

Рецензия на кн.: *Палкин А. С. Единоверие в середине XVIII — начале XX века: общероссийский контекст и региональная специфика.* — Екатеринбург: Издательство Уральского университета, 2016. — 338 с. (Б-ка журнала QUAESTIO ROSSICA) [*Palkin A. S. Edinoverie from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: national context and regional specifics.* Ekaterinburg, 2016. 338 p.]<sup>1</sup>

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In October 1800, the Russian Orthodox Church launched a new policy to bring the Old Believers back to the one true faith. Called edinoverie, the idea was relatively straight forward: converts from Old Belief would be allowed to keep their pre-Nikonian rites and be given priests who would perform the liturgy in accordance with texts from the period of ‘the first five Russian patriarchs’. However, the apparent simplicity of the idea disguises the tremendous difficulties inherent in realising it. Many in the Church, including Metropolitan Platon (Levshin) of Moscow, in theory supported the notion of edinoverie, proclaiming that ritual differences were not sufficient cause for a split in Russian Orthodoxy: in reality, however, they proved loathe to expose the faithful to a potential schismatic fifth column and legitimate a ritual that the most eminent Orthodox polemicists of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries had condemned outright as a sign of Arian heresy.

Metropolitan Platon and others were only forced into action by the manoeuvres of Russian rulers and statesmen, who looked upon the Old Believers as a useful resource to colonise largely uninhabited regions of the empire, especially the strategically invaluable provinces of the newly conquered south. Fearing that Emperor Paul intended to legitimate Old Belief entirely by establishing a direct connection between the state and the Old Believer leadership, Platon took steps to ensure that the Church and its interests would not be cut out of the picture by hastily negotiating and then ratifying a settlement with a group of Muscovite priestly Old Believers. Known informally as ‘the rules of Metropolitan Platon’, the settlement became the legal foundations of edinoverie across the Russian Empire.

However, in the attempt to combine the largely irreconcilable interests of the state, the Church, and the Old Believers, the rules of Metropolitan Platon created a series of irresolvable contradictions, the dynamics of which largely determined the development of edinoverie and its notable lack of success. Indeed, it is not entirely clear what Platon hoped for edinoverie. By placing strict restraints on Orthodox ‘conversion’ into edinoverie and confirming a unique and separate administrative order for edinoverie parishes, Platon undermined his own hope that the edinoverists would, with time, become enlightened and abandon their ‘mistaken’ rites

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for the Nikonian ones blessed by the Church. For much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church was unable to decide the purpose of edinoverie: integration or isolation. This was further complicated by enduring contempt for the pre-Nikonian liturgy, the state's eternally changing policies towards Old Belief, and developments within the Old Believer world.

Given all this, edinoverie was a far cry from the full legitimation sought by most of the Old Believers, who largely perceived it as an effort to undermine their rituals. And since edinoverie could not attract the Old Believers in the numbers for which the state had hoped (it seems unlikely that there were ever more than 300,000 edinovertsy at any point before 1918, nothing compared to the millions of Old Believers), the new arrangement failed to assist the Russian government in its efforts to instrumentalise the Old Believers for *raisons d'état*. It therefore comes as no surprise that the state sought on more than one occasion to ignore the rules of Platon and formulate different conditions for unification of the Old Believers with the Church. Requests for modifications to the rules (or indeed their outright abolition) frequently came from the edinovertsy themselves, who found their liminal position on the boundaries between Orthodoxy and Old Belief to be hypocritical and even humiliating: from the 1860s onwards, these requests were put into ever more eloquent, forceful, and urgent terms.

This brief precis of edinoverie's foundation and problems should demonstrate to the readers of this review just how complicated it is to write a history of this phenomenon. Not only does it require proficiency in the arcane (and often deeply tedious) theological debates about the relative superiority or inferiority of the pre- and post-Nikonian rituals, but one must also be able to weave together three or four different narrative threads into a coherent whole: equally, the geographical dispersal of edinoverie (by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were parishes in most dioceses of the vast Russian Empire) and the lengthy period for which it existed (well over a century) pose significant problems in terms of archival research and narrative cohesion. It is therefore to the absolute credit of Alexander Palkin that he has succeeded in crafting an irreplaceable account of edinoverie's history, one that will remain the key Russian-language work for decades to come.

Before we review the advantages and (few) shortcomings of Palkin's argument, however, we must briefly place the work into historiographical context. The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw numerous narratives of edinoverie's history emerge, some of them of considerable scholarly quality, others less so. By far the most read today is that by Father Simeon Shleev, the edinoverie priest of the Nikol'skaia parish in St Petersburg and (after 1918) the first edinoverie bishop<sup>2</sup>. While Shleev's account is detailed and analytical, it must be remembered that it was first and foremost written as a polemic: as the leading edinoverie cleric of the late imperial era, Shleev was passionately involved in the debates over edinoverie's future and sought to use his book as a means to justify his (at the time) highly controversial opinions and programme. The prominence of the work and its author has, however, led many modern Russian academics to rely uncritically upon it, an approach whose many problems are only accentuated by the near-total lack of studies produced during the Soviet period. As a result, scholars today are left with a terribly deficient study by Radislav Kaurkin and Olga Pavlova<sup>3</sup>: their bizarre periodisation, lack of archival evidence, and numerous factual errors sometimes beggar belief. With regards to the Western

<sup>2</sup> Шлеев С. Единоверие в своем внутреннем развитии (в разъяснение его малораспространенности среди старообрядцев). СПб., 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Кавуркин Р. В., Павлова О. А. Единоверие в России (от зарождения идеи до начала XX века). СПб.: Алетейя, 2011.

literature, I am the only historian to have devoted significant attention to the issue of edinoverie, and obviously I must leave it to others to compare the virtues of my work with those of Palkin's<sup>4</sup>. As such, one can say without a shadow of a doubt that this new book plugs a gap in the historiography that desperately needed filling: we finally have a reliable, accurate, and scholarly account of edinoverie based predominantly on the fruits of intensive labour in the archives.

Palkin's work is divided into three chapters: the first covering edinoverie from roughly the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the death of Alexander I, the second the reign of Nicholas I, and the third from the 1860s to the first Russian Revolution in 1905. Each of these chapters takes both central and regional perspectives into account, whilst also ensuring that each of the main actors (the state, the Church, the Old Believers, and the edinovertsy themselves) are given an appropriate amount of attention. Each chapter is based on a copious amount of published and archival data from both central and local depositories: while the Urals are given a disproportionate amount of attention, this is justifiable given that Palkin is based within the region and that the edinovertsy there were particularly numerous and influential, especially between the 1820s and 1860s. Equally, offering a helpful counterpoint to the recent ideas put forward by Thomas Marsden (who suggests that Nicholas I's persecution of Old Belief only really took off in the 1840s)<sup>5</sup>, Palkin shows that the Urals functioned very much as a kind of laboratory in the 1830s for Nicholas' policy of using edinoverie as a 'mechanism of coercion'. One might also note that a provincial focus should be praised. As Palkin frequently repeats, the local conditions in which edinoverie arose were just as important (and indeed perhaps more so) for its development as the prescriptions of the central authorities. While he does tend to overegg this argument (that a rather small number of parishes in the Urals and Ural'sk obtained edinoverie on the basis of special conditions does not detract from the fact that the overwhelming majority remained subject to the rules of Platon), it is nonetheless a vital point that he substantiates well.

The author is undoubtedly aware that one of the core criticisms of edinoverie research is the niche status of its subject: he is therefore sure to show the reader the connections between edinoverie and wider trends in both Russian and European history. For instance, in the first chapter he connects the foundation of edinoverie in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the growing popularity of European Enlightenment ideas about toleration at the Catherinian court, while in the third he gives some insight into the visions of edinoverie being developed within the incipient Russian public sphere of the 1860s and 70s. With judicious analysis, Palkin teases out the implications of each stage of edinoverie's development, leading to sagacious and well-reasoned conclusions thoroughly based on the evidence that he has provided. By the conclusion, one is very much convinced that edinoverie's ramifications for Russian (and possibly even European) religious history are much larger than its small size and controversial status would suggest.

Despite all of these many positives, there are nonetheless a few problems that we should address. Firstly, the book only runs up to 1905 and therefore ignores the 13 years between the two Russian revolutions. These were action-packed years for edinoverie, as any account of the life of Simeon Shleev reveals. The reader is thus left wondering if Palkin can fully justify his

<sup>4</sup> *White J.* A Bridge to the Schism. Edinoverie, Russian Orthodoxy and the Ritual Formation of Confessions, 1800–1918 (PhD dissertation, European University Institute, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> *Marsden T.* The Crisis of Religious Toleration in Imperial Russia: Bibikov's System for the Old Believers, 1841–1855. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

appraisal of edinoverie: after all, one cannot fully evaluate a novel or a film if one ignores its ending. However, the sheer amount of material for the post-1905 period would have meant extending the monograph (already quite long) by several hundreds of pages. Equally, other historians, myself included<sup>6</sup>, are in the process of subjecting the last era of edinoverie's existence to especial analysis. Secondly, one does feel that the book is somewhat too detailed: while Palkin's devotion to comprehensive coverage of edinoverie is certainly to be praised, he does occasionally go too far, leaving the reader feeling as though they are losing the thread of the argument being made. Thirdly, greater reference to English-language materials would strengthen the book's core argument.

Finally, there is an issue of interpretation. Within the third chapter in particular, Palkin asserts that the missionaries Nikolai Subbotin and Pavel Prusskii are to be seen as part of the 'Platonist' tradition of edinoverie. Regrettably, this rather distorts the nature of their position by the beginning of the 1880s, their transition to it, and its subsequent impact. In 1869, Subbotin had argued that the rules of Platon were 'the chief and almost sole legal basis' for resolving the problems of edinoverie<sup>7</sup>. However, just nine years later, Subbotin was campaigning before the Holy Synod for the replacement of those rules<sup>8</sup>. While the Synod did not in fact do this and instead decided for a few conservative changes to the 1800 settlement, Subbotin's fundamental ideas in effect became Synodal policy for the remaining decades of the imperial era: that edinoverie and Orthodoxy were one and the same confession, that Orthodox could 'convert' to edinoverie (and vice versa) without impediment, that both the old and new rituals had the same value *de facto*, and that the Church itself had to make some kind of effort to convince the edinovertsy of the confessional unity between them. This was not Metropolitan Platon's idea: as I noted in the introduction to this review, Platon was content to leave the edinovertsy on the outskirts of the Orthodox confession until they had abandoned a ritual form he viewed as being (at the very least) mistaken. In effect, unity was precluded on the condition that the edinovertsy become Orthodox in every respect, including ritually. That was, in the words of Metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov), the most that could be done for the edinovertsy: they had to come to the Church, not the Church to them.

To deemphasise this crucial difference between Subbotin and Platon (and Filaret for that matter) makes it difficult to explain events between 1905 and 1918. This is especially the case for the Local Church Council in 1917–18, where Subbotin's conception of edinoverie replaced Platon's: Palkin's interpretation would lead us to conclude that Platon's rules were replaced with a slightly amended version of the originals, which was not the case. I would therefore suggest that instead of Palkin's division of edinoverie's development into three tendencies (the traditionalist one espoused by Platon and then Subbotin, the radical/abolitionist one propounded by Father Ioann Verkhovskii, and the reformist one led by Shleev), we think in terms of four: Platonic/isolationist (supported by some even to the very end of the imperial regime), integrationalist (Subbotin and the Synod from the mid-1880s onwards), abolitionist (Verkhovskii), and autonomist (Shleev). Such allows us to clarify the positions of different

<sup>6</sup> White J. Orthodox Old Belief: Edinoverie as Movement for Religious Rejuvenation in the Russian Church, 1905–1918 // Russian History. 2016. № 43 (2). P. 181–208.

<sup>7</sup> Субботин Н. Несколько слов о единоверии в ответе на возрождения из Вятки. М., 1869. С. 21–22.

<sup>8</sup> Субботин Н. Отзыв ординарного профессора Московской духовной академии Субботина по поводу прошений единоверцев Святейшему Синоду о нуждах единоверия. [М., 1878].

actors and groups with greater accuracy and furnishes greater explanatory power for the post-1905 period.

However, this is a relatively minor quibble between specialists that in no way lessens the value of this extremely impressive work. Well-written, clear, and persuasive, Palkin's new book on edinoverie illuminates an extremely difficult problem with consummate skill and professionalism. It is to be highly recommended not only to experts on Old Belief and Orthodoxy, who will undoubtedly learn much, but also to students and the educated general public.

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