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Russian Spiritual Soil and the Retrieval of the Orthodox Christian Identity among Post-Soviet Immigrants to the United States

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Julia Klimova

Committee in charge:

Professor Thomas Csordas, Chair
Professor Martha Lampland
Professor Richard Madsen
Professor Steven Parish
Professor Joel Robbins

2014

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Russian Spiritual Soil and the Retrieval of the Orthodox Christian Identity among Post-Soviet Immigrants to the United States

by

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Doctor of Philosophy

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Professor Thomas Csordas, Chair

My work examines how former Soviet atheists have discovered and engaged with their national religious tradition, Russian Orthodox Christianity, after moving to the United States and becoming members of the local parish church. It is based on two years of fieldwork among the parishioners of the Southern California Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. I use the trope of the "Russian spiritual soil" which intertwines the spiritual, national, and material elements in Russian Orthodoxy to position my research historically and comparatively. While earlier, especially post-revolutionary forced immigrants,

equated maintaining religious identities and national church practices with the preservation of a true spirit of Russian Orthodoxy, removed from its physical roots, for recent, post-Soviet immigrants the parish church, I argue, became a space to retrieve religion as part of their culture, history and identity.

The parish setting provides a fruitful space to investigate the emergence of post-Soviet religious life, it is a space where habitual secular sensibilities meet and interact with arising religious ones. The parish setting in the foreign context adds new dimensions to these processes. Unlike in Russia, it employs Western models of organization and management, mostly borrowed from American Protestant churches, and secular Western practices of democratic voting and the equality of the clergy and the laity clash with the desire of new believers to submit to the spiritual authority of the parish priest and Church hierarchy. In my dissertation I trace and analyze the tensions and dynamics involved in processes of retrieval of the Orthodox identity by doing the ethnography of various practices, such as participation in the sacramental life of the church and in everyday management of parish life, veneration of miracle working icons, and pilgrimages. In search of a more pure and authentic spiritual life, for example, some parishioners go on regular pilgrimages to a Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona, while others utilize personal connections with priests in Russia to seek spiritual counseling. The local Russian Orthodox parish thus exists as a site of contestation and creativity, intermixing local and transnational, national and pan-Orthodox, secular and religious dynamics in the lived experiences of post-Soviet immigrants.

Introduction

My work examines how former Soviet atheists have discovered and engaged with their national religious tradition, Russian Orthodox Christianity, after moving to the United States and becoming members of the local parish church. I use the trope of the "Russian spiritual soil" which intertwines the spiritual, national, and material elements in Russian Orthodoxy to position my research historically and comparatively. I argue that, for the post-Soviet wave of immigrants, the parish church in America became a space to retrieve religion as part of their culture, history, and identity. Their experience differs from that of earlier immigrants, especially those in the post-revolutionary forced wave of immigration, who equated maintaining their religious identity and national church practices with the preservation of the rich canonical and cultural traditions of Russian Orthodoxy removed from its physical roots in a foreign context.

The phrase "Russian spiritual soil" is borrowed from a 2006 official interview given by the late Metropolitan Laurus, then head of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), during his trip to Russia. Metropolitan Laurus stressed that Russians abroad should stay connected to the "Russian spiritual soil" in order to remain true Orthodox believers and should not lose their cultural and national identity in a foreign environment. To him, Orthodox Christianity and Russian culture are inseparable, both "infused with the spirit of Holy Russia." Therefore, to maintain an Orthodox religious identity in a Western, "heterodox and non-Christian, secular environment," one has to stay connected to and preserve Russian culture and traditions (2006).

The metaphor of the "Russian spiritual soil" brings into play the national, spiritual, and material elements of religious life. On one hand, the spiritual wealth of the Orthodox tradition is linked to its national manifestations and a particular physical place. The Orthodox tradition is historically rooted in Russian geographic territory, which itself ensures the cultural and spiritual continuity of Orthodoxy, most vividly expressed in the concept of Holy Russia. The religious and national identity of Russian Orthodox Christians is seen as rooted in Russian soil, nourished by tradition. On the other hand, soil here is not only material, limited by the geographical space it occupies but also spiritual, transcending the borders of the nation state and connecting to the canonical and historical tradition of Orthodoxy.

The prism of the "Russian spiritual soil" allows positioning Russian Orthodox Christianity in a global context where it transcends territory and ties to the nation state. Russians immigrants themselves use phrases such as "Russia without borders" and the "Russian world" and see themselves as carving out "an island of Russian spirituality" in a foreign cultural and social environment. However, "soil" has very strong sense of immediacy and place, too. Only under specific environmental conditions did Orthodoxy take root in Russia and grow the way it did: producing holy spots, saints, and styles of iconography and church music. The particular combination of nature, landscapes, the contemplative moods of the Russian people, and their songs and stories directed the historical development of Orthodoxy in the Russian land.

Russian Orthodoxy abroad, then, is viewed as uprooted from its natural environment and transplanted into foreign soil, often seen as alien to critical elements of Russian culture, psyche, and values. While several informants in this study used the trope

of roots to talk about their life abroad, Elena offered a more colorful explanation. At one point in our interview, she commented with a certain tone of regret on the deepness of Orthodox Christianity's roots in Russia, which makes it difficult to transplant to other conditions. According to her, if the Orthodoxy had not grown in such fertile soil, its roots would adapt more easily to hostile foreign climates. The plant that grows on a rock, Elena said, might even welcome transfer to a different soil and flourish there in previously unknown ways, but Russians who leave their country are destined to live as potted plants.

Disconnected from their roots in the physical sense, Russians abroad face the challenge of maintaining the continuity of their religious and cultural traditions in an inherently discontinuous situation. However, the efforts of earlier generations created more favorable conditions for post-Soviet immigrants' transition to a new land. The informant Liza said that, after moving to California in the early 2000s, she experienced deep nostalgia and overcame it only by attending services at the local Russian Orthodox church. Through her connection with the church holidays and celebrations, she could feel at home in California and enjoy her life there. Not only in California but throughout the United States, Russian Orthodox immigrants have established Orthodox churches, monasteries, and seminaries, which not only maintain Orthodox ways of life and practice but guide the transmission of the religious knowledge and traditions of the homeland by educating new generations of priests and icon painters and even producing their own local saints. Orthodox holiness has reemerged in locations geographically removed from Russia and facilitated the materialization of the Russian spiritual soil in various places.

Another moment in Liza's experience of living in the United States helped her to connect to elements of Russian and Soviet history. While reflecting on our joint trip in

fall 2007 to the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox monastery in Jordanville, New York, she marveled at the similarity of nature in upstate New York to that in Russia. Upstate New York even reminded Liza of childhood summer trips to her grandmother's (*babushka*) countryside house: "There were the same village roads and variety of wild plants and smells. And the whole atmosphere around—little houses with chickens and vegetable gardens. I also think that the continuous Liturgies and prayers of the monastery create a very blissful atmosphere there, which extends onto the nature and everything that surrounds us." Liza then recollected visiting the Russian Orthodox cemetery adjacent to the monastery:

> I was walking by the graves, and reading the names of people buried there. They were all familiar names, of princes and duchess, the ones we know from Russian history and literature. You know, strangely, I always had a problem of being disconnected from history. These names were perceived by me as the ones of unreal literary heroes. … And only recently, after I saw these graves and heard these names, I realized that these people existed and were real. I think that it was the wounds of our pioneer and *Komsomol* youth upbringing that had split our perception of the succession of the generations. It is as if the roots were broken, and now they became regained again. When I saw that these people were real, the roots were rebuilt, and now I can relate to our history and events as something continuous.

Liza's reflections about history as perceived through the names of post-revolutionary Russian immigrants introduce important new dynamics to the concept of Russian spiritual soil. A reservoir of Russian religious and cultural traditions, it is not static but is constantly regenerated throughout history when the invisible becomes visible, and the hidden is uncovered. The retrieval of an Orthodox identity among post-Soviet immigrants to the United States is facilitated through interaction with religious materials that have become available both at home and abroad. One informant, George, compared

these historical processes with the melting of snow in the springtime: In winter, the soil is hidden by the snow, but as the snow melts, it uncovers roots which had always been there, ready to produce life and growth. The retrieval of Orthodox identity occurs through reorienting and reinterpreting not only what was hidden but also the familiar and the known. Orthodoxy, after it resurfaces in multiple levels within society, connects individuals to themselves and the world in changed ways.

My work analyzes these processes in the context of the Russian Orthodox parish abroad, which I argue provides a fruitful space to investigate the emergence of post-Soviet religious life. It serves both a new form of sociality and individual spiritual quests. A microcosm of contemporary Russian society, it is also a space where habitual secular and emerging religious sensibilities meet and interact constantly. The parish setting abroad adds new dimensions to these processes. As in Russia, it accommodates people with varying degrees of religiosity and attachments to secular ways of living, but unlike in Russia, the parish abroad employs Western models of organization and management, mostly borrowed from Protestant churches. The foreign context imbues Russian parish culture with new characteristics, and secular Western practices of democratic voting and the equality of the clergy and the laity clash with the desire of new believers to submit to the spiritual authority of the parish priest. For example, in search of a more pure and authentic spiritual life, some parishioners go on regular pilgrimages to a Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona, while others seek spiritual counseling from online Orthodox sources in Russia. Parishioners also use personal networks to bring sacred objects from Russia to venerate in both private and church settings. The parish thus exists as a site of

contestation and creativity, intermixing local and transnational, national and pan-Orthodox dynamics in the lived experiences of post-Soviet immigrants.

The Research Site

This study was conducted in the parish of the Russian Orthodox Church in Southern California (henceforth, "the local church" or "the local parish)" from the summer of 2008 to the spring of 2011. This relatively small parish, with approximately 50 to 60 members attending regularly (reaching 300 on major holidays), was established as a home church by a group of local believers in the late 1960s. It initially consisted of Russians from the post-revolutionary wave of immigration—Russian nobility and Americans converted to Orthodoxy. Until the early 2000s, the parish did not have a permanent priest, so priests from nearby ROCOR churches (in Los Angeles and Santa Barbara) made Sunday visits and performed liturgical services every two weeks. Parishioners were involved in all kinds of church activities, from readings and singing in the choir to cleanups and communal meals. Language use was mixed; either English or Church Slavonic was used. The informant Zina, who immigrated in the early 1980s, was pleasantly surprised that, during her first visit to the church, the readers shifted from English to Old Slavonic: "They recognized that we were from Russia and started reading for us. It was a very warm and spiritually touching experience."

Currently, the parish consists of post-Soviet immigrants who came to the United States in the 1990s and more recent years, and American converts to Orthodoxy. While the majority of post-Soviet parishioners are female, the American converts in this church tend to be male, with a good share of converted American husbands (and not a single

case of converted American wives). The ratio of females to males is approximately 2 to 1. The age of parishioners ranges from their 20s to their 70s, with a majority in their 30s and 40s. Many have university degrees and are quite successful professionally (e.g., scientists and real estate agents). Of course, there is a share of the ubiquitous *babushkas*, elderly ladies who followed their successful, mobile children abroad.

The church building is at the dead end of a small street and is not visible from the freeway, the nearby major intersection, or the small road leading to it. When turning from the main avenue to go up the hill, the most prominent structure is the Cambodian Buddhist temple, which is quite elaborate and occupies both sides of the street. Monks in orange robes and laypeople casually cross the street to go from one building to another. On one side of the street is the temple proper, while on the other is a structure built in the same elaborate traditional style used for social gatherings. On the weekends and holidays, it is crowded with ethnic Cambodians, doing the same things which other ethnic communities do in the United States—cooking, eating, and talking. Orthodox attendees have to turn right by the Cambodian temple to get to their church. Parishioners of the local church are not especially curious about the temple's activities and have never attempted to form any kind of relationship with the Buddhists. However, these Russian Orthodox parishioners have formed certain opinions about the proximity of this Other site. They vary from accepting it as one of many examples of multi-ethnicity in the United States, to seeing it as an addition to the spiritual charge of the neighborhood, and finally to viewing it as one of the many temptations facing Orthodox Christians in the host environment.

The church becomes visible only when pulling into the driveway as the city and the rest of the neighborhood fall behind. The latter makes its presence known only through the smells and sounds coming from the residential house sharing the fence with the church building—neighbors cooking food, listening to music, and chatting—in short, living their lives. The other fenced side of the church property faces a canyon-like ditch, which gives the church grounds an amazing sense of privacy. The space behind the church is used for parking and also has a children's swing set and a small space for sitting and socializing outside. Before a renovation of the church building in the summer of 2009, a big tent used for communal meals (*trapezas*) stood in the area now occupied by the children's playground. It was dismantled after the addition of a dining hall to the church building during the renovation.

With this new dining hall, *trapeza* and attendant social activities were transferred inside the church building. While increasing the convenience of serving meals—cooks did not have to carry heavy pots with soup down the stairs into the yard and then haul back all the heavy, dirty dishes—the new spatial arrangement generated a different set of problems. The outside tent had clearly demarked and separated sacred worship activities and social secular activities. While the kitchen proper was in the church building and worshippers could always to wander from the Liturgy to the kitchen and chat with the cooks, the main set-up for meals took place outside the church walls. With the new church building incorporating all types of activities, the border between sacred and secular spaces and times became more porous. Father Andrey, the parish priest and church rector, had his own idea of how to prevent interruption of liturgical time: He locks the door to the kitchen during Liturgy on Sunday with the only set of keys, which he has.

To get to the kitchen and dining area, one must leave by the front door, go around the church, and enter the opposite side.

The separation of worship and social spaces during the sacred service also has the practical purpose of keeping the prayerful atmosphere in the sacred space undisturbed. As many informants confided, they have difficulty enough concentrating on prayers during services. Some fight off random thoughts that came to them, from what to cook for dinner to the color and patterns of the skirts of the women nearby. Others find it hard to resist greeting latecomers, hugging them, smiling at them, and asking them about life. Latecomers to services are common at the local church. The majority of attendees arrive in the middle of the services, 30 to 40 minutes late. The movement in the church is constant, from people arriving and finding a place to stand to buying candles and placing them by the icons. Katerina, who usually stood close to the church candle table, said that, toward the end of services, it becomes increasingly difficult to pray: “It is hard for me to concentrate on prayer as it is. My mind often wonders. I usually stand close to the Kiosk, and there is a lot of commotion there throughout the service. And some people—you know who—always come late and start buying candles and paying and saying ‘hello’ to everyone around. It is very distracting.” Valentina related the following experience: “Often, people assume that I am sad or that something had happened to me because of the strange way I am during the services. But I am not sad. I am concentrating. I cannot go in and out of praying during services in order to greet someone who just came in.” Once, she continued, an older woman came in late and made her way through the church to the candle stand, greeting everyone along the way. Valentina intentionally tried to ignore her by closing her eyes, but “she got me, nonetheless—grabbed my hand and squeezed it.”

Valentina is also regularly tried by people speaking loudly in front or behind her: “I am getting really annoyed. No matter where I stand, there turn [out] to be people talking. I even had to confess to the priest about my annoyance. He just advised me to change places quietly, to move where there was no noise.” Priests in Orthodox churches are usually more aware than anyone else of the constant disturbances and interruptions of the prayerful mood during services, especially when the church space is not controlled by rows of pews which restrict movement and restrain attendees to a single spot for the duration of the service. The fluidity of space without pews, which encourages movement between icons and spontaneous prayer to the saints of the icons, is considered a voluntary sacrifice which should lead to the development of individual spiritual discipline.

Many informants decided to attend this particular church not only because it was Russian but also because of the arrangement of the worship space. Zoe, for example, first visited an American Orthodox church (OCA) close to her home but did not like the interior of the church because it had the rows of chairs resembling pews: “It felt as if we came here for a show, and have to just sit and observe performance. There was no movement in the church. It did not feel alive to us.” Many people I interviewed said that the pews in Greek, Serbian, and some OCA churches were a determining factor in the decision to attend ROCOR churches, which still practice standing. Liza, for example, felt uncomfortable sitting during the Liturgy at a Serbian church which she first attended after moving to the Unites States. She said she stood even when others remained sitting, and this literal standing apart bothered her and made her self-conscious, but she was not willing to sacrifice it for physical comfort.

"We have to suffer," Leo once explained the purpose of standing in the Orthodox Church to an American newcomer. Suffering is not the whole point, of course, despite the stereotype of the Russian love of suffering. Some informants describe standing as a part of sacrifice to God, undergoing physical, bodily strain to open up to the spiritual experience of worship. "It is more rewarding spiritually to be physically alert during the services, [to] prostrate and kneel," Nina once said. This statement echoes advice on the use of the body during Orthodox services given by the abbot of a North California Orthodox monastery (OCA): "Concentrate on your presence. … Go deeper and deeper into our bodies. … Be physically more and more present. The sign of the cross and prostrations are elements of this tradition" (Webber 2007: 62). Webber identifies the purpose of participating in services as "to be like the candles burning in front of the icons: simply to be who we are for the duration of time we are there" (2007: 63). The physicality of one's presence avoids wasting time in church and keeps the mind from wondering, albeit only for a short time. Russian proto-priest Mikhail Kozlov (2004), rector of a Moscow parish, writes that physical discomfort during service should be tolerated for personal spiritual benefit and the acquisition of certain spiritual skills. Both body and soul should work during services, Kozlov (2004) continues, and this labor brings God's grace and blessing to the whole body—legs, hands, back. The more physical discomfort is practiced, the sooner it stops (Kozlov 2004: 241).

Most newcomers to the church are not aware of these finer theological justifications for standing and instead rely on what they hear, read, or see others do. For them, following the form of church ceremony is of crucial importance, sometimes at the level of a vague intuition that it is the right thing to do. Vlad once explained that

neophytes, the term used for new believers, tend to be conservative because they "strive to get to the source" of their religious tradition. This statement points to a deeply held notion that the traditional and at times conservative elements of Orthodox practice (standing, certain styles of clothing, frequent crossing, and bowing) are part of a larger Christian tradition passed down since the early Apostolic church.

Ironically, the newest post-Soviet immigrants often become carriers of traditional, conservative Orthodox attitudes toward church practices. For example, Tamara, who joined the parish in the mid-1990s (earlier than other current parishioners), remembers how she was surprised to see women of earlier immigration waves wearing no head coverings, or wearing hats instead of traditional scarves (*platok*): "Everywhere I looked I saw hats. And I was wondering: Where did I come—to the beach or to the church?" Tamara remembered being surprised on another occasion to see a young woman, who recently given birth, in church: "I asked her, 'What are you doing here? You are not supposed to come to church for forty days after giving birth, and even then there have to be special cleansing prayers read for you.'" The woman resented this advice, and Tamara had to consult her Russian priest on that matter, because in America, "priests do not always know everything."

While newcomers can easily master visible forms of practice—standing and wearing the right attire to church services—they have to negotiate their relationship to the church hierarchy, including the parish priest, in a more liberal and democratic Western environment. The following example relates to one such negotiation (many others are addressed in chapter 4) involving the setup of children's Sunday school. Children are notorious for their misbehavior and loudness during Orthodox divine services. They

usually start attending church after being baptized either in infancy or adulthood, depending on their parents' level of churchlinesss (*votserkovlenie*, or a practicing believer). Most post-Soviet immigrants are new to the faith themselves, and although they baptized their newborns on the fortieth day after birth according to Orthodox tradition, the older children started going to church only with their parents. Both parents and children are unaccustomed to specifics of church divine services. In addition to being long and physically demanding, these services are also mostly incomprehensible to beginners. Parents usually have enough motivation and self-control to follow the rules of attendance, but even they occasionally violate them by walking around, talking, or forgetting to turn off their cell phones. Children become restless quickly and start whining, asking to go or run around. Out of boredom, some try to blow out candles. In short, they present a constant stream of distractions to adults trying to concentrate on prayers.

If adults create problems and distractions for each other, children amplify them. When the subject of distractions came up during a *trapeza* talk, a woman suggested that a good solution might be to hold the children's Sunday school class during the beginning and middle of the Sunday Liturgy before the Eucharistic communion. The logic was simple: Children are not paying attention to what was going on in the church, so giving them an educational lesson about a saint, icon, or church holiday would be a more beneficial use of their time. As a side benefit, Sunday school teachers would not have to stay after *trapeza* for classes, and children would have more free time on Sunday afternoon. Elena, Valentina, and Zoe, the main proponents of the idea, presented it to Father Andrey, with little doubt of its successful acceptance by the priest, who himself

had on a few occasions expressed frustration with misbehaving children. However, to their surprise, Father Andrey disapproved very strongly. He said that the Liturgy was the main event of the day and that it would be irresponsible to deprive children of it. As Valentina remembered, he said, “There is spiritual work going on during the Liturgy. There are angels and other spiritual forces present. They are attending to the kids in ways unknown to us and are building their spiritual character. Even if kids are not paying attention, they still receive grace, and they will carry it with them outside, and it will manifest itself at some point in their lives.”

From the spiritual point of view, Father Andrey was right. According to some American Orthodox priests and scholars, “prayer and worship are constitutive elements” of Christian living, and if children attend Sunday school during the Divine Liturgy, it encourages them “to think that worship is, at best, a secondary component of church life” (Calivas 2003: 135—136). Simply put, “it teaches children not to go to church” (Meyendorff 2003: 147). However, by refusing to compromise and allow children to miss part of the service or to teach any Sunday school classes, citing his inability to connect to children, Father Andrey, in the eyes of some parishioners, showed his ineffectiveness as a leader of the parish.

This incident is only one example of the occasional disagreements with the priest about the organization of parish life. Life in this particular parish is characterized by instability, mainly due to numerous changes in parish priests. Consequently, the parish is continuously searching for its identity. Over ten years, the parish had five priests; two were fired (chapter 4), one went into schism (chapter 2), and two were transferred to serve in other churches. The current and sixth priest was appointed in summer 2011 after

the end of my fieldwork. Relationships with the parish priests are examined in chapters 2 and 4; here, it is necessary to emphasize that this high turnover contributes the feelings of marginality in the parish's collective identity (Ammerman 1998) and to the persistence of tensions in the parish life.

These tensions are mapped onto several other marginalities present in the space of the church. First, life as immigrants away from national and cultural roots requires constant negotiation between the values of the rationalistic, legalistic, and individualistic West and the mystical and communal East. In the process of carving out space for national elements in identity, Orthodoxy serves a space in which to work out resistance to Western values. Father Boris Bobrinskoy, a former dean and professor of dogmatic theology at St. Sergius Institute in Paris, stresses that the East and the West are not geographic but, rather, spiritual concepts. He proposes seeing the East as the direction in which the sun rises and the West where the sun sets. While the East is illuminated by Christ who is the sun, the West symbolizes the darkness that covers the world. To be Christian, then, means to carry the light of Christ from the East to the dark of the West (2008). Russian immigrants to Western Europe and America, therefore, have double identities: On the one hand, they are citizens of the countries in which they live, but on the other, they are Orthodox. Orthodoxy abroad, while transcending territoriality, remains infused with cultural and national values cultivated in its native soil. The Russian Orthodox Church's efforts to maintain distinctively Russian ways of worship, the Old Slavonic language, a unique style of singing, and Russian iconography are part of preserving not only national identity but also religious values.

Second, and connected to the previous tension, is the overall marginality of Orthodox Christianity in the Western imagination. It is neither a Western form of Christianity (such as Catholicism and Protestantism), nor an Eastern religion in an established, conventional sense (such as Buddhism and Hinduism). Russian Orthodox Christianity, in particular, exists on two opposite planes of perception, which can be generally identified as conservative and liberal. The conservative viewpoint considers Russia to still be an atheist country and Orthodoxy at best as the thing of the past. During my fieldwork in the summer of 2008, the war between Russia and Georgia broke out. Senator John McCain, then a presidential candidate, was interviewed by Pastor of the Saddleback church Rick Warren. When the question of the war came up, McCain pledged his support to Georgia, partly justifying it by saying that Georgia was an old Christian country, and he had seen beautiful old churches there during his many visits. The sad irony of this statement is compounded by the fact that both Russia and Georgia are not only Christian countries but Orthodox, too. Another ironic statement was made by Senator Rick Santorum in the Republican presidential primaries in 2011, when he proudly referred to his grandfather fighting on the German side against Russians during World War I. Although pre-revolutionary Russia was an ally of the United States in this war, Santorum used this example to demonstrate the continuity of his family's fight against evil atheist Russians. The secular, liberal discourse on contemporary Russian religion connects it tightly to the authoritarian state, reiterating claims of the merger of the state and the church, especially on social and moral issues.

Third, the church also reflects Christian narratives of marginality, such as the temporality of human existence in this world and the transitory nature of human life

before entering eternity, the world to come. Some view the immigration experience and removal from all the material trappings of culture as a symbolic expression of movement between two homes—the worldly and the heavenly. The liminality of the immigrant experience becomes a sought-after state of existence, perpetuated by constantly reaffirming one's awareness of being in-between two lives. These narratives are accompanied by the inversion of values representing two different cosmologies and worldviews. The wisdom of this world is contrasted to the wisdom of Christ. If one, for example, has to be assertive and aggressive in the business realm, the church environment asks for other qualities—to be meek and obedient and to do good deeds quietly for the praise of God, not of oneself.

The final marginality discussed here is relevant mostly to the post-Soviet wave of immigrants to the United States, because unlike immigrants in earlier waves, they were not raised Orthodox and, after their relocation abroad, faced the transition from atheist ideologies and secular sensibilities to religious and spiritual ways of life. One attribute of the relationship between old (Soviet, atheist) and new (Orthodox) emerged from these immigrants' specific foreign context—the democratic management of the parish, which represented a new form of dealing with authority and community. Post-Soviet immigrants went through a double learning process which combined elements of the home and host cultures: national religion and democracy, which were new spiritual and political spheres of life.

Through individual and collective dynamics, the parish provides a setting where post-Soviet religious identity formation occurs. The following section provides an

overview of studies on post-Soviet religiosity, few of which discuss parish cultures in Russia.

Orthodox Christianity in the Post-Soviet Space: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Trends

Most work on contemporary Russian Orthodoxy is performed in Russia and other post-Soviet countries by both Russian and foreign scholars. The main themes of scholarly research tend to include morality (Wanner and Steinberg 2008; Zigon 2010, 2011), secularism (Luehrmann 2011; Wanner 2013), the transmission of religious knowledge and spiritual authority (Headley 2010), and social memory (Paxon 2005). Projects undertaken by the Halle Institute have addressed post-socialist religious life (Hann 2010). The volume *Eastern Christianities in the Anthropological Perspective* (Hann and Goltz 2010) dedicates two chapters to studies of pilgrimages in Russia (Kormina 2010; Naletova 2010). Among Russian scholars actively involved in anthropological and sociological research on Orthodox Christianity, both domestically and globally, is Alexander Agadjanian, who coedited volumes in English, *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age* (Roudometof, Aganjanian, and Pankhurst 2006) and in Russian, *Religious Practices in Contemporary Russia* (Aganjanian and Rousselet 2006) and *Parish and Community in the Contemporary Russian Orthodox Christianity* (Aganjanian and Rousselet 2011).

Studies of a more general nature on the post-Soviet transformation in Russia by anthropologists (Berdahl, Bunzi, and Lampland 2000; Pesmen 2000; Ries 1997, 2009; Yurchak 2005) and historical sociologists (Kharkhordin 1999; McDaniel 1996) incorporate Orthodoxy to varying degrees. Historians of Orthodoxy have produced

interesting works on sainthood in Russia (Kizenko 2000), monasticism and the institute of elders (Kenworthy 2010; Paert 2011), and the materiality of Russian Orthodoxy (Greene 2009; Shevzov 2007; Yazykova 2010). A growing number of Russian historians and sociologists are working on creating a New Sovietology, researching religion and society under the Soviet rule (Chesnokova 1994; Firsov 2012).

Many scholars raise questions about breaks and continuities in the Russian religious life because religion and religious practices were suspended during the seventy years of the state-enforced ideology of atheism. In this metaphor-rich field, scholars deploy various terms in addition to continuity and discontinuity: interruption, breaking points, amnesia, and coma, to name a few of the most common. Agata Ladykowska (2010) makes one of the strongest cases for continuity between the Soviet and post-Soviet moral worlds in a study of middle-aged school teachers of post-Soviet Rostov-on-Don in Russia. Although trained by the Soviet educational system with its strong, unbending emphasis on atheistic and scientific view of the world, many teachers have embraced Orthodox identity and "drawn on their social capital and organizational skills, built up during socialism, to establish Orthodox schools and courses" (Ladykowska 2010: 108). Ladykowska suggests that this "recycling" of secular pedagogies in a changed but not completely post-secular environment "served not only to create a smooth link between the secular and the religious, but also to connect the Soviet past and post-Soviet present into a seamless harmonious entity" (Ladykowska 2010: 108; see also Luerhmann 2011on recycling and desecularization). In this and other works (Ladykowska 2011), Ladykowska makes a convincing case for continuity between Soviet and post-Soviet formal practices and for the harmonious transition between activities, which happen to be

identical in form: “Whenever people were asked about transformations, they pointed to structural similarities between communism and Orthodoxy… and used them as examples to support the idea of continuity between these two ideological systems in their lives” (Ladykowska 2011: 30). For her informants, the view of Bolshevism as a civil religion Soviet style was open for discussion and negotiation (Ladykowska 2011: 31).

In a study of civil religion, American scholar Robert Bellah describes it, among other things, as a religious nationalism. In this view, religion has the power to legitimize the state to the extent that the state itself comes to be defined by its sacred power. In modernizing societies, traditional religious institutions gradually lose their force: “Religion declines as power coalesces in the institutions of the state” (Bellah and Hammond 1980: 77). However, in civil religion, “religious feelings are not eliminated—they are simply displaced to the state” (Angrosino 2002: 247; Catherine Wanner 2011 also expresses this view in a comparative analysis of secularism in Europe and the Soviet Union).

While secularism has led to the erasure of religious traditions and memories in Europe (cf. Hervieu-Leger 2000), the government of Soviet Union initiate secularism as a project to create religious ignorance by “the unknowing of religious traditions, practices and dogma, which, for some led to an erosion of belief” (Wanner 2011: 221). This unknowing, or religious amnesia, did not result in “an erasure of religious sensibilities or of emotional dispositions, which continued to respond to transcendent,” but their expression was displaced to political rituals of the state, which channeled them into more effective governance (ibid.).

This argument gains support from studies (see, for example, Kenworthy 2010 and Luerhmann 2011) discussing how communists borrowed Orthodox forms and infused them with new meanings. Studies of post-Soviet morality, in particular, often compare the Ten Commandments of the Bible and the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism from the late Soviet period (Aganjanian 2011a). The focus on structural similarities, however, obscures the drastic contrast in content, the consequences of which for post-Soviet religious identity cannot be ignored in a discussion of the harmonious transition and continuity between Soviet atheism and post-Soviet religiosity. Sergey Firsov, a prolific Russian historian writing on Soviet ideology and religion, calls the Soviet type of religiosity "the communist religiosity" and identifies it as a quasi- or pseudo-religiosity, characterized by socio-psychological aberrations, distortions of consciousness, and perversions of the religiosity of the people (2013 online).

According to Firsov, at the basis of communist religiosity lies the worship of the socialist state and the belief in the state as a sacral entity with metaphysical value. In this belief, internal forms of veneration replace external ones, and importance is increasingly placed not on what people believe but on how they demonstrate it. Hence, for example, are the compulsory visits of tourist groups to Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow's Red Square in Moscow, where the body of "the communist God-son" was (and still is) carefully preserved, or "mummified" as Firsov puts it (2013). This activity involves the use of several Orthodox Christian forms—pilgrimages to sacred destination and veneration of the incorruptible relics of saints believed to hold the power of the Holy Spirit and divine grace (see Greene, 2009, for a comparison of Lenin's preserved body and saints' relics). Another example is membership in the communist party and

attendance and participation in monthly or quarterly party meetings at the workplace as requirement to advance in one's career. These meetings, according to Firsov, were a mockery of meetings of Peoples Council of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Chesnokova, another Russian scholar of Russian Orthodox Christianity and Soviet atheism, investigates the function of rites in traditional, pre-Soviet Russian and Soviet culture (1994). According to Chesnokova, the Soviet ideologues subscribed to the Marxist theory that all rites, including those of Orthodox Christianity, were merely external actions devoid of any meaning. However, they acknowledged that rites, with all their meaningless words and actions, functioned to unite people and, therefore, should be retained and deliberately infused with appropriate Soviet ideological meanings. These new meanings, Chesnokova notes, differed from the old ones as fairy tales differ from parables. In fairy tales, usually written for young children, the meaning lies at the surface and is clear and spelled out from the start. Parables, on the other hand, are strange and obscure, and the meaning is often incomprehensible at first. As readers grow and mature, though, they can extract the hidden meanings always present in parables. This extraction requires additional thought and effort on the readers' part, and parables do not provide any direct answers, so every generation of readers comes to them with unique, specific problems and questions. The parable is eternal and inexhaustible, occupies a special space, and provides a set of directions to find where to search for meaning. The same holds true for rites, Chesnokova concludes, which do not offer readers the complete meaning but guides and lead them on the path to it.

In Chesnokova's framework, rites, as formalized sets of practices embedded in national culture and tradition, already contain meaning but only through personal effort

and lifelong work can it be uncovered. Soviet ideologues themselves, in contrast, ascribed ready-made meanings to their many rites, at the basis of which, following the Protestant hierarchy of values, they put labor (*trud*) as the basic human need (1994). While the satisfaction of this basic human need was a key in constructing the new, well-rounded communist person, other relevant positive needs, such as creativity and the development of talents, were taken care of by many palaces: the Palace of Culture, the Palace of Sports, the Palace of Concerts. These palaces provided a material base for the satisfaction of individual needs and aspirations, which in Chesnokova's view, was a primitive approach, assuming that people were driven by a stable system of goals. In Soviet culture, values and goals were clearly set and needs well defined, so the task of the Soviet system was to help people distinguish good goals from bad and to guide them in realization of the good ones while avoiding the bad. Chesnokova completes her analysis with the conclusion that the Soviet ideological approach as superficial and ultimately a failure, which nonetheless left a tangible imprint on morals and psyches (1994).

Firsov (2012) also considers this abuse of the desire for good life as a tragedy with dangerous, lasting consequences for the Russian people. Belief in the socialist state replaced belief in God, while the main precepts of Christianity were privatized not so much to produce "a good person" but, rather, effective tools, fanatically dedicated to communist ideas and ideals. Firsov sees a lasting effect of communist religiosity in the principle of the "goals justify the means," used to support killings millions for the purpose of building "paradise on earth." Firsov argues that this principle is seen now in the inability to separate the religious from the non-religious, the transcendent from the immanent, the Ideal from ideals, and the Kingdom of Heaven from kingdoms on earth.

Chesnokova's and Firsov's conclusions about the socialist system's lasting demoralizing effects on the religious life of post-Soviet believers are highly relevant to my study of the parish life abroad among post-Soviet immigrants (chapter 4). For example, many immigrants come to church, as to another Palace of Culture, expecting their spiritual needs to be taken care of, serviced, and satisfied. One female informant, Polina, recalled a male parishioner being upset with the priest for not putting enough effort in educating him in the intricacies of faith and practice. Polina wondered, "Is he a child? Is priest supposed to hold his hand and feed him knowledge about the church? He should attend services, participate in church sacraments, and then ask the priest questions about faith." While not all informants share Polina's opinion (their different stories of coming to faith are presented in chapter 3), it underscores the widespread tendency of post-Soviet converts to view the church as a Palace of Spiritual Services. Another ethnographic example (also discussed in chapter 4) relates to the searches for truth among groups of parishioners in their attacks on their priest, during which the goals indeed justified the means.

In these cases, it is more appropriate to talk, as Russian scholar Alexander Panchenko suggests, about both change and continuity, because "moral models are borrowed and elaborated anew according to the particular social and ideological context" (2011: 119). People make use of the available cultural resources to correlate their habitual moral choices with "institutional and pubic discourses of morality," in which morality is not a stable system but "a range of moral discourses and ethical practices" (Panchenko 2011: 119). This approach presents a dynamic view of changes and transitional periods in

the lives of individuals and societies, during which the old and the familiar are seen anew, reevaluated, and reapplied.

French religious scholar Kathy Rousselet offers a similar approach while considering the post-Soviet canonization of the last tsarist family killed by Bolsheviks in the summer of 1918 (this canonization is further discussed in chapter 2). Rousselet looks at this canonization in terms of both breaks and continuities. On one hand, the reexamination of the past led to its rewriting and reevaluation, which constituted "a breakdown, a radical change with the Soviet ideology" (Rousselet 2011: 159). On the other hand, although heroes were remade and historical wrongs righted on a societal level, the continuity between old and new values remained intact for her informants. The canonization of the tsarist family offered "a believer a means of continuity in a universe marked by ruptures" (Rousselet 2011: 163), helping post-Soviet Russians to reconnect with their lost history and past traditions.

In examining another post-Soviet canonization, that of the female saint St. Xenia of Saint Petersburg, Kormina and Styrkov make a case for the discontinuity between pre-revolutionary and new religiosity and "insist upon the 'invention' of the religious tradition, especially in the realm of lay religiosity" (2011: 171). In this viewpoint, the transmission of religious knowledge was interrupted, and after conversion, post-Soviet believers had to rely on self-education and personal communication with other new converts like themselves. In the process, they reused their Soviet habits, making contemporary Russian religious culture a product of Soviet heritage. Characteristics retained in this mutation of the Soviet secular into the religious, according to the authors, included assigning religious belief and practice to the private sphere. This assignation

allowed some of their informants to make individual choices about whether to go to church, whom to venerate, and the manner of veneration. It was against this background of the “irregular” post-Soviet religiosity and with the aim to construct “an avenue of contact with people who try to escape from the control of religious institutions” that the calculating Russian Orthodox Church decided to canonize the 18th-century lay female holy fool (Kormina and Styrkov 2011: 173).

These different views on the breaks and continuities in the emergent religious life in the post-Soviet Russia can be partly explained by how these terms are conceptualized. In the discussion about continuity, for example, much depends on what historical moment is taken as a starting point and the specific continuity addressed. Was Soviet atheism a continuity of religious moods disguised under socialist garb? Or is the contemporary post-Soviet revival of Orthodox practices merely a recycling of Soviet habits? How does the contemporary religiosity of Russian Orthodox believers compare to that of the pre-revolutionary Russian populace in the early 20th century? What was continued, and what was interrupted? Where is the point of comparison, of looking at the flow? This series of questions can also be asked about conceptualizations of discontinuity. Are we looking at discontinuities within the context of an individual’s previous life? Or within the life of the church? Chapter 3, dedicated to stories of individual conversions, attempts to answer some of those questions.

To Kormina and Styrkov’s (2011) point about the private nature of religion in the lives of the post-Soviet converts, Russian sociologist Ivan Zabaev (2011) introduces an interesting approach. He coins the term “sacred individualism” to describe his informants’ attitudes toward Orthodox practices, sacraments, and the church itself. Based

on a series of interviews with the attendees of Moscow churches, Zabaev observed that their perception of the church is influenced by a very sharp separation between two worlds—the sacred and the profane, the holy and the secular, and they place the church in the world of the sacred (2011: 346). His informants see the sociality embedded in some church practices as an obstacle in achieving the sacred, i.e., personal connection with God. They perceive the church as place existing outside the social reality to which they can escape from the secular world, not as a place to come and encounter a community (Zabaev 2011: 347). The sacraments of the church, such as confession and communion, are seen as extremely personal ways to achieve salvation, the ultimate goal of a Christian person, and as having nothing to do with the community of the church.

This "autonomisation," according to Zabaev, is unconnected to the lingering social apathy inherited from the Soviet past or to characteristics of the modern society, such as the focus on individualistic values outside the church (2011: 349). Nor is it similar to the religious processes analyzed by Western researchers in their societies (see, for example, Luckmann 1967). The phenomenon of the "sacred individualism" is neither a "privatized religion" nor an "invisible religion," because it accepts institutional Orthodoxy, including its sacraments and hierarchy (Zabaev 2011: 351). However, the communicative aspect is missing in the key Orthodox practices, raising the question of whether the celebrated concept of *sobornost* in the Orthodox tradition is a contemporary or historical phenomenon.

I clearly observed tendencies toward sacred individualism in some regular attendees at the local church. They came to the Liturgy almost every Sunday, and some even participated in the church choir, but they left immediately after the services, making

no attempt to socialize or interact with other parishioners. However, this group was not the focus of my study. I was more interested in those who followed their newly found religiosity into the social space of church life and prolonged their stay beyond the sacred Liturgical time. The motives to do so given by some informants rely on Orthodox discourses, emphasizing the communal aspects of the Christian path to salvation and the tradition of concilar (*sobornost*) in the Orthodox Church.

The next section addresses the position of the church and the parish in Orthodox theological and philosophical discourses.

Positioning the Church and the Parish Theologically

According to contemporary Orthodox thinker Bishop Timothy (Kalistos) Ware, the spiritual and earthly realms coexist in the Church: "Just as Christ the God-Man has two natures, divine and human, so in the Church there is a synergy or co-operation between the divine and the human" (1997: 244). However, alongside synergy, there is also tension in the earthly Church: "It is already the Body of Christ, and thus perfect and sinless, and yet, since its members are imperfect and sinful, it must continually become what it is" (Ware 1997: 244). Vladimir Lossky, a 20th-century religious philosopher, developed the concept of the Church as the body of Christ in his famous work *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*:

> The Church is at once the body of Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, "filling all in all". The unity of the body relates to the nature, which appears as the "unique man" in Christ; the fullness of the Spirit to persons, to the multiplicity of human hypostases each one of whom represents not merely a part, a member of the body of Christ by his nature, but also (considered as a person) a being who contains all within himself. The Holy Spirit … creates, so to speak, many Christs, many of the Lord's

> anointed: persons in the way of deification by the side of the divine Person. (Lossky 1976: 174)

For Lossky, the Church cannot be reduced to any single aspect: "It is not of this world, though taken from the midst of this world; it exists in the world and for the world. The Church cannot, therefore, be reduced purely and simply to its 'earthy aspect' and to its 'human implications' without abandoning its true nature which distinguishes it from every other human society" (1976: 175). The Church consists not only of visible human entities but also of invisible beings: "It is visible, for it is composed of specific congregations, worshipping here on earth; it is invisible, for it also includes the saints and the angels. It is human, for its earthly members are sinners; it is divine, for it is the Body of Christ" (Ware 1997: 243). For Bishop Ware, this coexistence of the visible and the invisible in the Church places it within and above time, for the Church "stands at a point of intersection between the Present Age and the Age to Come, and it lives in both Ages at once" (ibid.). The church on earth, according to Bishop Ware, will always maintain its unity: "Unity is one of the essential characteristics of the Church, and since the Church on earth, despite the sinfulness of its members, retains its essential characteristics, it remains and always will remain visibly one. There can be schisms from the Church, but no schisms within the Church" (1997: 245).

Alexander Schmemann, an American Orthodox priest and scholar, describes how the structure of the earthly church fulfills its divine mission:

> The church as a whole is a means of grace, the sacrament of the kingdom. Therefore, its structure—hierarchical, sacramental, liturgical—has no other function but of making the church ever capable of fulfilling itself as a body of Christ, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, to actualize its very nature as grace. … There is no separation, no division, between the church invisible … and the visible church, … the latter being the expression and

> actualization of the former, the sacramental sign of its reality. (Schmemann 2003: 198)

The Orthodox view of the parish places it in the center of Christians' spiritual growth: "An Orthodox Christian is vividly conscious of belonging to a community. … He is saved in the Church, as a member of it and in union with all its other members" (Ware 1997: 239). Ware cites 19th-century Russian philosopher Khomiakov as famously saying, "We know that when any of us falls, he falls alone; but no one is saved alone" (ibid.). Khomiakov, along with other 19th-century Russian Slavianophile philosophers, "held Russian Orthodoxy as characterized by *sobornost*: a symphonic unity among individual, family, and society, in which all elements contributed to the development of the other" (McDaniel 1996: 41).

Sobornost in the Orthodox tradition is tightly connected to the concept of the Church as the body of Christ expressed by St. Paul: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). In Orthodoxy, it is hard to define the Church, largely because of this perception of the church "as, above all, a living organism, Christ's very body, into which his creation is drawn through encounter and relation, rather than an institution or complex that can be neatly defined" (Steenberg 2008: 122). If the church is a living organism, those who inhabit it are cells, and the function and well-being of each cell affects the health and development of the whole body: "We are connected like parts of the human body; each member is a part of the body. If a member suffers, the whole body suffers; if a member rejoices, the whole body rejoices. This is an organic, biological vision of the Church, applied to the spiritual realm" (Calciu 2007: 187–88).

Another widely used image to describe the church is that of family. Russian proto-priest Alexander Tkachev writes that coming to Christ is like entering a family—the Church (2010). Within the Church, the parish provides environment a person needs for the full reception and self-realization of faith. A healthy parish, according to Tkachev, can resurrect people from the tombs of despair and meaninglessness and transform the Gospels from books to embodied fact (2010). The images of both organism and family emphasize the parish's collective identity over the individual identity of believers. All are grouped up into a single social and mystical body, in which all members have their place based on their talents. This system allows individual skills to blossom and contribute in meaningful ways to the whole, to the one harmonious unit but also creates a burden for the whole when some parts give up or become unhealthy. Like any family, the parish hosts people with many different personalities and temperaments, but as Zoe put it, "we are all needed nonetheless."

Parishioners apply family metaphors to church life abundantly and creatively. For example, when Father Joseph left the parish following the post-unification split (chapter 2), Katerina compared his departure to divorce: "It is as if the father had abandoned his family, leaving us all orphans." Igor described the 2007 unification of the two Russian churches as the reconciliation of spouses: "Their separation was wrong. They got into argument and let it split them." The Serbian and Greek Orthodox churches, according to Igor, are not spouses but cousins, distant and not immediate relatives to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Worship in the Orthodox Church, too, is communal, not individual. The word "liturgy" translates from the Greek *leit-ergos* as "the work of the people," and "the

emphasis of Russian Christians is upon the entire witness of the church" (Ugolnik 1989: 218). The practices of the church exist in mutual harmony. In the Orthodox Liturgy, "no single vehicle to understanding—icon, music, word—asserts itself over any other: The 'harmonic principle' prevails" (ibid.).

Overall, as contemporary American Orthodox theological scholar Thomas Hopko writes, nothing in the parish "can be 'merely human' or 'secular'" (2003: 2). The holiness of the parish is derived from by the holiness of the Church: "The parish must be holy because Christ's Church is holy. … Its organization, structure, administration, finances and properties, as well as its theological and moral teachings and practices, and its liturgical and sacramental rites and services—must be of God" (Hopko 2003: 2).

For some post-Soviet newcomers to the Orthodox faith, especially those discussed by Zabaev (2011), the church's holiness stands apart from the elements of parish sociality, which they perceive as secular. For others, church attendance and parish life are irrelevant to their personal, private spiritual quests (Kormina and Styrkov 2011). Participants in this study view the parish life of the local church as one of the ways to experience Christian life in its fullness. They experienced firsthand the many tensions involved in combining the social and the holy, the secular and the sacred. Problems in church are often amplified by members and non-members alike precisely because it is a church and, as many of my informants repeatedly phrased it: "Things like that should not happen in church." They expect church to be a safe place, an island of Russian spiritual territory where they can feel protected from the influences of the secular world. However, they encountered many temptations and falls during the process of retrieving their

Orthodox Christian identity, especially during their participation in social life of the local parish.

The next section is an ethnographic vignette dedicated to the local church's Easter (*Paskha*) celebration, which intertwines the themes of culture and religion, worship and social activities, past memories and present practices, and the borders of church belonging.

Ethnography of Paskha (Easter) Celebration

The Holy Week preceding the *Paskha* festivities usually includes many services. Depending on the priest of a particular parish, services can happen every day, with multiple services on Thursday and Friday. Father Andrey introduced more services during the Holy Week than previous priests: one on Wednesday, two on Thursday, two on Friday, and one on Saturday, leading to the *Paskhal* midnight celebration. He also introduced multiple times for the blessings of the *Paskhal* baskets: after the Liturgy on Sunday night, which lasted until 3 a.m., and twice on Saturday, after morning Liturgy at noon and before the night Liturgy at 11 p.m. The rationale behind this decision was to accommodate more people of the Russian-speaking and other local Orthodox, communities who often did not stay until the end of the *Paskhal* Liturgy and asked priests to individually bless their baskets earlier. I was present for such a private blessing of the *kulichi* (special *Paskhal* bread) of an elderly couple by Father John. Despite some objections to earlier blessings based on the notion that *Paskha* and Resurrection of the Lord have not happened yet, Father Andrey was open to the request, probably because of his previous pastoral experience in a Russian village.

Attendance at all three blessings was extremely high. Baskets of various size and grandeur covered eight large tables placed outside the church building. Some baskets had traditional entries, such as *kulichi* and plainly or elaborately decorated colored eggs, while others held cheeses, cold cuts, grapes, other fruit, jars with caviar and smoked fish, and bottles of wine. Some people put candles in their *kulichi* and waited to light them until the priest came out.

It would be fair to say that every family has its own recopies for *kulichi* and *paskha*, another traditional *Paskhal* food made from farmers' cheese and bearing the name of the holiday. Usually, these recipes are passed from generation to generation and altered in the process according to the preferences of the next cook. I have seen and tasted *kulichi* made with twenty eggs or five, baked overnight or over a couple days, decorated with edible gold beads or raisins. Liza likes to add rum to *kulichi* dough, which she considers the best substitute for the special type of liquor they use in her Siberian hometown. Coloring of eggs tends to be more uniform. Either because of Soviet-era shortages or the natural methods employed in traditional peasant recipes, the method for coloring eggs is to boil them in water with the onion skins. Even in the United States with no shortage of Easter supplies, including dye for eggs, Russian women choose to use their known ways. In addition to being healthier because "no one knows what is in those dyes," coloring with onion peels is part of the overall ritual of holiday preparation. Valentina, for example, starts collecting onion skins immediately after the Christmas holidays: "It gives me few months to collect enough to color dozens of eggs. I just save the skins from onions I use in cooking. My mother taught me that, and she learned it from hers." With a heightened sense of responsibility to give eggs to all attending church on

Paskha, Katerina gathers loose onion skins from onion stands in supermarkets and readily explains their purpose to perplexed cashiers, who always let her take them for free.

As people become more involved with the church, their childhood memories of large holidays such as *Paskha* become more vivid and alive. They remember the smells of baking *kulichi*, the sense of quietness and lightness leading to the holiday, and excitement at painting onion-colored eggs. Some even recall going to church at night with their *babushkas*. The latter, however, are memories of the countryside, not of large cities. In cities such as Moscow, police surrounded churches and did not let in any curious bystanders , only priests, other clergy, and, in police' eyes, one typical class of parishioners—in other words, *babushkas*. Zoe, at the height of her *Komsomol* youth, once watched the *Paskhal* midnight Procession, when parishioners walk around the church with lit candles at midnight. It was interesting and mysterious to her, showing her that another life in which she had no part existed. She said that she was not then a believer, so her moral inner voice prevented her from even entering the church.

My informants' childhood memories of religious holidays are mixed with those secular state holidays. *Paskha*, for example, always occurred in the spring and was mixed with other beloved spring celebrations: International Women's Day on March 8 (a combination of Valentine's and Mother's days in the West), International Day of Workers' Solidarity on May 1, and Victory in the Great Patriotic War (Word War II) on May 9. All celebrations, religious and secular alike, involved gatherings with family and friends, eating and drinking, and, on some holidays such as May 9, watching fireworks.

The *Paskha* celebrations, however, stood apart, because they were confined to the private domestic space and not experienced publicly.

Memories of *Paskha* also brought a sense of confusion. Its message was hard to grasp because many informants were not taught anything about Christianity and, at best, were introduced to it through images of saints on icons or the prayer practices of *babushkas*, all alien and incomprehensible to them. For example, Valentina remembers how, when she was around 10 years old, she saw her mother baking an unusual pie. Her mother explained that it was *kulich*, a special type of bread symbolizing Christ's body. She told the story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and concluded by saying, "This is why we tell each other on that day: 'Christ has risen!' And then people kiss and exchange eggs." Valentina remembers being horrified by the nails and the cross. She could not eat mother's *kulich* and partially blames the story for her staying away from the church as long as she did: "It was just a horrible story, with no spiritual meaning to it. How is the child, who was not raised in the church, where grace is present to open our spiritual eyes, supposed to react to a graphic story of a murder?"

In this attitude about the interconnectivity of the spiritual and the material in the Gospels lies a valuable insight into parishioners' reactions to the *Passions of Christ* movie. Some, such as Oksana, watch it every *Paskhal* season to remind themselves what Christ went through. "It is based on the Bible. We all need to see it. I weep so hard when I watch it," Oksana told me. Liza, on the other hand, did not like the movie. "Too much flesh," she said and continued, "Of course, Christ suffered—we have no idea how much—for all our sins, but we need to focus on the main message—His resurrection, trampling over death. Catholics and the West take the bodily sufferings to extreme." For

Liza, as for other informants, the Holy Week before *Paskha* presents a time for deep reflection of oneself and one's sins, not physical suffering, though many lament Christ's death on the cross, especially on the Friday services of the Holy Week.

Paskha, as mentioned, sees the highest attendance throughout the year. People who have never been to this church or come only on holidays attend in large numbers. Once, the attendance was estimated at more than three hundred people, ten times more than on a regular Sunday. While attendance is high on *Paskhal* night itself, it is quite low during other Holy Week services, ranging from ten to twenty. By offering to bless *Paskhal* baskets twice on Saturday, some council members hoped to increase attendance at other services. However, following Katerina's pessimistic outlook expressed as "they know, but they don't come," this plan did not yield any drastic changes. At one point, it even created a disturbance, at which I happened to be present.

I stood by the church kiosk as Father Andrey was finishing the Saturday morning Liturgy. The basket blessings had been advertised at noon, but the service had lasted past that time. An older woman whom I had never seen came to the kiosk and started complaining: "You know, there are people sitting there and waiting. Why is it taking you so long?" I tried to explain that the service was in progress and perhaps she should go inside and check it out, instead of sitting and waiting outside. She replied, "We all have plans for the day. You should not advertise it for noon if you are not ready by noon." She angrily walked out into the churchyard to continue waiting for the end of the service and the blessing of the *Paskhal* baskets.

On major holidays such as *Paskha*, regular parishioners, themselves new to the liturgically rich church calendar, were faced with the challenging task of participating

spiritually in celebrations while accommodating the needs of rare visitors. At the beginning of my fieldwork in 2008, the regulars treated irregulars similarly to themselves. For example, Katerina once went out to a large crowd with *Paskhal* baskets and delivered them an emotional speech: "People! Where are you coming from? Why don't we see you here any other days of the year?" There was silence in the crowd, as they waited for the blessing and then quietly dispersed. After this incident, some regulars consulted online sources and came up with helpful strategies on how to treat *zakhozhane*: Be patient, and do not tell them what to do, when to move, or how to put up a candle unless, of course, they ask for advice.

One parishioner, Nina, said that in their actions regulars should rely on the wisdom of the parable of the 11th hour, a Gospel reading at the *Paskhal* service also known as the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard: In the kingdom of heaven, "the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16). It does not matter, Nina continued, that you are already in the church and others are not, because everyone has their own path to God, and let us hope that there is always 11th-hour opportunities for all of us.

Outline of the Dissertation

The **first** chapter gives an historic overview of Orthodox Christianity in the United States, from early Russian Orthodox missions in Alaska to the development of Orthodox parishes throughout the country by believers from different waves of immigration. Regarding the Russian Orthodox Church, I discuss its gradual split following the tumultuous events of the 20th century into three independent entities: the

Metropolia, which became the Orthodox Church of America (OCA); the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR); and the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia under the Moscow Patriarchate (MP).

In the **second** chapter, I analyze the unification of two Russian Orthodox churches, the ROCOR and the MP in May 2007. I employ the theoretical concepts of diaspora and transnational community to look at the unification agreement between the two churches as an event which altered the ways Russian Orthodox Christianity is lived, experienced, and conceptualized both in Russia and abroad. The unification underscored the dynamics and tensions among different generations of immigrants and allows historically positioning an analysis of religious belonging and Orthodox identity within different periods in Russian and Soviet history.

The **third** chapter presents the stories of personal conversions, or coming to faith, of the most recent wave of immigrants from Russia and countries of the former Soviet Union, who made up the parish during my fieldwork in 2008–2011. Many came to the church after leaving Russia, while others were baptized and had their first church experiences in Russia before moving to the United States. Examining these stories enables accessing a more experiential aspect of the faith of contemporary Russian Orthodox believers in the United States while connecting them to broader socio-cultural and political processes in both home and host countries. The themes of roots and natural connection to Russia's religious traditions in spite of disconnection from them during atheist Soviet times run through the personal narratives, complicating recent findings in academic literature of post-Soviet conversions. This literature, as well as overall anthropological studies, emphasize conversion as a complete break with the past (beliefs

and lifestyles) and the adoption of the fundamentally new (the modernity and tradition duality is often evoked here). How then is one to account for conversion to a religion associated with a national cultural history, to which many of my informants felt connected even while being raised as and living the lives of atheists? I analyze conversion as a process of revealing and uncovering identity, which although very private nonetheless occurs within a particular social, cultural, and political context.

The **fourth** chapter focuses on the life of the local parish after the post-unification split and engages with the literature on congregational and parish studies by both American and Russian scholars. After unification, the local parish consisted almost exclusively of recent post-Soviet immigrants, altering the previous multi-generational balance. I analyze tensions and dilemmas involved in maintaining the Russian Orthodox parish in the American context, focusing on the ways that parishioners relate to the authority of the parish priest. In this context, retrieval of Orthodox identity occurs through actions, practices, and responses to group dynamics. Parish collective identity emerges as fluid and constantly changing, with each member creating new dynamics in the overall makeup. For some, the parish community exists as a source of temptations but also provides a way of growing in faith.

In the **fifth** chapter, I discuss the Orthodox Christian practice of pilgrimage. As newcomers negotiated lines of obedience to the parish priest and searched for a more authentic spiritual experience in the church, they started going on regular pilgrimages to a Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona. Employing the notions of communitas and contestation from the anthropological literature on pilgrimages, I look at the movements between parish church and monastery community and between national and universal

Orthodox traditions and how this movement influences self-understandings of national and religious belonging. I pay special attention to the spiritual practices of Orthodoxy, such as confessions and spiritual talks with monastery elders. For my informants, the monastery setting facilitates more direct and effective spiritual self-work.

In the **sixth**, and last, chapter, I look at one more Orthodox Christian practice, that of icon veneration. I pay particular attention to the visit and reception of the miracle-working icon from Russia to the local parish. Icons, arguably the most portable sacred objects in Orthodox Christianity, are tightly connected to the spiritual lives of individual believers, especially through the practice of prayer. At the same time, miracle-working icons are inseparable from histories of national Orthodox churches, embedded in different geographies and time periods. In this chapter, I show that the miracle-working and myrrh-streaming Theotokos (Mother of God) *Softening of Evil Hearts* icon is a co-creator of modern, post-Soviet Russian history and, as such, connects believers in the Russian Orthodox parish abroad to their national and spiritual home.

Chapter 1

The History of Russian Orthodox Christianity in Russia and in the US

This chapter begins with the history of Russian conversion to Christianity in the tenth century, and continues to present a historical ethnography of the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States. It starts with the first settlements of Russian Orthodox missionaries in Alaska, led by St. Innocent, and their relocation to Northern California after the sale of Alaska to the United States. It provides an overview of the further spread of Orthodox Christianity in the United States and the rise of Orthodox churches based on national ties to home/mother Patriarchates, which spanned two centuries. Special focus is given to the emergence of the Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia (ROCOR), which started in Europe during the 1920s in response to the Revolution of 1917 in Russia and the war on religion declared by the atheist state. ROCOR canonically separated itself from the Moscow Patriarchate (MP), resulting in a schism between two Russian churches, which was put to an end in 2007 with the signing of a unification agreement between ROCOR and MP.

History of Orthodox Christianity in Russia

Before converting to Christianity in 988, Russia was mainly a pagan country. In fact, there was no country per se, but rather a number of loosely connected Slavic city-states. Vladimir, who was the ruler of Kiev at the time, was looking for a religion that would unify the lands of Rus', as it was called then. According to historical records, Vladimir sent his vassals to different countries so they could choose a religion, and they

were most impressed by Byzantine Orthodoxy and Islam. Vladimir did not like certain dietary restrictions in Islam; in his response to the Moslem missionaries, he said: “drinking is the joy of Russians; we cannot do without it,” thus “devotion to drinking was one of the motives for Russia’s conversion to Christianity” (Fedotov 1960: 353). Another motive was Vladimir’s envoys’ absolute fascination with the Liturgical services of Byzantine Orthodox Christianity.

According to the legend, during the Divine Liturgy in the Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople, the envoys finally found what they were looking for: “We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty and we are at a loss to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service surpasses the worship of all other places. For we cannot forget that beauty. Every man, after tasting something sweet, is afterwards unwilling to accept that which is bitter” (qtd. in Fedotov 1960: 372).

There are a few things that are telling in this most famous quote of the Russian conversion to Orthodoxy. First, there is an emphasis on the incredible beauty of the church, which is equated with the divine beauty and the beauty of the spiritual world that can be expressed during the service. Second, both heaven and earth are present in the Divine Liturgy, and worshippers are taken into heavenly places, where “God dwells among men.” Finally, the fact that “the Russians did not ask about moral rules nor demand a reasoned statement of doctrine, but watched the different nations at prayer” illustrates that “the Orthodox approach to religion is fundamentally a liturgical approach, which understands doctrine in the context of divine worship” (Ware 1963: 271).

Although there were other geopolitical motivations and practical reasons for Vladimir to choose Orthodox Christianity as a religion for his country, the focus of the chronicles on the outward beauty of the ritual is significant. Christianity came to Russia not through theological teachings, knowledge of the Bible, or the message of Christ, but through the borrowing of an already formed religious culture. The emphasis from the beginning was on the external side of Christianity, on its ritualism, and "Russian thought entered into this tradition, and it became the basic source of Russian culture" (Schmemann 1963: 299). Given that literacy was a privilege of a few Russian elites at this time, and that Vladimir himself was illiterate and up until his baptism followed pagan rituals and worshipped pagan gods, it is safe to assume, as many historians do, that Russia accepted an Orthodox template with its external elements, while "the soul of the people continued to feed upon the old natural religious experiences and images" (1963: 301). Russian paganism did not actively resist the adoption of Christianity mainly because paganism was not very developed institutionally, lacking organization, literary tradition, and an established mythology: "The core of Russian paganism was not the belief in great gods but the religious veneration of nature herself in her elements and phenomena, only in part personified" (Fedotov 1960: 351). Paganism in Russia, therefore, was concerned with natural life and its cycles, with few pagan deities based in nature.

According to many researchers of Russian religious history, Russia's pagan beliefs and images gradually merged with Christian ones, as later occurred in Alaska, which led to the emergence of a peculiar form of Christianity, usually called in Russian *dvoeverie*, or dual faith. The famous Russian historian and theologian Father George

Florovsky distinguishes between the two cultures – one is the “daytime” Christian culture, which contains the spirit and the mind; the other is the “nighttime” culture, which exists in the realm of dreams and imagination (1937). While the “daytime” culture is the visible accepted form of practicing Christianity, and exists on the surface of cultural life, the “nighttime” culture flows underground, fed by Russian traditional national beliefs, practices, folklore, and feelings about the natural world. This non-confrontational character is exactly what made paganism vital in the development of Russian Christianity – it seemed to embrace the beauty of Christian liturgy, but mixed traditional Christian symbology with its own feelings and imagination, which resulted in the development of specific traits in Russian Orthodoxy.

In Russia, according to Sinyavsky (2001), Christian symbology was harmoniously mixed with traditional folk beliefs and attitudes towards nature. While Russians were not familiar with the dogmatic intricacies of the Holy Trinity, they revered it mainly because of the idea of the Holy Spirit. Sinyavsky observes that the deep mysticism of the Russian people is why they embraced the Holy Spirit as a life-giving force, and as a result, the Holy Spirit is more prevalent in Russian Orthodoxy than the concept of God the Father, and is even considered in some folk poems to be the creator of the world (2001: 286). The Holy Spirit is sometimes perceived as the breath of Christ, which permeates all nature and gives it life, especially on the days of Pentecost (descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles) and the Annunciation of the Mother of God.

Western saints from before the Russian conversion also fit into Russian folk imagination and practices well; they became connected “with the agricultural cycles and the overlapping cycles of human birth, mating and death” and “were personifications of

natural processes and human life stages" (Hilton 1991: 62). St. Nicholas and St. George became two of the most popular saints: and their days are celebrated twice a year, in May and November, which coincide with the farming calendar. Combined with pagan divinities, they and other saints "were connected with the biological and social functions of both women and men and with the cycle of the rural year," therefore giving personal identities and names to the various aspects of nature and special times of the year (1991: 61). There are numerous superstitions surrounding their days, almost all of them trying to predict the outcome of the farming season based on the weather during the saint's day. These superstitions became the source of many sayings and proverbs, a sort of folk wisdom that is still used and applied to agricultural and farming practices, reflecting the needs of rural people for numerous patrons and protectors (see Paxon 2005).

The Christian theme of atonement for sins was evoked on many occasions throughout Russian history, to explain events such as the Mongol domination from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, the schism within the Orthodox church of the seventeenth century, and Peter I's and Catherine II's modernization reforms of the eighteenth century. This theme will return to the Russian spiritual scene after decades of socialism to justify the canonization of the late tsar Nicholas II and his family as passion-bearers (to be discussed in detail in the next chapter), like the first canonized saints in Orthodox Russia, Boris and Gleb. Boris and Gleb were sons of Prince Vladimir, who initiated Russia's conversion to Christianity in 988, and were murdered in 1015 by their brother Sviatopolk in his attempt to take power after the death of their father. This type of power struggle was not novel in medieval Russia, but in the hands of early Christian hagiographers, the political history of Russia was transformed into a theological and spiritual history by

"removing accounts of their assassinations from a specifically localized political context and placing them instead within the context of the cosmic struggle between God and the devil," thus making Boris and Gleb heroes in the battle between good and evil (Sciacca 1990: 253). Both Boris and Gleb were informed about the evil intentions of their brother, but had chosen not to resist him, and instead accepted their deaths with humility and humbleness. This was interpreted, on the one hand, as an act of self-sacrifice that now defines Russia as a member of the Christian community and it "ritually formalized the state adoption of Christianity" (1990: 253). On the other hand, their deaths were seen as an imitation of Christ in His suffering and a reenactment of Christ's passion in order to provide salvation, in this case – to Russia and its people.

According to Fedotov, kenoticism is the dominant motive and defining characteristic of Russian Christian spirituality (1960). Kenosis denotes the imitation of Christ's remarkable humility, and finds its basis in St. Paul's description of Christ's renouncement of the divine status: "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8). This Christian spirit of obedience and humility is exemplified in the lives of Boris and Gleb. Their canonization indicated that the Russian Orthodox Church valued a death which imitated Christ's as much as it did a martyr's death for Christ. The first Russian saints, Boris and Gleb, "created in Russia a particular, though liturgically not defined, order of 'sufferers,' the most paradoxical order of the Russian saints" (Fedotov 1960:105). While the sanctification of suffering is not a uniquely Russian trait,

involuntary suffering and non-resistance to violence became the most deeply ingrained values in the Russian Christian consciousness, and kenotic spirituality emerged as a national trait, in both religious and secularized forms.

Russia embraced many paradoxes of Christianity, and the lives of saints are a good illustration how these paradoxes operated, in both life and death. By removing the deaths of Boris and Gleb from the context of politically motivated assassinations and presenting them instead as spiritually significant acts, the hagiography of the Christian church awarded both saints “the status of intercessors for Rus’ in God’s court and the ability to work miracles on the behalf of their newly converted countrymen and to aid their princes in defeating the attacks of the nomads” (Hollingsworth 1999: 210). According to Fedotov, the fact that “Saints Boris and Gleb immediately upon their death became the patrons of Russia, heavenly defenders in the days of national danger, a dignity which they preserved to the threshold of the modern Russian Empire” constitutes one of the main paradoxes of their cult (Fedotov 1960: 104). After all, Boris and Gleb did not directly engage in the fight against evil, and their deaths were far from heroic – they were just passive victims of their power-hungry brother. However, this paradox is perceived to be only the reflection of the main paradox of Christianity itself, in which the cross – the symbol of all sufferers – is transformed from the weapon of death into a sign of salvation and an emblem of victory against evil forces (Fedotov 1959: 31).

In Orthodox Christianity, unlike in Western Catholicism with its focus on the suffering Christ, “the Crucifixion is not separated from Resurrection,” and Christ, notwithstanding His outward humiliation, demonstrates His inward glory and reemerges as “our victorious king, not in spite of the Crucifixion, but because of it” (Ware 1963:

232-3). Russia, as a country, was conceived in Christian ideals, values and images. The carrying of the cross and the acceptance of the value of suffering became ingrained in the Russian understanding of Christianity, and the history of the country was always interpreted in Christian terms of purification, rebirth, suffering, and atoning for sins.

Russian Orthodox Christianity in the United States

Native Orthodox Christianity in Alaska

The emergence and development of Orthodox Christianity in Alaska is documented mainly in historical and theological accounts, with the exception of the work done by Sergei Kan, arguably the only ethnographer who considers the effects of Christianity on the traditional Alaskan lifestyle. Russian Orthodox Christianity planted deep roots in Alaska and became indigenized, which have led some to call it Native Orthodox Christianity. Scholars also speak about Russian America when referring to Alaska, calling attention to the presence of Russian churches throughout the Alaskan landscape. They belong to the Orthodox Church of America (OCA), a diocese that unites Orthodox Christians of all ethnic backgrounds, and includes 700 parishes in the United States, Canada and Mexico. According to the OCA official website, the church now claims more than two million faithful, the number of which continues to grow.

Although OCA is presently a multi-ethnic church, it started as a mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska in 1794, when eight missionaries from the Valaam monastery of Northern Russia arrived on Kodiak Island. Russian missionary activities culminated in the 1820s in a large scale effort led by John Veniaminov, arguably the most well-known and respected Russian missionary, who eventually became the Patriarch of

Moscow, and who was canonized in 1977 by OCA as St. Innocent of Alaska. He is credited with making Orthodox Christianity an integral part of cultural activity in Alaska, weaving it into the fabric of native life (by translating the Bible into native languages, and incorporating them into the liturgy and teachings of the faith), while at the same time being more tolerant of and sensitive to indigenous Alaskan cultures compared to successive, post-1867 US missions (Norlander 1995).

Before the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, Native Americans in Alaska were politically independent, and conversion to Christianity was not imposed by force. As many scholars observe, after the sale Alaskans came under American political domination, which included interference in their internal affairs, economic resources, and cultural ways of life – communal living and shamanism are some examples (Kan 1991). Presbyterian missions established in Alaska in 1878 were a tool of the American state to justify this interference from a religious point of view, equating the promotion of Christianity with a civilizing mission. The use of native languages was forbidden both in schools and in churches, and many native rituals were declared pagan, including those that combined native and Orthodox elements, such as the use of sacred objects. This is not to say that the Russian Orthodox Church was in full approval of everything native, but rather that it tolerated native customs while emphasizing the ritualistic nature of Orthodoxy, assigning a large role to sensory impressions, and promoting the use of sacred objects such as icons that would be perceived as analogous to many native rituals (Znamenski 1999: 69). Presbyterian missions, however, viewed both native and Orthodox rituals as backward and idolatrous, and set out to create a new culture of “competent Christian citizens” (Kan 1991: 382).

The overzealousness of the Presbyterian missionaries backfired and contributed to almost complete Tlingit conversion to Orthodoxy by 1910. Throughout the twentieth century, and especially from the 1960s, Orthodox Christianity became an important tool to reassert ethnic identity and to guide nationalist aspirations. Native Americans "started to treat Orthodoxy as a useful ideological instrument to mediate with American culture and used this church to reinforce their own identity" (Znamenski 1999: 260). Adherence to Orthodox Christian beliefs and practices was seen as a proof that they had been civilized already, and helped to dissipate the sense of inferiority and backwardness that American missionaries alluded to (cf. Robbins 2004 on inferiority feelings of the native population in the Papua New Guinea towards foreign missionaries). It also allowed the Tlingit to maintain their most important rituals, albeit infusing them with Christian symbols and meanings.

For example, Kan discusses the funeral and the forty-day period that follows death as one of the rituals in which native and Christian meanings coexist. In accordance with Orthodox Christian theology, the forty days after death are crucial for the soul: for three days it is allowed to wander the earth, usually staying close to home; after that it is shown Heaven for six days before being sent to Hell for thirty days. On the fortieth day, the soul once again ascends to God and awaits Judgment Day. Praying for the soul of the departed for forty days and burning candles at home and in church are considered to be the relatives' duties to ease the soul's transition into a different and unknown realm. During the time when the soul is separated from the body, it is extremely vulnerable, lacking all the accumulated knowledge of the body. Although traditional Tlingit cosmology lacked such an elaborate account of the soul's journeys, they too had a forty

day intense mourning period believing that the soul makes its way through the deep forest into the land of the dead. Thus Orthodox prayers for the Tlingit resemble traditional mourning songs aimed at “clearing the underbrush from the spirit’s path,” and burning of candles to help “light the way for the soul” (Kan 1999: 430, 433). This is what Kan calls ‘indigenization’ of Christianity, which he views “as a process of cultural adaptation, in which the fundamental meanings of a cultural system are retained… but are expressed in the symbolic forms of another, non-native culture” (1985: 196).

In one of his articles, Kan focuses on narratives of Tlingit elders (interviews from 1970s to late 1980s) as they attempt to rethink the Native American pre-Christian religion “by affirming its validity while acknowledging the greater wisdom and power of Christianity” (1991: 364). Some elders try to reinterpret shamans as prophets and healers in Christian terms. They liken the shaman’s ability to heal to the miraculous healings by Christ, and the shaman’s trance and imitation of different voices of spirits to the Apostles’ receiving the Holy Spirit. Some fully assigned the shaman’s spiritual powers to the Holy Spirit, and created categories of good and bad shamans “to differentiate between those shamanistic activities that resembled Christian practices and those that were clearly ‘heathen’” (Kan 1991: 373). Overall, they resist the idea that white people had taught them something new, and they acknowledge only that whites brought natives the Bible and taught them the proper ways of worshipping (Kan 1991, 1999).

This process of reinterpretation resembles what Velho calls productive anachronism, the way of interpreting the past using terms of the present and vice versa (2009). Kan, who employs a so-called etho-ethnohistorical approach, argues for the importance of understanding indigenous versions of history, because for natives “history

is not just some events that happened in the past but a vital force that continues to shape the present" (1991: 381). In turn, views of the past also tend to change in response to more recent events and social change, and in this respect newly emerged views on Russian Orthodox Christianity (which has been enjoying a remarkable revival since the 1960s) can be telling. For example, indigenous people in Alaska compare Russian and American attitudes to their land and ways of life; the former supported communal values and traditional subsistence practices, while the latter focused on individual achievements and wage labor. They also try to reposition Orthodoxy by emphasizing that it is the oldest Christian denomination in the world, which makes it more appealing, for "older ideas and practices have tended to have higher prestige in Tlingit culture" (Kan 1999: 535).

Nevertheless, the main reason for reaching back into the past for meaning seems to lie in resentment of the secular view of the world, which, in the words of one elder, undermines both traditional Tlingit and traditional Orthodox Christian spirituality, "denies spiritual reality and spiritual life itself, and results in loss of identity" (qtd. in Kan 1999: 537). This sentiment is echoed by the Rev. Dr. Michael Oleska, who proposes it as the conflict "between a traditionally sacramental vision of life and a radically secular one" (1992: 210). Dr. Oleska also views self-identity of traditional cultures as essentially spiritual, and considers the processes of secularization to be a threat not only to local identities but to the Orthodox Church itself, "since by becoming 'incarnate' in the traditional cultures of Alaska, the church has linked her destiny with them" (25). Here Dr. Oleska clearly indicates not only that Orthodoxy took root in Alaska, but also that Orthodox Christianity itself is now partly defined by the processes taking place in Alaska.

The treatment of native Orthodox experiences as indicative of the state of the Orthodox Church as such blurs the line between Christian center and Christian periphery: the center is not viewed as imposed onto the periphery, but is constantly being reshaped and reformed by the periphery's spiritual practices. To put it differently, there is no center or periphery as such, but a universal Church which is constantly transformed by local practices. Christian identity here is linked to a particular place and to a particular culture, while at the same time contributing to the construction of a universal Orthodox Christian identity. This can be further illustrated by the existence of Orthodox Christian saints, who are firmly positioned in their cultural contexts, but at the same time transcend spatial boundaries and become a part of universal Orthodoxy. Alaskan Christianity has produced a few of its own saints (Russian missionaries, local martyrs), and one can see their icons in Russian Orthodox Churches throughout the world.

Further Developments/Spread of the Orthodoxy in the United States

From Early Voluntary to Political Forced Migration (late 19th to early 20th century)

While emergence of the Orthodox Christianity in Alaska happened mainly due to the missionary activities of Russian monks, its mainland spread was closely tied to the efforts of immigrants. Virtually absent from the mainland religious scene for most part of the nineteenth century, "a growing tide of immigration from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East" made Orthodoxy, by the late 1880s, "one of the fastest growing faiths in America" (Erickson 2008: 37). Through over a century of existence in the New World, Orthodox Christianity underwent a series of transformations. Starting as a

multiethnic church under the ecclesiastical authority of the Russian Orthodox church, then shaped by many political and economic developments of the twentieth century in the Old World, Orthodoxy in America now presents a kaleidoscope of parishes organized along ethnic lines (which occasionally experience influxes of new American converts to Orthodox Christianity), as well as a multiethnic Orthodox Church of America (which, although granted autocephalous status in 1970, is still not accepted by all Orthodox Patriarchates). In this section I will provide a short history of Orthodoxy in the United States, paying particular attention to the development of Russian Orthodox parishes in light of the politics of the home country and connected to it changes in immigration flows.

Between 1870 and 1920, 27 million immigrants entered the United States, including Eastern Christians from south, east and central Europe (Erickson 2008: 42). Like Catholic and Jewish immigrants in this wave, Eastern Christians tended to be illiterate young males in search of jobs and with little intention to remain in the country permanently. They would start to establish parish churches not because they were deeply religious, but rather because for them Orthodox Christianity was tightly connected to all aspects of life at home. Church, therefore, was viewed by these groups of immigrants "as the foremost instrument for the preservation of ethnic identity and the cultivation and transmission of the community's cultural heritage" (Calivas 2003: 132). The newly formed parishes were thus tailored to the needs of a specific group, and churches became not only places of worship but also secure spaces for social gatherings and the formation of networks of mutual support. In these parishes, cultural traditions were maintained and celebrated, and generally there was "a very close relationship between ethnicity, language

and faith" (Fitzgerald 2003: 14). However, with all the cultural continuity in the lives of Eastern Orthodox immigrants, there was a complete absence of the traditional church-state affiliations present in their home countries.

Moreover, the identification of Orthodoxy with ethnic and cultural traditions of home indicates little knowledge of theological doctrines and canonical laws, according to which Orthodox parishes should be established. Instead, the immigrants took note of the ways some Protestant groups were running their congregations, and established lay boards of trustees, whose responsibility included the organizing of the parish legally, controlling parish finances and property, and hiring and supervising the priest (Fitzgerald 2003: 15). These structural innovations in the running of the Orthodox parish had important consequences in the ways Eastern Orthodoxy developed in the United States, with many tensions present during times of different waves of migration, when immigrants tried to reconcile traditions of the Old World with the practices of the New one.

The emergence of many ethnic Orthodox Christian parishes in the United States presented some new challenges to the North American diocese, which was still headed by Russian Orthodox bishops. One of these challenges lay in the need to "ensure the structural unity of Orthodoxy in America while at the same time respecting the wide variety of languages, customs, and forms of worship" of many (Serbian, Romanian, Greek) ethnic groups (Erickson 2008: 47). Bishop Tikhon Bellavin, who was the ruling bishop of the North American diocese from 1898 to 1907, was especially dedicated to preserving the multiethnic character of the diocese while at the same time becoming familiar with American ways and adjusting parish organization and management

accordingly. He advocated for greater autonomy for the church of America and for opening Orthodox seminaries so Americans could "become pastors for the people from within their own milieu, knowing their spirit, customs and language" (qtd. in Erickson 2008: 50). Bishop Tikhon is credited with transforming North American dioceses and in establishing many new programs and projects; however, up until the Russian Revolution of 1917, the archdiocese remained very dependent on the Russian Empire, with which the Russian Orthodox Church was closely associated.

Politics in the Old World, which almost inevitably affect both mother churches and their offspring abroad, presented another obstacle for Orthodox unity in the United States. Bishop Tikhon’s story offers good insight into this connection. In February 1917, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia was forced to abdicate and yield his power to a provisional government; however, his long-held wish to see the office of Patriarch restored to the Russian church materialized, ironically, on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution. The office of Patriarch was abolished by the church reforms of Peter I in the late seventeenth century, in which the Holy Synod replaced the Patriarchate, and in which the Russian Orthodox Church was renamed the “Department of the Orthodox Confession,” thus transforming it from a divine institution into a department of state (Ware 1963: 126). On October 31, 1917, the All-Russian Council of the Orthodox Church decided to restore the office of Patriarch, and a few days later Tikhon was elected the “first Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia in more than two hundred years” (Erickson 2008: 48, 59). This was a bittersweet moment in Russian church history – while the restoration of the Patriarchate granted the church a new level of independence and authority in managing its affairs, it coincided with its almost immediate persecution as an ideological foe of the

new Bolshevik government – persecution which the Church would have been unlikely to survive, however, if not for the reinstated office of the Patriarch. According to earlier statistics, around twelve thousand clergy and one hundred thousand lay Orthodox were killed following the Revolution of 1917 (Erickson 2008: 60), but numbers of persecuted continue to grow as more archival materials become available. Patriarch Tikhon himself was first deposed, and then put under house arrest, where he died in 1925. For the Orthodox churches in America, these developments in Russia signaled a crisis in the leadership and authority of the Russian Orthodox Church, and led to a restructuring of Orthodoxy in the host country.

The restructuring involved jurisdictional changes for Russian as well as other ethnic Orthodox churches. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, Greek parishes moved into a new American archdiocese as a part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Serbian parishes came under the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade, and a new Albanian Orthodox archdiocese in America was established (Erickson 2008: 68-70). The Russian Orthodox authority in North America also experienced a series of changes in jurisdictional affiliations, which by 1930s resulted in emergence of three separate Russian Orthodox jurisdictions: one original – the Metropolia, the shorter version of its original name, the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America (ROGCCA), and two new ones: one under the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate (MP), and another under the authority of a synod (not to be confused with the Synod established by Peter I), which became known as the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR).

In response to political changes in Russia, the Metropolia (how the North American archdiocese came to be known) announced itself in 1924 as "a temporarily

self-governing church" maintaining only “spiritual ties” with the mother church in Russia, until the time the latter would be able to engage in ecclesiastical affairs "under conditions of political freedom" (Erickson 2008: 62). This newly acquired institutional identity of the Metropolia was further amplified after the MP decided to establish its own jurisdiction in America in 1933, after accusing the Metropolia of initiating the illegitimate split of the Russian church.

ROCOR was founded by a group of refugee Russian bishops in 1922, in Sremski Karlovtsy, Serbia. The Russian Revolution and the following civil war resulted in massive displacement of the Russian population, and for the Orthodox communities in the loss of communication with ecclesiastical authority. As the canonical basis for the existence of the independent ecclesiastical center abroad, the bishops took one of the last Decrees issued by Patriarch Tikhon in 1920: "In the event a diocese...finds itself completely out of contact with the Higher Church Administration...the diocesan bishop immediately enters into relations with the bishops of neighboring dioceses for the purpose of organizing a higher instance of ecclesiastical authority" (Shchukin 1972, online, ROCOR website). As in the case of the Metropolia, the instituted Synod Abroad was conceived as a temporary self-governing body, “the representative of the free part of the Russian Church, temporarily torn away from its Homeland” (ibid.).

ROCOR gradually severed all canonical ties with the church in Russia, which it considered illegitimate, especially in light of two recent developments. One had to do with the introduction in 1925 of changes to church canon law and liturgy (which became known as *obnovlenchestvo*, or Renovationism). The second development was the declaration of loyalty to the Soviet state as being from God by the metropolitan Sergius

Stargorodsky in 1927. This declaration, in which Metropolitan Sergius called for the joys and sorrows of the Soviet state and of the church to be shared, became known as *Sergianstvo*, one of the most explosive issues two churches had to deal with in the years to come. ROCOR considered itself to be the organization carrying the true spirit and canonical structure of Orthodoxy, and in 1927 it established its own diocese in America.

The emergence of the three new autonomous jurisdictions of the Russian Orthodox Church on American territory had lasting effects on the development of parish life in the country, and on the identities of parishes and individual parishioners. Loyalties of parishioners were forming along the lines of belonging to a particular jurisdiction, which in turn was chosen based on both political and emotional connections to the Old World. Those who chose the jurisdiction of the MP justified it by the need to remain loyal to the Mother Church in these trying times, notwithstanding its compromises with the new government. Those who sided with ROCOR believed these compromises went too far, with the Church becoming merely the tool of the state, and preferred to show their loyalty to Russian Orthodoxy by preserving its historic and spiritual heritage abroad for future generations and in honor of the numerous victims of the godless regime. Lastly, parishioners of the newly, albeit temporarily, independent and self-governing Metropolia distanced themselves the most from the politics in the Old World, focusing instead on the uniqueness of the Orthodox history and experience in the New World.

Belonging to separate jurisdictions also led parishioners to resent each other, with emotions running high in the Russian Orthodox communities in America (Erickson 2008: 64). Owing in large part to the national tradition of alleviating tension with a joke, the following anecdote was (and still is) circulating in the Russian community. On a deserted

island two men meet; one of them, who is Russian, had already been living there for some time. He shows the newcomer the surroundings, including two Orthodox churches, one opposite another. The newcomer is puzzled as to why two churches are needed for only one person. The Russian explains: “This is the church I go to, and the other – I do not go to.” Jokes aside, this practice continues among Orthodox believers up to this day. With continuing political and ideological ebbs and flows, people might choose to drive two hours to visit their church while living ten minutes away from the other Orthodox church.

Multiple Russian and other ethnic Orthodox jurisdictions created also a unique situation from the canonical point of view. According to Orthodox canons, only one jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church can exist in a given geographic location, which is known as “canonical territory.” In the case of Russian Orthodox Christianity, canonical territory, this “ecclesiastical and political category widely used to denote the space of domination,” was always movable and adjustable to include Russian imperial expansion and Russian ethnic settlements (Agadjanian and Rousselet 2005: 40). Because one of these ethnic settlements in Alaska was established due to the efforts of Russian Orthodox monks, the United States, part of which Alaska eventually became, was considered to be a canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church up to the 1920s (actually, the MP still holds it to be true). This gave the MP theological grounds to assert its position as the only true jurisdiction in the United States, while both ROCOR and the Metropolia had to announce their independence only ‘temporarily,’ to be ended when the Mother Church in Russia was to become free again.

This is what happened to ROCOR (to be discussed in detail in the next chapter on unification), but not to the Metropolia. The Metropolia was granted autocephalous status by the MP in 1970 and became the self-governing Orthodox Church in America (OCA), albeit not recognized as such by the majority of Orthodox jurisdictions (Fitzgerald 2003: 20, Slagle 2011).

The next chapter will discuss a particular moment in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church, a step towards canonical unity: the unification of two branches of Russian Orthodoxy, MP and ROCOR, in May 2007. The chapter will unpack many discourses and reactions, both official and not, leading to and following unification.

Chapter 2

Unification of Two Russian Orthodox Churches

While divisions within the Church are loathed, they seem to be omnipresent in Christianity. There have been numerous divisions and splits throughout the centuries: between Eastern and Western Christianities (Orthodox and Catholic), within Western Christianities (Catholic and Protestant), within Eastern Christianities (Eastern and Oriental Orthodox), and, as was discussed in the last chapter, within the Russian Orthodox Church. This chapter will analyze the unification of two branches of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Moscow Patriarchate of Russia (MP) and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), and will present the ethnography of the split experienced at the local level in one ROCOR parish in Southern California.

This parish was among the few in the United States that experienced a split after the unification, with the priest and half of the parishioners leaving because they did not accept the authority of the MP. In this chapter I will analyze the tensions and dynamics involved in the preservation and reaffirmation of the national and religious identity of Russian people abroad at the moment of this structural change, and will explore the moods and narratives involved in formal and informal negotiation of the decision to stay or to leave.

I will show that although belonging to a national (Russian Orthodox) church is an important element of self-identification among Russian Orthodox immigrants in the US, the interplay of spiritual, cultural, political, and national aspects of religion produce different meanings of "Russia" among members of different waves of migration – and

that this difference was mostly dormant until the event of unification. This moment of crisis unleashed these different sets of meaning, resulting in confrontation and disagreement among the people of one faith and one parish. Some regarded the event as “traumatic” and sudden, yet others saw it as an expected occurrence, one of many aimed at testing and tempting the parish’s moral and spiritual strength at a critical moment, be it of national or individual importance. The split after unification provided a new context for negotiating and reaffirming of one’s identity as a Russian Orthodox Christian in a foreign socio-cultural environment. By using it as a case study of crises of identity and faith, this chapter will elaborate on the tensions individual believers experience when faced with connections and/or disconnect between political and religious developments, national and universal faith, religious cultural tradition and individual spiritual quests, and institutional and personal values.

Background History of the Division and Unification of the Russian Orthodox Church – Revisiting the Past

Signed in May 2007, the unification agreement of restored canonical communion between ROCOR and MP brought an end to their institutional and canonical separation. This agreement symbolizes the spiritual unification of the Russian people, who were forcefully separated in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war and persecution of the Church in the 1920s. For almost a century there was a division in the Russian Orthodox Church, between the Moscow Patriarchate, which officially accepted the Soviet regime, and ROCOR, which was formed in response by Russian emigrants. Established in the 1920s in Russian émigré circles, centered first in

Europe and since the 1950s in the United States, ROCOR saw itself carrying the true spirit and canonical structure of Orthodoxy, which, according to its members, had been lost in Russia after the communist revolution of 1917, and after Patriarch Sergiy declared loyalty to the Soviet state in 1927.

Talks about unification between ROCOR and the Moscow Patriarchate started in the 1990s following the fall of the Soviet Union and the so-called revival of religion in the former Soviet sphere. One of the signs that the Church in Russia was now willing and able to function independently from state was that, in the 1990s, it started the canonization process for the victims of religious persecution by the Soviet state, now known in the Church as the New Martyrs of Russia. The new process of canonizations "took place independently of ROCOR, overcoming both public and occasional government resistance and marking a re-evaluation of the past" (Zolotov 2007). However, the New Martyrs of Russia had already been canonized by ROCOR in 1981, indicating that religious developments in the diaspora can and have influenced the processes of the Church at home.

In August 2000, the Jubilee Council of Russian Orthodox Bishops unanimously approved the canonization of the last Romanov family: Tsar Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, and their five children. The decision for canonization was largely based on many reported miracles associated with Nicholas II and his family, which had been thoroughly documented over the years. Although talks about the tsar's canonization had started already in the early 1990s, they were treated as a charged political and moral issue because of his perceived weakness as a ruler of the country, which he demonstrated repeatedly in both domestic and international affairs, and which, in the views of many,

had ultimately led to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. One moral argument against canonization was the close connection of the tsar and his family to the controversial figure of Grigori Rasputin, a powerful healer and, as many believed, a religious prophet, who had strong influence over the family and interfered in all levels of imperial decision making. However, the argument that ultimately won the debate over canonization concentrated on the tsar's family life in exile after his abdication in 1917, after which the whole family was executed on Lenin's orders in July of 1918.

The Council of Bishops did not canonize the tsar and his family as martyrs, for this category is designated for those who died explicitly for their Christian faith and convictions. Instead, it was emphasized that they met their death with humbleness, patience, and meekness, and in imitation of Christ, who voluntarily endured suffering and death at the hands of political enemies. It was stressed that the tsarist family had ample opportunities to leave the country and escape inevitable murder, but chose to remain in Russia and share with the fate of the Russian people. The proponents of canonization compared this period of exile to the lives of the early Russian saints, Boris and Gleb, and it was concluded that the way Nicholas II and his family had accepted their fate was similar in spirit to that of the first saints. As a result, Nicholas II and his family were canonized as sufferers, or passion bearers – people who met their death with Christian non-resistance. It was also stressed that, just as Boris and Gleb died for the atonement of the pagan sins of pre-Christian Russia, so did the tsar's family die for the atonement of many sins of the westernized and increasingly secularized Russia of the early twentieth century.

Evoking the example of the first Russian saints, Boris and Gleb, signaled for many the end of atheism and the return of Russia to its spiritual roots. Canonization of the tsar and his family, along with more than a thousand other New Martyrs, opened up the way to reestablishment of the canonical communion between ROCOR and MP. In 2005, the IV All-Diaspora Council in San Francisco approved a resolution for the unification of two churches.

Proponents of unification pointed out that while the Decree signed by Patriarch Tikhon in 1920 gave the canonical basis for separation, "The Regulations of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia" developed out of this Decree outlined conditions for ending this separation: "The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad is an indissoluble part of the Russian Orthodox Church, and for the time until the extermination in Russia of the atheist government, is self-governing on conciliar principles" (qtd. in Perekrestov 2007). It was recalled that ROCOR was conceived as a temporary institution under extraordinary conditions, and "must be abolished without delay after the restoration of normal social and ecclesiastical life in Russia" (ibid.). In the eyes of the supporters of unification, ROCOR's mission of tending to the dispersed flock in the diaspora can now be strengthened by reinstituting ties with the Mother Church.

However, conditions in Russia in the 1990s, and even in the 2000s, were not considered favorable by the opponents of unification. Of the list of objections, both spiritual and political in nature, which they reiterated persistently, two were particularly emphasized.

The first was the so-called *Sergianstvo* issue: the official acceptance in 1927 by Metropolitan Sergiy Stragorodsky of the Soviet government as the one from God, and his

declaration (on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church) of loyalty to the Soviet state. According to a widely cited saying of Metropolitan Sergiy, the Soviet state's "joys and successes are our joys and successes, and … failures are our failures" (qtd. in Zolotov 2007). The second objection concerns the participation of the Moscow Patriarchate in the World Council of Churches (WCC) since the 1960s, the so-called ecumenism issue.

In the first case, opponents demanded an official apology from Russia for the actions of Metropolitan Sergiy. In fact, the apology had already been issued in 1991 by then-Patriarch Alexis II, but remained largely unknown to parishioners of ROCOR churches:

> That declaration is part of the history of our Church. As a person of the Church, I must take upon myself responsibility for everything that happened in the life of my Church: not only the good, but that which was difficult, lamentable, and erroneous. It would be too simple to say, 'I did not sign it and don't know anything…' Today we are able to say that untruth was mixed in his [Metropolitan Sergius'] Declaration... Defending one thing, he had to make compromises in something else. Were there other organizations or other people among those who had to bear responsibility not only for themselves but for the fate of thousands of others, who in those years in the Soviet Union did not have to proceed in like manner? It is not only before God, but also before all of those people to whom the compromises, silence, forced passivity or expressions of loyalty that the Church leadership allowed themselves to make in those years brought pain that I ask forgiveness, understanding and prayers. *(Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, № 10, 1991)*

However, even when the apology became known, it was not considered satisfactory, since it was made in a self-justifying form, according to opponents; i.e., the Russian Church had two choices – to cooperate or be destroyed. By being published rather than announced, the apology was also seen as lacking a public nature.

In the second case, the Moscow Patriarchate refused to suspend its membership in the Ecumenical Council, although it pointed to some fundamental disagreements between Eastern Orthodox and Western (Catholic and Protestant) forms of Christianity, and stressed that the participation includes cooperation in social issues and not ones of a canonical nature. This did not satisfy the opponents either – in their view, the World Council of Churches is a preview of the future Church of the Antichrist described in Revelation. One of my informants, Elena, reiterated this position from her talks with the opponents: "the World Council of Churches prepares the place for the arrival of the Antichrist. It is said in the Apocalypses that the Antichrist will unite all churches and all gods, and that all will bow to him. So all who participate in this Council are ecumenists. And ecumenism is heresy." In the Orthodox tradition, heresy is seen as any practice or position that violates Church teaching regarding the primacy of Orthodoxy and the one true and apostolic Church.

It should be noted that basic principles of faith were not part of this disagreement between MP and ROCOR, rather, the disagreements centered around the authority of those who can and should carry the Russian Orthodox faith forward, which in turn is based on the authenticity of a canonical connection to the apostolic tradition and on the ability to resist heresies abundant in the modern world.

While unification was supposed to be a largely positive event, ending a nearly century-long split within the body of the Russian Orthodox Church, it inadvertently produced traumatic consequences: namely, another split. Since this split occurred along the lines of different waves of migration to the US, with earlier post-revolutionary immigrants opposing it and newer post-Soviet ones embracing it, it might be productive

to analyze the events following the unification by employing theories from the fields of globalization and religion, and of diaspora and transnational communities. The next section will engage with theoretical insights from these studies.

Diasporas and Transnational Communities

In her ethnographic study of the traveling miracle icon, Nina Schmit uncovers the dialectic of mutual imaginings that transcends time and space between members of the Russian Orthodox diaspora in the United States and the Russian Orthodox community in Russia (2005). She reviews the response of the Russian diaspora in the United States to the movie made in Russia about the myrrh-steaming icon of the last tsar Nicholas II, which was written in the United States and then traveled throughout Russia in the late 1990s, attracting large crowds of believers. Tsar Nicholas II, who was already revered as a saint in the ROCOR but was not yet canonized by the Church in Russia, is an embodiment of the Russian 'Golden Age,' of the myth of Holy Russia, and of the past lost after the revolution, but which is now slowly being recovered. Schmit observes that the process of recovering the lost past occurs differently for different parts of the Russian Orthodox community, depending on what constitutes a homeland for the Russian Orthodox diaspora, on the one hand, and for the transnational community, on the other. Schmit makes a distinction between the two by suggesting that the Russian diaspora in the United States had internalized its status of exile, which implies a complete break with the homeland, while the transnational community is characterized by the continuity of this relationship (218). She argues that the movie about the icon of the late Tsar, which is tellingly called *The Return*, helps to transform the diaspora into a community with

transnational characteristics by appealing to the part of the past embedded in the collective memory of different generations of Russian people, migrants or not, and by bridging this past with the present. She looks at the dynamics of mutual imagining and remembering of the past, indicating that, due to the growing transnational character of interactions, there is a reversal of the traditional flow of religious influence, which no longer originates in the center (Russia) but instead assumes a reversed and multi-directional quality (cf. Csordas 2009).

I started with this case study to demonstrate the recent trends in conceptualizing immigrant communities. In the volume *New Approaches to the Study of Religion* (2004) Steven Vertovec observes that "the term diaspora has become a loose reference confusing categories such as immigrants, guest-workers, ethnic and "racial" minorities, refugees, expatriates and travelers" (6). This confusion partly stems from the previous definitions of diaspora, which tended to encompass all communities living outside their native land (Cohen 1997). While having obvious religious undertones in the concept of "the native land," which has strong Biblical references to the Jewish diaspora (Cohen 1997), the studies of dispersed populations had largely ignored their religious elements, focusing instead on ethnicity and nationality (Vertovec 2004).

However, there is a growing body of scholarly work dedicated to immigrant religions and immigrant churches in the United States (Fang and Ebaugh 2011a and b; Vasques and Marquardt 2003; Ammerman 2005; Levitt 2001). In analyzing processes of transformation of immigrant religions in the US, Fang and Ebaugh point to their Americanization and adaptation to local conditions, which "have global implications and transnational influences" (2001a: 271). While immigrants are "moving away from the

ritual and organizational center of their religious and cultural system" and becoming diasporic to their home traditions, they also capitalize on their new connection to the core country (i.e. United States) and are able to "exert economic, political, social, cultural, and religious influence on their communities of origin" (2001a: 272). In cases of some immigrant religions these processes leads to the reversal of religious influence from center to periphery (cf. Csordas 2009), and in some to establishing multiple centers of their religion.

Such elements of diaspora as exile and displacement, longing for the homeland and maintaining of a collective memory/myth about it, ethno-religious identity, and unwillingness to fully assimilate into the host environment are present in many diverse immigrant communities, including the one discussed in this study – Orthodox Christians from Russia. Diasporas are also subject to historical transformations due to changes in both host and home countries, and combine elements of preservation and change, with the potential to become "a site of creativity" (Cohen 1997: 4).

Conceptually separating diaspora and transnationalism, Vertovec defines a diaspora as an "imagined connection between a post-migration... population and a place of origin and with people of similar cultural origins elsewhere," and transnationalism as "the actual, ongoing exchanges of information, money and resources - as well as regular travel and communication - that members of diaspora may undertake with others in the homeland or elsewhere within the globalized ethnic community" (2004: 281). The line between the imagined and the actual can be crossed, since "all transnational communities comprise diasporas," though some diasporas do not "develop transnationalism" (ibid.).

In my study I differentiate between a diaspora and a transnational community following a set of sometimes-opposing characteristics of each. Post-revolutionary immigrants who form the diaspora resist change and assimilation, since the changes they experienced after forced migration led to lowered social and financial status. Post-Soviet immigrants, on the other hand, embrace changes that brought them better economic conditions and social stability. Immigration also expanded their cultural horizons, and in many cases introduced them to their national religion in new and fresh ways, while previous, forced immigrants were more concerned with preserving their cultural and religious traditions and transmitting them to their children. Overall, post-Soviet immigrants tend to develop transnational, and not diasporic religious consciousness. However, models of diaspora and transnationalism can be present within a single community setting. At the level of the local parish, for example, people have varying means and/or desires of traveling back home, of maintaining connections with family and friends in the homeland. Some parishioners, especially of older age, came to the US to be with their grown children and do not travel even if their children do. For them the ethnic and cultural elements in the local church present a level of significance that might not be shared by younger and more mobile parishioners. It is mostly people from this elder group whom I heard saying on many occasions: “This is a Russian church. All services in the church must be in Russian. We should have a Russian priest. Americans can go to other Orthodox churches if they want English language services.” Processes of adaptation and transplantation of ‘home’ religious tradition vary not only among different waves of migration, but within the same wave as well. This underscores the importance of paying

more careful attention to the particularities of historic, social and political conditions of immigration movements.

In the case study presented below, I will address the processes and tensions involved in negotiating and contesting Russian Orthodox identities among the parishioners of the local church, based on the different positionality of earlier and later waves of immigrants towards Russian history and memory.

The Parish Dynamics Before and Leading to Unification and the Split of 2007

The local parish of ROCOR provides a rare ethnographic case study, because it is one of several parishes in the United States that experienced a split following the unification.

I started my fieldwork after the agreement of canonical communion between two churches had been signed, although I was present in the parish during the time leading to unification. As a result, my interviews reflect mainly the position of those who stayed in the church after the split following unification, who tend to be immigrants of the most recent post-Soviet wave. While I realize that the information gathered in interviews with this kind of informants presents only one side of the story, and therefore is not completely balanced, I should also add that many of my informants refer to the events preceding the unification quite accurately, given my recollections of those events. In this chapter I am giving voices to informants that have experienced – themselves, and through the stories kept in their families – life during official atheism and the war on religion. These voices in my work are louder than voices of generations of earlier, post-revolutionary,

immigrants. It is a handicap from the perspective of a historically full picture, but it reflects the realities of this particular moment in the life of a particular Orthodox parish.

As was mentioned in the Introduction, the parish consisted initially of Russians from the post-revolutionary wave of migration, including members of the Russian nobility, and of Americans converted to Orthodoxy. During the 1980s and 90s, the parish started to attract a regular influx of immigrants of a more recent, post-Soviet wave of migration, which unlike the earlier, forced immigration, was voluntary – for reasons of work, study, joining family, and so on. Their presence in the parish at first generated a certain sense of mistrust, arguably one-sided, coming from the older immigrants, the *zarubezhniki* (translated roughly as 'foreigners') as they were termed, towards the Soviet newcomers – whom they actually did call *Sovetskie* (Soviet), or even *krasnye* (Reds).

Zina remembers that members from the old wave of immigration were very guarded and wouldn't let her in their circle: "I was assigned to the kitchen. I didn't mind, I would mow grass as well, do other upkeep. It was funny; they still viewed us as servants." This curious statement points to the preservation abroad of an old, pre-revolutionary class structure, the division between nobility and peasants, which was erased during the Soviet years and therefore was not part of the lived experience of the new immigrants. Tamara, who came a decade later in the 1990s, also commented on these sharp divisions along good old class lines. "We were *chelyad'* for them, assigned to the kitchen," *chelyad'* being a rather derogatory term for peasant servants. She recalled that during *trapeza* (communal meal following the service) there were special seat assignments, and the newcomers were seated separately from "the worthy ones" (*dostoinye*).

Tamara, however, acknowledged that they were gradually able to form warm relations: “they would tell us about their lives, how they and their parents immigrated. Some of them first immigrated to Brazil or Venezuela, before coming here.” This post-revolutionary immigration was known as “orange migration,” since people had to work manual jobs, such as picking oranges, to provide for themselves and their families, notwithstanding their noble background. Elena, who came to the US in the 1990s, commented on this situation: “They knew French, but did not know English. It was difficult for them.” Here Elena observed that while post-revolutionary immigrants were refined and educated, in immigration they were reduced, at least initially, to menial jobs and poverty.

Nonetheless, suspicions towards everything Soviet persisted. Elena recalled that when she started to teach Sunday school, earlier immigrants withdrew their children. Before, there had been a paid teacher of the Russian language, and “I would have done it for free, but they stopped bringing kids.” However, in just a few years, according to Elena, “things somehow changed very quickly, more young people started to come,” so that a visiting priest, who used to supervise the spiritual life of this church, on his next visit commented that “you now have a completely new parish.”

This transformation of the parish was mainly due to the increased number of post-Soviet immigrants, who were becoming more and more involved in parish affairs. In the early 2000s the parish, for the first time since its conception in 1960s, was assigned a permanent priest: Father John, a young Bulgarian and a fresh graduate of the Orthodox Holy Trinity Seminary in Jordanville, NY, under the ROCOR jurisdiction. As is required in Eastern Orthodoxy, a priest, unless he has taken monastic vows, should be married, so

upon graduation Father John married a young American Orthodox woman, who became a parish *matushka* (endearing way of calling mother in Russian).

The early 2000s was a time period of a new parish growth and formation, and towards 2007 the parish evolved as a social body, and consisted of almost equal numbers of *zarubezhniki* of different generations and a first generation of post-Soviet wave. It also became ethnically diverse, including believers not only from different parts of Russia, but also from the former Soviet republics of Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, as well as Romania and the US.

During Father John's tenure, which many refer to as "our golden years," the parish created a new identity, and initial tensions between *zarubezhniki* and *Sovetskie* seemed to recede into the background. After being transferred to a different parish in 2005, Father John was replaced by another graduate of the same seminary, Father Joseph. Father Joseph was a first-generation immigrant from Poland, who converted to Orthodoxy from Catholicism in the 1990s while already in the United States. He was the priest who led the split after the unification agreement was signed in May 2007, and because of that a further analysis of his position and arguments is in order.

The Splitting of the Parish after Unification: The Role of a Priest

The split that followed the unification of the churches in 2007, as was mentioned previously, occurred along the lines of different waves of migration to the United States, and while *zarubezhniki* tended to oppose unification, immigrants of the voluntary, newest wave overwhelmingly supported it. I should stress that although there are similarities with other parishes that went into schism after the unification, based on the underlying

abovementioned objections, this parish had unique local dynamics, largely influenced by the fact that the priest was driving the split.

Both Father Joseph and *matushka* were uncompromising opponents of unification with the MP, and in the months leading up to the unification they campaigned strongly against it, trying to convince parishioners not to accept it. They did so both through formal channels, such as Parish meetings and meetings of the Parish Council, and through informal ones, such as personal, private conversations with people. One parishioner, Valentina, even remembers that Father Joseph advocated his position during personal confession: “One evening I went to confession, while the night vigil was still in progress, and suddenly Father Joseph started telling me that we should trust him, that he was like Al Gore. You know, Al Gore, who just had his movie on the climate change out. So Father Joseph compared himself to Al Gore who would be right in the long run, but nobody listens to him now.” Besides violating the confessional space, which is to be used for hearing private confessions of sins and giving spiritual guidance, Father Joseph demonstrated himself being subject to sinful passions, which gradually undermined his spiritual authority.

The priest and *matushka*, however, were overall genuinely liked for their service both in and outside of church, and for their outgoing youthful disposition, and because of that there was a tendency at first to listen to their arguments and rationale. Most importantly, though, was the fact that the majority of the newest-wave immigrants were newcomers to the Orthodox faith, and many of them were not even aware of the existing split. For them, this was just the Russian church, abroad but Russian nonetheless. This is how Elena recollects her first steps in church and finding out about the division:

> When I came to this church, more than a year after I came to America, I did not know anything. I heard some conversations, but did not take them seriously. Then I went to Russia and to the local church there, and the priest explained it to me. He said that this church in America was schismatic, and that if I had asked his blessing before I started going there, then he would not have given it to me. He also gave me a book, where some guy from MP was refuting ROCOR's position point by point. I brought this book here, and people got outraged. I remember that I felt that it was all human (*chelovecheskoe*), and that if God brought me to this church, then it was His will. I started to pray for unification, because I realized that these were two parts of one church. What happened before – that was before.

For Elena, church attendance went hand in hand with her growing knowledge about faith and about history. The boundary that separated the two churches was fluid to her; she freely moved between churches in home and host countries, and tried not to get too entangled in politics. She is still grateful to Father John, who would bless people to take communion while in Russia, while other ROCOR priests would deny it. The official ROCOR position in the matters of joint communion was that it should be denied; however, Metropolitan Laurus made a finer distinction between denying it to hierarchy and clergy, "where there is no unity of mind," versus laymen, whose conscience is not "burdened with responsibility for the church administration" (2006). Overall, the immigrants of the newest wave emphasized that they came to church "for spiritual reasons," having been worn out by the domination of political ideologies in many aspects of their Soviet lives. They not only did not know, many of them did not want to know, and were indifferent to the debates.

However, as people of the post-Soviet wave were getting more informed about the arguments for and against unification, mainly because they were constantly raised by father Joseph in his sermons, they started to negotiate the limits of trust and obedience in

their relationship with the priest. Some were questioning his performance as a priest: “He is supposed to be our shepherd, to take care of his flock. Instead of leading us, he is breaking us apart,” Katerina said, after father Joseph’s announcement that he was leaving the church in May 2007. Others expressed doubt in the genuineness and authenticity of his Orthodoxy, as can be seen from Tamara’s question: “Why did he convert from Catholicism? I don’t trust converts, why run from one faith to another. One should stay with his culture and tradition.” For her, religion and culture are inseparable, meaning that one cannot be a good Russian Orthodox Christian if one is not from Russia. Peter tried to separate priests’ personal qualities from his priestly responsibilities: “So what that the priest is liked? People go to church, not to a concert. Church is not a place for intrigue.” Zoe attempted to be diplomatic and non-judgmental: “He is a good person, though very emotional. He truly believes in his position. But he is a very inexperienced priest, and temptations caught up with him. He should have been more cautious.” Temptations were of various natures, and arguably the main one came from his own family, namely *matushka*, who so adamantly opposed unification that for her it “was either divorce or schism (*razvod ili raskol*),” as Elena put it.

In negotiating decisions of whether to leave or to stay, people had to untie many knots, trying to reconcile individual spiritual quests with institutional changes. They were checking their personal experiences and loyalties against bigger discourses of tradition, roots, history, continuity, and authenticity of the Russian Orthodox faith. In the next sections I will discuss the various narratives involved in this negotiation, starting with the narrative on authenticity.

Authenticity and Politics of Forgiveness

In their argument against unification, Father Joseph and his followers (mainly from the second generation of post-revolutionary immigrants) tied the ecumenical and *Sergianstvo* issues mentioned above to the loss of purity of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia. The Church in Russia had lost its authenticity, according to them, because of its cooperation with the Soviet atheist regime. Father Joseph, according to Elena, said that it was important to wait for unification in order for a new generation of clergy to emerge in Russia – a clergy that would not be tainted by cooperation with a secular atheist 'demonic' power and its KGB agents. In his view, there are no untainted priests left in contemporary Russia, with all the good and clean (*chistye*) ones having been executed (New Martyrs). This also extended to the Patriarch, then Alexis II, who in their view was elected illegitimately – hence, grace had left the church in Russia. Elena remembers that she was confused by this particular argument: "I thought that Christ gives grace to the church, and that if priests and patriarchs are unworthy, it does not matter, because they cannot take grace from the church. But they [Father Joseph and *matushka*] for some reason imagine that if a priest is a KGB spy – then there is no grace in church." The image of Russia that came out of Father Joseph's statements was one of an impure place for Orthodoxy, a place that has lost its grace due to a break in canonical succession, and through accepting heresies such as ecumenism and *Sergianstvo*.

The search for the spiritual and institutional purity of the Russian Orthodox Church also had a very personal meaning for Father Joseph and *matushka*, as they had converted to Orthodoxy from Catholicism in the 1990s after coming to the United States from Poland. Elena, who had many conversations with Father Joseph and *matushka*,

recalls that they referred to Orthodoxy as "the only clean church in the world, untainted by heresies," and that if this clean church was to unite with the polluted one in Russia, it "would be like adding a spoon of dirt to a clean glass of water." For them, the perceived illegitimacy and heretical stance of Russian Orthodox authority translated into impurity of practice and spiritual experience, and therefore made it impossible to serve joint liturgies, at which the name of the current Patriarch of Russia is mentioned in prayers, and to participate in those Orthodox sacraments that unification would bring.

This image of a polluted and dirty Russia did not sit well with recent immigrants. While they seriously considered issues of maintaining the canonical purity of succession in Orthodox tradition, they refused to see the Russian Orthodox hierarchy as lacking it. As for the illegitimacy of the Moscow Patriarch and the corruption of priests in Russia, Elena commented that "the *church* cannot lose grace (*blagodat'*) because of actions of one or several priests." Zoe echoed this position by saying that "although I agree that the window of grace narrows as we accept in our circle unspiritual people (*lyudey nedukhovnykh*), it nevertheless does not close completely, grace is still flowing, albeit not as abundantly." Metropolitan Sergiy, for at least some of them, is actually seen as a martyr, who sacrificed his good name for the survival of the Orthodox Church in Russia, and they are confident that he too would be soon canonized, like Patriarch Tikhon was. "What do they want?" Peter asked rhetorically, addressing the anti-unification side, "…that all priests in the Soviet Union should have been shot? With no church and priests left for people? Is church only about killing and eliminating, with no place for life in it?" He went on to express disgust with the ideological nature of the split, stressing that he goes to church "for spiritual needs – to pray, to put candles."

Overall, recent immigrants emphasized spiritual over ideological aspects of faith, with a recurring statement that ideology "is not what I go to church for." In defense of their position, they drew on Christian values of being nonjudgmental, lacking pride, forgiving and asking for forgiveness. As Liza said: "We all make mistakes – the main thing is to admit them and ask forgiveness." Focusing too much on ideology, for them, was seen as being un-Christian, and therefore inauthentic. Igor put it this way: "To understand what was happening during Soviet times, one had to live there, but not in America. Let those throw stones, who are without sin."

These statements bring me to another side of the negotiation, involving narratives of "us" and "them," based largely on the politics of remembering and assigning different values to certain moments of Russian and Soviet history.

Politics of Remembering

Competing narratives of suffering and remembering the past, which incorporated newly revisited issues of class, were woven throughout the present developments. It is not surprising that the forced post-revolutionary Russian migration remained hostile to the Soviet regime – they were robbed of their possessions, forced out of Russia, and had to take low-paying, low-skilled jobs abroad. They looked at Soviet Russia through the prism of victimhood, and while educating their children about Russian pre-revolutionary history, culture, and religion, they were teaching them about the horrors and injustices of an ungodly Soviet regime as well. The victimhood stance internalized by subsequent generations of post-revolutionary immigrants was expressed well in the question posed by a second-generation *zarubezhniki* woman during a pre-unification parish meeting in

spring 2007: "We were taught that they should apologize to us for all they did to us. But now they say that we should apologize to them too. What for?" This question was perceived by a majority of post-Soviet immigrants as a statement of superiority, which originates not only in a sense of belonging to the real authentic Russian Orthodox Church, but also in a spiritual superiority of nobility, a kind of high-level spiritual hierarchy that had been lost in Russia with the take-over of the lower-class culture. Liza responded to it this way: "They left, but we stayed and lived through the communist atheist times. My grandfather was labeled *kulak* [wealthy peasant], he and his family were persecuted and sent to a labor camp. He did not have the opportunity to flee abroad, he was a peasant. First they [Russian nobility] betray the tsar to follow progressive Western ideas, then they leave the country, and now they blame us for the revolution, for living through the Soviet regime and for not becoming martyrs."

Peter made a finer distinction between the first generation and the second/third generation of post-revolutionary immigrants, saying that the former were "real Russian people," who were happy about unification, while the latter didn't love Russia – having been raised in the West, they did not, and could not, have a true spiritual and emotional attachment to it. They became, in Peter's words, more "career parishioners," and Father Joseph, not having been raised in Russia either, was "a career priest, not the one by calling (*po professii, a ne po prizvaniyu*)."

The next section will address the dynamic involved in maintaining traditional ways of Russian (Eastern) Orthodoxy against the background of Western society, with its values of liberalism, democracy and plurality.

Negotiating West/East Differences

Ironically, following a former Polish Catholic into schism was seen by the post-Soviet immigrants as a continuation of the old pattern of the nobility to reject Russian traditional ways of abiding to hierarchical authority, and to embrace the Western values of a democratic descent of the minority in search of truth. In one of his appeals to the parishioners, Father Joseph referred to the undemocratic nature of the decision-making process leading to unification: "They [church hierarchy] made this decision by themselves. They didn't consult you, people." However, the value of democratic procedures in managing church affairs was not equally accepted by all parishioners. On the one hand, in the Church abroad there are annual meetings of parishioners, at which matters of parish life are discussed and voted on (for example, planning of holiday celebrations, electing members of Parish Council, putting in a new floor, and so on). Compared to parishes in Russia, the ROCOR ones are considered to be more democratic and to allow easy access to communication with hierarchs (see Papkova 2011). On the other hand, issues of canonical communion between different branches of the Orthodox Church are seen to be out of the competence of parish meetings. Recalling the visit of the late Metropolitan Laurus to the parish holiday a few years ago, Zoe said: "I listened to Laurus, and I valued his spiritual experience more than mine. If one goes into schism, he shows distrust to the wisdom of hierarchy… Going against hierarchy is quite insolent (*nepodchinenie ierarkhii – derzost' nemalaya*)." Unification supporters, therefore, were willing to delegate the democratic procedure of voting on institutional and canonical life of the Church to higher authorities.

Parishioners of the newest wave of migration placed more value on unity and on restoring the body of the church, and on trying to work through differences to reinstate one Russian Orthodox family. Zoe put it this way: “as in family, no matter who you are as a person, you are still ours. The same in church – we are all needed.” The split, on the other hand, was seen as alien to the Russian communal spirit, and more in line with Western Protestant tendencies of endless separation into sects in search of purity. Igor put the main distinction between a sect and a church as that the former is based on the charismatic authority of a leader, who dissents in one or several matters from the mainstream view, and as a result the sect has a relatively short life-span. Peter commented on the future of Father Joseph’s church this way: “How would they survive, what would be the base of their existence? Would they be buying people? Giving ads in the paper and fooling people? People are not idiots. They will come by mistake a few times and then what?” He was referring to a rather active outreach policy (regular ads in local newspapers, for example) of the new church established by Father Joseph under the umbrella of the Greek Orthodox Church in Resistance, a church in schism from the Greek Orthodox Church. It is also known as the Old Calendar Greek Church, since it did not accept the transition to the new calendar made by the Greek Orthodox Church, and it is not recognized by other Orthodox jurisdictions.

Though embracing the Western values of freedom and democracy in political and social spheres of life, post-Soviet immigrants were not willing to extend them into the matters of managing all church affairs. In this sense, many of them leaned to the side of the so-called Orthodox conservatives (Vrame 2003), who accepted the canonical value of

Orthodox hierarchy, tested by centuries of tradition. In the next section I will address some of the issues involved in the continuity of the Orthodox tradition.

Continuity and Discontinuity of Russian Orthodox Tradition

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, in the discourses following the event of unification, the concepts of both continuity and discontinuity of Russian Orthodox tradition were present, in a dynamic and at times tense relationship. In the official discourses following unification, the main themes have been the reestablishment of the spiritual unity of the Russian people, who share a living bond with their Homeland, and of the role of the Russian Churches in preserving Orthodoxy and "Russianness" among generations of Russian immigrants. In the words of the late Metropolitan Laurus, then the head of the ROCOR, there is one crucial difference in challenges facing the Orthodox Churches in Russia compared to Russian Orthodox churches abroad. In Russia, according to Laurus, the Church has to combat the lingering effects of atheism, which pose the main threat to Russia's cultural existence and salvation. The influences of the West, however, are not too detrimental to Russia, "because Russians remain Russian" in their homeland, being socially and culturally rooted in their tradition. For the Church abroad, on the other hand, the main challenge lies in the dangers of assimilation, which leads to "falling away from the Church." For Laurus, like for many others, Orthodoxy and Russian culture are inseparable, both are "infused with the spirit of Holy Russia," and thus "falling away from the Church" occurs mainly due to the lack of education in the basics of Russian Orthodox culture and the damaging effects of the Western "heterodox and non-Christian, secular environment" (2006).

As Metropolitan Laurus stressed, Russia is not only a canonical territory of Orthodoxy, but also a place where tradition is historically rooted, and therefore the territory itself holds the cultural and spiritual continuity of Orthodoxy, which is most vividly expressed in the concept of Holy Russia – a land graced by saints, monasteries, and miracles. Because Russian people in Russia are physically connected to the territory of this tradition, it also translates into their natural existence as Russians, with a continuity of spiritual and cultural connection, which, though temporarily interrupted by state enforced atheism, nevertheless preserved its roots and ability to flourish. Places abroad, on the other hand, are disconnected from these roots in a very literal sense. Russian people abroad, due to their displacement from their native soil and broken roots, are facing a challenge of staying connected with a spiritual and moral center that is the Homeland, and of maintaining continuity in an inherently discontinuous situation. Holy Russia thus oscillates from being an established geographical location to becoming a moral and spiritual destination – one that can be accessed through Orthodox spiritual and cultural education and practices. Russian culture and religion in these emerging theological and geopolitical discourses are simultaneously assigned to a particular place and transcend it. This ambiguity forms the basis for contesting spiritual and institutional authority within the context of the unification of the two churches, giving way to competing claims of authenticity.

Starting with the first waves of migration, the people of the Russian Orthodox diaspora worked on preserving Russia and its culture and traditions abroad, invoking the historical memory of Holy Russia as their moral compass, and creating conditions of possibility for Orthodox holiness to reemerge in places geographically removed from

Russian soil. They were preserving Russia away from Russia, creating a "Russian world" in foreign spaces, and in the process transforming these places by establishing Orthodox churches, monasteries, and seminaries abroad, which maintained Orthodox ways of life and practice, educated new generations of Orthodox priests, clergy, and icon-painters, and even produced their own saints. As a result of these culturally specific processes, new conditions emerged for resituating and re-conceptualizing the Russian Orthodox spiritual center, where the homeland ceases to be the only site or source of authenticity. In this process of re-mapping spiritual traditions onto new geographies, new landscapes of holiness were produced, infused with symbolic meanings of the sacred and of home.

In this light, consider the following statement made after Liturgy on a Sunday afternoon, the week after the unification agreement was signed, when Father Joseph and his followers announced their decision to leave. It was made by a second generation *zarubezhnik*, who was born and raised in the United States: "Russia is over. It does not matter now what church we will go to – Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox or Orthodox Church of America. We will not come here anymore, because our kids do not understand Russian anyway, and now that ROCOR lost its independent [from Moscow] status, there is no reason to attend it." He further expressed frustration that this parish was becoming increasingly ethnically driven and focused too much on maintaining Russian identity instead of ministering to Americans. Unification of two Russian churches, paradoxically, created for some segments of Russian Orthodox immigrants, especially for second and third generations of post-revolutionary waves, opportunities to start fully assimilating

into the host socio-cultural environment, by letting go of a Russian element of religious identity – for there was no longer a Russia to be saved and preserved.

Russian immigrants of the recent wave, however, reaffirmed Russia as a spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church by, among other things, actively employing the metaphor of roots in positioning Russia at the center. Peter compared Russian Orthodoxy to a tree, and Father Joseph and his followers "are sitting on its branch and cutting it off. What is the point? Roots are staying in Russia." Elena, referring to the readings from the holy church fathers, such as St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco and Father Seraphim Rose, emphasized the significance of national self-identification, and positioned Orthodoxy at the heart of Russian cultural and spiritual tradition: "The deeper the roots, the more difficult is the adaptation to the new environment. Maybe this is why it is harder for us, Russians, to adapt here – our roots are deeper, they connect us to the native soil (*rodnoy zemle*). Cutting off the roots is more painful to us; the tree cannot take a hold here. In Russia we have a nourished soil, Holy Russia, and here it is barren, hard to move from one soil to another, hard to take roots here. It would have been easier if we had grown on the rocky soil, with no deep connections."

For Elena, in order to preserve a connection with native soil while being transplanted into a foreign one, and in order to survive abroad as a sort of "potted plant," one has to live and grow roots in the controlled space of a Russian Orthodox Church and regularly go back to Russia in order to become spiritually recharged, or, as will be shown in the chapter on pilgrimages, regularly go to Orthodox monasteries in America to maintain spiritual focus.

Conclusion

Unification challenged the collective identity of the parish, and forced people to reevaluate their positions as Orthodox Christians and as Russians. It is important to consider this divide in order to understand the role of religion in the politics of belonging, imagining, and inhabiting places in a global society. Discourses emerging during the interviews following the unification demonstrate creative reworking of history and memory, and application of these reworkings on present-day events.

The analysis of the multi-generational immigrant dynamics present in the tensions around unification also allows us to deepen our understandings and conceptualizations of diasporas and transnational communities. It could be said that the event of unification finalized the split from the Russian church for immigrants of the post-revolutionary wave and their descendants (maybe especially for descendants, who had no visceral connection with Russia, motherland, soil). Having already experienced a split from the Mother Church, and utilized legal canonical arguments for its justification (like the loss of legitimate authority), the split following unification was for them not a new break, but a continuation of a previously existing condition of separation, under which they had lived most of their lives. While it is impossible to make generalizations about situations in other ROCOR parishes in the United States, in the parish under study all of the old immigrants left. Many of them followed Father Joseph at first, and some still remain there. But many also joined parishes of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) or Antiochian Orthodox churches in the area.

However, for the newest wave of immigrants, many of whom just became aware of the existing post-revolutionary split, the remedy was the return to the continuity of the

Russian Orthodox tradition. They, along with believers in Russia, are aware of and grateful to the ROCOR for keeping up faith abroad during dangerous times in Russian history, and ultimately for having an impact on the life of the Russian Church in post-Soviet times. One of the legacies of the Russian Orthodox immigrants in the US to subsequent generations was the setup of the administrative and management functions of parishes. Needless to say, immigrants of the post-Soviet wave did not have any experience in any aspect of church life, including parish life. The next two chapters will analyze the processes of coming to faith (theologically new, but known through many cultural channels), and of trying to live this faith in a particular church abroad – the Russian Orthodox Church in Southern California.

Chapter 3

Individual Stories of (Post-)Soviet Conversions to Orthodox Christianity

In this chapter I will present and analyze stories of individual conversions to Orthodox Christianity of post-Soviet immigrants, those who stayed in the church after the unification and schism of 2007. While earlier immigrants, called in the previous chapter *zarubezhniki*, were raised Orthodox, post-Soviet ones, *krasnye*, came to Orthodoxy mainly after the disintegration of the atheist Soviet state. I will consider their personal conversion stories as inseparable from social and political processes, and propose to conceive of a conversion not as a rupture and radical change resulting in a new identity, but as a process of uncovering and reawakening one's Russian Orthodox identity. In the words of Elena, whose story will be given in this chapter alongside nine others, this process of self-rediscovery is comparable to "a husk falling away" – getting rid of parts of yourself previously deemed meaningful, but now hindering your "movement toward God." This process of *obraschenia k vere* (Russian expression for conversion, literally meaning "turning to faith") includes practices of internalizing Christian virtues, and continuous reevaluation of the past experiences in the light of the newly acquired Orthodox worldviews.

In the work *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, Hervieur-Leger observes that at "the source of all religious belief… there is a belief in the continuity of the lineage of believers. This continuity transcends history. It is affirmed and manifested in the essentially religious act of recalling a past which gives meaning to the present and contains the future" (2000: 125). In Russia, post-Soviet exposure to Orthodoxy involved

reorientation towards the values and beliefs presumed to be historically and culturally uniquely Russian. The following examination of the single conversion journey of one of my informants, Valentina, will lead the way to the theoretical framing of religious conversion and to the presentation and discussion of other ethnographic cases.

Valentina, a woman in her early fifties, started to come to this church two months after her baptism in Russia. Although she lived in California for ten years, she never had a desire to visit local Russian churches or connect with the immigrant community. If anything, she detested few fellow expatriates she encountered during her tenure in the States, seeing them as too clingy to the victim post-Soviet status and therefore entitled to various forms of the host government support. "All they wanted to do was to milk the system," – she once cynically observed. Valentina socialized mainly with her American friends, as well as with various Western European immigrants. Some of them were Christian, but she did not pay attention to their religion: "I could not believe they were serious."

On one of Valentina's visits to Russia, in the Summer of 2002, her mother suggested that Valentina should get baptized. By that time, almost all her family members in Russia were baptized to Orthodoxy – her mother, sister, brother, nephews and nieces, as well as some of her close friends. Valentina shrugged off this suggestion: "I had no desire to be part of this new fashion. Suddenly everybody became Orthodox. First they were party and Komsomol members, and now Orthodox. I could not understand how modern people, smart and educated, would choose to become religious." She and her close Russian friend Galina would instead engage in many existential conversations drawing on Eastern mysticism, Buddhism, Jungian psychology and

spirituality – the mixture of many spiritual and religious traditions, known in the West as the New Age. Bookstores in post-Soviet Russia were becoming increasingly saturated with all kinds of spiritual, religious and psychological literature unavailable during times of atheism. This peculiar combination of literature of established religious traditions, yoga, and self-help psychology, to name a few, allowed readers hungry for anything having a word "spiritual" in it to create individualized "patchwork" religious practices for themselves (see Agadjianian 2011a). Thus, Galina and Valentina would attend yoga classes, go to Russian *banyas* (baths) with scents, oils and meditation, and eventually start to make their way to Russian Orthodox churches to venerate icons and relics of saints.

By the Summer 2002 Galina did get baptized as the Orthodox Christian, and she took Valentina to several Orthodox churches in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In Galina's view, it was more powerful to go to churches after yoga practice with quieted mind, so on can receive divine grace more effectively. Valentina remembers: "we just walked into churches, not even during services. We walked around, looked at icons, kissed them and relics. Galina would cross herself, and I could not. But I guess something happened to me during these visits, even though I could not feel it then." This "something" proved to have a staying power, since during her next visit in December 2002 Valentina, with the encouragement of Galina, got baptized in one of the Moscow churches. This is how she remembers it:

> Galina is a very decisive person. One day she just put my name on the list for baptism in one of her favorite churches. We went to *banya* in the morning, our usual ritual when we get together, and then by the three o'clock we were in church, and I got baptized. There were two other people who were baptized at the same time as me, a young man who was

> not sure whether his *babushka* baptized him in his childhood, and a newborn baby. I brought a bed sheet and a night gown with me as instructed. We held candles, denounced devil by spitting three times, got dipped three times in the warm blessed waters, naked, Galina was holding a sheet to hide me from the others sight, and then I was wrapped in it. After drying off, I put on a nightgown, and then we got anointed with oils. It was incredibly meaningful and beautiful. I cannot explain what I felt.

Her friend Galina, however, was not short of explanations. Among other things, she confidently stated that *banya* experience had helped to open Valentina's chakras, which made her ready to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. Valentina's sister, a devout Orthodox, told her that the nightgown she wore after baptism was a source of grace, saturated with holiness from water and oils, and so in order not to devoid oneself of grace, Valentina should not shower and should keep the nightgown on for at least a week. In a week Valentina was supposed to return back to California, so she did not shower and wore the nightgown under her dress, but in California she "finally showered before going to work. I haven't worn this nightgown since, I keep it in the drawer as a holy item, *svyatynya*."

Before returning to California Valentina would visit Orthodox churches in Moscow every day for a week:

> I was inexpressively drawn to church. My mother has a book on all the churches in Moscow, very interesting book on locations and histories of the churches, when they were built, what happened to them during Soviet times, what miracle-working icons do they have. So I visited few churches with the miracle working icons, prayed in front of them, put candles. I found prayers to particular icons of the Mother of God in the Orthodox prayer book that my sister gave me, so I would just read them in front of the icons.

Besides discussing religious matters, Valentina enjoyed reminiscing on her childhood memories with her sister, especially the carefree summer vacations they used

to have in the countryside. They were left on their own a lot, and would wonder into woods, swim, play games with friends, many of which were inspired by reading Fennimore Cooper's novels on American Indians. Valentina laughed at this recollection: "Here in the States they too play cowboys and Indians. Only in our games Indians were good and noble, they fought for their land and for their families, and had a very respectable honor code." One childhood memory, sometime in mid-1970s, especially intrigued and puzzled her after the baptism:

> One day, after done playing Indians, we were coming back from the woods. It was a late afternoon, still very bright, and there was something magical in the air. I think I was around ten then. And we were talking how lucky we were to live in this country of ours, where we didn't have to fight for our freedom. We decided that we have to be grateful to Lenin for that, for because of him we had such a great time here and now. And then we, there were four of us, suddenly went into a high pitch frenzy about how we should be grateful to Lenin for everything – for our friendship, for the clothes we wore, for books we read, for the grass and for the sun. One of us, don't remember who, finally said – if not for Lenin, none of this and none of us would be here. We literally stopped walking at this realization. I still remember looking at the grass, forget-me-nots, birch trees, white gentle clouds on a bright blue sky and thinking – if not for Lenin, we would not be having that. What was that if not the genuine religious feeling about some higher power to which we should be grateful for ourselves and for the world?

Valentina admits that this feeling was new for her then, and that she had never experienced it with such intensity after that, especially with connection to the founder of the Soviet state. The fact that Lenin's legacy in her childhood experience was so intertwined with the beauty of nature brings to mind not only Wanner's argument about viability of religious moods that the Soviet state rechanneled towards its governing elite and public rituals (2011: 222), but also Russian Orthodox tradition of venerating nature

as a place where divine is constantly present. It has elements of both transcendence and imminence in it.

Back in California Valentina searched for a local Russian Orthodox church on the internet, and visited the local church services twice in two months. During the first service she almost fainted, so she had to flee at a very solemn moment of *Cheruvimskaya* singing, and some people gave her disapproving looks. She attributed this somatic weakness to the wrongly tied scarf – it was made from polyester, tied around her neck, so it prevented the proper flow of the air. After that incident she became more selective in her scarves, preferring the ones made from natural fabrics (cotton, wool, silk). Another interpretation of this occurrence, made later by her friend Galina, was that Valentina was not prepared yet to handle all the grace coming from the divine services, and that she had almost fainted due to the overexposure to it. In California, Valentina was making small gradual steps in becoming Orthodox – she read, mainly from the internet, on various saints and sacraments, online sermons, on various matters of faith from both Russian and American sites. When in church, she wrote notes for the health of living and for the commemoration of the departed, put candles, crossed herself during prayers, following the cues from other attendees.

Valentina's third visit to church was on the Saturday morning of the Easter weekend. It was a Liturgy, the last service before midnight Paskhal celebration of the Resurrection. Tasteful arrangements of flowers were scattered throughout the church, made mainly of stargazer lilies, contributing with their distinct smells to the fumes from incenses. Special paskhal breads, known as *kulichi*, were put by the church kiosk for sale. April sunrays were coming through the windows, illuminating some icons on the wall.

She was slow to leave after the Liturgy, feeling drawn to the place similar to what she experienced after her baptism in Russia. She noticed the elder man talking to the priest by one of the icons in the church, and soon she realized that it was a confession. She came closer. The priest noticed her, and after the man left stayed by the icon, not looking at her, and she intuitively knew that he was waiting for her. She never confessed before, and she did not know what to say. The few instructions she read before seemed superficial to her. She still remembers the first and the only line she uttered during this confession: "I did not follow the lent completely, there were too many temptations." The priest, father John, said "yes" very empathetically as she remembers, did not ask any questions, covered her head with a cloth, and read a prayer of absolution over her. He crossed her head, removed the cover, and she left without saying a word.

By combining all the information she learned from the internet sources Valentina knew that confession should precede the communion, and that one should fast before the communion. Usually it is an overnight fast, since the Liturgies are held mainly in the mornings. But the *Paskha* service is different, since it starts at midnight. She decided not to eat after five, which, as she learned later, turned out to be the right thing to do: "I was doing everything intuitively. Somehow I just knew when to move, where to go. I still had a lot to learn, since I was completely illiterate in Orthodoxy, but everything felt right, like I was coming home."

After *Paskha* and communion, her incorporation into church became more conscious – the process I will return to in the next chapter on parish life. Before introducing other conversion stories of my informants, I will offer a theoretical

framework based on analysis of the theories of conversion and post-Soviet transformations.

Conversion – Belief and Practice, Change and Continuity

Conversion highlights relationship of individual to her cultural surroundings and social processes. Albeit an instance of individual change and transformation, it happens on the background of bigger transitions involving family, community and society as a whole. Conversion in the story above was triggered by the performance of the sacrament of baptism, and not by deliberate acceptance of Christian teachings and dogmas, which remained unknown to many of my informants even after they were baptized. It even can be claimed, that Christianity as such was absent, substituted in this rite of passage by ritually rich steps devoid of conscious meaning. This view reflects complex dichotomy between belief and practice present in anthropological studies of Western forms of Christianity, predominantly Protestant ones (Hann 2010). In the Protestant cases conversion goes hand in hand with belief, grounded in learning and knowledge, both of which may or may not have a divine source (Harding 1987). In Orthodox Christianity practice leads to belief. It is through practices that person gets access to the divine grace, without which no change is possible. The most strong manifestation of the presence of grace in person's life occurs during the sacrament of baptism, and in Valentina's case baptism opened the path for conversion.

According to the Eastern Orthodox Christian theology, with baptism a person is received into the body of church and becomes a member "in the mystical body of Christ, which is actually formed through baptism" (Karmiris 2004: 24). Baptism and

Chrismation (known as Confirmation in Roman Catholicism) are performed in one ceremony and only by the ordained priest (some exceptions can be made in cases of grave danger or illness). First, in Baptism, the name of the Holy Trinity is invoked as a person gets immersed entirely into the water for three times, thus being incorporated into Christ, the Church. This is believed to wash away all the sins accumulated in the adult person's life, and to bring about "the ontological destruction of the very body of sin, the source of death, since it was by sin that death passed to all" (ibid.). Second, in Chrismation, a person receives the gift of the Spirit, which can be seen as "an extension of Pentecost: the same Spirit who descended on the Apostles visibly in tongues of fire now descends on the newly baptized invisibly, but with no less reality and power" (Ware 1997: 279). With a special ointment, known as the Chrism (*myron* in Greek), the priest anoints parts of the body of the baptized with oil and with a sign of cross, saying "The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Ware 1997: 278). In Baptism a person receives a new spiritual nature, and in Chrismation this nature is expanded and made into the divine image, and baptized persons become "children of God by grace, and partakers of the divine nature through participation in the Holy Spirit" (Karmiris 2004: 24).

Like all other sacraments, Baptism and Chrismation combine visible and invisible, "an outward visible sign with an inward spiritual grace" (Ware 1997: 274). Material substances, oil and water, function as vehicles for the Holy Spirit and divine grace. Once baptized and chrismated, a person is believed to be under the protection of the divine forces, which forms the basis for baptizing infants in the Orthodox Christianity: they are considered to become partakers in the divine and receivers of grace, even though they cannot yet comprehend it.

The sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation in the Orthodoxy, if performed canonically, cannot be repeated. However, in the Soviet Union there were many instances starting from the late 1980s when people would ask to get baptized as adults since they were not sure whether it had happened in their childhood. *Babushkas* in some families, for example, would take kids for baptism in a local church, but were simply afraid to share this information with ideologically differently inclined parents. As I once heard from a man in one of the Moscow churches, "I am pretty certain that my *babushka* baptized me, but I don't know for sure, so I want to get baptized now." With the end of the official church persecution in the late 1980s the number of baptisms in Russia had increased tremendously. In the mid-2000s, for example, almost all of nearly two hundred Moscow churches were performing baptisms on a weekly basis, and some even twice a day (from personal ethnographic observations). No appointment or previous preparation, such as catechism classes, were necessary in the majority of cases, people just had to show up at the right time. There would be schedules posted on the church wall with the list of required items to bring – such as a cross, a clean shirt and a clean sheet.

The number of baptisms did not translate into the numbers of truly churched people, the ones who would follow all the teachings and practices of the Orthodox Christian Church, such as regular attendance of services and participation in other sacraments of the church – of confession and communion. There are continuous concerns, which can be heard and read on the Orthodox websites, that many people continue to treat the church not as the body of Christ, but as the organization which provides "spiritual" services – besides sacraments of baptism and marriage, people come

to church to bless their cars and houses, or to get holy water (see Agadjanian 2011b on boundaries of belonging to church).

Return of the Russian Orthodox Christianity into the public life of the country is perceived by many as the process of the second baptism of Russia. After seventy years of disconnect, or as some prefer to put it "interruption" (Agadjanian 2011a), of religious practices from the space of the church, people began to rediscover and relearn their religious history and traditions. In some way it is not even accurate to talk about the "return" or "comeback" of Orthodoxy, since it never quite went away from both public and private realms. Some, albeit very few, churches were not destroyed and remained opened (five out of two hundred in Moscow, for example); *babushkas* kept praying in front of the icons, baptized their grandchildren, and made *Paskhal* breads and colored eggs; persecuted for their faith Orthodox laity and clergy joined the ranks of numerous Russian saints as new martyrs. The process of second baptism of Russia is more reminiscent of the uncovering of its true identity, of exposing of something which was already there, like the melting snow uncovers the earth.

This view of interconnectedness between Russian identity and Orthodox Christianity is, of course, not without its challengers. In the recent volume, *Conversion after Socialism*, authors focus on ethnographic studies of conversions to religions other than Orthodoxy, to the so called new religious movements in post-Soviet spaces. Relying on the theoretical framework of Christianity as religion of discontinuities (Robbins 2004), Pelkmans argues that "conversion occurs most frequently under conditions of societal distress," with the breaking down of familiar social networks and institutional structures, and that religion after socialism assumed a new relevance by serving "new needs" and

being “linked to new imaginaries” (2009: 5, 2). Pelkmans develops his argument by claiming that the new religious movements have thrived and proved to be more attractive than Orthodox Christianity because they were “concerned less with tradition and ritual and more with truth, morality and visions for the future” (2009: 2). Wanner echoes Pelkmans’ argument in her ethnographic study of the Ukrainian converts to Protestantism, who rejected the Orthodox identity as “geographically defined, automatically inherited and eternal” (2009: 167). One of Wanner’s informants Svetlana, for example, “didn’t really like that people came one after another to kiss icons” and buy candles, because all that she “really needed [was to] someone to explain the word of God” to her (2009: 169). While a valid concern for a Christian person, this, and other case studies of the volume, tend to favor belief over practice, the latter being considered as something unauthentic to a true believer, a meaningless ritualistic activity borrowed from the irrelevant to modern concerns religious traditions of the past.

Other side of the arguments presented by authors of this volume about the appeal of the new religions in the post-atheist space is that they provide a clean slate separation from the troubled past and guide believers in adaptations to new stressful circumstances in their lives. There is a reliance on the contemporary Western understanding of conversion, which was shaped by Evangelical Christians in the last several hundred years, and which is “generally limited to notions of radical, sudden change” following the Pauline paradigm of dramatic change, and has “an underlying assumption that converts are passive respondents to outside forces" (Rambo 2003: 213). Another assumption of the Pauline paradigm of conversion is that it leads to the complete break with a previous life

and the breach of all former social contacts and relationships, and forming of new obligations.

Besides perpetuating the Pauline paradigm of conversion as the complete break with the past, what remains unclear here is what one is to consider "new" and from what exact past one is separating. Is it possible to say that people converting to Orthodox Christianity were too converting to a "new" religion, since they were converting from atheism? And how movable are the boundaries separating a convert from his past? How "complete" can the break with the atheist past be, if this past included elements of religious tradition albeit in secularized cultural forms?

Authors of the volume *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* offer a more nuanced approach on the interplay between culture and self, history and identity in the studies of conversion. Diane Austine-Broos prefers to view conversion as "a form of passage, a "turning from and to" that is neither syncretism nor absolute breach" (2003: 1). "Turning from and to" includes the processes of reordering and reorienting of previously held worldviews with a clearly defined direction, it "is a passage to some place rather than no place" (2003: 2). The Russian term for conversion fits well with this approach. In Russian conversion means "*obraschenie k vere*" or "*perekhod v veru*," which literally can be translated as "turning to the faith" or "crossing, passage into the faith." As with the English term, it assumes change and transformation, however a more gradual and agency driven movement is emphasized.

Austine-Broos claims that it is more productive to think about conversion as a passage "that negotiates a place in the world" and as "a quest to be at home in a world experienced as turbulent or constraining" (2003: 2). Conversion, therefore, can be

reconceptualized to be viewed as a change within known and familiar social and cultural milieu that occurs over time and involves gradual reorientation and reordering of one's worldviews and attachments.

Austine-Broos' concept of conversion as "a type of passage" allows for a more diverse and encompassing view of change not only within the borders of one's culture, but also outside of it. As people cross boundaries of meaning, reevaluating and repositioning themselves within their past and present values, attachments and goals, religious conversion becomes a vehicle for crafting a "new" identity either in a familiar "home" or unfamiliar "host" settings. View of conversion as a process and practice leads to the better understanding of the complex interplay between individual identity, religious practices, cultural sensibilities and societal changes. Personal conversion stories presented below situate individual experiences within the main themes discussed, and provide ethnographic depth and texture of post-Soviet conversions to the Orthodox Christianity to the theories of conversions.

Coming to Faith – Stories of Journeys

Childhood and Youth Encounters with Orthodoxy, Anna and Igor

In this section I will discuss stories of Anna (a woman in her 30s) and Igor (a man in his 40s), who both had encounters with the Orthodox faith, church, and religious practices starting in their childhoods. Anna grew in a small town, where at first there was no working church:

> My parents never went to church, and when a new church was built near us, I started to go there by myself. I was nine years old, and I went by myself, nobody told me anything. Sometimes I would go even in the

> evenings, and the Vigil will last until eleven, and to shortcut I had to walk through the cemetery. And I walked alone through the cemetery, and I was nine or ten years old… I don't remember why I started to go, it was as if this is how it should be… maybe some inner voice told me, but there was no particular moment that I can remember, when I decided to start going. I was just going.

For young Anna the church going consisted not only in overcoming fears of walking through cemetery alone at night, but in repositioning herself in relation to her immediate social surroundings. With parents seeming indifferent to her newly acquired interest in church, Anna took on herself choices of attending services. Once, she relates, "I and my girlfriend asked to excuse us from school. It was the Good Thursday (*Chistyi Chetverg*) and we had a test that day, but we went to church." Whether it had repercussions in school or not was not of an issue here, rather she wanted to emphasize the determination she had to follow her "inner voice," and in process tying her identity to faith and religion.

Igor had similar moments of renegotiating priorities of social conformity to rules and statuses, but unlike Anna it did not involve attending the church. Instead it involved his *babushka*, grandmother. I heard him retelling this story several times, including in the interview:

> I was eight years old. My *babushka* was very *nabozhnaya* (pious, devout) and was praying in front of icons all the time. Once I had a conversation with the teacher, who said that only fools believe in God, and that scientists had proved everything already. So I was a confirmed atheist when I went to see *babushka* that day. She was praying in front of the icons. And I was puzzled – why pray if there is no God. So I asked her. She turned to me and asked – "who told you?" I said that it was the teacher. And she said: "You have a very stupid teacher. There is God." And then something strange happened. I believed my *babushka*. Maybe because I intuitively knew that she was not a liar. I remember this day very vividly, and I see clearly the line that separates it from the rest.

While many informants refer to their *babushkas* as the ones who carried on the faith during Soviet times, what is unique in Igor's story is that *babushka* became a facilitator of belief – belief without any knowledge of Christianity or church. Belief started with trusting in *babushka's* honesty, and with associating faith with practices – of prayer in front of the icons. There was also a moment, not dissimilar to the change introduced by conversion, of a border, or line that separated earlier experiences and knowledge from the ones to come. In a sense, this line indicates a point of no return, of impossibility of reverting back to oblivion, what, however, differentiates this moment from conversion in accepted sense is that it is the beginning of the process rather than a momentary change and a complete break with previous life.

Another childhood episode shared by Igor concerned his initiation into pioneers. Becoming a pioneer was one of the formal steps, which all Soviet children starting the age 9-10 had to pass compulsory in their school years. It included wearing a pin with Lenin's image on it and a red scarf tied around the neck (similar to boy scouts in the US). Another step would be becoming (also compulsory) a member of the Komsomol (Young Communist League) at the age of 14, which was marked by wearing a different pin with Lenin's image and shedding the red scarf. Both stages demonstrated ideological commitment and were necessary for successful socialization into all aspects of life after high school – work, university, and so on. Igor recalls that a year after his conversation with *babushka* he was initiated into pioneers, "but literally after two weeks I refused to wear a red scarf. Internally I felt that I could not do it. For that I was excluded from pioneers." Like for Anna, Igor's coming to faith and introduction to the religious

practices that were not accepted by official structures, resulted in gradual separation and confrontation with those structures, with renegotiating and reaffirming a separate and distinctive identity. And although Igor's faith until the age of 15 did not include church going at all, it was in his words "a faith in the soul," which eventually will bring him to church, like Anna's "inner voice" had brought her.

Anna refers to her relationship to Orthodoxy as the one that happened in cycles, at some points she was closer to faith, and at some she would stop to go to church completely. In her teens, for example, she became very interested in philosophy and in Hinduism, and read a lot of related literature. She then lived for three years in Turkey in the late 1990s: "I did not go to church there, because of my lifestyle and because it was a Muslim and not Christian society, and almost all my friends there were Muslim. I did have some Russian friends, but we were not thinking about religion. Also, it depends on the age, I was nineteen then." The meaning of age, as Anna refers to it here, lies in a care-free life devoid of any family obligations and responsibilities. Anna did not like to talk much about her past, but at some point she showed me pictures of herself as a lingerie model in Turkey. She is an attractive young woman, and she won the heart of one of her neighbors in Turkey, and soon became his wife. He was an American, and they moved to his home in California after getting married. It was after the birth of her son when she again decided to reestablish her relationship with Orthodoxy, already in the United States.

After coming from Turkey to Southern California, Anna wanted to get her little son baptized. The church closest to them was one of the OCA (Orthodox Church of America), and when she asked the priest when she could bring her son for baptism, he first wanted to know how often did they go to church. After finding out that not very

often, maybe three times a year, the priest told Anna that they should come every Sunday for three months, and only then he would baptize her son. “I did not like how he responded to me. He said he was not a baptism manufacturer, and especially I disliked his ordering tone of voice (*prikaznoy ton*). Maybe I was spiritually more closed then, maybe now I would have reacted differently. But I think that one should want to go to church, and that when someone is forcing you, you tend to defend yourself from this pressure.” This understanding of religious practices goes to the heart of the American belief that “adherence to ritual requirements must come from personal meaning, not authority” (Norris 2003: 175-76). Russians coming to get baptized in Russia were received by the church with minimal, if any, requirements, however, encounters with American Orthodoxy introduced to them a more stringent approach to the rules and authority. What is also ironic here, is that this was said about not Anna’s own baptism, but baptism of her son, who did not then or later have a chance to exercise his own free will in attending the church (the children of the newest converts to faith are a different story altogether).

After this disappointing interaction with the American Orthodox priest, Anna called “our Russian church” and had a more pleasing response from the priest there. Father John had “a kind voice” and invited them to come for baptism. Father John, though not Russian himself, appealed to many newcomers with little knowledge about faith because of his less legalistic attitude, to which many having been raised under the Soviet heavy hand had an automatic aversion. It is important to note, however, that Anna hinted on the possibility of her being “spiritually more closed” at the time of contact with the American priest, and that now she “would have reacted differently.” She seems to be involved in the process of reworking, reordering and reorienting her previous attitudes

(cf. Austin-Broos 2003: 2), as she becomes more engaged with the practices of the church and more educated about the values of Christian obedience and humility.

Igor too became side-tracked from the Orthodox faith during his youth. In early 1980s, when he was fifteen, he discovered that there was one church in his town that was not closed, and he started going there. He did not feel quite comfortable there, did not know what to do, but he was curious. However, already at eighteen he felt that his faith "reached a zero." It happened when he served in the army, which all Soviet men reaching the age of eighteen had (and still have) to do:

> It was a difficult period in terms of spirituality (*dukhovnosti*), there was no nourishment, and I was still growing and forming as adolescent. There was an interesting moment in the army when I read Tolstoy's "War and Peace." And my faith dropped to zero, since then I don't like Tolstoy. To me his books are uninteresting and hopeless. He is a beautiful writer and a story-teller, but when he starts to get closer to the soul – here one has to stop. Even his famous "Father Sergiy" ends just like that – and he walked on the road. But what happens to him at this moment was not said… So when I came from the army my spiritual state was at zero.

In this narrative two culturally significant moments are intertwined and are brought into relationship with each other. The one, serving in the army, is a rite of passage, initiation into adulthood and manhood, is accompanied by another – reading of Russian literary classics as a source of meaning and finding purpose in life. Both result in spiritual failure and in feelings of "total disconnect." "Zero" in this case becomes a carrier of a powerful dual message – as a loss of once cherished, but never fully comprehended, faith, and as a potentiality of filling the gap with new, yet unknown, searches for meaning.

As for many people of his generation, these searches took Igor outside of the Orthodox Christian tradition and into the realm of Eastern philosophies and practices. He became interested in Eastern martial arts, and at the age of twenty four even traveled to Tajikistan to be closer to India and China, and to gather more information and literature. But as in his childhood *babushka* intervened to save him from dis-belief, so now a woman-stranger interfered to bring him back to Orthodoxy: “Once I was in the park in Dushanbe, and a woman was sitting next to me on the bench. I was already this Eastern fanatic, and she said: “What are you doing, don’t you understand that this is a wrong energy, it will tear you apart, you will not be able to control it.” She spoke for a long time, I don’t remember everything she said, but she was citing the Bible a lot. This was a period when I was stopped in my tracks. I returned home in a state of shock, and I started to rethink everything.”

Igor’s journey back to faith was a lonely one, he did not have a spiritual guide who would direct him towards “the truth.” He compares himself to “doubting Thomas, who likes to touch everything,” so he read a lot of Orthodox literature in order to “know for sure.” The book Igor credits with playing a key role for him finally choosing the Orthodox faith was “Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future” by Seraphim Rose. Father Seraphim Rose is one of the favorite Orthodox authors in the last decades, his books are widely translated into Russian and are available in almost all Russian bookstores. Himself a graduate of the UC Berkeley, Rose experimented with various Eastern spiritual traditions before choosing Orthodox Christianity. He became an Orthodox monk, and spent many years in the monastery dedicated to St. Herman of Alaska in Platina, California, where he died in his mid-40s. He wrote extensively on the

dangers of all spiritual practices that lie outside of Orthodoxy, including yoga and Pentecostalism. According to one Russian Orthodox priest, with whom I had a conversation in Russia, "it is amazing how well he got it, even better than we, Russians, do. He has a lot to teach us." Almost all my informants have read Seraphim Rose, and many have recommended him to their American friends, "so that they can learn about Orthodoxy."

For Igor Seraphim Rose's book was a welcomed end to his spiritual searches, it complemented and organized his own thoughts. Since then, Igor admits, he firmly had chosen the path of Orthodoxy. He calls his faith "endured" and "earned," however he remains open to knowledge about other faiths, and would not shy away from discussions with practitioners of other forms of Christianity. He divides them into "open" and "closed," the distinction being that "open" will listen to you and be engaged in the dialogue, while "closed" have already all the answers and do not listen to you, just keep talking themselves. Many Baptist and Jehovah's Witnesses with whom he conversed in the United States were the "closed" ones:

> They remind me of people, who say: we know everything, and we will do as we want. I watched them in services, they are like stutterers, they start one sentence and then everything stops. There is no development, no further steps. The beginning was good, but then the same letter hangs during the whole service. A-a-a- - that's it. The same theme circulates over and over, there is no diversity. Everything is getting reduced to the naïve, childhood faith, I would compare it to three or five year olds. Short sentences, easy excitement. But good if this is just naïve, many make money on it, on brainwashing people. It became a business in America – open a parish, show some miracles, brainwash (*obolvanivat'*) people. And for an unenlightened person it could sound as revelation.

Clearly, Igor was not satisfied with the content and form of a Protestant worship, which is understandable since he identified himself as "conservative," who values

Orthodox canons and traditions. He appreciated the importance of logical thinking and learning, which can prevent one from the "blind faith," but for him the right worship practices reflected and uncovered the true essence of faith.

Coming to Faith and Church as Young Adults in Russia, Elena and Liza

The next two informants, Liza (a woman in her 50s) and Elena (a woman in her 30s), both started their journey to faith while still in Russia. They both lived in towns removed from the capital – Liza in Siberia, and Elena north-east of Moscow. They both attended universities and received their Masters degrees, and both moved to the US in the late 1990s. Liza worked for twenty years for restaurant chains in Siberia before getting married and moving to the US, and Elena moved to the US soon after graduation on the work visa, to work as a computer programmer.

Elena's path to church started with the visit to a local clairvoyant, or *gadalka* in Russian. Many people in her town were going to this woman with all kinds of problems, and someone recommended that Elena went too since she had marital and health problems. *Gadalki* is a peculiar category of practitioners on a Russian spiritual scene. They are known to give advice, read cards, and offer home-made herb remedies for a variety of illnesses, all of which make them similar to numerous Western and Eastern healers, Tarot readers, etc., which can be found in the US. In Russia, however, they occupy a middle space between official religion, i.e. Orthodoxy, and folk beliefs and practices. This can be seen as the lasting effect of *dvoeverie*, or dual faith, discussed in chapter 1. Besides offering home remedies, *gadalki* in Russia also use icons, holy water and incense brought from church, as well as send people to church priests for a blessing

before job interview, surgery, or exam – all these mundane activities that matter in everyday life. This does not mean that people who are sent to ask priest's blessing have necessarily to be believers and followers of the Orthodox faith (although many are), rather it is meant as an additional guarantee. If a client's undertaking is successful, it also has a side-benefit of validating *gadalka's* legitimacy in the spiritual field. This mixture of magic and religion, of combining sacred with profane (to use Durkheimian distinction) practices had blossomed in Russia starting in the mid-1980s, when the end of the state-sponsored atheism opened new possibilities for investigating uses of both magic and religion (see Lindquist 2005 for a rich ethnographic study of magic in contemporary Russia).

In her retelling of the story, now from the position of a more mature Orthodox believer, Elena tried to draw her own line between magic, or as she called it "paganism" (*yazychestvo*), and Orthodoxy:

> I was sent to this woman, and she told me to go to church. Many people still go to her, although they are already churched (*votserkovlennye*). We still have paganism here, pagan elements. I have this formulation for paganism – it is not that this life is the preparation for the next one, it is about settling in this life comfortably, to live here without problems. You can pray for a good job, for a family life, but you should not forget the main goal. Like, I don't know what will be in the other life, the main thing is to settle in this one. In paganism work and finances become your idols.

Elena started to attend services at her home church during the Bright week, the week following *Paskha* (Easter). She did not even know that *Paskha* was just celebrated, she was still not in tune with religious calendar. However, she appreciated the beauty of the Bright week services, and was coming back to church every day of that week. Finally, on Sunday her *gadalka* came to the service too and pushed Elena to ask the priest for the

blessing. When Elena did approach the priest, she could not force herself to ask for the blessing of what she came for (publishing of the book), and instead asked for the blessing for confession and communion. This was the start of her church life, and also of a very constructive relationship with the young and very dedicated priest: "He first figured out that I was completely ignorant in why communion is needed at all. He gave me books to read, gave me the Holy Scriptures – New Testament for the start. He told me to mark everything that I didn't understand and ask him. I am looking now through the book and see: seven loaves for four thousand people, and my question mark next to it."

Elena was referring to the passage in the Bible, when Jesus fed four thousand people with only seven loaves of bread, and she laughed at her level of literal reading of the book at these early stages of her religious education. Like Igor and Liza, whom I will turn to now, she was then "doubting Thomas," who needed physical proof and reasonable explanation. Liza puts it this way:

> I am like those people, or at least was, for whom belief is not enough, who have to dig deeper. I was completely unaware of religion intellectually, only knew some holidays from childhood – Paskha, *Rozhdestvo* (Christmas). But in school, when we started to study sciences that attempted to explain the world, like philosophy or mathematics, I reached an impasse. Especially with the materialist philosophy, which gave some explanations, but I soon realized that it was not enough. I got really depressed because of that. They taught us only materialistic viewpoint, and there were no other examples. And then I heard one phrase that for me turned everything upside down: that materialist philosophy or math theorems are also a sort of faith, we do not have any facts, we cannot prove anything, we assume that it is true. I was happy that it was not just my stupidity, but that we all take many facts at their face value, that we cannot prove or see everything.

Liza admits that she has an "inquisitive mind," and that she always was concerned with questions of the meaning of life. When she did not understand the aim of her life on

this earth, she would get depressed. It must be noted though, that in the Russian use of the word 'depression' it is usually devoid of its medicalized meaning, and instead points to feelings of despair. The Marxist materialist philosophy, on which official Soviet atheist ideology was based, compounded the feelings of depression for Liza, she was using it in her "searching for the proof for dis-belief" and could not find it. The main revelation she refers to here and the one she credits with the end of depressive moods, is that not everything in this life needs to be scientifically proven and that there is a space for faith, for not knowing but accepting, like mathematicians accept certain axioms before setting on to prove a theorem. Interesting here is the image of 'upside down,' which indicates the beginning of change, of reevaluation of previously acquired forms of knowledge. As Wanner describes the process, "Soviet secularization focused on shifting the foundations of knowing away from mysticism and the supernatural and toward the scientific and rational... Yet, when the powers of science and technology failed to offer meaningful explanations and insights, their authority as a means of knowing came into question" (Wanner 2011: 222).

Liza first started to go to church in her mid-twenties, when she already had been married, had a son, and got divorced. Although she became interested in Orthodoxy much earlier, and read some books on its history, she never had a "push" to go to church. Reflecting back on this, she assigns it to the divine providence: "If I would have gone when I was depressed or had marital problems, maybe I would have seen the church as a means of healing, of getting rid of depression." Instead, she thinks she went when she was ready to experience the Orthodoxy in its wholeness. She first went out of curiosity with a friend and liked it: "I intuitively felt that I will find help and protection here, I was

alone with the child and felt very unprotected from the outside world. And in church I felt some kind of barrier or fence, I found there spiritual peace, and I made peace with all my intellectual quests. And it was interesting to me to start praying, not that I wanted to pray, but I realized that I needed to pray. As if an angel was holding my hand and was telling me what to do, and I was just obediently taking it in."

Unlike Elena, who from the start had the guidance and advice from the priest, Liza relied more on her intuition, part of which she also ascribed to the divine guidance, in picking up the right behaviors and practices. Coming to church and faith involved two parallel processes. The first one was the reconciliation of all her previous intellectual struggles and doubts with the Orthodox system of teachings: "I got lucky with the Orthodox Christianity, I did not have to search for other religions, with Orthodoxy I have struck gold right away. I found right explanations about how the world came to be and how it works, and what are the relationships between us and the world." This statement is in line with the argument that religion, besides providing connections to the supernatural and transcendent, also "constitutes a theory of the world, a way of constructing reality that seems uniquely real to those who experience it" (Buckser and Glazier 2003: xi). The second process marked the deeper engagement with religious practices, such as prayer. Not having been instructed like Elena in the right ways to pray and confess, Liza satisfied her new need to pray by getting prayer books and icons from the church bookstore and starting to pray at home – reading long prayers from the book in front of the icon of the Kazan Mother of God.

There is also an indication in her story of the perception of the church space, which is seen as separated from the outside world, and which provides protective barrier

from the world. This space has its own independent life, and is fenced out from the rest of the world, creating a sense of safety once one crosses over into it. However, in order to fully belong to this other world one has to learn and to become a participant in its many forms of life. Before she became educated in practices of the church, Elena, for example, felt as an outsider even while being present at the divine services: “I had a feeling that everyone is celebrating, but I was standing outside and could not join in. I felt that I was not participating and was missing out on something very important.” The image here is of the invisible border, breaking through which is possible not by asking the priest’s blessing for publication of the book, as *gadalka* instructed, but in asking to learn the right ways of religious practice.

Interestingly, Liza’s first steps into the church space also lied through the person engaged in magic, but in this case it was her childhood friend who became involved in the occult practices in the late 1980s: “She [the friend] had natural extra-sensorial gifts. And it was the time when all these books appeared, on black and white magic. And soon after she began to practice it, horrible things started to happen to her. I will not even go into details, it was awful, she went through a lot. Once she was provoked into thinking of committing suicide, she would tell me that she wanted to go for vacation, spend there all her money and then drown herself. She got scared, and we went to church to baptize her and her child.”

The agents of provocations Liza is referring to, are the dark spiritual forces, whom her friend unleashed by getting in contact with them. For the Orthodox Christians the spiritual world, though invisible, is very real. It is inhibited by both light (angels) and dark (fallen angels or demons) forces. Forces from both sides are involved in the lives of

people – demons by tempting people into sins, and angels by helping them to overcome temptations. One of the goals of Orthodox Christian practices, such as prayer and confession, is to minimize contact with and influence from demons, and thus become more open to receiving the divine grace. Demons are considered to be very creative at getting attention from people, and once they are given access, even through some very minor sins, they are very hard to get rid of. Occult practices, from the Orthodox perspective, do a permanent damage to a human soul, since the person willingly and knowingly lets the dark forces in and then relies on them in her actions. Magic, or paganism as Elena identified it, is not the only dangerous spiritual practice, among others usually mentioned in this bundle, there are yoga (not so much as a physical exercise, but as a meditation that goes along with it), Pentecostalism, theosophy. Pentecostalism is singled out from other forms of Christianity precisely because of its focus on spiritual side of worship and speaking in tongues, which is ascribed to the descent of the Holy Spirit. From the Orthodox point of view, not only speaking in tongues does not led to clarity and mutual understanding as it happened with the apostles at the Pentecost, it also has a sinful presumption of being able to predict when the Holy Spirit will manifest itself. In Orthodoxy, the Holy Spirit is a gift of grace, which can be given to anyone at any moment, it can be prayed for but never expected or ordered to be received at a particular moment (see Rose 1999, who wrote extensively on that).

Although Liza's friend got baptized in the Orthodox church, she did not stayed there, and was going through different Christian churches before finally settling in the Pentecostal one. From Liza's current position and experience in Orthodoxy, she explains that this happened because the friend "got in too deep" with the wrong spirits, and that

"they had led her away." They are still friends, but have a mutual agreement not to talk about their religions: "She calls Orthodox icons idols, which provokes aggression in me, and in turn I morally and physically cannot tolerate their singing prayers" (see Sonja Luehrmann 2011 on insightful discussion of differences in Pentecostal and Orthodox prayers, on facilitating emotional responses (*dushevnoe*) in Pentecostal practices versus spiritual (*dukhovnoe*) in Orthodox ones).

Elena considers the beginning of her churched life a breaking point, after which she started "a smooth development (*plavnoe razvitie*)" as a Christian person: "before that I was unsettled, and now I am moving in one particular direction. Understandably, at times there is one step forward and two steps back, but at least they are in one direction. I see a clear goal, and although it is not a fact that I will reach it, I see ideals and examples of Orthodox saints." Elena admitted that in the process she began to lose some parts of herself, parts that were valuable to her before, but now had lost their meaning: "I understand that it is God's will, even when it's a pity to loose parts of myself. But maybe I just incorrectly saw their meaning, for example, I used to take pride in that I am smarter and quicker in grasping issues than others. Now I look at it differently. Probably it is like a husk (*shelukha*) falling away, this is how I see my movement towards God."

While both Liza and Elena had experienced turning to faith as a beginning of new life free of depressive moods and unsettlement, for Elena it also involved more pronounced processes of reorienting her image of herself and re-conceptualizing previously viewed integral parts of herself in terms of Christians meanings and concepts.

Coming to Faith through Interactions with Western Christianity, Nika and Peter

Nika, a woman in her 50s, was baptized as a child in a village by her relatives, but grew up atheist as everyone else, with exception of baking *kulichi* on *Paskha* and visiting deceased relatives at the cemetery on special days designated by the Church. In the late 1980s she got involved through family friends with a weekly Bible reading group led by American Baptists. Those were educational as well as social gatherings: Russians cooked, talked about their lives, and studied Bible under the supervision of American teachers. During every meeting there were stories of new conversions, usually following the same scenario, as she described it: "The new converts would say – "I was in the dark, and now I found Jesus, and he is the Lord." Then everyone clapped enthusiastically, with loud 'wows' and 'yeahs.' I did not like this part, it was too artificial and rehearsed for me." However, she enjoyed the social aspect of gatherings, and the reading of the Bible, which before that she had never read: "They explained everything very well. I do not think I could have read and understood it on my own." Nika attended this group for almost ten years, and eventually got tired of it. For one thing, she was growing weary of being "used" by her Baptist friends: "For them we were just statistics to be reported to their supervisors in the States, how many Russians converted and attend, their way to keep financing coming. They were not friends after all. When they started to get more lucrative converts, like bankers, they lost interest in me." On the other hand, Nika was also overgrowing this relationship: "We kept reading the same things, which was fine. But they were using the same, word to word, interpretations, jokes and examples from contemporary life." She slowly started making her way to the local Orthodox church. Nika did not attend services, she preferred to come in-between services, when it was

quiet and not crowded. “I would just sit on the bench, look at icons, put a candle. Sometimes I would start to cry, with no reason. Just sit and cry.” She was reticent to go to services, because she did not know what to do, how to follow the Liturgy, and as many was afraid of omnipresent *babushkas*, as if waiting for you to make mistake so they can pounce and scold you.

Babushki (or the less endearing *babki*), not to be confused with a *babushka* word for a grandmother, have become a certain cultural category. Widely used in the West to indicate old ladies in scarves, *babushki* became an iconic image of religious Russia and a permanent fixture in every Orthodox church. *Babushki* in the post-Soviet Russia seamlessly migrated from the secular context of sitting in front of the apartment complexes, observing what tenants do and judging their moral behavior and ways to dress, to becoming servants of the church, without even needing to change a scarf. For many church attendees, especially the new ones, they are the knowledgeable carriers of faith, which in some cases indeed applies. However, more often than not age does not equate wisdom for many church *babushkas*. Being usually the ones who informally enforce various church rules of the correct behavior, they often times perpetuate the assumption that present day practices of Orthodoxy are a set of pagan superstitions. For example, they would tell a believer not to light a candle from lampada (a special vessel in front of the icons), for it is a bad luck, and instead light it from other candles, or not to pass a candle with a left hand, or loudly comment on wrong clothes, the list of their interferences can be very long. Newcomers to church often voiced their fear of being scolded by *babushkas* in church, and gradually many measures started to be implemented in Russian churches in order to minimize the damage – such as explicitly telling

babushkas before big holidays not to approach anyone with advice, and let priests take care of the attendees (from a private conversation about one of the Moscow churches). Negotiating one's attitude to church *babushkas* involves the combination of respect to the services they provide to church and ignoring their often rude interference in one's worshipping activities, and it became one of the inescapable practices in the contemporary Russian Orthodox church.

Nika was resentful to attending services in Russia, because she was constantly afraid that she would do something wrong – unlike some of my other informants, she did not rely on the intuition. When she came to visit her relative in Southern California, they went few times to the local church. There was the first time she actually saw the Liturgy. When people were lining for communion she asked what was going on, and it turned out that she did not know what communion was. She explained that she was not interested in the worshipping side of the Baptist church, although she was invited to join the services, and that she was just interested in learning "how to read the Bible." She found the Southern California church less intimidating than churches in Russia, since it was a smaller and tighter community, open to explaining to her what and how to do. She even referred to it as "my church" in her later communication with her relative, but her visits to Moscow churches remain irregular.

Peter, a man in his 40s from another Russian big city, also got involved with the Baptists, however while already in the United States. He came to the country in the early 1990s, and enjoyed spending time with the Baptists, who were "very nice people," reading the Bible, and practicing his English (for he barely knew the language when he arrived to the country). He was not particularly religious then, having visited couple of

churches in his city to light a candle, and viewed interactions with his new friends along the lines of educating himself about the American culture. Soon he got approached by the leadership with the offer to help in Baptist missionary activities in Russia. He not only refused, but he was indignant that American Baptists considered his country as unenlightened: “We were Christians for a thousand years. What do they think they can teach us?” Peter suspended his relationship with the Baptists after that, and soon started to attend the local church, as well as to go on many pilgrimages, including the Holy Land.

Coming to Faith and Church as Adults in the United States, Katerina and Zoe

In this final ethnographic section I will discuss discovery of Orthodoxy by two female informants – Katerina, a woman in her 50s, and Zoe, a woman in her 40s. Like previous informants, they had exposure to Orthodoxy while still in Russia, but made their formal acceptance of it after moving to the United States.

Katerina came to the United States in 1992 from one of the major Russian cities, where she was a very successful business woman. She was making big amounts of money at the time of tough transition to a new post-Soviet economy, when majority of the population was using the card or stamp system to buy food. Katerina, however, was dissatisfied with the culture of dishonesty that was emerging, with “the moral breakdown” to use Zigon’s term (2011): "one could make a lot of money by stealing, and there was no other way. I realized that if I kept doing it I would either go to prison, or get killed by some jealous competitor." She immigrated to the United States and was ready to take any job as long as it was "honest." Before moving to California in the late 1990s she

lived on the East coast, and then in Washington, DC. While there, she heard the interview with the local priest on the radio program *Voice of America*, and decided to check out the church: "I was curious about religion before, I visited several churches in Russia, but it was more like going to the museum. It was interesting, but I did not understand anything."

Like many of her compatriots in Russia, who were just beginning to discover Orthodoxy, Katerina relied mainly on self-education (see cases discussed by Ladykowska 2011; Kormina and Shtyrkov 2011). Because she could not understand anything that was happening at the services in church, except “Lord have mercy,” she started to read on her own. By the late 1990s, after initial disarray in quality of religious publications of the early 1990s, the religious Orthodox literature in Russia was quiet diverse and widely available. Books could be ordered from Russian publishers to be sold in the church kiosks in the United States, plus there was also a steady flow of the local Orthodox Christian publications, albeit in English. “Step by step” she was learning about sacraments, prayers, saints, as well as trying to read the Gospels. “It was very difficult to read the New Testament, I could not grasp it, it was incomprehensible. I tried several times. Then I found a shortened version of it, and it was easier. For example, I would read parables from the New Testament, and rethink them, try to transfer their meaning onto my life, and then everything became clear.”

Although she did a lot of learning on her own, Katerina also had developed a healthy relationship with the local parish priest and his wife. They were very accessible and friendly people, and they shared a lot of stories about their families’ journeys to the US. The priest’s wife, *matushka*, was from the family of Rodzianko, one of the most

known post-revolutionary immigrant families from Russia. Fr. Basil Rodzianko, for example, was a very missionary oriented Orthodox bishop of the OCA in San Francisco, whose sermons were even broadcasted to the Russian audiences. However, soon Katerina moved to Southern California, and she credits the priest there, Father John, to becoming her first true spiritual counselor, the one who really helped her to sort out many questions on how not just read and comprehend, but to live according to the Gospel's teachings. Katerina said about father John: "I trusted him more than other priests. It was amazing that he was so young, fresh from the Seminary, easily could have been my son, but he was teaching me instead." I will dedicate more time to the discussion of the role of priest in parish life and in spiritual education and growth of parishioners in the next chapter, as it evident now that in many cases people's impressions of and interactions with priests are of the instrumental factors in forming their relationship to church and faith.

Among many books Katerina read there were the ones about other religious faiths as well – such as Judaism, Mormonism, Protestant Baptism. In the States she had an encounter with a female Baptist minister, who "really wanted to involve me in her church, with chocolates and so on, but I said, no thanks, I have my own church and do not want to change anything." Identification with the Orthodox Christianity went deep for Katerina, and the Russian Orthodox church was the only one she wanted to become a parishioner in. "It gets difficult in our church sometimes, I was disappointed a few times, but I never considered leaving. I have been in Greek and Serbian Orthodox churches, and I liked the people there, they are very friendly. It is close to ours, but still it is not ours, not *rodnoe*."

Concept of *rodnoe* has a deep meaning in Russian, and it does not have adequate English equivalents. It shares the root with "*rod*," which according to Russian historian Fedotov, means "the eternal kinship-community" and is "more vigorous than the sem'ia (family), which did not succeed in inheriting all the religious meaning of the former" (1960: 15). There are many other words in Russian language that share the same root: *rodit'sya* (to be born), *rodit'* (to give birth), *roditeli* (parents), *rodstvenniki* (relatives), *Rodina* (motherland or homeland), *narod* (a people, as in *russkiy narod* – Russian people), *Bogoroditsa* (Mother of God, literally Birthgiver of God), and *rodnoi* (familiar and close), to give some examples. When taken together they "suggest a fundamental continuity among the life of the individual, the extended family, and the larger society, all of them conceptualized in terms of the *rod*" (McDaniel 1996: 40). In his study of the illusive Russian idea, McDaniel traces how membership in the *rod* aided in producing a particular historical experience of community and a distinctive sense of it both intellectually and ontologically (1996). He argues that "the sense of community in Russia was always *in opposition* to some other group…[which] culminated in the sharp division of society between those who were and those who were not *rodnoi*" (1996: 42). Many things in Russian national culture were formed and now exist in opposition to what is not seen as *rodnoi*, or ours. This is a deeper opposition than merely "us" and "them," for as both Fedotov and McDaniel show in their analysis of the term *rod*, it has connections to the soil, family, religious feelings, memories, all of which contribute to a distinctive sense of community.

The way Katerina used the term *rodnoe* to differentiate between Russian and other ethnic Orthodox churches points to the existence of the specific closeness to the

Russian church as a carrier of national culture and traditions, which in turn have profound connections to one's identity and feelings of belonging to a specific historic community. The experience of my other informant, Zoe, provides an interesting additional insight into this connection.

Zoe was not just raised an atheist, as were almost all of the parishioners of the newest wave of migration to the United States, she was also a confirmed one, having proudly made it through all of the stages of the communist youth, from pioneers to komsomol, and finally into the communist party. She came to the United States with her husband Stan, and they first settled in Los Angeles, where he went to the graduate school in the mid-1990s. Because Stan has a rather common Korean last name (he grew up in Kazakhstan, where there is a substantial Korean population), they were constantly bombarded by the fliers of the Korean Baptists, both American and from Russia, inviting them to come to their services. At one point she succumbed and went: "They were very enthusiastic believers, and they tried to involve me. And I told them, that if I would have decided to go to church it would have to be our Orthodox church. Although then I did not have any intention to go to any church, it seemed to me that if I would have converted to faith (*obratilas' v veru*) I would have chosen our Russian church, because there the tradition was developing and shaping for centuries, and inside I felt that to have this root was very important for me."

For Zoe coming to church, if it ever would happen, lied through feelings of connection to some deeper roots, and although she was not aware of the exact meaning of this tradition and continued to equate religion with "obscurantism" (*mrakobesie*), something was already embedded inside her. From her current position she tries to

explain one of the reasons she finally made it to church: “I think that my *babushka*, who was a believer and whose whole family were believers, prayed for us. She prayed every evening for all of her grandchildren. And this is why I always had good graces in life, notwithstanding my hideous behavior (*bezobraziya*).” *Babushka* and her family are representatives of the *rod* in this narrative, where ancestors pray for their off-springs, thus collapsing time and tying together the past and future generations into “the eternal kinship-community.”

At this point Zoe’s mentioning of *babushka* comes as no surprise, since in other informants’ narratives, most notably in Igor’s, *babushkas* are given an instrumental, though not always immediately realized, role in awakening of opposite – from the atheist and scientific – meanings of life. Like Igor, Zoe had a memorable interaction about religion with her babushka at the age of eight, but unlike Igor she was not persuaded in the existence of God:

> I was living then with my *babushka* in Ukraine. And she asked my mother once whether I wanted to get baptized. I refused. At some point I made fun of her faith, asked her – so, where is your God? Something along the lines – cosmonauts went into space and did not see God there, who could believe in God in our times. I don’t remember what she said exactly, but I have an impression that it had shut me up immediately. *Babushka* explained that God is in everything that surrounds us, that he penetrates everything. She also said it in such a way that it did not sound primitive to me. And I accepted it, and stopped my attempts to make fun of this faith.

While living with *babushka*, Zoe also got exposed to a set of practices – like praying in front of the icons, which babushka did every evening, and especially in preparing for the feast of *Paskha* – coloring eggs and baking *kulichi*. Later in her life, in mid-1980s, when she was a student of geology in Moscow, Zoe and friends would go to

watch *Paskhal* processions in one of the Moscow churches: “It was already *Perestroika* time, and the rules were relaxed. There were no police cordons, as I read now about earlier Soviet realities. I started to go to churches out of curiosity, looked at architecture, mural paintings, as if on excursion. I always felt very awkward there. If I did not have a scarf to cover my head I would not even enter the church. Something inside would not let me do it.”

Although Zoe did not comprehend the meaning of all practices she observed, and approached the church exterior with a tourist gaze, there was a certain line she was not willing to cross. She was not yet at the stage of making unfamiliar into familiar and own, but “something inside” was preparing her for that. In her narrative at this point she shifted into the discussion of the “spiritual vacuum” that she felt at the age of thirty.

> Perhaps it was triggered by my new role of a housewife, with a kid and a husband. Before that I was in graduate school, lived my own life, read a lot. We always were searching for the meaning of life, always talked about it, had arguments all night long. It was during student years, we had a very mixed group – mathematicians, biologists, geologists. And we could talk through the night about what life was, where we should be going. But then I got married, had a child (*rodila*), and now what? Before that I had clear goals, and now the question of meaning of life came back again. Especially when I moved here. The stores are full with food, the car and the mobility, the husband and family – all is good. And what is next? There was a feeling of growing emptiness.

Zoe’s new social status, of a wife and a mother, coincided with her moving to the United States. For her, comparably to Katerina, the material wealth introduced by the new transitional times, whether in Russia or abroad, did not create a satisfactory substitute for a previously felt order and purpose in life. She identified this growing vacuum as “spiritual” for a reason – she could not take refuge even in her favorite pass time, reading, anymore: “I would start to read something, and it is not interesting to me, I

close the book and emptiness remains. It is as if I just chewed a gum and spitted it out." Zoe was increasingly unable to receive nourishment from previously beloved activities, but she remained "outside of Orthodoxy and of faith" because she considered herself a strong person, and "faith is for those who need crotches in life." Soon this conviction got challenged by people, with whom Zoe and Stan developed friendships after moving to Boston. One scientist from Stan's work and two young neighbors, who worked as computer programmers, "were interesting, smart, wonderful people, but every Sunday they would go to church. I could not understand that." They read "spiritual" literature, and once Zoe decided to read one of the recommended books, called *Father Arseniy*:

> Have you read it? This book is written as a life story of the priest, who went through the labor camps and exiles [during Stalinist times]. It is a compilation of biographical stories by his spiritual children. This book had an immense impression on me. I gave it to Stan, and he liked it too. And it is probably this book that shook my life (*perevorot*), turned it around. I was completely lost, and this inner emptiness could not be satisfied by any entertainment. But this book was like a live water (*zhivaya voda*). I was able to get the meaning of Christian love, and what does it mean to turn another cheek.

I haven't read the book at the time of this interview, but soon I had a chance to listen to it on tape while driving with Elena and Vlad to the Arizona monastery of St. Anthony. The book *Father Arseniy* details day to day life in one of the prison labor camps in the Russian Far East, very similar to the famous Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Archipelago Gulag*, where millions of the so called political and ideological foes of the Soviet state (*vragi naroda*, literally enemies of the people) were sent during 1930-40s. Among them were Orthodox believers, of both lay and clergy, whose faith was seen as dangerous and incompatible with the goals of the new Soviet Republics. Unlike Solzhenitsyn's *Archipelago*, *Father Arseniy* is written exclusively from the religious

Orthodox perspectives, depicting not only the horrors and inhumane conditions in camps, but also Christian ways to deal with them, in everyday interactions and labor chores. The overall message of the book is not of weakening of faith in such horrendous conditions, as usually happens when one confronts the eternal theodicy problem, but of its strengthening instead. Indeed, Father Arseniy not only grows in his faith himself, seeing his suffering as God's will and meekly accepting it, but he also spiritually attends to and in many cases turns to Orthodoxy many of the prisoners.

Reading this book not only guided Zoe and Stan in reinterpretation and uncovering of unknown layers in their country's history, it also facilitated the shaking of their personal value systems. Soon after their scientist friend had a son, and he asked Zoe whether she would become his *krestnaya* (God mother). The word *krestnaya* is connected to *krestit'* (to baptize) and comes from the root *krest* (cross). Zoe was decisive:

> I said that I was not baptized, but still I grabbed this opportunity, it was like a life saver for me then. I decided to get baptized (*pokrestit'sya*), found out how it is done. We also found the Russian church in Boston, went there, talked with the priest, he scheduled a date, and gave me the God's Law book by Slobodskoy. I read it, as a true *Komsomolka* I needed to know what organization I am seeking membership in. And when I read, I was horrified, because one of the main responsibilities of *krestnaya* is to raise a child in faith. But how will I raise anyone in faith if I am myself a nonbeliever? And I started to learn after I got baptized.

Zoe got baptized in the Russian Orthodox church in Boston, although she did not like the priest there, at least not at the first sight. She was quick to judge the way he looked, but admitted that he was a kind person. He instructed her on what to wear during the baptism, for example, told her to wear a thick shirt, so not to reveal too much after emerging from the water. He also had conversation with her and Stan before the baptism

about the main tenets of faith, but not too extensive. Zoe still did not completely understand what she was doing. As she was showing me pictures of her baptism from the family album, she commented: “For some reason I laughed during the Chrismation, don’t know why. Something was funny to me. I also have intolerance to smells, and the smell of *ladan* (incense) bothered me a lot. After baptism I was saturated with this smell, and I wanted to wash in off in the shower. But Stan said – what are you thinking, how can you? He told me to wait until the next day.”

Washing off anointing oils from your body for many believers is similar to washing off the grace, one wants to postpone it as long as possible. Zoe credits her husband Stan, who himself got baptized almost a year later, but having been raised in a pious Muslim family had acquired more sensitivity to spiritual matters, with keeping her from making this ignorant mistake.

Conclusion

Peter’s rhetorical question to Baptists – “What do they have to teach us?” – encompasses a more general attitude of the so called ‘cradle’ Orthodox to the ‘outsiders’ attempts to teach them about Christianity. By the mere fact of being Russian, people consider themselves already embedded in the rich Orthodox tradition of their country, notwithstanding that often they lack knowledge about main tenets of Christianity. Many share the view that having ‘roots’ in Russia and a certain predisposition of their souls to Orthodoxy is more important than to be knowledgeable about religion “in the head,” since knowledge is one of the acquired practices and not the prerequisite to faith. This is how Liza expressed this opinion: “I think that the Russian soul is distinctive, not better or

worse, but maybe deeper immersed in values that we had accumulated through generations. Russian people gravitate towards Orthodoxy, it is a natural faith for them."

While being responsive to new beliefs and practices, people undergoing conversion do not experience "a simple break with a previous social life," but rather are involved in "a process of integrating knowledge and experience" (Austine-Broos 2003: 2). This can be seen in the experience of Katerina, who in order to comprehend the Gospel's parables has read them in the light of her everyday situations and interactions. It is also can be seen in the ways people incorporate divine agency in their both past and present experiences. As have been noted by many ethnographers, "conversion narratives overflow with expressions of supernatural agency, in which the individual feels guided, or coerced, or enraptured by a divine presence" (Buckser and Glazier 2003: xii). Although not as dramatic as in other instances of conversion (see, for example, Harding 1987), which may be due to the gradual nature of change narrated by my informants, divine agency holds a constant presence in their stories. It can be more evasive, like in the cases of Anna's "inner voice" and Igor's "faith in the soul," or more direct, like in Liza's feeling of the angel teaching her the right steps in the church.

What unites the stories of my informants is that the divine presence was not experienced in the moment, but rather its role becomes ascribed to their experiences either when they are reflecting on them or trying to make sense of them in the present. Elena, for example, refers to the divine will quite often. In the above quote she views God's will as active in her process of churching. She also said that it "suited God (*Bogu bylo ugodno*)" to bring her to this particular church in the United States at the time before unification of the churches. There is a variety of expressions that people utilize to explain

why and how they came to church and faith: “God brought me,” “God precluded me,” “God decided it would be better for me,” to name a few. As they mature in their faith, people seem to become more aware of the divine agency in their past and present lives, and while many of the first steps to church they undertook on their own, without the feeling of the immediate presence of the transcendent, they consider it to have been following them all along. This suggests a more relational and dialogical connection with the divine, a relationship that leaves a space for human agency as well.

Uncovering one’s identity though deeply individual process, also involves various levels of sociality, especially when one gets involved in the life of the church parish. Involvement in the local Christian community for many of my informants happened for the first time in the United States and in this particular parish. This also means that rediscovering of their Orthodox identity was a collective process, encompassing learning and engaging in new types of social relations. The next chapter will shift focus from individual back to collective experiences of faith.

Chapter 4

The Parish and Its Priest

The previous chapter presented individual stories of coming to faith of parishioners in the Russian Orthodox South Californian parish, and positioned them within a broader context of social and religious developments in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, as well as within personal history of migration to the United States.

While being extremely personal and at times intimate stories, they nonetheless are not occurring in the socio-political vacuum and are always conditioned by culture. As authors of *Culture and Agency in Cultural World* put it, any personal formation "occurs via cultural resources enacted in a social context" (Holland et al. 2003: 282). Other scholars also stress that writing about personal experiences means "to speak of how individuals live in and through a shared socio-historic-cultural world," and that it is "a way of expressing the multiplicity of uniqueness that is always found in shared forms of life" (Zigon 2008: 87). Parish setting in the post-Soviet context exemplifies a particular social shared form of life, where familiar cultural resources intermix with newly found religiosity and create multiple, at times overlapping, discursive regimes. This chapter will examine how individuals with the newly acquired Orthodox identity learn to live their faith and reorient their dispositions towards themselves and others by engaging in the communal life of their church.

In his edited volume *Multiple Moralities and Religions in post-Soviet Russia* Zigon sets up a theoretical framework for the anthropological study of moralities and religion to address changes in contemporary Russian society. He looks at religions as just

one of many parts in the assemblages of what he terms “local moral constellation,” which is constitutive of many Soviet, secular and Western moralities (2011: 7). Zigon identifies three aspects of morality – institutional, public discourse, and embodied dispositions, – and suggests that ethics should be conceptually distinguished from them. Unlike morality which is "acted and articulated in either a non-conscious manner or discursively,” ethics is "a conscious attempt to be moral in moments of dilemma and questioning" (8). Zigon views ethics as a creative moment of reflective and reflexive work to be done by individuals or groups in the situation of the “moral breakdown,” when any or all of the aspects of morality are questioned and negotiated. During this creative moment “by means of various forms of internal and public debates and negotiations” new moral personhoods are created and new moral worlds are enacted (11). This framework, in Zigon’s opinion, is useful since it moves beyond the conceptualization of society consisting of one totalizing morality, and instead offers tools to analyze complexity of discourses and practices that compose local moral worlds.

The congregational or parish culture exemplifies and embodies, to apply Zigon’s terminology, one of the local moral worlds in society. Religious and congregational scholar Nancy Ammerman observes that congregations create their specific local culture by intermixing their larger religious tradition with local creativity (1998: 79). Every congregation for Ammerman “is unique gathering of people with a cultural identity all its own,” which is capable of constantly accommodating new members and therefore of maintaining fluidity in reshaping of congregational culture (78). Since for Ammerman the congregation “is never static” (81), it might occasionally undergo especially powerful transformative stages. Ammerman suggests that those times can be viewed in Turner’s

terms of liminality emblematic of the rites of passage – of being "no longer who we were but not yet who we will become," and as such they are characterized by reflection on the purpose and identity of the congregation, by experimentation with the rules, and by breaking of the routine (87). While congregational transformations of this kind are broader than "moral breakdowns" theorized by Zigon, his framework offers a useful lens to look at the complex interplay of secular and religious discourses in institutional and public setting which is the parish of the Russian Orthodox church abroad, the interplay that has the unique specificity of the local (moral) constellation.

Both 'constellation' and 'assemblage' terms used by Zigon imply temporality of a current construction and its fleeting nature with the potentiality of transformation. As applied to the parish discussed in this study, its identity was going through a profound change after the event of unification and the split that followed it (analyzed in chapter 2). New composition of the post-split parish brought new mixture of home and host cultures, of secularity and religiosity, and of levels of belonging to the church (cf. Agadjanian 2011: 21). Changes in the makeup of parishioners also resulted in new attitudes towards involvement in parish management and in relations with the priestly authority, which will be discussed at length in this chapter.

Majority of the parishioners at the time of my fieldwork were recent immigrants of the post-Soviet wave to the United States, the so called "newest Russians" (Erickson 2008). With few exceptions, some of which were mentioned in the previous chapter on individual coming to faith stories, many of them were newcomers to Orthodoxy. Some started their journey to faith while still at home country, some only after moving abroad. This local church became for most of them a landing space to work out many issues

related to the newly acquired status of being both immigrant and Russian Orthodox. Much of this work included negotiation of the new identities and reevaluating of the existing ones by becoming involved not only in the Liturgical life of the church, but in the day to day management of parish – while being unaccustomed to and inexperienced in neither one of those practices.

To draw again from authors of *Culture and Agency in Cultural World*, identity can be viewed as “one way of naming the dense interconnections between the intimate and public venues of social practice” and as “a central means by which selves, and the sets of actions they organize, form and re-form over personal lifetimes and in the histories of social collectivities” (Holland et al 2003 (1998): 270). Those conceptualizations of identities not only point to interconnectedness of intimate and public spaces, they position identity in the moment and also within the personal and shared collective histories as well. The latter brings to mind Ammerman’s notion of fluidity of congregational culture, and is in line with Stuart Hall’s thinking about cultural identity as “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’ (1999: 225). According to Hall, in ‘becoming’ cultural identity “belongs to the future as much as to the past,” it is a process of positioning ourselves within the narratives of the past through memory and myth and of creating and reaffirming difference. This for Hall is particularly true for diasporic identities, “which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (235). The dynamic concepts of identities above, embedding them in time and space, in personal experiences and in public actions is a way to analytically approach the transformational period in parish’ culture, and in individual and collective identities.

Parish life also facilitates new attitudes to authority, and the parish priest personifies it. The role of the priest in the Orthodox parish cannot be underestimated. He is the glue that holds the community of faithful together. As an Orthodox priest, through the sacrament of Ordination (Holy Order) he receives the charisms – gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are source of his power and authority in the church. This is how contemporary Orthodox theologian Thomas Hopko proposes to "properly understand" the parish priest:

> The parish priest, properly understood in Christian Orthodoxy, is neither a domineering despot nor a servile hireling. He is neither an authoritarian "stand-in" for an almost always absent hierarch, nor a lackey at the beck and call of a secularized "board of trustees." He is rather a called, trained, tested and ordained teacher, pastor and priest who guarantees the presence and action of Christ in the community… He is the servant of God, for God's glory and the good of all people, including those outside the parish community, whoever they may be." (2003: 9)

If this sounds perfect to the point of impossible, it is because it is. In this description there is the composite of all the ideal qualities one wants and expects to see in a priest. As a teacher, pastor and priest he should be equally effective in all spheres of church life – liturgical, pastoral and educational. He is supposed to lead faithful in worship, as well as to pastor to their collective and individual needs, and to facilitate their and their children's continuous growth in Christian faith. Individual qualities of the priest, his personality are also should be in harmony with the performance of his priestly duties, leaving almost no room for a human error.

Hierarchy of priestly authority in the Church is often described as a vertical line, and points to "a linearity of power and authority, taken in the positive sense of the power given to the apostles by Christ" (Steenberg 2008: 123). This line had been preserved

through generations and "traces the episcopal lineage of the churches from the twelve apostles, through the ecclesiastical centers they founded, locating their authoritative structure in the unbroken connection to these first descendants" (Steenberg 2008: 123). Through this line a local bishop and his priests and deacons are connected to the one true catholic and Apostolic church, and have the grace of the Holy Spirit and the authority to teach the gospels and to perform sacraments such as baptism, confession and communion.

As a Rector of the church, on the other hand, a priest is responsible for horizontal plane – for relationships with parishioners and with the parish "core" members, as well as for the day to day functioning of the church and for keeping it in appropriate physical condition. In the words of Metropolitan Yustinian, archbishop of Naro-Fominsk and who was appointed an Administrator of the Patriarchal parishes (MP) in the United States after the unification of churches, the cross formed by connecting these vertical and horizontal lines is the indicator of the proper composition of the church life (online, august 9, 2013). While the vertical line presents the type of relationship between a man and God, the horizontal one connects people attending the church among themselves (see Kozlov 2010). If one of the relationships is missing, or conversely is given a priority, the church life would stumble over many problems. According to Metropolitan Yustinian, for example, the cross in the American parish life unraveled horizontally due to the high laity involvement in the affairs of the church.

Alex Agadjanyan, in his overview of the contemporary Orthodox parishes in Russia, notes the persistent dilemma facing the parish priests, the dilemma that is also perpetuated by the parish by-laws in Russia and, I would add, abroad. He calls it a

paradoxical combination of the priest's canonical and economic dependency on the church hierarchy with his pronounced leadership role in pastoring, organizing and educating the parish (2011: 35). Thus the working By-laws of the ROCOR, which were established by the Synod of Bishops in1951, and revised in 1955 and 1971, in their first article state that the parish "constitutes a part of the Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and it shall be subject to the canonical rule of its Diocesan Bishop and the immediate supervision of the rector appointed by the latter." The article 1 then has a note:

> … the Diocesan Bishop being the Head of the local Church (diocese), has the right to remove the clergymen of the Diocese from their positions in case of their serious crimes or misdeeds and transfer them to other positions for the good of the ministry. The Diocesan Bishop has also the right to remove from their positions any persons in the parish administration and also to exclude from membership of the parish persons who resist the Administration, or those who conduct disruptive work, or who are convicted of crimes or serious misdemeanors harmful to the peaceful life of the parish. The Diocesan Bishop also has the power to suspend clergymen and excommunicate laymen in cases of serious violation of Church order and discipline.

The article 2 states the main aim of the parish as: "to unite the believers around the parish church on the basis of the teachings, the canons, the traditions and the rules of the Russian Orthodox Church for the satisfaction of the religious needs and moral benefit of its members." The object of the parish according to the article 3 is "to mutually assist the believers, forming part thereof and united in the Faith in Christ our Savior, by means of prayers, Sacraments, Christian teaching and Church discipline, in attaining salvation through the participation in sacraments and Christian enlightenment, worthy life and Christian charity." The article 3 then lists the immediate aims of the parish, which are:

"a) the care of the church and its adornment; b) the maintenance of the clergy; c) the economic prosperity of the parish and the care of the needs of the church, the clergy and all parish institutions, the diocesan and social needs; d) charitable work, and e) educational work in the spirit of the Orthodox Church."

In the article 16 the managing bodies of the parish are identified, the first of which is the general meeting of the members of the parish, i.e. those "Orthodox Christians of both sexes, regardless of their nationality, who have reached the age of 21, who pay the established membership dues, who make their confession and take Holy Communion not less than once a year, and who tend to the moral and economic welfare of the parish may become parish members" (article 11). The annual parish meeting elects new members of the Parish council and the Auditing Committee, two other managing bodies. The Parish council consists of the church Rector, Warden, Treasurer, Secretary, Head Sister (who is elected at the annual Sisterhood meeting), and up to five other members. The Auditing Committee, which oversees financial operations of the parish and makes an annual financial report to the parish meeting, consists of three members. It is stated in the note to the article 16 that "Canonical as well as jurisdictional matters shall not be within the competency" at the annual Parish meetings.

Everybody who is elected into any of the church managing bodies, including priests "shall be considered lawfully appointed if they occupy their said offices by appointment and permission and with the blessing of the Ruling Bishop appointed to this office by the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia" (article 8). The Rector of the church is appointed by the ruling bishop, he "shall be the

immediate supervisor of the parish and he shall be held responsible for its welfare before the diocesan authorities" (article 9).

The expectations placed on the priest in performing all these functions are high, especially in the post-Soviet context – both at home, in Russia, and abroad. The existence of these heightened expectations can be explained by ascribing to the priest the responsibility for the forming of the collective identity of the parish. There is a famous saying in Russian, part of the enduring folk wisdom: *Kakov pop takov i prikhod*, which is translated as – the parish is like its priest. This means that the parish as a communal entity is a reflection of the priest, and that if that entity functions harmoniously it is because the priest had provided necessary conditions for it, both spiritual and social. The opposite also holds true – if the parish is in disarray, consumed by conflicts and quarrels, this is due to the priest's inability to produce the favorable environment in his church, to connect vertical and horizontal types of relationships.

Another explanation lies in already mentioned unfamiliarity of newly converted people with almost everything related to the life inside the church walls. While many of them were exposed to some Orthodox practices in their homes, usually through a devout *babushka*, such as praying, veneration of icons and baking of celebratory meals, their steps into church required new levels of education. Some of my informants admitted a certain mystical connection to the church ("I was drawn to it," "It felt that I was finally home"), and a mysteriously resurfaced knowledge of what to do ("I just knew where to put a candle," "I knew where to stand"), but those feelings gradually were losing their intensity and were in need of a more conscious understanding of what was actually happening during the services. Recall Katerina, who started to attend services regularly

and was enjoying them, although she could not understand anything besides "Lord have mercy." She then relied on the parish priest in her Washington, DC church to guide her in becoming en-churched. Vlad at some point in our conversation suggested that what is going on in the divine Liturgy should be explained during the divine Liturgy, so that people would know why they are crossing themselves, what are they praying about, and so on.

Before the unification of ROCOR with MP priests who were serving in the ROCOR churches were at first those who immigrated from Russia, thus carrying with them lived knowledge of the Orthodox tradition, and later those who were educated abroad in the Orthodox seminaries, such as St. Vladimir seminary (OCA) and Holy Trinity seminary (ROCOR). Russian priests from Russia were not allowed to serve in the ROCOR churches unless they go through the ritual repentance for having served in the "tainted" Soviet church. Therefore, most of those who managed to immigrate from Russia and other post-Soviet countries were serving, usually on a temporary basis and not as Rectors, in the American Orthodox churches (OCA), who did not severe all connections with the Mother-church in Russia.

As mentioned before, previous priests Father John and Father Joseph were educated at the ROCOR Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary in Jordanville, NY, and were appointed to the parish as Rectors soon after their graduation. Both facilitated and invited more democratic attitudes in dealings with church matters, and both were starting to face challenges as the make-up of the parish and its managing body – parish council, were getting more mixed with representatives from different waves of immigrants. Father Andrey did not have to face this particular challenge, since all *zarubezhniki* left with

Father Joseph, however he definitely introduced new dynamic into his interactions between parishioners and parish council members.

One of the first initiatives Father Andrey undertook after becoming the new priest was to propose the extension to the church building. Both by the introduction of the new priest and the renovation of the church building deepened the already existing liminal qualities of the transitional period in the life of the parish, and had led to the critical transformation of the collective identity of the parish, as well as of the religious identities of individual believers.

Every change in the church – be it the makeup of parishioners, additions to the building, or a new priest – present challenges to the identity of the parish, and takes some time to settle in and normalize. While not every change creates a crisis, the liminal nature of the transformative period (cf. Ammerman 1998) requires reevaluation and/or reaffirmation of the main purposes and values.

Below is the ethnography of tensions exacerbated in this period of uncertainty and ambiguity, tensions that come out of struggles of how to combine, differentiate and reconcile faith and life, spiritual and material, sacred and secular. Evolvement and fluidity of Orthodox identity within the parish culture will be analyzed through the prism of, the often contentious, interactions with the parish priests. The ethnography of the rest of the chapter will untie many knots which emerged during the process of creating the newly discovered Orthodox identity, by looking at discourses generated by involvement in parish life and its many challenging and conflict situations.

Father Andrey

Unlike previous priests, Father Andrey was “one of us” (*svoi*, *rodnoi*), Russian, as one of the female parishioners once emotionally stated. He immigrated to the United States in the early 1990s, after being serving in various Russian Orthodox churches as a priest for twenty years, since 1970s. In the US he had been serving in various OCA churches, as invited but also as a permanent priest. However, at the time of his appointment to the local church he was not serving anywhere, and was even considering taking a car washing job in Los Angeles. Given the dire priest-less situation in the parish after the split of 2007, the diocese authorities of ROCOR decided to appoint Father Andrey as the Rector of the church rather fast, contingent on parishioners approval. Some parishioners, especially the ones who served on the parish council at the moment of split, felt a heightened sense of responsibility in making the right choice.

Vlad, for example, urged not to rush into any decisions and to conduct a more thorough search. He knew of a young priest in Texas, a graduate of the Jordanville Holy Trinity seminary and a friend of Father John. Like Father John he was of a relatively young age (late thirties) and had small children, which was seen by Vlad and some others as an appropriate status for a young and growing parish. On the other hand, Leo was actively lobbying for Father Andrey, highlighting his decades of experience and his ethnic, cultural and national roots.

These preferences also reflected the positions Vlad and Leo held in the church, and their previous ties to Father Joseph. Vlad, Elena and their young children were quite close to Father Joseph’s family, they met often outside of the church for dinners, walks, and talks about movies and literature. Elena sadly recalled that during some of those

times Father Joseph was lobbying them for not accepting the unification, although she did not realize it then: “We had all these discussions and debates, and they tried to convince us. Especially *matushka*, Father Joseph seemed to be more flexible.” The shock of the split was felt by them more than by others.

Leo, on the other hand, was the whistle-blower during Father Joseph’s anti-unification stances. He would write letters to higher diocese authorities, listing Father Joseph’s public utterances against unification, many of which happened at the sermons following the Liturgy. At one point Leo even challenged Father Joseph publicly – unheard of lay disobedience to the priestly authority, since nobody is supposed to contradict the priest as he stands at the Ambon with the cross and delivers a sermon. From the point of view of some parishioners, this particular incident caused many of the old immigrants, *zarubezhniki*, to join Father Joseph in the split, since they perceived this insolent behavior as yet another manifestation of the ungodly Soviet mentality, still vibrant in the recently converted post-Soviets, and as an additional proof that grace has left the MP (in its both Soviet and post-Soviet garb) churches. In the same category was the action of writing letters to higher diocesan authorities with reports on Father Joseph’s activities in church, which was compared to KGB *donosy* (denunciations). Supporters of Leo justified his actions by referring to the parish bylaws, citing the part about canonical and jurisdictional matters being outside of the competence of individual parishes.

The disagreements between Vlad and Leo also had another dimension, having to do with their position and function in the church. Vlad was an active participant in the services in a very important role, as a Reader, – reading prayers, singing in a choir, and being the priest’s right hand in many technical aspects of the service. After his official

initiation to the Reader rank during the special ceremony, he started wearing long black cossak, a garment that was now allowed for him to wear, since he was no longer just a layman. Vlad also served on several parish councils, first just as a member, then as a parish secretary.

Leo also was a parish council member, and also very active in the church. He was a manager, an organizer, a supervisor of all activities taking place during and after services. He would arrive at the very beginning of the Sunday Liturgy, always dressed in a suite and a tie, light the *lampadas* (oil lamps hanging in front of the icons), venerate icons and put candles by them, and then assume the position by the entrance, ready to instruct attendees in proper behavior. One of the parishioners once called him "our *babushka* without a scarf" for his zeal in telling people when was the right time to put candles, when one should be quiet and not move around, and so on. He would also be collecting donations by the end of the Liturgy, standing there with the plate, greeting everyone, thanking for contribution ("God bless" or "*Spasi Gospodi*"), and overall looking very presentable and trustworthy. Oksana, the close friend of him and his family, would be saying at the time that he was the only one she sees as a good *Starosta*, Warden – "when I look at him, standing there and praying, in his suit, I feel calm and reassured that all will be fine."

And indeed, Leo perfectly combined religious piety with the sincere care for the church' administrative and financial well-being. Leo mowed the grass, painted the fence, organized "brothers" of the parish for Saturday cleanings – which was a welcomed addition to the overactive and overworked sisterhood, traditionally carrying all the burdens of keeping the church clean. Stan, one of the "brothers" who participated, recalls

how well those Saturday work activities were organized: “We painted the fence, Leo had all the tools ready. Then he treated us for beer and some food.” For Stan the working together for the church helped to facilitate the sense of Christian community, while also being good for each individual soul. In his opinion, all parishioners should be involved in collective work for the church, building or cleaning, for their spiritual development.

Although Leo was very enthusiastic about Father Andrey, who was eventually appointed as the Rector of the church in the Summer of 2007, their constructive relationship was short lived. At one point, according to Father Andrey, Leo became too managerial and bossy, and was presenting the priest plan after plan for the improvements to be done in the church. Lacking in diplomacy and being rather straightforward in expressing himself, Father Andrey refused the plans, and said that he would manage the church as he saw fit. After that Leo threatened that he would stop donating money. And he did. The seeds of the future conflict with Father Andrey can be seen in this interaction. They include his unquestionable affirmation of the final authority in the church, and at the same time complete dependence on the parishioners for the financial support of the church, including priestly salary. The drying of Leo’s generous contributions to the church and the priest ignited the many crises that the parish, parishioners and the priest experienced in the coming years, the years that coincided with my fieldwork there. One of those crises involved the church renovation project proposed by Father Andrey in early 2008, and it will be discussed in the following section.

Priest and Church Building

With the introduction of the renovation project Father Andrey tapped into already existing discontents among parishioners towards the location of the church and to the building space it occupied.

There have been improvements to the building done before, especially to the interior. Since from the start it was a residential house, it had a kitchen, a bathroom and a shower. Shower room was adjacent to the small room used by the priest as an office, and it had a couch on which Father Joseph slept before his family moved from Jordanville, NY, and found a place to live. The floors were carpeted, and throughout years accumulated multiple stains from candle drips. Occasional interior touch ups, the most drastic of which were made during Father John's tenure, refreshed the place and made it more church-like. However, it was becoming more difficult to accommodate the growing number of parishioners throughout 2000s. On big Orthodox holidays, especially on *Paskha* (Easter), half of the people attending the service were standing outside, mixing with multiple cats inhabiting the streets at nocturnal hours.

Father Joseph too had plans for upgrading the building. There was a proposal at the annual parish meeting in Winter 2007, just before the unification, to sell the current building and use the money to find a bigger place in a better area. One of the big donors of the church was offering to match all the donations for the building fund to make it possible. The search took place and there were some positive prospects with nice properties, but in May 2007 the unification agreement between the MP and ROCOR was signed, and both the donor and Father Joseph left the church.

The idea of selling the old church building was revived after Father Andrey was appointed Rector, however without the generous matching opportunity. As some of the council members spilled out into the new council, now headed by Father Andrey, the ideas about finding the new church building and selling the old remained intact. At the annual parish meeting (different from monthly council meetings since it includes all the parishioners) in February 2008 various thoughts and opinions were circulating on this topic: using the existing church property to construct new residential buildings and rent them, which would provide additional cash flow for the church; buying pre-fabricated wooden church in Russia and putting it on the property alongside the existing church; selling the current church and its property and buying a new one; leaving the current church as is and building a new one in an area of more geographic proximity to the majority of parishioners; making new additions to the current church to increase its space.

These views reflected very varying and competing perceptions of what actually the church building is. Is it just another property to be sold and exchanged? Should it be treated as a residential house to get rent from in order to pay for the new church's ongoing expenses? Should the new church building resemble architecturally onion dome-crowned churches in Russia, or should it be a simple inexpensive shack (*sarai* as one parishioner called it)? Is the existing church building a sacred place, being sanctified by the presence of icons, relics and many years of prayers? The proponents of the last view were not only outnumbered at this meeting, but their position was seen as irrelevant to the main goal – to find a new church and financial means to support it. After the exit of big donors with Father Joseph, who were able and willing to foot the bills related to property purchases and salaries of the priest, the meager situation of parish finances exposed itself

and was impossible to ignore. So while some sentiments about the sacredness of the old church were shared sympathetically, they were overweight by the necessity to find and/or generate additional financial resources.

There was also another dimension in this separation of views. Those who saw the church as a sacred space tended to be older women with limited financial means, and therefore unable to contribute to big projects in monetary ways. They cleaned the candle holders, washed floors, cooked, did dishes and took away garbage, they attended all the services, prayed and confessed, but they were not seen as suited to make valuable decisions about the future of church building. When one of them said, that maybe we should pray more and God will provide us with needed resources, it was received as somewhat irrelevant in a bigger scheme of things. True, we all should pray to God, but we also should be proactive. As the Russian proverb goes, *Na Boga nadeisya no sam ne ploshay* – "You should rely on God, but don't fail yourself," or in English equivalent "God helps those who help themselves." Utilization of the folk wisdom in these "debates" provided an aura of validation for actions centered not so much on prayer, but on common sense and practical business models.

Leo provided an additional insight into "the new building, the old building" dilemma. Besides being one of the remaining big donors in church, he and his family were also driving every weekend for almost two hours to attend the services, never coming late. For them, obviously, having a church closer to home was a desired outcome. So instead of focusing on sacredness of the existing church, he shifted the focus on the surroundings: not only the church was in the bad neighborhood, which was not good for the children, it was also surrounded by Buddhist temples, "*kapischa*" as he called them,

term referring to pagan places of worship and for the Russian Orthodox ear having an unquestionably negative tint. One of the American parishioners, George, reminded that Christ worked in bad neighborhoods and later Apostles worked with pagans, but majority of the Russian parishioners were not inclined to look into the missionary aspect of the church life.

Father Andrey remained mainly quiet, and just listened to people's ideas. But from what followed it was clear that he preferred not to hold any more of those lengthy discussions and take decision making into his own hands. He enlisted the help of the new Warden Katerina and the new Treasurer Natalia, and they searched for properties and developed plans for the extension of the current church building. All this was done in the Summer without informing other parish council members, and in the Fall some of them voiced dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency in the priest's actions.

On the agenda of one of the resumed council meetings in the Fall of 2008 was who should be hired for the construction project, contingent on its approval by the all-parish meeting, including the questions of the firm's qualifications, experience, reviews, and so on. Father Andrey already had one in mind and was not too enthusiastic about hearing the alternatives, but following the rules of the democratic management required to have a discussion on the issue. After listening to many opinions and having felt that the discussion was getting too long, Father Andrey attempted to stop it and to move on. The reaction was immediate, given that on previous meeting Father Andrey exercised this style of "because I said so," and many council members felt cut off short again. One of them said that because of such authoritarian behavior of the priest, people have bad opinions about our church. "What people?" – Father Andrey asked. The response was

that those were people from Russian speaking community, discussing our church in hair salons and local delis. “You expect me to pay attention to what people say in hair salons, people who do not come to church, but supposedly are aware of everything that is going on here?” In a twist of irony, the priest who served in the Soviet Union and was constantly harassed and watched by the officials, now had to answer for his image as a priest to a community of gossiping ladies.

Regular contentious interactions with the priest at the council meetings on matters of accountability, style of management, following the bylaws of the church, priest’s salary, to mention a few, resulted in alienation of half of the council members, including both Leo and Vlad, and at the annual meeting in the Winter of 2009 four new council members and all new members of the Auditing Committee were elected.

The meeting lasted more than five hours and was full of tensions and emotions. By majority of the members votes it approved the proposed by Father Andrey renovation plan of the church to be started in the Summer 2009. Father Andrey found two private donors to finance the construction, and hired chosen by him local construction company.

But after summer vacations the new council too was growing increasingly hostile to the authoritarian style of the priest, who was making all the decisions single-handedly. He had disagreements with the Treasurer about managing donations for the construction fund. Some council members also disapproved that the newly installed windows did not have handles for opening them, that two dishwashers were purchased for the kitchen instead of one. Father Andrey also increased the control over the church space. During the Liturgy on Sunday he locked the doors that connect the kitchen with small kiosk space that in turn leads to the worshipping space. His rationale was that people should

pay more attention to the service, and less to wondering around, checking out the kitchen and letting cooking smells to penetrate the church' liturgical space.

In the edited volume *Studying Congregations*, substantial amount of discussion is dedicated to conflicts in church. Dudley, for example, writes that conflict "can provide a useful lens into many aspects of congregational life, including culture, leadership, and process… Conflict only arises when people care about and are committed to each other and the congregation" (1998: 119). Dudley goes on to point that the issues "people are willing to fight about may put in bold relief the functional priorities of faith and practice of a congregation," and that analysis of the conflict requires paying attention to beliefs and assumptions that "people bring to the conflict and use to frame the meaning of conflict issues" (1998: 119, 120).

Another author suggests that behind contentious situations in congregations usually lie unresolved tensions between explicit and implicit theologies. He identifies the explicit theologies as the ones "present in the official doctrines, creeds, and confessions a congregation subscribes to" and in a religious heritage of a congregation (Schreiter 1998: 30). The implicit theologies "inform the congregation's life but are not necessarily acknowledged or overtly expressed… they may be present in a variety of places and activities," such as allocations of budgets and responsibilities of members (ibid.). If unacknowledged, implicit theologies can erode congregational life by taking over the explicit ones, therefore in order to resolve the internal conflicts of the congregation the implicit theologies must be brought up to the surface. This becomes a task of a person conducting a congregational study, since the implicit theologies "often direct the life of a congregation in ways unbeknownst to the members themselves" (1998: 31).

In the conflict that was unfolding for two years before priest's removal, two opposing discourses, or implicit theologies, gradually emerged and crystallized. It is possible to distinguish between them as spiritual and legalistic, or more broadly – religious and secular, spiritual and worldly. From the one hand, there was an attempt to figure out the spiritual nature of events, to realize collective responsibility of the parish for the emergence of the conflict situation; on the other hand, there was a continuous tendency to channel all discussions into direction of secular values of legality, transparency, decency. In the process of the conflict escalation these two discourses were constantly overlapping, and their interconnection points to the existing tension between the Church as the household of God and the body of Christ, a place for sacraments and divine services, and the church as a social organization, responsible for the building of community, education of children and maintaining of cultural ties.

Sides were employing two different models in shaping their positions towards the authority of the priest: one of the Soviet top-down authoritarian model, "if Politburo ordered, we should comply," and another of pre-revolutionary model of church spiritual hierarchy. If the first model dominated the discourse, people tended to resist all kinds of 'orders' coming from the priest, in both management and spiritual matters, since in form those orders reminded of the imposed compliance with the top. The latter model was striving to rely on church tradition, and to conceive of hierarchy as a necessary condition for the creating of spiritual community.

One incorporated more secular-liberal views and another traditional-conservative attitudes, with each focusing on different aspects of priest's service in the church. In the process secular and religious elements of these discourses at first were tightly

intertwined, but gradually started to move in separate tracks. At some point Valentina summed it up in such a way: “It seems to me that we talk pass each other. Our arguments are like two parallel lines, going side by side but not connecting. One side talks about his love of money, and another about how he leads them to salvation. One talks about truth and justice, and another about love and forgiveness. One sees him as a KGB agent, and another as a martyr.” The following sections will analyze how and from what sources people were drawing in justifying their positions in the conflict with the priest, what was the dynamic relationship between explicit and implicit theologies in the parish.

Position of Priest in the American Parish – Spiritual and Secular Components in Pastoring

As was discussed earlier in the chapter, democratic management of the parish, according to the church bylaws, is carried out at the annual parish meeting, which votes on all the ongoing matters of church life and elects the members of the parish council, who manage day to day affairs throughout the year.

On few occasions issues of attracting people to church were raised. Some council members were feeling that relatively low church attendance can be remedied by doing a targeted outreach activities among the Russian speaking populace in Southern California. During one of Winter 2009 meetings the idea was voiced about developing and sending out survey-type questionnaires, the purpose of which was to find out what people want to see in church and then to adjust church activities accordingly. Among the types of questions circulating in this discussion were how often one goes to church, why and what can church do to make one attend more often. Natalia, a housewife in her early 40-s who

has just been elected a treasurer, was concerned, in accordance with her new position, who would pay for printing and mailing of the surveys. Another half an hour of discussions led to the idea that questionnaires could be passed at the end of the *Paskhal* liturgy, attendance of which traditionally was the greatest with up to three hundred people showing up. This way church can avoid expenses of mailing but nonetheless reach out to potential church-goers.

The idea was written down in the minutes of the meeting, to be revisited after the volunteer council members would sketch out the survey questions. However, soon after, at one of the informal *trapezas* and after a glass or two of the obligatory Charles Shaw wine, Father Andrey who at the meeting seemed to quietly accept the idea, jokingly asked: “so, along with the *Paskhal* egg I am supposed to be passing out questionnaires?” He went on to describe how ridiculous and out of place this would look. The feast of *Paskha*, in his opinion, is to be celebrated properly and with the spiritual message of the day intact: the midnight procession, singing of the “Christ has risen,” celebratory Liturgy and communion, with the passing of the colored eggs in the end.

Another business idea, raised later the same year, included employing a professional Public Relations (PR) firm. Enlisting of the services of the PR firm was argued on the grounds that for the outreach and recruitment to be successful, the research and marketing should be done by professionals and not by home-grown surveys. This move, according to the proponents of the PR idea, would allow to disseminate the information about the church more effectively and would bring in people from the Russian community, who are bombarded with all kinds of options in the American ‘religious marketplace.’

Katerina, the newly elected parish Warden, was skeptical about church marketing based on her personal experience. She said that if hundreds of people come on *Paskha*, it means that they know where the church is, they just do not need it. “We cannot offer more than we already have, – she elaborated, – we are not here to please people or to force them to come. Before I used to talk to those who came for *Paskha*, telling them how wonderful the church is and how much they are missing by not attending. But now I know that it is useless. If they wanted they would be here.” Katerina was learning from her experiences in watching the church attendance over the years that missionary component of reaching out was irrelevant in Orthodoxy at this particular stage – people knew about it but were not interested in becoming parishioners, treating the Orthodox tradition as merely a cultural artifact.

From the ‘growing business’ line of thinking emerged the idea of improving the leadership qualities of the priest. Since the priest in some ways is the ‘face’ of the church, people who come to the church would want to see a capable leader, skilled in communicating with diverse groups. While Father Andrey’s priestly experience in Russia was seen as an advantage in delivering “good and solid” service, in the matters of managing the parish in America it was considered a handicap. Tamara once said: “Maybe he is an experienced priest, but he does not understand that he is not in Russia anymore, and he is not surrounded by *babushkas* listening to his every word. We do not need this *edinolichie* (monocracy) here.”

Father Andrey was seen as falling short in many leadership qualities and people skills, mainly because of his authoritative style, which prevented the democratic expression of ideas. He liked to say “I am the boss here,” and once made fun of the

council member for "highlighting with red pencil every word in the parish bylaws," which prompted the latter to defiantly throw the copy of the bylaws into the garbage can. 'Carnivalesque' moments aside, such stubborn behavior of the priest led to his accusations in violating human decency and "Orthodox morality," as one council member put it in the complaint letter to the Archbishop.

Reaching an impasse in productive communication with the priest, mainly due to his escalating disagreement with the treasurer over the management of construction donations and bills, by the end of 2009 the parish council started to meet without him. This dire situation was first described in the letter to the Dean of the parish, and after not getting a timely response from him, in a series of letters to the Archbishop. The letter writing detailing utterings and actions of Father Andrey took a life of its own. Some council members felt a need to meet every week, and at every meeting a new lengthy draft of a letter to Archbishop was presented. Valentina remembers: "our meetings would start with the opening of a bottle of wine and eating. Nobody remembered to pray. Dan would lay out another draft. We would read it, argue over some lines and yell at each other." Katerina said that it reminded her of the elementary school: "the complaints became petty – he used this and this word, and what about tattoo on his hand, and maybe he is a KGB agent, you should investigate his past." Both Valentina and Katerina felt that the initial drive to right the wrong and seek the spiritual guidance from the diocese was deteriorating into hostility towards the priest and each other, into separating parishioners into 'us' and 'them.'

This internal division, search for the enemy within, framed in terms of "seeking the truth" and "fighting for the cleanness of the church," is not novel and is a part of the

recent Soviet legacy, if one substitutes the ‘church’ with the ‘party.’ It was ironic to Valentina that appeals to democracy and transparency in church affairs ended up in the resorting to the Soviet style written complaints about the impure and adverse elements in our midst. She recalled that one parishioner even told her that now she understood how the civil war happened in Russia after the revolution, and that if the circumstances were different, violence could have erupted in this church. As with the revolution, however, heightened hostility within the parish was seen by some parishioners as a consequence of the increased reliance on the secular models in managing the church, and of the attempts to find truth in this world.

The truth, in the view of majority of the council members, was in following the rules spelled out in the bylaws, especially concerning rights and responsibilities of the treasurer, such as having access to all the church expense accounts. Father Andrey, however, preferred to submit construction expenses to the Auditing committee and not to the treasurer, since he in his own words “did not trust her.” He stated few instances when she questioned and was suspicious of some of the receipts. The treasurer, Natalia, remained very persistent and found support for her claims in the bylaws. The council members had to agree, but increasingly the tone in the letters to the diocese and absence of the priest from the council meetings started to bother some of them.

Natalia, however, maintained that “we should all be on one side,” even if some do not agree with the written complaints about the priest, because then “we are on the other side,” i.e. the unified position of the council is ruined. This possibility was seen as detrimental for the council’s searches for “truth and honesty.” In one of the phone

conversations I had with Natalia she defended the council member, Dan, who was the main initiator and writer of all the letters to the diocese.

During almost half a year of the conflict situation the council received only one reply from the Archbishop. He asked the members to remain calm and not jump to any conclusions about actions of the priest, citing the example of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco. St. John is one of the modern Orthodox saints and, as his name indicates, had lived first in China and then after the Second World War in San Francisco. In San Francisco he built the Cathedral dedicated to the icon of the Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrows, now the main cathedral of the West Coast ROCOR diocese. During the construction in the 1970s Father John, now St. John, was accused by some parishioners of stealing money and dragged through the courts at his rather old age. The Archbishop in his letter referred to this incident, while asking the council to be patient and promising to send a special investigative committee.

This response satisfied Katerina and couple of other council members, since it came from a higher institutional authority and had both an advice and a promise out of conflict in it. At the following council meeting Katerina said that, as Christians, the council members should forgive Father Andrey and ask forgiveness from him, move on, and let the diocese take care of the rest. This appeal to Christian values was not shared by most members of the council, who treated it with suspicion of a hidden agenda Katerina must have had, and one of them expressed their shared opinion this way: “What forgiveness? We are seeking the truth.” He did not appreciate the Archbishop’s response and compared it to the orders of *Politburo*: “so again we should do as *Politburo* tells us?” The decision was made to ignore the letter, write to yet higher authorities, and set the

conditions for the diocesan committee during its work in the parish – making sure that nothing would be done behind the closed doors.

At this point in the development of the conflict the tension was not contained within the parish council. The members of the Auditing committee and other parishioners, who were usually not involved or concerned with church management questions, were becoming more vocal. It would be fair to say that this 'side' was the carrier of the religious discourse which increasingly came to counteract the secular one. Igor, for example, in the long phone conversation with me said: "All the laws, including bylaws, are secondary. I am in the Orthodox church and not in a business firm. There are many articles in the bylaws that are constantly being violated, we are all weak. And violations should be treated as our weaknesses and forgiven, and the same goes for the priest." Some of the bylaws violations Igor was referring to concerned the so called 'living in bondage,' which at the moment was practiced by several parishioners and council members. The selective use of the letter of bylaws was seen by Igor as a means to achieve the main aim – get rid of Father Andrey, for "he probably stepped on some toes. Who knows why."

Liza and Valentina attempted to reevaluate and explain their attitudes towards following the laws based on their Soviet upbringing. Liza expressed it this way: "We were raised in double standards, there was one face we have in public, and another at home. What you could say within your family, was impossible to say in public. I would never discuss at work how my grandfather was persecuted during Stalin purges, but at home we always remembered that." Liza was referring to the shared Soviet past, during which public and private expressions of ideas, beliefs and memories were at odds, and

which facilitated viewing of public expressions as pretense, and private as real. One could agree with the authority in public, while privately distrusting it (cf. Yurchak 2005 on a sharp line between public and private living of the 'last Soviet generation'). Specifically referring to 'living in bondage' and having marital affairs Valentina offered this interpretation: "Affairs were plentiful at my work place. Everybody had at least one. And you know, they were seen as a manifestation of private freedom, sort of private resentment against the overburdening standards of the system regulating your thoughts and behavior." She also recalled that the line about being "politically literate and morally fit" was obligatory in the personal files of party members at her work and elsewhere, however everybody knew that almost all of them had lasting marital affairs. Valentina used it as an explanation of a certain tolerance towards choices people make in their private lives, and of a sense of inappropriateness in bringing it up publically.

In the context of the church this secular attitude of tolerance to private misgivings got a Christian justification of being non-judgmental about people's weaknesses, as expressed by Igor, but the act itself became a sin – of adultery and fornication. As any other sin in Orthodox Christianity, it has to be confessed with the honest inclination to overcome and ideally not repeat it. Father Andrey was considered by almost all parishioners as a great confessor. Confessions for recent post-Soviet Orthodox present the source of a lot of anxieties, not only because it is new for them in form – neither a conversation nor a therapy session, - but also because they have to disclose details of their private lives and thoughts, with fornication being a classic example of a great source of discomfort (cf. Zigon 2010). Tamara once said: "you know, my dear, there are some things you will not tell to a priest, especially a young priest, right?" Oksana shared that

recently she was going through a difficult personal period in her life, and she felt a constant need for confession, since she was bothered by her actions and passions over which she seemed to lose control. Herself married she developed an attraction to a married man and it was mutual. She used to have affairs before, but now she was a practicing Orthodox and she had to deal with it differently, especially that her infatuation was apparent to the rest of the parish. Oksana was embarrassed to confess to Father Andrey what she was going through, and so she would try to do a general confession, i.e. read from the list of sins that the priest was always keeping on the confessional stand. She tried to refer to the authority of the previous priest, Father Joseph, who would encourage parishioners to read from the list of sins once in a while in order to remind themselves of the fullness of their sinful nature. This time, however, Father Andrey was not persuaded: "He told me to do it in my own words." And so she did, and was crediting Father Andrey for providing crucial spiritual support and saving her from the undesirable outcome of succumbing to passions.

But Oksana remained critical of Father Andrey in other areas, separating his spiritual priestly authority from his personal qualities and abilities to lead the parish. Liza, a close personal friend of Oksana for many years, was very angry at her for that: "If you trust him as a priest, then trust him in everything – maybe he knows better what we need, he has years of experience. He has a special grace after all, he is able to see what is closed from us." Distrust of secular authority during the Soviet times did not translate for Liza into the distrust of the priestly authority, the latter for her belonged to the realm of the real and not pretense acceptance. Zoe echoed Liza's spiritual undertones in interpreting the critical situation by saying that maybe we as a parish should be treated

authoritatively: "We had developed such high opinions of ourselves, we thought that we created a community (*obschina*), that we have achieved something. And now we are given a lesson in patience, so we can humble our pride (*smirat' gordynyu*)." Collective identity of the parish was once again linked to the cultivation in oneself Christian virtues, individually each of the parishioners had to grow spiritually, so the whole parish would too.

There was always an acknowledgement of unpreparedness and lack of experience in living Christian life within a parish or outside of it. What Zoe was alluding to was the almost euphoric sense of joy in finding the Church and the faith that was experienced by recent post-Soviet parishioners. By bringing their individual skills, talents, and energy into the church life and volunteering their time and money for a variety of tasks they lulled themselves into thinking that it was sufficient to becoming a perfect parish community. Looking back, Valentina was surprised at this sense of accomplishment: "We still do not know ourselves, we are in church for only few years, but we considered ourselves experts in church affairs. We got too much power through this democratic management, and too soon." She remembered that once Liza's sister Alia was visiting from Russia, and she sat in the church for several hours waiting for the council meeting to be over (Liza was a head Sister then). Although the doors to the office where the meeting was taking place were closed, Alia was still able to hear parts of interaction, especially when emotions ran high. After the meeting, Father Andrey, Katerina, Valentina, Liza and Alia had a habitual post-council meeting drink of Charles Shaw. And Alia, after expressing disbelief at the way some council members talked to Father Andrey, said: "In our church in Russia if someone would talk to a priest like that, he

would be denied communion for a year." Father Andrey laughed, and others expressed approval of such a measure, confirming once again that it was a Russian church and should follow Russian standards of behaving with the priest.

Dissatisfied with Father Andrey's leadership abilities and his style of management, some parishioners were searching for ways to undermine his authority and to provide justified ground for their discontent. Besides using officially legitimate channels, such as council and parish meetings, to subvert priestly authority in managing 'mundane' church affairs, they also put to doubt his spiritual authority by utilizing their personal ties and experiences. Power struggle for leadership in the space of the church gets especially complicated since the priest has ultimate spiritual authority. One of the ways to undermine it was to refuse doing personal confessions to the priest. Tamara, for example, decided to do a 'silent confession,' referring to the authority to her priest in Russia. According to Tamara, it is not necessary to confess your sins out loud, to pronounce them to the priest. It is at times enough just to stand by the priest in the confessional space and go through the list of sins silently in your head. Because, she went on, the God knows about all of your sins anyway, and here he sees your effort. The priest does not need to know everything. She approached with this kind of confession Father Andrey a few times, and although at first he was not convinced, he eventually gave in. This was considered to be a not so subtle demonstration that priestly advice, usually given during verbal confession, was not sought after. Father Andrey in this instance was assigned a role of a mere functionary who had to clear the bureaucratic hurdle leading to communion by putting the *patrihilia* over the confessing woman's head and saying required prayers.

Another, more mundane way, to undermine the authority of the priest, was by using financial means of control, which will be discussed in the next section.

Money and Church: Priest as a Paid Laborer and Provider of the Spiritual Services

On one of the first parish councils meeting with Father Andrey the question was raised about the pledge system and about reinstating it in our church. The practice of giving pledges – written commitments to provide monthly fixed amounts of monetary donations to church – is widespread in many Orthodox churches in America, as well as in Protestant, and is known as tithing. Grounded in the Biblical requirement to give ten percent of one's income to the church, tithing is generally expected from all congregation members. Pledge is a form of a voluntary donation, but unlike the regular Sunday plate donation, which is anonymous and varies from Sunday to Sunday, the pledge is made individually for a fixed amount for the whole year. On few occasions I heard the priest of one of the local OCA churches reminding his parishioners to submit their pledges for the upcoming year to make financial planning more informed.

In the local parish the pledge system was practiced at various points of its history, but never seemed to take root and become an established feature of parish life. The new priest and council decided to try again, and drafted the appeal for the pledge donations to be sent out to all parishioners as well as everybody else from the church database of contacts.

In the following weeks the treasurer received a handful of filled pledge forms, varying from $40 to $200. She also heard earful of people's attitudes towards such asking

for money. One woman, for example, gave her $20, without filling the pledge form, with the words: “Well, you had asked.” In retelling about this interaction Natalia sounded embarrassed that she had to deal with extracting monetary donations from the people who visit the church rarely. Regular parishioners as well were critical of the permanent and obligatory nature of the pledge. Tamara, for example, put it this way: “I don’t know what is going to happen to me during the year. What if I get sick and will not be able to fulfill my promise?” She said that she always donated to the church and the priest quite generously, “without detriment to my family,” and that resources permitting she would continue to do so in the future, however she would not commit to any sum in writing. Other parishioners too were quite creative in coming up with various scenarios of unexpected occurrences throughout the coming year. Pledging in these situations was considered irresponsible and the mere fact of asking for it provoked resentment.

Reaction to the pledges requests also underscored uneasy attitudes Russians have towards money. Following the council meeting in June 2009, after couple of glasses of Charles Shaw wine got consumed in the old tent, the conversation moved to the discussion of Russia’s destiny. Father Andrey said that Russia had never been nor will be rich, at least not for long, because otherwise it will forget spiritual life, and God would not allow this to happen. Wealth is distractive to spirituality, he went on, and in order to seek God one has to minimize many worldly distractions, such as false sense of comfort and complacency that career achievements and wealth bring.

The same theme of the fleeting nature of all worldly attachments and possessions ran through many sermons that Father Andrey delivered after each Liturgy on Sundays. His sermons were almost uniformly liked and appreciated by parishioners,

notwithstanding that they were considerably longer than sermons of the previous priests. One parishioner once told me that she was getting all the spiritual guidance she needed through Father Andrey's sermons. Tamara too confined that at first she was very respectful of Father Andrey mainly because of his "magnificent sermons." Overall, however, in Orthodox churches sermons do not carry the same importance as in Protestant ones. As one American priest, a former Protestant now serving in the ROCOR parish in Milwaukee, WI, explained to me: in Protestant churches congregation looks at priest's ability to deliver effective sermon to the point that it becomes the main "attraction" of the Sunday service, while in Orthodoxy there is an emphasis on the Liturgy itself and not on the priest.

Sermons in Orthodoxy are important, but they do not reflect how good or bad priests are. Father John was, according to many, a good spiritual counsellor, but he delivered in Liza's words "boring" sermons. Father Joseph was emotional, often during the sermon he would tear up and pause, which distracted some people who could not understand what was particularly so touching in what he said. "It looks that he is more concerned with his emotions than with delivering spiritual message," – Valentina once commented. Others, on the other hand, viewed this spontaneous tearing up, or as Orthodox fathers call it "a gift of tears," as a sign of grace and ability of Father Joseph to become spiritually open. Father Andrey's lengthy sermons, "winding and full of repetition," as Vlad once critically commented, always stressed the importance of repentance and of cleaning our souls from worldly passions and attachments. Father Andrey would start by saying that we pay disproportionate attention to the health of our bodies and to accumulation of material possessions, the so called "treasures on earth,

where moths and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6: 19). Instead, Father Andrey liked to stress, people should concentrate on storing gifts for the soul, "treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6: 20).

Spiritual message of Father Andrey connected with parishioners, but made discussions of his salary and other material compensations more awkward. Some council members were surprised at the change of subject right after the Liturgical time was over. Vlad and others pointed to inconsistencies: "he presents one image during the sermons, and after they are over only wants to discuss his salary, and at parish council meetings he talks only about finances, how he needs an increase in salary and more money for health insurance." Liza countered this position by saying that "we are responsible for our priest materially, as he is responsible for us spiritually. He has to live somehow, pay rent, support family. It would be better if people donated more to the church without asking where their money goes, let's church and priest decide." She added that everyone works for the salary, and nobody talks about how much they earn, nobody counts and discusses their money.

In his study of the Russian Idea Tim McDaniel observed that due to perpetuations of oppositions of us and them, pure and impure, Russian rulers "themselves could never live up to moral standards they constantly advocated" (1996: 55). Priests in Orthodox church work with other sets of oppositions based on values of this and other world, and by rooting their authority in opposing spiritual and material treasures, often seem to create impossible standards to follow. Like with pledges, parishioners on the local church preferred to make decisions on monetary contributions without being asked directly about them. There was a sort of a silent agreement among them: we will donate more

generously and freely if we are not asked about it, make us want to donate, give us a sign that we are donating to a spiritually dedicated priest, and not a greedy performer of services.

This sign in the local parish formed around priests' attitudes towards monetary compensation for special services called in Russian *treby*. Those include special rites and prayers either in performing sacraments, such as baptism and marriage, or other church ceremonies such as memorial services (*panikhidas*), blessings of houses and cars, or special prayer services called *moliebens* based on the needs of an individual or a group. *Moliebens* can be for safe travels, for the recovery of a sick friend or relative, or just for the expressing gratitude to Christ, Mother of God or a particular saint for a helpful intercession in someone's life, for an answered prayer. Such sacraments as confession and communion are generally part of a weekly common liturgical worship and therefore do not require additional compensation to the priest besides already existing plate collections.

Serving of *treby* is seen as an informal way to supplement income for priests in both Russia and the United States. While they are supposed to be free, people are encouraged to make donations directly to the priest or to the church. In some churches there are no fixed prices for *treby*, and the voluntary nature of donations is emphasized, while in others there are price lists with specifications of every service cost. In the local parish church, with its tightly knit community, prices for *treby* were not set, rather they were discussed and negotiated by parishioners among themselves. For example, parishioners who wanted their house blessed would ask advice from more "knowledgeable" ones about the requirements. Usually, as Elena related, it is a good

gesture to present the priest with compensation for the travel expenses, around $40, and to offer him and *matushka*, who often accompanies him for this particular *treba*, a post-blessing celebratory meal. *Moliebens* and *panikhidas*, on the other hand, are performed in the church, mostly after the Sunday liturgy, and involve several parishioners – some who requested them, and other who decided to join in. In these cases the envelope is usually passed around the participants to put their individual donations.

Zoe recalled that while Father John would always accept money with gratitude, Father Joseph often refused to get paid: "Yes, we were collecting money for him, but at times it was very difficult, even impossible to make him take it." Liza had similar experiences with Father Joseph, she remembered that once when couple of them ordered *molieben* for travelers "he was almost embarrassed to take the envelope, and did it only because we were insistent." Father Andrey, at first, did not seem to deviate from this pattern, he too would perform *moliebens* and blessings when asked, without requiring donation payments.

Soon, however, it became known through informal channels, namely through people who called the church to inquire about the prices of *treby*, that Father Andrey would put a rather high price tag on performing baptism. He dismissed it as a gossip, however this information was also brought up at the parish meeting in 2009 and created heated exchange between the priest and some parishioners. Father Andrey denied again that he was asking hundreds of dollars for baptism, however he acknowledged that he named a price to outside callers: "People are shopping around, they call church after church to see where it will cost them less. I ask them few questions and determine whether they should pay this amount, or more, or less. From some I would ask nothing."

Natalia, the treasurer, told me that once he explained his position to her this way: "People think nothing of spending hundred dollars for a restaurant meal, or thousands of dollars for weddings, so why can't they spend a fraction of it for the church sacrament?" This made a lot of sense for Natalia, but she still was uneasy about asking people for money, which was one of her responsibilities as a treasurer.

Igor, while remaining a strong supporter of Father Andrey as a priest, nonetheless conceded that demanding money for sacraments was wrong: "Sacraments that were given to us by God should be performed free of charge. Father Andrey never asked me for money. But if he did I would have given it to him. Sacraments are priceless, but I am grateful to the person who helped me in performing them." Liza became increasingly resentful to the comparison made between Father Andrey and Father Joseph: "So what that Father Joseph was *besserebrynnik* and refused donations? He had different circumstances, he was younger and healthier, he was supported by donors, and his wife worked. While he refused to take money for *moliebens*, he didn't hesitate to go into schism and split the parish. This is heresy. And giving money for *moliebens* is just a pious folk custom." Liza's highly emotional justification of Father Andrey was based on a large amount of support, both spiritual and human, that she got from him while undergoing cancer treatments. Father Andrey visited her in hospitals and at home, and at one instance refused to take a check from Liza's husband. Both Igor and Liza maintained that providing material support for the priest, "who always prays for us," was a Christian responsibility of all parishioners.

They also pointed to visible and invisible dimensions of priestly occupations, to services that are visible in their physical manifestation but also to those that are hidden.

Priests can pray visibly in the church during services, and they also pray in private for members of their flock. One can put a price tag on the visible, physical side of priestly work, but the other side, guided by mystery and power of the Holy Spirit, is a priceless divine gift. Position of the priests in the American churches, according to Archbishop Justinian (2013), leads to viewing it as just another paid job, one of the many, and as a result the spiritual element of priestly authority and guidance is downplayed. Priests in American churches, unlike many churches in Russia, usually have outside jobs besides their priestly duties to financially support themselves and their families. Perception of the priest's labor is heavily influenced by the Protestant environment of the country, and in the opinion of Archbishop Justinian makes a priest not a spiritual leader, but a hired laborer.

Tamara saw nothing wrong with treating the church priests as paid laborers. When there were negotiations around the appointment of the new priest, she proposed to draft a contract with listing his salary and obligations. She explained: "I am in this church for many years already, priests come and go, I stay. It is my church, not theirs." Priests themselves at times encourage such secular attitudes. Father Andrey, during the 2009 parish meeting, called himself "a highly skilled professional" deserving of an adequate payment, and said that he was not asking parishioners how much they were making, so they should stop digging out information about his *treby* payments. By putting conversation firmly on the secular path, Father Andrey contributed to emphasizing the 'provider of services' framework, and invited the mundane observations about his service to the church, such as: he shows up only on weekends, so why should we pay him the whole monthly salary, maybe he should be paid on an hourly basis, and so on.

There is also another dimension in this "priest or provider of the services tension," which is based on the Soviet value system. In her writing about donations in contemporary Russian Orthodox churches Detelina Tocheva (2010) points out one of the tensions arising from merging the Soviet and post-Soviet moral standards – what should be a morally acceptable attitude among church-goers towards young and able beggars. Should it follow Christian principles of the virtues of alms-giving, or the Soviet ones of the virtue of work? When there are no clear answers, there are tensions, and for Tocheva this was just one of the many examples "of the pervasiveness of the Soviet past and ideology, which continue to shape multiple aspects of social interactions" (2010: 113).

Priest in these approaches resembles a beggar. He is seen as able to find outside work, but chooses not to, preferring instead to rely on donations from parishioners. Once he was called extortionist (*vymogatel'*), who puts unreasonable demands on the cash stripped parish. Cutting priest's salary off and beginning to monitor payments for *moliebens* and baptisms were considered by some council members as their duty to the parish. In the tensions present in the parish regarding the salary to the priest, and in the ones discussed in Tocheva, the physical and spiritual labor are separated and put at odds. In the eyes of the supporters of such approach priest's work in church consists in physically showing up on Saturdays, Sundays and big holidays falling on the weekdays. The rest of the time he is idling around, the narrative goes, and instead, as a responsible human being, should be looking for work. As one council member expressed it: "We always can find another priest, who can use *cadilo* (censer) as well as Father Andrey." As all hired labor, priests are replaceable.

Priest as a Human Being and Questions of Morality

Questions about morality of the priest were raised persistently during the searches for truth, which were also framed as searches for "Christian truth" and "Orthodox morality." In this mixture of secular and religious terminology used by some parishioners being moral was equated with being Christian. Values of the Soviet secular morality were transferred onto the context of the church life.

Natalia, for example, gave the following evaluation of the parish council member and the priest: "Dan might be new to the church, but in essence he is more pure and more Orthodox (*chische i Pravoslavnee*), because he lives in accordance with the teachings (*zapovedi*). He reminds me of boys who jump to defend girls on the playground. And on the other hand, the priest – he sort of knows, but his behavior is far from this knowledge. It contradicts God's law." While framing Dan's behavior as aligned with Christian teachings, Natalia gave examples attesting to his moral qualities, and how they were manifested in taking her side and "defending" her from the priest. In her selective use of examples, she brushed off how the same council member was rude to those who disagreed with him, including Liza after her cancer treatments: "Well, yes, it was bad, but we all were getting emotional."

Natalia here highlighted one important tendency in evaluating personal qualities of the priest compared to other parishioners – he is put against a different standard. Professor Osipov from the Moscow Theological University offers this insight:

> There is a phenomenon which in psychology is called apperception. It is when the grey piece of paper looks black on the white background, and white on the black one. So we look at priests against the white background, because we know Christian teaching, it speaks of holiness. And we look at priests, who among themselves are mostly grey like the

> rest of us, and on the white background of Christianity all their actions seem to us horrible and make us indignant, although the same actions made by lay persons against the dark background look not so bad. (2014)

Professor Osipov goes on to say that priests like the rest of us are subjects to passions and desires, but because they supposedly teach about other things, their human weaknesses generate feelings of indignation in believers. Polina, then a member of the Auditing committee, admitted that the questions of priestly sins had worried her for some time, and she had to search for a lot of spiritual advice on that matter online, as well as to discuss it with her Orthodox friends in Moscow. She was told that "every priest has his own sins. The sins are different, but we should not pay attention to them, because we only can pray for priests. They are in high demand by dark forces, because they have grace and so on. But we have no right to judge, because every priest has his own sins, and it is not up to us to decide which sin is worse. We cannot change the person." She continued that we put more demands on the priests since we tend to idealize them: "we say that if he is a priest, he should be holy. True, there were saintly priests, such as St. Luke of Crimea, or St. Mechev [Rector of the Moscow parish in the 1930s]. People have wrong ideas. I remember in Moscow I would say – let's go to church. And they reply – there are those priests there, I don't trust them. So don't trust priests, but what does it have to do with faith in God?" She recalled that she had read somewhere online, that our faith is called Christianity, and not priestianity.

Separation of human qualities of the priest from his institutional position is not an easy task and presents constant challenge to believers. Katerina acknowledged that priests are "also sinful, like us made of flesh and blood" and that in their homes, in private they

"can behave as they want," but in the church they should behave in a way that leads people in the right direction. In her opinion, "the priest is our teacher. We do not have another teacher, besides reading books. But we go to church to be better, to find out how to live right. Because only the church teaches us life, this is my impression. The school and college can teach you a profession, how to earn money, how to be a boss, but only church teaches how to walk in life." Since the goal of going to the church for Katerina is to learn "how to enter the eternal life," the priest should be able to give a useful advice of how to achieve that by leading an exemplary life, "at least externally unblemished (*bezuprechnuyu*)." Priests' human imperfections, according to Katerina's reasoning, should remain invisible in the performance of their priestly duties.

This opinion was shared by many parishioners, with a various degree of leniency towards the human weaknesses of the priest. He was considered to be responsible for the formation and development of both individual and collective Christian identities, of providing an example of a Christian, and for some, moral life. Elena, for example, saw manifestation of some of Father Andrey's personal qualities (greediness, rudeness) as a sign that "there is something wrong spiritually," and because priest is "on top" in the local church hierarchy, this impropriety "descends on us" and influences both our social interactions and individual spiritual lives.

Igor, on the other hand, said that priests' personal qualities and actions have nothing to do with his personal faith. He acknowledged that the priest in many instances is a role model for us and that Father Andrey did some things wrongly, but the faith still remains: "the priest has a subjective side, which behaves as it wishes. Today it feels bad, so it behaves bad, tomorrow it feels good so it does good. Priest is the same human being

as we all, therefore he has no relation to our faith, he is not an exemplar of our faith. He just performs holy rites, that's it." For Igor, religious services and the way they are conducted are the main indicators of priests' worthiness. To illustrate his point, he related two stories about pre-revolutionary priests:

> One priest lost all his family, and became so sad that he started to drink. He drank so heavily that even showed up drunk for services. Parishioners began to send numerous complaints to the Archbishop. And the Archbishop as an honest man decided to verify this himself. He dressed up as a common man and came to the service. And when he saw the priest's soulful prayer and found out that many got healed by his prayers, the Archbishop refused to receive any more complaints about this priest. He saw the cry of the soul and not just a formal prayer… In the second story the priest also lost his family, and also started to drink, and got expelled from working in the church. He then lived with the homeless, and when he died all the homeless came to his funeral. And it turned out that he was their spiritual father.

Igor concluded his stories by reaffirming the Scriptural "do not judge and will not be judged yourselves." He also distinguished between temptations falling on the priest versus the rest of us: "We forget that by committing himself to serving God, the priest accepts temptations incomparable to ours. But he is still the human being as we are." This statement reminded me of the conversation I had with the priest in Russia, Father Alexander. He too said that depending on our spiritual level we face different temptations: ordinary human being might have one or two demons following him, a priest has maybe a dozen of them, and monks living in the desert – hundreds. Temptations in Orthodox Christianity are initiated by non-human spiritual invisible forces – demons, or fallen angels, – who constantly work on igniting sinful passions that are manifested in the sinful behavior.

"Temptations" became one of the most utilized words among Russian Orthodox believers. Once in one of the Moscow churches I overheard women talking about the usefulness of regular confessions, since we are surrounded by temptations on our every step – "with every step I sin, on every step there are temptations." All the sins committed by humans stem from their succumbing to the first temptation of the first fallen angel – eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In this act of free will humans chose to know evil. As Igor put it, "In good and evil there is no middle. Everything is very clear – good is the will of God, and evil is the departure from the will of God." Departure from the God's will occurs on a daily basis and is visible in multiple sins people commit against each other and themselves, most of the time repeating the same sins by yielding to the same passions. Katerina came to realization that is was not enough to know what to do and what to avoid doing: "I now know how to separate white from black, before coming to church it was harder. But I still have to do a lot of self-work. Because even if I know what is the right thing to do, there are always temptations, and I think – well, I relaxed too early." Being a good Christian person is not an act of a moral will, but a constant learning through right practices.

Temptations follow not only individuals, but groups as well, and the latter is most strongly manifested in the space of the church. In the words of the late Father George Calciu, a Romanian priest who spent twenty years in prisons of Communist Romania, "the Church is under the continuous attack of the devil. He knows the Church is the Kingdom of God on earth, and he wants to destroy her. He was so furious that he tried to tempt Jesus Himself" (2007: 194). Father Calciu then relates a story of a village, which had a restaurant always filled with drunk people cursing and fighting. There was also a

poor widow with children in the village, who often would go to bed without food but still every evening they knelt and prayed to God. And while there was only one devil in the restaurant, who spent his time there mostly napping, by the widow's house there were legions of demons. Father Calciu then brings back the story to the church: "Can you imagine how many legions are around the Church? Can you understand now why there are conflicts in the Church? It is because there are devils" (196). Demons in this story "own the street," and it is in the church that they have to consolidate all their resources in order to tempt those who are trying to get closer to God.

For many parishioners the issue of temptations and conflicts in the church were inseparable from such understandings of the tempting workings of demons. Elena, who stood aside during this latest conflict with the priest, preferring to concentrate instead on managing the Sunday school for kids, once wearily expressed: "I don't know why we as a parish are having the same temptations over and over again. We have a new priest, and the overall situation in the church seems to change, but temptations stay the same. It is as if a throng of experienced demons has been sent for the retirement here, to the sunny California. And they are having fun with us." Elena focused on collective temptation, on being tempted not only as an individual, but as a group. As a group, according to Elena, we are not learning our lessons and are not dealing with temptations successfully, and for this reason the parish is fighting the same battles over and over again.

Few other people presented the same view. Peter gloomily called the council being "possessed," for its exacerbating campaign against the priest and obsessive writings of complaints about him to the higher church authorities. Igor offered half-jokingly this solution to the crisis: "we should just take them by their tales and throw them out of the

window." Although the nature of the parish crisis was identified in these opinions, the practical side of dealing with consequences of temptations was not clear. How was one to deal with the "possessed" council and how were the demons to be thrown out?

On the one hand, the church traditions are quite clear about the ways to fight temptations: one had to pray, attend services, participate in the sacraments of confession and communion, read spiritual literature, and overall try to avoid, step by step, attachments to the worldly forms of living – watching too much TV, intense blogging, overindulging in food and drink. On the other hand, those were seen as not practical enough, too obvious and repetitive, especially when there was a perceived need for urgent actions. As Katerina said: "When I proposed to pray for the priest, they were looking at me like I was an idiot. Once they told me – enough with that, let's be serious." Valentina had a similar experience: "I was told that my head was in the clouds, and that was not the quality needed to conduct business of the council." By incorporating religious discourses into their actions, the "spiritually" oriented part of the council gradually withdrew from decision-making part of their duties, leaving the "secularists" to continue their struggles for truth.

The emerged local moral constellation, to borrow Zigon's concept, was drawing on different sources, from which discourses were forming: secular concepts of morality, and spiritual teachings of the church on human passions and sins. There were occasional "intermixing" of discourses, like in the already mentioned term "Orthodox morality," but even that backfired since for one parishioner the use of such a phrase was equal to saying "I am an atheist." On another occasion, after Father Andrey was fired, one council member said that "evil had left the church," which provoked this reaction from Liza:

“Really, the priest was evil? And now the evil had left? So where did it go?” For Liza, who was drawing from the Christian point of view, evil never leaves us and is present in continuous temptations we face. She was feeling sorry for the council member, since she viewed his actions as a result of possession by evil forces, and told him that she would pray for him: “But he looked at me and said that he did not need any favors from me.” Now, as Polina commented on this incident, demons could just relax and play on the porch, since the people are destroying their church themselves by rejecting basic belief system of their faith.

The current Orthodox discourses vary in the importance they assign to temptations in church and beyond. According to some the widespread view of multiplied temptations surrounding the church can have its limitations. Moscow deacon Andrey Kuraev, a contemporary public figure in Russian Orthodoxy, albeit controversial for his extensive blogging, pointed out in one of his online publications that ‘temptation’ became church equivalent for the word ‘problem’ (2006). He went on to explain that ‘temptation’ in its true meaning is an obstacle in realization of God’s Plan, but in our use these days ‘temptation’ often figures as an obstacle in realization of our human and quite mundane plan. It is not correct, according to Kuraev, to apply temptation in its traditional use to everything problematic in church life, since people are very capable of creating problems for themselves. Therefore, not everywhere there are difficulties there is a smell of sulfur. For example, Kuraev reasons, contemporary Orthodox believers in Russia carry all their ills into the Church, as some kind of smugglers who bring with them numerous secular preconceptions and prejudices (*predrassudki*). Without identifying what those

preconceptions are, Kuraev concludes that Christians always have one sorrow – that the border between the world and the Church in us runs not as sharp as we want it to.

Elder Paisios from Mount Athos in Greece, one of the most respected Orthodox monks of the twentieth century, considers temptations to be of a great value for humans:

> Besides leaving man free, God has also left the demons free, since demons cannot harm our souls (unless we let them). On the contrary, when evil, or careless people unwittingly, hurt us, they are in fact doing us a favor. Why do you think the Abba says, Take away temptations and no one will be saved? Temptations can do us great good. Not that the devil on his own can ever do anything good – since he is all evil! It is our Good God that catches the stone the devil is throwing at our heads; He catches the stone and puts it in our hand… In other words, when God allows temptations, … it is so that we will have realistic expectations about the Second Coming. We must realize that we are at war – and we have to keep fighting with the devil himself. For as long as we live, we have the right to take spiritual exams and we must work hard to improve our souls. If we die without having passed the tests, we will not get a second chance. There will be no make-ups! (2011: 67-68)

Temptations in Elder's view are to be welcomed and people who bring them are to be thanked and prayed for. Temptations often bring suffering with them, and this suffering should be viewed not in human terms of good and bad, but through the understanding of God's love. Professor Osipov (2014) distinguishes between human understandings of love and truth and those of God's. For God there is one true love, and there is no conflict between love and truth since they do not exist separately. Human understanding of love tends to exclude suffering, and God is often questioned when bad things happen to people, but suffering is given to person by God only to guide in his salvation. To illustrate his point, Osipov makes comparison with a doctor who performs a surgery to save a person's life instead of giving him a painkiller. While the latter might ease the pain experienced by a patient, it would not cure him. So does God, concludes

Osipov, saves us by helping, often through suffering, to get rid of things that could ultimately destroy us.

Igor once related a story of a woman who would come to the church and cry. When people got concerned, the story goes, and started to ask her whether something bad happened to her, she replied that the opposite was true: she had a great life, and everything was good in the family and at work. This had led to her distress, because it felt to her that God had forgotten about her. As Christians, Igor said, we need to be facing challenges in our lives, because only though learning to overcome them we can grow spiritually. And in the process, "we have the right to make mistakes, because if we did not have this right God would not be forgiving us." For Igor, as humans we are imperfect and this is what separates us from God, and we should focus on our lives and not lives of other people or the live of the church.

Passing spiritual exams and healing human imperfections occurs by employing personal effort and also with the guidance of the priest. Relationship of people with the priest, according to contemporary Russian proto-priest Andrey Tkachev, is always complex since it is impossible for the priest to please everyone (2010). Tkackev quotes the Gospel of St. Luke, "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets" (Luke 6: 26), and the saying of St. Paul that of one is a slave to people, he is not a slave to God. Depending on our internal state, the words of the priest can have different effects on different people, but overall they should bother and irritate people, because if his words are neutral, not cold and not hot, then they are useless.

Oftentimes, according to Tkachev, the priest acts as a doctor, who had touched thoroughly covered wounds of the soul by pressing on the sore spot and making manifest our internal diseases. Then, if the treatment and cure are part of our plans, we cry and pray and humble ourselves and thank God, but if we are not willing to be healed and are not willing even to learn about our ailments, then we become 'holy indignant' and shoot arrows with various labels at the priest: "reformer," "conservative," "obscurant," "prideful." Some imagine that they have clarity and had found all the answers, and any mismatch of their position with the thoughts of others is considered an infringement on the sanctity. Such people do not notice that life itself is contradictory and they tend to destroy prophets for the discomforts they create.

While being a doctor with the special grace to heal the spiritual wounds of the soul and to mediate between spiritual and natural realms, the priest is also an imperfect human being, and is always involved in a vulnerable balancing act. It is important to remember for those coming to the church, as proto-priest Kozlov notes, that the church is not a set of moral rules, and parishioners are not just a collective of people, but an organism. The priest in church not a party boss or psychotherapist, but a person who has a special grace from God to perform sacraments and offer people spiritual help (226). In Kozlov's opinion, Christians should do good deeds not in accordance with the atheist communist morality, but in order to make God manifest through them. There are many human truths, but only one truth in God, and hence, from the Orthodox Christian point of view, manifestations of the secular morality in themselves do not have any value in the space of the church if they are not fed by Christian dispositions of the heart.

Conclusion

Priests in the Orthodox church are not only responsible for the collective identity of the parish, they are also co-creators of individual religious identities. People in Russia are often advised to visit several churches and to see where the general atmosphere and priestly style connects to them the most. Then they can choose what church they want to become theirs. In the United States the choices are limited. As Katerina said: “We do not have several hundred churches as in Moscow. We have only one Russian church here.” In a sense, local parishioners are forced into collectivity in the church abroad, and have to navigate a complex set of the local conditions. It also happens that they came to one parish, with one collective identity, but it transformed into something different during their stay. The liminality and instability of the local parish life had led some to look for spiritual fulfillment either in other, not Russian, Orthodox churches, or, as will be discussed in the next chapter, in Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona.

Chapter 5

Monastery Pilgrimages

In this chapter I will look at pilgrimages of parishioners of local church to the Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona. I will consider these pilgrimage trips in the light of similarities and distinctions between communities of parish churches and monasteries. Both are worshipping communities, part of the same Church body, and can therefore be seen as two complementary structures serving the same purpose. On the other hand, the parish-based church focuses on the lay community and emphasizes doctrinal instruction and the celebration of sacraments, while the monastery community focuses on asceticism and "more personal and interactive approach through the spiritual father–spiritual disciple relationship" (Demacopoulos 2008:90). In Orthodox Christianity monasticism has always presented a draw for believers, who through centuries undertook pilgrimages to monasteries in search of a more pure and authentic practices of faith.

The St. Anthony Greek Orthodox monastery became a preferred pilgrimage destination of parishioners of the local church in the last few years. This might be attributable to the instability of local parish life. As was discussed earlier, from 2005 to 2010 the parish has had three changes of priests and two splits–of varying degrees of magnitude and reasons. With obvious individual variation in religious knowledge and embededdness in parish life, almost all current parishioners are relatively new to the Orthodox faith, having started practicing it in the last 10-15 years.

Besides having been a participant-observer on three pilgrimage trips, I conducted interviews with parishioners, including those who went to the monastery on other

occasions. Since the majority of interviews were conducted after the pilgrimage trips had been completed, they have a more reflexive quality to them, with pilgrims trying to incorporate their experiences into the flow of everyday life (cf. Frey 2004). This category of pilgrims falls into what Coleman termed “parish pilgrims” (2004: 61); however, unlike the groups described by Coleman, pilgrims in my study visit the monastery more often than once a year and are not led by a parish priest, and overall are more spontaneous than institutionally organized.

Pilgrims who go to the monastery are embedded in parish life in various roles. They attend services regularly, participate as readers, choir singers or candle attendants, and are active in the social life of the parish beyond the church space as well. However, the parish life is also seen as a site of a constant tension between individual spiritual growth and heightened sociality, between Church as the body of Christ and as a legal corporate entity. Although attending to administrative, financial and legal matters of the church is seen as necessary for sustaining a parish and as a Christian obligation of church members, the inevitable conflicts that arise out of involvement in any social organization are often considered to be unbearable and even dangerous to one’s spiritual state.

One day in winter of 2010, while discussing yet another crisis brewing in the parish, Elena sadly stated that involvement in church life was wearing her down, to the extent that she has to force herself to even attend services. She then added that this is the reason she is drawn to the Greek monastery in Arizona, where she would like to go as often as she can, “as if the road there was covered with honey,” for it is a place facilitating individual spiritual work, with the focus on prayer and repentance. Zoe, who was also one of Elena’s pilgrim companions on several occasions, compared journeys to

the monastery to the “spa treatment for the soul at the moments of acute need.” And Nina having just returned from the trip to the monastery felt rejuvenated, as if she “just had a drink from the fountain of life.”

All of these statements have enticing qualities of invigoration and of the self-restoration after being exhausted by demands and routine of the everyday life. The sensation of rejuvenation, which in modern secular world came to be associated mainly with physical exhilaration achieved after restful vacation, vigorous workout or treatment at the spa, here is applied exclusively to the state of one’s soul, which is viewed to be in constant need of spiritual cleansing and nourishment. Pilgrims are seduced to the spiritual purity of the monastery environment with its traditions of constant prayer and asceticism, and from corrupting worldly influences in the local church. In the movement between these two structures they signal distrust to the spiritual climate at the local church and embrace liminality of being in-between, neither completely here nor there.

Anthropological Theories of Pilgrimage I: Structure, Liminality, Communitas

Of many religious rituals, pilgrimage is one of the most ancient and at the same time one of the most popular contemporary religious practices. Victor and Edith Turner had developed, what has been acknowledged by many, the solid anthropological theory of pilgrimage as a ritual. They propose to view pilgrimage as a rite of passage, building on Victor Turner’s earlier work on liminality, the concept of which was initially introduced by van Gennep (Turner 1995). The Turners consider liminality, the transitional and transformative stage of a rite of passage, and a sense of communitas that accompanies it, to be a primary motivation for undertaking a pilgrimage trip. Liminality

allows pilgrims to leave behind the concerns of everyday life, and removes individuals from the ordinary and familiar, including "the mundane concomitants" of their religion (Turner and Turner 1978: 15). However, according to the Turners, in "the paradigmatic Christian pilgrimage, the initiatory quality of the process is given priority, though it is an initiation to, not through, a threshold" (1978: 14). Unlike tribal initiands, whose commitment to the social structure is strengthened during the liminal stage and who acquire a new sociocultural status after being reintegrated into the society, Christian pilgrims for the Turners do not experience a rise in status by the conclusion of a pilgrimage trip. Indeed, at times the opposite is true: by being initiated into "a new, deeper level of existence" and acquiring "a deeper level of religious participation," pilgrims upon return might severe social and economic ties, thus turning into less successful citizens, or in the case of the local church, less effective parish members (1978: 8, 15).

Pilgrimage for the Turners is not only the internal change, but an active quest for ideals known but not achieved at home, and it is often in the "far" milieu" that a pilgrim encounters "the basic elements and structures of his faith in their unshielded, virgin radiance" (Turner and Turner 1978: 15). This uncorrupted manifestation of faith facilitates for pilgrims the experience of communitas, "an alternative mode of social being," unstructured and unfixed, exemplified in the movement itself (39). In his earlier work, however, Victor Turner distinguished between three types of communitas: existential (or spontaneous), normative and ideological (1995: 132). While spontaneous communitas arises unpredictably and "can never be adequately expressed in a structural form," both normative and ideological communitas exist "within the domain of

structure," where personal aspirations have to be subjugated to the needs and dispositions of the group (1995: 137, 132).

The movement between two structures, that is, parish church and monastery, in this chapter can be seen as a move between different types of communitas, between routine and charisma. The heightened sociality of parish life combined with administrative and managerial duties pollute for some experience of normative communitas and push them to seek "what I really go to church for," as Katerina bitterly expressed. She then clarified: "I come to the Liturgy, pray, receive communion and feel elevated. But then I am almost immediately confronted with some problem, or have to choose a side in some conflict, and all of the goodness I just experienced is ruined." This tension points to the subversive potentiality of Christian pilgrimages, to "something inveterately populist, anarchical, even anticlerical… in their very essence" (Turner and Turner 1978: 32). But while for some pilgrimage to the monastery is indeed a contestation of the institutional authority of a local church priest, who is acting both as a rector of the church and as a spiritual counselor, for others it is a means to strengthen and reaffirm their Orthodox faith and identity.

Eade and Sallnow in their evaluation of the Turners theory of pilgrimage point to the necessity to frame pilgrimages not within one overarching discourse but rather as a field of competing discourses (2000:5). They advocate for a more thorough ethnographic description of what is happening at the pilgrimage site and for identifying various actors, groups, motivations and actions that constitute pilgrimage experiences. Before going into the detailed ethnographic discussion of the monastery pilgrimage in light of the

abovementioned theories, short overview of the monastery itself and the tradition of Orthodox monasticism will be given in the next section.

St. Anthony Greek Orthodox Monastery in Arizona and the Tradition of Monasticism

In Orthodox Christian tradition monasteries occupy a special place. While the Orthodox Church in general is referred to as the body of Christ and as a living organism, the monastery usually represents its heart–the part which provides the life-force for the rest of the body. The monastery in Arizona is dedicated to St. Anthony the Great, who is considered to be the founder of desert monasticism in the third century. With coming to power of Emperor Constantine in the middle of the fourth century and legalization of Christianity, desert monasticism began to grow “due to the refusal of many Christians to adapt to the more worldly character of the now established Church, and their desire to lead a strictly Christian life” (Mantzarides 2011). This influx of ‘new’ Christians resulted in the separation between parish churches and monastic communities, with the latter seeking to preserve the true spirit of early Christianity (Demacopoulos 2008). This process is not dissimilar to the celebrated ‘return to religion’ in Russia in the past twenty years: there is a reinstitution of parish-based church communities after seventy years of the state-enforced atheism, and a growing interest in monasteries, some of which remained opened and preserved traditions of Orthodox spiritual life.

In the last ten years Orthodox monasteries in North America (which have been present there since the eighteenth century) have acquired more visibility and influence on the broader life of Orthodox churches. Some scholars attribute this to the emergence of “monastic communities in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese under the leadership of Elder

Ephraim" from Mount Athos (Vrame 2008:305). At present there are seventeen of such communities in the United States and Canada, including the one in Arizona where Elder Ephraim resides.

Elder Ephraim brought the monks to Arizona from Mt. Athos in 1995. This mountain on the Greek peninsula is a place not only for Greek, but other Orthodox monasteries (Russian, Serbian, and others), and is accessible only to men: no women were ever allowed there in order not to disturb the monks' pursuit of the spiritual life. Mt. Athos is also known as the Holy Mountain and as the only place in Greece that is completely dedicated to prayer and worship of God through the set of ascetic practices.

Goals of the monastic life are theologically not different from goals of any Christian, however "the problem for the Christian in the world is that he is called upon to reach the same goal under adverse conditions" (Mantzarides 2011). While practices of the asceticism and obedience in the monastic life are believed to facilitate the work of fighting sinful passions (such as pride and selfishness), the life in the world presents Christians with the ever-increasing sets of temptations. The term "world" is used in an Orthodox Christian context to point to the fallen world with all its human attachments, opinions, and pleasures, all of which, while imbedding people in their everyday activities, ultimately create distance from God (see Kenworthy 2008). Monks, on the other hand, reject any attachments to the world, however they help to sustain it through their prayers in the wilderness and provide spiritual foundation to the Church structure (Hann and Goltz 2010:13).

It is very common to hear pilgrims refer to the monastery as a "heaven on earth," and this is not just a figure of speech. Monastery is the site where spirituality and

materiality connection manifests itself most strongly. Gabriel Hanganu in his work on Orthodox icons in the Romanian village stresses that “Eastern Christians… emphasized God’s call to synergetic partnership with him, by which both human and the surrounding natural world can be transfigured” (Hanganu 2010:43). Theologically this potentiality is ingrained in the biblical view of humans as been made in the Image and Likeness of God: “the first humans were perfect, but only in potential sense. They had to be endowed with God’s image from the beginning and were supposed to grow to full divine likeness through their own efforts and the assistance of God’s grace” (43). One of the parishioners, Liza formulated it this way: “We already have God’s image within us – we just need to uncover it. To achieve likeness we need to transform ourselves.” Transformation takes place by following the right set of spiritual practices–prayer, fasting, confession, communion, attending services,–all of which clear the way to God’s grace, without which no transformation is possible.

The story of the monastery’s foundation is a good illustration of the way Orthodox Christians conceive of realization of their potentiality and transformation. This is how my informants retell it, partly relying on some official sources, but also bringing their own insights: monks from Mt. Athos were looking for a place for a new monastery. When driving through the desert, Elder Ephraim suddenly asked to stop, got out of the car and said that the monastery would be built here. It was the middle of the desert, with literally nothing around. But he insisted, because he has heard the ringing of the bells. Soon after that the land was bought, and after praying in the desert for a few days Elder Ephraim showed the place where they can drill for water. This was how the spring was discovered deep in the desert underground.

This foundational narrative of the monastery contains several notable elements. For one, it connects story of the Arizona monastery with many similar stories through Christian history of hermits finding sources of water in the wilderness, thus making anchoring of the monastic community in the place possible (Fedotov 1966). Second, the possibility of transformation and uncovering of one's potential is clearly exemplified in nature – as treasures of the desert can be reached with proper practices and the desert itself can be transformed with proper cultivation, so can our souls. There are citrus orchards, olive groves, vineyards, gazebos and fountains, making the monastery "an oasis in the desert" and "a paradise on earth."

For pilgrims, this lushness and richness of the monastery is a manifestation of how the Holy Spirit works on earth: water springs and gardens of roses in the desert exemplify the harmony of the paradise – the lost state of humanity. Spirituality becomes materialized, the spiritual wealth of the monastery tradition becomes translated into material abundance (cf. Dubisch 1995; Ware 1995). In Orthodox Christianity, as mentioned before, God is not wholly separate from the world transcendent being. He is both transcendent and immanent, present in nature, objects and human beings, offering possibilities for theosis - deitification. The material lushness and richness thus is viewed by pilgrims in the spiritual terms, as a call for communion with God through nature and people.

Pilgrimage to the Monastery

On the Road

In order to successfully minimize worldly influences embedded in parish life, my informants tend to go on monastery pilgrimages in small groups, generally depending on how many people can fit into one car. Trips usually occur over the weekend, with taking off on Friday evening right after work, and coming back on Sunday night. This timing implies that pilgrims will not participate in the Liturgy at the local church, and instead will seek spiritual elevation at the services in the monastery. In lieu of the physical journey itself, pilgrims with whom I traveled assign significance to the proper behavior in the car. With Vlad and Elena we listened to prayer recordings for an hour, and then for the remaining five hours of drive to the book about Father Arseniy – a priest's life in Stalin's gulag. Car becomes the space of transition from mundane to sacred, as well as the space where seducing power of the monastery is felt: "Before the trip I am always stressed and entangled with daily concerns. Then we get into the car and very soon I feel how all the tensions are receding, receding, receding…,"–and Elena lowers her voice.–"It is as if we are getting into the field of monastery's influence."

The emphasis on the spiritual side of the journey is also reflected in choosing the companions for the pilgrimage. Ideally one will go with those who have "the same level of spiritual maturity" as you do, in the words of Zoe. She recalled how during one of her earlier trips she was annoyed by endless questions from the fellow pilgrim, who was interrupting her focus on prayers. On my trip with Nina and Anna, when three of us were driving though the dusk Arizona desert, Anna grew impatient with our chatter and asked to shift to prayers: "we need to get prepared for the monastery, and there is no time for

idle talk." The reason for the trip is framed in exclusively religious terms, with the emphasis on the individual spiritual work to be done at the monastery, and so all the unnecessary elements of sociality are minimized. On the trips to the monastery most pilgrims desire to immerse into themselves, be alone with their thoughts, and so they seek what can be called communitas of silence, of unspoken connection between people responding "to a charism, a grace" (Turner and Turner 1978:31).

Staying at the Monastery

One of the monastic ascetic practices is to seek external silence "in order to attain inner stillness of mind more easily," which is not an inertia "but awakening and activation of the spiritual life" (Mantzarides 2011). Known in Greek as *hesychia*, this inward silence or stillness "signifies concentration combined with inward tranquility" (Ware 1995:122). Russian pilgrims are attracted to the quietness of the monastery life, as Elena explained: "I like that they don't talk a lot there. In order to develop spiritually you do not need words, what you need is the spirit itself, you follow it and learn from it. This is how you educate yourself spiritually, and not by words. You just try to touch this spirit of life and to try to imitate this lifestyle." This quiet contemplation and learning to listen to the spirit is contrasted to the heightened and inescapable sociality of the parish community, which starts immediately following the Sunday liturgy.

If leaving on Friday after work, pilgrims arrive at the monastery just in time for the Divine Liturgy, which starts at one at night and lasts for three hours (up to five hours on Sundays and big holidays). The Liturgy as well as all other services are conducted in Greek, which none of Russian pilgrims know. During the service men and women stand

at the separate sides of the church – men on the right, women on the left. Elder Ephraim usually sits on a high chair facing the altar in the right front corner of the church, and knowledgeable pilgrims come to him for the blessing during the appropriate times of the Liturgy. Once, after receiving a blessing, Nina shared: "He knocked me three times on the head. Probably I have many demons, and he was trying to kick them out of me." We discussed it later again, and considered whether the gesture was not about knocking out demons, but a Trinitarian blessing. However, we do not have a means to know what it really signified, what is of importance here is that multiple occurences and gestures present during visits to the monastery, even the gesture of the elder's blessing, are generating multiplicity of interpretations and discourses.

The space of the church where the Liturgy is served remains dark, lit only by candles in front of the icons. As in Russian Orthodox churches, the space is relatively fluid – people can move during certain times of the service to put candles in front of the icons. Then they either stand or sit – unlike Russian churches the Greek ones have plenty of seating options available, from traditional wooden prayer chairs along the walls to regular chairs in the middle of the church. While some (including myself) prefer to sit whenever possible, others remain standing for three or more hours, seeing it as a necessary sacrifice of physical comforts. One of the parishioners Igor once explained to me: "Liturgy is a hard internal work, and by standing we manifest our effort and sacrifice." Notably, the practice of standing during Liturgy is followed mainly by Russian pilgrims, who bring in their understandings of tradition to the Greek monastery.

At the end of the Liturgy all attendees go to venerate the icons in the following order – first priests, then monks and nuns, then men, followed by women. The same order

is followed when going to meals after the Liturgy to a common dining hall. Men, women and monks are seated at separate long tables. On the weekends the meals are already put on the tables, this as well as cleaning after the meal are one of the many obedient chores for monks in the monastery. Pilgrims start to help themselves after the Abbot says the prayer. The food is simple and vegetarian, but in the words of Zoe "the most tasty I ever had." There are salads, shredded cabbage, stuffed peppers, fish, freshly baked bread, accompanied by the fruits of the monastery gardens – fresh olives, oranges, lemons, olive oil, vinegar. The meals are consumed in silence, while listening to the reading from the Lives of saints in Greek, and are stopped by the ringing of the Abbot's bell. Then everybody exits following the established order, passing by the Abbot of the monastery and receiving his blessing.

Pilgrims now can retire to their guest rooms, which are in separate buildings for men and women, and use this time to catch few hours of sleep before quiet hours end at nine in the morning. After breakfast at nine, there is free unstructured time until three in the afternoon, which is used for walks in the desert and monastery gardens (one path along the rows of olive tree Elena called "our Gethsemane"), visits to monastery kiosk, churches and chapels, or spiritual talks with elders (*startsy*). In the late afternoon there is an hour-long Vespers service, followed by lunch, and another set of quiet hours from seven in the evening to one at night – beginning of next Liturgy. In order for the journey to be considered a pilgrimage, and not just a weekend road trip, parishioners aim to attend all the services and follow monastery's schedule.

The imitation of monastic lifestyle includes also voluntarily undertaking various "obedience chores." For men these might include helping monks in the kitchen and in the

gardens, and for women cleaning the church and the territory. In the monastic tradition, involvement in physical labor is closely connected to the ascetic labor of unceasing prayer. A monk immersed in this prayer "prefers some simple occupation which will not require a great deal of thought but will leave him free to combine work with keeping his mind intent in the heart," thus making him "unfitted for the intellectual dialogue of ecumenical gatherings" (Sophrony 2001: 9). Some parish pilgrims offer their help in the monastery chores to achieve complete immersion in the lifestyle. However, they can be assigned chores not of their liking, which can lead to slight disappointments, as in the case of Stan who was assigned to the kiosk to greet visitors. Visitors, unlike pilgrims, are welcome to visit monastery grounds during the day, and they do not have to be Orthodox Christians. Indeed, many of them are not, and therefore unaccustomed to a proper dress attire – headscarves and long skirts for women, long sleeve shirts for men and women, long pants for men. While local Orthodox churches in America vary considerably in their dress requirements, monasteries, including St. Anthony's, enforce them very strictly. Stan was given an obedience of making sure that the visitors enter monastery grounds wearing appropriate clothes, and since "almost all men and women would come in shorts," he was responsible for explaining the rules of behavior and passing out skirts and pants. This task did not accommodate his notion of contemplative work and of keeping a quiet mind, but nevertheless was viewed by him as a lesson in obedience and humility. Turner viewed the behavior of "liminal entities" as "normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly" (1995: 95). In the case of parish pilgrims, their transformation into different people was aided by a full submission to the monastery authority, thus imprinting in them core Christian values to be taken outside of the monastery walls.

Another exercise in submission, patience and self-discipline is carried out in the talk to the spiritual elder, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Conversation with the Spiritual Elder

Meeting with an elder, which can take form of conversation, confession, or both, is arguably the most important part of the pilgrimage. The institution of elders is part of the tradition of desert monasticism, and it is considered to be the best expression of monastic life. This institution is not unfamiliar to Russian Orthodox Christians, since elders, or *startsy* in Russian, are an integral part of not only Russian monasticism but Russian culture on the whole (see Khoruzhiy 2006; Paert 2010). As 'elder' in English, in Russian the word *starets* means 'old,' however it points not to an attribute of age but to the mature spiritual state of the heart. While in the past elders were confined to the monastery, where their main task was cultivating the relationship of spiritual obedience with one or two monks, elders of modern times bring tradition into the social space by engaging into the spiritual father/spiritual child relationship with the outside 'worldly' people (Khoruzhiy 2006: 20). One of the main gifts of the elder is the gift of spiritual discernment, which marks his spiritual authority and comes as "a result of ascetic progress, trial and prayer" (Demacopoulos 2008: 98).

Notion of church hierarchy is crucial in Orthodoxy, and more so in the hierarchical relationship between the elder and his disciple. The disciple (*poslushnik* in Russian) is expected to completely entrust himself into the hands of the elder and follow all his instruction and advice. Here is how Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky famously described this relationship:

> An elder is one who takes your soul, your will into his soul and into his will. Having chosen an elder, you renounce your will and give it to him under total obedience and with total self-renunciation. A man who dooms himself to this trial, this terrible school of life, does so voluntarily, in the hope that after the long trial he will achieve self-conquest, self-mastery to such degree that he will, finally, through a whole life's obedience, attain to perfect freedom–that is, freedom from himself–and avoid the lot of those who live their whole lives without finding themselves in themselves. (2002: 27-28)

Obedience to an elder is required from monks, but lay pilgrims do not have to follow his advice unconditionally. Having grown accustomed to questioning spiritual authority of the parish priest, some of my informants tended to transfer this skepticism to elder's advice. "He doesn't know my life, so what can he tell me in few minutes of conversation," Katerina wondered. Zoe, on the other hand, while acknowledging the usefulness of the talk with spiritually more experienced person, was skeptical about 'our' abilities to understand his advice: "we are looking for magical answers, and often unable to hear what we are told to do, and at times we simply cannot formulate the right questions." She added that even when she came up with a question and got a response, she was able to understand what it really meant only few months later, and regretted not following the advice to the fullest.

Vlad emphasized the importance of exercising the obedience to a spiritual counselor, whose advice it will be safe for his spiritual life to follow: "In choosing the spiritual father it is important to know that he is beyond the worldly influences and that he had lived a monastic life. Then he will give you advice from his own experience and not from the books. To give advice from the books one just has to read a lot of books. In this monastery there is a continuity of a lived monastic tradition, and monks' connection

to the world is minimal. Elder Ephraim is a spiritual person, and therefore his disciples are spiritual too, and it is safe to get an advice from them." Level of spirituality for Vlad is connected to the level of withdrawal from the world, with all its noises and learnt wisdom. While it is safe and spiritually beneficial to get an advice from an elder of monastic tradition, there are dangers involved in following advice from less spiritually mature people, including parish priests. Vlad made a distinction between just confessing one's sins to the priest and in seeking his advice in various matters. Confessing sins to the parish priest is a valid practice, according to Vlad, for his authority and grace come from the institution, and ultimately the confession is made to God and not to a person. On the other hand, taking advice from the parish priest can be dangerous, as he knows one's position in parish structure and may find it hard to separate his own agendas from one's spiritual needs.

Among other dangers involved in having the wrong spiritual counsel, both Elena and Vlad mentioned the risk of falling into *prelest*. The word *prelest* translates from Russian as a "charm," and in an Orthodox Christian context means "spiritual deception," which also can be seen as a seduction away from God. In the Orthodox patristic tradition two basic forms of *prelest* are identified: the first "occurs when a person strives for a high spiritual state or spiritual visions without having been purified of passions and relying on his own judgment," and the second "offers to its victims not great visions but just exalted "religious feelings"" (Rose 1999: 144, 145). Both happen when the heart desires holy feelings but is unprepared and incapable of receiving them. The heart in patristic tradition is seen as "the spiritual centre of the human personality," it enlightens the mind (Sophrony 2001: 7). The mind, on the other hand, is imbued with the dogmatic teaching

of the church, and it is in the union of the mind and the heart in prayer that "the most authentic knowledge of the One True God" is acquired and "our whole being is given over to God" (6). The ascetic traditions of Orthodox monasticism – such as fasting and prayer, combined with regular confessions or conversations with the spiritual elder can shield a person from the temptations of *prelest* and put her on the path of pure and undistorted spiritual work.

Meeting with the elder is not listed on the official monastery schedule as something the pilgrims should do, it is passed through the informal channels among the pilgrims themselves. It is a sacrifice of the scheduled free time and a real test to pilgrims' "spiritual maturity," for waiting for the chance to see an elder can take hours or even days. Not all pilgrims are eager to make this sacrifice, preferring instead to wonder the monastery grounds, however there is a certain peer pressure to seek the meeting with an elder. On my first visit to the monastery Anna, one of my more experienced companions, insisted that myself and Nina go see the elder: "You should do it, you cannot just come here and deny yourself this spiritual treasure." Peer pressure can also come from the strangers one meets in the guest house common area – on a few occasions I witnessed women trying to persuade others in the benefits of talking to an elder. "We have such a unique opportunity to get advice from one of the most extraordinary spiritual man of our time. How can you not take advantage of that?"– one of them said.

Pilgrims try to prepare for this conversation in advance – they write down the sins to be confessed, and questions to be asked. Elena shared some tips: "If you don't ask him anything, he would not say anything. He will listen to your confession, and quietly pray for you. If you need an answer–make sure you ask a question. Better still–write it down

in advance, so you will not forget." Some pilgrims say that they get nervous when left face to face with the elder and become speechless, failing to remember what they came to say. Nina compared this experience to a regular confession to the church priest: "You know the list of sins, and you just go over them again. After all, we all repeat the same sins, at least I do. Here it does not seem to work. I started and stopped in confusion, I could not go on. You have to dig deeper if you want it to mean anything." Digging deeper requires hard work, not unlike cleaning of your house for Elena: "for me every trip to the monastery is doing the inner cleaning. To tidy up oneself you have to clean out and sort out everything, put it in places. There is a different quality of this process [in monastery] when you are not distracted, otherwise [in regular church confession] you sort of spruce it up, but did not go deep, into drawers." As with cleaning the house, the cleansing of oneself should occur on a regular basis. Engagement in the right practices, orthopraxis, should be constant if one wants to maintain connection with God, receive divine grace, and ultimately transform oneself.

To see the elder, pilgrims gather in the waiting room and put their names on the list with the elder's secretary; however, this does not guarantee that they will be received in order or received at all. It is left up to the elder to determine whether to receive someone, which depends on many factors (distance traveled by pilgrim, duration of his stay), but mostly remains a mystery. Oftentimes not the secretary but the elder himself would come out and point to a person to be next.

Queuing, as Naletova observes, "is an almost inevitable part of pilgrimage. Lines spontaneously form … in churches when people wait to kiss the cross or an icon, to receive anointing, or to make a confession. Accustomed to waiting, believers use time for

prayer" (2010: 250). Lines for Russian pilgrims produce a certain amount of anxiety. Many of them spent a substantial amount of their lives in the various parts of the Soviet Union, during times of permanent food and overall commodities shortages, which required constant standing in line, being watchful for those who try to cut through. Using time in line for prayer in the monastery is indeed a test for a pilgrim as she watches newcomers being led into the elder's room while those who have been there for hours keep waiting. While some pray, others use the time in line to share stories – of their pilgrimages to other holy locations, including those in Russia, and of their previous visits to St. Anthony monastery. For pilgrims, the experience of waiting in line turns out to be a particular ascetic practice–of letting go familiar 'worldly' responses of assertiveness and vigilance, of exercising self-discipline and restraint, and of redirecting watchfulness from others onto oneself. As Zoe put it, "I first thought that lines for confession hinder my inner work, but then I realized that they help to pinpoint my sharp corners, the ones that bother me no matter where I happen to be." The waiting room is therefore one of the spaces the monastery provides to turn known behaviors and numerous temptations into new forms of self-knowledge and social connection, into the spontaneous communitas, to borrow from Turner (1995).

The Turners observed that during pilgrimages new types of sociality emerge, when "social interaction is not governed by the old rules of social structure" and when individuals are brought "into fellowship with like-minded souls" (1978: 31). Zoe favorably contrasted the sociality experienced at the monastery to the one at the local parish church: "it is such a relief to be talking about spiritual matters, books and journeys, and not about diets and shopping, and even worse – fighting about finances and

management.” Being in a temporal pilgrim status at the monastery, people embrace their structural invisibility and their release from practical decision-making, and view the subordination to the authority as a desirable component of their spiritual work, and not something to be questioned and disobeyed.

Sitting in line and waiting to talk with the elder consumes the majority of pilgrims’ free time. Vlad and Elena said that once they had to spend all three days in the waiting room, only to be received by the elder just before their departure. On one of my trips, when we walked out into the beautiful sun-soaked monastery gardens, after two days waiting and after all members of our group have been received by the elder, one pilgrim exclaimed: “How nice is it to be in the sun, after sitting two days in the dark room,” to which Elena replied: “It is better to sit two days in the dark room than to spend an eternity in darkness.” Women laughed in agreement. While in terms of ordinary and everyday waiting in the dark room might be considered a waste of time, in the context of spiritual work aimed to getting closer to God two days in darkness was a necessary sacrifice.

This response also points to the internalized idea of the liminality of Christian existence in this world. This view is echoed by statements made on the St.Anthony’s website: “the rejection of worldly thinking is the duty not only of monks, but of all Christians. The faithful must not have a worldly mind, but sojourn as strangers and travelers with their minds fixed on God. … The Church can be seen as a community in exodus. The world is its temporary home but the Church is bound for the kingdom of God.” Elena’s response thus captures well both the transitory nature of the Christian existence in the world, and the importance of constant self-work to be done in this life

before entering the next. The monastery not only facilitates liminality for the true spiritual experience, but being "heaven on Earth" also provides a glimpse of true home.

Anthropological Theories of Pilgrimage II: Communitas and Contestation

Scholars studying Orthodox Christian pilgrimages, including pilgrimages to monasteries, have attempted to apply the notion of communitas in their analysis. Some observe that pilgrims to Orthodox monasteries are encouraged to emulate monks and form a sense of communitas with them, although only for a short period of their stay at the monastery (Poujeau 2010: 186). Others question whether this can be called communitas, since pilgrims are not part of the monastery hierarchy no matter how often they come and for how long they have been involved in working and praying at the monastery, and hence it is difficult to talk about communitas in a sense of erasing differences in social statuses (Kormina 2010).

Communitas in the St. Anthony monastery, in my opinion, might be forming not only with monks and nuns, say during participation in the obedience chores, but with other pilgrims in the monastery, and not necessarily with those with whom one comes. Ties among pilgrims can form during many moments of their stay in the monastery: in guest rooms pilgrims share, while waiting in line to talk with the elder, on walks on monastery grounds and around in the desert, in the bookstore, in visiting churches of the monastery to venerate icons and relics. Although the stay in the monastery is very structured and regulated around the monastery schedule, there is some room left for doing personal activities of one's choosing. Oftentimes these activities involve fulfilling "the obligations and concerns of everyday social life such as those of family, patronage, and

obligations to the dead" (Dubisch 1995: 43), and therefore cannot be considered completely anti-structural. Praying for the health of living and for the repose of the dead is a common practice in Orthodox Christianity, and giving notes with names of those to be prayed for is a part of divine liturgies, and other services. Russian pilgrims to St. Anthony usually bring prayer notes and monetary donations from the parishioners of their home church with them, and put them into special boxes along with their own. Sometimes they also would fulfill requests from individual parishioners and bring them back books, icons, or prayer ropes.

There is also a possibility of building social relationships and networks with those one meets during the monastery stay. As many Orthodox pilgrims start to relocate and buy houses in order to be close to the monastery (for example, Vlad and Elena moved there a year ago with their two small children), they form social ties among themselves and with those they encounter in the monastery, and continue to socialize outside of the monastery walls: joining efforts in home schooling their children learning Greek language, and so on. Usually this relocation implies that people moved away from their local parishes as well, thus reintegrating themselves into the new structure – that of monastery and its liturgical life. While commenting on this recent trend, parish pilgrims refer to it as "finding one's original home" and creating "our Optina" around the Greek monastery (the Optina monastery was one of the main sites of the revival of monasticism and institute of elders (*starchestvo*) in the nineteenth-century Russia, famously depicted by Dostoevsky in his novel *Brothers Karamazov*).

According to Eade and Sallnow, the "capacity to absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses, to be able to offer a variety of clients what each of them desires,"

and to "respond to a plurality" is what gives a pilgrimage destination its universalistic character (2000: 15). As part of the universal Orthodox Church, the Greek monastery accommodates not only pilgrims from other Orthodox traditions, but visitors of other Christian faiths as well. However, non-Orthodox Christians are kept from certain practices reserved only for the Orthodox. For example, they are not allowed to participate in the main sacraments, are assigned to different places during services, and consume meals separately from the monks and Orthodox Christians. In the eyes of my informants, this makes them just visitors and not pilgrims, for pilgrimage assumes that one will be dedicated to spiritual work through sacraments of communion and confession, and immersion in the daily rhythm of monastery life. Thus, while parish pilgrims are stripped from their social identity in the local church, their identity as Orthodox creates boundaries with other visitors and emphasizes the difference between them. The full liminal experience at the monastery, including the possibility of communitas, is reserved only for Orthodox believers. Other visitors to the monastery might experience "different degrees or forms of liminality and communitas" (Dubisch 1995: 43), or not experience them at all.

Conflicts between orthodoxies and confessional groups and contestations of religious meanings (Eade and Sallnow 2000: 2) exist not only at the monastery site, but also at the site of the local church. Although some parishioners have expressed the desire to visit the monastery, they postpone it by saying that they should put more effort into clearing this house and not be "running around looking for *starets*," – as Katerina disapprovingly put it. This group echoes part of the patristic tradition, according to which one should look for God in one's own heart, and establish Mt. Athos in one's own soul.

While pilgrimages to the monastery can be beneficial and have no harm in them, the main goal should be, in the words of Katerina, “to work on your own soul, to search for the holiness inside you, and to find holy places around you.” The parish pilgrims counter this perspective, saying that their trips help them in renewing these searches for holiness inside, the intensity of which tends to weaken with time but returns after every monastery visit.

Then there are those parishioners who did visit the monastery, but were overwhelmed by the amount of regulations and rules. As Oksana put it: “who cares what kind of skirt I wear, better focus on what is inside than on how tight one’s dress is.” She called it “hypocritical” to require women to cover themselves and be modest, while the monastery grounds are so full of non-ascetic material richness. She then contrasted it to another Orthodox monastery in Arizona – women’s Serbian monastery of St. Paisious, - which in her view exemplifies a true ascetic spirit of monasticism: it is poor, nuns and the abbot behave with humility, with no “VIP air” around them. Although most of the nuns in this monastery are Americans who converted to Orthodoxy, Oksana approvingly commented that they all learned Russian and Old Slavonic (in which the Orthodox services are conducted), and in the spirit are “like Russians.” There, Oksana stated, she would not mind covering herself and adhering to other rules. Katerina, who actually never visited the St. Anthony monastery although she admitted that she was in serious need of spiritual counseling, agreed by saying that she would rather go to the Russian monastery in America, or to this “poor Serbian monastery,” which are “closer to us in spirit, and are not so materialistic and pragmatic as Greeks are.”

Parish pilgrims, on the other hand, point to the missionary component of the Greek monastery, which is based not on the outreach programs but rather on the principle of "come and see." The monastery's beauty, both natural and architectural, and friendliness to visitors attract people who otherwise might not have visited it. This accessibility of the monastery is particularly important in the American context with its almost complete lack of knowledge of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. "Monks came from complete isolation [on Mt. Athos] to complete openness. This was done for a reason," Vlad explained. And indeed, the transformation from isolated, liminal, contemplative existence in the island caves to an advertised tourist destination in the United States is a rather dramatic one.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a discussion of pilgrimages of parishioners of the Russian Orthodox church to a Greek Orthodox monastery. Monasteries in Orthodox Christianity are viewed as "the foundations of the social world," they help in strengthening it by "transmitting religious knowledge [and] complementing parish-based institutional structures" (Hann and Goltz 2010:13). However, as presented in this chapter, there is also a contestation between the pilgrimage site and the site of origin.

The local church presents parishioners with a variety of temptations, which for some create an urge to escape the local environment. There are occasional discontents between viewing the parish as a body of Christ, with the Liturgical worship at the heart of it (see Hopko 2003), as an ethnic club for immigrants' socializing, or as a corporate legal entity. For some, the practical side of involvement in parish life, including occasional

conflicts with the parish priest and questioning his authority, inhibits their spiritual growth. The desire for an authentic and unpolluted spiritual experience draws some parishioners to the Greek monastery in Arizona – to the "spa for the soul."

For some parish pilgrims, going to the monastery is like going to "a different planet," which provides opportunities "for complete detachment from the everyday concerns and for concentration on the inner work" (from the interview with Zoe). This clear separation of two sites allows to employ the Turners' paradigm of pilgrimage as an anti-structural event, leading to the emergence of communitas (1978). Pilgrims experience structural invisibility as they participate in service differently than they do at the local church, being able to completely immerse into the worship. Their unfamiliarity with the Greek language and liturgical practices facilitates a more direct experience of the service and an uninterrupted flow of prayer. The liminality of their experience is further amplified by the separation of women and men during services and in the guesthouses, and by the inversion of day and night times in the liturgical schedule of the monastery.

Although they become detached from practical concerns of the local church, parish pilgrims face different challenges. By setting their goals on spiritual cleansing and refilling themselves with grace, parish pilgrims are forced to reexamine and reevaluate their normal everyday behaviors and attitudes, including those of submission to authority, as seen in the discussion of the waiting room. According to some pilgrims, working on spiritually perfecting oneself translates into helping the community of the local church, and prepares one to face the various temptations and conflicts of parish life from a new angle. This analysis supports the idea that monasteries and parish churches exist in a relationship, complementing and nourishing each other.

However, pilgrimage to the monastery also underscores differences and contestations at both sites. The idealized state of communitas experienced by parish pilgrims at the monastery is reserved for people of the Orthodox faith and of certain levels of “spiritual maturity.” Although willing, parish pilgrims are not completely successful in transporting the sensation of spiritual communitas to the normative communitas at the local church, being unable to deliver spiritual lessons learned from their pilgrimage experiences to other parish members. Pilgrimage to the monastery indeed emerges as “an arena for competing religious and secular discourses” (Eade and Sallnow 2000: 2), with accentuating different aspects of faith and practices by parishioners of the local church.

Trips to the monastery are becoming more regular as the parish pilgrims seek to return to their spiritual home and a source of spiritual nourishment. Seduction to the monastery, to the ‘heart’ of the Church, lies in longing for a more pure and authentic spiritual experience, which monastic tradition, one of the forms of early Christianity, still retains. The spiritual work in the monastery can be done more effectively also because of the wealth of spiritual monastic traditions accumulated over the centuries, learning about which not only guides pilgrims in their spiritual practices of self-transformation, but also assuages their spiritual hunger. Once pilgrims had a taste of it, it is harder for them to stop, and even upon return one is yearning to come back. Seduction here works on two levels – pull towards the restoration of the communion with God and return to the Garden, and push away from worldly temptations that are creeping into the parish life of the local church.

There are many paths one can take towards salvation, or "to get to the top of the mountain," as Elena put it in her characteristic creative fashion. Some of them are longer and windier and some are shorter and straighter, and for the parish pilgrims discussed in this chapter the shorter road goes through the desert monastery, and is covered with honey.

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Chapter 6

Visit of the Miracle-Working Icon

In this chapter, I propose looking at Orthodox icons as mediators not only between the material and spiritual realms, between the visible and invisible but also between the far and the near, the familiar and the Other and between individual believers and larger socio-political processes. Uprooted from their culture, post-Soviet immigrants experienced uncertainty and the constant negotiation of identity and belonging. Although these processes are not unique and can be recognized in many ethnic immigrant communities, Orthodox Christianity provides a set of symbols and practices which responds to spatiotemporal reordering in culturally specific ways and ties believers to their Russian spiritual soil.

In a seminal work, Benedict Anderson (2006) introduces the concept of imagined communities held together by mediated imaginations of spatially dispersed members and proposes that communities can be differentiated by the style used to imagining them. Birgit Meyer expands Anderson's understanding of imagined community by also paying attention to "the things, media and the body in actual process of community making … in order to grasp the particular modes through which imaginations materialize" (2009: 6). She states that "in order to become experienced as real, imagined communities need to materialize in the concrete lived environment and be felt in the bones" (Meyer 2009: 6). She views religion as a practice of mediation, "to which media, as technologies of representation employed by human beings, are intrinsic," and extends "the notion of

media … toward the inclusion of substances such as incense or herbs, … icons, sacred books, holy stones and rivers" (Meyer 2009: 11).

Another scholar of visual culture, David Morgan, also argues that visual images and religious practice contribute to imagined communities by providing symbolic forms that "allow them to participate in something that is larger both spatially and temporally than their immediate environment" and "to realize in a concrete, corporeal way that they belong to this world or clan or tradition and that doing so ensures them of the benefits of membership, such as an enduring identity" (2005). Morgan also emphasizes that "images and how people look at them are evidence for understanding belief, which should not be reduced to doctrines or creeds of a propositional nature. Belief is embodied practice no less than a cerebral one" (2005). Through practices of engagement with religious objects, post-Soviet newcomers to Orthodoxy not only connect in a tangible way to their imagined community but also refine and strengthen their religious belief. In this view, belief and practice are interconnected and reinforce each other, as I argued earlier.

Icon veneration is among the most widespread religious practices, grounded in the theological understanding of persons as created in the image and likeness of God (Hanganu 2010). In the words of Russian theologian and icon painter Leonid Ouspensky, "Being an expression of the image and likeness of God restored in man, the icon is a dynamic and constructive element of worship. … In the icon, the church recognizes one of the means which can and must allow us to realize our calling, that is, to attain the likeness of our divine prototype" (2004: 63). Ouspensky firmly positions icon veneration within the collective practices of liturgical worship, which sanctify the senses "by word and by image" (Ouspensky 2004: 63).

Icons travel well and are part of not only any church setting but also of believers' homes, cars, and workplaces. They are simultaneously emplaced and portable. Many icons in the local church were donated by parishioners from various generations and waves of migration. Others were family icons brought by the first wave of post-revolutionary immigrants, acquired on pilgrimages to Mount Athos in Greece, purchased from icon shops in American Orthodox monasteries, or recently obtained by current parishioners during trips to Russia and its many holy destinations. Once acquiring a home in the space of the church, icons continue to move. For example, certain icons are placed in the center of the church on specific holidays of the liturgical calendar (e.g., a saint's day, a day for veneration of the particular icon of the Mother of God).

The space of the church, therefore, has been constantly transformed, co-created, and personalized by past and present parishioners, symbolizing the lifeline and continuity of the Orthodox tradition, in both its national and trans-national manifestations. This view of space accords with contemporary anthropological theories of mobility and transnational communities (Levitt 2007; Malkki 1997; Vasques and Marquardt 2003), which no longer consider space to be a container of native cultures but view it as a process of constant remapping of cultural and religious traditions onto new geographies and re-creating new spatial arrangements which synthesize local, regional, and global dynamics. Through icons, the space of the church embodies the history of people, connecting past and present generations and the saints depicted in the icons into one church body.

Icons alleviate insecurities created by displacement from culturally familiar traditions both by inhabiting and infusing the space of the church with symbolic

meanings and memories of home and by traveling between home and host environments. Certain miracle-working icons, as they are known to believers, have become increasingly mobile in the last decades, reflecting the mobile experience of believers. They travel within national borders and abroad, visiting many Orthodox churches, monasteries, schools, and hospitals. Geographically dispersed localities become connected through the traveling miracle-working icon, whose presence positions them on the spiritual map of Orthodox Christianity.

Softening of Evil Hearts Icon of the Mother of God (Theotokos)

History of the Icon

This icon twice visited the parish where I conducted my fieldwork, once in fall 2009 and once in summer 2010. The first visit was widely advertised within the Russian-speaking and Orthodox communities in California. Flyers were distributed in Greek, Serbian, American, and Antiochian Orthodox churches and in Russian deli shops and places of business. The opening sentence of the flyer, which several parishioners collectively wrote, gave a brief biography (or social history, as Gabriel Hanganu (2010) would put it) of the icon:

> In [the] late 1990s, in a small Moscow apartment of a pious religious family, a miracle happened—the Icon of "Softening of Evil Hearts" began to exude myrrh. Created by artists in Sofrino, a small town outside of Moscow known for its icon painting, this modern icon became the talk of the town with people lining to see the Icon day and night. The doors of the apartment remained open to anyone eager to see the miracle but eventually the small room couldn't accommodate a constant stream of visitors. The Church was notified of this extraordinary event and the Icon eventually found its way to be displayed at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow.

Several aspects of this icon's biography are of interest. First, it emphasizes the contemporary nature of miracles: this is a modern icon, mass produced at a factory in Sofrino, which began to stream myrrh not in a church setting but in the home of individual pious believers in the late 1990s—in the midst of the so-called comeback of Orthodox Christianity in the public sphere after decades of persecution. Second, before making its way to the church—i.e., being authenticated by institutional authorities—the icon was venerated in a private house, and word about it spread through informal social networks. Finally, the icon was transformed from a private, sacred object into a national treasure, a miracle of national importance to be displayed in the main Cathedral of the Russian Orthodox Church. Later, the flyer mentions the icon's presence in the Cathedral during the election of the current patriarch of Russia (Kirill) in the spring of 2009. Mentioned not in the flyer but on sites dedicated to the icon is that, after the election of the patriarch, the icon started to stream myrrh abundantly, which the patriarch's public relations office interpreted as divine approval of the events.

Other details of icon's biography not included in the flyer are nevertheless significant and add to the modern dimensions of the icon's story. The icon started streaming myrrh after being blessed by the relics of St. Matrona of Moscow, among the most beloved new Russian saints. Living in Moscow in the first half of the 20th century, St. Matrona was physically blind (which to many indicates spiritual vision) and had special gifts of healing and spiritual foresight. After her official canonization in May 1999, her relics were transferred from a cemetery to the Intercession convent in a central district of Moscow. Long lines, at times several hours long, formed almost immediately and continue to this day. Inna Naletova argues that these lines contributed to the

sacralization of urban space, saturating it with the sacred (Naletova 2010: 250). Eventually, the faithful proclaimed St. Matrona the informal patron saint of Moscow, making her resonate more powerfully with believers in contemporary Russia. St. George the Martyr, a truly universal Christian saint, remains the official patron saint of Moscow, his iconic image displayed in various public official environments, including police cars. Those venerating relics sometimes place other objects on the relics to charge them with the special spiritual power believed to permeate the remains of holy persons after their physical death. The icon *Softening of Evil Hearts* was one such object.

Shortly after, the woman, who I will call Margaret, noticed small drops of myrrh appearing on the icon's surface, accompanied by a strong flowery fragrance. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, this phenomenon is known as myrrh-streaming, the flow of an oily, fragrant substance from the surface of various sacred objects, such as icons, saints' relics, and crosses. There are no predictions of how often or how much myrrh will come from these objects, nor is there a clear explanation of why it happens.

By the time the icon *Softening of Evil Hearts* first visited the United States in 2009, it had already accumulated a long list of associated miracles of both individual and national significance. I return to the flyer's description: "In 1999, before the terrorist explosions of several apartment buildings in Moscow, the image of the Theotokos on the Icon changed—sad dark circles appeared under her eyes. … On August 12th, 2000, the day the *Kursk* submarine sank, the Icon showed tiny bleeding "wounds." … It is known that Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev comes to pray to this holy myrrh streaming Icon before important state meetings and events."

The icon again is positioned firmly in the present, post-socialist life of Russia and in current events which have special symbolic significance in the collective imaginary of the nation: the sinking of a submarine (a military tragedy of national proportions), the bombing of apartments (increased terrorism), the election of a new patriarch (changes in the modern Russian church), and divine guidance to current Russian president who prays before the icon before making important decisions for the country.

This focus on the current events differentiates the *Softening of Evil Hearts* icon from other miracle-working icons of the Mother of God in Russia; however, its role has a certain continuity in connecting the national and individual. In a study of the veneration practices of the *Kazan* Mother of God icon in late imperial Russia, historian Vera Shevzov notes that "the production and reception of an icon … involved broader religious, cultural, and even political processes" and that the "notion of gazing upon an icon must therefore take into account not merely the personal religious sentiments … but also the icon's story, or life, in all its complex social and political dimensions, along with its interpretations in the worshiping community" (2007: 61–62, 66). The *Kazan* icon, like many other miracle-working icons of the Mother of God in Russia such as *Vladimir* and *Tikhvin*, takes its name from a particular location with which it is associated, thus participating in the creation of a sacred geography of Russia. The *Kazan* icon also has a distinctive role in historically meaningful events in the country: defending Russian cities from invaders and religious Others, Muslims from the South and Catholic and Protestant Christians from the West. The biographies of *Kazan* and other territorial icons are entangled with the history of the Russian nation, are firmly placed in its collective memory, and sometimes are invoked to connect messages of the past with the present.

For example, during the first decade of the 21st-century, the day of Russian national unity was instituted, not coincidentally, on November 4—the day of veneration of the *Kazan* icon. This holiday was intended to replace celebration of the anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917, which was held on November 7 during Soviet times and still resonates in memory as a day of national holiday. By replacing a Soviet holiday with the post-Soviet one and aligning it with a date of spiritual and national importance, the Russian government seems to return to an older meaning of the unity of the people and to stress the continuity of Russian religious traditions, which seven decades of official atheism did not break but merely interrupted (cf. McDaniel 1996).

In addition to being a guardian icon of contemporary Russia not assigned to a particular geographic location, the icon *Softening of Evil Hearts* differs from other icons in the style in which the Theotokos is depicted. In most icons, she is with the Child, which connects the image's motherly nature with protection of the nation, itself often called Mother Russia. *Softening of Evil Hearts*, however, is among the rare icons to present an individual image of Theotokos without the Child. The symbology of the image—Theotokos with seven swords pierced in her heart—recalls the story of presentation of Jesus in the Temple on fortieth day after His birth and the prophecy of St. Symeon, the God-receiver: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed, so the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:34–35). The message of the icon *Softening of Evil Hearts* is further elaborated:

> Just as our Lord Jesus Christ would be pierced with nails and a spear, so the soul of the most-pure one would be pierced by a weapon of sorrow and pain in her heart when she saw her Son's suffering. After that, the

> heretofore hidden thoughts of the people regarding the Messiah would be revealed, and they would face a choice: to be with Christ or to be against Him. Such an interpretation of Saint Symeon's prophecy became the subject of a number of sacred icons of the all-holy Theotokos. All those who turn to them in prayer sense that with the softening of evil hearts comes an easing of spiritual and physical suffering. People come to recognize that when they pray for their enemies before such icons, their feelings of enmity are softened, and that internecine strife and hatreds abate, giving way to kindness. ("The Softening of Evil Hearts" Icon, 2012)

This icon's message, therefore, shifts from motherly love and protection of the motherland and the faithful to the state of human heart, or more specifically, to the heart of the individual believer, and invites introspective reflection. This shift in meaning parallels broader socio-political and cultural processes in present-day Russia—the movement toward a more self-reflexive modern subject (cf. Zigon 2010) that accompanies a series of reorientations, from atheism to religion, from socialism to democracy, to name a few.

In the church flyer, the expression "a sign of our times" was used in a series of reflexive questions posed to an imagined reader: "Have we perhaps become hardened in our souls and angry in our hearts in the everyday tension and haste of our lives? Have our souls become cruel and void of compassion? Have our love become sparse and our hearts arrogant? Have we forgotten the kindness, forgiveness, and compassion that we should feel towards each other?" While valid questions for any Orthodox believer to revisit, they had special relevance to the state of affairs in the local parish, which was recovering from the split after the unification of the two churches and experiencing tensions between parishioners and the current priest. The icon's visit was seen as a way to heal the parish's collective wounds and feelings of individual hostility.

Receiving the Icon in the Local Church Community

I first saw the icon not in church but in the home of my friend Oksana, a parishioner. Her brother Alex accompanied the icon, along with its keeper or custodian, Sergey, Margaret's husband. They both stayed Oksana's house, and she invited some parishioners to venerate the icon before its display in the church. Oksana is a very hospitable person and made plenty of delicious food and drink available to guests: seafood soup, *bliny* (pancakes), and homemade herbal vodka, one of her specialties. The icon was placed on the dining room table on traditional Russian linens, surrounded by star gazer lilies and proteas from a local farm. It exuded a faint sweet smell but was not weeping. Visitors looked carefully around the frame to see whether they could find any drops of myrrh, but there were none. Alex commented that the icon had been rather dry during its visit to the United States. Before coming to California, Sergey, Alex, and the icon had visited churches on the East Coast, including the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox monastery in Jordanville, New York. For Alex, the reason for the icon's dryness was clear: The icon did not like it here. "Here" referred both to the country and to people. According to Alex, the country, the United States, is of poor faith, and people, including Orthodox believers, run after miracles without contemplating their faith. The only time it showed the drops of myrrh, Alex shared, was on the airplane, "because, you know, everybody remembers God then."

Sergey echoed this frustration: "All they [who come to venerate the icon] want is myrrh. Why? Will it make them better people?" As strange as it was to hear such statements from a person who had dedicated his life to keeping and accompanying the miracle-working icon on its many travels, they point to the tension between belief and

miracles that exists in Russian Orthodoxy. As the priest, Father Andrey, later said in his sermon after icon veneration in the church, “Do not be too happy about the myrrh-streaming. It might as well mean that we are weak in our faith. Miracles are given to us to strengthen our faith.” In all the attitudes expressed, one can see an implied paradox in the miracle: on one hand, myrrh-streaming occurs to strengthen our faith, but on the other, it stops if our faith is not strong enough. People refer to this ambiguity as one of the mysteries which we cannot and should not attempt to know.

Whether it streamed myrrh or not, people from the parish venerated the icon piously. After bowing or kneeling three times and crossing themselves before the icon, people kissed it. Some put their forehead on the image while saying a prayer. The conditions of the home setting permitted more unstructured time with the icon. Unlike in the church environment, there were no lines in the house, and people could spend as much time with the icon as they wanted. Some placed personal items on the glass surface of the icon; these included crosses, rings, and other icons, usually small and on paper. Some wiped the surface of the icon with their scarves. Historian Vera Shevtzov (2007) observes a change in devotional patterns: As more myrrh-bearing icons emerge in Orthodox churches, believers spend more time not only with the icon but also with other icons and personal objects. This change is attributed to increased access to sacred material objects in the age of mechanical reproduction. Every Orthodox bookstore or church kiosk offers a wide variety of icons available for purchase. The prices range from few dollars for small laminated icons to hundreds of dollars for larger, hand-painted icons. Parishioners buy icons everywhere they visit, give them, travel with them, and bring them to hospital and hotel rooms. Some have accumulated so many paper icons

over the years that they have made them into framed collages hung throughout their houses.

The local church dedicated two services to the icon: in the evening *Molieben* and *Akathist* and in the following morning *Molieben* and the Divine Liturgy. *Molieben* is a special prayer service asking for a saint's intercession, and *Akathist* consists of a series of chanted and sung prayers and hymns honoring saints or the Mother of God. Overall, most saints and almost every image of the Mother of God have *Moliebens* and *Akathists* written to honor them. Due to very broad advertisements of the icon's visit (the flyer was written in both Russian and English), attendance at all services was high. Elena describes the event in a short article she wrote for the parish newsletter:

> All parking spaces on the streets close to the church were hopelessly full and blocked by some unimaginable number of cars, and I was sent by "my own (*svoi*)" parishioners to park on the street. I barely found a spot quite far away from the church. I was also upset with the weather, which decided to spoil (*isportit'sya*) the day before. I put on my raincoat and scarf and rushed to the church. Small groups of people were moving alongside me. This sight was so unusual to the neighborhood that many locals asked us where we were going and what was going on. These questions brought me out of immersion in my thoughts, and I noticed that something extraordinary was indeed happening. Worries of the day receded, and something switched inside. When I approached the church I realized that I had no chance to get inside, so I had to squeeze into the adjacent space of kiosk. There I stood during Molieben and Akathist.

In this narrative, the familiar space, however marginal, was transformed into a site where extraordinary events took place. It no longer belonged to a limited group of regulars but expanded to accommodate newcomers, former regulars who left for a variety of reasons, and laity and clergy from other Orthodox churches in the area. Elena commented on the attendees:

> During the services, I stood quietly in the corner with my candle and watched. A lot of faces passed by me, familiar and unknown. There were many familiar ones, almost all whom I met in this church or elsewhere during the last ten years. Everyone has its own story, its own joys and sorrows. Today I am remembering all their stories—someone was sick and got better, somebody had a child. … Today they all came to meet the miracle. Or – moved towards the miracle. They stood there, prayed. Somebody even cried, talked to each other, and their faces were so remarkable (*chudesnye*), the faces that I had never seen before in my life. … This was a miracle of love, all-forgiving and all-conquering love, the love that never ends. Because it was this love that brought all of us, so different, together under one roof.

The services the next morning were not as well attended, but the church was full. As in the evening, people lighted candles, stood, and prayed during the Liturgy and *Molieben*. After the services, there was a time for private veneration of the icon, which was positioned in the center of the church. People formed a line, so everyone had some personal time in front of the icon. After bowing or kneeling three times and crossing themselves before the icon, people kissed it. Some put their foreheads on the icon while saying a prayer. As always, some believers had more knowledge about various practices of veneration. A few placed on the surface of the icon personal items, such as rings, crosses, and other smaller icons. As one woman, Slava, explained to me and others, doing so charges the personal items with grace, or transfers some of the grace from the miracle icon to them. Sergey, the guardian of the icon, also had small cards with reprints of the icon, which he distributed among the faithful after the services. Although the cards had been already charged on the icon, believers still put them on its surface.

Myrrh was distributed through cotton balls or Q-tips dipped into myrrh and handed out in Ziploc bags (to preserve moisture longer). After Divine services (*Molieben*, *Akathist*, Liturgy), worshippers lined up to personally venerate the icon, and the priest

then anointed them with myrrh, making the sign of the cross on their forehead and sometimes their cheeks, hands, and neck, and then gave them a Q-tip soaked in myrrh from the icon.

It is possible to say that believers learned from each other different nuances in and the meanings of the practices of icon veneration. They instructed one another what to do while venerating the miracle-working icon, making it a process of collective learning and exchange of behaviors, including placing personal items on the icon's glass surface and saying certain kinds of personal prayers. Slava, for example, said that, when she approaches the icon, she "asks, asks, asks" and suggests that others do the same: "This is such a great opportunity. The Mother of God herself is present here. You have to ask her for help." Andrea, who is not a regular at church, said that, when she approached the icon, "suddenly all the words disappeared from my head. I could not think of anything to ask." She was advised not to think too much and simply to ask for the divine will to be made manifest in her life. She agreed, saying that indeed she felt it more appropriate at that moment to think not about her own wishes and desires but about God's. In this way, "image[s] steal belief from words" (Morgan 2008: 96). Andrea was learning how to believe and what it means to be a believer. Sergey, who himself was baptized nearly a decade ago, stated that, "through this wonderworking icon, I'm learning to be an Orthodox believer."

In addition to strengthening belief, practices of icon veneration develop and affirm believers' Orthodox Christian identity. The visit of the miracle-working icon from Russia added nourishment to foreign soil, making the experience being cut off from the roots of national tradition less uncertain. The space of the church itself accommodates the

transitory and stationary experiences of believers and sacred objects. As Liza once commented, “I wouldn’t have loved California as I do now if there was no Russian church here.” Many other parishioners also admit that acceptance of the culture of the host environment remains problematic for them, but their immigrant life has become richer because of the existence of the church.

Orthodox Christian Teachings on Prayer and Icon Veneration

In a book on the Orthodox Christian experience of God, Archimandrite Meletious Webber, the abbot of an OCA monastery in Northern California, addresses the Orthodox approach to prayer. “The words are important … but so too is the silence between the words. … We listen carefully to the silence between the words, before going on to the next one. We have no expectations, and indeed, nothing has to happen. We do not expect to think anything, feel anything, or hear anything. We simply listen to the silence” (Webber 2007: 56). He continues, “In the world at large, there is a silence which is simply the lack of all noise. This is a negative silence, a silence waiting to be filled. However, in the spiritual life we discover another, much more valuable sort of silence, and this is the silence which is the voice of God. … Silence is the language of God. Everything else is a mistranslation” (Webber 2007: 56).

This view on silence in the spiritual religious experience proves helpful in understanding why it was nearly impossible to get people to talk about their experiences of the icon. As an ethnographer, I observed behaviors around the icon: prayers, placing objects on its surface, kissing it, bowing and prostrating in front of it, putting candles next to it. When they talked, though, worshippers said phrases of rather general nature, about

how amazing the icon was, what a miracle it was that it visited us at this time, how they were not worthy but nonetheless were given God's grace.

This lack of articulation might have another cause, as well. Orthodoxy generally discourages talking about one's spiritual experiences, because they are a mystery between the believer and God. As well, boasting about how spiritually advanced one is could tempt others into jealousy, which would negate the gift of grace received and raise the danger of falling into the state of *prelest* (discussed in chapter 5). Instead, one should talk only about the visible results, such as physical healing or getting a job. Saints, for example, "do not tend to advertise" their deeper awareness and intuition (Webber 2007: 13). Words corrupt the spiritual experience and bring it into the domain of human feelings and emotions, which, like the thoughts of a fallen human, are "broken and unreliable" (Webber 2007: 12).

According to the elaborate Orthodox theological tradition of icon veneration, icons are not intended to evoke emotions, feelings, and imagination. Icon veneration lies in the realm of the heart, not the mind. Icons invite "the believer to dive more deeply into the mystery" and let their hearts resonate "voicelessly with the spiritual reality portrayed upon the icon's surface" (Webber 2007: 101). The surface of icons surface is often called the window into heaven, which Webber sees as misleading because, although believers do look through icons into the heavenly world, they invite worshippers "to enter the mystery rather than to look beyond using our imagination" (2007: 105). Entering involves breaking down the boundary separating two worlds and two realities, opening the window to let in divine grace. George, a parishioner, put it this way: "It is like a light socket. You plug into the energy which is always there already. The icon is a mechanism

the divine uses to connect with your soul." Myrrh-streaming icons make manifest the divine presence in a highly visible way, demonstrating that "God is willing and able to enter into the world He Himself created—rather than stand outside and observe it" (Webber 2007: 104). Brought into close communication with God through the icon, worshippers can speak the language of God—the language of silence.

According to Archbishop Rafail Karelin, this silence, like the icon itself, is not static but is a dynamic silence which transfers those who pray in front of the icon from earth into the heavenly kingdom. Icons, Karelin writes, depict images as still and static but underneath them lies a tremendous dynamism. The more external dynamism and expression an icon has, the less it reflects the presence of spiritual energies (online). Leonid Ouspensky echoes this idea: "The icon transmits not the everyday, banal face of man, but his glorious and eternal face. … The flesh is represented completely differently from ordinary corruptible flesh" (2004: 46). By lacking emotion, "the icon is a peaceful transmission of a certain spiritual reality. … The icon visibly captures an individual who has become a living icon, a true likeness of God. *The icon does not represent the divinity. Rather, it indicates the human's participation in the divine life*" (Ouspensky 2004: 46, italics in the original).

Theological writings on icons, especially contemporary ones, often compare icons to other forms of visual art, including religious paintings, mostly from the Western Renaissance, and point to many contrasts between them—emotions and quietness of spirit, the present time and the future, an earthly focus and the eternity of the heavenly sphere. Unlike in a painting where time is fixed, the time of the icon is eternity, and its main focus is the image of a saint illuminated in this eternal light (Karelin).

Elena made an interesting comparison while reflecting on the icon's visit in the parish newsletter. She wrote that, since childhood, she had liked a piece by 19th-century Russian Alexander Ivanov called *The Appearance of Christ Before People*: "Even being then atheist, I could look at this painting for hours, look at faces of the people which were turned to Christ. I couldn't find explanation to what fascinated me so much in this painting, and only many years after I realized that it was the light of Christ, which like in the mirror was reflected in the faces of people. Artist Ivanov managed to depict this divine light in the faces of the painting, they transformed from faces to *liki*."

In re-visiting and re-thinking the experiences of her atheist past, Elena utilized familiar cultural references to evaluate the experience of the present, reinforcing and confirming belief. Becoming an Orthodox believer is a process, occurring through many stages and many different practices. This process is not always smooth or linear and takes many twist and turns along the way to believing and becoming a faithful Christian (*veruyuschiy*). Elena continued: "Yesterday, during service, the unpainted *liki* were passing by me. Real, alive icons, reflecting the divine light, because on that day all of us, even for a short time, turned our faces to God. All of us carry an image of God in us, and this is what makes us human. And along those unpainted icons [people] the image of the Mother of God was present, as if she Herself was present among us."

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed that icons in Orthodox Christianity mediate between the past and present, far and near, familiar and unknown. Part of believers' spiritual and social life, icons alleviate uncertainties associated with immigrants' experiences by

extending the notion of the homeland to foreign spaces. The Orthodox tradition of Russia itself expands beyond national borders and takes root in many foreign spaces, transforming them from unknown, hostile sites into new places of holiness. In the case of the traveling, myrrh-streaming Theotokos *Softening of Evil Hearts* icon, its embeddedness in contemporary Russian history through miraculous responses to current events provided Russian Orthodox believers abroad with greater ties to the Mother church in Russia, whose authority and authenticity was reconfirmed. This is especially significant in the light of recent unification of two branches of the Russian Orthodox Church, amid questioning of the reputation of the church in Russia. In the words of the parishioners Igor: “If miracles happen, then the grace has not left the church.” The icon’s visit made this Russian parish in the United States part of the global Orthodox imaginary and a co-creator of the icon’s biography and social history, even as the icon itself became a part of the religious biographies of individual believers.

Conclusion

In concluding remarks I will give an ethnography of my visit to Russian city of Rybinsk on Volga river in the summer of 2010. I spent a week there at the house of Father Alexander and his family – Matushka Inna and their five children. I met Father Alexander a year before, when he was visiting our local California parish with Matushka and their youngest daughter, who was then two years old. They were invited by Elena and Vlad, as a gesture of gratitude to Father Alexander in helping Elena to enter the Church and for continuing to be Elena's spiritual counsellor, as she moved between Russia and the United States (chapter 3). The priest and his family were taken to some local tourist attractions, such as whale watching, as well as to more spiritually oriented trips to San Francisco's Russian Orthodox churches, and to St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox monastery in Arizona.

I first saw Father Alexander at the local church, on a winter Sunday in 2009, when he was co-serving the Divine Liturgy with the local priest, Father Andrey. After the Liturgy Father Alexander gave a brief sermon, in which he talked about his visit to the monastery in Sarov, found by a widely revered Russian saint Seraphim of Sarov in the 18th century, and about his parish church in Rybinsk. Then they stayed for *trapeza*, where I was able to communicate with him informally, and got an invitation to visit them while in Russia.

The ethnography of my visit will touch on the main themes that were presented and discussed in this study, as I moved with Father Alexander in space – through Russian landscapes, old towns and monasteries, and through time – Russian pre-Revolutionary

and Soviet history, present state of the Russian Church and Russian parishes, and memories of his and mine experiences in the United States.

On the second day of my visit Father Alexander took me on a tour around local churches and monasteries. Besides churches in Rybinsk, we visited towns of Uglich and Tutaev, and one of the oldest and now spectacularly revived Tolga women's monastery. The monastery was found in the 14th century, and its current structure built in the 17th century. It was closed during the Soviet times serving first as a hospital, and later as a correctional center for juvenile delinquents. In this sense its fate is similar to most Orthodox churches and monasteries in Russia, which during the years of atheism were converted into factories, storages, and in the case of one Moscow church – into animation movies production facility.

Now Tolga monastery is a common pilgrimage destination, with people being drawn to its many holy relics and old icons, including the miracle working Tolga icon of the Mother of God. In 14th century it revealed itself in this particular place, which was interpreted as a sign for building the monastery. We visited the monastery on a quiet week day, venerated the miracle icon, and were even allowed to walk in the old cedar grove on the monastery's territory, which although is generally closed to visitors, was opened to Father Alexander, whom one of the nuns recognized as a priest even though he was wearing regular clothes. On the way out of the cedar grove Father Alexander noticed a small hand written flier on the fence wall, which urged visitors to buy rosary beads made from local cedars. Slightly annoyed, he wondered: "Why did they have to put this announcement here? Buy cedar beads… Clearly, a woman has written that (*po zhensi napisano*). Why remind to buy something in the monastery shop, as if it is not clear that

one should make donations here – everywhere I look there are donation mugs (*kruzhki*)." He then added, somewhat jokingly, that being a priest in a women's monastery is equal to suicide, since "priest means not as much for nuns as the Mother Superior. They will always do as she says."

The last comment pointed to an uneasy gender dynamic that exists in the post-Soviet parish churches and monasteries, both in Russia and abroad. Oksana, parishioner of the local church, being worn out by the conflict of predominantly women's parish council and the priest, Father Andrey, once said that no woman should be allowed into the next council, since "all we do is intrigue and gossip, and we can do it on our own, I know I will, but not in church." While not specifically addressed in this work, reevaluation of gender roles, from proclaimed by the Soviet regime gender equality to the Orthodox hierarchical submission of wives to husbands, was and remains part of the process of reorienting oneself towards Orthodox values and way of life. For example, Elena, strong, successful and independent woman, at some point in our conversation admitted that becoming Orthodox for her went hand in hand with becoming more submissive to her husband, and granting him a final word in all family decision making. Based on St. Paul's Gospel teachings about the Christian family, excerpts of which are read on every Orthodox church wedding, a man as a head of the family and a woman is its heart, while Christian family itself is conceived as a small church. For Elena, this concept of a family is different from the model of oppressive and abusive husband, since both husband and wife are assigned critical and mutually constitutive roles.

After the Tolga monastery, we set off to Uglich and Tutaev, which are quaint and picturesque old Russian towns on the banks of Volga river, dating respectively to the 12th

and 15th centuries. Almost on every block there is a church of an elaborate old Russian style architecture, as Father Alexander noted: “those are real Russian style churches, built before Peter I. After him all went downhill, Orthodoxy was never the same.” He was referring to the modernization reforms undertook by Peter, and later Empress Catherine II, that in his view, and in view of many Russians, damaged the spirit of Russian Orthodoxy and made it reliant on the state in corrupt and ungodly ways. “Maybe that is why we needed a Revolution, - he echoed the opinion I heard expressed many times, - so that the Church can purify itself.”

Churches in Uglich and Tutaev, as many other churches in old towns throughout Russia, are firmly embedded in country’s history and culture. They are sites where many historic events took place, such as the murder of young prince Dmitry, son of Ivan the Terrible, in Uglich in 1591, that had led to the so-called Time of Troubles marked by occupation of Russia by Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The church where the murder took place is now called Church of St. Dmitry on Spilled Blood and is a destination of many heritage tours and pilgrimages.

Reflecting on the rich history of St. Dmitry’s church, Father Alexander made this observation: “Foreigners, visiting our old towns and churches, are always surprised at the long history Orthodoxy has in Russia. Some still view us as atheists, and are literally dumbfounded when confronted with the richness of our Orthodox past.” This reminded me of a similar observation made by the American parishioner George of the local California parish, who said that persistency with which Americans view Russians as godless atheists is strange, given that Orthodoxy existed in Russia for a thousand of years, and that to count a historically short seventy years of atheism as representative of

the country's religious life is similar to still viewing America as a country of slave owners. George, as a former Protestant, also marveled at historical richness of Orthodoxy: "in Protestantism there is a different sense of history, they have nowhere to go beyond Reformation. Because of that Protestants have a different sense of responsibility for the preservation of tradition. Protestants do not have to preserve, they are looking for the source and are trying to connect it to the present, and in the process they bypass history." The source for Protestants, as George explained, is the Bible, on which all their faith is based, but it does not connect them historically neither to the early Christian church, since the New Testament was compiled only in the 4th century, nor to the Catholic church, which they view as gone irreversibly astray from Christian truth.

Tradition and Scripture were also at some point a topic of my conversation with Father Alexander. As we were driving through the lush countryside from Uglich to Tutaev, he coyly quizzed me: "What do you think is primary – Tradition or Scripture (*Predaie ili Pisanie*)?" I paused with my answer, and he immediately continued: "Tradition, of course. Tradition came before the Scripture. When Apostles were writing their Gospels of the New Testament, they were writing from the experience of the heart. They were not robots, whom God dictated what to write. They were writing from their personal spiritual experiences of communicating with God." In Orthodox view, Father Alexander explained, the New Testament is inseparable from the Church. The Church adopted the New Testament as its bylaws in 325, and since then it is inseparable from the Church, meaning of course the Orthodox Church – One Holy Catholic and Apostolic, as it is also called in all Liturgical services. And while Church canons remained unchanged throughout the centuries of its existence, the Tradition is constantly evolving, being fed

by spiritual experiences of many generations (cf. Lossky 1976, Ware 1997). In this fashion, Father Alexander continued, the Church is always checked and verified by Tradition, and Tradition by the Church.

This view of succession of Tradition in Orthodox Church does not facilitate the use of language of breaks and disconnections prevalent in Protestantism. As the scholar of Orthodoxy Anthony Ugolnik put it, "In Orthodoxy the emphasis is on continuity rather than on restoration... Reformation as principle presumes an "estrangement," ... a purity that had been lost... Orthodox ... see themselves in an unbroken rather than "restored" continuity with the early church" (1989: 132). However, Father Alexander admitted, Protestants are quite advanced compared to Orthodox in their knowledge of the Bible. He went on to distinguish between Baptists in Russia and in the United States: "In my opinion, in America Baptists are more tolerant, I even saw some having and displaying icons of the Mother of God in their houses. Here [in Russia] they completely refuse to accept anything related to Orthodoxy. They exist here at the expense of our mistakes." Father Alexander was referring to a very low level of literacy about basics of Christian faith among the majority of the newly baptized Russian population: "some *babushkas* still would tell you that Trinity consists of Jesus Christ, Mother of God, and St. Nicholas." I, of course, knew then that Trinity unites God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit in one essence, so I could appreciate the sad irony of Father Alexander's comment.

Father Alexander told me then, that since becoming a serving priest in the St. George church in Rybinsk, he conducted many classes about basics of Orthodox faith among children and adults. His primary target audience were those ubiquitous *babushkas*,

who attended the services regularly and were becoming increasingly involved in the after service activities, such as cleaning the church, planting the gardens, and cooking. On several occasions he had overheard them sharing folk wisdom and practical advices of right behavior in church, and decided to improve their popular religiosity: “I started to read the New Testament with them, from the very beginning. I read it out loud, and then we had discussions. With some people I did it twice, and with some even more. Now I think I have the most educated *babushkas* in my parish.” *Babushkas* in St. George’s church are not only well educated, but, as I had a chance to observe two days later, quite well behaved during services. As I stood in the church by a candle holder in front of the icons, I noticed one *babushka* continuously attending to it – putting out almost burnt down candles, rearranging the remaining ones as to open up spaces for people to put new ones, and so on. Soon I realized that there was an individual *babushka* working her particular candle holder. There were around seven or eight of them in the church. *Babushkas* were performing their tasks quietly but consistently.

Observing this, I recalled the practices of attending to candles in a local church. There are certain times during divine services, when people are permitted to move, venerate icons, and light candles. Those are after the Scriptural readings, and in between singing of Cherubim song, Symbol of Faith and the Lord’s Prayer. Our *babushkas* were aware of those times, and would even stop those who did not adhere. However, they were so determined to take care of burning down candles, that would rush to them as soon as the Scripture reading was over. I at times wondered if they at all paid attention to what was going on during the service, besides knowing the ‘right’ time to move. Once one of my favorite *babushkas*, Slava, got carried away and continued cleaning the candle stand

when the ‘right’ time was already over, during the singing of the Cherubim song, when everybody is supposed to stand still. I later asked her why did she seem to have such an eagerness to do the cleaning during the services, since it did not look urgent at all, and she did not seem to understand my question. She just replied, that she was doing good for the church, and that she was given this task by the priest. As we talked more, Slava also mentioned that it was much easier to do it during services than after, since it saved her some time.

Father Alexander’s attention to productive channeling of newcomer’s newly found enthusiasm did not stop on *babushkas*. He also instituted talks with those who wanted to get baptized or married. Those sacraments have been in high demand in Russian Orthodox churches since 1990s, and as had been discussed in chapter 3 it was often enough just to show up at the right time to have a sacrament performed. Father Alexander gradually changed this informal attitude towards Church’s sacraments: he began to require a series of talks with the priest for couples about to get married, or for those to be involved in the sacrament of baptism (parents and godparents of babies to be baptized, for example). This measure, according to Father Alexander, had met with some resistance, with some people refusing talks and going to less strict churches: “as a result we have less baptisms, but those who come had thought it through more carefully.” In his opinion, both sacraments of baptism and marriage are the beginning of Christian life, and only people who are serious about starting a Christian life should take part in them.

Focus on religious education of post-Soviet population is gaining momentum in Orthodox churches in Russia: in local parishes with the in-home priests, and through various media channels (such as Internet, TV and radio). This development stands in

stark contrast to pre-Revolutionary state of the Orthodox Church, which according to some historians of Russia, "tended to equate religiosity with ritual" and "never made any attempt to foster a religiously literate population" (Pankhurst 1996: 147). While the proposition that ritual for pre-Revolutionary population was devoid of any religious knowledge is questionable, it nonetheless points to an existing tension between ritual practice and knowledge that exists in Russian Orthodox Christianity. Professor Osipov, who is one of the most outspoken contemporary Church educators in Russia (with active presence on Orthodox TV channels, youtube, etc.), equates mindless performance of ritual with paganism: "People think that they should do things right outwardly, and they preserve the form, but the content gradually wears away (*vyvetrivaetsya*), and Christianity transforms into paganism" (2014). For Osipov, it not enough that a person goes to church and prays, since prayer without attentive concentration is useless, as well as standing at the service without knowing what it means.

Russian sociologist Valentina Chesnokova (1994) too is critical of mere adhering to the form without investing it with religious meanings (as was discussed in Introduction). She views the form of the religious ritual as potent only if it maintains connection with cultural history of the nation. Ritual's force is accumulated throughout centuries, she argues, it ties together multiple generations to their shared culture and history. Culture for Chesnokova is a memory of society, which stores a lot of necessary information, some of which might remain unclaimed for a long duration of time, but becomes unlocked during critical for the nation historical moments. While meaning of religious rituals had been lost during forceful separation of religion from people's lives during Soviet regime, in Chesnokova's opinion, it could return if people again start

mindfully engaging in life and practices of the church. Form can become a vehicle of knowing, of recovering the lost meaning.

Many parishioners in the local California church regarded learning the formal aspects of Orthodox worship important for their growth as Christians and en-churched persons. Valentina at one point said: "Even if I do not understand why I am crossing myself at a particular moment of Liturgy, I still do it. It is part of an ancient tradition, and I trust that if I do it, I will eventually understand." American parishioner George defended the form this way: "Christ came into this world in the form. Form is given to us to provide a better understanding, to grasp the deeper meaning. Form is nothing without understanding, and intellect is nothing without divine services." The last statement interestingly echoes the teachings of Church fathers, which state that: "only through the union of prayer and knowledge does life in God become fuller and more perfect. Prayer by itself is not yet perfection. And intellectual familiarity with dogmas is not perfection either… twofold determination to cling to prayer and preserve the dogmatic teaching inherited from the Fathers of the Church" (Soprhrony, Archimandrite 2001: 7). By keeping the form, in styles of clothing and practices of prayer, in icon veneration and in attending services, believers were accumulating spiritual experiences for the gradual incorporation of faith.

While the Soviet state succeeded in erasing religious knowledge, it did not get rid of the religious moods (Wanner 2011). With all the destruction of numerous church buildings, killings of Orthodox believers, and filling the old forms with new meanings, Soviet state-enforced atheism kept the religious moods alive. Those translated into attaching transcendent powers to revolutionary and later state leaders (Firsov 2012), and

ritualization of the state holidays, albeit with employing different affective regimes (Luehrmann 2011). Luehrmann observes that moods cultivated during Soviet celebrations were those of joy and celebration of human achievement, with no reference to any significant no-human agents (2011). Russian historian Firsov, on the other hand, points out that while the founder of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin, was not called God directly, he was given all godly functions, such as omnipresence and omnipotence, and was even proclaimed immortal, as is evident in the famous Soviet slogan "Lenin is more alive than those who are living" (2012).

Persistence of religious moods applied to the secular context, in a paradoxical way, affirmed the importance of transcendent. With all the language of breaking the old world and building the new society from scratch, by appropriating the form of the Christian Church the Soviet state secured its continuity. The final resting place of the revolutionary leader happened to be the mausoleum on the Red Square, where his corpse was put on display to be venerated, in a similar fashion that the relics of saints are venerated in Orthodox Christianity (cf. Greene 2009). The Red Square, which in the modern eye came to be associated with the Soviet, and now Russian, military might, is also a place of an assemble of old Russian Orthodox churches known as Kremlin, which are strong symbols of continuity of Russian history and culture.

I was reminded about this point once more, as Father Alexander and I moved through the holy sites along Volga river. After Uglich we stopped in Tutaev. Tutaev is another picturesque Russian town, located on both banks of Volga. Until 19th century it used to be two separate towns – Romanov and Borisoglebsk, the latter named in the memory of the first Russian saints, passion bearers Boris and Gleb (see chapter 1). In

1918 it was renamed after the local revolutionary leader, who was killed during the post-revolutionary unrest. Father Alexander did not seem to be too concern with the name change, since revolutionary hero Tutaev too sacrificed himself for the better future of the country. "He might not even have been as atheist, for all we know," – he added. Even with being renamed after the new era hero, the town still maintains the transcendent and timeless mood.

In his reminiscing on self-sacrificial character of many early Russian revolutionaries, Father Alexander touched on another trend in the contemporary Russian Orthodox circles – the one that tries to align Soviet values with the Orthodox ones. First and second generations of "godless" people while rejecting faith and religion in words, could not yet reject it completely in minds, they were saturated with it, as Father Alexander put it. This is why many ideals of the Soviet society were accepted by them, since in large part they were continuation of the Christian ones, such as self-sacrifice and love of family and friends. One of my informants Liza once said, that connection of a Russian person with religion and with the best ideas of Orthodoxy was so strong, it was able to withstand many attempts of destruction by the very alien to its nature Soviet order: "even during socialism, Russian people carried in themselves the best ideas of Orthodoxy and lived with them. For example, our victory in the war [World War II], when people sacrificed their own lives for their country and for their neighbors. These are Christian ideas, maybe Soviet too, but Christian first." She went on: "during socialism we were taught not to steal, be honest, and Russian people took it seriously. Of course, there were dishonest communists, but I know people who sincerely believed in the ideal feelings, and in that they were building the bright future for others. They made sacrifices

in the present, worked hard. This is Christian." In Liza's view, the Soviet movies and books were uplifting, human, and kind, building on the best qualities in a person.

In my observation, almost all post-Soviet parishioners at the local church are still warmly attached to many products of the Soviet culture: movies, songs, books (cf. Ladykowska 2011). At one of the parish celebrations of victory in the World War II (May 9), people were singing the Soviet war songs, and the kids performed a variety of the Soviet children songs. When I asked why parents in America were teaching their children Soviet era songs, one of the mothers replied: "the values were real and good then. Not like now." The state of morals in Russia these days for some of my informants fairs worse than during the Soviet times: if during the Soviet times there were some moral standards, now there are none. In place of the state enforced atheism came the Western type of secularism, and while religion is not persecuted officially, it is controlled by the liberal secular media. Believers in public discourses are now not persecuted, but rather treated as sick people, who still believe in the imaginary God. While before there were moral codes of the builders of communism, which were close in form (and spirit) to the Christian ones, now there is market, money, and selfishness. Elena once said that people now more prone to compromise than before, they seek material at the expense of transcendent and spiritual. At the time of the interview she was still living in California (before moving closer to the monastery in Arizona), and had a good paying job, however, as she put it: "I am sometimes hungry for the hunger." Demands of the modern world and fast paced life generate nostalgia for economically inferior, but culturally and morally richer Soviet life.

Not all Soviet legacies, however, are met with nostalgia. As was shown in chapter 4, suspicion of authorities, paranoia and search for enemies within, desire to change others and not oneself (cf. Kharkhordin 1999; Luehrmann 2011) had led to prolonged tensions and conflicts in the local parish. Father Alexander shared a joke about post-Soviet newcomers to Orthodoxy: "God gave me a gift – to see the sins of others." The spiritual authority of the local priest was seen by some post-Soviet parishioners as irrelevant compared to his managerial and leadership qualities, as well as to his abilities to facilitate democratic decision-making in the parish. However, methods employed by several members of the parish council were regarded by other parishioners as leftovers from the Soviet practices, such as writing of complaints denouncing the priest's character, and endless searches for truth, which resulted in establishing plutocratic rule of the few. In Valentina's words: "Sometimes it felt that I was present not at the parish council, but at the [communist] party meeting. Descendants were crushed in the name of transparency and democracy. They wanted to do good for the church, but they were employing atheist, not Christian, world views."

In Father Alexander's opinion, who through contacts with Elena and Vlad was aware of the brooding situation in the local parish, the problem of Russian Orthodox churches in America lies in their isolation from each other. He made a comparison with the state of affairs in Russia: "In our Yaroslavl' diocese now we have 350 priests, and as I understand in California there are only 60. If we have so many, it means they are all needed. I am in constant contact with the Archbishop of the diocese, he comes for a visit every two months. In California, as I was told, you see your Archbishop once a year, at a parish day celebration. How much can you discuss during few hours of visit?" Father

Alexander said that regular contacts with the diocesan authorities are crucial for priests, since they are getting spiritual guidance and advice, as well as opportunities for confession. In California, on the other hand, "I am not aware of the priests confessing. They are so far away from each other. Each is presiding over their own small kingdom." He also recalled that as a Russian priest visiting from Russia he himself was treated with a certain restraint by local ROCOR priests, who even after unification of the two Russian churches, ROCOR and MP (discussed in chapter 2), remained suspicious of anyone and anything coming from the Mother Church.

Father Alexander did not understand the reasons for opposing unification by some ROCOR clergy and laity, since in his mind unification was more needed for them than for the MP. After unification, according to Father Alexander, ROCOR clergy was allowed to participate in joint services with other Orthodox jurisdictions, such as Greek or Jerusalem Patriarchies, by whom before unification they were not treated as equal. As for the collaboration with the Soviet state and KGB, one of the most vocally voiced objections for unification from ROCOR, Father Alexander said: "Collaboration with KGB? And how can they know that it occurred? Sometimes priests were summoned to local KGB quarters and were asked to sign a note, stating that if they come across anti-Soviet activities they will report on them. And priests signed, and never had contact with KGB ever since." Signed papers, now to be found in KGB archives, in Father Alexander's view, do not prove guilt of priests: "The actions of priests during Soviet times were very restricted. And sometimes activities of the church abroad provoked repressions of priests in Russia." He then made an observation, that in America things

tend to be framed in terms of black and white, and here in Russia there are more grey areas.

On the third day of my visit, Father Alexander took me to the newly constructed church in a nearby village. The village is small and poor. However, in recent years people were coming from big cities, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, buying land and building houses. They tend to be more well off than locals, and eager to donate for church purposes. For Father Alexander building of the new church and people's enthusiasm around it were yet another indication for the importance of Orthodoxy in contemporary life of Russia: "Church in Russia has a lot of chances now to increase its role in society, in a positive way. Here in Russia we have the whole tradition behind us, and state authorities are generally sympathetic to church' needs." He then made comparison to the position of the Russian Orthodox Church in America, where "you are on your own, one of the many." He recalled his trip with Elena and Vlad to San Francisco, to the Cathedral *Joy of All Who Sorrow*, which was built by St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco and which is now the main Cathedral of the Western Diocese of ROCOR: "This is a beautiful church, but where is it located? On a busy street, far from the city center, next to the Catholic Temple and the Synagogue. Can you imagine the main Cathedral in Russia to be located somewhere in suburbs?" This was a rhetorical question, of course, stressing the point of the incomparable roles Orthodox churches have in Russia versus the United States.

Later in the evening we were having dinner at Father Alexander's house, and enjoyed pleasant conversation and a bottle of kagor, a sweet red wine, also known as a Chalice wine, used for communion. He and *Matushka* were reminiscing warmly about

their trip to California – about stores and shopping, food, Zoo and whale watching. They had a very enjoyable time, but as Father Alexander admitted he would not want to move there: “What would I do in California? Go whale watching every day? And the council will be counting every dollar I spent?” For him, church life in America did not present enough challenges, while in Russia his services are in high demand. One of them includes the facilitation of parish life in his church, and helping to create one in the newly constructed village church.

Revival of the parish culture was one of the tasks in the post-Soviet religious transformation, since it almost ceased to exist in the Soviet times, both in Russia and abroad. Being heavily controlled by the state, the Russian Orthodox Church could engage in the transmission of spiritual traditions mainly in few monasteries that remained open, such as Holy Trinity (Lavra) in Sergiev Posad (Zagorsk) close to Moscow, and Pskov Caves monastery at the border with Estonia (Shevkunov 2012). Those monasteries preserved spiritual traditions of Orthodoxy and kept alive the institute of spiritual elders (cf. Headley 2010, Paert 2011). Visiting elders in monasteries, either for an answer for an important problem in life or for maintaining spiritual father – spiritual child relationship (discussed in detail in chapter 5), was a common practice among the Soviet believers, especially starting from 1970s when the state control over churches was somewhat lightened. But while in Russia the life of church parish communities went largely underground, in the United States it was maintained by immigrant churches.

Although parishes of Russian Orthodox churches in the United States adopted Western models of governance, they maintained canonical structure, language and style of worship, all of which were immediately recognizable by new generations of

immigrants. “I feel like home, in Russia, here,” – the sentiment I have heard many times from young and old Russian people alike about Russian churches in America. For some, like Liza, visits to the Orthodox churches, monasteries, and cemeteries abroad helped to restore the feeling of the broken succession of generations of Russian people. In her words, she was no longer *homo soveticus*, with no past and no country, but instead became reconnected with Russia’s history and Church Tradition.

By unpacking the national, spiritual and material layers of meaning embedded in “the Russian spiritual soil,” this study analyzed how they coexist in the experiences of Russian Orthodox Christians in the United States, and more specifically, at the parish level of the Russian Orthodox church in Southern California. In this study I discussed how Russian people abroad negotiate their identity and belonging by staying connected to the religious traditions of their home country. This negotiation takes place along multiple borders and boundaries that my informants have to cross, reexamine and reposition as they navigate their lives: between home and host countries, between atheism and religion, between national and universal, between tradition and modernity.

The concept of retrieval of the Orthodox identity that I proposed, is connected to these multilayered processes. It is based on the slow transformation and uncovering of one’s religious identity through merging the experiences of the Soviet life with pre-Soviet religious tradition, kept and fed by developments both in Russia and abroad, which gradually resurfaces and becomes part of their present lives. People are coming to the reservoir of Russian history, culture and religion, and reframe personal lives and memories. While maintaining spiritual center in Russia, history of Russian Orthodoxy being made in foreign lands as well, adding to the cultural reservoir of tradition, and

creating favorable conditions for roots of tradition to be transplanted in new environments.

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