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Nikolai Il'in and his Jehovist Followers: Crossroads of German Pietistic Chiliasm and
Russian Religious Dissent

by

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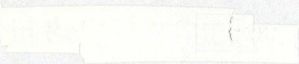
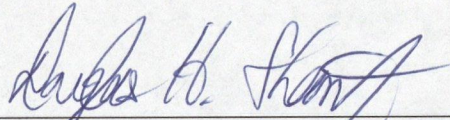
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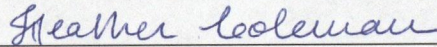
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Nikolai II'in and his Jehovist Followers: Crossroads of German Pietistic Chiliasm and Russian Religious Dissent" submitted by Sergey Petrov in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

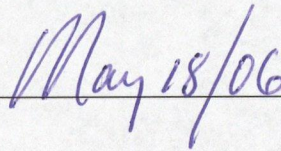
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ABSTRACT

The emergence of native millenarian movements in Russia is traced back to the first half of 19th century. Russian millenarianism appeared under the direct influence of the ideas of German radical chiliastic Pietism. This influence was conveyed most notably by the popularity of the writings of J.H. Jung-Stilling (1740-1817) in Russia. The little-known and secretive millenarian movement of Jehovahists, followers of Nikolai Il'in (1809-1890), included many doctrines of the German Pietistic chiliasm. However, in order to make sense in a totally new social and cultural setting, as well as to survive under adverse circumstances of oppression, the movement had to resort to innovative interpretation of Pietistic ideas, unique practices and highly elaborate rhetoric.

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INTRODUCTION

Nikolai Sazontovich Il'in (1809-1890), a Russian retired military officer, writer and religious thinker, in the 1840s founded and led an apocalyptic millenarian movement that has survived in parts of the former Soviet Union up to this day. Nikolai Il'in was greatly influenced by ideas of German chiliastic Pietism, and although he and his followers later drifted away from aspects of Pietistic ideology, Il'in's doctrine retained clearly distinguishable Pietistic elements. The movement, under the name of Jehovahists-Il'inites (*Egovisty-Il'inty*), stands out among other groups of Christian millenarianism for its original preaching techniques, elaborate persuasive rhetoric, distinctive beliefs, and a unique set of practices that contributed to the survival and tentative success of Il'in's followers under very unfavourable circumstances.

Although some of the critics, especially those who belonged to the dominant Russian Orthodox church, denied that Jehovahists-Il'inites may be rightfully called Christian, Il'in's millenarian discourse is essentially of the same nature as many other millenarian movements, from radical Anabaptists to American Millerites. Russian Jehovahism emerged in the mid-19th century, precisely at the same time as the Millerites, Christadelphians, and Latter-Day Saints, which raises questions about contextual and typological similarities, although an investigation of these is beyond the focus of this thesis. The classical definition of Christian millenarianism, given by Norman Cohn in his *Pursuit of the Millennium*, generally fits the purposes of the present work. Cohn wrote that millenarianism "referred to the belief held by some Christians, on the authority of the Book of Revelation (20: 4-6), that after his Second Coming Christ would establish a messianic kingdom on earth and would reign over it for a thousand years."¹ It should be noted, though, that German Pietists believed the millennium would be established before the coming of Christ.²

¹ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 15.

² Martin H. Jung, *Nachfolger, Visionärinnen, Kirchenkritiker* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 95-96.

In spite of the long tradition of apocalyptic thinking, present in the Orthodox, and, especially, Old Believer doctrine,³ millenarianism was not typical in Russian religious thought. Millenarianism came to Russia at the beginning of the 19th century along with ideas of late German Pietists, particularly those of the Swabian school that developed an explicitly millenarian world view. Chiliastic expectations of Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) and Friedrich Christof Oetinger (1702-1782) were popularized in Russia through translations of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling's writings⁴ and activities of certain members of the Russian Bible Society, which was founded and worked under the aegis of Emperor Alexander I (r. 1801-1825). The Emperor, not unlike many Pietists, saw his religious ideal in the unity of Christian faiths. He attended Quaker meetings, Moravian services, welcomed to Russia a famous German Pietist mystic Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817), and even visited the colonies (established with his permission) of the native Russian sect of Doukhobors (Spirit Wrestlers).⁵

The influence of Pietism and the religious situation during Alexander's reign gave rise to Russian millenarianism, of which Jehovahists-Il'inites were one of the branches, along with a much more renowned group of Molokan Jumpers. Molokans-*Pryguny* (or Jumpers) split from the larger body of Spiritual Christian Molokans in 1830s. Somewhat later, in the 1850s, a radical wing of the Jumper movement appeared under the charismatic leadership of Maksim Gavrilovich Rudometkin (1832-1877). The latter developed an elaborate and complicated system of beliefs and practices codified in the book of *Dukh i Zhizn'* (*Spirit and Life*) revered by the followers of Maksim (called Maksimists) as a sacred text.⁶ Maksim, a self-proclaimed King of the Spirits and Leader of the People of Zion, was sent to a notorious monastic prison in the northern Solovetskii Monastery and then transferred to a similar prison in Suzdal' where he died and was secretly

³ Eugene Clay, "Apocalypticism in Eastern Europe," *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 3:293-308.

⁴ For example, *Prikliucheniia po smerti (Szenen aus dem Geisterreich)* (Sankt-Peterburg: V tipografii F. Drekhslera, 1805). *Ugroz Svetovostokov (Der Graue Mann)*, (Sankt-Peterburg: V imperatorskoi tipografii, 1806); *Pobednaia povest' very khristiankoi (Die Siegesgeschichte der christlichen Religion)* (Sankt-Peterburg: 1815); *Toska po otchizne (Heimweh)* (Moscow: V universetskoi tipografii, 1817).

⁵ Nicholas Breyfogle, *Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 28.

⁶ *Bozhestvennyi Izrecheniia nastavnikov i stradal'tsev za Slovo Bozhie, Veru Iisusa i Dukh Sviatoi Religii Dukhovnykh Khristian Molokan-Prygunov* (Los Angeles: Dukh i Zhizn', 1928).

buried.⁷ Maksimists still await his return at the end of times, riding the white horse of Armageddon, when he will destroy the wicked and establish the Millennial Kingdom of the “true worshipers,” his Maksimist followers.

There have been a number of scholarly works about the genesis and history of Molokans written by both Russian and Western authors.⁸ The fact that thousands of Molokans immigrated to the United States in 1905-1911 and established communities in California (especially in the Los Angeles area), Arizona, and Oregon, has contributed to a relatively high degree of scholarly attention to their denomination.

As we shall see, the most central ideas of radical German Pietism were incorporated into Il'in's teaching. Among them were: belief in the millennium; unification of faiths; pursuit of the Judaic roots of faith and expectation of conversion of the Jews; a critical view of historical churches and their ritual and authority; Biblical criticism; a positive attitude towards empirical knowledge and technical progress, and others. In fact, it can be said that Nikolai Il'in's doctrine is a product of the creative use of different elements that, coupled with smart persuasive rhetoric, turned Il'in's followers into a tentatively successful and stable millenarian denomination.

Indeed, in comparison with many branches of so called Old Russian sectarianism (as opposed to the newer generation of Christian Protestant minority denominations that came directly from the West), Il'inites fared quite well. While much bigger and better known movements, like the Doukhobors and Molokans dwindled, weakened and lost the missionary

⁷ Aleksandr Stepanovich Prugavin, *Monastyrskiiia tiur'my v bor'be s sektantstvom* (The Hague – Paris: Mouton, 1970), 17.

⁸ As early as 1819 a Quaker traveling minister Stephen Grellet wrote about Molokans in his *Journal* (Stephen Grellet, *Memoirs*, Ed. By Benjamin Seebohm. London: A.W. Bennett, 1862, Vol. I, p. 400) The Molokan immigration to America contributed to the rise of interest in the sect. The first ethnographic essay written about the Molokans in English was the book by Pauline V. Young *Pilgrims of Russian-town. The Community of Spiritual Christian Jumpers in America* with an introduction by Robert E. Park (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967). More recently the Molokan sect has become a topic of historical and sociological studies, among them *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005) by Nicholas Breyfogle, and *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration, and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim* by Susan W. Hardwick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Molokan members of the American melting pot also published books about the history of their own people, for example *Molokans in America* by John K. Berokoff (Hacienda Heights: UMCA Library, 1987) and *A Stroll Through Russiantown* by George W. Mohoff, Jack P. Volkoff, and Sada J. Volkoff (Published by G.W. Mohoff and P. Valov, 1996).

zeal they once had, and some others, such as Old and New Israel, *Khristovshchina* (Christ-faith), and the *Skoptsy* (Castrates), practically disintegrated,⁹ the Jehovahs-II'inites exist up to this day, and keep on producing and distributing their literature, making converts, and living their way.¹⁰

The early history and the doctrine of the movement remained largely focused upon the figure of its founder, Nikolai Il'in, who was also the sole author of the writings that have been revered as revelation, studied, and spread by generations of his followers. Therefore the present work will be chronologically focused on the lifetime of Nikolai Il'in, although data on predecessors of Jehovahs-II'inites as well as materials regarding the later history and development of the group will be used as needed.

A secretive and closed society, the II'inites regard the distribution of their teacher's message throughout the world as a sacred duty. They look forward to the establishment of the peaceful and happy kingdom of Jehovah with its capital city in Jerusalem and personal bodily immortality for themselves as inhabitants of the kingdom.

In spite of difficulties of a legal and economic character, II'inites, who live in various parts of the Russian Federation, in Ukraine, and the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, try to revive and intensify their missionary outreach, taking advantage of every opportunity.

This thesis attempts to trace the transformation of a small Russian sectarian movement from a mere borrowing of the ideas of late German chiliastic Pietism to a separate community of believers who managed to develop a very innovative theology, ecclesiology, code of conduct, proselytizing strategies, and an amazing internal coherence, sense of unity and common goals. The notion of a strong Pietistic influence on Russian religiosity in Alexandrine times is a

⁹ On those old native Russian sects see A. I. Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism in Russia (1860-1917)*, E. Dunn, tr.; S. P. Dunn, ed. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982).

¹⁰ See publications in modern Russian and Kazakh press: Elena Kulikova, "Eres' ne proshla" (Heresy has not gotten through), *Ural'skie Tamozhennye Vesti* (The Urals Customs Herald), (2 February 2000); Bolatbek Batyrbala "Beseduem s nebom na ty. Chleny 'il'intsev-iegovistov' schitaiut sebia chelovekobogami" ("Talking with Heaven Without Ceremony. Members of the Jehovahs-II'inite Community Consider Themselves Men-Gods"), *Diapazon*, no. 58 (24 July 2001); News Section, *Bigotry Monitor*, Vol. 1, no. 13, (5 October 2001); retrieved from www.fsumonitor.com/stories/100501Russia.shtml, URL accurate as of 02 April 2006.

commonplace.¹¹ However, the role of this influence on folk religiosity and sectarian groups has received less scholarly attention. A detailed case study of a particular instance of transformation of Pietistic influence into an autochthonous sectarian group has hardly ever been undertaken. However, in the opinion of the author, such a case study will serve as both a contribution to the history of ideas, especially since the scholarly and public interest in apocalypticism and millenarianism is experiencing a renaissance, and as an illustration of the internal logic and mechanisms of survival of a sectarian movement in the modern and late modern period.

Jehovists-Il'inites may rightfully be called a "religion of resistance" as understood and described by Bruce Lincoln. In his book *The Holy Terrors* Lincoln says: "Such ideologies and institutions – which I would term 'religions of resistance' – result from the inevitable failure of the religion of the status-quo to permeate and persuade all segments of society."¹² The continuing appeal and persuasiveness of Il'in's doctrine appear to be of extreme importance whenever the survival and stability of a religion of resistance is at stake. Russian Jehovism, a movement in constant opposition to the dominant religious milieu, came up with a strong and coherent discourse of an alternative purpose and identity that possessed sufficient persuasive potential and power of resistance to endure and survive the direct and indirect pressure of the status-quo ideology.

¹¹ See A.N. Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia pri Aleksandre I* (Petrograd: Ogni, 1916); E.V. Molostvova. *Iegovisty. Zhizn' i sochineniia kapitana Il'ina* (S. Peterburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1914); James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

¹² Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors. Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 82.

CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE AND SOURCES

Literature in the Russian language

The available literature about the Il'inites is small and almost entirely consists of materials written in the Russian language. The first to start writing about Il'in and his sect were his natural opponents, Orthodox priests and anti-sectarian missionaries. Needless to say, the main goal of their efforts was to refute the heresy or to suggest the means of suppressing it. The earliest articles about the Il'inites appeared in the local church bulletin of the Perm diocese in the Urals in 1867.¹ Nikolai Ivanovich Ivanovskii, a theology professor at the Orthodox Kazan Academy was one writer who devoted a series of articles to the Il'inites. The first batch of his materials about the Jehovahists was published in 1876 in the Orthodox journal *Pravoslavnyi Sobesednik* (*The Orthodox Companion*).² Further articles by Ivanovskii appeared in the specialized journal for missionary workers *Missionerskoe Obozrenie* (*The Missionary Review*) around 1900 when the author undertook a missionary rally over Upper Volga and the Urals, the region where the Il'inite population was concentrated at that time.³ The Il'inites were not the primary object of Ivanovskii's missionary effort, but certainly were among those who annoyed and puzzled him most.

Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich was another Orthodox theology professor who set apart a chapter for the Jehovahists in his *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov* (*Review of Russian Sects and Their Fractions*) published in 1910.⁴ Both authors regarded the Jehovahists-Il'inites as a bizarre and fanatical sect, a creation of the insane imagination of Captain Il'in, a movement with no theological merits or rational basis whatsoever. In fact, both writers rather tended to exclude the Il'inites from the number of Christian denominations. Neither of them came up with any

¹ A. Maksimov, "Kapitan Il'in i ego posledovateli", *Permskiiia eparkhial'nyiia vedomosti*, 1867, No. 24.

² Nikolai Ivanovich Ivanovskii, "Materialy dlia kharakteristiki sekty, izv. pod imenem "Sionskaia Vest'." *Pravoslavnyi Sobesednik*, 1876. Vol. 2, 91.

³ Nikolai Ivanovich Ivanovskii, "O sekte "Obshchestvo Desnykh" ili "Sionskoi Vesti. (Dve sudebnykh ekspertizy)." *Missionerskoe Obozrenie* (January-April 1899). "Moe puteshestvie na Ural i ural'skie sektanty iegovisty" *Missionerskoe Obozrenie* (February 1900).

⁴ Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich, *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov* (Khar'kov: Tipografiia Gubernskago Pravleniia, 1910).

comprehensible idea of why the sect had appeared and what it might have offered to its followers that Orthodoxy or other denominations possibly failed to offer. Butkevich was not even sure where to locate the Il'inites within the traditional Russian Orthodox division of heretical movements into mystical and rational ones. He saw that in Jehovahism "extreme mysticism is mixed with the most primitive materialism" and agreed with Ivanovskii that Il'in's doctrine was nothing more than a "delirium." Occasional articles on the Il'inites appeared in other Orthodox periodicals of the pre-Revolutionary period, especially those published in the Urals, but their contents were usually limited to brief information on the movement and reports submitted by parish priests about its spread in a particular area.⁵

Another type of literature on the movement is represented by secular and liberal writers. The Russian secular liberal literature on sectarians of that time is characterized by a certain pro-sectarian disposition displayed by the authors. The most thorough and detailed account of the life of Nikolai Il'in and his early followers was written by Elena V. Molostvova (d. 1936) and published under the aegis of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in 1914 with the title *Iegovisty. Zhizn' i sochineniia kapitana Il'ina. Vozniknoveniie sekty i eia razvitie (Jehovists. Life and Works of Captain Il'in. Origin of the Sect and its Development)*.⁶ Indeed, most of the book, 10 chapters out of 12, is devoted to the biography of Il'in, while the society of his disciples did not get much attention. The editor of the book was a famous left-wing journalist and researcher of Russian religious dissent Aleksandr Stepanovich Prugavin (1850-1920). His *Monastyrskiiia tiur'my v bor'be s sektantstvom (Monastic Prisons and Their Fight with Sectarianism)* mentions both Nikolai Il'in and Maksim Rudometkin among sectarian leaders who spent long years in ecclesiastical jail⁷ and highlights the inhumane and inquisitional character of this method of "correction" of heretics. The book by Molostvova was written with sympathy for the Il'inites whom (along with other sectarians) the author apparently considered unconscious allies of the

⁵ See P.B., "Mestnyia staroobriadcheskiiia i drugiia sekty." *Permskiiia Eparkhial'nyiia Vedomosti* (March, 1894).

⁶ E.V. Molostvova. *Iegovisty. Zhizn' i sochineniia kapitana Il'ina* (S. Peterburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1914).

⁷ Prugavin, *Monastyrskiiia tiur'my v bor'be s sektantstvom* (The Hague – Paris: Mouton, 1970), 58-59.

powers of progress and reform in their struggle with the outdated and retrograde social structure of the Empire. Molostvova visited Leo Tolstoi in his estate in Iasnaia Poliana and shared with him her first sketches of the Jehovahists. Molostvova enjoyed the friendship and co-operation of the Il'inites who helped her to collect materials, and willingly shared their stories and memoirs. No wonder that copies of her book are still kept in many worship groups of the Il'inites as a rare example of what they regard as an objective and honest account of their teacher's life and doctrine written by an outsider. Molostvova traced the origins of the Il'inites to European mysticism, to the influence of the German mystic Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817), and to Russian religious enthusiasm and toleration during Alexander I's reign (r. 1801-1825).⁸

An interesting and unusual, although highly controversial view of Il'in, his doctrine and followers was articulated by the famous Russian psychiatrist Vladimir Bekhterev (1857-1927). In his course of lectures on mental suggestion and its role in social life delivered at the Military Medical Academy in Saint-Petersburg, Bekhterev classified the spread of the Jehovahist sect as a "psychopathological epidemic" along with instances of mass hallucinations, medieval epidemics of convulsions and religious hysteria, and witchcraft and demonic-possession.⁹ Apart from the obvious ethical ambiguity of such a claim, it should be noted that Bekhterev never had any first-hand experience with Il'in or Jehovahists as psychiatric patients. He never produced a specific medical case involving a Jehovahist patient, let alone a mass epidemic. Besides, a mass hysteria is called that because it affects a mass or a group of people, usually in a defined geographical location. This is certainly not the case with Jehovahists-Il'inites. They have now existed for more than 150 years and have maintained amazing stability in their communities; they have never been a significant portion of population in any area and stand out for the special place that they devote in their world view to logic and empirical knowledge. However, collective mutual suggestion undoubtedly played a role in the endurance and spread of Jehovahism. Here we refer to the elaborate and effective rhetoric and a unique set of preaching techniques and practices that

⁸ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 17-28.

⁹ Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev, *Suggestion and its Role in Social Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

contribute to the cohesion of Il'inite communities. Bekhterev wrote: "this sectarian doctrine, or more precisely, delirium, despite its striking absurdity, nevertheless finds many followers."¹⁰ We intend to demonstrate that the world outlook that might have seemed "delirium" to a sceptical medical doctor, has its internal logic and was able to endure and develop under highly adverse circumstances precisely due to the fact that it made sense to the followers of Nikolai Il'in.

In the Soviet period Jehovahists were never a focus of any systematic scholarly work. Aleksandr Il'ich Klibanov, a prominent Soviet researcher of Russian religious dissent, repeatedly mentions Il'in and his eschatology along with Maksim Rudometkin in the context of a major work on religious utopia in Russia, *Narodnaia sotsial'naia utopia v Rossii (Popular Social Utopia in Russia)*.¹¹ The book treats *Obshchee upovanie* (The Common Hope), the communist group founded by Akinfii Popov, the "Brotherly Love" group headed by Nikolai Popov and the common-purse communities of Ivan Grigor'ev and Timofei Bondarev, to name just the most prominent ones. Klibanov wrote from the Marxist viewpoint and emphasized the communist tendencies of Russian sectarianism. Obviously, Il'inites' or Maksimists' communitarian aspirations and social focus did not allow Klibanov to consider them proto-Communists. Yet, their expectations of the coming new and just world allowed Klibanov to classify them as utopian, and, therefore, as seekers of a just social order.

A modern Soviet author Aleksei Trofimovich Moskalenko wrote about the Il'inites in his books *Sovremennyi iegovizm (Contemporary Jehovahism)* and *Istoriia i deiatel'nost' khristianskikh sekt (History and Activities of Christian Sects)*. However, the main topic of his books is not Jehovahists-Il'inites, but the denomination of Jehovah's Witnesses. Moskalenko, contrary to all historical evidence, links the two groups together and regards Il'in as the predecessor of American Russelites. Moskalenko apparently has not had any interaction with the

¹⁰ Bekhterev, *Suggestion*, 124

¹¹ See Aleksandr Il'ich Klibanov, *Narodnaia sotsial'naia utopia v Rossii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1978).

Il'inites and his main source on their doctrine was the book by Molostvova which he extensively cited.¹²

Interestingly enough, the idea of a possible influence of the Russian Jehovahists on the Watchtower Society and the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses was raised in a few publications in the Russian popular and church press.¹³ However, apart from using Jehovah as a name of God, and their antitrinitarianism and millenarian expectations, their similarity does not go too far, and there is no historical evidence available to support such a connection.

Another aspect of Il'in's teachings, his emphasis on the restoration of true Judaism and the synthesis of Judaism with Christianity, drew the attention of Savelii Dudakov, a Russian-born Israeli writer. His recent book, *Paradoksy i prichudy filosemitizma v Rossii (Paradoxes and Oddities of the Philosemitism in Russia)*, addresses this issue.¹⁴ Dudakov, who calls Il'in "an apostle of universal love," was fascinated by numerous Jewish elements within his doctrine and located Jehovahism within Russian "philosemitic" movements, along with *Subbotniki* (Sabbatarians), *Gery* (a group of ethnic Russians converted to rabbinic Judaism) and the already mentioned utopian community of Timofei Bondarev. Although it cannot be denied that references to Jews and Jewish scripture are extremely frequent in Il'in's writings, philosemitism would not be the correct term to describe his relation to the Jews. The Jews Il'in so much revered were not the Jews of the *shtetl* (a Jewish town or ghetto in Eastern Europe) or urban centers of the Empire, and the Judaism he sought to incorporate into his system was not the rabbinic or Hassidic practices he could see around him. Of both the former and the latter Il'in was very critical, if not hostile, although not any more so than he was hostile towards the Orthodox church. Rather, he dreamed of the ideal Jews of the past, prophets who spoke with Jehovah face to face, and the lost ten tribes of Israel who, according to Il'in, inhabit the hidden and mysterious Land of the Living and will re-appear to help Jehovah in his last battle with Satan.

¹² Aleksandr Trofimovich Moskalenko, *Sovremennyi Iegovizm* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, Sibirskoe otdelenie, 1971) and *Istoriia i deiatel'nost' khristianskikh sekt* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, Sibirskoe otdelenie, 1978).

¹³ Aleksandr Eliseev, "Svidetel'stvo o Svideteliakh," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (28 November 2001).

¹⁴ Savelii Dudakov, *Paradoksy i prichudy filosemitizma v Rossii. Ocherki* (Moscow: RGGU, 2000).

Literature in English and other languages

There is very little written about the Il'inites in English. Probably the first English-speaking person to learn about Il'in was a British traveler and journalist W.H. Dixon who visited Il'in during the latter's confinement in the Solovetskii monastery in 1869. Dixon expressed the hope that following the end of the explicitly reactionary and authoritarian reign of Nicholas I (r. 1825-1855) Russia would start its move towards tolerance and freedom. He was especially interested in religious freedoms and religious dissent. Dixon described his short conversation with Il'in in his book *Free Russia*. A number of chapters of his book are devoted to religious dissenters, from Old Believers to inmates of monastic dungeons. Dixon was touched by Il'in's dignity, sincerity and steadfastness, and even tried to petition before authorities on Il'in's behalf, though without success.¹⁵

A small section in Frederick Conybeare's *Russian Dissenters* is devoted to the Il'inites.¹⁶ The author translated the name of the movement as The Righthand Brotherhood and was entirely dependent upon Ivanovskii in his description and assessment of the Il'inites. Conybeare was quite right in pointing to the apocalyptic foundation of Il'in's discourse and his view of Christ as an incarnation of Jehovah, a Christological idea Conybeare traces back to the ancient heresy of Patripassianism.¹⁷ The author takes note of the ambiguity of Il'in's "philosemitism," for, in spite of the fact that the movement "is... strongly tinged with Judaism", "at the same time Jews are called a congregation of Satan." Conybeare was incorrect, though, when he followed Ivanovskii in ascribing the custom of circumcision to the Il'inites.

Serge Bolshakoff, a Russian emigré writer and church historian, mentioned Il'in and the Jehovahists (he called them the Fraternity of the Just) in his *Russian Nonconformity* under a small section on eschatological sects. Bolshakoff is right in linking the Il'inites with the Molokans

¹⁵W.H. Dixon, *Free Russia*, Vols. 1-2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1870).

¹⁶Frederick S. Conybeare. *Russian Dissenters*, Harvard Theological Studies 10 (New York: Russel and Russel, 1962), 330-331.

¹⁷ Refers to a belief that God the Father and God the Son are different aspects of the same being. Therefore, God the Father suffered on the cross.

(Maksimists), but exceedingly simplistic in calling them “Communist in outlook and puritanical, unitarian, nonritualist, and anticlerical in religion.”¹⁸ The thesis about communist or communitarian tendencies among the Il’inites is utterly groundless, although mutual aid has always been important among them. Describing the Il’inites with the term “puritanical” may lead astray, rather than shed light on who they are. Also, their denial of the traditional Orthodox view of the Divine is not tantamount to “unitarianism,” for they admit plurality of gods and the possibility of god-like perfection for humans.

The doctrine and sect of Nikolai Il’in was sometimes mentioned by Western scholars in a context of some broader discourse. For example, Lev Gillet, a French Orthodox priest and theologian, in agreement with Savelii Dudakov, considers Il’inites a sect of Judaizing Christianity in his book on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and he calls them “a kind of Old Testament Christianity.”¹⁹

A brief, but accurate treatment of both the history and teachings of the Il’inites appeared in the article “Apocalypticism in Eastern Europe” by Eugene Clay, a U.S. researcher of Russian sectarianism and Old Belief, published in the 3rd Volume of the *Encyclopaedia of Apocalypticism*.²⁰ Clay places the Jehovahists within the Russian apocalyptic tradition, but at the same time correctly points to the influence of Pietistic thought on Nikolai Il’in and his ideas.

For the purposes of the present research project, the author extensively used the book by Molostvova for the biography of Nikolai Il’in while the publications of Orthodox missionaries provided the information on the initial period of Il’inite history. Numerous newspaper articles on the Jehovahists in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian, Kazakh and Kyrgyz press contributed to the understanding of the reasons why the Il’inite apocalyptic discourse proved to be so viable and able to resist and survive under the enormous pressure of the status-quo ideologies.

¹⁸ Serge Bolshakoff. *Russian Nonconformity: The Story of “Unofficial” Religion in Russia* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 112.

¹⁹ Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah: Studies in the Relationship between Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2003), 238.

²⁰ Eugene Clay, “Apocalypticism in Eastern Europe,” *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 3:311.

Writings of the German Pietist Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling that influenced Nikolai Il'in so profoundly are, of course, among the main sources, of which *Die Siegesgeschichte des christlichen Religion (The Victorious Story of the Christian Religion)* is of special importance. Both the German original²¹ and a Russian translation²² have been extensively used. Tatjana Högy pointed out the fact that early Russian translations of Jung-Stilling were far from being accurate, and in some instances paraphrase the original text rather than translate it. Thus, peculiarities and vocabulary of the Russian translation are to be considered when evaluating the venues and character of the influence that the book exerted on Russian readership.²³

Writings of Il'in

This thesis is based mainly on the writings by Nikolai Il'in from different times. A number of these the present author has in his possession either in printed form or as manuscripts. Another source the author relied upon was the works by Johann-Heinrich Jung-Stilling that were translated into Russian in the Alexandrine time, particularly *The Victorious Story*. The author firmly believes that without a clear understanding of Jung-Stilling's millenarianism one cannot make much sense out of the Il'inite doctrine.

The rich literary heritage of Il'in himself is a primary source of utmost importance. His literary activity started around 1840 when Il'in published a few articles on religious topics in *Maiak (Lighthouse)*, a journal published by Stepan Anisimovich Burachek (1800-1876), a military engineer, general of the Russian army, and editor. The first original work, *Sionskaia vest' (The Message of Zion)* in three parts was written by Il'in in 1850-1851. The book is still kept in many Il'inite groups, but it is considered outdated and improved by later works of the

²¹ Jung-Stilling, Johann Heinrich, *Erster Nachtrag zur Siegesgeschichte der christlichen Religion in einer gemeinnützigen Erklärung der Offenbarung Johannis* (Nürnberg, im Verlag der Raw'schen Buchhandlung, 1805).

²² *Pobednaia povest' ili torzhestvo very khristianskoi, predstavlennoe v Apokalipsise, ob'iasnennom na pol'zu obshchuiu I.G. Iungom. Perevod s nemetskogo. 1807go goda.* (Manuscript: no publication data). Kindly provided by the Hilandar Research Library, Ohio State University, and Hilandar Orthodox Monastery of Mount Athos, Greece.

²³ On Russian translations of Jung-Stilling see Tatjana Högy, *Jung-Stilling und Russland. Untersuchungen über Jung-Stillings Verhältnis zu Russland und zum "Osten" in der Regierungszeit Kaiser Alexanders I* (Siegen: Im Selbstverlag der J.G. Herder-Bibliothek Siegerland e.V., 1984), 72-97

prophet. Il'in took advantage of any opportunity to write while he was imprisoned, and most books now in use among the Jehovahists date from the 1860s to 1880s, that is, his sojourn in the monastic confinement and the decade Il'in spent in exile upon his liberation. The most important book Il'in wrote in the Solovetskii monastery is called *Luch sveta dlia rassveta* (*A Ray of Life for the Dawn*). It consists of nine parts and contains both prose and poems. Many of the prayers and verses taken from *Luch sveta dlia rassveta* are still recited and sung by the Jehovahists at their worship meetings. The relative freedom of exile was especially productive for Nikolai Il'in's work, and practically all the booklets and brochures the Il'inites distribute among outsiders were written by him in the 1880s. However, not all of the books were meant for distribution. Some, such as *Samoe verneishee sredstvo sdelat'sia bessmertnym vsiakomu, kto tol'ko iskrenne sego pozhelaet* (*The Most Sure Way to Become Immortal for Everyone Who Sincerely So Wishes*) was given only to those who showed considerable interest in the Il'inite teachings and already knew the basics.

Nikolai Il'in authored dozens of small pamphlets (2-40 pages each) on various aspects of his doctrine. They are referred to as *razdatochnye* (for distribution) by the Jehovahists. These pamphlets were initially addressed to the Theosophical Society of Elena Blavatsky, the Jewish community of Paris, "all educated people," and so on. A number of the *razdatochnye* brochures are now posted to be read and freely downloaded at the Jehovahist website www.svetoch.net.²⁴

Finally, an article by the author of the present thesis, that resulted from a period of intensive field studies conducted in 2003-2004, should be mentioned.²⁵ The article briefly deals with the biography of Il'in, his doctrine, practices and history of the movement after Il'in up to the present. Printed and written sources, including manuscripts, gathered at that time will be extensively used in this thesis.

²⁴ URL accurate as of 4 April 2006.

²⁵ Sergey V. Petrov, "Jehovists-II'inites: A Russian Millenarian Movement," *Nova Religio*, Vol. 9, number 3 (March 2006), 80-91.

Historiography of Millenarianism

There is a growing awareness of the continuing presence of apocalyptic and millenarian ideas even within “mainstream” Christian thought. Douglas Shantz, a scholar of Christian apocalypticism, millenarianism, and German Pietism, notes: “apocalyptic and millennial ideas are far more central to western historical consciousness than was previously recognized.”²⁶

The genesis, nature and premises of millenarian movements have always been controversial. At first materialistic theories prevailed. They explained the phenomenon as a product of certain economic and political conditions, primarily those of deprivation, major political shifts, industrial development and their influence in causing psychological instability in masses of people. Douglas Shantz called this “the first generation” of scholarly study of millenarianism.²⁷

There are still many researchers who attempt to explain the phenomenon of apocalypticism by either negative factors of a common experience of a catastrophe (Michael Barkun), feelings of dissatisfaction or anxiety (Ronald Reid), or the psychological proneness of certain audiences to exaggerated perception of calamities (Barry Brummett). This view is represented by Norman Cohn, who wrote:

...the many who for one reason or another could find no assured and recognized place – such people living in a state of chronic frustration and anxiety – formed the most impulsive and unstable elements in medieval society. Any disturbing, frightening or exciting event, ... anything in fact that disrupted the normal routine of social life – acted on these people with peculiar sharpness and called forth reactions of peculiar violence. And one way in which they attempted to deal with their common plight was to form a salvationist group under a messianic leader.²⁸

²⁶ Douglas H. Shantz, “Millennialism and Apocalypticism in Recent Historical Scholarship” in *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880* (Paternoster Press, 2004), 18.

²⁷ Ibidem, 24

²⁸ Cohn, *Pursuit*, 59-60.

So, a marginal population, conditions of extreme and unusual need or deprivation, and a charismatic leader are the necessary prerequisites of a millenarian movement, according to Cohn.

A second generation of scholarly study of apocalypticism was characterized by the growing understanding that apocalyptic and millenarian ideas are interwoven with much of the western religious, cultural and intellectual world view. It became obvious that the reductionist deprivation theory could not explain many instances of millenarian movements and expectations. This generation of scholarship is represented by J.F.C. Harrison, William Lamont, Marjorie Reeves, and Peter Toon.²⁹

More recent theories tend to ascribe the rise and development of millenarianism to the means of persuasion and rhetoric used by protagonists of those movements and to regard them as ideological constructs and products of creativity rather than mere expressions of material or psychological need. This view was suggested by Stephen O'Leary in his book *Arguing the Apocalypse*, a study focusing primarily on two cases of American millenarianism – the Millerite movement in 1830-40s and the millenarian and apocalyptic preaching of Hal Lindsey in 1970s. O'Leary argues that

...critics should view apocalyptic discourse as argument that is intended to persuade, focusing attention on specific interpretive practices. This emphasis on logic and rationality might seem misplaced to those disposed to view apocalypticism as an outbreak of irrationality or mass hysteria. However, ...such discourse often exhibits intense concern with the appearance of rationality and “logical” argument.³⁰

²⁹ Shantz, “Millennialism and Apocalypticism in Recent Historical Scholarship,” 28-29.

³⁰ Stephen O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse. A Theory of Millenarian Rhetoric* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 15.

O'Leary offered what he called a rhetorical theory of apocalypticism, with its focus on the internal logic of apocalyptic and millenarian discourse and the rhetorical techniques that contribute to its persuasive strength. Stephen O'Leary emphasized three pillars, or topoi, that the apocalyptic argument tends to be centered on – time, evil, and authority.³¹ O'Leary says that “evil and time are omnipresent and interrelated conditions of human existence... for all symbol systems that attempt to make ultimate sense of humanity's role in the cosmos.” The topos of time refers to “charismatic, textual, and interpretive authority and the politics of interpretation.”³² The role of rhetoric in the creation of a successful religious discourse is also noticed by Thomas J. Csordas in his book on Catholic Charismatics.³³

The millenarian discourse of Il'in is a remarkable example of a religious rhetoric that fully employed the three traditional topoi of apocalypticism, those of evil, time and authority. He made considerable use of logic, science and common sense in a successful attempt to persuade his audience.

At the same time Jehovahs-Il'inites may be regarded as a classical religion of resistance which had to resort to very elaborate preaching techniques and to a set of practices that helped them to survive. Jehovahs-Il'inites employed a maximalist approach to religion, using Bruce Lincoln's terms, and their history supports his controversial supposition that “the more thoroughly the community's preferences can be encompassed within the religious, the more stable the community becomes.”³⁴

Methodology

A thorough historical and critical reading of both primary and secondary sources is the main method used by the author. This critical approach to all of the sources is required due to their tendentious nature. The theory of religious rhetoric is also a perfect tool to make sense out

³¹ Ibidem, Chapter Two, 20-61.

³² Ibidem, 20.

³³ Thomas J. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997).

³⁴ Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, 56.

of them. As we shall see, Il'in's millenarian discourse sought to interpret the three main questions that every apocalyptic ideology has to confront, according to Stephen O'Leary. Nikolai Il'in attempted to offer an innovative and highly original theodicy and a solution to the problem of the existence of evil; he presented a strong claim of authority based upon his status as a prophet with his critical approach to the Bible, and emphasis on logic, science, and common sense; finally, he developed a new sacred chronology and an interpretation of time and space that fitted with his teachings.

The chapter divisions of the thesis have as their object to show the dynamics of the emergence and development of the millenarian sect of Jehovahists-Il'inites and to place it within a historical and social context. In order to achieve this goal it was necessary to examine the pre-history of the movement, the life and work of its founder, Nikolai Il'in, the sources of his ideas, the influences he was exposed to, and the reasons for implementation of distinctly Il'inite ideas and practices.

The second chapter of the thesis is devoted to the pre-history of Russian millenarianism. It covers the Pietistic influence on Russian religious thought, particularly strong during the reign of Alexander I. It also considers the activities of the Russian Bible Society and the translations of Jung-Stilling. The emergence of the first millenarian movements in Russia is also considered. These include the sect of *dukhonostsy* (Spirit-bearers) and the millenarian enthusiasm among Molokans towards 1836, the year of the beginning of the millennium according to Bengel and Jung-Stilling.

The third chapter includes a biographical sketch of Nikolai Il'in. The author seeks to show how Il'in's family circumstances, environment and professional interests contributed to the creation of his millenarian sect. This section also deals with the history of the Il'inite movement at the early stage of the movement, that is, approximately during the lifetime of Il'in (d. 1890) and somewhat beyond. When needed, biographical and other data on Maksim Rudometkin, leader of the rival millenarian movement of Molokan-Jumpers, were also brought up. This

chapter also touches upon the place of the Il'inite movement within the comparative typology of Christian denominations suggested by Ernst Troeltsch.

The fourth chapter examines the Pietistic element within Il'in's millenarian discourse. It deals with distinctively Pietistic ideas or ideas that were adopted by Il'in via Pietism. These ideas include the concept of unification of faiths under the principle of love; belief in the coming millennial kingdom of Christ on Earth and dramatically improved living conditions of humankind; biblical criticism; special interest in the book of Apocalypse; the expected conversion of the Jews; acknowledgement of the special role Jews play in world history; belief in the special significance of Russia in world history; a positive attitude to science; and finally a sharp critique of historical Christian churches. This section also looks into other ideas of western Christianity that Il'in drew from, and personalities that played a role in his formation as a religious thinker, such as the mysticism of Jakob Böhme, the spiritualism of George Fox and the Quakers, and the religious enthusiasm of Baroness von Krüdener.

The fifth chapter deals with the millenarian rhetoric used by Il'in and some original practices that helped to shape the Pietist heritage and preserve the stability of the movement up to this day. This section covers the interpretation by Il'in of the three topoi of apocalyptic rhetoric – time, evil and authority. It also investigates religious practices such as veneration of their sacred scriptures by Il'inites; proselytizing only through dissemination of writings with explicit prohibition of oral preaching and religious argument; the closed and secretive character of the Jehovist community; and kosher dietary restrictions.

The Conclusion summarizes the main ideas and findings of the thesis. The Bibliography contains a list of primary and secondary sources used in this thesis. Transliteration of Russian personal names, geographical names, titles of books and periodicals with the exception of the most commonly used ones (Moscow, Urals etc.) follows ALA-LC Romanization tables approved by the Library of Congress and the American Library Association.³⁵

³⁵ *ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts* (Library of Congress, 1997).

CHAPTER 2. BEGINNINGS OF RUSSIAN MILLENARIANISM

Introduction

The history of millenarianism is the story of one of the most fascinating and controversial intellectual developments in Christian thought. It is all the more interesting that millenarian expectations have implications that go far beyond religion *sensu stricto*.

This chapter will look at the current scholarship on German Pietism, particularly, the discussion regarding its definition. This is important because the geographical and chronological frameworks of this research go beyond German-speaking lands and Lutheran religion. The present thesis supports a more inclusive and broader definition of Pietism since my research deals with the repercussions and influence of Pietism outside its usual geographical area and somewhat beyond its chronological peak. Obviously, an adequate understanding of Pietism is impossible without taking into account the context. The deep and broad degree of mutual interaction of Pietism with other religious ideas in different cultural settings is proof of the great significance of Pietism for European intellectual history.

The chapter will then expose the pre-history of millenarianism in Russia, and explore the role of German Pietism in its emergence. As will be shown, a few indigenous millenarian movements appeared in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century as a product of infiltration of Pietistic ideas, particularly mystical insights of Württemberg chiliastic thinkers, immigration into the country of Swabian folk Pietists, and activities of the Russian Bible Society, that promulgated chiliastic ideas. On the other hand, all those influences fell on a good soil, which was prepared by the atmosphere of religious toleration under Alexander I, and by a pre-disposition of native sects of Russian religious dissent towards apocalypticism.

German Pietism

German Pietism was a movement that emerged in the latter half of the 17th century within Lutheran and Reformed churches, primarily in Germany, but also in The Netherlands and Scandinavia. The movement was deeply rooted in the Spiritualism of the radical Reformation, and the mysticism of Jakob Böhme and Johann Arndt. Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) is considered the pioneer and founder of the movement. Pietism, according to Johannes Wallmann, was characterized by certain millenarian tendencies from the beginning. Wallmann's definition of Pietism includes three key features – the development of an innovative conventicle structure (*ecclesiolae in ecclesia*), the optimistic belief that better times await the church of Christ (*Hoffnung besserer Zeiten*), and a special emphasis on personal devotion and Bible reading.¹ “Pietists emphasized godly living over pure doctrine, piety over faith, sanctification over justification, and personal Bible reading over Sunday worship and sacraments.”²

There is currently no agreement on the geographical and chronological boundaries of the Pietist movement. According to Jonathan Strom,³ there are three main approaches to the definition of Pietism, depending on how broadly the term is applied. The most broad and inclusive approach is represented, among others, by Martin Brecht and Ernst Stoeffler.⁴ This approach tends to include related or similar movements, such as “further Reformation” in The Netherlands, Puritanism and Methodism in England, the earlier activities of Johann Arndt, and movements that relate to German Lutheran Pietism only indirectly or to a small degree, such as Hassidism and Jansenism.

The second of the approaches strives to define Pietism in a narrower manner, limiting it to the German setting, and implying at least two main criteria: separate organizational forms (conventicles), and chiliastic expectations. One of the leading figures who advocate this

¹ See Johannes Wallmann, *Der Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

² Douglas H. Shantz, The dictionary entry on Pietism for *New Westminster Dictionary of Church History* (Westminster/John Knox, forthcoming).

³ See Jonathan Strom, “Problems and Promises of Pietism Research,” *Church History*, Vol. 71, no.3 (September 2002), 536-554.

⁴ See Martin Brecht, “Probleme der Pietismusforschung,” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History* 76 (1997), 227-237.

approach is Johannes Wallmann.⁵ Consequently, Pietism-related or typologically similar and simultaneous religious developments as well as such figures as Arndt are left outside the scope of Pietism proper.

The third approach suggests that Pietism actually appeared when the very term came into wider usage in Germany. This view advocates the narrowest application of the term Pietist and is mostly concentrated on German Lutheran Pietism in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This view was upheld by Hans Leube and Harry Yeide.⁶

Pietism is deeply interwoven into the fabric of European religious, social and political history and cannot be seen apart from this broader context. The topic of the present thesis best fits within the broad and inclusive definition of Pietism since this research deals with the repercussions and influences of Pietism outside of Germany and beyond the 18th century. This thesis illustrates the free, and, at times, whimsical interaction of ideas and mutual intellectual influences that know no national boundaries or chronological limitations. It should be pointed out that the use of the term “Pietism” to describe religious developments in Russia is appropriate, since “in the Baltic and eastern European countries where German Lutheranism also had strong ties, historians often employ [the term] Pietism widely.”⁷

As it was noted, eschatological motives were present already in early Pietist thought. However millennialism became increasingly prominent within radical Pietist thought. For example, Heinrich Horch (1652-1729), a Hessen Pietist and a Reformed theologian, promoted eschatological views in his 1712 *Mystische und Profetische Bibel (Mystical and Prophetical Bible)* which was “one of the most ambitious hermeneutical achievements of Hessen Pietism.”⁸ Horch “understood John’s Revelation as a prophetic portrayal of the principal events in the

⁵ See Johannes Wallmann, “Von Katechismuschristentum zum Bibelchristentum. Zu Bibelverständnis im Pietismus,” in *Die Zukunft des Schriftprinzips*, ed. Richard Ziegert (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 30-56.

⁶ See Hans Leube, “Pietismus,” in *Orthodoxie und Pietismus: Gesammelte Studien*, ed. Martin Schmidt (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1975), 113-128 and Harry Yeide *Studies in Classical Pietism: The Flowering of the Ecclesiola* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

⁷ Strom, “Problems and Promises”, 545.

⁸ Douglas H. Shantz, “The Millennial Study Bible of Heinrich Horch (1652-1729)” in Peter A. Lillback, ed., in *The Practical Calvinist. Essays in Honor of Dr. D. Clair Davis* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 391.

history of the church and the world,”⁹ an idea common to Pietistic millenarian theology. Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649-1726) and his wife Johanna Eleonora (1644-1724) were other champions of Pietistic chiliasm. According to Douglas Shantz the Petersens believed in a three-fold gospel, which included the gospel of the soon coming millennial kingdom of Christ along with the gospel of faith, and the eternal gospel of the restoration of all things.¹⁰

However, the stronghold of millenarian theology in Germany was Swabia/Württemberg. The famous chiliastic thinker Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) and his disciple Friedrich Christof Oetinger (1702-1782) represented the Swabian school of Pietism. Swabia was one of the strongholds of the German Peasants' War, and, consequently, of popular chiliasm from early on. It is little wonder that the Swabian Lutheran church was especially prone to Pietistic influence and millennialist interpretation of the Bible. Harry Yeide calls the Württemberg Lutheran church “the most ‘pietist’ church in the world.”¹¹ Historically, Swabian Pietism dates back to Philipp Jakob Spener’s stay in Württemberg in 1662. However, Ernest Stoeffler notes that “there was in Württemberg a strong native inclination toward personal piety”¹² from as early as the Lutheran Reformation of early 16th century. Hartmut Lehmann wrote that Pietism soon created an identity that required acceptance of the Pietistic interpretation of church history by all Pietists. This included acknowledgement of Spener’s merits as a man who continued the Reformation, and recognition of Bengel, especially in Württemberg, as a true successor of Spener. Being Pietist also usually presupposed following the teachings and example of local Pietist leaders, or, as Lehman calls them, “patriarchs.”¹³ Chiliasm was a part of this “patriarchal” tradition of the Württemberg Pietism.¹⁴

⁹ Ibidem, 392.

¹⁰ Douglas H. Shantz, “The Sixteenth Century Spiritualist Pedigree of Pietist Universalism: Johann Wilhelm Petersen’s Appeal to Hans Denck and David Joris,” a paper presented at the Sixteenth century Studies Conference, Toronto, ON (28-31 October 2004).

¹¹ Yeide, *The Flowering of the Ecclesiola*, 105.

¹² Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 92.

¹³ Hartmut Lehmann, *Pietismus und weltliche Ordnung in Württemberg vom 17. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969), 15.

¹⁴ Lehmann, *Pietismus und weltliche Ordnung*, 18

Pietism had the potential to become a sectarian movement from early on. This potential became realized in the Pietist immigrant communities in America, and, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, played a role in the emergence of the movement of Jehovist-II'inites in Russia.¹⁵

Johann Albrecht Bengel was the most prominent chiliast thinker of Swabian Pietism. His careful investigation of the prophetic biblical books allowed him, as he believed, to calculate the exact date of the beginning of the millennium. Bengel never claimed any special personal revelation or prophetic abilities. For him, his calculations were only the result of careful, thoughtful and scrupulous study of the biblical text coupled with the knowledge of mathematics.¹⁶

The influence of Swabian Pietism, as we shall see, played a major role in the formation and emergence of millenarian movements indigenous to Russia.

Pietism Comes to Russia

According to James Billington, German Pietism was “filtering into Russia ever since it began to dominate ecclesiastical life in Germany in the early eighteenth century.”¹⁷ However, it became an important part of Russian religious discourse only during the reign of Alexander I (1804-1825), a monarch for whom his personal quest of religious truth was of no less importance than the most burning issues of European politics.

Inasmuch as his status as the Orthodox monarch and the ultimate protector of the Orthodox faith allowed him, Alexander I strove for religious tolerance and the unity of all Christians. Alexander permitted the Russian branch of the British Bible Society to be founded in Saint Petersburg in 1812. The Russian Bible Society proved to be one of the agents of the popularization of Pietistic mysticism in all classes of Russian society. Among its founding

¹⁵ See Donald F. Durnbaugh, “Work and Hope: The Spirituality of the Radical Pietist Communitarians,” *Church History*, Vol. 39:1, (March 1970): 72-90, and Mark Holloway, *Utopian Communities in America* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), 31-52.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 99.

¹⁷ James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 277.

members in Russia were Protestant pastors, an Armenian priest, Orthodox hierarchs and lay people with varying degrees of involvement in religious affairs.¹⁸ Prince Aleksandr Golitsyn, a member of one of the most influential and noble families of Russia, and the supervisor of foreign confessions in Russia, was elected President of the Bible Society. Prince Golitsyn converted to a kind of pietistic Christianity upon reading the New Testament. As Billington wrote, “he began to feel that the Christian sectarians – particularly Protestant Pietists – were better practitioners of New Testament Christianity than the Orthodox. He had particular regard for the Moravian Brethren’s community.”¹⁹ He then resigned from the position of the Procurator of the Holy Synod to be closer to those whom he apparently considered true Christians.²⁰ The Society, along with publishing Bibles, New Testaments and separate biblical books in various languages of the Russian Empire (Polish, German, Armenian, Greek, Tartar), also translated them into dialects with no previous literary tradition whatsoever (those of indigenous tribes of Siberia), and prepared a Russian translation of the New Testament to give to those who were not very well versed in the sacred Slavonic language of the Russian Orthodox church.²¹

The endeavors of the Bible Society were often received with great enthusiasm not only by more educated people, but also by the peasantry. No wonder that in the areas inhabited by sectarians, particularly Spiritual Christians (Molokans and Doukhobors to name the most prominent ones), the efforts of the Society and the kind of literature promoted by Aleksandr Labzin, writer, translator and editor, were especially welcome. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Pypin (1833-1904), a Russian historian and a researcher of the Alexandrine epoch, wrote about “numerous so-called ordinary folks” among supporters of the Russian Bible Society. He mentioned instances when peasants from two villages of the Voronezh province donated substantial sums to the Society.²² This may be better explained by the fact that the Voronezh

¹⁸ A.N. Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia pri Aleksandre I* (Petrograd: Ogni, 1916), 27-28.

¹⁹ Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*, 281.

²⁰ Ibidem, 281.

²¹ Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia*, 37-98.

²² Ibidem, 45.

province was densely populated by Spiritual Christians. Furthermore, Pypin noted the popularity of the Russian Bible even among Old Believers.²³

Even before the Bible Society began its operation in Russia, in 1806, a prominent Russian freemason, mystic and translator of Jung-Stilling into Russian, Aleksandr Fedorovich Labzin (1766-1825), started a journal called *Vestnik Siona (The Herald of Zion)*. The journal promoted ideas of the “religion of the heart,” the unity of all true Christians with no regard to denominational differences under the banner of a “higher form” of Christianity. The journal was soon closed down under the pressure of ecclesiastical censorship, but the activity of the Bible Society gave a new opportunity to Labzin when he was elected a member of the Board of Directors of the Society in 1814. In 1817 the publication of *The Herald of Zion* was resumed at the request of Tsar Alexander who became a sponsoring subscriber.²⁴

Johann-Heinrich Jung-Stilling

The works of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817) were also becoming known throughout the Russian Empire. Jung-Stilling, born into a poor family of a village tailor in Westphalia, became one of the most multi-faceted figures of late Pietism. He got a doctorate in medicine from the University of Strassburg in 1770 and soon became a famous eye surgeon. Jung-Stilling’s autobiography (first part was published in 1777) was an immense literary success, and other books followed. In 1778 Jung-Stilling became a professor of economics at Kaiserlautern, and in 1784 at Heidelberg. In 1786 Jung-Stilling was appointed professor of economics at Marburg. He was able to combine his academic career with medical practice and literary work. In 1803 Jung-Stilling accepted the position of private counselor to the Elector of Baden, and moved to Heidelberg and in 1806 to Karlsruhe. He died in Karlsruhe in 1817.²⁵

²³ Ibidem, 104.

²⁴ Ibidem, 136-137; Billington, *The Icon and the Axe*, 285.

²⁵ See a list of Jung-Stilling’s biographical data on the web site of Die Jung-Stilling-Gesellschaft (The Jung-Stilling Society) in Siegen, Germany, at http://www.jung-stilling-archiv.de/Faltblatt_engl.htm (URL accurate as of 17 April 2006).

Some of Jung-Stilling's books, especially at the later period of his literary career, had a strong mystical leaning. These were the books that directly contributed to the emergence of Russian millenarianism. In 1794-1796 he published the novel *Homesickness (Das Heimweh)* containing eschatological ideas. The *Grey Man (Der Graue Mann)* was published as a series between 1795 and 1816. The main protagonist of the book, Menace Eastern-Light, a man in a grey suit, was a mysterious person commissioned to spread true Christianity and prepare men for the imminent coming of Christ. *The Victorious Story of the Christian Religion (Die Siegesgeschichte des christlichen Religion)*, published in 1799, was a popular commentary of the *Apocalypse of John*. According to Jung-Stilling, the churches of Chapters 2 and 3 of the *Apocalypse* represented a periodization of Christian history which would culminate in 1836 with the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. Finally, *Scenes in the World of Spirits (Szenen aus dem Geisterreich)*, describing afterlife experiences, was published in 1795-1801.²⁶

Aleksandr Labzin, the publisher of *The Herald of Zion*, was one of the active translators of Jung-Stilling's writings into Russian. He translated and published *Scenes from the World of Spirits* in 1805²⁷, *The Grey Man* in 1806,²⁸ and *The Victorious Story* in 1815.²⁹ Another Russian writer, journalist and translator, Fedor Lubianovskii (1777-1869) translated *Homesickness*, which was published in 1817-1818.³⁰

Jung-Stilling, a contemporary of the French Revolution, was strongly opposed to its secularizing impact. He believed in the divine plan of history, and regarded the Revolution with its influences and subsequent Napoleonic wars as the fulfillment of the apocalyptic prophecies about end times.³¹ The Russian Emperor Alexander I with his political conservatism and deep personal interest in religious matters was for Jung-Stilling a providential figure who was capable

²⁶ Johann Heinrich Jungs, genannt Stilling, *sämmtliche Werke* (Stuttgart : J. Scheible, 1841-1842). See Volume 2 for *Scenes from the World of Spirits*, Volume 3 for *The Victorious Story*, Volumes 4 and 5 for *Homesickness*, Volumes 7 and 8 for *The Grey Man*.

²⁷ Genrikh Iung, *Prikliucheniia po smerti* (Sankt-Peterburg: V tipografii F. Drekhslera, 1805).

²⁸ Genrikh Iung, *Ugroz Svetovostokov* (Sankt-Peterburg: V imperatorskoi tipografii, 1806).

²⁹ Genrikh Iung, *Pobednaia povest' very khristianskoi* (Sankt-Peterburg: 1815).

³⁰ Genrikh Iung, *Toska po otchizne* (Moscow: V universitetskoi tipografii, 1817-1818).

³¹ Andrei Zorin, "Star of the East": The Holy Alliance and European Mysticism," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring 2003), 313-342.

of defeating Napoleon and reversing the revolutionary tendencies and social turbulence stirred up by the Revolution and war.

The German mystic and the Russian monarch met in person and held each other in high esteem. In his letter to a close friend Jung-Stilling wrote: “King Alexander told me... that he would support those things [activities of the Bible Society] with all his power, and generally would work faithfully for the Kingdom of God. He shook my hand, and said: we want to remain true to Him to death, we want to conclude this Alliance.”³²

Jung-Stilling used his influence so that The Holy Alliance, the union between conservative Christian monarchs of Europe, Alexander of Russia, Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia, and Franz of Austria, could be concluded in September, 1815.

At the beginning of his work Jung-Stilling gives credit to J.A. Bengel for discovering the key to the book of Revelation and generally follows his exegetical pattern. However, as was rightly noted by Alice Kuzniar, Jung-Stilling denounced Bengel’s assuredness that commentators may understand the divinely inspired text in its entirety and instead stated that the full understanding of the prophecies will be attained only after the second coming of Christ.³³

The world view of Jung-Stilling included important aspects of millenarian Pietism that later were borrowed, modified and used by Nikolai Il’in. The form these aspects took in Il’in’s discourse will be treated in detail in Chapter 4 of the present thesis. Jung-Stilling anticipated the unification of all “true Christians,” represented for him by the Philadelphian church of the Apocalypse (Rev. 3:7-8). Jung Stilling specifically mentioned Moravians, Mennonites, Separatists, Pietists, Methodists, and Quakers who were expected to form one community in brotherly love.³⁴

³² Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, *Briefe an Verwandte, Freunde und Fremde aus den Jahren 1787-1816* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1978), 157.

³³ Alice Kuzniar, “Philosophic Chiasm: Generating the Future or Delaying the End?” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 19, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985), 1-20.

³⁴ *Pobednaia povest’ ili torzhestvo very khristianskoi, predstavlennoe v Apokalipsise, ob’iasnennom na pol’zu obshchuiu I.G. Iungom. Pervod s nemetskogo. 1807go goda.* (Manuscript: no publication data), leaf 25.

Jung-Stilling looked forward to the conversion of the Jews to Christianity and their return to the land of Israel as a sign of the imminent millennium.³⁵ Jung-Stilling authored a call to Jews confirming their status as a chosen nation of God and urging them to accept Christ and unite with true Christians in one community.³⁶ He believed, as did F.C. Oetinger, that this unification and return of the Jews to Israel would be accompanied by restoration of the Jerusalem temple and the sacrificial cult.³⁷

Acknowledgement of a special role for Russia in future eschatological events was also prominent in Jung-Stilling's thought. In his *Homesickness* he wrote: "Russia prepares to play a great role."³⁸ Taking into account the political significance of Alexander I, Jung-Stilling saw the great role of Russia mainly through the prism of eschatological discourse. Jung-Stilling believed that at the end of time Russia would become the place of refuge for all "Philadelphian Christians."³⁹ This thought, first expressed in his successful novel *Homesickness*, found enthusiastic readership, especially among folk Pietists in Württemberg,⁴⁰ and stirred up Pietist emigration from Württemberg to southern Russia, which will be discussed at more length below.⁴¹

Inseparable from his political views were Jung-Stilling's expectations of the new world order and the coming millennium. The role of Jung-Stilling in the promotion and popularization of millenarian ideas in Russia cannot be overestimated. Jung-Stilling expressed his views on the Apocalypse in a book that was highly instrumental in the emergence of native Russian millenarianism, *The Victorious Story of the Christian Religion*. The direct influence of Jung-

³⁵ Jung-Stilling, Johann Heinrich, *Erster Nachtrag zur Siegesgeschichte der christlichen Religion in einer gemeinnützigen Erklärung der Offenbarung Johannis* (Nürnberg, im Verlag der Raw'schen Buchhandlung, 1805), 17, 70.

³⁶ Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, *Zuruf eines geistlichen Israeliten an die Jüdische Nation* on the web site of Die Jung-Stilling-Gesellschaft (The Jung-Stilling Society) in Siegen, Germany, at <http://www.jung-stilling-archiv.de/ZurufJuden.htm> (URL accurate as of 17 April 2006).

³⁷ Ibidem, see also Jung, *Nachfolger*, *Visionärinnen*, *Kirchenkritiker*, 107.

³⁸ "Russland bereitet sich, eine grosse Rolle zu spielen," quoted from Tatjana Högy, *Jung-Stilling und Russland. Untersuchungen über Jung-Stillings Verhältnis zu Russland und zum "Osten" in der Regierungszeit Kaiser Alexanders I* (Siegen: Im Selbstverlag der J.G. Herder-Bibliothek Siegerland e.V., 1984), 30.

³⁹ Ibidem, 55.

⁴⁰ Lehmann, *Pietismus und weltliche Ordnung*, 150.

⁴¹ Ibidem, 175.

Stilling's writings on native Russian sectarianism was noticed by Butkevich⁴² and Breyfogle in the case of the Molokan sect. Describing motives of the Molokan migration from central Russia to the southern part of the Empire, Breyfogle said that

...liberty of spiritual practice and freedom from persecution were not the only religious factors that drew sectarians to the southern frontier. Equally important were the widespread reports... of the imminent end of the world and the coming of God's thousand-year kingdom. Such speculation, which... predicted the apocalypse in 1836, was stimulated by the circulation of a book entitled *The Triumphant Tale of the Christian Faith (Pobednaia povest' khristianskoi very)*. The spread and varying content of the rumours, however, had more to do with the sermons of travelling preachers than with sectarians reading the book themselves.⁴³

Later works by Jung-Stilling, and *The Victorious Story* in particular, became handbooks for Nikolai Il'in, founder of the Jehovist movement.⁴⁴

Through the appreciation of the true significance of the work of Jung-Stilling for the religious developments in Russia, a direct link can be established between traditions and ideas of European Spiritualism, Radical Reformation, and Pietism, and Russian religious dissent. The impact of Jung-Stilling on Russian religious movements varied from prevailing influence and direct borrowing as in the case of Il'in, to a less direct and mediated impact of specific views or a particular work as it was with the Molokans, to some infiltration of ideas and imagery which was

⁴² Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich, *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov* (Khar'kov: Tipografiia Gubernskago Pravleniia, 1910), 418.

⁴³ Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 63.

⁴⁴ E.V. Molostvova. *Iegovisty. Zhizn' i sochineniia kapitana Il'ina* (S. Peterburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1914), 26.

the case with some groups of Old Believers.⁴⁵ Nevertheless the influence of the work and personality of Jung-Stilling on religion in Russia was felt at varying degrees in different segments of the Russian religious palette throughout the country. Although Jung-Stilling's connections with more "visible" and official forms of religion in Russia, such as the fashion for Pietistic mysticism during the Alexandrine time, has received some scholarly attention, his impact on "sectarian" religion in Russia remains a little explored area. The present thesis strives to improve our knowledge of Jung-Stilling and Russian underground religion.

German Colonists

Another important factor in promulgating and popularizing German Pietism and, specifically, chiliastic ideas in Russian society was the immigration of German Pietistic enthusiasts into Russia for religious reasons. Russia was an important destination of religious immigration from Germany from as early as 1763 when members of the Pietistic Moravian Brethren were allocated 6,500 hectares of land in the Lower Volga area and guaranteed complete religious freedom and administrative autonomy in their settlement. The famous colony and town of Sarepta was founded by those settlers, and by 1810 it had over 500 inhabitants. According to the plan designed by the Herrnhut headquarters, the colony was established mainly with missionary prospects, to serve as a stronghold of Pietism among other local Germans, mostly Lutherans, who inhabited a total of 72 settlements in the Volga area.⁴⁶

Although proselytizing among Orthodox Russians was explicitly prohibited by law, interaction between the non-German population and the Moravians took place routinely. Although forbidden to preach actively, the Moravian Brethren of Sarepta influenced the general population by their collective testimony of the Pietistic way of life. Andreas Gestrich says: "In

⁴⁵ Nikolai Nikolaevich Pokrovskii, and Zol'nikova, Natal'ia Dmitrievna, *Starovery – chasovennye na vostoke Rossii v XVIII – XX vv. Problemy tvorchestva i obshchestvennogo soznaniia* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2002), 171.

⁴⁶ Andreas Gestrich, "German Religious Emigration to Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity. New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*, Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, Renate Wilson, ed., (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 77-98.

1816, Sarepta had 431 citizens and 459 outsiders, 274 Germans, 151 Russians, and 34 Tartars. Quite a few of them were married and had children, for whom the Brethren provided good schooling. Schools for children and for the adult workers were seen as an important task of the community, and the standard of teaching seems to have been remarkably high.”⁴⁷

The colony of Sarepta reached its peak in 1810. Official policy at that time was favourable towards innovations of this sort. The Moravian Brethren during the reign of Alexander I were very enthusiastic about the prospects of their colony, inspired by the personal favour of the Emperor and the prevailing spirit of religious tolerance. They even petitioned for permission to conduct missionary work among non-Christian ethnicities, particularly Kalmyks, a nomadic Mongolian tribe that lived to the south of the Moravian settlement and with whom Moravians had business relations. The Herrnhuter mission succeeded in converting twenty-three Kalmyks, but the pending petition was finally rejected in 1820, when anti-Western sentiments started to take over in Saint-Petersburg, and the converted Kalmyks had to be baptized in the Orthodox church.⁴⁸ In spite of reaction and a drastic change of political conjuncture, Sarepta existed as a distinctive autonomous Pietistic settlement till 1892, when the inhabitants of the colony, by that time ordinary Russian subjects with loosened connections with Herrnhut, joined the Lutheran church.

Another wave of Pietistic resettlement in Russia was the so called *Schwäbische Auswanderung nach Russland* (Swabian emigration to Russia). Remarkably, the bulk of settlers came from the area which historically was a stronghold of Pietistic chiliasm in Germany. According to Andreas Gestrich, “the main theological background for popular chiliasm had been provided by the Württemberg theologian Johann Albrecht Bengel, who reckoned the Second Coming of Christ for the year 1836.” Whether Bengel expected in 1836 the second coming or the beginning of the millennial Kingdom which would precede the coming of Christ is a subject of

⁴⁷ Ibidem, 84.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 85

current discussion.⁴⁹ The millenarian expectations of Bengel were propagated by his pupils, the enthusiastic Baroness von Krüdener (1764-24) and particularly by the religious writings of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817) that gained considerable popularity. “Like Bengel, Jung-Stilling counted on the millennium’s beginning in the very near future, and he, too, thought that Russia would play a special role among the nations after the Second Coming of Christ.”⁵⁰ Alexander I promoted the policy of open doors for the Pietistic settlers from Germany, and many of Württemberg’s chiliasts moved to Russia.

Although the intended final destination of those enthusiasts was Transcaucasia and, particularly, Mount Ararat, Russian immigration officials held most of them in what is now southern Ukraine. However, some settlers in an effort to be in the epicentre of the coming millennium made it all the way to Tiflis (now Tbilisi, Georgia) and Azerbaijan where the town of Helenendorf was founded.⁵¹ This town, now called Khanlar, endured as a German settlement until 1941 when Soviet Germans were en masse deported from the European part of the USSR and Caucasus to Central Asia and Siberia as a preventive measure following Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union.

Emergence of Native Millenarian Movements

As Andreas Gestrich rightly concludes, “the nineteenth-century Pietists and separatists brought into Russia a catalytic element that not only transformed existing German religious groups, ...but also affected the host society more than the older groups of religious immigrants had done so far.”⁵² The emergence of native Russian chiliastic and apocalyptic movements was an important part of this process. As we shall see, their creation and development at the initial stage took place under the direct influence of German Pietistic ideas and writings. However, later

⁴⁹ See Martin H. Jung, *Nachfolger, Visionärinnen, Kirchenkritiker* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 93-116.

⁵⁰ Gestrich, “German Religious Emigration to Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” 93

⁵¹ An account of this southernmost German settlement in the Russian Empire told by Jacqueline Grewlich-Suchet, spouse of the German Ambassador to Azerbaijan, may be accessed on the Internet at http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai122_folder/122_articles/122_helenendorf_khanlar.html (URL accurate as of 7 February 2006)

⁵² Gestrich, “German Religious Emigration to Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” 97.

religious, social, political and intellectual circumstances led to a considerable “russification” of borrowed chiliasm and a creative use of innovative preaching techniques, survival strategy, and apocalyptic rhetoric. In the case of the Jehovahists, followers of Nikolai Il’in, the move from a mere borrowing and transplanting of a Pietistic world view to a separate and unique doctrine was gradual and slow. However, Jehovahist doctrine retains considerable and clearly visible Pietistic elements until today.

The new ideas of German Pietism that burst into Russia and flourished during the reign of Alexander I led to the emergence of new and original religious movements that creatively developed and transformed them. The Il’inites, along with the Molokans-Maksimists, were some of them. However, the earliest religious movement of this kind, and one of the first organized millenarian groups on Russian soil, was a short-lived sect of *dukhonostsy* (spirit-bearers) founded in the Don province by a Cossack officer (*esaul*) Evlampii Kotel’nikov at the beginning of 1820s. Pypin wrote a detailed article on the “Bible sect” of Kotel’nikov, and pointed to its roots both in the Spiritual Christian movement and in the activity of the Bible Society. The spirit-bearers sought a pure and ritual-free Christianity and condemned the official church hierarchy as the Babylonian Whore. Kotel’nikov proclaimed Alexander I a divine figure who promoted the same faith as the spirit-bearers and would eventually destroy the kingdom of Antichrist, that is, the Orthodox church.⁵³ Then, upon the defeat and binding of Satan, Alexander would reign with Christ for one thousand years, and the whole world would adopt the teachings of the Spirit-bearers. Three apocalyptic angels in charge of the establishment of the new religion, according to Kotel’nikov, were the Bible Society, Alexander I, and certain chosen members of the Bible Society board (possibly Golitsyn and Labzin).

In 1824, certain political changes and the constant pressure of the Church hierarchs resulted in Golitsyn and some other representatives of the “pietistic party” falling into disfavour. Golitsyn was stripped of his position. In 1824 Evlampii Kotel’nikov was arrested and in 1825

⁵³ Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia*, 426.

sent to the Solovetskii Monastery (the place of the future confinement of two other leaders of Russian millenarian sects, Maksim Rudometkin and Nikolai Il'in) where he died around 1853 after a 28-year-long imprisonment.⁵⁴ Il'in, who entered the Monastery in 1859, could not have met him, but Kotel'nikov's memory must have been preserved, and Il'in mentioned Kotel'nikov in one of his letters as "an officer who was tortured, because he doubted the washing (baptism) done by priests."⁵⁵

After the death of Alexander I in 1825, the official approach towards matters of religion changed drastically. Nicholas I, who on the eve of his coronation had to confront the revolt of the Decembrists, a group of nobility that sought social reform, feared all possible foci of resistance or dissent, be it Western or Russian mystics, foreign preachers or domestic sectarians. The Bible Society was officially shut down in 1826. Instead of the relative religious toleration of the Alexandrine time, a policy of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" was enacted and enforced at all levels of state and social life.

The repercussions of the religious ideas that came to Russia during the first quarter of the 19th century were felt in the following decades. If the fashion for mysticism disappeared from the higher society as soon as it fell into disfavour, the ideas of Pietism, the apocalyptic predictions of Jung-Stilling, and a longing for a pure spiritual Christianity gave rise to several new religious movements, of which the short-lived sect of Kotel'nikov was a pioneer. A coming millenarian Kingdom with its centre at Mount Ararat in the Caucasus was preached among Russian Molokans in 1830s by Lukian Petrovich Sokolov (d. 1858). In accordance with the prophecies of Jung-Stilling, Sokolov initially set 1836 as the year of the establishment of the Kingdom.⁵⁶ The prophecy increased the enthusiasm of those Molokans who were on the move to the Transcaucasian provinces open for the resettlement of sectarians according to the 1830 Decree of Nicholas I.⁵⁷ Although nothing extraordinary happened in 1836, millenarian discourse did not

⁵⁴ See a detailed article on Evlampii Kotel'nikov in Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia*, 419-458.

⁵⁵ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 128

⁵⁶ Butkevich, *Obzor russkikh sekt*, 418.

⁵⁷ On the Molokan migration to Transcaucasia see Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers. Forging Russia's*

vanish, but rather, under the leadership of Maksim Gavrilovich Rudometkin, became transformed into the millenarian denomination of Spiritual Molokan-Maksimists that survives until now in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, in parts of Russia, in California, Arizona and Oregon in the USA, and in Australia.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Millenarianism in Russia can be traced back to Württemberg Pietism as its direct ancestor. Of course, the emergence and survival of millenarian movements would not have been possible without the tolerant policies of Alexander I and his personal involvement with the idea of Christian unity. Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling and his work was one of the main venues of Pietistic influence on Russian sectarian religion and the main agent that led to emergence of the Russian native millenarianism. However, millenarian discourse would have surely vanished soon had it not been for the receptivity of native Russian religious dissenters and seekers. They appropriated it and made it their own. Therefore, from a certain point of view we can speak of a native Russian millenarian discourse with distinctive elements of German chiliastic Pietism.

The Jehovahs-Witnesses represent a particularly clear and exemplary case of this transformation. The life, work, and development of ideas of Nikolai Il'in are relatively well documented in the sources. The clarity of his discourse allows for a detailed analysis of its composition, rhetoric and internal logic. This will be attempted in subsequent chapters.

Empire in the South Caucasus (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), Chapter 2, "To a Land of Promise," 49-83.

⁵⁸ See John K. Berokoff, *Molokans in America* (Hacienda Heights: UMCA Library, 1987).

CHAPTER 3. NIKOLAI IL'IN, A RUSSIAN MILLENARIAN PROPHET

Introduction

Although Nikolai Il'in lived and worked after the peak of Pietist influence on Russian religious thought, nevertheless many of his ideas were a direct development of the fundamental tenets of Pietist theology. The influence of German Pietism and neo-Pietistic mysticism lived on in sectarian movements and enriched the spiritual arsenal of Russian religious thought.

This section will deal with the biography of Nikolai Il'in, and his spiritual pilgrimage towards the original teaching he developed. The external factors that contributed to this included his family environment, his reading of the spiritualist and mystical literature that was popular in Russia at that time, and social developments of his time, such as the growth of free-thinking and the rise of scientific and technical progress.

The book *Iegovisty (Jehovists)* (1914) by Elena Molostvova contains a detailed account of Nikolai Il'in's life. It served the present writer as a major source of factual biographical data. Other important sources were *Free Russia* by William H. Dixon, two chapters of which are devoted to Il'in, Nikolai Il'in's letters to his friends and followers and his books, pamphlets and manuscripts.

Il'in's Early Years and Founding of the Il'inite Brotherhood.

Nikolai Il'in was born in 1809 in Astrakhan', South Russia. He claimed to be the illegitimate son of a Swedish army general and a Polish woman Tenczynska. Il'in's descent remains unclear; the fact is, however, that he was baptised Orthodox, but then educated in a Polish Jesuit boarding school (collegium) in Polotsk, a then predominantly Catholic city in the Western part of the Empire (now Belorussia). Upon graduation Il'in passed examinations and entered a military school in St. Petersburg. In 1834 as a young officer Nikolai Il'in married Olga

Tide, a Lutheran by faith, and soon asked to be transferred elsewhere as life in the metropolis proved to be too expensive for a newlywed couple.¹

As we can see, Nikolai Il'in lived in an environment of religious plurality from his early years. In addition to the three main branches of Christianity, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism, to which Il'in was exposed due to his family circumstances and education, he soon became acquainted with Judaism. He was transferred to Volynia, the south-western province of the Russian Empire, a region densely populated by Jews. There Il'in attended synagogues and engaged in discussions with rabbis, trying to understand their position.² No wonder that religion played an important role in Il'in's personal world view, and that he was particularly interested in the possibility of religious unity and agreement.³

Although Pietistic aspirations for unification of all true Christians were no longer favoured by the authorities, the repercussions of this attitude still survived in both sectarian movements and certain circles of the religiously-minded intelligentsia. By 1840 Nikolai Il'in became an active correspondent for a new magazine called *Maiak (The Lighthouse)*.⁴ The magazine, although it claimed to promote the official ideology of Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality, still maintained to a certain degree the mystical tendencies of the famous *Sionskii Vestnik (The Herald of Zion)* published by Aleksandr Fedorovich Labzin (1776-1825), a free-mason and mystic.⁵ Nikolai Il'in read *Sionskii Vestnik* and the ideas of the universal brotherhood of all men, a mystical core common to all faiths, and the focus on personal spirituality as opposed to external forms, appealed to him. Ideas of Jung-Stilling, critical in the formation of the Jumper movement among the Molokans, particularly eschatology, also played a very important role in shaping Il'in's worldview.⁶ Il'in, like many other Christian mystics, turned to the most mysterious text of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, and thoroughly studied Jung-

¹ E.V. Molostvova, *Iegovisty. Zhizn' i sochineniia kapitana Il'ina* (S. Peterburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1914), 1-4.

² Ibidem, 6; Dixon, *Free Russia*, Vols. 1-2 (London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1870), 1:232.

³ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 4.

⁴ Ibidem, 7.

⁵ A.N. Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia pri Aleksandre I* (Petrograd: Ogni, 1916), 136-137.

⁶ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 25.

Stilling's commentaries on this book. Apparently, Jung-Stilling's *The Victorious Story* caused Il'in to revise his views on church and Christianity and ultimately led to his decision to leave Orthodoxy.⁷ Deep personal experiences and insights of a religious nature gradually led him away from the strictly Orthodox way of thinking, and his initially eclectic world view evolved into a specific doctrine.

In 1843 Olga Tide, Nikolai Il'in's wife, converted to Orthodoxy after a miraculous healing. Il'in's account of this experience was published in *Maiak*.⁸ In 1846 Il'in was transferred to Ekaterinburg and, in the following year, to the nearby settlement of Barancha. Around 1850 Il'in began to write his first decidedly non-Orthodox book, *Sionskaia vest'* (*The Message of Zion*). As we can see, even the title of the book bears a strong resemblance to the name of the Pietistic-minded magazine *Sionskii Vestnik* (*The Herald of Zion*).⁹

The book that Il'in called his Good News (*blagovest*), taught of a coming battle between God and Satan and the division of people between "those of the right hand" and "those of the left hand", an allusion to verses of Matthew (25:32, 33). The essence of the true religion, according to Il'in, was Love alone, not any external forms of worship or rituals. The law of Love, common for the ancient Hebrew prophets and the teachings of Jesus Christ, would be a foundation for the unification of faiths.¹⁰ Although Il'in primarily strove for the unification of Christians and Jews, his call for unity was also directed to Muslims, who are also descendants of Abraham. *The Message of Zion* reiterated the exegesis of the book of Revelation suggested by Bengel and Jung-Stilling. *Desnoe Bratstvo* (literally "Brotherhood of those of the Right Hand", sometimes translated by Western researchers as The Righteous Brotherhood) became the initial name of their group used by Il'in and his friends.¹¹

Il'in's friends, Aleksandr Stepanovich Laletin, a forester, Kapiton Aleksandrovich Protopopov, a priest's son, a teacher and a clerk at a seminary, and Nikolai Ivanovich Budrin, a

⁷ Ibidem, 25-26.

⁸ Ibidem, 13-16.

⁹ Ibidem, 35-66.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 48-49.

¹¹ Ibidem, 44.

secretary (*deloproizvoditel'*) at a monastery, and Il'in's future son-in-law, were co-founders of the Righteous Brotherhood. Il'in's wife and daughters, as well as Laletin's and Protopopov's wives, joined the Brotherhood under the influence of these men.¹²

At the foundation of the Righteous Brotherhood, Il'in suggested the members should take second, biblical names, an idea, as noted by Molostvova, borrowed from Jung-Stilling's *Homesickness (Heimweh)*.¹³ Il'in took the name of the prophet Elijah.¹⁴

Il'in vigorously spread his ideas among the workers of the factories in the Ekaterinburg and Perm' areas. A significant percentage of the population in the Urals belonged to Old Belief, a major dissenter movement that separated from the Russian Orthodox Church in the latter half of the seventeenth century following the liturgical reforms of Patriarch Nikon.¹⁵ Old Believers showed a higher degree of interest in religious matters compared to their Orthodox neighbours. A number of Old Believers joined the Brotherhood, which is also evidenced by the acceptance among the Il'inites of the traditional Old Believer spelling of the name Jesus, *Isus* as opposed to the Orthodox spelling, *Iisus*. In order to reach out to Old Believers Il'in wrote pamphlets for distribution among them using the archaic script (*poluustav*) normally used in Old Believer writings.¹⁶

The Urals Old Believers, as a religiously active group of people, were also influenced by the ideas of Jung-Stilling's works. Russian researchers Nikolai Nikolaevich Pokrovskii and Natal'ia Dmitrievna Zol'nikova point to the fact that a book written in late 1830s – early 1840s by *chasovennye* Old Believers in the Ekaterinburg area, *Kniga, pravyi put' pokazuiushchaia* (*The Book That Shows The Right Way*) contains as many as 47 references to the *Pobednaia Pesn'* by Jung-Stilling. The Ekaterinburg paleographers found handwritten copies of Jung-Stilling's writings and original works based upon his eschatological prophecies in the Old Believer

¹² Ibidem, 66.

¹³ Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, *Das Heimweh* (Verlag am Goetheanum, 1994).

¹⁴ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 177.

¹⁵ On Old Believers and their eschatology see, for example, Robert O. Crummey, *The Old Believers and The World of Antichrist* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).

¹⁶ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 58-71.

libraries of the Urals, that is, precisely where the Il'inite movement originated. Russian scholars Baidin and Shashkov call this popularity of Jung-Stilling among Old Believers “somewhat unusual,”¹⁷ but apparently the influence of Jung-Stilling on Russian religious dissent in the 1820s – 1850s was very significant. The eschatological views of Jung-Stilling certainly must have helped many Old Believers to accept the doctrine of Il'in. At the same time, Il'in himself distributed *Pobednaia pesn'* by Jung-Stilling among the Old Believers along with his own writings at the initial stage of his activities as an independent religious thinker and preacher.¹⁸ Molostvova apparently believed that it was Il'in who introduced Jung-Stilling to the Old Believers. However, *Kniga, pravyi put' pokazuiushchaia* was written before Il'in started to preach, proving that Urals Old Believers were exposed to the thoughts of the German mystic independently some time earlier.

There are a few factors that made Il'in so sensitive to the prophecies of Jung-Stilling and his interpretation of the Apocalypse. The most obvious of these reasons is the explicitly mathematical approach promoted by Jung-Stilling that must have been especially appealing to Nikolai Il'in, who was himself a brilliant mathematician by profession and training. The German mystic insisted that the mathematical progression of universal applicability that Pietistic theologian Bengel found in the text of the Book of Revelation was the best proof of the divinity of the Book itself, and, consequently, of the visions and predictions it contained. Jung-Stilling asserted that the mathematical complexity of the Apocalypse was in striking contrast with the rest of the Biblical books, and that the apostle John, who hardly had any experience in mathematics, could never have written such a book on his own.¹⁹ For Il'in this feature of the Apocalypse was the best proof of its authenticity.

¹⁷ Nikolai Nikolaevich Pokrovskii, and Natal'ia Dmitrievna Zol'nikova, *Starovery – chasovennye na vostoke Rossii v XVIII – XX vv. Problemy tvorchestva i obshchestvennogo soznaniia* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2002), 171.

¹⁸ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 68

¹⁹ *Pobednaia povest' ili torzhestvo very khristianskoi, predstavlennoe v Apokalipsise, ob'iasnennom na pol'zu obshchuiu I.G. Iungom. Perevod s nemetskogo. 1807go goda* (Manuscript: no publication data), leaf 5.

For the reason described above, the Book of Revelation seemed to Nikolai Il'in the clearest text of Scripture, provided one knows the mathematical clue to it. The book explained mathematically did not allow for multiple interpretations as opposed to the rest of the biblical books. Eventually his attempts to find the one and only exegetical solution for other biblical books led Il'in to the conclusion that the impossibility of defining the right interpretation proved that those books were not quite correct, corrupted, or distorted.

Il'in's Imprisonment (1859 – 1879)

When the civil and ecclesiastical authorities became aware of the new dissenter movement, Nikolai Il'in and his friends were arrested, and came to trial in 1859. Il'in was found guilty and sent to Solovetskii Monastery in the North of Russia, “for the purposes of spiritual correction”. One of his close friends and contributors to the *Sionskaia vest'*, Aleksandr Stepanovich Laletin, was likewise sent to a monastery in Sviiazhsk, Kazan province. Laletin died unrepentant a few years later and was denied burial within the Orthodox cemetery. His family buried him in a special plot for babies who died unbaptized. A number of Il'in's friends and sympathizers were demoted, transferred to remote areas or rebuked for their association with the heresy.²⁰

However a steadfast group of his early followers, led by the brothers Volgin, former Old Believers, continued in the Urals area in spite of the persecution. That group, devoid of almost any communication with their prophet, retained the early teachings of Il'in intact for decades. The Volgins preserved the Pietistic core of Jehovahism, while Nikolai Il'in reformulated or reinterpreted many of his initial views during the time he spent in monastic confinement.²¹

Il'in's sojourn in the monastery did not differ much from imprisonment. Although the Solovki was the largest site of monastic confinement in Russia, more than a dozen monasteries

²⁰ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 77-107.

²¹ A manuscript, containing copies of the correspondence among Jehovahist communities, dated from 1914 to 1925, in possession of the author, 21-26.

throughout the country were used as places of “spiritual correction.”²² Researcher of Russian religious dissent Aleksandr Prugavin wrote, quoting one of the former prisoners of the Solovki, that the Solovki prison was a truly unbearable place. The windows would not open, and it was hard to breathe, the food was very bad, and the prisoners were happy when they were given fresh bread. Inmates could not use candles even during the long northern nights.²³ The internal policies of the prison forbade any contacts of an inmate with outsiders without explicit permission of the abbot (*arkhimandrit*), any letter exchange, or delivery of parcels or monies, among other restrictions. He could not leave the monastery, receive visitors, even family members, interact with other inmates, choose books for reading or freely exchange correspondence with anyone. He was required to listen to the admonitions the monks gave him in order to make him repent. After many unsuccessful petitions Il'in's daughter, Natalia, got permission to visit her father in 1868. Molostvova reported that after a week's stay in the Monastery with the father, the young woman returned with gray hair.²⁴

Although the access of visitors to the inmates of the Solovki monastic prison was forbidden, a British journalist, historian and traveller William H. Dixon managed to arrange for a short meeting with Nikolai Il'in some time in the 1860s on his extensive travels across Russia.²⁵ At first the guards would not let him in, but then relented and allowed Dixon to talk to the prisoner for a few minutes. Monks told the British gentleman that Il'in was “an obstinate fellow; quiet in his ways; but full of talk; he worries you to death; and you can teach him nothing... A

²² Prugavin, *Monastyrskii tiur'my*, 35.

²³ Ibidem, 41.

²⁴ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 156.

²⁵ *A Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature* by John W. Cousin (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. and New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1910) has the following entry on William H. Dixon: DIXON, WILLIAM HEPWORTH (1821-1879). - Historian and traveller, b. near Manchester, went to London in 1846, and became connected with *The Daily News*, for which he wrote articles on social and prison reform. In 1850 he pub. *John Howard and the Prison World of Europe*, which had a wide circulation, and about the same time he wrote a *Life of Peace* (1851), in answer to Macaulay's onslaught. *Lives of Admiral Blake and Lord Bacon* followed, which received somewhat severe criticisms at the hands of competent authorities. D. was ed. of *The Athenæum*, 1853-69, and wrote many books of travel, including *The Holy Land* (1865), *New America* (1867), and *Free Russia* (1870). His later historical works include *Her Majesty's Tower*, and *The History of Two Queens* (Catherine of Arragon and Anne Boleyn). Though a diligent student of original authorities, and sometimes successful in throwing fresh light on his subjects, D. was not always accurate, and thus laid himself open to criticism; and his book, *Spiritual Wives*, treating of Mormonism, was so adversely criticised as to lead to an action. He wrote, however, in a fresh and interesting style. He was one of the founders of the Palestine Exploration Fund, and was a member of the first School Board for London (1870). He was called to the Bar in 1854, but never practised.

man of rank; in his youth an officer in the army. More than one of our Archimandrites (abbots), having pity on his case, has striven to lead him into a better path. An evil spirit is in his soul... We never talk of him; it's against the rules... A bad Russian, a bad Christian, he denies our holy Church."²⁶ This is how Dixon describes Il'in: "An aged, handsome man, like Kossuth in appearance, starts astonished from his seat; unused, as it would seem, to such disturbance of his cell. A small table, a few books, a pallet bed, are the only furnishings of his room, the window of which is ribbed and crossed with iron... A table holds some scraps of books and journals; the prisoner being allowed, it seems, to receive such things from the outer world, though he is not permitted to send out a single line of writing."²⁷

Dixon was so impressed with the strange prisoner he met, that he went on to gather as much data as he could on Il'in's biography and his religious teaching. He told a detailed story of Il'in in a separate chapter of his book *Free Russia*.²⁸ Generally it is characterized by factual accuracy and correct indication of some of the sources Il'in drew on (Judaism; idea of universal brotherhood of all true believers) as well as a great deal of sympathy towards the inmate. Dixon even attempted petitioning on behalf of the prisoner, but his plea was turned down upon examination of Il'in's dossier by the Russian Ministry of Interior.²⁹ Dixon expressed his appreciation and admiration of Il'in in the following words: "Yet men like Nicolas Ilyin are the salt of the earth; men who will go through fire and water for their thought; men who would live a true life in a dungeon rather than a false life in the richest mansions of the world."³⁰

Monastic confinement was a common way of dealing with prominent religious dissenters in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. The leader of another millennial movement, the Jumper Molokans, Maksim Rudometkin, shared Il'in's fate and spent 19 years in Solovki and then in the Suzdal' Spaso-Evfimiev Monastery (1858-1877) where he died and was secretly

²⁶ Dixon. *Free Russia*, 1:226.

²⁷ Ibidem, 1:227-228.

²⁸ Ibidem, 1:230-241 (Chapter 22, "Nicolas Ilyin").

²⁹ Ibidem, 1:241.

³⁰ Ibidem, 1:241

buried.³¹ Most of this time both “heretics” were kept in the same place and had a number of heated theological discussions as Il’in testifies in his treatise *Indestructible Arms of God of Peace and Love Jehovah*, specifically aimed against Maksim and the Maksimist religion.³² In fact, in 1864 the Holy Synod ordered the abbot of the Solovetskii Monastery to tighten control over Il’in because of the influence he had on his fellow-inmate Maksim Rudometkin.³³

The use of the same imagery and even vocabulary by Nikolai Il’in and Maksim Rudometkin reflects the great influence that the Russian translations of Jung-Stilling’s writings, particularly, *The Victorious Song of the Christian Religion*, had on both of them. Both Il’in and Rudometkin refer to their opponents as *oshuinye* (those of the left hand) and mention the 666 faiths that constitute the “whore of Babylon.”³⁴ Of course, there are obvious differences as well: Il’in built his own denomination completely separate from any other religious movement, while Rudometkin acted within the Molokan sect that amounted to tens of thousands of people at that time and enjoyed official recognition as a religious body from 1805. Of course, radical millenarianism and claims to special prophetic authority resulted in a split of the Molokan community and bitter feelings towards each other of rival factions, but Maksimists never completely disassociated themselves from a larger body of the Molokan religion. Besides, being geographically isolated in a far away part of the Russian South and surrounded mainly by ethnically non-Russian nations with their own languages, cultures and religion, Maksimists never proselytized and soon turned into a close-knit ethno-confessional group. Maksimists living in the USA and Australia continue to maintain these ethno-confessional features to a great degree.³⁵

Maksimism, although having established its own corpus of sacred writings (*The Book of Spirit and Life*), maintained allegiance to the Bible as the word of God. Nevertheless the

³¹ Prugavin, *Monastyrskii tiur'my*, 17

³² Il’in, *Nesokrushimoe oruzhie BOGA mira i liubvi EGOVY zakavkazskim družiam i druginiam EGO i moim*. (Manuscript, n.d.).

³³ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 150-151

³⁴ *Bozhestvennyi Izrecheniia nastavnikov i stradal'tsev za Slovo Bozhie, Veru Iisusa i Dukh Sviatoi Religii Dukhovnykh Khristian Molokan-Prygunov* (Los Angeles: Dukh i Zhizn', 1928), 252, 345. Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 57-59.

³⁵ See John K. Berokoff, *Molokans in America* (Hacienda Heights: UMCA Library, 1987), 148-155.

traditional Molokan allegorical interpretation of biblical texts allowed for a much greater freedom of opinions than a typical Bible-based Protestant church would have deemed acceptable.

Differences are just as remarkable between the personalities of the two millenarian prophets. Nikolai Il'in was a learned man with considerable secular education and keen interest in the latest advances of empirical science and technology. He was able to read Jung-Stilling and other Pietist authors in the original German. Dixon, the British journalist who visited Il'in in monastic prison, thus described his conversation with the sectarian leader:

‘Your name is?’

‘Ilyin; Nicolas Ilyin’

Shaking his head in a feeble way, he mutters to himself, as it were, like one who is trying to recall a dream. I put the question again; this time in German. Then he faintly smiles; a big tear starting in his eye. ‘Excuse me, Sir’ he sighs, ‘I have forgotten most things; even the use of speech. Once I spoke French easily. Now I have all but forgotten my mother tongue.’³⁶

By contrast, Maksim Rudometkin was born into a peasant family in Tambov area. He must have been a Mordvinian by origin, that is, belonged to a Finno-Ugric ethnic group that was incorporated into the Russian state in 14th-16th centuries and has been subject to assimilation since then. Orthodoxy came to the Mordvinians as a part of the assimilation process and was accepted quite superficially. That ethnicity actively participated in a number of movements of religious dissent, including the Molokans. Maksim's parents became Molokans when he was eight years old and shortly thereafter moved to the Caucasus in search of religious freedom and in expectation of the millennial kingdom. From then on Maksim resided in a small Molokan village surrounded by the predominantly Armenian population. He never received any formal education, and his handwriting abounds with grammatical mistakes, misspellings, and misinterpretation of terminology he was not familiar with.³⁷

³⁶ Dixon, *Free Russia*, 1:228

³⁷ For example, see *Dukh i zhuzn'*, 168. (Facsimile of Maksim Rudometkin's handwriting).

The mutual influence and sharing between the two sectarian leaders did not lead to agreement, though. Throughout Il'in's pamphlets Molokans and their leader are objects of a sharp critique, if not hostility. Il'in thought that Maksim's death in monastic imprisonment was Jehovah's punishment for the Molokan leader for "his shameless curses" against Jehovahism.³⁸ In the second chapter of the mentioned pamphlet against Maksim Il'in wrote:

Let Heaven and Earth testify on my behalf... as well as the *arkhimandrit* (abbot) of the Suzdal' monastery Dosifei... that Maksim Rudometkin was defeated in the cell with sudden death for his curse against my GOD JEHOVAH, namely, that when I pointed out to Maksim to the words of JEHOVAH from HIS Book from Heaven (Revelation) "Blessed is who fulfills what is written in this Book, for he will become for that a brother of Holy Prophets and a friend of Angels of JEHOVAH", Maksim said: "this is devilish lies, but only he is blessed who fulfills what is written in the Gospel and the Bible..." To this I told Maksim in a loud voice: "You will die then here in the cell for your satanic curse against my GOD JEHOVAH!"³⁹

It is evident that Maksim was a representative of a more traditional version of millenarian apocalypticism based on Christian Scripture and rooted in an earlier tradition of his Molokan faith. According to Il'in, he spent 16 years of imprisonment together with Maksim, 12 years in Solovki, and 4 years in the Suzdal' monastery. In the fifth chapter of the same pamphlet Il'in describes one of the discussions he had with Maksim. Nikolai Il'in attempted to convince his fellow inmate of his views, but Maksim remained steadfast in his convictions. Il'in quotes Rudometkin: "No, I will by no means turn away from that teaching that the holy Molokan Tveritinov⁴⁰ passed on to my father, and for which my father endured terrible suffering."⁴¹

³⁸ See Il'in, *Otkrytie umu-nepostizimogo sobytiia na sei planete, chto pod imenem Isusa Khrista byl raspiat Sam-zhe Glava bezsmertnykh liudei – EGOVA* (Privately printed, n.d.), 30 and Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 172.

³⁹ Il'in, *Nesokrushimoe oruzhie*, 5-6.

⁴⁰ Dmitrii Tveritinov, a medical doctor, is considered by Molokans one of the forerunners of their religion. He was

Mocking his adversary, Il'in frequently mentioned that the former "allegedly resurrected a woman in the Caucasus and made a goat to speak," actions he apparently believed to have been a trick.⁴²

Maksim Rudometkin, the leader and prophet of the Molokan-Maksimist movement, paid back Il'in in the same manner. In his writings, composed in imprisonment and passed on to his friends in the Caucasus, Maksim called his opponent "the great enemy of my Lamb-like love, Captain Il'in" and even suggested that Il'in and his doctrine might be one of the horns of the apocalyptic beast.⁴³ In any case, Il'in and Jehovahism had some following among Transcaucasian Molokan-Jumpers, another Russian sect of Sabbatarians⁴⁴ that moved to modern Armenia along with Molokans, and even among the Armenian population that surrounded Molokan villages. Letters of Nikolai Il'in sent to his Caucasian followers in 1886 and 1888, when he had already been released from monastic imprisonment, show that there were small groups of Jehovahists or individual believers in the city of Yerevan and the village of Elenovka (now Sevan in Armenia) inhabited at that time almost exclusively by Sabbatarians and Molokans. Il'in even urged his followers in Transcaucasia to translate his writings, if possible, into Armenian and Turkish, for Il'in was concerned about poor understanding of his writings by Armenian converts.⁴⁵ Some of the people mentioned in the letters bear Armenian names (Akop, Avetis).

It is noteworthy that one of the poems written by Nikolai Il'in and included in the Il'inite Hymn Book can be also found in the *Songbook of Zion (Sionskii pesennik)* used by the Jumper

tried for heresy in 1713 in Moscow. Consult the entry on Tveritinov by Paul Steeves in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, vol. 40. George N. Rhyne and Joseph L. Wiczyński, ed. (Academic International Press, 1997).

⁴¹ Il'in, *Nesokrushimoe oruzhie*, 13

⁴² For example, Il'in, *Prizyv vsekh liudei k bezsmertiiu* (Privately printed, n.d.), 16.

⁴³ *Dukh i Zhuzn'*, 485.

⁴⁴ Sabbatarians (*subbotniki*) - a movement that apparently emerged in South Russia in the latter half of 18th century. They denied the Christian church, sacraments, New Testament, divinity of Christ. Some Sabbatarians (*gery*) eventually

merged with Rabbinic Judaism. There exists an unofficial Sabbatarian web site <http://www.subbotniki.org> containing a collection of materials on the movement in English and Russian.

⁴⁵ Il'in, *Pis'ma vsemirnogo Svetitelia* (Manuscript, n.d.), 28

Molokans in the USA and elsewhere under the number 504-G, of course without any indication of authorship.⁴⁶

A thorough investigation of the venues of influence of Pietism and Jung-Stilling's writings in particular on Molokan Jumpers is another missing side of the story of Russian millenarianism, but it would take us far beyond the topic and purpose of the present thesis. It should be noted, though, that, unlike in the case of Il'in, such an influence had a considerably more grassroots character among the Jumpers. While Jehovahists-Il'inites were to a high degree a construct created by Il'in's intellectual endeavor and religious inspiration, Jung-Stilling's millenarianism seemed to have inspired large masses of an already established religious movement, and eventually caused an internal split in the Molokan church, since the millenarian Molokans founded their own organization. However, the majority of Molokans, the so-called *Postoiannye* (Steadfast), now prefer to interpret the millennial kingdom in purely spiritual terms, although the issue still remains a somewhat controversial point in mainstream Molokan theology and causes ongoing discussion.⁴⁷

In 1873 Il'in was transferred to Spaso-Evfimiev Monastery in Suzdal', which was the second largest monastic prison in Russia, because his health was deteriorating quickly in the very cold and humid climate of Solovki. Il'in spent a total of 20 years (1859-1879) in monastic confinement. In spite of strict control, he used every opportunity to write and communicate with his followers and kept on writing when he could. A major work written by Nikolai Il'in in the monastery is called *Luch sveta dlia rassveta* (*A Ray of Light for the Dawn*). The book consists of nine parts and is devoted to a wide range of doctrinal and practical questions, from apocalyptic prophecies to the internal structure and code of conduct for the members of the Righteous Brotherhood. In fact, it was from about the time of his transfer from Suzdal', that Il'in began calling his fellow-believers "Jehovists". Towards the end of the 1870s the health of Il'in became

⁴⁶ *Sionskii pesennik stoletniago perioda* (Hacienda Heights, CA: UMCA, 1986), 412-414.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, articles by I.I. Fedorov "O tysiacheletnem tsarstvii na osnovanii sviashchennogo pisaniia" and G.V. Bogdanov "Tysiacheletnee tsarstvo: ego znachenie" in the Molokan magazine *Dobryi domostroitel' blagodat* 14 (May 2000).

especially bad. He suffered from severe headaches and nervous exhaustion. According to Molostvova, once a nurse applied a leech so close to Il'in's eye, that the eye flew out.⁴⁸ Under those circumstances Il'in's family and friends resumed petitioning on his behalf, and, finally, in July 1879 Il'in was set free and ordered to settle in a village called Palangen in the predominantly Lutheran Kurland province (now Latvia) with the specific purpose of preventing Il'in from spreading his views among the Orthodox population. A little later Il'in got permission to move to the town of Mitau (now Jelgava, Latvia) of the same province in order to have better medical care.⁴⁹

A Division within Jehovahism. A Traditional "Pietistic" Group in the Urals.

Of course, the thinking of Nikolai Il'in never stood still and frozen throughout his lifetime. Letters of his first-generation followers bear testimony to the shift that occurred in Il'in's apocalyptic discourse during his sojourn in monasteries. A letter addressed by one of the Jehovahist leaders to Nizhnii Tagil in the Urals in 1914 accuses Urals Jehovahists with their leader Pankrat Volgin (one of the Volgin brothers, rich merchants and early followers of Il'in) of relying upon earlier books of Il'in, written before his imprisonment or in his first years in Solovki, and books by Jung-Stilling. Early books by Il'in, among them *The Message of Zion* and *A Ray of Light for the Dawn*, were written under the direct and heavy influence of Bengel and Jung-Stilling. The anonymous author says about Volgin: "he gave different books, for example *Pobednaia Povest'* (*Siegesgeschichte der christlichen Religion*), *Tainstvo Kresta* (anonymous mystical treatise *Mystery of the Cross*), *Ugroz svetvostokov* (*Der graue Mann*), *Prikliuchenie po smerti* (*Szenen aus dem Gersterreich*), *Toska po otchizne* (*Heimweh*), different corrupted prophecies and others not written by the Universal Enlightener (Il'in)."⁵⁰ Thus, practically all existing Russian translations of Jung-Stilling's books and writings of other mystics translated in

⁴⁸ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 173.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, 174.

⁵⁰ A manuscript, containing copies of the correspondence among Jehovahist communities, dated from 1914 to 1925, in possession of the author, 21.

the Alexandrine epoch, already about a century or more old at that time, were being preserved, read and revered by the community.

We can see here that two tendencies in Jehovahism were in strict opposition to each other in the earlier period. One of them adhered to the earlier views of Il'in, supporting explicitly Pietistic and mystical views, and revered the mystical writings of Jung-Stilling and other like-minded authors well into the 1910s. This group was located in the historical focus of the movement, the Urals, and was led by people who knew Il'in in person before his imprisonment. Another group emerged due to the proselytising activities of Il'in in the later period of his imprisonment and his life in Mitau. At that time the denomination was shaped as a distinct sectarian group with authoritarian leadership and a strong dependence on the leader, who by then had proclaimed himself a Universal Enlightener, new Elijah, and the last prophet of Jehovah. It is quite possible that a certain parting of ways with the Pietistic tradition and theological premises of Jung-Stilling occurred in part due to heated discussions with Maksim Rudometkin, whose world view arose from the same kind of theology and apocalyptic interpretation. It might have been important for Il'in to emphasize the distinctiveness of his apocalyptic discourse from a more traditional and Bible-based discourse of Molokans-Maksimists, and, therefore, from that of Jung-Stilling and millenarian Pietists. Thus, Nikolai Il'in cut off the liaison that connected him with the tradition of Jung-Stilling in order to more effectively advance his cause and provide for a more coherent organizational and ideological system given the circumstances of oppression and illegal existence. This may be a reason that Jung-Stilling is never mentioned in any of the later writings by Il'in, although there are frequent references to the German Pietist mystic Jakob Böhme, Quaker George Fox and even the leader of the peasant war during the German Reformation, Thomas Müntzer, as martyrs for the truth and forerunners of Jehovahism.⁵¹

The primitive group in the Urals that continued to keep the Il'inite doctrine and practice of the early "Pietistic" period, became isolated and was weakened by internal disorders and

⁵¹ Il'in, *Prizyv*, 8; Il'in, *Samoe istinnoe sredstvo sdelat'sia bezsmertnym vsiakomu, kto tol'ko iskrenno sogo pozhelaet* (Manuscript, n.d.) 39, among others.

leadership crises. Finally, it was absorbed by the larger “orthodox” Jehovist body some time in the beginning of 20th century, at least by 1914 as indicated by the aforementioned letter.

Characterising the group, the author of the letter says: “(they) have introduced different rites and holidays, for instance: a long prayer according to a prayer book, the feast of Easter..., funerals with prolonged prayers and reading...”⁵² As we can see, the “Pietistic” group was more traditionally Christian in its ways and practices, to the irritation of “orthodox” Jehovists with their clearly sectarian approach to other religions. Later Jehovists completely abandoned all religious celebrations and did not care for funerals for their dead or maintaining their graves awaiting resurrection of Jehovists in due time.

We can say, therefore, that a group of believers that based their teachings mainly on the writings, ideology and theology of German millenarian Pietism emerged and existed in the Russian hinterlands until the early 20th century. Thus, the direct impact of chiliastic expectations of Bengel and Oettinger and the mystical insights of Jung-Stilling in Russia turned out to have been quite prolonged. Furthermore, the writings of Jung-Stilling served as a scriptural foundation of a kind for an organized group of believers. Of course, in all probability they did not see themselves as successors of the Pietistic tradition, nor use the term “Pietism”.

Last Years of Il'in (1879 – 1890)

Liberation of the leader led to a certain revival among the Jehovists in the Urals. New pamphlets were coming to Barancha, Nizhnii Tagil and other Urals towns, while money gathered by the Jehovists was being sent to Mitau as Il'in's financial situation after his liberation was critical. Letters of Il'in to his followers in different places of the Empire show that the amount of single-time donations sent to Mitau ranged anywhere from a modest two rubles to fifty rubles (an average monthly salary of a factory worker at that time) depending on the size and material well-being of the Jehovist group that made donations. It should be said that Il'in tried to re-distribute

⁵² A manuscript, containing copies of the correspondence among Jehovist communities, dated from 1914 to 1925, in possession of the author, 21-22.

money flows so that isolated and poor Jehovahs could get subsistence. He also urged local leaders to create monetary trusts and common treasuries to help the neediest of the brethren.⁵³

Il'in continued writing books and sending them to his followers in the Urals and to a number of actual and potential readers throughout the Empire and abroad. Many of his writings of that time concluded with invitations to contact the author with any questions or should readers need more copies. Already in Il'in's lifetime communities of Jehovahs were founded in the North Caucasus (Piatigorsk) and Transcaucasian regions, while isolated families and individual believers could be found in many provinces of the Russian Empire.⁵⁴ His followers were fervently distributing booklets, making converts among the factory workers and others, and annoying local authorities. A new trial of Il'inites began in Ekaterinburg in 1886. In 1887 Il'in was arrested again and sent to Ekaterinburg to appear before the court, since all other convicts and members resided in that area. About two months later, on August 30, 1887, Il'in was set free on bail. He took advantage of his unexpected freedom and went to Nizhnii Tagil and Barancha to visit and encourage his friends. This sudden visit led to an outburst of joy and optimistic expectations among the followers of Il'in, who had been quite depressed by the trial and arrests of many of their number. Jehovahs hoped their brethren would be freed soon. In fact, however, Il'in was arrested again on September 13 and put back into the Ekaterinburg prison as the authorities knew he was encouraging the sectarians and holding meetings with them. Nikolai Il'in underwent a medical checkup in January, 1888, and was found mentally insane and not fit for any further court proceedings. The trial was suspended until his recovery. Il'in was sent back to Mitau early in 1889 and immediately put under strict police surveillance. Upon his return to Kurland Il'in resumed writing and mailing out his brochures in spite of his fragile health. No recovery followed, though. Nikolai Il'in died in Mitau on July 3, 1890.⁵⁵ The place of his burial is unknown.

⁵³ Il'in, *Pis'ma vsemirnogo Svetitelia*, 14. (A letter dated 29th of May, 1885).

⁵⁴ See Il'in, *Pis'ma vsemirnogo Svetitelia*, 25-26. (A letter dated 17th of March, 1886).

⁵⁵ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 173-175.

Conclusion. Place of Jehovism within Christendom.

The paradigm of the development of Il'in's religious thought was a gradual drift from Pietistic chiliasm with its emphasis on Christian unity, love, and spiritualism to a classical closed sectarian movement. Adverse personal circumstances of a long and harsh imprisonment and the logic of the continuous struggle against the dominant status-quo ideology contributed to this process. A small break-away group of "Pietistic" Il'inites continued well into the 1910s, but was finally absorbed by a larger body of the Jehovahists. The reason for that was twofold: 1) the "Pietistic" group became alienated from its main sense of authority, the prophet Il'in; 2) writings of Jung-Stilling could not serve as an adequate theoretical and authoritative basis for the building of a group of the sectarian type.

Typologically the movement of Jehovahists-Il'inites from the time Il'in separated himself from the Pietistic tradition fits into the Troeltschian category of Protestant sectarianism and, more specifically, "modern sects" as Troeltsch calls them. Interestingly, describing these modern sects within Protestantism, Troeltsch mentions primarily groups of a millenarian character – Adventists, Irvingites, and Darbyists. Moreover, Troeltsch notices that "these newer sects represent the natural development of the persecuted Pietist element." Furthermore, these sects pursued the goal of reawakening of "the old ideas of world-renewal which characterised the aggressive sects" and a pursuit of the earthly Kingdom of God.⁵⁶ Troeltsch explains such radicalization of modern sectarianism by social and economic conditions caused by the rise of capitalism. Whether it is the case with the Russian Jehovahists or not, may be a questionable matter. More important is the obvious typological similarity of Jehovahists with Western religious movements of the described kind. This typological likeness (as well as historical liaisons) allows us to classify Jehovahists-Il'inites as a Christian group of a sectarian kind with its roots in the European Reformation and Pietism in spite of the striking uniqueness and originality of some of Il'in's theological and ecclesiological premises, such as his denial of biblical authority, or the

⁵⁶ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2 Vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 2:725.

closed character of his organization. Orthodox churchmen particularly supported the view that Jehovahism cannot be classified as a Christian denomination due to its strictly anti-Orthodox ethos. However Jehovahism can be interpreted with less difficulty and more fairness using the Troeltschian typology of Protestant sectarianism. The issue of the Pietistic component and influence on Jehovahism will be analyzed in the next chapter bearing in mind the deeply sectarian character of the group. It can be said with a fair share of accuracy that Russian Jehovahism is a product of mystical chiliastic Pietism confined to sectarian existence.

CHAPTER 4. PIETIST VIEWS IN THE DOCTRINE OF IL'IN

Introduction

While Pietistic views could peacefully co-exist within, or, at least, with established churches throughout Protestant Europe, the political, economic, and social conditions of Russian hinterlands in the mid-nineteenth century did not permit this. An attempt to incorporate basic tenets of Pietism into the fabric of the mainstream Russian intellectual palette was made under Alexander I.¹ This palette was characterized by the officially endorsed policy of relative toleration towards non-Orthodox religions of Western origin and native religious dissent; publication and wide circulation of Pietistic literature, translated from German; and mass immigration of German Pietist radicals into Russia for religious reasons. The attempt was tentatively successful, but the success lasted only as long as these ideas enjoyed official support and the personal protection of the Emperor. When the protection and official recognition ceased, ideas of radical Pietism in Russia inevitably had to resort to sectarian forms of doctrine and worship.

Sectarianism and secretiveness boosted the development of very unique religious practices and the sectarian organizational structure of the Jehovist community, not typical of western European Pietism. However, much of the Pietistic theoretical foundation remained clearly visible and can be easily distinguished within a sectarian discourse.

The root of Il'in's apocalyptic discourse was the chiliasm of Württemberg Pietism, represented most prominently by Johann Albrecht Bengel and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. Bengel's chiliasm, according to Hartmut Lehmann, was firmly founded in biblical exegesis and derived from his through study of the Bible.² Bengel believed he was living shortly before the final battle between powers of light and darkness. The date of the beginning of the millennium

¹ James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 276-290.

² Hartmut Lehmann, *Pietismus und weltliche Ordnung in Württemberg vom 17. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969), 70-71.

calculated by Bengel on the basis of the book of Revelation was 18th of June, 1836. Bengel saw the Pietist movement as a fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecies. He regarded Johann Arndt, a German religious thinker and forerunner of Pietism, and Philipp Jakob Spener, founder of the Pietist movement as the Angels in the book of Revelation.³ Bengel and other Württemberg Pietists expected the imminent millennium, unification of true Christianity, destruction of the papacy, and conversion of the Jews.⁴

In this section we will look at the distinctly Pietistic ideas within Il'inite doctrine and the peculiarities of their interpretation. Among these ideas are:

- a) the concept of unification of faiths under the governing principle of love;⁵
- b) belief in the coming terrestrial Millennium with the capital in Jerusalem and the miraculous transformation of earth and the living conditions of humankind;⁶
- c) a critical approach to the Bible, and special focus on the book of Apocalypse;⁷
- d) a special attitude towards Jewish people and Judaism, acknowledgement of the peculiar role of the nation of Israel in world history and in the coming millennial kingdom, and the expectation of the conversion of Jews to Christ;⁸
- e) belief in the special role of Russia in history, supported by Jung-Stilling, who believed in the sacred mission of Alexander I as protector of order in Europe, and who expected the millennial kingdom to be revealed in the southern part of the Russian Empire;⁹

³ Ibidem, 71-72.

⁴ Martin H. Jung, *Nachfolger, Visionärinnen, Kirchenkritiker* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 107.

⁵ See Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*/Kurt Aland (Hg.). 3. Nachdr. der 3., durchges. Aufl. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964), 44-45, 60.

⁶ Hartmut Lehmann, *Pietismus und weltliche Ordnung in Württemberg vom 17. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969), 18, 71-72; Jung, "1836 – Wiederkunft Christi oder Beginn des Milleniums? Zur Eschatologie J.A. Bengels und seiner Schüler," 102-112.

⁷ Douglas H. Shantz, "The Millennial Study Bible of Heinrich Horch (1652-1729)" in Peter A. Lillback, ed., in *The Practical Calvinist. Essays in Honor of Dr. D. Clair Davis* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 406; Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 96-102.

⁸ Jung, *Nachfolger, Visionärinnen, Kirchenkritiker*, 107. See also Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, *Zuruf eines geistlichen Israeliten an die Jüdische Nation* on the web site of Die Jung-Stilling-Gesellschaft (The Jung-Stilling Society) in Siegen, Germany, at <http://www.jung-stilling-archiv.de/ZurufJuden.htm> (URL accurate as of 17 April 2006).

⁹ Lehmann, 171; See also Andreas Gestrich, "German Religious Emigration to Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity. New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*. Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, Renate Wilson, ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 93.

- f) a positive attitude towards empirical knowledge and technical progress, and belief that science is in agreement with true religion;¹⁰
- g) a critical view of historical Christian churches, especially non-Protestant, and denial of institutional ecclesiastic authority in spiritual matters.¹¹

Mechanisms of Transformation of Jehovism

As we shall see, primitive Jehovism (before Il'in's imprisonment) was a movement that appeared under the direct influence of chiliastic and highly mystical Pietism. Il'in, in all probability, did not have any personal contact with German Pietists, so this influence took place through their books.

In the course of the development of the Jehovist doctrine some of the Pietistic ideas vanished altogether while others took an exaggerated and somewhat bizarre form. As Jehovism was increasingly becoming a sectarian movement, following the arrest and imprisonment of Il'in (1859), the toleration and non-confessionalism so typical of German Pietism disappeared. The authority of the Bible and focus on personal biblical reading and devotions were replaced by the authority of Il'in's prophetic personality and his writings. Highly unorthodox views such as polytheism and materialism took the place of a theology more traditional for Christianity. The main reason for these changes was the transformation of Il'in's doctrine into a closed and sectarian movement. Similar tendencies were typical of immigrant German Pietistic communities in America. Those intentional communities founded by Radical Pietists, mostly from Württemberg, included The Woman in the Wilderness, Ephrata, Zoar, Amana, Harmony, and others.¹² The doctrine and religious practices in those communities often deviated greatly from the usual patterns set by the Reformation. Durnbaugh wrote that unorthodox practices typical of those communitarians reflected the strong influence of Jakob Böhme, and included the

¹⁰ Martin H. Jung, *Pietismus* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), 103-105.

¹¹ Lehmann, 15.

¹² See Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Work and Hope: The Spirituality of the Radical Pietist Communitarians," *Church History*, Vol. 39:1 (March 1970), 72-90.

encouragement of celibacy, millenarianism, charismatic leadership, and focus upon active work.¹³ Sometimes they also included Sabbatarianism, the belief in imminent bodily immortality for their members, and an emphasis on astronomical observations and calculations.¹⁴

In the example of Jehovah's Witnesses we observe a transformation of Pietist ideas in the process of resistance under adverse social and new cultural conditions. In other words, we observe 1) marginalization of an ideology which causes it to become a "religion of resistance," and 2) development of means of resistance, that is, tactics and practices that make the resistance efficacious.

Il'in and the Idea of Unification of Faiths; His Connections with European Radical Christianity

Nikolai Il'in declared his intention to unite all religions and make out of their multitude just one, based on the principles of love towards God and one another.¹⁵ This sounds quite in line with one of the basic teachings of Pietism. The roots of Pietistic interdenominationalism and ecumenism lie in the spiritualist tradition of the early Radical Reformation. The spiritualist tradition, represented by such figures as Kaspar Schwenkfeld, Sebastian Franck and Jakob Böhme, insisted that "the Holy Spirit... was superior to any historic record... be it the Bible (or any part thereof, like the New Testament) or the church (or any institution thereof, like the clergy)."¹⁶ The influence of Spiritualists and Jakob Böhme on Pietism was noted by Martin Brecht.¹⁷ Thus, unity for Spiritualists and Pietists was a unity in spirit, not an organizational unity of a separate denomination. For the most part, Pietists belonged to established religious communities, mainly to the Evangelical Lutheran church. External and organizational matters are naturally of little concern for those who believe that worship, salvation or communion with God

¹³ Ibidem, 85.

¹⁴ Mark Holloway, *Utopian Communities in America* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1966), 37-43.

¹⁵ Il'in, *Razsvet nad Erusalimom* (Privately printed, n.d.), 27.

¹⁶ George H. Williams, ed., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), 31-32.

¹⁷ Martin Brecht, "Das Aufkommen der neuen Frömmigkeitsbewegung in Deutschland," in *Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 113-203.

pertains exclusively to the inner life of a person. While Il'in did not fully appreciate the tradition that stood behind these ideas, his writings do bear testimony to the fact that he felt linked to this Spiritualist and Pietistic lineage. Consequently, Il'in's very critical attitude to the rest of the denominations of contemporary Christianity did not preclude him from claiming some of the important historical figures of old times as his allies. For example, in the booklet *Light to the Gentiles*, Il'in explicitly called Balaam, Jethro, Job, Buddha, Pythagoras, Confucius, Zoroaster, Jakob Böhme, Thomas Müntzer and Skharia, a semi-legendary leader of the medieval Russian heresy of Judaizers, holy prophets.¹⁸ Apparently, Il'in felt an urge to place himself and his doctrine within a broader context of like-minded (of course, tentatively) religious actors. In *A Call of All People to Immortality* he added Ivan Suslov, an eighteenth-century leader of the Russian underground sect of *Khristovshchina*, or Flagellants, John Hus, a Czech Reformer, Hieronymus of Prague, and Baroness von Krüdener, a Pietistic preacher of late 18th – early 19th century to the list.¹⁹ Similar lists of former prophets of Jehovah appear in a number of other pamphlets by Il'in. In some of his pamphlets George Fox (1624-1691), founder of the Society of Friends (Quakers), John Wycliff (1320-1384), the late medieval translator of the Bible into English, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish visionary and mystic, Nikolai Novikov (1762-1813), the first Russian mason, Lord Radstock, an Englishman and Evangelical preacher of mid-19th century among the Russian aristocracy in Saint-Petersburg, Pashkov, a 19th century pioneer of Russian Evangelicalism are called either prophets or friends of Jehovah.²⁰

References to George Fox, Jakob Böhme and Baroness von Krüdener, as we shall see, are of special significance. All three represent a spiritualist trend within Christian thought, and the influence of all of them on Il'in goes far beyond mere mention. Quakers, according to Jung-Stilling, and, consequently, Nikolai Il'in, are one of the branches of Philadelphian Christianity,

¹⁸ Il'in, *Svet narodam i obrazumenie iudeiam* (Privately printed, n.d.), 65.

¹⁹ Il'in, *Prizyv vsekh liudei k bezsmertiiu* (Privately printed, n.d.), 8.

²⁰ See George Fox, *Journal* (Friends United Press, 1976); A. Kenny, *Wyclif* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Inge Jonsson, *Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971); on Novikov and Russian masonry see Billington, 242-259; on Radstock and Pashkov consult Edmund Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy, 1860-1900: Radstockism and Pashkovism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970).

that is, true Christendom of the modern times. Indeed, Quakers, along with the Moravians, were prominent on the Russian religious landscape of Alexandrine times. Aleksandr Pypin wrote:

“Alexander held Quakers in such esteem, trust and sympathy, that his relationship with them reflects features of his own mood and character, and acquires a historical importance.”²¹

Alexander I visited a Quaker meeting for worship in London, and welcomed Quakers to Russia. A deputation of Quakers also visited Alexander at a London hotel. Alexander said, among other things, that the service for God must be spiritual to be accepted by God, while external forms are of secondary importance.²² An account of a meeting between Alexander I and a deputation of British Quakers was published as a pamphlet.²³ Some, such as Stephen Grellet, travelled extensively across the country, visiting colonies of Russian dissenting sects of Molokans and Doukhobors in the south of the country. Others, such as Daniel Wheeler, found professional employment in Russia.²⁴

In his book, *The Most True Way to Become Immortal for Everyone Who Sincerely So Wishes*, Il'in defines Quakers as the Apocalyptic “Philadelphian church.”²⁵ The Philadelphian period in the history of the church, as Pietist mystics understood it, refers to the time shortly before the millennium when primitive Christian love and unity among various denominations will be restored.²⁶ Jung-Stilling specifically mentioned Quakers, Mennonites, Separatists, Methodists, “Pietists of every kind,” and Moravians as the churches that will constitute the core of this unification.²⁷ Il'in wrote that Jehovah would “make them [Quakers] forever chamberlains in GOD’s palace,” because, as Il'in believed, they had fulfilled apocalyptic commands in precision. He further clarified this: “Jezebel now calls those beloved servants of HIS... Quakers,

²¹ A.N. Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia pri Aleksandre I* (Petrograd: Ogni, 1916), 401.

²² Ibidem, 406.

²³ See *A Correct Statement of what passed at a Conference between the Emperor Alexander and a deputation from the Society of Quakers; consisting of J. Wilkinson, S. Grillette, and Wm. Allen, etc.* (London, 1817).

²⁴ See Daniel Wheeler, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours of the late Daniel Wheeler* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1852).

²⁵ Il'in, *Samoe istinnoe sredstvo sdelat'sia bessmertnym vsiakomu, kto tol'ko iskrenno sего pozhelaet* (Manuscript, n. d.), 39.

²⁶ Douglas H. Shantz, “The Millennial Study Bible of Heinrich Horsch (1652-1729)” in Peter A. Lillback, ed., in *The Practical Calvinist. Essays in Honor of Dr. D. Clair Davis* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 405.

²⁷ *Pobednaia povest' ili torzhestvo very khristianskoi, predstavlennoe v Apokalipsise, ob'iasnennom na pol'zu obshchuiu I.G. Iungom. Perevod s nemetskogo. 1807go goda* (Manuscript: no publication data), leaf 25.

or the ones who do not put off their hats before any authorities and even before kings.”²⁸

Besides, Il'in said that Jehovah would hide Quakers from the coming tribulation, and that there would not be much time left between the emergence of Quakerism and the battle of God with Satan.

Jakob Böhme indirectly influenced religious discourse in Russia from early on. Böhme's ideas first came to Russia in 1670-80s when a Böhmist group existed among German expatriates who lived in Moscow. His influence became especially strong in late 18th – early 19th century when Pietism was one of the dominant currents of Russian religiosity. Böhmist ideas in Russia were promoted and popularized by Aleksandr Labzin, editor of *The Messenger of Zion* and certain workers of The Bible Society.²⁹

References to Jakob Böhme seem to likewise indicate Il'in's intellectual connections.³⁰ Böhme was particularly instrumental in shaping the views of a second important figure in Swabian millenarian Pietism, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. According to Stoeffler, “not even Bengel, who had hitherto been his (Oetinger's) religious mentor, had been able to do for him what Böhme promised to accomplish.”³¹ Specifically, the idea of nature, or the world around us, as a channel of knowledge of and about God, seems to have been well reflected in Il'in's thought. Il'in welcomed everybody to test the veracity of his theology using a “triple criterion,” one part of which was application to it of the laws of nature. “There is nothing more beneficial, better and more precious for a man than if he acquires both the divine and the temporal light (knowledge),” says Böhme. Il'in quotes Böhme's words in his *Common Alphabet*, one of his earliest writings, and in *The Message of Zion*.³²

²⁸ Il'in, *Samoe istinnoe sredstvo*, 39.

²⁹ See Zdenek David, “The Influence of Jacob Boehme on Russian Religious Thought,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 21, no. 1 (March 1962), 43-64.

³⁰ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 37

³¹ Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 108.

³² Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 37.

It should be noted that Böhme's *The Way to Christ (Der Weg zu Christo)*³³ was translated into Russian, published in 1815, and spread through the same channels, namely The Bible Society, and by the same people as works by Jung-Stilling. Böhme's book fell into disfavour with the Orthodox clergy soon after its publication.³⁴ It is undoubtedly read Böhme, whose book *Christosophia, or The Way to Christ* was published in Russian in 1815,³⁵ and the influence of the latter on the former was profound.

Baroness Julia von Krüdener (1764-1824) was born into a Russian German noble family and married a Russian diplomat, also of German descent. Lutheran by birth and upbringing, she was exposed to the ideas of Pietism in Germany where she continuously lived for many years. She visited Moravian settlements in Herrnhut and Berthelsdorf and was impressed by Moravian piety. She sought Jung-Stilling's friendship, finally met him in Karlsruhe, and stayed with him and his family for quite a while in 1808. Jung-Stilling made such a deep impression on her that von Krüdener became one of the most active supporters of his ideas in Russia.³⁶ She had an extensive network of friendships and acquaintances among the Russian nobility, and used her skills and access to high spheres to promote mystical Pietism. Of particular importance is her influence on Emperor Alexander I. She met the Emperor in 1815 in Paris by his invitation. Baroness's influence on the Emperor was so profound that it was believed that she suggested the very idea of the Holy Alliance between Russia, Prussia, and Austro-Hungary. Although the latter statement was probably not accurate, and Jung-Stilling should be credited with promulgation of the idea of the Holy Alliance, von Krüdener initially did make a strong impact on the Emperor.³⁷

However, the rather extravagant behaviour of the Baroness, falling into religious ecstasy and prophesying, as well as her friendship with known charlatans finally led to Alexander's disfavour. Baroness von Krüdener undertook a philanthropic campaign to Switzerland, which had been hit by a bad harvest and resulting famine. She distributed food among the hungry and

³³ Jakob Böhme, *The Way to Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

³⁴ Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia*, 253.

³⁵ Iakov Biom, *Put' ko Khristu* (Saint-Petersburg: 1815).

³⁶ Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia*, 317-324.

³⁷ Ibidem, 333-361.

caused unrest by her millenarian prophecies that were deemed politically dangerous by the authorities.³⁸

Among other projects von Krüdener was involved in recruiting prospective Swiss pietistic settlers into Russia where, she believed, they would find peace, prosperity, autonomy and religious freedom. She was asked to leave canton after canton, and at last had to return to Russia in 1818 when the Pietistic cause was about to fall into disfavour at the Russian court. She died in 1824.³⁹

Thus, Nikolai Il'in's frequent reference to these prominent figures of the past reveals a lineage of intellectual and ideological inheritance that links radical Pietistic mysticism and millenarianism to a small apocalyptic sect founded in 1850s in the hinterlands of Russia. These references establish a link, albeit an indirect one, between traditions of European radical religious dissent and a small Russian millenarian sect. Il'in himself recognized and acknowledged this lineage of spiritual ancestry, and expressed his recognition in exalting the Quaker George Fox, the German mystic Jakob Böhme, and the Russian-German prophetess and promulgator of millenarian ideas Baroness von Krüdener as true servants of Jehovah.

Chiliastic Expectations

Il'in made use of all the fundamental tenets of millenarian Pietism as we know it from the writings of Swabian Pietists, in particular Bengel and Oetinger. Swabian (or Württemberg) Pietism stands out for its millenarianism, that is, belief in the imminent coming of the kingdom of Christ on earth. Those ideas probably were not borrowed by Il'in directly from Bengel's writings. Most likely, they were conveyed to him through the writings of Jung-Stilling and his Russian propagators.

As it was noted, chiliastic expectations and a special hermeneutics of the book of Revelation as an account of the history of Christendom existed in Pietism before Bengel.

³⁸ Ibidem, 361-374.

³⁹ See the detailed story of Baroness von Krüdener in Pypin, *Religioznye dvizheniia*, 295-395.

Douglas Shantz points to the “medieval beginnings of this model” and demonstrates that this pattern may be traced back to Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), a medieval Franciscan mystic.⁴⁰ Jung affirms that Philipp Jakob Spener, founder of the Pietist movement, built the basis for Bengel’s eschatology by his anticipation of “better times” for the church.⁴¹ Spener’s eschatology already included belief in mass conversion of Jews to Christianity, destruction of the papacy and unification of Christian denominations.⁴² He did not however speak about the millennial reign of Christ nor set any dates for Christ’s return.⁴³ Bengel’s more elaborate and developed eschatological views, following Spener’s guidelines, already included the idea of the millennial kingdom. He even went as far as proclaiming 1836 as the year of the expected beginning of the millennium.⁴⁴ Bengel’s tradition of Pietistic chiliasm was revived and promulgated by Jung-Stilling some fifty years later. His thought was characterized by the vigorous millenarian mysticism, a focus on Christian unity, and non-confessionalism.

Jung-Stilling’s books *Homesickness*, *The Victorious Story of the Christian Religion*, *The Grey Man*, and *Scenes from the World of Spirits* were published in Russian in 1806-1817 and won considerable popularity. In *The Victorious Story* Jung-Stilling popularized the exegesis of the Apocalypse suggested by Bengel, with some minor corrections.⁴⁵ The Russian translation of *The Victorious Story* was Il’in’s handbook in the years preceding his break with the Orthodox church.⁴⁶

Nikolai Il’in’s eschatology, unlike that of amillennial Orthodoxy, Old Believers and other Russian sects, was chiliastic from the very beginning. Il’in followed the pattern of chiliastic discourse set by Bengel and Jung-Stilling, who slightly modified and popularized Bengel’s views

⁴⁰ Douglas H. Shantz, “The Millennial Study Bible of Heinrich Horch (1652-1729)” in Peter A. Lillback, ed., in *The Practical Calvinist. Essays in Honor of Dr. D. Clair Davis* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 391-414.

⁴¹ Jung, *Nachfolger, Visionärinnen, Kirchenkritiker*, 99.

⁴² Spener, *Pia desideria*, 43-45, 60.

⁴³ Jung, *Nachfolger, Visionärinnen, Kirchenkritiker*, 99

⁴⁴ Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Erklärte Offenbarung Johannis und vielmehr Jesu Christi* (Stuttgart: Erhard, 1740), 1073.

⁴⁵ *Pobednaia povest’ ili torzhestvo very khristianskoi, predstavlennoe v Apokalipsise, ob’iasnennom na pol’zu obshchuiu I.G. Iungom*. Perevod s nemetskogo. 1807go goda. (Manuscript: n.d.), leaf 3.

⁴⁶ E.V. Molostvova. *Iegovisty. Zhizn’ i sochineniia kapitana Il’ina* (S. Peterburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1914), 26.

on the subject. Il'in was well aware of the focal point of his doctrine; he often called his religion "the apocalyptic faith."⁴⁷ A detailed description of the coming millennium with the rebuilt Jerusalem, the palace of Jehovah in its centre, a happy and untroubled life for the Jehovahists within the city, and significantly improved conditions of others outside Jerusalem, technical and moral progress are all part of the Jehovahist "creed" or "confession of faith." Il'in repeated this confession in many of his pamphlets, and Jehovahists are supposed to know the creed by heart.

Biblical Criticism

Along with millenarianism, another important development that had an effect on Nikolai Il'in was Bengel's critical approach towards the text of the Bible. Ernest Stoeffler wrote: "Bengel made his contribution to Protestant theology chiefly at two points – biblical criticism (as well as the exegesis based upon it), and eschatology."⁴⁸ Jung-Stilling in his *Victorious Song of Christian Religion* credited Bengel with the right approach to the interpretation of the Apocalypse, and did not claim anything original except for correcting Bengel in certain details.⁴⁹ Therefore, the basis of the apocalyptic thinking of the Russian mystic seems to have been laid upon Bengel's foundation. "Bengel sincerely believed that the entire progression of historical events was fully present in the mind of God before the world began... Thus he regarded the apocalyptic passages of the Bible, and especially the Book of Revelation, as prefigured history."⁵⁰ As we have demonstrated, Il'in upheld the same view of the apocalyptical revelation.

The influence of Bengel's biblical criticism on Il'in's attitudes towards the Christian Scriptures is somewhat more difficult to prove. However, the fact is that both Bengel and Il'in were confronted with the same problem. Stoeffler states about Bengel: "In the face of various readings of many biblical passages how can one regard the totality of such passages as the

⁴⁷ Il'in, *Ob 'iavka, chto poiavilas' na svete chudo-knizhka, ili divnyia predskazaniia BOGA-bogov EGOVY* (Electronic version of the pamphlet, available at <http://www.svetoch.net/upload/docs/obiavka%20hto.doc> URL accurate as of 4 April 2006), 21.

⁴⁸ Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century*, 96.

⁴⁹ Jung-Stilling, Johann Heinrich. *Erster Nachtrag zur Siegesgeschichte der christlichen Religion in einer gemeinnützigen Erklärung der Offenbarung Johannis* (Nürnberg, im Verlag der Raw'schen Buchhandlung, 1805), 42-43.

⁵⁰ Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century*, 102.

infallible Word of God? This was the problem which confronted him.”⁵¹ It should be noted, however, that Bengel lived and worked in a thoroughly biblical environment, which was a logical limitation of his biblical criticism, while Il’in acted in a quite different setting, and in a sense could afford to disregard restraints Bengel never attempted to overcome. The foundation of the Protestant Reformation, and, thus, Pietism as an offshoot of Lutheranism, was the principle of *sola scriptura*. A denial of the Bible or even an unsympathetic criticism would inevitably endanger the position of such a critique in the Protestant milieu of 18th century Württemberg. Il’in, on the contrary, lived considerably later in the much more multiconfessional and multiethnic environment of the Russian Urals. He could afford a less restricted critique of the biblical text where it was necessitated by the rhetorical needs of his discourse. This will be discussed at more length in the next chapter.

Role of the Jewish Nation

Acknowledgment of the extraordinarily important role of the Jewish nation in God’s plan for the Universe, so prolific in Jehovism, also was a topic initially brought up by millenarian Pietists. P.J. Spener, the founder of Pietism, lived in Frankfurt, a city with a significant Jewish population, and developed a lively interest in Judaism. Bengel and Zinzendorf also visited the Frankfurt ghetto. Pietists expected a mass conversion of Jews to Christianity as a sign of the last days as outlined in Romans, chapter 11.⁵² However, Oetinger expressed this Pietistic philosemitism in the most articulated manner. Oetinger believed that Jews would gather from exile towards the end of time, including the ten tribes lost in the Babylonian captivity. He expected restoration of the Jerusalem Temple and the sacrificial cult. Oetinger thought Jews would have a key position in the coming millennial kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital and

⁵¹ Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century*, 97.

⁵² Martin H. Jung, *Pietismus* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), 100-101.

Hebrew as its official language.⁵³ Inhabitants of Herrnhut, a Pietist settlement in Moravia, even rested on the Jewish Sabbath and celebrated Yom Kippur.⁵⁴

Il'in also believed in the restoration of the kingdom of Israel in Jerusalem, and acknowledged that Jehovah is in fact the God of Jews, who now appeals to the heathen as well because Jews would not listen to him. Il'in believed that Jehovah, a man like us, is a circumcised Jew, and that he naturally is very concerned with the fate of his own flock.⁵⁵ Likewise Il'in supported the belief in ten lost tribes of Israel which, in his opinion, still adhere to a faith very similar or identical with that of the Jehovahists.

For this reason the missionary efforts of Il'in and the Jehovahists have always been directed especially to the Jewish population. Il'in wrote and sent out dozens of letters and pamphlets to Jewish communities, from Kishinev, in Russian Moldavia to Warsaw, Paris, and the New World. He expected a conversion of Jews to his religion at any moment and their "stubbornness" and reluctance to listen to him gave Nikolai Il'in real pain.⁵⁶

Significance of Russia

Already J.A. Bengel believed in the special significance of Russia for the events of the end time.⁵⁷ Jung-Stilling upheld and promoted this view in his works. "Like Bengel, Jung-Stilling counted on the millennium's beginning in the very near future, and he, too, thought, that Russia would play a special role among the nations after the Second Coming of Christ, whose return was expected from the east, from Palestine or the Ararat mountain."⁵⁸ This belief, as we

⁵³ Jung, *Nachfolger, Visionärinnen, Kirchenkritiker*, 107.

⁵⁴ Jung, *Pietismus*, 22.

⁵⁵ Il'in, *Pobeditel' raznykh izhei i prelestei: iudeiskikh, khristianskikh, magometanskikh i buddiiskikh* (Privately printed, n.d.), 2-3.

⁵⁶ Il'in, *Blagovestie ot BOGA, voskreshaiushchego mertvykh, otradnoe dlia vsego chelovechestva, ili zhivotvoriashchii svet BOZHII vo t'mu mira sего* (Privately printed, n.d.), 16-18.

⁵⁷ Lehmann, *Pietismus und weltliche Ordnung*, 171.

⁵⁸ Andreas Gestrich, "German Religious Emigration to Russia in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity. New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*, Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, Renate Wilson, ed., (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 93.

have seen, triggered both the *Auswanderung* of Swabian folk Pietists to Russia and the internal migration of the Molokan sect from central Russia to the Caucasus.

Tatjana Högy wrote that Jung-Stilling's heartfelt and joyful support of the spiritual endeavours of Alexander I, his court, and Pietistic activity in Russia, went along with the mystical notion of the "East" in Jung-Stilling's works, something he came up with even before his acquaintance with the Emperor.⁵⁹ Jung-Stilling's *Heimweh* (*Homesickness*) is especially exemplary for employing the imagery of "eternal East" as a holy homeland of men, and the source of the spiritual light. "*Der Osten*" appears in Jung-Stilling's as a symbol of spiritual regeneration, purity, and wisdom.⁶⁰ With Alexander I as the ruler of the country Jung-Stilling felt that his dream of the spiritual East found its material incarnation in Alexandrine Russia.

Il'in also believed that Russia had a special place in world history. The final will of Jehovah was now proclaimed to the nations in the Russian language, which took the place of Hebrew as the sacred language. Besides, new sacred places, such as the mountain of Siniaia in the Urals where Nikolai Il'in claimed to have talked with Jehovah face to face, just as Moses did on Sinai, added a sacral dimension to the image of Russia among Il'in and his fellow Jehovahists.⁶¹

Science and Empirical Knowledge

Il'in always emphasized that his doctrine did not contradict scientific findings. He was convinced that true religion and true science could never contradict each other. In fact, he regarded the suspicious approach to science, characteristic of historical churches of the period, as a clear indication of their deviation from the truth. Il'in's writings are full of references to scientific facts and mathematical calculations. We have seen that mathematical accuracy might have been an important factor that persuaded Il'in of the validity of the prophecies of the Apocalypse. Il'in repeatedly mocks the idea of a soul as a substance separate from the body and firmly upholds the materialistic position that in mid 19th century was enough of a challenge and a

⁵⁹ Högy, *Jung-Stilling und Russland*, 34-66.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 34-39.

⁶¹ Il'in, *Prizyv vsekh liudei k bezsmertiiu*, 31.

token of scientific radicalism. Moreover, Il'in's Jehovah is a God primarily because he elevated himself to the level of godhead through knowledge, wisdom, and erudition. It should be noted that modern Il'inites, unlike members of many other small and isolated sects both in Russia and in the West, have no restrictions on the use of technology. Internet and e-mail are now some of the increasingly important and effective means of propagating Jehovahism.⁶² Jehovahists in general tend to value secular knowledge and often say that their message is especially directed at learned and educated people.⁶³

In his positive attitude towards empirical science and technology Il'in generally followed the pattern set by German Pietists. Jakob Böhme preached the idea of the realm of nature as a gospel proclaiming God. Friedrich Oetinger, who was engaged in chemical and physical experiments, upheld similar views. It is worth mentioning that Jung-Stilling was one of the best medical doctors and eye surgeons of his epoch and performed around 2000 cataract surgeries.⁶⁴ Jung noticed that Pietistic passion for nature and even technology was a distinctive feature of the movement since A.H. Francke who had in Halle an extensive collection of "*Naturalien*" exhibits from all over the world, from a stuffed crocodile to a model of the solar system.⁶⁵

Denial of Ecclesiastical Authority

German Pietists usually showed varying degrees of criticism of official church structures. Their preoccupation with spiritual aspects of Christianity resulted in the lack of motivation to break away from the dominant church or to found splinter groups, with the exception of Zinzendorf and the Moravians. Even Pietists who were loyal members of the dominant church maintained a degree of separate identity, thinking of themselves as "a church within a church". The formation of conventicles, Pietist communal and spiritual centres, is the best example of this approach. Maintaining a separate identity and having a separate organizational structure were an

⁶² See www.svetoch.net, a Jehovahist web-site, URL accurate as of 4 April 2006.

⁶³ Il'in, *Obschechelovecheskaia istina* (Privately printed, n.d.), 11.

⁶⁴ Stoeffler, *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century*, 258.

⁶⁵ Jung, *Pietismus*, 103.

act of criticism per se, since Pietists believed official Lutheran services and pastoral care were inadequate or insufficient for deeply spiritual and serious Christians. They replenished this insufficiency with separate prayer meetings and other kinds of spiritual nourishment.⁶⁶

The attitude of Pietists towards forms of Christianity other than Protestantism could be far more critical. For some of them, especially eschatologically minded ones, the Roman Catholic church was the apocalyptic Babylonian whore. Such was the opinion of Jung-Stilling expressed in *The Victorious Story*.⁶⁷ Nevertheless Jung-Stilling was careful not to promote sectarian partitions within Christianity. When straightforwardly asked by Russian Emperor Alexander I whether Herrnhuters were the truest church of Christ, Jung-Stilling was hesitant to confirm that, and instead said that he certainly held Moravians in high esteem, but that all Christian churches were good. As Tatjana Högy rightly noted, Jung-Stilling's Christianity went beyond confessional borders.⁶⁸

Nikolai Il'in accepted and intensified this critical approach in his works. Of course, the Russian Orthodox church took the place of Catholicism in Il'in's interpretation of apocalyptic imagery. Besides, Il'in's critical approach grew into an outward hostility as Jehovahists-Il'inites transformed from a group of enthusiastic mystics inspired by visions and the insights of Jung-Stilling and Bengel into a clandestine and persecuted movement of a sectarian type. However, Il'in's initial intention was to unite all true believers in Christ and convert Jews to his "New Testament Judaism."

Even at a later, "sectarian" stage of his movement, Il'in expressed his reverence and recognition towards such groups as Quakers and Moravians in his *The Most True Way to Become Immortal for Everyone Who Sincerely So Wishes*,⁶⁹ written after his release from imprisonment (after 1879), though most other Christian and non-Christian groups were severely criticized and frequently mocked by him.

⁶⁶ Douglas H. Shantz, Dictionary entry on Pietism for *New Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, Westminster/John Knox, forthcoming).

⁶⁷ *Pobednaia povest'*, leaf 22.

⁶⁸ Högy, *Jung-Stilling und Russland*, 17.

⁶⁹ Il'in, *Samoe istinnoe sredstvo*, 38-40.

Il'in believed that he had received a new revelation that "the whole essence of Christianity is in love alone."⁷⁰ Of course, the notion of Christianity as a religion of love comes from the words of Christ himself, as recorded in the New Testament (Matthew, 22:37-39). However, roots of this claim made by Il'in should also be looked for in the spiritualist tradition that he got to know through acquaintance with the writings of Jakob Böhme and other mystics. As we have already noted, the Christianity of Pietists was non-confessional. Moreover, it was to a great degree ecumenical. Zinzendorf, in particular, was "the first great ecumenist of Christian history."⁷¹ Thus, if the proposed unity of Christians is not based on the ecclesiastical, ritualistic, or even theological unity, it must be founded upon unity in spiritual matters. One could argue that Il'in's interpretation of Christian unity, in spite of his declarations, ultimately became extremely narrow and confessionalist following the transformation of the Jehovist movement into a sectarian organization. This is true. However, the influence of Pietistic spiritualism and an effort to remove denominational barriers was apparent at least at the initial stage of the Il'inite movement, that is, before his imprisonment (1859).

Conclusion

An impetus to the emergence of Russian millenarianism was given by a combination of factors. German, particularly Swabian chiliastic Pietism proved to be the decisive factor in the formation of Jehovism. Nikolai Il'in borrowed and used a number of characteristically Pietistic ideas. A necessary precondition for such an influence was a unique intellectual and political milieu that existed in Russia in the first quarter of the 19th century during the reign of Alexander I. The Personal spiritual interests of the Emperor, officially endorsed activities of the non-confessional Bible Society, translation and publication of works by Jung-Stilling and other mystical writers, domestic periodicals like *Sionskii Vestnik*, active immigration into Russia of

⁷⁰ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 23.

⁷¹ Jung, *Pietismus*, 62.

chilastically-minded German and Swiss settlers were among the external factors that made the emergence and development of Russian millenarianism feasible.

Il'in's sect evolved during the reign of Nicholas I, a brother and successor to Alexander I. The new monarch completely reversed the principles of religious tolerance professed by his brother. The influence of distinctly Pietistic ideas was especially effective at the earlier stage of the Il'inite movement. Later, following Il'in's imprisonment and a wave of persecution of his followers, Jehovahism gradually took on an increasingly more sectarian outlook and ideology. Some of the initial Pietistic ideas were drastically transformed or vanished altogether. The teaching of Nikolai Il'in can be regarded to a degree as a Russian offshoot of chiliastic Pietism. The cultural and religious distinctions peculiar to Russia, including a different political and social environment, the underground and clandestine existence the sect was forced into quite early, as well as the personality of Nikolai Il'in, gave to Jehovahism a unique and distinct character.

CHAPTER 5. THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF IL'IN'S RHETORIC

Introduction

The most original and unique feature of Il'in's theological discourse was his highly innovative persuasive rhetoric. Historically, in spite of the ongoing attraction of chiliastic ideas within Christianity, millenarian movements tend to be rather short-lived. They reach their apex at the moment of the most intense expectation of the coming millennial kingdom, the date for which the event is predicted. Then, as the predictions fail to come true, disappointment follows, many former members leave the movement and it either disintegrates or dwindles in numbers and adopts much quieter and more careful attitudes, becoming an insitutionalized church rather than a movement drawing on the enthusiasm of followers.¹ The classical illustration of the described pattern within the North American setting is the Millerites, or Adventist movement of the 1840s.² O'Leary writes about the choice the Millerites as a movement had to make after William Miller's prophecy that Christ would come in 1843 failed: "Such a drastic reduction in both public credibility and membership left Millerites with few options: they could disband and face the taunts of their fellow citizens, or they could form a church that would insulate them from public humiliation."³

It is psychologically difficult to maintain the intensity of the apocalyptic expectations on a high level characteristic of radical millenarianism. The necessity to do so requires a special effort and an extraordinary strength of persuasion on behalf of the promulgators of such movements.

¹ See *Expecting Armageddon. Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy*, Jon R. Stone, ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) on response of apocalyptic movements to failed prophecies.

² On the Millerites see *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

³ Stephen O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse. A Theory of Millenarian Rhetoric* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 110.

Topoi of Il'in's Rhetoric

The stability of millenarian groups often to a great degree depends on the leader's personality, organizational and other qualities, and simply on his/her physical charismatic presence. 19th-century Russian Jehovism was unique for its leader spent much of his life in confinement with little opportunity to communicate with his followers. Even upon his conditional release, Nikolai Il'in lived far away from the areas where most Jehovists resided, and could not travel freely. Therefore, in spite of the great reverence Jehovists had for their teacher as "the Universal Enlightener," the movement preserved its stability not so much due to successful management, but due to other factors. Among them we find an innovative apocalyptic rhetoric as well as certain original practices contributing to the cohesion, unity and solidarity of the group. These practices may be generally described as aimed at maintaining in the followers the feeling of separateness, otherness, and partaking in the sacred.

Il'in's rhetoric addressed the theme of evil and constructed his unique and original theodicy, which, according to Stephen O'Leary, is the most important component of the topos of evil.⁴ Then, this discourse treated the issue of time and sacred chronology, and, finally, established sources of authority for his audience. Contrary to Il'in's Orthodox critics who labeled his religion a "delirium" or a product of an insane imagination,⁵ Jehovism seems to be a fairly logical and balanced world outlook which apparently could and still is able to satisfy the spiritual needs of a number of people.

The current chapter attempts to show how the topoi of apocalyptic discourse are interpreted in the doctrine of Il'in. The best way to do this is to give an account of Il'in's world view pointing to the peculiarities of his treatment of the themes of authority and biblical interpretation, evil and theodicy, and time. The works of Il'in are the main sources used to research his sectarian apocalyptic discourse.

⁴ See O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 34-44.

⁵ Timofei Ivanovich Butkevich, *Obzor russkikh sekt i ikh tolkov* (Khar'kov: Tipografiia Gubernskago Pravleniia, 1910) 554; Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev, *Suggestion and its Role in Social Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 124.

Authority in Il'in's Rhetoric

First and foremost, Il'in rejected belief in the Bible as a sacred book or the word of God. He believed it to be utterly corrupted and perverted by Satan. The fact that there is some truth in the Bible was not denied, but separating worthy contents from falsified was considered practically impossible. Instead, Il'in believed that the Book of Revelation, or Apocalypse was the only authentic biblical text. Il'in wrote: "Can you not see that every Christian group bases its hellish superstition... on the Holy Scripture that Satan composed already in the 2nd century?.. But to save at least some of the Jews and heathen from that Scripture, JEHOVAH sent The Book from Heaven 50 years before the satanic-Christian Scripture, to wit, in the year 62."⁶ Interestingly, Il'in regarded biblical narratives as contradicting contemporary findings of empirical knowledge (creation of the world in seven days etc.). This proved they were the work of Satan who distorted the original biblical text. He wrote: "If GOD created in the beginning heaven and earth, does that mean that he had nothing more to create in the following days? It is said below that God created the earth in the 3rd day, and not in the beginning."⁷ The version of Apocalypse that the Jehovahists use differs from the text of the book as it appears in the Russian Bible approved by the Synod of the Orthodox church. Il'in's version of Apocalypse is known under the title *The Book from Heaven (Kniga s neba)*, and, along with insignificant variations of the text (e.g. *Jehovah* instead of *the Lord*) is furnished with numerous commentaries made by Il'in. Jehovahists consider the book to be written by Jesus (or Jehovah since, according to Il'in, both names mean the same person). Here Il'in goes along with Bengel who wrote in his *First Speech about the Revelation of John* that "the Lord Jesus Christ is the author of the Revelation, and John moved the feather."⁸ *The Book from Heaven* is considered a secret book that may only be given to the full-fledged members of the community. Books, booklets, pamphlets, speeches,

⁶ Il'in, *Razsvet nad Erusalimom* (Privately printed, n.d.), 13-14.

⁷ Il'in, *Obshchechelovecheskaia istina* (Privately printed, n.d.), 8.

⁸ Bengel, Johann Albrecht, *Gott hat mein Herz angeführt. Ein Bengel-Brevier* (Mettzingen/Württemberg: Ernst Franz Verlag, 1987), 122.

letters, songs and poems written by Il'in were also considered revelation from God Jehovah, or Jesus, which Jehovahists-Il'inists study, revere, copy, and disseminate.⁹ Il'in wrote: "Eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans or in the year 62 after CHRIST, JEHOVAH sent the Book from Heaven with HIS personal signature and with HIS Angel in order to show HIS servants what would begin to happen soon, and that Satan would compose in 2nd century, through Papius and Origen, the Christian Holy Scripture, which would bear in 2000 years 666 Christian hellish and hostility-creating faiths."¹⁰

The problem of the correct interpretation of Scripture proved to be a trap for many sincere and devout Christians. Various Christian denominations claim that their faith and practice directly follow Biblical texts, a fact that creates distrust in the Bible as a source of divine revelation. Part of the problem with the Bible, according to Il'in, was that it was written by men, and not by God, and so did not really deserve to be called the word of God. O'Leary put it this way in his discourse on authority as a topos of apocalyptic rhetoric:

The rejection of traditional authority in favor of the authority of Scripture did not bring about the simplification of the problem of authority, but instead resulted in a hitherto unimaginable fragmentation of the sources of authoritative discourse. The focus on *sola scriptura* paradoxically necessitated a new emphasis on interpretation; for the symbolic narrative is inherently ambiguous, its application to current events always a matter of dispute.¹¹

Therefore, the emphasis on the book of Revelation as the only God-given text in the direct sense of the word was a central point of Il'in's theory. A special focus on Revelation was,

⁹ For example, the Preface to *The Universal Truth* contains the following warning: "whoever you are, o mortal man,... you must read this Book with the utmost attention and reverence, without the tobacco smoke or the smell of alcohol. Otherwise you rather not read it, I warn you out of my love of fellow-men," Il'in, *Obshchechelovecheskaia istina*, 3.

¹⁰ Il'in, *Prizyv vsekh liudei k bezsmertiiu* (Privately printed, n.d.), 5.

¹¹ O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 54.

of course, typical for all Christian millenarian movements, and German Pietism gives some remarkable examples of exalting the book of Revelation as a prophetic text of special significance. Heinrich Horch, an 18th-century Radical Pietist, represents this attitude. “Horch’s treatment of the Biblical message made Song of Solomon and John’s Revelation the interpretive key to the whole Bible.”¹² However Il’in was unique in reducing the Bible to *The Book of Revelation* alone.

The plain and unequivocal rejection of the biblical canon in itself represents a strong claim for Il’in’s personal authority. Il’in’s position towards sacred books pursued a dual goal. Firstly, his claims for religious authority are exempt from the requirement of “correct” biblical exegesis. Consequently, his followers need not bother themselves with protecting their interpretation against attacks of propagators of “better” interpretations. Secondly, the self-consciousness of his community as keepers and protectors of *The Book from Heaven* must greatly contribute to the increasing cohesion and internal solidarity of the group. Besides, this status of a collective keeper, protector and distributor of truth must emphasize their opposition to “others”, who do not have access to the true sacred writings, thus creating a strong marker of belonging to the community of the chosen.

The Book of Heaven cannot under any circumstances be given to a non-member of the Jehovist community. However, the analysis of available quotations from *The Book* shows that there is not much difference between Russian translation of the Bible and the text of *The Book from Heaven*. The latter uses Jehovah instead of the Lord, and a somewhat more colloquial style. The peculiar feature of Il’in’s writing is extensive commentaries and footnotes to every statement he made. If we compare this description with the structure of *The Victorious Song* by Jung-Stilling, we see that the book of the German mystic includes the whole text of the Apocalypse with extensive commentaries on each verse. Lack of positive evidence does not allow for making strong claims, but there is a good reason to believe that Il’in’s commentaries on

¹² Douglas H. Shantz, “The Millennial Study Bible of Heinrich Horch (1652-1729)” in Peter A. Lillback, ed., in *The Practical Calvinist. Essays in Honor of Dr. D. Clair Davis* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 398.

the holy book of Jehovah's Witnesses paraphrase *The Victorious Song* by Jung-Stilling and retain its structure.

It is a legitimate question why Il'in did away with the Bible and what he gained by abolishing this traditional Christian source of authority. Virtually all of his apocalyptic predecessors, preachers of Apocalypse-based eschatology, in spite of the highly important role they attributed to the Bible, still retained the canon of Biblical books intact. Obviously, recognition or rejection of the Bible as a sacred scripture has much to do with the question of authority; in fact, it drastically changes the way authority is perceived. Hence, what encouraged Il'in to make such a radical shift? O'Leary notes that "all mythic discourse, and not only that of eschatology and apocalypse, must present itself as authoritative, if it is to have any claim at all to our attention (to say nothing of our allegiance and obedience)."¹³ It is therefore evident that denial of the authority of the Bible somehow served the purpose of strengthening the authority of Il'in's apocalyptic discourse.

Of course, any such shift, as O'Leary demonstrates by the example of early Christian preachers, indicates a change of the audience that apocalyptic discourse intends to reach.¹⁴ Indeed, the Il'inite movement coincided with such processes in the social and economic life of Russia as the rapid development of capitalism, migration of peasants into large cities (especially from 1863 when serfdom was completely abolished in the Empire), urbanization, unprecedented trust in empirical science and scientific progress, spread of communist ideology, and other utopian social ideas.¹⁵ James Billington wrote of this process: "the realization rapidly grew in the late 1850's that Russia was heading for profound changes. The English and French ships which brought troops to Russian soil during the Crimean War did not disrupt Russian culture nearly so much as the new techniques and ideas that streamed in peacefully after the treaty of Paris."¹⁶ A

¹³ O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 51.

¹⁴ Ibidem, 52.

¹⁵ See Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963 - Sixth edition, 1999), 368-390, 422-435.

¹⁶ James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 361.

new revelation built upon a new foundation consistent with scientific findings and modern ideas would have represented a rhetorical authority claim by Nikolai Il'in.

Il'in in some sense acted in the epicentre of all these new influences, since the Urals provinces where he lived and recruited his first followers were among the most industrialised regions of the country, due to a high concentration of mining factories, refineries, military plants and similar industry.¹⁷ Historically factory workers, many of them uprooted peasants and their descendants, have been the least religious social group of the Russian population, a fact noted and appreciated by Lenin and other propagators of communism.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, a special rhetoric was needed to reach that audience.

Another consideration refers to the fact that the geographical area of Il'in's initial preaching efforts was multinational and multiconfessional. Alongside Orthodox Russians who in many individual localities did not comprise the majority of population, there were Russians, who adhered to various sects of Old Belief, as well as sects such as *nemoliaki* (who rejected any external religiosity) and *neplatelshchiki* (who denied paying taxes and private ownership of land).¹⁹ Of course, a growing number of factory workers were indifferent, non-religious, or outright atheists. The non-Russian population was represented by predominantly Sunni Muslim Tartars and Bashkirs, and various Finno-Ugric ethnicities (Komi, Mordva, Udmurts, Mari and others) who were nominally christianized, but retained numerous elements of their pre-Christian animistic religions.²⁰ Some of them were also members of the Old Belief (Komi in northern Urals)²¹ or the Molokan sect (Mordva to the east of Urals). Clearly for many of those members of ethnic or religious minorities the Bible could not have been a compellingly authoritative source of religious truth. Many of them, Muslims, animists, atheists, or some radical sectarians,

¹⁷ See, for example, V.A. Ljapin, "War industry in the Urals in the first half of the XIX c. (technical-economic and social aspects of development)", *Ural'skii Istoricheskii Vestnik* (September, 2003), 90-103.

¹⁸ See V.I. Lenin, *Sotsializm i religii* (Moscow: Progress, 1979).

¹⁹ See A.S. Prugavin, *Nepriemliushchie mira: ocherki religioznykh iskanii. Anarkhicheskoe techenie v russkom sektantstve* (Moscow: 1918).

²⁰ See M.P. Soldatkin, "N.I. Il'inskii i nasazhdeniie pravoslaviia sredi mordvy vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka," in *Issledovaniia po istorii Mordovskoi ASSR* (Saransk: MNIIIaLIE, 1974).

²¹ A.N. Vlasov, "Komi staroobriadtsy Pechorskogo kraia," *Vzaimodeistvie knizhnykh traditsii Pomoriia, Urala i Sibiri v XVII-XX vekakh* (Ekaterinburg: 2002), 168-181.

did not know or accept the Bible altogether, while others, such as Old Believers or Orthodox, never read it in the vernacular and often had a vague idea of its contents. A stark contrast with the situation of apocalyptic movements in Europe or North America is obvious. European chiliasts, Pietists no exception, lived in a biblical environment, so to speak. Their audiences knew the Bible very well, and a denial or a too thorough revision of Biblical authority would have been problematic. Indeed, it would have discredited any such movement in the eyes of believers. Il'in had to reach an audience which had little or no regard for the Bible. This called for a new approach to scriptural authority, one that most people around him could identify with.

Of course, a denial of much of the biblical canon, except the Apocalypse, takes away much of the traditional moral teachings of both Judaism and Christianity as well as much of sacred history. Obviously, Il'in had to make up for these losses. Moral requirements in Russian Jehovism do not differ much from those in many other denominations of Christianity. Il'in urged his followers to love each other and their neighbours,²² and he generally promoted the teaching of the Ten Commandments with minor modifications. For example, it was permissible, although not recommended, to work on the Sabbath, provided earnings of that day went to good works. Any killing, even during wartime or in self-defence, was prohibited. However, these teachings were promulgated by Il'in not on the basis of biblical texts, but, rather, through his own writings that to a great extent took the place of holy scriptures for his followers.²³ Thus, Il'in came to assume the responsibility for creating an alternative source of authority. Rhetorical losses and gains that resulted seem ambiguous. On the one hand, denial of the biblical canon and substituting it with a "home-made" revelation objectively weakened the trustworthiness of the latter in the eyes of more traditionalist audiences. In fact, this caused a rather hostile attitude towards Il'in by many believers in the Bible, including the Orthodox, and Protestants, for

²² Il'in, *Essentsia iz zhivitvoriashchego sveta* (Privately printed, n.d.), 12.

²³ For example, the Preface to Il'in's *The Universal Truth* says: "Although this book is small, it is so precious for all mortal men, that compared to it piles of diamonds are worthless, because it declares to this dead world... the Quickening Truth," Ili'n, *Obshchechelovecheskaia istina*, 3.

example, Baptists who at times competed with Jehovahists for converts.²⁴ On the other hand, the prophet himself was the best interpreter of his own revelations. If something needed clarification, Il'in could clarify, or, if need be, modify his views in the course of events. He did not have to defend his right to interpret the revelation or the correctness of his exegesis before those who believed he was a prophet.

Il'in strictly prohibited transmission of his message through oral preaching. Instead, he commanded to disseminate the truth only in written form, by sending out printed booklets and leaflets. He wrote: "[the prophet] will proclaim MY NAME to all nations, and the Universal Truth (or Religion), but in such a way that no public preaching of him... will be heard."²⁵ The prophet, according to Il'in, was himself: "this prediction of JEHOVAH was fulfilled in this Messenger of HIS precisely, that is, that he has proclaimed to all tsars, nations and tribes this GOD's call of all people to the Universal Religion and immortality not verbally, but in writing."²⁶ Jehovahists have been doing so for well over a century. The prohibition to preach orally contributed to a better preservation of the doctrine since the chance of misinterpretation of the message would increase with oral preaching. Also, friends of Jehovah should do their best to refrain from disputes and arguments with the "Satanists" which would have been inevitable if they preached publicly.²⁷ At the same time, psychologically the interest that developed in the course of individual pondering upon a read text often was more profound than a curiosity that might arise as a result of listening to a speech.

Interestingly, Il'inities in their zeal to keep the letter of the divine revelation intact still use old-style Russian orthography which was in use when Il'in wrote his works. It was modified by a governmental decree in 1918. Use of such old orthography may create technical problems whenever Jehovahists reproduce, on paper or electronically, the writings of their leader. They have to look for rare fonts and make sure the outdated letters are rendered correctly whenever works

²⁴ A. Bukreev, "Egovisty-Adonaitsy", *Baptist Ukrainy* 5, 6 (1927).

²⁵ Il'in, *Poslanie v Obshchestvo Teosofii Vostoka i Zapada* (Privately printed, n.d.), 5.

²⁶ Ibidem, 6

²⁷ N.I. Ivanovskii, "Moe puteshestvie na Ural i ural'skie sektanty egovisty," *Missionerskoe obozrenie* (February 1900), 272-273.

by Il'in are printed, published on the Internet, or even hand copied. However, the feeling of partaking in the sacred duty as well as satisfaction from the fact that they have completed their mission properly in all probability outweighs the difficulties.

Typologically, an observer cannot but see a great similarity in the way sacred writings are treated by Jehovahs-Il'inites and by Orthodox Jews. In both cases every letter and sign of the sacred text has to be preserved exactly as they appear in the original, and a tradition of copying the sacred writ by hand exists in both communities. Moreover, Il'in introduced the idea of a sacred language, so familiar to the Jews. According to Il'in the Russian language has been made a sacred language of the time instead of Hebrew since the will of Jehovah was proclaimed through his last prophet Il'in in Russian.²⁸

There is no direct evidence that Il'in intentionally imitated Jews in those matters, but, given his self-identification as a restorer of "New Testament Judaism" and a "brother of the holy Hebrew prophets,"²⁹ a conscious or unconscious use of Jewish religion as a role model cannot be doubted. In any case, the emphasis Il'in placed on the way his followers were supposed to treat the sacred text strengthened the feeling of unity and "otherness" of the community of Il'inites in much the same manner that Torah preserved the self-identification of the Jewish diaspora.

Jehovists are not supposed to read any texts that are considered sacred in any other religion nor attend any worship outside their group. "Do not read any preaching and theology, Talmuds, Old and New Testaments, or Al-Quran," wrote Il'in.³⁰ Nevertheless seekers who are not yet members of the Brotherhood may be encouraged to read the Bible and compare what is written there with Il'in's interpretation.³¹ References to the Bible are abundant in Il'in's pamphlets and it is often presupposed that the reader is familiar with the biblical narrative to appreciate its critique or reinterpretation or can check out the biblical text. For example, in his

²⁸ Il'in, *Poslanie v Obshchestvo Teosofii*, 6.

²⁹ Il'in, *Ob 'iavlenie ot BOGA, voskreshaiushchego mertvykh* (Privately printed, n.d.), 8; *Razsvet nad Erusalimom*, 15.

³⁰ Il'in, *Pobeditel' raznykh lzhei i prelestei iudeiskikh, khristianskikh, magometanskikh i buddiiskikh* (Privately printed, n.d.), 6.

³¹ Il'in, *Blagovestie ot Boga, voskreshiushchego mertvykh, ortadnoe dlia vsego chelovechestva ili zhivotvoriachshii svet Bozhii vo t'mu mira sego* (Privately printed, n.d.), 2.

Razsvet nad Erusalimom (The Dawn over Jerusalem) Il'in said: "Beside HIS crucifixion, it was also fulfilled that HE entered Jerusalem, was betrayed for 30 silver coins, was born in Bethlehem, walked in Jerusalem and indeed visited the 2nd Temple."³² In spite of this, as it was noted above, Il'in does not recognize the validity of the texts of the Christian Gospel.

All other churches and denominations, except the Jehovahists, fall into the category of apostates. They were changed and perverted by Satan and no longer represent Jehovah and his teaching. Spiteful references to "666 Christian, 333 Buddhist, 10 Jewish, 6 Mohammedan and 1 Zoroastrian faiths" are frequent in Il'in's booklets.³³ All churches of historical Christianity are labeled the Babylonian whore and Jezebel.³⁴ Although for obvious reasons the Orthodox church is the most frequent object of the critique and mockery, other denominations and sects also get their share of the same attitude. Il'in wrote:

The GOD of Gods JEHOVAH commanded that everyone should learn individually from HIS utterances ... how to become immortal. But Satan commanded that among Catholics only the pope can learn them..., among the Orthodox – only their popes [patriarchs], or the Synod, among Lutherans – superintendents, among Jews – only rabbis, among other faiths – only mullahs or brahmins. But I urge you to listen to JEHOVAH, and not to Satan, and in order to do so to examine this GOD's call to immortality and universal peace with the following test:

1. By reading of all quotes from the scriptures [referred to] here.
2. By the endlessness of the Universe and the innumerability of different suns, planets and comets in it.
3. By geology.
4. By the universal history

³² Il'in, *Razsvet nad Erusalimom*, 7-8.

³³ Il'in, *Neprestanno napominanie* (Privately printed, n.d.), 6.

³⁴ Il'in, *O pogibel' zapечатlennykh sedmiglavykh zverstvom* (Privately printed, n.d.), 8-12.

5. Whether all this [teaching of Il'in] is consistent with common sense or reason.³⁵

In his booklet *A Question to the Universal Enlightener* Il'in says: "The most abominable religions for JEHOVAH are Jewish and Lutheran".³⁶

With all his contempt and even hostility towards other religions, Il'in's goal was a synthesis of religions which would lead to the restoration of their unity. In a brochure that circulated among the Jehovahists was a manuscript, *Questions about Nine Incarnations of Jehovah*. There Il'in asserted that Jehovah previously took the form of Manu, Krishna, Rama, Osiris, Hermes Trismegistos, Orpheus, Buddha and Zoroaster.³⁷ In practice, Il'in tried to merge Judaism with Christianity, to give way to what he called "New Testament Judaism". Indeed, certain elements of Judaism, keeping the Sabbath on Saturdays and the kosher diet, were incorporated into Russian Jehovahism as essential elements of practice. Precisely because of their Sabbatarianism, Jehovahists in the Urals were popularly known as *Subbotniki* (Sabbath-keepers).³⁸

Common roots of the three Abrahamic faiths were obvious to him and a merger and integration of the three monotheistic traditions was a main goal for Il'in. He wrote: "Like the prophet Isaiah, I call heaven and earth as my witnesses, that Christians, Jews and Mohammedans do not yet know their God, nor His struggle with Satan and Satanic Christians and Jews... nor the future endless transformation of the Earth, and do not understand that to trust GOD (JEHOVAH) and to believe in God are as different as Heaven is different from the Earth."³⁹

Topos of Evil

Theodicy, or justification of the existence of evil in the world created and governed by a good, merciful and all-powerful God, has always been a major theological problem of Christianity. If God is good and almighty, why does he tolerate evil? If he wants, but is not able

³⁵ Il'in, *Essentsia iz zhivotvoriashchego sveta* (Privately printed, n.d.), 3.

³⁶ Il'in, *Vopros ko Vsemirnomu Svetiteliu* (Privately printed, n.d.), 12.

³⁷ Il'in, *Voprosy o deviati voploshcheniakh EGOVY* (Manuscript, n.d.), 1.

³⁸ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 215.

³⁹ Il'in, *Otkrytie 7-mi tain* (Privately printed, n.d.), 11.

to eliminate it, he is not almighty. If he can, but does not want to get rid of evil, he is not good. Nikolai Berdiaev, a Russian religious philosopher, wrote: “People serious and profound, pondering over the meaning of life and seeking truth, sometimes become atheists; but this is so because they cannot resolve the problem of theodicy, they cannot become reconciled with theism. The crushing fact of the boundless evil and innumerable sufferings of the world is a singularly serious objection against faith in God.”⁴⁰ The leader of the Russian Jehovahs solved the problem of theodicy in a very unorthodox way, employing rhetoric of radical dualism.

Il'in is straightforward and unequivocal in rejecting monotheism. Such a rejection is an integral part of his innovative theodicy. His Statement of Faith, reiterated in many of his pamphlets, affirms that “There are two MAN-GODS, equal in strength, on this planet: JEHOVAH and Satan. JEHOVAH is the GOD of immortal people only, and Satan is the God of the mortals.”⁴¹ In his brochure *The Never-Ceasing Reminder*, Il'in exposed this idea in the form of a dialog between a “friend of Jehovah” and a “friend of Satan”:

Friend of Satan: Do you believe in God?

Friend of JEHOVAH: In which God?

F. of S.: But God is only one!

F. of J.: No, we hold that there are two Gods: the God of death and animosity, or the God of the present... world, and the GOD of IMMORTALITY and LOVE, or the GOD of the coming soon 1000-year-long... world.⁴²

In fact, in the Universe there are even more gods than these two, for the arena of struggle between Jehovah and Satan is limited to the Solar System. Jehovah-Jesus has a father and a mother. They both live on a distant planet far away from Earth and, consequently, are of little

⁴⁰ Nikolai Berdiaev, “Iz razmyshlenii o teoditsee,” *Put'*, Number 7 (April 1927), 50. (English translation by Fr. S. Janos, available online at http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1927_321.html, URL accurate as of 12 April 2006).

⁴¹ Il'in, *Kollurii ot religioznoi slepoty iudeiam i geidenam* (Privately printed, first published in Mitau in 1884), 19.

⁴² Il'in, *Neprestanno napominanie*, 5-6.

concern to humankind. Additionally, there may be an immeasurably high number of other gods in the endless universe, but they likewise have nothing to do with Earth and earthly affairs. Humans do not need to worship those gods. God, as well as everything else in the world, is material. There is, said Il'in, no such thing as spirit or soul which he declares to be one of the most subtle and destructive lies of Satan. Both earthly Gods, Jehovah and Satan, are not just material, they are humans like us. Il'in often recalled the biblical narrative of three angels that were accepted by Abram as guests, ate meat and bread, and drank milk. In Il'in's opinion one of the angels was Jehovah himself, and Jehovahists are reminded that he is still around and may knock at the door at any time. Thus, Jehovah is a man, but by far the wisest, the most learned, the strongest, and the most loving of all men. Il'in calls him a wizard, a magician, a scholar who has reached incomparable wisdom and erudition in the process of his billion-year-long life. Gods, according to Il'in "are men..., that have reached in their billion-year life such wisdom or erudition that they know the mysteries of nature, not just earthly, but also on other planets."⁴³

Immortal people, that is, Jehovahists, will eventually attain the same condition. Remarkably, Il'in calls Jehovah (and Satan) Man-Gods, emphasizing their humanity that gradually evolved into divinity, which (along with plurality of gods) surprisingly resembles teachings of the Latter-Day Saints, that emerged in the USA a few decades earlier.⁴⁴ Investigating parallels between Russian Jehovahists and Mormons is beyond the goal of this thesis; however, research of this issue could lead to interesting results and, possibly, trace shared sources of these theological conceptions.

Good comes from the God Jehovah while evil comes from the God Satan. It is up to every human being to decide whom he or she prefers to choose. "These two Men-Gods are enemies to each other, and, therefore, their teachings are... opposed to one another."⁴⁵ This means that Jehovah is not liable for any evil that exists in the world, for it is another equally

⁴³ Il'in, *Razsvet nad Erusalimom*, 18.

⁴⁴ See Darrick T. Evenson, "Man Can Attain Godhood: Ancient Evidence for Modern Mormon Doctrine," in *The Gainsayers: A Converted Anti-Mormon Responds to Critics of the LDS Church* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, Inc., 1989).

⁴⁵ Il'in, *Razsvet nad Erusalimom*, 18.

powerful divine being that creates evil and is responsible for it. This position has obvious typological links with the Zoroastrian stand on theodicy. “The other straightforward answer is to deny that the God is all-powerful. This was the answer of Sassanian Zoroastrianism... [Personified evil,] Ahriman, became elevated to the same stature as the God, Ormuzd. Ahriman was nearly as powerful as Ormuzd. In time and with man’s help, Ormuzd would prevail, but here and now Ormuzd was not sufficiently powerful to eliminate evil.”⁴⁶ Writings of Il’in do not contain any answer on how evil originated in the world, and the biblical narration about the disobedience of the first couple in Eden or the concept of original sin were never brought up by him as an explanation of evil. It is pre-supposed that evil appeared together with Satan, who, like Jehovah, is a billion-year-old being.⁴⁷ Thus, humans are not blamed with being inherently sinful. They make themselves guilty only when they out of their own free will align with the evil superpower in spite of the clear message of Il’in.

A serious implication of this kind of a theodicy is that since both powers are equal in strength, one may have doubts about which one will ultimately triumph. The very intensity of the struggle calls for action on behalf of the friends of Jehovah, and the Jehovahists see their own efforts in spreading the message of Jehovah and their personal and communal loyalty to the cause as a conscious involvement in the mysteries of the destiny of the world and the human race. Eugene Clay rightfully indicated that “Il’in emphasized the positive possibilities of human action,”⁴⁸ and the ambiguity of Il’in’s theodicy contributed to a more active participation of the friends of Jehovah in the fight on the side of their God.

Topos of Time

Universal history is thought of in terms of a never-ceasing struggle between Jehovah and Satan. Members of the Jehovahist community fight on the side of Jehovah while all others

⁴⁶ Albert Bailey, “Zarathushtrian Theodicy,” in *Vohuman.org*, an online Zoroastrian journal, available at <http://www.vohuman.org/Article/Zarathushtrian%20Theodicy.htm> (URL accurate as of 10 April 2006).

⁴⁷ Il’in, *Razsvet nad Erusalimom*, 18.

⁴⁸ Eugene Clay, “Apocalypticism in Eastern Europe,” *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3 vols. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 3:311.

consciously or, in most cases, unconsciously, take the side of Satan. In many instances Il'in called his followers "fighters" or "warriors for Jehovah" and a local Jehovahist congregation is often referred to as *druzhina*, an archaic Russian word meaning a prince's own team of soldiers. Although both Gods are professed to be equal in strength, Jehovahists unquestionably believe in the victory of their God. Il'in never set any particular date for the coming Armageddon battle of Jehovah with Satan. Instead, he only said that all those events would take place soon and pointed to signs of the imminent end (wars, famine, and earthquakes).⁴⁹

Il'in was very assertive that his *blagovest* was the "obvious and irrefutable truth." He welcomed everyone to test his system by what he called "the triple criterion," which included reason, Scripture, most importantly the book of Revelation, Universal history, and the current political and social events.⁵⁰

"The signs of the last time" have always been one of the favourite topics of apocalypticism. However, while supporting and upholding this latter point, Il'in enhanced the linear time pattern of traditional apocalypticism with a kind of a cyclical time which will replace the former in the future millennial kingdom. Indeed, according to Il'in, time will know no end, but rather will periodically repeat itself in increasingly glorious and perfect forms forever, for, following the millennial reign of Christ, a new Earth will be created, a million times more spacious than the old one. After 280,000 years Jehovah will improve Earth once again, and this process of periodical improvement will continue forever.⁵¹

The attraction of this rhetorical imagery for his audience depended upon the saturation of its contents with "positive" and comprehensible contents. It is possible that the idea of a cyclical time, inherently characteristic of most agricultural societies (and nineteenth-century Russia generally remained one), possessed more of a persuasive power for this audience and made more sense for the followers of Il'in.

⁴⁹ Il'in, *Otkrytie 7-mi tain*, 3.

⁵⁰ Il'in, *Pravda BOGA Izraileva* (Privately printed, n.d.), 5.

⁵¹ Il'in, *Otkrytie 7-mi tain*, 9-11.

Of course, the failed prophecy of Bengel about 1836 as the beginning of the millennial Kingdom must have influenced Il'in's approach to setting up specific dates for the apocalyptic events he was expecting. Although the coming great battle of good with evil permeated all his thought and writings, he made sure to refrain from indicating any chronological framework for these events. Il'in must have known about the Molokan migration to the Transcaucasian provinces triggered by hopes for 1836 as a special year. Breyfogle specifically points to the circulation of *The Victorious Story* by Jung-Stilling as the source for these hopes.⁵² He also might have been aware of the *Auswanderung* (emigration) of Swabian Pietistic sectarians to Russia in the 1820s.⁵³

A key term in understanding Il'in's dynamics of the time and the place of his movement is "epochal symbolism" suggested by Stephen O'Leary. The term refers to "a society's own epochal understanding, its prevailing mode of symbolizing cosmic and historical time."⁵⁴ Historical time for Il'in was symbolically described and interpreted in the Apocalypse, or *The Book from Heaven*, as the messages to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3 of the Apocalypse). This old idea was borrowed by Il'in from Jung-Stilling's *The Victorious Story*. The idea of the book of Revelation as a symbolic map of church history may be traced back to Italian Franciscan Joachim of Fiore, French Franciscan Peter Auriol (14th century). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was adopted by Protestant Radicals.⁵⁵ This method of apocalyptic exegesis appeared in German Pietistic hermeneutics of the Revelation, seen for example in Heinrich Horch's *Mystical and Prophetical Bible* (1712).⁵⁶ The whole history of Christianity was divided into seven ages, partially overlapping with each other. O'Leary rightfully notes that "in the

⁵² Nicholas Breyfogle. *Heretics and Colonizers. Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 63.

⁵³ Andreas Gestrich, "German Religious Emigration to Russia in the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries," in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity. New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*. Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, Renate Wilson, ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 77-98.

⁵⁴ O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 46.

⁵⁵ Douglas H. Shantz, "The Millennial Study Bible of Heinrich Horch (1652-1729)" in Peter A. Lillback, ed., in *The Practical Calvinist. Essays in Honor of Dr. D. Clair Davis* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 406-407.

⁵⁶ Shantz, "The Millennial Study Bible of Heinrich Horch (1652-1729)," 404.

mythic awareness of temporality, the present is always the time of greatest evil.”⁵⁷ In accordance with this conception, current time is chronologically placed within the final, seventh period of the Laodicean church while Pietistic Christianity, Moravian Brethren and Quakers referred to the sixth, the Philadelphian period.⁵⁸

We can see that the main pattern of apocalyptic symbolism of time was borrowed by Il'in from Bengel's and Jung-Stilling's prophetic insights. The image of “a woman clothed with the sun” (Revelation, chapter 12) that in Jung-Stilling referred to the church of the Moravian Brethren, in the opinion of Nikolai Il'in symbolised initially all true Christians, Moravians included, and later came to denote the denomination of his followers *par excellence*.⁵⁹

Upon his victory in the battle of Armageddon Jehovah will establish his millennial Kingdom with the capital in the New Jerusalem which will be built by inhabitants of other planets and descend from heaven. Satan will be bound and imprisoned for one thousand years. Jehovahists will then be taken into the land of Palestine, and be inhabitants of that glorious city. Other peoples will live outside the walls of Jerusalem. Death will cease, but disease will still be around. Then, after one thousand years, Satan will be freed for a short time, but will be defeated again, and forever. Jehovah will make a brand new planet, a million times more spacious than the Earth, and will reside there with his immortal people. After 280,000 years Jehovah will make a new, even better, planet, and this process of ongoing improvement will continue endlessly.⁶⁰

Role of Science in Il'in's Rhetoric

References to science and scientific facts play an important part in Il'in's rhetoric. In the brochure *The Light To The Gentiles And Bringing To Reason of the Jews*, Il'in wrote:

⁵⁷ O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 46.

⁵⁸ Il'in, *Samoe verneishee sredstvo*, 39-40.

⁵⁹ Il'in, *O pogibeli*, 17-21.

⁶⁰ For example, see Il'in, *Otkrytie 7-mi tain*, 10-11.

...modern astronomers **mathematically** (bold font in original) prove that if you fly from the Earth to the 2nd Sun at the speed of a cannon-ball, you will not reach it even in 7000 years. Actually, you will not reach the 1000th Sun even in a billion years. How can it, therefore, be that GOD who put into astronomers HIS Divine wisdom, ordered the earthly kings to torture them by an inhuman **Christian** inquisition and even to burn alive only because they, having learned this Divine Truth, ceased to believe in a silly priestly dogma... that “the Moon and all innumerable suns, planets, and comets were created in one single day.”⁶¹

Il'in's reverence for scientists was so high that he described Plinius, the great Russian scientist and founder of Moscow State University Mikhail Lomonosov, Voltaire, Espinoza, Renan, and Darwin as “endowed with sacred wisdom.”⁶²

This attention to science may in part be explained by the educational and professional background of Nikolai Il'in. However, their main rhetorical value is the positioning of his doctrine as scientific, logical, rational, and consistent with empirical knowledge. Il'in especially emphasized this feature as sharply opposed to the position of the dominant Orthodox church that often treated scientific progress with suspicion. Il'in seems to have developed this view from early on. Even in his first anti-Orthodox book, *The Message of Zion* (ca.1850), he promoted the idea that “earthly knowledge” was good and beneficial for men, although it should be subordinate to obedience to God and knowledge “from above.”⁶³ Astronomical and mathematical calculations are a commonplace in his writings.

The power of logic and persuasion of the Il'inite system is often underlined by the Il'inites as a primary reason for joining the Society. Some of the earliest converts, the brothers Volgin, rich Old Believer merchants, testified:

⁶¹ Il'in, *Svet narodam i obrazumlenie iudeiam*, 45.

⁶² Ibidem, 46.

⁶³ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 39.

As we were searching and thirsting for the truth, God has sent us Il'in as a tool... When Il'in pointed us to the Word of God in the Gospel, we checked everything written by Il'in in the book of The Message of Zion, with the Word of God, and (discovered that) it was in agreement with the Word of God and our common sense, and we thank God that he has opened this to us, and we became completely convinced and joined this Righteous Brotherhood.⁶⁴

Elsewhere Il'in states that mathematics, unlike religion, is the same among all people, because “mathematical truths are founded upon axioms, while different theologies and philosophies are based upon falsification of... the utterances of JEHOVAH.”⁶⁵

Conclusion

Il'in's apocalyptic discourse, although it may seem quite bizarre to external observers, is neatly founded upon logical and, in some sense, rational considerations. The world view Il'in wanted to reveal strove to be, above all, holistic. Il'in wanted it to answer a wide circle of questions that people looking for meaning might ask. Moreover, his discourse was progressive, at least for his time, for it attempted to embrace the latest achievements of science and the most recent social trends. His apocalyptic rhetoric was persuasive, elaborate and innovative. This was, as far as we can judge, the key to the relative success and continuous endurance of his group. This is remarkable considering the inherent instability typical of movements with charismatic leadership, the long imprisonment of their leader, the dispersion of members of the community, and their unceasing repression by the authorities.

⁶⁴ Molostvova, *Iegovisty*, 70-71.

⁶⁵ Il'in, *Vopros ko Vsemirnomu Svetiteliu*, 10.

CONCLUSION

The Jehovahist-Il'inites are one of two surviving Russian sectarian groups (along with Molokans-Jumpers) the emergence of which was triggered by the direct influence of German chiliastic Pietism, especially the prophetic works of Jung-Stilling and his Russian supporters. It was soon transformed into a sectarian and underground movement, and many of the distinctively Pietistic teachings were reinterpreted by Il'in and his followers.

Despite the circumstances of constant oppression and underground existence, Jehovahists were able to survive and win converts. The reason for this lies in the internal cohesion of Il'in's doctrine, his unique rhetorical techniques and the practices Nikolai Il'in employed in his discourse and organization, such as denial of biblical authority and emphasis on the personal prophetic authority of Il'in; proselytizing only through dissemination of writings with explicit prohibition of oral preaching and religious argument; and the closed and secretive character of the Jehovahist community.

As we have seen, Il'in largely relied on the traditional platform of apocalyptic discourse. However, he creatively enriched the presentation and resolution of the themes of authority, evil and time, offering a radical dualism, and even certain features of polytheism, as a foundation for his theodicy. There were also his special emphasis on logic, science, and common sense as the basis of his claims for authority in opposition to the traditional methods of biblical exegesis, as well as the elements of cyclical time instead of a strictly linear time pattern of classical apocalypticism. These enhancements proved to be some of the agents of cohesion that helped to maintain the amazing stability of the Il'inite world view and community for over 150 years in an adverse political and social environment.

Furthermore, the case of the Russian Jehovahists shows that the movement, being to a high degree an ideological construct and a product of religious creativity, needed a considerable power of persuasiveness and ability to make sense to a varied audience of interested, followers, proselytes, and members. In order to make sense, the Il'inite doctrine relied upon and developed

the topoi of apocalyptic discourse, time, evil, and authority, employing specific venues and offering original answers to the most important questions and pressing issues of the time.

Finally, this study of the Jehovahists-Il'inites contributes to the history of ideas, particularly the influence of Pietistic chiliasm and the history of Russian religious dissent. Recent developments, among them the Waco tragedy in the US, the rise and fall of the White Brotherhood in the Ukraine and Russia, which led to civil disorders in Kiev in 1993,¹ and others, indicate that the “pursuit of the millennium” continues to retain its attraction nowadays. This case study of the Il'inites is a significant link in the chain in a broader context linking German Pietism and Pietistic chiliasm with contemporary Russian religious history. Their story enhances our understanding of the internal logic and ongoing strength of millenarian discourse.

¹ See “Crackdown Faced by Ukrainian Cult,” *New York Times* (7 November 1993).

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APPENDIX

Nikolai II'in

THE SECOND CALL FROM JEHOVAH'S MESSENGER, OR FROM THE GOD OF PEACE AND LOVE¹ TO THIS ENTIRE HELLISHLY RESTLESS WORLD (1880s)

A man who is not altogether transformed into a merciless dog² by the religious and tribal hostility, but who feels within his heart even a tiniest spark of GOD's love for all men,³ let him trust JEHOVAH's word,⁴ that all the tsars, peoples, and tribes are in error; and that the sorrow among all those on the earth and in the sea is caused by the diverse religious and tribal divisions, by which Satan, or the God of death and animosity, separated all the people. And that soon Satan will release from the abyss such a true christianity, which will establish its throne in the same city where JEHOVAH was crucified; and it will start to spread its hellish power with fearful bloodshed and tortures over all men and use them as cannon fodder, and in particular, will cause a horrible ruin to those living in the Turkish Empire, on the Balkan peninsula, in Jerusalem, and in the Caucasus.⁵

THAT IS WHY

I give to you this my piece of advice: if you will believe in this proclamation JEHOVAH made through me, and thus, will want to save yourself from all these calamities and from eternal death⁶ in the fiery pit, immediately leave all the divisions,⁷ join JEHOVAH, and, with no regard to anything, and even to your own life, help HIM to destroy all the satanic, hostility-creating, and mortifying divisions, and call all the men to immortality, to the Universal and brotherly love and into the unity of the life-giving religion of the Brethren of the Prophets and Friends of the Angels,⁸ and to HIS Universal Temple of prayer, which HE will build for 1000 years in Jerusalem on the New Zion Mount.⁹ Truly so! Amen.

Light to the Gentiles, and the One who brings the Jews to reason,¹⁰ or the Destroyer of all satanic divisions,¹¹

Elijah.

¹ 1 Jn 4:16.

² B.H. 22:15; B.H. means The Book from Heaven, which JEHOVAH, the GOD of holy prophets, sent from Heaven to the earth with HIS angel in the year 62 AD, or 11 years before the destruction of Jerusalem. B.H. will be "APOCALYPSIS" in Greek.

³ And even for animals.

⁴ If Satan forbids you to have a look at the whole world and be directly convinced by the truth of JEHOVAH's words.

⁵ B.H. 11-7, 8; 17-2, 3; 14-20; 12-19; Isaiah 60-2; and read a God's book "The Destroyer."

⁶ B.H. 14-9, 11; 19-2, 3; 20-15; 21-8; 14-20; 16-10; 12-12; Is. 60-2.

⁷ Even if they are made up by angels of light.

⁸ B.H. 22-9, 17; 1-3.

⁹ Mk. 11-17; Is. 56-7; 2-2, 3; Ez. from 40 to 48; Zach. 14-16... 21; B.H. 11-1, 2; Mal. 1-11; Eph. 4-13.

¹⁰ Is. 41-25; 42-6... 1.

¹¹ Dan. 2-34, 45, 44.