

Regula Zwahlen

What is a “Healthy National Feeling”? Serge Bulgakov’s Response to Chaadaev’s Despair

In his *Vekhi* article *Heroism and Asceticism* from 1909, Bulgakov called for a “healthy national feeling.”¹ It seems to me that this notion always appears at times when nationalism is on the rise and when politicians and intellectuals begin to deliver complex arguments about the distinction between (bad) nationalism and (good) patriotism. Quite often these arguments are accompanied by a confusion of notions and contradictory statements.

Unfortunately, Serge Bulgakov provides us with an example of how sincere talk about “healthy nationalism” can grow into quite fervent nationalist rhetoric. As Evgenia Gercyk puts it, Bulgakov (like many others in Russia and throughout Europe) was taken by a “chauvinist frenzy” (*shovinisticheskii ugar*)² when confronted with the First World War and Christopher Stroop examines Bulgakov among other promoters of Russian

Regula Zwahlen is a Postdoctoral Research Assistant at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. She is the author of *Das revolutionäre Ebenbild Gottes. Anthropologien der Menschenwürde bei Nikolaj A. Berdjaev und Sergej N. Bulgakov (Man as the revolutionary image of God. The philosophical anthropologies of Sergii N. Bulgakov and Nikolai A. Berdiaev)* (LIT Verlag, 2010), and co-editor of the German edition of the Russian theologian Sergij Bulgakov’s work. She co-edits the journal *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West* (Zürich, www.g2w.eu), and has published a number of essays on Russian and Soviet concepts of personality and on Russian Orthodox human rights discourse.

¹ S. N. Bulgakov, *Heroism and Asceticism. Reflections on the Religious Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia*, in: *Vekhi: Landmarks: a Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia*, eds. by M. S. Shatz, J. E. Zimmermann, London 1994, p. 43 ff.

² E. К. Герцык, *Николай Бердяев*, in: Н. А. Бердяев, *Самопознание*, Москва 1991, p. 366.

national messianism in the wave of “Nationalist War Commentary.” Even though Bulgakov, in contrast to his contributions to religious philosophy and Orthodox theology, cannot be said to be an original thinker with regard to nationalism, it is interesting to reflect on the pitfalls of his discourse about a “national healthy feeling” that was intended to be a progressive alternative to the “militant nationalism,” or, as Bulgakov sarcastically put it, the *nacional’nichanie* of the government and the conservative patriotic unions of the time.³

Chaadaev’s despair

As for Chaadaev, Bulgakov doesn’t mention him very often, and if he does, he does so by means of the well-known cliché: the name of Chaadaev stands for the topos of Russian backwardness with regard to world history, and Johann Gottfried Herder’s (and Soloviev’s) idea of the whole of mankind as an organism and each nation as an organic member with its own function and mission.⁴ Hence Chaadaev’s despair is concerned with Russia’s lack of (or search for) a proper mission.⁵

In an earlier article about Alexander Herzen, Bulgakov, like Chaadaev, refers to “the West” as the older brother of “our culturally outdated fatherland.” But, says Bulgakov, Russian intellectuals should not follow Chaadaev’s despair caused by his negation of any Russian cultural capabilities – hence Bulgakov seems not to have known Chaadaev’s *Apologia of a Madman* with his vision of a great future for Russia. With regard to Western *technical* achievements like industrialization, the railway, banks and a constitutional state, Bulgakov seemed to be sure that it was only

³ S. N. Bulgakov, *Heroism and Asceticism*, op. cit., p. 44.

⁴ G. Gaut, *Can A Christian Be a Nationalist?*, «Slavic Review» 57 (1998) 1, p. 92.

⁵ As Robin Aizlewood has shown, the republication of parts of Chaadaev’s work by Mikhail Gershenson in the years 1905 to 1908 is closely linked to the publication of *Vekhi* by the same editor. Gershenson mentions Chaadaev in the preface as one of the Russian thinkers to warn Russian society against following the guidance of the atheist and cosmopolitan Russian intelligentsia that “has made our country sick in spirit.” R. Aizlewood, *Chaadaev and Vekhi*, in: *Landmarks Revisited. The Vekhi Symposium 100 Years On*, eds. by R. Aizlewood, R. Coates, Boston 2013, p. 171–173.

a question of “cultural maturity” and a matter of time before Russia would adopt them. But he agreed with the Slavophiles (and many representatives of the European cultural elite of the day) that there is such a thing as *spiritual* creation which calls for cultural diversity, to which each nation contributes with its own “new word.”⁶ Like Chaadaev, Bulgakov saw Western civilization as “a tree deeply rooted in history,” a culture “at least half built on religious foundations laid down by the Middle Ages and the Reformation [...] which feed the tree and with their healthy sap to some extent render harmless the many poisonous fruits,”⁷ but *unlike* Chaadaev, Bulgakov thinks that there *is* a Russian past that could provide some “healthy sap” in order to heal the wounds inflicted on Russia by the revolution. According to Bulgakov, the Russian intelligentsia’s lack “of a healthy national feeling hinders the development of national self-consciousness and is intimately connected with [its] separation from the people.”⁸ This critique is linked to the “national turn” in Russian idealism in the aftermath of the revolution of 1905–1907, which Catherine Evtuhov described as kind of nationalism that is simultaneously Russian and cosmopolitan.⁹

The “national turn” in Russian idealism

A short look at the political context of the time shows that the “national question” was debated vigorously due to the increased “Russification” throughout the Russian Empire, especially in Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine and Finland. The first two Russian parliaments after 1905 reflected the multiethnic composition of the empire rather well, but the new electoral law diminished the share of minorities in the third duma drastically. Nationalist trends among the Russian deputies became increasingly important, not only within “nationalist” parties, but also in the moderate

⁶ С. Н. Булгаков, *Душевная драма Герцена*, in: С. Н. Булгаков, *Сочинения в двух томах*, т. 2, Москва 1993, p. 120–121.

⁷ S. N. Bulgakov, *Heroism and Asceticism*, op. cit., p. 23–24.

⁸ S. N. Bulgakov, *Heroism and Asceticism*, op. cit., p. 25, 43.

⁹ C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle. Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy*, Ithaca 1997, p. 65.

parties of the Octobrists and the Constitutional Democrats.¹⁰ As for the Church, it played a very active role with regard to nation-building at the turn of the century.¹¹ Thus, there were many different concepts of “national self-confidence” in the air.

At the beginning of the 20th century, at least three types of nationalisms can be found in Russia: first, the “traditionalist” type based upon the elements of Orthodox faith, unlimited Russian tsarist autocracy, and Russian nationality, mostly associated with state officials and right-wing parties; second, the “radical” ethnic nationalism of Mikhail Men’shikov; and third, the “liberal nationalism” of Petr Struve, based on elements such as national culture, liberal democracy, and imperialism understood as equal treatment of all ethnicities and peoples of the Russian Empire under the guidance of the Russian nation.¹² It was Struve who asked the question “What is true nationalism?” for the first time in 1901.¹³

Bulgakov belonged to the latter group of “liberal nationalists,” represented by the Constitutional Democratic Party, but he criticized their religious indifference. After the revolutionary events, the right medicine for his sick country was, according to Bulgakov, a return to religion, and especially to Orthodox Christianity. The medical metaphor is strongly connected to his organicist view of society as a living organism.¹⁴ Bulgakov’s call for a return to Orthodoxy was based on a strong conviction that only if the members of the Russian intelligentsia understood the importance of religion in people’s everyday life would they be able

¹⁰ A. Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, London–New York 2001, p. 343–344.

¹¹ See J. Strickland, *The Making of Holy Russia. The Orthodox Church and Russian Nationalism before the Revolution*, New York 2013.

¹² С. М. Сергеев, *Русский национализм и империализм начала XX века*, http://www.portal-slovo.ru/history/39051.php?ELEMENT_ID=39051&SHOWALL_1=1.

¹³ Ю. С. Усачева, *Проблемы национализма и патриотизма в трудах П. Б. Струве*, «Вестник Санкт-петербургского университета. Серия 2» (2011) 2, p. 73.

¹⁴ The medical metaphor has been ridiculed by Dmitrii Merezhkovsky’s sarcastic comment that in *Vekhi*, “seven physicians are treating the patient with seven drugs.” E. van der Zweerde, *The Rise of the People and the Political Philosophy of the Vekhi Authors*, in: *Landmarks Revisited. The Vekhi Symposium 100 Years On*, op. cit., p. 117–118.

to serve the country as true representatives of the people. If Bulgakov’s own “religious turn” had previously been motivated by his concern for the dignity of the human individual, after the first Russian Revolution he appreciated traditional institutions like the state and the Church, even if he advocated reform for all of them. His new concept has been framed as “liberal conservatism.”¹⁵ Together with his fellow thinkers on the way “from Marxism to idealism” Bulgakov turned to the concept of nationality as a means of unifying Russia’s divided society. Indeed, *Vekhi* engendered a large debate about nationalism.¹⁶

As for Russia’s lesson for the world, or at least for Europe, according to Bulgakov its mission was to lead the prodigal sons of the atheist or agnostic humanist and socialist cultures back to their father’s house. Bulgakov was following Vladimir Soloviev’s moral critique of official and ethnic nationalisms while promoting a kind of “true patriotism” or Slavophile “cultural nationalism” based on the ideas of a free Orthodox Church and “the people.”¹⁷ And despite his obvious approximation to the ideological program of the Orthodox clergy based on the idea of “Holy Rus’,” Bulgakov’s vision contained sharp differences, as he explicitly rejected the official model of “Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality,”¹⁸ and welcomed the Paschal Edict on religious toleration in 1905.¹⁹

Bulgakov’s cultural patriotism

In his article *Reflections on Nationality* from 1910, Bulgakov juxtaposes several antagonisms concerning what he considers to be a flawed nationalist concept or a “healthy national feeling.” Given the contradictions in

¹⁵ О. К. Иванцова, *Сергей Николаевич Булгаков*, in: С. Н. Булгаков, *Избранное*, Москва 2010, p. 12–13, 17.

¹⁶ See M. A. Колеров, *Национализм. Полемика 1909–1917. Сборник статей*, Москва 2000.

¹⁷ G. Gaut, *Can A Christian Be a Nationalist?*, op. cit., p. 77, 88; S. Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, New York 2006, p. 101, 130–131.

¹⁸ J. Strickland, *The Making of Holy Russia*, op. cit., p. 173.

¹⁹ C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, op. cit., p. 121–122.

Bulgakov's arguments it must be kept in mind that in 1910 he was about to change from a social liberal view to a more conservative patriotic one.

Firstly, he condemns positivist or idealist nominalism: a nation is not an abstraction from a sum total of facts and not a collective concept the origin of which can be easily explained by the methods of historical science. He considers the right approach to nationality to be mystic or "spiritual realism:" the nation is a substantial (Sophic) principle that creates different forms, which never totally melt with it and can therefore change. Secondly, he opposes rationalist cosmopolitanism to the nation as a "real, blood-related union" linked to Fedorov's idea of humanity as a community of fathers, mothers, and children. The argument is about people being concrete, socially integrated persons instead of abstract, dissociated individuals. However, it runs the risk of being confused with ethnic nationalism because Bulgakov argues that nationality is a part of the "personal nucleus," and even puts it in an extended version of Marx's words: "*National* existence determines consciousness." Therefore, thirdly, he thinks that nationality is not a concept you can create via a conscious, reflexive ideology. Hence Bulgakov would strongly disagree with Benedict Anderson's constructivist concept of "imagined communities," because, according to him, nations are "born" with a special independent self-awareness and instinct even if nationalities rise in history and consist of complex ethnographic mixtures.²⁰

Fourthly, Bulgakov criticizes a wingless conservatism, treating the past as something dead instead of a body with "living principles" like language, art, philosophy, and especially religion. A boom of "cultural patriotism" should lead to a weakening of political nationalism and at the same time prevent Russia's capitulation to Western culture. But fifthly, he condemns nationalist exclusiveness, because nationality is not the highest form of human unification. Therefore there is no room for national egoism: a nation is a body that should look after its welfare and health, but it should not want to grow fat, and threaten others with a *panzerfaust* (like,

²⁰ С. Н. Булгаков, *Размышления о национальности*, in: С. Н. Булгаков, *Два Града. Исследования о природе общественных идеалов*, т. 2, Москва 1911, p. 280–284.

according to Bulgakov, Germany does). That is how Bulgakov, sixthly, criticizes militant nationalism on the government level.²¹

His remedy for militant nationalism is a concept of national responsibility, humbleness and asceticism: like individuals, nations have not only interests but a conscience too, and they can be punished for nationalist sins, as Soloviev already argued. With regard to other nations, Bulgakov (like Soloviev) stresses the need for national humility instead of national pride. But this doesn’t mean that Bulgakov, seventhly, promotes separatism. On the contrary, he condemns national individualism, desire for national autonomy and “tribal patriotism.”²² Minorities in the Russian Empire should develop a certain “state patriotism” not based on a treaty, but on the common search for a “common house,” on a “feeling of belonging to a certain legal system” and to a national economy.²³ Such a statement reflects Bulgakov’s ambiguity with regard to legal institutions at the time, because what else is a treaty than a common commitment based on a feeling of belonging to a certain legal system? It seems that his recent “Slavophile turn” partly distorted his usual commitment to the rule of law.²⁴ Furthermore, according to Bulgakov (following Petr Struve), other peoples in the Russian Empire should be granted national equality and political autonomy, and in a footnote he affirmatively refers to the writings by Mikhail Dragomanov, who supported the concept of a federated, democratic Russian state with a constitutional regime.²⁵ However, he thinks the priority of Russian leadership to be legitimate because of the “state-building” activity of the Russian people.²⁶ Actually, Bulgakov shares a rather static view of the “people” with all other authors of *Vekhi*: as Evert van der Zweerde has elaborated, their rather aristocratic political

²¹ С. Н. Булгаков, *Размышления о национальности*, op. cit., p. 285, 290, 295, 302.

²² С. Н. Булгаков, *Размышления о национальности*, op. cit., p. 292.

²³ С. Н. Булгаков, *Размышления о национальности*, op. cit., p. 292–294.

²⁴ See P. М. Цвален, *Право как путь к правде. Размышления о праве и справедливости* С. Н. Булгакова, in: “Правда.” *Дискурсы справедливости в русской интеллектуальной истории*, ред. Н. Плотников, Москва 2011, p. 264–275.

²⁵ D. von Mohrenschildt, *Mikhail Dragomanov: Russian-Ukrainian Federalist*, in: *Toward a United State of Russia*, ed. by D. von Mohrenschildt, Toronto 1981, p. 131, 155.

²⁶ С. Н. Булгаков, *Размышления о национальности*, op. cit., p. 291.

philosophy still built on a “good” intelligentsia leading the anonymous “people” down the right path, a worldview not really compatible with the contingency of the unpredictable outcomes of a democratic society with multiple actors and various interests.²⁷

Eighthly, a healthy national feeling is opposed to the concept of class consciousness: according to Bulgakov, economic forms of human unification are rooted in external life conditions, while one’s nationality is an internal form of unification (by birth).²⁸ That is why “natural sobornost” is stronger than class consciousness. It is interesting to observe that Bulgakov always emphasizes individual rights when he criticizes the abstractness of *socialist* notions like “class” or Feuerbach’s “humanity,” but he didn’t seem to notice the abstractness of a notion like “the people” or “the nation.” This is especially troubling with regard to his frequent emphasis of gradual historical development and the relativity of historical instruments and institutions.²⁹ Like Struve he saw the nation as a concrete-historical category, as a “cultural individuality” based on a common cultural heritage.³⁰

But for Bulgakov, nationality is a lower form of “transcensus” of the self, the highest form of which will be found in the realm of a unified humanity in the Church. There is only one true universal Catholic religion, but it speaks to concrete persons in different languages etc. Hence, a “national religion” is a legitimate individual form in which universal truth is received.³¹ This argument raises certain problems with the concept of “religious freedom.” Bulgakov favoured religious freedom as long as the Orthodox Church was subordinated to the state. Given the problem of religious tolerance in the Russian Empire and debates about freedom of conscience in the State

²⁷ E. van der Zweerde, *The Rise of the People*, op. cit., p. 115–116. See also D. Offord, *The People*, in: *A History of Russian Thought*, eds. by W. J. Leatherbarrow, D. Offord, Cambridge 2010, p. 241–262.

²⁸ С. Н. Булгаков, *Размышления о национальности*, op. cit., p. 295.

²⁹ О. К. Иванцова, *Сергей Николаевич Булгаков*, op. cit., p. 12.

³⁰ Ю. С. Усачева, *Проблемы национализма и патриотизма в трудах П. Б. Струве*, op. cit., p. 73.

³¹ С. Н. Булгаков, *Размышления о национальности*, op. cit., p. 286, 298.

Duma,³² when we consider his own earlier works on the topic and, finally, his emphasis on the role of religion in society in general, it is quite surprising he did not even address the question of religious plurality.

The First World War and Russia’s calling

It seems that the apocalyptic scenery of the First World War blurred all differentiations between a sick and a healthy nationalism Bulgakov had tried to make a few years earlier. He even forgot the idea of national asceticism: his idea that a nation should not love itself, but its own “calling” was probably even more dangerous than mere egoism.³³ His critique of militant nationalism was no longer aimed at Russian nationalists, but at Germany alone. Like many others he firmly believed in Russia’s calling “to manifest to the world a new, harmonious social organization” by achieving victory in the spiritual battle of Russia with “Germanism.”³⁴ Putting the emphasis on religion as the foundation of every social ideal, Bulgakov was convinced that Russia’s calling consisted in bringing Europe back to its Christian roots. He depicted Russia as part of the spiritual organism of Christian Europe – he even called this vision a “real-historical westernism.”³⁵ But spiritual change was to be realized through Russia – if it didn’t betray its calling.³⁶

³² See P. W. Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths. Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia*, Oxford 2014.

³³ С. Н. Булгаков, *Война и русское самосознание*, in: С. Н. Булгаков, *Труды по социологии и теологии*, т. 2, Москва 1997, p. 169.

³⁴ C. Stroop, *Nationalist War Commentary as Russian Religious Thought: The Religious Intelligentsia’s Politics of Providentialism*, «The Russian Review» 72 (2013) 1, p. 113–114. See also N. S. Plotnikov, M. A. Kolerov, “Den inneren Deutschen besiegen.” *Nationalliberale Kriegsphilosophie in Russland 1914–1917*, in: *Verführungen der Gewalt. Russen und Deutsche im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Hrsg. K. Eimermacher, A. Volpert, München 2005, p. 31–70.

³⁵ С. Н. Булгаков, *Война и русское самосознание*, op. cit., p. 163, 170.

³⁶ C. Stroop, *Thinking the Nation through Times of Trial: Russian Philosophy in War and Revolution*, in: *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914–22*, eds. by M. Frame, B. Kolonitskii, S. G. Marks et al., Book 2: *Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*, Bloomington 2014, p. 207, 210.

But it did: after the October Revolution Bulgakov wrote that “Russia betrayed its calling, became unworthy of it, and therefore fell, and her fall was as great as her calling had been.”³⁷ According to a somewhat puzzled commentator who could not find an answer in Bulgakov’s public lecture about “Homeland or ‘the Internationale’?” on Crimea in 1919, Bulgakov deplored the idolisation of the “people” by both socialism and “zoological patriotism,” speaking about “Russia” as a universal, not a national idea.³⁸ But in 1922, on his way to exile in Constantinople, he wrote in his diary that he was now no longer travelling towards a rotten, bourgeois Western world, but towards the West, where Christian culture still existed.³⁹ What we learn from expressions like this is that in Bulgakov’s view national or geopolitical values are generally secondary to Christian universal values. Different prioritizations in this regard will characterize the cleavage between the “Eurasians” like Evgenii Trubeckoy and Peter Savicky and the “Russian universalists” like Bulgakov or Berdyaev who criticized the Eurasians’ naturalism, monism, cultural relativism and their flirtation with Eastern religions that were said to be closer to Orthodoxy than Latin Christianity.⁴⁰

“There is no chosen people”

In Bulgakov’s reflections in 1931 on the fate of Judas and the fate of Russia we will find a moderated version of Russian messianism: the Russian people is called to the faith of Christ, *together with other peoples*,

³⁷ С. Н. Булгаков, *На пиру богов: Pro i contra: Современные диалоги*, in: *Вехи. Из глубины*, ред. А. А. Яковлев, Москва 1991, p. 294.

³⁸ С. Б. Филимонов, *Религиозно-философские общества в Крыму. Новые материалы о С. Н. Булгакове*, «Вестник РХД» 185 (2003) 1, p. 142.

³⁹ С. Н. Булгаков, *Из «дневника»*, in: С. Н. Булгаков. *Pro et contra*, ред. И. И. Евлампиев, Санкт-Петербург 2003, p. 144–145.

⁴⁰ S. Wiederkehr, *Die eurasische Bewegung: Wissenschaft und Politik in der russisch-Emigration der Zwischenkriegszeit und im postsowjetischen Russland*, Cologne 2006, p. 185–186; М. А. Колеров, *Братство св. Софии: «Веховцы» и евразийцы (1921–1925)*, «Вопросы философии» (1994) 10, p. 143–166.

and it *also* bears the seal of apostleship,⁴¹ just like Judas, who despite his betrayal will rise from the grave in Christ. And so will Russia, Bulgakov hopes. In his article titled *Nation and Humanity* from 1934, Bulgakov abandoned the idea of a chosen people, because “the closeness of a chosen people has ended by achieving the goal of God’s incarnation, and after that there is no chosen people.” For Bulgakov, everyone is chosen, everyone has a calling and it is “a blasphemous pretension by whatever people to think of itself as a chosen people, that is the people of Christ. All people are peoples of Christ.”⁴²

As mentioned above, in the 1920s and 30s Bulgakov was opposed to both the rising National Socialism in Germany and the religious nationalism of the Russian Eurasian movement.⁴³ Yet Bulgakov above all develops his sophiology that includes a Chalcedonian anthropology based on the concept of the coexistence of spirit and nature “without confusion and without separation.”⁴⁴ But what does it mean with regard to his concept of nationality? According to Bulgakov, the principle of nationality belongs to the foundations of (Chalcedonian) anthropology as a feature of the human soul and body. However, nationality is not a spiritual category anymore, because in Christ, there is no “Greek nor Jew.” Nationality is a feature of the incarnation of the spirit, because every individual human being has its roots in space and time, in a family and a homeland.⁴⁵ At the same time there is no pure nation, because there is development and history which corresponds to the “sophianic idea of being.” A nation is historically conditioned: “Nations emerge, they commingle, die out, amalgamate, and anyway the idea of a pure nation is one of the utopias,

⁴¹ S. N. Bulgakov, *Judas or Saul?*, «The Slavonic and East European Review» 27 (1931) 12, p. 526.

⁴² С. Н. Булгаков, *Нация и человечество*, in: С. Н. Булгаков, *Сочинения в двух томах*, т. 2, op. cit., p. 650, 652.

⁴³ *Братство Святой Софии: Материалы и документы 1923–1939*, ред. Н. А. Струве, Москва–Париж 2000, p. 203–204.

⁴⁴ R. M. Zwahlen, *Different Concepts of Personality: Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov*, «Studies in East European Thought» 64 (2012) 3–4, p. 198.

⁴⁵ С. Н. Булгаков, *Нация и человечество*, op. cit., p. 653.

false values, that seduce humanity.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, love for one’s country is a duty for Bulgakov, but it is on a lower level than love between persons.

Furthermore, nationality is an individual feature (*svoystvo*). That is why, according to Bulgakov, Soloviev was wrong when he said that you should “love foreign nations like your own” – in the same way that it is not right to love any woman like one’s own. There is a value in particular objects and features, they are worthy of our love and sacrifice, but they should never be deified. Nationality is a given condition for spiritual and cultural creativity, it is a creative duty (*zadannost’*). That is why for Bulgakov, Dostoevsky was wrong when he said that Pushkin’s universality was a national feature, because it is the other way round: the creative principle is universal and belongs to any “national poet.” But because world citizenship does not abolish nationality at all, Bulgakov’s new maxim of a healthy national feeling or even a national altruism goes: “On the basis of one’s own national feeling, [...] respect [other people’s] right to existence like your own, live and let others live in order to match their efforts in free competition.” However, Bulgakov condemns the nationalism of small, artificially resurrected peoples with their particularism.⁴⁷ Still, he doesn’t elaborate any criteria for discerning which national feeling is artificial and which is natural.

As in his earlier article, Bulgakov draws a parallel between the relation of nationalities to world citizenship and the relation of local churches to the universal Church: inspired by the ecumenical meeting at Lausanne of 1927, Bulgakov argues that the ecumenical movement does not abolish national churches. Spiritual humanity transcends nationality from within. This is illustrated by the spirit of the Pentecost, when everyone understood each other even though different languages were spoken.⁴⁸ In his book about *The Orthodox Church* from 1932 Bulgakov had already claimed that Orthodoxy corresponds especially well to the modern situation of nation-states because of its conciliar

⁴⁶ С. Н. Булгаков, *Нация и человечество*, op. cit., p. 646, 648.

⁴⁷ С. Н. Булгаков, *Нация и человечество*, op. cit., p. 647–651.

⁴⁸ С. Н. Булгаков, *Нация и человечество*, op. cit., p. 649.

organization that allows for a plurality of locations and the principle of unity in multiplicity.

Chaadaev revisited

On a final note, let us take a look at Bulgakov’s text about *Racism and Christianity*, which he wrote in the winter of 1941 to 1942 and was left unpublished until 1991. On the one hand, Bulgakov opposed racism as a one-sided anthropology that neglects the universal spiritual element of humanity.⁴⁹ But on the other hand, there is a category which Bulgakov seemingly just can’t get rid of: the “Russian people.” Fearfully observing Russia under the control of militant atheism and a “beastlike Georgian,” and recently attacked by the Third Reich, Bulgakov returns to Russian messianism and to his belief that the Russian people has one of the highest missions in world history. He returns to the Chaadaevian motive of a future Russian people that hasn’t said its “own word” yet, which is: to show the world the creative image of Russian Orthodoxy.⁵⁰

Bulgakov’s tendency to link Orthodoxy with “the Russian people” may be one of the unhealthy elements in his search for a “healthy nationalism” both within a multinational state and within an international and ecumenical community. I believe that the category of “the people” is as unhelpful a category for organizing human social relations as “the class” in socialism, against which Bulgakov argued so brilliantly, bringing to the fore the notion of the “concrete, living, human person as an individual.”⁵¹ If the individual is able to transcend his conditions as a member of a social class or as an “ensemble of social relations,” he must transcend his natural ties to a nation and a religion too, because a person is more than an “ensemble of national, ethnic or religious relations,” and because a national “people” consists of quite different individuals, ethnicities,

⁴⁹ С. Н. Булгаков, *Расизм и христианство*, in: С. Н. Булгаков, *Труды по социологии и теологии*, т. 2, op. cit., p. 598.

⁵⁰ С. Н. Булгаков, *Расизм и христианство*, p. 642–643.

⁵¹ S. N. Bulgakov, *Karl Marx as a Religious Type: his Relation to the Religion of Anthropotheism of L. Feuerbach*, Belmont Mass. 1979, p. 51.

religions and denominations. Furthermore, I think Bulgakov underestimated the problems of the vast category of “religion” as a means to overcome social cleavages, which can only be explained by his fervent fight against atheism. But we know well enough today that religion as such is no remedy for any “unhealthy” radicalism or nationalism, especially related to a certain “calling.” If Bulgakov wanted “to lead [Orthodoxy] out of its provincial constraints to the height and breadth of universal tasks,”⁵² he had to sever the strong link he made in certain writings between “the Russian people” and “the Orthodox Church,” simply because there are obviously other Orthodox peoples, non-Orthodox Russians and individual Orthodox Christians with different nationalities. Fortunately, he did just that by creating theological works that reach far beyond national boundaries.

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⁵² С. Н. Булгаков, *Расизм и христианство*, op. cit., p. 642–643.

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