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The Apostle to the Intelligentsia,

Father Alexander Men' and the Rediscovery of the Russian Silver Age

By: Robert Lindsay

Supervisor: Zakhar Ishov
Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies (IRES)
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To Bryant Lyman...



Протоиерей Александр Мень

Abstract

This thesis seeks to shed light on a remarkable figure in Russian history, Father Alexander Men'. How and why did Men' identify Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolai Berdyaev, and other pre-revolutionary cultural figures as representatives of authentic Russian religious culture? Why would a popular Russian Orthodox priest present the writings of mystics, anarchists, and the Silver Age counterculture as the antidote for seventy years of Soviet materialism? What role did Judaism and the Russo-Jewish intellectual tradition have on Men's identifications as an Orthodox priest? I use a semiotic theory of culture following Yuri Lotman and the Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School as a framework to analyze the historical development of Orthodox personalism. Through this we find a coherent justification for Men's cultural project. This thesis traces this line of thought from theories of cultural unity by Pyotr Chaadayev, through Christian universalism in Vladimir Solovyov, the existential personalism of Nikolai Berdyaev, and finally through Men's personal relationship with Nadezhda Mandelstam.

Keywords: religion, Russian Orthodox Church, Alexander Men', Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolai Berdyaev, Nadezhda Mandelstam, Silver Age, philosophy

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It was only toward the middle of the twentieth century that the inhabitants of many European countries came, in general unpleasantly, to the realization that their fate could be influenced directly by intricate and abstruse books of philosophy.

-Czeslaw Milosz

Up until the Bolshevik Coup in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church had been regarded as a major cultural and political influence on the country. The Church's importance was strongly diminished in the wake of the Petrine reforms that curtailed the influence of the church and introduced the primacy of the state in the 18th century. Unable to assert its independence from the state, the Russian Orthodox Church in pre-revolutionary Russia espoused largely conservative views. Yet, even in this largely diminished public role it continued to exert a strong cultural influence. A group of philosophers, poets, and theologians including Solovyov, Frank, Bulgakov etc. based their philosophy on Christian teachings. During the Silver Age of Russian poetry, poets such as Blok, Bryusov, Bely etc. equally embraced mysticism based on Orthodox Christianity. However, the Bolshevik revolution ended this religious flowering abruptly and violently. From its inception the new Bolshevik state declared a war on Russian Orthodox Church. The Marxist ideology conceived as a New Faith did not tolerate any rivalry.

Father Alexander Vladimirovich Men (1935-1990) was a Russian Orthodox priest who served in the small parish of Zagorsk, modern day Sergiyev Posad, in the Moscow Oblast. He was an influential dissident between the 1960's and 1990. From the village of Zagorsk Men' was able to publish historical, philosophical, and religious texts through tamizdat publications smuggled from a press in Brussels, circulated through the web of samizdat, and, albeit briefly, through the official Soviet Orthodox thick journal. In his basement, with assistance from his son, he created documentaries on Russian and European history and religion which he circulated in cassette tapes. Despite constant harassment by the KGB Men' was able to organize underground reading groups and seminars across Moscow. During Glasnost when restrictions on publications, religion, and public meetings were lightened he became a celebrity. Men' quickly mastered modern mass media. Fr. Men' regularly appeared on TV shows and radio shows. He spoke to those in Russia who were left adrift after the death of Soviet socialism and facing a spiritual vacuum when communism became obsolete, offering a possibility for a spiritual revival for a nation after 70 years of spiritless existence. In 1990, at the height of his celebrity, popularity, and influence he was murdered outside his home in

Semkhoz with an axe. The mystery surrounding the assassination, and the incompetency of the subsequent investigations, caused a public outcry in Russia. This led to the personal involvement of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin in the investigations. Neither the assassins themselves nor those who masterminded the attack were ever brought to justice. The motivation for the assassination, and the identities of the assassins, remain a mystery to this day.

Over the course of his professional life Father Men' sought to revive certain figures from Russia's pre-revolutionary past. This project of building a cultural bridge to pre-revolutionary Russian intellectual and cultural traditions was not new. Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam, Joseph Brodsky, Boris Pasternak, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and others took part in the colossal task of preserving the Russian pre-revolutionary traditions of the intelligentsia, which were most heavily under assault under Stalin's terror. Although Men's task might look then like a rather standard case of the Russian cultural dissident, if we dig a bit deeper, we see that he deviates from our expectations and stereotypes in many remarkable ways.

According to Men' the Soviet Union destroyed the genuine cultural traditions of Russia right as it was going through the great renaissance known as the Silver Age. Men' tried to build a bridge to this period to help fill the cultural and ideological void of the late Soviet Union. What in the Russian past can fill the ideological void left by the death of communism? The answers to this varied but followed certain trends. Mandelstam, Brodsky, and the Acmeists wanted to build a bridge to the great cosmopolitan traditions, a westernizing "world soul," of the Russian belle époque. Solzhenitsyn and many in the Russian Orthodox hierarchy turned to nationalism, pan-slavism, and a romantic reconstruction of Tsarist Russia. Russian Orthodox theologians were engaged in a return to rigorous patristic scholarship and the return of the Palamists¹

Completely upending the trend, Alexander Men' identified a certain list of individuals as being archetypical of Russia's true religious and cultural tradition. These figures include the contributors to the famous collection of essays "Vekhi" including Mikhail Gershenzon, Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Alexander Izgoyev, Bogdan Kistyakovski, Pyotr Struve

¹ Promoters of the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas. He formalized the Hesychastic tradition of Orthodox mystical theology. See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.

and Semen Frank. However, the chief figure that represented authentic Russian Orthodoxy and Russian philosophical culture was Vladimir Solovyov. It seems very strange then that a priest in the official Soviet-Russian Orthodox Church would choose to revive people like Solovyov, Berdyaev, Pavel Florensky, and Sergei Bulgakov.

Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900) was the founder of modern Russian philosophy. In many ways he can be considered the fulfillment of the movements founded by Chaadayev. Solovyov repaired the divisions that split Russian philosophy through the nineteenth century. He combined the intellectual rigor and respect for science from the Westernizers with the reverence for Russian folk traditions and the Orthodox Church of the Slavophiles. Furthermore, he became the darling of the Theosophical movement that gripped the European intelligentsia, including such Russian figures as Madame Blavatsky. Vladimir Solovyov's teachings in Sophiology, which formed a major part of Florensky's and Bulgakov's theology, was declared a heresy by the Patriarch of Moscow in 1935.

Nikolai Berdyaev, second in importance for Men' only to Solovyov, was a self-described anti-clericalist and Christian anarchist. In 1913 Berdyaev publicly condemned the Holy Synod for the use of the Russian navy to forcibly expel the Imiaslavie monks from Mount Athos. For this Berdyaev was charged with blasphemy, the punishment for which would have been permanent exile to Siberia. He was only saved by the October Revolution. Furthermore, he defended, with incredible vitriol, his idiosyncratic belief that the only true political philosophy compatible with Orthodox theology is anarchism. The state and capitalism needed to be destroyed if Christ's vision was to be fulfilled on earth. This does not sound like the biography of a man a village priest from Moscow would identify as a true bearer of Russian religious and intellectual tradition.

It is not just ecumenism and liberalism that mark Alexander Men's project. Alexander Men' was an ethnic Jew, his mother being a convert to Orthodoxy as an adult. Alexander Men's parish in Zagorsk consisted largely of hundreds of Jewish intellectuals, many of whom converted to Christianity because of Alexander Men'. The Jewish character of his parish was so pronounced that some residents of the village thought his church was not an Orthodox church at all, but rather a synagogue. Furthermore, every intellectual figure I have mentioned as Alexander Men's bearers of genuine Russian culture engaged deeply with Judaism and

Jewish religious philosophy. Men', as the heir to this tradition which began with Solovyov, constantly emphasized the centrality of Jews and Judaism to Russia.

How and why did Father Alexander Men', a small-town priest of the official Soviet-Russian Orthodox Church identify Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolai Berdyaev, and other pre-revolutionary cultural figures as representatives of authentic Russian religious culture? What role did Judaism and the Russo-Jewish intellectual tradition have on Men's identifications as an Orthodox priest? While this might initially look like two separate questions, they can, and will, be answered simultaneously. The answer to the latter is contained in the answer to the former. However, its distinct importance requires it being made an explicit aim at the beginning.

Previous Research

In my project I build on Dominic Rubin's book *Holy Russia, Sacred Israel: Jewish-Christian Encounters in Russian Religious Thought*. In this book Rubin traces the influence of Jewish thought on every Russian philosopher listed above. He then, in an epilogue, identifies Alexander Men' as the "heir to Solovyov." I will take this as my foundation and use his research to springboard my own project that focusses specifically on Men' and Solovyov. This will not mean, however, that my project will be only parasitical to Rubin's. Rather, this will provide inspiration for my project and keep my feet on the ground, standing firm on a bedrock of contemporary research.

There are many biographies written on Men', I will chiefly use the biography *Russia's Uncommon Prophet: Father Alexander Men' and his Times* by Wallace Daniel to provide biographical details. His personal interviews with Men's family, Russian academics, and Men's followers make this the authoritative biography. Although other biographies exist, some offering perhaps a better list of biographical facts, the Daniel biography is the one currently used as a standard by philosophers and cultural historians. There is simply no other parallel for the attention to detail and intellectual nuance when discussing Fr. Men'.

Considerable work has been done, in both Russian and English, providing philosophic commentary and analysis of Solovyov, Berdyaev, and Men'. I will follow the lead of the American philosophers George Kline and Judith Deutsch Kornblatt. The former was the recognized authority on Russian and Soviet religious philosophy theory and translation.

Much of the writings we have by post-Revolution Russian philosophers were translated by his hand. Kline's published articles on Soviet religious philosophy remain the standard for research. Kornblatt is a contemporary translator and commentator on Vladimir Solovyov. Where the previous generation of philosophers dissected Solovyov's corpus to remove anything not immediately palatable to the Anglo-Analytic tradition, Kornblatt highlights these previously ignored, yet critical, parts of his work. This is absolutely necessary when trying to understand Men's interest in Solovyov which goes quite beyond the mathematical certainties of Bertrand Russel.

There is a special historiographic difficulty when writing about the intellectual history of the Soviet Union, the veracity of the secondary literature. During the Soviet period everything that was published both inside and outside the Soviet Union took on a special combative nature. American and European scholars sought to make villains out of the philosophers who supported the Soviet state and saints of those who opposed it. Of course, the reverse was also the case. To oppose this trend of biased ideology-driven scholarship those scholars writing after the collapse of the Soviet Union tend to overly underplay the issues faced by philosophers inside the Soviet Union. This creates its own set of problems and misunderstandings. All sources must be analyzed with this in mind.

I would like to bring special attention to the impressive work of Father Stephen Janos, a priest in the Orthodox Church of America who recently retired from St. Herman of Alaska Church in the diocese of eastern Pennsylvania. Throughout his long career he has provided us English speakers with the only translations of not just Alexander Men's philosophy, but the essays of Berdyaev, Solovyov, and many others. In order to make these translations widely available, and himself aid in the revival of pre-Revolutionary Russian and Jewish philosophy, he published his translations for free online at a time when such works were completely banned inside the Soviet Union and publications on these topics almost impossible outside it. Humbly, he would only sign every translation "Fr. Janos." Following the path of Alexander Men', we have Fr. Janos to thank for the continued propagation, and existence, of Russian philosophy today.

Method

The research methods I will be using will combine document analysis and comparative religion/philosophy. The former research method will properly limit the data I will be using while the latter will assist in the interpretation of said data.

The bulk of my research analyzes Alexander Men's lectures, essays, books, and sermons in order to better understand the motivations behind his choice of figures for cultural revival. He was a prolific writer and used multiple forms of media including radio, TV, documentaries, public appearances, as well as his written publications. It is beyond the scope of this project to make a thorough analysis of Men's entire corpus. In order to properly limit the research project, I focus especially on his late lecture series gathered in the collection of essays titled *Russian Religious Philosophy* and his biographical essays on Solovyov and Berdyaev. The lecture series was given in late 1989 and early 1990 and thus represents the culmination of his mature thought. The purpose of this lecture series was explicitly to popularize the philosophers he discusses and hopefully encourage Russian publishers to create new editions.

It would be quite beyond the scope of my thesis to look deeply at every philosopher mentioned by Men'. I focus on four lines of interest, Vladimir Solovyov, the Religio-Philosophic Gatherings, Nikolai Berdyaev, and Nadezhda Mandelstam. Vladimir Solovyov, the "father of Russian philosophy," is identified by Men' as the single most important Russian thinker for modern Russia. This claim, while not ubiquitous, is not very controversial. Any discussion of Russian religious philosophy must start, and end, with Solovyov. The Religio-Philosophic Gatherings is representative of the liberal, ecumenical, strain of the Silver Age counterculture and its interactions with the Russian Orthodox Church. Although there were only twenty-two meetings, they produced, and continue to produce, intense discussion both inside and outside academia. Nikolai Berdyaev provides a modern philosophic standard combining western existentialist theory with Russian culture and religion. Nadezhda Mandelstam, the widow of the great poet Osip Mandelstam, was a philosopher in her own right. As the wife of Osip Mandelstam, one who rubbed elbows with the full gamut of the Russian intelligentsia, and a philosopher in her own right she speaks with considerable authority on what her generation saw as good, and bad, in the Silver Age. She was not necessarily an impartial observer, inasmuch as that is possible, but rather an educated and involved individual. Also, Alexander Men' was her spiritual advisor. She is the important personal bridge connecting the Silver Age and Alexander Men'.

I will engage in comparative philosophy, comparing Men' himself, and his representations of these figures, with the figures themselves. My epistemology will take as authentic the positions revealed in the publications, letters, and speeches I analyze. By seeing the key ways in which the representations differ from the original we can distill what Men' saw as truly unique and important. This will then be a purely qualitative textual comparison. There are, as in all methods, distinct strengths and weaknesses. This method has strong and serious foundations and belongs to the most historically established method in the humanities. comparative analysis stands as one of the oldest and most practiced research methods from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* to contemporary scholarship. The weaknesses include the assumption of the reliability of the archetypes, case study selection, and the selection of data within each case study. All of these have been considered and will be addressed. We shall treat the documents themselves as the objects of our study, taking careful consideration of their production, function use and content (Davie and Wyatt 131).

The very necessity of having to choose a limited number of archetypes for the case study leads necessarily to an exclusion of other figures which might still properly belong to the research field. This represents a possible weakness of this approach. At the same time my choice of including Nadezhda Mandelstam will balance this approach and address the weakness. As a woman and a widow of a great poet she has until now been overlooked and overshadowed by those using this method who choose to focus instead on her husband. My thesis seeks to recalibrate that by attaching prime importance to the thought of Nadezhda herself.

Theory

My textual analysis will be carried out according to the semiotic theory of culture as described in the book *Universe of the Mind, A Semiotic Theory of Culture* by Yuri Lotman and the Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School. As Lotman describes:

The historian is condemned to deal with texts. The text stands between the event 'as it happened' and the historian, so that the scientific situation is radically altered. A text is always created by someone and for some purpose and events are presented in the text in an encoded form (217).

This stands in stark contrast with the naïve textual criticisms which use positivistic methods popularized in the 19th century. According to this view historical facts must be reconciled to whatever scientific standards happen to be in the reigning paradigm of the day (if we are to

use Thomas Kuhn's language). Any source of "untruth" was ascribed to political, religious, or cultural bias at best, ignorance and fantasy at worst. This older method sought to provide us with a royal road to brute facticity. Using a semiotic theory of culture, on the other hand, places the prime importance on what the facts were for the person composing the document being analyzed as being prior to any establishment of "facts in themselves." The way to do this is through not just a deep understanding with the prevailing cultures of the day, but also with the grammar and thoughts of individuals (230). A semiotic theory of culture then uses the entire semiotic space of the culture, the semiosphere, through which language gains its meaning, to interpret texts themselves (125).

To apply this to textual criticism in general, the primary units of knowledge will be the following:

1. the transmission of available information (that is, of texts);
2. the creation of new information, that is, of texts which are not simply deducible according to set algorithms from already existing information, but which are to some degree unpredictable;
3. memory, that is, the capacity to preserve and reproduce information (texts) (12).

The cultural theoretical framework is provided by the essays of Joseph Brodsky, Osip Mandelstam, and Isaiah Berlin using a cultural semiotic framework following the Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School and Yuri Lotman. These four authors have written authoritative essays on, among other subjects, the unique cultural bridge building phenomenon that existed throughout the Soviet period. The Nobel Laureate and American Poet Laureate Joseph Brodsky, provides us with a unique analysis of Soviet culture. Brodsky was in the same generation as Alexander Men', born only five years apart. They both went through the same soviet educational system and both write very critically of it. Brodsky's essays on Soviet education, as well as unique insights into the very same Soviet cultural atmosphere Men' struggled against, are beginning to be discovered by intellectual historians. Joseph Brodsky was had a personal friendship with the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova which cemented his position as the heir apparent to the acmeist tradition. While in his American exile his English language reviews of Mandelstam, Akhmatova, and the acmeists help establish their memories outside Russia and continue the process of cultural resurrection (Ishov). Osip Mandelstam was a vigorous exponent of pre-Revolutionary culture. In addition to his important place as a poet-martyr, he also was an accomplished essayist and critic. He is crucial because he understands, and represents, that culture Men' tries to reconnect with. He summarizes, and

represents himself, what was important for Men' in the Silver Age. The philosopher and historian Isaiah Berlin wrote the first systematic history of Russian philosophy. He is the single most authoritative source for 19th century Russian intellectual history. Shortly after the end of WWII he travelled on a diplomatic mission to the Soviet Union. He visited Leningrad and Moscow as an official in the British foreign office. While there he met privately with Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak (Ishov). Berlin was the first Western intellectual to visit Russia and publish an objective report on "Stalin's war against Russian culture." It must be remembered that this was not just a war on Russian culture, but also Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Georgian, etc.

The great purges and trial of the years of 1937 and 1938 altered the literary and artistic scene beyond all recognition. The number of writers and artists exiled or exterminated during this time – particularly during the Ezhov terror – was such that Russian literature and thought emerged in 1939 like an area devastated by war, with some splendid buildings still relatively intact, but standing solitary amid stretches of ruined and deserted country (Berlin, "The Arts in Russia under Stalin" 6-7).

The unique nature of philosophy and culture in the former Soviet states requires sometimes unorthodox theoretical choices. As the American philosopher George Kline wrote, academic philosophy was impossible in the Soviet Union. Academia was largely limited to dry commentaries on Plato. As such, we need to look past the criteria set by some other disciplines and actually try to listen to the world. As a primer for the idiosyncratic and regional Russian understanding of the goal of philosophy, especially religious philosophy, I present a quote from Nikolai Berdyaev, who will feature heavily in this thesis:

Philosophy is the discipline or science, scientia, concerning the soul. The scientia concerning the soul is however the scientia concerning human existence. Particularly within human existence is revealed the meaning of being. Being reveals itself through the subject, and not through the object. Philosophy therefore of necessity is anthropologic and anthropocentric. Existential philosophy is a cognition of the meaning of being through the subject. The subject is existential, existentialised. In the object, on the contrary, the inner existence is concealed. In this sense philosophy is subjective, and not objective. It is based upon spiritual experience (Berdyaev, "My Philosophy").

Vladimir Solovyov

Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov (1853-1900) was a Russian philosopher, mystic, poet, and critic. In addition to being a famous academic philosopher, he was also a social activist and forerunner to the Ecumenical Movement. He is nearly universally regarded as the most influential and important systematic Russian philosopher of the nineteenth century and the father of modern Russian philosophy. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Solovyov not just to Alexander Men' in particular, but also to Russian culture and philosophy generally. Outside the specifically Russian context, his philosophy was instrumental in the rediscovery of the Orthodox doctrine of *Theosis*², "Divinization," the cornerstone of modern Orthodox theology. The writings of Solovyov provide the foundation for the Russian tradition of personalism in philosophy and theology, inside and outside the walls of academia. Solovyov was the primary influence for not just Alexander Men's idea of what was lacking in Soviet society, but also for both of Men's life's projects. Men's career as a historian of world religions was inspired by, and dedicated to, Solovyov and Men's cultural education projects, both underground and official, were directly attributed to his influence.

However, unlike many of those who influenced his thought such as Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, or Böhme, Solovyov left behind no coherent school of thought. Although his importance to Russian intellectual history is always asserted, he is most often treated as more of a historical character than a philosopher in his own right. The eminent American scholar of Russian philosophy George Kline, in his Weil Institute lectures *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* (1967) saw Solovyov as "inferior... as a philosopher of religion and philosophical theologian" to people like Rozanov, Shestov, Berdyaev, or Tolstoy and thus did not include him in the lecture series proper, relegating him instead to an introduction (2). More recently, Thomas Nemeth, the author of the entry in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Solovyov, addressed this trend among academic philosophers and dismissed it in principle. He noted that "it is not surprising that those not directly acquainted with his explicit philosophical writings and their Russian context view Solovyov as having nothing of interest to say in philosophy proper." Nemeth thus advocated for a rigorous analysis of Solovyov's

² Theosis is the dogma that what God is by nature man will be made by grace. This formulation was stated most clearly by St. Maximus the Confessor. It is regarded today as the chief defining feature of Orthodox theology.

philosophic corpus using modern analytic methods. However, in order to save Solovyov he hacks off any parts that would not appeal to the analytic, academic, philosopher. He removes the poetry, mysticism, and theosophy while leaving only the vivisected Solovyov the academic.

The ambivalent attitude toward Solovyov might seem surprising given Solovyov's enormous standing among the Russian Symbolists around the turn of the century and defining influence he had on the early twentieth century Russian thinkers such as Berdyaev, Frank, and Florensky. As the widow of Osip Mandelstam, Nadezhda Mandelstam, attests, Solovyov had a similarly formative influence on her husband. All this was despite the fact that during the Soviet period any mention of Solovyov was cut out by the vigilant Soviet censors. He was even denied the relative protection of having his corpus, or some selection thereof, declared a monopoly of the state like Dostoevsky, Aksakov, and Gogol during the 1918 nationalization of classics (Friedberg 186).

Yet, Solovyov was singled out and defended as an absolute cornerstone of Russian thought and culture four decades after Solovyov's death in a country where religion was drastically suppressed, and philosophy was practically nonexistent, unless it was a branch consistent with the "eternal science of Marxism-Leninism." Many followers of Solovyov's teachings were deemed too dangerous to the existence of the Soviet Union, and the society it sought to create, and were thus exiled on the infamous "philosopher's ships" in 1922, the year of the USSR's birth. During the Soviet period the only way his name could be mentioned in any publication was for derogatory purposes, but even this was a very rare occurrence. This makes it all the more astonishing a fact that a religious figure and employee of the state church who was born during the time when Stalin strengthened his grip on Russia, and Solovyov's influence could not exist would come to be fascinated with him. Father Alexander Men' spent a career trying, and succeeding, in popularizing Vladimir Solovyov towards the period of late socialism when very few people in the USSR were even aware of Solovyov's existence.

However, this project went beyond a mere desire to enhance the Soviet educational system by providing a more complete picture of Silver Age history. Beyond trying to popularize Solovyov as a historically instrumental figure in Russian culture, Men' believed that Solovyov was the ideal figure to provide a firm intellectual foundation for the spiritual

revival of Russia following its departure from religious thought in the wake of the Soviet experiment based on Marxist materialism that lasted for seventy years. Although he never adopted wholesale the systems that Solovyov proposed, he was convinced that Solovyov was far more than simply a historical figure to be revered. He rather argued that “Today, in the epoch of the ecological crisis, of national and geopolitical conflicts, Solovyov’s call and idea that the divine unites while all that divides is Satanic remains actual in the highest degree” (Men’, “Life and Thought of Solovyov” 44).

Solovyov’s writings on *Богочеловечество*, “God-manhood”, as well as his socio-political views, provide the center that connects the otherwise very dissimilar group of intellectuals that Alexander Men’ promoted during his career, and especially in great clarity during his 1989-1990 lectures on Russian Religious Philosophy. As such, the figure and writings of this man demand a lengthy discussion. To begin I will provide a brief intellectual backdrop to Solovyov. He did not spring forth, fully formed, from the head of Russia but was rather a character in a natural historical progression. Although the subject matter may seem arcane and remote, it is only by understanding how Vladimir Solovyov, inspired by Dostoevsky, reacted against Feuerbach that can find the start of the line we shall follow throughout this paper. It is also important to note that this discussion of Solovyov will be driven by Alexander Men’s own writings and interests, as this truly is the subject matter of this thesis. I will present Russian history through Men’s eyes. This follows the apositivist textual criticism of Lotman’s semiotics which considers the facts for the people composing the texts before any attempt at describing the meaning of the texts in themselves (Lotman, 218).

Before Solovyov

According to Alexander Men’, Russian religious philosophy can be divided into three parts: “those who preceded Solov’ev, Solov’ev himself, and those who are derived from him, like the wellsprings of a river” (Men’, *Russian Religious Philosophy* 2). This Solovyov-centric history of Russian philosophy reflects only partly Men’s idiosyncratic understanding of Russian history. It is important to understand who Men’ recognized as Solovyov’s important predecessors so we can find the beginning of our thread through Russian history to Men’ himself.

Who were the intellectual precursors to Solovyov? Men’ identifies a liberal intellectual tendency beginning in the 16th century with the translator, philosopher, and theologian St.

Maksim Grek. This Athonite monk was a noted humanist scholar, educated in Italy during the height of the Renaissance. He was summoned to Rus' by Tsar Vasili III Ivanovich, father to Ivan the Terrible, from Mount Athos in order to oversee the translation of Greek texts into Slavonic. Maksim quickly became embroiled in what is called today the "Non-Possessor" controversy. This controversy concerned the increasing wealth of the Church and the process of centralization by which it was becoming a mere wing of the centralizing Russian state. The Non-Possessor camp, led by St. Nil Sorsky and championed by St. Maksim Grek, argued against the institution of Serfdom, executions of religious dissenters, and the accumulation of wealth and worldly power by the monasteries. Unfortunately, history favored their enemies, the Josephites, who argued for the merging of ecclesiastical and state power, use of strong methods of repression, and the subservience of the serfs (Men', *Russian Religious Philosophy* 5). This controversy in the early Russian Orthodox Church is used by Men' to demonstrate how social activism was not something foreign to the Church, but rather could be easily found in its history. Men' states at the end of his lectures on Russian Religious Philosophy that "The Orthodox Church is sometimes accused of social passivity, but Nil Sorsky and the entire movement of the Non-Possessors illustrates that this is untrue. Also, that social activism is a part of Orthodox tradition" (179).

Fr. Men' then, perhaps a first for Russian Orthodox priests, writes a defense of the westernizing program and heritage of Peter the Great. He does not try, like Chaadayev, Belinsky, and Herzen, to defend the very real violence done to Russian culture through these reforms. However, Men' offers a clear rebuff to Slavophiles by defending the new bright culture they helped create.

"Tsar Peter I forces a break-through – roughly, shattering old traditions, bearing enormous harm to the culture. But then nonetheless, a new era of the culture is created, and we have no right to be indifferent and scornful towards it. Because, if there had not been this Peterburg period of the Russian empire, we would not have had either Lomonosov, or Pushkin, or Dostoevsky, or Tolstoy, or Blok." (6)

Here at the beginning, with these two examples of Solovyov's predecessors, we can see Men's idiosyncrasy and major sources of controversy for a Russian Orthodox priest. The success of the Josephites in the non-possessor controversy is a major turning point in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church and defined the way it would seek to orient itself with the state throughout its history, even today. The event is seen by the Russian Orthodox Church as a point of victory, establishing itself as an important institution. Meanwhile, Tsar

Peter I represents the first major defeat to the established Church. The entire institution of the Patriarchate was dissolved, and we see the beginning of secular culture in Russia. With the establishment of St. Petersburg, a new cultural capital was created that sought to supplant traditional Muscovite culture with a new, Westernizing, one (Billington 180-181).

Aside from being a link in a historical tendency and acknowledging that there is much that is original to Solovyov, he does have a more direct historical precursor in the Russian Schellingian philosopher Pyotr Chaadayev (1794-1856). W. H. Auden, in his essay *On Chaadayev*, describes the unique position Chaadayev found himself in in relation to multiple prevailing currents in Russian culture. “Unlike most of the Russian Westernizers of his time, Chaadayev was not a political revolutionary. Like the Slavophiles, he sought spiritual and religious solutions to social problems. But unlike them he believed these could only be sought in the West, not in the East” (415). This position, like Solovyov later, invited accusations from all sides. Westernizers accused him of being a Slavophile while Slavophiles were convinced of his Westernizer sympathies. Alexander Men’ points out that “Chaadayev stood, as it were, for the principle of balance, of harmony” (Men, *Russian Religious Philosophy* 11). Chaadayev thought that Russia could unite the West and the East into a “realization of the ideal on earth.” For Chaadayev, this is only possible by “uniting into a single current the Western activeness and the Eastern depth of contemplation” (11). The important thrust of his social philosophy is the idea that if a civilization is to be healthy and grow it must include both a religious and spiritual foundation as well as material progress through technological and economic improvement. When one aspect of a civilization is missing it has an equally deleterious effect as a vivisection of any organic whole. Rather, a unity of parts ought to be the goal not just for Russia, but for Christianity as a civilization.

However, despite this he did not share any of Men’s democratic feelings. “He saw the Unity of Christianity to be a goal. However, he was a fierce autocrat and did not trust the ability of the common man” (Auden 415). This fact can be partially explained by the aristocratic family Chaadayev belonged to, close to the imperial throne. Solovyov, although influenced, was not a carbon copy of Chaadayev. What was important for Solovyov in Chaadayev was this idea of synthesis and cultural unity. Like Chaadayev before him, Solovyov sought to create a synthesis of Slavophile and Westernizer ideology while at the same time updating them to face the demands and claims of contemporary positivism, nihilistic materialism, and populism.

“The struggle between reason and the intuitive, between reason and faith – is abnormal a phenomenon. This is a conflict, destructive of the integral wholeness of man! And this is because man was created with dual an aspect. Man was created as a being, who lives by both the heart, and by the mind. Get rid of either of these, -- and the image of man becomes distorted.” (Men’, *Russian Religious Philosophy* 7)

Solovyov, like Chaadayev before him, had heavy intellectual debts to German idealists.

Beginning in the second quarter of the 19th century there was a major shift in thought. In the West there was a strong reaction against the dry rationalism and new sciences of the Enlightenment and a turn back to more classical humanistic subjects such as history, religion, and philosophy. As Isaiah Berlin wrote in his essay, “A Remarkable Decade”:

...the romantic reaction against the claims of scientific materialism did set up permanent doubts about the competence of the sciences of man – psychology, sociology, anthropology, physiology – to take over, and put an end to the scandalous chaos of, such human activities as history, or the arts, or religious, philosophical, social and political thought (156).

This is a brief background to the intellectual tendency Alexander Men’ identified in Russian intellectual history which culminated in the person of Vladimir Solovyov. It by no means pretends to be thorough, but rather presents an image of the Russian intellectual tendency Men’ recognized as vital to Russian life and culture. Now we can move on to the personal biography of Solovyov the philosopher.

Biography

Vladimir Solovyov was born in 1853. His father was the famous historian and professor Sergei Solovyov, universally considered one of the greatest Russian historians (Nemeth). Solovyov grew up surrounded and influenced by the brightest minds of the Russian intelligentsia. Sergei was also a priest’s son and the scion of a long line of priests. This fact was very important to Vladimir who particularly honored his grandfather’s memory. His mother had both Polish and Ukrainian heritage, including such illustrious names as the 18th century philosopher and mystic Gregory Skovoroda (Men’, *Russian Religious Philosophy* 16). This dual heritage reflects the idiosyncratic way Solovyov, throughout his career, merged these two aspects, religious mysticism and secular rationalism.

Solovyov studied science, history, and philology at Moscow University and, after being graduated in 1873, spent a year studying at the Theological Academy at the Trinity Monastery of Saint Sergius at Zagorsk, modern day Sergiyev Posad, the future parish of

Alexander Men'. At the age of nine, while at the chapel of Moscow University, he had the first of three visions of Sophia, the wisdom of God and incarnation of the "World's Soul" personified as a beautiful woman (Kline, " 56). In 1875, on sabbatical from his teaching position at Moscow University, he travelled to the British Museum in London to study theosophy and gnostic philosophy. During this year of study, he had a second vision of Sophia. In this vision she told him to travel to Egypt and await another vision. Egypt for Solovyov and other European spiritualists was the "ancient cradle of mysteries, of the great religions, of gnostic theosophy" (Men', *Russian Religious Philosophy* 19). After receiving this vision he immediately dropped his sabbatical and travelled to Cairo (Edie, James M, et al. 56). After a period of waiting unsuccessfully for another vision he wandered out into the desert in an attempt to force one. He, dressed in his top hat and black European attire, wandered aimlessly in the desert and became lost. He would have died as he wandered aimlessly in the desert if not for being captured by Bedouins, who mistook him at first for an evil spirit. These three visions would be recalled constantly throughout Solovyov's career and be constantly reimagined as justifications for his ever-changing views. Solovyov considered, throughout his entire life, these three visions to be the very crux of his personal beliefs and sense of self.

Although this might seem bizarre to a modern reader, Solovyov's spiritualism did not exist in a vacuum. Russia, like western Europe, in the late 19th century was gripped by a popular interest in spiritualism, mysticism, and the occult. Judith Kornblatt points out in her edited and collected works of Solovyov titled *Divine Sophia, The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* that during this period "...an international following of artists and writers flocked to séances, manifestations, and other exhibits of parapsychic events" (31). From the court of the Tsar to the British Museum there was an intense interest in theosophy and occult experiences, exacerbated by the popularization of writings and publications by authors like Helena Blavatsky.

In 1878, Solovyov began a series of twelve lectures on the topic of Divine Humanity. The lecture series was a major public and cultural event. The event was well attended by students, who were usually averse to religious subjects. Surprisingly, the lectures were flooded by representatives of the Petersburg and Moscow intelligentsia, the cream of Petersburg society,

as well as members of Russian nobility.³ In this series of lectures he defined his metatheory of God-Manhood *богочеловечество*.

Philosophy and Dostoevsky

Perhaps the most popularly known instance of Solovyov's influence on Russian culture was through his close personal friendship with the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. Vladimir Solovyov initially knew Dostoevsky through his older brother, the author and journalist Vsevolod Solovyov. Vsevolod was Dostoevsky's literary protégé and most indefatigable proponent in the Russian press in the 1870s (Frank 50). In 1874, Dostoevsky received Vladimir's master's thesis *The Crisis in Western Philosophy, against the Positivists* while working as the chief editor of the thick journal *The Citizen* (51). Solovyov's thesis "aimed to prove that modern philosophy had reached its end point and that humanity required a new synthesis based on religious principles to continue its teleological⁴ path" (Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia* 13). Dostoevsky was impressed by the influence of Friedrich Schelling and Slavophile thinkers including Ivan Kireyevsky and Alexei Khomiakov in this early writing of Solovyov, as well as his clear rejection of the materialist philosophies of the 1860s. As a longtime critic of both western philosophy and the effects of positivism on Russia, Dostoevsky could not but be intrigued by this young philosopher.

Upon Dostoevsky's return to the capital after ten years of absence in imprisonment and banishment due to his involvement in the doomed Petrashevsky Circle, he was terrified of being culturally disconnected from the intellectual currents in Saint Petersburg. Once this happens to an author, Dostoevsky believed, one's career is over. Luckily, the existence of the Solovyov brothers helped assuage Dostoevsky's fears that he had become culturally disconnected with the Russian youth who seemed to be more and more dominated by the materialistic and positivist philosophies of Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, and Pisarev. To Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solovyov was confirmation of the predictions of his early ideas of

³ One of these lectures was the only time Lev Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky were ever in the same room. However, the two did not meet as Tolstoy was attending incognito.

⁴ Teleological, from the Greek *τέλος* meaning end or goal, is when an event, process, or action is understood as being caused by its end or goal. Some examples would be Sophocles' description of path of Oedipus or the equally ill-fated Marxist-Hegelian understanding of the march of human history.

*pochvennichestvo*⁵ as part of which Dostoevsky hoped for the return of the Russian intelligentsia, disillusioned with western rationalism, to their Muscovite cultural and religious roots (Frank 52).

While the relationship between Dostoevsky and Vsevolod Solovyov remained merely professional, beginning in 1873 a personal friendship developed between the author and the younger Solovyov who became a frequent visitor. Anna, Dostoevsky's wife, noted with delight the positive effect Solovyov's presence had on the older man. In him Dostoevsky had a friend and intelligent conversationalist who meshed well with this infamously cantankerous man. Following the death of Dostoevsky's son Alexei in 1878 Anna proposed that Solovyov accompany him in the long-planned pilgrimage to Optina Pustyn, a famous monastery and center of the Russian staretsdom (384). This trip not only helped lift Dostoevsky's spirits but also provided him with inspiration and raw material for his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. It was during this pilgrimage that Solovyov became Dostoevsky's inspiration for the characters Alyosha and Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, both representing different sides of this complex individual. This personal relationship with Vladimir Solovyov became so great that both Dostoevsky and his wife were personally present when Solovyov defended his dissertation, *A Critique of Abstract Principles (Kritika otvlechennykh nachal)* (494).

While Solovyov's friendship helped bring Dostoevsky out of depression, Dostoevsky's novels helped cure both Solovyov brothers from their brief infatuations with nihilism and atheism. Vladimir Solovyov was particularly inspired by the novel *Demons*, published in 1871-72. This novel follows a political cabal of would-be revolutionaries. The character Alexei Nilych Kirillov sits alone in a room the length of the novel with a plan of suicide. This act of self-murder was not seen by Kirillov as an escape from worldly cares but rather the

⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, together with his older brother Mikhail, co-founded two thick journals, "Epoch" and "Time." The name they used to describe their journals' social-cultural tendency was *Pochvennichestvo* or "return to soil." This tendency sought to pave a middle path between the Slavophile and Westernizer camps. As Joseph Frank describes in the third volume of his literary biography of Dostoevsky, "Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865," "The *pochvenniki*, in other words, believed that the social-political issues of the day should be seen as secondary to the larger task of helping to forward a new Russian cultural synthesis – one that would emerge from the fusion of the people and their more cultivated superiors." (35) This was seen by Dostoevsky as the answer and solution to the Slavophile's insistence that the cultural elite "return" to the people and the Westernizer's idea of the people must come and replace the cultural elite.

natural culmination of his atheism, the ultimate and pinnacle act of man's self-will. Since God is dead it is up to mankind to rise and properly realize its place as God. The only way for Kirillov to do so was to conquer the fear of death by ritualistically killing himself for no other reason than the act itself, thus not polluting his act of pure will. By doing so he, as a being of pure will even if only for an instant, takes his place as God, the "Man-God."

This peculiar brand of atheism, influenced by the book *Essence of Christianity*, published in 1841 by the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1814-1872) was the main way western ideas of atheism were imported and digested by the Russian intelligentsia. Feuerbach however did not advocate for suicide, nor would he have seen this as the natural progression of his atheism. Feuerbach disliked the characterization of his ideas as atheistic, but rather described his position as "anthropotheism." He saw his entire project, as reflected in the book *Essence of Christianity*, as refuting the false theological basis of religion and replacing it with the divinity of man. Todd Gooch, a leading Feuerbach scholar, describes the aim of Feuerbach's work thus: "Feuerbach's central claim in *The Essence of Christianity* is that religion is an alienated form of human self-consciousness insofar as it involves the relation of human beings to their own essence as though to a being distinct from themselves" (Gooch).

This idea of mangodhood is the reverse of Solovyov's later idea of Godmanhood, proposed in his previously mentioned 1871 lecture series. In mangodhood man reaches up and, in the ultimate promethean act, seizes divinity for himself. Since all the attributes of God (good, eternal, just, etc.) are understood to be derived from the internal recognition of said attributes in man, and it is known that God as an external being is a fiction, those attributes can only exist in their true originator, man. Thus, the rejection of God results in the shift of divinity onto man. This argument was instrumental in the atheist turn in the Belinsky Pleiad in the 1840s, eventually resulting in Dostoevsky's alienation from said group. The young Solovyov suffered a personal crisis as a young man after reading *Essence of Christianity*. This led him into a period of atheism modeled on German Idealism, following the defunct trend of the 1840s, rather than the Russian Nihilism of his peers which was primarily inspired by the materialism of Chernyshevsky and Pisarev. Due to this generational gap, Solovyov's idiosyncrasies led him down the path Dostoevsky did a generation earlier and thus to similar, but not identical, views.

Solovyov gave three addresses beginning in 1881 and ending in 1883 on Dostoevsky, who died in 1880, and in his memory. In these three lectures he describes what he thinks is unique and important in Dostoevsky for Russia and posterity. However, in these lectures he projects himself heavily on his subject and tells us more about himself than Dostoevsky proper.

Vladimir Solovyov was deeply, both personally and professionally, concerned with German trends in philosophy and their manifestations in Russian culture. He was among the top experts in German philosophy in Russia at the time. It is important to note, however, that his understanding of the final ramifications of Feuerbach's idea of manhood was defined by Dostoevsky's analysis. In the character Kirillov, Dostoevsky, and Solovyov through him, precisely saw suicide and death as the natural culmination of his line of thought (Solovyov, "Three Addresses in Memory of Dostoevsky" 23).

In these lectures Solovyov identified three faiths: Faith in man, faith in nature, and faith in God (23). The balance of these three faiths in an individual is necessary to create a whole and complete person. Likewise, as a macrocosm, a society must have a balance in order to be whole. According to Solovyov, these three faiths were in complete harmony in Russia, and their distinction was impossible to conceptualize, until the introduction of western ideas of Enlightenment. Russia was then split into three equally false camps. Mystics and spiritualists despised human freedom and saw in nature only a shadow, or reflection, of God. Humanists, of both idealist and materialist schools, placed human reason and achievement on a pedestal and thus dethroned the faiths in nature and God. Naturalists believed that man and God are mere modes of nature and can only be understood in relation to an analysis of natural laws (23-24). The combination of all three faiths is absolutely necessary for the harmony and development of the individual man, society, and humanity as a whole. All cultural evils are derived from the denial of one or more of these faiths.

All delusions of the mind, all false theories, and all practical one-sided attitudes and abuses have descended and continue to descend from the division of these three faiths. All truth and all good come out of their intrinsic combination. On one hand, man and nature have meaning only in their connection with the Deity. For man, left to himself and confirmed in his godless foundation, wipes out his inner falsehood and arrives, as we know, at murder and suicide; and nature, divided from the Spirit of God, appears as a dead and senseless mechanism without reason and goal. And, on the other hand, God, divided from man and nature outside of his positive revelation, also appears for us as either empty abstraction or all-consuming indifference (24).

One can see in this idea a rejection of Slavophile and Westernizer, mystic and materialist, atheist and zealot. By observing these distinctions, and rejecting them, Solovyov argues that

Russia can lead the world to a spiritual revival. Necessary first, however, would be a national reconciliation between Catholicism, Judaism, Orthodoxy, and Islam inside Russia (27). According to Solovyov, if people place God properly within themselves (in relation to nature and man) they would then be able to see God in the Catholic Church and Jewish Synagogue just as much as in the Orthodox Church. Thus, Solovyov derived, and demanded, a total ecumenism. Anything less could, and he thought would, bring destruction to the individual and to mankind at large.

As Stephan Finlan points out, in his article *The Comedy of Divinization in Soloviev*, Solovyov's philosophy was truly syncretic. He freely combined elements of Greek Neo-Platonism, Hermeticism, Theosophy, and Jewish Kabbalah with non-Orthodox authors like Böhme and Swedenborg. It is a characteristic of Solovyov that everything he read he synthesized into his overarching system. These authors he submitted to his Christianizing synthesis to create Sophiology (176-175). For Solovyov the believer, by uniting him or herself with Christ, is created into a new "spiritual being" who can be properly understood to be a person.

Solovyov and Men'

Vladimir Solovyov, despite, and perhaps due to, his incredible cultural influence was a deeply divisive figure, inviting biting criticism from all sides. His intellectual eclecticism and absolute value of genuine ecumenism made him many more enemies than friends, as Judith Deutsch Kornblatt writes:

"For Slavophiles, he focused too much on the West; for Westernizers and liberals, he was an irrational mystic; for Orthodox clergy, he was a freethinker who flirted with Catholicism, for Tolstoyans, he supported Orthodox doctrine; for Dostoevsky's reactionary acolytes, he was too sympathetic to Jews... Catholic, protestant, rationalist, mystic, nihilist, Old believer, and, finally, Jew" (Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia* 19).

By refusing to become an adherent to any established camp or school and seeking to provide eclectic and nuanced answers to the pressing questions of the day, Solovyov became an enemy of all schools. It is not an accident then that more than 80 years after Solovyov's death Alexander Men' would present a very similar figure to Soviet society. By placing Solovyov as a thinker needed beyond any other in the Russia of his day, and urging almost anyone who would listen to find and read Solovyov's books (to his and their great peril), Men' was making a bold statement of values that marked him as an enemy to the Communist Party's

materialistic atheism, nationalists in every Soviet republic, mystic revivalists in the Soviet-Russian Orthodox Church, humanists in the intelligentsia, and the wide undercurrents of Soviet anti-Semitism. In this light it is a shock that Alexander Men' gained any popularity at all, despite throwing down a gauntlet at the feet of almost every section of Soviet society.

However, despite how essential Solovyov was to the intellectual development of Father Men', there remained stark differences of opinion. For one, the core idea of Solovyov, his Sophiology, is completely absent from Men'. Although Men' does mention Solovyov's three visions of Sophia, the manifestation of the divine feminine, in his 1989 lecture on Solovyov, and affirms its centrality to Solovyov's thought, he does not give the idea a central place in the lecture itself. Rather, he emphasizes the socio-political ramifications of Solovyov's ideas. Men' even goes so far as to describe the visions as youthful 'occult and mystical' experiences, two words he uses exclusively for derision (Men', *Russian Religious Philosophy* 19). Alexander Men' strongly opposed any positions that waxed mystical, theosophical, or occult. This is made clear in his later lecture of the same series, on Pavel Florensky where he not only associates such preoccupations with youthful fancy but even describes them as obstacles to be overcome. Men' describes Florensky's involvement with the occult, spiritism, and unhealthy obsession with mysticism "stumbling blocks and a peculiar problem" (147).

Men's rejection of the questions posed by Solovyov's Sophiology, although difficult and often arcane, is all the more surprising considering how important they are for understanding modern Russia. Judith Kornblatt, emphasizes the importance of Sophia and Sophiology to Russian culture, saying that "Solovyov bequeathed his Sophia to the next generation of Russian writers and thinkers, and they, in turn, embedded her firmly in Russian culture of the twentieth century. Even the Marxist-Leninist materialism of the Soviet period did not uproot her entirely" (Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia* 9). However, Fr. Men', like Solovyov himself, was an eclectic that took what he saw as good and jettisoned what he saw as unhelpful from every author he read.

St. Petersburg Religio-Philosophic Gatherings and Nikolai Berdyaev

On 29 November 1901 at the location of the Geographical Society on Fantanka in Peterburg occurred an extraordinary gathering. The narrow, corridor-like hall is crammed full. In the corner – is an enormous, squat calico statue of Buddha. At the presiding table are people in clergy riasas and klobuks. Alongside on the loft – are the secular, primarily the young. And amazing is the absence, such as is customary for public gatherings, of having someone appointed, with the right to cut off the orators. There is an atmosphere of excitement. And everyone has the feeling that this is an important event. Thus began the Peterburg Religio-Philosophic Gatherings (Men', *Russian Religious Philosophy* 69).

In this chapter I will describe an event that provided Alexander Men' with an exact model and pathway for the proper spiritual revival of Russian culture, helping it overcome the spiritual vacuum, which was the legacy of the 70 years of a dictatorship dominated by a Communist ideology. A unique event, this series of gatherings and open debates brought the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church together, in the same room, with leading representatives of the Russian intelligentsia. Both sides were able to come face to face with each other and freely present ideas and grievances constructively and uncensored by a representative of the state. By understanding the Religio-Philosophic Gatherings we can understand what Fr. Men' himself envisioned. Through sincere and honest dialogue between the Church and the secular intelligentsia, Fr. Men' thought, late Soviet society could begin to overcome the spiritual vacuum and habitual disregard for people's real concerns inherent in late socialism. This was not meant to be the end itself, however, but rather the means to the end. This assembly of different groups united by a common interest would provide the model for a discussion within Russian society, in contrast to the habitual imposition of an official agenda imposed from above.

The Religio-Philosophic Gatherings also began the career of the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev. In Father Alexander Men's office, alongside his icons, were two photographs. Alongside a portrait of Vladimir Solovyov hung a framed photograph of Nikolai Berdyaev (Daniel, *Russia's Uncommon Prophet* 181). Berdyaev, together with Solovyov, is the other core figure that will make up our analysis of Men's thread of liberal Orthodoxy. I will provide a brief biography, placing heavy emphasis on his involvement with western existentialist circles. Then I will show how Berdyaev became the primary and clearest proponent of Orthodox personalism, an idea that is absolutely central to Fr. Men's

understanding of what is unique and central to Orthodox social thought. Nikolai Berdyaev was not just a public intellectual but an important member in the European movements of Existentialism and Phenomenology. These pages of analysis will make clear the historical-intellectual underpinnings of Men's thought and the true motivation of his wider project. Men', like Berdyaev and Solovyov before him, was motivated to action by philosophy. One must remember, also, that Men' encouraged everybody to become deeply familiar with Berdyaev's thought and sought to expand access to every one of his publications. Because of Berdyaev's centrality for Men', detailed a discussion of him is paramount for the understanding of what he meant for Men' during late socialism.

Petersburg Religio-Philosophic Gatherings

The Petersburg Religio-Philosophic Gatherings were organized by the symbolist poets, editors, and authors Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1866-1941) and his wife Zinaida Gippius (1869-1945) in order to do one thing, heal the cultural rift that had formed between the intelligentsia and the Russian Orthodox Church. Dmitry and Zinaida were both poets and editors in of the symbolist school. Dmitry was especially influenced by the writings of Solovyov, which lent his poetry a distinctly philosophic bent. Zinaida was influenced by Solovyov's decadence and apocalypticism, incorporating these themes into her gnomic poetry (Terras 416-418). They saw in the two sides, the Church and the secular intelligentsia, true parallel lines, always running adjacent yet never crossing. Moreover, when an interested member of either side would attempt to cross those lines they would find themselves in an unintelligible world. Even when attempting to criticize and pour vitriol on the opposing camp, the existence of the publications would rarely be known by their targets. There was an obvious need to overcome this sharp division if a cultural and spiritual healing of Russian society was to take place.

An issue that plagued the sessions of the gathering was, ironically, the very impetus that drove its creation. Harmful stereotypes and the total lack of a common language nearly derailed the talks from the beginning as some members sought to use the occasions to grandstand. The monks, priests, and lay theologians that represented the Russian Orthodox Church were well adapted to being able to produce scriptural justifications in real time and were knowledgeable in the historical, theological, and philosophical debates of the church fathers. The secular intelligentsia, on their part, were well versed in western philosophy, science, and literature. The members of the intelligentsia, influenced largely by positivism,

populism, and the cult of progress looked at the Church as just one more institution subservient to the state destined to be outgrown by the progress of human civilization. Furthermore, those secular writers, poets, and philosophers who did come out publicly in defense of the Church, or religion in general, were ostracized and derided. On the other side the Church often viewed the secular intelligentsia as a group of freethinking atheists who always had the secret agenda of destroying Christianity and all of Russian. It was not worthwhile, according to some within the Church, to engage meaningfully with secular culture lest that same secularity come to taint the Church itself. This mutual distrust, at sometimes open hostility, from both sides stopped any previous attempts to sincerely bridge this gap. It is no small feat then that Dmitry Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Gippius organized a meeting devoted to discussions of philosophy, aimed at a secular audience, that would be well attended by representatives of both groups. All this without a representative of the state with the authority to censor or cut off speakers (Men', *Russian Religious Philosophy* 71).

Previously the only window the intelligentsia had into the Orthodox Church was through the famous monastery of Optina Pustyn. Some historians make much of this monastery but its influence on the intelligentsia has been all too often overblown. Often too much is made of this connection. The trips made by members of the intelligentsia were infrequent and episodic (71). Even the famously pious Dostoevsky only traveled there for three days with Solovyov on vacation. This trip had more to do with researching for his new novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and for lifting his spirits, than any explicit religious pilgrimage. However, the monastery of Optina did influence a number of famous authors, including Gogol, Khomiakov, Dostoevsky, Solovyov, and Tolstoy.⁶ To the Orthodox faithful, Optina Pustyn was, and is, the center of Russian monasticism and the institution of the elders.⁷ It remains an important pilgrimage location to Orthodox Christians to this day (Ware, *The Orthodox Church* 120).

⁶ Although Tolstoy himself was excommunicated due to his open rejection of the Orthodox faith, his connection to the Optina elders was so great that one of them attempted to visit Tolstoy on his deathbed at Astapovo but was not granted entry (Ware, *The Orthodox Church* 120).

⁷ The importance of the institution of the *starets*, or “elders”, cannot be exaggerated. The philosophers and theologians Ivan Kireyevsky and Georgy Fedotov both, among others, emphasized the importance of making pilgrimage to find an elder to help guide you in the spiritual life (Ware, *The Orthodox Church* 120).

With these difficulties in mind, it is shocking that real dialogue happened and both sides were, on the whole, pleasantly surprised with the other. Zinaida Gippius remarked later that despite the monks, priests, and theologians coming from a totally different world, they all bore the “imprint” of being member of one cloth, sharing a common history, people, and land. They effortlessly, according to Zinaida, embodied the previous desires of the Russian intelligentsia to return to the land, the peasants. They did not need to return to an “authentic Russian culture”, because they never left in the first place. The intelligentsia were surprised that the monks were not the uneducated, backward, and uncultured people they were assumed to be. Aside from being predisposed to “’mundane’ theosophia,” the monks showed a surprising erudition and willingness to have sincere dialogue (Men’, *Russian Religious Philosophy* 74). On the part of the Church, they were happy to see that, despite the entire event being organized by representatives of the secular intelligentsia, and the audience of the debates and discussions being explicitly secular, the Church was not merely being lectured and derided. Rather, on the whole the questions and discussions were completely sincere. Furthermore, there was a genuine attempt to listen, and not just to lecture. Alexander Men’ describes the way the Church viewed secular participants thus:

The representatives of the Church came to see that within the secular society were people, vitally interested in spiritual problems, and capable of dialogue. And quite literally, the possibility of a mutual enrichment was at hand. And especially so, through the vital interaction of opinions, whereof to build a full-blooded spiritual life (83-84).

Alexander Men’ highlights an important aspect of these meetings – a blending of European and Russian cultural legacy: that the Western instrument of debate and dialogue can be put to use to promote an essentially Eastern value – spiritual life. Men’ emphasizes again and again in his lectures that despite the gatherings being forgotten by the 1980s, “the whole movement of Russian religious thought in one way or another emerged from these gatherings, initiated by Merezhkovsky – or more accurately, by Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Nikolaevna.”

Alexander Men’, always ecstatic when discussing the meetings, reminds his listeners that

Men who were on the order of professors at the Spiritual [Theological] Academy, and the clergy, literary figures, critics – including an entire cohort from the “World of Art”: Sergei Diaghilev, Lev Bakst, Aleksandr Benua [Benois]. And it was with an extraordinary interest that they had come – a new religious world had opened up for them!

A new religious world had opened up for them, and Men’ hoped, so too would a new world be opened to those attending his own lectures. This further emphasizes the importance of

these gatherings to Men's entire project. The entire tone of Russian religious philosophy was set by these meetings. Also, it is important that although the meeting was housed by the Church and opened by Bishop Sergei, it was the brainchild of Zinaida Nikolaevna, a member of the intelligentsia. It was truly a coming together and not merely one side offering an olive branch to another.

The gatherings lasted just over a year, a total of twenty-two meetings, before being ended by the Ober-Procurator to the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the highest imperial official supervising the Russian Orthodox Church. Berdyaev, recalling the meetings later in life, summed up their importance when saying "suddenly, in a corner of Peterburg – there was freedom of speech, freedom of conscience – though for short a time!" (96) A similar freedom of speech, sincere and genuine dialogue, and desire for cultural synthesis would not be possible again in Russia for some time.⁸

Nikolai Berdyaev and Existential Personalism

The Peterburg Religio-Philosophic Gatherings provided Men' with a format for the spiritual regeneration of Russia. However, Berdyaev provided him with a respected foundation in modern philosophical discourse. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev was born in 1874 into a well-off family in the Ukrainian gentry. While a student of law at the University of Kiev he was arrested for radical political activities, expelled, and sentenced to exile in Vologda, where he would reside from 1900 to 1903. Although Berdyaev was never able to return to the University of Kiev, nor was he able to complete formal education elsewhere, he became deeply knowledgeable of both eastern and western literature, theology, and philosophy through his own efforts as a lifelong autodidact. Berdyaev intellectually followed a path that was common for members of his generation. Emerging from the populist teachings of Lavrov and Mikhailovski, Berdyaev became a convinced Marxist. However, despite the popularity of a deeply materialist reading of Marx in the Russian youth at the time, Berdyaev found himself more attracted to the ideological subsection of Marxist theoreticians who interpreted Marx through a neo-Kantian lens. As part of this tendency within Russian Marxism he published a treatise on Kantian-Marxist ethics in 1901. Eventually, Kant gained prominence in Berdyaev's thought, and he abandoned Karl Marx altogether. By the end of the 1910s he

⁸ See Herman Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet literature, 1917-1991* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997)

abandoned Kant's Transcendental Idealism after he discovered and fell in love with Dostoevsky and Nietzsche and began developing his own existentialist philosophy (Kline, *Russian and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* 90-91). This trajectory, from Marxism to Idealism, then Idealism to Orthodoxy and Existentialism, was very common for the religious philosophers in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. This developmental path was also followed by Fr. Pavel Florensky, Fr. Sergei Bulgakov, among many others.

When other reformed Marxist intellectuals such as the theologian and scientist Sergei Bulgakov were returning or joining Orthodoxy in the 1920s and 30s, rushing to fully partake in the liturgical and intellectual life of the Church, Berdyaev notably did not follow them. As described in his 1989 lecture by Fr. Men':

He journeyed to monasteries, he prayed in the churches, he communed the Holy Mysteries, but when the repentant Intelligentsia went to various startsi-elders and lovingly accepted their words as on the order of the utterings of an oracle, -- Berdyaev could not bear to do this, he considered that this was not his pathway. And he always remained not so much a theologian, as rather a free philosopher. He spoke thus: 'I think independently, I proceed from my own 'I' and its own intellectual experience and intuition (Men', *Russian Religious Philosophy* 108).

Berdyaev was influenced by Solovyov but it would be too strong to identify him as a disciple. What is most useful in Solovyov, according to Berdyaev, is his emphasis on the unity of man in Godmanhood and the rejection of positivism by being a personal embodiment of antinomy. By making himself openly self-contradictory, Solovyov illustrates the poverty of seeking to create overarching logical categories to organize mankind (Berdyaev, "Idea of Godmanhood in V.I. Solov'ev").

In 1922 Berdyaev was exiled along with other anti- and non-Marxist philosophers on the infamous "Philosopher's Steamers." On August 16th Berdyaev received the dreaded nighttime knock of the OGPU, the secret police that existed briefly between the Cheka and the NKVD. He was found guilty of engaging in anti-Soviet activities and sentenced to exile. Berdyaev objected, saying that although he was an enemy of "idealized Communism," he was not guilty of engaging in anti-Soviet activity and did not regard himself as engaging in any interpretation of anti-revolutionary activity (Gregory 490). He then proceeded to further condemn himself by declaring his existentialist thesis during the interrogation that "Any class organization or party should be subordinated to the individual and to humanity" (491). Unfortunately for Berdyaev, he was number 55 out of 186 who were ejected based on the

Politburo “Decree about Anti-Soviet Groupings among the Intelligentsia,” published on the recommendation of a report by Dzerzhinsky (480, 489). By 1923 Berdyaev found permanent residence in Paris where he lived, through the Nazi occupation of France, until his death in 1948 (Kline, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* 91).

In France Berdyaev publicly associated himself with the existentialist movement, but with reservations. He identified the “true” existentialist tradition in St. Augustine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard and rejected the “pseudo-existentialist” tradition of Sartre, Jaspers, and Heidegger⁹ (92). This placed him at odds with the French existentialist tradition that was oriented toward a phenomenological existentialism influenced by Husserl rather than a religious one influenced by Pascal and Kierkegaard. Despite this, Berdyaev became a common feature of the French philosophy scene, a recognized and respected philosopher in the West.

Berdyaev described himself as following “Dostoevskian Christianity.” The nature of Berdyaev’s Christianity should be understood to be truly, and almost solely, Dostoevskian. He not only interpreted the Bible through the lens of Dostoevsky, in his writings he only quotes the Bible as they appear in Dostoevsky’s novels. Dostoevsky is almost always used as the sole authority of matters of scripture, without any appeals to the Bible itself (95). Berdyaev shared Solovyov’s sentiment regarding the three faiths that come into harmony in Christianity. However, he injected his own Hegelian framework as justification of the thesis, a method he was already adept at through his Marxist and Kantian education. He identified a historical idealistic dialectic in the Medieval rejection of man and dominance of concern with God coming into conflict with the modern rejection of God and exaltation of man. Berdyaev illustrates this well in his essay, *The End of the Renaissance*:

In having exalted man, humanism deprived him of God-likeness and enslaved him to natural necessity. The Renaissance, based upon humanism, revealed the creative powers of man as a being natural, and not spiritual. But natural man, sundered off from the spiritual man, does not possess an infinite wellspring of creative powers, he becomes drained and winds up on the surface aspect of life (Berdyaev).

Christianity, of the Orthodox-Dostoevskian type, would unite the two into a new organic whole. This synthesis of ideas would result in a Christian socialism, which he called

⁹ Those authors in the opposite trend throw the same barbs at followers of the followers of Kierkegaard and Pascal. This is a classic academic division of schools within a tradition.

personalism (Kline, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* 93). Following through with his Hegelian dialectic, the positive aspects of both would be preserved while the negative aspects rejected. There would be a clear rejection of abstraction, both the abstract individualism of capitalism and the abstract collectivism of socialism. Never again, in this new epoch that Berdyaev thought humanity was entering, would persons in the concrete be sacrificed to people in the abstract (Berdyaev, “The End of the Renaissance”).

Berdyaev’s personalism, however, was not merely a Hegelian prediction of a future epoch in the development of humanity. It had a conception fully divorced from Hegelianism and had a foundation in his own existential anti-ontology. Following the most foundational aspect of existentialism, the rejection of the existence of the universal in the face of the concrete, Berdyaev affirms the existence of individual person as our only proper concern, supplanting society.

“The social projection of personalism presupposes a radical, a revolutionary transvaluation of social values, i.e. the transfer of the centre of gravity from the values of society, the state, the nation, the collective, the social group, to the valuation of person, of every person. The social projection of personalism is a revolutionary repudiation of the capitalistic regime, of the utmost anti-personalist, the utmost death-bearing for person, as ever existed in history. The socialisation of the economy, which affirms the right to work and a guarantee of a worthwhile existence for each human life not permitting the exploitation of man by man, is a demand of personalism. The sole system, therefore, corresponding to the eternal truth of personalism, is a system of personalist socialism. At the basis of a social world-concept of personalism lies not the idea of equality nor the idea of justice, but rather the dignity of every human person, which should receive the possibility to realise itself” (Berdyaev, “Personalism and Marxism”).

It is this description of personalism that Fr. Men’ considers important enough to be preserved and propagated in the Soviet Union of late Socialism. Berdyaev, followed later by Alexander Men’, rejected Solovyov’s mysticism and instead emphasized this concept of Godmanhood justified through existentialism and not appeals to mystical visions of Sophia (Rubin 157).

Men’, the Gatherings, and Berdyaev

Following the trend presented in the previous chapter, the issue of being condemned by all sides plagued Berdyaev as much as it did Chaadayev and Solovyov. Berdyaev, in a letter to the Russo-Jewish philosopher Lev Shestov, complained that “Left-wingers consider me right-wing, right-wingers consider me left-wing; the Orthodox consider me a heretic, heretics

consider me Orthodox.” Berdyaev himself considered himself an enemy of all obscurantism, whether Bolshevik or right-wing (Kline, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* 92). Berdyaev, in the course of his life, faced persecution from many sides. The Russian Orthodox Church tried him for blasphemy over his criticism of the 1913 Russian invasion of Mount Athos and defense of the Athonite monks, but Berdyaev was saved from official condemnation due to the revolution. On the other side, the Soviet state, in the first year of its existence, condemned and exiled Berdyaev for anti-Soviet activities. This is a trend that follows those whose writings follow a line of “liberal Orthodoxy,” as Men’ knew full well.

Berdyaev, despite the incredible difficulties and pressures he faced during and after the Bolshevik coup, maintained the thick journal *Put*, or “The Way.” He was the chief editor of the journal from its creation in 1925 until its end in 1940, working with his partner the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva. The importance of this journal for Russia, according to Men’ cannot be over emphasized. He praises the journal as “...not a journal, it is a treasure-trove of thought! Its sixty issues comprise a wealth, an inheritance, which we today are receiving, and God grant, that this should pass down to our descendants” (Men’, *Russian Religious Philosophy* 83). Men’ did not want to convince people, necessarily, that these ideas are correct but rather to spread them so that they can become, once again, productive parts of Russian culture.

Just as Men’ accepted Solovyov with reservations, so too did he with Berdyaev. There are many aspects of Berdyaev’s thought and manner that Fr. Men’ did not agree with. For one, Berdyaev was a convinced anarchist, and thought that no other form of political organization can exist in a genuine interpretation of the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church. Alexander Men’ was a convinced believer in liberal democracy. He condemned any revolutionary political ideology, whether communist or anarchist, with as much fervor as he condemned monarchy and a return of the tsar. Berdyaev was a true aristocrat, Men’ considered him “haughty, fiery, a bit naïve... never able to join anything” (108). This clashes radically with Alexander Men’s own desire for a coming together of individuals in humble religious communities, always more ready to listen than to argue. Also, Berdyaev’s rejection of the Bible as a resource runs completely opposite to Men’s career as a biblical critic, scholar, and founder of the Russian Bible Society. As with Solovyov, Men’ wanted to bring the writings of Berdyaev back to Russia in order to celebrate them as another victory of

culture. He did not advocate his followers become followers of Berdyaev, but rather be able to understand and engage with his writings (122).

Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam

Alexander Men' was deeply influenced by the writings of Vladimir Solovyov and Nikolai Berdyaev and spent a career promoting their works. However, he did not have a similar relationship to Osip or Nadezhda Mandelstam. Nevertheless, we can speak of the same central line of thought and despite the fragmented references it is possible to identify that Nadezhda was an important figure for Men'. Furthermore, there was deep running ideological convergence concerning the importance of cultural continuity and the preservation of Russian culture. The poet Osip Mandelstam was, according to some, the most important Russian poet of the 20th century. Furthermore, Mandelstam himself was a personal friend of Berdyaev and a self-described "Solovievian Christian." Despite this, Fr. Men' did not promote him in the same way as he did Solovyov, Berdyaev, Frank, Bulgakov, and others. One might ask then why this chapter exists, if the intellectual relationship between Osip Mandelstam and Fr. Men' is non-existent. The answer lies in Osip's widow, Nadezhda Mandelstam.

Alexander Men had a close personal connection with the widow at a time when she was abandoned by all others. He baptized her, was her spiritual father¹⁰ while she lived, and presided and sang over her funeral. Nadezhda Mandelstam, both in her own right as a philosopher and through her famous husband, was Fr. Men's personal connection to the intellectual culture of pre-Revolutionary Russia and the tendency of liberal Orthodoxy we have been following throughout this paper. As such, it would be remiss of this us to ignore the important figure of Nadezhda Mandelstam who, in the flesh, Men' saw as pre-revolutionary Russia personified. Also, equally important, Nadezhda and Osip were both Jewish converts to Orthodoxy, placing them in the same cultural-religious milieu as Men' himself. It must be said that Nadezhda is almost exclusively considered, even in modern scholarship, as nothing more than Osip's shadow and widow, instrumentalizing her and tying her entire existence to her husband. This simply does not match the historical record. Fr Men' was alone in her contemporaries in considering her an important scholar and intellectual in her own right. I also seek to partially right this wrong in shining a light on a fascinating and important individual who history will remember for herself.

¹⁰ It is standard practice for an Orthodox Christian to have a spiritual father. This is a trusted priest who hears their confessions and provides them with spiritual, and often worldly, advice.

Biography

Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) was part of a group of poets and intellectuals who described themselves as Acmeists. They rebelled against “the unbridled mysticism, the self-dramatising metaphysical dreams and the conscious ‘decadence’ of the Russian symbolist writers” (Berlin, “A Great Russian Writer” 39). In 1922 Osip married Nadezhda Yakovlevna and the two would live together until the untimely end of his life nineteen years later. Osip died while in transit to a gulag in 1938 after being arrested for reading an epigram in verse about Stalin in 1934 (42). This short poem was read to a small group of individuals in an apartment literary salon. They knew he was on thin ice with the authorities for years before this, and the unfortunate couple waited every night for the dreaded midnight knock on their door. Despite this, and perhaps because of it, Osip felt that writing and reading such a poem was necessary.

Like Solovyov and Berdyaev, Mandelstam’s writings were only available in the 1960s through 1988 illegally either through self-published samizdat copies or from old publications that were hidden away. Despite this, there were still interested readers across the Soviet Union who cherished his works (46). Osip’s writing includes constant Jewish themes, describing the plight of Russian Jews as a “Judaic Chaos” (Mandelstam, *Noise of Time* 79). As a young man Mandelstam sought to distance himself from his Jewish identity, he later grew to embrace it in his prose of the 1930s. He spoke with pride of his belonging to such an ancient tribe.¹¹ It cannot be ignored that he and Nadezhda bore a distinct Jewish identity, even if they did not follow the Jewish faith. Osip’s prose is full of Jewish images, persons, and figures. Isaiah Berlin emphasizes this as the way in which he perceived his world:

“The suffering hero of ‘The Egyptian Stamp’ is a Russian Jew. His prose is populated with figures and images of his Jewish environment, treated with neither condescension nor irony nor aggressive self-identification, indeed no selfconsciousness of any kind. This evidently remained his natural world until the end.” (50).

Osip Mandelstam himself personally embodied the interesting cultural position occupied by Jews in Russian culture. As Joseph Brodsky tells us in his essay on Osip Mandelstam, “The Child of Civilization”:

“...Mandelstam was a Jew who was living in the capital of Imperial Russia, whose dominant religion was Orthodoxy, whose political structure was inherently Byzantine, and whose alphabet had been devised by two Greek monks” (130).

¹¹ Я настаиваю на том, что писательство в том виде, как оно сложилось в Европе, и особенно в России, несовместимо с почетным званием иудея, которым я горжусь.

Of her eighty-one-year life Nadezhda was married to Osip only nineteen. However, after his death she devoted herself totally to the preservation of his memory. She collected and memorized his poetry, constantly fought for the preservation of his publications and his name and defended him against critics. She endured decades of “widowhood, utter deprivation, the Great (obliterating any personal loss) War, and the daily fear of being grappled by the agents of State Security as a wife of an enemy of the people” (Brodsky, “Nadezhda Mandelstam 1899-1980 An Obituary” 146). All of this was due to her sense of personal duty to stand against the Soviet process of erasure, preserving Osip for future generations.

Nadezhda Mandelstam produced two memoirs that were dedicated to preserving the life, writings, and memory of not just Osip but also of Russian culture itself. They were published in 1970 and 1974 in English translations by Max Hayward with the titles *Hope Against Hope* and *Hope Abandoned*. She began writing these memoirs at the age of 65, in 1964 (149). These two volumes are absolutely necessary for anyone seeking to understand Stalinist Russia. As historical documents they are invaluable to historians who want a firsthand account of the horrors the intelligentsia, Jews, and indeed men and women of every background, experienced under Stalin. Furthermore, they give us a full understanding of Osip’s position on the cultural struggles of his day. At the same time her memoirs were a brutal condemnation of the intelligentsia of her generation, shining daring light on all complicity with the state. This significantly harmed her popularity with the intelligentsia who largely abandoned her after their publication. “A prominent dissident declared, shaking his beard: “She shat on our entire generation” (152). The intelligentsia were shocked at this unique case of complete abandonment of the self-censorship that had become a standard feature in Russia. Furthermore, what she created was completely unique in providing an honest source of reflection on 20th century Russian cultural, religious, and political criticism. This is how, among other things, we learn about Solovyov’s strong influence on her husband and his preoccupation with philosophy.

Osip Mandelstam and Solovievian Christianity

As a teenager Osip Mandelstam became interested in the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov. Although Mandelstam counted Solovyov as a subpar poet, he found his philosophy inspiring. Unfortunately, we have almost nothing written by him directly concerning Solovyov except

for a few short articles discussing the Symbolist poetry of Alexander Blok. This was due to the fact that Mandelstam's greatest years of productivity were after the decision was made by the Soviet state that Solovyov had no place in the new society. It would have been impossible for any editor in the country to publish non-derisive articles on Solovyov. Despite this, there are traces of Solovyov's philosophic methodology, ideas, and even expressions throughout Osip Mandelstam's works¹² (Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 275). Furthermore, Osip considered Solovyov, and his memory, as making up an integral piece of Russian culture and thought. Nadezhda recounts a time when Osip was so frustrated with the way Solovyov's memory was rejected that he lashed out at her:

When we stayed in the CEKUBU rest home on the former Trubetskoi estate where Soloviev died, M. was struck by the indifference to his memory with which Soviet scholars stay writing articles, reading newspapers or listening to the radio in the same blue study where Soloviev had once worked. At the time I knew nothing of Soloviev myself, and M. was quite indignant: 'You're a barbarian, like them.' For M. these professors were nothing but a horde of barbarians invading the holy places of Russian culture (275).

It must be noted here also the parallels with Alexander Men' who made pilgrimage to this very same room and even went so far as to petition the government for the installation of a plaque that would commemorate Solovyov. It need not be said that this request was denied.

Like Solovyov, Osip was disturbed by the process of cultural vivisection, and indeed oblivion, in Russia. He devoted an essay to the theme of the separation of religion and culture in *The Word and Culture*. Osip likewise dedicated some of his earliest publications to philosophical topics, such as his essay *On Peter Chaadayev*. In this article he praises Chaadayev for leaving an imprint on Russian culture like "diamond drawn across a glass." He likens the role of the Russian philosopher to "fulfilling a holy obligation" (83). The main emphasis is placed, like those philosophers in the preceding chapters, on Chaadayev's thoughts concerning cultural and religious unity. Nadezhda provides an analysis herself on Osip's essay on Chaadayev, recounting how:

In a youthful article about Chaadayev he wrote: 'One cannot launch a new history – the idea is altogether unthinkable – there would not be the continuity and tradition.

¹² There is much still to be said about Osip Mandelstam's interest in Solovyov's philosophy. His interest in Chaadayev, Berdyaev, and even the Sophiological works of Pavel Florensky (to whom Alexander Men' also devoted a lecture in his series on Russian religious philosophy) shows that he belongs to the same intellectual world I am discussing here. This topic deserves much more attention than it has hitherto received. Hopefully, in the future this will be remedied.

Tradition cannot be contrived or learned. In its absence once has, at the best, not history but “progress” – the mechanical movement of a clock hand, not the sacred succession of interlinked events.’ These words refer to Chaadayev, but the idea behind them was certainly very close to M.’s own way of thinking as well (Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 296).

Like Berdyaev, Mandelstam’s personal acquaintance and friend, “...he was horrified at the social engineering calculated to crush and destroy the personality” (Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 216). Osip was not solely concerned with poetry but had a sharp interest in philosophy as well. He actively sought to collect works of philosophy and incorporated it into his poetry. Nadezhda recalls that Osip:

“...eagerly bought the work of thinkers, such as Chaadayev and the Slavophiles. On the other hand, he clearly had no time for German philosophy. Once he bought a volume of Kant, sniffed at it and said: ‘Nadia, this isn’t for us...’” (Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope* 287-288).

Nadezhda and Osip tried, as best they could, to keep informed on contemporary issues and currents in both Russian and Western philosophy as they developed. They even attempted to keep track of Berdyaev’s movements in French philosophic circles. However, despite their efforts it became more and more difficult, and indeed dangerous, to acquire such illegal and clandestine information (288).

Osip Mandelstam was an Orthodox Christian, but an unconventional one. In the 1910s he understood the core of Russian society to be Christianity combined with European culture, and the Great War as a desperate crisis of this same culture. This represented his first matured vision of Russia’s religious identity (Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 440-441). Influenced by Dante and a firm commitment to a Western cosmopolitan identity, Mandelstam was initially drawn to Roman Catholicism. Later, after falling under the influence of Fr. Kablukov, a Russian Orthodox priest, he began to incline more toward Orthodoxy. However, even before his meetings with this priest there were signs of this Orthodox shift¹³. Later in his too short life he began to speak openly about his Christian faith, stating “I drink the cold mountain air of Christianity” (441). He described himself as being Christian “In a Solovievian sense,” underscoring both the intense influence this author had on him and the idiosyncratic nature of his faith.

¹³ I recommend Osip Mandelstam’s famous *Journey to Armenia* to anyone who is interested in Osip’s early contact with the “cool mountain air of Christianity.” In this travelogue he recounts his journey through Georgia, Armenia, and Abkhazia and his thoughts on the region.

Osip, throughout his life and career, attempted to provide his own person as the bridge to pre-Revolutionary culture. This position that Osip found himself in as inheritor of Russian culture was not just a heady belief of his, nor was it merely a title placed on him posthumously by anti-Soviet commentators. Even while he lived a Pravda article condemned Mandelstam of coming directly from the past and attempting to continue on with it to the future and uses this as one more among many reasons why he did not fit in the new Soviet state (474).

Nadezhda Mandelstam the Philosopher and Fr. Men'

Alexander Men' considered Nadezhda a true philosopher and would declare this publicly in mixed groups (Glinka 616). This position is, however, idiosyncratic. Few commentators and critics consider her a philosopher proper, rather choosing to see her only in relation to her much more famous husband. Even Anna Akhmatova, Mandelstam's comrade in suffering during the worst years of Stalinism and a very close personal friend, chose not to read Nadezhda's memoirs, being unable to accept Nadezhda in the role of a writer in herself, only considering her instead a mere "writer's wife" (Murina 390). This does not mean that her words did not carry weight nor that she was not respected. Nadezhda had recognized moral and cultural authority according to Joseph Brodsky (Brodsky, "Nadezhda Mandelstam 1899-1980 an Obituary" 152). However, this reputation did not compare to her husband.

Nadezhda received a full education in religious philosophy by living and travelling with Osip, acting as his amanuensis, editor, and secretary. Due to this ad hoc education, she developed idiosyncratic religious views herself, just as with Osip. In the 60s and early 70s Nadezhda was already becoming interested in Russian Orthodoxy through her associations with the priest Fr. Sergei Zheludkov. This Orthodox turn influenced her second memoir which dwelt on religion much more than the first and includes many references to Orthodox liturgy and sacraments (Nechiporuk 224). In the second memoir she developed her own recontextualization of the language of the Silver Age, instead of merely repeating ideas developed by Osip. This can be seen in this following quote when she moves from an often-repeated distinction in Osip's writings between "Freedom and License," describing her own grappling with these ideas as she incorporates it into her new grammar and cultural language:

“...’this is not freedom, but licence.’ For me this contrasting use of freedom and licence was something new. I did not know that it had been a commonplace in the years before the Revolution. Later I found it in the works of Sergei Bulgakov and

Berdiayev. (We have been cut off not only from the outside but, but also from our own past, from books, ideas, and everything else; as a result, when things eased a little, we all started discovering America, marveling at the simplest things which had long been known to everybody in the rest of the world. At the moment we see people ‘discovering’ the elementary truths of Christianity, which had been forgotten after being buried away for half a century” (Mandelstam, *Hope Abandoned* 311).

Nadezhda, as with Berdyaev and Men’, was suspicious of Solovyov’s Sophiology. She even likened ideas of Sophia with chiliasm and the cult of ‘progress,’ two accusations usually reserved by her and Osip for Bolshevism (259). Nadezhda was also skeptical of any ideas of returning to an idealized past, and held in contempt any ideas of romanticization, as did Fr. Men. She personally remembered all too well the decadence and violence of the period. These years, the years of the Silver Age, were not the blissful period that some recalled. Indeed, she often rebuffed those who might interpret her as painting a romanticized version of the past.

I am not trying here to defend the pre-Revolutionary years. The fact that they are referred to as the Silver Age makes me laugh; it was mainly a time of anxiety and forebodings of doom. The roots of all subsequent evils, however, are to be found neither in those years nor in the twenties but go much deeper (216).

Furthermore, the idea passed around by the disaffected and disillusioned intelligentsia under Stalin, that the age merely “stumbled” and everything that came afterward was nothing more than an unfortunate accident, she held as nothing more than “wishful thinking” (494). However, she obviously held many aspects of the past, especially religiously and culturally, in high regard. This is a special nuance that is present in Men’ as much as in Nadezhda.

Nadezhda met Fr. Men’ in the summer of 1971 and was shortly after baptized by him in his parish at Zagorsk (Nerler 711-712) (Shukman 14). It was at this time that Alexander Men’ was just starting to gather a following among the Jewish and Russian intelligentsia. By the end of the 70s he would be an established dissident figure and have a considerable following. His church at Zagorsk became a pilgrimage site for the disaffected intelligentsia (Daniel, *Russia’s Uncommon Prophet* 193).

Although there were still a few dedicated readers of Osip Mandelstam through the Soviet period, by the 1960s the writings of Osip Mandelstam were almost impossible to find (Rubenstein 32). The chance of happening upon his works accidentally were almost impossible. Osip’s memory did not continue to provide Nadezhda with reliable personal

connections and friendships. Nadezhda, in her old age, after being largely abandoned by any friends she might have retained in the intelligentsia through her explosive memoirs, found it difficult to live by herself. Alexander Men' organized a team of volunteers from his spiritual children to care for her in shifts. This was absolutely necessary once she later became bedridden and could not be left alone (Murina 354, 386). When she died in 1980 Fr. Men' co-organized and sang at her funeral (390).

Fr. Men spoke at a memorial held for her in 1988, two years before his own death, and again praised her role as a philosopher and connecting figure in Russian culture. There are strong parallels between her and Men' both in religious disposition and devotion to their respective life's tasks. Nadezhda devoted the core of her life to preserving Osip Mandelstam in her writings and, much more importantly, her memory and Mandelstam's legacy. Doing so was a great personal struggle, taking all of her strength and health (362). Her writings on Osip "illuminate the darkness, fill in the voids, eliminate the distortion. The net result is close to a resurrection..." (Brotsky, "A Child of Civilization" 135). For Nadezhda Mandelstam Alexander Men' had the same qualities that her husband Osip admired in others of his own generation (Daniel, *Russia's Uncommon Prophet* 114-115). Fr. Men' sought to preserve the pre-revolutionary cultural continuity and the importance of intellectual tradition which took the form of a personal devotion to Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolai Berdyaev, and others as cultural models and archetypes. For Nadezhda, however, the project also included a deeply personal element that was missing for Men'. She sought to maintain the persona and legacy of her murdered husband. By her very existence she was thwarting the process of erasure instigated by the Soviet state against the old Russian culture. However, despite this she was likewise devoted to reviving Russian cultural continuity. What was said of Berdyaev, that he philosophized with his whole being, can be said of Nadezhda Mandelstam as well.

Father Alexander Men' and Judeo Christianity

I want to revisit here the central question of my thesis: “Why did Father Alexander Men' seek to promote and revive Vladimir Solovyov and Nikolai Berdyaev?” Why would a village Russian Orthodox Priest, with no formal education in philosophy, go so far as to risk the lives and livelihoods of himself and his family to promote these writings and teachings? It seems completely unreasonable, on the face of it, that Fr. Men' would seek to promote to all Orthodox in Russia an intense and close reading of a Silver Age philosopher, gnostic, and mystic occultist. Furthermore, why teach catechumens and the newly baptized the philosophy of an anarchist existentialist philosopher who was charged with blasphemy by the imperial courts and with anti-Soviet activities by the Soviet? Why befriend, baptize, and support an elderly Jewish woman who was universally abandoned and condemned by the entirety of the intelligentsia as well as the ideologues of the state?

In the previous three chapters I have answered these questions. Vladimir Solovyov, in addition to being an occultist, was the father of Russian philosophy, personal friend and inspirer of Dostoevsky, and provided a firm foundation for the future of Russian thought. Nikolai Berdyaev codified personalism, an existentialist foundation for contemporary Orthodox social teaching. Men' sought to answer the needs of the deep persistent thirst for “spiritual values” that was found among all ranks of Soviet society (Daniel, “Struggle to Recover Russia's Heritage” 83). One way he sought to do this was to resurrect the writings of Russian religious philosophers and make them again part of the lifeblood of Russian culture. Dominic Rubin asserts that Fr. Men was indeed successful. Solovyov, Berdyaev, Frank, Bulgakov, and others are studied in Russia today.

“Their way of doing philosophy is not dead. The mixing of boundaries continues apace between theology, literature, philosophy, journalism, and prophetic political commentary. Furthermore, during the Soviet period the smuggled copies of these philosophers' works provided an alternative to communist ideology, and with the fall of communism their works were fresh with the lure of the forbidden. Thus works that first saw the light of day in 1905, 1913 or 1921 can be read with an enthusiasm and topicality that is difficult to imagine in the Western context (Rubin 511).

While the availability of these previously banned books has increased considerably, Rubin's assessment is too optimistic. There was indeed a resurrected interest in Solovyov, Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and other pre-revolutionary religious philosophers among academics, authors, and other segments of high culture. However, Men' had in mind a much wider popularization

which would serve as an antidote to a population that languished under 70 years of materialist education in the Soviet Union. This was not the case.

Judeo-Christianity

Something that has not been explicitly addressed here is the role that Men's Jewish heritage played in Men's life and works. Alexander Men' was an apostle to the intelligentsia, but especially so to the Jewish intelligentsia. Judith Kornblatt, who spent a considerable amount of time performing interviews with Jewish converts to Orthodoxy in the Soviet Union, writes about how the Russian Jews in post-Stalinist Russia felt trapped both spiritually and intellectually before the emigrations began in the 1970s. For them the Russian Orthodox Church presented a unique opportunity to escape from the "cellarlike incarceration of their spiritual lives." Since this generation was already secularized, and had no generational memory of Judaism, there was not a feeling of the betrayal of an identity. What was desperately needed was an answer to the "illogical and empty world" of post-Stalinist Russia (Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen* 69). Alexander Men' gave this generation of the secular Jewish intelligentsia a way out.

Fr. Men' made it very clear, declaring it multiple times publicly, that he hoped for the development of a "Judeo-Christianity." His parish at Zagorsk was comprised of hundreds of Jewish converts from the intelligentsia, Nadezhda Mandelstam included. The Jewish character of Men's parish was so pronounced that, in one humorous occasion, a man living in Zagorsk was surprised when he entered Fr. Men's church, as he originally thought that it was a synagogue. Christianity, especially Orthodoxy, was a way for secular Jews in Russia, having been divorced from their religious, cultural, and intellectual heritage through generations of Sovietization, to "reconnect with the faith of their ancestors, as expressed in the Old Testament (Rubin 512)."

Men' did not think that what existed in his parish was a true example of "Judeo-Christianity." However, he did entertain hope in a future where Jews and a Jewish consciousness would gather in the State of Israel and, with full approval with the Jewish community and State, join together with the apostolic churches, Orthodox, Catholic, and Armenian (519). This combination of Zionism, syncretism, and Christian missionary zeal made him very popular with the Jewish intelligentsia in the Soviet Union who were spiritually starved. However, it

made him many more enemies including anti-Semitic forces inside and outside the church (including the famous Solzhenitsyn¹⁴), Zionists who saw Men' as subverting the secular message of the Zionism in the USSR, and faithful Jews who were horrified at the sheer number of Jewish converts to Orthodoxy who cited Men' as the inspiration.

Men', however, saw his position as falling perfectly in line with the tenants of Zionism, which at its core was a secular ideology. He vigorously opposed any imposition of religion on the citizens of the USSR and the State of Israel and was a clear enemy of any admixture of church and state. He did advocate, for those who chose to stay in Russia and for those that chose to emigrate, that they embrace a religion. If they returned to Judaism this was seen as just as much of a win for Men' as if they converted to Orthodoxy. For Men' a Jewish convert to Christianity did not cease to be a Jew but would rather be more solidly connected with their tradition. As Fr. Men' said, "...this will already be not tradition in the archaic sense of the term, not in the closed-national sense, but in the broad, universal, powerful sense, as with the very foundation of the Church" (Rubin 518-519).

This might seem to indicate that Men' was a proponent of Messianic Judaism, the trend in Judaism that claims that Christ was the Messiah but all of Jewish law must be maintained. However, despite superficial similarities this was simply not the case. Only by looking at Solovyov's position on the issue of the reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity, can we understand Men's position on this difficult matter. It is obvious that Men' had in Solovyov an inspiration and a model. This universalist vision of religion Alexander Men' took directly from Vladimir Solovyov. The doctrine of "All Unity" in Solovyov, combined with the "multiplicity-in-unity" idea inherent in Khomiakov's *Sobornost*, which Men' advocated was rather the ability to allow both the theologies of Judaism and Christianity to exist simultaneously while immersing them in Russian philosophy (Rubin 518). Solovyov's doctrine of Godmanhood implied, according to Men', a very literal joining of the divine and the human. As such, "there is nothing in history which is a matter of indifference to spirituality." Christianity, understood in this light, "can absorb into itself everything,

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Solzhenitsyn and Fr. Men' met multiple times in Russia and had an initial friendship. It was Solzhenitsyn who introduced Fr. Men' to western publishers in Belgium that allowed Men's tamizdat career to begin in the first place. However, as both developed intellectually, they quickly became estranged (Daniel, *Russia's Uncommon Prophet* 112-113).

including social problems, the moral problems of society, and even problems of art” (Men’, “Two Understandings of Christianity” 157). This, combined with Solovyov’s demand for a national reconciliation between Russian Jews, Christians, and Muslims, illustrates the form religion would take in his ideal Russia.

In Conclusion

Men’ emphasized the ideals of freedom and dignity manifested in Berdyaev’s personalism. The experience of societal dialogue was not all novel, outlandish phenomena, but had already existed in the Russian context, taken root, and could once again be recycled and adopted to the post-Soviet reality. Differently from Petrine times, there was no need to have a wholesale importation of Western methods and technologies. Solovyov, Berdyaev, and others had already set the precedent. Russian pre-revolutionary thinkers, with Solovyov and Berdyaev at their helm, offered a fusion of Western and Russian approaches to solving Russian dilemmas and situations. Because these approaches were home-grown, Men’ hoped that they could be more readily and successfully adopted to the Russian post-Soviet experience. The trouble was that the continuity of tradition had been broken and the names and legacies of these figures had been essentially forgotten. Men’ shared with Nadezhda Mandelstam the same understanding of the importance of preserving this cultural continuity and the memory of the past. Men’ was perhaps more optimistic than Nadezhda Mandelstam, hoping that the effects of the seventy-year-long state-sponsored oblivion could be reversed. Solovyov and Berdyaev were so important for Men’ because their ideas could be used as the foundations for the re-emergence of meaningful spiritual life in a post-communist Russia and its surroundings. However, eschewing the path of the political dissidents, Solovyov and Berdyaev did not provide constitutional and legal principles, but rather suggested a way for a spiritual resurrection for a nation that blended openness to European culture with an Orthodox Christian sensibility.

Other possible approaches to this topic

In this section I will discuss a few alternative possible approaches that one could take to this topic. This will provide a little extra clarity and information concerning Alexander Men’s life’s work. Men’ was an eclectic scholar and took inspiration from many philosophers and thinkers. While it is uncontroversial to say that Vladimir Solovyov and Nikolai Berdyaev were the two most influential philosophers for Men’, they do not stand alone. Another approach I could have taken, and there would be strengths to this path as well, would be to

place a greater emphasis on the Russian Orthodox clergy, using the persons of Fathers Pavel Florensky (1882-1937) and Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944) instead of Solovyov and Berdyaev. It might be argued that Fr. Florensky and Fr. Bulgakov were of equal significance for Men's line of Russian thought and their re-emergence after the lifting of censorship during Perestroika and the early 1990s has been similarly impactful for the development of philosophy in Russia. Both of these figures had their own lectures devoted to them in Men's 1989-1990 lecture series, just as with Solovyov and Berdyaev.¹⁵ Furthermore, as fellow priests in the Russian Orthodox Church, there are more obvious, yet superficial, similarities between Florensky, Bulgakov, and Men'. Some scholars indeed do emphasize the influence Florensky and Bulgakov when analyzing Men'. Dominic Rubin, for example, refers plainly to Men' as a "Bulgakovian Judeo Christian" (Rubin, 511). Another strong argument for this path would be the relative success of Men's revival of these two authors. Florensky and Bulgakov are very common additions not just to religious bookstores and libraries, but even can be found in current print editions in general bookstores in Russia, Europe, and America. However, neither of them is even comparable in importance, either to Men' or the development of Russian philosophy in general, to Solovyov and Berdyaev. I believe that my choice of materials was more pertinent to the topic, although I can imagine the possibility of alternative approaches that places greater emphasis on the clergy rather than secular writers.

I also decided to largely ignore Men's involvement in charitable and academic pursuits not directly related to philosophy. After Perestroika began in 1988 and the political and legal oppressions on religion and culture were lifted Alexander Men' did all that he could to make up for all the time lost under the Soviet yoke. He was hugely productive in late 1988 up until his murder in 1990. He founded and co-founded a series of organizations that still exist today. He recreated the Russian Bible Society, disbanded since 1813, for the cultivation and popularization of biblical studies and modern historical-biblical criticism. Men' helped found the Cultural Renaissance Society, an organization formally dedicated to seeking out and recovering anything and everything that was stolen from Russian culture between 1917 and 1988. He oversaw the creation of the Alexander Men' Open University in Moscow. This University combines secular and religious subjects for a holistic education. Seeing a great need in the lack of appropriate healthcare for children Fr. Men' founded a charity that continues to assist families of chronically ill children pay hospital costs (Daniel, *Russia's*

¹⁵ See Appendix 1.

Uncommon Prophet 263). I am well aware of these other dimensions of Men's activism and legacy but to have brought them into the body of this paper would have been a distraction and would have only had marginal pertinence to the study.

Course for future research

There is much scholarship still to be done on Alexander Men'. He left behind a large corpus that is in the process of being published by the Russian Patriarchate that will finally make his works easily found and referenced, a great difficulty when dealing with Soviet dissidents. We are seeing a surprising growth of interest in Men' outside those interested in Soviet and Orthodox history. His writings on biblical criticism and religious history are being discovered by European and American academics. His works on theology, surprisingly unexplored, are seeing a resurgence of interest along with his commentaries on the French theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. However, what is of particular importance, and my own personal interest, is the relationship between Alexander Men' and Nadezhda Mandelstam. There are significant overlaps in the importance they find in continuity and tradition in Russian culture and its deep-running and vital connection to European culture. Both were equally misunderstood. Nadezhda Mandelstam has been largely overshadowed by the figure of her husband, a major 20th century Russian poet, whose legacy she dedicated her life to preserve. However, Alexander Men' was the only one who gave Nadezhda full recognition as a thinker and writer in her own right – indeed a unique figure who had a similar vision with regard to the role of religion and the historic and cultural tradition in rectifying the damage done to Russian culture by the imposition of a materialist, communist, ideology. Unfortunately, she did not live long enough to witness the dismantling of the Soviet system, but her vision for Russian and European culture, which she considered one and the same, shows many parallels with that of Fr. Alexander Men', her spiritual advisor and confessor in her final years. In particular, like Men' she saw the figure of Vladimir Solovyov as central in that he offered a path of spiritual regeneration for Russia. The present study is the first to date that highlights these parallels and the under researched overlap between these two representatives of Russian culture, so striking especially in view of their generational difference. This topic warrants further research.

Some Final Reflections

It is an exciting time for historians of Russian religious philosophy. Alexander Men' is again being a subject of discussion in conferences and publications. Mikhail Epstein, the major

post-modern philosopher and literary critic specializing in Russia and the Soviet Union, recently published the entry on Men' in *Filosofia: An Encyclopedia of Russian Thought*. At the same time interest in the Silver Age is flowering with a large growth in Solovyov studies. Unfortunately, Men' had hitherto been almost a non-entity in the West, but that is no longer the case. Academics, clergy, and Orthodox laymen alike are discovering Men' and his writings. In Russia regular conferences are held concerning the teachings and legacy of Fr. Men'. There are even some who revere Men' as a martyr and saint and his icons can be found in houses inside and outside Russia.

However, and unfortunately for some, the interest of academics does not a worthwhile project make. Why does it really matter what motivated Father Alexander Men? Despite his meteoric rise to popularity in Perestroika Russia, his legacy has been overshadowed by the imposed asceticism and suffering of the 90s. Why would a Russian, or someone from the West for that matter, concern him or herself with the "apostle to the intelligentsia", a group that today only has a debatable existence, and even more dubious relevance. Schelling has been relegated to the dustbin of history. The cultural wars of the 1860s, the persons of Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, and Dobrolyubov, are all just so much academic minutia, regurgitated for a grade. Even the relatively famous Berdyaev struggles to make it into contemporary anthologies of existential philosophy, shoved out for Karl Jaspers and just one more Kierkegaardian antimony. Why does this matter?

We find ourselves today more and more left in a spiritual wasteland, with neither religion nor the "New Faith" of intense coherent political ideologies left to provide a common cultural frame of reference for us. Moving forward on nothing but dry momentum, we find ourselves culturally in the same place the Russian youth did in the 1880s and the Soviet people did during Perestroika. We face an uncertain future and do not have ground to stand on. In an important way, even if we totally disagree both with Men's conclusions and arguments, his project speaks to us today. All too often we allow harmful, yet comfortable, stereotypes to obscure our view.

It is much easier to look at the Orthodox Church and lazily condemn it as historically dated, nationalist, or antisemitic. At best maybe a vestigial spiritualism on the outskirts of European culture. Father Men' spent his career and was murdered confronting this idea. Father Alexander Men', and the thousands of his followers who still live in Russia and abroad, stand

in stark contrast to these stereotypes. Furthermore, if we follow Men's analysis of Russian religious history, this liberal tendency is not new but is rather an established and integral part of Russian Orthodoxy. Men's vision of Russian culture was one that sought to reconcile the irreconcilable, to promote tolerance, inclusion, and co-existence. These values are especially important in view of the growing fraction and division in society.

People are again faced with a terrible lack of meaning. As we become further and further alienated from every aspect of our lives, concrete persons find themselves rolled into people in the abstract. Everything can be sacrificed of the individual to appease the specter of humanity. While trying to find meaning, there is no succor found in a flat secular materialism. While traditional religion, pushed further and further outside the public sphere, is forced to either turn inward into obscurantism and mysticism or secularize and become just another charitable NGO. Or, much more dangerously, religion is taken over by nationalists and extremists, used to project geopolitical ambitions. None of these provide an adequate place for those who themselves are likewise inspired by the writings of Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolai Berdyaev, and other figures in this liberal tendency in Orthodox spirituality and thought. In Russia the specter of a state-run centralized religion eviscerated from spiritual value, co-opted by the state, that has accompanied the Russian Orthodox Church throughout its history, again looms its head. Yet, the equally old intellectual traditions of saints Nil Sorsky and Maksim Grek exist still as well.

Fr. Men' thought that both extreme liberalism and conservatism were stumbling blocks on the road to God. Mikhail Epstein, the famous scholar of Russian philosophy and post-modernism distills Men's subtle distinctions thus:

On the one hand, conservative intolerance precludes the possibility of embracing all souls, while on the other, overly liberal standards for worship may gloss over the need for spiritual growth and commitment. A conservative standard locates God exclusively within the Church, thus denying the relevance of secular disciplines for the attainment of religious enlightenment. But a liberal standard is also detrimental, insofar as its relativism prevents it from recognizing that certain paths to God are more revealing than others (Epstein).

Despite Men's attempt to find a middle path, he did not escape being condemned as a liberal by more conservative voices inside the Russian Orthodox Church and as a Slavophil and conservative from those who advocated for the swift adoption of western secular liberal values. Men' did not seek to melt the Church into the world, but rather wished to widen its

scope so as to accommodate the achievements of culture and science. Men' preached the importance and value in cultural achievement and the advancement of science as ways of knowing God. However, he was overcome both in life and death with the weight of stereotypes and bigotry.

I will end this paper with a quote from the end of Fr. Men's lecture cycle. This brought to a close his series on Russian Religious Philosophy and was the final major public speaking event of his life for on September 9th of that same year he would be murdered. These words answer provide a succinct answer to our central question:

With this we conclude the cycle of our lectures. And for me it is very important, that the final effect we have wrought with this portrait, is because, and I repeat this, -- Russian Religious Philosophy was never merely something for one's private chambers or study, detached from life, abstract. All its representatives were brave witnesses to Truth, confessors of the Gospel, they all in one way or another entered into the struggle with life, they all left the imprint, each in their own way, of their views not only on paper, but also in life. They were the saints of our culture, not formally canonized, but actually images, the which our present-day and future generations can take the measure to strive to equal (Men, *Russian Religious Philosophy* 199).

Appendix 1: List of the meetings of the 1989-1990 Lectures by Fr. Alexander Men' on the topic of "Russian Religious History" in chronological order, listed by subject

1. The Predecessors of Vladimir Solovyov
2. Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov
3. Sergei Nikolayevich and Evgenii Nikolayevich Trubetskoy
4. The Religio-Philosophic Views of Lev Tolstoy
5. Peterburg Religio-Philosophic Gatherings
6. Dmitri Sergeyevich Merezhkovsky and Zinaida Nikolaeva Gippius
7. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev
8. Father Sergei Bulgakov
9. Father Pavel Florensky
10. Semeon Ludvigovich Frank
11. Georgii Petrovich Fedotov
12. Mother Maria Skobtsova

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