distributed. A patriotic reaction resulted in those radicals who sympathised with the Poles losing public support. This allowed the government to act against its opponents, many of whom were exiled. Among them was Shchapov who was accused of having connections to Kel'siev. Though these connections were never proved, the government's assumptions were clearly based on their common interest in the political significance of the *raskol*.

Despite its obvious importance, the relationship between religious dissent and political radicalism has been neglected in the historiography. Recently Alexander Etkind has attempted to redress the balance. He discusses the significance of sectarian religion to the populist movement and Shchapov as the founder of a theory which connected dissent with revolution and which had important consequences. Etkind emphasises the ethnographic aspects of Shchapov's thought. The study of the people as 'other' was central to the populist movement as it attempted to learn from them and draw on their potential. Shchapov's importance was in 'identifying the other in Russian society.'¹⁰ In drawing attention to the exoticism of religious sects he revealed for a later generation the political, social, and imaginative forces which existed in this ready-made alternative culture to official Russia.

¹⁰ A. Etkind, 'Whirling with the Other', *The Russian Review*, 62 (2003), p.574.

The ethnographic significance of Shchapov's work was not confined to the development of radical populism. Especially in his later works he entered into a scientific discourse, used by radicals such as Chenshevskii and Pisarev but also by progressive officials, which stressed the importance of science in both the study of the people and in application to national life. Nathaniel Knight has shown how Russian ethnography emerged from the Russian Geographical Society, an official organisation founded in 1845. Nikolai Nadezhdin (1804-56) was the founder of this specifically Russian ethnography. Like the radicals of the Slavophil tradition Nadezhdin believed that each nation had a unique spirit. He searched for this national essence through the detailed study of the *byt*, way of life, of the peasants.¹¹

The application of science in the search for Russian nationality had a political motivation. Many of the members of the society saw it as an extension of the bureaucracy, a way to gather the reliable information which the Ministry of Internal Affairs strived to have of the people. The membership consisted of enlightened bureaucrats who, by the 1850s were committed to the emancipation of the serfs and who saw the study of the peasantry as a means to attain this goal.¹² The incentive for the government to gather information about the way of life of its subjects did not end with the emancipation. In fact the reforms which increased the role of the peasants in local government and judiciary demanded even greater knowledge. A mixture of moral and economic questions placed the peasant at the centre of concerns about Russia's future.¹³

Despite pretensions of science, it was absolute concepts of the *narod*, consequences of ideology rather than observation, which prevailed. Many of the populists idealised the people and saw in them egalitarian socialist revolutionaries. Others called for the intelligentsia to lead the people due to the peasants' perceived ignorance, which could be seen in their religiosity and faith in the tsar, which prevented them from fulfilling their true revolutionary potential. This latter position was taken by the anti-idealists

¹¹ N. Knight, 'Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographic Society, 1845-55', in J. Burbank and D. Ransel (eds.), *Imperial Russia* (Bloomington, 1998), pp.120-1.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.111-112.

¹³ C. Frierson, *Peasant Icons. Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York, 1993), p.vii.

of the 1860s. Led by Chernyshevskii they demanded a ‘realist’ depiction of the people, and while they recognised their revolutionary potential, they denied them any constructive power. As Chernyshevskii argued, without leadership ‘the people are ignorant, dominated by primitive prejudices and blind hatred...They will act against...all without exception...[they] will destroy our civilisation.’¹⁴

As seen in the works of Shchapov, which both assail the *narod* for its ignorance and praise it for its creative energy, these concepts could be confused. The *narod* was both the ‘other’ and the very spirit of the nation. This meant that bestiality and spiritual strength were not mutually exclusive. The former could be explained by a lack of enlightenment or centuries of oppression. Either way it meant that the *narod* ‘served the psychological needs of educated Russia’ as a ‘simple, unenlightened, homogeneous unit of humanity...capable of receiving society’s projected ideals.’¹⁵

This ‘myth of the peasant’, which has been examined by Daniel Field, also determined the government’s interaction with the peasantry. The *narod* was seen as essentially passive, God-fearing and tsar-loving, which justified the patriarchal order. According to the myth, the peasants ‘can be stirred out of their natural and salutary inertia, only by an outside passer-by or agitator.’¹⁶ Field has shown how this myth effected the interpretation of events after peasant resistance at Bezdna in 1861. The peasants claimed that with the emancipation decree the tsar had given them true freedom; they refused to work, saying that the landlords and officials were concealing this from them. Their resistance was never violent but government troops fired on them killing between seventy and three hundred peasants. The official interpretation was that the peasants had been led astray by the ring-leader Anton Petrov due to their credulousness and love for the tsar. It was in the regime’s interest not to disturb the myth of the peasants’ loyalty in spite of this open manifestation of discontent. The radicals also interpreted the event according to their myths: with Shchapov leading the way it was seen as an example of the ‘political initiative’ of the peasants in their desire for democracy.¹⁷

¹⁴ F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (St Ives, 2001), p.174.

¹⁵ C. Frierson, *Peasant Icons* (New York, 1993), p.53.

¹⁶ D. Field, ‘The Year of Jubilee’, in B. Eklof, J. Bushnell, and L. Zakharova (eds.), *Russia’s Great Reforms, 1855-1881* (Bloomington, 1994), p.47.

¹⁷ D. Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston, 1976), pp.101-2.

The historiography of this protest has ignored the fact that both official documents and radical interpretations saw religious dissenting involvement in the protest. Both the reality of this and the significance of religious dissent for the ‘myth of the peasant’ have yet to be evaluated. After all, the religious dissenter could neither be seen as Orthodox, nor in many cases tsar-loving, and yet a large number of Russian peasants were dissenters.¹⁸ In fact the ‘myth of the peasant’ determined a myth of the *raskol’nik*, which could either compliment or subvert the former. As with the ‘myth of the peasant’, the myth of the *raskol’nik* was used by the educated elite to overcome diversity in popular life.

Shchapov’s interest in the *raskol* reflected growing concerns about religious dissent in church and government. The treatment of the *raskol* was founded on the law ‘concerning the prevention and suppression of the *raskol* and heresy amongst the Orthodox.’ This law, dating back to the seventeenth century, stated that the *raskol’niki* should not be persecuted for opinions of faith, but they are forbidden to corrupt or persuade anyone into the *raskol*, ‘to cause any kind of insolence against the Orthodox Church’ or in general to deviate from lawful regulations.¹⁹ However, the vagueness of the formulation meant that it was open to wide interpretation. It permitted the beliefs to be held while not allowing any manifestation of them.

Moreover this basis of toleration became increasingly meaningless as the government began to deal with dissent through secret directives. A secret committee on the *raskol* was formed under Alexander I and marked a departure from tolerance. Under the influence of ecclesiastics the committee accepted proposals that toleration would destroy the religious foundations of the state.²⁰ This secret and arbitrary method of dealing with dissent increased under Nicholas I who saw it as incompatible with the bureaucratically controlled regime and the official ideology of ‘Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality.’ Nicholas attempted to bring all dissenters under closer police control, and greatly inhib-

¹⁸ Mid-nineteenth century estimates ranged from just under one million to more than ten million.

¹⁹ O.P. Ershova, ‘Razvitie zakonodatel’noi sistemy v oblasti raskol v 50-60-e gody XIX v’, *Starobriadchestvo: istoriia, kul’tura, sovremennost’*, 4 (1995), p.26.

²⁰ P. Pera, ‘The Secret Committee on the Old Believers’, in R. Bartlett and J. Hartley (eds.) *Russian in the Age of Enlightenment* (London, 1990), p.232.

ited their freedom. In addition he attacked the large monastic centres of dissent which up to this point had enjoyed a degree of independence. The *raskol* communities at Irgiz and Vyg were destroyed, and the Moscow cemeteries were forcibly converted to *edinoverie*,²¹ at the beginning of the 1850s a number of *raskol skity*, small monasteries, were also dissolved.

The foundation of the secret committee marked an attempt to understand the different branches of dissent more fully. It supported investigations to find out about their teaching and organisation. A consequence of this was the division of dissent into three categories: ‘most harmful’, ‘harmful’ and ‘less harmful’ based on moral, social and political considerations. What the government feared most from dissenters was social disorder. Irina Paert argues that the practice of civil marriage, encouraged by some sects, was seen as a sign of radicalism liable to lead to sexual immorality and threatening to good social order.²² Engelstein argues that in decrees concerning the self-castrating Skoptsy sect the essential danger was defined not in religious but in social terms with the damage the sect inflicted to the family as the ‘basic foundation of social life.’²³ However, there was increasing concentration on the political connotations of the teaching and organisation of the *raskol*. This increased in the latter years of Nicholas’s reign, especially after 1848, when fears of revolution were at their height.

Alexander II removed some of the disabilities for dissenters which Nicholas had introduced and brought in improvements to their situation. At this time when freedoms were being conceded and the anti-state party was increasingly fervent it became less possible to ignore the unjust situation of so significant a number of the subjects of the empire.²⁴ However, the reforms gave small concessions not full liberty of conscience.

Gregory Freeze’s work on the church has shown that in the nineteenth century it

²¹ There were two cemeteries in Moscow which were the centres of the two main branches of Old Belief. The Rogozhskii cemetery of the Popovtsy sect, and the Preobrazhenskii cemetery of the Bezpopovtsy, Fedoseevtsy sect. *Edinoverie*, established in 1800, was a proposition in which Orthodox priests conducted services according to dissenting rituals so that Old Believers were incorporated into the Orthodox Church.

²² I. Paert, ‘Regulating Old Believer Marriage’, *Slavic Review*, 63 (2004), pp.563-565.

²³ L. Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom* (New York, 1999), p.51.

²⁴ O.P. Ershova, ‘Razvitie zakonodatel’noi sistemy’, *Staroobriadchestvo: istoriia, kul’tura, sovremennost’*, 4 (1995), p.28

felt itself besieged by dissent. The poor condition of the clergy and the necessity of clerical reform were increasingly openly acknowledged. In the process of reform consideration of dissent was central. Parish reform undertaken in the 1840s and 1850s caused great resentment and complaints that schismatic preachers had begun to appear where the clergy had been reduced.²⁵ On the other hand it was felt that the condition of the clergy and its economic dependence on the people made the peasants unwilling to assist and thus increased the success of the dissenters.

Central to the threat, as perceived by the church, were the shortcomings of popular piety. The Synod's publications were often highly critical of folk Orthodoxy.²⁶ They tended to see religious dissent as a consequence of ignorance, and it was partly in response to the threat of Old Belief that the church began to reformulate its objectives from purely liturgical to instructional. As an inquiry of the Holy Synod concluded in 1818, 'the Old Believers, even despite their own ignorance, exploit the lack of knowledge among the Orthodox to seduce them into the *raskol*.'²⁷ Therefore, it was in those parishes where dissent was most prevalent that the greatest efforts were made to increase religious instruction. Priests were required to give frequent exhortations to *raskol'niki* in their parishes, explaining to them their mistakes. In addition *raskol* leaders were forced to have public debates with Orthodox churchmen, and popular religious literature denounced the *raskol*. In the 1860s when attention was turned to the development of education, the idea that enlightenment would reduce the attractiveness of dissent persisted.²⁸

Religious dissent was made up of vastly different understandings. In common, dissenters rejected the authority of the church hierarchy, and therefore, whether explicitly or implicitly the civic authorities. This rejection was generally coupled with an ideological rejection, represented by millennial or apocalyptic expectations. The vast majority of

²⁵ G.L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth Century Russia* (Princeton, 1983), p.96.

²⁶ G.L. Freeze, 'The Rechristianization of Russia', *Studia Slavica Finlandensia*, 7 (1990), p.103.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.107.

²⁸ O.P. Ershova, 'Razvitie zakonodatel'noi sistemy', *Starobriadchestvo: istoriia, kul'tura, sovremennost'*, 4 (1995), p.30.

dissenters were comprised of those who objected to the reforms of the church service books carried out in the 1650s and 1660s by Patriarch Nikon. These changes did not appear to touch the dogma of the church and mainly affected ritual, most significantly the adoption of the three-fingered sign of the cross to replace the former two, and changes to 'the letter', for example changing the spelling of *Isus* (Jesus) to *Iisus*. Nevertheless these changes led to schism in the church. Those who rejected the changes split into two main branches: the Popovtsy who accepted clergy who had been ordained by the Orthodox and subsequently joined the *raskol*, and the Bezpopovtsy who rejected priests and often, in consequence, marriage. Both these groups believed that the true church had fallen, and to a lesser or greater degree that the reign of the Antichrist had begun in Russia. This doctrine was especially emphasised in some sects of the Bezpopovtsy who saw the power of the Antichrist in both civil and ecclesiastical powers. These more radical sects were still appearing and increasing in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Popovtsy was also undergoing significant changes at this time. In 1847 it acquired its own higher clergy founded at an émigré colony of dissenters in Austrian Bukovina.

In addition to these sects who called themselves Old Believers or Old Ritualists - Orthodox from prior to the Great Schism - there were other dissenters far more estranged from the Church, though still labelled *raskol'niki*. They had some similarities with the sects of the Old Believers, especially with the more radical ones, suggesting that they originated from the same fertile grounds of religious fermentation following the schism. They took the dogma of the Antichrist and the fall of the Orthodox church and rejected marriage. These included the 'rationalistic' sects such as the Molokany and the Dukhobory. Basing their teachings on the gospels, they lived communally, preached love and equality, and passively rejected authority. The 'prophetic' sects included the Khlysty and the Skoptsy. They revered their leaders as prophets, and incarnations of Christ. They renounced sex and alcohol and in the case of the Skoptsy practiced self-castration, a rejection of the flesh to allow the achievement of the spiritually divine.²⁹

An examination of the significance of religious dissent must take into account the historiography concerning Russian popular religion. Both contemporaries and subsequent historians have emphasised that religious dissent was a popular phenomenon, at

²⁹ L. Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom* (New York, 1999), pp. 7-19.

least to the extent that the majority of dissenters were peasants. One approach to the question of religious dissent is to examine it as popular religion; either as a lay interpretation of Orthodoxy or as representative of the failure of the masses to assimilate the Orthodox faith and the endurance of pagan and superstitious beliefs. Religion was central to peasant culture however, as contemporary observers frequently pointed out, peasant religiosity was often at odds with Orthodoxy and churchmen were frequently advised to fight against superstition and pagan beliefs. A term which was used by the church to describe this was *dvoeverie*, dual faith, describing the blend of Christian and pagan elements in the spiritual lives of the laity. Levin argues that the concept of *dvoeverie* ignores those elements which elite and popular religious culture held in common and that it overlooks the diversity and adaptability of popular religious life. Rather than preserving unchanged an alternative religious moment to that of the elite, popular religion was a blend of belief systems which changed in response to elite culture while adapting to lower class life.³⁰

The idea of a separate popular religious life in Russia and the sects as being representative of this suggests that this life was subversive and that the sects were a manifestation of this subversion. Pierre Pascal emphasises those aspects of Orthodox Christianity which were most important in the religious life of the peasants. The importance of asceticism, the lack of distinction between church and *izba* or clergy and peasant, the sense of man being in God's own image, all these were conducive to the formation and spread of independent faiths. Moreover, Pascal sees this popular piety as directly political: the Russian peasant advocates religious democracy and freedom of interpretation. It is therefore opposed to authority of all sorts which it cannot reconcile with the notion of Christianity and the religious ideal of equality and freedom. This sensitivity to the contradiction between the state and the Gospel means it is prepared to rebel for the sake of the religious ideal. As examples of rebellion Pascal cites the practices of the Beguny and the Dukhobory.³¹

³⁰ E. Levin, 'Dvoeverie and Popular Religion', in S. Batalden (ed.), *Seeking God* (DeKalb, 1993), pp.31-4.

³¹ P. Pascal, *The Religion of the Russian People* (Oxford, 1976), pp.32-6. The Beguny was a radical sect of the Bezpopovtsy the followers of which left their residences and led a life of wandering to es-

Therefore it was elements within Orthodoxy which gave rise to an identifiable lay Orthodoxy. This lay Orthodoxy has been shown to play a significant role in the teaching of dissenting groups. It embraced the monastic ascetic ideal as the apotheosis of spirituality and saintly charisma, and the ability to commune directly with the divine. As Engelstein writes, the 'direct accessibility of the divine' which was embodied in the central rite of the Skoptsy also 'marked all folk adaptations of Orthodoxy', and was a significant part of the Old Believer protest; that the rites themselves embodied the divine.³² Of course central to the Skoptsy ordeal was the monastic ideal of renunciation. Zhuk argues that many sectarian communities began with those who aspired to be more pious Orthodox, they emerged with 'the convergence of the popular piety of Orthodox peasants with dissenting immigrants.'³³

Popular piety has therefore been represented as a creative counter-culture to elite religion. This idea has been maintained by recent historians of the sects who see in them evidence of the capability of the common people to address religious questions. Pascal writes that the sects are proof of the need of the Russian peasant to 'justify his faith morally and logically.'³⁴ Engelstein sees the formation of the Skoptsy as an example which shows 'how deeply questions of faith and the search for meaning was embedded in the lives of ordinary peasants.'³⁵ Did then the sects represent the intellectual development of the people and its alienation from the official culture? Some historians have argued that this was the case: Kornilov saw the increase in the number of dissenters in the nineteenth century under Nicholas I as proof that the 'gulf between the ideology of the government and that of the people grew and broadened in that reign in perhaps greater dimensions than even the gulf between the government and the intelligentsia.'³⁶

Shchapov saw the different teachings of the *raskol* as directly representative of the ideology of the people and as a reflection of the reality of *raskol* life, determining its organisation as a counter-society. However, while examining popular religion is essential

cape the world of the Antichrist.

³² L. Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom* (New York, 1999), pp.18-19.

³³ S. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation* (Washington D.C., 2004), p.11.

³⁴ P. Pascal, *The Religion of the Russian People* (Oxford, 1976), p.25.

³⁵ L. Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom* (New York, 1999), p.28.

³⁶ Quoted in N.V. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality* (Berkeley, 1959), p.225.

to understanding the significance of the *raskol* the two phenomena should not be conflated. The majority of dissenters were peasants and it is likely that most of them were illiterate, but it was not a homogeneous movement. There were various levels of cultural and organisational leadership. The way in which rich merchant *raskol'niki* in the towns or large dissenting monasteries related to the majority of dissenters dispersed throughout the countryside has not been examined. It is necessary to recognise that dissent as much as Orthodoxy had high and low cultures.³⁷ Only in this way is it possible to understand if the political implications of dissenting teachings had political consequences. Certain sacred texts provided the cultural foundations of dissent, at least in the case of Old Belief, the understanding that illiterate peasants had of this culture was limited.

Moreover, were these divisions within *raskol* society overshadowed by divisions between the dissenting and the Orthodox or between the different sects of the *raskol*? Engelstein, in her study of the Skoptsy, has emphasised both the isolation of the Skoptsy in relation to wider society and the self-image they formed in conjunction with society. She has argued that the sectarians responded to the negative images that were created of them by educated society and yet these images were central to their own self-understanding. It was an understanding of their isolation which they expressed both confrontationally and evasively as they sought martyrdom and refuge; it was shaped as much by the persecution of the government as by their millennial teaching. Moreover, persecution forced on them an awareness of the political situation and they attempted to give their communities historical relevance within this context.³⁸

Given the extreme persecution experienced by the Skoptsy and the significance of their central rite, they felt more isolated than other sects. Nevertheless interaction with Orthodox society remained unavoidable and was central to their self-understanding. Other sects came to terms with the surrounding world, despite their apocalyptic teachings.³⁹ Many *raskol'niki* had daily contact with Orthodox neighbours which makes the

³⁷ R.O. Crummey, 'Old Belief as Popular Religion: New Approaches', *Slavic Review*, 52 (1993), pp. 700-12.

³⁸ L. Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom* (New York, 1999), pp.130-58.

³⁹ R.O. Crummey, *The Old Believers and the World of the Antichrist* (Wisconsin, 1970), p.59.

notion of a counter-society unrealistic. The complexity of these divisions can be seen in the sympathies Orthodox peasants showed to dissenters, showing solidarity together against the state. Conversely, the solidarity of *raskol* communities even on a village level was never absolute. Paert has shown how dissenters used their knowledge of state legislation to escape the demands of their community. This shows, she argues, a striving for social integration and citizenship, rather than separation.⁴⁰

In examining Shchapov's works and the significance of religious dissent in the 1850s and 1860s his ideas will be compared to those relating to religious dissent in official and radical discourse at this time. For this the volumes of documents collected by Vasilii Kel'siev in 1860 and 1861 are central. They contain the reports of official investigations into religious dissent and the writings of major figures in its study: the ethnographer Nadezhdin, the conservative bureaucrat Ivan Liprandi (1790-1880), and the progressive official and author Pavel Mel'nikov (1818-83), who also published several volumes about religious dissent in the 1860s. Also illuminating of the radicals' attitude towards dissent is the paper they published for a popular readership, *Obshchee Veche*. For documents relating to dissent at a popular level the reports of the clergy and officials of Kazan' province will be used. Kazan' province contained a large number of dissenters of the major sects and was also a centre of peasant revolt and political agitation in the 1860s. Moreover, it was where Shchapov first began his study of dissenters and where he made his first connection with the radical movement.

⁴⁰ I. Paert, 'Regulating Old Believer Marriage', *Slavic Review*, 63 (2004), pp.570-576.