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The Dukhobor and Molokan Ethno-Denominational Groups

The Dukhobor and Molokan (or Spiritual Christian) sects emerged in Russia around the end of the seventeenth century.¹ Their doctrines were founded on the ideas of Western Protestantism (German Anabaptism, Polish Socianism), and their social base was the free peasantry. Because their doctrines included ideas that undermined secular authority (the disavowal of the divine provenance of supreme power and earthly laws; the repudiation of violence, up to and including the refusal to defend the motherland; the idea of elect status [*izbrannost'*], etc.), they were constantly persecuted, both under the tsars and later, in Soviet times. In the early nineteenth century, the Dukhobors and a few Molokans relocated, with government permission, to the Taurida (Melitopol'skii district [*uezd*]), where they lived in close proximity to one another and in isolation from the Russian people. But most Molokans continued to live among the Orthodox in the provinces of southern and central Russia. In 1841–45 they were moved out of Taurida by administrative order and resettled in the Transcaucasus, where Molokans also voluntarily resettled in large numbers from Tambov and Samara provinces and elsewhere during the 1840s. They settled in compact colonies, mostly in what is now Azerbaijan and Armenia, although many did continue to reside in Russia's interior provinces.

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Since in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the word “Orthodox” was taken to be synonymous with “Russian,” the Dukhobors and Molokans, having broken with the Orthodox Church, acknowledged themselves as non-Russians, believing instead that they were God’s own special peoples.² The denominational idiosyncrasies of the sects had a powerful impact on their culture, which, despite its Russian foundations, came to differ substantially from that of their ethnic origins. Their awareness of cultural and religious distinction, their status as God’s elect, their shared history, and their positive ethno-denominational identity (their elevated, not to say overstated, assessment of their “own folk”), combined with a negative perception of the culture and religion of the Russian people and of their Caucasian neighbors, formed the essential mechanism that knit them together and enabled them to exist and maintain their unique culture over the long term.

That mechanism began to fail at the end of the nineteenth century. In the early decades of Soviet power, which proclaimed atheism the official ideology and employed all means at its disposal to combat religion, the destruction of that mechanism accelerated significantly. With the decline of religious commitment and the dismantling of their cultural insularity, the foundation of the sects’ cohesion was gradually lost. Until the mid-1980s, however, members of both sects—both the faithful and those who held themselves aloof from religion—were united by a self-awareness based on an idea that was less religious than it was culturo-historical. The Dukhobor and Molokan communities in the Caucasus were also united by a shared territory, surrounded by people of other ethnicities.³

Although all Dukhobors and Molokans who graduated from Soviet schools knew that they were Russian nationals, they still took pride in their group membership. That ethno-denominational identification, although largely positive, distanced them somewhat from the Russian people. Yet their positive self-identification gave reason to hope that a liberalization of the political regime might serve to revive these two Russian sects.

In the late 1980s the leaders of the two movements were convinced that if only freedom of conscience were to be granted not on paper but in fact, and if micromanagement by the state were to be halted, the Dukhobors’ and Molokans’ own strengths, desire, and enthusiasm would suffice to revive their traditions and their high moral standards and to draw in those who considered themselves Molokans or Dukhobors by extraction but had abandoned religion and took no part in the community’s spiritual life.

This enthusiasm among Dukhobors and Molokans coincided with the development of the nationalist movement in the Transcaucasus. The anti-Russian hysteria that began in the republics' [Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—Ed.] media and the ensuing national compartmentalization stimulated a rapid growth of ethnic self-awareness among the Molokans, and more particularly the Dukhobors, in the Caucasus. At a complex time of conflict between nations, they had to decide who they were. The early 1990s were characterized by a search for new identities and by mass migrations of Dukhobors and Molokans of the Caucasus to their "historical motherland" of Russia. Yet their leaders realized that the dispersion of the settlers among the Russian population countrywide would lead to their rapid assimilation and the loss of the legacy left to them by their forebears. It would serve to further weaken the denominations as a whole, since the strongest of their communities happened to have been in the Transcaucasus. Furthermore, the mass resettlement from the Transcaucasus to Russia impelled and accelerated, as it were, the institutionalization of the sects—the creation of representative and managerial bodies, local and central, whose purpose was to represent their interests at all official levels.

Now that almost a decade has passed, we can clearly see the problems that the Dukhobors and Molokans were set to resolve and the extent to which they succeeded in doing so.

To revive these religious groups, the downright catastrophic drop in their numbers would have to be checked, the average age of their membership brought down, the level of denominational self-awareness and religious commitment raised, central bodies created, and leaders capable of developing a program and the means to achieve it brought to the fore.

The numbers of the faithful in Molokan and Dukhobor communities began to fall in the 1930s, went rapidly downhill from there, and, in many communities, culminated in self-dissolution. In the 1920s, for instance, in Melitopol'skii district (Ukraine), the village of Astrakhanka contained seven Molokan communities and as many prayer houses, and the village of Novovasil'evka had five of each. But in the early 1990s each village had only one Molokan community, and that scenario was repeated everywhere. By then, most Molokan communities, even in the countryside, had fifteen to sixty members, but many consisted of only a handful of the faithful. The same process was under way among the Dukhobors. Some twenty people gathered for prayer in the largest and

strongest Dukhobor community in the village of Gorelovka (Georgia), a number that only on holidays rose as high as fifty. This was brought about by official atheist indoctrination, by the development of the mass media and cultural standardization, by the outflow of young people to urban areas, and, of course, by official policy on religious associations, especially sects. As a result, the line of generational continuity has been broken. The end result of the shrinking and graying of religious communities was that the Dukhobor and Molokan cultures could never be regenerated fully or returned to their previous levels. Their respective cultures had lost specificity.

Many Molokan communities became too small to retain their registration and thus forfeited their juridical status, which itself meant little then except that it granted a community permission to maintain its own prayer house, so that communities without legal standing would have to meet in private homes. Those communities no longer officially existed. By 1990 fewer than fifty Molokan communities were registered throughout the country. Molokan communities in the rural Caucasus saw no need to register at all, since they could always find a place to meet somewhere in the village. Sometimes the collective farm would allocate premises for meetings, restricting the teaching of atheism to the schools.

The Dukhobors never registered; and in 1988 the Council on Religious Affairs, having inquired how many Dukhobors were living in the Soviet Union, was told that they had all emigrated to Canada in the late nineteenth century.

The registration situation was entirely satisfactory—both to the local authorities, since it did not mar the picture of the religious status quo, and to the sectarians themselves, because it meant they did not have to account to anyone, especially since their activities amounted only to attendance at prayer meetings and the upkeep of their places of worship. They were not active socially and certainly did not proselytize, because they could not even if they had wanted to.

As a first step in reviving Molokanism and Dukhoborism, managerial bodies would have to be created, because neither group had any central organizations in the USSR. Even before the Revolution, when the laws were somewhat liberalized in 1904 and 1905, the Molokans attempted on several occasions to unify, to fashion organizational structures, to convene congresses, but there was never any real unification of the scattered Molokan communities in the Transcaucasus and southern and central Russia, not to mention those in Siberia and the Far East.

Up until the end of the nineteenth century, the Dukhobors had subordinated themselves to their spiritual leadership, whom they elevated to the rank of “Christs” (or [if female], “Mothers of God”) and to the decisions taken by congresses of representatives from all the villages in the Transcaucasus and Kars oblast. Recurrent schisms and resettlements in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries severely undermined the sect’s unity and weakened it; the repressions that began in the late 1920s and continued until the end of the 1930s wrested away the most committed and authoritative Dukhobors; and any attempts to organize were nipped in the bud.

The Dukhobors and Molokans held a number of congresses in the 1990s, with a view to unification. In preparation for the first Molokan Congress in 1990, Ivan Aleksandrov revived the periodical *Dukhovnyi khristianin* and used it to publish pregress materials. In the spring of 1991 in various regions of the country, local community unions or committees of Spiritual Christian Molokans, headed by the senior presbyter or president, were being set up. In April of that year, an organizing committee began issuing a fact sheet titled *Vest’*, which was intended to inform the communities of progress made in planning the congress. Not long before the congress was convened, the Obshchina [Community] charitable association was set up with the declared goal of “reviving Molokanism.” This was done at the initiative of Aleksandrov, who had set up the congress. He was a major player in the Molokan movement, although he ultimately did it about as much harm as good.

The first Congress of Spiritual Christians took place in Moscow in June 1991. It was attended by representatives from more than sixty communities, and over forty communities came together to form the new Union of Communities of Spiritual Christian Molokans of the USSR [Soiuz obshchin dukhovnykh khristian-molokan SSSR, UCSCM]. Some people also joined the union as individuals. Although it is indicative that the union was open to all the various Molokan groups, its intent being to revive Molokanism and link the disconnected communities, whatever their persuasion, in fact only Constant Molokans joined. The congress adopted a charter and ordained Aleksandrov as senior presbyter.

Only two weeks after the Molokan Congress ended, an All-Union Congress of Dukhobors opened in Tselinskii raion, Rostov oblast, which was inhabited by Dukhobors who had resettled there in 1921–23. Immediately before the meeting, the Religious Alliance of Spiritual Warriors of Christ in the USSR [Religioznoe ob’edinenie dukhovnykh bortsov

Khrista v SSSR] was registered, at the initiative of Iurii Kryzhanovskii, who had also been instrumental in arranging the [Dukhobor] Congress. Kryzhanovskii, a person far from devout in any faith, was pursuing his own selfish interests and was later to cause a great deal of unpleasantness and disappointment for the Dukhobor movement. On the registration certificate, he defined the Dukhobors' religious affiliation as an "Orthodox Christian ethnic group of schismatics." The Dukhobors arrived at the all-union congress under that designation, the registration being by then a *fait accompli*. But the congress resembled nothing so much as a glorified party meeting, since few delegates attended and the first matters up for discussion included modern methods of increasing land productivity and the development of small enterprises to process agricultural output. Only after that were organizational issues tackled. No expressly Dukhobor, or even spiritual, problems came up. The congress's only positive result was that it set in motion a search for ways of uniting the Dukhobors and elected a fifteen-member Dukhobor Council, whose mission was to provide leadership between congresses, and an executive committee to organize resettlements and establish liaisons with state structures. The congress appealed to all the country's Dukhobors with a call to "be more active in reviving the traditions, mores, customs, and rituals of the Dukhobors" and advised all Dukhobors "to employ every opportunity to revive and create Dukhobor communities and other forms most fitting to cooperative work and a life of comfort and affluence."

To dissociate from Kryzhanovskii and form a strong organization that would have the support of all Dukhobors, a second, extraordinary congress met in the summer of 1992 in the village of Arkhangel'skoe (Chernskii raion, Tula oblast), where Dukhobors from the Caucasus had resettled in 1989–91. This congress was better attended and more representative than the first. It adopted a charter and resolved to re-register the Dukhobor organization under a new title—Alliance of Dukhobors of Russia [Ob'edinenie dukhobortsev Rossii, ADR]—since the old name no longer reflected the situation that obtained after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The charter stipulated that all Dukhobor communities in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) could join as equals.

The central organs of the Molokan and Dukhobor unions promptly took up the resettlement issue. As early as November 1991 the UCSCM had resolved to set up a Committee to Assist Molokan Settlers [Komitet sodeistviia pereselentsam-molokanam], which searched for land to be settled by communities from the CIS, so as to preserve them and to

regenerate the Molokan culture in a new location. The UCSCM appealed all the way up to the [Russian] president to elicit help for the settlers. Its council had compiled a small package of documentation containing estimates and the plan for a future settlement, and it was eventually allocated lands for resettlement in Chernskii raion, Tula oblast.

The executive committee for resettlement formed at the first Dukhobor Congress was, however, never equal to its mission. A special committee on resettlement that was established within the executive committee also proved ineffectual, and its functions were assumed by the ADR Council, as the legal entity representing the settlers.

Without material resources, the central bodies could not act, and the programs to revive Molokanism and Dukhoborism could not be implemented. From the beginning of the movement for Molokan unity, Aleksandrov had urged the setup of commercial enterprises to generate funds that would help those resettling from the Transcaucasus, finance a periodical, compensate its editorial board, and defray the UCSCM's necessary organizational expenditures. (The Obshchina association was actually supposed to have united the leaders of Molokan collective farms and cooperatives, but it had been stillborn.) The draft charter for the future UCSCM had stated that the union would not only facilitate the development "of legal and social self-awareness" and so on but would also broker agreements among farmers; arrange the purchase and sale of machinery and equipment, land, seed, livestock, and other necessities; and extend credit. The UCSCM's financial resources were to come from membership dues and voluntary donations, but while its charter was still in the discussion stage, there were serious complaints from the localities that it catered not to Spiritual Christian Molokans but to "Christian Molokans of the flesh" [*plotskie*]. So a paragraph on mandatory membership dues was omitted from the charter adopted at the congress, but provisions regarding the economic activity of the UCSCM (foreign trade, the production and sale of agricultural products, the opening of stores and stalls, etc.) remained.

The issue of mandatory fees is being debated to this day; in recent years, the magazine *Slovo very* has carried an extensive and heated exchange on the subject. Molokan presbyters and movement activists have found it more important to remain free of any suspicion of greed and to avoid possible accusations of serving "for the sake of enrichment and even for an easy way to procure their daily bread" than to create an economic base that the UCSCM could use going forward.⁴

The religious tenets of the Dukhobors and Molokans did not include tithing to the church or compensating the presbyter, elders, or cantors for their work. Voluntary donations were always made in secret, each giving what he or she could afford. Material reality was now invading the life of the spirit, but some did not want to accommodate the demands of the time and others did not know how to merge the two. The contradiction between tradition and looming necessity has never been successfully overcome.

In the early 1990s, unfortunately, the Molokans had entrusted their material problems to Ivan Aleksandrov, and the Rostov Dukhobors had delegated theirs to Iurii Kryzhanovskii. A General Construction Enterprise and a Committee to Resettle Dukhobors in Rostov oblast, neither of which actually existed, sprang up on paper, above Kryzhanovskii's signature. Shady deals were put together using funds allocated to the committee, again as represented by Kryzhanovskii. The Molokans began accusing Aleksandrov of financial irregularities. Facts such as these unquestionably discredited the very idea of the economic activities being conducted by the Molokan and Dukhobor organizations.

Organizational efforts were, and continue to be, significantly complicated by an acute shortage of funds. The sects could not rely on a systematic receipt of donations, since the overwhelming majority of the faithful consisted of senior citizens who had limited means and were often simply impoverished. American and Australian Molokans and Canadian Dukhobors have periodically sent help to their Russian coreligionists, but such subsidies, which often take the form of humanitarian aid (food and nonfood items), have not resolved the problem. The American and Australian Molokans have allocated funds for congresses, the publication of periodicals, and the construction of a prayer house in Stavropol krai, but they themselves are not rich, and their assistance pales in comparison with the considerable infusions of cash sent by foreign Adventist or Baptist churches to their own coreligionists.

The entities that used to be Molokan and Dukhobor collective farms and are now accorded the status of "communities" and "partnerships" [*tovarishchestva*] do not operate economically as religious organizations. If they allocate anything to the religious communities or to central organizations, they do so not as mandatory dues but as voluntary assistance, which is more often than not earmarked to support cultural initiatives. For example, the L.N. Tolstoy Settlers Dukhobor Collective Farm/Community in Tula oblast has from time to time placed small sums at the

disposal of the Dukhobor Council, which moneys were used to make and release a commercial recording of Dukhobor psalms and folk songs and to publish several issues of the *Vestnik dukhobortsev*.

One Molokan spiritual community did make a stab at for-profit activity in the 1990s. While building a prayer house in the village of Kochubeevskoe (Stavropol krai), the Molokan religious community set up a brickworks and a workshop to produce window frames and doors and sold a portion of the output. A small sewing atelier was also opened, which provided work to some Molokan women, with the profits going to the building project.

The first congresses brought a sense of uplift to the communities. UCSCM representatives visited communities in Russia and the CIS, with the goal of effecting Molokan unity. In the early 1990s the UCSCM Council assisted communities in their efforts to regain the use of their prayer houses and distributed literature and humanitarian aid. The ADR Council was also active, meeting three times a year within the ambit of the communities of Rostov and Tula oblasts, the North Caucasus, and Georgia. After tallying everything those organizations did, however, it must be acknowledged that their mission of unification did not yield the expected fruits, because the centrifugal forces were far stronger than had been anticipated. The overwhelming majority of Dukhobors and Molokans who migrated from the Caucasus were dispersed throughout the country, despite their declared desire to resettle in tight-knit groups in Russia and thus preserve their culture. An insuperable obstacle on the path to unity was the sects' internal power struggle, accompanied by mistrust in their elected leaders. This phenomenon had its foundation in something other than the weaknesses inherent in us all. In our view, it rested on the disavowal characteristic among Molokans (and Dukhobors from the late nineteenth century onward) of any hierarchical structure within the spiritual community.⁵ Such wariness on the part of Dukhobors and Molokans toward their own leaders may also be explained in part by their dismal experiences of the early 1990s.

In the fall of 1991 Aleksandrov resigned as senior presbyter, assuming instead the post of UCSCM president. Two congresses were held in September 1993, one in the village of Kochubeevskoe by supporters of Senior Presbyter Timofei Shchetinkin and the other in Moscow by Aleksandrov's followers. In 1994 Aleksandrov was ousted from the UCSCM leadership. Although the UCSCM re-registered on 6 December 1994 under a new name, the prior unity could never be restored. The last congress, held in

Tambov in August 1997, was called not by the UCSCM Council but by the leaders of the Tambov Molokans and was ignored by the numerous communities that were beginning to coalesce around Shchetinkin and the Molokan center that he had created in Kochubeevskoe. In September 1997 Shchetinkin also summoned, in the name of the UCSCM Council, representatives from several communities to attend the dedication of the UCSCM's Central Prayer House, a gathering that the organizers intended to turn into a congress.

The publication of Molokan periodicals readily illustrates the process of the UCSCM's dissolution. From 1990 through 1994 the Molokan magazine *Dukhovnyi khristianin* was published in Moscow, with Aleksandrov as editor; the magazine *Vest'* was published for over four years beginning in 1991, also in Moscow. Both were UCSCM publications. In 1994 another magazine—*Slovo very*—was founded in Moscow, as a central organ independent from the UCSCM, with the sole goal of preaching the Gospel. In 1997 the Kochubeevskoe community began publishing a periodical of the same name, without the approval of the editorial board of the original *Slovo very*. So the Moscow magazine, beginning with its ninth issue, was renamed *Dobryi domostroitel' blagodati*. Also in 1997 two issues of a generally literary/historical magazine entitled *Mlechnyi put'* were published in the settlement of Slobodka (Chernskii raion, Tula oblast) by Viktor Tikunov, presbyter of the Molokan community that had resettled there.

The ADR Council gradually became an organization that represented the interests of Dukhobors living in Rostov and Tula oblasts, since from the early 1990s on the Dukhobors remaining in Georgia had been economically segregated from the rest of the Dukhobors and could not attend council meetings. The Dukhobors of the Caucasus subsequently acquired a leader of their own and, preoccupied with the problem of simply surviving, completely withdrew from cooperation with the ADR Council. In the spring of 1997 the Dukhobor community in the village of Gorelovka (Georgia) underwent an economic schism, which was compounded by a conflict between certain Dukhobors and the Armenian authorities of Ninotsmindskii raion (whose population is almost exclusively Armenian). These Dukhobors are being forced to look for ways of migrating to Russia, but they are bypassing the ADR in their negotiations with various state agencies. By the mid-1990s, that is, managerial decentralization had begun for both the Molokans and the Dukhobors. Managerial bodies became irrelevant, and often their initiatives not only

failed to win local support but were even perceived as a desire on the part of the leadership to usurp power.

Despite calls in the early 1990s for the revival of Dukhoborism and Molokanism, little has actually changed. Dukhobor religious communities are still small in number and remain unregistered, because they simply see no point to registration. Molokans are also not eager to legitimize their activities, although some new communities, especially those consisting of recent settlers, have gone through the legal formalities. Most of the communities that legitimized their activities in Soviet times also continue to register. For some of them, the motivation remains what it has always been: to retain or acquire a prayer house or at least an apartment in which to hold prayer meetings, a survey having revealed that many registered Molokan communities have no permanent place for prayer due to the local authorities' dilatoriness in the allocation of premises. Half of those surveyed did not believe that registration would bring them any advantages whatsoever, and those who thought that it would wanted it mainly to give the community legal status, which would allow it to engage in dialogue with the local authorities, again with a view to acquiring premises.

The unregistered communities continue to gather in private homes and apartments, and they have even found a way to open their own bank accounts [which normally requires registration—Trans.]. One community member, usually the treasurer, maintains a savings account into which the group's money is deposited, making another community member the account beneficiary. This variant of the "commercial account" is quite widespread among other denominations, too.

Although Dukhobor and Molokan memories of repression are still fresh, it is unlikely that anyone would explain the refusal to register by concern over a possible reprise. The primary explanation proffered by the Molokans is the time-honored one: that they do not do anything except hold their traditional prayer meetings.

During the 1990s there was no radical change in the age composition of the Molokan and Dukhobor religious communities, neither of which has had any specific experience in working with children and young people. Previously, children grew up in a religious environment, being taught the psalms by their parents, while the Molokans also introduced their children to Bible reading. It all came about organically and naturally. In Soviet times atheist indoctrination in schools robbed most children of any desire to share the faith of their fathers, although some—unquestionably a

minority—returned to their roots in retirement. Undoubtedly, the official ban on proselytization also played a large role. Even in villages inhabited only by Molokans and Dukhobors, where there had once been many children and young people, the older generation has made no attempt to draw them into the communities' religious life. When asked why, the elderly normally reply that no one can be brought to God by force.

One might have thought that the democratization of public life and the lifting of prohibitions on religious organizations would have changed attitudes toward proselytization, especially to attract young people. As it happened, the Molokans preceded the Dukhobors in sounding the alarm on the younger generation's absence. From its earliest issues, the periodical *Dukhovnyi khristianin* recommended encouraging young people to attend meetings and opening Sunday schools for children. In the *Vest'* fact sheet, the Molokan community in Tsakhkadzor (Armenia) reported that it had launched a Sunday school and called on other communities to follow suit.⁶ The UCSCM placed the youth issue on the agenda from the outset. In *Dukhovnyi khristianin* Senior Presbyter Shchetinkin urged Molokan women to raise their children in their faith: "all the living human world is nurtured at your hands, and the words that children hear are imbibed with their mothers' milk."⁷

At present, however, there is a conspicuous lack of children and young people in many tight-knit Molokan communities, and others cannot find suitable premises [for youth education—Trans.] or anyone willing to undertake the work. Still, a few Sunday schools do exist. The faithful in some communities bring their grandchildren to holiday meetings, where the elders talk to them about the Holy Scriptures. The 1994 Congress in Tselinskii raion invited children from the local Sunday schools and from Kochubeevskoe to showcase their psalm-singing abilities. In fact, the Kochubeevskoe Sunday school has been operating successfully for some time, under a teacher who worked in a kindergarten for thirty years and knows how to capture children's interest.

The 1997 Tambov Congress concentrated on the problem of spiritual renewal among children and youth. The congress communiqué told all Molokans: "Finally we have recognized that without a youth movement there will be no future. At last we have recognized our responsibility to our children." A youth working group at the congress recommended a program of action that comprised a periodical, seminars for young people, a summer camp, and a new form for the meetings that would allow young people to take part. Some presbyters spoke out publicly, stating baldly

that if nothing was done in the near future, Molokanism would simply die out. Even so, the congress failed. When the time came to make a decision, the older presbyters, who wielded great authority among the Molokans, recommended not adopting any resolutions but instead instructing all the communities to fast and pray, so that the Lord Himself would make everything right. This approach, although completely natural from a believer's viewpoint, is an unlikely springboard to success.

The youth problem in Dukhobor communities is even more acute, by virtue of this group's considerably lower degree of religious commitment and its smaller size. For the last few decades, even middle-aged people have not been attending Dukhobor prayer services. In the village of Arkhangel'skoe, which happens to have been settled mostly by middle-aged and young people, attendance at prayer meetings is significantly younger than the average. Women aged fifty to sixty, who previously did not attend services, now come together and study the psalms, but they do that more to support a tradition and perform necessary funeral rites than out of profound religious commitment.

The youth issue was brought up in 1996 at an expanded session of the ADR Council. In carrying out the decision reached there, the Arkhangel'skoe Dukhobors set up a Sunday school under the auspices of the secular day school, one of whose teachers undertook to deliver a series of lectures on Dukhobor history and doctrine to the upper grades. The plan was to teach the students psalms and verses, but this was, in essence, less a matter of attracting children into the community's spiritual life than of teaching them about the cultural legacy of their forebears. Actually, all Dukhobor projects involving young people take the form of cultural studies. One of the inaugurators of Dukhoborism's cultural revival in Rostov oblast wrote in *Vestnik dukhobortsev*, which is published in the city of Chern (Tula oblast), that one cannot claim to be a Dukhobor if "one does not know a single psalm, the history of one's forebears, or the established Dukhobor rituals and customs."⁸ To gain familiarity with the traditional culture, the descendants of Dukhobors living in Rostov meet in the regional museum, which has a permanent Dukhobor exhibition, to sing psalms and verses. On one Trinity Sunday, the members of the club dressed in historical costume and paraded, singing, through the city streets, to the applause of onlookers. But, while all this is most welcome, there can be no revival of the culture, of the traditions of such ethno-denominational groups absent the religion, for otherwise the net result of these efforts will be the formation of folk music troupes, which is what we are indeed witnessing.

The problem of increasing and rejuvenating these sects could be resolved by drawing in new members from outside the Dukhobor and Molokan milieus. But this approach runs counter to tradition, which holds that one can be Dukhobor or Molokan only by birth. The historical background to this is that the religious communities in the Taurida and the Transcaucasus were simultaneously agrarian communities, which would not have profited from an expansion entailing the acceptance of an influx of outsiders. The Molokans in Russia's inner provinces were in the same circumstances, and as a result, any even remotely active proselytizing was simply out of the question.

The UCSCM Council at one time included a missionary group—which, admittedly, did nothing at all to spread the Molokan doctrine. A Voronezh elder who is highly respected among the Molokans upbraided his coreligionists for their inactivity in *Slovo very*, writing that the hour had come “to engage in active exhortation and the singing of psalms; in everyday life, through good works and with loving kindness to all, that ‘the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all the kings thy glory’ [Isaiah 62:2].”⁹

Also, as a leader of the Tambov Molokans has acknowledged, “the courage and firmness of spirit” needed to attract outsiders “is lacking,” since there is nothing that would serve to draw a newcomer in and those who do come are immediately turned off, finding the whole thing depressing, uninteresting, and dull.¹⁰ Indeed, there is a frequently voiced opinion that the preaching of Molokan presbyters in no way meets the spiritual needs of people today. Most presbyters are elderly and poorly educated, and the excellent knowledge of the Bible whereby Molokan presbyters have always distinguished themselves is no longer sufficient for the faithful, especially those in urban communities and the young. Many who attend Molokan meetings also go to Baptist and Adventist meetings, on the grounds that they more fully satisfy their religious needs.

We have before us a letter written to the Tambov Congress by a young, energetic, thoughtful Molokan from Riazan, who offered an accurate analysis of the situation within the sect. He urged not waiting for Molokan offspring to join the spiritual community and recommended instead going out to spread the word among other denominations, not holding fast to the “purity of the doctrine” but modernizing Molokanism, making the leap from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first. The letter laid out a program of action, but no one even bothered to discuss it.

Some elders associate the decline of Molokanism with the lack of money, one writing in *Slovy very* that without tithing, Spiritual Christian Molokans face a dismal future: “Oh, were our communities a little wealthier in some degree, and more welcoming, how many souls might they win!” This is to some extent true, but poverty, in addition to preventing the broader pursuit of proselytizing, propels those who are less certain of the truth of their belief into other churches. Molokans have long been leaving to join the Baptists, but in recent years the outflow has become very pronounced—and not only to the Baptists but to the Adventists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, too, for reasons not only spiritual but material, since those latter sects distribute humanitarian aid almost every month. The presbyter of a community in Tbilisi complained in conversation that economic difficulties have undermined the constancy and devotion of his brethren in the Molokan faith. Contemporary material problems point up even more forcefully that all is not well in the Molokan spiritual community either, that the religious commitment of some of its members is weakening.

The issue of proselytizing has never even arisen for the Dukhobors. As we see it, the problem of replenishing their sect remains unresolved primarily due to the lack of a truly serious desire to move in that direction, on the part both of the older generation and of the young.

Most of those with whom I spoke (both ordinary Dukhobors and Molokans and their leaders) fail to recognize the specific group interests that they should be affirming and defending before state and society. The Molokan survey reveals that all they require of the state is the legally mandated equality of all denominations that “do no harm” to society. Unquestionably both Dukhobors and Molokans do care about their legal position and the state’s attitude toward them, but one gains the impression that all the discussions of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations [O svobode sovesti i religioznykh ob’edineniakh] in 1997 seemed not to concern them at all. Conversation with presbyters at the Molokan Congress in Tambov revealed that none of them even had any interest in the law or were making any attempt to raise issues of importance to Molokan spiritual life at the congress. The Dukhobor leaders also did not consider it necessary to read the bill.

A study of these sects and their history indicates that the most ultimately religious requirement, which reflects the level of their religious commitment and denominational self-awareness, is the demand for exemption from military service.

Until the late 1920s Dukhobors and Molokans did not have to serve in the army, but in 1929, under Soviet pressure, they agreed to do so, at the Akhalkalak Congress of Sectarians of the Transcaucasus. During the Great Patriotic War [1941–45], both groups joined, on an equal footing, in the defense of the motherland, and subsequently they even produced some military professionals. In recent years, members of both sects, whose doctrine forbids the use of violence, were invited to meet with public and state organizations studying the issue of alternative forms of national service to accommodate religious convictions.¹¹ They attended the meetings but did not take any initiative there. Seventy-five percent of the older (sixty-five and up) Molokans I surveyed (mostly presbyters) responded to a question about military service by stating that Molokans should serve like everyone else. Only 8 percent declared that they should not serve at all, on the grounds of their convictions, and the remainder saw a solution in alternative forms of service. Some survey responses bear quoting: “We are Russian people and are obliged to serve wherever the Motherland needs us,” a sixty-six-year-old Molokan presbyter wrote. Another, even older presbyter responded: “All young men and even some girls should serve in the army. Love for the Motherland and defense of the Fatherland are the defense of our creed.” Almost all the middle-aged faithful favored alternative service. Subsequent conversations, however, revealed that this choice was dictated not by religious but by sociopolitical tenets, primarily the army’s shortcomings and the negative attitude toward it fostered by the media.

Dukhobors who refused to perform military service and burned their weapons in the late nineteenth century emigrated to Canada, while those who remained in Russia entered into a compromise with the state. For them, the issue of exemption from military service was closed to discussion in the late 1920s. The ADR Council—which, suffice it to say, is headed by a retired colonel—has refused to raise the issue under any circumstances. So, should any young person today display an unwillingness to serve, it would not be on religious grounds.

The changes in the self-awareness of Dukhobors and Molokans that came about in the 1990s are also clearly seen in their attitude toward the Orthodox Church. Even before that, Dukhobor and Molokan offspring who went to live in urban areas were sometimes baptized into Orthodoxy. Usually these were the children of mixed marriages or women who had married an Orthodox man and lived with his family, but in the 1990s some Molokans living in the towns and cities of Transcaucasia

accepted baptism by Orthodox priests to underscore their ethnic (Russian) origins. The erstwhile religiously motivated distaste—not strong but nevertheless perceptible—when the conversation turned to the Orthodox Church has been significantly muted, and the attitude would now most accurately be classified as circumspect. It would be difficult to imagine any Dukhobor or Molokan, even a decade ago, expressing any desire to help the Church, but now there are such instances, as exemplified by a Dukhobor community in Gorelovka (Georgia) that has made several food donations to St. Olga's Monastery and has sent food to the Russian Orthodox Church in Tbilisi for distribution to parishioners. The usual explanation given by community leaders for these actions is that they are Russians above all and wanted to help some of their own who had fallen on hard times.

Dukhobors and Molokans are apt to complain that Orthodoxy is gradually, albeit unofficially, acquiring the status of a state religion, but the complaints are directed more at the state than at the Church.

There has long been no trace of any denial of secular authority. The Molokan and Dukhobor attitude to authority is, perhaps, best couched as follows: "They don't interfere with us, and praise be to God for that." Announcing the completion of its registration in December 1994, the UCSCM of Russia stated, "We give thanks to the Lord for the favor shown to us by all authorities, which do not hinder us from offering up prayers and petitions both for ourselves and for all mankind."¹² They harbor no illusions or hopes of official assistance in reviving their culture, although in the last decade the attitude of the local administration toward the Dukhobor and Molokan sects has improved noticeably.

Both sects received much national press coverage and considerable television airtime in the early 1990s, in connection with their forced migration. As a result, the public began to regard them positively and to show an interest in their history and culture. Their spirituality was not only esteemed but even somewhat overstated. Indicative in that regard is the communication addressed to the UCSCM by the administration of Tselinskii raion (Rostov oblast), where the Fourth Molokan Congress had been held, which declared in part that the congress attendees had "demonstrated the goodwill attendant upon the revival of Molokanism in Russia, which will inevitably exert a fruitful influence on the overall spiritual and moral state of society. One may state without exaggeration that the work you have done occupies a worthy place in the process of reviving and supporting the Spiritual Christian Molokan movement in

Tselinskii raion and in Russia as a whole, touching as it does on the past and on general spiritual values.”¹³ The administrations of a whole array of non-black-earth districts also expressed a desire to take in Dukhobors and Molokans emigrating from the Transcaucasus.

But looking back on the problems faced by the Dukhobors and Molokans in the late 1980s, it must be acknowledged that none of them has been resolved. It may, furthermore, be said that the mechanism that once permitted fellowships such as these to retain their unity and to function is now in great disrepair. Rather than reviving, denominational self-awareness continued to wane in the 1990s. Most Constant Molokans and the overwhelming majority of Dukhobors (those who designate themselves as such) self-identify not by their religious community but by a shared history and culture that has lost a significant amount of its religious underpinning. Whereas matters of religion are raised at Molokan congresses and in Molokan periodicals and the post of senior presbyter is occupied by a man known for his religious commitment and knowledge of Molokan dogma, the Dukhobors long ago stopped discussing religious issues in general. The Council of the Alliance of Dukhobors is an explicitly secular organization, led by a secular individual. In fact, the Dukhobor communities are more expressive of regional solidarity [*zemliachestvo*] than of religious sectarianism.

The resettlements occasioned by the collapse of the USSR and the ensuing national conflicts have dealt a harsh blow to these two ethno-denominational groups. Strewn across the country among the Russian population, the Dukhobors and Molokans from the Caucasus who were until recently the custodians of their forebears' legacy will be assimilated piecemeal by the Russians. It is unlikely that anyone can arrest that process.

The opportunity for revival that history offered has been squandered.

Notes

1. In this article we concern ourselves only with the Constant Molokans [*postoiannye molokane*, also known as Steadfast Molokans—Trans.], [Semen] Uklein's followers and the practitioners of the rite he introduced.

2. Though the Dukhobors and Molokans included people of various nationalities, most were Russian nationals.

3. It is essential to specify what we have in mind when we speak of Molokan and Dukhobor communities, since the concept of “community” has a dual meaning when applied to these two sects. On the one hand, it implies groups of people who attend prayer meetings and perform all the religious rituals. On the other hand, if the

entity in question is a compact colony of Dukhobors and Molokans (as, for example, in the Transcaucasus), the whole village is usually referred to as a community, since regardless of the degree of religious commitment, everyone participates to some extent or another in collective or familial religious rituals, although even here there is a core of most dedicated believers—a spiritual community that monitors the social behaviors and lifestyles even of nonbelievers in the village.

4. S.P. Petrov, "Nuzhny li v molokanstve naemnye sluzhiteli," *Slovo very*, 1996, no. 6.

5. The last spiritual leader recognized by all Dukhobors was Luker'ia Kalmykova, to whom deference was paid due to a profound faith in her divine nature. She died in 1886. The Dukhobors who emigrated to Canada in 1898 and 1899 considered Petr Verigin their leader, whereas those who remained in Russia recognized no spiritual leadership.

6. *Vest' dukhovnykh khristian-molokan*, 1991, no. 4.

7. *Dukhovnyi khristianin*, 1992, no. 1, p. 64.

8. L. Laukhina, "Kazhdy i vse vmeste vozrodim dukhoborchestvo," *Vestnik dukhobortsev*, 30 October 1993.

9. P.A. Petrov, "Obrashchenie ko vsem dukhovnym khristianam-molokanam," *Slovo very*, 1995, no. 5.

10. S.P. Petrov, "O nashei tambovskoi obshchine dukhovnykh khristian-molokan," *Slovo very*, 1994, no. 1.

11. S.A. Inikova, "Istoriia patsifistskogo dvizheniia v sekte dukhobortsev (XVII–XX vv.), in *Dolgi put' rossiiskogo patsifizma* (Moscow, 1997).

12. *Vest'*, 1995, no. 1.

13. "Nam pishut," *Slovo very*, 1995, no. 3.

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