

Horujy S.

Interview to Kristina Stoeckl and Alexander Michailowski

This interview was held in March 2015, during the visit of Sergey Sergeevich Horujy to the Institute of Human Sciences in Vienna. The questions were asked by Kristina Stoeckl and Alexander Michailowski

AM: In this period we are preparing, here at the Institute for Human Sciences, the translation of several essays by Vladimir V. Bibikhin. One of them is essay “For Official Use Only” from the book *Another Beginning* (2003). In this essay, Bibikhin describes the mechanism of intellectual production in the context of the INION, the Institute for Social Sciences, during the late Soviet period. The essay starts with a somewhat mysterious phrase: “The authorities began to look for an alternative ideology to Marxism very early. Already in 1973, we knew that the military political strategists were planning to abandon Marxism and replace it by Orthodoxy for ideological support of the Soviet army.” Could you say the same about yourself, namely, that you “knew”, at that time, that the Soviet nomenclature was conducting this exploration of alternatives to Marxism?

SH: I am not part of this “we”. I did not know anything about such plans of Soviet authorities or top military leaders, and more, I don’t believe that there were such plans. Right, immediately after the fall of the communist regime quite a big part of soviet nomenclature started to announce themselves champions of Orthodoxy and the Church. But it happened after five years of *perestroika* and sharp criticism of soviet ideology, when the defeat of the latter was evident. However, in the 70s the fall did not look as a real perspective and I think that as a rule, members of the nomenclature were still convinced of the strength and stability of soviet ideology, even if many of them were not enthusiastic adepts of the latter. They could not see any serious need to look for an alternative to this ideology, but, on the contrary, they had serious reasons to keep it. For instance, the role and activity of the USSR on the world scene was strongly dependent of the closest ties with Marxist parties and movements all over the world. Could they reject all this?

As for my views at that time, around 1973, then I also didn’t doubt that the nomenclature and, in particular, “military political strategists” are in overwhelming majority loyal adepts of soviet ideology who are very far from planning any radical alternatives to it. And I’m sure this view was largely shared

in the milieu of the Church people and Christian intellectuals, to which both Bibikhin and myself belonged.

AM: But what was the motivation for the statement by Bibikhin?

SH: I cannot tell for him. As a guess, this statement and its “we” could refer to another milieu, with which Vladimir Veniaminovich was connected, that of Moscow liberal philosophers, in particular, from the INION, the Institute for Social Sciences, whose activity he describes in the text you are quoting. This circle included also party members, people with some inside knowledge. They knew much better what party leaders were up to, and perhaps they could imagine such a shift and discuss it in their table-talk (or rather kitchen-talk in the soviet intelligentsia style). But still I think that the plans of the shift were mostly the fruits of their imagination and wishful thinking.

AM: In his book *The Russian Party* (Moscow, 2003), Nikolaj Mitrokhin claims that in 1974, in the second issue of the underground journal *Moskovskij Sbornik*, which went under the motto "The problems of the nation and religion", the real author of the article “Lev Karsavin. A biographical sketch”, published under the pseudonym S. Glebov, is you. Is Mitrokhin right, and if yes, what can you tell us about your collaboration with Leonid Borodin, the editor of this journal and leader of the nationalist Russian Party?

SH: In the beginning of the 70s I was writing my first philosophical texts. They were devoted to Russian religious philosophy, to Florensky, Karsavin, etc. and they were of the kind not only unpublishable, but severely persecuted in the USSR of that time. Thus it is only through the *Samizdat*, through underground journals of the dissident movement that they could find their way to readers. I collaborated with this movement, but only to some restricted extent. Undoubtedly, I shared its general anti-totalitarian and anti-communist positions, and I considered it a kind of moral duty to support it. But, having first-hand knowledge of it and being personally acquainted with many of its leaders, I saw clearly that the crude reality of the movement, its persons, its ethical atmosphere often did not correspond fully to its high principles and goals. Moreover, I was carried away very much by my work in quantum field theory and I didn't think it's worth to sacrifice this work in favour of the dissident activity.

As a result, it was a distanced relationship. One can say that, not including myself directly into the dissident movement, I was part of its supportive milieu. For instance, it was known that I knew the Russian émigré literature very well, and so I used to compose lists of books that should be ordered from the West and brought to the Soviet Union. Long lists of philosophical and theological books. And you see, from time to time these lists of mine really went through and the books arrived and could be read and used.

AM: But what about your article in the *Moskovskij Sbornik* and your collaboration with Leonid Borodin?

SH: While I was not fascinated by the general atmosphere of the dissident movement, at the same time I had a quite high opinion of some concrete members of this movement. Some of them were rather close acquaintances. In the first place I must name here two persons who were among the leaders of two opposite trends or wings. Sergey Grigoriant was one of leaders of the European-oriented dissidents, while Leonid Borodin belonged to leaders of the opposite, the so-called nationalist or Russian Party trend in the dissident movement. One could say probably that they both were my friends. For example, they both came to see me just few days before they were arrested. Usually people like them knew quite well that they would be arrested. And it makes difference, whom you choose to see in the last days of your freedom. Such meetings create a link and leave a mark.

Now, as I said, my texts could only go to the *Samizdat*, and since Leonid was publishing some underground journal (I can't remember whether I saw any issue of it), I was giving him some of them. And I don't know what happened afterwards. I disliked the idea of a pseudonym, but on the other hand I understood very well that I couldn't publish under my real name, so I just didn't put any name on these texts. There were several such texts: one on Florensky, one on Karsavin. Then there was one samizdat project (not connected with Borodin) about which I knew a bit more, it was the collection of articles called *Slovo*, Word, dedicated to some anniversary of the priesthood of father Alexander Men. I have written a text about the concept of symbol specially for this project. I know that it was published, but I never saw the book.

AM: So you are telling us that you don't know all your pseudonyms?

SH: Exactly. I don't know. But from your question I gather that this text about Karsavin, under the pseudonym Glebov, must be by me. You see, if the publishers had told me that I had to choose my pseudonym, I probably would have decided to put my real name.

AM: How do you feel today about your collaboration with Borodin?

SH: As you see, my participation in Borodin's projects was quite insignificant and was based entirely on our warm personal relationship. My texts were philosophical. I never read his journals and we never discussed their ideological platforms (although I suspected that probably I would not subscribe to them). But in no way it means that it was all the same for me, in which ensemble my texts are included. No. It means that having personal confidence in Leonid I admitted a priori that this ensemble is of good quality enough and cannot propagate something disgusting and unworthy.

The same kind of feeling I had about Grigoriant as well. And it is characteristic that in the post-soviet period my relationship with both of them did not continue. Something had finished. And the main element in this "something" is perfectly obvious: of course, it was the feeling of fraternity in common resistance to totalitarianism.

AM: In your book *After the break. Ways of Russian Philosophy* (St.-Petersburg, 1994) there is a chapter called "The Looters". In a footnote you write that this essay is a reply to an "extensive essay by Professor M.," devoted to criticism of the "Russian idealist philosophy." Can you explain to us the context of this article? In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a new discovery of the Silver Age of Russian philosophers. You contributed to this re-discovery, and wrote about the "urgent need to find historical memory, bridge the gaps, and fill in the white spots in our spiritual history". You also spoke of the need to "return the people to their cultural heritage in its entirety". What are the difficulties and dangers linked to such a program? Twenty years have passed since the publication of this book. Can we consider this task fulfilled, or do we have to make additional efforts?

SH: At first, about the context. In the early 90s I had been asked by a big publishing house to write the internal review of a huge manuscript "Downfall of

Russian idealism”, making the decision whether the book should be published. The author, Prof. V.Malinin, was unknown to me, but he was a big figure in communist ideological bodies. The book was a very long survey of Russian religious philosophy in the style usual for such surveys in soviet philosophy and combining throughout ignorance and vulgar rudeness. However, the high-ranking author was late with his big work. The time was not soviet anymore, religious philosophy suddenly became fashionable and praised, and now publishers needed texts proving not the downfall, but the triumph of Russian idealism. That’s why they invited me as an unofficial and non-Marxist expert in religious thought. My review (included in my book later) was, of course, sharply negative and often of a caustic style. I was told later that it was a big surprise for the author. Having read it during his visit to the publishers, he turned red and left the place with threats and curses.

Thus the chapter you mentioned is a kind of farewell to the Soviet epoch. Your next questions refer to the next period. One of the great public campaigns of the first post-Soviet years had the title “the return of the forgotten names”. It was an important effort to retrieve the thought of the philosophers of the Silver Age, who are really the most considerable Russian philosophers up to this very day. Undoubtedly, the Russian Silver Age was a cultural phenomenon of world importance. And therefore the return of this thought from nearly complete forgottenness was a good thing. But there were also difficulties and dangers in this project.

AM: This is precisely the point of my question.

SH: I would say that the difficulties and dangers lay not so much in the reception of these texts as in the very process of their return. The “Return of the forgotten names” was, from the very start, organized and dominated by the official Soviet philosophers, whose direct duty not long ago was not just to criticise, but to distort and banish Russian religious philosophy. The people for years and years had earned their bread through lying about Russian religious thought. They didn’t understand it. But because of the positions they held, it was them who lead the process of the return of forgotten names.

AM: You say that this process started in the early 1990s?

SH: Actually it started even earlier, in the late 1980s. I can reconstruct the chronology with quite some precision, because I was involved in it from the very first stages. It started in 1988 or 1989 and then it proceeded in a very quick tempo. There is a famous anecdote – it seems that it is not invented, but real – that the last decision made by the Politburo of the Communist Party, before it was dissolved, was the decision to organise a big campaign to publish Russian religious philosophers.

AM: This “Return of the Forgotten Names” worked through the journal *Voprosy Filosofyi*.

SH: Yes, this journal was the centre of all the campaign. It was the chief periodical of soviet philosophy and it preserved this role in the post-Soviet epoch. By the irony of fate, for some period its principal mission became the propagation of Russian religious thought. To ensure success of the mission, a new secretary of the editorial board has been appointed who was the son of one of the closest collaborators of Gorbachev. And as early as in 1989 the big publishing project has been launched, the book series devoted to works of Russian thinkers, religious philosophers, in the first place. The series continues up to this day, although it ceased to be in the focus of public attention long ago. Its volumes are not of rigorous academic standards, but still they gradually achieved a decent level of the textological and commenting work, and the people who prepare them are usually good enough experts.

Thus the project was a success, but on the whole the big boom around Russian religious thought produced very mixed results. In the spirit of all the period of Eltsin’s Russia, there were lots and lots of lies, falsities, ambiguity and, of course, rude incompetence. As I said, leading roles in all the process have been seized, firmly and everywhere, by former communist functionaries.

KSt: So you are telling us that at the time when Russian religious thought finally could emerge from the underground of Soviet society to public consciousness, it was not you and your lot – the religious dissidents who had cherished this legacy and kept it alive for decades – who led the process, but it was the Communist Party?

SH: Not quite so. Of course, Communist Party as such has lost its leading role, but a very big part of its functionaries left its ranks in time and succeeded in

taking leading positions in all important fields. In particular, great many of them announced themselves, as I said above, champions of Orthodoxy and the Church. As for ideological functionaries, they easily preserved their leading posts in all the machinery of philosophical (as well as cultural) life, changing communist slogans to primitive Orthodox twaddle. They were, of course, incompetent and unable to do any scholarly work in the field of religious thought, but still they headed all big and important projects in this field, while real experts were exploited for doing all the concrete (and often hard) work for a song. They were also active and energetic in hunting for huge grants, both Russian and foreign, presenting projects with extremely noble and pious titles and goals. They started organizing lots of programs, events and institutions directed to such goals. For example, I was once approached by a strange person who introduced himself as the head of the “World Congress of Holy Trinity and Sobornost”. Using Christian terms like words from a badly learned foreign language, he invited me to join his congress. Later I found out that this person was a professor at a KGB academy.

All this faked spiritual activity made the situation extremely mixed and muddled and nasty smelling. It was a problem to find in this stuff real and valuable elements, but such elements were also there – *malgré tout!*

KSt: What does your story teach us about today’s situation? You know that President Putin recently quoted Berdyaev and Ilyin in his speeches.

SH: One more thing, which must be said here: In spite of all the nasty things that I described, the main task was to have the texts published, to make accessible to the public what had been forbidden for many, many years. And this task was fulfilled quite successfully. Now the whole body of texts from Russian religious philosophy is easily accessible for anybody interested. In that sense, the “return of forgotten names” was indeed successful.

KSt: But what about the reception?

SH: Well, exactly, the reception is quite a different problem. The texts are accessible, but what next? Next it might very well turn out that they are not needed. Evidently, the problem of the reception has two different aspects, namely, the reception of individual thinkers and the reception of all the tradition, of the phenomenon of Russian religious philosophy in its entirety. Taking the

first aspect, I would say that today for each of the big figures of the tradition the reception is quite different. Philosophers are bright individuals and each of the towering figures of the Silver Age has his own destiny in our times. Vyacheslav Ivanov, for example, has a very happy destiny. There is a good academic community around him both in Russia and abroad. This community is more or less united, not much difference whether members of this community work in Russia or in Berkley or anywhere else. They have regular meetings, they communicate with each other. Florensky also has a rather self-reproducing community of scholars who study him and publish his works. Ilyin is again a slightly different case; he became the chief author of the nationalist circles. Losev has an excellent centre in Moscow, which coordinates all the work on his heritage. Karsavin has a small community as well. Berdyaev is still another story (after decades of immense popularity he is not so lucky today), and so on. So there is a set of individual receptions and, on the whole, there are some experts and some continuing line of studies on each of the major figures of the tradition.

In contrast to this, in the second aspect I would say that the rich phenomenon of Russian religious philosophy still has no full and self-consistent reception. One serious reason is that this philosophy is of a mixed nature, combining properties of Western philosophy and Byzantine thought, which is deeply different from the latter in its constitution and discourse. (In particular, it creates a different relationship between philosophy and theology.) What is Byzantine thought is still not sufficiently understood and is actively investigated now; and as a consequence, the nature of Russian religious philosophy is also not yet sufficiently understood. Another reason is that the philosophical situation both in Russia and on the global scale is not very creative now. Contemporary Russian philosophy lacks the generalizing ability and effort, and it seems that it is not able to create a sound conception of the big phenomenon of Russian religious thought in all its complexity and entirety.

The absence of the intelligible reception of the past stages is a big obstacle to the further development of Russian philosophy. Because of this absence, when young people today become interested in Russian religious thought, they organize discussion groups on sophiology, on name-praising – all very old phenomena that ended about one century ago! But in order to move on, we would first have to produce a reception of what was before.

KSt: Let us move from philosophy to society, politics and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Patriarchate of Moscow has experienced a steep revival during the past 25 years, acquiring ever more public visibility and wealth, enlarging its base of believers and number of more or less well-educated clerics, some of which have studied theology abroad. This revival of the ROC initially seemed to extend also to religious intellectuals, who came out of a very different religious experience during the Soviet period. I am thinking in particular of the legacy of Alexander Men', at the margin of the official Church. You yourself, for example, became a member of the Biblical-Theological Commission. In recent years the situation seems to be changing again and for an outside observer like myself the nationalist wing inside the Orthodox Church appears to have gained an upper hand and access to politics. My first question is whether you agree with this assessment, and secondly, how you evaluate and explain it? What has gone "wrong" and why does Russian Orthodoxy today appear destined to repeat the split of the 19th century between free thinking religious intellectuals and an official Church locked to the state?

SH: As nobody can deny now, there is indeed a general shift to nationalism, anti-westernism etc. This shift is demanded from above, from the state power, and it takes place everywhere in Russia. The Church cannot be an exception. What is more, the Church had always its own ground for and variety of nationalism: in Russia, as almost in any Christian country, pious people are much inclined to believe that their country is the most Christian or even the only Christian country on the planet. But nevertheless the main priority of the heads of the Church was always to keep the unity of the Church and not let some group or wing, be it nationalist or ecumenist, conservative or liberal, to become totally dominant. I don't think that this priority is rejected today.

On the other hand, the balance between groups can be shifted within some limits. One of the factors in this shift is the changing character of the group of the Church intellectuals. It was traditional in the Russian political discourse to liken or even to equate intellectuals with intelligentsia. However, these notions are not identical at all. Intelligentsia was a specific social group with its own independent ideas, ethics, and style, which was at the same time in liberal or revolutionary opposition to the official establishment of both Church and state. Its members could be religious (and religious intelligentsia played the important

role in the last prerevolutionary decades), but as a rule they were neither fundamentalist nor nationalist. Now this group has disappeared (may be, with a few small relics, like, e.g., the followers of Fr. Alexander Men), but intellectuals, i.e. intellectual and educated persons, did not; quite the opposite, their number grows. The average level of theological education and erudition has steadily grown in the last years and it continues to grow. The growth and development of theological education is a fact, but this process does not necessarily contradict the growth of nationalism. There are more and more people in the Church who are erudite, not badly educated, and who are nationalists at the same time, monarchists or sometimes even Stalinists. So nationalists can very well be intellectuals, and, vice versa, intellectuals can be nationalists. You see, the dividing lines are not here, these two things are perfectly compatible.

KSt: But what is incompatible then? Are there dividing lines that structure the religious discourse in a liberal, reformist camp and a conservative, nationalist camp?

SH: Of course, there is inevitably some structuring, but in the changing modern reality its principles may change too. Sure, some universal principles are always there: for instance, in the ROC, like in any religious society at any period, there are fundamentalist (conservative, nationalist, anti-secular) and liberal (reformist, open to dialogue) groups and trends. Today, as we already said, the fundamentalist trend grows and prevails. As for new principles, one very old dividing line becomes much more visible and important in the last years, under the present Patriarch: the division between the rich and the poor, the rich hierarchy with its surrounding and the poor majority of the clergy, paid miserably and dragging a heavy burden of ever-growing payments to higher ecclesiastic authorities. This greed for money is a bit new feature closely connected with the new status of the Church.

After the fall of the monarchy and the Church Council of the 1917-1918 the ROC ceased to be the Synodal Church and restored the Moscow Patriarchate. Then after the fall of the Soviet regime it ceased to be totally controlled by the secular state. As a result, a certain new kind of the relation of the Church and the state emerged, in which the Church is much less subordinated to the state and included into its mechanism. As before, it gives all the support to the state, but now it has the freedom of choice (at least relative) and this support is not taken

for granted. It means that the Church has now some power of its own, and it wants very much to increase this power. It wants to be a strong and independent ally of the state having all possible profits of its support of the latter. And the strong power is always greedy for money and wealth.

.Thus the striving for power and wealth is now very visibly high on the list of priorities of the heads of the ROC. The closest partnership with the secular administration on all levels is very visible too. Moreover, together with all the country, the Church is affected with the enormous over-bureaucratization and formalization of all its life, which are bordering on absurdity. All these striking features are at the forefront, but, in contrast to them, it is not so easy to see, which place is given to properly Christian and spiritual values and goals.

Inevitably, this glaring predominance of quite worldly and dubious goals and interests should sooner or later result in the loss of the spiritual authority of the Church, the disaffection with the Church of wider and wider strata and the decline of public support of the Church. The coming of these phenomena is clearly seen already.

KSt. and **AM:** Sergey Sergeevich, thank you for this conversation.

2015