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On the History of Mystical Anarchism in Russia

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Translated from the Russian by A. V. Yarkho

IT SEEMS that the time is ripe to write about the subject of Mystical Anarchism. It is not a simple subject to discuss. It is rooted in the remotest past of Gnostic Christianity and even perhaps earlier (according to the legend) in Ancient Egypt.

In Russia, the development of Mystical Anarchism, or otherwise, Mystical Acratism, is primarily connected with the name of Professor Apollon Andreevich Karelin (1863-1926). In 1917 he returned to Russia from Paris after many years of forced emigration (Nikitin, 1991a, 1991b).

The well-known American historian of Anarchism, Avrich (1998), calls Karelin a Soviet anarchist, because for a number of years he was the leader of a small group of anarchists in the All-Union Central Executive Committee. The members of the group were "observers" in the supreme organ of authority. Its task was to make all that was happening more humanitarian, to oppose the death penalty and terror in general.

Anarcho-Mysticism did not represent any political party. It had neither a program nor a definitive ideology.¹ A supporter need not have been an anarchist. The term "Anarchism" itself was interpreted very broadly. It would be more apt to speak of the principle of *nonviolence*, understood with sufficient broadness. At the same time, it was not a nonviolence of the Tolstoyan type. The revolution as an overthrow of the

existing regime was regarded by many as a natural and unavoidable historical event. The important thing was that the fight for freedom should not turn into a new nonfreedom.

At the end of the 1920s, among some of the Anarchists, the idea of forming a party emerged. Their argument was that Anarchism had failed in a revolutionary struggle because it had no organization of the Bolshevik type. The counterargument was that formation of such a party would render meaningless the anarchic movement. Representatives of Mystical Anarchism, A. A. Solonovich in particular, were sharply against the idea of the party. I was a witness of this absurd and vehement fight.

But the philosophical foundations of this fight were fairly serious. By the end of the 1920s the following alternative had become obvious: either to construct a new society based on a materialistic position, which unavoidably makes it necessary to resort to a dictatorship of the Bolshevik type, or to take the road of a free quest, in which case the boundaries of human individual consciousness should be expanded. The latter means acquiring spiritual experience, and establishing contact with mystical experience. However, the word mysticism sounded awful to many, especially in the 1920s, which were penetrated by the spirit of vulgar scientism.

Mystical Anarchism in Russia

INSTITUTIONALLY, in somewhat simplified terms, Mystical Anarchists could be regarded as members of a closed religious-philosophical fraternity, most often called the Order of the Temple. Participants could be people of spiritual broad-mindedness, having: (1) uncompromising moral values (of predominantly Christian type); (2) a pronounced awareness of personal dignity; (3) a faculty of mystic perception, an ability to recognize spiritual aspects in the environment and in metaphorical texts; and (4) a profound urge towards the ultimate principle of the Universe.

Spiritual broad-mindedness immediately excluded the participation of members of the ruling party and dogmatists of all sorts.

It is noteworthy that Mystical Anarchists preserved neutrality toward the ruling party longer than any other dissident revolutionaries. Another noteworthy detail is that Karelin lived in the apartment house inhabited by government members, "The 1st House of Soviets" (former Hotel National, Room 219).²

Indeed, Solonovich was first arrested in 1925. But then he was interceded for by Karelin (with the support of A. S. Yenukidze) and liberated. He was even given back his typed manuscripts, which were accompanied by the declaration that they were to be regarded as scientific works. The only requirement was that Solonovich was not to organize any groups, circles, or regular meetings; that is, he was not to work with people.

Even then people associated with Solonovich were actively shadowed. A relative of Solonovich's secretary told me that she was regularly summoned to a certain place with the suggestion that she should cooperate with the authorities. Sometimes, when she was out with her young man, she was approached in the street by agents who mysteriously proposed to her that she should follow them. The last menace was that she would be infected with a venereal disease. For help, she had to address Pyotr Germogenovich Smidovich (deputy of M. I. Kalinin), who usually helped in such matters willingly and with success. As a result she was summoned by V. R. Menzhinsky. She was startled upon entering as she heard the orders:

"Switch on the radiators!"

"So you don't want to cooperate with the Soviet authorities?"

"Do you know how these authorities behave?"

"Take her away!"

After that the persecution stopped.

A tragic case: a young anarchist for some reason moved (with his family) to Komsomol'sk-na-Amure. He never concealed his views and was reported to the police (nothing more). Then he was summoned, an inquest started, and he was beaten on the head with revolver butts, which caused his death. All the materials (with many photographs) were again sent to Smidovich. After the investigation was over, the victim's family was granted a pension. What really strikes us about this horrible case is the degree of *intolerance*. Representatives of the authorities, whose job it is to preserve order, kill a person only because of his dissidence. That brings about sad thoughts: Perhaps, this intolerance is an important index of spiritual retardedness in our country?

One certainly should be very cautious in evaluations. I am reminded of Karelin who said that the revived Gnostic Christianity, transformed here into a Mystical Anarchism, nowhere received such a broad response as in our country. It could also be added that its members were never so much persecuted as here.

We have to acknowledge that we lived, and continue to live, in a very heterogeneous country in which so many different cultures of East and West came into contact. True unity failed to be achieved either through the tsarist regime or that of its Bolshevik heirs.

The Scale of the Movement

JUDGING BY fragmentary data, Mystical Anarchism in the 1920s (during a short period of time) became very widespread among free professionals and intellectuals: scholars and scientists, college professors, artists and actors from many towns. There were also contacts with noninstitutional spiritual teachings, and somewhere in the Caucasus, contacts with sectarianism. An attempt was even made to come into contact with the youth (scouts organization). I feel we shall never be able to get exact data even after all the archives are open, as for the sake of safety, different names were used: Brotherhood of Parakletes,³ Order of the Spirit, Order of the Light, Order of the Temple,⁴ and perhaps many other ones. When I returned after the repressions (1936-1954), I recognized many,

but did not speak to them: the masks were still on. Not everybody remained as before. Some became traitors, some merely went over to another camp without betrayal and turned into non-Party Bolsheviks. How could it be possible to disentangle all that? I am sure there were people who recognized me, too.

A. A. Solonovich (who knew already of the future arrest) told me as his farewell: "Now we are numerous and some small roots will remain."

Where are these roots?

I was saying good-bye to him at the familiar leather sofa where a new blanket lay prepared for the prison.

Readiness for Sacrifices

THE READER must have long felt a desire to ask why all that was necessary.

This question can have various answers.

The most general answer is as follows: a spiritually endowed man aware of the Universal responsibility, a Pneumatic (a term of the Gnostics often used by Solonovich), is such that in tragic times he must be willing to act in any circumstances. But how? In a hopeless situation the only open road is sacrifice. This is a Christian answer to the above question.

Are we ready to accept it?

I believe that Mystical Anarchists acknowledged this principle. At least this is testified to by the fact that after the arrests of 1930 their activities were still going on.

Another question is: while the elder participants, experienced and mature, were ready for sacrifice, did they have the inner right to call younger ones to follow them? My feeling is that they did. They called only a few and were honest in warning them of what might happen. It was hard on everybody. The mother of my friend Yu. Proferansov herself led her only son to the road to Golgotha.

Could there be any hope for a positive, or at least, not so cruel an outcome? Before the mass terror, Solonovich spoke of the possibility of a spontaneous beginning of a second world war and, as a consequence, of a new revolution that could acquire a different, nondictatorial nature if people were spiritually prepared by that time. His forecast was essentially erroneous.

Indeed, the Second World War did break out, but we gained a triumphant victory together with

our Western allies. Then came the lengthy period of the Cold War that we eventually lost against former allies. The expected revolution came, and the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party collapsed. But by that time there were practically no spiritually-prepared representatives of free thinking.

The policy of dictators to exterminate all dissidents was farsighted, and their alternative dramatic: If not for them, the country would perish.

But was it intelligent and humane?

It is difficult for us to understand the course of history in the twentieth century. We can only comprehend the fate of individuals, but never that of humankind. Such fate is beyond our grasp.

In the terms of the ancient Greek philosophers we could use the term *Epokhe*, abstention from further reasoning; or else *Aeon*, extratemporality. The latter term was widely used by Gnostics who wished to restore by their imagination what was happening in Ultimate Reality. We are unable, however, to reinterpret their constructions in contemporary language.

Readiness of the Russian Intelligentsia to Accept the New Mystical Teaching

THE NATURAL question is: why did Mystical Anarchism receive such a broad response in Russia?

My opinion is that it was significantly related to the situation of the first postrevolutionary years. The Russian intelligentsia was preparing for the revolution for a long time and discussed at length the ways of its development. But despite the arguments one thing was certain: They believed it would be successful and sacred. They believed in people, in their creativity and faultlessness. They were ready to worship people's capacities.

But their romantic hopes were destroyed. Only the Bolsheviks were able to curb the mad cruelty. All the other parties proved helpless: Their position was too civilized. Traditional Anarchism failed to stand the test as well. The Church, too, proved to be helpless, though "Holy Russia" was a frequent phrase. The central problem proved to be the deficit of kindness, tolerance, and decency.

The reflective and concerned intelligentsia again had to face the notorious Russian question: What is to be done?

Many intellectuals felt that Mystical Anarchism provided an answer to this question: It was to make Christianity more profound by returning to its origin, to liberate it from dogmatism and some anachronistic ideas, to remove intolerance towards other religions and science, and to introduce into the outlook mysticism lost by the Church.

What we have said above, on the role played by the revolution in the development of the new religious movement, can be supported by the fact that when A. A. Karelin came back to Russia he started as the Secretary of the Russian Federation of Anarchists-Communists, though later these activities became secondary and then stopped altogether, replaced by a mystically-oriented philosophy.

Ideological Premises

LAST BUT not least are the ideological premises, the most important question being about the basis of Mystical Anarchism.

There is no source, nor can there be a source, that would formulate the principal premises of this teaching. It cannot exist since the thinking of an Anarchist must remain free, untied by any unconditional dogmas.

Still, there was a source. It existed as oral ancient legends.⁵ The amazing fact is that Karelin actually remembered all the legends (there were more than a hundred): After his death not a single note was found. These texts were regarded as esoteric material, not to be passed on to the noninitiated. At the same time it was said that even if they got into the hands of outsiders, that would not do much harm, as their perception is a sacrament.⁶ It can be performed only in a specific spiritual atmosphere created by the leader together with the collective sharing his attitude. Karelin possessed a special spiritual power that was preserved for some time after his death.⁷

It was emphasized, and indeed was very important, that everyone could understand the legends in his own way, as myths, tales, or allegories exposing elements of the new outlook. The creative task was to be able, after this text became a part of you, to create your own text corresponding to the meanings and requirements of the present day. That was an ancient Gnostic principle.

The fact that the legends were passed on orally made the teaching dynamic. The storyteller could

change the text according to the change of culture. This is not to say that the spirit of the teaching changed, it was only the form that was subject to changes. The oral mode was also significant for the reason that great attention was paid to answering the questions posed by listeners in the course of telling the legend. Such conversations are only possible in the language of today.

An essential question is how much these legends correspond to historically preserved materials of Christian Gnosticism. I am not in a position to act as an expert, but I would still like to say a few words about this point.

I feel that the general spirit of legend is in accord with Gnostic thinking, but that is about all, at least for the above-mentioned reason, that legends could change with time. We should also bear in mind that legends (e.g., in the case of the Templars) were complemented by new material related to the development of knighthood; and by the Crusades, that provided new meetings with the East, including Moslem esoterism. The legend of the Holy Grail became a new subject as well (Jung & von Franz, 1970; Baigent, Leigh, & Lincoln, 1989).

It is also difficult to answer the above question for the following reason: It is not easy to achieve a formulation of what Gnosticism is. In the broadest understanding it represents the Christianization, and, at the same time, the Hellenization⁸ of the entire range of Mediterranean cultures.

It is difficult to indicate on the time scale when this movement started and when it ended, or, to be more accurate, when it went underground, emerging on the surface as individual splashes, though frequent and sometimes prolonged ones.⁹

It is not simple either to describe the geographical expansion of the movement. One of its trends, *Manichaeism*, spread from Northern Africa to China, having found a specially favorable soil in Middle and Central Asia. One of the Gnostic sects is preserved in Iraq to our day.

Still, attempts were made to formulate the basic postulates. Below we quote one of the statements by Jonas (1958):

The stage would be the same [as in the Bible], the theme as transcending: the creation of the world, the destiny of man, fall and redemption, the first and the last things. But how much more numerous would be the cast, how much more bizarre the symbolism, how much more extravagant the emotions! Almost

all the actions would be in the heights, in the divine or angelic or demonic realm, a drama of pre-cosmic persons in the supranatural world, of which the drama of man in the natural world is but a distant echo. (p. xiii)

Here is a broader view of the subject discussed (Sventsitskaya & Trofimova, 1989):

At the International Congress in Messina in 1966, the thesis was formulated stating that to define the origin of Gnosticism means to define its essence. It was however absolutely impossible to establish its origin unambiguously, as in teachings related to Gnostics according to the ancient evidence a mixture of fairly different elements is represented. (p. 165)

In contemporary language we would say that the outlook of Gnosticism is a multidimensional phenomenon: Its probabilistically weighted constituents are correlated. This correlation is not stable, it is determined by the active observer changing in the process of perception the weight of individual constituents.

It is this flexibility that enables modern researchers to discover parallels between modern thinking and the Gnostic ideas of the distant past. It is also essential that in both cases, in the present and in the past, thinkers on the deep level of their consciousness proceeded from the same archetypes. One of the attractive features of Gnosticism is exactly that it reflected in the most complete way the archetypal heritage without any dogmatic limitations. Gnosticism in its manifold vision of the world seems to be the *freest* systematic view of the world.

We would like to illustrate the above by a few examples. In the book already quoted (Sventsitskaya & Trofimova, 1989) we find the following words concerning the search for parallels between Gnosticism and modern times:

...that opened up the prospects of drawing parallels between apophatic descriptions of the One and the linguistic observations of L. Wittgenstein; between Gnostic cosmology and the hypotheses of contemporary physics on duality and nonduality; between the identification of man in ancient texts and the roads of psychoanalysis. (p. 166)

The book *Gnosis und Mystik in der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Koslowski, 1988) is devoted to the problem of parallels.¹⁰ This collection of

papers contains twenty chapters embracing not only individual thinkers but also entire trends.¹¹ We see how deeply Gnosis penetrated philosophical thinking up to our day.¹² We would also like to mention here a collection of papers, edited in Holland, which is hard to get: *Gnosis de Derde Component van de Europese Cultuurtraditie* (Quispel, 1988) resembling the book (Koslowski, 1988) both structurally and in content. We would also like to indicate the comprehension of Gnosticism in prerevolutionary Russia. Below we quote the paper of A. Belyi devoted to the early works of A. Blok (Belyi, 1988):

...she is the Virgin, Sophia, the Mistress of the World, the Dawn; her life incarnates in love the most supreme goals of Vladimir Soloviev and the Gnostics; turns abstraction into life, and Sophia into Love; and brings down straight into our soul odd conceptions of Valentine and Vasilides, connects the vaguest quests of ancient times with the religious-philosophical quest of our days. (p. 285)

As you see, part of the intelligentsia in Russia was ready to accept Mystical Anarchism fermented by Gnostic Christianity.

Opposition to the State Power and Orthodoxy

DESPITE GNOSTIC teaching being so broad, opposition did emerge, and it was sometimes quite pronounced, both in the distant past and in days close to our time. One case was the opposition to Byzantine Orthodoxy. The description of this opposition may shed more light on the nature of Gnostic Christianity than any attempts to describe it according to numerous sources. Such an approach could be called apophatic, as it reveals the nature of Gnosticism by stating what it is not. The opposition will naturally be revealed by the difference in interpreting canonical texts.

We shall consider the following aspects of opposition.

1. *The principle of doing.* Gnostic Christianity traditionally accepts the principle of *doing* as an urge towards justice; social justice, of course. That follows from reading canonical gospels. Recall at least the parable of the fig tree. Christ also said of himself:

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. (John 9:4)

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. (John 13:15)

I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)

Orthodoxy, on the contrary, limits itself to praying, praying for everybody. But is that enough?¹³

In contrast to Orthodoxy, Gnostic Christianity in the tragic days of revolutionary conflict made an attempt to join the struggle, having declared the formation of the new movement, Mystical Anarchism. Representatives of this trend who were not afraid to soil their names entered the All-Union Executive Central Committee. Why then did none of the hierarchs of Orthodoxy recognize the revolution as a fact and enter the Committee (at least as observers) to soften the terror?

2. *Opposition of the sources.* The great teaching of Christ which is actually extratemporal (i.e., invariant with respect to the multitude of cultures) is given to us by the Church as interpreted through only one ancient culture. That attaches *archaic* features to the teaching, which alienates many intellectuals from Christianity. The alienation is also promoted by the fact that opposition is often manifested between the Old Testament and the New Testament.¹⁴

As early as the time of its first appearance, Gnosticism attempted to go beyond the boundaries of national limitations, rejecting the Old Testament as a primitive (from the viewpoint of *Weltanschauung*) interpretation of the history of one nation. In the Gnostic interpretation, the Christian teaching has significantly acquired a cosmopolitan nature.

Gnostics did not accept the Old Testament, and their attitude to the New Testament was critical. The reason for this was an essential divergence of initial premises. In the Gnostic approach, God was alienated from the fate of this world. God was described by such epithets as indestructible, existing without a name, inexpressible, supercelestial, immutable, unknowable, nonexistent. It was stated that the Savior with his mission exists from initial time in various manifestations. "I wandered through worlds and generations until I came to the gate of Jerusalem" (Jonas, 1958, p. 79). Man is but a wanderer in the world, and Earth is but one of his abodes. A special metaphysical significance was attached to

knowledge as a way of spiritual ascent. The language of Gnosticism is amazing. Its typical feature is a symbolic way of expressing ideas by means of allegories, myths, and legends, and sometimes poetry that contains philosophical images. Its peculiarity is a creation of new metaphors. To the words of ordinary language such as Silence, Reason, Abyss, or Delusion, a new specific meaning is attached without any additional explanation.

How different is all that from what we regard as Christianity!

The renovated Russian Gnostic Christianity also recommended treating the canonical gospels critically. For instance, it is difficult today to accept the statement, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:30, Luke 12:7).¹⁵ This extreme determinism is not compatible with the concepts of our day. It would be difficult to see God as a giant computer counting our hairs. It is equally difficult to understand why marrying a divorced person should be regarded as fornication (Matt. 5:32; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). That seems to be a concession to the cultural tradition of those days. Such examples can be multiplied. The important thing is also to interpret facts that were supposed to be overlooked. For instance, Orthodoxy considers it sinful to speak of metempsychosis, but it is mentioned in the Gospel according to John 9:1,2; the idea of these lines is that the blind man could commit a sin before he was born, that is, in a previous life.¹⁶

3. *Attitude to power* is one of the examples of opposition of the Old Testament to the new teaching (if it is liberated from certain alien insertions).

In the Gospel according to Luke we read how the devil tempted Christ:

And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. (Luke 4:6)

If thou therefore will worship me, all shall be thine. (Luke 4:7)

In contrast to that, in the fifth book of Moses we learn that power belongs to God:

And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. (Deuteronomy 10:12)

For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible God, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward. (Deuteronomy 10:17)

Another, demoniacal image of the carrier of supreme power is given in the Apocryphon of John¹⁷ (Robinson, 1981):

[10] And she [Sophia] called his name Yaltabaoth. This (20) is the first archon who took a great power from his mother. And he removed himself from her and moved away from the places in which he was born. He became strong and created for himself other aeons with (25) a flame of luminous fire which (still) exists now. And he joined with his madness which is in him and begot authorities for himself.

[11] And he is impious in his madness, which is in him. For he said (20), "I am God and there is no other God beside me," for he is ignorant of his strength, the place from which he had come.

But Yaltabaoth had a multitude [12] of faces in addition to all of them, so that he could bring a face before all of them, according to his desire, being in the middle of seraphs. He shared (5) his fire with them; therefore he became lord over them, because of the power of the glory he possessed of his mother's light. Therefore he called himself God. And he did not (10) put his trust in the place from which he came.

[13] And when the mother recognized that the cover of darkness was imperfect, then she knew (35) that her consort had not agreed with her. She repented [14] with much weeping. And the whole pleroma heard the prayer of her repentance and they praised on her behalf the invisible, virginal Spirit. (pp. 104-106)

But let us return now to the New Testament. In the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle to the Romans, the tradition of the Old Testament of praising any supreme power is again repeated:

13:1. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Thus each Christian has to face the dilemma of whether to accept unquestioningly any supreme power or to reject the principle of violence itself. Russian Orthodoxy identified itself with the Russian powers, both with the former tsarist power and the postrevolutionary one, when at first it was not yet militantly atheistic. Gnostic

Christianity in the Russia of 1917 found itself under the banner of Mystical Anarchism. Without letting ourselves be carried away by emotions, we can assert that both interpretations of the initial texts are possible. The choice is determined by the spiritual level of the one who chooses.

It is noteworthy that the word *communism* was inscribed on the banners of both Bolshevism and Anarchism. The experience of more than seventy years has demonstrated that for those who have chosen the road of conscious murder this slogan quickly turns into a mask.

The word *communism* has lately become one of abuse. But it should not be forgotten that this utopian image is part of the foundation of Christianity. Recall but one phrase from Christ's sermon, "Sell what you have and give alms" (Luke 12:33).

All originally Gnostic European heresies were developed under the symbol of equality, brotherhood, and freedom. There is a well known treatise *On Justice* (Nikolaev, 1913) ascribed to Epiphanies that sheds light on early Gnosticism. This is how it is described in the book by K. Rudolph (1977): "The author [of the composition] reveals the image of Gnostic communism and shows in this way what explosive force the Gnostic world had" (pp. 285-286).

The charge had long been wandering through Western Europe until it exploded in full force in Russia, where the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, also borrowed from Europe, was used as a detonator.

4. *Going beyond the limits of original sources*, in its urge to preserve the purity of belief, Orthodoxy treated secularization with caution.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the history of Russian philosophical thought is essentially the secularization of Orthodoxy. It will suffice to remember such names as F. Dostoevsky, L. Tolstoy, V. Soloviev, S. Bulgakov, P. Florensky, and many others (Zen'kovsky, 1989). Secularization was naturally fraught with conflicts with the Church, sometimes of very serious significance. In recent decades this thread of Russian thought was broken, perhaps for the reason that the state censorship became much stricter. But it may be that due to the existing oppressive atmosphere the spiritual impulse was attenuated.

But let us come back to Gnosticism. In it, even within one trend, many nonconflicting ramifications were allowed to exist. For instance,

for one of the well-known schools of Gnosticism, that of the Valentinian, even in the sources preserved today we can find many independent versions deviating from the original one. This is what Irenaeus wrote about this trend (Jonas, 1958): "Every day one of them invents something new, and none of them is considered perfect unless he is productive in this way" (p. 179).¹⁹

When we try now to mentally reproduce the atmosphere in which Gnosticism was developing, we see a brotherhood of people, each of whom meditated over the problems of existence proceeding from the common premise of man's desertedness. The results of these meditations were formulated as philosophical and poetic structures, the most vivid of which gave rise to separate schools and their ramifications. Many were seized by a creative quest. They tried in their imagination to create the mythological model of the world. Their penetration into the depths of the human spirit is amazing.

Up to now we have spoken about the sharp opposition of Russian Orthodoxy and Gnosticism. But this opposition was later softened, if not on the side of Orthodoxy itself, then in its secularization, which underwent a similar process: The Russian teaching of Sophia was also a mythological model of a cosmogonic variety.

If now we come back to Mystical Anarchism, its inner life can be almost fully characterized by the same words that we used to describe ancient Gnosticism: that it was a brotherhood whose intensive creative activities were going on both within it and outside. It was expressed in plays staged in theaters,²⁰ in creating artistic works and in writing philosophical papers on general social and historical subjects. I personally was well acquainted with the works of Solonovich. Thirteen of his philosophical notebooks are preserved. All in all there were fifty-nine exercise books and five thicker ones. I also remember his papers on Christ and Christianity, the courses of lectures called "Elements of *Weltanschauung* and Mystical Anarchism," as well as his fundamental work on M. Bakunin and the cult of Ialdabaof during the last two millennia. He regarded Bakunin not only as a political figure but also as a philosopher.²¹

That is how the *principle of doing* was personified, aimed at expanding spiritual knowledge in an epoch when it was in every way suppressed by the dominant *ideology* of atheistic conformity.

Personalities and Reprisal

I would like to sketch here a few portraits.²²

Alexei Alexandrovich Solonovich, of mathematical background, Associate Professor at the Moscow College of Technology, was my teacher. He was rather tall, solid, of considerable physical force. There was something Mongolian about his face: high cheekbones, slanted black eyes, a flattened nose. He had long hair reaching to the shoulders, a high forehead, and a noble and significant look. He spoke like a born orator. His speech would fascinate an audience as soon as he pronounced the first words: It was full of lofty ideas, original judgments, inspiration, and intellectual audacity. He was intelligent and courageous.

Once an unknown person from the audience tried to provoke him with the question:

"Is there a group of people forming around you?"

His answer was instantaneous:

"You can get an exhaustive answer to your question from the GPU [Secret Police]."

Solonovich was one of the leaders of Mystical Anarchism. He spoke in public often and openly. He signed with his true name the papers that were published outside the state publishing houses.

He was first arrested in 1925, but set free soon after the verdict. He was even given back his manuscripts, which were classified as scientific papers. The only condition made was that he should not work with people. This requirement was, however, impossible to fulfill, as the participants of the movement set themselves the task not only to master spiritual knowledge, Gnosis, but also to implement it in concrete deeds. For some time the question was even raised concerning the necessity of creating a closed spiritual university. That was not completely fulfilled, but the university did exist, though not officially, and I was to study there for ten years.

I was always amazed by the efficiency of Solonovich: He taught higher mathematics at the Moscow College of Technology (it was he who made me interested in mathematics after he had demonstrated to me its philosophical meaning in relation to *Weltanschauung*). He gave public talks on philosophical subjects, developed the theory of Mystical Anarchism, read a lot on history and psychology, and displayed an acute interest in the traditional symbolism of the East and West as well as Eastern spiritual teachings and Gnosticism. He

also prepared various cross-disciplinary educational courses for the audience that gathered in the Kropotkin museum, where all these spheres of interest were brought together, and that in the sphere of philosophy, covered everything from Aristotle to Kant. Even then he was trying to integrate spiritual, scientific, and general cultural knowledge into a single approach.

Besides, he often met and talked with people, attracting them with his charismatic personality. His time was occupied and arranged by encoded marks in the pad that he would take out of his eternal Tolstoyan shirt when he made another appointment with us.²³

Arrested for the third time, Solonovich died in prison in 1937 after a hunger strike.

Agniya Onisimovna Solonovich was the wife and helpmate of Alexei Alexandrovich. I remember her especially well, as our relationship was characterized by a very specific flavor of maternal friendliness that I especially appreciated, for I lost my mother when I was a boy of nine²⁴ and never regained this maternal space until I met Agniya Onisimovna.

Tall, big, almost common, she was completely transformed when she started to speak. Her ideas were clear and penetrating (obviously the effect of her—albeit unfinished—mathematical university education). Her position in the Kropotkin museum enabled her to devote herself wholly to the “great cause.” After her husband was arrested in 1930, she took his place in all his activities.

Two features were especially prominent in her character: her cordiality, that we all knew very well, and her stoicism, that manifested itself at the inquests after her arrest in 1936. Reading protocols of the inquests one cannot help being amazed not merely by her human courage in the face of the merciless monster of the system, but by her lofty spirit and dignity.

In each protocol one comes across the refrain pronounced almost word for word: “I am a convinced Anarchist and I refuse to answer this question for moral-ethical reasons.” Not once did she accept the accusations she was charged with, either at the inquests, in the court, or when she had to sign a special paper informing her of the grounds on which she was incriminated. She declared her position with firm though uneven letters: “Innocent. Agniya Solonovich.”

I would like to quote here one of her letters, preserved in the KGB archives, that was addressed to Solonovich in prison, in 1925. Let her speak to us with her own voice at least now:

My dearest beloved Alexei,

We are all hugging you numerous times: myself, Al'ka, Tanya, Seryozha, Katya, Narya, mother, Tonya, Iya. I received your cable on July 26. Is it possible that you were en route for so long? How are you? How is your health? What kind of regime do they have in Suzdal? I am awaiting your letter impatiently with all the details of your life and a description of how meetings with relatives are arranged. I would like to know that beforehand to get ready. I hope you have already written about all that. Please, be especially careful with your health.

All this time I have had my hands full with the bustle about your case and do not yet know whether they are going to reconsider it. The procrastination is such that I can hardly bear it. Send me a warrant that I can take care of your case, otherwise, in the office of Katanyan they refused to inform me. My dear, do not worry and do not waste your energy over there. You write that you feel guilty about me. This is completely wrong: your arrest did not depend on you. You have not done anything to be arrested for, so you are not guilty. I could be arrested in exactly the same manner...And the children may remain alone. Will we feel guilty about them? We are all right. Al'ka, Tanya, and Iya play together, sometimes they fight. Just now they have taken the carpet and their dolls outside and are playing in the shade near the barn, opposite the porch.

Mother helps me a lot. Though sickly, she has plenty of endurance. She walks and takes care of herself. We leave the house to her and go away, each to our duties. Sergei is off to a football match, Tonya and Katya go to their offices (Katya has found a job, it seems to me a temporary one, in a children's home), I go somewhere in connection with your case. By the evening we all get together. I am not yet looking for a job, since it would take time and I would not be able to petition for you the way I would like to. For the moment this is my closest task. I am only thinking about the way to get you free. I have not yet applied for the meeting. First I have to see people, and after that I will come to see you. I'll bring along paper, books, jam, and other things. Please, write what you need most of all. I am sending you for your expenses 10 roubles and 6 stamps for the letters. I received only two of your letters, of July 9 and 15. No letters from

America so far. No money in the Red Cross. There is desperate need for it. How is Ivan Vasil'evich? Kindest regards and all the best to him. Are you together again? Apollon Andreevich is still in a sanatorium and both he and Eugen. send you best regards. They occupy now a room on the opposite side, near the main entrance, the first to the left as you enter. When I visited them on Sunday, Eugen. was in bed. All our friends are now concerned with how I am doing. That is very handy, as thanks to this I can avoid taking care of that myself. Actually, this is such a trifle...Now the only essential thing for me is you, I can only think about you...Here is a piece of news for you: the other day the daughter of our Ashkhabad aunt came to see me and said that your mutual acquaintance would soon arrive in Moscow and stay in the same place that he had left before. I am surprised. In a few days we shall have our kitchen repaired. Your niece Irina came. This year they no longer live in the same apartment over Moskva-river where they used to live and where we visited them. A pity—it was so nice to sit on their balcony. She is bustling around as always. What are you busy with, what are you thinking about? How is your mathematics going? At the worst, we shall order whatever you need from abroad, but will not leave you without books. Perhaps, you want to write something about Anarchism or other problems that interest you. Do that. I would be especially interested in your letters on early Anarchism. Remember that in a letter with a 7-kopeck stamp you can write a whole sheet of paper, and if only I could get such letters every week...I am longing to be spiritually with you. It is hard on me that I cannot experience everything that you are experiencing at the moment. Anyway, there is no point in complaining: if legal Anarchism continues to be persecuted, my destiny will be the same. Until the repairs are over, Tonya occupies your room. Then I shall move there, because Seryozha will take my place. Tatyankha repeats every day, "Daddy sweetie come back quickly," in a patter. Al'ka remembers you rarely, but when she does, then in a very serious way. When she hears we are talking about you she suddenly asks us to repeat something. As to Sergei, he will write himself. I received the money. Paid off almost all the debts. Also paid to the proprietor for two months (June and July) and not taking into account the money I am sending you, I still have 20 roubles. That will be enough for 10 days, and soon after there will be another salary. How do you arrange with washing your things? How many hours a day are you outdoors? Is it a camp or a prison? I wish so

much to see you, my dear Alyoshechka, to speak with you. Write more often and longer letters. Anyway, you have more time to spare, while I am run off my feet. I will soon begin to learn a new piece for recital.²⁵ Your advice is that I must not waste time. But I have to confess that all this time I have been unable to read anything but novels. It seems that now I will be able to start something more serious, though not immediately but after my bustle is over. Each time when Sophia Grigorievna Kropotkina comes to Moscow, she comes to see me. She sends you best regards. I wanted to mail this letter yesterday, but was late. So, see you soon. I kiss you affectionately,

Your loving Agniya

Mikhail Alekseevich Nazarov was short, bearded, with light brown hair. Unostentatious but well-educated, he knew foreign languages and was one of Solonovich's favorite students. He was very enthusiastic about the ideas of Mystical Anarchism and devoted his time and his soul to them and to all of us. He talked much with people, and wrote much on social-historical subjects. There was something old-fashioned and stable about the fluidity of his thoughts.

But people are truly revealed only in tragic situations.

Arrest and inquests became a tragic reality for him not only because he acknowledged being guilty of preparing terrorist plots against the leading party and government members, but also because he was made to give evidence against Agniya Solonovich and Iosif Sharevsky, which formed the basis for their accusation and death verdict. Iosif Sharevsky was shot on the same day as Agniya Solonovich, at the age of 25.²⁶ Like her, he never acknowledged himself guilty, and refused to answer any questions at the inquests, to prevent his investigators from using his responses as evidence against others. They both were tried by the Military Board of the Supreme Court of the USSR headed by Ul'rikh. The entire procedure of the trial, prepared beforehand in the written form, took twenty minutes, and made no provision for the presence of witnesses, advocates, or the right to appeal the verdict. It was thus to be fulfilled immediately. The relatives received from the civil registrar's offices certificates that death occurred in prison or in camp, with an arbitrary date. The requests, entitled "secret," were sent out by the KGB and the corresponding papers that had nothing to do with reality were issued by the official state offices. They lied as

much as they wished and to whomever they wished. In the name of what? I would like to know that.

Speaking about Nazarov, I must say that he was forgiven by all the victims at the time when they hoped to be able to tell him that personally. But he was also shot. (In the evidence material there is a postmortem certificate stating that Nazarov suffered from a grave mental disease. But if that could be discovered posthumously, how could that be overlooked in the process of investigation?!)

I do not know how many people were arrested in the case of Anarcho-Mysticism in 1936-37, but I know that nine people were shot (among them the well-known anarchist-mathematician D. A. Bem), all those who were charged with terrorism and tried by the Supreme Board of the Supreme Court of the USSR.

A large group of the accused tried by the Special Conference were sentenced to five years in labor camps that, for those who survived, turned into a prolonged term at camp and eternal exile. Some of the survivors were rehabilitated in the 1950s, others only in the 1960s.

Conclusion

I am thinking now of *all* who perished.

The castle of Shanon—I happened to visit this ancient fortress of the French kings elevated over the earth that goes far beyond the horizon.

Everything around was in bloom, happy, and blissful.

It is in this castle that Joan of Arc, guided by the voices, recognized the King in disguise.

It is in this castle, on the central landing of the thick round tower, that the Grand Master of the Order of Templars, Jacques de Molay, and the Commander of Normandy, Geoffroy de Charnay, were chained to the wall. In March of 1314 the King of France, Philip the Fair, and Pope Clement V burned them in a slow fire in a Paris square (Baigent, Leigh, & Lincoln, 1989).

The destruction of the Templars was a major event of the fourteenth century. Here is how a contemporary, Dante (1931), responded to it:

91. I see the second Pilate with this deed,
Yet not content but ruthless, without law,
Into the Temple bear his sails of greed.²⁷

94. When shall I, O my Lord, rejoice to see

The vengeance which, being hidden, maketh
sweet

Thy wrath in thine own counsel privy.

—*Purgatory*, Canto XX

After their order was exterminated the surviving knights continued to participate actively in the evolution of European culture, but in a concealed form. This subject is thoroughly illuminated in a book by Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln (1989).

Six hundred and twenty-three years later those who called themselves Templars die again, this time not in public but under the title "secret."

Why were their deaths necessary? Why in secret? Why the absurd accusations whose absurdity was evident even then? How was it possible to say that Mystical Anarchism, a spiritual movement preaching nonviolence, was capable of degrading to terrorism?

The accusations were absurd from the geographical point of view as well. A. A. Solonovich could hardly have headed the terroristic movement he allegedly did because he was in exile in a small village in Siberia, inaccessible in winter and barely accessible in summer. As for Iosif Sharevsky, who was allegedly sent by Solonovich to Moscow in order to organize terroristic acts, he could not do that because he was under observation and his contacts with Moscow were limited by a one-hundred-kilometer area, beyond which he was not allowed to travel.

What lies at the root of the urge to exterminate a movement of this sort? The question is pertinent also because the evidence indicates that belonging to the Order did not subject one to the criminal code.

I am holding in my hands the book by Kanev (1974). It contains a lot of interesting data, and mentions Mystical Anarchism, including A. A. Solonovich. But it finishes with the statement that in Russia Anarchism was not repressed but simply came to an end.²⁸

The only words we can address to the author of the book are:

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it
must needs be that offences come; but woe to
that man by whom the offence cometh! (Matt.
18:7)

What was the true reason for the destruction of the Templars of our day? In the Gospel of Philip (Robinson, 1981) we read:

83. For so long as the root of wickedness is hidden, it is strong. (p. 149)

The Anarchists wished to disclose the root of wickedness called to life by the idea of bloody dictatorship, which was at the moment perceived by many as the power able to undertake the favorable social transformation of the world.

I wrote this book in memory of people who have perished, of their destroyed cause, of their annihilated works. My text is not complete. I would like to hear others who are able to tell about what I have missed. I was close to this movement for ten years, but I was too young and I was only at the threshold. The movement was dominated, on the one hand, by esoterism, and on the other hand, by severe conspiracy that isolated us from each other.

But the lectures of my teacher Alexei Alexandrovich Solonovich; communication with his wife Agniya Onisimovna Solonovich; the image of Apollon Andreevich Karelin; and the inspiration passed on by them, struck the fire within, whose power and light illuminated all my life and thoughts. Everything that I have written, thought over, or made, can be devoted to them—they initiated my spiritual creativity and taught me “the courage to be.”

Notes

This work is based on the author's personal experience and materials from the Central Archives prepared by Jeanna Nalimov-Drogalina. It is a chapter from V. V. Nalimov's autobiographical memoir, *A Rope-Dancer (A Wreckage)*, published in Russian (Nalimov, 1994). The chapter was translated into English by A. V. Yarkho and has been further edited for the present work.

After the present work was finished, A. L. Nikitin (1992/1993) published a series of papers entitled “Templars in Moscow” in the journal *Nauka i religiya* [Science and Religion].

1. Despite the lack of ideology, Karelin's Mystical Anarchism had its outlines, though fuzzy ones. Karelin cannot be considered a direct heir of the anarchism of G. Chulkov that emerged as early as the first decade of the twentieth century. Still, we would like to quote here two attractive fragments from the book by Chulkov (1971):

By mysticism I mean an aggregate of feelings based on the positive irrational experience occurring in the sphere of music. I call music not only the art revealing

in combinations of sounds principles of melody and harmony, but any creative activity based on rhythm and revealing to us directly the noumenal side of the world. (p. 3)

Fight against dogmatism in religion, philosophy, morality, and politics—that is the slogan of Mystical Anarchism. The fight for the anarchic ideal will lead not to indifferent chaos but to a transformed world, if side by side with the fight for liberation we shall be participants in the mystic experience via art, religious love, via music in general. (p. 43)

2. This is official information: It was an address of the Secretariat of the All-Union Federation of Anarchists-Communists.

3. Parakletes (Greek)—Spirit-Comforter, Protector.

4. The three last names are also given in the articles by A. L. Nikitin (1991a, 1991b).

5. Oral legends are the tradition of early Christianity. Here is what we find to the point in Svetsitskaya and Trofimova (1989):

Oral tradition continued to exist in the period when the first scriptures appeared. Eusebios of Caesarea (IV c. A.D.) in his “History of the Church” quotes the Christian writer Papias (2nd half of the II c. A.D.) of Hierapolis (Minor Asia) who collected oral legends: “...if I had a chance to meet anyone who communicated with forefathers, I would carefully ask them about the forefathers' teaching, for instance, what Andrew said, what Peter or Philip said, and what was said by Thomas or James, assuming that a living and penetrating voice would be of better use for me than bookish lore.” (p. 9)

A little further in the same book we read:

Apocalyptic literature was intended for reading out loud. It had to be “entered” emotionally: intonation and expression of the reader was to make the effect of frightening, mysterious description more impressive, and “entering” itself was regarded as a sacrament. (pp. 12-13)

6. One should not think that esoterism is an infringement of democracy. Science is also esoteric in its own way—it is impossible to comprehend serious books on theoretical physics or mathematics without a solid background. Popularization of science only vulgarizes it. The same is true of art. A well-organized university education is a sort of initiation: the professor passes on to his students something more than the contents of the manuals. He creates an intellectual atmosphere in which students learn.

7. The legends are preserved and some of them are published in the journal *Nauka i religiya* [Science and Religion] (see Nikitin, 1993), which I feel to be illegitimate, as it violates the tradition. The copyright should have been obtained from those who were to guard the tradition.

8. What they borrowed from Hellenism was the idea of sin not as the absence of obedience (fall of Adam) but noncognition of oneself. The Gnostic idea emphasizing "...the indissoluble connection of the one with the multitude embraced by it" (Sventsitskaya & Trofimova, 1989, p. 183) is obviously Hellenic.

9. Remember the Bogomils, the Cathars, and their followers, the Albigensians. It is perhaps possible to speak of the influence of Gnosticism (through the Rosicrucians) on the evolution of ideas of the French Revolution.

10. The term Gnosis is often understood to have a broader meaning than Christian Gnosticism.

11. I would especially like to emphasize the Gnosticism of Carl Gustav Jung.

12. An attempt was even made to see the elements of Gnosticism in dialectical materialism.

13. At the beginning of the revolution Russian Orthodoxy did not come out with its own program corresponding to the catastrophic situation of those days. In our day, too, many acute problems keep arising, but we do not hear the Christian response to them. For instance, a tragic problem for our country is that of abortions, as well as that of population reproduction. We are all aware of the fact that sooner or later politicians will have to solve such problems. But where is the voice of Orthodoxy? We feel it should have joined the discussion of these problems, and, moreover, join the struggle for its Christian solution.

The attitude toward social responsibility of Western Christianity is different. Here is a quotation from the paper of the Swiss Protestant theologian Barth (1966), one of the founders of "dialectical theology":

In this way the Kingdom of God starts attacking society. (p. 203)

Are we aware of the fact that what is required from us today is not opposition in one or several specific questions, but re-orientation to God in our life as a whole. (p. 206) [Pages are given according to the Russian edition.]

14. This opposition is natural, this is the meaning of Christ's Divine Message.

15. Note that Marcion, a Gnostic close to traditional Christianity, required that these lines be omitted, as the alienated God could not occupy himself with human hairs.

16. In our book (Nalimov, 1982) a separate chapter is devoted to the problem of reincarnation. This subject is also discussed in Nalimov (1990).

17. This gospel is entirely devoted to theurgical cosmogony.

18. Secularization is religious belief manifested outside the church.

19. Irenaeus was the Bishop of Lyon. His famous conviction of Gnostic heresies dates back to the end of the second century.

20. At present the following names of theater figures of this trend have become known: L. A. Nikitin, P. A. Arensky, V. S. Smyshlyaev, Yu. A. Zavadsky (Nikitin, 1991a). Moscow Arts Theater 2 seems to have been strongly influenced by this trend. Mikhail Chekhov was in all probability also acquainted with it.

21. The interpretation of Bakunin in the book by Zen'kovsky (1989) is very close to that given by Solonovich.

22. Since we continue to work with the archive materials, certain facts can be specified in the future.

23. Solonovich lived in a by-street near Ostozhenka, on the ground floor of a two-storey wooden building which no longer exists. By a passage, one entered a dining room and a small bedroom, with a bed table at the bed on which was a bunch of ritual artificial flowers resembling real ones. Opposite the bedroom there was a study with a large rectangular table surrounded by massive leather chairs with high backs and a cosy leather sofa, with small portraits of P. A. Kropotkin and Gandhi on an upper shelf. On the walls one could see large paintings of M. A. Bakunin and A. A. Karelin. The host's seat was a bentwood chair with a round back, at the head of the table.

24. My mother, a surgeon treating soldiers during World War I, was mobilized by the Red Army and died in an epidemic of spotted fever.

25. I think she means the texts of the legends.

26. It goes without saying that Nazarov was not the only one who gave evidence "by order." Among those was also a cousin of Iosif Sharevsky, Iosif Ioffe, who cooperated with the KGB and had regularly informed for them since 1934. It should also be said that Nazarov started to give his disheartening evidence only at the end of the investigation. It is to his credit that he resisted so long.

27. These lines concern the struggle of Philip the Fair against the Church's (Pope's) power.

28. Here is the relevant statement:

The disappearance of anarchism not only as a political trend, but also as an ideological one, from the arena of life of Soviet society is, as we see, not the result of forcible measures but a consequence of a consistent ideological struggle of the Communist Party and radical social transformations made on the basis of Lenin's plan of constructing socialism. (Kanev, p. 401)

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