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STATE, RELIGION and CHURCH

Vol. 7 (2) 2020

STATE, RELIGION and CHURCH

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STATE, RELIGION and CHURCH

State, Religion and Church is an academic peer-reviewed journal devoted to the interdisciplinary scholarly study of religion.

Published twice yearly under the aegis of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.

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Channeling, Agency, and Strategic Information: The "Semiotic Ideologies" of New Age Culture

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One important aspect of religious practices and representations concerns the way information is handled. This article understands religion as a form of imagination, giving human properties to "nonhuman" agents (and vice versa), and thus, the rules of communication and interaction with such agents play a special role in religious culture. Webb Keane's theory of "semiotic ideologies" is one tool that facilitates the study of religious norms, expectations, and rules. In New Age culture, practices of "information exchange" with imaginary superhuman agents and transpersonal forces are based on specific psychophysical techniques, often called "channeling" or "contact." The analysis of specific ethnographic examples related to ufological channeling demonstrates that this practice forms new types of collective agency, a distinctive feature of New Age culture itself.

ONE IMPORTANT aspect of religious practices and representations concerns the way information is handled. If one understands religion as a form of imagination, giving human properties to "nonhuman" agents (and vice versa), one can expect that the rules of communication and interaction with such agents play a special role in shaping religious culture. Indeed, the ritual norms, expectations, and rules that anthropologists of religion study can be viewed as the study of the needs (and problems) of that exchange of information between people and certain "otherworldly" (that is, nonhuman) beings and forces. This approach is equally applicable to prayer and fortune-telling, sacrifice and demonic possession, and child "summoning" and Spiritualist séances. Webb Keane's concept of "semiotic ideologies," which shifts a researcher's attention from the process of meaning and interpretation to its social prerequisites, conditions, and consequences, presents a convenient analytical tool for studying the aforementioned norms, expectations, and rules in this context (Keane 2003, 419). Keane's ideas facilitate the analysis of local and historically-conditioned methods of communication with the transcendent, as well as the comparison of different perceptions of media and material carriers of "otherworldly information." Below I will try to demonstrate some of the perspectives of this concept in relation to contemporary New Age culture.

In New Age culture, practices of "information exchange" with imaginary superhuman agents and transpersonal forces are based on specific psychophysical techniques, mainly "channeling" or "contact" (Hanegraaff 1996, 23–41; Wood 2007; Hammer 2001, 369–73, 393–401). "Channeling," as defined by British sociologist of religion Matthew Wood, is "a form of spirit possession in which the spirit is held to be a religious master of some sort (rather than an ordinary deceased human, as in spiritualism, or a deity, as in paganism or Pentecostalism), whose primary purpose is to deliver messages of general interest to humans regarding the current state of, and future changes to, the world and our place within it" (Wood 2007, 101). Researchers of New Age culture have long recognized the prominent place of channeling. According to Wouter Hanegraaff: "

> There can be no doubt about its central importance in the genesis of New Age religion. Many of the fundamental New Age beliefs . . . have first been formulated in channeled messages. It is therefore fair to say that, in spite of the tendency among New Age believers to emphasize personal experience as the exclusive basis of religious truth, New Age religion must to a large extent be considered a religion of revelation [*Offenbarungsreligion*] (Hanegraaff 1996, 27).

In such a generalized perspective, channeling, of course, does not differ much from prophecy, including prophecy as depicted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. At the same time, it has a number of specific features and properties as an emic category.

The genesis of channeling is closely related to the history of Spiritualism and Theosophy, which proliferated in Western culture at the end of the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century. In essence, channeling is a logical continuation of the Spiritualist technique, with the only difference being that it does not require any special devices, (e.g. a table with a pencil inserted in it), ritualized "séances," or the presence of a virtuoso pretending to possess the charisma of a "medium." Conveniently, anyone can be a channeler, although special abilities or training under an experienced mentor may also be required. This "democratism of revelation" in New Age culture is comparable to the perception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, in both cases, the information transmitted by prophecy becomes a discursive field for social competition and struggle.

Although initially supported, Wood's claim that channeling did not imply communication with the "ordinary dead," but rather with "spiritual teachers" has begun to be scrutinized (Hammer 2001, 380–82). Initially, it had a number of supporters. Helena Blavatsky argued that she received the "secret doctrine" and Elena Roerich the "living ethics" from "ascended masters" or "teachers of eternal wisdom," that is, from human beings who differed not only in their degree of spiritual development, but also in their paranormal abilities (telekinesis, telepathy, etc. . .). Thus, the technologies of "communication with the otherworldly" used by Blavatsky and Roerich generally inherited the practices of Spiritualism, but significantly changed the status of the addressees: they were not ordinary people, but superhuman beings with special knowledge and capabilities. Jane Roberts, for example, received "spiritual knowledge" from Seth, an "energy personality essence" (Roberts 1970, 13). Here, however, the idea of individuality was quite different from that of Theosophy. One of the most significant innovations in New Age anthropology is a kind of "distribution of agency," whereby any personal consciousness is a part of the one God or the universal soul (Hanegraaff 1996, 207–10). This approach, of course, makes it more difficult to distinguish between addresser and addressee, but does not deny them individual agency. The channeler, however, seems to double, as the principle of "self-divinity" (Klin-Oron 2015, 363–65), implying that he or she is both an ordinary person and a superhuman agent at the same time, or, in Mar-

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shall McLuhan's terms, both a medium and a message. "In sum," notes Hugh Urban, "it is not simply the *medium* who is the message — that is, both the spokesperson for the divine and herself divine; rather, *we are all the message* insofar as we are each potential channels for the divine transmission of our own inherent godliness" (Urban 2015, 326).

Channeling practices, however, also involve interaction with more familiar types of agents, namely beings from extraterrestrial civilizations, who "like benevolent deities, . . . care about the planet Earth, . . . about the human race, . . . about human politics, and . . . about the well-being of individual humans" (Partridge 2015, 390). According to Christopher Partridge, aliens have become significant characters in the Western occult and may even assist in communication in both the Spiritualist and the Theosophical tradition (Partridge 2015, 394–95). However, it is among channeling practices, whose formation and spread coincided with the "ufological boom," that extraterrestrial civilizations functioned as important communication partners for individuals, nations, and humanity as a whole.

Thus, the recipients of channeling can be "spiritual teachers," aliens, or holistically understood transpersonal forces. The boundaries between these types of agents are often rather blurred, especially as practitioners are free to address all of them. In this context, it is fair to speak not only about the similarity of channeling with the practices of Spiritualism and Theosophy, but also about its specifics. Discussing the media-specific features of channeling, Urban suggests that this form of religious revelation "was uniquely adapted to the new environment of television, where the medium really was the message. . . . Although there is now a good deal of literature on the subject of religion and television . . . , channeling represents perhaps the most explicit but ironically unexplored example of this spiritual-technological interface" (Urban 2015, 321). Although this analogy between channeling and TV channels may not seem obvious, the media specificity of religious revelation in New Age culture certainly deserves attention.

In her research on religion and media in the modern world, Birgit Meyer suggests using the term "sensational forms," which complements the concept of semiotic ideologies. According to Meyer:

> Sensational forms are relatively fixed modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental, offering structures of repetition to create and sustain links between believers in the context of particular religious regimes. These forms are transmitted and shared; they involve religious practitioners in particular practices of worship, and play a cen-

tral role in modulating them as religious moral subjects and communities (Meyer 2013, 315).

In other words, unlike Keane's approach, which implies special attention to the typology of signs and conventional methods of their interpretation, Meyer's concept considers the role of media and the social in organizing religious experience. Proceeding from this, she builds a typology of "modalities of media" characteristic of various "religious regimes." If the boundaries between the medium and the message are not quite clear, i.e. in the case of icon worship, where the material object is not separated from the "spiritual forces" it embodies, the medium tends to "disappear." If the (in)appropriateness of an existing medium becomes the subject of discussion and/or alternative options appear, i.e. in the reception of sacred images and biblical text by Protestants, it is permissible to speak of "contested" media. Finally, media can become "hyper-apparent": this is particularly the case with the use of modern communication technologies in charismatic Christianity (Meyer 2013, 317–20).

This model encounters some difficulties, however, when applied to channeling practices. On the one hand, since the medium here is always the contactor himself, who, according to Urban's idea, turns into something like a TV with a set of channels, it seems possible to claim the disappearance of media. On the other hand, the abovementioned agents, who act as channeling addressers, refer to slightly different modalities of media. In my opinion, the disadvantage of Keane's and Meyer's approaches is that they do not pay sufficient attention to the types of and cognitive characteristics of the agents involved in the informational exchange with the transcendent. Thus, it seems that additional analytical tools are needed

It is necessary to return to more general issues of human interaction with "invisible partners" in "religious communication." The semiotic ideologies on which these practices are based imply a close link between the cognitive status of communicators, the significance of information, and the means of transmission. This interdependence is clearly demonstrated by Pascal Boyer, who believes that the characters of the religious imagination have the status of *full access agents* (FAA) — agents with "full access to strategic information." He writes:

> Strategic information is the subset of all the information currently available (to a particular agent, about a particular situation) that activates the mental systems that regulate social interaction. [. . .] In social interac-

tion, we presume that other people's access to strategic information is neither perfect nor automatic. [. . .] There is a general difference between our intuitive representation of humans we interact with and our intuitive representation of supernatural agents. The latter are *full-access strategic agents* — agents whom one construes as having access to any piece of information that is strategic. That is, given a particular situation, and given some information that activates one's inference systems, one assumes that the full-access strategic agent has access to that information (Boyer 2001, 152–58).

In other words, access to strategic information is a prerequisite for choices in any social situation. This is not simply about the FAA's omniscience, but also the fact that their knowledge and actions are critical to individual and collective actions. Boyer, in particular, illustrates this idea with the following example. If one compares the two statements — "God knows the contents of every refrigerator in the world" and "God knows you are lying" — the second statement is more familiar and more significant. However, in certain contexts, the contents of the refrigerator will also matter, for example, "if that includes items you stole from your neighbors" (Boyer 2001, 158). According to Boyer, the human brain easily (without resorting to complex inferences, but following intuitive patterns) distinguishes between strategic and non-strategic information, as well as differences between FAAs and all other imaginary and non-imaginary agents.

In general, these considerations by Boyer (as well as his concept of religion more broadly) imply a more parasitic view of the FAA. "What is 'important' to human beings, because of their evolutionary history," he argues, "are the conditions of social interaction: who knows what, who is not aware of what, who did what with whom, when and what for. Imagining agents with that information is an illustration of mental processes driven by relevance. Such agents are not really necessary to explain anything, but they are so much easier to represent and so much richer in possible inferences that they enjoy a great advantage in cultural transmission" (Boyer 2001, 167). In other words, FAA images are primarily used in culture to perform, say, emphasize, and legitimize. Boyer suggests three types of such agents — "legislators," "exemplars," and "onlookers" — emphasizing that the latter type is usually at the center of all religious practices.

It is worth asking, however, what kind of information these interested onlookers share with humanity. In one situation, a demon-possessed woman may report the name of a village sorcerer who harms

her fellow villagers; in another, she may report the special hatred that demons have toward the Orthodox, thus asserting the primacy of Orthodoxy over all other Christian denominations. It is clear that the discovery of a harmful sorcerer is directly related to strategic information and the social choice of community members. The topic of "the triumph of Orthodoxy," however, may or may not be related to such a choice — here, as in the case of refrigerators, everything depends on context. Often, however, information shared with people by such agents is purely abstract and often unlikely to be perceived as strategic. The most obvious example is Pentecostal glossolalia, where the semiotic status of speech is not in itself disputed, but the difficulty or impossibility of deciphering it is. The Holy Spirit speaks likely important but incomprehensible things with the mouth of a possessed person. A few other factors are also important here: the anthropomorphism of the consciousness of the FAA, his or her presence in a particular community, and with whose mouths he or she speaks.

Boyer probably should have more thoroughly discussed the FAA's motives and intention, in short were they "good" or "evil." Clearly, this binary is not exhaustive — especially in the perspective of a cognitive approach, where the manifold goals and intentions of the "interested observers" vary based on the people with whom they have to deal. Their initial intentions, however, can be described in terms of aggression and benevolence, harm and benefit, as well as sincerity and deception.

On the basis of these considerations, I have formulated three principal questions with which to explore obsession and revelation in the context of local semiotic ideologies:

1. Why do FAAs in some religious communities use the human body to communicate with believers, while those in other communities do not?

2. Why do FAAs report strategic information in some cases and not in others?

3. How do the expected intentions and behavioral strategies of the FAAs correlate with the nature of the information transmitted?

The first of these questions is the subject of quite a lot of research, which offers quite different answers (Boddy 1994, 407–34; Cohen 2007, 59–97; Huskinson and Schmidt 2010, 1–15; Halloy and Naumescu 2012, 155–76). One of the most common (albeit often criticized) approaches uses neo-Marxist rhetoric. In the words of James Scott, spirit possession is the "weapon of the weak," a means of symbolic resistance against social, economic, or gender domination (Lew-

is 1966, 307–29). In this perspective, the charisma of either the possessed or of a prophet, who opposes the routine social structure, turns out to be a gift that makes it possible to acquire a new status and influence, to bypass existing norms, and so on. Another interpretive model of obsession, formulated by Janice Boddy and built upon the ideas of Bourdieu, Gramsci, and Foucault, is nearly the opposite. Criticizing medicalizing and functionalist approaches to obsession research, Boddy (as well as a number of other researchers) focuses on the *embodiment* of spirits as a paradoxical means of maintaining and reproducing moral and gender norms:

> The possessed learn a spirit anti-language that metaphorically alters quotidian terms. . . *Zar* is at once a healing rite and a parodical means to domesticate male and alien powers, an ambiguous metacommentary on local morality, and a history and anthropology of life in colonial and post-colonial Sudan. I accent its comedic and aesthetic dimensions by comparing it to satirical allegory, where the historical consciousness of the village is vividly dramatized in challenging but also reinvigorating its embodied, engendered, moral order (Boddy 1994, 417).

I think, however, that the social drama of possession, revelation, and prophecy operates with a more intricate set of roles and behavioral strategies. How and why do glossolalia and meaningful prophecies coexist in the same community? How different are the ways and practices of interpreting the speech and behavior of a possessed person in terms of functionality? How do semiotic ideologies combine perceptions of the verbal and action?

Without trying to answer all these questions, I will try to apply this model to the practice of channeling. Before diving in, it is necessary to say that in his arguments Boyer mainly considers examples from archaic cultures and world religions, and does not pay special attention to New Age and other forms of present-day postsecular culture. He does pay some attention to aliens, but does not discuss channeling as a special practice:

> Although many people seem to accept the existence of such beings and the surprisingly efficient governmental cover-up, there are no specific rituals directed at the aliens, the belief seems to trigger in most people no deep emotional commitment, no significant change in lifestyle, no intolerant notion that *we* are better because *we* believe in aliens. If I may speculate, I would add that in the most popular version these aliens are

not described as having what I just defined as strategic knowledge. That is, although the aliens are described as smart fellows with advanced knowledge of physics and engineering, this somehow does not seem to trigger the inference that *they know that my sister lied to me* or *they know that I filed an honest and accurate tax return*. The way believers acquire and represent the "evidence" for alien visits seems to have no bearing on individual behavior.

In contrast to this, a small number of people actually represent aliens in the same way as gods and spirits. In some cults what the aliens know and want makes a huge difference to people's lives. What you can do and how you do it, the way you live and the way you think are all informed by thoughts about the aliens (Boyer 2001, 166).

These statements can hardly be considered ethnographically correct. The "emotional commitment" related to belief in aliens, both in the United States and elsewhere, seems to be characteristic of more than just small and marginal groups like the Heavenly Gate, whose members committed suicide in 1997 to go to the spaceship accompanying the Hale Bopp comet (Zeller 2014). In fact, "ufological" beliefs and practices are an important part of modern mass culture (Lewis 1995; Partridge 2003; Palmer 2004; Reece 2007; Lepselter 2016). Although I cannot judge what percentage of people give aliens FAA status, both "UFO religions" and channeling practices seem to imply more complex variations in agency, including its relationship to imaginary strategic information. To look at this problem in a slightly different way, maybe scholars should consider separately the status of the FAA and the degree of their involvement in human life (or, in other words, belief in their presence). In this sense, theism and deism represent two poles of the collective imagination, between which there can be some sort of intermediate emotional and cognitive models.

The practice of channeling, as a rule, does not deal with glossolalia, but here too, the messages of "invisible partners" are often not very meaningful. They can abound in repetitive moralistic maxims and quasi-scientific reasoning, seemingly unrelated to "strategic information." At the same time, one of the significant and expected leitmotifs of channeling is the theme of a new epoch, which implies impending catastrophes and the physical rebirth of the human being. This often entails quite specific forms of social choice, such as strict dietary prescriptions or a code of conduct. Here, however, it should be assumed that the same medium (whether Pentecostals, "contactors," or some other type of revelation) can transmit different messages in different

contexts in a meaningful (and probably functional) manner. To test this assumption, special and rather painstaking ethnographic work is needed, but even without it, it is possible to try to draw some conclusions based on more disparate materials. Below I will give an example of the mutual connection between the status of channeling recipients, the content of their messages, and the social context of post-Soviet culture.

The example centers on the history of the "Vissarion movement" or the Last Testament Church (hereafter referred to as the LTC) (Panchenko 2011, 119-45). The Church was founded in 1991 by an amateur artist from Minusinsk named Sergei Torop (b. 1961), who claims to be Vissarion, a new incarnation of Jesus Christ. Despite his Christian entourage, known as "the Fulfilment," the LTC's activities, ideology, and the practices are directly related to the culture of the late Soviet New Age, and the movement itself emerged from channeling sessions. Minusinsk was a hub of New Age religion: in 1989 Y. I. Yaklichkin ran "Hypothesis," a club that united ufology and paranormal enthusiasts. In the late 1980s similar clubs, which functioned as local New Age centers, appeared in many cities of the USSR. The scope of activity of Minusinsk's "Hypothesis" was quite broad: it led visits and conducted "research" into various "anomalous zones" (including the so-called "Perm Anomalous Zone," where, according to ufologists, UFOs and other unusual objects had been repeatedly observed); collected information about "paranormal phenomena," including now-forgotten "poltergeists" (Iaklichkin 1996); and it performed various methods of alternative healing (Ol'khova 1996). Channeling was also practiced at the club, mostly with extraterrestrial civilizations.

In 1990, Sergei Torop joined the club. This is what Yaklichkin himself had to say about it in an interview with a Krasnoyarsk journalist:

> Vissarion (Sergey Torop) and his friend Vladimir Plesin were members of our club in 1990. He did not stand out from the crowd of 100 people. Then, we were just trying to make contact. It was not entirely clear to us with whom we were in contact. Some said it was with gods, others said it was with aliens. [. . .] A number of experiments were carried out and in one of them Plesin made contact. When a person makes contact, he writes a report on how it all happened, on what he saw, and on how he got the information. In general, we received information on the substance of the contact. But then we noticed a strange thing: as soon as Plesin made contact, he immediately began to change. He began to receive information about a new religion that was focused on space. In the

end, he separated himself from us. [. . .] In our research on anomalous zones, poltergeists, and contact forms, we found that the contact was not with gods, not with other civilizations, but with other life forms that have a spherical structure. They are recorded on video and captured in photographs. Sometimes they can even be observed visually. This life form was a completely different matter, unfamiliar to us in its physical properties. It is aware of our biology, our constitution, and it can enter into our consciousness and program it. By the way, zombies are the product of these very creatures (Ol'khova 1996).

However, Plesin himself, in his book *The Good News*, which recounts the first years of "Fulfillment," recalls what happened at "Hypothesis" in a slightly different way:

In December 1990, he [Vissarion] appeared for the first time in the lives of many people, including those engaged in ufology. Among them was Vladimir, who had absolutely no thoughts about any religious teaching, let alone comprehension of it. That day, expedition members told the audience about the results of the trip to the anomalous zone of Perm. Among the speakers was Vladimir Plesin, who said that according to the information collected from the extraterrestrial world, a new evolutionary stage in the development of mankind would come, which no one could avoid. [. . .] At the end of the meeting, Vissarion came to Vladimir and asked quietly: "Wasn't it the external world that said the Fulfillment would begin after January 1991?" [. . .] After a while, on New Year's Eve, Vladimir came to Vissarion's house. [. . .] And to the question asked earlier, Vladimir brought forth the answer, revealed to him by the Universe, : "We know about Vissarion. He is the One who will lead humanity to Spirituality and Unity." (Plesin 1998)

The Last Testament (*Poslednii zavet*), the sacred book of the LTC, which contains the chronicle of the "Fulfillment," describes the same episode as follows:

Vladimir Minusinsky, who stayed next to the Teacher on all His trips, had a peculiar feature: his consciousness was able to perceive information from the extraterrestrial world, from external sources, invisible to the human eye. [. . .] In December 1990, when Vladimir saw Vissarion, the man who had once visited the ufological center and modestly watched one of its meetings, he immediately took an interest in this unusual man. Soon extraterrestrial sources told him that Vissarion was

the One who would lead mankind to salvation. [. . .] Shortly thereafter an event occurred in Vladimir's life that changed the quality of the information he received: he heard the voice of the ancient prophets, who live in the invisible world, in the midst of the living on the Earth, and strive to achieve their own presence and to use their wise voice to help people. Vladimir not only heard them, he also saw them. And his heart saw a significant difference in the quality of communication with the extraterrestrial world, with the nonhuman world, and with the circle of saintly brothers, left by the Will of the Great Father in a subtle and material body to aid man. For a human warmth emanated from the ancient prophets, a warmth of heart that in its essence was unrelated to a rational, strict, and logical extraterrestrial world. [. . .] And sometimes with a strict word, the saintly brothers pointed out to their brothers living on the Earth their carelessness in comprehending the Truth or told them about the times when the righteous gave their lives for the Truth of God (*Poslednii zavet. Povestvovanie ot Vadima*, n. d. Pt. 2, ch.3, 63–74).[1]

Thus, Plesin received information on Vissarion's divine mission from extraterrestrial addressers. Soon, however, these extraterrestrials were rebranded as "ancient prophets" also known as the "saintly brothers." Plesin himself wrote in his book: "Many lines in scripture are written in the name of the Saints and prophets of the Lord, of whom you know from the scriptures of the ancients. By the will of God, these twelve Caesars of Heaven, as well as Mother Mary, remain in the midst of us in the spirit of subtlety, fulfilling their destiny" (Plesin 1998). It was Vissarion who prompted this transition from one type of agent to another.[2] Vissarion also mentions the "holy brothers" in his meetings with his followers:

> *Can an astral body last longer [than a physical one]?* Only by the will of the Heavenly Father. If it is necessary to use you to help people, you may

1. The quotations from the Last Testament (*Poslednii zavet*) given in the paper are from an electronic version prepared by the LTC members.

2. In his recent autobiography, ("Znakom'tes', takoi vot ia" [*Meet Me, This I Am*], 2017), published on his personal web-site, Vissarion does not mention that his divine mission was reported to Plesin by aliens and only speaks of an "Old Testament prophet.".: "As Vladimir himself, who was in my house at the time, later on told me, his so-called psychic abilities allowed him to see suddenly an unusual for him appearance of a nice old man, who introduced himself as one of the famous Old Testament prophets. Through Vladimir, he conveyed to me, in a poetic and intricate form, a kind of message, in which, among other things, he expressed his advice that I should use the name Vissarion, which, thinking later, I agreed with." http://vissarion.name/znakomtes-takoj-vot-ya/.

be left with a material life force that can help people. A more complete fulfillment in such a state is performed by the Holy Brothers. You call them fathers, but this is not true: they're your Brothers, you have only one Father, who is in Heaven. The Holy Brothers are some of God's children from the times of the Old and New Testament. By the Will of God, the twelve Brothers were left on earth to help people, and miraculously could be seen by many chosen ones. In addition to them, My Mother Mariam was also left behind according to God's Will in the name of Fulfillments (Last Testament. Meetings. Ch. 2, 24).

It is difficult to determine to which specific historical characters Vissarion is referring. There could be many sources for this image: from the twelve "minor" Old Testament prophets revered in the Russian Orthodoxy to the twelve church fathers according to the Fifth Ecumenical Council. It is ironic that Plesin's "twelve Caesars" can be interpreted as an allusion to Suetonius's work, whose heroes were anything but moral leaders of humanity. Thus, in this case, the agents were of an "anthropomorphic type," like the "ascended masters" of Blavatsky and Roerich.

Furthermore, although Vissarion received the first messages about his divine mission from aliens, he soon began to criticize this type of channeling as dangerous and damaging to humanity. His opinion shifted because often alien civilizations desire to destroy humanity and intentionally send "false information":

> *Now there is much talk of contacts with space. Can we believe them?* If they believe they're communicating with the Extraterrestrial Mind, that's the truth. And if you believe what they learned during the conversation, you should know that almost no one will get serious truthful information. And in recent times, this has been understood by people who are in most close contact with such phenomena. They were able to deduce that almost all the information coming to the Earth was false. But from now on, there will be a great multitude of people communicating with the universe. And the inner essence of these people will be such that they will quickly believe that they are the ones who receive the truth. This bitterness has yet to be felt by the majority of mankind but trouble is not far off. Contacts between your children and extraterrestrial worlds will be especially dangerous (Last Testament. Meetings. Ch. 1, 105).

Vissarion had his own reasons for taking this position. First of all, this conflict should be interpreted in Max Weber's terminology as a con-

frontation between routine and charismatic power. Vissarion, who calls himself the "Word of the Heavenly Father," could now claim to be the principal and only channeler. In such a case, the boundaries between the medium and the message disappear completely, so that Vissarion represents the physical embodiment of the FAA. Alternative "channels of communication" with any FAA are not only redundant, but also challenge Vissarion's conventional status. In practice, however, during the first decade of the LTC's existence, many of his followers continued to engage in channeling with aliens and to exchange information they received from outside contactors. As far as I can see, these messages were often related to several waves of eschatological panic, which had a rather noticeable impact on the daily life of the LTC (including the popularity of very strict dietary prescriptions, which endured until the mid-2000s). This panic stemmed from an increasing expectation of planetary accidents that not only would transform the Earth, but also would lead to a physical change among a small portion of mankind and the destruction of the rest. Vissarion's own authority was not enough to put an end to these panics, and in 2001 the official newspaper of the LTC published the reports of the "Intergalactic Council for the Salvation of the Earthlings," designed to reassure members of the church who expected a catastrophe in the near future.

In the second half of the 2000s, the intensity of eschatological expectations among Vissarion's followers decreased significantly and, at the same time, interest in channeling with aliens decreased. Vissarion's position on the dangers of such contacts seems to have become increasingly shared, as is evident from interviews with members of the LTC in 2007:

> I turned on through Kashpirovsky. It wasn't Kashpirovsky who turned it on. There's another source still working through it.
> *Interviewer*: Which one? What source is working through it?
> In my understanding?
> *Interviewer*: Yes.
> Virtues in quotation marks . . . in quotation marks. Luciferic direction. There are civilizations that the Bible called Lucifer, an angel. This is one of the directions of the higher mind, which sees humanity as a tumor and tries to get rid of us with our own hands. And that's the source. The only civilization trying to get rid of us is the Lucifers. It's a Lucifer concept, it's . . . It's the only thing you can call it. If we talk about their representatives, you should know these representatives. They send bioandroids here all the time.

Interviewer: Bioandroids?

Here we go, green guys. These are their materialized copies.

Interviewer: Of Lucifers?

Yeah. That's exactly what they are, but that's not their essence. They're like that, but it's their doppelganger. They are materialized, they have great abilities, they use their . . . — what's in their head — and we are unreceptive to everything. And these guys, they're sending this stuff in here, which is doing their tasks. And then they just leave. That's already known. Previously, it was closed, it was secret — top secret—now it has all come to the surface, all of it is known. These guys were the ones who were doing the tasks on these. . . , on the plates of the so-called spacecrafts, which fell into the hands of people . . . and they were making their own conclusions accordingly, as it turned out (P., A. 2007, Panchenko and Shtyrkov, v. Cheremshanka, Kuragino district, Krasnoyarsk region, August 29).

Another interview with a "contactor" demonstrated that channeling with extraterrestrial civilizations was not only spiritually but physically harmful:

Everyone decides for themselves, but the Teacher says it is better not to do it. Don't mess around, because, yeah, anyone can connect. And [there are] those who want to help you, and those who want to kill you. That's why it's better not to get carried away. [. . .] We have a man here in the village. In his time, he was in contact with some civilization. Yes. And the Teacher told him to stop doing it, and his flesh started to fall apart because [. . .] He really started to fall apart because he was taking it all through the bone . . . musculoskeletal apparatus, i.e., through the bones. His bones were starting to fall apart. He started to walk badly, his hands were bad . . . Well, he stopped it on the Teacher's recommendation. He's straightened out now, yeah. He was still walking with a stick, with a crutch a year ago, but now he's moving fine. [. . .] The Teacher's attitude is that it is better not to do it, better not to spoil it. A lot of people have come from the secular world already — they're messing with it. But right now, I think most people have this disease cured (K., G. 2007, Panchenko and Shtyrkov, v. Tayaty, Karatuzsky district, Krasnoyarsk region, September 2).

In the words of the woman who told this story (who had never been "in contact"), channeling appears to be something akin to dangerous demonic possession. Interestingly, the topic of television also appears, although not quite in Urban's terms:

It was very hard to back off. Quitting, was very difficult. She went to our priests, talked to them, and was told, "Well, yes, there is a place for that, but you have to deal with it yourself. And here are the methods that are being used to cope there — the state of prayer, straight away — "no, no, I don't want to, leave me alone" — these are the methods of preparing yourself. I mean, so that the law of freedom of choice is not violated. As the Teacher says, many civilizations are trying to get in touch with us, but they have no right to violate the law of freedom of choice. They may be trying to get in touch with you, but if you say no, they leave you alone. [. . .]

That's exactly what's going on. Some people are shown pictures. That's who. . . that's who they've been trying to get in touch with, they tell how painful it is. They even show pictures. There's one woman here, now she's not here, she's on the payroll, she says, "Here I was in the tent, and suddenly these pictures came up. It's just like a TV all over the tent, so it's panoramic. They come up with pictures and thoughts that inspire and inspire you. And," she says, "it's literally the head that boils." She rushed out of the tent, and says, "brrr," and began to pray. Well, here she is, she too, left this contact (K. G. 2007, Panchenko and Shtyrkov, v. Tayaty, Karatuzsky district, Krasnoyarsk region, September 2).

Such an attitude toward mental contacts with alien civilizations in the LTC did not at all imply that the practice of channeling had disappeared from the daily lives of Vissarion's followers. Channelers, however, sought out other types of addressees — the souls of deceased relatives and acquaintances — and thus the content of the broadcast underwent some changes.

We've got some people talking to the souls of the dead. Not many, but there are some. You know, see, or whatever. . . Feeling. Within forty days, these souls may somehow come into contact with their loved ones who live here. And now I think someone at P.'s father's house said that it is advisable when you see your soul there, to stand in a circle, to light candles, to stand in a circle and wish: "Fly high, fly far, fly to the Father." It seems to help the soul a lot. And somehow it went like this in the [New] Promised Land, so guys if it helps the soul to get away from the earth, let's practice it. [. . .]

K.'s sister just left. "We," he says, "are sitting here, remembering her. Oh, how beautiful she was, then, yes, sir." And they [the sisters] — one has the gift of seeing since she was six years old, and K. . . just feels it. "And," she says, "the answer is, why 'she was'? Why are you talking

about me in the past tense? I'm alive, I'll be alive forever. And. . . and you'll remember that we're going to be here forever, that we're not dying. The soul does not die, the soul is eternal, don't talk about us in the past tense. [. . .]

Oh, yeah, here's what else she said. What I have to go through, her sister said. [. . .] I think my sister told her, "I've got to go through twenty-four steps of ordeal here." Here you go. And they're in a circle, too — K. — they're in a circle. And they sang twenty-four psalms. And one of the sisters, who has been seeing since she was six years old at K.'s, says she saw "Our sister's, — says, — such a husk, such dirt flew off at this time. They sang twenty-four psalms to make it easier for her to do all these twenty-four steps of ordeal (K., G. 2007, Panchenko and Shtyrkov, v. Tayaty, Karatuzsky district, Krasnoyarsk region, September 2).

T.'s got an aunt in St. Petersburg or something, so she's gone. And a woman, who lives in Cheremshanka, she's got contact with her soul. Here, after the [Good Fruits] Holiday. [. . .] And, this means that this holiday was happening for the first time in the universe on such a scale, very big. All the authorities were there, everybody. . . The bright forces from all the planes were here with us. And, in general, a holiday of light forces is of very large scale like this– that's how it was said. Which means that a new stage begins in the development of the Earth or something. And the Teacher is changing now, and the Earth is changing its vibrations. Even people who know, don't know, feel, don't feel, even earthlings, all this also affects them. And two key phrases even accompany this new stage [. . .] Oh, there was something first there, that you pay a lot of attention to trifles because everything is built of trifles. And I forgot the other one. But, in general, it's like nothing special, maybe that's why I didn't even remember it anymore. But the fact that the Holiday was a very large-scale event, and all the angels were here. . . This is what she conveyed through this woman in Cheremshanka (B., L. 2007, Panchenko and Shtyrkov, v. Tayaty, Karatuzsky district, Krasnoyarsk region, September 2).

Although the latter example also deals with events of planetary importance (which is rather typical of the messages from extraterrestrial civilizations), the focus here is shifted to the daily ritual life of the LTC — specifically, the annual holiday commemorating Vissarion's first sermon. As for the other stories, they should also be interpreted primarily in the ritual context — as a means of legitimizing the nascent funeral ritualism of the LTC. In this case, it is unlikely that one can attribute FAA status to the souls of the deceased.

Both this and similar examples demonstrate that aliens interacting with post-Soviet contactors in the 1990s and 2000s usually predicted a universal catastrophe and the coming renewal of humanity. At the same time, they can hardly be classified as "punitive gods," whose access to strategic information (especially negative information) is directly related to the nature of their actions toward individuals and humanity.[3] Rather, external forces and sometimes even the people themselves, particularly their negative deeds and thoughts, are seen as the cause of catastrophic changes. This means that the three types of agents (aliens, "teachers," and the souls of the deceased) with whom the "contactors" of the LTC have interacted and are interacting, are "responsible" for different blocks of information. Aliens report an impending eschatological catastrophe and ways to survive it, "teachers" are primarily concerned with personal spiritual growth and do not address humanity as a whole, and the souls of the deceased offer information of a "private" nature significant for the development of family and community ritualism. I believe that these differences reflect specific types of agency — "individualized" in the case of "teachers," "collectivized" in the case of aliens, and "privatized" in the case of the souls of the deceased. This observation, at least in the post-Soviet context, makes it possible to conclude that the notion of New Age culture as highly individualistic is not entirely correct. In fact, practices such as channeling are successfully adapting to local ideologies and forms of socialization. It is indicative that LTC "contactors" were less interested in messages regarding the idea of "self-godliness," yet the holistic view of an individual as part of the transpersonal consciousness was quite popular. Vissarion is in fact the only "self-godly" creature in the LTC, and his followers can transform their agency through the meditative practice of "merging with the Teacher," which is partly reminiscent of channeling, but does not imply any direct exchange of information.

It is obvious that we are dealing with rather complicated (especially in the procedural and diachronic perspective) forms of supplemental distribution of different types of agency. How typical such a situation is in modern New Age culture, what the specific socio-economic factors are that determine the configuration of this distribution, and how it is comparable with other types of religious practices and representations in the past and present is the topic for further research.

3. On "punitive gods" see Purzycki, Finkel, Shayer, Wales, Cohen, and Sosis 2012, 846–69; Norenzayan 2013.

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ELENA STEPANOVA

Leo Tolstoy's Faith: The Equivalence of State of Mind and Content

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This article discusses Tolstoy's faith in the unity of its two aspects: as the state of mind of its carrier and in terms of its content and the life principles that flow from it. It is shown that at the same time and in the same respect Tolstoy was the bearer of the faith and its investigator; therefore, its adequate interpretation is possible only if the principles established by him for himself are taken into account instead of an abstract and outward interpretation of what faith should be. The article considers, first, Tolstoy's explanation of faith in various works, letters, diaries, and the like during the last thirty years of his life; and second, his distinctive expressions of faith along with discussions of it. The article demonstrates the equivalence of Tolstoy's state of mind and the content of his faith, as well as its purely individual character. The study concludes with a discussion of the significance of Tolstoy's understanding of faith for us today.

Introduction: The "Undiscovered" Tolstoy

THE PROBLEM of the consistency and/or the rupture between Tolstoy's artistic and religio-philosophic oeuvre and the essence of his spiritual crisis has long evoked enormous controversy.[1] At-

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1. In Western scholarship on Tolstoy a new wave of interest in the second period of his creative work (1880–1910) has appeared in recent decades. Among works related in one way or another to the topic of the present article, the following are noteworthy: Gustafson 1986 (Russian translation: Gustafson 2003); McLean 2008; Medzhibovskaya 2009; Medzhi-

tempts to understand this process arose among Tolstoy's contemporaries and from the beginning gave rise to mutually exclusive opinions. On the one hand, Semyon Frank, as well as many others, wrote that Tolstoy, like other "twice-born" natures, lived through the repudiation of the old and a spiritual revolution (Frank 2000, 547). On the other hand, Georgy Florovsky questioned the authenticity of the turning point in Tolstoy's life and asserted: "There was no birth of a 'new man.' There was no mystical revelation, no encounter, no breakthrough. And there was no change in his views" (Florovskii 2000, 677). To this day the view expressed in Tolstoy's time by many Russian philosophers is extremely widespread: Tolstoy was a brilliant writer and a mediocre thinker (See Gel'fond 2010) (a "multi-talented artist" and "an utterly non-talented philosopher" in the words of Nikolai Fedorov [Fedorov 2000, 193]). According to Semyon Frank, "the former enjoyed boundless recognition, [but] the latter was almost universally and unconditionally dismissed" (Frank 2000, 299).[2]

The reasons for such ambivalent attitudes are extremely varied, but they can be explained in a most general way, in my view, by the extraordinary scale of the tasks which Tolstoy set himself as a spiritual reformer. These tasks are not easy to comprehend adequately, a situation that often leads to the rise of a simple explanatory scheme based on the principle of "either-or." Following Olga Sedakova (2014, 37), one may observe that until now the "astonishing undiscovered-ness" of Tolstoy has held sway in Russia for numerous reasons (see also Guseinov 2018, 19). The positive assessment of Tolstoy the artist and the negative view of Tolstoy the thinker have been reinvigorated today in the renewed debate over the Holy Synod's Edict of February 20–22, 1901, on Tolstoy's defection from the Church, and in discussion of problems that arose in connection with Tolstoy's attitude toward Orthodoxy (See Orekhanov, 2010). Moreover and paradoxically, until recently most of Tolstoy's religio-philosophical works remained largely inaccessible to the majority of Russian readers, as many of these writings had only recently or never been reissued, and as the ninety-volume *Complete Collected Works* had become a bibliographical rarity.[3]

bovskaya 2019; Orwin 1993 (Russian translation: Orwin 2006); Paperno 2014 (Russian translation: Paperno 2018). In Russian scholarship the following are particularly significant: Guseinov 2008; Guseinov and Shchedrina 2014; Guseinov 2018; Zorin 2020.

2. In Russia today, Archpriest Georgii Orekhanov defends the image of Tolstoy as a mediocre thinker, maintaining that Tolstoy in his philosophical treatises was unable to offer a "complete religious doctrine" (Orekhanov 2016).

3. This state of affairs changed radically once an electronic version of the ninety-volume *Complete Collected Works of L. N. Tolstoy* appeared (http://tolstoy.ru/creativity/90-volume-collection-of-the-works/).

This article considers Tolstoy's faith, taking into account the unity of its two aspects: first, as the *state of mind* (*sostoianie*) of its bearer, his inner sense, which was for him identical to life as such; and second, as its *content* (*soderzhanie*), that is, what it contained and what sort of life principles it consequently entailed. For thirty years (1879–1910) Tolstoy wrote of his faith in various genres — essays, journalistic works, letters, diaries, and notebooks — and his conception, while remaining true to his original inspiration, was continuously changed, clarified, and deepened.[4] Maria Gel'fond, speaking of the importance of this topic to Tolstoy, notes: "It would not be an exaggeration to state that all his philosophical and theological essays were devoted to one extent or another to the problem of faith" (Gel'fond 2009, 65). This article explores Tolstoy's understanding of faith as a process, one distinguished by its exceptional consistency and wholeness, thanks to the unity of several of its components: first, faith was the foundation of human existence; second, the Christian teaching of nonviolence was its content; and third, from this content principles of everyday behavior flowed. The main purpose of this article lies in proving this unity.

Before examining Tolstoy's faith in the unity of its existential and objective aspects, let me make several preliminary remarks. First, Tolstoy simultaneously and in one and the same relation *experienced* faith and *described* it for himself and the audience, that is, he was at once both faith's bearer and its investigator. Therefore, an interpretation of Tolstoy's faith is simultaneously an interpretation of his understanding of faith, and makes sense only when it takes into account the principles he established for himself and does not proceed from any abstract and external concept of faith whatsoever, especially since Tolstoy's concept of faith has almost no analogue in the history of human thought. Second, it is well-known that Tolstoy's discovery of faith resulted in a radical change in the author's life. In a letter to Alexandra Tolstoy on February 2–3, 1880, he bore witness to this: "Everything that I knew before, everything was turned upside down, and everything that was upside down before, was turned right side up" (Tolstoy 1935–58, 63:8). This admission sums up the unique place finding faith had for Tolstoy in his creative work and life. I shall consider below Tolstoy's conception of faith drawing exclusive-

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4. Unfortunately, the scope of this article does not permit a detailed examination of the evolution of Tolstoy's conceptions of faith nor a detailed delineation of these changes and clarifications.

ly on his own statements or on their exposition in a form as close as possible to the original.

The Problem of the Articulation of Faith

One of Tolstoy's earliest attempts at a *profession de foi* is contained in a letter to Alexandra Tolstoy of April-May 1859, in which he recalls his sentimental adolescent faith, which subsequently collapsed, but in its place an "inner (*umstvennaia*) exaltation" emerged, which even then (1852–53) had led to thoughts of immortality and love. He wrote: "These revelations surprised me with their similarity to the Christian religion, and instead of exploring these ideas myself, I began to seek them out in the Gospel but found little" (Tolstoy 1935–58, 60:293). And here Tolstoy formulates his most important "methodological" principle: "Moreover, for me life shapes religion; religion does not shape life" (294). This means that the starting and ending point on the path to faith was himself and his unique, lived experience. Tolstoy spoke of this numerous times and at the end of his life expressed it thus: "The main and in essence the only question of human life is just this, How shall I live? That is, What shall I do? To answer this question, one needs to know who one is" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to P. P. Sokolov, April 11, 1910, 81:222–3).

This path of self-discovery was long and gradual, and there were several important stops during its first stage. The first was a turn toward other people's experience in the form of scientific theories, philosophical teachings, and religious doctrines, which Tolstoy studied attentively and then rejected, a process described in detail in the author's religio-philosophical works of 1879–84. It is important here to point out the reasons for this rejection, which I believe consist of the following: first, in Tolstoy's view, scientific knowledge by its very nature cannot pose the question of the meaning of life. Second, philosophical concepts, although they acknowledge the validity of the question itself, cannot actually answer it because the task of "true philosophy," according to Tolstoy, lies only in posing the question, not answering it; thus, "instead of an answer [one obtains] the same question but in a more complex form" (Tolstoy 1935–58, "A confession," 23:20). And finally, with respect to the Christian religion as traditionally understood, the main problem for Tolstoy was that each denomination proclaimed itself as the sole truth, denying this truth to all others and thereby creating an insoluble contradiction. In Tolstoy's words:

> If one takes any twig from a sprawling bush, it would be completely just to say that from twig to twig, from twig to branch, and from branch to root, each twig comes from the stem, but no one twig is the sole offshoot. All are alike. To say that any twig is the one true twig would be absurd (Tolstoy 1935–58, "The four Gospels harmonized and translated," 24:11).

The second stop was the deep emotional stress connected to a sense of utter loss of the meaning of life and of the fear of death, similar to the "Arzamas horror."[5] What is important here is that, as Tolstoy himself acknowledged, it was neither a reasoned recognition of the absence of meaning in life that brought him to this new religious consciousness, nor a rational quest for an acceptable explanation, but

> the feeling of [one's] whole being. The difference is this — to recognize with the mind or to be brought to the abyss and to be appalled, having seen it. It seems to me that only this leads to true unshakable faith: only having experienced the perdition of *all* paths, besides the one true path, will you stand unwaveringly on what is true (Tolstoy 1935–58, Diary, October 24, 1889, 50:161–2).

In a diary entry on October 24, 1889, Tolstoy acknowledged that there may be other, positive paths for "more sensitive and pure natures" (1935-58, 50:162), including revelation, but Tolstoy's case followed a negative path, resulting not so much from love for the truth but rather from the consciousness of the futility and even destructiveness of all other paths.

Consequently, Tolstoy, like Descartes,[6] became convinced that only one's own "self" truly exists, but it is a suffering "self," deprived of access to the meaning of life, as it subjected all concepts related to this — concepts of God, freedom, good — to logical investigation, and they did not withstand the critique of reason. After the consistent rejection of all variants of the answer to the meaning of life previously attained by humanity, Tolstoy found himself alone with himself, and a last

5. Tolstoy gave a very restrained description of his experience in a letter to S. A. Tolstoy dated September 4, 1869: "I suddenly was filled with despair, fear, and horror such as I had never experienced [. . .] and God grant may no one experience" (Tolstoy 1935–58, 83:167). A more graphic description is found in "The Memoirs of a Madman."

6. In 1875 in the work "On the soul and its life outside the life known and comprehensible to us," Tolstoy wrote: "I do not know how accurate Descartes' statement is: 'I think, therefore I am [literally, "I live" — Trans.]'; but I do know that if I were to say, 'I know [undoubtedly only] myself first and foremost, then, that I am [literally, "I live" — Trans.]' — this cannot be wrong" (Tolstoy 1935–58, 17:351).

question remained, "the simplest question, lying in the soul of each person, from the simple baby to the wisest old man" (Tolstoy 1935–58, "A confession," 23:16). This was the ultimate question: "Is there any meaning in my life that will not be destroyed by the death inevitably coming to me?" (16). And the ultimate answer Tolstoy discovered: Faith is the "knowledge of the meaning of human life, as a result of which a person does not destroy him or herself but lives" (35). This meaning cannot reside in any teaching offered by science, philosophy, or religion, for in that case it is nothing other than the "ephemerality of the finite" (33–4). The meaning that nothing destroys because it transcends everything can only be the meaning of the infinite: "Every response of faith to the finite existence of a person imparts the meaning of the infinite, a meaning that is not destroyed by suffering, deprivation, and death" (35).

Thus, faith, without which life is impossible, according to Tolstoy, is not hope of the fulfillment of the expected and trust in the testimony of the truth, but it is an "inner certitude of conviction, which becomes the basis of life,"(Tolstoy 1935–58, "The four Gospels harmonized and translated," 24:795) a spiritual state of mind, which is the perception of the infinite. Such a faith directs a person's actions, places one in a strictly defined position with respect to the world, and dictates one's everyday conduct, as a result of which "one naturally acts in accordance with this position" (Tolstoy 1935–58, "What is religion and wherein lies its essence?" 35:170). This faith is never irrational, never conflicting with existing knowledge; this faith contains nothing contrary to reason, and, conversely, illuminates everything that without it seems irrational and contradictory (171–2).[7] In turn, one must have faith in reason, because it was given to humanity by God and proceeds from the very infinity that makes faith possible.

In sum, faith is humanity's conscious relation to the infinite,[8] life in the perspective of infinity, "the sense come back that life was infinite in its moral significance" (James 1992, 201). This discovery of faith in oneself must undoubtedly lead to a full reexamination of all values

7. In my view, there is no basis for the frequent charge of rationalism leveled against Tolstoy, as Tolstoy in general did not support the traditional dichotomy between reason and the emotions and the rational and the irrational; to him reason was the sole and natural means of perceiving life, a means given by God to humanity. For more detail on the relationship between faith and reason for Tolstoy, see Gel'fond 2009.

8. Friedrich Schleiermacher's definition of religion as the "sense and taste for the infinite" is the closest to Tolstoy's understanding of faith. [I have seen the Schleiermacher phrase translated thus in English; I have also seen "feeling and taste" and "sensibility and taste." — Trans.]

and priorities, so that "everything that was on the right was on the left, and everything that was on the left was on the right" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "My religion [What I believe]" 23:304). The universality of such a faith appears as its fundamental quality, in that the infinite, whose presence one perceives in the soul by means of faith and of which one is a part, cannot be particular but is universal.

Faith as the perception of the infinite in a person is a means of discovering God. Tolstoy emphasized repeatedly that it is necessary to find faith first, and then God, not the other way round (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "A confession," 23:35). Finding God begins from the feeling of being orphaned and alone, from the feeling of the loss of faith in oneself and of the hope of someone's help, but as long as God remains an external object toward which faith is directed, he in fact becomes only increasingly distant from a person. Ultimately, Tolstoy wrote, one can know God only in one's soul, but only to the extent to which he is revealed to a person, and along with God one can also find oneself. This quest has no end; its main aspect is continuous movement, losses and gains, and simultaneously the paradoxical equivalence of process and result, occurring here and now:

> That in which one must believe — a mystery — is the condition of every life, of movement. Without mystery there would be no possibility of moving forward to the unknown. If I were already there where I am going, I would not have gone. Movement toward this unknown is also life. Love for this unknown is faith. You are going to go anyway. But faith will make you go with joy (Tolstoy, 1935–58, Diary and notebooks [for] 1890, entry for January 3," 51:13–14).

Tolstoy's last words several days before his death concerned this known and unknowable God: "God is the limitless Everything, of which humanity recognizes itself as a limited part. Only God truly exists. Humanity is a manifestation of Him in matter, time, and space (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "Diary for myself alone," October 31, 1910, 58:143). The "self" found in faith finds itself part of infinity, which is one with God to the extent that a person feels God in his or her soul.

Mere Christianity

In 1859 Tolstoy confessed in the letter quoted above that he found little of importance in the Gospels. Twenty years later everything had changed:

> I did not know the light; I thought there was no truth in life [. . .], I began to seek its source and found it in the Gospels [. . .] And, drawing near this source of light, I was blinded by it and received complete answers to questions about the meaning of my life and the lives of others, answers entirely convergent with all the answers I knew from other peoples and, in my view, surpassing all of them (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The Gospel in brief," 24:807).

Over the next thirty years Tolstoy tirelessly explained his understanding of Christianity repeatedly to all sorts of people — friends and enemies, allies and opponents — in all kinds of genres and forms, from artistic works to notes in his "Diary for Myself Alone." Works in which Tolstoy laid out his conception of Christianity were well known during his lifetime despite censorship bans, and many people commented upon them and continue to do so, espousing extremely varied, often contradictory views. On June 15, 1881, Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev wrote in a letter to Tolstoy concerning his petition for a pardon for the murderer of Emperor Alexander II: "When I read your letter I saw that your faith is one thing and that mine and that of the Church is another, and that our Christ is not your Christ" (quoted from Tolstoy 1935–58, 63:59). One must admit that in his own way he was right: Tolstoy's Christ truly bore no relation to Pobedonostsev's Christ.

Tolstoy, in setting out his conception of Christianity, continuously emphasized that he sought in New Testament texts only what was clear to him (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The four Gospels harmonized and translated," 24:18). In other words, Tolstoy proceeded from his own inner right to accept or reject any parts of the text. But it was this circumstance that drew the greatest censure from his critics, including those quite well-disposed toward him. For example, Vasily Zenkovsky called Tolstoy a victim of the "seduction of individualism" (Zen'kovskii 2000, 527), a man who "was never interested in the Gospels objectively" (525), who in his "religious system relied exclusively on his own religious experience and took from the Gospels that which corresponded to his own experience" (507). If, however, one acknowledges Tolstoy's right (and that of any other person) to his own interpretation of the Gospels (and of any other text), then regardless of agreement or disagreement with his interpretation, the main thing will be the acceptance of his right and of the principles he established for himself. Taking into account that the Bible was written by people with their own merits and shortcomings, their own preconceptions and insights, one should probably agree that all the Bible's readers have the same right

to their own preconceptions and insights. Furthermore, this right means that there are no obligations to dogmatic rules established by tradition and ecclesiastical institutions regarding the interpretation of New Testament texts. This is what fundamentally distinguishes Tolstoy from many Christian thinkers and is the main reason for the exasperation and indignation of his critics.

So, what was Tolstoy seeking and what did he find in the Gospels? By his own admission, he sought the one truth that faith should be. At first, Tolstoy turned to various ecclesiastical interpretations of Christianity, but did not find this one truth in any of them. Tolstoy's quest seemed impossible because Christians almost from the very beginning were divided among themselves, and the need arose in each group to "assert its truth, to impute infallibility to itself" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The kingdom of God is within you," 28:46). But for Tolstoy there was one truth, which — if it were the truth — should be the one truth for all. Accordingly, if each church thinks its own truth is the only one, this means that none of them possesses the truth: "It is evident that there is not and never has been one church, that there is not one church, not two, but two thousand, and that they all deny each other and only assert that each [one of them] is the one true church" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The four Gospels harmonized and translated," 24:10). To understand Christianity one must study "only the teaching of Christ, as it has come down to us, that is, the words and actions that are attributed to Christ" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The Gospel in brief," 24:814). In the diary entry for July 21, 1910, discussing how one should interpret the text of the Gospels, Tolstoy noted: "One has to read the Gospels and all the books recognized as Holy Scripture, analyzing their content, just as we analyze the content of all the books we read" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, 58:82).

Tolstoy found the one truth of Christianity in the commandment not to oppose evil with violence, which he had to discover anew "after 1800 years of profession of the law of Christ by billions of people, after thousands of people had devoted their lives to the study of this law" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "My religion [What I believe]" 23:335). Countless works have been written on Tolstoy's interpretation of non-resistance, some enthusiastic, some critical. Here it is especially important to turn one's attention once more to *how* exactly Tolstoy formulated his conception of non-violence as the main content of Christianity. He wrote that 39 verses of Chapter 5 of the Gospel of Matthew became the key for him to all of Christ's teaching, emphasizing *what* was most important to him: "I suddenly for the first time understood this verse directly and simply. I understood that Christ is saying *what he is say-*

ing (emphasis mine — E. S.)" (310). This is also the point at which Tolstoy's conversion occurred, "an instantaneous removal of all that obscured the meaning of the teaching, and an instantaneous illumination by the light of truth" (306). Then all former beliefs ceased to matter, and a spiritual revolution was underway:

> And when I understood all these sayings simply and directly, as they had been said, then at once in all of Christ's teaching, not only in the Sermon on the Mount but in all the Gospels, everything that had been confused became clear, what had been contradictory became consistent; and the main thing is that what had seemed superfluous, became essential. Everything flowed into a single whole and one part unquestionably corroborated another, like the fragments of a shattered statue, when put together as they should be (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "My religion [What I believe]" 23:311–2).

Non-violence is the same as love, and love is God, and this is the only thing a person can know about God (Tolstoy, 1935–58, Letter to E. D. Pospelovaia, May 11, 1907, 77:102). Faith in God, who lives in a person's soul and through the teaching of Christ shows how one should live according to God's will, is the sole condition for fulfilling the commandment of non-violence (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The one commandment," 38:115). Tolstoy was certain that supernatural help was unnecessary to fulfill this commandment; fulfillment lay entirely within human power, as it was a clear, definite, important, and practicable rule (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "My religion [What I believe]" 23:365). As Abdusalam Guseinov writes, "There is no other means of overcoming violence except refusing to commit it, and nothing can prevent a person who has realized this truth from following it, if one has decided to do so" (Guseinov 2018, 12). Non-resistance means making no distinctions between oneself and all other people, whatever their faith, race, nationality, and the like. Non-resistance means doing the will of God, which is "that people love each other and consequently treat each other as they would like others to treat them" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "Response to the Synod's Edict of February 20–22 and to the letters I received concerning this case. April 4, 1901," 34:251).

In an unsent letter to N. N. Strakhov, written in November 1879, Tolstoy acknowledged:

> In Christ's teaching I found one special feature that distinguishes it from all [other] teachings. He teaches and explains why the meaning of our life is that which he gives to it. But with that he always says that one

must do what he says and then you will see whether what he says is true" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, 62:502).

This equivalence of faith and action flowed for Tolstoy from the very essence of the commandment of non-resistance, in which the whole meaning of Christ's teaching found expression, for non-resistance entails action: the replacement of evil and violence with good and harmony (Tolstoy, 1935–58, Letter to N. Krastin of May 21, 1901, 73:77). But such action is possible, first, thanks to faith alone, which is the sole cause of good works, while good works, in turn, are the inevitable consequence of faith (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "An investigation of dogmatic theology," 23:244). Second, this action is natural, flowing out of love, which has become the power of life and shows a person what one should do and how:

> People who believe in the path of life are, according to Christ's saying, like springs of living water, that is a spring gushing forth from the earth. Everything they do is like the flow of water, which flows everywhere, far and wide, despite obstacles holding it back. [People] who believe in Christ's teaching can no more ask what positive thing [they] should do, than can a spring of water bubbling from the earth. It flows, giving drink to the earth, grass, trees, birds, animals, and people (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "Industriousness, or the triumph of the land-tiller [preface to the work of T. M. Bondarev]," 25:471).

Tolstoy constantly repeated that the Christian teaching "is a clear, profound, and *simple* (emphasis mine — E. S.) teaching of life, fulfilling the highest needs of the human soul" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The four Gospels harmonized and translated," 24:7), and called his confidence in the simplicity of Christianity "a terrible and joyous truth" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "My religion [What I believe]" 23:357). This simplicity is determined by the truth of Christianity, which is understood to be love for God and one's neighbor, being a position that requires no additional explanations: "It is one, because it is everything" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "Industriousness, or the triumph of the land-tiller," 25:470). The teaching consists only of the meaning it gives to life; there is no mysticism in it, nothing mysterious or incomprehensible, but simply the certainty that only in this way can life be a blessing (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "Industriousness, or the triumph of the land-tiller," 25:470). To believe in God as in love "people need only believe in what actually exists [. . .], in what

it is impossible not to believe" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The one commandment," 38:110).

Least necessary of all for such a faith is faith in the resurrection of Christ as a miracle, which, in Tolstoy's thought, "directly contradicts the teaching of Christ" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The four Gospels harmonized and translated," 24:792). On the contrary, Tolstoy was certain that it was the death of Christ that emerges as the condition for living out his teaching. In the work "The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated," Tolstoy sets out the words of Christ about his death thus:

> But truly I say to you, that it is good for you that I go away. If I do not die, then the spirit of truth will not appear to you, but if I die, then it will take up residence within you. It will enter you, and it will be clear to you what is a lie, what is truth, what you should do (Tolstoy, 1935–58, 24:757).

In other words, the "resurrection" of Christ for Tolstoy makes sense only as the realization of his teaching, and therefore each one who accepts this teaching thereby resurrects Christ in himself. Christ lives while those to whom his teaching is the truth of life live. In a letter to Nikolai Ge (the father) dated March 2–3, 1884, Tolstoy wrote: "There is no way that I shall believe that he was resurrected in his body, but I shall never lose the truth that he will rise again in his teaching" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, 63:160).

If one recognizes Tolstoy's right to see in the New Testament the meaning closest to him, then Christ appears to be inextricably linked with the person of Tolstoy himself as his interpreter. Moreover, it is this connection of the image of Christ with Tolstoy's unique lived experience that is the condition for the unique "resurrection" of Christ in Tolstoy, as well as in each subsequent reader of the biblical text.

Tolstoy understood that faith in love, which has no external form, and the worship of God, which is not defined by any form, time, or place, might seem vague and even dubious to most people (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The one commandment," 38:104). At the same time, it is difficult even for people convinced of the truth of their faith not to doubt it, "when [they] learn that other people just as persuaded of the truth of their [own] beliefs also consider the [first group's] faith false" (105). The resolution of this contradiction, which in Tolstoy's view destroyed the truth of ecclesiastical Christianity, lies in recognizing love as the one object of faith and the sole principle of life, common to all people. The person who acknowledges love as such an object of faith common to all cannot have any doubts of its truth (105); and Christi-

anity, which focuses on love as the basis of life, coincides with "the basic tenets of Brahmanism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Buddhism, even Mahommedanism," and, like all these teachings, seems simple, comprehensible, and rather uncomplicated (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "What is religion and wherein lies its essence?" 35:190). As Tolstoy noted in a diary entry on February 13, 1907, a common fundamental rule exists, the main tenets of which are identical in all confessions because of the oneness of human nature (Tolstoy, 56:15). This fundamental rule, in Tolstoy's thought,

> defines a person's relationship to God as that of the part to the whole; from this relationship comes a person's purpose, consisting of the increase in oneself of the divine attributes; one's purpose [is] to derive practical rules from the rule to treat others as you would have them treat you (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "What is religion and wherein lies its essence?", 35:191).

This is what reason, placed in people by God, requires of them. Reason unites people — near and far, the departed, the living, and those yet to be born — in the ability to love one another:

> Thus, we enjoy all that reason has produced, the reason of Isaiah, of Christ, of Buddha, of Socrates, and of Confucius, and of all the people who lived before us and who put their trust in reason and served it. Treat others as you would have them treat you, do not retaliate against those who did evil to you but return good for evil, be temperate, chaste, not only do not kill people but do not become angry with them, be at peace with all, and much else, all this is the product of reason and all this is preached alike by Buddhists, Confucians, Christians, Taoists, Greek and Egyptian wise men, and all good people of our day (Tolstoy, 1935–58, Letter to V. K. Zavolokin, December 17, 1900, 72:528).

With respect to Tolstoy's faith, above all one must stress its exceptional, deep feeling, reasonableness, and absolute completeness. All the components of this faith, all the questions and answers exist and are developed in unity with each other and, ultimately, converge in a single point. Furthermore, simplicity proves to be a key characteristic of this convergence, in that the state of faith, a means of holding infinity in the present, can entail only the kind of content expressible in a fleeting instant of the present. At the same time this content — love — is "the manifestation of the divine essence, for which there is

no [such thing as] time, and therefore love appears only in the present, now, at every minute of the present" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The path of life," 45:336). In fact it is difficult to pin this faith down in some sort of finished form, for it is characterized by continuous movement from oneself to God, movement in which there are not and cannot be definite laws and rules, while Christian commandments are "in essence like markers on the infinite path of perfection, toward which humanity is moving" (Tolstoy, 1935–58, "The kingdom of God is within you," 28:80). The faith to which Tolstoy came is life itself, rather, it is a condition of life as inevitable as breathing (Tolstoy, 1935–58, Letter to A. E. Alekhin, April 11, 1909, 79:155).

The Problem of Conveying Faith

Many have levelled countless invectives against Tolstoy's idea of faith. In this section, I will consider the reproaches concerning individualism (already discussed above) in the wider context of the problem of Tolstoy's transmission of his beliefs and the possibility (and/or the limitations) of other people understanding them.

After Tolstoy's conversion his views on faith evoked astonishment and indignation, but also admiration among those close to him as well as those who were more distant. Alexandra Tolstaya, a close friend and simultaneously an opponent of Tolstoy's religious views, gave the following description of him:

> He always lived only with his own impressions, his own thoughts, admitting no outside influence and attaching no value to the beliefs of others [. . .] Perhaps I am mistaken, but it seems to me at times that it is from this point of exclusive trust in his own conclusions that Levochka has also proceeded step by step to begin to reject and demolish no longer [just] human opinions, but also the Word of God, when it conflicted with his beliefs. He sought God, but without humility, and found only himself, that is some sort of new ugly code that he invented, and which he values and *is proud of* precisely because he worked it out himself (Azarova 2011, Letter to S. A. Tolstaia, July 19, 1882, 533).

Father John of Kronstadt, Tolstoy's implacable opponent, wrote of him thus: "'I and no one besides me,' dreams Tolstoy. 'You are all in error; I discovered the truth and I shall teach all people the truth!'" (Ioann Kronshtadskii, O. [Fr. John of Kronstadt] 2000, 367). Mikhail Novoselov, initially a follower of Tolstoy but then a harsh critic, made the

following accusation against him: "Your God is only your idea; you set your heart on it and [you] are still enamored of it, turning it from side to side over the course of two decades. You cannot get out from the enchanted circle of your own 'self'" (Novoselov 2000, 381).

Vladimir Chertkov — Tolstoy's closest friend and comrade-in-arms — stressed that Tolstoy "always acted without following any program imposed on him from outside and without succumbing to anyone's personal influence. In his distinctive way he was guided only by the dictates of his own inner consciousness" (Chertkov 1922, 67).[9] Nikolai Lossky wrote of "the unusually broad dimensions" in which Tolstoy manifested his individuality and realized his multifaceted development (Losskii 2000, 233).

It has already been said that Tolstoy arrived at a personal understanding of faith after he became convinced of the futility of following anyone else's path. Of course, he knew perfectly well the heated feelings evoked by his views and could not remain indifferent:

> The whole meaning of my writings is that I am expressing *my own*, my own personal faith [. . .] I am often surprised by the irritation that my confession of faith elicits. [. . .] My friends, even my family, turn away from me. Some who are liberals and aesthetes think me mad or weak-minded like Gogol; others — revolutionaries [and] radicals — think me a mystic, a wind-bag; government people think I'm a malicious revolutionary; the Orthodox think I'm the devil. — I admit that this is hard for me (Tolstoy, 1935–58, Letter to A. A. Tolstaya, 1884, 63:201).

Nevertheless, as Abdusalam Guseinov emphasizes, Tolstoy "could in no case agree that his judgments have the status of an opinion, being one of the points of view" (Guseinov 2018, 10). There are at least two reasons for this: first, Tolstoy was entirely convinced that his personal path in faith for all its uniqueness was at the same time universal. Of this Tolstoy wrote: "I am so firmly convinced that what is the truth for me is the truth for all people, that the question of when people will come to this truth does not interest me" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to V. G. Chertkov, May 19, 1884, 85:60). This confidence in the universal meaning of faith in people's lives was strengthened and expanded as Tolstoy became convinced that he was not alone in his interpretation of the Gospel as the answer to the question of the meaning of life:

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9. This statement must be interpreted in the context of the situation with Tolstoy's will, but it seems to me it is much broader in meaning.

> This very answer to the question of life was expressed more or less clearly by all the best people of humanity both before and after the gospel, beginning with Moses, Isaiah, Confucius, the ancient Greeks, Buddha, Socrates, and up to Pascal, Spinoza, Fichte, Feuerbach and all those often unnoted and unheralded people who sincerely, without teachings taken on faith, thought and spoke on the meaning of life (Tolstoy 1935–58, "The Christian teaching," 39:119).

Second, since faith and action are one and the same, according to Tolstoy, from the moment of finding faith he perceived his actions as a mission, considering it impossible not to speak up publicly about faith, even at the risk of being misunderstood and coming into conflict with the "reigning faith" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to A. A. Tolstaia, 1884, 63:200). Just as each person who follows Christ as the messenger of truth must also be a messenger (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to V. G. Chertkov, January 30–February 3, 1885, 85:136), so a person, like a flying stone, must strive toward the goal and rejoice "that it is flying, and knows that it is nothing [in] itself — a stone, and all its significance lies in this flight" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to N. N. Ge (the son), February 4, 1885, 63:207). In the work "My religion (What I believe)" Tolstoy wrote:

> I believe that my life and knowledge of the truth is a talent, given to me to develop, that this talent is a fire that is only a fire when it is burning. I believe that I am Nineveh in relation to other Jonahs, from whom I learned and am learning the truth, but that I am also Jonah in relation to other Ninevites, to whom I must impart the truth (Tolstoy 1935–58, 23:461).

This mission as an emissary was based on confidence in the essential unity of all people, as a result of which an increase of one person's faith makes possible an increase in the faith of all people (Tolstoy 1935–58, Diary [for] 1894, April 21, 52:116). Drawing upon Lao-Tzu, Tolstoy wrote: "In order to achieve something great, a person must do something small, but believe that in this small thing lies salvation not only for him but for the whole world. [. . .] It is necessary to believe in the immensity of this act" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to V. G. Chertkov, September 21, 1893, 87:223).

This sense of mission, born of inner freedom and the right to express one's own personal faith, had another side, however — doubts of one's own sincerity, the need to find like-minded thinkers, disappoint-

ment in one's hopes, and a feeling of endless aloneness. From the very beginning Tolstoy strove to assure himself of the genuineness of the motives prompting him to the public expression of his beliefs, fearing ambition, pride, and self-deception (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to V. I. Alekseev, November 15–30? [*sic*], 1881, 63:80). He was well aware of the danger of mixing two motives — doing things for God and for worldly glory — for it is very difficult to draw a line between them: "It sometimes happens that you think you believe in something in which you do not, and sometimes the reverse — you think you do not believe in something but you do" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to E. I. Popov, September 16, 1890, 65:162).Tolstoy acknowledged the dearth of people close to him who shared his faith and longed to subject his convictions to the judgment of co-religionists (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to V. G. Chertkov, June 6–7, 1885, 85:223). Tolstoy constantly sought examples of true faith among the vast number of people with whom he associated, fascinated by them yet disappointed in them. He constantly emphasized that he had no teaching of his own apart from the teaching of Christ, which, in turn, as movement from a person to God, did not and could not contain any definite laws and rules and before which "any degree of perfection and any degree of imperfection" were equal (Tolstoy 1935–58, "The kingdom of God is within you," 28:79).

Finally, Tolstoy felt loneliness acutely in a simple human sense. In an April 3, 1892, diary entry Tolstoy wrote:

> I am alone, while there are so horribly, endlessly many people, all these people are so diverse, it is so impossible for me to know them all — all these Indians, Malays, Japanese, even all those people w[ho] are always with me — my children, [my] wife . . . Among all these people I am alone, quite lonely and alone. And the consciousness of this loneliness, and of the need to interact with all [these] people, and of the impossibility of this interaction is enough to [cause me to] go out of my mind. The only salvation is the consciousness of an inner association, through God, with all of them. When one finds this association, the need for external interaction ceases to trouble one (Tolstoy 1935–58, 52:64–65).

But despite all this, Tolstoy never deviated from his concept of faith and its content, Christ's teaching on non-resistance to evil by force. Several weeks before his death Tolstoy wrote that finally he understood clearly the line between resistance as "rendering evil for evil" and "the resistance of holding firm in an action that you recognize as your duty before your conscience and God" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to

V. G. Chertkov, September 16, 1910, 89:213). Tolstoy came a long way in faith — from the dream of founding his own religion, through the passionate rejection of the kind of faith he considered a "fraud" (On this see Gel'fond 2009), through the antagonism of people who disagreed with him, to the firm conviction that true faith entails tolerance toward other faiths. He came to this after contact with an unbelievable number of people, both those who understood and accepted his beliefs as well as those who were completely intolerant toward them. In the end, Tolstoy understood that each person has the faith that corresponds to his or her mind and heart, and therefore it is impossible to require people to believe at someone else's behest. Moreover, in this case, when faith is the result of an exclusively individual path, it is evident that the advantage of freedom and independence in conveying this faith to other people is limited. In other words, one must transmit and share individual experience together with faith, and this is scarcely possible. In a February 11, 1908, notebook entry, Tolstoy remarked: "There is no way to inspire [in another], to transfer to another a religious worldview. [. . .] It is only possible to give materials for the formation of one's worldview, and [the other] will take from them what [that person] needs" (Tolstoy 1935–58, 56:311). To Alexandra Tolstoy, a long-time opponent of the author's position on faith, he wrote:

> This truth has long been known to all, and I only recently felt it in my heart, and understood that a person's faith (again, if it is sincere) cannot lessen his virtues and my love for him. And from that time I ceased to want to communicate my faith to others and felt that I love people regardless entirely of their faith and attack only the insincere, the hypocrites, who preach what they do not believe (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to A. A. Tolstaia, February 21, 1903, 74:48–49).

So, what was faith for Tolstoy? In an existential sense one's faith is oneself, a point of support, on which one's whole life is built and which gives one the opportunity to develop. Each person has such a point of support: "Everything depends on the weight of the demands of the heart and mind" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Diary [for] 1910, March 27, 58:30). Faith is the only way of finding one's true "self": "Faith is only the consciousness of one's position — one's position is not higher, and most importantly is not lower, not more insignificant, than it is" (Tolstoy 1935–58, letter to V. G. Chertkov, December 23? [*sic*], 1889, 86:281). Such a faith is composed of complex, inexpressible spiritual processes that connect a person with God, and this connection does not per-

mit any outside interference. This kind of faith places on every true believer the obligation to respect the sincere faith of other people and not to interfere with it. "If I ever have strayed from this rule," wrote Tolstoy, "then I repent of this with my whole heart and ask forgiveness of those whose feelings I offended in this way" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Draft letter to an unknown addressee, June 21, 1909, 79:241).

Conclusion: Tolstoy for us

Before addressing what we can learn today in Tolstoy's statements about faith, I want to note several methodological considerations. As already discussed, Tolstoy (like any artist and thinker) deserves to be judged by the laws that he himself acknowledged for himself (in accordance with Pushkin's famous maxim). Hence, one should not assign Tolstoy's faith in the unity of its existential and objective content to the spheres of philosophy, religion, or artistic creativity; correspondingly, one must not analyze it using the methods of these other spheres. Tolstoy's faith is not an intellectual construct nor a religious teaching, but an attitude toward life and is itself his life. This faith has the unconditional right to be what it is because it made it possible for him to answer that one question he posed to himself: Who am I?

A scholar who seeks to give an adequate interpretation of someone else's viewpoint should be neither an adherent nor a judge. Rather, as Alexander Piatigorsky wrote, he or she should observe the thought of others, while not repudiating his or her own personal perspective, but rather observing it (like all others) as *other*: "The position of the observer then will relate not to the observation of the *world*, about which others and the observer think, but only to the *thought* of others and the observer about this world. Such a position may for our purposes be called a meta-position (*metapositsiia*)" (Piatigorsky 1996, 353). It seems to me that this kind of meta-position with respect to Tolstoy's faith excludes its evaluation as true or false (which would inevitably be subjective); rather, the position consists of striving to see this faith in the context of the author's whole life and creative work and with unconditional trust in his own words. This trust is justified, first, by the exceptional, time-proven integrity of Tolstoy's faith, and second, by the author's merciless presentation of himself as simultaneously the subject of the faith and an observer of himself, the "resident" and the "stranger" in relation to himself, to use Richard Gustafson's metaphor (Gustafson 1986 and 2003).

What is most important for us today in discussion of Tolstoy's faith? I think it is the aspect for which he was most criticized, namely, the extremely *individual* nature of his faith. What many perceived in the early twentieth century as a malevolent violation of generally accepted rules has become in the early twenty-first century one of the characteristic traits of contemporary society, in which widely varied individual forms of faith exist, whose trajectory a person can construct independently.

Inessa Medzhibovskaya has expressed the interesting thought that Tolstoy "was Russia's first modern man, the first defender of the autonomous freedom of conscience, its first consistent and courageous point of contact, its open practice and forum" (Medzhibovskaya 2009, 352). In addition, Tolstoy's individualization of faith corresponds surprisingly to what Ulrich Beck has called "the second modernity" (the second half of the twentieth century). In Beck's interpretation, the individualization of religion initiated by the Reformation ("the first modernity") took place within Christianity, whereas the individualization of religion occurred in the "second modernity." In the latter, each person, regardless of whether one adheres to any established religious system or formulates a system oneself, does so as if creating one's own religion or, in Beck's words, "a God of one's own" (Beck 2010, 81). People can now form their religious identity independently, borrowing its elements from various, not necessarily interconnected sources.

This formation often involves a process of constructing and reconstructing an individual religious identity on a foundation of elements combined from various traditions. Here it is important to emphasize that the individual doing this does not now depend on the rule of external dogmatic authorities but, in the words of English sociologists Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, has the "courage to become one's own authority" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 4). To be sure, for all the importance of the process of the individualization of religion, it is certainly not some sort of universally binding developmental trend in contemporary society but represents only a tendency manifest in various forms. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor called this situation in contemporary culture "the massive subjective turn [. . .], a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths" (Taylor 1991, 26).

In the contemporary pluralist world, filled with an endless number of different cultures, people, and worldviews, combined in countless ways, Tolstoy has become an interlocutor who demonstrates rootedness in his own culture, confidence in his own beliefs, and at

the same time openness to other traditions and respect for otherness. As Abdusalam Guseinov notes, in Tolstoy "there are no religious, national, class, historical, or any other constraints that would make him unacceptable to representatives of any religion" (Guseinov 2018, 12).

The most important problem in the contemporary pluralist world, one actively discussed in the socio-political sciences, is the problem of accepting the "other," which is possible only when the other's right to a different opinion and a way of life that is considered an equally valued component of community life is acknowledged. When one speaks of religious pluralism, the problem here lies in the need to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable things: faith in the truth of one's own religion and toleration for the truth of other religions. But one can look at this another way, namely, one can admit that at the current stage of the individualization of religion the possession of the only truth, as well as maintenance of the dogmatic purity of a belief system, in many instances ceases to be an end in and of itself. On the contrary, the multiplicity of religious systems proves to be a source of people's spiritual development. In the words of Danièle Hervieu-Léger:

> Legitimation of belief is moving from religious authorities, guarantors of the truth of belief, to individuals themselves, who are responsible for the authenticity of their own spiritual approach. What gives value to the believer's search, not only in his own eyes but also in the eyes of those with whom he dialgues, and before whom he testifies, is his sincerity and personal commitment (Hervieu-Léger 2015, 256–7).

In this case, the reconciliation of different religious concepts and traditions is perceived as the norm and as a means of learning more about one's own religious experience, as well as the experience of others. Since now no one has to be right in the sense of possessing religious truth, the maxim "freedom of religion is freedom of other people's religion" (Beck 2010, 141) comes into effect.

Tolstoy's conviction of the unity of all religions makes it possible to resolve the dilemma of accepting the "other's" truth, in that "the golden rule of morality," as the only content common to all religions, not only permits but presupposes the differences in religious beliefs in everything except this rule itself. In other words, the unity of religions lies in the principle that governs relations between people and not in the specific content of faith teachings, which may be as different as can be. It was this — and not his exclusive right to possess the truth —

that Tolstoy passionately defended when he wrote: "I do not say that I alone am in the truth and that all who believe otherwise are in error, but I ask all others to treat me in the same way" (Tolstoy 1935–58, Letter to M. M. Dondukovaia-Korsakovaia, August 31–September 1? [*sic*], 1909, 80:83). Thus, the conclusion that flows inevitably from an interpretation of Tolstoy's faith in accordance with his own principles consists of the recognition of Tolstoy's right, as well as that of all other people, to one's own faith, which is the only condition that gives us the right to profess our faith freely. And conversely, if we deny other people this right, we thereby deny it to ourselves.

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Daniil Melentev

Ethnography and Eroticism in Russian Turkestan

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There are only a few studies of the Muslim peripheries of the Russian Empire that apply a gendered lens. This article explores representations of Muslim women in pre-revolutionary Turkestan. It focuses on the research and practices of colonial ethnography, which supplied the authorities with knowledge about locals. Images of Muslim women in the Turkestan Album*, a state-sponsored photography project, and French traveler Hugues Krafft's independent volume* Through Russian Turkestan*, are analyzed and compared to explore how external observers depicted Muslim women. In addition, the article examines how the observers assessed the morality of Muslim women, as well as the impact that male affinities for effeminate young boys (bachas) had on the segregation of women.*

FROM the second half of the 1860s, the Russian empire continuously absorbed Central Asian spaces. Even though it had yet to complete its military campaigns, the imperial government created the Turkestan General Government in 1867 and began to institutionalize its new possession. The authorities needed knowledge to understand this specific region (*krai)*, so the imperial administration commissioned ethnographic projects to study and classify a kaleidoscope of local socio-political and psycho-cultural norms. They tasked employees of the Turkestan Military District (TurkVO) and professional scientists with collecting the information (see Lunin 1962; Lunin 1965; Lunin 1979; Lunin 1990; Geraci and Khodarkovsky 2001; Tolts 2013).

These researchers tried to both discover general information and obtain reliable data on the indigenous population. In particular, they drew

attention to the public and private positions of Muslim women. Officers often depended on the descriptions of their predecessors, or used Muslim men as informants (see Murav'ev 1822; Khanykov 1843; Burslem 1846; Vamberi 1865; Pashino 1868; Nazarov 1968; Demezona and Vitkevicha 1983). For example, officials used their administrative positions to acquire information on locals, inviting Muslim intellectuals to celebrations or gatherings in their homes for unconstrained conversations (Furkat 1961). Travelers arrived from Europe and the USA and, like the official agents, were interested in Muslim women and their role in society and culture (Schuyler 1876; Lansdell 1885; Ross 1899; Kennedy 1890; Meakin 1903; Kemp 1910; Olufsen 1911; Curtis 1911).

In the 1880s, the Nalivkins coauthored an ethnography on Muslim women (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886). In the early 1870s Vladimir Petrovich Nalvkin was a member of several Turkestan campaigns, but soon he resigned due to his political views (socialism) and ethical considerations (rough treatment of the indigenous population). In the 1880s Nalivkin immersed himself in ethnography and decided to devote his life to education, working as a teacher at several institutions in Tashkent (Abashin 2015). His wife, Maria Vladimirovna, who likely knew one of the local languages (Chagatai or Farsi), became the first European woman to study the daily life of Muslim women in Turkestan (Arapov 2015). In addition to detailed anthropological and psychological characteristics of the women, the essay contains an analysis of the chapters (*surahs*) of the Qur'an, which indicate the position of Muslim women in society. The Nalivkin's findings are very different from the articles published both before and after their work. In their essay, Muslim women appear not as unfortunate creatures, but as subjects with certain rights and rational lives.

In addition to ethnographic essays and travelogues, this article uses visual sources: the state-sponsored *Turkestan Album* and *Through Russian Turkestan*, an independent work by the French traveler Hugues Krafft. Increasingly, visual representations of the moral and ethical aspects of life in Turkestan have become an object of study (Abashin 2012; Chernysheva 2015; Yurgeneva 2018; Gorshenina and Sonntag 2018). The works of V. A. Prishchepova are the closest in proximity to this investigation. These works examine deviations in the court behavior of the emirs and khans of Turkestan, but only consider the wealthy classes. (Prishchepova 2007, 223-260; Prishchepova 2011). Yet, as the present article posits, Russians and Europeans reproached not only the "native" elites for their immoral behavior, but the local society itself. In addition, Prishchepova concludes that the deviant behavior of the "natives" was "normalized" by the presence of the Russian government in

Turkestan, and that the October Revolution and the coming to power of the Bolsheviks finally destroyed all deviant behavior. My article proves the opposite: a "policy of non-interference" in the affairs of the indigenous population placed the Russian authorities in an "intermediary position." (Kotiukova 2016; Morrison 2008; Vasiliev 2018).

Orientalism is inseparable from travelogues and ethnographic sketches of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The extraction of knowledge about the Orient as a form of Western domination was first identified in the famous work by Edward Said (2016). As in the work of Said, the problems of exoticization, eroticization, and femininization of the Orient are important here. The Europeans chose such optics because they understood the Orient as a "space without censorship," where it was acceptable to disregard formal moral and ethical norms. European men, in particular, desired to penetrate the thick walls of the harem, gain access to the bodies of oriental women, feel the limitless possibility of manipulating them, and experience the whole palette of emotions associated with the sexuality of Muslim women (Alloula 1997). With these stereotypical categories, the Europeans constructed the image of the Orient as "the other," which needed the help of the West and its rational and utilitarian worldview, society, and culture (Bobrovnikov and Miri 2016; Boetsch and Savarese 1999, 123-144; Sobolev 2013, 39-59).

The purpose of this article is to study pre-revolutionary representations of Muslim women in Turkestan. How did Europeans / Russians learn about and evaluate the visual qualities, character, and morality of Muslim women? What role did ethnographic photography play? With what did Europeans associate the segregation of Muslim women, and how did it correlate with prostitution and homosexuality?

Muslim Women Through the Eyes of European Observers

Representations of Muslim women depended on the aesthetic tastes, education, and cultural and socio-political ideals of the observer. Many Europeans imagined oriental women within the dreamy space of the harem[1] and condemned their husbands as tyrants who undervalued their wives. A Muslim woman was intriguing to a European man, as an object of desire and a sexual fantasy; she was hard to reach and touch but captivating and esteemed (Said 2016).

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1.   In Turkestan, the rich and powerful kept harems. As the bulk of the population was poor, most Muslims were monogamous.

Turkestan urban Muslim women (Sart women) were presented as beautiful, with dark-skinned faces and a penetrating gaze, passionate and flirtatious (Tageev 1904). It was noted that Sart women were by and large small, with an abundance of feminine curves (Shishov 1904, 106; Minaev 1879). Nomads (Turkmen and Kirghiz), on the contrary, seemed unattractive. When visiting the Turkmen lands, composer Wilhelm Napoleonovich Garteveld admitted that 50 percent of women would do well to veil their faces, "for such faces are rarely found anywhere" (Gartevel'd 1914, 52). The city was different: upon arriving in Turkestan, ethnographer Dmitry Ivanovich Evarnitsky lamented that on the city streets it was impossible to see the eyes or face of a Muslim woman wrapped in a veil (Evarnitskii 1893, 130; Skrine 1899, 368). This image of the oriental woman was drawn not only from Orientalist literature, but rooted in the prevailing psychological background of the nineteenth century Western world; the concepts of "sex" and "woman" were inseparable, meaning that women were identified based on their sexuality (Abrams 2011).

European opinions about Muslim women's mental capabilities were condescending and dismissive. For example, many Europeans believed that Muslim women only thought about romance:

> . . . here is the world of the Central Asian desert, on the horizon of which the bright star of a woman's love shines, a wild love, replacing all feelings, all passions ... a love that we have no idea about. There, a woman in her confinement only lives for love; she ponders it in the long days of loneliness, she cherishes it, she is proud and flaunts it; she knows no worries other than those of the heart. . . (Kovalevskii 1843, 12-13)

According to journalist Yevgeny Lvovich Markov, knowledge about the ancient history of Central Asia, namely about the marriage of Alexander the Great with the Bactrian princess Roxanne, provided the basis for fantasies about the attractiveness of local women (Markov 1901). In addition to historical reminiscences and descriptions of physical appearance, Europeans gave a moral and ethical assessment of oriental women. To some, Muslim women were seen as vindictive, jealous, selfish, and quarrelsome (Khoroshkhin 1876; Lykoshin 1916)

Some observers, however, elevated the moral qualities of Muslim women in Turkestan. Europeans were impressed by Muslim women's desire to create strong families (Geier 1909). Colonel Vsevolod Vladimirovich Krestovsky, who was an official for special assignments under the Turkestan Governor-General in the Bukhara Khanate and part of the mission of Prince F. Wittgenstein, emphasized that Mus-

lim women were chaste and avoided meeting with Europeans even when completely hidden by the veil. At the same time, there were cases when Krestovsky, walking along the streets of Bukhara, would raise his head to the second floor windows of houses and see Muslim women who did not hide, but allowed themselves to be admired (Krestovskii 1887). A similar event occurred in the Andijan region with the geographer Vladimir Platonovich Voshchinin (Voshchinin 1914).

It was widely believed among Europeans that Muslim women had no rights or freedoms and could do nothing without a man's permission. In reality, everything depended on where they travelled and on who they observed: townspeople, highlanders, or nomads. For example, according to a number of observers, Turkmen women (*tekinki*) enjoyed a degree of independence, could own land and water, and had the right to vote at community gatherings (*maslakhat*) (Abaza 1902; Grodekov 1883; Lomakin 1897).[2] However, the plight of Muslim women was evident in the disproportionate division of household responsibilities. Women were charged with all the "dirty work," and might also take on the work of harvesting and handicrafts (making carpets or clothing) (Abaza 1902; Alikhanov 1883; Geier 1909). Fatigue and strenuous working conditions affected the health of many women, who reportedly lost their attractiveness and aged prematurely (Pashino 1868).

"Muslim Turkestan" through the Camera Lens

The camera appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century, making it possible to expand the horizons of perception. Photography could create a feeling of closeness or highlight differences between cultures, and was therefore a unique tool that the authorities could use to manipulate public opinion. Since photography made it possible to simplify the process of collecting ethnographic data, it was used for the first time in the Caucuses as a strategy to appropriate the conquered spaces of the Russian Empire. The experiment turned out to be successful, so the imperial administration decided employ it in Central Asia. (Gorshenina and Sonntag 2018). In the early 1870s, the Governor-General commissioned the photo project *Turkestan Album*.

Turkestan Governor-General K. P. von Kaufmann published the album as propaganda in order to visually show the Western powers how

2. Officer A. Lomakin, a connoisseur of Turkemn adat, held the opposite opinion. Having studied the rights and freedoms of Turkmen women, he came to the conclusion that the image of a free and independent woman did not correspond to reality. On the contrary, her reality was quite depressing.

the Russians mastered the Turkestan region (Chernysheva 2015). Another goal of the album was enlightenment, i.e. demonstrating to the elites which peoples and cities the empire possessed and the extent of their wealth. During the Great Reforms (1860s — 1870s), a discussion began among the enlightened Russian public about the oppressed state of women and the need to "emancipate" them like the recently freed peasants (Browder 2003, 41). Consequently, it is possible that one of the functions of the album was to demonstrate the positive influence of Russian power and culture on Muslim women. The compilation of the *Turkestan album* was entrusted to the Russian orientalist Alexander Ludwigovich Kun (Sultonov 2014). Excluding drawings and maps, Kun selected a total of 1,235 photographs and divided them into sections: ethnographic, historical, archaeological, commercial, and technical (Abashin 2012).

As a part of the *Turkestan album*, Kun photographed "natives" for an exhaustive examination of their traditional dress and religious customs (Yurgeneva 2018). The section on ethnography contains 491 photographs, which are divided into two parts. The first part consists mainly of portrait photographs taken in profile and front-facing. Most are arranged in rows of three, with images of men first, followed by women. Along with Muslim women, the album contains photographs of Jewish, Gypsy, and other women pictured in festive outfits. The shots are divided according to ethnicity: first, there are portraits of Kyrgyz, Tajiks, etc. . . (Kun 1871-1872, 3-32).

Illustration No. 1(Kun 1871-1872, 6)
Images from the Turkestan Album

In the second part, there are only 4 pictures with Muslim women. The photograph included in the section, "Public Amusements of Central Asians," portrays a young girl sitting on carpet in traditional clothes. She has an uncovered face and holds a tambourine (*zenbaz*) in her hands, half-turning to look toward the lens (Kun 1871-1872, 4).

Illustration No. 2
Muslim Girl with Zenbaz

All of the photos are staged, which is clear by the artistry of poses, the intentional placement of objects, and the focus of those posing for the camera. Although the photographer suggests that the images were spontaneous, it is not difficult to notice that the models are frozen in uncomfortable positions. The appearance of Muslim women, presented with exposed faces and heads covered with only headscarves or skull-caps, and their placement at home, against the background of a plain, clean wall, emphasizes this artificiality. Towards the end of the first part, there is a snapshot showing the daily clothes (burqa) of urban Muslim women (Kun 1871-1872, 71) without any accompanying explanation.

Illustration No. 3
Everyday dress of urban Muslim women in Turkestan

The Representation of Muslim Women in the *Turkestan Album* and Narrative Sources

There was a stereotype that Muslim women did not appear on the streets with uncovered faces in the cities and villages of Turkestan. In fact, this was an observation made by Europeans in one locality that was applied to the entire territory: the situation, however, was far from homogeneous. Khiva Muslim women wore turbans on their heads, wrapped themselves in thick cloth, and donned leather boots (Abaza 1902, 15). Their outerwear included a shirt and a robe with wide sleeves (*mursek*), and their legs were completely covered with tight-fitting pantaloons. A veil was then thrown over everything. Contrastingly, Tashkent Sart women tied a white scarf (*uramal*) around their heads, covered their faces with an impenetrable mesh (*chimet*), tucked their pants into leather boots (*ichigi*), and wore a shirt and colored caftan (*beshmet*) on top (Khoroshkhin 1876, 113-114). A married Muslim woman could not

appear on the street without a veil, but unmarried women could cover their faces with muslin (a cotton fabric) (Geier 1909, 18).

In mountainous areas, a woman could walk around the village without covering her face, so as not to impede one's movement (Shishov 1910). Nomads did not wear a burqa and their clothes did not differ from men's (Kostenko, 1870). Kyrgyz women wore a long shirt, wide trousers, a long-sleeved robe, boots, and a white scarf over their heads (Smirnov 1914). Muslim Turkmen women of the Trans-Caspian region also did not wear veils. The Turkmen woman's costume consisted of a multi-colored shirt and pantaloons, a woolen robe, and a scarf or a skullcap (Alikhanov 1883). Hairstyle was an important feature in the photographs, especially those showing Uzbek and Tajik women. The number of braids indicated the woman's status (single or married): if there were five of them (*besch kakul*), she was single, and if there were two (*dzhuan*), she was married (Khoroshkhin 1876, 114). In most of the photos, the women have five or more braids. For example, the Uzbek woman Makhtab-ai and the Tajik woman Mahsat-ai both have their hair parted and styled into more than five braids and are wearing skullcaps (Kun 1871-1872).

Illustration No. 4
Uzbek woman Makhtab-ai and Tajik woman Mahsat-ai

It appears that the women in the photographs are around twenty years old, so it is likely they were married, despite their hairstyle. In Turkestan marriage took place between the ages of twelve and fif-

teen, however there were also cases of younger girls being married off (Kushelevsky, 1891). Most likely, the uncharacteristic hairstyle and "emancipated" representation of the women in the photographs reflect the requirements of the photographer. It remains a mystery how the women agreed to pose in such a way, i.e. how were the "models" selected for the shooting? Was there an agreement with their husbands? Notably, the models' social origins were also unknown. Perhaps these are the daughters of Muslims who closely cooperated with the imperial administration and were thus relatively Russified (Gramenitskiy 1896, 48).

Photography and Prostitution

In addition to the *Turkestan Album*, this paper relies on *Through Russian Turkestan*, a work compiled by the French traveler Hugues Krafft in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast to the Album, the photographs taken by Krafft were accompanied by the author's comments. Krafft also photographed residents of different ages alongside monuments and cityscapes. In one illustration in the section "*Habitations et mœurs*" ("Dwellings and manners"), we find a group of Muslim women dressed in burqas walking to the bazaar (Krafft 1902, 105). And on the next page, a staged photo of a girl standing against a wall holding a little boy, possibly her brother. In the photographs, both are dressed modestly in everyday clothing (Krafft 1902, 106). In Krafft's photographs, the girls' faces are not covered because children could be unveiled.

Just as Kun did, Krafft, in the section "*Types et costumes*" ("Types and Costumes"), included many staged shots of Muslim women. As in the 1870s, Krafft surprisingly managed to persuade women to be photographed. He attributed his success to finding prostitutes willing to pose (Krafft 1902). At first, he attempted to take pictures of Muslim women in Bukhara but failed and concluded that there were either no courtesans in Bukhara, or that they were kept secret (Krafft 1902). Krafft was almost correct, there was both open (*jalap*) and undercover (*kupiya*) prostitution in Turkestan, the latter of which would have only been known to a chosen circle of officials, merchants, and clergy (Nalivkin 1886). These men invited secret or "elite" prostitutes over to dance, please the men, and provide pleasant company (Nalivkin 1886, 243). Krafft was unable to pinpoint the ethnicity of the women he photographed, but it is likely that they were Uzbeks, Tajiks, or Turkmen. Mongoloid women were not pictured.

Illustration No. 5
A Female Child

In order to differentiate Turkestan prostitutes, Krafft left a description of their outfits, which differed from the clothing of "decent" Muslim women. Prostitutes wore European clothes in combination with local ones: jackets, tunics, loose dresses, and robes. In addition, their outfits were made of expensive materials and embroidered with velvet or silk (Krafft 1902, 150).

The hairstyles that Krafft describes are similar to those in the *Turkestan Album*. Long hair was parted in the middle, braided into many thin braids, within which silver jewelry was woven (Krafft 1902, 150). On their heads, courtesans wore a diadem, in which they inserted feathers and from which they hung silver and turquoise pendants. According to Krafft, courtesans also wore jewelry inlaid with precious stones and silver necklaces interspersed with corals and seashells. They also looked after their toilette, buying incense and perfume (1902, 150).

Illustration No. 6
Photograph of a Turkestan prostitute

Illustration No. 7
Clothing and Jewelry of Turkestan Courtesans

It is safe to assume that A.L. Kuhn resorted to a similar method of selecting "models," contacting prostitutes and negotiating payment with the women themselves or brothel owners. Krafft and Kuhn also photographed Jewish women. Regarding Jewish women, Krafft clarified that he worked not with prostitutes, but with "decent women," who he photographed only after receiving permission from their husbands, who were interested in obtaining copies of the photographs themselves (Krafft 1902, 154). It is possible that Kuhn also received permission from the husbands of Jewish women.

Turkestan was not only an attractive travel destination for European ethnographers. In the early 1870s the American diplomat and explorer Eugene Schuyler visited the region. Schuyler was a member of the American and Russian Geographical Society, and he left behind a two-volume work devoted to the Turkestan region based on his observations and communication with settlers, indigenous people, and officials (Schuyler 1876). Schuyler, like other travelers, focused on the appearance of Muslim women. He noted that most appeared on the streets of Tashkent in a burqa, but that one could encounter Muslim women with bare faces. In a similar vein, the Nalivkins also reported uncovered Muslim women, who protested against outdated moral rules. To the Nalivkins this protest "...was something in between a curse directed at her past... and a celebration of freedom" (Nalivkin 1886, 238).

Society considered those "freed" from the veil to be prostitutes, but in reality, this was unlikely. Often, women abandoned the veil in order to leave unwanted husbands. To do this, a Muslim woman feigned sickness and went to a Russian hospital, where, in the 1870s, the staff consisted of Christian men (Schuyler 1876, 124). The Christian man's supposed unhindered access to the Muslim woman's body was perceived as a violation of bodily and mental purity, and an invasion of the woman's intimate space. Visiting a Russian hospital could also convey a Muslim woman's lack of respect for her husband. By overstepping both ethical and religious boundaries, she humiliated her husband, made him feel useless, and destroyed his self-confidence. Such transgressions often led to divorce. These divorced Muslim women calmly appeared on the streets of Tashkent without a veil and drove around the city in phaetons (Schuyler 1876, 124).

Wearing a veil was a measure of morality for a Muslim woman. Covering one's body ensured its safety and indicated loyalty to only one man. Conservative clothing was associated with piety and intended to shield women from their "vulgar" nature. Thus, Muslim men perceived the *chadra* as a way for Muslim women to adhere to the traditional social order (Northrop 2004, 44). Interestingly, Schuyler and Krafft noted that

Tartar and Jewish women voluntarily put on a veil when going outside (Krafft 1902, 158; Schuyler 1876, 124). Veil wearing among non-Muslims can be seen as an adaptation to the local culture; many Tatars and Jews adopted this norm to conceal their ethnic origins and avoid conflict, since local Muslims treated them with contempt. Not only did Turkestan Tatar and Jewish women begin to imitate local custom, but Christian women in Syria also left the house covered with a veil (Amin 1912, 3).

The Thorns of Vice of Turkestan Society

Russian and European observers not only described the exoticism of Turkestan, but condemned its "native" societal vices. Many reproached Muslim husbands for their indifference to their wives (Shishov 1904, 404). According to Europeans, this happened for several reasons. Firstly, long-standing oriental traditions, which expected Muslim parents to choose their sons' wives, ruled out marital choice. Secondly, a lack of communication between partners before marriage desacralized the wedding bond and thus diminished the importance of family. This lack of prior acquaintance complicated everyday life because it was impossible for spouses to know the other's character. And finally, the disproportionate division of labor after marriage, in which the woman did all the household chores, led to strife. Women, they argued, realizing their "utilitarian" role, stopped caring for themselves. Sex, too, served either the satisfaction of momentary desires or procreation, which was itself dictated by tradition and controlled by relatives and community members.

Commonplace in the descriptions of Turkestan were complaints about legal discrimination, tyranny against Muslim women, and male indifference towards women's needs in the family, all of which Europeans considered anachronistic. According to a local saying, "a woman is like a cow," i.e. she is of a small mind and risks making a man obtuse, if he spends a lot of time with her (Ostroumov 1896, 66). Among nomads, proverbs humiliating women were common: "Hope better for a dog than for a wife who can betray you," or "A woman's hair is long, her mind is short" (Katanov 1893, 8).

From these clichés, European observers concluded that men, estranged from family life, looked for other forms of emotional release, which led to immoral acts. Urban Muslim men knew where to find prostitutes, but they were considered expensive entertainment. Therefore, same-sex relationships were widely practiced with effeminate young boys (*bachas*) from poor families who were specially trained to perform erotic dances (Shishov 1904, 331). Unlike in the case of pros-

titutes, clubs paid for the services of bachas making them affordable for poor men. In the harems of the Central Asian rulers, the bachas lived as concubines for Bukhara emirs and *beks* (dignitaries) (Olufsen 1911). Notably, while condemning local sexual practices, Russians and Europeans nevertheless described them with enthusiasm. Their compositions are full of detailed information and photographs of bachas.

Illustration No. 8
Turkestan Album: juvenile bacha

Among their descriptions, Europeans reported how the owners of the dancing boys (*bachebaza*) helped their wards by paying for their studies. In return, bachas were invited to a teahouse or home where orgies were held (Dobromyslov 1912; Ostroumov 1896) and sometimes taken on pleasure trips. By evening, the parties usually ended in gang rape.[3]

3. This is the phrase used by N. Ostroumov

Jealousy over coveted bachas sometimes led to murders (Ostroumov 1896). A bacha's beauty was noted until about 25-30 years old, after which he became either a bachebaza himself, or a criminal involved in petty theft or robbery (Ostroumov 1896).

Usually, bachas sang or demonstrated erotic dances in the streets, a custom that did not disturb locals. British traveler Henry Lansdell reported a scenario where three men played tambourines while boys danced to the music on streets of Kitab (Lansdell 1885). Bacha dances and songs were not only a means of entertainment, but were also part of theatrical performances; the boys changed into women's clothes with many small bells on their arms and legs (Kostenko 1871, 77), and adult bachas wore long hair and red attire (Lansdell 1885, 33). This choice of color was not accidental, as red symbolizes eroticism, physical pleasure, passion, and femininity in many cultures (Pasturo 2019).

Illustration No. 9
Through Russian Turkestan: Adult Bacha

The bacha dance consisted of rolling on bare feet, small jumps, and waving hand movements. Faced with the onlooker's gaze, the bacha "made eyes," rolling them upwards in an expression of bliss, straightened his long curls, flirted, and sent air kisses towards the beholder (Krestovskii 1887, 175-6). After the dance, the bacha was invited to *dastarkhan*, where he was given a sip of tea from his own bowl to make him feel more at ease (Kostenko 1871, 78). Bachas were treated and addressed with respect. Travelers reported sayings such as "Your Majesty," "Your slave listens," (Schuyler 1876, 133) and "Let the pains of your misfortune strike me" (Arandarenko 1889, 7). In Turkestan one could find female dancers, but they were kept secret and seldom advertised, since women's erotic dancing was considered a contemptible and taboo form of entertainment (Schuyler 1876, 137). Arguably, local attitudes and perceptions of women, sexuality, and marriage all contributed to the popularity of bachas, overturning "correct" modes of sexual behavior in favor of "deviant" ones.

Bacha dances had names, for example, "Afghani," "Shirazi," "Kashgari," which reflected the stories of same-sex love that took place in different countries or cities (Schuyler 1876, 134). Bachas had their own songs for each type of client and often caricatured them according to their particular traits: fat and bald, rich or poor. Each boy was known by his name, to which was added his status "bacha:" Mirza Hamdam Hajibacha or Seid-bacha. Erotic meaning and romantic passion permeate the essence of the songs. Ethnographer Abubakir Akhmetzhanovich Divaev (1855-1933) recorded and translated several such songs:

> Now, in a dance we set off down a charming path for friends
> We sacrifice our goals and our souls for each other
> While dancing, cast off your grief and sorrow
> Be kind, take a look and appreciate the expression of Hamdam's eyes
> And another tenderness
> And a different pose (Komarov 1910, 203-219).

Or:

> I look at my lover, what is his goal
> Copulation with me will heal your sorrows
> My black eyebrows are a craving for the soul
> To the amorous crowds, I am the source of only one misfortune
> And another tenderness
> And a different pose (Komarov 1910, 203-219).

European observers claimed the spread of sexually transmitted diseases was an obvious consequence of prostitution and homosexuality (Kushelevskii 1891). Islam, like any monotheistic religion, does not accept prostitution, for which severe punishments are imposed. Moreover, heterosexual relationships in Islamic culture are sanctified, while homosexuality is treated as a crime (Lev-Starovich 1991; Ostroumov 1900). Despite this, homosexuality and pedophilia in Turkestan did not cause open discontent. At the same time, homosexuality led to even greater oppression of women. According to Shishov, Muslim women considered homosexuality to be a vile phenomenon, given that bachas were attracted to men more than young girls (Shishov 1904).

Administrative Tolerance, or "Ignoring" Cultural and Moral "Deviations"?

American traveler and journalist William Curtis characterized the attitude of the Russian authorities towards Turkestani traditions, customs, and ways of life as tolerant (Curtis 1911). For a long time, the Russian administration did not interfere in the intimate lives of the "natives," as it was the clergy's obligation to watch over Muslims' moral character. Furthermore, no sanctions were applied to brothels, since prostitution in Russia was legalized in 1843 (Dobromyslov 1912; Malysheva 2010).[4] Indeed, in Tashkent, the city administration, the police, and the *rais* (moral observers) protected prostitutes from clients who used their services and did not pay (Dobromyslov 1912, 325). When women reported these occurrences to the police, they immediately took action (Dobromyslov 1912, 325).

Pleasure houses provided work for Muslim women in the region. European observers found several reasons why these women became prostitutes (Lykoshin 1916). Often, women turned to prostitution in order to become fiscally independent from men or to overcome fa-

4. Then, on the initiative of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Count Lev Alekseevich Perovsky, a supervisory body for "public women" was created: the Medical and Police Committee. Immediately after the occupation of Tashkent, the Russian administration began to register prostitutes. In 1876, 100 prostitutes were registered in Tashkent, of which 80 were local Muslim women and 20 were Russian women. A medical examination was carried out once a week. In Turkestan, supervision of prostitutes was assigned to the police and the city doctor.

milial poverty; to live lavish lifestyles that the domestic space did not provide; or to avoid becoming a second or third wife (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886, 235–236.). Remarkably, according to General Georgy Alekseevich Arandarenko (1846-1908), in urban areas, husbands allowed their wives to engage in prostitution to support their families (Arandarenko 1889; Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886).[5] It was possible to sell a woman to a brothel by legalizing the case with a judge (*Kaziy*) (Arandarenko 1889).[6] Urban Muslims (Sarts) maintained most of the brothels, often allowing no more than four prostitutes, according to the maximum number of legal wives (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886). Extensive erotic literature authored by local Muslims about heterosexual and same-sex love also existed (Babadjanov 2010).

The authorities were also aware that in addition to husbands selling wives, parents sold their young sons as bachas in order to earn a living (Arandarenko 1889). Although homosexuality and pedophilia were criminal offenses in the Russian Empire, those who "kept" bachas were not responsible before the law. The Russian government even weakened its regulation over lower-level administrators, allowing the People's Court (*Mehkeme*) to determine sentences for sodomy. According to the orientalist and local imperial official, Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin, the People's Court was known for issuing more lenient sentences than the Russian secular court (Lykoshin 1916).

Both male and female prostitution contaminated the image of Russian authority. In Tashkent, brothels, taverns, and baths were raided. After their arrests, the prostitutes were sorted into locals and visitors. Locals received "yellow tickets," while visitors were sent back to their native lands. These actions were ineffective, as the number of courtesans quickly replenished. In 1910, 24 brothels were discovered in Tashkent (Dobromyslov 1912, 342-3).

Moreover, it was not until 1884 that the city mayor, Colonel Stepan Romanovich Putintsev, attempted to suppress bacha practices in the "old" (Muslim) part of Tashkent. Putintsev asked the opinion of Muslim jurists (*fakikhs*), who condemned the phenom-

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5. According to V. P. Nalivkin's memoirs about the annexation of the Kokand possessions, after the Russian occupation of the right bank of the Syr Darya (Namangan district) in 1875, local men began to bring their wives to the Russian detachments as prostitutes.

6. On the relaxation of Muslim morals and the sale of wives see: Mikhaylov 1900.

enon as unlawful (Ostroumov 1896, 69-71). No measures were taken, however. In 1890 the head of Tashkent asked for the opinion of the judges (*Kazies*)[7] on the problem of bacha ownership and banned dancing in teahouses (Lykoshin 1916; 358). The law came into force, but in 1896 it was revoked, and bacha dances were introduced into charity festival programs (Lykoshin 1916; 358).[8] Bachas even performed in the open at the Turkestan agricultural, industrial, and scientific exhibition of 1909, held in Tashkent (Komarov, Il'kina, and Divaev 1910).

Storytellers (*Bakhshi*) sang love songs about bachas. A common theme was the khan's love for an indifferent bacha. Tormented by an unrequited emotion, he invited the bacha home and performed consoling elegies. Muslim men, listening to such lyrics, sobbed until the verses described the softening of the youth's temper and his growing sympathy for the sovereign (Kostenko 1870, 78-9). Bachas were also portrayed in the visual arts and folk poetry. As an "oriental exotic" they certainly attracted the attention of painters. The Russian painter Vasily Vasilyevich Vereshchagin depicted a Muslim woman wrapped in a veil and a bacha (Schimmelpenninck 2009; 179-209). The tradition of admiring bacha dances survived the October Revolution and the Bolshevik rise to power, as evidenced by a verse called "Turkestan" published in the educational collection of the Turkestan People's University (TNU):

> ... Where is the fanatical priest of the Prophet
> Half-dozing, at this late hour
> Calls the sons of the Orient to the mosque
> Make your usual prayer
> Where is that lazy Sart
> He hurries under the shadow of elm
> Where a voluptuous cocotte,
> The feminine bacha is dancing. ("Sbornik Turkestanskogo Narodnogo Universiteta" 1918, 169).

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7. Sometimes rendered as Qadi.

8. Perhaps the authorities did not have enough funds for an administrative event, so they had to take a step back. Bachebazas were wealthy people, and Muslim men enjoyed watching bachas dance. Apparently, to attract attention and interest among the population, the authorities went for a more tolerant approach.

Conclusion

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian Turkestan attracted travelers and researchers. Wishing to learn more about Russia's new possessions, ethnographers and orientalists began to study the "indigenous" peoples, including women. They tried to describe the Muslim woman as accurately and clearly as possible, giving rise to eroticized and exoticized narratives. While reporting the traditions and customs of local society, observers, many of whom were ruled by their own prejudices about the Orient and Muslim women, gleaned from "Orientalist" literature, tried to capture her visual, moral, and spiritual characteristics.

Furthermore, photography, invented in the nineteenth century, served as a vehicle of propaganda for the authorities. Thanks to this new technology, K.P. von Kaufman and A.L. Kun provided a glimpse into of the lives of Turkestan Muslim women: how they looked and dressed, what they did, and how they entertained themselves. The depiction of women in the *Turkestan Album* is not "objective," but rather a romanticized representation created by the imperial administration to impress the international arena and the Russian public. Although schematic and simple, the album illustrates the diversity of the region and its people.

Krafft's work, *Through Russian Turkestan*, was intended to be the opposite of the *Turkestan Album*. Krafft relied on attracting daughters of Russified Muslims or prostitutes, since parents and relatives had little control over them. Although many courtesans entered into a marriage (*nikah* according to Sharia), this was but an illusion to protect the brothel. Wearing the veil (burqa) was not widespread either, rather it depended on environmental conditions as well as cultural and social norms. Some urban Muslim women voluntarily gave up the burqa without becoming prostitutes, although in the eyes of most believers they were automatically considered as such. In general, conservatism was deeply rooted in the minds of ordinary people and the "native" aristocracy.

Eroticism and exoticism — an integral part of travel stories and essays — appear immediately when authors describe a Muslim woman. However, to a greater extent in the narratives there are depictions of brazen young bachas rather than attractive women. Feminine boys were considered an important part of the daily lives of many Muslim men who had lost interest in family life and wives whom they did not choose. Despite the condemnation of homosexuality and pedophilia

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in Islam and in the laws of the Russian Empire, local society tolerated both. Bacha dances were commonplace in public spaces, while the erotic dances of young women were hidden from society. Narrative and visual representations constructed the orientalist image and flavor of Turkestan society with a ubiquitous sense of lust and hedonism, where even men were feminized.

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Danila Rygovskiy

Technology and Its Representation as a Source of Religious Experience for Old Believers of Yenisei Region

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The paper discusses an ambivalent interaction between Chasovennye Old Believers of Yenisei region and modern technologies. Old Believers must rely on certain technologies and equipment for survival in the severe conditions of taiga and mountains. Nevertheless, technology is strongly associated with Antichrist and signifies his imminent arrival. The paper is focused on the intensity of usage of certain technological devices by the Old Believers, and how these devices are interpreted in eschatological terms. Technical specifications of various devices therefore serve as mediators in expressing religious emotions and experience.

Keywords: Old Believers, Chasovennye faction, semiotic ideologies, material religion, eschatology, technology.

Introduction and Research Context

I N THIS article, I will discuss Chasovennye Old Believers (autonym "Christians"), who live in taiga settlements on the tributaries of the Yenisei River. The areas under consideration include the upper reaches of the Little Yenisei (Tuva), the southern portions of the Krasnoiarskii krai, and the lower reaches of the Yenisei (Krasnoiarskii krai). In the latter of these regions, there is not only a population of Old Believer lay people (in other words, not monks), but

also the Dubchessky sketes, which are well-known from the works of N. N. Pokrovskii and N. D. Zol'nikova (Zol'nikova 2001; Pokrovskii 1992; Pokrovskii and Zol'nikova 2002). The core of the article is based on my own field notes, which were gathered in 2017–2018.

Recently, Old Believers have become more prominent in the public sphere. Representatives of various confessions have appeared in public platforms and in forums, they are active on social media, and they are featured in educational literature. At the same time, the so-called Chasovennoe faction remains "closed off" in this regard. My interlocutors always showed an extreme uneasiness about the possibility of their names being made public (they were particularly worried about their personal data appearing on the Internet). For this reason, in this article I do not reveal the names of the Old Believers with whom I interacted during the expedition. I also do not name any specific settlements, instead referring only to the name of the region. The conclusions I draw based on this research can be applied not only to the Yenisei Chasovennye Old Believers but can also be extended to other groups within that confession or within other Old Believer denominations. It is also possible that one can observe similar processes outside of Old Rite Orthodox Christianity as well. Nevertheless, my approach consists of concentrating on a specific group, as, following Birgit Myer, I presuppose that religious experience depends on the character of local interactions between people and technological devices (Meyer 2008, 124–35).

Throughout their spiritual movement's history, Old Believers have regarded innovation with suspicion. They may perceive threats in material objects and social innovations of all kinds, from the potato to the census. The interactions between adherents of the Old Belief and technology follow this general tendency. Old Believer instructional texts called on the faithful to renounce the use of radios, televisions, motors, and other "devilish temptations." In spite of this, technology has firmly entered the everyday lives (*byt*) of Old Believers, as have a number of other innovations.

This can be observed among the Yenisei Old Believers, who mostly live on the edge of infrastructure: in taiga villages, in the mountains, along untamed tributaries, and far from other human settlements. Perhaps the only exceptions are the Chasovennye who live in large villages or towns not far from the city of Minusinsk and Abakan, the capital of Khakassia. Old Believer settlements in the southern part of Krasnoiarskii krai and in part of Tuva have access to electricity and some villages have generators. There are refrigerators and

washing machines in nearly every home. In addition, Old Believers skillfully operate heavy-duty trucks, off-road jeeps, and other vehicles, and buy motors for their home-made metal boats. They pass down their habits of technology use from generation to generation along with other forms of "popular knowledge" and their belief system. Contrary to the opinion of N. N. Pokrovskii, the technical and engineering skills of the Chasovennye are amply demonstrated in the Dubchessky sketes, where Old Believers have constructed a dock, wood-working and metal-working shops, and a great deal else.[1] During Soviet times, the sketes did not have technological equipment; however, Soviet patterns of working with collective farm equipment played an important role in integrating technology into everyday life (*byt*) (Liubimova 2017, 128).

Researchers of the Old Belief have explained the relationship of the Chasovennye to technology in various ways. For example, N. N. Pokrovskii suggested that the Chasovennye proscription against owning televisions and radios are a bastardization of the storylines from Old Russian literature about the "heresy of Skomorokha music" and early Christian eschatology (Pokrovskii 1993, 449). At the same time, Old Believer eschatology is not confined to references to medieval texts; rather, Old Believer methods of interpreting technology as a sign should be understood as a kind of conspiracy theory. As Aleksandr Panchenko notes, Christian eschatology is endowed with "a particular valence toward conspiratorial explanatory models" (Panchenko 2015, 124). One can observe that the frameworks used by the Yenisei Chasovennye do not necessarily contain references only to Old Believer texts. For example, a widespread narrative in Old Believer communities is that of the "Beast Computer," which was ostensibly built in Brussels. The computer collects and controls information about all human beings on earth to prepare for the coming of the Antichrist. The appearance of this legend is connected to ultraconservative Christians in the United States; a Russian translation of the text produced in the U.S. in the 1980s found its way to the Siberian Chasovennye.[2] In spite of its ethnic and cultural foreignness, the "Beast Computer" narrative has not only spread to the Yenisei Chasovennye, it is actively used to

1. Pokrovskii asserted that boat motors and electronic equipment had spread among the Old Believers, but not within the sketes (Pokrovskii 1993, 448).

2. A professor at the University of Southern Alabama, Paul Vaulin, published his translation in 1981; another independent translation was made in the 1980s, either by Russian Baptists or Old Believers living in America. (Panchenko 2017, 81).

interpret contemporary social, political, economic, cultural, and historical processes.[3]

One might conclude that the fusion of these specific American Protestant texts with the Old Believer predisposition to interpret innovations in eschatological terms happened seamlessly. I am aware of only one example of a person who tried to stop the diffusion of conspiracy theories among his fellow believers, that of A. G. Murachev, a prodigious Old Believer writer and the author of numerous polemical works in the Chasovennoe confession. In his memoirs Murachev writes about another idea popular not only among Old Believers but among conservative Orthodox Christians as well: that the bar code placed on goods contains "the number of the Beast."

> In 1995 our Christian community was roiled. It started with the sketes,[4] when bar codes began to appear on goods; Baptists and other heretics began to call it the "mark" that had been written about in the Book of Revelation. The magazines and newspapers began to publish a profusion of heretical articles; their sophistry was absolutely not in harmony with the Holy Word. Members of the skete communities, because of their illiteracy, believed in that heretical teaching and began to spread these fantastical lies about the end of the world to the people. Of course, people did not agree about everything: some of them remain with us, devoted to the correct teachings, others turned into a mafia, carried away by heretical teachings they received from the monks (Zol'nikova 2010, 284).

Although Murachev enjoyed great authority within the community,[5] his judgment on this issue found practically no support. Even now those Old Believers who knew him still note that, in spite of his spiritual wisdom, Murachev was not correct in all matters, especially as he did "not fault the bar code," that is, he did not consider it forbidden to use goods on which it is imprinted. Obviously, it was not only

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3. Maria Akhmetova notes that so-called "technological eschatology" is widespread in contemporary Russia. One can find similar stories about computers, televisions, and other technological innovations not only among Old Believers, but among the rest of the Orthodox population (Akhmetova 2011, 144–57).

4. The reference is to the sketes on the Dubches River.

5. This is attested to by the fact that the sepulcural cross at his grave is marked by an epitaph, an unmistakable sign of reverence, in so far as the Chasovennye write epitaphs only for the most significant people. Murachev is called "an illuminator of the twentieth century, a pedagogue and teacher of God's Word" (Author's Field Materials — hereafter AFM, Lower Yenisei, 2018)

a matter of rumors about the bar code, but about its ubiquity and the suddenness of its appearance in everyday life.

Some researchers of the Chasovennoe Old Belief assert that it is being strongly influenced by globalization and modernization and thus could disappear in short order. This line of argument assumes that the Old Believers are waging a tireless struggle to preserve their identity and culture, however. In part, Margarita Tatarintseva utilizes this logic to explain the prohibition against the use of certain devices among Chasovennye believers in Tuva: "Teachers (*nastavniki*)[6] forbade the use of everyday technologies that could threaten the Old Belief ideologically, sow doubts in the souls of believers, and shake the faith" (Tatarintseva and Storozhenko 2015, 79). She also writes about the "canonization of old customs in the everyday": "Strictly following the pre-Nikonian ancient church rules, rituals, and traditions, the Old Believers connected this church ritualism to elements of traditional Russian everyday culture. They regarded the latter's material forms to be a form of divine essence, a part of the Old Belief, and an indivisible feature of Old Belief" (Tatarintseva and Storozhenko 2015, 72). The only part of this explanation one might take issue with is Russian everyday culture (*byt*), which undoubtedly changed not only in the twentieth century, but also two centuries ago. The Old Believers, in the end, purchased and used the same goods as the rest of the population. For example, in Tuva after the revolution, the Old Believers treated Soviet goods with suspicion, as they regarded the Soviet state as "godless;" yet their "ancient" everyday culture was nevertheless filled with other "foreign" goods: home-made or Chinese.

> Monks,[7] who maintained reserves of bread, did not accept as charity the bread that had been marked as subject to taxation; but those who did not have reserves of old bread ate the taxable bread. They did not use those goods that had been produced in Soviet factories, preferring old or Chinese goods. To copy books, they bought paper from the Chinese and made inks from berries and birch fungus. All of this gradually began to die out and the religious [persons] adapted to life and became ordinary and it ceased to seem new or unfamiliar [. . .] (TIGPI RF, d. 503, l. 32).

6. Among the Chasovennye Old Believers, teachers [*nastavniki*] are spiritual leaders of the community; they lead liturgies, hear confessions, and perform religious rites (baptisms, weddings, and funerals).

7. In the twentieth century, the Chasovennye Old Believers in Tuva had monasteries. Today the latter remain only on the Lower Yenisei.

The source of this report was the Old Believer E. D. Pazderin, who witnessed the changes in everyday life that took place among the Tuva Chasovennoe denomination after 1917. He wrote his memoirs during Soviet times, and thus the reasons that the monks "maintained the old ways" were left fairly vague. Surely the difficult relations between the Soviet state and the Chasovennye only strengthened the latter's rejection of "unfamiliar" objects. Nonetheless, as Pazderin writes, the Old Believers "adapted to life." In other words, there was a "canonization" of certain material forms on the one hand, and, on the other, the continual transformation of that "canon" related to the proliferation of innovations.

What shapes this process? In her work on labor ethics among contemporary Chasovennye in Tuva, Galina Liubimova notes the paradoxical co-existence of ideas about technology's sinfulness and its widespread utilization within Old Believer settlements. This state of affairs is justified by the fact that technology is used exclusively for the purposes of labor, in so far as without it, it is impossible to ensure the material existence of the community, especially in the conditions of the taiga. The author draws on Valerii Kerov's conception of the "blessed fault," i.e. the Old Believers' religious and ethical justification for the use of technology if it is necessary for economic development or entrepreneurial activity (to a great extent, this enabled the modernization of agriculture on the part of Old Believers) (Liubimova 2017, 126, 129). Thus, the exigencies of survival led to sharp changes in the Old Believer system of prohibitions, compelling them to reconsider their own views on contemporary technology.

At the same time, there are certain reasons to think that this concept does not fully explain the internal conflict within the Old Believer worldview. First, the "blessed fault" is not an "emic" concept to the Yenisei Chasovennye. The connotation of "blessed," that is approval by a higher power, is out of place. A "fault," or to be more precise the fallenness of various objects, exists as a religious practice of the Chasovennye: any potentially dangerous objects, whether they are bank cards, goods with a bar code, documents (especially electronic documents or those that contain biometric data), among others, have to be "acknowledged as fallen." That is to say, it is necessary to acknowledge them as unbeneficial to the soul and to repent the necessity of their use. That being said, a full renunciation of similar items is regarded as the ideal. Secondly, this does not refer simply to items that make housework easier. Chasovennye have a similar relationship to mobile phones, for example. It is problematic to explain their widespread use,

when telephones are associated with the sphere of entertainment and not with one's own work. Thirdly, it is worth mentioning that certain prohibitions within this system are more common than others. Certain items are actively worried about and spoken about; they are discussed and can be regarded as a part of an active eschatology. Other prohibitions, on the other hand, even if they were articulated in the decisions of communal councils, are not as acute and are more or less forgotten. It is appropriate to recall the struggle of Chasovennye teachers (*nastavniki*) against the radio and two-way radio communication, which they waged for the entire second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The polemics against these devices quieted down after the appearance of a new threat: mobile phones. What is more, radios and two-way radio communication persisted among Old Believers: for example, two-way radios remain a necessary means of communication in taiga settlements. Yet no one sees them in eschatological terms any longer. In other words, economic necessity does not fully justify the use of technology, and the relationship of Old Believers to technology is not fully captured using the proposed terms.

Analytical Method: Semiotic Ideologies in the Concepts of Webb Keane and Birgit Meyer

Apocalyptic prophecies presume that signs of the end of the world will appear in the real world in tangible, material forms. Thus, technological devices can appear, in Webb Keane's terms, as a *sign vehicle* of divine presence and the fulfillment of prophecies. Keane calls this method of interpretation a "semiotic ideology," or the sum total of people's ideas "about what signs are, what functions signs serve, and what consequences they might produce" (Keane 2018, 64).

I will demonstrate the fundamental workings of this mechanism through the example of texts about the dangers of using radios. In the "Tale of Miraculous Occurrences," a Chasovennye collection of historical/hagiographic stories, there is a story of a mother named Evstoliia, in whose life radios appear in very dramatic circumstances. In the first place, Evstoliia's marriage was not working out, as her husband not only took a mistress but brought her into the home and forced his spouse to "serve them as a slave." The husband had a radio, the "evil sounds" of which the devout woman hated. The second moment occurred when she was incarcerated in a labor camp and had to listen to the radio while the barracks were searched. Evstoliia related how, in the first and second instances, the radio went silent when she made

the sign of the cross over it. After she did this, no one could turn it on again (Pokrovskii 2014, 267). This story not only illustrates the power of the sign of the cross; it also demonstrates something about the radio. If it is commonly accepted that devils fear the cross, and the radio stops working when the sign of the cross is made over it, it all adds up to the conclusion that the radio has a demonic "nature." It is no accident that the collection's authors placed the story into the category of "demonic miracles giving way in the face of the profession of the Orthodox faith," alongside the story of an oracular doll that broke due to the power of prayer (Pokrovskii, Zol'nikova, and Zhuravel' 2016, 88).

The concept of "semiotic ideologies" suggests that the accepted methods of interpreting signs in one society can differ substantially from the explanatory mechanisms in another, which becomes particularly clear, in Webb Keane's view, at the moment of conflict between two interpretive frameworks. Moreover, the sign itself is unconventional in the sense that the symbolic meaning can be ascribed to the subject by some and can be rejected by others (the author notes this in relation to iconoclasm) (Keane 2018, 81). The Old Believer attitude toward innovation, including technology, can be explained by a similar mechanism of semiotization. If one considers how much the Yenisei Chasovennye discuss the spread of electronic devices, then it follows that technology constitutes an important source of religious experience in that society. Keane's concept of "semiotic ideology" allows scholars to approach the Old Believers' use of technology — with its attendant eschatological fears — a little bit differently. Namely, they can differentiate between those situations in which technology is perceived as a sign of the self-fulfilling apocalyptic prophecy, and those in which technology is accepted for what it is rather than as a mediator of the activities of the Antichrist. The feelings that arise as a result of such interactions will be negative, in the sense that it is a feeling of danger, of the threat of being led away from salvation. These fears are all the more important, because they serve as a reminder of that same danger.

In so far as it was media devices — televisions, two-way radio communication devices, radios, mobile phones, and computers — that fell under Chasovennye canonical prohibitions (that is, prohibitions that were adopted collectively at a council of the confession and were codified in writing in the form of a legal code), I have chosen an analytical approach that arose from studies of the interaction between religion and media. In addition, I was interested in how these devices are depicted in Old Believer communities, whether in narratives or in wall prints. In a similar vein, Birgit Meyer examines how television, art objects, and ra-

dio are used not only by "traditional" religions like Christianity and Islam but also by comparatively recent religious movements (i.e. New Age). In this sense, it does not matter whether media elicit religious excitement or offend the feelings of religious people; the main thing is that they create a certain experience. Meyer also understands media broadly, as "those artifacts and cultural forms that make possible communication, bridging temporal and spatial distance between people as well as between them and the realm of the divine or spiritual" (Meyer 2008, 126).

The Computer

Among the Yenisei Chasovennye, drawings on spiritual and moral themes are quite popular. Aleksandr Kostrov and Ekaterina Bykova call these drawings, not quite correctly in my view, "popular prints" (Kostrov and Bykova 2016). In the following, I will use the term "wall sketch," which is mentioned by the art historians E. I. Itkina and Z. A. Luchsheva in their works (Itkina 1992, 6; Luchsheva 2006, 196). Most interesting to me of these is the drawing "Two Roads, Two Paths," published and described by Kostrov and Bykova:

> The field of the popular print [. . .] is divided into three main sections: a textual segment below two visual sections titled "the righteous path" and "the path of sin." [. . .] The upper portion of the popular print is dedicated to the "sinful world." [. . .] The motif connecting them is a "smooth and broad path," which appears in the form of a bright yellow road, upon which people are traveling from the top of the page downward by various means of transportation (cars, buses, motorcycles) and on foot. These persons are dressed fashionably and carry trendy bags and tape recorders. A lit cigarette emits smoke as it hangs in the mouth of one of these characters. At the end of the path, they tumble into the wide-open void called "Satan's realm." Their movement is accompanied by several scenes of sin, which are juxtaposed with the righteous scenes on the opposite side of the page (Kostrov and Bykova 2016, 182, 186).

In the center of the "path of sin" is an enormous spider symbolizing the "diabolical networks," spread out over the world's capital cities (which are depicted in the form of their major tourist attractions: the Kremlin, the Statue of Liberty, etc. . .). One of the spider's legs is coming out of a cross-shaped building labelled "Beast." This is the same Brussels super-computer, which, according to the Old Believers, was built to trap the souls of Christians (see ill. 1, 2).
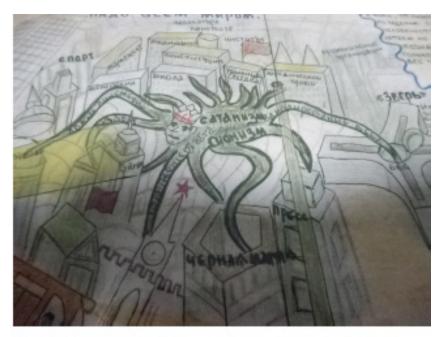
Illustration 1,2. Details from the wall sketch "Two Roads, Two Paths." Photo: Doctor of History A.A. Prigarin, August 2018, Krasnoiarskii krai.

In fact, the Chasovennye of Siberia rarely have many interactions with computers: they agree to keep them in their schools, where they instruct their children in the worldly sciences, only because Rosobrnadzor requires it.[8] It is quite telling that the computer is part of the Old Believers' direct contact with the state. However, as one of my interlocutors (one of the Tuva Chasovennye's teachers [*nastavnik*]) noted, in this case, the state itself is not so much at issue as it is the computer as a means of collecting data:

> Well, this is, as it is said . . . Contemporary science has proved it and it is coming true according to the Apocalypse [here and throughout, the emphasis was on the final syllable. — D.R.]. For example, in the Book of Revelation, it is said . . . they can only find shelter in the mountains and the caves. And in our times, you can be found anywhere over the Internet. From space. Oh, and now they are even talking about new passports. They have those magnetic ribbons and that's it. [. . .] And then, when you, for example, are buying tickets or picking something up, and you hold your passport up to the computer, it's invalid without those ribbons. It happened that some of our people took them and scraped them off — and that's it, it is not valid without that ribbon. Thousands of words are contained in those ribbons [. . .] Where the Antichrist reigns, the world will be charmed. Almost . . . very few will be left who will not be under his control. That is, with all of those electronics (AFM, Tuva, 2018).

The Tuva teacher (*nastavnik*) repeated the narratives, widespread among the Chasovennye, about contemporary biometric passports being created specifically for the purpose of tracking the movements of religious people. In addition to this, the Old Believers are convinced that when biometric data are given, the forehead and hands of the person are marked with the Antichrist's number, "666." This prompts them to, if not to renounce passports and other documents entirely, then at the very least to treat their use and safekeeping with caution. Few renew their passports immediately when they are lost. Not all of them have documents and others treat their use (i.e. to buy tickets) with apprehension, preferring to get around in their own vehicles, either cars or boats.[9] Accordingly, in spite of the fact that transporta-

8. Rosobrnadzor is the government agency responsible for overseeing schools [— Ed.]
9. Travel is indispensable when it comes to great distances; for example, the road north from Tuva, to the Dubchessky sketes, is more than 1,200 km.

tion is a part of the image of the sinful world, its use, in practice, allows one to escape other more serious dangers, from the point of view of the Chasovennye.

The same teacher asserted that the technical powers of computers to track people are "proved by science." At the same time, the Old Believers do not simply accept the judgments of outside experts (or their interpretations of those opinions), but rather try to understand how those judgments are formed. For example, another of my informants appealed to "common sense":

> He [the Antichrist — D. R.] must tempt. And what a temptation has come about. The telephone and whatnot. Do you know the telephone well, then? They are written about in the prophesies. There will come a time when the Antichrist will unite the faraway with the nearby. You can speak with whoever, like you and I now. And, see . . . You know more than I do, Skype or whatnot [. . .] There is the Antichrist! And you are a clever man, you ought to know how it works? There is this little trick, you put it in, and it plays up to a thousand songs or films. How can it do this? It can't do it without an evil spirit. Or a computer — this is a mind. But a metal mind also cannot create the mind of a man. Little switches, that's it, that's all it is. . . . But this all comes from the Antichrist. All of this is trickery and sophistry. Somehow they worked. For example, if the refrigerator were heated up, the heat switch would turn on. This is all clear. There are some other contraptions, too. And then you have this little trick, and how does it work? Can metal, even with all those microchips, can it become a mind? Man has never and will never re-create the human mind. But with the devil's power. The devil's power helps.[10] And in all this rubbish a human mind is created, that's that. And the telephone, that's that. All of that is the devil's weapon and the devil's power. If someone uses it and does not stop, he will bring them to him, and that's it. With both hands. "You used my instrument!" And the computer, too. The computer comes out . . . The computer and the television — the icon will emerge from the sea. Well, this is written in Apocalypse. The computer and television are this icon, it's understood. And people will bow down to it. That is to say, they will pray to it. You see how it is now. You come home from work, maybe you yourself, and you have to go to the computer right away. Watch-

10. One of the widespread judgments among the Yenisei Chasovennye: three sixes are stamped inside computers. If these are removed, then it will stop working.

ing something, your email, Skype . . . all kinds of correspondence. You know all of this. Right away you can't tear yourself away. You eat quickly, quickly and go right back to it. Now, the icon gets its adoration. And the icon . . . The sea — this is the people, a large sea. And he came out of the people, an icon Television at first, and then icons and then all people . . . Well, the television, as you can see, it would be great if people became addicted, and everyone needed it. But it became a nuisance. Now, some people watch, some don't watch. Now it's the computer. And the computer, you see, it sucks people in up to the limit, such that a person cannot tear himself away. When does he pray? And it is for this that the Antichrist made the computer and the television, so that people do not pray. Because God does not take people, he only accepts those who are willing. And he [the Antichrist] is trying to have people not pray (AFM, Tuva, 2017).

In this extended discussion, there are not only references to the Book of Revelation, but the speaker also reflects upon his own interactions with technology. The principle of the refrigerator's functioning is clear to this contemporary Old Believer, so even if one takes into account that the "previous generation's" technology was also created under the influence of the Antichrist, such influence is not taken seriously. The refrigerator, as a familiar and domesticated device, cannot call forth fears. This takes place with practically any technology with which the Old Believers have direct experience or wish to use for economic purposes. For example, damless hydropower plants or solar panels are ordinary topics of discussions in the Yenisei taiga, just as is debating the advantages and disadvantages of old Soviet outboard motors and new Japanese motors.

I would like to turn attention to the fact that technology exists in two capacities. Switching between these two happens in relation to the material embodiment of the device. A specific vehicle that one uses, maintains, and swaps will only weakly remind one of the Book of Revelation. It is an entirely different matter for a vehicle that comes up in an educational circle or that is depicted in a popular print. This explains why a computer appears "dangerous," while a refrigerator and other technologies do not. the computer practically does not exist in the lives of Old Believers, and if it does appear, it is only in specific contexts that are connected with the collection of personal data. This does not contradict judgments about the idleness of those who keep a computer in their home, it merely confirms that similar objects are the "weapons of Satan."

The Television

Above, I cited a fragment of a field note, in which one of my interlocutors spoke of addiction. The television, like the computer, in his mind, constitutes an icon of the Antichrist. The television has found a similar place in the Old Believer popular print: "Next to the television, on which devils show their ruler with a crown and the number 666, there is a sign that says 'Come bow to the new tsar! And 'God'?" (Kostrov and Bykova, 187). Yet, television does not have the same destructive power. Televisions may not be widespread in their everyday lives, but Old Believers can watch television at their non-Old Believer friends' homes or while traveling. The experience of one Yenisei teacher([*nastavnik*]) is quite telling. He and his wife were arguing about the "nature" of the television. She regarded the television, according to traditional ideas, as an icon of the Antichrist. The teacher, on the other hand, said the television itself was not yet an icon but rather a portent of a thing that will hang in the air and be called an icon.

Here, as with the means of transportation depicted by the author of the popular print, the semiotic meaning of the television changes according to the various contexts and material forms in which the device appears. As is clear from the example, direct contact with a device does not necessarily become a source of religious experience, that is to say, it does not evoke such emotions. The experience comes about when the narrativization or visualization of the contact is filled with eschatological anxieties. In some way, the Yenisei Chasovennye living on the taiga create their own "mediators" around contemporary media and technology, in which the latter belong to the world of the Antichrist. In its essence, this is no different than a city-dweller interpreting the world in a mediated way, via news channels and informative programming, yet simultaneously maintaining their own direct experience of contact with that world.

At the same time, I am not suggesting that the Old Believers' real interaction with technology is completely detached from their mediated one. These are intersecting planes. For this reason, when reflecting on the fact that they nevertheless make use of technology, the Chasovennye underscore that their ideal is a full renunciation of it. It is another matter that the task of providing for their families does not allow for it; from this condition comes the necessity of mediated images of various devices: they serve as a reminder of approaching apocalyptic events.

This is not the only intersection between two images of technology. The adoption of certain devices — the "accommodation" of their

existence in the world — lowers the degree of their eschatological charge. It is possible that this explains the historical shifts in the relationship of Old Believers to innovations (as in their change of views on the radio and two-way radio communication). The object that becomes a familiar and accepted part of everyday life cannot be a source of religious experience and disappears from the eschatological or conspiratorial narrative. For example, this took place among the Pechora Old Believers with the potato. "According to the testimonies of researchers and travelers, who visited Pechora krai at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, local authorities took extensive measures to make the potato widespread in their territory; potato cultivation had already become customary for other inhabitants of Russia. In spite of the administration's aggressive measures and the efforts of the intelligentsia, the Ust'-tsilemites[11] at first refused to even cultivate them on their lands" (Bobretsova 2001, 91). According to Elena Smilianskaia, among the Old Believers there was once a widespread belief that the potato had appeared as the result of "unholy intimacy" between a woman and a dog. This legend supported a prohibition against using the potato in food. Yet by the end of the twentieth century, the potato had become an increasingly important part of the Old Believer diet in Pechora, and thus a countervailing text appeared, which related how members of skete communities had used the potato long ago (Smilianskaia 149–50).

Does this mean that in time the television will stop being associated with apocalyptic prophecies and the Chasovennye will stop depicting it in their wall sketches? One should not give a simple answer to this question, as the interpretive frames around each material form follow their own trajectories. Alongside "accommodations" of items that were earlier forbidden, prohibitions on formerly accepted devices can also occur. For example, it had become customary in the sketes to use LED flashlights. One hegumen, however, reported having a dream,[12] after which these lights were all replaced by *zhuchki*, a Soviet-era flashlight powered kinetically by squeezing a lever. This is another example demonstrating that if two devices serve the same purpose, the more progressive one is designated as sinful.

11. Ust'-tsilemite was the autonym of the *Pomortsy* faction of Old-believers living on the Lower Pechora. See (Bobretsova 2001).

12. Unfortunately, the content of the hegumen's dream remains unknown to me.

The Mobile Phone

Among all technological gadgets, the cell phone occupies a particularly important role in the life of Old Believers. They own almost no computers; telephones, however, are ubiquitous. At the same time, their role is not concretely defined: on the one hand, it is a "toy" since it is not an absolute necessity for living on the taiga; on the other hand, the telephone is used widely in certain circumstances, including for economic purposes (calling family members, negotiating deals, etc. . .). Even in monasteries, located many kilometers away from cellular service, telephones are given to boat operators during their travels. At the same time, use of the telephone is censured. Thus, after returning to the sketes, boat operators are required to perform penance for their use of telephones. It is worth adding that the Chasovennye usually have the "old-fashioned" phone models with physical buttons. Sometimes this is imagined as a form of compromise, since these kinds of phones do not have access to music, the Internet, or other "temptations." That being said, I should note that I mostly observed the older and middle generations; smartphones are popular among the youth.

Old Believers practices of using mobile phones depend directly on the degree of infrastructural development in the region. For example, in the upper reaches of the Little Yenisei, only three villages have reliable service and access to 3G Internet, and even that is only from a single provider, which does not guarantee service in the entire region. Many Chasovennye living upstream cannot freely use a digital connection at home. In the southern Krasnoiarskii krai, the situation is inverted: among the Old Believers of the Lower Yenisei, service exists only in the largest settlements; in the remainder, it does not exist at all or it is very weak.[13]

In Old Believer testimonies, even minimal interaction with phones is described as spiritual degradation and evidence of the coming of the Last Judgment. For example, they believe that phones influence the next generation and explain widespread alcohol abuse among young people. Small children also appear very dependent on telephones. The older generation of Old Believers make the following judgment from observing children interacting with gadgets: "in the main, the young

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13. The following example will give some idea of the level of service experience by the Chasovennye: in one of the villages on the Lower Yenisei, mobile phones are attached to certain windows of the home using tape. This is the only way to "catch a signal." If a person needs to make a call, they dial the number without detaching it from the glass, and then turn up the volume to the limit in order to have a conversation.

ones are pulled toward that phone" (AFM, Lower Yenisei, 2018). According to older people, the mobile phones influence children and make them "uncontrollable," which is to say that they stop listening to adults. As my informants noted, this happens because children cease fearing God and they "become godless." Young people's use of digital devices causes great consternation among the older generation. As numerous informants told me, they suspected boys and girls used them to watch pornography. This all strengthens the narrative that the mobile phone was created with the goal of separating people from God, polluting their minds, and taking over their will:

> A person becomes dull if they use the Internet or that computer. A person simply becomes dull. He cannot do without it. Then, if he is deprived of it, he becomes hysterical. It is that way. One can explain it like this. If a person is constantly connected with it, he has become a slave to it. And when he comes to the last days, when he comes to the Apocalypse, he will not be able to distance himself from those documents, cards or whatever, and that is how he will be sealed. He will not be able to. He is always drawn in, drawn in, and he will approach the end without realizing it. That is terrible. The Antichrist will send a message throughout the world. If one becomes sealed, then he is already dependent on it. But it is gradual. One is lured, one is baited, and then one's mind is darkened. He does not understand anymore how terrible it can be. This is already demonstrated by science, it's being described on all programs, in the newspapers and journals, that whoever uses the telephone, their conversations are all being recorded. Whether it's about religious topics or making deals or whatnot, it is all recorded and then that person can be traced, where he is and all of those conversations (AFM, Tuva, 2018).

In this testimony, mobile phones appear as instruments of the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecies, as the acceptance of the seal of the Antichrist. In my interlocutor's opinion, and that of many other Chasovennye, this is connected to the coming persecution of "Christians." Many Old Believers hold their ground against the charms of the Antichrist, but so that their views do not outrage others, they can cast them off. I will note that these convictions complicated my interactions with the Chasovennye to a certain extent, as they not only told me about their fears, but also expressed to me that I could cause them harm if I published recordings of their conversations on the Internet.

The proliferation of mobile phones and concomitant ideas about their dangers have caused the Yenisei Chasovennye to adopt new in-

tra-confessional rules of living. In part, this problem was discussed at councils along with other "dangerous" objects: bar codes, bank cards, individual tax numbers, etc. . . At one Yenisei council, which took place in 2014, the question was raised about prohibiting the use of mobile phones. As my interlocutors noted, "lawmakers" that wanted to confirm this prohibition were unable to do so, but they did not declare "permission" to own phones either.

> [There was a council here where they were deciding whether the use of telephones should be allowed or not?] No such decision was made to allow them, this permission was not given. Nobody agreed. But if someone uses them, let them repent of it (AFM, Tuva, 2018).

The Chasovennye tried to regulate the use of communication devices earlier, prior to the arrival of cell phones, when it came to the use of two-way radios in the conditions of the taiga. As it was in the story of the computer, the concern had to do with the way "Christians" spent free time:

> On almost every holiday, the inhabitants of the village or farm gather around the radio and begin to share news with one another. The majority talk about useless things and sit next to the radio for long periods of time, hours even, passing the receiver to one another [. . .] It also happens that people get on the radio in a drunken state in which they really cannot hold their tongue about gossip [. . .] And yet in Christian homes and in some houses of prayer there are still two-way radios. [. . .] Radio stations are also a diabolical idol (Pokrovskii and Zol'nikova 2002, 97).

An important distinction between the two-way radio and the telephone is the "individuality" of the device. Prohibiting it, then, carries with it a measure of personal responsibility. In a certain sense, the telephone, or more precisely, the limits on its use becomes a kind of mechanism for the formation of subjective religious experience and agency.

> [So people are expelled from the brotherhood for using a telephone?] Expulsion is not out of the question, but it is, so to say, on the conscience of each person [. . .] From our point of view, it is forbidden for a Christian. And even though we use them… a person should consider these things. A person should make penance. And if a person accepts it all without any qualms, well then, they are slowly going downhill. It seems

like it is not noticeable, but from a distance it's clear that they are going downhill (AFM, Tuva, 2018).

The cell phone, then, is not only technologically a more complex device then a two-way radio, but it is a more semantically rich object. Various characteristics of the *mobil'nik* attract eschatological motifs and conspiracy theories. And its very ubiquity charges everyday life with apocalyptic drama. At the same time, the telephone is capable of producing fairly strong eschatological anxieties, which correlate with the Old Believer's ideas about faith and its meaning in people's lives.

Conclusion

The concepts of Webb Keane and Birgit Meyer are important for research into the relationship between Old Believers and technology, in so far as they show that any material forms can become a source of religious experience. In addition, this experience can be positive (for example, rapture from contact with the divine) or negative (terror at prophecies realized, in the case of the Chasovennye). For this reason, telephones, televisions, and computers are worth considering as material forms of the incarnation of divine signs and prophesies. They become mediators of religious experience, producing certain kinds of experiences of the divine. Nonetheless, this does not lead to the exclusion of technological devices from the everyday life of the Yenisei Chasovennye. Old Believers create their own "mediated" images, as I call them, of technology, which allow them to maintain a balance between their everyday needs and their apocalyptic belief system.

The Chasovennye Old Believers appeared in the upper reaches of the Little Yenisei (that is, in Tuva) more than one hundred years ago, and in the lower reaches during the Soviet period. Some villages are just thirty years old. They independently built roads, created river routes, connected themselves to electricity, and introduced and utilized technological devices in their settlements. That being said, one of the most important specificities of the Old Believer worldview is the inclination to notice potentially dangerous objects, which often include various technological devices and innovations. Returning to the concept of semiotic ideologies, it is worth emphasizing that Old Believers are intent on recognizing the activities of the Antichrist in the material world. Above all this means that Old Believer communities are more suspicious of the absence of such threats than their continual presence. The paradox consists of the fact that technology occu-

pies an important place in the lives of the Chasovennye; furthermore, concrete things only play the role of dangerous objects temporarily, as prohibitions on their use can be forgotten.

I explain this paradox through the coming together of several interpretive frames. Technology constitutes simultaneously a sign of the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Apocalypse and a necessary tool of survival. In contrast to Protestants, the Chasovennye do not consider economic success a sign of one's chosenness. Their ideology does, however, contain an instruction toward economic autonomy. In this article, I cited the example of personal transportation, which allows the Old Believers to move around without coming into contact with the state (that is, showing a passport to buy tickets) or the outside world (eating in road-side cafes). Then again, this instruction is not simply about wanting to avoid contact. Food sold in stores or a government pension are considered "ruses" against which true Christians must steel themselves. Accordingly, one ought to rely on one's self, though it is impossible to produce the necessary amount of food and to earn a living without using technology.

The latter circumstance should not be considered the only thing that explains the widespread use of technological devices in Chasovennye settlements and monasteries. The multiplicity of explanations are suggested by the material forms themselves, in so far as they create various trajectories of interaction with technology. For example, the refrigerator mostly fulfills a single purpose, which is strictly defined as economic. It is also relatively simple to operate, all the more so in a rural setting. With the phone, it is much more complicated. Also important is the frequency with which Chasovennye come into contact with one item or another. For example, familiarity with the computer and the television develops indirectly for the most part. At the same time, it is precisely these items that are on the "leading edge" of eschatological anxieties. In such cases, religious experience forms not as a result of real interaction with a device, but rather through visual images, such as wall sketches, narrative sources like the "Tale of Miraculous Occurrences," or oral narratives. Separately, I will note that regardless of the source, i.e. the material form that contains the religious symbol, the interpretive frames that allow a device to be regarded simply as a device, on the one hand, and as a symbol of the end of the world, on the other, are not isolated from one another. Thus, for example, the most ambiguous object for Old Believers remains the cell phone, which according to the descriptions in the Book of Revelation ought to be understood as "the Anti-

christ's weapon," but at the same time is a necessity in everyday life. This makes the telephone a powerful source of personal religious experience, causing its user to experience doubts practically every day about the necessity of its use.

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 Book Reviews

Orthodoxy on the Internet and the Internet in Orthodoxy

Review of: Mikhail Suslov. ed. 2016. *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World: The Russian Orthodox Church and Web 2.0.* **Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag. — 321 pp.**

Translated by Markian Dobczansky

The book *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World: The Russian Orthodox Church and Web 2.0* investigates the role, place, and meaning of Orthodoxy in the virtual and media-driven world. The book is made up of eleven chapters organized into three thematic sections: Discourses, Divergences, and Practices. The research builds on classic works by Heidi Campbell (2010, 2013), Knut Lundby (2012), Daniel Stout (2012), and Antonio Spadaro (2014), among others, which examine the intersection of religion and the Internet, the construction of sacred practices through the medium of the web, and the role of contemporary media in the evolution of religious consciousness.

The authors rightly point out that Western researchers have extensively studied Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Protestantism, and Catholicism in cyberspace, but Orthodoxy in the virtual world remains understudied. Russian academia has also produced only a few works on this topic; for this reason, this book should be of great interest to a broad audience and to leading specialists. In addition to the authors' research, the book features a "virtual round table" that showcases Orthodox bloggers' opinions on virtual reality.

The authors pay a great deal of attention to the ambivalent and complex reception of Orthodoxy on the part of Russia's in-

habitants. According to statistics, 70 percent of the population consider themselves Orthodox, while "only 2 to 4% of Russians keep the fast during the Lent, or take communion" (1). In the virtual sphere, Orthodoxy occupies a modest niche: the top site *pravoslavie.ru* only takes 101st place among the most popular sites on the Russian Internet. According to Mikhail Suslov, the collection's editor and one of its authors, Orthodoxy's reception is similar online and offline: "It is safe to say that the share of Orthodox content in Runet roughly corresponds to [. . .] the proportion of regular churchgoers in the Russian society" (6).

To what extent has the Russian Orthodox Church adapted to the steady virtualization of today's world? In the 1990s, digitization provoked a measure of unease within the Church. Admittedly, even today certain Orthodox believers relate to the Internet with alarm, calling it a "source of evil" and "the harbinger of the Anti-Christ." In the chapter "The Medium for Demonic Energies: 'Digital Anxiety' in the Russian Orthodox Church", Mikhail Suslov describes the position of clergy in relation to cyber-reality. To Hieromonk Anatolii Berestov, "virtual reality creates a 'false universe'" (32). Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev) has labeled the Internet as "the place where

people can freely lump together all of their dirt and negative attitudes without being censored or punished" (34–5). Church representatives call for transparency and renounce "masks" in the digital realm: the anonymity of blogs seems like "a token of irresponsibility and a lack of trust" (39).

At the same time, the majority of the clergy thinks that mastering the Internet is a requirement of the times. Orthodox bloggers note that digital technologies carry with them "great possibilities of both evil and good, and every person determines what is closer to him" (294). The Russian Orthodox Church uses the Internet to publish news about its own activities, publishes religious literature on its site, and distributes Orthodox journals and calendars. According to one author, Alexander Ponomariov, in the future online texts could replace "traditionally bulky print media," used in worship services (131).

In the words of Patriarch Kirill, the ROC does not "fight against the Internet, but for the Internet," and as Suslov notes, "the Orthodox religious tradition, conservative disposition of the ROC's leadership and constituency, as well as the Church's participation in shaping today's state political agenda is not particularly accommodating to the

new media, and yet its highest clerics and intellectuals understand that it is better to master the new technology than to fight it" (5). The clergy establishes rules for what is acceptable online, and in general do not welcome attendance or the carrying out of sacraments and rituals online. One person surveyed, Father Makarios (Markish), called "virtual chapels and candles" "a silly fake" (292). Father P. (another of the priests interviewed) said that the "traders" of sacred objects on the Internet "will be punished for their poison when their time comes" (292).

Two chapters of the book — "Holy Pixels: The Transformation of Eastern Orthodox Icons Through Digital Technology" (Sarah A. Riccardi-Swartz) and "Wi-Fi in Plato's Cave: The Digital Icon and the Phenomenology of Surveillance" (Fabian Heffermehl) — are dedicated to icons and Orthodox images in reality and virtual reality. Riccardi-Swartz analyzes the relationship of the Orthodox community of the city of Ozark (Missouri, USA) to digitalization and to the commercialization of icons on the Internet. Parishioners actively participate in Internet auctions (mostly on eBay) and easily obtain exclusive or important Orthodox images. Their actions in the market are similar to a game of chance:

one of the interviewees claimed he "won" an old icon of the Theotokos by bidding 30 dollars for it, and also obtained an icon of "the Mystical Supper of Christ" for a single dollar (269).

According to the position of church clergy, digital icons that exist only in electronic format (on computer screens, tablets, and phones) are no less sacred than those in wood, paper or plastic. Many encourage the faithful to pray through the "screen"; as Father Makarios (Markish) noted, "technological developments in recent years have brought computer images quite close to the original." According to one "virtual round table" participant, Father Sergii (Kruglov), there is no difference between an "icon [that] is painted or highlighted on the screen." Some clergymen emphasize that traditional icons are "preferable," but do not make any arguments against images on a screen (292–3).

Cyber leaders, such as Orthodox bloggers ("ortho-bloggers"), play a key role in the development of digital Orthodoxy. Ideologically they are divided into those who support the ROC and those who criticize its actions. According to research, the latter are more common on the web. In the chapter "Heretical Virtual Movement in Russian *LiveJournal* Blogs: Between Religion

and Politics," Ekaterina Grishaeva deals with the activities of the "heretic" blogger Vladimir Golyshev. Golyshev was "within" the system, a member of a parish for five years, but left after becoming disenchanted with the ROC (145). He began a personal blog, in which he expressed his religious worldview, which was largely based on his criticism of the existing church system.

The chapter "Between Homophobia and Gay Lobby: the Russian Orthodox Church and its Relationship to Homosexuality in Online Discussions" (Hanna Stähle) examines Protodeacon Andrei Kuraev's posts about the scandal at the Kazan seminary in 2014. Over the course of a few weeks, his page became enormously popular, as demonstrated not only by the number of subscribers and comments, but also from an analysis of Internet surveys on the subject. Kuraev's main point was his condemnation of the Church for its duplicity with regard to homophobia and its excessive secrecy around internal scandals.

Opposition bloggers also create Internet content that makes fun of the ROC's activities. In the chapter "Post-Secularity and Digital Anticlericalism on Runet," Maria Engström reviews the personal attitudes and creative activity of Internet users, which consists of jokes, Internet memes,

"demotivator" posters, and doctored images. Their evaluations of Church actions are often related to their criticisms of the existing power structure.

"Traditional" Orthodox bloggers respond to the challenge of these dissenters with jokes, counter-memes, and the creation of public groups (229–31). To counter the posts of Kuraev, supporters of Orthodoxy created the *LiveJournal* community "Kuraynik," in which they satirize and denounce the deacon's activities. They call him "homodeacon," "professional atheist," and "sectarian." In spite of this, according to Stähle, these blogs and groups are not particularly popular and have few subscribers: "'Kuraynik' suffers [from] its lack of readership and is trying to combat its own insignificance" (185).

The ROC considers it much more effective to create content to attract maximum attention from Internet users. Irina Kotkina and Mikhail Suslov describe "traditional" Orthodox bloggers on the platform *LiveJournal*. These are usually young people around the age of thirty, who "graduated from an institution of higher Orthodox education in Moscow or St Petersburg [. . .] and received a position of a priest in a parish, usually in the province" (285). They share many of the same views

and "constitute a net of interconnected 'friendships', and established traditions of commenting on each other's posts" (285). Orthodox bloggers not only maintain accounts for themselves, but also in response to orders "from above": Dmitrii Vaisburd reported that he created his account with the "blessing" of his spiritual father, and Father Makarios (Markish) disclosed that he began his life on the Internet after "the direct call from the [Church] hierarchy" (289). According to the authors, the ROC actively encourages the creation of personal blogs, which influence their audience and often have no fewer than "two or three thousand readers" (286–87).

If for "traditional" bloggers, the Internet is a place of missionary work and calling their flock to the faith, then for oppositional bloggers it is practically the only outlet they have for expressing their views. For Golyshev, the Internet allows him to create his own "outcast religious identity" (157), which would have had little impact (or been legal) in an offline context. Creating blogs for both groups allows them to find fulfillment, which, incidentally, also increases the dynamism of Orthodoxy on the web.

For ordinary Orthodox Christians, the Internet is primarily a source of information about religious traditions and sacred rituals. Parishioners read blogs and ask questions in forums and on social media. As Suslov observes, "people often do not know how to behave themselves in church, or how to approach a priest and ask him a question. Blogs of the priests effectively solve this problem, providing them with a medium in which they feel more 'at home' and do not hesitate to speak about their religious needs" (24). On the other hand, the Internet offers the possibility for lively interaction among Orthodox believers. In the chapter "Ortho-Media for Ortho-Women: In Search of Patterns of Piety," Anastasia Mitrofanova shares examples of interactions among parishioners in forums. In the discussion "Are you eating Lenten mayonnaise during the fast and Lent, is it appropriate?" there are multiple points of view, from the sharply unfavorable — "Formally may be yes, but in such case I don't fully understand the meaning of the fast" — to the rather positive: "We ate mayonnaise during the fast for ages [. . .] As for harm, life is harmful in general" (246–47).

According to Mitrofanova, virtual interaction is particularly effective for female parishioners. In the Russian Orthodox tradition, it is not customary to have special meetings during which women's

questions can be discussed.[1] For this reason, female parishioners prefer communicating on specialized "women's" sites. The most common topics in these conversations are "Culinary and Lenten food," "Clothing, inside and outside the church," and "Relations with men (including sex)" (244). Addressing certain questions directly to priests can cause women to feel inhibited or uncomfortable: "I am very interested in this issue, what is allowed and what is not allowed on 'these' days. I am ashamed to ask the father at the church. Matushki, enlighten me, please" (245). According to the research, online interactions are "a supplement to, not a substitute for, the normal liturgical life of the practicing Christians. They constitute no 'digital church' or 'network parishes,'" but women often "prefer on-line to off-life [sic] non-liturgical contacts to work out patterns of Orthodox piety" (256).

For those who think about the church or God, the Internet is a place where they can express their ideas and sentiments. In the chapter "The Religious Identity of Russian Internet Users: Attitudes Towards God and Russian Orthodox Church", Viktor Khroul

examines the site *lovehate.ru*,[2] where people exchange ideas about their "love" and "hatred" toward God. According to the author, a majority of those surveyed expressed "love" (1,039 respondents), while 676 respondents wrote of their "hatred." In order to explain their feelings, "internet users mostly refer to their own experience (59.5%) and the experience of other people (16.4%), not [to] faith (10.6%), authority (6.1%) or tradition (3.1%)" (303–5).

Researchers of the virtual world increasingly confront the necessity of reacting in real time to contemporary challenges and the dynamic changes taking place in the virtual space. Dramatic transformations are happening even in a seemingly traditional and slow-to-embrace-change institution like the ROC. For example, today communication over *LiveJournal* (about which much was written in the book) is already being replaced by interactions on other social media sites. In my own observations of the activities of priests in the Magnitogorsk eparchy, this communication happens mostly on *Vkontakte* and *Instagram*. The latter is preferred, as it generates quick reactions from follow-

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1. According to Riccardi-Swartz, American parishes often have a special "coffee hour" after services, during which parishioners can discuss various "women's" questions (262).

2. This site has been closed down since November 2019 due to complaints about extremism and legal violations.

ers. In many eparchies, special departments that create content have existed for many years. Today in the period of coronavirus-related isolation, the Orthodox Church confronts new challenges and shapes its online image in new ways. Discussions about the "disinfection of shrines" as well as the necessity of special liturgies and prayers against coronavirus all take place exclusively online. There is a sense that the Church today exists no less in the virtual world than it does in the real one; like the social sciences, the Church is searching for new ways to adapt to the breakneck pace of change and the rapid shifts between online and offline status.

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Persistent Orientalism: How Does the West View Islam on the Internet?

Review of: Gary R. Bunt. 2018 *Hashtag Islam. How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. — 234 pp.

Professor Gary Bunt was one of the first to draw attention to the phenomenon of cyber-Islam. As they would say in social media sites, he examined this topic "before it became mainstream." By mainstream, I am referring to the influx of works that rec-

ognize the effective use of media by the "Islamic state" and the special role social networks played in the Arab Spring (including its association with Islamic discourse). In reality, the phenomenon of electronic Islam dates back not to the 2010s, but to the 1990s, when Bunt became a pioneer of this topic. In an article published in 1999, he examined sites in detail to analyze the identity of British Muslims (Bunt 1999). He was the first to draw attention to the technology's performative role in the lives of Muslims, a conclusion he based on his fieldwork in Malaysia and Pakistan in the mid-90s. In his analysis of religious authority and decision-making, he noted that emails and communication on sites began to have a real impact on events in the real world (6). After the publication of his first monograph in 2000, Bunt immediately became one of the most cited authors on the subject (Bunt 2000). The aim of the work was to assess the implications of how Islamic sites functioned and to examine not only how they represented Islam and Muslims, but also to ascertain how Muslims and non-Muslims might perceive Islam and Islamic issues (Bunt 2000, 9). Building on this work, his 2003 monograph focused on "digital jihad" and "online *fat-*

was" (Bunt 2003). And in 2009 yet another work dedicated to "digital Islam" quickly attracted the attention of many scholars (Bunt 2009). Bunt's next monograph, the subject of this review, builds upon his many years of research, and thus gives the scholar the opportunity to critically assess the work's analytical language and its methodological approach and to determine the place of this work in the broader context of Bunt's research.

Bunt's work focuses on the *cyber-Islamic environment*, (CIE).

> The Cyber Islamic Environment [is] an umbrella term which can refer to a variety of contexts, perspectives and applications of the media by those who define themselves as Muslims. These may contain elements of specific Muslim worldviews and notions of exclusivity, combined with regional and cultural understandings of the media and its validity (Bunt 2003, 5).

This term covers a wide range of "online activities," from a Muslim scholar's claim on a site to a blogger's tweet. "The term *Islamic* (ital. in original) is used to refer to any view that describes itself as belonging to Islam, even if that view is not universally shared by all Muslims" (7). This concept is rather broad, but according

to the author, it is the most effective approach to this subject. Thus, almost any reference to Islam on the Internet — whether a *fatwa* site or a single post on a social network — is within the sphere of Bunt's research. The question is whether this is justified or productive.

The primary advantage of such a broad interpretation of the cyber-Islamic Environment is the ability to demonstrate the diversity in the articulation of Islam on the Internet. The work *Hashtag Islam* is a kind of guide to countless Islamic online discourses. The empirical (not methodological) part begins in the second chapter, where Bunt analyzes social networks as "a significant game changer in relation to articulation of religious values and concepts" (20). Here, he speaks less about content and more about the structural aspects, for example, the growing popularity of social networks (which, for some reason, is only considered for countries in the Middle East and North Africa) and the expansion of Internet access, both of which have transformed the transmission of religious knowledge. Recently, the issue of Internet control or censorship is beginning to resemble a symbolic struggle for "correct" articulations of Islam. In relation to this, "Islamic alternatives" to

Facebook and Twitter are also briefly discussed.

In the third chapter, he addresses selected elements of digital Islamic discourse. For example, considerable attention is paid to the digitization of the Qur'an. He analyzes new immersive forms of the representation of the Qur'an — new approaches to its visualization, recitations through mobile apps, convenient online platforms for discussion, and ergonomic interfaces that simultaneously display several translations of the Qur'an. Such a focus leads to another of the key questions: how does this relate to tradition and "traditional ways of obtaining knowledge?" For Bunt, the answer is quite simple and is formulated in the logic of Talal Asad's "discursive tradition":

> New forms of knowledge can be acquired outside of traditional cultural and religious contexts. What "traditional" precisely means is open to scrutiny: intergenerational differences exist between ideas on religion and its place in society, along with distinctions between and within communities at all levels (36).

In the same chapter he also addresses other segments of Islamic online discourse, namely pilgrimage, fasting during the

holy month of Ramadan, Islamic converts, the problems of gender, sexuality, and familial relations, as well as representations of Sufis, Shiites, and "alternative forms of Islam." This chapter is filled with case studies from all corners of the Muslim world, from Morocco to Indonesia. However, it is not completely clear to what extent the aforementioned segments characterize the cyber-Islamic environment, or if they simply attracted the bulk of Bunt's attention. At the end of the chapter, he notes the emergence of a new phenomenon — "Islam 3.0." In "Islam 3.0" Muslims are no longer simply using the Internet (Islam 2.0), rather the online space, itself, has a significant transformative impact on Muslim practices and on non-Muslim's perception of Islam. For example, the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoon scandal would not have been possible without lightning-fast distribution via the Internet.

In the fourth chapter, Bunt addresses, what is in his view, the primary aspect of the study of the cyber-Islamic environment — the problem of religious authority. He proceeds from the assumption that the online environment is the most important factor in the transformation of the essence of authority in Islamic tradition today. Primarily, this is because the Inter-

net is closing the gap between the average Muslim, seeking answers to religious questions, and the scholar, who is qualified to make judgments based on sacred texts. This gives rise to several contradictions at once. On the one hand, it becomes possible to "localize" Islamic knowledge up to its individual personalization. If earlier the interaction of an individual *ulama* with an *ummah* was limited to a *fatwa* directed toward all Sunnis, now the specific identity of its target has become the key to the success of a YouTube channel of one *ulama*, which takes into account not only the identification with a particular branch of Islam, but also the individual's political views, age group, region, and so on. On the other hand, such a massive "opening of the gates of ijtihad" raises the question of religious authority. The anonymity and accessibility of the Internet makes it possible for everyone to act as a religious authority and base that authority on their own convictions rather than on years of theological training. This ultimately leads to the vulgarization of Islamic knowledge, and the emergence of a new generation of Google sheiks and Wikipedia muftis, turning the Internet into a boxing ring, where their main weapon is cyber-tajwid or, more simply, trolling (83).

Finally, the fifth and sixth chapters discuss cyber-jihad. The fifth chapter analyzes this phenomenon and illustrates it with abundant examples (e.g. the Taliban, Al-Shabab, Al-Qaeda, as well as cyber-jihad's role in the Palestine-Israel conflict, in Pakistan and Mali, and among Muslim minority communities in Western societies). The sixth chapter is devoted specifically to the Islamic State. So, how has the Internet influenced the actions and strategies of the movements in question? The fundamental difference between "Al-Qaeda" and the "Islamic State," from this view, lies in the fact that the former adapted and gradually included in its strategy the use of the Internet to recruit members, whereas the latter from its very inception pursued an active media strategy that included vigorous promotion on social networks, the development of original content, often in the forms of online magazines and films about "peaceful life" in the State, and an emphasis on the aestheticization of violence. It is worth noting that from the very beginning Bunt stipulates that jihad is a very minor element in Islamic cyberspace, yet it dominates contemporary Western agendas regarding Islam.

Bunt brilliantly identified the general tendencies that characterize contemporary Islamic cyberspace. However, at this point, the sociological study of Islam can solve more "problematic" issues, rather than simply and almost in a positivist way applying separate changes in the structure of cyberspace. In this regard, several questions arise about the methodology of this study.

Firstly, in his effort to give a general depiction of Islamic cyberspace, this concept becomes rather fragmented. Examples from different geographic and political contexts unduly and excessively homogenize the Muslim world. It seems as though the Indonesian cyber-Islamic environment is no different from it in the Moroccan or European context. Yet, for example, a survey of the representation of gender in the online sphere is critical in all these different regions.

Secondly, Bunt proceeds from a thesis, which apparently needs no more argumentation, that assumes the "overreaching transformational effect" (8) of the Internet on Islamic practices. This assumption is based on Marshall McLuhan's concept of the "global village" and Jurgen Habermas' public sphere, both of which Bunt refers to in the text. Although he occasionally makes a reservation about the importance of taking into account other social, political, and economic factors, the general message

remains the same: it is indisputable that meanings are more-fully articulated in hyperreality than in the real world. This raises several questions. Should online and analog Islam be separated? How does the Internet actualize the implicit and explicit meanings of symbols in a religious context? And finally, how is the structure of knowledge of Islam shaped in the online environment? While captivated by the poststructuralism of Jean Baudrillard, Michael Foucault, and Roland Barthes, Bunt nevertheless seems to be implementing David Easton's "systems theory" approach, but instead of a political system, there is the cyber-Islamic environment. In such a theory, the system is like a black box that receives inputs and modifies questions based on proposed solutions. For example, in this approach a Qur'an reading application, originally designed to satisfy the demand for easier access to religious knowledge, changes the "traditional" system of knowledge transfer, but this raises the question of whether tradition should be interpreted as such. The main problem of Easton's "systems theory" approach is that it does not allow one to examine the black box itself. The issue here is to determine the transformational impact on the substantive rather than the structural lev-el. The work itself seeks to formulate the impact of the online environment on Islamic identity, however, Bunt's descriptions focus too much on Islam and too little on Muslims. One should ask: How Muslims assess the importance of particular segments of the cyber-Islamic environment? How do the socio-political and economic contexts of individual regions, countries, or communities impact the patterns of participation in "online activities"? That Bunt bypasses these questions makes his work seem schematic. For example, in the second chapter, which discusses the issue of controlling social networks, he turns to Iran and Saudi Arabia. Here, he seems to confirm existing stereotypes about these authoritarian regimes, while turning a blind eye to censorship in other "less-obvious" cases.

This is not to say that the study is purely descriptive and that the research question is overlooked. Bunt repeatedly declares that his primary interest is to learn how the multifarious online projects transform Islamic authority. This is not a new inquiry in the sociology of Islam. There is even a certain tendency to pose such a question: European researchers, for example, tend to emphasize positive aspects, depicting the democratization of access to Islam-

ic knowledge as a consequence of the polyarchy of authority on the Internet. For example, B. S. Turner focuses on the "democratic discourse" that various religions enter into in cyberspace. "The Internet also has a democratizing effect in the sense that it levels out power differences between social groups; for example, the Ismailis can appear to be as mainstream as other movements in Shi'ism" (Turner 2007, 127). The emergence of "new intellectuals" leads to the systematization of Islamic thought, an increased level of literacy, and greater competition among "new intellectuals," seeking to expand their influence in the religious environment. Bunt is also inclined to such positive assessments. No stranger to left-liberal discourse, he draws attention to the fact that the voices of Muslim minorities are being recognized thanks to the Internet. The erosion of the "traditional" monopoly of authority on Islamic knowledge on the Internet creates new opportunities for articulating (and thus legitimizing) a multitude of local identities.

The emphasis on the competitiveness of Islamic discourse reflects the insistence that sociological and anthropological inquires in Islam examine the diversity of Muslim communities. Against the backdrop of a flurry

of publications after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which linked Islam and terrorism and assessed the problems of "radical Islam," the study of Muslim individual experience and "lived Islam" is designed to overcome stereotypes about the centrality of radicalism and violence in Islam by showing the "normality" of regular Muslims. It would seem that Bunt's work should solve this problem, but it in fact does the opposite.

In an effort to cover absolutely all Muslim contexts and regions, Bunt mentions only the most prominent cases that are more understandable to a western reader. Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando very succinctly described this trend: "the reincorporation of Muslims into the realm of the ordinary hinges on showing how Muslims — or at least 'everyday Muslims' — cultivate and celebrate values that are deeply familiar to secular sensibilities." (Fadil and Fernando 2015, 75) As an example they cite numerous studies devoted to the problem of the hijab as "an idiosyncrasy that needs to be explained" (2015, 65 f. 13) As a result, only those practices that do not correspond to the "secular lifestyle" become the object of research (2015, 65, f. 13). If Fadil and Fernando draw attention to the framework of secularity, which confines the study of

Muslim experience, then Bunt's research inevitably turns out to be mediated by Orientalist discourse. The diversity of the cyber-Islamic environment boils down to a set of segments that fit into generalized Western ideas about the Muslim world and Islam, i.e. the problem of Islamic attitudes toward women, radical Islam, etc. . . When it comes to Iran or Saudi Arabia, the pluralistic cyber-Islamic environment is opposed to a homogenous and centralizing state system, almost in the vein of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations." The cyber-Islamic environment becomes a space for free discussion of reforms in opposition to a rigid "traditional" system.

Pioneering research approaches in the field of digital Islam from the early 2000s, now seem to require an update. A simple description and fixation on the change in the institution of authority brought about due to the transformation of the ways of transmitting Islamic knowledge is no longer sufficient. Given the complexity of the social context of Muslim experience, it seems more productive to examine not general global tendencies, but rather to explore individual local practices, paying special attention to their contexts, their intertextuality, and their interrelationships. Underestimation of

such context in this case oversimplified the subjects of Bunt's research. Finally, although the study strives to analyze the impact of the online environment on Muslim identity, Muslims are absent from the study. Ultimately, it turns out to be a re-articulation of Orientalism. In analyzing the "objective" trends and main segments of the cyber-Islamic environment, Bunt, in fact, describes how the West views Islam in the online environment. Furthermore, a fundamentally important question remains unanswered: how do Muslims, themselves, assess the importance of certain segments of the cyber-Islamic environment? It seems that a change in analytical optics, which would consider the agency of the Muslims themselves, will bring a new dimension to the study of the cyber-Islamic environment.

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