

Extract from **Amelie Lanier** at **Context XXI**

<http://contextxxi.org/--amelie-lanier--.html>  
 (<http://contextxxi.org/the-raskol.html>)

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# The "Raskol"

■ AMELIE LANIER

The strive for unity both by worldly and ecclesiastical powers led to the big *schism within the Russian orthodox church*, the 'Raskol' in 1652.

After Russia had managed its big crisis in the Times of Turmoil which almost led to its decomposition, and had elected and enthroned a new tsar, the first Romanov tsar, Mikhail Fyodorovitch, the question of how to go on with the church was unresolved. Michail's father Filaret was elected patriarch of the Rus', but rather acted as a wordly regent beside his son. In the last years of Mikhail's reign a council of church reformers was formed who in Russian historiography are called the 'adherers of devoutness', founded by the personal priest and advisor of the new tsar 'gentle Alexei'. From this group emerged the man who was to both split and unite the Russian Church, Nikon.

wanted to unify the church in its dogms and liturgy. Among other things he fell back on certain rules or habits from the Greek legacy. As it has been established later, he also took the contemporary Greek liturgy of his times as a model for his reforms. These reforms of the patriarch led to a big protest from clerics and believers all over the country who declined to accept these changes which they considered heresy and a breach with the 'real belief' they claimed to profess.



'The bojar lady Morozova',

being driven to the execution place in chains declaring a last time that she will rather die than cross herself with three fingers (as a symbol of the newly introduced Trinity), as the new rules of Nikon established. (Painting by Vasilij Surikov)

It is generally assumed nowadays that most of those people rejected first of all the strive for centralization and unification as a threat to their independence, and had lesser purely religious objections. But it also influenced the relation between serfs and their feudal lords. Many serfs felt that their inferior condition (that also had been established and codified shortly before, in the time of Boris Godunov) would be established even more gravely by this reform, and they fled from their dependency.



'The fight about faith'

Painting by Vassily Perov, trying to portray the agitated sessions of the church hierarchy on the reform.

Those who did not consent to the reform – which was backed by the tsar – were either burnt on the stake if they were prominent enough, or they fled to the far-out parts of the vast Russian Empire. The Old Believers (*staroverije*) populated Siberia and the Far East, the Danube Delta and remote areas of Russia's north.

Also within the church resistance persisted. Among the most famous 'splitters' (*raskolniki*) were the monks of the very prestigious Solovyetski monastery in the north, on an island in the White Sea – the monastery where Nikon himself had started his career as a monk. Their position as one of the most traditional and respected monasteries of Russia was too delicate to summon them all to court or extinguish them. So they were simply excluded from the Russian Patriarchate, and fell into disgrace.



The Solovyetski monastery on the main Solovyetski island in the White Sea

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They were only pardoned and readmitted into the church by Peter the Great in the course of his church reforms. Peter therefore is highly estimated in this mo-

nastry, on the contrary to many other clerical institutions in Russia.



**The wooden church on the minor Sayatski island of the Solovjetski island group**

It was erected upon the visit of Peter the Great who brought the pardon to the 'splitters' in 1702

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It has been established by the Russian Orthodox Church in the 20th century that Nikon was not authorized to condemn those who didn't follow his instructions and that the condemnations of the 'heretics', those not willing to adjust to the new rules, are null and void. The 'Old Believers' have thus been rehabilitated and reaccepted into the church. Still they insist on forming an own confession and elect own leaders.

From my lecture on the internet I found out that some adherents of the Russian Orthodox Church still defend the Nikonian reforms against the 'Old Believers'. They are quarreling with each other – partially on the internet.

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und Philosophie an der Universität Wien, dort Promotion zum Doktor der Philosophie 1988. Dissertation: „Über die Widersprüchlichkeit von Moralphilosophie am Beispiel Friedrich Nietzsches.“ Seither freie Forschungstätigkeit über die Geschichte Osteuropas und des österreichischen Kreditwesens. Publikationen zum Transformationsprozeß nach 1989 und den neueren Entwicklungen im Bankwesen. Wohnort: Zell am See. Motto: „Wenn die Pforten der Wahrnehmung gereinigt würden, würde alles dem Menschen erscheinen, wie es ist: unendlich.“ (William Blake, Die Hochzeit des Himmels und der Hölle)

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