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- 1 Numerous accounts have documented the exuberant development of the religious landscape in post-Soviet Russia over the past 25 years. Alongside the Russian Orthodox Church's growing public role, the influx of foreign missionaries' church planting, and popular interest in a variety of spiritual traditions, the struggles that specific non-Orthodox faith communities have faced to establish themselves as legitimate in the wider society have received somewhat less ethnographic attention. The 'anti-sectarian' public discourses have successfully created an air of suspicion around non-traditional¹ religious groups in the minds of ordinary people. This paper focuses on one of these non-traditional groups as I explore the difficulties a small community of Evangelical Christians has met in a traditionally Orthodox environment and try to analyse their responses to the scepticism they have encountered.
- 2 Historically, Orthodox Christianity has occupied a significant place in Komi culture.² In the villages, Orthodoxy is seen and valued as a meaningful lens through which the world can be understood by those people who do not consider themselves to be religious or believers as such. Certain Orthodox practices are often implicitly part of the identity of being a village Komi (see Leete & Koosa 2012).
- 3 As elsewhere in the Russian Federation, since the early 1990s a wide range of religious groups and confessions have been active and well visible in the Komi Republic. However, in this environment of religious plurality, which started to develop rapidly in the post-Soviet period, different religions have not been competing on equal grounds and the

decision to follow a particular faith is not only a question of individual choice. This is particularly conspicuous in the countryside, where relations between neighbours and relatives are close and social control in the community much stronger than in the more anonymous urban environment.

- 4 The ethnographic data I draw on in this paper was collected from 2006 to 2013 in the Kulömdin district of Komi Republic, Russia. The empirical material was gathered by conducting interviews, by way of informal conversations, and by attending church services (both Orthodox and Evangelical) and other church-related events. Additionally, I have included in this study references to thematic accounts from the media.

The Christian community of Don

- 5 Although Evangelicals in Komiland, especially in the villages, are often seen as odd social marginals, they have in fact become a conspicuous group in the republic's religious landscape. While the overall number of Protestant believers has remained modest³, the social and religious activism of Evangelical Christians has made them visible, a group to be reckoned with. As the larger number of Evangelical congregations is located in the cities (Syktyvkar, Ukhta, Vorkuta), people in the rural settlements still perceive local non-Orthodox believers as peculiar exceptions, while in general their media coverage as more controversial when compared to the Orthodox Church.
- 6 The Evangelical congregation under study here was started in 2003 in the village of Don (photo 1), which has approximately 500 inhabitants and is located in the Kulömdin district, about 15 km from the district centre.

Photo 1



A view of the Don village.
Photo Art Leete, 2011.

- 7 An American Evangelical missionary, William,⁴ can be regarded as the main initiator of this group. His interpreter and fellow missionary Andrei, with a background in a Charismatic church, became the pastor of the group. In Komi they teamed up with a Baptist, Semen, and eventually, when the missionaries settled in Don, a congregation formed around them. The first members of the community were the few local women who had converted in a Baptist church in Syktyvkar in the mid-1990s. In fact, one of those women had met William when he was still in search of a location to settle in Komiland, and she strongly suggested that he choose Kulömdin district to do his mission work. Later on, some more locals started to visit the church – some more, some less, regularly, and while a handful have been baptised in this new congregation, others continue simply to visit.
- 8 The members call their congregation the Christian Community of Don (Donskaja Hristianskaja Obščina)⁵. Irrespective of particular denominational backgrounds of specific people, in the paper I will refer to the group members generally as Evangelicals. Both William and pastor Andrei have vigorously pursued nondenominational principles in the community. Among others, the community has relationships with Baptists and Pentecostals, who have been welcomed as guest preachers in Don. In addition to not really knowing the difference between Protestant denominations, some of the community members are not fully aware of the doctrinal differences between Protestant and Orthodox faiths, or simply find them irrelevant.
- 9 In spite of attracting attention and stirring up controversy all over Kulömdin district and even farther, the group has in fact remained rather small, having about 15 more or less regular members (Photo 2 et 3).

Photo 2



After the Sunday service the congregation enjoys tea together.

Photo Art Leete, 2011.

Photo 3



Singing religious songs at the church is usually accompanied by guitar and synthesiser.
Photo Art Leete, 2011.

- 10 The majority of the churchgoers are middle-aged and elderly women. Ethnically, most of the members are Komi, although there are also Russians (including the pastor) and Ukrainians and thus the services are held in Russian. The services are conducted in a private house adapted to accommodate religious gatherings (Photo 4).

Photo 4



The Don congregation gathers at a private house adapted to hold services.
Photo Art Leete, 2011.

Evangelicals in the view of (Orthodox) villagers

- 11 As a number of sociological surveys have shown, the relationship between personal belief, religious identity and religious practice in contemporary Russia is complex and contradictory. It is not uncommon that people who identify themselves as Orthodox are not baptised and never go to church. Religion is often perceived as a part of the traditional cultural environment and national belonging is equated with religious belonging (see Krindatch 2004, p. 126; Mitrokhin 2006, p. 37-38). In accordance with such understanding, some polls have revealed that about half of both non-believers and atheists consider themselves to be Orthodox (Kääriäinen & Furman 2000, p. 54).
- 12 The Russian public generally does not distinguish between Western mainstream and new religions coming from the West (Agadjanian 2001, p. 354), and similarly in Komi, people have little knowledge of different Christian denominations. Often all non-Orthodox groups are simply lumped together as 'sects'. On the one hand, 'sect' is a term carrying detrimental connotations as it denotes something that represents a threat to both individuals and state. As Ludek Broz (2009, p. 21) has put it, the notion of sect has absorbed many of the negative meanings Soviet ideology projected onto religion in general and this word has ultimately come to signify the dark other of post-socialist religious life. Then again, the concept of 'sectarians' is popularly often used simply to indicate the strangeness of the group or church under question and that it is not regarded as a normal part of the community, marking its non-belongingness.
- 13 Derogatory and suspicious attitudes towards 'new' religions are widely spread in Russia. The ROC⁶ has had an important role in encouraging mistrust of 'non-traditional' faith groups. Emily B. Baran (2006, p. 638) has considered the attacks on rival religious

organisations, in particular those of Western origin that the ROC has dismissed as dangerous, 'totalitarian' cults or sects, as one defining element of the ROC's post-Soviet activity. However, the secular media has played a key role in transmitting the anti-cult message and language through both regional and national newspapers to the ordinary people and making it relevant to them. (ibid., p. 650) Konstantin Mikhailov has also found that in the media the locally new religious groups are frequently designated as sects, and often the term is accompanied by epithet 'totalitarian' or 'destructive' (Mikhailov 2013, p. 68).

- 14 While some of the Orthodox clergy do have more tolerant views and at least unofficially there can even be certain Protestant-Orthodox joint projects (see Caldwell 2011; Lunkin 2010), Komiland's bishop Pitirim's attitude clearly represents the other end of the scale. The bishop of Komiland is well-known for his rigorously antagonistic views on Protestant churches, most of which he habitually addresses as sects. Pentecostals have provoked especially sharp comments, but all other Protestant churches (perhaps with the exception of the Lutheran Church) are also firmly part of the anti-sectarian discourse. Pitirim and other Orthodox clerics close to him have publicly designated different Evangelical denominations (among other things) as pseudo-Christian denominations, pseudo-faith, neo-protestant sects, neo-Charismatic sects, destructive movements, and totalitarian sects. Sometimes, when addressing the general public, the anti-sectarian statements can be more restrained as compared to the messages directed to the Orthodox community. For example, when in 2009 under the Eparchy the Centre for the Study of New Religious Movements was established, it was announced slightly differently in secular and Orthodox media. In the secular news the secretary of the Eparchy archimandrite (then hegumen) Philipp was reported to say that the centre was a replacement for the previous Anti-sectarian Centre, which had fulfilled its purposes, and that the new centre was intended to counsel people on new religious movements (Dzhavrshian 2009). At the same time, an Orthodox portal emphasised the establishment of an anti-sectarian centre and reported archimandrite Philipp's comment that the centre was founded as a reaction to the "expansion of religious sects and cults in Komi", but also in connection with 'destructive activities of the neo-Charismatic sects in prisons and unlawful spread of the sectarian rehabilitation centres (Romashin 2011). Pentecostals and Baptists are generally flatly categorised as endangering both individuals (by menacing their mental health and by depriving them of eternal life) and social integrity. As a reaction to the Pentecostal concerts in Syktyvkar in 2012, an Orthodox hegumen wrote a petition to the mayor of Syktyvkar on behalf of his congregation, asking the authorities to restrict such events; in the petition he announced, regarding the Pentecostals, that "Everyone baptised to Orthodoxy is united with Christ and obliged to serve the Sun of Truth, obliged to stand against evil, evil-faith, pseudo-faith, to take care of the spiritual health of their fellow citizens, neighbours and relatives" (Hegumen Ignatii 2012, p. 6).
- 15 The local ROC has also repeatedly intimated that the growth and activity of Evangelical congregations represents a danger to national stability and security, the American background of the 'neo-Protestant sects' is emphasised and their activity is said to be supported by the American secret services (see Bradauskas; Dzhavrshyan 2009; V Komi 2009).
- 16 According to Pitirim, Orthodoxy needs to be protected as the 'genetic code of Russia' and equality of religions is out of the question, as this would mean 'destroying the indigenous religion and indigenous population' (Episkop 2010). Interestingly, Pitirim has supported

his intolerance of religious plurality with references to following the 'European way' (Zayavlenie 2010).

- 17 Through media 'anti-sectarian' views have had their impact on the discourse and vocabulary used when discussing non-traditional faiths, the agendas of the missionaries and how the people engaged with the groups in question are imagined in the Komi villages. In Kulömdin district the Don Evangelicals have come to embody the often confusing religious heterogeneity that rapidly started to develop in the post-Soviet period. Not every one of my fieldwork partners has had direct contact with the Don Evangelicals; in the villagers' overall critique and depiction of the non-Orthodox believers, comments on contacts with and ideas about the Don Evangelicals and media-based generalisations concerning new religious groups as such are frequently inseparably intertwined.
- 18 The popularly exploited ideas about zombification and brainwashing as methods of obtaining adherents are also present in the Kulömdiners' imagination of the locally new faith groups. The religious fervour the (recently) converted tend to display causes estrangement and is interpreted in terms of the person having been 'brainwashed'. Furthermore, the 'sectarians' are pictured as completely unreasonable in their views and 'zombified' to become blind followers of their authoritarian leaders. In the following quote the priest's wife Olga⁷ expresses these commonly held notions:

[T]hese are people who believe the Gospel but interpret it completely distortedly. That one thing is written in the gospel but they say that no, there is completely another subtext. It needs to be understood otherwise. You see, there are these kinds of people. It is impossible to communicate and talk with them. That is, the person has these glassy eyes and he doesn't listen at all to what you say. You see, that is my personal experience in communicating with the sectarians. There are other kinds of people, these kinds of more fair-minded ones. [---] But as a rule, [---] when a person already sits deeply in it, he doesn't want to look critically at it. [---] But the difference between Orthodoxy and sectarianism is that, the sectarian, he doesn't want to look critically at what some kind of, let's say, teachers, tell him, because in the sects there are leaders who say that it has to be so, so and so. Read this, do that.

- 19 In the above-quoted comment an additional line of thought comes up – some sectarians are 'more fair-minded' than others. That is to say that actually the category of 'sectarian' is not as uniform as it might at first appear. While only a few of the Orthodox I have spoken with have evaluated the Don missionaries' enterprise in straightforwardly positive terms, others do allow that though being unsuitable to the Komi countryside, as their 'spirit is not Orthodox', their intentions in general might be good. However, as their faith is seen as foreign, as an 'American faith', their presence nevertheless provokes disapproval. Thus the notion of sect can be quite accommodating and broadly used, starting from signifying all non-Orthodox faiths (usually with the exception of other 'world religions') to indicating sinister esoteric groups. For example, a woman who first classified all non-Orthodox Christian denominations as unwanted sects, later on expressed a much more permissive opinion, stating that:

It is better of course if a person believes, even if he is not an Orthodox Christian. Well, I certainly don't mean those secret sects (laughs) that zombify people, demand complete obedience and something more. I speak of Christian religions, branches of Christianity. (Zhanna)

- 20 Besides 'brainwashing', another severe accusation blames the Evangelicals for constituting a danger to the physical health of those under their influence. The ideas about Evangelical blood libel were promoted in the atheist campaign during the 1950s

and 1960s (see Dobson 2014; Panchenko 2013)⁸ and it seems probable that this propaganda at least partly influenced the image of the Evangelicals that the older generation has today. The Don Evangelicals have repeatedly exemplified the prejudiced ideas the locals have about them by recounting the motif of sacrificing children:

And as soon as you start to speak [about faith], everyone will point to their temples and say that you have gone mad, [that] Baptists are sectarians, Baptists are altogether horrible people who, that is, burn their babies, sacrifice them. Apparently, sometime in the time of the communists, people were frightened with Baptists this way. (Lidia)

- 21 Interestingly enough, I have only heard this accusation recounted by the Evangelicals themselves, and I have not come across this particular allegation when discussing non-Orthodox believers with the Orthodox (or non-believers)⁹. The allegations against Evangelicals I have recorded in the Komi villages are usually rather non-specific, broadly concerned with ritual-doctrinal issues and the mental health of the believers. Indeed the young people are considered to be especially threatened by the 'sectarians', but it is mainly their psychological immaturity that is seen to place them under greater risk as the 'sectarians' are imputed to take advantage of suggestible and unsuspecting young minds, or of people in distress. Possibly this motif of ritual murder of the young is recalled from Soviet propaganda or from thematic literature as an ultimate manifestation of the unjust and outrageous nature of discrimination from which Evangelical Christians have suffered, and with which they still struggle.
- 22 From the Evangelicals' narratives an idea emerges that there is a certain age-specific difference in the attitude people have concerning Protestant faiths. Younger people are seen as having a more tolerant and open-minded view of the non-Orthodox Churches, but also as being more 'receptive to God's message' (in the Evangelical sense). The older generation in turn is depicted as having fixed preconceived ideas and being more corrupt because of the former 'godlessness' and state atheism they grew up with, hence they have more difficulties developing a personal relationship with God. As my non-Evangelical interlocutors have primarily been middle-aged or older, I cannot really confirm this assessment about age-specific attitudes towards the non-Orthodox. However, it is interesting to note that several members of the Don community were first persuaded to go to church by their children or grandchildren, which does seem to indicate the youngsters' greater receptiveness and their role in introducing the 'new' faith to their senior family members.
- 23 While individual villagers' knowledge and ideas about the Evangelicals are quite haphazard and vague, there are certain motifs besides brainwashing and the like that have recurrently emerged from the interviews and conversations on that topic. In the following I will outline the main issues that my (tentatively Orthodox) interlocutors have found to be 'wrong' and irritating about the Evangelicals.
- 24 The most conspicuous aspect of the Don Evangelicals by which people have come to be aware of the group in the first place and categorised it as problematic, has been the presence of the American missionary. This foreign connection has provoked both curiosity and sharp disapproval. The American missionary is perceived as an agent of his origin country, somehow working for the interests of his government, attempting to force a foreign power and culture upon the locals. As religious deviance from what is considered to be customary is associated with political deviance, it therefore awakens doubts about the patriotism and loyalty of the Evangelicals. Some villagers flatly accuse

local Evangelicals of 'betraying their fatherland'. How closely tied national and religious belonging is perceived to be, is well demonstrated by the fact that people belonging to the Evangelical group in Don are called 'Americans' among other villagers. On the one hand, (influenced by the media) Protestant faith groups are commonly associated with Western countries anyway, often specifically with America; on the other, as there is actual American presence, this circumstance in turn encourages the view of evangelism as being a specifically American phenomenon.

- 25 Another oft-surfacing source of reproach in regard to non-Orthodox believers has to do with their mission style, or what it is imagined to be. The 'sectarians' are generally characterized as intrusive and annoying with their 'recruiting' (*verbovka*). Jehovah's Witnesses going door-to-door are typically thought of when talking about the invasive mission practices of new religious groups¹⁰. When comparing 'sects' to Orthodoxy, it is a common opinion expressed by both active church-goers and simply Orthodox sympathisers alike, that while people go to the Orthodox Church voluntarily, those who attend the 'sects' are somehow (emotionally) coerced to do so by those already in the sect, who are ascribed as having the duty of recruiting new members. The 'sectarians' are seen as trying to lure people to join their communities by offering help or money; considerable material benefits are thought to be used for this bribery. However, for instance the mutually supportive environment typical to the Evangelical communities is also depicted as part of the emotional manipulation used to recruit members¹¹:

Alla: [---] if we talk about the difference between our Orthodoxy and sectarianism, [then] there they take one compulsorily, by the hand to the church - you come to us. Every kind of attention is paid to the poor thing, everyone loves him there [ironically], all kinds of material benefits are given to him...

Aleksandra: An apartment...

Alla: ...is bought and everything is given to him. So that you would be with us and not go anywhere. But no one is holding us, we come to the church with all our heart and we feel good and as if acquiring the meaning of life.

- 26 The fact that the social work and mission activities employed by Evangelicals are considerably different from the practices of the Orthodox Church can cause ambivalent responses among both the villagers and the wider society from another perspective too. The representatives of the ROC generally depict Evangelical social projects as highly suspicious with the main goal of carrying out 'religious propaganda' (see, for example, Dzhevhrshian 2009; Romashin 2011; V Komi 2009). But in a way, Evangelical activism has prompted a critical appraisal of the ROC by some who find that it should likewise pay more attention to and engage in a similar sort of social outreach (see Koosa & Leete, forthcoming).
- 27 Even people who in general have a very hazy understanding of the nature of Protestant denominations usually come up with certain doctrinal and ritualistic features that are at odds with their religious know-how and come to highlight the Evangelicals' deviation from the locally accepted norm. Most often the Evangelicals are blamed for not venerating icons and saints. Quite interestingly, one woman connected this disregard with what she described as Protestants' excessive rationality. As she was talking about wonder-working icons and how non-believers try to explain away the miraculous healings and suchlike, she went on to ascribe the Protestants with a similar unwillingness to accept the reality of miracles:

But many want to understand, for example, Protestantism. It is plainly an idea to try to understand everything with reason, through logic, through verifications. You

see, [like] lawyers – there's the law, you'll have to understand it precisely like this. You see. It is like that. That is, what holy fathers can there be, we ourselves are all saints. (Scornfully) [---] We read the gospel, pray, and that's it. We are already saints. You see. (Olga)

28 With her comment about not venerating icons and saints, the priest's wife goes on to disapprovingly point to the view of the laity and approach to the individual in Evangelical practice, and indicates what is perceived as an excessive emphasis on reading the Bible. In the Orthodox tradition, knowledge of the Bible by lay people has not been considered to have any special value, or even to be necessary. First, the Evangelicals' frequent references to the Bible can arouse antagonistic feelings as it is recognised as boastful ("Well, it is not a heroic deed that he knows the Bible by heart."). Second, in a way this concentration on the Bible comes to symbolise the circumventing of other authorities and media (saints, church fathers, icons) in communication with the transcendental. The Evangelical insistence on the importance of a direct personal relationship with God can seem simply inappropriate from the Orthodox viewpoint.

29 Furthermore, the Evangelical emphasis on personal conversion is not quite understood from the Orthodox perspective. The converts' confidence in having found the way to salvation is criticised as arrogant and disrespectful in regard to the Orthodox because of the Evangelicals' critical view of local traditions of religious practice. Somewhat ironically then, the Evangelicals themselves are accused of not accepting alternative ways of believing:

There is this malady too, that when a person becomes a believer, that is, a neophyte, he starts to think that before him there was no one at all. Well, [that] somewhere there was Christ 2000 years ago, but now only they are this kind of [true] Christian. [They are] the first and they know how to do something. Truth is with them. This is this Baptist, sectarianism. Word determines the being. (Laughs) That is, this kind of thing. It's kind of funny. (Vassili)

30 Preaching a locally new faith irritates the Komi villagers because they perceive it as an attack on their traditions and the religious continuity in their families and wider community. Indeed this kind of reasoning – equating the acceptance of a non-Orthodox religion to the rejection of one's native culture – has been characteristic to the public anti-sectarian discussions as well, which certainly has helped to generate and increase such feelings on the whole. However, quite differently from hazy ideas concerning the doctrinal or practiced 'evils' of new faiths, a lot of people in the villages have very personal experiences of Orthodoxy and with the keeping of its traditions. During the years of communist rule and closing of the churches, vernacular Orthodox practices and knowledge were held in the village communities by certain elderly women (see Il'ina & Uliashev 2009, pp. 159-164; Koosa & Leete 2011). While there were few widely acknowledged specialists (who carried out baptisms, for example), many women who were young adults at the beginning of the Soviet period, functioned later on as mothers and grandmothers, as religious experts at the family level. Because of this, many of the now middle-aged people are at least to some extent enculturated to vernacular Orthodoxy or are sympathetic towards Orthodoxy because of the personal memories related to it. It is not uncommon for people to reminisce with remorse about how they confronted their grandmother's religious views and attempted to challenge them with scientific-atheistic principles. So, although in reality a minority of people in the traditionally Orthodox community are neither religiously active nor claim to be believers, nevertheless there is this general understanding that if a person wants to follow a

religion, it ought to be Orthodoxy. The similarity of viewpoints of the churched Orthodox and people rather lukewarm in religious matters is well illustrated with the two interview excerpts below. In the first quotation, a regular church-goer reports scolding her neighbour for attending the Evangelical congregation; in the second, a woman who used to be active in atheist propaganda work and considers herself to be a non-believer, but visits church on bigger holy days, comments on her attitude towards the non-Orthodox missions:

I say [to her] that [---], why do you go there? Yet you always used to believe in Orthodoxy, went to church. But not now. She says that one can follow any faith, the main thing is that you believed in God. But anyway, there's certainly no need for so many faiths. (Agrafena)

These Baptists have come to us many times. [---] They offer books, all kinds of brochures for reading. Then they invite. I say to them that I'm a constant person, conservative. You can't persuade me, better don't come. (Laughs) I say that if [I was] to follow any faith at all, then I believe what my ancestors, my parents, believed in. I don't want to betray their faith. (Evdokia)

- 31 In connection with this pervading attitude of antipathy towards non-Orthodox faiths, it seems pertinent that the people of Kulömdin hold a certain image of themselves and their district as embodying true Kominess (see Leete & Koosa 2012). As Orthodoxy is understood to constitute an integral part of Komi identity, the Protestant mission and people converting to Protestantism are seen as compromising the collective self-image.
- 32 In the Komi countryside the Evangelicals are predominantly regarded with distrust and scorn. The first emotion emerges from narratives concerned with foreign contacts and the Evangelicals' presumed hidden agendas, ideas about 'brainwashing', 'zombifing' and aberrant worship practices, picked up from the popular media, also add to the anxiety. 'Scorn' broadly marks the attitude with which the Evangelicals' 'recruiting' tactics and locals' motives to join non-traditional faith communities are judged. Both of these sentiments thus indicate specific premises and attitude, but they are often intertwined with how people speak about the Evangelicals. The following quotation from an Orthodox woman well exemplifies the mixed feelings people have concerning the new religious groups and their activities in the local community:

Well, he [William] is helping [people] like that. This certainly, perhaps the person himself is, well, a believer... You could even respect that, but on the other hand again... I don't know, I somehow don't trust them. I think that... What I'm interested in is who's behind this and from where the resources are taken for this. (Laughing¹²) So I don't trust them.[...] [T]here was this interesting case here in one family. That is, one brother became a Baptist and another became a Lutheran. You see. (Laughing) And they can't stand each other! (Laughing out loud) That's in the other end of the hamlet, there's this kind of family. It was simply told to me that one is a Baptist and the other a Lutheran and they don't get along.(Zhanna)

- 33 Here we can see how in spite of admitting that some of the activities in which missionaries engage are indeed beneficial to the community members, this sort of charity work is still seen (although somewhat hesitantly perhaps) as suspicious as there might be some unknown foreign sources to support this kind of endeavour. So, on the one hand there is this feeling of slightly timid uncertainty concerning the 'new' religions, on the other hand the locals who have decided to join some of those 'new' groups are depicted as foolish and laughed at. But even though the story of two brothers falling out with each

other is presented as humorous, at the same time it expresses the notion that these 'new' faiths break up families.

- 34 Analysing marginal religious groups in America, the sociologists Charles L. Harper and Bryan F. Le Beau (1993, p. 172) have pointed out that there are at least four dimensions in the marginality of a religious group: numerical, ideological (or doctrinal), legitimacy ('respectability') and political (power). They go on to argue that there is no direct determinant relationship between high problematisation or accommodation and viability, growth, success, and social influence. Similarly, they claim, deviance is related to but is not the same as problematisation – some deviant groups and people are problematised, others are not. A group or person may be viewed as quite deviant (strange, bizarre, different) and yet be an accepted and un-contentious part of the social landscape (ibid., p. 174). In the case of the Don Evangelicals, it could be argued that the most vexatious aspect of their group in the eyes of the non-Evangelicals is the presence of a foreign¹³, notably an American, missionary¹⁴, which makes it difficult for the congregation to be accepted in an unproblematised way among the wider community. For the local people, it is hard to understand exactly why a foreigner would decide to leave home and travel thousands of kilometres just to come to 'help the needy people and tell them about Jesus Christ', as it is explained to them. So they suspect that in fact this kind of missionary has some sort of hidden and probably harmful purpose.

The Evangelicals' strategies to cope with criticism

- 35 In the following part of the paper I will turn my attention to the arguments and strategies that Don Evangelicals have used to respond to the criticism and labelling as sectarians, and to make a claim for a position as legitimate actors in the local religious landscape. While some of these strategies are first and foremost directed at outsiders, some are rather used within the community and function to reassure and empower the believers spiritually.
- 36 The focus of the Don Evangelicals' ministry has been social outreach with the basic idea of witnessing their faith first by deed and then by word. It was precisely their commitment to dealing with social problems by providing practical help that soon introduced the group around Kulömdin district. During the first years, the missionaries actively drove to different villages in the district, helping children's institutions (schools, kindergartens, orphanages) with repair and renovation work, building playgrounds, etc. In the evenings they would have some sort of educative missionising event at the local clubhouse, such as a concert with Christian songs or showing an anti-addiction film. As the news spread about the Evangelicals' 'free social service', local village heads were apparently quite eager to invite them. And indeed, so were (and are) individual people. Regardless of their possible dislike of promoting a 'foreign' faith, at times local people take a very business-like attitude towards the missionaries. For instance, a woman in her seventies who visited the Orthodox church fairly regularly and was regarded as an exemplary believer by her neighbours, quite harshly interpreted the Evangelicals' activities as 'buying souls', but at the same time admitted that she too had accepted their help in building a new cellar.
- 37 While social outreach is primarily conceptualised by the Evangelicals as a means to spread the gospel, they are not oblivious of the fact that these socially beneficial activities enable them to achieve a more positive reception by the otherwise sceptical villagers. Lay

members of the Don community especially contemplate less the doctrinal principles that are supposed to distinguish true religion from sects, and rather determine the difference through the activities with which each engages. Engagement with social justice projects is thought of as evidence of the groups' respectability. Accordingly, sects are defined by their inability to do good deeds; they are seen as only being able to harm people, mentally or physically:

Even our relatives, who were saying in the beginning [that] you are a sect, sect, sect, and that's it, now [there is] no more [of this kind of talk]. They see that William is helping a lot, and Semen. A sect, well, sectarians are not able to help. [...] There is something different with them. There is something wrong inside of them. For example, the Jehovahists [egovisty]. We have them here in Kulömdin as well, this kind of sect. This is a sect. (Oksana)

- 38 However, after the change of officials in the district administration in 2007 these kinds of activity were substantially restricted. The new head took a more or less openly antagonistic stance in regard to the Evangelicals and banned most of their activities, insisting that no religious propaganda is allowed in public or education institutions. Pastor Andrei commented on the change of the district head as follows:

And all the administrative leaders [of local villages] were summoned, they came to Kulömdin, and they were simply told not to invite William and his friends to carry out work projects. They were almost threatened with being fired in case they did invite [William] [...]. And now we're asked [to come to help] very seldom. Mostly because they [local village officials] don't want to have problems with the district authorities. You see. [...] when we had another leader here there were no problems whatsoever. He [the previous head] even came to us, we went to his office, we communed with him.

- 39 In 2011, a new district head was elected and at first the Evangelicals expressed high hopes of him being tolerant towards Protestants and allowing their public projects to continue. As soon transpired, despite the new leader having an open-minded view of non-Orthodox Christians, no noteworthy changes in the administration's overall attitude followed as most of the other previous officials remained in position, and the Evangelicals reasoned that the new head preferred not to create tensions within the administration by opposing his more conservative colleagues.
- 40 While the officials restrict Evangelicals' access to village clubs with the argument that in the framework of secular state, religious agitation in public establishments cannot be allowed, a noticeably different standard is applied to the ROC. For example, the priest has been included in public celebrations (for example Victory Day) in the district centre and has also blessed the rooms of the administration building.¹⁵ However, in the framework of concepts about 'traditional religion' and 'ROC's canonical territory' with which many officials approach religious issues, the ROC's activity is not seen as proselytising or as 'religious propaganda', but is taken to be quite natural.
- 41 Under the influence of William and the leadership of Andrei, the Don congregation has emphasised their non-denominational ideology. The Evangelicals have sought to have contacts with not only other Protestant churches, but also with Orthodox partners. When the missionaries settled in Don in 2003, there was currently no permanent priest serving at the district centre's Orthodox church. When in 2006 a new priest, Aleksandr, assumed the position, the Evangelicals approached him with the aim of aligning forces in different kinds of social program and bringing people to God. At the beginning, the two sides apparently developed quite an amicable relationship. However, after some time this

amity was broken off by the priest. Whereas both sides agree that it was the priest who cut off the relations, each explains differently why this happened. The priest states that the Evangelicals took advantage of his being amiable with them in their mission work, using his friendliness as an argument and proof to the claim that there is no difference in going to an Orthodox or an Evangelical church. The Evangelicals in turn explain the priest's change of heart as him following a commandment from local bishop Pitirim, who did not want to see any collaboration between his clergy and Evangelicals.

42 Although the contacts with local Orthodox clerics can be intimidating¹⁶, Evangelicals strongly believe that the higher officials of the ROC really are tolerant towards the Evangelicals and support cooperation between the Orthodox and Protestant confessions, and the problem is that the patriarch simply is not able to ensure that this kind of friendly atmosphere is maintained in the peripheries.

43 The Don Evangelicals' conceptualisation of the role of the ROC in the region is not unambiguous. While confident that Protestant denominations have every right to operate in Komiland as equals to the Orthodox Church, the Evangelicals do acknowledge the ROC's historical position, and in some remarks, to a degree, even its somewhat prerogative rights in the Komi Republic. However, at the same time they criticise and even ridicule the argument of traditionalism, pointing out that paganism would be even more traditional than the Orthodoxy. Pastor Andrei has commented on the matter as follows:

Here the traditional Church is of course the Orthodox Church. No one is arguing against that. Yes. Simply sometimes there is some overstraining concerning others. You see. Concerning other normal believers. They will sometimes have to fight with pointless problems. You see. [To] Prove that we are not crocodiles, that we are as normal people as they are.

44 While representatives of the ROC frequently interpret the mission activity of religious newcomers as stealing souls from their flock, the Don Evangelicals give assurances that their aim is not to make Orthodox believers abandon their faith for Evangelical Christianity. However, the ROC and most of the village people usually understand quite differently from the Evangelicals whom to consider Orthodox (cf. Wanner 2009, pp. 167-168). For the Evangelicals, believing means acting, one's belief in God should show in everyday performance, and the decision to 'take Jesus into one's heart' has to be made individually and consciously as faith cannot be inherited. They ridicule the traditionally Orthodox who drink and smoke, only go to church on major holy days and pay – according to Evangelicals – too much attention to the icons. Actually, even the Orthodox priests are occasionally accused of setting a bad example to the people by consuming alcohol. In addition, the ROC and its clerics are criticised for their passivity concerning mission work and reaching out to the people. In a way, the ROC's passivity is used as an argument for the need for an Evangelical presence. While it has been claimed that (hidden) criticism of the majority religion, of its ritualism and corruption has been the key element in the preaching of a number of Protestant Churches in Russia (Lunkin 2000, p. 125), the Don Evangelicals generally prefer to avoid condemning the ROC's practices and rather stress the necessity and ideal of working together.

45 As cooperation with the local Orthodox Church did not prove to be feasible, all the more important have been the tight bonds the Don congregation holds with other Protestant Churches and believers. These ties comprise personal friendships and kinships, the exchange of information over religion-related matters, mutual visiting of the churches, jointly organised discussions over some religious topic, organising bigger collaborative

events, etc. Every now and then, fellow believers from William's home church, and also from other Evangelical churches abroad, have visited the Don congregation. As the Don Evangelical group is small and feels frequently attacked at some level because of its 'deviance' from what is generally considered to be normal, the relations with other Protestant groups can be used as a means of empowering the local community. Such connections enable the locally small group to perceive itself as a part of the large worldwide community of Evangelicals.¹⁷ In this way they are not just some few peculiar people, but part of a wider and very vital community. At the same time, these international relations function ambivalently, as one main criticism from outsiders is specifically concerned with it (cf. Broz 2009, p. 20).

- 46 Aside from understanding themselves as being somehow connected with all other (Evangelical) Christians at the geographical level, there is also an idea of a temporal dimension that unites all true believers in time. So the hardships one encounters being a believer are seen in accordance with the persecution of Jesus and the first Christians, as well as with all true Christians throughout history:

But when we talk about these things, then people say that you are spreading heresy, that you are doing some sort of thing that is no good. But it is not so only here. I think, this is so in the whole world. That there are some oppositions. It was the same way in the time of Jesus Christ. If you know something about the Old Testament – there it was the same way. They told that Jesus is a sectarian, that it's heresy [what he teaches]. So because of that evidently it is still so. (Lidia)

- 47 Hence, although it is difficult to comprehend or bear at times, experiencing hardships is to be expected by true believers and in a way proves that they are right in their pursuits. By the difference that is brought about with the knowledge of being saved, the Evangelicals feel elevated and disdain the occasional mockery and discrimination from the non-Evangelicals.

- 48 There are still more active ways of countering popular prejudice. Members of the Don group are well aware that local people consider them to be a 'sect', perhaps not dangerous but deviant and somehow suspicious. The Evangelicals also recognise indifference in the attitude of their surrounding society and that the term is often used simply to mark their strangeness from the villagers' point of view. One way of responding to such labelling is to try to give the popularly applied term a more positive or at least neutral meaning. This is how pastor Andrei once explained this word both to me and to some of the congregation members:

I think that people simply, they do it [call Evangelical Christians sectarians] simply out of ignorance. Probably only rarely [people call Evangelical Christians sectarians] specially [that is, maliciously]. Because if 'sect' always has a negative nuance, even though we know that this word originally had all sorts of neutral meanings – part of the whole, right? Sector – sect, right? All the way to the completely negative [meanings], right?

- 49 In addition to referring to the possible neutral meanings, Andrei also argues here that people are simply ignorant of the non-Orthodox Christians and this is why they think Evangelicals are the same as 'real' sectarians, in the negative (and prevalent) sense of the concept.

- 50 There is also some conscious effort made to control language use so as not to utter words that automatically determine the way people perceive them. As a mode of encouraging and placating the potentially interested or sceptical outsiders and as a means of diminishing the estrangement many people automatically feel in connection with non-

Orthodox religious groups, the congregants generally consciously avoid mentioning specific denominations (Baptist, Pentecostal, etc.). Instead, they prefer to refer to themselves as simply (Evangelical) Christians or Protestants.¹⁸

Basically, in the Protestant Churches there is now the tendency to clear up this label from their names. It's because these labels are intimidating for many people. There's the First Baptist Church – [and the people would say] ooh, Baptist! – I will never go to a Baptist church! [Imitating an agitated tone of voice.] But if you call the Church, for example, I don't know, Church of Home of God [Dom bozhii] for example or, for example, well, I don't know, Church of New Generation [Novoe pokolenie] or the Friends of Jesus Church [Druz'ia Iisusa]. Simply this kind of totally neutral name. For some people, it is better this way. Apparently they would rather go there than to some Baptist church [...]. (Andrei)¹⁹

- 51 Although sometimes explaining the term 'sect' in a more neutral light and hence somehow, to a degree, willing to embrace classification as being one, the Evangelicals do agree to the position that there are some truly harmful sects or 'pseudo-religious' groups (for example Jehovah's Witnesses, the White Brotherhood) from which people need to be protected. From that perspective the Evangelicals can express comprehension in regard to overall scepticism towards them:

But of course there is an opposition [to non-Orthodox believers]. Because under the name of missionaries, under the name of good-doers there are probably indeed arriving some bad people to some of the regions who are recruiting, let's say, young people, dragging [them] into the sects. You see. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses. (Lidia)

- 52 Thus it can be said that the Evangelicals do not challenge the Orthodox/popular discourse on sectarianism as a whole, but only the fact that they too are its targets. In principle, the Evangelicals also argue for the need to fight sects. The partial copying of the anti-sectarian discourse is used to create legitimacy for their own group.

- 53 And as the Evangelicals emphasise that there are indeed *real* dangerous sects about, their effort is directed at explaining that Evangelical Christians are a legitimate part of contemporary religious plurality. The hostile attitude towards Evangelical believers is rationalised by the rapid changes in society over the past decades that have thoroughly confused ordinary people. Pastor Andrei explains:

After the collapse of Soviet power we already had democracy, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and these churches, these religions were spreading like I don't know what. And these sects. So that people also don't know any more where there is a sect and where there is a true church. You see. They don't even understand that any more. Protestantism is for a lot of people like a bad sect. (Laughing) You see, that's how they think. That they [Protestants] bring some kinds of sacrifices there. You see, they think this way. In Europe Protestantism is of course widely spread.

- 54 In addition to simply trying to explain to people what kind of faith groups should and should not be regarded as sects, references to their constitutional rights are frequently made, the often-repeated phrases being that 'Russia is a multi-national and multi-confessional country' and 'the Constitution grants us the freedom of religion'. In the capital, Syktyvkar, for example, a Baptist church has taken legal steps against a local Orthodox newspaper for classifying them as sectarians, and a Pentecostal church has repeatedly filed appellations against city administrations for obstructing their public meetings (Sibirieva 2013). The Don Evangelicals refer to these instances to show that although so far they have not felt the need to use this opportunity, there are indeed possibilities to take legal measures against direct harassment. While being aware, and

reminding critics, of their legal rights, for the Don Evangelicals the option to turn to the courts remains a latent strategy to cope with discrimination.

- 55 Although not disregarding the justice that secular institutions can provide, the Evangelicals are confident that what matters in the long run is their righteousness from the transcendental perspective. References to the highest authority are made in the sense that eventually God will set things right. Confronted with accusations of following a strange foreign religion, Evangelicals most often answer that there is only one God for all and they worship him according to the Bible. The villagers indeed agree with the statement that there is only one God, but they see him as an *Orthodox* God. When preaching or wanting to support their words and practices by giving incontestable proof, Evangelicals quite often quote passages from the Bible. However, unexpectedly for them, instead of convincing people, it actually sometimes makes them feel that the Evangelicals simply try to show off with their good knowledge of the scripture.
- 56 To challenge the usually quite unspecified accusations of aberrant worship and practices, the Don Evangelicals strongly emphasise that it is possible for anyone interested to go and see for themselves that there is nothing strange going on during their services or otherwise; and that everyone is there of their own free will and by personal choice. Some Evangelicals even go as far as to be ready to place their personal space in front of the presumably distrustful gaze of their non-Evangelical neighbours:

Thank God, now everybody knows that you are a normal person, [that you] believe God. Everything is at sight. In the beginning [when] we were living here, we didn't even have curtains on the windows for how long - [I] suppose half a year. We didn't put up curtains - everything is in sight. You can see how we live, everything!
(Semen)

- 57 It is relevant to note that this kind of demonstration was considered necessary by a person coming from another district and having no kin ties with the Don village community, being therefore doubly 'other'. For the locally born people or people who have been living there for decades are familiar to members of the small community and therefore, although perhaps frowned upon because of their 'peculiar' religious preferences, they would not be seen as suspicious as a 'heretic' from outside.
- 58 The idea that everything is in sight is present in another kind of Evangelical argumentation too as they sometimes claim that the inner change brought about by conversion is also observable for non-believers. The Don Evangelicals' typical example of God's power to change a man completely has been the American missionary, William, who used to be a heavy alcoholic and a drug addict and who has now dedicated his life to doing good and helping needy people. Of course, other congregants tell their personal stories as well, but William's case is especially convenient to use, and it truly functions as an exemplum because of the very radical change in his life that is easy to articulate. At the same time, some other members of the group have not experienced such an abrupt and drastic break from their previous lifestyle, or are not (yet) so fluent in presenting. Some members of the group talk about how becoming a believer has changed not only their behaviour and habits but also given them some kind of special general appearance or 'aura', which is said to be noticed by non-Evangelical people as well. For example, a woman described how she is able to remain calm when everybody else gets upset in a tedious everyday situation:

Even if I go to Kulömdin, there is this long long queue, I stand there for two hours and the salesclerk says afterwards that you are the only one to be so calm (laughing), everyone else is so angry and irritated. Says to me that I'm so calm,

[that] it's so interesting. You see, it is good that people already see the difference and it feels good too. (Inga)

- 59 However, if someone is sceptical about Evangelicals, the overtly enthusiastic embracing of one's new found faith and talking about it might actually only confirm the initial scepticism as there is this common idea of new religions turning people into 'zombies'. Here is how a teacher describes her colleague's reaction to her sharing of emotions about going to church:

[We] were sitting in the canteen, chatting, everybody was sitting there [and] I started to talk like this [...] and she said that 'I'm astounded, you have this kind of eyes...!' [imitating her colleague's startled voice; laughter] I say that what I feel, that I tell. I say that I'm not a fanatic, I really like it there [in the church]. She says that 'you've got this kind of eyes, you talk in such manner that I don't even know...' (laughter) (Varvara)

- 60 However, as the canteen experience of the teacher quoted well illustrates, this kind of religious enthusiasm, or what believers distinguish as a certain personal peace or radiance coming from inside, can be interpreted quite differently by outsiders, who speak of 'zombified' people. Neither is the exemplary case of William univocally convincing in the way the Evangelicals hope. Quite a few Komi villagers react with annoyance when a former drug-addict is presented to them as a role model or – as they perceive it – almost a holy man, and feel that he is not the right person to judge their way of life and preach the word of God to them.
- 61 The Don Evangelicals have employed rather elaborate strategies and divergent answers to their ostracism. However, most of these have remained unnoticed by outsiders and hence have not really worked in the expected way. Although not perceived without ambivalence, social outreach has been the most successful way to conciliate the critics, acquire a more positive reputation and, to an extent, even make the Evangelicals a welcomed part of the community.

Conclusions

- 62 The majority of village Komi do not think of the different Protestant denominations that are currently pursuing mission work in Komi Republic as legitimate alternatives to Orthodoxy. It is widely understood that as there is Orthodoxy for the Komi, so there are other religions for other ethnic groups and it makes people uneasy when one disregards such supposed consistency. On the one hand, this view is derived from the local traditions and experiences; on the other hand, it corresponds to the more widely dominant understanding that links nationality and Orthodoxy.
- 63 While the qualms the villagers have about the Don Evangelicals are vague and often centred around the American connected with the group, and with the notion that they 'believe wrongly', the Evangelicals respond to their critics in a rather detailed manner, employing a number of methods by which to convince people of their normality. However, quite a few of the chosen strategies to approach people do not really work because they are perceived to be patronising, if noticed at all. On the part of the wider community of Kulömdin, there is some curiosity presented concerning the Don group, which again has mainly to do with the American missionary, but most people do not bother to delve into their message and show little interest in the Evangelicals as long as they 'keep to themselves'. The image local people hold of the Don Evangelicals is

influenced by the sensational stories picked up from the media rather than formed on the basis of encounters with evangelical believers.

- 64 The basic mode of adaptation put to use by the Evangelicals is to convince people around them that apart from having some form-only dissimilarities, their faith does not really differ from Orthodoxy. The ecumenical approach the Don Evangelicals represent and pursue can be considered quite unusual in the Russian context. At the same time the Evangelicals evidently carry and somehow give off the idea that their faith is more genuine and 'right' than that of many of those who consider themselves to be Orthodox.
- 65 The experiences of assaults and hardships Evangelicals encounter are utilised in the process of identity building. Thus the discrimination comes to affirm and strengthen Evangelicals' concept of themselves as true Christians. Discrimination because of their belief (seen to be in accordance with the experiences of the first Christians) is somehow taken as proof that their faith is genuine. In their daily lives Evangelicals operate under the moral obligation to spread the gospel. While doing so, they quite consciously place themselves under the pressure of a society largely unsympathetic to Evangelical message and messengers. This kind of positioning can again be seen as important from the viewpoint of constructing the (Russian) Evangelical identity, in which process the experience of hardships is somehow converted to affirm the truthfulness of the message preached.

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NOTES

1. The preamble of the 1997 religious law On the Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations specifies Christianity (with special reference to Russian Orthodoxy), Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as religions traditional to different peoples of Russian Federation.
2. The Komi (Zyryans) are a Finno-Ugric people most of whom live in the Komi Republic situated in the north-eastern corner of the European part of the Russian Federation. According to the Russian census carried out in 2010 the Komi form 23% of their titular Republic's population of about 900,000.
3. According to some estimations Protestants have become the largest group of believers in Komi, pushing Orthodoxy into second place (see Kublitskaia 2010), but a recent sociological survey (Arena 2012, p. 182) informs us that the number of people belonging to some Protestant denomination remains about 1%, while the churching Orthodox make up 30%. Another 4% reported that they were Christian without specific denomination – an identification much more likely to be used by a person influenced by some (Evangelical) Protestant ideas than by a person with an Orthodox background.
4. For a longer discussion on William, see Koosa 2013.
5. Although the Don group is not officially registered as a church, in this paper I use the terms 'church' (cerkov'), 'community' (obščina) and 'congregation' (prihod) interchangeably following the vernacular practice; colloquially, the first, and also the second, notion are most often used by Evangelicals.
6. Russian Orthodox Church.

7. The Orthodox priest in Kulömdin, his wife and evangelical missionaries who are publicly known, are identified in the article by their real names; all others have been given pseudonyms.

8. Although the blood libel has more commonly been connected with the Jews, in Russia the accusation of ritual murder of infants was evoked in the 18th and 19th centuries in relation to the schismatic movements *Khristovschina* and *Scopchestvo*; the Russian literature of late 19th and early 20th centuries played a notable role in spreading the legend (Panchenko 2000; 2013).

9. Panchenko (2010) also writes that according to his knowledge, the contemporary Russian peasants' legendary does not contain the motif of ritual human sacrifice among sectarians.

10. Jehovah's Witnesses have gained an especially negative reputation partly because there have been major court-cases aiming to restrict their activities, widely reported in the media; see Agadjanian 2001, p. 354 and Baran 2006.

11. Bishop Pitirim has also addressed the Evangelicals' informal style by commenting that "not only the Protestants, but we Orthodox people too can enjoy ourselves and talk over a cup of tea. Only differently from the Protestants, we not only have spiritual talks, but spiritual life as well". (Interv'iu 2010)

12. In narrative practices laughter often functions to create ambivalence and it is difficult to interpret definitively. Here, rather than annulling the statement, the speaker uses laughter to soften her remark.

13. In the Soviet Union foreigners were commonly perceived as potential spies; in propaganda the USA was depicted as the main enemy of the Soviet people and this occasional phobia about America remains noticeable in contemporary Russia.

14. In June 2011 he left Don to start a church in another district but over a year later this fact was still mainly unknown to the larger community of the district who still associate the group with 'the Americans'.

15. The pastor's wife was participating in an entrepreneurial seminar offered by the administration, when an official entered with the priest, interrupted the seminar, and said that the room needed to be blessed. According to the pastor "the *batyushka* (diminutive for 'priest') went around and sprinkled water, everyone had papers spread around, and he simply blessed everyone. And without even asking [for permission] /---/. They went and sprinkled every room, even [an Evangelical's] office. Knowing her views and that she doesn't believe in these holy waters and so on, simply the door was open and [they] said that the room needed to be blessed".

16. For example, a priest in one of the district's villages filed a petition against both a Don missionary and a Pentecostal missionary working in the same district in an attempt to get their mission work banned. The prosecutor's office examined the missionaries' documents and all their materials (literature, cassettes, CDs) and found nothing illegal in their activities.

17. Coleman (2004, pp. 13-14) has observed a similar strategy in the case of Swedish Word of Life adherents, who found "comfort in the fact that they belong to a movement whose scope extends beyond an immediately hostile religious and political environment".

18. Such a tendency is not unique to Don Evangelicals, see for example Vallikivi 2011, p. 15 note 4; Wanner 2009, p. 168.

19. This idea and experience of the public being especially suspicious of the Baptists is also present in the Komi Evangelical Church in Syktyvkar (Komi Khristianskaya Tserkov Evangeliskoi Very). The pastor of the church commented: "Our people are of course a little frightened. [...] If you say that you are not from an Orthodox church, people of course become very tense. Very strongly. [They conclude that] If not Orthodox, then it is a sect. [...] So it was during the Communist regime too. For all believers there was one stamp – a Baptist. 'Ah, you're a believer, consequently a Baptist!'"

ABSTRACTS

This article addresses some aspects of the social tensions that have accompanied religious pluralism that emerged in post-Soviet Russia. The paper presents a case study of Evangelical Christians' attempts to position themselves as legitimate actors in the local religious landscape in the Komi Republic, where Russian Orthodoxy is considered to be traditional. In the first part of the paper, I will consider how discourses learned from the media are used to conceptualise contacts with non-Orthodox believers and what aspects of Evangelical practice and ideology seem alien to the Komi villagers and provoke reproachful attitudes. The second part of the paper discusses the Evangelical responses to criticism and the strategies they use to diminish it.

Cet article touche quelques dimensions des tensions sociales suscitées par le pluralisme religieux qui a émergé dans la Russie post-soviétique. C'est une étude de cas sur des Chrétiens évangéliques et leur tentative de se positionner en tant qu'acteurs légitimes dans le paysage religieux local en République komie, où l'orthodoxie russe est considérée comme la religion traditionnelle. Dans la première partie, j'étudierai la manière dont les discours issus des media servent à conceptualiser les contacts réels avec les croyants non orthodoxes, et j'analyserai les aspects de la pratique et de l'idéologie des protestants qui apparaissent comme étrangères aux Komis du village et qui suscite leur réprobation. Dans une deuxième partie, j'examinerai les réponses des protestants aux critiques qui leur sont adressées et leurs stratégies pour en réduire l'impact.

Alates 1990. aastatest on Venemaa religioossele maastikule ilmunud arvukalt kohalikus kontekstis uusi ja vähetuntud usugruppe. Samal ajal on jõudsalt kasvanud Vene Õigeusu Kiriku ühiskondlik positsioon ja tähendus. Artikkel käsitleb mõningaid usulise mitmekesisumisega kaasnenud sotsiaalseid pingeid ühe väikese evangeelsete kristlaste kogukonna näitel Komi Vabariigis. Toon esile, et Komi külaelanike arvamus kohalikest evangeelsetest kristlastest on kujunenud pigem meedia vahendatud suhtumistel kui tegelikel kontaktidel ning osutan evangeelse usupraktika ja ideoloogia aspektidele, mis õigeuskliku taustaga inimestes võõristust tekitavad. Samuti analüüsin evangeelsete kristlaste reaktsioone kriitikale ning toon esile strateegiaid, mille abil nad on püüdnud kohalikku külakogukonda integreeruda.

INDEX

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