

A New Role for Religion in Russia's New Consumer Age: the Case of Moscow*¹

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Of all the changes that have marked Russia's transformation in the postsoviet period, one of the most intriguing has been the emergence of a vibrant religious orientation in what was formerly an officially atheistic society. If the Soviet era was characterised by the official secularisation of the state through a series of measures that included disbanding religious organisations, closing churches and synagogues, confiscating church property and executing religious leaders, the postsoviet period has, by contrast, been marked by a resurgence in public religious activity. Both indigenous and foreign religious communities have capitalised on the opportunities for religious freedom that were initiated in the late 1980s, with the reform-oriented policies of *glasnost*' and *perestroika* initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev and then continued after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The state has returned church and synagogue property to their respective religious communities and Russian citizens have begun attending worship services, immersing themselves in religious education and publicly identifying themselves as believers. What is most intriguing, however, about these changes are the ways in which Russians have incorporated religion into their everyday lives and specifically into practices of a decidedly more economic nature. The importance that foreign missionaries have placed on the spread of religious communities and elevated church attendance as evidence for Russians' heightened spirituality and commitment to religious truths (and to Christian truths in particular) diverges sharply from the mercantilist orientation that pervades many Russians' explanations for their religious participation. In many ways, Russians' religious activities reflect and coincide with their economic interests.

Muscovite consumers like the individuals described in this article display an entrepreneurial spirit in the types of religious activity they choose to join and the benefits they acknowledge receiving from these activities. For some, religious movements offer new employment opportunities, while others interpret their participation in Russia's market economy through religious paradigms.

It is this connection between the religious and the economic that I am investigating in this article. Specifically, I am interested in how changes in Russia's commercial sphere, which have been most evident in the types of commodities available to consumers (see for example Patico and Caldwell, 2002), now include a specialised

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consumer niche devoted to goods and services more typically associated with the realm of the spiritual. This realm of commercialised spirituality offers forms of religious expression ranging from organised denominations to more individualised practices such as acupuncture and acupressure, energy channelling, meditation, aromatherapy and witchcraft. Russian consumers who previously assured their financial security by investing money in apartments and durable goods like appliances and cars now look to safeguard their savings, and perhaps make a return on their investments, by paying for the services of healers (see Lindquist, 2000) and buying talismans. As the examples in this article illustrate, religion has emerged as a viable and desirable commodity in today's economy in Russia. Collectively, the broad variety of religious movements, practices and services that are available offers consumers opportunities to address and alleviate material, physical and metaphysical concerns, while simultaneously providing a lucrative source of income and prestige for their practitioners.

In this article I concentrate specifically on Moscow and the experiences of Muscovites who draw on their participation in religiously oriented activities to make sense of market capitalism. I suggest that these individuals are distinguishing religion, which is broadly conceived for the purposes of this article as a set of practices and beliefs that includes both institutionalised religion and forms of popular religion, from notions of personal faith and spirituality. Consequently, Muscovites who perceive religion as distinct from spirituality and faith view it as just one more type of commodity available to consumers. According to this perspective, religion is similar to other commodities in that it offers postsocialist citizens resources with which to position themselves advantageously in the new market economy.² Ultimately, by emphasising the economic aspects and implications of the religious practices of Muscovites, I want to show how religion has emerged at the centre of Russia's new marketplace. In so doing, I offer a new understanding of what it means to be religious and spiritual in a postsocialist consumer society.

This article is based on ethnographic research conducted between 1997 and 2002 in the community that has been emerging from an English-speaking, international Protestant congregation (the Christian Church of Moscow (CCM)) and its social welfare programmes in Moscow.³ I have used pseudonyms for this congregation and its members in keeping with standard ethnographic practice to protect their privacy. This effort to shield the CCM community is also due to recent changes in the political and religious climate in Moscow. Although this community has been legally recognised by the Russian government for several decades, during my fieldwork political and religious leaders in Moscow have complained that the congregation and its welfare programmes are drawing Russian congregants away from local Russian Orthodox churches. Thus the position of the CCM in Russia is tenuous and I do not wish to draw undue attention to its members and activities.

Between 1997 and 2002, the CCM congregation included approximately 300 members. Of these congregants, roughly 50 individuals were Russian citizens. The ages and life experiences of these men and women were varied: they included upper-class university students, middle-aged professionals, young disabled persons and older retirees receiving their pensions. Despite the fact that the CCM conducted all its services and affairs in English, not all Russian congregants spoke English. The other members of the congregation included North American expatriates and African students and refugees living in Moscow. The larger community formed by the CCM social welfare programmes comprised 1500 Russian recipients and 50 Russian volunteers, social workers and other officials. Recipients were predominantly elderly

Muscovites, many of whom also had status as veterans and invalids; the vast majority were female.

The larger project from which this article derives is based on 20 months of participant-observation in the CCM community and formal interviews and informal conversations with Russian and non-Russian members of this congregation and its welfare services, as well as with their friends and acquaintances. These data are supplemented by visits to other Christian and non-Christian religious communities in Moscow. The following three examples are representative of these visits: a prayer meeting at a Russian Orthodox church in downtown Moscow that I attended as part of an official CCM delegation; a visit to Sunday services at a Korean Protestant Church in Moscow that was arranged by a member of the CCM congregation whose colleagues at a missionary society in Moscow attended this church; and a visit to the Hare Krishna community's Sunday evening services to which I was invited and escorted by a CCM welfare recipient. My data also include conversations with several Russian acquaintances who work in the field of alternative healing, information drawn from local Russian newspapers that focus on religious affairs, and advertisements for local churches. These are the materials that inform the discussion in this article. In order to illuminate the ethnographic content of this article, however, I focus much of the discussion around the narratives of three key informants whose experiences are representative of the larger community in which I was conducting research.

Religion and Russia's Political Economy

In socialist systems like the former Soviet Union, religion, in both its institutionalised and popular forms, occupied a tenuous and ambiguous position *vis-à-vis* the state. In the logic of Marxist-Leninist ideology and of scientific atheism in particular, religion represented ideologies that competed with the state's aims of modernisation and emancipation. Perhaps more importantly, religion offered socialist citizens both alternatives to official state doctrines and means to criticise the state. Consequently, socialist authorities carefully managed the extent to which religious outlets were available to their citizens.⁴ Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and other religious practices associated with the Soviet Union's indigenous peoples were reclassified as remnants of folk traditions belonging to non-Russian ethnic groups. The Soviet authorities carefully monitored and managed these religious traditions so that when Soviet citizens practised them it was as part of a performance and not as religion. Sascha Goluboff notes that in Soviet times Jewish culture was reformulated as 'national in form and socialist in content' (2003, p. 22).

Religious groups were often complicit in the state's programmes of secularisation and centralised control. Most notably, the Soviet state derived much of its power and authority through a carefully cultivated relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. On the one hand, the Soviet leadership invoked religious motifs to legitimate their authority and vision. Both Lenin and Stalin deliberately used religious motifs and the form of Orthodox iconography to cultivate sacred images of themselves (Tumarkin, 1997). Artists who were active in the Soviet state's nation-building campaign utilised historical connections between Orthodoxy and Russianness by including Orthodox symbols in their representations of national culture (Ellis, 1998).⁵ Priests and other officials within the Russian Orthodox Church similarly participated in the state's activities by collaborating with the KGB and conducting surveillance on church members (Ellis, 1998).⁶

Despite these concerted efforts by political and religious officials to manage religion both by refashioning it in ways that supported the state's objectives and by eliminating it outright, popular belief persisted throughout the Soviet period even as it was divorced from institutional structures and channelled into alternative outlets such as beliefs in the supernatural (Husband, 1998). One practice that persisted was the pre-Soviet tradition of seeking counsel from *starsy*, elders or holy men who were believed to have special insight derived from prayer and asceticism (Ellis, 1998, p. 280).⁷ At the same time, socialist citizens strategically enacted their criticisms of the state in unmistakably religious ways, such as using the language and imagery of theological argument to understand state policies and justify their disagreements with them (Husband, 1998). As Daphne Berdahl has discussed for the case of East Germany during the socialist period, religious acts such as baptisms, taking communion and enrolling children in Catholic kindergarten 'were both religious and overtly political' (Berdahl, 2000, p. 176).

By the late 1980s, however, interactions between religion and the socialist state had shifted radically from a relationship that was framed in political terms to one that was refracted through economic interests. One of the most significant consequences of Gorbachev's programme of *glasnost* in the mid-1980s was the revival of religious practices in the Soviet Union. In 1988 Soviet politicians joined Orthodox officials and followers in public celebrations of the millennial anniversary of Orthodoxy in Russia. Subsequently, churches, mosques, synagogues, monasteries and seminaries were reopened and restored. Gorbachev's reforms also relaxed the restrictions placed on foreign institutions, a change that allowed the influx of foreign ideas, commodities, businesses and religious denominations. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 further assisted the spread of foreign groups, so that today foreign denominations ranging from Catholicism and various forms of American Protestantism and evangelical Christianity to the Baha'i faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, the Salvation Army and the Hare Krishna movement, among many others, have established a visible presence in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union (see Goluboff, 2003; Lankauskas, 2002; Lindquist, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Wanner, 2003).

Foreign missionaries whom I have interviewed in Moscow typically interpret the growth of organised religious groups and the increasing rates of church attendance, baptisms, and conversions in Moscow as evidence that Muscovites are becoming both more religious and more spiritual.⁸ The salvationist discourse of some evangelical missionaries likewise shows that they view Muscovites' participation in religious activities and interest in religious education as evidence that their souls have been saved. Nevertheless, this assumption that religious practice reflects an individual's intrinsic spirituality ignores more pragmatic factors that are contributing to Russia's religious revival. One factor contributing to this flourishing religious diversity is that the predominant religious institutions that formerly existed in an uneasy and competing association with the state have lost the appeal they had when they appeared as alternatives to the socialist regime (Berdahl, 1999, p. 97; Berdahl, 2000, p. 176; see also Szemere, 2000, p. 169).⁹ A second factor is that many postsoviet citizens have grown disillusioned with these institutions since the publication of previously secret documents has verified the cooperation of many of them, to a greater or lesser extent, with the communist authorities.

Perhaps the most intriguing facet of this religious revolution, however, is the close connection between religion and economics that characterises contemporary postsocialist life. Throughout the late socialist and postsocialist world, transnational religious movements have been closely tied with the trends of globalisation, market

capitalism and commercialisation (Borenstein, 1999; Gillette, 2000; Lankauskas, 2002; Lozada, 2001). On the one hand, religious missionaries and other foreigners perceive in this new religious landscape lucrative financial opportunities both for themselves and for their congregations. As Goluboff has observed for the Moscow Jewish community that she studied, the growth of this population represented a promising market for kosher food products and other religious materials (Goluboff, 2003). On the other hand, transnational religious movements have been important conduits for the introduction and dissemination of foreign goods and fashions in the postsocialist world (Gillette, 2000; Lankauskas, 2002).¹⁰ For the specific case of postsoviet Russia, observers have suggested that the growth industry of religion is a form of capitalist 'cultural invasion', an interpretation illustrated by Eliot Borenstein's comment that "'cults" are to churches what Snickers bars are to kiosks' (1999, p. 441).

Borenstein's analogy illustrates the commercial aspect that currently characterises the religious pluralism found in Moscow and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union (see Wanner, 2003). This aspect certainly features in the approach to religion displayed by members of the larger CCM community in Moscow. As I shall describe below, these Muscovites strategically use religion, the services of religious practitioners and religious articles as commodities that can be bought and sold in order to remedy their material, physical and metaphysical troubles. People invest money in religious ventures, as both clients and practitioners; and they use religion to enhance their own material circumstances. Thus the ways in which Muscovites deploy and employ religion differentiate between spirituality and religion (see Epstein, 1995, cited in Borenstein, 1999, p. 441).

Following Weber's model of religion as a class of ethical philosophies that are arranged in a gradation in which some are more explicitly contemplative while others are more pragmatic (Weber, 1946), anthropologists have carefully pointed to the differences between aspects of religious activity that have formerly been lumped together, at the same time that they have emphasised similarities among practices that have been relegated to different realms.¹¹ For instance, in his study of funeral rituals in China, James Watson (1988) notes that there is a distinction between religions that gain their legitimacy and meaning through the correct performance of ritual actions (*orthopraxy*) and those that require followers to adhere to a correct set of doctrines (*orthodoxy*).

Similarly, the distinction that I am drawing here between religiosity and spirituality reflects how my informants distinguish between performed activities and professions of personal beliefs. As Judith Kornblatt observes, 'In contemporary Russian speech, as in early Russia, spirituality (*dukhovnost*) need not signify religiosity associated with any specific ritual behavior ... but rather can suggest a more generalized moral, aesthetic, or psychological depth' (1999, p. 418). Similarly, in her research on Russians' conceptions of the soul (*dusha*), Dale Pesmen writes that although the Russian idea of soul 'is related to Judeo-Christian notions of soul and other vital principles, [it] can imply a sense of spirit and of what gives life to flesh' (2000, p. 15). Pesmen goes on to cite Anna Wierzbicka's tripartite definition of *dusha*: one that is religious or quasireligious, a second that is tied to everyday life, and a third that is more metaphysical and transcendental (Wierzbicka, 1992, cited in Pesmen, 2000, p. 16). These distinctions are not unique to postsoviet Russia but in fact derive from older tendencies in Russia that predate the Soviet period. From the time of the christianisation of Russia (officially in 988) the formal institutions of Russian Orthodoxy have coexisted with pre-Christian practices and beliefs, a dual orientation

known as *dvoyeveriye* (double-faith) that some observers have recognised in Russians' current eclecticism (e.g. Ellis, 1998).

It is important to note that the dual nature of Russian religious practices raises questions about the connections between religion and identity, particularly in terms of whether Russians invoke a notion of a long-term religious orientation or sense of personal identity that persists even as they strategically manoeuvre among multiple religious practices – especially those that are associated with foreign movements. The terms '*pravoslavy*' (Orthodox) and '*veruyushchi*' (believer) have offered Russians discursive means to claim for themselves a connection with longstanding religious traditions, even for individuals who either do not participate in organised religion or have chosen to engage in nontraditional practices. Most of my Muscovite acquaintances outside the immediate CCM congregation, however, did not typically identify themselves with these terms. Instead, most individuals preferred to say that their interests in or support of religion reflected their interests in philosophy more generally. Even among those persons who belonged to the CCM congregation, I rarely encountered direct professions of personal faith, belief, or religious identity. A telling example was that during the section of CCM services that was devoted to congregants' public statements of faith and requests for prayers, African members of the congregation often reflected on their personal spiritual journeys, while Russian members of the congregation typically focused their comments on requests for material assistance. This issue of underlying identities and long-term faith is an important one, but it is currently outside the scope of my research and the discussion in this article.

An analysis that considers the ways in which forms of religious activity can be distinguished from the more contemplative experiences of personal reflection and transcendence that are generally associated with spirituality and faith is useful for understanding the ways in which religion and economics are interpenetrating systems. Putting it in slightly different terms for the intersection of Pentecostal Christianity and popular culture in Ghana, Brigit Meyer has argued for analyses of religion that move beyond conventional dichotomies that place religion in a sphere distinct from other aspects of daily life and instead suggests a consideration of the spaces where these spheres overlap (Meyer, 2004). In the analysis that I present here, I approach this issue by drawing inspiration from Marx's ideas about use values and exchange values, and I suggest that religion in Russia is simultaneously a system of values and a system that has value.¹² Postsoviet citizens concerned with the nature and consequences of the capitalist market that has emerged in their midst are increasingly refracting those concerns through ideologies of morality (Humphrey and Mandel, 2002; Kaneff, 2002). Hence, as a system of morality, religion helps Muscovites make sense of their place in Russia's economy and of Russia's place in a modernised, global world, a correlation that has been observed by anthropologists working elsewhere in the world (Dolan, 2002; Kohnert, 1996; Seur, 1992).¹³ Similarly, in his work on Pentecostalism in Latin America and the Caribbean, Paul Brodwin writes that 'people turn to Pentecostalism as a way to negotiate the frustrations and contradictions of modernity' (Brodwin, 2003, p. 87). Moreover, not only do religious goods and services circulate freely throughout Russia's economic system, but more importantly, they are the resources on which consumers draw in their efforts to engage with and shape Russia's economy. This state of affairs resembles the situation of the Mongolian shamans described by Manduhai Buyandelgeriyn (2002) whose livelihoods depend just as much on their ability to present a financially secure image and cultivate affluent clients as they do on the shamans' abilities to connect with the spirit world.

An understanding of the dual nature of religion as a system of value and a system with value illustrates how a Weberian-inspired approach (Weber, 1976), that links the economic and the religious as correlative aspects with a shared morality, only emphasises the distinctiveness and autonomy of these two realms. Such a perspective does not fully account for the way in which Muscovites have integrated religion into the local economy. Weberian paradigms emphasise the interconnections and interpenetrations of religion and economics, but maintain that the two remain distinct. In Russia, however, the two realms 'religion' and 'economics' have become fused, while 'spirituality' has become separated from 'religion'. Ultimately, the implications of this commercialisation of religion mean that by disentangling personal professions of spirituality from the institutional structures and rituals of religion, Muscovites have reinforced the distinction between belief and practice so that irreligious spirituality and aspiritual religiosity are both possible.

In the remainder of this article I shall describe how Muscovites approach religious practices in ways that evoke economics more than spirituality by discussing the ways in which Muscovites use religion to resolve personal problems ranging from limited material resources to personal anxieties about their relationships with other people and with the postsocialist economy. I have used the rubric of 'healing' to show how such otherwise disparate practices, ranging from organised religions such as Orthodoxy and Protestant denominations to more individualised practices such as shamanism, magic, and energy healing may be understood collectively as strategies that Muscovites invoke to tackle, solve or compensate for the problems of everyday life in postsoviet Russia. I present the narratives of three key informants who exemplify the experiences reported by my informants. Aleksandra Petrovna, Larissa Antonovna, and Vera are pensioners in their seventies who are long-time recipients of the CCM welfare programmes. Aleksandra Petrovna has also been an active member of the CCM congregation, although she officially belongs to another Protestant congregation in Moscow.

The Utility of Religion

Helping the Self

Aleksandra Petrovna, a 75-year-old Russian pensioner, considers herself to be a devout Christian believer and points both to her family's religious background and her current religious activities as evidence of her faith. Before the Second World War, Aleksandra Petrovna's grandfather was a respected icon painter in Moscow. Later, despite the restrictions on religious expression imposed by the Soviet authorities, her parents ensured that their two daughters knew and appreciated the family's Russian Orthodox heritage. She recalls how her mother safeguarded icons under a bin of potatoes in their cellar. As an adult during the Soviet period Aleksandra Petrovna did not engage in public religious activities. Although this was partly because of the official sanctions placed on religious practice, just as important was the fact that she was married to a KGB agent. The increased openness fostered by *glasnost*' in the late 1980s, together with her divorce from her husband during that same time period, encouraged her to begin attending church services and reading religious materials. Despite her family's strong Orthodox heritage, however, Aleksandra Petrovna elected not to attend Orthodox services because she found the worship style too impersonal. As someone who had devoted her life to social welfare-oriented volunteer work, she also criticised the Orthodox Church for not devoting sufficient attention or resources

to the needy in Moscow. Instead, she officially joined a Korean Presbyterian Church and also regularly attended worship services and fellowship activities at another transnational Protestant congregation. She explains that she liked to attend church to enjoy the music and liturgy of the Protestant-style worship services and because of the leadership roles offered to women in these congregations. Yet she admitted that what was perhaps even more important to her was the fact that these Protestant congregations offered secondary services such as free second-hand clothing, food packages and occasional monetary loans. Aleksandra Petrovna attended church faithfully every week, but her decision as to which service to attend depended largely on what each congregation was offering on a particular Sunday morning. It was not uncommon for Aleksandra Petrovna to rush across the city in order to attend services at both churches on the same morning.

My elderly friend Vera approached religion in a similarly utilitarian way. Although proud of her Jewish heritage, particularly because of the malicious discrimination she had suffered from her in-laws and other Muscovites, Vera began participating in an evangelical Christian congregation. She explained that she would always be a Jew, but that she was attracted by the practical benefits of this congregation. Specifically, Vera's severe arthritis prevented her from venturing too far from her apartment; but the younger members of this church faithfully provided her with transport to church services and events, helped her with her shopping and even supplied her with reading material. Vera explained that attending church did not conflict with or contradict her Jewishness, but rather complemented her personal sense of spirituality.

As their actions reveal, Muscovites like Aleksandra Petrovna and Vera have engaged with the religious diversity surrounding them from the perspective of consumers. The way in which they evaluate religious philosophies and congregations not only according to their theological messages, but also according to which church or religious movement provides the most attractive set of goods, supports the argument by Starke and Finke (2000) that individuals apply a 'cost-benefit analysis' framework to their religious participation.¹⁴ Larissa Antonovna, a retired historian, epitomises this mercantilist attitude toward religion. Although she claims that she is an atheist with only a 'philosophical' interest in religion, Larissa Antonovna is a regular presence at many different worship services around Moscow. She explains that she selects which services to attend on the basis of what members of that group are offering. Her favourite activity is to attend weekly outreach programmes sponsored by the Hare Krishna community in Moscow. She claims that the movement's philosophy of good, evil and reincarnation has helped her overcome the traumas of her earlier life, including the death of her firstborn child in infancy 40 years ago. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that these outreach programmes combine religious education with free (vegetarian) meals. Like many of the other Muscovites who have attended these events, Larissa Antonovna comes prepared with empty containers so that she can take leftover food home with her. On the evening when I accompanied her to a meal at the Hare Krishna temple she pointed out that the vast majority of people in the crowd were impoverished Muscovites like her: elderly, disabled and homeless persons.

Other Muscovites display similarly utilitarian attitudes toward religion. On a separate occasion in spring 1998 Larissa Antonovna invited me to attend an apple-blessing ceremony at the newly restored Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. When we arrived at the church, several hundred people were already queuing ahead of us; and before long there were several hundred people behind us as well. Although some of the people waiting were young adults or business people who had come over

during their lunch break, most were elderly or disabled. Larissa Antonovna and I both recognised other pensioners who belonged to the larger community formed by the CCM's welfare programmes. Most people carried empty sacks and briefcases or pushed shopping carts that they then filled with apples when they reached the front of the queue. On another occasion, after services at a Korean Protestant church in Moscow, I watched as elderly Russian members of the congregation emptied the trays set out for lunch, putting the sandwiches into their satchels. By contrast, although younger members of this congregation, most of whom are second- and third-generation Korean Russians, were not financially dependent on the church, they identified other material benefits to their participation in church activities. For some, church services provided an opportunity to practise their Korean language skills; whereas for others, interactions with Protestant missionaries from the West provided networking opportunities that might lead to jobs or education abroad.

For other Muscovites, churches and synagogues offer productive sites for approaching strangers to give them a few coins. Russian Orthodoxy has a strong tradition of charity (Lindenmeyr, 1996), and beggars who wait outside (or sometimes inside) Orthodox churches in Moscow frame their appeals to church visitors with references to religiously inspired compassion and assistance. The prayer meeting at an Orthodox Church that I attended with members from the CCM congregation included a section when visitors could present themselves to the community. Several people framed their introductions around lengthy descriptions of personal hardships and the illnesses of close relatives before shifting to explicit requests for both the prayers and the material assistance of other congregants present.

For Muscovites like Aleksandra Petrovna, Vera and Larissa Antonovna, then, the possibilities for religious education and personal spiritual growth that are available, either directly or indirectly, through religious institutions are distinct from, and often secondary to, the very material resources that these congregations provide. For many people, this pragmatic aspect of religious life is a critical factor in their everyday survival. In describing why religion was important to her, Aleksandra Petrovna repeatedly returned to practical reasons; as she described her situation, it was clear that without the material assistance that she received from church she could not survive.

Healing the Self

As well as taking advantage of the forms of material assistance available via religious practice, Muscovites also approach religion as a means of resolving the more intangible problems with love and interpersonal relations that they encounter in their daily lives. When I arrived at the apartment of Aleksandra Petrovna to visit her one day in summer 2002 she began digging around in the stack of books and papers next to her bed, before happily pulling a folded newspaper from the bottom of the heap. Asking me to excuse her for a moment, she seated herself in her armchair and telephoned someone; she told the other woman she had found the newspaper and then read off a telephone number from it. After the call she explained that she had been speaking to an old friend who was having trouble with her teenage granddaughter. I understood from what I overheard of the conversation that the girl was disobeying her grandmother and not demonstrating proper respect and deference to the older woman. Aleksandra Petrovna said that although her friend was upset about this behaviour towards her, she was apparently more concerned about her granddaughter's general well-being if she continued her present conduct. Recognising that

her friend was at her wits' end, Aleksandra Petrovna had found an advertisement in a local newspaper for a New Age healer who specialised in solving domestic problems. Commenting that these services appealed to desperate Muscovites like her friend who had nowhere else to turn, Aleksandra Petrovna said that she herself had considered trying a healer to improve her own life, despite the challenges she faced in paying for such an expensive service with her tiny monthly pension.

She then brought out more materials on healing practices for me to read. One text was the weekly newspaper that contained the advertisement that she had relayed to her friend, *Tainaya vlast'* (*Secret Power*), with the slogan that it was 'the newspaper for those who want to know the unknown' (*gazeta dlya tekhn, kto khochet poznat' nepoznannoye*). The letter 'A' in the word *vlast'* was rendered as a pyramid with an eye. Much like the issue I bought a few days later, Aleksandra Petrovna's paper contained an eclectic assortment of pieces on such topics as palm reading, horoscopes, Tarot readings and natural health remedies, and advertisements for Voodoo, parapsychology and Afro-Brazilian magic performed by the ordained Caribbean witch Helen Santera.¹⁵

Included among these alternative religions was at first glance a rather unlikely religious faith: Russian Orthodoxy. Both Aleksandra Petrovna's paper and the issue that I bought the next week contained several lengthy articles about the mysteries and healing powers of Orthodoxy. One healer who called himself the 'Clear-seeing Prophet Pavel' advertised that he was one of only four healers (*tselitel'*) who have been recognised by and received the blessing of the church. The Prophet Pavel's advertisement includes a photograph of him standing next to an Orthodox priest in front of a small altar before an icon of the Mother of God.

I was initially surprised to see Russian Orthodoxy included in this paper, particularly because the Orthodox Church has been a leading force in Russia's recent clampdown on non-native religions (which can mean any religions other than Orthodoxy, Judaism or Islam) (Borenstein, 1999; Kornblatt, 1999; Lindquist, 2000). Aleksandra Petrovna did not voice any such surprise, however. In fact, the next collection of materials she brought out for me to read included a set of religious tracts distributed by local Orthodox churches. One was a devotional booklet whose title indicated that it was intended for people who wanted to 'help those who are suffering from the diseases of drinking and drug addiction'. She told me that she had bought this booklet for her son, who was struggling with a drinking problem. Since she had given him a copy, he was successfully controlling his drinking and had turned his life around. Another set of materials was a large binder filled with photocopies of articles, unpublished writings and lecture notes covering a range of topics including arithmancy, feng shui, colour analysis and even directions for the proper types and colours of bed linens to be used to promote physical health and fertility. Aleksandra Petrovna told me that these readings were for a class on healthy living offered by a priest in one of the neighbourhood Orthodox churches. She added that although she had found this course both useful and philosophically interesting, she had been forced to stop attending because she could not pay the fees with her meagre monthly pension. The priest who ran the class, however, impressed on her the importance of this knowledge and encouraged her to save her money and join again at a later time.

That representatives of the Orthodox Church in Moscow, among other organised denominations, have entered the realm of self-help and healing has significant implications, especially given what many have seen as the Orthodox Church's animosity toward other religious practices, particularly nontraditional forms such as

magic and healing (Borenstein, 1999; Kornblatt, 1999; Lindquist, 2000). Unfortunately, because my research did not examine changes within the Orthodox Church, I cannot address how widespread this support for alternative activities is among Orthodox clergy, both within Moscow and across the country. Yet it is significant that there is at least a small group of Orthodox clergy and followers who are publicly participating in alternative healing practices; and their activities offer evidence for how religion may be transformed into a service or commodity. Thus, as religious groups in today's Moscow actively compete to attract congregants, supporters and funding, religion itself – as both faith and practice – has become the channel through which this competition is actualised.

The Business of Religion

Perhaps the greatest disorder facing Muscovites in postsoviet Russia today is that of the marketplace, as people continue to struggle with learning how to navigate and succeed in Russia's constantly changing and contradictory economy. Not surprisingly, religious practices have been one of the areas to which Muscovites have resorted in order to harness, control and influence the market for personal gain (see Lindquist, 2000, 2001a).¹⁶ Newspapers like *Tainaya vlast'* advertise the services of practitioners of magic who can bring one success in business, help one's investments grow, or recoup one's previous losses. During a drive in the outskirts of Moscow, Serezha, a middle-aged acquaintance who works as a producer at a local alternative news agency in Moscow, drew my attention to a huge metal pyramid sitting in the middle of a farm field. He explained that the pyramid was one of several placed around Moscow. They had been erected, he told me, by an influential businessman who wanted to centre the region's energies more effectively. Serezha's remarks also implied that the businessman also hoped that these efforts would benefit him and his business dealings. Although I was unable to verify Serezha's account, it was nonetheless significant in light of a subsequent conversation that we had. Returning to the topic of metaphysical energies, Serezha tried to impress on me the significant relationship between triangles and money by showing me the pyramid containing the eye that is on the back of the US dollar bill. He explained that this connection showed why the American economy has historically been so strong.

Other Russians see and enjoy the financial aspects of religion more directly. For many, healing practices derived from forms of popular religion offer lucrative job opportunities. Although my friend Lena enjoyed her work as a physician, she found that alternative healing practices such as acupressure and leeching brought her much greater income and flexibility. She eventually allowed her medical certification to lapse and concentrated on these other techniques. In a similar situation is Lyuba, a young mother who considers herself a Christian and regularly attends church services and fellowship activities at several mainstream Protestant churches (churches supported by the liberal wings of American Lutheran and Methodist denominations) in Moscow. She supports her elderly mother and young son by teaching English in several schools and by offering private lessons in people's homes. Although she enjoys teaching English, and the income she receives from private lessons is reasonable, she finds more economic and personal satisfaction from her sideline as a healer and thus combines private English lessons with energy channelling and exorcisms. In the hope of enhancing both her abilities and her reputation as a healer, Lyuba studies with a more senior practitioner in Moscow. In the past, she has accompanied this other woman on educational trips around Moscow and abroad. Lyuba expresses the hope that this

experience will eventually enable her to emigrate to the USA and establish a healing centre there.

At the level of Moscow's commercial sphere, religion has emerged as a highly profitable business; and Muscovites can exercise their consumer power by buying religion in a wide variety of forms. Muscovites interested in exploring different faiths and practices can choose from a wide variety of books, newspapers and magazines available at their local kiosk. Inside metro stations and along city streets, seminary students and elderly women staff tables and kiosks where commuters can purchase icons, candles, crosses and other jewellery, religious tracts and other religious materials. Some churches and synagogues include small shops where visitors can buy various articles – even cookery books and health foods, including kosher foods (Goluboff, 2003). Located on the grounds of the Danilov Monastery, the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church, in central Moscow, are small shops selling religious vestments, icons and musical recordings, as well as groceries. An affiliated shop located several blocks away, off the grounds of the monastery, sells herbal teas packaged under the monastery's label, honey from the monastery's beehives, and drinking water that has been blessed, among other items. Of particular note is the Russian Orthodox Church's intervention in Russia's commercial sector. The labels on bottles of *Saint Springs* (*Svyatoi istochnik*) water carry the following information (in both Russian and English): 'Blessed by His Holiness Alexei II, Patriarch of Moscow and Russia. Church proceeds will be contributed to the rebuilding of Churches and Monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church'.¹⁷ Less well known are the church's other ventures in the oil, tobacco and banking industries.¹⁸

Meanwhile, privately owned shops that draw explicitly on contemplative religious themes, such as the stores 'The Third Way' (*Treti Put*) and 'Jagganath' (*Dzhagganat*), both located in downtown Moscow, offer customers opportunities to cultivate their inner spirituality through such products as natural foods, bells, crystals, incense, stones and other devices intended to tap into non-earthly energies. These stores also provide spaces for local healing practitioners to advertise their services to potential customers with fliers and for customers to record their experiences and offer recommendations to other customers. Elsewhere in Moscow, consumers can purchase teas that are appropriate for the lunar, Chinese and Indian horoscopes. According to the packaging on the boxes, each blend of tea contains a distinctive combination of ingredients that is unique to the particular qualities and persons of each astrological sign and system.

Conclusion

To conclude this discussion of the intertwining of Russia's economic and religious spheres, I want to turn to one final vignette. Svetlana Grigor'yevna is the owner and manager of a cafeteria complex in Moscow, and she often contracts her cafeteria's services to local and foreign food aid programmes. When dealing with church-based organisations, she emphasises her Christian beliefs as a selling point. Several years ago, after having successfully used her identity as a Christian in landing the contract to provide food services for a soup kitchen programme run by the CCM community, Svetlana Grigor'yevna began defrauding the church by adding her employees to the recipient roster and charging fake expenses to the church's account. Aleksandra Petrovna, who was a recipient at the soup kitchen, criticised Svetlana Grigor'yevna for behaving in a way that was not representative of a Christian. When I suggested instead that perhaps the other woman was a businesswoman, Aleksandra Petrovna

tartly responded that that was an accurate assessment: Svetlana Grigor'yevna was a businesswoman and *not* a Christian. Despite her assertion that one could not simultaneously be a Christian and a businesswoman, however, Aleksandra Petrovna's views on the relationship between religion and economics have clearly shifted since that time. Her enthusiasm for the utilitarian aspects of religion became apparent during the summer of 2002, when she began consulting newspapers like *Tainaya vlast'* and considered hiring a healer in order to improve her financial situation. By the summer of 2004, when I visited her, she had begun reading about feng shui and collecting frog figurines that were alleged to draw financial prosperity to their owners. Thus, as these examples reveal, for Muscovites like Aleksandra Petrovna, it is not only possible to combine the economic and the religious, but also in many ways necessary.

As the ethnographic examples I have provided above illustrate, simply explaining religious phenomena through economic metaphors or the language of economics does not go far enough in explaining the extent to which these two realms are interdependent. More importantly, Muscovites who approach and use religious practices in decidedly practical ways have transformed the nature of Russia's economy, so that today religion exists as just one of many different commodities available to Moscow's consumers. Thus, economics has not become Russia's new religion; but instead, by providing new commodities and new jobs, and by shaping the ways in which Muscovites interact with the market, religion has become part of the new economy. In many ways, then, to be religious in Russia today means to be a consumer.

Notes

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- ² See Patico, 2002, on the correlation of social status and prestige with consumer products in Russia.
- ³ I discuss the CCM community in more detail in Caldwell, 2004.
- ⁴ For information on the analogous case of China, see Lozada, 2001.
- ⁵ Jane Ellis writes that Soviet writer Vladimir Soloukhin was like many of his contemporaries in that in his work 'Orthodoxy was important ... more as a symbol of national cultural achievement than as a spiritual force' (1998, p. 284).
- ⁶ For more detailed accounts of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the presoviet and Soviet periods, see Ellis, 1998; Freeze, 1996; and Husband, 1998. For more information on the place of Judaism within the Soviet Union, see Goluboff, 2003.
- ⁷ See Wynot, 2002, on the topic of 'secret monasticism' during the Soviet period.
- ⁸ See Borenstein, 1999, and Kornblatt, 1999, for information on surveys showing that as professions of faith were increasing, church attendance was decreasing.
- ⁹ For more detailed ethnographic discussions of the waning influence of Catholic and Protestant churches in Eastern Europe, see Berdahl, 1999, 2000; and Szemere, 2000.
- ¹⁰ In his article on consumerism, tradition and evangelical Christianity in Lithuania Gediminas Lankauskas, 2002, describes how the young adults who belong to a foreign evangelical group in Lithuania consume American and European soft drinks, luxury

automobiles and technology more generally as part of their performance of modern, antisoviet religiosity. Similarly, Maris Gillette, 2000, has described how the desire for 'pure and true' (*qingzhen*) foods among China's Muslims has both fostered and been facilitated by foreign food transnationals that use industrial packaging to certify food safety.

- ¹¹ For anthropologists, the two social thinkers who have made perhaps the greatest contributions to reframing and expanding the concept of religion are Emile Durkheim (see e.g. Durkheim, 1995) and Stanley Tambiah (see e.g. Tambiah, 1990).
- ¹² I am grateful to our discussant William Kelleher for highlighting this distinction in his response to my paper.
- ¹³ This resembles what Catherine Dolan has described as the case in Kenya, where accusations of witchcraft are the mechanisms through which people explain and redress economic imbalances (Dolan, 2002).
- ¹⁴ See also Finke and Starke, 1998. For examples of how this cost-benefit paradigm plays out in Ukraine, see Wanner, 2003; for examples of its application to faith-based charity work in the USA, see Bartkowski and Regis, 2003, p. 19.
- ¹⁵ For an account of Galina Lindquist's ethnographic research with Helen Santera and her clinic, see Lindquist, 2001a. See also Lindquist, 2000, 2001b.
- ¹⁶ Birgit Meyer has made a similar observation for the case of Ghana, where evangelical Christians have long approached Pentecostalism as an opportunity to gain wealth (Meyer, 2004).
- ¹⁷ Taken from bottle of Saint Springs water purchased by the author in Moscow.
- ¹⁸ According to an article in *The Humanist*, in 1997 these activities 'cost the Russian government at least \$40 million in forfeited revenues' (*The Humanist*, 1997).

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