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Talking to God: Religion, Para-Science and Disciplinary Practices as Consolidation Tools

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ABSTRACT

The article examines social instruments used to consolidate small religious groups in modern society. Such groups are viewed as a variation of the development of a local Orthodox parish founded as a community of like-minded people. The research subject is closed religious community that has existed in the Perm region (Russia) for over thirty years. The community has evolved from a typical Orthodox parish to a modern-type spiritual group that used non-Orthodox sources of information and devotion, and was led by a woman. The study identifies most effective social instruments for the consolidation of those type of religious community. The research includes reconstruction of the history of the community and the analysis of the materials of spiritual seminars held there, reflecting gradual transformation of the teachings and change of the leader's status. The research data were acquired from several sources: interviews and personal correspondence of the author with former members of the community, materials of journalistic investigations, etc.

KEYWORDS

contemporary religiosity, closed religious community, Perm region, *Pokrovskaya Obitel'*

Introduction

In the 1990s, Russia had witnessed not only the transformation of the political regime but also the proliferation of diverse religious groups, including completely new, as well as the old ones, which underwent significant changes in that period (Akhmetova, 2010; Dubin, 2006; Filatov & Strukova, 2003; Kaariainen & Furman,

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2000; Konacheva, 2001; Mitrokhin, 2004; Sinelina, 2014). In the 2000s and 2010s, the region of upper Kama¹ became a site of turbulent transformations in the sphere of religion, which had led to the emergence of new religious communities. One of those new forms was the closed community led by small group of religious activists, usually located in a single region or urban area. In this article, the term “closed religious community” is used to describe the specific way of religious community’s life in the urban environment. Those communities are usually characterized by permanent membership, limited ties with the outside environment, and living within closed compounds. They also use consolidation methods that will be discussed below. The modern city inspires a new rhythm of religious life, new forms of piety, new the ways to consolidate a group of believers and to protect them from the outward influence.

Small religious groups, which exist in big cities (in this case—the city of Perm), are often “invisible” for researchers. This is partly determined by the situation, in which such communities emerge and act. Under state legislation, every group of believers regardless of its size has to be registered as a religious group and to constantly report local authorities about its activities. Such a group has no chance to attract a sufficient number of neophytes, and to compete with other religious groups; its missionary work could only be conducted “indoors”, in its place of worship. Usually, such “non-traditional” communities have no representation in inter-religious organizations like Interconfessional Advisory Committee². They do not participate in the official events on a par with the leaders of Christian churches or the Muslim Ummah, and seldom attract media attention. A major part of the population views such communities as “sects”, harmful to their adherents and the adherents’ families. As a result, such groups are faced by a lot of complications in their religious and social life.

Nevertheless, in the religious history of Russia, we have numerous examples of small religious groups, which are capable of be proud of both—a long, harrowed history and an impressive story of survival. Among them are different communities of Old Believers (especially, so-called *bezpopovtsy*, the “priestless” strain of the Old Believer movement), unregistered Pentecostals, *initsiativniki* (unregistered Baptists), Krishna worshippers, etc. They all were under significant administrative pressure, yet strove to preserve their spirituality and lifestyle (about the persecution of the Old Believers, see, for example, Zenkovskii, 2009, pp. 531–605; about unregistered Pentecostals: Beliakova & Kliueva, 2017; Kliueva, 2015, 2020; about *initsiativniki*: Glushaev, 2011; Glushaev, 2012; Glushaev & Glushaeva, 2016; about the Vaishnavas: Pudov, 1989, pp. 466–477).

While those groups were open to new members, yet they continued to exist as “closed communities” mostly because of the hostile environment around them. Those communities that were consolidated around the figure of a leader were interpreted

¹ The European territory of the Urals, which includes part of the basin of the River Kama. The Kama region is traditionally defined by historians as the upper Kama region, whose administrative center is the city of Perm.

² Interconfessional Advisory Committee—public organization, which includes 7 confessions of the Perm region—was established in October 1998. The tasks of the committee is organization of interreligious dialogue and holding of joint non-confessional cultural events.

by the authorities and some researchers as “sects” (for a detailed review of the term, see: Panchenko, 2004, pp. 45–54). Most of these groups now function as religious communities and are transparent for an external observation.

In the article, I would like to analyze the case of the religious organization’s transformation into a closed community due to its leader’s activities, which resulted in obtaining the new status of the group, new elements in doctrine, and specific principles of religious management. As a result, such communities become isolated from the society and face conflicts between former and actual members.

***Pokrovskaya Obitel’* [The Holy Virgin Intercession Abode] as a Research Object**

In the city of Perm, a striking case is the community of *Pokrovskaya Obitel’* (The Holy Virgin Intercession Abode). For over 30 years, it existed as a community of the Orthodox believers and has come a long way from a conventional Orthodox parish to an independent religious community with its original doctrine and cult practices.

The main research question is the following: What were the way of the community’s consolidation under the conditions of the religious diversity of the 1990s and the administrative pressure of the 2000–2010s? What were the methods to convince the believers to prefer a small closed group to the official Orthodox church parish and vernacular doctrine?

First of all, let us briefly examine the history of the community. *Pokrovskaya Obitel’* [The Intercession Abode] was founded by four religious activists from the Karelia Republic (George Pervushin, George Andrievsky, Alexander Altmark, and Olga Budilova). They planned the revival of the Orthodoxy in the Urals (Private correspondence with George Andrievsky). They started to work as a team under the original name *Istok* [The Source], whose members trained their sponsees to solve so-called “inventive problems” according to the method of Genrich Altshuller (Private correspondence with George Andrievsky). Altshuller (1926–1998) was a Soviet engineer and inventor who tried to find patterns of solving engineering tasks and devised a set of mental techniques (Altshuller, 2010; Altshuller & Shapiro, 1956). The emphasis on secular methodology was gradually substituted by the Orthodox dogmatics. In 1990, four partners and their followers decided to organize an Orthodox community.

Activists’ first actions included organization of home chapels for the residents of orphanages, male and female labor camps, and mental hospitals. Meanwhile, the founders of the movement received the official ecclesiastic status: three men who were part of the original team became priests, while the only woman among them remained the mastermind of the movement with new adherents joining it. The main problem was to find affordable housing and headquarters for the community. The problem was solved thanks to one of the woman–adherent, who exchanged her flat to a wooden house that became the base for the community, which henceforth became known as *Pokrovskaya Obitel’* [The Intercession Abode]. The title “Abode” had to emphasize the communal cohabitation of its members (Private correspondence with Georgy Andrievsky). The house was reconstructed and soon supplemented

with additional premises. The newly-ordained priests provided Orthodox services for The Intercession Abode parish. The main focus of the religious group was charity.

2002–2011 period brought some major changes into the community's life. All members who dwelt on the premises had to take part in religious services led by the priests and to work in the house, garden, or farm. Meanwhile, Olga Budilova's task was to teach the Holy Scripture and other sacred texts. She was in charge of the spiritual education for the faithful leading seminars devoted to the Christian way of life and spiritual upbringing of the members of community. Those educational activity attracted some Orthodox Christians from Perm and other places (for example, ex-members of the George Kochetkov's Orthodox Fraternity). In the years 2002–2015, more than 100 people became members or temporary inhabitants of community of The Intercession Abode. About 40–50 of them became the core of the community, and Budilova was able to consolidate believers as her followers. For some of them, she became incontestable authority even higher than the Orthodox Church clergy, and more important than their relatives. Eventually, George Pervushin and George Andrievsky left the community (the former faced difficulties in his family life while the latter was accused in abuse by the local religious authorities). Alexander Altmark has lost his status as the head of the Perm Orthodox Gymnasium and served at the parish as an ordinary priest. The exceptional position of Budilova as a spiritual leader remained unchanged and unchallenged. It is worth noting that she never had any official status in the community.

In November 2019, after the inspection from the diocesan commission and several lawsuits from a former member, The Intercession Abode community was excluded from the diocese and declared heretical. Alexander Altmark was stripped of his priesthood, and the community became legally independent. Nevertheless, the expulsion from the local Orthodox diocese did not hinder the community's ongoing activities.

Below, I would analyze instruments and methods used by Budilova in order to strengthen her control over the community in the situation when its leadership was partially disintegrated. My aim is to prove the eclectic character of the community, which leadership had used not only religious but also some mythological and secular methods in order to attain the obedience of its members.

I have used various types of sources to gather information about community of The Intercession Abode and its doctrine. In recent years, the community has existed in complete isolation from the outside world, which made proper observations almost impossible. The community's members unanimously rejected any contact with researchers or journalists. There were only two interviews conducted with the former followers of Olga Budilova; both were highly problematic and partisan. To compensate the lack of information, I have used private correspondence with one of the community's founders (with the informant's permission). Thus, my research is based on anonymous personal communication with community members in 2008–2009, 2010–2011, and 2014–2015.

From theoretical point of view, the main problem for researcher is to find the demarcation line between contemporary and traditional religiosity, new religious

movements and parishes, which belong to so-called “traditional” churches. In my opinion, such demarcation would help to determine the place of a newborn religious group in the confessional space, and to explain the features of its doctrine, cult practice, and management.

Basically, we have a ready-made classification toolkit in our hands. There are quite many publications about new religious movements (NRM) both domestically and internationally. Contemporary researchers single out their basic features: exotic origin; new lifestyle; deep level of involvement into the movement; and charismatic leadership (Barker, 1989, 2009, 2015; Wilson, 2005). Dianna Stone and Bruce A. Campbell added to this list the following characteristics: new sacred power in the ordinary life of people; new structures of social cohesion (new communes); new task and means of spiritual healing; a gearing-up for the arrival of a new age, anti-institutionalism and decentralization; accept of the authority of science; pragmatic attitude; organizational openness (Arweck, 2006; Campbell, 1978; Derek & Hankins, 2003; Stone, 1978; Zeller, 2010). Many Russian researchers agree with these characteristics (Gurevich, 2019; Kanterov, 2018; Mitrokhin, 1985), adding to this list active proselytism (Astakhova, 2011; Fedotov, 2018; Pronina et al., 2018; Tkacheva, 1991), and syncretism (Balagushkin, 1999).

However, in the case of community of The Intercession Abode it is problematic to identify it as NRM. The community lacks several characteristics related to the lifestyle, origin, and principles of relationship with society (proselytism, organizational openness). During the first half of the community’s history, its members were incorporated into the religious life of the Orthodox parish. Despite the exclusion of the community from the Orthodox parishes and the suspension of its priests, the members consider themselves as Orthodox Christians. In 2020–2021, the community took an active part in various social events of patriotic character, and received grants from local authorities. In the autumn of 2020, the community received grant from the administration of the Ordzhonikidzevsky district of the city of Perm to organize series of patriotic celebrations. As a result, *Uchebno-prakticheskii tsentr Russkogo Boevogo Iskusstva imeni general-maiora Iurii Ivanovicha Drozdova* [The Training and Practical Centre for Russian Martial Arts Named in the Honor of Major General of Foreign Intelligence Service Yuri Drozdov] was founded³.

However, the community cannot be classified as a sect, since they have existed in isolation from the society (for a detailed analysis of the term see: Panchenko, 2004, pp. 45–54). At the same time, the community has exhibited some clearly “sectarian” features—specific interpretations of the Holy Scripture, as well as sacred plots and images; charismatic role of the leaders; social isolation. In the following section, I would analyze whether the community bears any characteristics of either new religious movement or historical sect.

³ <https://vk.com/upcrbi>

Olga Budilova and Her Interpretation of Faith

Officially, community of The Intercession Abode was a part of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate until autumn 2019. The community's website describes it as an "Orthodox village" (Ob Obiteli Pokrova Presviatoi Bogoroditsy, 2019). All members of the community were baptized, and for twenty years they visited Orthodox services. In the seminars, Olga Budilova used various religious terms associated with Christianity. She cited the Holy Fathers and called her followers to devote their lives to God, to conquer their arrogance, and to grow up spiritually (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015). The most popular idea of the seminars was to refrain from relying on one's own abilities and to entrust one's life to God: "Spiritual affairs must be subordinated to Jesus Christ, Our God" (Anonymous source, personal communication, October 13, 2019; my translation—S. R.). At the same time, Budilova offered a path to salvation that was different from the one offered by the traditional Orthodox Church. In the special seminar devoted to Russian Orthodoxy, Budilova defined the latter categorically: "The church paves the way to hell. It is the beginning of Apocalypse. The new Church is found in the invisible sphere [...] The Church is the place where the Word of God is killed" (Anonymous source, personal communication, September 4, 2019; my translation—S. R.). The denial of the official church makes Olga Budilova's ideas close to some teachings of Old Believers and so-called Orthodox sects. Unlike a significant part of new religious movements, Budilova does not insist on the idea that all religions are the same or that they originate from a single source. Her criticism of the Orthodox Church implied a hostile attitude to its members. Instead of attending services, she suggested her followers to establish a personal contact with God through her mediation techniques. This accent becomes a central point of her interpretation of the Christian doctrine (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 25, 2015).

Budilova's assertions that "God began to talk to us [...], that He started a direct intimate interaction with us" (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 21, 2015; my translation—S. R.) testifies strengthening mystical component of the religious faith. In the Orthodox tradition, mystical experience is acceptable; but in this case, it has been interpreted specifically. The leader of the community becomes the primary translator and mediator of the mystical experience. On one hand, at every seminar, she talked about the communication and even some disputes with the Almighty. On the other hand, requiring constant spiritual efforts from each member of the community, she influenced religious behavior of her followers, even in the smallest everyday things. This practice is similar to the role of the guru in so-called neo-orientalist doctrines (International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Transcendental Meditation Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, etc.). Many researchers note the increasingly significant role of the leader in the community as a characteristic feature of the new religious movements in general (Arweck, 2006; Astakhova, 2011; Balagushkin, 1999; Barker, 1989, 2009). At the same time, it should be noted that historically many new religious groups were consolidated due to the authority of their leaders.

Budilova has created a sense of belonging her followers to the chosen people destined for salvation through contact with the leader. The formation of an elitist consciousness is typical for the religious movements that arose in Western culture in the second half of the 20th century and in Russia after the 1990s. The case of Olga Budilova is interesting because she does not claim to create a new teaching and to revive any tradition. Formally being within the boundaries of Orthodoxy and using the format of training seminars, she broadcasts a specific worldview, and thereby formates the worldniew and behavior of her followers.

Perhaps, such interpretation of Orthodoxy could be attractive to some representatives of the modern urban population, dissatisfied with everyday religiosity. In modern cities, the parish—as a basis of vernacular religiosity—is gradually melting away (Ryazanova, 2018). If believers seek more intense spiritual life and cannot realize it independently, they may find satisfaction within communities like The Intercession Abode. Such leaders as Olga Budilova promise to follow the traditional doctrine of faith. For those dissatisfied with the inconsistency of historical religion (as is is often the case in our time), it is proposed to adopt just some part of Orthodoxy, which does not contradict modern cultural life. An adherent of such a leader simultaneously receives membership in a community of like-minded people and share their religious worldview, which helps to answer critical questions about the way of life and to obtain a sense of elitism. Olga Budilova's disciples, as a rule, did not have either opportunity or desire to check how correct her interpretation of the Orthodox doctrine and cult was. Most of them had no experience of religious life before joining the community. Psychological comfort and comfortable existance within a group replaces theological discussions and the inclination towards the pursuit of spirituality.

Eclecticism as a Worldview and a Way of Management

Mystic ideas are not the only instrument that increases the cohesiveness of the community. It represents itself as a community of like-minded people. Its main goal is to unite all adherents into a single movement. “The community is a place of deep learning where persons continually explore themselves and their relationship with the whole World and its Creator; that’s why this community is in the permanent movement never staying at the same place or existing in the only one adopted form. The community is in continual development and search” (Chto takoe Obitel’? Ee ideia ili glavnaia mysl’, 2019; my translation—S. R.). This fluidity of behavior and vision characterises mythological or secular worldview rather than religious consciousness, which implies following canonical norms.

The members of the community had created sacred spaces, for example, training center, “which has an octagonal form and symbolizes the Inner Sense of Russian Martial Art—the Mystery of Stone with eight sides” (Ob Obiteli Pokrova Presviatoi Bogorodits, 2019; my translation—S. R.). They utilized cultural heritage of other countries (for example, performance of the *El’fiiskaia Pesn’* [Elf Song], composed in the community), Old Russian vowels, and different “magic things” (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 21, 2015; Interview with S. Hvatkov).

They not only prayed but also meditated and tried to confront magically the enemies of the community, which is very typical for the mythological worldview.

At the same time, the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the group was built up on several secular instruments. In my assumption, it was the *Teoriia resheniia izobretatel'skikh zadach* (TRIZ)⁴ [Theory of Inventive problem solving] and its principles, which became the theoretical and organizational basis for community seminars. By its nature, this theory is based on secular methods aimed at the development of creative thinking and contrivance. In Budilova's young years, when she worked in *Istok* [The Source], she had received necessary teaching experience. She regularly used a set of methods developed by Altshuller, including the classic brainstorming methods like “yes and no” answers; the search for the primeval sense; devise of fantastic objects; getting the perception of an object as a part of larger one; uncovering contradictions; analysis of a phenomenon as if it existed in the past, present and future; creating imaginary situations and situations “what if”; heuristic questions; hyperbolization; and agglutination of images. Undoubtedly, the teaching method of the interactive seminars, which is typical for TRIZ, can be used in teaching religion. Budilova's experience, in which she successfully used that method and was even able to influence the way of life of her adherents proves that she was quite skilled teacher.

According to the witnesses, Olga Budilova's seminars contained plenty examples of the TRIZ methods and practices. Her most popular method of explaining her ideas was creating the imaginary situations. Sometimes, such situations were connected to religious services or practices:

- “Imagine that the Holy Gates have been opened, and you are the first who can come in” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.).

Quite often she used imaginary social situations:

- “Imagine that you have bought an agricultural area and one carbuncle was put up there” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.);
- “You are a poor person standing in the street with a hand out” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.);
- “When you join a battle in the war, you have no task to storm Reichstag at once” (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 16, 2007; my translation—S. R.);
- “As if you are studying at the university and every day you have to pass an exam” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.).

Budilova had a rich imagination, and sometimes she offered her followers fantastic plots:

- “If you were taken away from this planet [...] where would you take a communion?” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.).

⁴ TRIZ is a set of methods developed by G. S. Altshuller for solving various types of problems, see Kuznetsova (2018).

This way of explanation is completed by the so-called “What if” method. It looks like the way of “imaginative situations” but evokes deeper and clearer images:

- “Imagine that you have inner organs [...]; imagine that they will not work” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.).

The method of “hyperbolization of characteristics” gives us better understanding of Budilova’s religious ideas. Very often she used physical and chemical terms:

- “This is each grain of time, a millisecond, a part of a second. We feel it to be overvalued” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.);
- “There is a boundary, which, I say, is thinner than an angstrom” (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 2, 2014; my translation—S. R.).

The excessive use of scientific language is typical of some groups that identify themselves as Orthodox (Mitrofanova, 2021). At the same time, the use of scientific terms creates similarities between Budilova’s texts and the eclectic doctrines of new religious movements. The difference between those methods and the use similar examples in the sermon was that the listeners took an active part in the process and offered their ideas of solving the problem.

The method of “yes and no” answers and the analysis of the phenomenon as existing in the past, present, and future are very useful for the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving. The leader of the community applies them in the following way:

- “Each marriage exists between ‘yes’ and ‘no’” (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 16, 2007; my translation—S. R.);
- “The Holy Spirit has shown us some kind of future with great clarity. It is not our present time in which we are now but some kind of future” (Anonymous source, personal communication, January 24, 2015; my translation—S. R.)

The method of “uncovering contradictions” has the same effect, assisting disciples in evaluating all aspects of the phenomenon in question:

- “It was transported to our world by Satan. It is profitable for him [...], but there is no such intension in the Holy Scripture” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.);
- “She (‘Virgin Mary’—S. R.) has embedded what is not embedded” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.);
- “In human life, it (marriage—S. R.) destroys incompatible contradictions” (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 16, 2007; my translation—S. R.);
- “Each crystal [...] stays on three pairs of contradictory categories” (Anonymous source, personal communication, November 25, 2014; my translation—S. R.).

The most important goal of these methods is to get used to the object of comprehension and to find “primary sense”. As a rule, Budilova had only one such object—God. And only this term proves the religious character of these seminars:

- “You must be concentrated on being directed to God” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.);

- “You need to grow together with God” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.);
- “The attendance of God living between us” (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 21, 2015; my translation—S. R.).

According to Budilova, this kind of comprehension gives one a possibility to be connected with the “primary sense” (Anonymous source, personal communication, January 24, 2015; my translation—S. R.).

The methods used in the seminars are secular by their nature⁵. Their active use, in my opinion, indicates the desire of the leader to adapt the content of Christian teaching to them. Intensive learning not only influenced the way of followers’ thinking but also made them active advocates of the proposed lifestyle and social behavior.

Community Regulation as a Way to Individual Salvation

One more instrument of influencing the followers is enforcing control over the group. First of all, it is the authority and control of the leader:

- “You need all your ideas to be fixed and weekly come to the leader with this list of them” (Anonymous source, personal communication, October 13, 2019; my translation—S. R.).
- The “correct” assumption of the disciple usually leads to thoughts like “I am the worst”, “I deserve punishment for my sins” (Anonymous source, personal communication, October 13, 2019; my translation—S. R.).
- The members of the community are not able to analyze their ideas independently (Anonymous source, personal communication, October 13, 2019).

The community is recognized as the only way to salvation, as “a spiritual loupe”. It helps to recognize false things and correct them. If a person has been living in the community for a long time, they can understand everything and keep a “hawk eye” on the flock. All the punishments in the community, even corporal ones, are interpreted as useful and helpful for personal improvement (Anonymous source, personal communication, October 13, 2019). That is why members should avoid to be by themselves. To be alone means to contrapose one’s own opinion to the opinion of the community guided by the Holy Spirit (Anonymous source, personal communication, February 21, 2015). Budilova urges to “part with everything that one has supported earlier because these are false anchorages” (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015; my translation—S. R.).

The reverse side of such a directive is the strong criticism of the society and the external social environment. The leader insists:

- “Society is a monster, which forms artificial interactions between people. It is a form of suicide, created by people to stop their relations with God” (Anonymous source, personal communication, December 4, 2016; my translation—S. R.).

⁵ In this case, by secular I mean an anthropocentric worldview, which is not based on religious views and prioritizes the scientific explanation of phenomena.

By that token, social marriage was considered a form of unfreedom; social unit like a city excluded the opportunity to pray to God (Anonymous source, personal communication, May 11, 2015). Those people who were disillusioned with the spiritual activity of the community were considered the enemies of the believers as their desire was to physically eliminate the Holy community.

Every believer needs to minimize their social contacts through their membership in the community, the perception of the mystery of God's love, and the integration of their nature with the nature of God. Community of The Intercession Abode was interpreted as a non-social phenomenon that can save the follower from the terrible reality (Anonymous source, personal communication, December 4, 2016). Budilova called the neophytes to refuse from any form of travel (Anonymous source, personal communication, January 24, 2015), to stay constantly in the community, and to stick to the recommendations of the spiritual leader. For the "chosen" members of the community she organized a special group *Voiny Sveta* (Warriors of Light), which purpose was to conquer enemies of the community and to provide spiritual growth (Anonymous source, personal communication, January 12, 2015). The status of a warrior becomes an additional attractor for those who have problems with the routine of social life.

Conclusion

The characteristics of community of The Intercession Abode described above allows me to argue that it can be hardly attributed to the NRM. Community members perceive themselves as Orthodox believers who follow Christian teaching. The leader does not declare the emergence of a completely new doctrine. The principles of the community's organization and lifestyle could be better characterized as eclectic. The regulation of the lifestyle and social behavior is not typical for the majority of the Orthodox parishes; using the idea of self-restraint and fulfillment of God's will corresponds to the lifestyle of non-Orthodox religious groups.

In my opinion, this community is an attempt to institutionalize a modern interpretation of the Orthodox doctrine. The leading role in the emergence of a community of such type undoubtedly belongs to the leader. Budilova equally effectively uses her experience as a secular trainer and her religious authority as an elder. Religious terms, mythological context, and secular methods have turned out to be very useful to organize a spiritual community and to keep control over it for a long time.

A case of community of The Intercession Abode, I argue, shows the limitations of the terms "new religious movements" and "historical sects". Their application makes sense only when analyzing the phenomena localized in particular time and place. These terms do not reflect the specifics of contemporary religiosity. In modern religious life, there is an intensive development of various doctrines, cult practices, and communities of believers. The individual religiosity plays important role as a major factor of the development of religious life in the modern society. If the carriers of new ideas turn out to be able to lead people and transmit to them their

ideas about God, they become a centre of emerging of a new religious group. The educational qualification, gender, and competence of the group leader in the field of theology are much less significant. The success in the forming and functioning of the community of believers depends mainly on whether there is a demand for the religious product offered by the leader. If at the next stage of the group's existence its leader can find effective methods of managing the followers, then the community of believers becomes highly resistant to external influences. Such closed religious group may exist in an urban area, but they are not really popular among urban residents; rather, it enhances the unification of the worldview of its members and reduces the possibility of unwanted contacts. Thus, a small group of like-minded people can turn out to be very tenacious in the face of competition between various religious trends.

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