

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY

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Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective

Edited by

Chris Hann and Hermann Goltz



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Avtobusniki

Russian Orthodox Pilgrims' Longing for Authenticity

Jeanne Kormina

“We got into such antiquity [*starina*]! Real Russia, Rus’! What I liked—it was simple folk standing there. They were selling pies for just three rubles each . . . everything on simple stools. The people were Seto.¹ There are only nine hundred of them left. And they also sold apples—only one ruble for a bowl. One could choose them oneself. . . . I was there on the 4th and 5th of October, only two days. I felt as if I had a week of vacation. Along the way one could see . . . nature, these smells, and our lopsided little grey village cottages [*izbushechki*] . . . I have learned that eyes relax very well while looking at our Russian landscape. . . . And when approaching the city, it seemed to me that we were driving into hell itself. Chimney smoke, advertisements, tobacco smoking. My God! Where did we drive, into a kind of a pit.”

These were the words of Vera, a woman in her early fifties who was working as a cleaner in a small publishing house in St. Petersburg. I found Vera through a friend of a friend who worked at the same organization and recommended Vera to me as an experienced pilgrim and a person who loved talking about her travels and giving advice to people on religious matters. The recommendations proved worthwhile. Vera had indeed participated in more than two dozen pilgrimages since her first trip to the towns of Pechery and Izborsk (Pskov province) in 1996, the subject of the above recollections. She readily agreed to an interview, but there was a problem in identifying a place to meet. Vera did not want to invite me to her home because her husband ridiculed her religious activism and, as I heard later, was a heavy drinker. She did not want to meet at her working place, where she held a position of low prestige. I suggested that we met at her church, but she said she was not a member of any particular parish. Like many new Orthodox

believers in Russia, she changed churches frequently, looking for a better priest, a more convenient location, and something else that she could not articulate. Eventually, I invited Vera to my home.

Where to conduct interviews was one of the major difficulties I faced during my research in 1999–2006 on organized pilgrimage in contemporary Russia. I also interviewed people in buses, once in the informant's own car, occasionally in their homes, but never on the premises of a parish. I participated in pilgrim trips to sacred sites in the provinces of Leningrad,² Pskov, and Novgorod. Some of my observations from 1999 were no longer valid by 2006, but the search for authenticity has remained one of the basic purposes of what I shall refer to in this chapter as Russian Orthodox religious travel.

Vera, unlike many of my informants who converted to Orthodox Christianity during the religious boom of the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, was baptized as a child in one of the few churches of Soviet Leningrad. Before the mid-1990s she did not practice her religion. She described herself as a blind person; during a tourist visit to the Russian Orthodox convent (Piukhtitsy) in Estonia during Soviet times she “for some reason could not see anything.” This changed only in 1996 with her first pilgrimage, which in effect was a conversion experience. The pilgrimage boom was slow in starting. The organizers had to elaborate new routes and establish contacts with local clergy (mostly recent converts themselves) (see Kormina 2004). Pilgrims themselves helped to invent ritualized programs, which included reciting prayers collectively in the bus, bathing in holy springs, sharing a meal (*trapeza*) in a remote monastery or village parish, participating in the liturgy there, and so on. The first pilgrimage agency was founded in St. Petersburg in 1993 by Melitina Ladinskaya, a former English teacher. As in Soviet times, travel was mostly restricted to short trips of one or two days and took place within Russia. It was possible to visit holy sites abroad such as Mount Athos, Jerusalem, and Bari (where the relics of Saint Nicholas of Myra, the most popular saint in Russia, are kept), but most pilgrims stayed within their own region. Short trips were cheaper, took less time, and were easy to organize. There was also a strong ideological explanation for staying close to home. Small monasteries, stones marked by God's footprint, holy springs, and the graves of holy persons (*startsya*) were represented in pilgrimage discourse as containers of Russian Orthodox Christian tradition.

The bus pilgrimage was a new arena of popular religious practice.³ Although bus pilgrims insist on the continuity of their religious tradition, in fact what they do is novel. It is popular in the sense that it is initiated by ordinary believers, often without even nominal control by the official church, and it is opposed to sophisticated forms of religion such as monastic life. It often stands in opposition even to regular parish life. Pilgrims themselves make such distinctions. They are mostly

relatively poor people whose practices differ considerably from the demonstrative religiosity of Russia's new elites.

In this chapter I will explore both the production and the consumption of authenticity, which in the sphere of religious travel is an object of negotiation among different agents. The principal agents are the organizers of religious travel (both official pilgrimage agencies and independent activists); the participants; and the keepers of the shrines, including local clergy. Following John Eade and Michael Sallnow, I will try to “develop a view of pilgrimage . . . as a *realm of competing discourses* . . . brought to the shrine by different categories of pilgrims, by residents and by religious specialists, that are constitutive of the cult itself” (Eade and Sallnow 2000: 5). As we shall see, authenticity is central to discourses about the sacred in contemporary Russian pilgrimage. Although the discussion of this concept originated in tourism studies (MacCannell [1976] 1999), numerous anthropologists have begun to explore the affinities between tourism and pilgrimage both in ideology and in practice (Cohen 1992; Eade 1992; Badone and Roseman 2004; Coleman and Eade 2004). Both kinds of travel involve interaction between hosts and guests, a trip to some desired destination, and a search for the authentic. Moreover, the genealogy of contemporary Russian-organized pilgrimage shows that post-Soviet religious travelers drew directly on their Soviet experience of domestic heritage tourism.

Tourism studies tend to link mass Western secular tourism to the postcolonial order. According to Dean MacCannell, tourists are doomed to experience only simulated pseudo-events. Following Erving Goffman, MacCannell argues that hosts (“natives”) put on special performances for guests and try to convince them that they are having an authentic experience by observing or participating in the performances (MacCannell [1976] 1999: 91–100). By contrast, in the case of Russian Orthodox pilgrimage the convention is that every Russian has the right to access the authentic, nonsimulated experience. Orthodox Christianity is understood by many Russians in a rather primordial way, as something naturally inherent in the national landscape and in people's minds and bodies. In theory at least the hosts and guests are interchangeable: pilgrimage is a form of heritage tourism where the natives are visited by the natives (or, as we shall see, by the former natives). I shall show that what is perceived as authentic depends upon the level of the pilgrims' involvement in religious life, their religious knowledge, and their role in the performance of authenticity.

It would be too easy to conclude that the religious knowledge of the bus passengers is low and that their travel is in fact highly secular. Yet the participants insist that they are looking for religious experience and that they do in fact manage to gain it. The task of the social scientist is then to analyze this new style of religiosity, and to show how prior spiritual and nonspiritual experiences of the

neophytes, as well as a range of social and economic factors, influence their understanding of religion and ways of practicing it. Pilgrimage in pre-Soviet times was obviously very different, yet the contrast should not be exaggerated. As early as the middle of the nineteenth century more secular (urban and educated) pilgrims developed aims and practices that differed from those of peasants (Chulos 1999). Traditionally (and in the Soviet period) pilgrims used to have an individual goal, a vow (*obet*, *zavet*—both nouns derive from the verb *obeshchat*, “to promise”). The vow is a kind of a secret personal agreement with God based on the idea of reciprocity. A person did not ask advice from anybody, not even the parish priest, in taking the vow. Usually, a believer promised to make a pilgrimage to some sacred place and to give something (for example, towels) or to make something (for instance, build a chapel or restore a well) there. The promise had to be kept in return for God’s help. Alternatively, the effort was expended as a request for such help.⁴ The tradition of taking vows remained a popular religious practice in rural areas in the Soviet period. Since monasteries were mostly closed, people directed their vows to local sacred sites.⁵ This practice has now become marginalized. Contemporary religious tourists are not familiar with such traditions, which if they persist at all are sustained by old village women. In their religious behavior contemporary religious tourists follow the instructions of the organizers of the trips, who are also neophytes. Traveling by bus, religious tourists might be seen as heirs of a Soviet habit, since, before the 1990s, collective shopping trips and excursions were commonly organized by trade unions or activists at factories, schools, and hospitals (in northwestern Russia, for example, people used to travel to Soviet Estonia for a better range of goods).

THE QUALITIES OF AUTHENTICITY

Participants in religious travel themselves sometimes make a comparison between secular tourism and pilgrimage. “This time it was tourism rather than pilgrimage” was the negative comment of one pilgrim when the journey had not lived up to expectations. She complained that the group leader had not done her best to “make a pilgrimage of the trip” and that the places visited had not been holy enough to provide an authentic experience. “Tourism” (*turizm*) for this woman as for many others means the inauthentic or false, while “pilgrimage” (*palomnichestvo*) denotes some reality that is “true” in their eyes. They do not use the term *autentichny* nor the related terms *podlinny* (genuine) or *nastoyashchy* (real). As Regina Bendix has demonstrated in her work on folklore studies, authenticity is an etic, rather than an emic, concept. However, everybody knows what is authentic and can talk about it using a specific vocabulary (Bendix 1997: 36–44). The main tropes of authenticity for post-Soviet urban religious travelers are simplicity, purity, and antiquity. Let us look closely at each in turn.

Simplicity

In her story about her first pilgrimage experience Vera spoke enthusiastically about simple folk (*prostoy narod*) using simple stools (*taburetki*) as stands for their artless goods. The fact that the people selling food to the pilgrims belonged to a non-Russian ethnic group was seen as enhancing authenticity, because it rooted them in that rural locality. Their grey huts, and wonderful village smells, belonged to the landscape of the real Russia, Rus.⁶ Poverty made them even more authentic: they were living as if the new capitalist economic conditions did not yet exist, and represented a primeval state in which people were simple and life easy. The term Rus’ evokes a poetic passage by Pushkin that is known to almost everybody in Russia: “Zdes’ russky dukh, zdes’ Rus’u pakhnet” (Here’s Russian spirit, it smells of Rus’). Vera was following a Russian tradition that ties authenticity to sensual perception. Writers and painters began to promote the Russian landscape as an aesthetic object in the nineteenth century, as part of their contribution to the construction of national identity (Ely 2002). Vera sought authenticity in a rustic idyll, and she concluded her narrative with a list of the characteristic features of the opposite, nonauthentic world, with its chimney smoke (modernization), advertisements (commercialization) and tobacco smoking (decline of morality).

Although the authentic is located outside urban life, it is possible to live a decent life in the city, too. Vera constantly stressed that she herself lived frugally. When she narrated her autobiography she drew on representations of sanctity found in the popular booklets available in church shops.⁷ Thus her bad relations with her husband and son-in-law, who mocked her religious activism and prevented her from taking her grandson to church, were interpreted as *gonenija* (persecution)—that is, she was suffering for her faith. As a cleaner she had no social esteem, but her simplicity and poverty rendered her sufficiently pure in the eyes of her superiors (*nachal’nikov*) to be entrusted to perform religious missions. God was in permanent contact with Vera, setting puzzles for her to solve. In one of her stories the chief accountant of the bank where she had worked previously asked Vera to pray for her to escape an onerous impending audit. Vera had made a pilgrimage to a small provincial town in Novgorod province where an ancient miracle-working icon of Theotokos (The Holy Icon of Our Lady of Staraya Russa) was kept. Initially she had not intended to comply with her superior’s request. However, after she had visited the church and seen the icon, a priest in the church had asked her: “Where have you been?” Vera responded: “I’ve been to the church.” “No,” replied the priest, “you have visited Theotokos herself! You should ask for everything you want.” “It was as if he reminded me about that request,” Vera explained to me. She had then returned to the church and expressed the request of the chief accountant to the Theotokos (Bogoroditsa): “Do what the servant of God Galina [the name of the chief accountant] asks you” (“Vot prosit tebia raba

Bozhia Galina, vot tak i sdelai"). It helped: though dismissed from the office, she managed to avoid further punishment, and the audit did not take place. Vera represented herself in this account as an independent person who obeyed God and whose prayers were efficacious. The priest had served to mediate between God and Vera, with whom he wanted to communicate. She had been chosen by God, implicitly because of her simplicity.

In her interview Vera told me many stories of how she had helped her colleagues in different religious matters. She had interpreted dreams, prayed for her colleagues' children before their exams, informed others about the dates of church feast days, taken a secretary at the bank who suffered from eczema on her hands to the chapel of Saint Xenia of St. Petersburg where "the doctor whom you don't have to pay" had healed her, and so on. At her workplace Vera represented herself as a person endowed with deep religious knowledge and experience. She used her religious knowledge as cultural capital, to make herself an important person in the eyes of her superiors: "They [at the bank] always sent me to pray for somebody if needed." In other words, Vera considered her pilgrimages as a form of public service rather than a personal religious deed, very much in accordance with notions of public work developed in the Soviet period. As in that time, there was no reciprocity involved, just recognition that low-status workers might have authority in some nonwork sphere. We can conclude that Vera participated in at least two different performances of authenticity. The first performance included the simple way of life in the rural landscape, where Vera was a spectator who believed that she experienced something authentic. The second show of authenticity involved Vera deploying her religious knowledge on the urban stage, where her colleagues were both spectators and consumers of the authenticity that she performed.⁸

In addition to being a personal trait and the quality of a place, simplicity can refer to a particular time. Thus simplicity is a characteristic feature in narratives about the early 1990s, when monasteries and parishes were renovated and restored by simple egalitarian church communities. Those people represent themselves as resembling the first Christians or the protagonists of an etiological myth. Galina, a woman in her late fifties, told me about her family's connections with Konevets, an island monastery located in Ladoga Lake in Leningrad province. She recalled her baptism in 1991: "Father Superior N. baptized me on Christmas Day in the monastery refectory in an enamel basin, because it was too cold in the church." When Father N. later took up a prominent post in the church, Galina had hesitated to turn to him for confession and communion, viewing these church rituals as routine and unworthy of his attention. She dared to disturb him only when she had to make some important decision, about changing her job, for instance. When she lost her employment as a doctor she asked him for his blessing to work as a guide in the pilgrimage agency of her "native" Konevets monastery.

In the first half of the 1990s many residents of St. Petersburg, including Galina and her family (in 1991 she and her husband were forty-four years old, and their son and daughter were sixteen and twenty, respectively), participated in the rebuilding of monasteries by giving their labor in return for basic accommodations and food. Galina had heard an announcement on the radio by Father N. encouraging volunteers to join the effort. It had been a very hard time for her family; in addition to their daughter's mental disability, their son had left school and was experimenting with drugs. Later Galina thought that the work in the monastery had saved him: "manual labor in fresh air in such a holy place" had done the trick. In those years of mass conversion many people preferred to be baptized in a remote semidestroyed rural church or monastery. Galina did not like to go to church in the city. She preferred to confess and receive communion in the monastery: "My soul opens there, while in urban temples I feel myself as . . . in a crowd."⁹ She recalled being often reduced to tears after confession in the monastery with Father N. "Nowhere had I ever felt such a sense of purification as in that temple on Konevets. I remember: I am standing . . . and on the floor, on the nonpainted batten, there is a dark spot. My tears are streaming."

The enamel basin and bare batten in Galina's narrative of "the time of creation" exemplify simplicity. She had helped Father N. to rebuild the monastery and thereby participated in the creation of an ideal Orthodox world, which later had gradually disintegrated. The spiritual purification experienced by Galina and her family harmonized with the idea of technological simplicity in the rural environment. The everyday life of a monastery in some ways resembled that of the traditional peasantry, as this was understood by urban pilgrims at any rate. There were no bathrooms, no flush toilets, no television. Monasteries kept animals and bees and made their own butter, cheese, and bread. In other words, in this religious discourse the economic backwardness of the countryside was converted into a positive quality; the village appeared as a kind of a preindustrial paradise and a guarantee of authenticity. Again, such attitudes have Soviet roots, in this case in recreational practices such as ecological tourism, which was a popular collective vacation among the Soviet "technical intelligentsia." This, too, was definitely a search for an antiurban experience, but ecological tourists escaped to nature without any serious engagement with rural life, just as dacha owners could live in a village for leisure without engaging with the local peasants (Zavisca 2003). Village life in the late Soviet period had no prestige. Yet in the early post-Soviet years many people of this sort spent their vacations in a monastery doing peasant work. This rather sudden idealizing of rural life can be understood only in the broader context of the demodernization that took place in the 1990s all over Russia, but especially in the provinces. The revival of Orthodoxy in its traditional antimodernist version was an organic dimension of this process. However, this period was short-lived. A few of the early enthusiasts joined monastic orders or

became village clergy, but most resumed their secular urban lives as “the time of creation” gave way to routinization and institutional consolidation.

Purity

A person wishing to participate in a pilgrimage has only to call one of the numerous pilgrimage agencies. The prospective customer will be informed of a few obligatory points. It is necessary to bring a vessel for holy water and a bathing costume for the holy spring. Although bathing is widespread in Christian pilgrimage, there are many variations. According to Eade less than 10 percent of pilgrims to Lourdes visit the baths (2000: 56–57). For Russian bus pilgrims bathing in holy springs and lakes or showering with water from a holy well is as essential as attending church services. In my experience almost every trip included this possibility, and almost everybody took advantage of it. In their narratives pilgrims liked to mention that although the weather was unsuitable for bathing, nobody got ill. Vera had bathed in a holy spring at the beginning of October during her first pilgrimage, although the temperature of the water was no higher than 10°C. Pilgrims, mostly women, neither young nor particularly healthy, washed their entire bodies, or at least their legs and hands, in the cold water. I once saw a small girl about six or seven years old crying from the cold, but her grandmother pushed her to get undressed and threw cold water from the holy spring over her. She explained that the girl was only crying because of the devil inside her, who did not like the holy water.

Bathing at holy places was common in Russia until the middle of the twentieth century: some elderly informants recalled that the sacred places in their villages had separate bathing facilities for women and men. However, local people living close to a sacred place no longer practice this custom. They call the bathers “walrus” or *morzhi* (winter swimmers), emphasizing the secular character of this practice in their eyes. Pilgrims themselves see bathing as another form of religious experience. Liudmila, a woman in her fifties who worked as an accountant at a shipyard in St. Petersburg, represented the results of her bathing as a miracle:

It was the first time I plunged into the holy spring. It was cold. It was snowing even. However, I decided to try, to enter into that holy spring. Almost all the people in the group were from our factory.¹⁰ All of us work in the accounts department. Then one woman, we work together, said to me: “Liudmila Efimovna, are you crazy? Do you really want to bathe?” You know, one must plunge one’s head three times into the spring. And it is amazingly hard to enter the water for the first time. You feel as if your body is not yours. The water is icy. And you must plunge a second time, and a third time. And then—you hover as if you are in space! Those who were sitting in the bus became green and frozen, while those who plunged had red cheeks after bathing. While those who took the plunge did not get sick, those who did not—half of them got sick. And again: what is the secret? It is incomprehensible.

Small miracles of this kind can be experienced by everybody.¹¹ Dipping one’s body into a holy spring is somehow associated in the pilgrim’s mind with the practice of baptism. While dipping their bodies three times into the water the pilgrims, under supervision of a trip leader or of their more experienced fellow pilgrims, make the sign of the cross three times “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The performance resembles a baptism ritual performed without a priest. Another reason for the popularity of bathing is that it corresponds perfectly with the idea of accumulating grace in a human body, as I shall show below.

In the pilgrims’ discourse the trope of purity is frequently articulated in secular language. Purity is understood as an ecological clarity of air, water, and the sacred landscape as a whole. The leaders of pilgrimages often pointed to signs of virgin nature as additional evidence of the holiness of a sacred site. During a trip to the Konevets monastery, pilgrims, encouraged by their group guide, tried to find seals living on the island. In Pskov province a pilgrimage agency guide, using religious and secular arguments simultaneously, encouraged pilgrims to buy houses in that region. First, she drew attention to the large stork population, which indicated ecological purity. Second, she explained that cities had a curse on them and every Orthodox Christian should escape to remote areas to increase his or her chances of obtaining salvation. Third, she noted the unique sacred objects that were to be found there. It is quite typical for urban dwellers to merge their obsession with ecology with religious eschatological discourse. Purification of both body and soul is one of the implicit aims of all religious travel, and bathing in clean and holy water is perceived by pilgrims as a practice of purification and a way to gain a personal religious experience. However, in contrast to many “traditional pilgrims,” contemporary religious travelers seek recreation rather than miraculous healing.¹² Vera’s first pilgrimage was a mere two days, but she felt as if she had had a week of vacation, and that was her small miracle. She also mentioned that her eyes could “relax very well while looking at our Russian landscape.” Recovery from blindness was the most typical form of miraculous healing in pre-Soviet Orthodox culture. Vera’s eyes did not just recover; they became relaxed.

Antiquity (Namolennost’)

When indicating the spiritual value of a site (a church, a monastery, or a village shrine with a stone bearing God’s footprint on it) or an artifact, people often used the term *namolennost’*, which can be roughly translated as “antiquity.” Pilgrims had difficulty explaining its meaning. Orthodox journalists stress the nonrational nature of *namolennost’*, which can be grasped only sensually, like a fragrance or like beauty (Suglobova 1996).

Unlike Muslim *baraka* (see Meri 1999), for contemporary Orthodox in Russia, the quality of *namolennost’* is attached to an object or place rather than to a person

and his relics. Holy icons are the objects most often called *namolenny* (which literally means “absorbed many prayers”). However, the quality of “wonder working” does not correlate with *namolennost’*. The former derives from the biography of the particular icon, which is not relevant to the latter. While a person accumulates and spends his or her stock of grace (*blagodat’*), which requires replenishment, a church or a holy icon saves up the prayers of “many generations of people” (Zykov 2007). Material sacra do not lose their *namolennost’* even when it is transmitted from them to other physical objects by means of physical contact. When I asked whether an ordinary paper icon could be *namolennaya* I was told by an informant:

Yes. Yes, of course. We have been to Tikhvin,¹³ and all the icons in the church shop were made of paper. But all of them were *namolenny*. They were put on the icon [of Our Lady of Tikhvin]. . . . Some energy passed to them from this icon.

The word *namolenny* is a participle derived from the verb *molit’sya*, which means “to pray.” The degree of grace concentration in a site or object depends on how many people used to pray at the place and for how long. Liudmila, like many others, used the word “energy” (*energija* or *energetika*) to explain the essence of *namolennost’*. For example, she recalled disputes about God at her workplace:

I don’t tell you [her colleagues] that God sits on clouds, dangling his legs, waiting for you to start praying to him. I tell you that there is holy energy (*sviataya energetika*). It’s different. After all, one goes to a temple because, presumably, it concentrates there . . . perhaps they are constructed in a specific way . . . so that you feel something . . . something happens inside of you.

Presumably an echo of this idea is what prompts many pilgrims to collect all manner of souvenirs from each holy site they visit. They buy or take liters of water from holy springs, holy oil from local churches, candles, icons from church shops, homemade bread, honey, and other peasant goods produced in a monastery, flowers, sand, stones, rocks, and so on. I was told that in one village market the price for potatoes cultivated at the local monastery field was four times higher than the asking price for ordinary potatoes: a high premium for authenticity.

As we have already seen, the new believers need to translate religious ideas into their everyday language (see Ginzburg 1980). Exploiting the quasi-scientific metaphor of energy is a good example of such translation in religious speech of new Russian Orthodox Christians. The genealogy of this metaphor can be traced to Soviet urban beliefs in bio-energy healing and *extrasensy* (Lindquist 2001: 21–22; Panchenko 2006: 127). Later, in the early 1990s, healers like A. Kaspirovski generated mass hysteria (Lindquist 2001: 23). In many flats and houses at that time one could find a bowl of water standing close to the television to receive the healing

energy Kaspirovski transmitted during his TV shows. It was believed that this energy could then be further transmitted to cure sick bodies. Similarly, many pilgrims believed that the human body could also be a container for grace or “holy energy.” Unlike holy places and items, the grace in a person can decrease as well as increase: indeed, human energy has to be topped up from time to time. One pilgrim group’s leader commented on this in a speech to pilgrims at the end of their journey: “Keep the *blagodat’* you have received during our trip as you keep heat after travel to the South.” This is why it is considered good to participate in pilgrimage, communion, and other religious practices regularly.¹⁴ Perhaps this is one of the reasons pilgrims insist on having communion in a monastery or a church on their trip. The liturgy performed at a remote holy place is more holy and hence more efficacious.

The degree of *namolennost’* of a material object corresponds directly with its authenticity. Here we have a creative process of inventing values and ascribing them to things and places. Places are also things in this logic; they participate in the market of religious tourism and compete with each other in their *namolennost’*. Russia as yet lacks a harmonious grand historical narrative, but the majority of Russians see Orthodox Christianity as somehow primordial, and the generations of believers who prayed at holy places were undoubtedly Russians. They filled the churches and monasteries with their holy energy, which can now be transmitted to the bodies and souls of modern visitors. Holy places and holy things provide continuity between the ancient inhabitants and those of today. Since the holy energy concentrated in a place cannot ever diminish, even the destruction of icons, their transfer to museums, and the conversion of monasteries into hospitals, storage facilities, military bases, or prisons did not pollute the holy places. This Soviet history can therefore be forgotten.¹⁵ The appeal to Orthodoxy as a basis for national identity is a way to avoid history, or at least the traumas of recent history. At the same time, the need to ensure personal access to “holy energy,” which is not under control of the church, is evidence of a mistrust of the current church as a religious institution. In short, traditions conceived as primordial are authentic, but history, along with the secular logic of economics and urban modernity in general, is not.

AUTHENTICITY PERFORMED

As Regina Bendix points out, “The crucial questions to be answered are not ‘what is authenticity?’ but ‘who needs authenticity and why?’ and ‘how has authenticity been used?’” (1997: 21). Let us now examine how authenticity was performed for visitors to holy sites and how it was understood by local inhabitants.

There were several categories of visitors to a sacred site such as a monastery. Monastery dwellers had their own emic classification, according to which the

most alien were those who came in groups by buses. They were sometimes called *avtobusniki* (literally, “those who come by bus”). They were always in a hurry. During their short stay (from several hours to a couple of days at the most) they tried to collect as much “holiness” (*sviatost’* or *blagodat’*) as they could. Another type consisted of people who stayed in the monastery for several weeks, often their entire vacation. While these visitors devoted their free time to God, real monastery people lived their whole life for Him, and their entire identity was invested in the monastery.

A third category was that of the *trudniki*.¹⁶ The word *trud* means “labor” or “work,” and a *trudnik* is a “person who works in a monastery for free, because he or she has made a vow” (Dal’ 1996: 437). In the first half of the twentieth century it was a common practice in Karelia (and not only there) to dedicate a sick child to a monastery for a certain period of time; “then having reached adulthood he or she would make a journey to a monastery and stay there for the duration promised to perform volunteer labor.” A sick person could also promise that a relative would go and perform unpaid work in a monastery if he or she recovered (Stark 2002: 161–62). I found that the practice of making vows had almost disappeared, at least in big cities, and *trudniki* were those who lived and worked without pay in a monastery for a few months before returning to secular life. Normally they did not intend to become monks or nuns. People often pronounced this word as *trutnik*, which changed the meaning radically. A *truten’* is a drone, metaphorically a person who lives at the expense of others. This category of visitor included former alcoholics, drug addicts, prisoners, and others who had failed to socialize into “normal” life. As Marina, a girl in her early twenties who had spent half a year in a monastery two hundred kilometers from St. Petersburg when she was fifteen, explained to me, for many monks and nuns work was a substitute for prayer, but work by *trudniki* was of a lower quality.¹⁷

The hosts, to use MacCannell’s term, were those who were preparing to take or had taken a monastic vow.¹⁸ They performed a staged authenticity for guests, while their own backstage reality was “intimate and real” (MacCannell 1999: 94). Marina provided the following vivid account of how monastery people perceived their visitors:

Pilgrims travel to communicate with the sacred. It is necessary (in their opinion) to bathe naked in the holy spring—otherwise they’ll not be sanctified [*ne osviiatitsia*]. There is an obvious irony in the monastery against them. Normal monastery people understand that if there are village guys hiding beyond a bush and spying upon bathers, then you should wear a swimsuit or a shirt. But it is impossible to make pilgrims change their mind. . . . There are narratives there. . . that the Mother of God appeared at the spring at 4 in the morning. That’s why monastery people bathe at night. . . and because they don’t want to be seen by village guys.

Monastery people put on a show for their guests, treated them with ironic distance, and did not allow them to enter the “back stage” of monastery life. They guarded the boundary between the front and back stages of performance. In this example the narrative about the Mother of God was designed for internal use and served to consolidate the group. The same distinctions can be traced in different spheres of everyday life. Monastery people use water from the holy spring for mundane purposes, too, since it is the closest supply of water to the monastery, and they do not call this water “sacred.” They do not use it for tea or cooking because it does not taste good. In general, monastery people and villagers living close to a sacred site and venerating it are less overtly respectful than pilgrims.

For monastery people, all three categories of visitor (*avtobusniki*, *palomniki*, *trudniki*) were pilgrims (*palomniki*), and this term did not have positive connotations. Pilgrims were outsiders, and even those who lived and worked in a monastery for months would remain strangers. Once on my way to Konevets monastery I asked the woman sitting next to me on the bus if she had ever met “real pilgrims,” thereby implying that our obviously semiseular travel was not quite authentic. She looked surprised and said that in her opinion our group was just a normal pilgrim group. In fact it contained some people who did not know any prayers; almost nobody kept the fast (it was the time of the fast before the feast of the Assumption); many women used makeup and were clothed in trousers (the church forbids all cosmetics and the wearing of trousers for women); some had uncovered heads, and the group guide wore a cap instead of the head scarf prescribed by the church. At first I was puzzled by the reaction of my neighbor, but later I realized that she was herself a “monastery person,” and for her the level of authenticity of the pilgrims was not relevant. No matter how carefully they might dress, for her they would remain aliens. This woman was given free transport by our group guide as a “native person” of Konevets. She had spent the previous “twelve winters” in the monastery carrying out different jobs, long enough to cross the boundary and become part of the monastic community, even though she had not formally taken vows.

The pilgrims performed the same actions and used the same standard narratives at every monastery or village shrine they visited. Their hosts simulated the “true experience” while concealing unique details of their local community. Students of tourism argue that there are no “real places” anymore and that the dramaturgy of tourist places has become so elaborate that nobody could imagine that there could be a real “back stage” (see, e.g., Rojek 1997: 60). However, as long as “locals” produce authenticities to be consumed by the visitors in special performances and narratives, it seems safer to infer the continued existence of backstage performances. Theoretically, every pilgrim can gain access to a “more authentic” experience by moving from the tourist stage to the back stage. He or

she just has to become a "native," a long-term *trudnik*, the keeper of a local shrine, a member of clergy, and so on. Some might then be disappointed to find that their invasion into the authentic destroyed it totally. Authenticity is a matter of belief rather than an entity; it can be enjoyed, emotionally and physically, as we saw, but not appropriated. Vera once spent several days in a monastery as a *trudnitsa* and decided it was not her way. She disliked monastery life because of its strong hierarchy, heavy labor, and lack of freedom. She was satisfied with the variant of staged authenticity that she experienced during her pilgrim trips, which gave her respect and some hidden power over her colleagues and superiors. Monasteries and parishes receiving pilgrims also made some profit from their authenticity. Pilgrims brought food, clothes, and household goods.¹⁹ They bought candles in the monastery and ordered prayers for their deceased and living family members, for which of course they paid.²⁰ They also bought local honey and milk products, oil, icons, CDs, and DVDs in church shops. In short, the inhabitants of the sacred places are just as interested in the pilgrims as the pilgrims are in their quest for authenticity.

BELIEVING WITHOUT BELONGING, BELONGING WITHOUT BELIEVING

It was not unusual for people in their fifties or older to be unsure about the circumstances of their baptism. Galina told me that her husband had learned from his mother when in his forties that he had been baptized by his aunt as a child. Many baptized their children in deep secrecy because the practice had serious consequences, including the loss of one's job.²¹ However, in some cases the "baptism narrative" had no solid factual basis. Liudmila and some of my other interlocutors preferred to think they had been baptized, knowing that theoretically it was possible and hence not a pure lie. One explanation of Liudmila's assertion is that she might have felt herself too old to be baptized together with the younger generation of her family. Another possible motivation was that to her mind she had a right to Orthodox Christianity as a part of the cultural tradition she belonged to by birth. She was a Christian because her ancestors had been Christians, and she did not need a priest and church rituals in her religious life. What mattered was to accumulate "holy energy" by traveling to sacred places.

For many city dwellers in Russia participation in an organized pilgrimage has become one of the most acceptable ways of practicing religion. It is seen as a "user-friendly" version of Orthodox Christianity. The pilgrim is taught how to convert her or his secular cultural experience and knowledge into something that, according to emerging convention, could be considered a religious experience. Although a pilgrim might believe that such a pilgrimage guarantees an authentic religious experience, nonetheless this type of religious traveler is better classified

as a consumer in the religious market. Another category of pilgrims (Vera is one of them) consisted of critically minded individuals who were actively looking for God outside the institutional church. These believers wanted to be religious without having to accept any control over their religious life—whether the commands of a parish priest in his role as confessor or the social control exercised by a church congregation. Belonging to a parish would also take up time and other resources. Pilgrimage agencies by contrast offered their clients the chance to become anonymous members of a temporary religious community. Each trip usually included the Eucharist in a village church or remote monastery. While some travelers made confession and communion for the first time in their lives and saw this as the exotic highlight of a cultural program, for others the ritual was more meaningful. They confessed to a local priest whom few of them had seen before and whom they would never see in the future. The older and more locally rooted this priest was, the more authentic he was held to be.²²

The guides and organizers of these bus pilgrimages cultivated the idea that it was possible to become religious not so much by accepting certain religious ideas but by coming into contact with a tradition that is as much cultural as it is religious. Everybody had a right to this tradition, and the mediation of the church was superfluous. This phenomenon might be called a democratic form of religiosity, as it stands opposed to the demonstrative religiosity practiced by Russia's postsocialist elites. The latter need institutionalized religiosity more than the common people.

In her study of the religious life of contemporary Britain, Grace Davie stated that "the majority of British people . . . persist in believing . . . but see no need to participate with even minimal regularity in their religious institutions" (Davie 1994: 2). This "believing without belonging" both resembles mainstream religiosity in Russia and differs from it radically. In Russia I found many believers who did not want to belong to a parish but were ready to join a temporary religious community that provided access to spiritual experience. Such believers needed to practice religion, unlike the British, who are content with their faith. The Russian religious travelers I have discussed received their religious experience collectively but anonymously. While bathing in holy springs, kissing holy icons, or just taking the air in a holy place they were accumulating something unconditionally "true" (*podlinnoe*), good, and efficacious. They *practiced* their religion, and for many participants these practices were a substitute for even minimal religious knowledge.

The organizers consciously represented their tour parties in terms of *communitas* (Turner and Turner 1978). Collective meals and prayers, equality of treatment, and the sharing of discomfort were all instruments to bind the group together. However, the pilgrims often differed so greatly in their religious backgrounds and in their purposes that efforts to create a *communitas*-group failed. A

structure emerged in which positions depended on religious experience and sometimes on personal closeness to the organizer. Moreover, people resisted the forging of a collective. As we saw in the cases of Vera and Liudmila, the pilgrims' quest was for individual religious experience. Individualization must be recognized as one of the key features of what I call here the new popular Orthodoxy. At the same time, being part of a pilgrim group strengthened the sense that pilgrims were indeed participating in religious practice. I met pilgrims who had not been baptized, had not even a minimal knowledge of the liturgical life of the church, and only the vaguest ideas about how to behave in church. They might not even be sure that they believed in a Christian God, preferring instead to talk about "holy energy" (e.g., Liudmila) and to concede only that "probably there is something" (*chto-to est*). However, by joining the bus pilgrimage they could convince themselves that they were living out the authentic life of an Orthodox Christian. In other words, "belonging without believing" has become a new variant of Orthodox Christianity in Russia.

CONCLUSION

According to the 1999–2000 World Values Survey, 70.3 percent of the Russian public answered affirmatively when asked whether they believe in God, while only 9.2 percent attended church at least once a month (Agadjanian and Rudometov 2005: 14). Some inside observers state that scarcely 1 percent of the population participates properly in the liturgical life of the church and can be considered *prikhozhane* (those who belong to the parish, *prichod*); the majority are *zakhzhane* (those who drop in) or *prokhozane* (those who go by) (for discussion of the wordplay here, see Chekrygin 2007). In other words, the average believer in post-socialist Russia is not a churchgoer and arranges her or his religious life outside the church. Instead of acquiring religious knowledge and language under the supervision of the church, the new believers have created their own mode of religiosity by drawing upon their previous experiences (such as heritage tourism) and beliefs (such as bio-energy healing, etc.). As we have seen, they have found abundant ways to gain personal religious experience, to make small miracles happen, and to articulate them in terms of everyday secular language. Overall, intensive recreation has come to substitute for miraculous healing in their pilgrim narratives. As the famous preacher and mission deacon Andrey Kuraev puts it, the credo of the majority of those in Russia who consider themselves Orthodox Christian can be boiled down to two simple statements: "There is something" and "We are Orthodox because we are Russian" (Kuraev 2006: 62). Against this background, the organizers of bus pilgrimages collude with "locals" to offer exactly what these religious travelers are looking for: an authentic Russian tradition dressed in the clothes of Orthodox Christianity.

The new, user-friendly, democratic style of religiosity described in this chapter is just one of a range of religious styles available within Russian Orthodox Christianity. It is most typical for the cohort of ex-USSR citizens born in the 1950s, who have their distinctive history of spiritual searching. Their children have had a different religious socialization and may in time gravitate to quite different orientations. All that can be concluded with confidence is that a longing for authenticity has been a central part of the construction of new identities in Russia, and that this process have been expressed in the language of Orthodox Christian tradition, as people know this language in their post-Soviet present.

NOTES

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1. The Seto are an ethnic group living mainly in the borderland between Russia (Petchery region of Pskov province) and Estonia; in fact, they number about 13,000. See Engelhardt, this volume.

2. The name of the city of Leningrad was changed to its original name, St. Petersburg, in 1991, but its province has kept its Soviet name, Leningradskaya oblast.

3. The emerging market for religious travel in Russia comprises many actors. First, independent pilgrimage agencies are organized and headed by a charismatic person, usually a woman, and not supervised by any official church representative. Some of these persons become leaders of pilgrimages and assume the roles played normally by priests. Second, parish-based pilgrimages are managed by parish priests who consider pilgrimages a valued activity for the church community. Third, some large monasteries, such as Valaamo (in northwestern Russia), provide their own pilgrimage services and organize special courses for people who want to work as pilgrim guides. They monopolize pilgrimages to the sites they control and have a "business" attitude. Fourth, diocesan pilgrimage operators have offices in the diocese administration and, compared to other service providers, are more tolerant of secular participants. Some of these guides wear caps instead of the Orthodox head scarf, and female pilgrims may wear trousers instead of a skirt. The diocesan operators double as specialists in heritage tourism.

4. The tradition of making obet or zavet in Russia is discussed in Shchepanskaya 1995: 118–20 and Panchenko 1998: 82. See also Stark 2002: 157–66.

5. For example, according to a report of the representative of the Council on Religious Affairs in Pskov province, in 1949 three thousand people came to venerate a village shrine in Gdov district, without clergy or any official permission. State Archive of Pskov Province, file 779, p. 33.

6. The term Rus' refers to the early centuries of the East Slav polity, before the rise of the Muscovite state.

7. For urban believers, booklets of this sort have become the main vehicle of religious self-education.

8. The efficacy of simplicity and humility is also a biblical tradition in Christian ethics and hagiography; cf. the *Vita* of the servant Euthymios, who served at the lowest level of a monastic kitchen but was more highly honored by God than the whole brotherhood that he served, and was taken every night to paradise from his lowly corner in the monastery kitchen.

9. She borrows the word *khram* (temple) from church discourse in place of the usual *tserkov'* (church). The word *khram* has become a common speech marker for so-called church people (*votserkovlennyye*), and Galina uses it to stress her identity as an Orthodox Christian believer.

10. The trade union of a factory used to organize collective pilgrim trips, just as it had arranged secular tours in the Soviet period.

11. It is a widely held view, disseminated through popular religious literature, that miracles are relatively common occurrences on the margins of the new, commercially oriented Russian society, namely, among the deprived. In Vera's case typical miracles were economic in nature: she had no money for a pilgrimage and suddenly received some; the cat food for which she had spent her last rubles doubled in quantity by the time she reached home. It seems that in the post-Soviet context a shortage of money and other resources became the main impetus for miracles.

12. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. Fertility problems and children's diseases have been motives for pilgrimage in recent times, just as they were in earlier periods.

13. In 2004 the miracle-working holy icon of Our Lady of Tikhvin returned to the town of Tikhvin (Leningrad province) from the United States, where it had been kept after the Second World War. According to a legend supported by the Orthodox Church it is believed to have been painted by the evangelist Luke and appeared miraculously near Tikhvin in the fourteenth century. The government of the city of St. Petersburg and Leningrad province held splendid celebrations to mark the return of the icon.

14. Some devout Orthodox Christians explain that they receive communion every Sunday in order to replenish the grace diminished in them since their last Eucharist.

15. The relics of many saints were placed in museums as a result of atheistic campaigns in the 1920s through 1930s. But when these items are rediscovered they have lost none of their sacred power. For example, the relics of the famous Orthodox saint Serafim Sarovskiy were miraculously found in the attic of the Museum of the History of Religion in St. Petersburg in the 1990s and given back to the monastery in Nizhni Novgorod province.

16. Also sometimes called a *poslushnik*, "a person who carries out *poslushanie*" (derived from the verb *slushat'sya*, "to obey"). Usually, one performed the same job throughout one's stay at the monastery: for example washing dishes, cooking, or gardening.

17. It is true that some *trudniki* live in monasteries for many years and become "natives," yet they never obtain any official status in the monastic hierarchy.

Marina's religious biography differed from that of the older women I discuss in this chapter. She had decided to be baptized when she was eleven because many children in her school had crosses on their necks. Her parents and sister were baptized at the same time. Later she joined the Orthodox youth club and a group that spent some vacation time at the monastery, where she decided to prolong her stay. She eventually left the monastery after deciding that it was not her way. She had graduated from university and was enrolled in a PhD program when I met her. She might be considered typical for a critically minded intellectual believer.

18. The guest-host division is by no means the only cleavage affecting the monastic community; other "political" divisions may be even more important.

19. I was told that no one ever brought underclothes or hygienic tampons, which are much needed in convents inhabited mostly by young girls and women of fertile age (but perhaps considered unsuitable as gifts from visitors). The "true life" of bodies was not consonant with the roles they played in performances of spirituality and authenticity for pilgrims.

20. The prayer for the dead and the living is one of the oldest functions of a monastery and one of the strongest ties between the monastic and mundane worlds.

21. My own father (born 1946) was secretly baptized by his mother's younger sister and without the knowledge of his mother, who was a convinced atheist and had an official position she could not afford to lose.

22. A priest in a village church in Novgorod oblast' was marketed by the pilgrimage leader as *blagodatny batiushka* (a priest full of divine grace) because of his authenticity: he was a local person, a tractor driver in the Soviet past, and the very embodiment of tradition.

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PART FOUR

Person and Nation

*Church, Christian Community,
and Spectres of the Secular*

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