

ON DOUKHOBOR PSALMS

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I. Introduction

I am dreaming of someone who entered a great garden and wandered happily, amazed by noble and exotic flowers, straying in fragrant groves and wondering at low bushes with healing powers. With so much to find, not for days did he realize that on one side of the garden was, brought from far away, a great and ancient tree of singular beauty and worth. It is like this for those who consider the literature of British Columbia: between our known and established writers, the richness of the vernacular of fisher, logger, rail and cowboy poets, the potent myths of native people and the bright work of rising and rebellious authors, it is easy to miss the local and obscure performance of Doukhobor psalmody. This psalmody is rarely heard outside the West Kootenay — and then only at worship or infrequent community festivals. Time and circumstance thus conceal a potent and elegant transplantation of Russian spirituality, its richness sometimes unseen even by its preservers. In this essay, I hope to introduce the form and a little of the content of this tradition.

The sect that came to be known as Doukhobors was born out of the *Raskol*, the schism that followed reforms in the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1650s, when many rejected Orthodox form, scripture, hierarchy, liturgy, and authority as corrupt or corruptible and in any case inferior to the voice of God within the believer. God's People, as they named themselves, must not take life, even as soldiers at the State's behest, because to do so would be not only to kill but, far worse, to silence the divine voice: adding decide to homicide. Horrific persecutions followed as a matter of course from both Church and State. Over the 18th and 19th centuries the Doukhobors acquired their current name, a principle of spiritual leadership, and a special body of liturgical texts. Supplemented by hymns, legends, prophecies and healing charms, these came to be known as the Living Book. St. Paul comments (II Cor. 3/6, NEB) that "the written law condemns to death, but the Spirit brings life." So Doukhobors proverbially say, "Write it on the heart, reveal it through the mouth" — meaning at least to imply that we are not so well addressed through cold print as we are through the speech of a living companion.

Conscription, spiritual revitalization, and punitive outrages drove the most devout Doukhobors from Russia to Canada at the turn of the century, and external and internal conflict brought them to their present circumstances: most living in the West Kootenay of British Columbia, as many in their first refuge in eastern Saskatchewan, some in the lower Fraser Valley, a few everywhere. They are divided into three major factions: the Community, Independents, and Sons of Freedom. And they are challenged by their own divisions, by the acculturative pressures of the North American late 20th century and by the ominous shades of war and the beggaring of the natural world. The mother tongue is not strongly preserved; young people are confused by external lures and internal failures; the future is in doubt. Yet still the Psalms are recited and sung, because they speak to the condition of life and have answers worthy to be heard.

Doukhobor Psalmody has been neglected by scholars¹ till very recently. Nothing easily available to the researcher was documented before the turn of the century; the first and great serious collection is that of Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, a Marxist scholar (who became Lenin's personal secretary and favourably influenced Soviet policies toward sectarians), made in Russia and Canada at the turn of the century and published in Russia in 1909. This was translated (but, alas, issued before the rough translation was revised) in 1978. Kenneth Peacock collected widely in the mid-1960s and published three tune and song texts with translation and LP floppy transcription in 1970; and in 1972, I presented over a hundred texts in transcription and translation in a dissertation that is currently undergoing revision for publication. The Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ published an excellent revised collection of Psalms, hymns, and secular songs, edited by Peter Legebokoff and Anna Markova, in 1978.

II. *The Music of the Psalms*

All Psalms may be spoken, but some are also sung in meetings (never privately or by one person: they are a communal expression). The music is remarkable. Its origin is uncertain but is clearly rooted in Russian religious tradition, possibly preserving some qualities of the lost, indigenous *Znanemi* chant of Orthodoxy, certainly cognate with the post-Byzantine hymnody of medieval eastern Europe. It is polyphonic in a manner simpler than the western Baroque tradition but more complex than any European folk tradition and arguably equalled only by the *Gamelan* folk-orchestral tradition of Indonesia. It shares with the Southeast United States Sacred Harp tradition a provocative archaic choral structure: the melody is carried by two central voices, Lower Female and Upper Male either in unison or parallel octave, while Lower Male and Upper Female move in approximate but regularly varied four-to-five interval organon below and above the central

voices. In a large assembly, four or five female descants and perhaps two male contrabasses may sing lines of extreme harmonic freedom.

The fundamental harmony is simple, but other factors complicate what is heard. Melisma is extreme: a verse of a typical psalm may run anywhere between 1½ and 6 minutes at a rate of up to two or three pitch-changes per second, and cover 6 to 12 words. Singers who falter through age or inexperience will not pause till they recover, but will improvise an independent line leading back into the general melody they ought to follow. When choirs from regions with variant traditions share a common performance, unexpected changes result. Finally, an acoustic effect (harmonic resultant) may cause the listener to hear most clearly notes that no singer is producing.

The choral tradition was strictly oral till the last 15 years, when two hymnals² were published among Community Doukhobors. While musical style has been buttressed by the making of recordings (disc and, more recently and generally, tape) since the 1940s, the Psalms are not represented in published recordings. All regional communities are chorally active, with groups composed variously of Elders, Men, Women, Young People, Children, and (mixed) Adults. Since hymns and secular songs can also be performed by soloists, duets, trios, quartets, and larger small groups of any age, enthusiastic singers may perform in more than one group through their singing lives. I would guess that at least 5% of Doukhobors have extended choral expertise and that about 17% have experience characteristic of Anglo-Canadian church choristers.

III. The Texts of the Psalms

The texts of the Doukhobor Psalms present distinctive religious concepts through distinctive literary techniques; it seems appropriate to outline these before we consider some representative examples.

It is difficult to classify the Psalms: they deal with subjective and transcendental ideas that are often opaque to logical dissection; further, under the rubric of Psalms, Doukhobors include several kinds of text: Catachetical texts; the core indigenous body of communal texts; personal prayers; Biblical, liturgical and devotional excerpts; healing prayers; and texts comparable to amulets. Bonch-Bruevich essayed a fourteen-part classification but could not avoid inconsistency; however, we should recognize his major classes: Dogmatic; of the Next Life and of Future Judgement; Accusing; Didactic; Suppliant; of Thanksgiving; of Praise; on Events from the Gospels; and Miscellaneous. I elect, practically, to keep to his numbering system. To set up and argue a new classification here goes beyond an introduction, but its outlines may appear when we consider the Psalms' religious content. It is, of course, obtuse to speak of religious content in religious documents; but it is less so to note

motifs and elements of style that mark religious concepts and moods specific to Doukhobor belief.

There are three classes of motifs prominent in the Psalms and characteristic of Doukhobor belief, at least in contrast with schools of Western psalmody. I have set aside some well-represented motifs that occur more widely, such as New Jerusalem, Church/Temple, and so on; those retained have special contexts for Doukhobors. References to Psalms by Title refer to texts collected in my dissertation but not by Bonch-Bruevich.

A. Expressions of Doctrine

1. **CHRISTOLOGY:** Psalms 1/3, 16; 71; 74. Christ is described, with no detail, as "God . . . within man"; "God . . . speaks with a human mouth." "In his own being the Son bears witness to the Father." Miraculous or supernatural attributes and acts of Christ are pointedly not discussed.
2. **TRINITY:** Psalms 1/5; 64. "In every quality of the spirit, the human power is this: memory, reason, will. By memory we are likened to God the Father; by reason, . . . to God the Son; by will — to the Holy Spirit, thus in the holy Trinity there are three persons, yet they hold one spirit; three spiritual powers, but one God." Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, IX, iii.

B. Definitions

1. **CLEANLINESS:** Psalms 1/10; 6/12, 43, 114; 6 Var./69. Physical cleanliness is a sign of spiritual purity.
2. **COMMUNION:** Psalms 1/24; 6/123; 6 Var./65-67; 74; 76. The Eucharist consists of sharing Christ's suffering and receiving the strength of spiritual knowledge from him.
3. **IMAGE:** Psalms 6/63; 74; 83; 146. It is a sin to bow to any but God, whose only image is Christ and man; Doukhobors bow not to man but to the God within man.
4. **MILLENARIAN CHANGE:** Psalms 6 Var./12; 144/5, 6. The world and the Believers in it move continually forward from chaos to perfection.
5. **MIRACLES:** Psalms 1/13; 191. Believers need concern themselves with no miracles beyond that of the redemption of sinners.
6. **ORIGIN:** Psalms 6/70; 6 Var./16. The Three Holy Children (cf. Daniel 1, III, esp. 16-18 or III) are the archetypal Doukhobors. (They defied blasphemous tyranny, were condemned to torment and were miraculously preserved, to the tyrant's edification.)

C. General Concepts

1. ANTICHRIST: Psalms 6/100; 6 Var./20; 130; 143; 166. Once named, twice identified as Goliath, twice as Antiochus: archetype of human opposition to Christ and his Believers.
2. DIRECTIONS: Psalms 6/103; 6 Var./71; 61; 71; 89; 123; 140; 197; 213; 156; 266; 342; 352; *Maiden Mother-of-God*; *Against Witchcraft on the Way*. Believers, Blessings, the Christ-Child, the Lord in Judgment, and the Sun and Morning-Star all appear from the East. (The concepts /Sun/ and /Star/ appear twelve times, half of them associated with the direction.) Believers, like the Willow-Herb (Fireweed), float Upstream (against the common direction).
3. GREEN EARTH: Psalms 161, *To Invoke Forgiveness for a Child, Help Me, Jesus Christ Yourself*. Lit., "Damp" or "Virgin" earth; includes "Mother-" Earth: a pre-Christian entity.
4. GUESTS: Psalms 181; 213; 243. Guests are associated with the need for or arrival of divine blessing.
5. LIVING BOOKS: Psalms 113; 156; 267. The Living Book(s) of Heaven record the redeemed and are offensive weapons against evil.
6. a. MOUNTAIN: Psalms 6/118-119; 71; 113; 324; *I Raise my Voice*; *A Doukhor is One*; *Against Appendicitis*. Mountains may symbolize approach, through faith, to God. Upon Mount Zion the heavens rest, thence judgment is given.
 b. SPIRITUAL FOUNTAIN: Psalms 71; 146; 334; *Maiden Mother-of-God*. From Mount Zion rises a mystical spring that washes away sinfulness (cf. Book of Enoch, xxvi; Apocalypse xxii, 1-2).
7. PATH: Psalms 6/44, 72-75, 98; 150; 176; 182; 197; 226; 262; 276; 328; *Maiden Mother-of-God*; *Christ is One*. Faith and the will of God are a path upon which the Believer walks.
8. PILLAR: Psalms 6 Var./20; 79; 91; 106; 166. A Pillar(s) is a very holy person upon whom the Lord may rely; or, it is the might of the Lord himself. (In one case, a strong support for the Antichrist: the inference of /support/ is central.)
9. a. SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE: Psalms 1/124; 6/123; 64; 146; 181; 277; 299; 316; 384; *With Prayer I Call*. "We wholeheartedly want to attain this, that you[, Lord,] would speak with us inwardly." Also see COMMUNION above: the Believer's mind is one with that of God.

- b. PRE-CULTURAL IGNORANCE: Psalms 161; 267. Spiritual Knowledge of both high and lower kinds was not always available to the Believer.
10. SEVEN: Psalms 1/120; 147; 324; *We "Cossacks" Sing; Against Appendicitis; Against the Evil Eye; Against Sore Throat*. An arbitrary "magic" number (as against 3, 4, and 12, which are used in one-to-one counting however symbolic): perfection, completion, power.
11. SUFFERING: Psalms 1/15, 24; 6/55; 130; 139; 140; 143; 202; 205; 226; 243; 252; 256; 286; 343; 345; 284; *In the Garden of Gethsemane; With Prayer I Call*. The Believers are often in a state of Suffering whence they cry out to the Lord. Psalms 140 and 143 especially, which cite intolerable sufferings, call to mind the experiences of the Old Believers under Empress Sophie.
12. TREASURE-HOUSE: Psalms 316; ?320; 328. The Lord is an eternal treasure-house. Psalm 6/123: God's innermost mind, secret truths.
13. WILDERNESS: Psalms 140, 143; 166; *Against Fear II; Against Witchcraft on the Way*. The Wilderness is (usually) a place of trial for Believers. *Against Fear II* tends to reconcile the Wilderness through the *Green Earth* concept.

If the Psalms are the House of Doukhobor belief, motifs such as the above are the stones of its walls: but stone must be bound with mortar. This task is performed by two classes of stylistic elements. The one is Generic; it includes a heavy reliance upon Apocalyptic myth. The other is Syntactic, characterized by dyadic structures. One case, *Righteous Souls . . .*, is clearly edited from an OT external source (Wisdom III, 1-9) and appears to be modelled on the formal parallelism of the Hebrew Psalter.

A. Genre

1. APOCALYPSE: Psalms 6/96-106; 71; 99; 113; 123; 144; 146; 267; 324; *I Raise my Voice; A Doukhobor is One; We "Cossacks" Sing*. Drawing upon the tradition of the NT Apocalypse, these psalms allude to this sequence of future events: the tribulation of the righteous; the coming of the Lord; victory over evil; the punishment of the sinful and the vindication of the righteous; the eternal Kingdom of God.
2. EXUBERANT & HIGHLY METAPHORIC DICTION: Psalms 91; 320; 324; 359; *Maiden Mother-of-God*. (Healing Psalms are generally of this character.) Psalms cited here are characterized by climactic strings of short, noun-laden clauses of rich affect and covert semantic coherence; or by florid diction.

3. GNOMIC: Psalms 138; 159; 161; 182; 187; 241; 384. Psalms wholly or in part composed of formulae or practical aphorisms inculcating worldly virtues appropriate to a Believer.

B. Dyadic Structures

1. DUALISM: Semantic groups in which paired concepts are opposed and contrasted, often in phrases of parallel syntax.
 - a. MATTER/SPIRIT: Psalms 6/3, 68; 78; 144; 313; *A Doukhobor is One; Basic Rules for Young Children*.
 - b. SINNER/BELIEVER: Psalms 64; 74; 88; 123; 140; 156; 182; 252; 276; 384; *Questions on Citizenship; We "Cossacks" Sing; Christ is One*.
 - c. SUFFERING/VINDICATION: Psalms 61; 191; 219; 260; 335; 349; *Righteous Souls; Christ is One*.
 - d. PAST/NOW: Psalms 172, 352.
 - e. NOW/FUTURE: Psalms 143, 243.
2. DUAL ADDRESS: Psalms 61; 87; 113; 130; 140; 143; 150; 161; 166; 247; 276; 344; 345; *In the Garden of Gethsemane; I Raise my Voice; We "Cossacks" Sing*. Two speakers are present, not of equal status. Commonly the Believer(s) complain of present suffering and the Lord replies, promising early vindication.
3. DUAL SYNTAX: Psalm 139; 166; 184; 213; 321; 359. A parallel sequence of two-part sentences appears, of which one part tends to be repeated without change. The fixed part may be either a phrase, or a semantic slot within a phrase. This is a primary technique of Hebrew Psalmody: cf. OT Psalms, CXXXVI.

IV. Some Doukhobor Psalms

In most cases, I follow existing convention by presenting texts³ in undivided prose blocks. Their structure has provoked some experiment, seen in a few examples, with a free verse form reflecting syntactic patterning. The headnotes are by no means exhaustive; I keep to analytic comments.

Psalm 61

This Psalm characteristically includes dialogue between God and the believers in a didactic frame.

God is a holy spirit, a holy place in himself; his spirit [is] a body — never aging, not born, not created, eternal, self-existing, wrapped in

light as [in] a robe, in his eternal immortality; in this place we bow to Father, and Son, and to the Holy Spirit; for your rule, Lord, [is] in all the heavens, and on the earth, on the sea, in all the abysses. You the one Heavenly Father were pleased to pour out [your] mighty power with your right hand. [God speaks:] When the star [rises] in the evening sky, then shall I judge you with my true justice. I will gather you, for the sake of truth, in the isles of the sea, by ones, by twos, by threes — for the sake of your holy name. We pray and beseech you the one Lord, maker of heaven and earth, when you show yourself among the nations and take up the staff of patriarchal life, the nature of the Highest, then bring us exiles together from the four corners of the earth. Your path is holy truth, your path [is] a rest in our midst. Stay with us from age to age, [in] this age [and] in the age to come remember us, Lord, when you come into your Kingdom.

Psalm 78

As with Psalm 61, millenarian hopes are uttered; the soul is held to be the essential person or self, which ought to recognize its divine provenance.

Our heavenly homeland — I, a Christian, would have for myself on earth; thence we all began, we were born, we are divine [in nature]. The earth is not our home, we are strangers on the earth. Our earthly body is not a person — the person is a soul within the body, a heavenly, divine conscience; our earthly body will change into dust, but the soul will return to its eternal home, where there is no death, no misery, no guilt, no hunger, no thirst, but an everlasting day, unbroken light!

Psalm 91

This is one of the most popular of the Psalms; its exuberance is built upon piled-up assertions of the power of sacred song. Yet it speaks from a remarkable position, introspective and expressive at once, and recognizes both individual and communal benefits from song. Basil's Homily on the First Psalm (Patrologiae Graecae xxxix, 209-13) may be a distant source.

The singing of psalms — adornment to our souls. It brings angels to our help — drives away darkness, creates holiness, strength for the mind of man, effaces sin. It is like the charity of saints; it increases faith, hope, and love. As sunlight it lightens, and as water it cleans; though like fire it scorches, [yet] like holy oil it anoints. The devil it shames, God it reveals, fleshly desire it quells. It is like the [holy] oil of charity, destiny rejoicing, an honouring of chosen angels, it drives out ferocity, it quietens all kinds of rage and shatters wrath, it is unceasing praise to God. It is like honey — the singing of psalms! The songs of the chosen are before God. It drives away sin, it teaches all, it reveals all, it honours the soul, it cleanses sense and gladdens the

heart, it builds the high pillar, it enlightens man, it opens the senses, it destroys all evil, it reveals perfection. Whoever has [within himself] memory and love, also fear and praise of God in his heart, he shall never fall away [nor perish], but after all he shall make merry, always in prayer before God. Serenity of mind — it is the proclamation of peace. Psalms pray for the future, give praise for the present, repent of the past, rejoice for good deeds, with gladness they recall the kingdom of heaven. In turns by psalm-singing — the great shield of truth is thrust against devilish power. The brightness of truth shows, to the old — comfort; but to the young — beauty, perfection of the mind, Christ himself — God's work, helping, giving to the tongue prophetic power. These very psalms, established by the lips of prophets [of old], carefully teach [us] always to pray. [In the singing of psalms] there is praise and honour [to God], greatness, goodwill, radiance, wisdom and thanksgiving, power and strength.

Psalm 113

This archaic Psalm, drawn in part from the Apocalypse (IV, 6-8; XII, 9-11), is commonly sung in Sunday Morning Prayer (/Molenie/) and at Commemorations (/Paminki/); at the latter, it would assert the justification of the dead as a believer. I gloss /of multitudes/ in the last sentence, following traditional interpretation of the apocalyptic "sea."

Our Lord walks without touching the earth, opening up his heart, a wonder of heaven is revealed, Mount Zion is glorified. The Lord speaks to his people: [Here am I] with my arms outstretched all day [long] to unrepentant people, — enemies of his word. He prophesied: reason itself will judge them, it will become unbearable for them. For the holy Lord God, All-creator, was the [sole] judge from time immemorial and will be forever. Soon heaven will open, the angels of God will carry forth the throne upon four awesome beasts. They shall place the throne in the earth's midst with great sounding of trumpets. Then shall all the living books open their mouths, but one book, which is the book of life, will direct the judgement. Then Michael the Archangel shall sound his great trumpet, he shall do battle with the ancient serpent. He shall defeat the serpent of old with the living scriptures. He shall tumble Satan from the throne, he shall smash Satan's throne utterly, the devil's glory shall perish. Then the kings shall behold him, the princes shall come and bow deeply before him for fulfilling the word of the Lord; therefore are you faithful, o holy Israel, chosen of your Lord, and you shall have power over the sea [of multitudes], and shall gain power over all its waves.

Psalm 150

This Psalm, notably used at funerals, couples very open dialogue between the Lord and his people with apocalyptic imagery apparently unique to Doukhobor tradition. Bonch-Bruevich notes that /iron doors/ are sometimes read /iron chains/.

From the beginning [of time] and to this day the Lord calls his children: Come to me, children, come to me, my dears — for you the Kingdom of heaven is prepared by our Lord God. Do not be sorry [to leave] your father [and] mother, all your kin, all your perishable fleshly goods, — take pity on me, your Father, the heavenly king in the spirit. The children call to him, the dear ones pray to him: Lord, Lord, it is so hard for us to enter your heavenly kingdom; all the paths to you are choked [with obstacles]. On the paths stand doors of iron, gates of brass, at the gates stand wicked guards. The Lord speaks back to them: Do not fear, my children, do not fear, my dears; for I, the mighty fighter, go in strength before you. I will break down the iron doors, I shall tear down the brazen gates, and shall scatter the evil watchers, but you I shall lead into my own heavenly kingdom, and will reign with you [there] forever. I go to the heaven of heavens, the face of the God of Jacob.

Psalm 166

This beautiful psalm (whose imagery recalls the Baltic exile, self-imposed, of many skoptsy and khlysty⁴) symbolizes the experience of suffering believers as a journey, against hard odds set by the Lord, to a mystical Jerusalem. Three speakers appear: a narrator, who sets the stage and records actions; the young men, witnessing believers; and the Lord. Tribulations are symbolized both by the human and anti-christian opposition of the Antiochus figure, and by threatening natural objects and forces. The youths have two duties: to press against opposition and to wait in patience. The 'ship of Noah' appears in the NT as a type of salvation through both righteous acts and faithful witness (1 Peter III, 20-22).

Young men were born from holy clouds.

The young men cry out before the Lord:

Lord! Lord! We have neither family nor kin,
we have only spiritual brothers and
sisters,

our children count few
years.

They go forth, the young men, about the world in glory, in greatness,
in the beauty of man

Beauty in man — [that is] the pouring forth of blood upon the earth
for the name of the Lord,
for witnessing for Jesus
Christ,
for the word of God.

Antiochus the King shut up the youths in gloomy dungeons.

The young men wept bitter tears before the Lord :

Lord! Lord! Free us from the dark dungeons:

We want to go on to your Jerusalem-town,
there to look upon the great fiery
pillar;

it shines from earth even to
heaven.

My young men! My Jerusalem-town is far away

beyond lofty mountains,
beyond shadowy forests,
beyond gloomy seas.

My young men, open up my Lordly gates

opposite the gates of Hell.

The young men wept bitter tears before the Lord :

Lord, Lord! Your gates are hard to open up :

your gates are blocked by living stone,
they are buried by the sands of the
sea

For us to open your gates — is to pour our blood
upon the earth.

My young men, you will go on through the shadowy forests,

you will go up into the lofty mountains,
you will come to the gloomy sea,
you will embark in the ship of Noah.

The wild winds were uproarious,

the dark sea was stirred up.

The young men wept bitter tears before the Lord :

Lord Lord! Why do you allow the wild winds to rage,
the waves of the sea

to billow up,
the dark sea to heave?

It is not possible for us

to come to your Jerusalem-town,
there

to look upon the great fiery pillar
that shines from earth
even to heaven.

O Young men, stay you a while by the sea,

wait a little for fair weather,

till the Word of the Lord comes to you

for witnessing to all nations,
for exposing the unrighteous.

My young men, you stand upon my pillar

though you do not see the pillar!

Psalm 172

This penitential Psalm, used among youth as well as at /molenie/, associates sin with attachment to worldly goods.

Creator, my creator, my guardian, you made me in this bright world. First of all I loved God, thus God's fear was then in me. O, you my God, my Merciful [one], when I was poor, I asked for all from God, but when I grew rich, I grew forgetful of God. When I then began to adorn my flesh, I began to strip bare my soul. O you my God, my Merciful [one]! What sort [of man] I have been, but what sort I have become: sinning, without control.

Psalm 181

The three spiritual guests resemble the three angels who visited Abraham under the Oak at Mamre (Genesis XVIII); the early Church Fathers interpreted these as the Trinity, and Russian iconography set the image of the angels as the Trinity's proper signifier.

Not just one guest serves me, but three guests care for me: Wisdom, Innocence, and the third is Peace. Dense clouds are made light through understanding; all our sins are scattered by all our pure desires to love the Lord God.

Psalm 242

This devotional Psalm is taught to young children. The reference to knowledge means the spiritual wisdom that shares the mind of God.

Calm me, Lord, quieter than the waters;
 Humble me, Lord, lower than the grass;
 Strengthen me, Lord, stronger than a precious stone.
 You, Lord, give me birth
 and you, Lord, strike me,
 you quench [Life's] flame within me.
 Make me able, Lord, to know all,
 to understand everything,
 to perform your will
 and to live with the saints forever.

Psalm 343

A Psalm for Christmas morning prayer, derived from the Gospel accounts of Christ's birth, the adoration of the shepherds and the massacre of the Innocents: a contrast not far from Doukhobor experience of piety and punishment, and fervently expressed. Bonch-Bruevich notes that it resembles a text from the repertoires of the Wandering Cripples, a class of religious mendicant singers.

On the day of Christ's birth we rejoice all together, everywhere we are blessed. We begin to sing God's praise, at midnight — a star appears. The angels cried out to the shepherds our newly-born God. Herod the King, [that] king was enraged — he had children killed. They fought, slashed and swore at the gathered mothers — [those] murderers, wicked cutthroats. Children shriek, mothers wail, for to a place of death [the children] were dragged from their mothers' breasts, [they were] hewn in two and trampled. I lament for these my little ones, my piteous sorrowing mothers and all my children: they fall as lambs, as sheaves on the field. Mothers wring their hands and tear their hair, but those lie dead. Heaven rings with the uproar, hearts cry to God.

Psalm 359

This Psalm is remarkable for its precise prosodic and semantic rhythms; each line holds three elements, two usually a repetition; and three holy personages are named, three events (the wandering of the Virgin, the raising of the mystical church from the wood of three trees and the setting there of three tombs where three birds, like priest and deacons, sing). It might well be compared with the medieval English Carol /All Bells in Paradise/, which appears to share similar eucharist metaphors. One might note a further tertiary structure: Christian history is overlaid by legend, which itself is overlaid by symbolic diction. The repudiation of heritable blame for the Jews is noteworthy in this slavie context.

She walked, she walked — the Holy Virgin,
 She sought, she sought for Jesus Christ.
 To meet the Virgin, many Jews did come.
 You Jews, you Jews, you crucified Christ.
 Not us, not us, our fathers [did that].
 Here was, here was, a mountain steep;
 On this, on the steep mountain, three trees grew tall;
 These trees were hewn down;
 From these, from the trees, squared beams were hewn;
 From these, from the beams, a church was raised.
 In this, in the church, three tombs stood,
 In these lay holy ones.
 In the first tomb — Jesus Christ himself;
 In the second tomb — John the Forerunner;
 In the third tomb — the Holy Virgin.
 Over Jesus Christ the angels sang.
 Over John, over the Forerunner candles
 glowed.
 Over the Holy Virgin a vine put flowers forth.
 On that, on the vine, three [small] birds sit:
 They sing a song of the Cherubim, of the
 Seraphim:
 Alleluia, for God is with us.

Against Sore Throat

This pre-Christian charm is reported to have been used as late as the 1950s against Poliomyelitis; it is "to be recited three times early in the morning and late at night, spitting and blowing on, and massaging the sore throat or affected part." The mysterious /latyr/ or /ladar/ -stone may be lodestone; or it may be amber, associated with the Baltic sea and with Buyan (now the isle of Rugen), an ancient centre of pre-Christian Slavic religion. Presumably the charmed affliction fades by degrees, just as the toads vanish one by one, or twilight fades.

In the sea, in the ocean, there lies the white latyr-stone.
 On the stone sit seven crones, casting spells on seven toads.
 From seven to six,
 From six to five,
 From five to four,
 From four to three,
 From three to two,
 From two to one,
 From one to God's servant N———,
 [There remains] not one.

Help Me

My informant said of this Psalm, in part: "Maybe [a child] had an accident someplace . . . especially when they get scared, that's the best place — there you should recite it. . . . It helps just as good, as long as you ask God, that's the main part. Because it's not we that help, it's God that helps; we ask him and he gives, that's how it works out." As a spiritual consolation and aid, this short prayer certainly calls upon all available powers. (/Matiushka/, the diminutive form of Mother, implies not small size but great affection.)

Help me, Lord Jesus Christ yourself, and you, most holy Mother, Bearer of God. Rise up, all Saints, to my aid. Help me, Little Mother, Mother green earth. Forgive me, O holy place, in body and soul and in all thoughts of [my] heart. And to you, Little Mother, Mother green earth, a great bow! As twilight fades at dawn, so may my illness.

V. The Uses of the Psalms

The use of Psalms for private devotions or healing is not always accessible to the outsider. I can say little beyond noting that I have encountered the former use in both formal and informal modes, and have been told of the latter many times. These are usually private matters, but we note that they also represent the interaction of an individual's cultural heritage and mores, will, and deep experience and needs. Like all forms of prayer, they represent a dialogue between the self and

the divine. Tradition and group use affirm the enduring and communal need for that dialogue.

Psalms are also used publicly, and here always communally, in the major events of worship, marriages, funerals, commemorations, and festivals. They may be sung (about 50-60 texts extant), spoken, or both; often they are spoken by one after they are sung by all in worship. Some are used frequently or even at fixed points in the liturgies of marriage, funeral, or the Sunday morning Prayer assembly; the last of these consists essentially of the singing and recitation of Psalms, supplemented by the singing of hymns. At community festivals, choirs from various locales recite and sing Psalms and hymns in massive assemblies.

Such use is oral in spirit as well as in fact. It serves many purposes: the young learn the tune and song texts; the older refresh their memories; the skilled present exemplary versions. More deeply, the community joins in great, explicit and implicit unities by sharing the performance roles, by uniting in common breath and sound, by harmonizing diverse voices. Old and young often experience an alteration of sense perception. More deeply, the substance of Doukhobor faith is raised to consciousness and once again shown to be real. Certainly, to be a Doukhobor is to sing the Psalms.

The Psalms, then, serve several purposes in Doukhobor society. They record and embody the Doukhobor view of existence and experience. They represent the community to itself and to onlookers. They bind the community in one kind of shared experience and in reference to other sharings, spiritual and historic. They mark two times: the calendar of the year with its worship and festivals; and the human life-cycle. They provide individuals with modes of healing, spiritual and mantic. They channel expression, joining theological and literary arts that at present, alas, appear in abeyance, with a musical art that continues to evolve.

Doukhobor modernization has not dealt too well with the Psalm tradition. It is seen as relatively inaccessible because archaic and difficult, and only a few Doukhobors apply themselves to the texts from time to time in an analytic way, though many more use them as sincere (or pro forma) personal prayers and aids to meditation. The Healing Psalms and the more metaphorical Psalms present particular difficulties. The latter are held, even by many Doukhobor intellectuals, to be opaque to any but the most spiritual eye and hence less valuable because less plain and direct. The Healing Psalms are often discarded as pagan superstition to which ineffectual elders cling, and this is a great tragedy: they include texts not only of great antiquity and beauty, but also of proven worth in at least the process of psychological preparation for healing. Folklorists, anthropologists, and medical experts have only in the last seventeen years begun to recognize or discuss the validities of such techniques and must bear some of the blame for the levity with which such healing is viewed.

If the Psalm tradition is not markedly easy of access, we would do well to recall that Doukhobors did not receive it in a lump, as a printed book (at least till the last decade). Rather, it was taught by parents over the childhood years and developed by song and perhaps discussion in the community. Traditionally, spiritual insight and living demonstration were essential for the growth of understanding of this oral literature and, like all such literatures, it was not divided from other intrinsic aspects of life. Though Doukhobors state that only Doukhobor identity and knowledge of Russian give final access to the texts, it may appear by now that they bring much to those who look at them with honesty and humility. In whatever tongue it speaks, the soul cries out and is heard.⁵

NOTES

¹ Major Doukhobor Psalm Text sources:

Bonch-Bruevich, Vladimir D. *Zhivotnaia Kniga Dukhobortsev*. Series 'Material' i k istorii i iskucheniiu russkavo. St. Petersburg (?), 1909; Reset (?) Winnipeg, Regehr's Printing, 1954; *The Book-of-Life of Doukhobors*. "Materials toward the Study and History of Russian Sectarianism." Blaine Lake, Sask.: Doukhobor Society of Saskatchewan Project. Tr. V. Buyniak (but published before revision);

Legebokoff, Peter & Anna Markova. *Sbornik: Dukhoborcheskikh Psalmob, Stikhov i Pesen*. ("Collection: Doukhobor Psalms, Hymns and Songs"). Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1978;

Mealing, F. Mark. *Our People's Way: a Study in Doukhobor Psalmody & Folklife*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania. Ph.D. Dissertation, Dept. Folklore & Folklife, 1972;

Peacock, Kenneth. *Songs of the Doukhobors*. Bulletin #231, Folklore Series #7. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1970.

² Nicholas N. Kalmikoff, *Dukhovn'ie Stikhi i Narodn'ie Pesni: Dukhobortsev v Kanade*. ("Spiritual Verses and Folk Songs: of the Doukhobors in Canada"), Richmond, B.C.: privately published, 1973; and the *Sbornik* as above. See also: Youth Sunday School Committee of the USCC, *Stikhi i Psalmi*. . . . Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1968, mimeographed pamphlet.³ My sources are the 1954 reprint of Bonch-Bruevich's collection; the 1968 USCC collection; materials collected and translated about 1970 by Roman Piontkovsky; and my own informants. My original translations were based on texts supplied by Mercedes Cheveldayoff Blaine Lake and Eli Popoff of Grand Forks; I am most grateful to them and to J. McKintosh of the Library, U.B.C., who is giving great assistance in revision.⁴ The skoptsy and khlysty were radical sectarians. The khlysty were self-flagellants; the skoptsy practised more extreme austerities, including permanent hermitage and self-castration.⁵ Material in this paper is based on relevant sections of my dissertation and has been presented in shorter form at the annual general meeting of the American Folklore Society in Portland 1974 and at the annual general meeting of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada in London in 1978.