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RUSSIAN CHRISTIANS WITHOUT CLERGY: WHO ARE THE BESPOPOVTSY?

Abstract

The bespopovtsy are Orthodox Christians without clergy. They hold the belief that the reign of the Antichrist on earth invalidates the priesthood and sacraments (except baptism) of any Christian Church. This belief emerged in response to the liturgical reforms undertaken by the Orthodox Church in Muscovy, which they deem to have introduced unacceptable alterations to traditional rites. Consequently, the bespopovtsy contend that following the death of the last clergymen ordained according to the rite preceding the reform, genuine priests no longer exist in the world, leaving Jesus Christ as the sole guiding priest for believers. Bespopovtsy communities are organized into communes overseen by regulators, and their places of worship are termed molenna. Due to the absence of a clerical hierarchy, various distinct communities rapidly evolved within the bespopovtsy group.

Keywords: Old Believers, bespopovtsy (priestless), molenna, reform, patriarch Nikon, Antichrist, schism

The Moscow Church schism resulted from liturgical reforms implemented between 1654 and 1657 during the tenure of Patriarch Nikon of Moscow (1652–1666). It was argued that the objective of this ritual reform was to expunge inaccuracies and unwarranted inclusions from the Moscow Church's liturgical texts that were absent in Greek Orthodox scriptures. Over time, these alterations occurred while copying these texts. Even though the Moscow Orthodox Church was a descendant of the Byzantine tradition, the Ruthenian rites deviated from the Greek. Patriarch Nikon's reform was executed based on a comparison of the Slavonic and Greek liturgical texts used in Holy Mount Athos. Both these texts and rites were also employed by the ancient patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The liturgical texts and the Orthodox rite were intended to be an exact translation and reproduction of both the Greek books and rites. The Orthodox church reform in fact not interfering in any way with the truths of the faith caused much opposition

from the village clergy and the faithful, who believed that only the old rites were salvific and any change was treated as a betrayal of the true faith (Billington 2008: 123–125).

Reform opponents held that only the Ruthenian Church's rites were sacred. They deemed rites from the ancient patriarchates "tainted", attributing this to the Patriarchate of Constantinople's perceived Orthodoxy betrayal during the Florentine Union (1439) with the Roman Church. Advocates for the ancient rite believed that the "Greek East" should adjust its scriptures and rites to align with those of the Moscow Patriarchate (Lobachyov 2003: 117). This conviction was heavily influenced by the "Holy Rus" ideology, which championed the harmonious relationship between the Moscow patriarchate and the nation (Ławreszuk 2000: 142–143). This also gave rise to the notion of Moscow as the Third Rome. Post the fall of Constantinople, the Second Rome, the Muscovite rulers viewed themselves as the Byzantine emperors' successors. This fostered a belief that the Moscow Orthodox Church's traditions surpassed all others, including Greek ones (Przybył 1999: 63–73).

Eventually, in 1667, the Orthodox Church labelled all "old rite" followers as heretics. This denunciation of the Old Believers transpired at the Moscow Council, convened between 1666–1667, attended by patriarchs: Alexandria's Paisios (1657–1677), Antioch's Macarius III (1648–1672), representatives from other ancient patriarchates, and Tsar Alexis I of Moscow (1645–1676). Notably, upon his patriarchal election, Nikon had already envisioned a reform agenda for the Moscow Church. The changes he instigated built upon the initiatives of previous Moscow Patriarchs. He predominantly altered ceremonial aspects and revised the liturgical scriptures, "cleansing" them of additions and modifications that emerged over centuries of transcription.

One of the significant alterations in ritual was how the sign of the cross was made. Previously, the gesture was made using two fingers (dvuperstiie) folded, symbolizing Christ's divine and human natures. The revision mandated the use of the first three fingers (troeperstiie), representing the Holy Trinity. This sign of the cross required the middle finger to slightly bend towards the index finger, with the other fingers touching, further symbolizing the Trinity (Pastuszewski 2015: 81, 189). In the older tradition, "Hallelujah" (Alilluia) was sung twice (sugubo) during services. The updated rite specified it be sung thrice (tregubo), mirroring the Greek tradition. The Orthodox-Slavic spelling of Jesus's name shifted from "Isus" to "Iisus", reflecting Greek orthography. Another noteworthy amendment was in the direction of temple processions. Instead of moving with the sun (posolon) i.e. in accordance with its apparent movement, the processions now occurred counter-clockwise, or against the sun (protivo solontsu). Historically, in Christianity, the sun symbolized Jesus Christ, known as the "Unsetting Sun". Moving clockwise in processions metaphorically represented following the Sun – Christ. Words absent in Greek texts were excised from liturgical ones. For instance, in the Creed (Veruiu) recited in every Divine Liturgy, the phrase "His Kingdom has no end" was altered to match the Greek as "His Kingdom shall have no end" (Church Slavonic: "Ego zhe Tsarstviu ne budet kontsa"). Additionally, in the Symbol of Faith used by the Moscow Orthodox Church, the adjective "True" describing the Holy Spirit was removed. Thus, "In the Holy Spirit, the True Lord and the Vivifier" became "In the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Vivifier", as per the Greek text (Bazylow, Wieczorkiewicz 114–115). Previously, only eight-beamed crosses with a tilted third beam were permitted in churches and on domes. Following the reforms, four-cornered

crosses were also allowed. The Liturgy of Preparation, known as the Proskomedia, once used seven prosphoras (Eucharistic breads). Post-reform, only five prosphoras were utilized. Baptismal rites also underwent change. Previously, baptism was exclusively by full immersion (pogruzheniie) of the individual three times. Only this form was acceptable and considered valid. With the reforms, sprinkling (polivaniie) water thrice on the catechumen's head was also sanctioned (Iwaniec 1977: 36). While only monophonic singing was permitted before, the changes allowed polyphonic singing during services. Additionally, Patriarch Nikon, inspired by Greek designs, sought to innovate church architecture (Billington 2008: 123).

Implementing these changes spanned several years, gaining approval between 1654 and 1658 at various synods of Moscow Church bishops. An initial plan for the ritual reform was crafted. In 1655, the council verified Greek books against Orthodox Slavonic ones. The timing of water blessing was a topic of discussion as well. In 1656, along with Patriarch Macarius III of Antioch and Patriarch Gabriel I of Serbia, the Russian Church bishops excommunicated those who persisted in using two fingers for the sign of the cross. That same year, it was declared that Catholics converting to Orthodoxy need not be re-baptized. By 1657, work commenced on publishing the reformed *Sluzhebnik* (*Triebnik*), based on the Greek *Sluzhebniks* (*Euchologion*) (Riasanovsky, Steinberg 2009: 205–206).

The speedy and superficial implementation of Orthodox book reforms met resistance from several quarters. Skepticism grew due to the limited number and recency of the Greek texts it was founded upon. For instance, the *Triebnik* of 1655 drew inspiration from the *Euchologion*, published by the Greek Diaspora in Venice in 1602. Supporters of the traditional rites feared that texts from the West might harbor heretical elements, thus being unsuitable as the foundation for new translations or ritual modifications. Though the initial disputes over the reform were narrow in their focus, resistance quickly broadened among the faithful (Lobaczjov 2003: 127). 127). Over time, the opposition started to encompass a larger portion of believers. The reformed texts and modified rituals faced rejection. Not only did a significant part of the clergy serving in the rural areas not accept them, but they were also rejected by some boyars (Heller 2009: 261–262).

The most notable opponent of the reforms was boyarina Feodosia Morozova (1632–1657). Tsarina Maria Miloslavskaya and her courtiers also did not endorse the Orthodox reforms (Grek-Pabisova 1999: 15). The most prominent defender of the "old faith" was clergyman Avvakum Petrov (1620/1621–1682), the protopop of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Moscow Kremlin (Pascal 1963: 213–215). The boyars could not shield themselves from the persecution directed at reform opponents initiated by Nikon (Lobaczjov 2003: 186). In 1657, the monks of the Solovetsky Monastery refused to adopt the reforms, continuing their services and sacraments as per the old church books (Billington 2008: 124). Until the Great Moscow Synod (1666–1667), bishops permitted both the old and new rites. In 1664, the ordination of monks from that monastery as priests and deacons took place using the old ritual. This ordination was officiated by the Metropolitan of Novgorod, Pitirim (from 1664, and Patriarch of Moscow from 1672 to 1673) (Pascal 1963: 343).

Patriarch Nikon himself was reluctant for the reform to continue, struggling with the opposition from such a vast portion of clergy and believers. Nikon accepted the coexistence of the old and new church books. Nonetheless, the anathemas against followers of the

traditional rites remained in effect. In 1658, the relationship between Nikon and Tsar Alexei soured. Nikon departed from Moscow, relocating to the New Jerusalem monastery he had initiated. He, however, retained his patriarchal title. For eight years, the patriarchate was overseen by the aforementioned Metropolitan Pitirim. While Patriarch Nikon attempted a return to Moscow in 1664, Tsar Alexis no longer wished him to occupy the patriarchal position. The Tsar aimed to summon a synod to both remove Nikon and, paradoxically, validate all the Church reforms introduced during his reign. Tsar's aims were realized. The Moscow Synod of Bishops sanctioned most of Nikon's reforms, implementing them within the Church. Only rites conducted as per the reformed books were recognized as legitimate. Traditional rite followers were formally ostracized from the Church (Billington 2008: 134). This decree solidified the schism (raskol). Many traditional rite adherents remained faithful, with only a minority transitioning to the reformed rite. The schism was undeniable. Reform advocates became known as Nikonians, while their adversaries were labelled Raskolniks.

As early as 1656, traditional ritual followers deserted their homes, convinced that the Antichrist's era had commenced and anticipating an imminent apocalypse. On occasion, believing in the impending end, they committed suicide through starvation or self-immolation (Poliakov 1991: 51–54). Following the 1667 excommunication of traditional rite followers, the Tsar, eager to quell the schism, instigated unprecedented persecutions: confiscating lands, initiating deportations, and employing torture (Poliakov 1991: 59). That year, an armed insurrection erupted at the Solovetsky Monastery. Eventually, the Tsarist forces captured the monastery in 1679. Numerous monks endured martyrdom for the "old faith" at this juncture (Iwaniec 1977: 31). In 1682, protopop Avvakum, along with three clerics – Fyodor Ivanov, Epiphanius, and Lazar – were executed defending the "old faith". By the decree of Tsar Fyodor III (1676–1682) and with the Orthodox Church's endorsement, they were executed by burning (Szaszkov 2000: 87).

Upon the death of Tsar Fyodor III in 1682, the Moscow uprising erupted, notably by riflemen who predominantly backed the Old Believers. That same year, the Old Believers approached Patriarch Joachim and the reigning Tsarina Regent, Sophia (1682–1689), urging the reinstatement of traditional rites throughout the Church. From May to July, the Old Believers embarked on a preaching campaign, persuading a substantial number of believers to their cause. However, the Moscow uprising was quashed, and its participants faced reprisals. Bishops initiated measures to eliminate locations outside Moscow that resisted the Orthodox reform. The clergy were instructed to notify their superiors about believers who abstained from sacraments in the reformed style (Iwaniec 1977: 34). In 1648, Tsarina Sophia issued a decree mandating penalties, ranging from flogging, property confiscation, to even capital punishment, for both clergy and laity who practiced the old rites. This decree exacerbated resistance to reform adoption, resulting in a mass exodus to the remote and less accessible territories of the Moscow state (Grek-Pabisowa(1) 1999: 15).

In their defense, the Old Believers accused the Nikonians of conspiring with Jews to dismantle the Orthodox Church. Avvakum even proclaimed that with the plight of the Old Believers, Christ himself was suffering a second time (Przybyl 1999: 152). Both Old Believers and reform proponents levelled heresy accusations against each other. Polemical writings from the Old Believers claimed that the Great Moscow Synod had Jewish complicity, while reform supporters asserted that Jews conducted services for the Old Believers (Billington 2008: 147–148).

The aforementioned Patriarch Joachim, a fervent adversary of the Old Believers, was determined to suppress them. In 1682, he convened a synod that resolved to shut all monastic establishments suspected of adhering to the old rites (Pascal 1963: 544). New centers for Old Believers were to be razed, and none were to be officially recognized as Orthodox monasteries. Consequently, Old Believers were no longer legally deemed Orthodox Christians. The Synod endorsed the dissemination of the new church books. The Orthodox clergy was mandated to collaborate with tsarist officials in opposing the old rite's advocates. Hence, both the Church and the secular regime joined forces against the Old Believers. Around this period, Old Believers began migrating beyond the Moscow state's borders, seeking refuge in places like Sweden, Courland, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Iwaniec 1977: 32–34). The reforms of Tsar Peter I (1682–1721) contributed to the increase in flight from Russia. Nevertheless, the Tsar only permitted them to reside in their self-established settlements. By the mid-18th century, an estimated one million Old Believers had departed from Russia (Poliakov 1991: 70–75).

By the end of the 17th century, Old Believers' communities faced a problem due to a shortage of clergy. Priests ordained according to the old rite were dwindling in numbers. No bishops remained to ordain new priests (Riasanovsky, Steinberg 2009: 207). Until that point, the Divine Liturgy, along with other services and sacraments, had been conducted by clergy ordained prior to the reforms. As these clergy aged, their numbers diminished, and by the early 18th century, Old Believers' communities lacked both the Eucharist and other sacraments. Some Old Believers' communities began searching for priests from the Orthodox Church clergy who were willing to embrace the old rites and undertake pastoral duties in their communities. Initially, only those clergy ordained before 1654 were deemed suitable, and later, consideration was limited to those baptized before that year. Eventually, Russian clergy ordained under the new rite were being pursued (Iwaniec 1977: 37). Among the communities eager to re-establish the clerical hierarchy, the Vietki and Deacon communities were particularly keen to identify a bishop willing to revert to the old rite. On 28 October 1846, Greek Ambrose, the Metropolitan of Bosnia (b. 1791), embraced the old rite as the metropolitan of Belaya Krinitsa (near Suceava) and took residence at the Old Believers' monastery located there. Ambrose commenced celebrating the Divine Liturgy as per the old rite and began administering the sacraments, including the ordination of deacons and presbyters. The subsequent year, on 6 January in Belaya Krinitsa, he bestowed chirotonia upon the Russian monk Kirill, who then became the Bishop of Majnos. This led to the formation of what's known as the Belaya Krinitsa hierarchy (also termed the Austrian hierarchy). Ambrose's decisions drew criticism from the Most Holy Synod of the Russian Church, who deemed them non-canonical. Kirill's chirotony was conducted without the necessary participation of a single bishop as required by Orthodox canons. Ambrose was deposed in 1848 and sent into exile in Styria. He never revisited Bukovina and passed away in 1863. Clergymen ordained in Belaya Krinitsa journeyed to Russian territories to serve the Old Believer communities there. The hierarchy ensured all sacraments were observed. This was when divisions amongst the Old Believers ceased (Grek-Pabisowa(1) 1999: 15).

Some Old Believers were of the opinion that the true priesthood had vanished as a result of Nikon's reforms. They held the belief that only Christ serves as the genuine priest for the true Christians – those who adhered to the old rite. This staunch perspective on

priesthood was ratified at the Old Believers' conventions in 1692 and 1694 in Novgorod. Their lack of a clerical hierarchy led to them being termed "bespopovtsy" (priestless). Originally, proponents of the Novgorod Synod's resolutions predominantly resided in northern Russia by the White Sea. They soon came to be known as "Pomorians", as Russian Pomerania emerged as their principal hub (Grek-Pabisowa(2) 1999: 36).

Regardless of their stringent stance on the priesthood, the bespopovtsy endeavored to rebuild the hierarchy. In 1730, in pursuit of authentic priests, the monk Vyshatin of the Epiphany monastery in Vyg journeyed to the Holy Land accompanied by his popovtsy. Despite their differences, the Pomorians maintained amicable relations with the popovtsy. They even held discussions in Moscow in 1765 concerning the consecration of a joint ruler. They desired the bishop's chirotonia to be performed using a relic from the body of Saint Jonah, the Metropolitan of Moscow, or another pre-reform Orthodox ruler (Juchimienko 702).

The Epiphany Monastery, previously mentioned and known as the Vyg Hermitage, played a pivotal role in shaping the ecclesiology of the bespopovtsy. The hermitage was established in 1694 by monks from the Solovetsky Monastery: Vikulina, Denisova and Kornelia (Maltsev 2002: 704). It evolved into the nucleus of both a male and female monastic community. Various sketes also originated there. The Vyg Hermitage became a focal point for the theological development of the bespopovtsy, disseminating its tenets through literature penned within its confines. In 1772, a significant work by monk Denisov titled "Pomorian Answers", detailing the doctrine of the bespopovtsy, was published. Another publication was "A Life of the Defenders of the Old Faith" authored by monk Semyon (1682–1744). Old Orthodox church books were replicated in this hermitage, and the monastery's history was chronicled by Ivan Filipov (1655–1744). The center also founded a school to train men as *Starik*, individuals who oversee worship services. Prospective psalmists received education there, and an iconography school, preserving principles predating the Orthodox reform, operated within the hermitage (Maltsev 2002: 704). Missionaries trained at this establishment worked to disseminate bespopovtsy beliefs throughout Russia. The bespopovtsy were profoundly committed to their faith, even to the point of death. Indeed, there are documented instances of ritual self-immolations (Iwaniec 1977: 37–38).

The Pomorian Old Believers' communities made notable contributions to the Pomerania region's development. They conducted trade with Saint Petersburg, vending local products, and also with Moscow (Kowalska 1987: 32–28). By the latter half of the 18th century, Moscow had a burgeoning Pomorian community, with its epicenter being the Molyna of the Protection of the Mother of God (Pokrowska). This community was led by Emelianov (d. 1797) (Malcev 2002: 708). In Moscow, they transitioned to a more "conventional life". The Moscow Pomorian municipality began offering marital blessings in 1798, thus reviving the institution of matrimony (Malcev 2002: 708). Following the restoration of marriage, monastic life persisted. However, the Vyg Hermitage was closed in 1854 by Tsar's decree (Ageeva 2002: 709).

In the 19th century, Saratov on the Volga River emerged as the second significant spiritual center for Pomorians, where Old Believers established a molenna where services persisted until mid-century. Three hermitages operated near Saratov until 1845. Pomorian communities were also prevalent in Volsk on the Volga. Furthermore, Pomorians founded

their communities in the Urals, Western Siberia, and the Perm and Vyatka governorates. By the mid-19th century, it became standard to pray for the Tsar during services, a practice previously strictly forbidden. The bespopovtsy, starting to diverge into different factions from the late 17th century, gradually accused each other of heresy. In 1875, Pomorians branded the Fedoseevtsy, Filippians, and those Pomorians who rejected marriages blessed in molennas by *Stariks*, as heretics. In the 19th century, the Pomorians were notably active in Moscow, where, by that time, they owned roughly fifty private worship houses (Ageeva 2002: 710–711).

Conditions improved for Pomorians and all Old Believers following the tolerance decree issued by Tsar Nicholas II in 1905. Pomorians gathered from across Russia for all-Pomorians conventions. In 1909, the first All-Russian Council of Pomorians convened at the Moscow Molenna of the Resurrection and Protection of the Mother of God. It was during this period that supreme bodies were formed to manage Pomorian communities. A crucial component was the establishment of educational points on Pomorian Church doctrine and the launching of a religious paper. Discussions also centered on the sacraments of baptism, confession, and marriage (Ageeva 2002: 716).

In 1911, representatives of the Pomorian Old-Orthodox Church in Dyneburg deliberated on setting up educational institutions to train future *Stariks*, missionaries, and educators. The Second All-Russian Pomorian Council in Moscow formed a Higher Clergy Council in 1912 to oversee individual parish activities (Ageeva 2002: 716). Plans for the development of the Pomorian Orthodox Church were thwarted by the outbreak of the First World War, followed by the revolution in Russia and with it a change in the state system. The Pomorian Orthodox Church, like other religious communities, found itself in a very difficult position at the time. In 1930, the authorities closed the Moscow Molenna of the Resurrection and Protection of the Mother of God (Ageeva 2002: 717). As early as the 1930s, most of the Pomorian centers began to operate in secret and formally ceased to carry out pastoral activities. The situation was different for Pomorians who lived outside the Soviet Union: in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, where they could practice their faith without any obstacles. Latvia had the largest number of communities, with 82 communities. Pomorians from the aforementioned countries worked together. Even in 1939 in Vilnius they passed a project to establish an international union of Pomorian communities.

These plans were interrupted by the Second World War (Ageeva 2002: 717–718). After the war, most of the Pomorian communities found themselves in the Soviet Union, where they had limited freedom to practice their faith. In spite of this, three conventions of Pomorians were successfully organized in Vilnius. When the Soviet Union ceased to exist, Pomorians, like other communities, regained the freedom to practice their faith in Russia and other countries that had regained their independence. Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the Russian Council of the Pomorian Old Orthodox Church was established to administer communities in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. A symbolic moment in the rebirth of the Pomorian Orthodox Church was the recovery of the Moscow Molenna of the Resurrection in 1993. Today, the Pomorian Church in Russia is operating freely and developing all the time. In May 2006, the Third All-Russian Council of the Pomorian Old Orthodox Church met in Saint Petersburg. The next All-Russian Council met in May 2012 in Saint Petersburg, at the Znamensky

Synod. Representatives of all local Pomorian Churches were present at the convention. Today, there are seven Pomorian local churches. They are managed by the United Council of the Pomorian Old Orthodox Church, established in 2001. It brings together Chief Councils of Old Believers from different countries. The United Council comprises the Council of the Russian Church, the Central Council of the Latvian Church, the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Church, the Central Council of the Church of the Republic of Belarus, the Central Council of the Church of Ukraine, the Union of Old Believers' Communities of Estonia, the Conference of Old Believers' Communities in the USA, as well as the Supreme Council of Old Believers in Poland (Ageeva 2002: 718–719).

Today, there are more than two hundred Pomorian communities in the Russian Federation. Outside Russia, the largest number of communities, sixty-six, are in Latvia, twenty-seven in Lithuania, eleven in Estonia, thirty-seven in Belarus and forty-five in Ukraine. Pomorians also live in Kazakhstan, where eighteen communities are active. There are four communities operating in the USA. Three, however, operate in Kyrgyzstan. There are also individual communities in Romania, Moldova, Germany, France and the UK. Pomorians also live in Scandinavia, Argentina and Brazil (Ageeva 2002: 719). It is worth pointing out that there are currently five bespopovtsy communities in Poland.

In the latter part of the 17th century, another "bespopovtsy" movement arose, initiated by Feodosiy Vasilyev, deemed the Fedoseevtsy' progenitor. Feodosiy, attending the Old Believers' conventions in 1692 and 1694 in Novgorod, was a staunch critic of ordaining new priests. He contended that the priesthood became obsolete with the new rite's advent. In 1706, Feodosiy came to the Vyg Hermitage to preach his teachings. A schism then occurred. Followers of Feodosiy Vasilyev's teachings separated from the Pomorians (Iwaniec 1977: 40–41).

Feodosiy advocated for extreme asceticism. He did not acknowledge the sacrament of marriage and consequently forbade any form of sexual intercourse. Married couples who affiliated with the Fedoseevtsy movement were expected to live celibately. Those who followed Feodosiy's teachings only recognized crosses inscribed with ИНЦИ (translated as *Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews*). For them, the genuine cross was, naturally, the Orthodox Cross. The Fedoseevtsy were instructed not to consume food sourced outside their community without first offering prayers and performing prostrations to purify it. The Fedoseevtsy, akin to other Old Believer groups, were cautioned to maintain limited interactions with members of other Churches, notably the Nikonians (Iwaniec 1977: 40–41).

The Fedoseevtsy were notably active in Moscow. From 1771, their primary location was a compound comprising religious, residential, and agricultural structures called the Transfiguration Cemetery. This center was established by the merchant Ilija Kowylin, who passed away in 1809 (Malcev 2002: 707). The era marked by the persecution of the Old Believers was under the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1825–1855). The aforementioned sacred complex was confiscated by the ruler's order. During this period, some Old Believers transitioned to what is known as "single faith" (yedinoverye) and became part of the Russian Orthodox Church. This applied to those Old Believers who, whilst in eucharistic communion with the Russian Orthodox Church, upheld the ancient rites and liturgical texts from before Nikon's reform (Mirolubov, Sarancza 2008: 42–50). The Fedoseevtsy regained the Cemetery only in 1905 after Tsar Nicholas II issued the Act of Toleration. Presently,

the primary hub for the Fedoseevtsy in Russia is the molenna in Moscow. They also operate a parish Sunday school (Ageeva 2002: 720).

Individual Old Believers began to leave Russia towards the end of the 17th century, including to the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They first settled in the areas of Augustów and Sejny, and near Suwałki. They also established themselves in the provinces of Vilnius, Novogrudok, Polesie, and Grodno. In the 19th century, during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1825–1855), as persecution grew more severe, Old Believers expanded their communities in the Suwałki and Augustów regions. They migrated to East Prussia, around Bełdany Lake and the Krutynia River. A monastery was founded in Wojnowo (Eckertsdorf) by Duś Lake, serving as a key spiritual hub between 1847 and 1867 (Grek-Pabisowa, Maryniakowa 1989: 95–96). It is believed that as early as the 1830s, clusters of Old Believer monks' communities existed in the area around Duś Lake. The bespopovtsy acquired the land from the Prussian King, Frederick William II (1797–1840) (Jaroszewicz-Pieresławcew 2014: 859). In 1836, an elderly man named Grigoryev (Lavrenty Rastropin) took up residence in a hermitage by the aforementioned lake.

In 1845, Moscow's Fedoseevtsy community's treasurer, Andrei Shutov, was dispatched to Eckertsdorf to ascertain if the lakeside village was suitable for a monastery. Due to persecution by the authorities, there was a desire to establish a religious center outside of Russia. Shutov remained in Masuria for over a year, overseeing the construction of the future center. In 1848, he brought a group of Old Believer monks from Russia, justifying this move with the need to assist an elderly man named Georgiev in the vicinity of the emerging center. One of them was Pyotr Lednev (1821–1895), assigned to finalize the monastery's construction and organize monastic life. Subsequently, the Wojnowo hermitage was transformed into the Monastery of Christ the Savior and the Holy Trinity.

The next year, Lednev obtained Prussian citizenship, enabling him to acquire land for the remaining monastic structures. In 1850, Lednev took his vow as Pavel (later known as Prusskiy). This event occurred at the Zlynka monastery in the Chernihiv region. By 1852, he was chosen as the superior of the Wojnowo monastery. As the superior, he managed its further expansion. He also accumulated an impressive collection of books. During his tenure, a convent school for boys was established. Furthermore, he played a key role in initiating a female Old Believer monastery in Spychowo (Puppen). It is worth noting that Lednev's efforts resulted in the establishment of new pastoral points across Russia, led by his disciples. At the time, the Wojnowo Monastery acted as a spiritual and intellectual hub for the Russian Fedoseevtsy community. Over the years, Lednev, through his study of the Bible and the Church Fathers' writings, evolved his views on marriage. He asserted that marriage is a sacrament and the doctrine prohibiting sex within marriage is un-Christian. He further contended that this prohibition was not universally upheld. In 1861, he also mandated that prayers for the priesthood's renewal be recited during services at the Wojnowo Monastery. Lednev's actions caused a schism among the Old Believers in Masuria, dividing them into those in favor and those against his teachings. When the Fedoseevtsy from Moscow ceased their financial support of the Wojnowo monastery, Lednev secured funding from the Saint Petersburg community, which endorsed his perspectives (Iwaniec 121–126). By 1866, a majority of the Wojnowo monks contested Lednev's teachings. The dissenting monks exiled him and a handful of monks who aligned with him. However, since the monastery's land and buildings belonged to Lednev, the very monks who had expelled him

found themselves obliged to vacate the monastery. In 1867, Lednev departed for Russia, and the ownership was transferred to two monks, Shimon and Bartlomey (Iwaniec 129–131). Following this, the monastery's stature waned, and in search of financial support, the monks opted to relocate to the Pomorian community. In 1884, the last monk, Makary, married, thereby leaving the monastic life. When he departed for Russia, he took the church books and icons with him (Grek-Pabisowa 47–48). The debt-ridden monastery subsequently became the property of Ulyan Slavikov (Iwaniec 1977: 137).

The next year, nun Eupraxia Dikopolska purchased the monastery buildings in Wojnowo and established a women's monastery. She brought in nuns from the Spychowo monastery and another monastery situated between Osiniak and Majdan. By the end of the 19th century, the monastery housed eight nuns. Only after the introduction of the Tolerance Act in Russia in 1905 did nuns start visiting, seeking aspirants for the Wojnowo convent. It is worth highlighting that the Wojnowo monastery remained a significant Old Believer center, thereby slowing down the conversion of Old Believers to "single faith". A "single faith" parish was founded in Wojnowo, which, by 1913, comprised two hundred believers (Grek-Pabisowa(2) 1999: 48). Owing to the efforts of nuns in Russia, by 1909, the Wojnowo monastery housed forty Old Believer nuns, and this number rose to forty-six in 1914 (Iwaniec 1977: 140–141).

The First World War posed significant challenges for both the monastery and the Mazurian Old Believers. In 1914, the nuns were detained in Olsztyn by the German police. The following year, they were incarcerated in Zinten, where they remained for several months. The war catalyzed the decline of Mazurian Old Believer communities and the nun population also diminished. In the 1920s, the monastery was home to twelve nuns and an equal number of noviciates (Iwaniec 1977: 145). During the Second World War, the Wojnowo monastery remained untouched by the conflicts. However, in January 1945, it came under the control of the Soviet army and faced potential requisition. This move was fortunately averted thanks to the intervention of Antonina, the ihumenia of the monastery. The only restriction placed on the nuns at that time was a ban on fishing from the lake, a crucial source of their sustenance (Pastuszewski 2017: 64). Nonetheless, the sisters managed to endure in Wojnowo. By 1968, only two nuns and four noviciates remained in the monastery (Iwaniec 1977: 145). Tragically, in 2006, the last Old Believer nun in Poland, Afima (Kuśmierz), passed away, marking the end of an Old Believer monastic tradition in Poland.

The Monastery of the Savior and the Holy Trinity in Wojnowo is now a museum. It is privately owned by the Ludwikowski family. However, an Old Believer's parish remains active in the village of Wojnowo, conducting regular services in a neo-Gothic molenna built in 1927. There is also the Orthodox monastery of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, under the jurisdiction of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The present Monastery Church began as the church of the "single faith" parish – the Old Believers of the Russian Orthodox Church. It was constructed upon the initiative of Father Alexander Avayev (1882–1956), who was the pastor of this parish at the time.

In Poland, there are three additional parishes affiliated with the Pomorian Old Orthodox Church of the Republic of Poland, also officially known as the Eastern Old-Orthodox Church. These are independent, bespopovtsy communities bound by a single faith. Besides the Wojnowo parish, Old Believer parishes can also be found in Suwałki,

Wodziłki, and Gabowe Grądy. Each parish has its own molenna. The largest is in Suwałki, which also houses the Church's authorities and its executive body, the Supreme Council of Old Believers. The historical molenna in the village of Wodziłki, in Suwałki County, built in 1921, still hosts occasional services. The most significant community of Polish Old Believers is situated in the village of Gabowe Grądy, in the Augustów County. Their molenna, dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God, was erected in 1948, on the site of a previous one destroyed during the Second World War. In Gabowe Grądy, there is another newly-constructed molenna dedicated to Saint. Nicholas the Wonderworker. This is the place of worship for the Old Orthodox Church of Old Believers, a community that separated from the parish in Gabowe Grądy. This church was officially registered in December 2013. Currently, the majority of Poland's bespopovtsy communities reside in the Suwałki, Augustów, and Masuria regions. Besides the molennas, numerous ancient cemeteries have been preserved, including those in the villages of Sejny County: Buda Ruska, Głęboki Rów, Głuszyna, Karolin, Rosochaty Róg, Sztabinki, Wiereśno, and Suwałki. The largest active cemetery is in Gabowe Grądy, in the Augustów County. Several burial places of adherents of the "old faith" can be found in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, in the Piła County, in places such as Gałkowo, Iwanowo, Kadzidłowo, Ładne Pole, Onufryjewo, Osiniak-Piotrkowo and notably, the village of Wojnowo. In Wojnowo, the still-active parish cemetery and the nuns' cemetery at the Wojnowo Old Believers' Monastery are located.

Once, in East Prussia and later in Poland, the Old Believers of Masuria were termed "Filippians", which was somewhat of a misnomer. In reality, the Filippians belonged to a sect of Russian Old Believers who followed the teachings of the monk Filipp from the Vyg Hermitage. The sect derived its name from him. In 1729, Monk Filipp contested a decision by his hermitage's monks to include prayers for the Tsar during services. Consequently, Filipp left to establish his own monastery, which emerged as the epicenter of teachings for the Filippians. This community persisted until 1742 when its members opted for self-immolation rather than permitting a tsarist inspection of their monastery (Iwaniec 1977: 39). However, the Filippians endured as some religious centers of the Pomorians embraced Monk Filipp's teachings. By the latter half of the 18th century, Filippians communities thrived across central Russia, even establishing molennas in both Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Ageeva 2002: 713). In the 19th century, they extended their reach to western Siberia. Notably, the Filippians differed from other sects due to the absence of a single dominant theological hub. Each community displayed significant independence concerning teachings, rituals, and pastoral activities. The Moscow community, in particular, held considerable sway. By the close of the 18th century, the views of Filippians communities towards other Old Believer sects and even the Tsar began to diverge. Their criteria for inducting new believers also varied.

During the 19th century, Filippians communities were predominantly active in locations such as Moscow, Korchev, Saratov, Uglich, and Yaroslavl. Saint Petersburg even hosted a female hermitage. As time progressed, divisions arose within the Filippians centers due to shifting perspectives on marriage, an institution they had previously dismissed. Until the 1820s, all Filippians were mandated to lead celibate lives. Between 1823 and 1825, this issue caused a schism. While the Filippians in Kimry began sanctioning marriages, the Moscow community remained steadfast in its original stance against it. The dispute was resolved in a rather interesting way at the convention of the Filippians in Uglich in 1826,

where it was decided at the synod that the problem would be solved by the *Stariks* in the individual communes. However, the matter lingered unresolved till the late 19th century (Ageeva 2002: 713). After the issuing of the tolerance decree in 1905, the Old Believers experienced unfettered religious practice. All of the cited bespopovtsy currents have begun to reform their structures and clearly formulate their teaching. By 1912, the Filippians proscribed family life, meat consumption, and tea. New community members also underwent re-baptism (Ageeva 2002: 720–721). Their main molenna in Moscow was demolished in 1926, depriving them of their worship venue. Only from 1940 did they manage to conduct services in a solitary chapel within the Transfiguration Cemetery. Presently, scarcely any Filippians remain in Moscow. In 1990, the Filippians' chapel in Moscow was closed due to a dwindling congregation. Today, a modest number of Filippians reside in locales such as Siberia and Odessa. Small communities also persist in Romania (Ageeva 2002: 721).

There are several other minor bespopovtsy communities in existence. In Perm, along the banks of the Kama River, the Stranniks are found. This sect took root during the reign of Tsarina Catherine II (1762–1796). It was founded by the Old Believer monk Euthymius, who opposed the legal regulation of Old Believer communities. He believed such regulation amounted to a rejection of the true faith. Euthymius mandated the destruction of documents proving the identity of Old Believers, which resulted in an inability to live in one place due to constant movement. They were living on the move and were constantly fleeing the activities of the evil spirit (Maltsev 2002: 708, Ageeva 2002: 722).

In the twentieth century, the so-called Titoist sect emerged, following the teachings of its founder Tita Tarasovich. These teachings mirrored those of the Stranniks (Ageeva 2002: 723). Currently, the Spas sect, which originated in the 18th century and negates the practice of religious services, has members residing in Cherepovets and Volga in Russia. Its adherents shunned any form of worship in molennas, contending that following the Orthodox reform, humanity lost its grace. They believed the era of the antichrist had dawned (Malcev 2002: 706). According to their beliefs, only Christ the Savior (Spas) knows the path to salvation. Today, they live in Saratov, Sterlitamak, Cherepovets and Moscow, among others (Ageeva 2002: 721–722). It is also worth mentioning a group that did not have a clergy hierarchy, but its members did not want to be referred to as bespopovtsy because they believed that the lack of priests was temporary and that the clergy hierarchy would be renewed in the future. They were convinced that holding services without clergy was temporary. Members of the movement were called Chasovnalists. The name came from the word chapel (chasovnya), where they held their services. To this day, in some Chasovnalists communities, "holy communion" is practiced with water consecrated on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord (Malcev 2002: 709). In the nineteenth century, the bespopovtsy Melchizedek movement was born. Members of this movement also held the view that the priesthood had ceased to exist following the reforms of Patriarch Nikon. However, they believed that partaking of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, was vital for the salvation of the soul. Taking inspiration from Melchizedek, who offered bread and wine to God, they celebrated a form of the Eucharist. They placed bread and wine before the icons, recited prayers over them, and then the consecrated elements were consumed by all, believing them to be the Body and Blood of Christ (Ageeva 2002: 715). It should be emphasized that numerous bespopovtsy currents existed, and some still operate today.

Today, Old Believers without a clerical hierarchy establish independent parishes led by Stariks. As previously mentioned, a Starik is not a clergyman but is responsible for presiding over services and managing the respective community. He can perform baptisms and hear confessions. Baptism is only recognized when done by full immersion in "living water", such as in a lake or river. Confession generally takes place at the beginning of Lent. While it is usually a collective confession, individual confessions are available upon request. Men and women confess separately. If a sin is committed, it is read out and the person makes an earthly bow before the icon. After confession, the Starik simply proclaims God's will for the forgiveness of sins. As he is not a priest, he cannot absolve believers. The Starik merely witnesses the wedding, which is led by the couple themselves. The matrimonial rite is distinct and does not resemble that of the old rite churches with clergy or the Orthodox Church. Daily cycle services occur in the molennas, but they differ from those led by the popovtsy. As they are overseen by Stariks and not priests, portions of the texts meant for clergy are not recited; for instance, no ectenia (litanies) are said, and only the threefold "Lord, have mercy" (Gospodi, pomilui) is sung in place of the smaller ectenia and twelve times for the ectenia of peace and the so-called supplication ectenia. Instead of the fervent ectenia, "Gospodi, pomilui" is sung forty times. The daily cycle of services is maintained in the molenna. Vespers (vechernya), after supper (povecheriye), midnight service, matins (utrenya), and the services of the first, third, sixth, and ninth canonical hours are celebrated. As the Divine Liturgy is not held, "obednya"is conducted in its stead. Moleben plays an important role. The service actually became part of the daily cycle (Malcev 2002: 708). The Starik both commences and concludes the services, and it is only he who reads the Gospel passage set for the day and feast. He also cense the icons and the faithful during the service, making the sign of the cross with an incense stick before them. The censers are affixed to a special handle and not to chains for swinging – as in Catholic or Orthodox churches.

The Starik also oversees the funeral, which is held in the home or molenna, depending on the family of the deceased's wishes. The faithful pray over the deceased's body, which is wrapped in a special cloth, referred to as a "savan" from the Greek, before being laid in the coffin and then covered with a white cloth. A passage from the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels is recited. Before the procession to the cemetery, much like Catholic practices, family and friends bid farewell by kissing the departed. The body is then taken to the cemetery (Iwaniec, 1989: 109–110). On the ninth and fortieth days after death, as well as on its anniversary, a service known as "panichida" is observed. All services are conducted in the Orthodox Slavonic language using pre-Nikon reform books. Old Believer communities strictly follow the Julian calendar. The Orthodox Church year largely aligns with that of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In the molenna's Eucharist celebration, there is not an altar section (sanctuary – "Holy of Holies"), which in Catholic churches is divided by an iconostasis with three doors. In molennas, the iconostasis is simply on the eastern wall, often with shelves where icons rest. The arrangement of icons is not as rigidly prescribed as it is in Catholic or Orthodox churches. In molennas, the area in front of the iconostasis, termed "soleya", mistakenly named the "Holy of Holies", elevated by a step or more, is separated by either a balustrade or an icon wall (zakliroshnik). Typically, three to five desks are positioned on the soleya. On the central lectern, termed the "likeness of the altar throne" (podobiye pristola), rests

the Gospel Book (evangelie), with the cross positioned behind it; on the side lecterns are icons of locally revered saints. This arrangement is frequently termed an altar. On the sides, in the so-called kliros (right and left), are desks for the lectors to recite liturgical texts and the Acts and Epistles of the Apostles. Here, lectors and choristers stand during services. The soleya's primary section is the pulpit (amvon), a forward-extending semi-circular area. The remaining space is filled by the congregation. Men pray on the right, while women, who should always cover their heads during prayer, are on the left. There are also benches against the walls in the worshippers' area for the elderly and unwell. A multi-tiered ornamental chandelier (panikadilo) is a typical feature of the ceiling, which is purposely lowered to light the candles. Candles are strategically positioned on each level. The panikadilo is illuminated during significant services. The entrance room of the molenna is termed the vestibule (pritvor) (Pastuszewski 2015: 120–121, 140, 173).

Currently, most bespopovtsy communities uphold the dogma of the Orthodox Church, which has accepted the Nikon reform. Their stance on moral issues aligns with the broader Orthodox Church, including the Russian Orthodox Church. However, various factions of the bespopovtsy regard themselves as the sole true Orthodox Christians. They persistently believe that the Reformed Church lacks any of the grace lost due to modifications in the liturgical texts and changes in service texts, sacrament celebrations, or the act of making the sign of the cross. According to this group, these practices lack redemptive power. They firmly believe that with the demise of the last clergy ordained as per the pre-Nikon reform rite, the priesthood ceased. The only priest and leader is Savior Jesus Christ. The majority of the bespopovtsy are of the view that the antichrist has already come to Earth.

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