Reform and Revival in Moscow Orthodox Communities

Two Types of Religious Modernity

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Reforma y revitalización en los comunidades Ortodoxas de Moscú. Dos tipos de modernidad religiosa

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Reform and Revival in Moscow Orthodox Communities Two Types of Religious Modernity

This paper ¹ addresses the issue of “religious modernity” in the current Russian Orthodox context; the term itself as it is used here can be understood within the frame set by Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1993; 1999). Among the varied post-Soviet trajectories in the Russian religious field, this particular trend – religious modernity – is just one of many expressions of religiousness, which make up a large range, stretching from detached, “unchurched” individual religiosity through the imperial, militant symbolism of a “national religion.” Within this range many church life patterns can be found, which have opened up since the end of the 1980s. Post-Soviet religious liberty meant for some an emphasis on monastic ethos and ascetic other-worldliness; for others, a focus on popular worship of icons, relics and pilgrimages; yet for others, an ideological and nationalist agenda; finally, for some, active congregational life and social engagement. However, the trend addressed here has a particular importance, because the related phenomena are, as I believe, at the very edge of interaction between (late) modernity and Eastern Orthodoxy as a “chain of memory,” to use D. Hervieu-Léger’s catchy expression. I studied two groups (or rather two church subcultures) that represent a relatively small segment of Russian Orthodoxy: they are in a way exceptional. And yet, they reveal very much. They both belong to the “active” and socially engaged type; they are strong communities, which are not many in Russia. However, even if we take these two, as we have done in this paper, we can find both similarities and striking differences. What makes them similar is exactly their quest for a kind of religious modernity (even though, generally, this term stirs up skepticism in Church circles). I am not going to define this particular type and tenor right now; I hope instead to grasp their content in the course of my study. As for the striking differences between the two groups, I will try to show how this contrast is poignantly expressive for

1. I am indebted to Jonathan Sutton, Leeds University, for his careful reading of the English translation of this text and for his numerous important suggestions.

refining the notion of “Orthodox modernity” as such and for understanding the entire grass-roots life of the Church. At the end of the paper I will also get back to the question of the real place and weight these subcultures occupy within the entire space of Russian Orthodoxy, and of society as a whole.

The two subcultures in question, which I studied between 2008 and 2010 using participant observation and in-depth interviews, are the two Christian Orthodox communities in Moscow: *Preobrazhenskoe* (Transfiguration) Commonwealth of Small Orthodox Brotherhoods (hereafter Commonwealth) and the St. Cosmas & Damian parish (hereafter C&D). Both groups traced their formation back to Soviet times and then went through substantial growth in the 1990s and 2000s. The Commonwealth was created and led by the priest Father Georgii Kochetkov, who, at the beginning of the post-socialist era, launched the most daring reformist project in the Russian church. The Commonwealth sprang from underground communities organized by Kochetkov since the 1970s and, after the liberalization, a few parishes in and outside Moscow where Kochetkov served as priest. Since the early 1990s, because of his reformist agenda, Kochetkov and his community came increasingly under pressure and then experienced administrative persecution from conservative church forces and the church hierarchy. He lost all the parishes he had founded, but managed to refashion his following as a “commonwealth of brotherhoods” (*sodruzhestvo bratstv*) not related to any particular church or parish.

The second subculture was formed around Father Alexander Men, a charismatic priest honored by the intelligentsia and murdered in 1990 amid a fabulous ascent of his popularity. In Soviet times, it was first based at the parish in Novaia Derevnia locality, outside Moscow, and an informal Moscow network of his disciples who, after the tragic death of their leader in 1990, rallied around other priests, Men’s disciples and spiritual children: Vladimir Arkhipov, Dean of *Novaia Derevnia* parish; Alexander Borisov, Dean of Cosmas & Damian parish (which features in this study); and Vladimir Lapshin, formerly second priest of C&D and then Dean of *Dormition of Theotokos* church, located not far from the C&D in Moscow’s city centre. The C&D parish, led by Father Alexander Borisov, is seen as the main institutional legacy of Alexander Men.

Orthodox Modernity

Since the end of the Soviet Union both our groups have been engaged in continuous efforts to recreate Christian communities relevant to a new social context and the new spiritual, intellectual and social needs of their potential congregation – urban educated middle class (by Russian standards) of the capital city of Moscow. This “ecclesiastic project” – if we can use such an expression – combined two central tasks: revival and finding relevance to the world here and now; it was a search for *relevant revival*. This meant building a subculture

through a careful (not necessarily methodical or deliberate) selection of sources which link to an uninterrupted tradition *and* which are intelligible now; recreating a relevant “chain of memory.” This also meant formulating a few major formative points upon which this church culture is built. There are a few such formative points which define these two groups.

The first and the main such point is... Jesus Christ. Placing Christ figure at the *absolute* centre of spiritual experience and ecclesiastic rhetoric is a distinguished emphasis of both groups which, ironically, contrasts them with mainstream Orthodox Christianity. Christocentrism, stressed by both Kochetkov and Men’ (and Men’s successors), means to create a clear hierarchy of meanings, thus downplaying other aspects which the mainstream church is committed to: Tradition, post-biblical texts, custom, cultural texture/cloth of faith. Both groups also refer to early Christianity, the time of the Apostles, as the main source of their ethos and praxis. Both groups, accordingly, view the Eucharist, Eucharistic communion, as an axis of their own ritual process and the deepest spiritual experience. This idea is validated not only by the reference to apostolic times, but also by selecting a tradition of “Eucharistic ecclesiology” developed by the Russian *émigré* theologians in the mid-twentieth century².

Accordingly, both groups are generally distanced from (without totally dismissing them) such popular devotional practices which, for most other congregations and in the popular imagination, form the core of Russian Orthodox spirituality: the veneration of saints, miracle-working relics and icons, holy water, pilgrimages, votive supplications, healing, processions and even the “material” side of fasting – everything that may be roughly categorized as ceremonial devotion with “magical tendency”. Church sacraments are interpreted spiritually and therefore performed free of charge, in contrast to the common practice in other churches of assigning a fixed price for baptism or wedding. (However, the C&D accepts fixed money offerings for prayers – for healing and the dead – and candles). Their ethos and praxis may seem sober and dry as compared to the sumptuous traditionalist ceremonialism of the mainstream. Both groups have been accused of being under Protestant impact³. In fact, these two communities,

2. Father G. Kochetkov himself would refer to the “Eucharistic ecclesiology” created by Father Nikolai Afanasiev (1893-1966); to Father Alexander Shmemann’s work on Eucharist (A. Shmemann, 1987) and to similar ideas developed by Bishop John Zizioulas (J. Zizioulas, 1997); he also referred to the practical experience of the communities based upon frequent communion (G. Kochetkov, 1994 (2000): 91, 110-113). This same emphasis can be found in the tradition of A. Men’ and in C&D community. Alexander Borisov wrote about frequent communion in his book (A. Borisov, 1994: 42-3); he repeated this to me in an interview of 2008 (R-8 [22.12.08]). (Here and hereafter the interviews are formalized with R – respondent – followed by a number and date. In most cases I do not give the names).

3. See a polemical volume against both our groups: *Sovremennoe obnovenchestvo*, 1996. *Obnovenchestvo* (“Renovationism”), a wide reform movement within the Church in the first decade after the 1917 Revolution, was greatly compromised by its links with the Soviet secret

in contrast to most others in Russian Orthodoxy, are *word*-oriented; Scripture is definitely central in liturgy (readings from the Bible); a long catechization precedes baptism; most members make up special groups for detailed Gospel readings; the sermon is far more developed than in mainstream Russian Orthodoxy; both groups are active in Biblical and liturgical scholarship. A well-supplied church bookstore is the main source of C&D parish income. Reading is mentioned by many respondents as the main stimulus for conversion or “church induction,” *vosterkovlenie*⁴. Clarity in faith, doctrine and liturgy is essential: both groups played a pioneering role in linguistic reforms, trying to introduce into the Liturgy elements of current Russian language instead of Church Slavonic⁵.

Thus a new rationalized faith style has been created, which appealed to educated urbanites who tended to join religion consciously, by choice (and not belong to it ascriptively – for ethnic or cultural reasons). However, when speaking of such religious rationalization, of Weberian *Entzauberung*, we need to be careful not to overestimate this side: for, given the context and milieu we have described, longing for real religious *experience* was a key motive for conversion. Both groups are made up of those who are conscious converts (now, with their children as well), those who were baptized by choice and thus may be called born-again (this evangelical allusion may not be entirely nonsensical here!); they share a neophyte mentality, with many people reporting a deep *metanoia* experience and a life-transformation incentive. A search for meaning, for many core members, combined *both* the search for verbal clarity with the search for deep emotional, mystical (thus, “supra-rational”) experience of faith. Faith worked, in fact, as an alternative to a modern rationalized *Zeitgeist* – either in the form of Soviet total bureaucratization or in the form of capitalist, materialistic pragmatism that came to replace it. Therefore, *Entzauberung* goes hand-in-hand with a sort of re-enchantment – but rather in an interior, personalized form. Thus

services which manipulated it to destroy the Church, and since then the term *obnovlenchestvo* acquired strongly negative meaning (on *obnovlenchestvo*, see A. Levitin-Krasnov, Shavrov, 1996). References to Protestant influence may have some foundation: a few respondents got their first encounter with the Gospel through Protestant missions and publishers, although the Protestant attitude to scripture seemed “superficial”, not so ... reverential (*trepetnoe*) as in Orthodoxy (R-2 [24.03.2008])

4. Interview: R-9 [24.12.2008] (C&D deputy-warden for parish economy); interviews: R-1 [12/03/2008]; R-3 [16.05.2008].

5. A. Men' encouraged his flock to read the liturgy and prayer book (*molitvoslov*) in modern Russian translation, but never did this other than for private use (interview: R-15 [18.03.2009]). Today's younger C&D people would certainly favor modern Russian (interview: R-10 [30.12.2008]). G. Kochetkov went much further: he introduced *full* liturgy in modern Russian and was sharply criticized for that. Such a modernist undertaking as the translation of liturgy into modern languages, approved in Roman Catholicism by Vatican II, was absent from the Russian Church. Can we find here a direct or unconscious impact of *obnovlenchestvo* of the 1920s, esp. of Metropolitan Antonin Granovsky's liturgical reforms? (On A. Granovsky see A. Levitin-Krasnov, Shavrov, 1996). G. Kochetkov himself denied this link in an aphoristic motto: “renewal without renovationism, simplicity without simplification” (*obnovlenie bez obnovlenchestva, prostota bez uproshchenchestva*); G. Kochetkov, 1992: 37.

spiritualization of faith, its interiorization makes it “rational” in one sense; yet deep emotional commitment is (or may be) an important accompanying element ⁶.

As appears from the above description, members of both our groups in principle reject the culturalist type of religiosity – the one dominant within most official church institutions and massively adopted in Russia by the large majority of people with *thin* religiosity. Faith in our two groups tends to be stripped of “culture” (in ethnic or national sense close to “folk culture”). Nationalism is very untypical of them. Although they do not reject confessional boundaries altogether and strictly follow the Eastern Orthodox rite and calendar, both groups promote open Christianity, stress the unity of Christendom and maintain relationships with western churches. (Please note that Eastern Orthodox confessional emphasis is much stronger in the Commonwealth, but it is still different from mainstream parishes). Many are intensely involved in links with the Taizé community in France. After all, the emphasis on Christ, on “meeting Christ” (a popular adage in these circles) that I mentioned before, *relativizes* confessional boundaries that go beyond this ultimate centre of faith.

Both communities – with this strong sense of commitment – also possess a strong and articulated identity which differentiates them from more mainstream parishes. This is based on shared narratives of origin centered on the founders – G. Kochetkov himself in the first case, and late A. Men’ in the second. The founders, their charisma, worldview and pastoral style are central identity-making factors. Specifically, the tragic death of A. Men’ in 1990 contributed very much to creating an identity for the C&D subculture; the charisma of the founder has remained unquestioned, if only partly transferred to his disciples, the priests Vladimir Arkhipov, Alexander Borisov, Vladimir Lapshin and the late Georgii Chistiakov; at the same time, each of these four priests possess(ed) their personal charisma that contributed to the general identity of the subculture.

Both founders, in turn, are retrospectively linked, in these shared narratives, to a particular chain of spiritual continuity, either recent (20th century) or going back in time. The selected chain is in many ways similar to both subcultures: for example, the Commonwealth traces back to Kochetkov’s spiritual father, Vsevolod Shpiller (died 1984), a Moscow priest who about the same time as A. Men’ addressed religious quests of non-conformist intelligentsia. Both groups highly respect Russian religious philosophers (V. Soloviev, N. Berdiaev, S. Bulgakov) and *émigré* religious figures of the 20th century (see note³ above). Both groups also draw upon the lines of “catacomb” religiosity of the Soviet period – something that endows them with a warranty of purity of faith – to which the founders trace back their spiritual upbringing; for G. Kochetkov, these are Alexii Mechev

6. G. Davie notes that the *experience* of the sacred, *religious feeling*, is crucial for many western believers as well: the purely cerebral religion (such as, for example, biblical exposition of liberal Protestantism) does not work anymore (G. Davie, 2007: 146).

(1859-1923) and Sergei Mechev (1892-1942), father and son, famous charismatic Moscow priests, canonized as “new martyrs” in 2000. The Mechevs’ environment was as much important for Men’ (and his followers); he was baptized by father Seraphim Batiukov (1880-1942), who was a friend of A. Mechev; also, monks and nuns close to bishop Afanasii Sakharov (1887-1962), also canonized in 2000, were of major importance (A. Men’, 2007, 201 and *passim*). These two spiritual lineages often concurred in the Soviet period: as for example, are some overlapping circles of “catacomb” religion, such as the Moscow circle around a scientist and theologian Nikolai Evgrafovich Pestov, 1892-1982, which was important for both Men’ and G. Kochetkov; the monk-priest Tavrion Batozskii, 1898-1978, considered as a *starets* (elder), whose style of piety affected both leaders. The lineages coincided in a more remote past as well: both find links to the tradition of *startsys*, elders, of the 19th century. Both groups also refer to a few recent names such as highly esteemed Metropolitan Antonii of Surozh (1914-2003), who lived and served in London, and literary scholar Sergey Averintsev (1937-2004)⁷.

In both communities reference to the times of the Apostles is typically combined with “modern” sensibility. Reference to the ultimate source serves to legitimize open-minded thinking and negotiating with current patterns of changing life, absorbing spiritual quests of a vibrant urban milieu. Interestingly, these church subcultures have a relatively balanced gender and age composition (women and elderly people dominate but not to the same extent as in other churches); as a few respondents said, gender differences in services, behavior or piety are played down, this issue is “simply un-intelligible” (*prosto neponiaten*) (interview: R-10 [30.12.2008]). These subcultures are not inclined to monastic or ascetic world-detachment and rather tend to be world-involved through missionary activities (developed catechetical programs, educational and publishing projects, sponsoring conferences, etc.); social/charity work (wide, intense, and multifaceted charitable programs); and civil engagement. Being generally aloof from ethnocentric Russian culture, both groups have shown openness to “culture” in a different sense – a set of modern resources related to sciences, art and humanities⁸. Openness to culture is a key quality in selective narrative of the group’s genesis⁹. Politically, most of the core members of these two groups have been

7. A more detailed account of the spiritual continuity of both subcultures deserves a separate account which can not fit into this paper.

8. One respondent said that this community solved for her two main problems she initially faced in the Russian church back in her youth: her Jewishness and her artistic vocation. Both were met with suspicion in the mainstream, and both were welcome in A. Men’s subculture (interview: R-19 [06/05/2009]). A young man from a provincial town said that in C&D he found “at least one normal, adequate parish! There you see freedom, you see Heaven, you see Christ. Man has value there, the person is the main thing!” (interview: R-20 [07/05/09]).

9. When Father A. Borisov mentions the spiritual continuity with the 19th century *startsys* (elders) of *Optina pustyn’* monastery, he stresses their “openness to the world, to culture” (A. Borisov, 2003). Russian philosophers of the past were “open” in the same way, in contrast to mainstream Orthodoxy.

either skeptical or overtly opposed to both Soviet regime of the 1980s and to Putin's regime of the 2000s¹⁰.

Overall, the two subcultures seem to have stemmed from a common combination of religious and secular traditions and have addressed the needs of the same urban milieu. Yet the two groups evolved in quite different directions from each other in terms of structure, of identity and authority. In the next section we will move to their common associational patterns and then to the differences.

Searching for meaningful sociality

The lack of voluntary supra-familial sociality in the Soviet Union combined, since the 1990s, with a more general trend of the erosion of sociality in late modern western societies. This *general* (and not that recent) trend found its way into the field of religion, too¹¹. This trend was captured as “invisible religion” by T. Luckmann (1967), “believing without belonging” by G. Davie (1994), *Sheilaism* by R. Bellah (1996) or as “everyday religion” in a volume edited by N. Ammermann (2006). This volatile religiosity may be partly formalized or remain completely informal; it may create a more or less temporary community or remain completely private. A type of individual, highly privatized religiosity – amidst dominating religious indifference – may well be found in Russia. Yet because the voluntary sociality in the Soviet Union was restricted, curtailed, or semi-underground, the *longing* for spontaneous, meaningful sociality – especially in the milieu we are dealing with here – became an important driving force of post-socialist life. Hervieu-Léger shows how “the protest against world disorder” among the “converts” leads to the creation of “refuge groups” (James Beckford's term), attempting to create local “social utopias” (D. Hervieu-Léger, 1999: 140-41). I see our two groups as certain socio-spaces with both world-rejecting and world-adapting mechanisms. And because of initial individualism amidst the milieu of our “converts,” these socio-spaces represent the “communitarian, or informal, regime of faith” (as opposite to “institutional”, or formal) (*Ibid.*: 184).

Initially, in Russia there was an impression that a new religious associational life was possible within established institutional structures such as parishes. Parish revival became one of the key slogans in post-socialist Russian Orthodoxy.

10. Father A. Borisov was an active member of Moscow city parliament in the turning years of 1990-1993, but then he left any direct political involvement (A. Borisov, 1994: 96).

11. G. Davie speaks of religious process as a particular case of this general trend: “Religious institutions, *just like their secular counterparts*, are undermined by the features of late modernity which erode the willingness of European populations to gather anywhere on regular and committed basis.” (G. Davie, 2007: 92)

The 19th-early 20th century imperial state church, with its territorial parochial system, was the main reference point and an ideal model for the official revival project¹². In most cases, however, parishes lacked real communal intensity. Sergey Filatov finds *within* parishes similar “atomized” religiosity not only among laity but also among most priests as well (S. Filatov, 2005)¹³. What was happening in post-Soviet Russia was, in fact, a double process: restoration of institutional church life and an innovating growth of *thick* religious associations based on a “communitarian regime of faith” developing either outside or, most likely, within the institutions. In line with this second trend, the model of parish for people from our groups seemed to be linked to outward, ceremonial, and bureaucratic religion. Instead of looking at the 19th century church, – and fully rejecting the model of the state church¹⁴ – in the process of referential selectivity, they would rather draw upon the Church Council of 1917-1918 which sought radically to democratize parish life, that is, to break with the “parochial civilization” of the past¹⁵. Therefore both groups are in principle a-territorial: members gather not because of territorial proximity but around leader-priests and the core religious agenda¹⁶. With a particularly strong sense of identity and belonging, they sought to create a true community (*obshchina*), a *Gemeinschaft*-type of

12. The growth of parishes was referred to as the sign of an overall Church revival. About 30,000 parishes were reported by the official Church statistics in 2008 instead of 6893 in 1988, with a really impressive four-fold or five-fold growth within about twenty years (See the official site of the Moscow Patriarchy <http://www.mospat.ru/index.php?mid=215> (retrieved on 26.02.2009).

13. S. Filatov estimated that there were about 250 parishes of this kind in the Russian Church (S. Filatov, 2005). These estimates are very approximate. S. Filatov lists a few active Moscow parishes founded by known priests: Dmitrii Smirnov, Artemii Vladimirov, Vladislav Sveshnikov, Tikhon Shevkunov, and Alexander Borisov (the Dean of the C&D). A few years earlier Dmitrii Pospelovsky, in his open letter to the Patriarch defending G. Kochetkov, provided his own list of parishes with a strong missionary agenda, which also included both protagonists of this paper (D. Pospelovsky, 1998).

14. G. Kochetkov’s theory splits Christian history into three parts: pre-Constantinian (early apostolic Christianity) – Constantinian (state church model) and Post-Constantinian (our times). What he believes is needed now is the return to pre-Constantinian patterns (see: Father G. Kochetkov, 1991: 21-22).

15. The post-socialist myth of revival endowed “parish,” in line with the 1917-1918 Council, with a supposed potential of democratization and “renewal from below,” but the restoration of a strong Church hierarchy, with a dependent status of parish, made such renewal impossible. At the same time, the restoration of the pre-revolutionary, “synodal” system of parishes proved to be an illusion. A decline of the traditional parish system in the Roman Catholic Church was captured by scholars declaring the end of the “parochial civilization” that occurred throughout the second part of the 20th century (see Y. Lambert, 1985; D. Hervieu-Léger, 2003).

16. The Cosma & Damian community operates as a formal parish within Moscow diocese, and there are certainly believers who come to the church from the neighbourhood; yet the majority travel on Sundays or other days from remote areas, thus preferring C&D to “territorial” churches. G. Kochetkov’s Commonwealth has had no parish of its own since 1997 and operates as a network of tightly-knit brotherhoods representing Moscow and some other cities, but the territorial location is not at all substantial.

collectivity rather than to build a traditional parish: “not a parish in its traditional formal sense, not a church administrative unit, but a living organic cell of the Church: a community.” (A. Borisov, 1993: 94). Parish, a Commonwealth member said, with all its economic and administrative functions, diverts from what is the main thing (interview: R-7 [20.12.2008]). The parish, if not rejected, should be stuffed with real, sincere, communitarian content: parish should evolve into a “community” and finally a “brotherhood.”

The early Christian *ecclesia*, once again, was chosen as an ultimate model, based on Eucharistic communion; the term used here was *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*), intimate participatory communion within a local church around *this particular chalice*, that is, a combination of Eucharistic unity with social, brotherly proximity. Both groups also appreciated and tried to introduce *agapas* – post- or extra-liturgical gatherings of Christian love, which go back to the same apostolic times. Both Commonwealth and C&D have practiced, from the very beginning, so called “small groups” as a major organizational pattern; “small groups” meet regularly to pray, discuss the Scripture and confess to each other personal problems, thus providing an immediate experience of sharing mystical and social solidarity, as well as a sort of psychotherapy¹⁷. Some of liturgical modifications in both communities were supposed to boost the sense of *sobornost'* (togetherness; Kochetkov proposed the term *mestnaia sobornost'* – local togetherness) and participatory involvement of the laity in the liturgy: for example, saying priestly prayers loudly aloud (unlike in canonical practice); singing prayers together by the entire liturgical community (not just by the choir); introducing sermon after each gospel reading; etc. Over-emphasizing the gulf between laity and clergy has always been an object of criticism in the common rhetoric of these groups.

Two types of authority and community

Searching for “relevant revival” requires not only a legitimating authority of a chain of memory (a selected chain of historical sources/references), but also a particular institutional authority that keeps a community together. We have seen

17. The large parish of C&D is made up of a number of smaller groups, both formal and informal. The pattern of the “small groups” (*malaia gruppya*) was first introduced by A. Men' in 1970s-1980s for both pragmatic (the conditions of semi-underground) and spiritual considerations; by the time of his death in 1990, there were about ten such groups. About the same time a similar pattern was spread in the Roman Catholic Church in Europe. This pattern was much more common in Protestant denominations with a strong congregational penchant (“home churches”). According to my observation, there are up to three-four dozens such groups called “gospel groups” (*evangel'skie gruppy*) in C&D. For many respondents the small group is “my home”; one of A. Men's followers, however, was rather skeptical of such groups and called them “collections of lonely, dispersed people” (*sbor odinokikh, dispersnykh ludei*) that provides a “necessary therapy” (interview: R-14 [27/02/2009]).

that the traditional references invoked by both groups seem to be largely overlapping; by contrast, it is in the institutional structure, where we will find radical differences. It is true, that in both cases we can see a similar emphasis on strong community and family-like “small groups”; but the understanding of *how* a community is organized (beyond its Eucharistic basis) and *how* the “small groups” are bound together, is essentially different. We will see that these two “alternative spaces,” as we defined them earlier, have had a different *sense of boundary* from the rest of the social space around. What, then, are the crucial differences between the two subcultures?

First of all, G. Kochetkov’s Commonwealth has been much more radical and consistent in pursuing the project of revival-through-reform; it was a conscious and risky laboratory in (re)creating a new *ecclesia*. G. Kochetkov was much more systematic and went much further in creating a community with strong identity and commitment; he invented a much more elaborate system of catechization and Christian education; he initiated much more radical liturgical reforms. G. Kochetkov’s radicalism and audacious intransigence led to severe administrative repressions by the Church hierarchy in the mid-1990s: as said before, the Patriarch accused the group of sectarianism, deprived it of centrally-located Moscow parishes, and temporarily forbade G. Kochetkov from conducting divine services. The Commonwealth survived but its activities were curtailed.¹⁸

About the same time as G. Kochetkov was repressed, the C&D also went through major troubles. The image of Father A. Men’, who was seen by Church extreme conservatives as a crypto-Catholic, crypto-Jew, ecumenist, and heretic, has affected the public image of C&D. The criticism of A. Borisov as being too “Protestant” and too liberal was also quite severe. At some point, the parish was on the point of being destroyed (simply by removing the priests with the Patriarchal power). It did not happen precisely because it did not claim to be – and was not – a strong autonomous structure, a challenge to authority, as in the case of G. Kochetkov’s community. Nevertheless, A. Borisov was forced to change his policy and to find a compromise, the price being a shift to a more traditional, if not conservative, stance. He had to accept the nomination, by

18. At the diocesan meeting of the Moscow diocese in December 1997, the year of the repression against the community of G. Kochetkov, Patriarch Alexii II said about this case: “The fact is that the pseudo-missionary activity at this parish was directed to attract spiritual seekers not so much to Christ and to the Church but specifically to their own parish community. What happened in this parish was the emergence of an absolutely intolerable cult of the leading priest, whose authority was considered higher than the authority of the Hierarchy. Therefore, the very principles of canonical order have been violated. Church liturgical traditions have been blatantly disregarded in this community. The community opposed itself to other parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church and was, in fact, evolving into a sect-type community.” (“Radonezh” #21 (65), December 1997). In 2000 he again received the right to conduct priestly services and since then he co-served at various Moscow churches. He never got back the position of Dean. The activities of his followers have since been mostly performed by the Union of Brotherhoods and a college called the St. Filaret Institute.

bishop's decree, of two other parish priests (Ioann Vlasov and Alexander Kuzin) who were definitely not of the same "cup of tea." Over 1990s and 2000s the overall orientation of the parish changed: as the Dean confirmed to me in an interview (R-8 [22.12.2008]), the parish continued to grow rapidly in size and diversity, and certainly evolved. Viewed from this point, we can talk about weakening of the parish's initial orientation towards religiously sensitive cultural elite and intelligentsia, who certainly made up the core in the early 1990s. Of exceptional significance for maintaining the spirit of this subgroup was deep and charismatic impact of another priest, Father Georgii Chistiakov (1953-2007), whose pastoral style uniquely matched the tastes of the parish intelligentsia; his service counterbalanced the trend just mentioned. However, although this subgroup certainly retained core positions in the overall informal structure of the parish¹⁹, they have now found themselves surrounded by large new groups of different social origin possessing various kinds of religiousness.

Pavel Men', Father Alexander's brother, says about a general trend in Russian Church: the masses who joined the Russian Church in the 1990s, brought with them "pagan attitudes" to which the clergy has to adjust; the intelligentsia who were prominent in the late Soviet times were pushed aside (interview: R-5 [31.10.2008]). Now C&D is home for people representing the entire urban social spectrum. Accordingly, the dominant discourse in the parish has evolved. What you can now hear from the C&D key people, including A. Borisov himself, is the idea of *open Christianity*, implying openness to various forms of worship and all types of believers. Father A. Borisov says that he himself became more careful to comprehend the "emotional, irrational side of worship: music, prayer, images..." (interview: R-8 [22.12.2008]). It should be added that the successor of A. Men's parish in *Novaya Derevnia*, Father Vladimir Arkhipov, from the very beginning a more traditional priest, has backed a more orthodox and more Russian type of worship (interview: R-15 [18.03.2009]). A few other respondents said they rediscovered, with time, the mysticism of icons and saints (interviews: R-3 [16.05.2008]; R-5[31.10.2008]).

This shift over time was scornfully referred to by some dissenters as concessions, betrayal of principles, moving to traditionalism, and so forth. A crisis in the parish was mentioned by many of my respondents. The crisis led to some splits. The church of the Dormition of Theotokos at Uspenskii Vrazhek (*Uspenia Bogoroditsy v Uspenskom Vrazhke*) headed by Father Vladimir Lapshin, represents an interesting contrast. V. Lapshin was a priest in C&D and then received

19. This particular image and spirit were supported by a few factors: personal impact of the Dean (Borisov) and of the late Father Georgii Chistiakov; the key role of A. Men's family (his brother heads the Men' Foundation located in the Church; his widow is the parish churchwarden (*starosta*); his son who is a high ranking official, supported the parish); the key role of A. Men's *spiritual children* (immediate disciples, *dukhovnye chada*) in the parish council and *de facto* defining the parish life (although they are split into a few groups who are not necessarily close to each other).

a new church where he maintained in more pure form the C&D traditions of the earliest period. Many parishioners of C&D, unsatisfied with what they believed to be a trend towards conformity, moved to V. Lapshin's new church (which is, by the way, 15 minutes' walking distance from C&D). The V. Lapshin parish is much smaller, but closer to the "reformist" line in terms of interior, liturgical innovations, and the composition of churchgoers. In spite of this contrast, however, the priests of both churches maintain friendly relationships, and both parishes share a common identity with the tradition of A. Men'.

A. Borisov's loyal followers would, responding to the critics, praise the priest's wisdom that allowed the parish to survive and to grow (the nomination of the new priests and stylistic looseness were seen as a price for survival). The feelings were complex: as one respondent rendered it, "Borisov somehow paused, we were even offended... But we understand now that it could not be otherwise..." (interview: R-19 [06.05.2009]). Overall, in my opinion, there was a *forced* compromise here, but I would assume that a certain inherent flexibility, going back to the founder (A. Men'), explained the possibility of such a shift.

This inherent flexibility of C&D became the main target of criticism by G. Kochetkov's followers. The Kochetkov Commonwealth's strategy, in spite of the crackdown by church bureaucracy, was – in sharp contrast to C&D – a further development of a rigid and identity-driven community. The Commonwealth is structured as a network and a hierarchy: it is divided into brotherhoods, and then down to communities – small groups (initially formed by people who went together through a very elaborate process of catechization). The membership is fixed (you never find this in parishes including C&D). There is also a hierarchy of membership, depending on a stage of initiation (catechumen – "church members" – "full family members"); the type of membership defines access to various extra-liturgical meetings or events (G. Kochetkov 1991, 17-33). Although the structure has considerably changed over time – especially after G. Kochetkov was deprived of his own parish, and, therefore, the Eucharistic center – the organizational *style* persisted: a marked sense of openness/closeness, of us *versus* them. The main pillar of G. Kochetkov's experiment, speaking in sociological terms, was, above all, his own strong personal charisma, which resulted in the emergence of an *exclusive authority space*. The commitment of members has been very much centered on G. Kochetkov's leadership; the traditional mechanism of spiritual guidance (*dukhovnichestvo*) – spiritual father-son/daughter relationship based on confession – played a much more important role here.

The conflict of authority has been essential in the events that led to administrative repressions by the Hierarchy; in fact, the main accusation was sectarianism²⁰.

20. See note 18 above.

The mid-1990s was the time when the Moscow Patriarchate made continuous efforts to restore administrative discipline within the Church; the G. Kochetkov case coincided with the campaign against the so-called *mladostartsy* (“young elders”) – charismatic, authoritarian priests who were said to have abused priestly power to create groups of highly committed devotees. The “young elders” have been condemned by a special ruling of the Holy Synod (see: Synod, 1999). G. Kochetkov’s project of a new type of congregation – a *communion-based-community* – was clearly a challenge to the conservative Church mainstream, which opposed the pursuit of spontaneous solidarity. Yet the centrality of communion (the Eucharist), which by the end of the twentieth century has become a general trend – certainly so in the groups that inherited A. Men’s tradition, too – did not necessarily lead to such a radical challenge to traditional authority structure. In G. Kochetkov’s case, the spontaneous Eucharistic community was coupled with a distinctive strictness and leader-centered discipline²¹. The *exclusive authority space*, created around G. Kochetkov’s charismatic leadership, is responsible for general rigidity of the Commonwealth structure: fixed membership, hierarchy of communities, degrees of openness/closeness, etc.

This strikingly contrasted to a looser, more flexible network of autonomous small groups and individuals making up the C&D congregation²². The reason

21. Many parishioners of C&D believed that G. Kochetkov’s brotherhoods have “too much of communitarianism” (*slishkom mnogo obshchinnosti*); “too much of militaristic spirit” (*slishkom voenizirovannaia*); that it is therefore a certain “order” or a “sect” within the church (as we see, this opinion reverberates with the official justification for disbanding G. Kochetkov’s parish in 1997). For their part, the Commonwealth people have been skeptical about the looseness of the C&D community; as a Commonwealth respondent said, “When you come to liturgy their [C&D church] nobody even notices you” [*nikto tebia dazhe ne zamechaet*] (interview: R-22 [10.03.2010]). (In the debates between the two groups, it is interesting how both sides, in fact, reproach the other with the lack of personalism (*bezlichnost’*), although for two opposite reasons: rooted either in *too much* or in *too little* community). Some people from C&D, especially the younger ones, do admit this shortcoming; as one respondent says: “There is no real sociality in the church” (*v khrame net nastoiashchego obshshchenia*), and his response was to join, along with some parish friends, an ecumenical group for young couples, which offers this intense sociality they badly need (interview: R-18 [05.05.2009]). Another respondent, who moved from Commonwealth to C&D, complained that in C&D “people get out of hand (*ras-puskaiutsia*), and sometimes one would wish more strictness” (interview: R-7 [20.12.2008]). Many young parish people join tightly-knit, “passionate” groups such as the one headed by a Moscow monk-priest Evgenii Peristyĭ, who uses elements of charismatic worship.

22. An exception within the C&D parish structure was a community called *Hosanna* created by A. Men’s lay disciples Karina and Andrei Cherniak; this was, as many respondents told me, the only attempt to build a real community. Karina in an interview referred to Father Men as saying that an Orthodox sense of sacraments should be combined with a Protestant sense of community (interview: R-13 [24.02.2009]). In brief, many see the group as a separate entity with strong solidarity and religious commitment, and with Protestant-like practices (elements of charismatic “praise and glory” worship, etc.) The group went through its own crisis in the 1990s (some respondents believe that it was a crisis of authority) but then continued with various activities in a separate “Christian centre” (without breaking off spiritually from the C&D parish). This group deserves special attention, but not in this paper.

for such contrast lies in an essential difference in the nature of personal charisma of the leaders. Alexander Borisov has a reputation as a softer type of character. Respondents praise the C&D parish spirit for making no emphasis on rules, taboos, and restrictions (interviews: R-3 [16.05.2008]; R-10 [30.12.2008]). As for the community's founding father and initial leader, A. Men', who was a no less powerful personality than G. Kochetkov, he also had direct relationships with his followers which were the axis of the subculture; yet, as far as we know, he did not envisage – even after the restrictions on religion were removed in the last years of his life – to creating a tight, rigid, membership-based community. “His parish was a free space (*vol'nitsa*), he did not create a community, he simply valued everybody” (interview: R-19 [06.05.2009]). A. Men' certainly preferred informal networking to any kind of formalization. A. Men' was certainly less selective and more inclusive in his pastoral and missionary practice. His personality kept this network of diverse people together, and after his death the network split into groups with different styles, each creating a different image of the late priest. Also, A. Men' was never as radical in ecclesiastical and liturgical novelties: he preferred careful, step-by-step modifications to “reform” as a declared conceptual project²³.

On a more general level, we can find the essential difference in the two leaders' (and therefore, of the two communities') relation to Russian Christian tradition as such. Both related to the “catacomb” churchliness of the Soviet times, and both reproduced the deeply informal, mystical pattern of spiritual guidance (*dukhovnichestvo*) which became, in the Soviet underground, the pivot of religious life. Both stressed the centrality of Eucharistic communion and both were open to Christianity beyond denominational borders. However, the roots were not identical. A. Men' came from a very devout Christian background (through his mother and a “catacomb” network)²⁴. By contrast, G. Kochetkov,

23. One weak point in this analysis is that we do not know how the changing circumstances and growing popularity would have changed A. Men's vision and activities, were he not murdered in 1990, at the very start of a new era of Russian society and religion. We can only rely on his lifetime agenda and the witness of his followers to reconstruct his character as a man and a pastor. Yet, I believe, the evolution of C&D (also keeping in mind a somewhat stricter *Uspenie* parish of V. Lapshin) may characterize the inherent type of the subculture.

24. The issue of A. Men's Jewish background – both his atheist father and devoutly Christian mother were Jewish – deserves special exploration: how did this fact and identity influence Men's worldview and work? One certain consequence was his ecumenical openness and lack of nationalism (neither Russian nor Jewish). Secondly, the fact of his origin would attract to him a large number of Jewish intelligentsia inclined to Christianity (see J. D. Kornblatt, 2004). Thirdly, the same fact ignited special resentment against him in more conservative and ethnocentric Russian Orthodox circles. Fourthly, A. Men's deep feeling of Judeo-Christian continuity (seen, among other things, in his biblical scholarship) made him more conservative, more holistic in his perception of church tradition, more careful in maintaining the fullness of *orthopraxy*, less radical in liturgical reforms; therefore, as a close disciple testifies, A. Men' was pragmatic in terms of divine services: he did not pay much attention to liturgics as church discipline (interview: R-15 [18.03.2009]).

coming from a secular background, became a self-made seeker-turned-neophyte constructing his spiritual ancestry from scratch, as a deliberate, rational (and passionate!) enterprise. This led to differences in ecclesiological program and in the style of spiritual guidance. Both associated themselves with a tradition of spontaneous, grass-roots churchliness distanced from state-controlled, bureaucratic, “Byzantine” type ecclesiology. However, Men’ created a flexible network of followers, while G. Kochetkov launched an elaborate project of a tightly-knit, boundary-conscious, authoritarian community. A. Men’s *inclusive* ecclesiology accepted all who came; G. Kochetkov’s *exclusive* approach was selective, aimed at creating a homogeneous church culture. G. Kochetkov was more conscious in inventing his “chain of memory”: he strongly referred to historical precedents of a strong, real, highly autonomous community. One can find this spiritual lineage in the writings by G. Kochetkov himself and his followers. In a historical account of brotherhoods and communities in Russian tradition, Viktor Kott (he later broke with G. Kochetkov) refers to “confessional families” which, as he claims, have existed in Russia since the earliest times until around the reign of Peter the Great (early 18th century); spontaneous monastic communities of “non-possessors” of 15th century; “God-lovers” of 17th century; St. Paissii Velichkovsky’s community in the late 18th century; brotherhoods in the 19th century; a church community of Alexii and Sergey Mechev in early 20th century (see V. Kott, 2000). “Spiritual guidance” was conceived as a more rigid and exigent in G. Kochetkov’s project – in this sense, he reproduced a more conservative authoritarian pattern found in Russian tradition and revived in post-socialist Russia.

The dialectic of “centrality” and “marginality”

As I said at the beginning, the type of religiousness we have seen in this paper can be best understood in terms developed by D. Hervieu-Léger’s research on religious modernity. The core of both our subcultures belongs to what she called *pèlerins* (“pilgrims,” similar in this context to *seekers*) who became *convertis* (“converts,” who “joined” religion as an *identité choisie*, chosen identity²⁵). The “internal imperative and personal choice” is what makes the basis of such religiousness (*Ibid.*: 95), – in contrast to the *default* cultural identity of the mainstream religion and to those “traditional practitioners,” *les pratiquants* in D. Hervieu-Léger’s terms, with a different “type of sociability” based upon “obligation” rather than choice (*Ibid.*: 95: 109). In the different context of the United States, N. Ammerman speaks of “choice-based congregations” (N. Ammerman, 1997: 353).

25. D. Hervieu-Léger classifies converts into three categories: those who changed religion, those who came from no-religion, and those “internal converts” who changed from nominal to committed belonging (D. Hervieu-Léger, 1999: 119-125). In our case, the second and third categories, strongly overlapped in post-soviet society, were certainly the majority in our groups.

Our two communities may be also dubbed “liberal” in conventional terms, and belonging to “religious modernity”, for a number of reasons: because they address themselves to the intelligentsia; because they distance themselves from an official great narrative of the “National Church”; because they are relatively open to the experiences of other Christian churches and because they seek to be socially relevant, active in missionary terms, and civically involved. This agenda of relevance seems to appeal to large numbers of urban, middle-aged and educated people, and, I would argue, the experience of these communities reflects some major – although not dominant – trends of Russian religious life (and society). Both subcultures absorb and produce a type of *agency* which wants the sacred to be relevant to the modern and postmodern social and cultural trends. They both are, to use N. Ammerman’s language, “generators of social capital,” “pockets of communal solidarity producing trust” (N. Ammerman, 1997: 363). This social capital makes religious tradition adaptable to, – yet not identical with – the secular, post-Christian society.

At the same time, due to different genesis and the contrast of leaders’ personal charisma, the two subcultures’ modes of adaptation are quite different. The two groups differ in strictness, desired homogeneity, and in acceptance of free-riders (practically none in the Commonwealth and many of those in C&D). Their “liberalism” is, therefore, not the same: “liberal” in one case (Commonwealth) is construed as *uniformity of innovative agenda*; while “liberal” in the second case (C&D) would rather mean *a diversity and flexibility*. Dialectically, both groups are also conservative in their own ways: the Commonwealth, because of its strictness, and C&D, because of its flexibility (which means openness to traditionalistic forms of religiosity). Both groups may draw upon the same milieu, but, perhaps, each attracts people with somewhat contrasting disposition for stronger or softer sociality and a different type of guidance.

Elaborating on this contrast’s social consequences, it would be appropriate to refer to Robert Putnam’s distinction between the two types of social capital, produced and possessed by a community: *bonding* and *bridging*. The *bonding* social capital relates to social forms that are “inward looking and tend[ing] to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups”; this type of social capital is based on trust and networks *within* the community borders. By contrast, the *bridging* social capital relates to networks that are “outward looking and encompass people across social cleavages;” they are more inclusive and less boundary-sensitive (R. Putnam, 2000: 22-24), I would suppose that G. Kochetkov’s community displays more “bonding,” while the C&D demonstrates a more “bridging” type of social capital.

In a broader sense, the two subcultures represent what D. Hervieu-Léger defined as two ideal-typical, contrasting trends in (current) religious modernity: she calls them *processual* and *substantive*. The first is manifested in a type of

community with unfixed borders and no imposed homogeneity, which operates as a fluid “process” of “mutually accepted ‘convergence’ of members’ individual acts and aspirations”²⁶ (the C&D community in our case). The second trend, by contrast, produces solid, highly cohesive communities – “small worlds of certitudes which ensure an efficient way of putting-in-order individual experiences; therefore, such a community promotes a homogeneity of shared truths, a common code of both beliefs and practices, and fixed group boundaries” (in our case, the Commonwealth)²⁷.

We see that both groups are quite “modern” in many ways and in the deepest sense: they are laboratories of religious modernity. Like some American groups studied by N. Ammerman, they are neither “traditionalistic throwbacks” nor “lifestyle enclaves of individualistic religious consumers” – they are the “social creations of the modern world...” (N. Ammerman, 1997: 352). Yet in the new context that offers new choices of belief and non-belief, they prefer to operate, albeit in very different ways, *within* Tradition, *within* a “chain of memory” which is both Eastern Orthodox and pan-Christian.

How typical – or how exceptional – is a trend towards religious modernity, represented by our two communities, as compared to the Tradition at large? And how relevant are they, in the final analysis, to the entire Russian society? How to approach their real social weight? Are they “central” or “marginal”? In fact, these groups seem to be *both* central and marginal. They are central within the religious field because they belong to the institution that dominates this field – the Russian Orthodox Church, which claims to possess, in terms of Bourdieu, the monopoly for the “means of salvation”; they both are located at the very centre of the capital city, of the Russian social and religious life; they both attract educated urban people who tend to be highly involved in modern secular activities and share many modern secular attitudes. They are, however, on the margins, because of some exceptional qualities they possess: indeed, being “liberal” in contemporary Russian Orthodox culture means to hold alterity: their culture – their articulated message, language, activities, their search for as much administrative and stylistic autonomy as possible (without breaking with the Institution) – is clearly different from the mainstream.

Viewing even more broadly, within societal scope, they are on the margins in a different, deeper sense, because the religious field to which they belong, is, after all, – in spite of an atmosphere tacitly or openly favourable to religion in post-socialist Russia – a marginal segment within the larger, secular society.

26. See D. Hervieu-Léger, 1999: 198: « ... La “convergence” mutuellement reconnue des démarches personnelles de ses membres. »

27. *Ibid.*: « ... petits univers de certitude qui assurent efficacement la mise en ordre de l’expérience des individus. La communauté concrétise alors l’homogénéité de vérités partagées au sein de groupe, et l’acceptation de ce code du croire communautaire, qui embrasse croyances et pratiques, fixe en retour les frontières du groupe. »

But looking from yet a different angle, they are again “central” – or *relatively* central – in terms of their structural location within this predominantly secular society: indeed, being at the “liberal” margins of the Church, actively interacting with the rest of society (as these groups do) – means to be closer to the society’s structural centre. In this sense these groups are, so to speak, at the cutting edge of religious change: they test the solidity of borders: borders between tradition and novelty; between Eastern Orthodoxy and the rest of Christendom; between church and society; between the sacred and the secular.

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Reform and Revival in Moscow Orthodox Communities

Two Types of Religious Modernity

Two Russian Orthodox communities in Moscow in the late 2000s are qualified as special Church subcultures representing the quest for “religious modernity.” Both communities seem to be at the same time “marginal” and “central”: marginal, because they represent a minority group with strong and accented identity and commitment; central, because they are located at the cutting-edge of the negotiation for the tradition’s new place in a changing society. At the same time, sharp differences between the two groups in the structure of spiritual authority and the individual/group relationship represent the two different types of religious modernity.

Key words: Russian Orthodox Church, religious modernity, congregation, community and individual, post-Soviet religiosity.

Réforme et Renaissance dans les communautés orthodoxes moscovites Deux types de modernité religieuse

Deux communautés orthodoxes russes moscovites, à la fin des années 2000, sont décrites comme des sous-cultures spéciales de l'Église en quête de « modernité religieuse ». Ces deux communautés semblent être à la fois « marginales » et « centrales ». Marginales parce qu'elles représentent un groupe minoritaire avec une identité et un engagement solides; centrales parce qu'elles se trouvent à la pointe de la négociation d'une nouvelle place pour la tradition dans le changement social. En même temps, les différences marquées entre les deux groupes en ce qui concerne la structure d'autorité spirituelle et la relation individu/groupe représentent les deux différents types de la modernité religieuse.

Mots-clés : église orthodoxe russe, modernité religieuse, congrégation, communauté et individu, religiosité post-soviétique.

Reforma y revitalización en los comunidades Ortodoxas de Moscú Dos tipos de modernidad religiosa

Dos comunidades ortodoxas rusas en Moscú a fines de la década del 2000 son calificadas como subculturas especiales de la Iglesia, dado que representan la búsqueda de "modernidad religiosa". Ambos comunidades parecen ser a un tiempo "marginales" y "centrales": marginales porque representan una minoría con una fuerte y destacada identidad y compromiso. Son centrales, porque están ubicados en la vanguardia de la negociación de un nuevo lugar de la Tradición en una sociedad cambiante. Al mismo tiempo, diferencias nítidas entre los dos grupos en la estructura de la autoridad espiritual y la relación grupo-individuo muestran dos tipos diferentes de modernidad religiosa.

Palabras clave: Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa, modernidad religiosa, congregación, comunidad e individuo, religiosidad post-soviética.