

## Businessmen, Priests and Parishes

Religious Individualization and Privatization in Russia

*Hommes d'affaires, prêtres et paroisses. L'individualisation religieuse et la privatisation en Russie*

*Hombres de negocios, sacerdotes y parroquias. La individualización religiosa y la privatización en Rusia*

Tobias Köllner

---



### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/25037>

DOI: 10.4000/assr.25037

ISSN: 1777-5825

### Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

### Printed version

Date of publication: 1 July 2013

Number of pages: 37-53

ISBN: 978-2-71322395-2

ISSN: 0335-5985

### Electronic reference

Tobias Köllner, "Businessmen, Priests and Parishes", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* [Online], 162 | 2013, Online since 01 July 2016, connection on 22 March 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/25037> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.25037>

---

Tobias Köllner

## Businessmen, Priests and Parishes

### Religious Individualization and Privatization in Russia<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in the late socialist years, the religious situation changed massively and local authors describe this phenomenon as religious renaissance (*renessans*) or religious rebirth (*vozhrozhdenie*) (E. Arinin, 2005a, 2005b; V. N. Konstantinov, 2003; L. A. Fevraleva, 2005). The widespread romantic picture of a religion that survived in remote places, however, is misleading because the recent revival of Orthodoxy largely depends on religious and political centers like Sergiev Posad, Vladimir or Moscow (M. Benovska-Sabkova *and al.*, 2010). In my research I focused on the middle-sized city of Vladimir, which is situated about 180 kilometers to the East of Moscow. Due to its historic importance, Vladimir and the surrounding region played an important role for the Orthodox religious revival in Russia. Not only the city itself, but also the close-by towns of Suzdal or Rostov the Great and famous monasteries (Bogoliubovo) or old churches (Church of the Intercession on the Nerl) are considered to be part of the Orthodox heartland. Therefore, at particular events Vladimir is referred to as the “heart/soul of Russia” (*serdtse/dusha Rossii*). Not only the level of religious affiliation changed considerably but also the way how people practice religion, relate to priests and participate in parish life. In this way, the ethnographic material presented here reminds in many details on the material presented by Jeanne Kormina (2010). Like in her case, believers in Vladimir were not content with their faith alone but wanted to practice religion. However, many believers practiced a kind of “user friendly” version of Orthodox Christianity (see J. Kormina, 2010: 280f). While in J. Kormina’s case the temporary community of pilgrims was preferred to the permanent community of the parish, in my case believers do become part of a parish. Participation in parish life, then, is reduced to a minimum and the

---

1. This article would not have been possible without the generous help and the insightful discussions during the research and the writing-up process. In particular, I would like to thank my wife Sabine, Chris Hann, Bernhard Streck, Milena Benovska-Sabkova, Jennifer Cash, Tünde Komáromi, Agata adykowska, Detelina Tocheva, Jarrett Zigon and my brother Sebastian for their support and helpful comments on earlier versions of this article. Research and writing for this project was made possible through funding provided by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany.

most important characteristic for these believers is the close relation to the priest who often served as spiritual father for them. In this article I focus on this kind of user friendly and individualized religiosity, and a particular group within the parish communities: businessmen. I look at businessmen because among those who preferred the “user friendly” version of Orthodoxy the social group of businessmen was very prominent. I take into consideration how religion was practiced by businessmen and how they relate to parish communities, priests and other believers. In turn, I was also interested how businessmen and their behavior were perceived, judged and interpreted by priests, and other believers inside the parish community. The emphasis on businessmen and the “user friendly” version of Orthodoxy allows for interesting insights into the relation of many Russians to their respective parish community. By looking at the personal relation to the priest, the individualized character of the religiosity of businessmen becomes obvious. For businessmen not the participation in everyday parish life proved to be of utmost importance, but the personal relation to the priest who served as spiritual teacher (*dukhovnyi nastavnik*) and interpretator of “right belief” and “right practice”. Accordingly, the religious practice of businessmen depended less on official interpretations of the Russian Orthodox Church, but on the exegesis, interpretation and advice of their spiritual teacher. As a result, the participation in everyday activities of the parish proved to be less necessary. The religious practice of businessmen (prayers, blessings, penance) was loosely connected to the parish community and took place in the office, at the priest’s home or in closed churches.

## Individualization, privatization and public religion

Change in the religious sphere was an important topic in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and raised general interest in the social sciences. Thus, classical authors like Weber and Durkheim noted a decreasing importance of religion in modern society and a differentiation of various spheres. In this interpretation, religion had lost most of its integrating power and its former central position in society. In this way modern science, modern capitalist economy and the modern secular state had emancipated themselves from ecclesiastical control. Often this process is called secularization but according to José Casanova, at least three separate propositions have to be distinguished when talking about secularization: secularization as religious decline, secularization as differentiation and secularization as privatization (J. Casanova, 2001: 7). Drawing on the findings of secularization theory, I would like to put emphasis on a line of thinking where religion was considered to disappear from the public sphere and to withdraw to the private sphere. This process has been called privatization. In contrast to some adherents of classic secularization theory, proponents of the individualization theory like Thomas Luckmann (2000) claimed no concomitance between modernity and a general decline in religiosity. In this reading, modernity was not accompanied

by a complete disappearance of religion but by a retreat of the religious to the private sphere and a plethora of individual forms of worship and religiosity. Later, a discrepancy between a considerable persistence of religious beliefs, and a declining rate of ritual participation and institutional attachment was observed in European societies. Focusing on post-war Britain, Grace Davie (2003) termed this development of declining institutionalized religiosity and continuous individual spirituality “believing without belonging”. According to her observations, two contradictory reactions emerged: first, a tendency where consumerism extends into the sacred sphere and people “shop around for [...] spiritual needs” and, second, a pattern where the notion of consumerism is rejected altogether and the sacred is perceived as an alternative and different way (G. Davie, 2003: 39f.). Both patterns can be found in Russia as well.

Change in the religious sphere and the individualization of religion have been major topics in Russia too (A. Agadjanian, K. Rousselet, 2010; S. Filatov, R. Lunkin, 2006; N. Mithrokhin, 2004). For example, emphasis has been laid on the ambivalence between a collectivist past and a more individualized present. In contemporary postsocialist Russia, a similar paradox between individualist and collectivist tendencies of religion has been noted. On the one hand, religion is becoming more privatized and there are eclectic beliefs and low rates of institutional affiliation with Orthodoxy, and, on the other, high respect for religion in the public sphere and a growing participation of Orthodoxy in public events (I. Borowik, 2002; G. Lindquist, 2006). Accordingly, Alexander Agadjanian and Kathy Rousselet (2010) are right when they claim that social reality is never purely “individual” or “collective” but depends on the context. In addition, religion is often linked to national or ethnic sentiments and has become thoroughly politicized and used for nation-building purposes (I. Borowik, G. Babinski, 1997; A. Mitrofanova, 2005; T. Köllner, forthcoming). Therefore, some authors noted besides more privatizing tendencies a “fashion” (*moda*) to be Orthodox in post-socialist years (J. Anderson, 1994: 85). This corresponds to a paradox that has been noted by J. Casanova where religion continues to become ever more privatized, and, at the same time, a process of “deprivatization” takes place “whereby religion abandons its assigned place in the private sphere and enters the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society” (J. Casanova, 2001: 66). Thus, at times, it is difficult to classify “whether one is witnessing political movements which don religious garb or religious movements which assume political forms” (J. Casanova, 2001: 41; see also T. Köllner, forthcoming).

### Sociological background about the religious situation in Vladimir

The years of *perestroika* and the time following the demise of socialism bear witness to major changes in the religious sphere in Russia. An officially atheistic country has turned into one where up to 82% of ethnic Russians claim identification with Orthodoxy (S. Filatov and R. Lunkin, 2006: 35; K. Kääriäinen,

D. Furman, 2000). Of course this does not mean that about 75 to 85 million Russians attend church services regularly or have a deep knowledge of Church dogmas or religious rituals. According to the Council of Religious Affairs, in 2007 in Vladimir Region there existed 342 religious organizations belonging to 16 confessions. The latest survey of religious affiliation in the Vladimir Region was carried out by researchers from Vladimir State University and Lomonosov Moscow State University for the Council of Religious Affairs in 2004 and declared about 78% of the religious organizations as belonging to Orthodoxy (Moscow Patriarchate). Despite many religious institutions belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church and a high level of identification with Orthodoxy, the level of religious practice, however measured (church attendance, prayer, adherence to Lent), and knowledge of Orthodox axiological teachings in general remains low (I. Borowik, 2002; S. Filatov, R. Lunkin, 2006; K. Kääriäinen, D. Furman, 2000; A. D. Sokolova, 2005). Because prayers and adherence to Lent are difficult to observe, church attendance is the main way of measuring religious practice in Vladimir. According to a survey organized by the Vladimir eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, church attendance in Vladimir is less than 0.5% of the inhabitants (1,750 attendees) on a normal Sunday (personal communication from Father Aleksii Golovchenko). Taking into account that daily services take place in the morning and evening, sociological surveys mention about 7% that visit the church at least once a month (K. Kääriäinen, D. Furman, 2000: 21). This mismatch between high levels of religious identification with Orthodoxy and the preference for a loose form of religious affiliation is remarkable. The Orthodox Church perceives itself as the living body of Christ (*telo Khrista*) where every believer is an active part of this body – an idea that is mentioned in the Bible (1 Cor. 12:13) by st Paul. Accordingly, salvation outside the Church is considered to be impossible and active engagement with the Church is demanded. Especially the process of “inchurchment” (*votserkovlenie*) plays an important role and addresses the question how one should work on oneself in order to come closer to the Church and one’s own salvation; to make a “real” Christian out of a “nominal” one, as it is phrased by priests. In the narrower sense, *votserkovlenie* is part of the baptism ritual and refers to the admission into the religious community. But today it is mostly understood in the broader sense, as a life-long process of engagement with the Church and a strict observance of clergymen’s prescriptions.

## Religious beliefs and practice

Recently, C. Hann and H. Goltz (2010: 15) have argued that in the study of Eastern Christianities it is necessary to draw attention to the “solid theological backing for attaching prime importance to *practice*” and – at the same time – to avoid structuring belief and practice as diametrically opposed. Instead, they contended that greater insight into Eastern religiosity depends on “recogniz(ing)

more complex combinations of beliefs and practices, varying between different social groups, but also between individuals, and contextually variable even for the individual” (C. Hann, H. Goltz, 2010: 16). On the one hand, Russian Orthodoxy is often distinguished from Catholicism and Protestantism with a reference to the emphasis which Orthodoxy places on “right practice”. Yet on the other hand, the contrast between practice/belief within Orthodoxy is drawn less strongly by Russian Orthodox believers when they describe their personal relationship to religion. Many people, for example, described the beginning of their engagement with religion as originating in belief. Often they came to “believe” in Church teachings after they heard a priest or leading parishioner interpret an event or circumstance in a new way that caused them to re-evaluate their previous assumptions or perspective. Thus, it is not possible to dispense with the concept of “belief” in favor of “practice” when analyzing the relationship of businessmen with Russian Orthodoxy. Namely, the most important religious beliefs for Russian businessmen are those connected to suffering and notions of evil. One important belief in Russian Orthodoxy is related to the understanding of punishment on earth (*nakazanie*). Unlike in Protestant belief, Orthodox theology has developed the dialectic between bodily suffering and bodily restoration, as exemplified in Christ’s resurrection, in ways that blur the distinction between the spiritual and the material (J. Eade, M. J. Sallnow, 2000: 22). Thus across Orthodox communities, bodily imperfections and illnesses are often interpreted as outward signs of God’s punishment for one’s own sins (see L. Danforth, 1982). Accordingly, accidents (*neschastnye proisshествiia*), illness (*bolezni*) or bad luck (*neschast’e*) are often connected to one’s own misdeeds, and result in processes of self-reflection that could lead to conversion or more serious engagement with religion. Certainly, these events provide an impulse for becoming religious in any society, but in Orthodoxy the clear-cut reasoning in church discourse is striking and puts considerable pressure on believers or “religious seekers”. Besides the notion of punishment on earth, notions of evil (*zlo*) and anxiety (*bespokoistvo*) have been important too. Many businessmen hold beliefs in evil forces which could disturb them at home or at work and they undertake a variety of practices to protect their businesses, families and souls. A range of fears are created and strengthened through the interpretation of priests and ongoing discourse in the parish community: What is a just price? Was it acceptable to purchase and sell a certain item? Or, might it be related to a crime, death or accident? Is this the reason why it is sold at such a low price?

The most widespread religious practices among businessmen are blessings of various items (offices, office equipment and machinery, homes, cars, etc.) with holy water (*osviashchenie*), lighting candles and the use of icons at home and in offices. To a lower extent the adherence to Lent is important too. However, these are mainly practices that are only loosely connected to a parish, do not have to be exercised in public and largely rely on priests as intermediaries. Therefore priests are requested to read prayers or to perform ceremonies and rituals.

In this case, priests are invited to the office or they are asked if the ceremony could be carried out in a closed church or at the priest's home. The religious practices demanded are diverse and range from life-cycle rituals to benedictions (*blagosloveniiia*), blessings (*osviashcheniia*) or prayers (*molitvy*). According to a widespread attitude among businessmen, it is the expert's task to communicate with God who is considered to be much more successful in obtaining results (see also T. Köllner, 2011a: 108f). Like in other social groups of society, but in contrast to the Church's demands, my own observations reveal that there is a high level of absence of businessmen from everyday parish life and a general reluctance among businessmen to show religiosity openly. Inchurchment, the process of active engagement with the Church and Orthodox beliefs, seldom applies to businessmen. Thus, inchurchment among businessmen is rare, even rarer than among other groups of society. According to my own observations they predominantly visit churches on special occasions like festive days or in times of personal problems (e.g. health issues, bereavement, money shortage).

### Notions of shame among businessmen

Often notions of shame (*stydy*) or embarrassment (to be embarrassed – *stes-niat'sia*) were given as reasons for absence from parish activities. Even when a closer attachment to Orthodoxy was mentioned, often a restriction followed: "Of course we do not pray to such an extent that the head breaks (*golovu razbit'sia*)". For most of my informants, attachment to Orthodoxy basically served as an ethnic marker and to show deep religious feelings openly was considered to be shameful. Sometimes I also had the impression as if they feared to look foolish when showing their religiosity. As a result, religious practice is mostly hidden and many Russians still hesitate to show their religious feelings openly in public. Sometimes, religious feelings even were hidden from other family members as the following example shows. While I was conducting an interview with a businesswoman, her daughter who worked as her secretary joined us for two minutes. The businesswoman immediately switched to another topic which was not related to religion at all. She did not want to talk about this topic in the presence of her daughter. In addition, it was remarkable that she only whispered when we talked about difficult issues like her personal religious beliefs and practices. I can give no reasons for this feeling of shame in relation to religion but at least I would like to mention some possible explanations like gender, educational background or notions from the socialist period. Men, and business is predominantly a male domain, seem to find it even harder to show deep religious emotions openly. Especially for businessmen who had leading positions in socialist times and/or were well-known members of the Communist party, it is shameful to show their U-turn towards religion. An additional factor is that many of today's businessmen were trained as engineers during socialism. Rationality and calculability were especially stressed in this

profession and the self-declared aim was to bring evidence that every religion is a superstition. Furthermore, rationality is seen as the direct opposite of religion and remnants of socialist upbringing and education are still present and prevent to show religious feelings too openly or any closer affiliation with a parish. Embarrassment and shame had also been noticed by priests and, consequently, they were trying to fight this general trend by gaining more public attention. For this reason, the performance of rituals and processions in public was considered to be important and attempts to hide one's religious emotions were criticized. Although feelings of shame to show religious feelings openly are not confined to businessmen alone it is quite common among Orthodox believers to name businessmen as bad examples as the following example from Father Vladimir shows. He is between 50 and 60 years old and had run a business on his own, before he became a priest and the director of the Orthodox school in Vladimir. His former business was independent from the church, but he established good relations with the Church because he sold religious paraphernalia. The following part from an interview with Father Vladimir shows the problem very well and exemplifies the preference among businessmen to perform religious rituals in secret. Here is how he describes his view:

And do you know what is said? Let's meet on Sunday in the office when it is closed and nobody is there; we carry out the blessing in secret. I say, excuse me, but what are we going to do – am I going to steal something with you? On the contrary, it is important that all your employees come and I will give them a candle; we stand and I will talk to them and we stand up and pray. Only then it makes sense. But when we enter through the window [here he uses the diminutive form] in order not to switch on the light, in order not to be seen, to carry it out quickly – okh [imitating relief], “I blessed my office”. For whom is your blessing then necessary when no one [knows] about it? But he is embarrassed. He wants it, first and foremost, because, well, it won't become worse (*khuzhe ne budet*), he thinks, it will become better (*budet luchshe*). Just in case (*Na vsiakii sluchai*). To show that he is a believer makes him feel embarrassed. [...]

I come in the office in order to bless it and everybody goes to have a cigarette. I say: “Where are you going?” – “We will only have a cigarette. You will do it”. Interesting, but did I come to repair your car? And I will tell them: “Please go and I will fix the screws; you will come afterwards and check if I managed it”. No! Especially your prayers are necessary, not mine. I tell him: “Stop doing this and everybody should come here; I will do nothing without you. And they will come. For them it is unusual. To hold a candle is strange to them. To cross himself he can't. He does not know how to cross himself. He is embarrassed”. [...]

## The ambivalent role of the spiritual father for businessmen

Despite their obvious absence in everyday parish life, businessmen perceive themselves as part of the parish and are, as well considered to be an important part of the parish by priests. Through their financial support they are able to build personal relations with priests who, in return, deliver religious services like prayers, blessings and baptisms (*kreshcheniia*) in the enterprise, at home or in



the church. Within the relationship priests often take the role of a spiritual teacher or father (*dukhovnyi nastavnik*) and try to influence beliefs and the behavior of businessmen through interpretation, advice and suggestions. However, the role of the priest as spiritual teacher often is ambivalent because businessmen, due to their financial importance, are also able to exercise pressure, e.g. by choosing a particular priest who desists from criticizing entrepreneurial misconduct too harshly. Thus the relationship with spiritual teachers is based on respect, but reflects the personal preferences of businessmen. Often these are long-lasting relations that are renewed again and again and require a certain degree of intimacy. In many cases, spiritual teachers guide people's actions by advising a code of conduct and a particular form of penance. This is often done through priestly benediction or blessing. Thus, the religious practice of businessmen, as has been said in the beginning, was guided less by official teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church but by the exegesis, interpretation and advice of their spiritual teacher. In order to exemplify my argument I have chosen two ethnographic examples which support my claims in different ways. The first example is the businessman Artem who is about 60 years old and the owner of a medium size company situated some 90 kilometres away from Vladimir in several small settlements. It comprises numerous hotels, restaurants, food shops, garages for car repairs and shops for construction materials. In total, more than 600 people work for the company. In socialist times, Artem was the head of a department in one of the big state corporations that was located in Moscow but had its *dacha* settlement in the village where the headquarters of his firm are situated today. In 1991, he started to sell groceries from a cabin with two companions who left the company later. Artem still lives in Moscow, but comes to the company nearly every day. Although he has been baptized in socialist times shortly after his birth, he only started to engage with Orthodoxy from early 2000 onwards. He visits the church regularly although not every week, observes fasts and goes to confession. In the following interview he talks about a dialogue with the priest during confession.

Sometimes there is temptation (*iskushenie*) because I am a director and whether I want or not, I commit sins anyway. Someone, for example, violates the law or does not pay taxes. But do you understand how it is here [in Russia]? The laws are so stupid (*Zakony, takie duratskie*). I went to the priest in order to confess and told him: "Father, I haven't paid my taxes properly". And he said: "You cannot live if you do not sin, and you cannot repent if you do not sin" (*Ne prozhivesh' – ne sogreshish', a ne sogreshish' – ne pokaesh'sia*). Priests themselves understood because they are adequate/proper people (*adekvatnye liudi*).

Artem's confession to evading taxes and blaming the stupidity of the laws for his evasion of them, is quite common among businessmen. What is more interesting in this anecdote, is that the priest supports Artem's explanation and even encourages him to continue by referring to two popular Russian proverbs: "You can not live honestly in this world" (*Chestnym v mire ne prozhivesh'*) and

“If you do not commit sins, you can not repent” (*Ne sogreshish’ – ne pokaesh’sia*). According to the priest’s logic, sinful behaviour is a necessary precondition for repentance. Artem appreciates the priest’s lack of criticism as an “adequate” (*adekvatnyi*) and understanding response; both priest and businessman criticize the state and its laws as creating difficult and unstable circumstances, in which man cannot live honestly. Under the circumstances, confession and repentance constitute a moral response to an immoral world. Such a position, however, is also in clear contradiction to the Russian Orthodox Church’s official teachings that one should live according to the state’s laws, and in which tax evasion is described as equivalent to “theft from orphans, the elderly and the handicapped” (cited in G. Simons, 2005: 19). This example clearly shows the difference between the Church’s official teachings and everyday interpretation and practice. Showing respect, and even sympathy, for the problems of businessmen enables priests to play an ambiguous role as friend and spiritual teacher. The compassion by Artem’s priest shows that he understands the dilemma that Artem faces. Such expressions of compassion from priests, especially when accompanied by practical solutions – such as confession – allows priests and businessmen to initiate long-term relations. Over time, these relations allow for the mutual exchange of support and favors; businessmen receive blessings and prayers, but they also give donations. Relations between priests and businessmen have both spiritual and material dimensions to them. In this relation, priests emphasize the axiological teachings, being important as an ideal, but actually reshape their practical advice, in order to meet the spiritual needs of businessmen.

My second ethnographic example relates to charitable contributions (*blagotvoritel’nost’*) and donations (*pozhtvovanie, darenie*) by businessmen to the Church. Charitable contributions and donations to the Church and to people in need are among the most widespread forms of penance among businessmen. As in other Christian doctrines, in Orthodoxy charity is perceived as a Christian duty towards people in need and Orthodox religion plays a pivotal role in charitable giving. In the pre-socialist history, however, the Orthodox Church itself, as A. Lindenmeyr (1990: 680) argues, sponsored relatively few charitable institutions of its own, but stressed the “individual, moral nature of giving”. Accordingly, charity was and is perceived as a personal duty that was considered essential for salvation (A. Lindenmeyr, 1990: 680; see also A. Agadjanian and K. Rousselet, 2010). This notion is valid until today and confirms to the findings by Oleg Kharkhordin (1999: 356ff.) who noted the importance of penitential practices for individualist tendencies within Russian Orthodoxy. It is the individual’s responsibility for salvation that initiates penitential efforts like the donations mentioned. In contemporary Russia, however, the role of the spiritual teacher for giving donations is of utmost importance as the following example shows. When I left my field site in August 2007, the first stone was laid for a church which was to take the place of one that had been destroyed during socialism (in 1970). The new church was situated not far from the city centre on one

of the central squares next to the eternal flame. The church was dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan – one of the most important icons in Russia. Among the donors were two entrepreneurs who donated each 10 million roubles (about 300,000 Euros) for the construction work. One of the businessmen is Gennadii who is in his mid-40s and runs one of the biggest construction companies in Vladimir Region. The church whose blessing I attended in 2008 was the second church construction Gennadii has donated to. The first church was built on the site of the cemetery of the city and had been completed before my arrival, but rumors about the construction still circulated during my research. The construction work for the first church had started in 2004 and was finished in 2005. Similar to the construction of the second church Gennadii himself donated a considerable amount of money to the construction, but shared the cost with several other businessmen. Although Gennadii mentions for both constructions dreams he had who suggested him to build the churches, I know from a good acquaintance of him that in fact both construction go back to initiatives of the archbishop – the spiritual father of Gennadii. Here, however, it is difficult to give any details about the suggestions of the archbishop or interpretations of the dreams by him. In the end, however, Gennadii claimed the influence of his spiritual father for the decision to donate money because “he proposed”. Furthermore, the intimate personal relation between them is important because the archbishop addresses Gennadii personally and calls him by his first name during the opening ceremonies. After the construction was completed, Gennadii received an old icon from the archbishop as a sign of his gratitude for the generous donation.

## Orthodox businessmen and parish community

The relation of businessmen to other believers and the parish community is important because businessmen consider themselves to be members of the Orthodox community and engage in parish life. For their engagement in parish communities, however, they have chosen a kind of “user friendly” version of Orthodoxy which is related to particular parishes only. During fieldwork in Vladimir I took notice of two different forms of parish life. On the one hand, there was a first type of parishes where parish activities flourished and life inside the parish was intense. As I came into contact with believers, I noted that most of them lived in the surrounding neighborhood and visited the parish regularly. In this first type of parishes, relations between its members were dominated by multiplex or many-stranded interactions (J. Boissevain, 1974: 28ff). Thus, people met each other in a range of roles and in various everyday interactions. Parish life, then, was dominated by a close-knit parish community where people knew a lot about each other. As a result, parish life was characterized by a high level of mutual activities like joint meals (*trapezy*), joint communions and joint pilgrimages. But there was another type of parishes where life inside the parish was reduced to

services while few other activities took place. In the second case, contact between believers often was limited to the exchange of greetings during service or the veneration of icons or relics. As it turned out, most believers did not know each other quite well and the parish was characterized by a very diverse personal background of believers. Often believers lived in different districts of the city and had very different professional backgrounds. Therefore, most believers decided for the parish community because of its priest and their personal relation to him. Life in the parish, thus, was highly individualized and the personal relation between believer and priest was most decisive to join this parish. Although parish life in the second case was limited to a minimum, many believers and most businessmen welcomed this type of parishes as it gave them the opportunity to practice religion without being bound too close to one particular parish and without being obliged to visit services regularly. Despite the fact that joint activities inside the parish were welcomed as such it became obvious that the high level of joint activities in parishes of the first type coincided with an equally high level of control among believers themselves and by the priest. Absence during important activities of the parish had to be justified or explained at least. This fact corresponds to findings in network analysis; J. Boissevain (1974: 32) assumes “that where a many-stranded relationship exists between two persons, there is greater accessibility, and thus response to pressure, than is the case in a single-stranded relation”.

## Evaluation of businessmen by other believers

Although businessmen considered themselves to be part of the parish community and were accepted as such by priests this is not equally true for most other parishioners. Many believers and even some priests criticized businessmen and their attitude towards the Church for various reasons. Businessmen, then, were met with reservation and confronted with many stereotypes. Some aspects of the evaluation were remnants of socialist upbringing, as the following example from Father Kliment, a priest in his 30s, shows. Father Kliment claimed: “to buy goods for five roubles and to sell them for ten. What do you think is this? It’s a sin (*grekh*). Of course, it is sin”. I tried to argue and said: “But probably he will not earn five roubles profit because he has to pay the rent, the equipment and so on.” But Father Kliment still disagreed and told me: “Nevertheless, it is a sin. This is mere speculation (*spekulatsiia*). It would be something different if someone is producing something on its own and sells it for its real cost (*real’nye raskhody*).” The discussion reveals the ongoing influence of socialist teachings on contemporary religious discourse. The official position of the Russian Orthodox Church stipulates that trade, if carried out without deceit, is considered to be a regular and moral occupation (*Osnovy* VI.5.). Yet, it is clear that Father Kliment considers every sale that is not made directly by the producer to the

consumer to be a form of speculation, and thus sinful. According to his understanding, goods should be sold for their real cost and not for a price formed by the supply and demand of the market. The problem is not a doubling of price by many contemporary businessmen, but that they add any costs at all to account for the value of their own labor and overhead. Father Kliment's position, like that of many Russians (as Caroline Humphrey) has already noted (2002: 59), reflects a Marxist interpretation of the labor theory of value where true value is created by labor. This influence is even more clearly betrayed by Father Kliment's use of the term "speculation" to characterise trade. This term was often used in socialist times specifically to discredit trade. However, as Father Kliment equates speculation with sin, he reconfigures socialist teachings as religious ones. While the interpolation of socialist values into postsocialist Orthodoxy can sometimes be explained as a matter of individual biography and experience – as in the case with older priests like Father Vladimir who were educated during socialism and had other occupations before entering the priesthood – this is not always so. In Russia more generally, it could be argued that religious and secular notions intermingle and constitute a nexus, but not clear-cut opposition or contradiction. A second evaluation accused businessmen of treating the Church like a client in the market that provided a particular, spiritual service (*dukhovnaia usluga*): the more I pay, the more I expect to get in return. If such an understanding of exchange between God and businessmen was made explicit this has been criticized. Again, I would like to bring an example by Father Vladimir who has a lot of contact to businessmen as he is the person in Vladimir eparchy who is responsible for donations to the Church. In this conversation, Father Vladimir criticised behaviors that are based on a tit-for-tat strategy (*dash' na dash'*) in the pursuit of personal gains. These behaviors, he says, reflect superstition rather than belief.

He [the businessman] perceives God like some, eh, like some gods, which can give or take according to his will. [...] He thinks like this: I give you a bigger candle and You ... You give me more. Like tit for tat (*dash' na dash'*), like in a food shop. I go into a shop, right, and say, so to speak, I am ready to buy, I have money and I want the very best. See, here is the money for you and give me the very best. Here they think that God is so stupid (*Zdes' zhe oni dumaiut, chto Bog takoi glupyi*) that He buys this candle for 1,000 roubles and God gives him a million dollar in return. But this is all stupid!

### Critique by businessmen in relation to other members of the parish

But businessmen are not only criticized by others but emphasize differences to most other believers too. One example is Ivan, the owner of a real estate business. Ivan is in his mid-fifties and in socialist times he was an engineer and worked as the head of a technical department. He left the company in 1990 in order to start work for an American company which was building a sanatorium in Vladimir Region. There he had a leading position and became acquainted

with the non-state sector and Western modes of business. In 1991, he came to the real estate sector and worked as a manager in a real estate firm. In 1995, Ivan left the firm and started his own business. In addition, he was singing in the church choir for several years and visited other countries with it. During their visits they came to Germany and he visited Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber, a pitoresque city in Bavaria with many historic buildings. There he took part in a Catholic service and compares this experience to the one he made in Russia:

Ivan: Especially I was moved by this big cathedral in Rothenburg-ob-der-Tauber. The organ stood above us and there were many, many, many people. When the organ started to play, all people started to read the music and sang as the service was starting. Like one man, like one organism they started to sing. Afterwards, they began to pray. Like a community (*obshchina*), like one complete [thing] (*odno tseloe*). In our parish it is still not like this.

In our parish everyone arrives alone and the feeling is still a different one [...]. Such a feeling like being one organism is missing. In addition, there are these grandmas (*babushki*), the elders, who lived without religion for years. They rushed into the church due to their age and in order to hide their sins. They say: "In the church you are not allowed to lit a candle with your left hand! Only with the right [hand]!" Or they say: "Before the festive days you are not allowed to wash yourself, you must not have a shower!" The priest tells them: "You are the bride of Christ, you are entering the church in order to meet Christ ... but if you are going to meet your husband – are you going to wash yourself or not?" They [the elderly women] are answering. "Of course, if I would go to meet my husband I would wash myself." Do you understand me? Why I have to lit the candle with the right hand and not with the left one?

Tobias Köllner: Well, there are these rules (*pravila*) ...

Ivan: [Interrupting me] These are no rules, this is not right! (*Eto ne pravila, eto nepravil'no!*) And even the priest ... even the priests say that this is stupid (*eto gluposti*).

This example clearly shows that feelings of a community and the ideal of a close-knit parish are appreciated as such by businessmen like Ivan. But businessmen like Ivan are exceptional, and many businessmen prefer to reduce the participation in parish life to a minimum and the "user friendly" version of Orthodoxy. Old women (*babushki*) and their rules are criticized and serve as bad images. Like in the example of Artem given above, priests are said to agree with the opinion of businessmen. In this way, the position of businessmen is justified and the critique of ordinary believers is countered. Accusations are answered with counter-accusations, what leads to misunderstandings and mutual critique among the different groups of believers.

In this article, I have drawn special attention to the ambivalences in the relationships between businessmen and priests. The establishment of a personal relationship with one or several priests is an important characteristic of the religiosity of businessmen that includes a plethora of individual forms of worship and religiosity. Businessmen rarely attend church regularly and are invisible members in parish communities, if they associate with a particular parish at all. Nevertheless, most businessmen are not opposed to the Church's official strictures and

practices. They often have long-term relationships with individual priests to whom they turn for various blessings, life-cycle rituals and forms of spiritual advice, including the interpretation of dreams and other events, and confession and penance. The interpretations given by priests differ considerably, but they generally emphasize religious action and right ritual performance, rather than scrutinize the correctness of the beliefs or meanings that a person attaches to the actions that he performs. In this way, Russian Orthodoxy is more flexible than even its practitioners and priests like to acknowledge. Orthodoxy adapts to individual needs without changing its axiological teachings. Therefore the religiosity practiced by businessmen is not contradicting Orthodox doctrines, but allows for their incorporation into the Orthodox community. Yet, the ways in which businessmen are incorporated into the religious community sustain, and even encourage, popular discourse about the incompatibility of business and religion, and of self-interested profit and spiritual growth. Businessmen experience and are described as experiencing, fear, shame and misunderstanding when confronted with rituals that require right performance to demonstrate belief. Thus, the concept of individualization is important because businessmen often practice religion outside close-knit parish communities. Although they follow the right practice, the attached meaning is quite open and can take highly individualized and personalized forms. But my observations also show the limits to this freedom of choice. Often a general commitment to an abstract notion of Orthodoxy is highly appreciated and has even become a kind of a “fashion” (*moda*): offices have to be blessed by a priest, an icon has to be there too and one’s children have to be baptized in any case. In this way, social aspects are important and have to be taken into account too. Especially economic and political elite groups face limits of individual religious choice because “*it is still impossible to disentangle the ‘economic’ from the ‘political’*” (C. Humphrey, 2002: xxii). For this reason, businessmen from bigger enterprises have to take part in the friendly course which the state has taken towards the Church and which has been intensified by former and new President Vladimir Putin. This shows the limitations of Luckmann’s understanding of individualization as a retreat of the religious to the private sphere for my Russian case and supports Casanova’s interpretation, where religion becomes more privatized, and, at the same time, a process of “deprivatization” takes place.

Tobias KÖLLNER  
Consultant for RKW Saxony-Anhalt,  
Zentrum für Transformationsforschung,  
Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg, Germany  
tobias.koellner@hotmail.de



## Bibliography

- AGADJANIAN Alexander, ROUSSELET Kathy, 2010, "Individual and Collective Identities in Russian Orthodoxy", in Hann C. and Goltz H. (eds.), *Eastern Christianities in Anthropological Perspective*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 311-328.
- ANDERSON John, 1994, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- ARININ Evgenii I. (ed.), 2005a, *Svecha: Religiia i lichnost' v proshlom i nastoiashchem* [Candle: Religion and Personality in Past and Present], vol. 12, Vladimir, Vladimir State University.
- , 2005b, *Svecha: Religiia i lichnost' v proshlom i nastoiashchem* [Candle: Religion and Personality in Past and Present], vol. 13, Vladimir, Vladimir State University.
- BABINSKI Grzegorz (ed.), 1997, *New Religious Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe*, Kraków, Nomos.
- BENOVSKA-SABKOVA Milena, KÖLLNER Tobias, KOMÁROMI Tünde, ŁADYKOWSKA Agata, TOCHEVA Detelina and ZIGON Jarrett, 2010, "Spreading Grace in Post-Soviet Russia", *Anthropology Today*, 26 (1), p. 16-21.
- BOISSEVAIN Jeremy, 1974, *Friends of Friends. Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- BOROWIK Irena, 2002, "Between Orthodoxy and Eclecticism: On the Religious Transformations of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine", *Social Compass* 49 (4), p. 497-508.
- CASANOVA José, 2001 [1994], *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- DANFORTH Loring M., 1982, *The Death Rituals of Modern Greece*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- DAVIE Grace, 2003, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- EADE John, SALLNOW Michael J. (eds.), 2000 [1991], "Introduction", in *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, p. 1-29.
- FEVRALEVA L. A., 2005, "Formirovanie atmosfery veroterpimosti v usloviakh religioznogo pliuralizma" [Formation of an Atmosphere of Religious Tolerance under Circumstances of Religious Pluralism], in Arinin E. I. (ed.), *Svecha: Religiia i lichnost' v proshlom i nastoiashchem* [Candle: Religion and Personality in Past and Present], vol. 12, Vladimir, Vladimir State University, p. 281-290.
- FILATOV Sergei, LUNKIN Roman, 2006, "Statistics on Religion in Russia: The Reality behind the Figures", in *Religion, State and Society*, 34 (1), p. 33-49.
- HANN Christopher M., GOLTZ Hermann (eds.), 2010, "Introduction: The Other Christianity?", in *Orthodoxy, Orthopraxy, Parádosis: Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 1-29.
- HUMPHREY Caroline, 2002, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- KÄÄRIÄINEN Kimmo, FURMAN Dmitrii (eds.), 2000, "Religioznost' v Rossii v 90-e gody [Religiosity in Russia in the 1990s]", in *Starye tserkvi, novye veruiushchie: Religiia v massovom soznanii postsovetsskoi Rossii* [Old Churches, new Believers: Religion in Mass Consciousness in Postsoviet Russia], Moskva, Letnii Sad, p. 7-48.



- KHARKHORDIN Oleg, 1999, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- KÖLLNER Tobias, 2011a, *Practising without Belonging. Entrepreneurship, Morality and Religion in Contemporary Russia*, Dissertation, University of Leipzig.
- , 2011b, “Built with Gold or Tears? Moral Discourses on Church Construction and the Role of Entrepreneurial Donations”, in Zigon J. (ed.), *Multiple Moralities and Religions in Post-Soviet Russia*, New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, p. 191-213.
- , forthcoming, “Ritual and Commemoration in Contemporary Russia: State-Church Relationship and the Vernacularisation of the Politics of Memory”, in Michelutti L., Forbess A. (eds.), *From the Mouth of God: Divine Kinship and Political Modernity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Focaal.
- KONSTANTINOV V. N. (ed.), 2003, *Mirovozzrencheskie predpochteniia zhitelei Vladimirskogo kraia: Istoriia i sovremennost'* [Ideological Attitudes of the Inhabitants of Vladimir Region: History and Present], Vladimir, Markart.
- KORMINA Jeanne, 2010, “Avtobusniki: Russian Orthodox Pilgrim's Longing for Authenticity”, in Hann C. M., Goltz H. (eds.), *Orthodoxy, Orthopraxy, Parádosis: Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 267-286.
- LINDENMEYR Adele, 1990, The Ethos of Charity in Imperial Russia, *Journal of Social History* 23 (4), p. 679-694.
- LINDQUIST Galina, 2006, *Conjuring Hope: Magic and Healing in Contemporary Russia*, New York, Berghahn Books.
- LUCKMANN Thomas, 2000, *Die unsichtbare Religion*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp.
- MITROFANOVA Anastasia M., 2005, *The Politicization of Russian Orthodoxy: Actors and Ideas*, Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag.
- MARX Karl, 1986, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I, Moscow, Progress Publishers.
- MITROKHIN Nikolai, 2004, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov': sovremennoe sostoianie i aktual'nye problemy* [The Russian Orthodox Church: Contemporary Condition and Current Problems], Moskva, Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.
- Osnovy sotsial'noi kontseptsii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* [Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church], 2000, online: <http://www.mospat.ru/index.php?mid=90>, accessed on 04 March 2009.
- ROUSSELET Kathy, AGADJANIAN Alexander (eds.), 2006, *Religioznye praktiki v sovremennoi Rossii* [Religious Practices in Contemporary Russia], Moskva, Novoe Izdatel'stvo.
- SIMONS Greg, 2005, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Its Role in Cultural Production*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- SOKOLOVA A. D., 2005, “Kriterii religioznosti: Problemy i nekotorye aspekty (na primere issledovaniia religioznosti zhitelei goroda Vladimira)” [Criteria of Religiosity: Problems and some Aspects (example from research about the religiosity of the inhabitants of Vladimir city)], in Arinin E. I. (ed.), *Svecha: Religiia i lichnost' v proshlom i nastoiashchem* [Candle: Religion and Personality in Past and Present], vol. 12, Vladimir, Vladimir State University, p. 279-281.
- WEBER Max, 1990 [1922], *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr.

## **Businessmen, Priests and Parishes**

### **Religious Individualization and Privatization in Russia**

*Beginning in the late socialist years, the religious situation in Soviet Union changed massively and local authors from Vladimir region describe this phenomenon as religious rebirth (vozrozhdenie). The believers often have long-term relationships with individual priests to whom they turn for various blessings, confessions, and forms of spiritual advice, including the interpretation of dreams. The advice and interpretations given by priests differ considerably, but they generally emphasize religious action and right ritual performance. Russian orthodoxy sustains highly individualized forms of religiosity and becomes more flexible than even its practitioners and priests like to acknowledge.*

*Key words: entrepreneurship, individualization of religion, religious practice, Vladimir (Russia), spiritual teachers.*

## **Hommes d'affaires, prêtres et paroisses**

### **L'individualisation religieuse et la privatisation en Russie**

*Au début des dernières années du socialisme, la situation religieuse en Union Soviétique change massivement et des acteurs locaux de la région Vladimir décrivent ce phénomène comme une renaissance religieuse (vozrozhdenie). Les paroissiens entretiennent des relations à long terme avec les prêtres auxquels ils s'adressent pour diverses bénédictions, confessions, et formes diverses de conseils spirituels, y compris l'interprétation des rêves. Les conseils et les interprétations données par les prêtres diffèrent considérablement, mais ils soulignent généralement les actions religieuses et la pratique correcte du rituel. L'orthodoxie russe soutient des formes de religiosité fortement individualisées et devient plus souple que ses praticiens et prêtres n'aiment le reconnaître.*

*Mots-clés : entrepreneuriat, individualisation religieuse, pratique religieuse, Vladimir (Russie), maîtres spirituels.*

## **Hombres de negocios, sacerdotes y parroquias**

### **La individualización religiosa y la privatización en Rusia**

*Al principio de los últimos años del socialismo, la situación religiosa en la Unión Soviética cambia masivamente, y actores locales de la región Vladimir describen este fenómeno como un renacimiento religioso (vozrozhdenie). Los parroquianos sostienen relaciones de largo término con los sacerdotes, a los cuales se dirigen para diversas bendiciones, confesiones, y formas distintas de consejos espirituales, incluso la interpretación de los sueños. Los consejos y las interpretaciones dadas por los sacerdotes difieren considerablemente, pero destacan generalmente las acciones religiosas y la práctica correcta del ritual. La ortodoxia rusa sostiene formas de religiosidad fuertemente individualizadas y se vuelve más laxa, tanto que a sus fieles y sacerdotes no les gusta reconocerse en ella.*

*Palabras clave: empresariado, individualización religiosa, práctica religiosa, Vladimir (Rusia), maestros espirituales.*

