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Verhoeven, Claudia

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# The Priest and the Tsaricide

*Claudia Verhoeven*

In 1866, after Dmitry Karakozov had fired his gun at Alexander II, Tsar of Russia, Alexander Herzen engaged in a discursive battle with Count Mikhail Nikolaevich Murav'ev, head of the Investigative Committee into the Karakozov case, who had spoken of Karakozov's tsaricide as an "unheard of" crime in Russia. In his émigré journal, *Kolokol (The Bell)*, Herzen retorted that there was nothing "unheard of" about tsaricide in Russia and listed the murders of Tsarevich Dmitry (1591), Dmitry the Pretender (1606), Boris Godunov and his son (1605), Tsarevich Aleksei (1718), Peter III (1762), and Paul I (1801) as evidence.<sup>1</sup> But what the official had understood, and Herzen had failed to notice, was that there was actually something qualitatively different, something *modern* indeed about Karakozov's attempt on the life of Alexander II. Herzen's list of tsaricides consists exclusively of members of the upper echelons of society whose assassinations took place in private spheres inaccessible to the Russian public. Karakozov, contrarily, was a civilian trying to murder a Russian autocrat in public. And with that one shot, Karakozov not only challenged the state's monopoly on violence, but he also forced officialdom into a highly undesirable dialogue on the nature of political legitimacy with the most radical elements of Russian society. It is this dialogue (actually a cacophony of voices, gestures, and acts from across Russian society) and its ability to shape the world that I analyze in my dissertation.

What is fascinating about Dmitry Karakozov: Unlike the 1881 tsaricides, easily classifiable after several years of systematic terrorist acts, Karakozov was unexpected and misunderstood. And thus, during the four months between his failed attempt on the life of Alexander II and his public execution, Dmitrii Karakozov and

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<sup>1</sup> See Alexander Herzen, "Pol'sha v Sibiri k Karakozovskoe delo, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh* (Moscow: 1954-65), Vol. XIX: 130.

his "unheard of" act became the subject of a cacophonous discursive onslaught. It is difficult indeed to resist approaching Karakozov solely as a *tabula rasa* onto which various segments of Russian society inscribed their cultural fears, assumptions, and (sometimes) hopes.<sup>2</sup> But this risks burying Karakozov underneath mountains of script and reducing a polyphonous Russian society to an amalgam of non-referential signifiers. Instead, in what follows, I explore what we can learn about the world of one man, Archpriest Vassili Polisadov, as he wrote not just about Karakozov, but also about talking at and talking with Karakozov.

On the very day of Dmitrii Karakozov's failed assassination attempt, April 4, 1866, Count Dmitry Tolstoy, future minister of interior, was asked to recommend "a priest for a discussion of today's criminal."<sup>3</sup> Tolstoy did not elaborate on the nature of the discussion and we note that he did not write "discussion *with* today's criminal." A few days later, an invitation was sent to Vassili Polisadov, Archpriest of Peter-Paul Cathedral, located on the grounds of the Peter-Paul Fortress in Saint Petersburg. Until September 3, when Karakozov was publicly hanged, Polisadov arguably spent more time with him than anyone else. The historical record has not preserved the details of their discussions, but we do have memoranda of intentions and results.

The first time we get an indication of the purpose of discussions between priest and criminal is in a letter from Engineer-General Sorokin, Governor of Peter-Paul Fortress, to the Chief of Staff of the Department of the Gendarmes and Administrator of the Third Section (the Tsarist secret police), Nikolai Vladimirovich Mezentsev. Sorokin reports that, despite "the strong prohibition" against admittance to the cells of criminals held in Alekseevskii Ravelin, he had permitted Archpriest Polisadov and Colonel Losev to meet with Karakozov privately, "keeping in mind . . . the goal of *raz'iasnenie prestupleniia* (an explanation of the crime)."<sup>4</sup> Since the time of Peter the Great, priests were

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<sup>2</sup> In light of the 1863 Polish rebellion, much of the public immediately assumed that Karakozov was in league with the Polish faction, officialdom supposed that he was acting for the popular radical, Chernyshevsky, and segments of the peasantry believed Karakozov represented the interests of the nobility, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii* (GARF), f.109, op. 1, d. 268.

<sup>4</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 1, d. 100 ch. 1, l. 24.

required by law, at the penalty of losing their robes, to inform the authorities of information related to crimes revealed during confession. In all likelihood, this is what Sorokin had in mind when he wrote of *raz'iasnenie prestupleniia*, especially since, at this time; Murav'ev's Investigative Committee was still far from having completed its investigation into the circumstances surrounding the crime. Sorokin's report, however, was a direct response to Mezentsev's request that Sorokin allow Polisadov and Losev access to Karakozov "at any time," but the request neither mentioned a *raz'iasnenie prestupleniia*, nor suggested that Polisadov and Losev meet with Karakozov privately.<sup>5</sup> So we turn to Polisadov's April 23 report of his first visit:

The first time [I visited him] - for a simple conversation (*dlia prostogo sobesedovaniia*), and the second - for a service that included a water purification ceremony, after which, in accordance with the ceremony, a speech was held (*skazana byla rech'*) about the relationship between ceremony and faith, the visible and invisible, the natural and supernatural, with the goal of arousing in him faith in God, invisible judge of our life and merciful father, who is always prepared to forgive the sincerely repenting sinner, and whose power it is, through the ways of the church, to purge his soul and elevate her to a state like that of angels.

As far the future is concerned, I intend to visit the criminal three times a week - and if You will permit it, then even more frequently - mornings from 9 - 10 and evenings around 6 -7. It will be useful to report to Your Excellency that each visit will begin with a private service (Liturgies in the mornings; Vespers in the

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<sup>5</sup> GARF f. 109, op. 1, d. 100 ch. 1, l. 16ob. It is very difficult to discover from the archival sources whose request Mezentsev is passing on. Most likely, he is following the instructions of Count Shuvalov, Chief of the Gendarmes and Head of the Third Section. But there is a slight possibility that the orders came from Alexander II himself, as someone (Sorokin?), in one report, requests explicit permission from the emperor for allowing Polisadov and Losev into Karakozov's cell. Curiously enough, however, that particular source is neither addressed to anyone, nor signed by anyone, which is very unusual for these types of sources, usually meticulously written on official stationery. GARFf. 109, op. 1, d. 100 ch. 1, l. 18.

evenings) and finish with a sermon, different each time, but all on the theme that the Lord Christ extends his merciful embrace to each sinner, having sincerely repented, and on the terms of a sincere repentance. At the time of these activities I will be in sacerdotal robes, and the criminal needs to be on his feet.<sup>6</sup>

All the talk occurred in accordance with official church regulations: Ceremonies, rituals, speeches, sermons, Polisadov in sacerdotal robes, and Karakozov, for hours on end, on his feet, being talked at.

In the next paragraph, however, Polisadov writes, "After that," that is, after all the church formalities, "I will talk with (*besedovat' s*) the criminal specifically about his great crime, inducing him to an *otkrovennoe ob'iasnenie* (an open/unconcealed explanation/declaration)." He adds, "If he reveals to me something suitable for the *sudebnogo raz'iasneniia ego prestupleniia* (judicial/court explanation of his crime), I will ask and persuade him to inform whomever it may concern about everything."<sup>7</sup> First, Polisadov strips the dialogue of certain formalities: "After that (the activities requiring that Polisadov will be in sacerdotal robes and Karakozov on his feet)" implies that, during what follows, those regulations no longer apply. Second, we note that the use of the verb *besedovat' s* eases the formality of the situation, as it means "to talk/converse with"; it is, in fact, the first time Karakozov is being talked *with* (the verb takes the instrumental *s: s prestupnikom*.) (Note also use of the word *sobesedovanie* above in *prostogo sobesedovaniia*, simple conversation.) Additionally, Polisadov seems to differentiate between the *otkrovennoe ob'iasnenie* and the *sudebnoe raz'iasnenie*, suggesting that the relevance of the discussions stretches beyond whatever details reveal themselves as suitable for the court.<sup>8</sup>

In the next paragraph, Polisadov distances himself even further from his bureaucratic superiors:

<sup>6</sup> Polisadov's April 23 report to Sorokin, GARFf. 109, op. 1, d.100 ch. 1; ll. 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> Polisadov's April 23 report to Sorokin, GARFf. 109, op. 1, d.100 ch. 1; ll. 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> The content suggests this, but there is also a subtle difference between *ob'iasnenie* and *raz'iasnenie*, the first being tied to confession or a clearing, the latter specifically meaning explanation. (Note also: vb. *ob'iasnit'*, to explain; adv. *iasno*, clear.) Additionally, considering the laws related to confession, Polisadov's qualification of the statement with "if" and "ask and persuade" is telling.

But in order not to appear to him like a person who is, however spiritual, too official or even an investigative police officer, I wish, in my personal conversations with him (*v chastnykh moikh s nim sobesedovaniiaakh*), to enter into a discussion (*rassuzhdenie*: reasoning, debate, argument, discourse) about science, literature, art, their various directions, and finally [about] when science and literature act beneficially and when destructively on the young generation and society. Also I would hope to permit myself to discuss (*rassuzhdat'*: to reason, discuss, debate, argue) the social condition of society. All these discussions (that is, about science, literature, art, society), in a strict Christian and conservative direction, will have the goal of changing the mind of the criminal, of changing the ruinous theories from which sprang, in my opinion, his crime, and which he, of course, has not yet repudiated.<sup>9</sup>

Here, Polisadov is proposing a dialogue with Karakozov. Yes, “in a strict Christian and conservative direction,” but the fact that he even mentions this suggests there are other, competing perspectives on these issues. What will Polisadov and Karakozov discussing after the sermons? Science, literature, art, society, and theory. And what is particularly interesting is that on April 23, that is nearly 3 weeks after his arrest and numerous, torturous police interrogations, Karakozov, who has been historiographically branded a mentally unstable half-wit, “of course, has not yet repudiated [the ruinous theory]”. Discussion or debate on subjects of the nature proposed by Polisadov does not take place with someone who is mentally deranged. If Polisadov is asking for permission to dialogue with Karakozov, he must think there exists a possibility that dialogue be fruitful. Polisadov’s goal, which has little to do with elucidating details of the crime, consists in nothing less than changing Karakozov’s mind and theories (towards repentance) through dialogue.

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<sup>9</sup> When two people *rassuzhdat'*, the term has the meaning of debate or argue. When one person employs the verb for him/herself, it implies that he/she will expound on or discuss a subject in detail. The latter seems to be implied the second time Polisadov uses the term (“I hope to permit myself to *rassuzhdat'* . . .”), but in the context of “I want in my personal *sobesedovaniiaakh* with him to enter into *rassuzhdeniia* . . .” it is clear that there will take place an exchange of ideas.

Polisadov concludes his letter with the suggestion that, "In order to invoke the criminal to a frank explanation with me (*iskrennoe ob'iasnenie so mnoi*), it would be useful if the guard and his assistants let us talk privately (*dozvoliali nam besedovat' na iedine*)."<sup>10</sup> Thus, we find the request for the private meetings that reappears, this time approved, in Sorokin's report to Mezentsev. But it is clear that Polisadov's idea of the content and purpose of these visits differs from that of the officials.

Now we skip ahead a few months to the day after Karakozov's public execution, September 4, when Polisadov sat down and penned the following letter to Count Peter Alekseevich Shuvalov, Chief of the Gendarmes and Head of the Third Section.

Your Highness, Worshipful Sire, Count Peter Andreevich!

Yesterday, when, having performed the last pastoral duty for the criminal Karakozov, I moved away towards a group of people standing on a special podium, one of the military gentlemen asked me, "Did the criminal sincerely repent?" to which I laconically replied, "That is the confessor's secret."

That reply was given by me because I really did not recognize You (Your appearance has changed a lot, High Count), and because a clearer and more satisfactory answer would also be heard by someone in the dense group and be interpreted in a manner unfavorable for my pastoral modesty.

Soon after that they told me that Your Highness had put that question.

Knowing what great assistance you have shown me in the pastoral guidance of Karakozov, I hasten to satisfy Your Highness's wish, expressed in Your question: Did he repent sincerely? Not in the least frightened to violate the Divine seal of Confession, I can announce - to Your Highness or anyone who asks me about Karakozov's last days, not out of sheer curiosity, but out of a Christian concern for his soul and

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<sup>10</sup> I don't know if he had in mind a prison guard or Colonel Losev, whom Polisadov never mentions in his reports.

eternal fate, - that the criminal died with salvific Christian moods, beliefs, and feelings. And, that upon hearing his detailed, most seriously conducted confession, in my soul slumbered a weight that had been pressuring me especially in recent times on account of a thought that consistently pursued me, - will the distinctive will of this grave criminal entirely give itself up to my guidance and will he fulfill the terms of a Christian confession? Of course, in the words of the Apostle Paul: What man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? (*I Corinthians 2, 11*) and in the words of the Prophet, only God feels the heart and the insides of people. But all the same, Karakozov's overall conduct over the last days allows me to preserve the persuasion that his confession was not given superficially, so that I, relieved in my conscience, thanked the Lord Jesus for saving the lost sheep and decided to give Karakozov the holy confirmation of Christ, towards eternal life.

The comforting result of my efforts to save Karakozov's soul I owe to Your Highness, and to Your predecessor Prince Andreevich, who gave me the right to go into the cell of the criminal and, what had never before been permitted, to talk with him privately. That was in April. Consequently, since mid-June, of course with Your permission, they took Karakozov to the Kommendantsky Church for the divine service; even though I did not have the possibility to properly converse with the criminal about the ulcers of his soul, I had the possibility to preach the New Testament with respect to his condition. All that gave me the possibility to turn Karakozov towards better, salvific feelings. Giving Your Highness the humblest gratitude for your timely and kind assistance in my difficult service to the benefit of the soul of the great but repentant sinner, I dare to hope that Your Excellency will not abandon me [and deny me his] assistance with respect to other political arrests kept in Alekseevskii ravelin and in prison. As for me, I am wholeheartedly ready to serve the good and salvation of their souls.



All-humble, diligent, and devout,  
 Vassili Polisadov, Archpriest of Peter-Paul  
 Cathedral.<sup>11</sup>

This letter consists of more than a simple, if tense, apologia. In what follows, I would like to suggest a reading of Polisadov's short passage from the scaffold towards the podium as a metaphor for his hazardous dwelling simultaneously in two conflicting realms, namely the world of spirit and the world of the flesh, or of God and Man. Since it is in the midst of this passage that Polisadov commits his *faux pas*, we will start with a reconstruction of what happened that day.

Polisadov has just completed the last rites for a repentant criminal (with whom he has spent a lot of time over the last few months). We imagine him solemnly descending from the scaffold and still wrapped up in the ceremony of the occasion when "one of the military men" calls out, "*Did he repent sincerely?*" at a volume loud enough for Polisadov to worry that his own response will be overheard by the dense crowd. Polisadov understands the question as bad form and curtly retorts with, "That is the confessor's secret," which may have multiple meanings, but in the context of the occasion could easily be interpreted as the equivalent of "that is none of your business." He has his protocol, too, and within the spheres of religion and etiquette, the Archpriest may be quite correct. But he forgets where he is: After the ceremony, after his descent from the platform, after his movement towards the crowd, Polisadov walks in the world, and among men of the world. Misfortune dictates that the one he arrogantly dismisses happens to be a high official and his superior.

The actions that follow are easily understood: Shuvalov's identity is revealed to Polisadov, who then hastens to apologize, lest all the privileges he has gained over the last few months be taken from him again.<sup>12</sup> The content of the letter thus reads as follows: After all you've done for me, yes, I will tell you; yes, he died a Christian; I was worried for a while (after all, who but God really knows what goes on inside a person's mind?), but the criminal's behavior indicated that he was sincere, so I gave him his

<sup>11</sup> Polisadov's September 3 letter to Shuvalov, GARFf. 109, op. 1, d. 100 ch. 1; 112-113ob.

<sup>12</sup> "I really did not recognize You (Your appearance has changed a lot)" is, of course, a terrible excuse, indicative only of the fact that *had* Shuvalov been but "one of the military men" he would certainly never have received Polisadov's letter.

last sacraments. Thus emerges what I believe Polisadov intended to communicate to Shuvalov: A portrait of a humble priest who may have momentarily forgotten himself, but essentially knows his place in a strict hierarchy. There is no doubt about the respective placement of the count Shuvalov and the priest Polisadov: “Your Highness, all you’ve done for me, what had never been allowed before, please do not deny me your assistance in the future, etc.” Read with this slant, the citation from *1 Corinthians* further deflates any impressions of false pride. In contrast to the arrogance of the previous day (“that is the confessor’s secret”), Polisadov now presents an image of humility (“what man knows . . . but the spirit of man . . . only God . . .”). Polisadov not only hesitates to express certainty on the state of Karakozov’s soul, he also relegates responsibility for its salvation to the Count. In the end, Shuvalov made salvation possible, while Polisadov merely performed a service that was expected of him, as a servant of state, church, and God.<sup>13</sup>

A very different Polisadov stares us in the face, however, when we check his reference to *1 Corinthians*, Chapter 2:

1. When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom.
2. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
3. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling;
4. and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
5. that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

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<sup>13</sup> He responds, in fact, as if guiding Karakozov towards sincere repentance had been his explicitly assigned task all along, which, professionally, it had been, of course, but it’s not clear that the high officials of the secret police had this in mind when they assigned him to the Karakozov case. And he responds *as if* he assumes Shuvalov’s question to have been sincere, which is not obvious considering the qualifying sentence, “not out of sheer curiosity, but out of a Christian concern for his soul and eternal fate”, which grammatically seems tied to “anyone who asks about Karakozov’s last days”, that is, anyone of a crowd, but before Shuvalov’s identity was revealed as more than “a military man” he, too, was part of the curious crowd.

6. Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.

7. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.

8. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9. But, as it is written,

‘What no eye has seen, nor ear  
heard  
nor the heart of man conceived,  
what God has prepared for those  
who love him,’

10. God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

11. For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

12. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

13. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.

14. The natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

15. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

16. “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Did Polisadov ‘coincidentally’ quote from this particular chapter out of preoccupation or cunning? Either way, *1 Corinthians* not

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<sup>14</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, revised standard edition. (New York; Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 1381-1382. The Oxford Bible employs the term “unspiritual” in 1 Corinthians 2,14, but adds in *note e*: “or natural.” I have elected to use the latter term., p. 1382.

only contains Polisadov's defense but also further elucidates the Archpriest's understanding of the world, the W/word, and its purpose.

Wherein consisted Polisadov's verbal transgression? In the world of the church, "the confessor's secret" is but a truism, while in the world of men, it offends and excludes. *1 Corinthians* suggests that this is only logical; speaking in the world, a man of God is practically guaranteed to offend: "I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom . . . my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Read with *1 Corinthians*, we realize that Polisadov's world is split in two, the division indicated by a linguistic barrier. The obvious truth of spiritual statements is necessarily misunderstood in the world, for the wisdom of God is "a secret and hidden" and "None of the rulers of this age understood this." And what is Shuvalov but a ruler of this age?

But he is a ruler of the age who might judge Polisadov, in an explicit inversion of the Pauline dictum: "The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one." In a world where a spiritual man must answer not only to God but also "to military men," is that world not topsy-turvy? Does that world not place the spiritual man in a rather uncomfortable position vis-à-vis God? Of course, considering Polisadov's seasoning of the humble apologia with a little "Your Excellency" here, and a little "Your Highness" there, one could frown at the implicit reference to a Pauline distaste of "lofty words or wisdom," especially as Polisadov was not appointed as Archpriest of the Peter-Paul Fortress without possession of the requisite talents in the socio-political realm. Nonetheless, I would suggest that Polisadov constantly negotiated between his commitments to God and the world - - and that we find evidence thereof also in this very letter.

Why, in a letter concerning the state of Karakozov's soul, does Polisadov's own psychological state obscure everything else? Why does he presume that details of his own condition amplify the sincerity of Karakozov's confession? ("After hearing his detailed and most seriously conducted confession, in *my* soul slumbered a weight . . .") Why confess the turmoil of his own soul to Shuvalov, a man he obviously does not know well? ("a thought that consistently pursued me . . .") The tension with which the letter is wrought cannot only be explained by Polisadov's nervous compensation for his social *faux pas*. Rather, the Archpriest had

indeed been pursued by doubts of his own capacity, challenged by both the conditions in which he was supposed to perform his "difficult service" and Karakozov himself. Beyond the dialogue with Shuvalov, Polisadov as a servant of the state dialogues (glances over his shoulder, as Bakhtin would say) with Polisadov as a servant of God, and convinces himself (and God?) that, given the circumstances, he performed his service as best he could

What were the conditions of his service? Polisadov had been allowed to visit the criminal, even, "what had never before been permitted," to speak with him privately. *But* he "did not have the possibility to properly converse with the criminal about the ulcers of his soul." This seems to indicate that Polisadov's April 23 request to enter into discussions about science, art, literature, and society had been denied, and that the "ulcers of his soul" refer to the painful results of "the ruinous theory . . . which [Karakozov], of course, has not yet repudiated." (For the relation between the intake of ideas and digestion - - and indigestion - - of the soul, note also Polisadov's May 2 letter: "Presently being afraid of the surfeit of spiritual-intellectual food for the person - generally weak in faith and teaching - given to my spiritual care, I would consider it useful to give him time, so to say to digest everything he has been told . . .")<sup>15</sup> But instead of dialogues about the world, Polisadov writes, "[he] had the possibility to preach the New Testament with respect to his condition."

This is where we return to *1 Corinthians* and the linguistic split of the world. Not as a "ruler of the age", but as "a natural man," Karakozov was certainly deaf to the Word and the Spirit of God ("generally weak in faith and teaching"). But when Polisadov, as a man of God, speaks through the Spirit (that is the Word that is the wisdom of God), how can he expect Karakozov, as a man of the world, to hear, seeing as he cannot "receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned"? Hence we note Polisadov's explicit goal in preaching to Karakozov:

[All of the visits] were filled conducting a divine service, in accordance with the official regulations of

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<sup>15</sup> Polisadov's May 2 report to Sorokin, GARFf. 109, op. 1, d. 100 ch.1, ll. 41ob-42. It is interesting that he employs a medical term here rather than, say, a "possession" of the soul.

the church, a sermon, and a private interview. The goal of all these activities was: To open the Christian consciousness and feeling in the criminal, to whom were applicable the words of the Apocalypse: So then because you are neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth (3, 16); further, to restore him to living hope for God's mercy and to make tangible a state of a true repentance; finally, to prepare him for a candid and open acknowledgement of his guilt in all its breadth.<sup>16</sup>

It is at the end of this letter that Polisadov expresses his concern about the "surfeit of spiritual-intellectual food" and recommends an interlude, "so that he, in the words of the prophet, will become aware of the smoothness of listening to the words of God, prayers, and discussions sobering for the mind." But after months of preaching and talking at Karakozov, the soul of the Archpriest was still weighed down by the resistance he sensed in Karakozov's "distinctive will."<sup>17</sup> Will he submit? Will he repent? Is he sincere? Has he changed his mind?

In the wake of Karakozov's attempted assassination of Alexander II, Dostoevsky expressed his concerns about censorship in a letter to the publicist Mikhail Katkov:

But how can one fight nihilism without freedom of speech? If even they, the nihilists, were given freedom of speech, that might even be more advantageous then: they would make all of Russia laugh with the *positive* explanations of their teachings. But now people attribute to them the form of sphinxes, enigmas, wisdom, an air of mystery, and that entices the inexperienced.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> May 2 report to Sorokin, GARFf. 109, op. 1, d. 100 ch. 1, ll. 41ob-42.

<sup>17</sup> The phrasing is "*svoeobraznaia volia*". *Svoeobraznaia* (adj.) means original, peculiar, distinctive. *Obraznyi* (adj.) means picturesque, graphic, or (liter.) employing images, figurative. *Obraz* is a shape, form, or appearance (but also an icon).

<sup>18</sup> Letter Dostoevsky to Katkov, GARFf. 109, op. 1, d. 2051.. N.B.: the Third Section intercepted this letter and then extracted and copied the above-cited section for its records. The full letter appears in F. M. Dostoevsky, *Complete Letters. Volume Two: 1860-1867*, trans. David A. Lowe (Ann Arbor, 1989), p. 194.

Might Polisadov (implicitly) have shared these rather “liberal” sentiments of his fellow “Christian and conservative”? The Archpriest explicitly wrote that, “all these discussions (that is, about science, literature, art, and society) will have the goal of changing the mind of the criminal and the ruinous theories . . .” Did he think that through a dialogical confrontation Karakozov would have seen the internal contradictions of his ideas unraveled? Would a dialogical transcendence have been evidence enough that Karakozov would “fulfill the terms of a Christian confession”? Perhaps then Polisadov might not have hesitated to speak for himself, might not have granted Paul the authoritative word on the riddle of Karakozov’s soul.