

Whose Tradition?:
Adapting Orthodox Christianity in North America

by

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*For my Naşa Karin-Irina Doehl,
proud feminist and Orthodox Christian,
to whom I owe so much.
May her memory be eternal.*

Abstract

Focusing on three Orthodox Christian communities – St. Paraskeva and St. Luke in Midwestern US, and St. Nicolas in Atlantic Canada – this thesis examines the complex cultural dynamics surrounding Orthodox Christianity in North America. I explore the ways believers, both the Orthodox-born and new converts, negotiate with an ancient faith in a contemporary society where this faith may appear counter-cultural. Building on Leonard Primiano's (1995) theory of vernacular religion, I propose the concept of vernacular theology to shed light on these processes. Despite the illusion of theology as the exclusive purview of clergy, laypeople exercise interpretive agency to creatively adapt doctrine to their individual life circumstances.

Considering the significant role of Church history in the religious choices and experiences of my consultants, I begin with a historical overview of Orthodox Christianity, from its origins in the Roman Empire to the present day, including its path to North America. The themes of empire, romantic nationalism, anti-Westernism, and Communism that have historically shaped this faith are explored specifically in Romania, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine, the home countries of my Orthodox-born participants. I analyze the Orthodox Church's response to globalization and how this may affect the future of the Church in North America.

I further consider encounters between converts and Orthodox-born immigrants within the walls of North American Orthodox churches, examining how Orthodox Christian communities meet the needs of these different groups. I argue that those who convert to Orthodox Christianity create exoteric folklore *about* ethnicity in terms of those who have cultural connections with the faith.

In my last two chapters, I address theory and practice in the lives of Orthodox Christians, with specific emphasis on how women navigate this patriarchal faith in a society in dialogue with feminist ideas. Themes include understandings of clerical authority, spiritual obedience, and the interpretive agency of parishioners. I offer a theory of vernacular feminisms, in which women create strategies of empowerment within a patriarchal system. By creating these choices for themselves, they simultaneously subvert and support a system that limits them on the basis of gender.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis examines how Orthodox Christianity is being adapted in twenty-first century North America. I engage with the following broad questions: Why and how does Orthodox Christianity remain a relevant faith in twenty-first century North America, where it is relatively new and “foreign”? What does belonging to an Orthodox Christian community mean for both North American converts and Orthodox-born immigrant believers? How is this faith culturally adapted and negotiated in a context where it may appear to many to be counter-cultural?

I will illustrate that such adaptation becomes possible at least partly due to the interpretative strategies of what I call *vernacular theology*, employed by both clergy and lay believers. One of the key adaptations involves Orthodox Christian women, as their mainstream North American culture promotes gender equality while their religious institution operates on division along gender lines. My research shows that women, and converts in particular, empower themselves through vernacular theology that, in turn, serves as an agency for female believers. Their negotiation of the patriarchal system within Orthodox Christianity often results in what I understand as *vernacular feminisms*.

Related Literature

Considering my research questions, this thesis is informed by several overlapping clusters of literature, including works devoted to Orthodox Christianity, vernacular religion, globalization, folk groups, ethnicity and heritage, and gender. While I engage with individual sources and ideas more extensively in the subsequent chapters while exploring particular issues, I will briefly identify their relevance to my work below, emphasizing only those concepts that are related to the overall thesis.

Orthodox Christianity

The greatest body of academic literature devoted to Orthodox Christianity focuses predominantly on formal institutional discourse surrounding this faith, including a history of the Church and its roles in society and politics in majority-Orthodox contexts such as Greece or several countries of Eastern Europe (see, for example, Batalden 1993, Dubisch 1995, Hann and Goltz 2010, Herzfeld 2002 and 1990, Pelkmans 2006, Steinberg 2007, Yannaras 2007). While this literature sheds light on important broad processes addressed in chapter three, it lacks the nuances found in lived religious experiences.

Folkloristics is a field defined by the study of tradition from the perspective of its participants. While several sources rooted in the ethnography of everyday life address Orthodox Christianity, these studies also focus on parts of the world where this religion has been historically dominant. Such works include Marja-Liisa Keinänen's (2010) research on Russian Karelians, Laura Olson and Svetlana Adonyeva's (2012) study of Russian village women, Christine Worobec's (2006) work on lived religion in Imperial Russia, and Paul Werth's (2011) study of Russian Orthodox Christianity as it is experienced today. These ethnographic studies challenge the stereotypical perception of Orthodox Christianity as static and unchanged, showing that in practice it is a living mosaic of believers negotiating with their traditions in changing cultural contexts. Individual interpretations of Orthodox Christianity occur in many forms in the rituals that believers enact in private, domestic spaces. As their roles in the church space are limited, it is often women who initiate and conduct domestic rituals. For example, Folklorist Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby shows how local religious traditions sometimes develop in response to external power systems, as was the case when Russian Orthodox women preserved faith traditions under Communist regimes (Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby 2011). Historian

Nadieszda Kizenko, writing about contemporary Orthodox women's piety in Russia, found that her interviewees all expressed feeling respite from the cares of the world in church, including economic survival and romantic interest (Kizenko 2013, 614). To provide another example, folklorist Mariya Lesiv discusses a communal prayer ritual in Ukraine among Orthodox women, in which a healing statue of the Mother of God is venerated. She argues that this particular ritual provides hope and empowerment in a context where the economy is in crisis and basic healthcare may not be available (Lesiv 2012, 235-7). Drawing upon its methodological and theoretical approaches grounded in deep contextualization, I expand the geographical scope of this ethnographic literature by providing a folkloristic perspective on Orthodox Christianity as it is lived in North America, addressing nuanced issues characteristic for this specific context.

Vernacular Religion

While North American Orthodox Christianity has been overlooked by folklorists, our field has produced a growing body of literature devoted to religious communities, including Protestant churches (Cartwright 1982, Lawless 1988, Yoder 1974 and 1968, Lawless 1993, Davie 1995, Ritchie 2002), Mormon churches (Wilson 1995, Mould 2011), and Catholic churches (Primiano 1993 and 1985). These works inform my methodological approaches and theoretical interpretations.

Leonard Primiano's idea of "vernacular religion" as both a concept and a theoretical approach constitutes the core of this study. Considering the long history of Orthodox Christianity, with its firmly established practices and doctrines, locally specific beliefs and practices related to this faith may appear as examples of what earlier folklorists viewed as "folk religion." According to Don Yoder, one of the main theorists of folk religion, "Folk religion is

the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion” (Yoder 1974, 14). However, Primiano convincingly argues that an objective standard for “official” religious practice does not exist (Primiano 1995, 46), and the concepts of “official” versus “folk” constitute a false dichotomy (Primiano 1995, 40). Instead, he proposes the term “vernacular” religion that better reflects the complexities of people’s daily experiences with their faith.

The term “vernacular” was first coined in 1857 to describe “an unaffected, unselfconscious” manner of speech or architecture (Gowans 1986, 392). Historian Alan Gowans points out that “vernacular arts” may be described as “midway between folk art and modern mass or popular arts,” though sometimes influenced by elite culture as well (Gowans 1986, 392). Primiano borrows the term to describe the experience of lived religion, arguing that vernacular religion “is a way of communicating, thinking, behaving within, and conforming to, a particular cultural circumstance” (Primiano 1995, 42). There is no religious practice that is not vernacular (Primiano 1995, 44). Even a faith like Orthodox Christianity, which prides itself on being unchanging over time, displays many examples of “creative self-understanding, self-interpretation, and negotiation by the believing individual” (Primiano 1995, 44). Importantly, no authoritative religious figure, not even “the Patriarch in Istanbul” (Orthodox believers call him the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople), who is the figurehead of the Eastern Orthodox Church, “lives an ‘officially’ religious life in a pure, unadulterated form” (Primiano 1995, 46).

Religious studies scholar Randall Balmer criticizes the term “lived religion” for being so ubiquitous in scholarship, especially in the United States as to be meaningless. He writes, “What is *not* ‘lived religion’?” (Balmer 2017, 256). Perhaps the same could be said of vernacular religion: if all religious practices and beliefs are vernacular, what is the point of adding this

term? In short, it is because of perceived loci of power which control predominant discourse both within the faith itself, in religious studies, and other fields. Primiano himself writes that the theory of vernacular religion is so important precisely because it shifts the focus of study from “religion” in an abstract sense to the people who continually define and redefine what that means (Primiano 2012, 384). In addition, the theory complicates what is meant by institutional traditions; they are as conflicted and multivocal as those of laypeople.

There are certainly teachings in Orthodox Christianity that take on the weight of institutional hegemony, such as whether or not women are allowed to be priests. Primiano writes that often, the aspects of religion that are referred to as “official” mean those aspects which are “authoritative when used by empowered members within that religious tradition,” and it is assumed “that religion is synonymous with institutional or hierarchical authority” (Primiano 1995, 45). The illusion of “official” religion seems convincing because of the “context of power” (Primiano 1995, 47). In Orthodox Christianity, clerical interpretations represent a privileged standard against which other beliefs are evaluated, even though both are subjective.

In reality, it is not only those who possess institutional power but also common lay people who engage in creative interpretations. Such interpretations may help them to fill the gaps when there is no consensus among clergy about a specific topic or to negotiate complex issues. I call these strategies *vernacular theology*, though Christine Blythe has simultaneously used this term in her study of Mormon women’s home birth traditions (Blythe 2018). Like part of my work, Blythe’s study examines women’s agency in a patriarchal religion. Although she does not explicitly define “vernacular theology,” she uses the term somewhat interchangeably with Primiano’s “vernacular religion” to refer to feminist interpretive strategies among women

(Blythe 2018, 88). While our foci are overlapping, my own use of the term is concerned with theological interpretation among both clergy and laity in Orthodox Christian communities.

In the present study, vernacular theology is a branch of the tree of all-encompassing “vernacular religion.” I find it worthwhile to present it as a distinct entity for the following reason: theology is widely viewed as institutional knowledge, the domain of those with power who engage with deep theoretical questions about their faith. My research shows that laypeople not only *practice* their religion in accordance with their life needs but also engage with larger theological questions such as those about the nature of God, the meaning of divisions between the sexes in Orthodox Christianity, and the purpose of obedience. Indeed, lay answers to these questions may stubbornly persist even if religious leaders say they are wrong—a truly remarkable state of affairs in the rigid hierarchy of the Orthodox Church. It is these creative interpretations and negotiations of the specifically theoretical aspects of their faith in believers’ everyday lives that I call vernacular theology. Both clergy and laypeople engage in vernacular interpretations of theology.

The Orthodox Church has its own word for a similar concept—*theologoumenon* (plural *theologoumena*), “a theological statement or concept in the area of individual opinion rather than of authoritative doctrine” (Merriam-Webster 2015). There is some difficulty in determining what counts as authoritative doctrine. Who decides what is and is not sanctioned by the phrase “Orthodox Christianity”? According to some, *theologoumena* is only a term that can be applied to the opinions of Church Fathers—not necessarily doctrinally binding, but to be taken seriously (Patapios 1998). For example, according to one priest I interviewed, nothing is *theologoumena*, technically, because all writings of Church Fathers were divinely inspired. There are a number of Orthodox writers in the present day (by no means all— Orthodox bishop and scholar Timothy

Ware is a modest exception) who would discourage innovation of any kind on the part of Orthodox believers as prideful and even dangerous. My research shows that despite such restrictions imposed by authoritative voices, in reality, lay people possess tremendous agency in the form of vernacular theology.

When I use the terms “official” and “institutional” in this study, it is not because there is a truly static ideal for theological interpretation in Orthodox Christianity, but rather because they are the opinions of those in power, and as the present work demonstrates, even those opinions vary widely. I use the term “vernacular” not because I believe that this is a lesser variation of something “official,” but rather, to refer to diversity in the faith itself. I will illustrate that it is this diversity, informed by the strategies of vernacular theology, which makes Orthodox Christianity a religion relevant to many in 21st century North America.

Globalization

The spread of Orthodox Christianity in North America has occurred due to the processes of globalization. North American converts are practicing a faith and its surrounding traditions which come from radically different cultural contexts than their own. Orthodox-born immigrants are similarly adjusting their faith to new (Western) realities. Cross-disciplinary literature that defines and discusses globalization can help provide a context for these processes, with many scholars characterizing globalization as a movement of resources across locales (Ashcroft, et al. 2000, Appadurai 1999, Lapegna 2009).

Some broad patterns revealing institutional and clerical responses to globalization and related processes have been identified in previous academic literature (Roudometof 2008,

Roudometof and Agadjanian 2005). While some members of the clergy and laity question how to reconcile cultural and spiritual values, and many Orthodox priests and hierarchs have had a protectionist response to globalization, others sharply critique its outcomes. Some especially vocal responses in the latter category include anti-Western sentiments (Coakley 2013, Petrà 2013, Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou 2013, Prodromou 2013), objections to particular cultural values such as individualism (Bellah 1991, Agadjanian and Rousselet 2010, Herbel 2014, Prodromou 2008, Slagle 2010), and convictions that Orthodox Christianity can only exist in a country with a historical presence of the faith (Dubisch 1990, Englehardt 2010).

I found that the fear of globalization and its cousin, globalism, has sparked extremism in some small circles of the Orthodox Christian community, and this information is widely disseminated via the mass media. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's concept of "global fundamentalisms" and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's idea of "liquid modernity" help me to contextualize such extremist behavior (Appadurai 1999, 225, Bauman 2012). In addition, I find resources discussing fundamentalist extremism in Islam to be apt in addressing this topic (Al Raffie 2013, Hamid 2014). As the extremist trend is connected with broader historical patterns in Orthodox Christianity elsewhere, I utilize literature that deals with uses of the Orthodox faith by Eastern European countries for purposes of propaganda and, in some cases, fascism (e.g., Cvetković 2012, Hosking 2012, Leustean 2009, Scarfe 1988, and Shevzov 2012).

While focusing on the nuances of people's daily lives, however, I found no such extremism in my research sites. My research shows that Orthodox Christianity, as lived "globally" in local contexts, produces more complex meanings than those portrayed by both the media and social scientists who do not employ ethnographic methodology. Broad definitions of globalization often overlook the lived realities of its processes in given locales. Just as there are

vernacular approaches to religion (or, rather, all interpretations of faith are vernacular), there are also vernacular responses to globalization. Folklorists are methodologically well-equipped to shed light on these phenomena. Folkloristic literature shies away from “grand theories” of globalization and instead emphasizes “humble theory”, looking at the lived experiences of individuals and their communities (Noyes 2008). I draw on folklorist Margaret Mills’ work, in which she suggests that “a process of ‘emicization’ or vernacularization” may be applied to globalization (Mills 2008, 21). Mills writes that traditionalization can be studied by paying attention to how individuals select their influences and appropriate them to local contexts (Mills 2008, 21-22). Some individual responses to globalization overlap with those found within broad patterns discussed above but many are specifically local and situational and, thus, more complex. Although conflicts do occur in the Orthodox communities I studied, they generally take place on a much smaller scale and frequently involve questions of cultural adaptation. To understand these dynamics, I consult literature on cultural hybridity (Noyes 2014, Noyes 2006, Spitzer 2003, Szwed 2011) and Orthodox Christian responses to democratization (Prodromou 2008), as well as works addressing resources in Orthodox Christianity that help believers to discern between the spirit and the letter of tradition (Forbess 2010, Volkov 2005). My study sheds further light on globalization processes as understood locally in a nuanced way via a faith that involves a great amount of adaptation.

Folk Groups & Communities

My study is informed by folkloristic literature on folk groups. Early folkloristic works essentialized groups and regions (Dorson 1959), especially in search of “authenticity” (Bendix 1997). I draw upon more recent research that questions how categories of local culture and community are constructed, affecting, in turn, our concepts of folk groups (Anderson 1991,

Bowman 2012, Howard 2009, Shuman 1993). While examining churches as folk groups, I especially engage with the work of folklorist Dorothy Noyes who argues that groups as entities are not fixed (Noyes 2008 and 2003b). Church communities frequently involve smaller, overlapping social units and, as a result, a sense of belonging in folk groups may be situational. Cross-disciplinary literature devoted to identity formation processes also helps in my quest to understand this phenomenon (Abrahams 2003, Bhabha 1987).

Orthodox-born believers build community with one another through shared experiences, but these may include a recent change in context, as with immigration. I draw on sources that examine religious identity as affected by diaspora (Bar-Itzhak 2005; Dobрева-Mastagar 2016; Levitt 2007, 107). The experience of diaspora may change the reasons some Orthodox-born believers choose to attend or to not attend church. A church may take on a new social function as a result of displacement (Abrahams 2003). Converts to Orthodox Christianity often bond with one another by sharing their conversion narratives, forming small groups within their larger communities. Thus, studies of conversion also shed light on group formation processes (McKnight and Ondrey 2008, Slagle 2010). Often, Orthodox Christianity is appealing to converts because its mysticism contrasts sharply with Western culture's emphasis on empiricism. To better explain this, I turned to sources both on the nature of belief in Western culture (Hufford 1982a, 1982b, 1985, 1995) and literature dealing with Orthodox theology as a mystical tradition (Forbess 2010, 147; Hann and Goltz 2010, 15). Lastly, I draw upon both folklorist Ray Cashman and sociologist Stuart Tannock's theories of nostalgia to examine converts' desire for the kind of cultural connection to Orthodox Christianity which the Orthodox-born possess (Cashman 2006, Tannock 1995). While not dealing specifically with folk groups, these sources help to understand beliefs and sentiments behind people's choices related to community building processes.

Building on the work of Oliver D. Herbel (2013) and sociologist Amy Slagle (2010, 2011) in particular, I examine how the forces of conservatism and dynamism affect the ways in which Orthodox Christians adapt their faith in North America (Toelken 1996, 39). I document how community functions differently for each person. Each believer has different expectations of the community, and their backgrounds, whether convert or Orthodox-born, determine how each shapes his or her community.

Ethnicity and Heritage

As Orthodox Christianity is both a religion and part of the fabric of cultural identity, I look at literature that explores definitions of heritage, including many which apply to my work in different ways. In the field of folklore, these studies frequently focus on heritage as a commodity (Hufford 2003, Kapchan 2014, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998 and 1995, Noyes 2009 and 2014). More recently, folklorists Valdimar Hafstein and Bill Ivey have critiqued past definitions of heritage and offered analyses of heritage as a category by which society and its discourses are shaped (Hafstein 2018, Ivey 2018). I also draw on anthropologist Laurajane Smith's approach to heritage as lived relationships and historian David Lowenthal's concept of heritage as separate from history (Lowenthal 1996, Smith 2005).

Ethnicity is a closely related concept to heritage, in that it is symbolic of belonging to a specific group or legacy (Gans 1996). Folklorist Margaret K. Brady writes that in the U.S., the term "ethnic" is usually applied to foreign nationality or immigrant groups, and is often extended to American Indians, African Americans, and other racial groups, and sometimes to specific religious groups, irrespective of their national background" (Brady 1996, 227). In the context of my own research, "ethnic" or a specific nationality is frequently juxtaposed against

“American” as an unmarked cultural category, especially since Orthodox Christianity is inextricably linked to cultural heritage (Dobрева-Mastagar 2016, Rouhier-Willoughby 2008). I rely on folkloristic approaches to ethnicity as a genre of performance to better understand this phenomenon (Fraser 2008, Greenhill 1994, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1986, Nahachewsky 2002).

Gender

There are vernacular responses to how Orthodox sources describe men and women (with divergent commentary) and the reality of a North American society in dialogue with feminism. I rely on the theories of Lila Abu-Lughod (2013), Judith Butler (1999), bell hooks (1999), Amy Shuman (1993), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) to understand the varieties of feminist perspectives apart those solely representative of white, Western women. Historian of religion Nadieszda Kizenko (2013) proposes that for many Orthodox women, the ideology of the West does not apply. The experiences of female converts bridge Eastern and Western ideologies, and to better understand them, I consult sources that discuss individualism and feminism as related concepts in Orthodox Christianity (Agadjanian and Rousselet 2010, Larin 2008, Sigrist 2011). Marja-Liisa Honkasalo’s work (2015), which focuses on Orthodox women in Karelia, also helps me to understand agency for women as vernacular theology, resulting in vernacular feminisms within Orthodox patriarchy.

Issues of representation around gender are at play in the Orthodox Church, which routinely privileges male experiences as the standard for normalcy. While analyzing this aspect of Orthodox Christian experiences, I turn to texts about narrative and the construction of truth (Kalčik 1975, Ochs and Capps 2001, Personal Narratives Group 1989, Shuman 2005, Thomas

1997). I also incorporate sources which refer to privilege and the ability to define truth (Kruks 2005, Firestone 1972, and DuBois 1994).

Methodology

I conducted research in three communities: St. Luke, St. Parascheva, and St. Nicholas. I have changed the names of each church I visited and every consultant I interviewed. This was not my original plan, as several consultants gave consent to using their real names. Others never wanted to be known by their real names, and they chose their own pseudonyms during the interview. In the end, I decided to use pseudonyms for clarity, as some people had the same name, and also for the sake of consistency. In addition, I changed the names of some past priests at St. Parascheva, now deceased.

The only real names I use are those of two bishops, two priests, and one photographer, to whom I owe credit for a photo in chapter five. In the case of the two priests, Father Roman Braga and Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa have already been the subjects of documentaries and articles, and both are now deceased. For all three communities, I relied upon personal interviews, oral histories, and participant observation. Here I will address demographics and research challenges.

St. Parascheva

Converts at St. Parascheva Romanian Orthodox Church are the main focus of this study. On a given Sunday, there may be around one-hundred in attendance, though the extended community network may be over twice that many. As Father Ephraim, the priest, suggested, it

depends on how one calculates membership, whether based on paying tithes, regular attendance, or occasional attendance. In the summer of 2015, I conducted research among the regularly-attending members of St. Parascheva's four demographic groups: American converts to Orthodox Christianity (roughly 60% of the congregation), Orthodox-born Romanian immigrants (roughly 30%), non-American converts, and American-born Orthodox Christians (perhaps 10% combined). I approached as many people as I could for interviews, and I even put a small "ad" in the community newsletter describing my project. I easily made contact with American converts and found volunteers willing to be interviewed, as several of them knew me as a child (I grew up in a neighboring Orthodox community which shares many close social ties with St. Parascheva). Many of the Americans I interviewed were near or post-retirement, and they had time to graciously allow me to interview them.

Despite my best efforts, the end result was that far more Americans were willing to talk to me than Romanians. Reasons for this include discomfort with the English language among some Romanians (and my inability to speak Romanian), and I suspect there was both suspicion and discomfort about being interviewed by a near-stranger about personal topics. Some Romanians remember the Communist times, in which people were pressured into signing documents without informed consent. Some are distrustful of being audio-recorded or signing forms. This was the case for one Romanian woman I did interview, who was unwilling to be recorded, though she reluctantly signed my consent form. Some Romanian members of the community consented initially to an interview and then withdrew. Others did not answer my e-mails. In general, the Romanian segment of the community contains many young families, and it was difficult for parents to find time between work and family to be interviewed at all. I interviewed two Romanian immigrants at St. Parascheva, as well as one member whose parents

are Romanian immigrants. As a result, my descriptions of the Romanian segment of this congregation rely disproportionately on the experiences of a few Romanians and the anecdotes of non-Romanians in the congregation. In total, I interviewed twenty-five people at St. Parascheva. Twelve were women, and thirteen were men. Eighteen of these people were American converts, including the priest. These converts are named in this study as Christina, Clive, Neil, Amanda, Milton, Bill, Father Ephraim, Mary, Julia, Esme, Irene, Martin, Jeff, Raj, Helen, and Joy. I also interviewed two converted men whom I did not end up quoting in this thesis, but whom I will call Bruce and Scott. Of these converts, most have belonged to St. Parascheva for nearly two decades, if not longer, and most are in their fifties and sixties. Neil and Amanda, a married couple whom I interviewed together, are in their forties. Christina and Raj are both millennials, by which I mean those born between 1981-1996 (Dimock 2018). Raj is an immigrant from India who converted to Orthodox Christianity upon his marriage a few years ago. I interviewed two other millennials who are Orthodox-born from an American family; their pseudonyms are Simon and Catherine. All of the converts I interviewed were college-educated, and about half of them have graduate degrees. This is representative of the other converts in the congregation.

I interviewed three more American, Orthodox-born members of the congregation. This includes Victor, who is in his sixties and comes from a Romanian family. Halyna is in her forties and from a Ukrainian family. I interviewed two Orthodox-born Romanian immigrants: Gavril is in his early forties and immigrated fairly recently, and Florina is over sixty and has been in the U.S. for decades. I interviewed Ksenia, Orthodox-born Russian immigrant in her forties. In terms of the representation of the community, these numbers better represent percentages of the

community with regular Sunday attendance than they do the whole scope of the church's local network.

I attended Sunday services for participant observation, and I conducted interviews in person with all twenty-five of these consultants. In chapter four, I discuss the history of this congregation, from its founding in 1910 to the present day. When constructing the history of this congregation, I relied heavily on oral tradition, photographs, some documentation of the history of Romanians in the metropolitan area, and a commemorative pamphlet put together by the community at the time of its one hundredth anniversary in 2010.

St. Nicholas

My realization at St. Parascheva that believers' differences in outlook had more to do with personal background than specific church location led me to use supplementary research from St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in Atlantic Canada among Eastern European immigrants. I do not consider all Orthodox-born Eastern Europeans to be part of a single cultural category. I do, however, find patterns of experience among Orthodox-born immigrants from former Eastern Bloc countries. At St. Nicholas, I was able to interview seven more people, five of whom fall into this category. All but one were Orthodox-born. Four were women, three were men. Dmitri, in his forties, is both Orthodox-born and Canadian born. Father John, of similar age, is a Canadian-born convert. I interviewed two Orthodox-born university students in their twenties, Marko from Serbia and Nina from Russia. I interviewed an Orthodox-born Russian woman in her forties named Olga. I interviewed two Orthodox-born women from Romania: Leila, in her late thirties, and Adina, in her forties.

These demographics may reflect regular Sunday attendance than the scope of the larger community network. A regular service frequently has fewer than ten people, yet at Pascha, the pinnacle of the Orthodox calendar year, the attendance may be greater than fifty. When I attended Pascha in 2015, there were also many Greek-Canadians in attendance who do not typically come to Sunday services. My success in finding more Orthodox-born people to interview at St. Nicholas was likely due to the fact that I had invested time attending this parish for a year between 2014 and 2015 rather than the three months I spent at St. Parascheva; I became a familiar face at St. Nicholas. These interviews clarified my perspective on patterns I perceived regarding differences in experience between converts and those who are Orthodox-born.

Unlike St. Parascheva, St. Nicholas is a small community which, at the time of my visit, rented space on a university campus rather than having its own building. Few members who attend regularly remember the beginnings of this community, which speaks to the transience of its membership. Many have come to Canada either as students at the university or for temporary work contracts, and they move on when those commitments end. Due to employment or enrollment at the local university, most congregants at St. Nicholas have college and graduate degrees (or are working toward them). Only a handful of those who attend regularly are permanently settled in Canada. Those who gravitate toward St. Nicholas tend to be Orthodox-born, often from majority-Orthodox countries, seeking a familiar anchor in an unfamiliar place. Members of the congregation hail from Egypt, Romania, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine. By contrast, the priest and his wife are in the minority as Canadian converts.

St. Luke

St. Luke Orthodox Church was the community of my upbringing. I returned in the summer of 2014 to conduct a separate research project for a conference paper. The paper won the American Folklore Society's Don Yoder Prize for the Best Graduate Student Paper in Folk Belief or Religious Folklife, and it became the basis for chapter eight of this study. While I give a history of the parish in that chapter, it is important to know that the subject of the chapter is women who held napkins under the communion chalice at the church. St. Luke's is a majority-convert community in the Midwest of around one hundred parishioners. I interviewed a total of six women who had been communion napkin-holders at St. Luke's and two priests. Their pseudonyms are Abigail, Carol, Madeline, Father Simeon, Father Timothy, Jeanette, Moira, and Grace. All of those whom I interviewed are converts, and most of these parishioners have been Orthodox for close to two decades. All but one were in their sixties; Grace is a millennial who was raised in the congregation. In addition, I quote Father Simeon's wife, Elizabeth, who was not herself a napkin-holder.

All of my consultants are longtime residents of the Midwest, and most attended this church when it converted *en masse* to Orthodox Christianity in 2001. Since I grew up in this community, it was not difficult for me to establish connections with consultants. I attended Sunday services for participant observation and interviewed members in person. All of the people I interviewed have known me for most of my life and know my family. My consultants are all regularly-attending members of the church who actively socialize with one another outside of services. Each person I interviewed has a college degree, though graduate degrees are less common at St. Luke's; among my consultants, Father Simeon and Elizabeth have graduate degrees. This community may be characterized as more blue-collar than the other two communities where I conducted research. In addition, since the overwhelming majority of

members at St. Luke are American converts to Orthodox Christianity, the culture of the church is different than at St. Parascheva or St. Nicholas. While I discuss this topic at length in another study, it is of significant importance to this community to find an American expression of Orthodox Christianity which is not beholden to the traditions of majority-Orthodox countries like Russia and Greece (Bringerud 2012).

Subjectivity & Reflexivity

I have brought my own subjectivity with me into my doctoral research. For example, I questioned whether I was the only person who was bothered by patriarchy in Orthodox Christianity, or the potential for the abuse of authority. I wondered how a belief system which does not always fit easily with Western values attracted American converts in this century. I wondered also about those who are Orthodox-born and how they make sense of Orthodox Christianity in the twenty-first century. Are contemporary Romanian immigrants content to continue practicing the faith of their forefathers by rote, or do they negotiate with tradition? Each assumption I had was challenged by my consultants. There are, in fact, Orthodox feminists. There are both converts and Orthodox-born believers who practice their faith while disagreeing with certain aspects of it. There are those who follow the spirit of tradition and those who follow the letter. Many Orthodox do both, discerning how the spirit and the letter fit into their own lives. Fortunately, the field of folklore has given me tools to understand traditions as complex as Orthodox Christianity and the complicated people who practice them.

Folklorist David J. Hufford writes about reflexivity, or a scholar's ability to acknowledge his or her own subjectivity, in the study of belief. He discusses the difference between what he calls the "scholarly voice" and the "personal voice" (Hufford 1995, 65). Academic disciplines

are built on shared beliefs just as religious communities are. By the same token, scholars may belong to their own spiritual traditions or ascribe to “traditions of disbelief” (Hufford 1982b). It is possible to be a scholar and to share beliefs with those whom one studies, or to disagree with members of one’s own academic community. Hufford also points out that plenty of scholars are guilty of proselytizing for the theories of their disciplines (Hufford 1995, 70). It would be foolish for me to pretend that my own voice is without bias. A viewpoint is not scholarly just because a scholar happens to hold it. I recognize that as the author of this study, my voice has privilege. It is my perspective which frames my consultants’ narratives.

A Personal Aside

I know the experience of the rituals I describe because I have been Orthodox. I grew up in a Midwestern church which converted to Orthodox Christianity *en masse* when I was fourteen years old. Before that, the community had been a self-invented charismatic community known as the Evangelical Orthodox Church (see Bringerud 2012; Gillquist 1992; Herbel 2014, 103-145; Lucas 2003; Ware 1997, 182-3). When I look back on this part of my life, particularly the transition into Eastern Orthodox Christianity, there are several things I take away from it. Those who converted took their pasts with them, especially from their previous experiences of religion. The burden of these personal histories affected their outlook after becoming Orthodox. For some, this contributed to disillusionment in the faith for which they had sacrificed so much.

Another important lesson I learned in my community’s conversion was that converting was not the same as belonging. Especially since ours was a community of all converts and no Orthodox-born members, we did not resemble many surrounding Orthodox churches culturally. Our community, in fact, had developed its own culture through years of shared experience

together. As a result, some Orthodox-born visitors did not feel that our church performed Orthodox Christianity sufficiently. These visitors would say things like, “It just doesn’t *feel* Orthodox,” or “It seems too American.”

In the transition between being Evangelical Orthodox and “canonically” Orthodox, as it was said, I learned that the word “Orthodox” itself had many meanings, and there was not agreement as to who could use the word appropriately. For example, when I was twelve and still Evangelical Orthodox, I went on a trip to a monastery with children from a local Orthodox community. I had always been taught to refer to myself as Orthodox, despite some theological differences between our communities. It became clear to me that the others with whom I took that trip did not see me as one of them. There was no bullying or intentional exclusion, but I did feel that I was an Other. Some members of my community had left and joined local Orthodox churches, and when they returned to speak to our community members, it was clear they also believed we were not cut from the same cloth. One of these people was my godmother, with whom I spent a lot of time growing up, and she gave me a steady stream of messages about Orthodox Christianity’s superiority to the faith my family was practicing. When I repeated some of these messages to my family, they were dismissive. Generally, this period of my life can be described as confusing, but I also became aware that words were political, and no two people seemed to mean the same thing by the word “Orthodox.” I could not have known that this would continue to be the case, in my experience, after our conversion.

When my community had a breakdown due to internal politics, I was completely ready for us to join up with local Orthodox churches. I wanted to feel I belonged somewhere. The aesthetic of Orthodox services can be very comforting and enveloping, as described above, and I liked that the people I knew who were Orthodox seemed very certain about the right way to

practice their faith. I wanted to be certain about something too. Soon after our conversion, I became active in our church choir, and I wanted to know the structure of services and how to do them with technical correctness (I discuss this at length in Bringerud 2018). In short, my obsession with technical perfection led me to view church as a job, and in general, I found it joyless. Our previous worship experience had been more laid-back and charismatic, but I could not return to that, as I understood it to be theologically incorrect. I was between a rock and a hard place.

My struggle with Orthodox Christianity played out further in my home. My parents colored my experience of the faith through their own interpretations of it, which were human and imperfect. They approached Orthodox Christianity as a series of obligations—the obligation to be at every service holding the music together (my mother was the choir director), the obligation to fast correctly, and the obligation to be generally pious. As I have aged, I now wonder if these obligations were perhaps all that felt solid to them in unhappy lives, in an unhappy marriage. I became dissatisfied in other ways. When I was in college, I began dating a non-practicing Jew. He made me happy, and I hoped we would get married. When I talked to a priest about this possibility, he was troubled and gently suggested that I should not marry someone outside the faith. The reason, I learned, was that I could be excommunicated for doing so. I was deeply upset by this, and I left that particular meeting in angry tears. In hindsight, I am not sure that I necessarily would have been excommunicated; different priests view this issue differently, and no doubt there would have been someone who would have married us. As it happens, that boyfriend and I broke up anyway, but my dissatisfaction was only beginning.

In university, I was learning steadily about feminism, and I began to wonder why I could never be a priest in my religious tradition. I knew a lot about my faith, I loved its ritual traditions,

and at the time, I was of the opinion that I would have made an excellent homilist. I became interested in how other faiths viewed the nature of divinity, and I became convinced that no single faith possessed all of the truth. When I moved to a new town to start my Master's degree, I decided to stop going to church. Still, that did not sever my relationship with the Orthodox Church. It is hard to escape one's roots.

I ended up writing my Master's thesis on my church community's conversion to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and though I did not allude excessively to my personal experiences in that study, they informed my interpretation of others' experiences. In that work, I focused on believers' definitions of authenticity and reasons why Orthodox Christianity was appealing to them over their previous religious traditions. In this study, I have asked far more questions about the differences between the worldviews of those who convert as opposed to those who are born into the faith. I have specifically questioned why contemporary, educated women have chosen a faith which appears to deny their rights in the secular world, and I have looked at a broader political context for their conversion.

What I have been glad to discover in subsequent research is that no two people "do" Orthodox Christianity identically. Everyone has an idiosyncratic approach, and more often than not, people disagree with some aspect of their faith's theology. Each person negotiates with tradition. One hundred people might identify as Orthodox, but they will also exhibit one hundred ways of being so. The people I interviewed have inspired me in this regard, and I was humbled by each and every one of them.

Like the smell of incense clinging to one's clothes, or the hymns lodged in memory after a liturgy, the past has a way of permeating the present. One may say that I study Orthodox

Christianity because it will not let go of me—my family is still deeply involved, and I am still moved when I hear music from the Orthodox Christian tradition. My own vernacular negotiation between belief and disbelief is unresolved, and this informs my subjectivity in all my research. In this way, I am not so far removed from my consultants. I hope, however, that by positioning myself with a foot in both worlds, I can reveal at least one aspect of a beautiful and complex faith—the aspect that comes from my perspective as a folklorist.

Orthodox Churches in General

Upon first entering an Orthodox church, a participant will become immersed in beauty. Painted icons surround the worshipper, candles flicker from golden candle stands, richly-adorned figures—priests, deacons, and acolytes—enact liturgical ritual, and a cantor or choir sing hymns, perhaps in four-part harmony, or perhaps in a two-part Eastern tonal style. For a first-time visitor, this may seem like an odd historical re-enactment. This is partially true; the aesthetic appearance of the service draws heavily from imperial Byzantine models. The service may seem exotic or foreign; this is also true. The Orthodox liturgy is an experience distinct from other Christian traditions in the Western world today.



Figure 1

The interior of St. Parascheva Romanian Orthodox Church. The deacon is venerating an icon on the left. He stands before the *iconostasis*, a wall of icons which separates the altar from the nave, or general worship space.

The architecture of an Orthodox church has symbolic significance. This is to say, buildings which are intentionally constructed to be Orthodox churches. Sometimes a congregation may have to meet in a repurposed space if they do not own a church building. It is modeled on ancient Jewish temples, with a wall separating the altar area from the nave, where the congregation stands, facing it. In an Orthodox church, this wall is called an *iconostasis*, or “icon wall,” since it is covered in sacred images. There will be double doors in the center of the iconostasis, called the “royal doors,” through which only a priest may enter and exit. Smaller doors on the ends of the iconostasis are for deacons and acolytes, or altar boys. Some portion of the ceiling in the nave will be a dome, symbolizing the heavens and all of creation. Often a large

image of Jesus or the Virgin Mary can be found, either on the ceiling or on the wall rising above the iconostasis.



Figure 2
Acolytes following the priest and deacon
during a procession at St. Parascheva
Romanian Orthodox Church.

The priests, deacons, and acolytes who come and go from behind the iconostasis are designated by their clothing, as seen in Figure 2. Depending on a parish's resources, acolytes may wear simple white robes, or they may have ones richly embroidered with golden threads. Deacons and priests are frequently compelled to grow beards, and sometimes, if they are also monastics, their hair. Both deacons and priests wear elaborate

robes which may come in different colors depending on the feasts of the church calendar. As vestments are expensive, the variety of clerical garb is often

dependent on a parish's means. These robes can be elaborate, and every piece is imbued with symbolic meaning. For the purposes of this discussion, deacons may be identified by a long stole or *orarion*, a narrow piece of fabric matching the vestments, wrapped around the torso. Priests may be identified by a *phelonion*, a cape-like garment usually embroidered with a large cross on the back, worn over their other vestments.

The organization of space in the church building matters, and not everyone has access to the same spaces. The iconostasis cannot be penetrated by women, who are excluded from clerical offices. There are some cases where a woman may enter who has been given a blessing to clean behind the iconostasis, but this is strictly occasional. An oft-repeated maxim among priests is

that no person may go behind the iconostasis without a reason, including clergy. Many practices around the *iconostasis* mirror that of ancient Jewish priests and the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, described in Exodus 28: 1-43. According to legend, Jewish priests would have a rope tied around his waist or ankle when entering this sacred space, because they could be struck dead by God and need to be pulled out if their hearts were unworthy. Some male members of the laity are allowed to go into the iconostasis to receive a blessing from the priest to publicly read from the Epistles, or letters from saints to various churches in the Bible, during a service.

In some church buildings, men and women will stand on either side during the service; the men stand on the right, where an icon of Jesus is displayed, and the women may stand on the left, where an icon of Mary is displayed. This is more common in Eastern European churches than North American ones, and none of the communities where I conducted research observed this practice. Depending on the church, women may be compelled to cover their hair and wear long skirts, or they may have freedom to choose dress pants with uncovered hair. Some churches actually keep a box of scarves by the door to accommodate visitors unfamiliar with the practice. In some congregations, women will be expected to abstain from communion once a month when menstruating, while in others this is a personal choice just like head coverings.

Also in the nave is a designated space for the choir; depending on the church, this may be in a balcony or close to the iconostasis in front of the congregation. In some congregations, only men may sing in the choir or direct it, though this was not the case in the communities I studied. If the choir director has been tonsured to the position of reader, he will be a man and wear a long black cassock to mark his office. Music is an integral part of Orthodox liturgical experience. It has been said that the entirety of the service is sung acapella because in one interpretation of Psalm 150, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord,” the voice emits from the body,

directly created by God, and is therefore a more sacred form of worship than sound produced from man-made instruments. Music in the service becomes a conduit for worshippers to commune with God directly, but it also becomes a source of connection with community—doing the work of liturgy with others around you, and “bringing the world back to our Heavenly Father,” as one priest put it.

The music of Orthodox services has the capacity to be haunting, embodying the presence of the divine within and around worshippers. Coupled with the other senses—the smell of incense, kissing the icons, eating the Eucharist, watching the ritual—Orthodox worship is all-encompassing. The experience of liturgy and related services can follow a person out of the church. Sung prayers may become stuck in a participant’s head, such that one might find oneself humming or singing them on the way to work. One’s clothes smell of incense after leaving a church, and perhaps the presence of icons in a believer’s own home evoke memories of shared worship. The repetition of ritual at home in personal prayer may evoke those memories, and some Orthodox burn incense in their homes as well, to add to this effect.

Liturgical Ritual

Rituals in the Orthodox Church range from those performed in private spaces to those done communally in public spaces. There may be local diversity in their performance in both contexts, though rituals themselves tend not to vary once they are established. As folklorist Roy A. Rappaport writes, ritual is formal, varies little, and the medium of performance is essential to its message (Rappaport 1992, 249-50). This is certainly true in Orthodox Christianity. Rituals are frequently used as a medium for believers to embody deeper spiritual truths. Therefore, any variation could have great spiritual consequences. Nonetheless, because believers are only

human, rituals may be performed as a perfunctory gesture just as often as they are performed with conscious intent. There is a feature of certain services during Lent where “Lord have mercy” is chanted as many as one hundred times. A saying I have heard among some Orthodox converts is, “Why chant ‘Lord have mercy’ one hundred times? Because of the ninety-nine times you weren’t paying attention.” Repetition may cause some believers to lose focus, but the rhythm established by such rituals also ensures that the meaning will still be there when participants attune themselves to it.

Folklorist Jack Santino writes that “ritual derives validation from a transcendent authority,” which may be both God and the institution of the Orthodox Church in the context of my research (Santino 2011, 64). As such, the liturgical ritual functions to reinforce theology. Scholar of religion Catherine Bell theorizes that ritual is not only the expression of cultural values but the very means by which cultural patterns are constructed (Bell 1997, 82). Like the painted images of saints which adorn all Orthodox churches, the liturgy itself is meant to be an icon of how to live a virtuous life through *theosis*, or becoming like God, according to theologian Maria McDowell (2013, 74-75). The Orthodox Christian liturgy is a physical activity on the part of both priests and laity, and the ritual establishes relationships among participants. McDowell specifically builds her argument around the gendered relationships established in the liturgy, which seem to point to gendered roles as necessary for *theosis* (McDowell 2013, 74). However, I have found that the Orthodox Church as an institution cannot dictate the meanings which individuals make out of the liturgy.

Anthropologists Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw argue that the meaning of ritual is not fixed, but rather emergent for individual participants (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 213). Folklorist Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby expands on this theory in her study of life-cycle rituals

in Soviet Russia; the government replaced many Orthodox Christian rituals with their own, intending singular, non-religious meanings for them. Rouhier-Willoughby found that despite their best efforts, the government could not control individual ideas and interpretations (Rouhier-Willoughby 2008, 24). I have found the same to be true of rituals in the Orthodox Church. Each participant will take away something uniquely meaningful. One woman I interviewed told me that for her, watching the children of St. Parascheva play and sometimes misbehave during the liturgy was a spiritual experience because it was joyful (Helen, July 27, 2015). Another woman told me that the physical actions of the liturgy—the routine sign of the cross, made many times, and the bowing—were an important aspect of her spiritual discipline as a rehearsal for life in paradise (Julia, June 30, 2015). For many others the music is certainly an important, transcendent part of the experience (Bill, July 12, 2015; Martin, June 20, 2015; Mary, June 13, 2015). Noyes wrote that each of her consultants “found the Patum perfectly compatible with his own version of Catholicism” (Noyes 2003a, 175). I believe, similarly, that each of my consultants, with a range of backgrounds and beliefs, takes what they need from the liturgy and finds it compatible with his or her worldview.

In the Orthodox Christian context, liturgy is the Sunday service where Eucharist, or communion, is served. Liturgy comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which literally means “work for the people” (Lewis 1960, 177). The word was originally used to refer to a class of people in Greek society who did compulsory services to the public, and then the word was adopted by Christians in the fourth century (Lewis 1960, 181-2). The focal point of the liturgical ritual is consuming the Eucharist, which is believed to be the mystical body of God, healing and uniting all those who partake. This highlights a key feature of rituals: transformation. Folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1999, 102-108) famously studied rites of passage, which are a specific kind

of ritual by which change is brought about. The participants themselves are transformed, but they are also doing the work of transforming the world. Rituals are frequently described as necessary for the well-being of a group of people (Santino 2011, 61). When a priest says that the liturgy brings the world back to God, the task is not only to sanctify the community but all of creation. By restoring balance, the liturgy acts as a rite of incorporation, by Van Gennep's categories.

The Orthodox Christian liturgy can be compared to the Catalan Patum as described by Dorothy Noyes:

I came to understand the techniques of incorporation as reciprocal: the individual is brought into the Patum, and the Patum is taken into the individual. One's change of attitude is then literal and visible to others. (Noyes 2003a, 136)

Noyes tells the story of an Italian tourist who comes to Catalonia for the Patum, but wishes only to observe from a balcony. She is looked upon with disgust by participants, because "The Patum's techniques are dedicated to making the body passive and receptive to the experience," which cannot be achieved through distant observation (Noyes 2003a, 137). Embracing this immersion—and transformation—of the self is a key feature of Orthodox rituals. It is said that the five senses are involved in all Orthodox worship—the eyes through icons, the nose through incense, the ears through singing, the mouth through communion, and touch through veneration, which often involves kissing the Bible, icons, and other holy objects. A range of actions are available for participants through ritual, and each person may negotiate how he or she engages with it.

Philosopher Mircea Eliade, who was himself an Orthodox Christian, theorized that the Orthodox Christian liturgy marks a change in time, from profane to sacred. He states, "The Christian liturgy unfolds in a *historical time sanctified by the incarnation of the Son of God*" (Eliade 1959, 72). The repetition of liturgical ritual is the effort to be close to God. Eliade argues

that in Christian tradition, liturgy is the return to “mythical time,” and the reenactment of this sacred story brings participants to “a time sanctified by the divine presence” creating “a nostalgia for paradise” (Eliade 1959, 92). By this logic, to participate in liturgy is to recreate paradise. This is why the Eucharistic liturgy is sometimes called the “divine liturgy.”

The liturgical ritual is common to all Orthodox Christians worldwide. In addition to the ritual described above, there are also locally distinct rituals in different countries. In the Romanian Orthodox Church, for example, it is common to touch the hem of the priest’s robe as he passes by holding the Eucharist. This ritual is a reference to the healing of the woman in the Bible with an “issue of blood” (Mark 5:25-34, Matthew 14:35-36), though there does not appear to be a scholarly consensus on a contemporary explanation of this medical condition. While all Orthodox Christians share some funeral customs, there are variations by country and region. Romanians, for example, may additionally hold a home prayer ritual for someone in the community who has died, which includes a meal. I had the privilege of participating in one of these rituals in Canada.

One individual ritual which is significant in the Orthodox Church is fasting. This is a practice done with great personal variation. Typically, fasting involves abstaining from animal products (both meat and dairy), which is a carry-over from Jewish practices of kosher eating. The website of the Orthodox Church in America specifies that fasting need not be limited to animal products, and during periods of fasting, believers are encouraged to discipline themselves from “passions” which they might otherwise allow to control them, like television (Orthodox Church in America 2018a). Pregnant women or the elderly, for example, may be granted dispensation from a priest to modify the degree to which they fast, as well as families with small children, or others with health needs, etc. Fasting is a personal ritual, and not every believer

requests dispensation from a priest to modify the practice. There are four periods of the church calendar in which fasting occurs—Great Lent, roughly forty days before Easter; a week in the summer to honor of Sts. Peter and Paul; another week in September for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross; and a fourth time during Winter Lent, before Christmas. Orthodox Christians often regularly fast from animal products on Wednesdays and Fridays, in commemoration of Judas’s betrayal of Christ on a Wednesday and Christ’s crucifixion on a Friday.

McDowell writes that the “liturgy is an icon of community-in-relation” (McDowell 2013, 74). Those who attend liturgy may be elderly widows and widowers, they may be young families with children running around, they may be curious visitors, or they may be single participants of any age. To stand in the liturgy, in some sense, is to bear witness to one’s own community. The actual script of the liturgy is ongoing, with sung prayers by both the priest and congregation, but it is also an opportunity for laity to reaffirm relationships with one’s spiritual family by bearing witness to their lives. This is most powerful when congregations are multigenerational, as the community participates in different rites of passage depending on where each person is in the life cycle. Liturgy and its kindred rituals—baptisms, marriages, funerals—give a sense of continuity to the lives of community members.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter two begins with an overview of the history of Christianity from the time of Jesus through the formation of Orthodox Christianity specifically in the Byzantine Empire. I address themes in the history of Orthodox Christianity after that period, using moments from Romanian, Russian, Serbian, and Ukrainian history as examples. I conclude with a brief history of Orthodox Christianity in North America, including contemporary influential figures.

In chapter three, I look at responses to globalization within the Orthodox Church as an institution. Orthodox Christianity exists in North America as a result of global processes, and yet anti-Western sentiments in some corners of the Church cause converts to face an identity crisis. I examine how the Orthodox Church, as an institution, has responded to global processes. I question how North American converts discern the way their cultural heritage impacts adaptations of their faith, and how being Orthodox, conversely, affects their views of Western culture. Globalization often goes hand-in-hand with democratization, and this is, in many ways, foreign to a church with a rigid hierarchy. I analyze how American converts adapt Orthodox Christian traditions to their cultural landscape and consider what the future will look like for the Church in North America.

In chapter four, I give a brief history of the congregations of St. Parascheva and St. Nicholas. I discuss themes I found in the conversion narratives of the St. Parascheva community, especially attitudes toward intentional community. I am interested in what about Orthodox Christianity was appealing to both Orthodox-born immigrants and converts in the twenty-first century, especially women. I am interested in what drew them to St. Parascheva specifically, when there are six Orthodox Christian churches in the area, and the majority of members have no Romanian background at all. I ask what draws believers to St. Nicholas in Canada. I examine differences between Orthodox-born believers and converts in terms of how Orthodox practices are learned. I pay attention to rhetoric about and definitions of authenticity, and I am especially interested in how conversion has changed the lifestyles and perspectives of members.

In chapter five, I explore the relationships between parishioners and Romanian culture at St. Parascheva. There are a few members of the church who are ethnically Romanian, but the vast majority are Midwestern converts. I survey definitions of heritage and ethnicity, and I ask

why church becomes a site for heritage preservation. I look at both material and customary ways of maintaining heritage, asking what counts as “American” or “Romanian.” I consider the role of language in the maintenance of heritage. I explore the folklore which some converts to Orthodox Christianity create *about* the Orthodox-born. This is exoteric folklore about ethnicity, to an extent, as those creating it perceive themselves to be outside the cultural groups in question (Wojcik 1996). There is a perception among some believers, both converts and Orthodox-born, that the Orthodox-born have a cultural birthright to the faith that converts do not possess, and this also leads to exoteric folklore about those who are “cradle Orthodox,” or raised in the faith. I am curious about the relationship between cultural custom and liturgical tradition more broadly in Orthodox Christianity, but I am also interested in the adoption of these customs among converts. I ask whether heritage is a product of nostalgia for an imagined past, or something alive in the present. I seek to understand how they understand the maintenance of Romanian heritage in relation to their lives in the church community and personal spirituality.

In chapter six, I discuss theology about gender roles as a form of spiritual discipline. I am interested in how different believers understand the authority of a priest and the value of spiritual obedience. I observe believers’ approaches to gender in their faiths and lives, what it means to be a man and a woman in their experiences of Orthodox Christianity, and most importantly, how much of this is overtly left up to parishioner interpretation versus how much is doctrinally expected behavior.

In chapter seven, I put forth the theory that vernacular religious practice or “folk Orthodox Christianity” is not restricted only to Orthodox-born believers. Those who convert to the faith also engage in creative negotiation with their theology. I ask to what extent beliefs and attitudes can differ while still falling under the “Orthodox” label. I look at vernacular theology as

a form of agency and question how it is a strategy for personalizing a faith which appears otherwise difficult to reconcile with Western cultural values. This chapter focuses specifically on women who convert, coming from a Western society in dialogue with feminism, who make sense of an ancient faith with a patriarchal structure.

In chapter eight, I offer a case study from St. Luke Orthodox Church regarding a challenging negotiation between clerical authority and cultural values for converts. I interviewed a group of women in the parish who were asked to assist priests during the Eucharistic ritual by holding napkins under the communion chalices. When the parish came under a new bishop, he felt it was inappropriate for the women to continue in this activity and they were ordered to stop. I look at how members of the congregation responded to this decision, how they understood the bishop's interpretive authority, and how they themselves interpreted the will of God in this situation. I ask whether there are negative consequences to unconditional obedience, and whether believers' faith can be damaged by the potential abuse of their humility by authority figures.

In the conclusion, I tie all these threads together and consider how the communities I studied are contributing to the future of Orthodox Christianity.

While these chapters focus on one particular community with references to two others, I believe that they represent experiences in other Orthodox Christian communities. Increasingly, converts are the future of Orthodox Christianity in North America. The way in which they integrate this faith with their cultural identities will shape its legacy for more converts. The complex history of the Orthodox Church from the Roman Empire up through twentieth-century

European dictatorships seeps into its present politics. The following chapter examines this history.

Chapter 2: From Empire to Diaspora: A Brief History of the Orthodox Church

Orthodox Christianity as it is practiced today relies a great deal on its history. A number of excellent scholarly works have explored this subject in depth, especially with regard to the relationship between specific nations and their churches (see, for example, Himka and Zayarnyuk 2014; Kivelson and Greene 2003; Leustean 2009, 2010; Perica 2002; Ramet 1988; Roudometof and Makrides 2017). In order to talk about Orthodox Christianity in North America, as practiced by Orthodox-born immigrants, Orthodox-born Americans and Canadians, and the newly converted, it is necessary to be aware of the larger history of Orthodox Christianity in the world. For example, I have interviewed a number of converts who believe Orthodox Christianity to be the most authentic form of Christianity because of its age and apparent changelessness over time. For the Orthodox-born, especially in majority-Orthodox Christian countries, religious identity and national identity are often deeply related, and this, too, is a product of a long history.

Lived experiences are shaped by broader contexts, even when individuals are not conscious of them. Folklorist Mary Hufford discusses historical discourse as encompassing more than the past. Discussions of people, land, and history may deeply concern the present (Hufford 1995, 546). Folklorist Diane Tye chose to analyze her mother's life through her recipes because of what they revealed about her community and her place within it rather than because she enjoyed baking (Tye 2012, 5). Larger social forces shaped her experience. In the case of the Orthodox Church, it is crucial to understand the history and culture of the Byzantine Empire to understand the church's aesthetic, its views on authority, its approach to gender roles, and even its liturgical rituals. Not all believers who participate in Orthodox Christian liturgies are aware of the church's history permeating their lived experiences, but they are affected by it nonetheless.

Theologian Aristotle Papanikolaou discusses how Orthodox Christianity shaped the culture and politics of the Byzantine Empire at the same time that its own thought and practice were shaped by the empire itself (Papanikolaou 2003, 77). The Orthodox Church's contemporary attitudes toward democracy, nationalism, and individualism are all connected to its past. Papanikolaou suggests that the relationships among the culture of Byzantium, its imperial government, and theology are especially at issue when addressing contemporary questions about Orthodox Christianity. It is beyond the scope of this work to provide a complete, detailed history of the Orthodox Church. Instead, I will focus on its pivotal development in the Byzantine Empire, followed by a few themes that are pertinent to this specific study, including empire, nation, anti-Westernism, and Communism. I draw from the histories of Orthodox Christianity in Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, and its presence in North America.

Origins in the Roman Empire

Orthodox Christians trace the history of their faith back to the time of Jesus Christ (0-33 AD/CE), an itinerant Jewish healer living in Judea, in the Roman Empire. Claiming an unbroken lineage to the teachings of Christ is a major way in which the Orthodox Church appeals to authenticity. In describing his conversion to Orthodox Christianity, Father Peter Gillquist writes that he considered the Catholic Church to be less authentic because, in his view, they broke off toward a separate path of Christendom in 1054 AD (Gillquist 1992, 48-49, 66-7). When Orthodox Christians talk about their faith being ancient, as Gillquist does in his book, this is what they mean; they tie the founding of Orthodox Christianity to the founding of Christianity itself.

After Christ's crucifixion, his disciples spread his teachings throughout the Roman Empire and even beyond its borders. The scope of this missionary work is how the first Christians, who were also Jews, gradually became the founders of a new religion, believing Jesus to be the Messiah of biblical prophecy (See Biblical scholar Bart D. Ehrman 2018 for a fuller discussion of how Christianity became a separate religion, rather than a sect of Judaism). The earliest Christian communities sprang up in Jerusalem, Rome, Athens, Ireland, Northern Africa (especially Egypt and Ethiopia), and the city of Antioch (today, the Turkish city of Antakya). According to the book of Acts (11:19-26), the word "Christian" to describe the followers of Jesus was coined in Antioch. As historian and Orthodox theologian Timothy Ware writes, the bureaucratic structure of the early Church was determined by the structure of the Roman Empire; there was a bishop to oversee the Christian community in each city, and he was assisted by priests, and below them, deacons (Ware 1997, 13).

Historian John Meyendorff describes that in its first three centuries, Christianity faced waves of imperial persecution, particularly under emperors Nero, Domitian, and Diocletian (Meyendorff 1981, 15). In part, this was because Christian theology bade followers to obey God first before any earthly authority, and this was politically threatening to the Romans, for whom their emperor *was* a god. Not unlike today, early Christians were not necessarily all of one accord in their beliefs. Ehrman discusses the diversity of beliefs in early Christian communities, including syncretism with pagan traditions (Ehrman 2018). "Pagan" here is defined in opposition to Christianity; Ehrman uses the term loosely to refer to many different traditions which were polytheistic and without formally written or unified doctrine (Ehrman 2018, 83). I use the term in Ehrman's sense. Historian Lars Brownworth suggests that the appeal for converting to Christianity, in spite of this persecution, was the message that suffering was not in vain

(Brownworth 2009, 7). The corruption of officials and impossibly high taxes made life difficult for average Roman citizens, particularly the lower classes. Seeking the message of hope and a glorious afterlife, many plebeians were drawn to mystery cults, of which Christianity was the most popular. Brownworth writes that the pagan ideas of the afterlife became less attractive because they did not promise happiness (Brownworth 2009, 7). Besides this, pagan gods were depicted as unpredictable, not unlike their human worshippers.

The emperor Diocletian (who ruled roughly from 285-305 CE) led an especially thorough persecution of Christians, destroying churches and Christian writings, and torturing or killing thousands. Pagans and Christians had coexisted as friends and neighbors for years, and there was public sympathy for those persecuted (Brownworth 2009, 8). Brownworth writes that “Most pagans refused to believe that a religion that encouraged payment of taxes, stable families, and honesty in trade could be full of dangerous dissidents, threatening the security of the state” (Brownworth 2009, 8). In less than one hundred years, the tide would turn the other way.

The Rise of the Byzantine Empire

Diocletian recognized that the Roman Empire was growing too large to be easily administered from a single city. In 285 CE, he split the empire in half, complete with two capitals and two emperors. Rome was the Western capital, and the Eastern capital was called Byzantium, from which later historians would draw the term “Byzantine” to describe the Eastern half of the empire. While inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire had Roman citizenship, their language was Greek. In this multiethnic empire, people referred to themselves as both “Roman” and “Greek.” Eventually the latter became a more common identification (particularly after the Schism with the West). Hundreds of years earlier, Alexander the Great conquered these lands

and required all people to learn Greek, though their own vernacular languages coexisted. When the Romans took over, they spoke Latin, but it was expedient to learn and use Greek as a *lingua franca* as they expanded into Alexander's former territories. Shared knowledge of Greek greatly aided the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. It is significant that when the first books of the Christian Testament, or New Testament, were written, it was not in Jesus's own language, Aramaic, but in Greek, a political language of the conquerors of Judea.

Constantine I, later known as "the Great," assumed power in 306 CE. It was Constantine who made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire. By this time, the faith had existed long enough to develop different schools of thought and interpretations, leading to civil unrest among some factions of Christians. In an attempt to make his citizens more unified, Constantine ordered a council of bishops to meet and resolve their differences. In fact, three hundred bishops came to the meeting, which would later be known as the First Ecumenical Council, held in the city of Nicea in 325 CE. A statement of faith, known as the Nicene Creed, was drafted at this council; it is still used in many Christian traditions today. In 330 CE, Byzantium was renamed Constantinople after its leader, who converted to Christianity on his deathbed, seven years later.

The Church convened seven Ecumenical Councils over the course of the next five hundred years to solidify its theology. Some of the earlier schools of thought were labeled heresies, and others were incorporated into the official dogma of the Church. After Christianity became legal under Constantine, this paved the way for several Christian emperors. In fact, Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, making other faiths illegal. Over the next two centuries, Christian emperors granted the Church a great deal of power, including public welfare (Meyendorff 1981, 16-17). Meyendorff points out that the legalization of Christianity and, indeed, the merging of Church and State during this period

shaped the legacy of Orthodox Christianity thereafter. Where Christianity was once the religion of a persecuted minority, it became a faith whose adherents held special privileges. Meyendorff argues that the history of persecution in the Church led to some defensive tendencies, in the hope of safeguarding the faith (Meyendorff 1981, 21). For example, liturgy became more formal, increasing the distance between priest and laity. It was also during this time that priests began to adopt imperial-looking garb rather than wearing simple, casual robes as the laity did.

It should be noted that the earliest Christian documents do not indicate consistent or specific attitudes toward Roman culture or politics. Papanikolaou writes that while the Bible itself offers contradictory assessments of worldly governments, its three major attitudes toward them include “necessity, divine sanction, and condemnation” (Papanikolaou 2003, 81). Two representative quotes include “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” in Matthew 22:21 and “those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” in Romans 13:1. These attitudes changed in the fourth century after Christianity became legal and the official faith of the Byzantine Empire. Christian writers began describing the emperor’s position as ordained by God. Where there were ambiguous attitudes before, a Christian emperor meant reimagining government structures as part of God’s divine plan to bring Christianity to all peoples (Papanikolaou 2003, 81-2). Meyendorff writes that in Byzantium, “the Church and the State...represent the internal cohesion of one single human society, for whose welfare on earth the emperor alone is responsible” (Meyendorff 1981, 49). In this model, imperial authority was an icon of God’s authority. Some Orthodox Christian theologians also extend this symbolism to domestic life, where the husband, as head of the house, is an icon for Christ as the head of creation (for example, Kalliakmanis 2016).

When Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, the shape of government changed as well. The bishop of this city became the clergyman closest to the throne in influence and proximity. The cooperation of the bishop and the emperor was seen as essential to harmony or *symphonia* (Papanikolaou 2003, 82). Interestingly, the relationship between the emperor and the bishop could affect theological interpretation. Meyendorff notes that if the emperor appointed certain people in ecclesiastical positions, he could influence the way doctrine was interpreted and applied (Meyendorff 1981, 51). This bishop would be the first to call himself the Ecumenical Patriarch, a position still occupied in the Church today. Historian Andrew Louth, writes that the mentality behind calling this bishop “Ecumenical Patriarch” stems from a very Roman mentality; the Greek word “oikoumene” means the “inhabited land,” which the government used to refer only to the territory of the empire (Louth 2013, xvi). This situates the position of the Ecumenical Patriarch in the context of an empire. Though he is a bishop like any other, his position in the center of the Byzantine Empire put him symbolically at the center of the Roman vision of the world. This is but one example of how contemporary hierarchy and governance in the Orthodox Church stems from an imperial past.

In the 5th century CE, the Western half of the Roman Empire began to collapse, following invasion by Germanic tribes. These included the Goths and Visigoths, who were defeated by the Frankish Merovingian dynasty. Some Merovingian rulers converted to Christianity, and by the turn of the 6th century, efforts were made to convert the rest of the Franks (the aristocracy, by and large, converted more willingly than the peasants, who were practicing a form of Germanic paganism). As a new Frankish dynasty, the Carolingians, succeeded the Merovingians, a Latin Christian Renaissance was underway in Western Europe. Charlemagne, the most famous Carolingian ruler, was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III in 800 CE. It is important

to note that “pope” at this time simply meant the bishop of Rome, not the sole head of the Christian Church. As the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople was the “first among equals” with other bishops, the pope was simply the bishop of the largest Christian metropolis in the West. This Christianizing process in the West led to tensions with Constantinople, which was competing with them for the conversion of new peoples, especially the Slavs in South and Central Europe respectively.

This was nowhere more apparent than in the territory of Bulgaria, led by Tsar Boris I. Boris made a choice to adopt Christianity among his people (comprised of two ethnic groups, Slavs and Bulgurs) as a tactic to unify them with surrounding European countries, all of whom were Christian. Rome and Constantinople both wanted to influence Bulgaria, as it was a strategically advantageous territory between the two halves of Christendom. Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius were working their way through Slavic territories, and they offered Boris the Cyrillic alphabet which they developed for the Slavonic language. Boris’s interest was piqued, and he sent an emissary to Constantinople, which was using a Greek liturgy, to ask if the Bulgarian Church could be independent and perform services in their own language. Constantinople refused, and Boris banished the Byzantine missionaries and turned to Rome. The Byzantine emperor Michael III was displeased by this action and wrote to Boris, criticizing the Roman Church. Boris requested that Rome ordain bishops in Bulgaria, but his candidates were denied, communication was slow, and the pope with whom he had been in correspondence died. Boris perceived the delays in proceeding as an insult, and he turned back to Constantinople. Boris I was baptized in 863 or 864 CE, and his people followed. When Boris was baptized, the Byzantine emperor Michael III became his godfather (Meyendorff 1982, 26). This suggests his conversion was part of Bulgaria’s political alliance with the Byzantine Empire. The result was

that Constantinople granted Bulgaria an independent national church with a liturgy in the local Slavonic language, an unprecedented act in the East or the West.

A little after this time, the missionaries Cyril and Methodius converted another major Slavic group: the Kievan Rus'. In 944, a treaty between Byzantium and the Kievan Rus' was forged, by which time a small Christian community already existed in Kiev. The conversion of Rus'ian Princess Olga popularized the faith among some aristocracy (Poppe 1992, 271). Continuing tradition, Byzantine emperor Constantine VII became Olga's godfather (Poppe 1992, 272-3). Her conversion laid the groundwork for a large-scale Rus'ian conversion decades later, as the result of a political agreement. Byzantine scholar Andrzej Poppe writes that in 987, the Byzantine emperor Basil II requested help from the Rus'ian Prince Vladimir to defend Constantinople from an insurrection by a general named Bardas Phocas (Poppe 1976, 197). In return, Vladimir was given the emperor's sister in marriage, providing that he and all the Rus' convert to Christianity (Poppe 1976, 198). Sure enough, the Rus' were baptized en masse in the Dnieper River, an event immortalized in legend.

The legend of the conversion of the Kievan Rus' is still glorified in the Orthodox Church. *The Russian Chronicle* is a fundamental text which recounts the history of the early Slavs between 850 and the early 1000s, when it was compiled. Historian of Russia, Thomas Riha, writes that the chronicle has a heavy religious bias in general and borrows from many Greek Byzantine written sources (Riha 1964, 1). According to the chronicle, Vladimir had some interest in Christianity even before his military assistance to Constantinople. In 987, wanting to unify his people, the prince sent emissaries to foreign lands to study Bulgar Islam, Khazar Judaism, and Byzantine Greek Christianity to choose which faith would best accomplish this task. Apparently, the Muslim aversion to alcohol was unacceptable to Vladimir, and he interpreted the loss of

Jerusalem by the Jews as proof that their God had abandoned them. His emissaries who traveled to Constantinople witnessed a liturgy in the Hagia Sophia, and they described its beauty. Riha's translation of this account in the *Chronicle* includes:

...the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty. (Riha 1964, 9)

Anecdotally, I have heard this specific part of the account quoted or paraphrased by Orthodox Christian converts. With or without the fuller context of historical politics, the aesthetic impact of liturgy resonates with many of them, and a historical account of similar sentiments provides a sense of connection. Orthodox Christian convert and journalist Frederica Mathewes-Green wrote a blog post about aesthetics and Orthodox Christianity referencing the conversion of the Kievan Rus', which circulated in my childhood community of converts (Mathewes-Green 2008). She used the story to make the argument that beauty convinced an otherwise thuggish warlord to be Christian and that it is a necessary part of Christian experience today. Drawing on history in this way to argue for both the authenticity of Orthodox Christianity and its contemporary relevance is a tactic I have found frequently in conversion narratives. Orthodox-born believers may not necessarily share this sense of awe, because the liturgy is not new for them; it is habitual.

The Split Between East & West

A key aspect of Orthodox Church history still cited in the present day by believers is the Great Schism of 1054. Deep divisions had percolated between the East and West for centuries. At the time, there were five main bishops, four of whom were in the East. The youngest of these bishops was the Patriarch of Constantinople. Brownworth writes that in the East, "the Greek love of disputation had kept the church somewhat decentralized," and important decisions were made

by a council of bishops, whereas in the West, the Patriarch of Rome had “grown weary of the endless eastern speculation and heresy, and had begun to see himself as the final authority in Christendom” (Brownworth 2009, 222). Against this backdrop, an old argument resurfaced between Patriarch Michael Cerularius and Pope Leo IX over the West’s addition of the word *filioque* to the Nicene Creed, the Christian Church’s statement of faith. In English, the original creed states that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father, who is worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son,” thus making reference to the relationships among the persons of the Trinity. The addition of the *filioque* clause in the Western church changed the statement to say that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son.” The Eastern Church disagreed with the theological meaning of the *filioque* clause, claiming that the new statement set the Father and the Son over the Holy Spirit, when all three persons of the Trinity were equal. Furthermore, there was disagreement over whether the pope had the authority to make such an amendment to the Nicene Creed; a council of bishops had labored over the original document, and now one bishop wanted to change it for all of Christendom.

In the end, the Western Church formally adopted the clause, and the patriarch and the pope excommunicated one another (Brownworth 2009, 224). As with much of history, the Great Schism was a process more than a single event; for the purposes of this study, it is important to understand that 1054 is marked as the definitive year Christendom was rent in two. Over the next several hundred years, different popes and patriarchs attempted to heal the schism, but to no avail. This soured relationship rooted in Byzantine history is the reason why the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are separate entities today, and it is also the reason why the meaning of the word “pope” and the attitudes toward such a figure differ widely between the two. To this day,

the Catholic Church uses the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed, and the Orthodox Church does not.

The Byzantine Empire had been in decline before the Great Schism, but this monumental event hastened its demise. The Seljuk Turks invaded Byzantine territory by 1067, and a great battle against them was launched in 1071 (Brownworth 2009, 225). Meyendorff writes that this moment marked the end of imperial power in Byzantium (Meyendorff 1982, 67). This event also plunged the Byzantine Empire into an ideological crisis. Byzantium was shaped by the Roman ideal of a universal empire, and through a Christian lens, the emperor's authority was a reflection of God's. Though the idea of a universal church wed to a universal empire was a fantasy almost from the beginning, the power wielded by Byzantine emperors upheld the image of a divinely blessed theocracy (Meyendorff 1982, 69). After the invasion of the Seljuks, this façade could no longer be maintained.

In 1095 Emperor Alexius I sought assistance from the pope to fend off the Seljuks, and this was one of many reasons behind Pope Urban II's launch of the First Crusade. As historian Jonathan Phillips explains, while the idea of two Christian forces banding together to push back the Muslim Turks was appealing, the reality of collaboration between the two proved more difficult (Phillips 2004, xxi). The Byzantine Greeks distrusted the crusaders as "poorly disciplined barbarians who posed a real danger to Constantinople; indeed, some on the Second Crusade advocated an assault on the city" (Phillips 2004, xxi). The crusaders, for their part, were wary of their reliance on the Greeks for food and supplies, expecting betrayal at any moment. When the Second Crusade failed following a poorly-planned attack on Damascus, some crusaders blamed the Greeks for betraying them to the Seljuks (Phillips 2004, xxi). Tensions flared further when the Byzantine throne was usurped by the military leader Andronicus

Comnenus, who, in contrast to his recent predecessors, was against Western influence in Byzantium. It should be noted that Byzantine rulers had been intermarrying with Frankish nobility for decades, but the public had more oppositional sentiments (Phillips 20014, xix-xx).

These events set the stage for the Massacre of the Latins in 1182, in which the Orthodox Christian supporters of Andronicus Comnenus slaughtered the Roman Catholic residents of Constantinople. The main targets of the massacre were Italian merchants, who virtually controlled the Byzantine economy. The mob slew the elderly and clergy (including a papal legate), and churches were burned (Phillips 2004, xii). The event was condemned by both Romans and other Constantinopolitans. Trade resumed between Italians and the Byzantines, but a dark cloud loomed.

Usurpations of the Byzantine throne continued, and eventually one prince negotiated a deal with Pope Innocent III to send a Fourth Crusade in exchange for reinstating his father as emperor and bringing Byzantium under the Western Church (Phillips 2004, 127-8). The crusaders were low on capital and supplies, and in the end, the Fourth Crusade turned into a sack of Constantinople in 1204. In many ways, the crusaders did to the Greeks what the Greeks themselves had done in the Massacre of the Latins: burned their holy places, slaughtered innocents, and stole precious relics.

The Ottoman Empire, meanwhile, was gaining a foothold all around the lands of Byzantium. Historian Judith Herrin writes that over several centuries, there was continuous interaction between the Ottomans and Byzantium (Herrin 2007, 314). The former grew in power, and the latter shrank and weakened. Though they were political rivals, they also exchanged enormous influence through intermarriages and customs such as land and tax management. It

was this cultural exchange that prevented the Ottomans from immediately subsuming Byzantium, even when they had the city surrounded by 1379. The Ottoman sultan, Murad I, had made all Byzantine rulers his vassals, and he benefitted from their support (Herrin 2007, 311).

Fall to the Ottoman Turks

The Byzantine Empire eventually gave way to Ottoman rule during the siege of 1453. The fall of Byzantium was so epic that it gave rise to a number of legends. Herrin (2007, 319) writes, for example, that the last emperor, Constantine XI, was lost during the siege, and his body was never found, giving rise to the legend that he had been divinely absorbed into the walls of the city and would one day come again. In another story, Ottoman sultan Mehmed II wept when he entered the city, seeing how beautiful it was and mourning the loss of its greatness (Herrin 2007, 319). What is known for certain is that the Fall of Constantinople had a traumatic effect on the legacy of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox Christians today continue to refer to the city as Constantinople rather than by its contemporary name, Istanbul, hearkening back to this golden age of the faith.

Ware (1997, 87-8) writes that Muslim Ottomans were generally more tolerant of Christianity than Christians were of one another. As long as Christians submitted to their rule, they were allowed to carry on worshipping as they pleased. However, Christians were still second-class citizens, and they paid higher taxes than others (Ware 1997, 88). The sultan chose their patriarch, continuing a tradition begun by the Byzantines; he styled himself as the protector of their faith. Christians were required to wear specific dress to set them apart, and not allowed to marry Muslims, join the army, or convert Muslims to their faith. Since the Ottoman Empire was itself a theocracy, it treated the Christians within it as a separate nation—the *Rum millet* or

Roman nation (Ware 1997, 89). It is both ironic and confusing that Christians were called “Romans” by the Ottomans given that they frequently referred to themselves as “Greeks.” Historian Aristeides Papadakis writes that there was no linguistic, ethnic, or national continuity in the *Rum millet* (Papadakis 1988, 45). These were not viewed as important divisions to the Ottoman Turks. The Orthodox Church was used as an administrative unit, closing the remaining gaps between sacred and secular. Bishops were made government officials, and the patriarch was both the spiritual and civil leader of the Greek nation (“ethnarch” or “millet-bashi”) (Papadakis 1988, 46-49). Ware points to this as the origin of the entanglement between nationalism and the Orthodox Church (Ware 1997, 89). On the one hand, the group identity of the Greeks in the millet system allowed the Church to survive, but on the other hand, it was nearly impossible to separate the civic from the spiritual. Ware also blames this period for the beginnings of a money-laundering tradition among some clergy (Ware 1997, 89-90). The sultan would sell the seat of patriarch to the highest bidder, and so candidates would collect money from other bishops, who would in turn tax their clergy, who would tax their laity. Naturally, this caused great insecurity on the part of the patriarch, who knew others would vie to replace him. The Ottomans were effective at dividing their subjects to better subdue them.

A dual legacy of the Ottoman Empire on the Orthodox Church was both an abiding conservatism and Westernization. The Church was in a defensive state for hundreds of years, trying to maintain a distinctive identity while subject to a foreign authority both culturally and spiritually. Ware writes that Greek ideology hardened under the Ottomans, but their commitment to conservatism allowed the Orthodox Christian tradition to survive intact (Ware 1997, 92). When many converts say that Orthodox Christianity appeals to them because of its

“changelessness,” this is what they mean. It stubbornly clung to tradition with such a grip that it resisted the turmoil around it, for better or for worse.

The second effect of Ottoman rule on the Orthodox Church was the way the clergy were educated. The best schools in the world at the time included those in Western Europe, Paris, Berlin, and Rome. When clergy and theologians studied in the West, their approaches to Orthodox Christian theology changed. Ware talks about the danger of being “cut off from living tradition” (Ware 1997, 92). While Western-educated Orthodox Christians would still read authors from their own tradition, in university, they only studied those whom Western Christians also valued.

The Ottoman sultan viewed the Patriarch of Constantinople as the administrative head of Christians across the empire, but the empire eventually began to decay in the 19th century. The result was that the Patriarch of Constantinople, while still honored as the “first see of Orthodox Christianity,” lost much of its legal, financial, and jurisdictional authority (Papadakis 1988, 49). The Ottoman state fragmented, giving way to smaller nation-states, many of whom united behind a vision of Orthodox Christianity as national identity. These nations sought to establish their own churches independent of Turkish rule (Ware 1997, 91). The Church of Greece was eventually recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch as a formal entity in 1850, and others followed. The Ottoman Empire did not formally end until 1920, when Turkey itself became a modern nation-state. To this day, the Ecumenical Patriarch is still within the confines of Turkish political authority, illustrating the longstanding historical forces (and grudges) which play into the present-day state of the Orthodox Church.

Perhaps what we can most take away from this brief overview of Orthodox Christianity from the Roman to the Byzantine to the Ottoman Empires is how inextricably intertwined politics and religion have been for most of its history. Some of these politics were cultural, to be sure, but they were also related to relations between rulers and their constituents, relations between rulers themselves, and finally, the politics of land ownership. Papanikolaou summarizes that the Byzantine Empire was a theocracy in which Orthodox Christianity was the state-sponsored religion (Papanikolaou 2003, 77). Under the Ottomans, politics and faith became even more deeply intertwined. As such, the legacy with which contemporary Orthodox Christians must contend is how to make sense of the faith in democratic societies. In addition to its ideological legacy, the Byzantine Empire left an aesthetic mark on the Orthodox Church today in the garb of priests, iconography, the gestures by which believers venerate icons and other holy objects, and musical style. When Orthodox Christian believers today say they practice an ancient faith, this is why. Rituals and theology can be traced back directly to the earliest development of Christianity in the Roman Empire through the split between East and West.

The division between the two halves of the Roman Empire also left its mark on the Eastern Orthodox Church in particular in sometimes antagonistic attitudes toward Western culture (Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou 2013). The Pew Research Center found that among Orthodox Christian believers in Eastern and Central Europe, a majority look to Russia to counter the West (Pew Research Center 2017a, 35). Some Western converts to Orthodox Christianity either feel conflict about negotiating their culture of origin with the faith or feel some antagonism toward Western culture.

Orthodox Christianity & Geography

The spread of Orthodox Christianity in the world is part of the Byzantine Empire's lasting mark on history. The legacy of Cyril and Methodius can be observed in Russia, for example, where 71% of the population identify as Orthodox Christians. They are the largest number of Orthodox believers in a single country, totaling 101 million people, according to the Pew Research Center's recent survey on religion in Eastern Europe (Pew Research Center 2017a, 5). The largest concentration of believers in a total population is in Moldova, where 95% of the population are Orthodox, a total of 3.5 million people (Pew Research Center 2017b, 23). The second largest number of believers in a

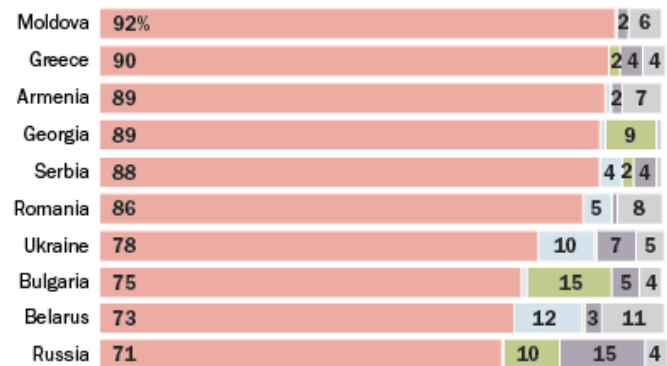
single country is in Ethiopia, where 43% of the population are Orthodox Christians, a total of 36 million people (Diamant 2017). Notably, Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia have a much higher rate of regular church attendance and participation in faith-based activities than their European counterparts; in Ethiopia 78% say they attend church regularly compared to a median of 10% in

Religious landscape of Central and Eastern Europe

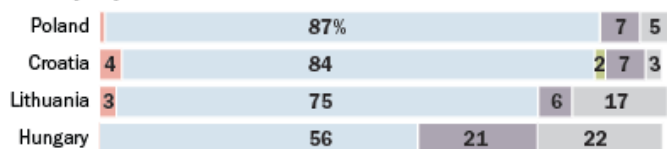
% who identify as ...

Orthodox Catholic Muslim Unaffiliated Other

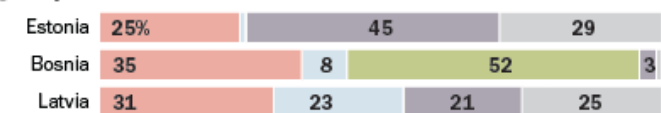
Orthodox majority



Catholic majority



Religiously mixed



Majority religiously unaffiliated



Note: 13% of respondents in Hungary identify as Presbyterian. In Estonia and Latvia, 20% and 19%, respectively, identify as Lutherans. And in Lithuania, 14% say they are "just a Christian" and do not specify a particular denomination. They are included in the "other" category. A negligible share of respondents in each country decline to answer the question. They are included in the "other" category. Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries.

See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Figure 3

Europe. I could not find statistics on the relationship between religious identification and national belonging for Ethiopia, but given that less than half of Ethiopians identify as Orthodox, it seems safe to say that the relationship between the two is significantly different than in Eastern Europe. Diaspora communities of over one million Orthodox Christians have developed in countries such as Egypt, Germany, India, Kazakhstan, and Spain. Fourteen countries in the world have Orthodox Christian majorities, with only one of those being outside Europe—Eritrea (Pew Research Center 2017b, 23). A recent study by the Pew Research Center offers comprehensive data about the state of Eastern Orthodox Christianity in Central and Eastern Europe (Pew Research Center 2017a, 5). One of their graphs, shown in Figure 3, illustrates the number of people polled who identify as Orthodox Christians in the region. It is worth noting also that the number of self-identifying Orthodox Christian believers in Eastern Europe has risen significantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Russia, the number of adherents was 60 million in 1910, which dropped to 39 million during a repressive period of the Communist government in 1970 (Pew Research Center 2017b, 21). Today, that number has nearly tripled. This same trend is observable in other Eastern European countries, though the specific numbers differ.

I will address some historical themes in Orthodox Church history, including empire, nationalism, anti-Western sentiment, and Communism. These themes are deeply intertwined, and so are the countries whose histories I will address. Though Romania's history is relevant to the majority of my Orthodox Christian-born consultants, I will also devote some attention to Russia, as it is an important force in the Orthodox Christian world. I will briefly touch on Serbia (formerly Yugoslavia) and Ukraine, as I have consultants affected by the legacy of Orthodox

Christianity in these countries as well. I will end with an overview of Orthodox Christianity in North America.

Empire

The most obvious carryover from the Byzantine Empire to contemporary Orthodox Christianity is the legacy of empire. In fact, there is a fourteenth century letter which survives from the Patriarch of Constantinople to the Emperor of Byzantium in which he writes, “My son, it is not possible for Christians to have a Church and not have an empire. Church and empire have great unity and community...[and cannot] be separated from one another” (Skedros 2016, 219). At the time that these words were written, the Byzantine Empire was in decline, and there was increasing awareness that its inhabitants could not be unified by the emperor. Rather, the patriarch himself became the rallying point for Byzantines after the Ottomans invaded; he had jurisdictional authority over Orthodox Christians. Historian James C. Skedros calls this new ideology “political Orthodox Christianity,” which he describes as Orthodox Christian religious practice “in the service of the larger emerging ethnopolitical identities of the Eastern Roman Empire” (Skedros 2016, 222). He writes that after the fall of the empire,

The *imperium* was the protector of Orthodox Christianity: a concept that signified not only a theological body of doctrine, but a cultural expression of Christianity that was neither Latin nor barbaric. It was neither Western nor Middle Eastern. It was not Roman Catholic, nor was it Islamic. It was Orthodox Christianity. (Skedros 2016, 228)

Instead of being a set of religious practices, Orthodox Christianity became a marker of identity, and to defend Orthodox Christianity was to defend this identity as well. The body of believers became an empire more than just a political territory.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. When the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottomans in the mid-15th century, Muscovite Russia saw itself as the last Orthodox Christian empire (Meyendorff 1996, 14). A Muscovite Grand Prince even married the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor, marking the passing of Byzantium's legacy. When the Golden Horde declined in the late 15th century and was no longer able to enforce control over their territories, Muscovy/Russia became an independent state with imperial aspirations of its own. These were feudal times, and Muscovy was technically the name of a single duchy, but was widely used to refer to territories of the Rus' until the 18th century when the term Russia became more common (Hosking 2012, 13-36).

Russian Orthodox practice became more modeled on the Byzantine imperial style (Meyendorff 1996, 14). After the fall of Constantinople, rulers started to be called "tsars" consistently, derived from "Caesar" (Uspenskij and Zhivov 2012, 7). In 1547 the term was officially applied to monarchs (for an extended discussion of historical views of the tsar's power in relation to God as the divine tsar, see Uspenskiy and Zhivov 2012). This deliberate word choice implied that Muscovy was the "third Rome." The first Rome was viewed as heretical, the second, Byzantium, had just fallen to Turks, and now the third Rome, Muscovy, was seen as the last bastion of true Christianity (Meyendorff 1996, 14). Like the Byzantine Empire, Muscovy was a majority-Orthodox Christian entity with a mutually influential relationship between the head of the Russian Orthodox Church and the tsar. However, Meyendorff argues that in the Muscovite Empire, there was not the same understanding of *symphonia* between the tsar and the patriarch that there was in Byzantium (Meyendorff 1996, 15).

At the turn of the 18th century in Russia, Tsar Peter I (also styled "the Great," 1682-1725) pushed Westernizing reforms on Russian society, including an attempt to bring the church under

state control by deposing the patriarch (Shevzov 2012, 23). Unlike medieval Byzantium, it was quite clear that the political goals of the tsar could overturn those of the Orthodox Church. Nonetheless, the Orthodox Church in Russia still maintained its vision of a Byzantine legacy by supporting monastic missionaries to Asia and Alaska in the late eighteenth century. The first lasting North American Orthodox Christian settlement was established on Kodiak Island in 1794.

Nation

The very idea of a nation is a fairly recent one, but it is an outgrowth of the idea of empire and its expansion. Regina Bendix has written that while European nationalism has roots in the attempt to cast off monarchies and embrace democracy, the idea of “national uniqueness” depends somewhat on homogeneity (Bendix 1997, 8). That is to say, romantic nationalism, or the idea that one’s own nation is superior to others, is reliant on the idea that the people of a nation are, in some sense, the same: religiously, ethnically, linguistically, or otherwise. Orthodox Christianity has been wielded as a weapon of national identity in some Eastern European contexts, starting with the origins of nation-states.

Romania

For many majority-Orthodox Christian countries, the origins of nationalism go back to gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century. Romania gained its independence in 1877. While Orthodox Christianity had been a vehicle for cultural preservation under Ottoman rule, its place in the new nation was undefined. Orthodox Church authorities were threatened by the success of the Catholic Church, for example, which had more financial support from the royal family (Scarfe 1988, 210). In order to gain social prominence, members

of the clergy were willing to ally with political leaders, and the State was interested in being able to control the Church.

Political scholar Lucian Leustean (2009, 10-23) argues that the Romanian Orthodox Church's collaboration with the government had a twofold origin: it was committed to the Byzantine concept of *symphonia*, harmony between Church and State, and it already had nationalist proclivities. The government and the Church shared some ideology as well. Sociologists Gavril Flora and Georgina Szilagyi (2005, 115) write, "Both regimes stressed 'ancient Romanian rights' and the assertion of Romanian national supremacy within the state. The cherished ideal remained that of an essential ethno-cultural homogeneity." This excluded both religious and ethnic minorities from the discourse on national identity.

As World War I (1914-1918) came and went, the Orthodox Christian and Catholic clergy continued to vie for dominance over who would symbolize national identity. The Orthodox Christian clergy saw a useful vehicle for its objectives in a right-wing movement founded by Corneliu Codreanu called "The Legion of the Archangel Michael," also known as the Iron Guard. As Scarfe writes:

The Legion was poised to save Romania from foreign ideologies and the ultimate enemies, the Jews...The Jews were joined in their persecution by Russian Bolshevik sympathizers, some of whom were simply socially conscious peasants. (Scarfe 1988, 216)

Alliance with this populist movement put the Orthodox Church in a tricky position. The movement was poised to use religious symbolism to dictate Romanian national identity, and the Church desperately wanted to be involved. On the other hand, some clergy were not in agreement with the anti-Semitism message, but if they spoke out, they were deemed anti-Romanian or, at worst, against God. In fact, one of Romania's most famous theologians,

Dumitru Stăniloae, early in his career, advocated for the philosophy that it was necessary to be Orthodox Christian to be truly Romanian (Leustean 2009, 50; Scarfe 1988, 217). The Orthodox Church as a whole used its relationships with far right groups as a play for dominance in Romania, but this strategy would be ultimately undermined by the outbreak of World War II.

Ukraine

In Ukraine, connections between the Orthodox Church and nationalism are tied to Russia's attempts to control it. In the 16th century, the land that is contemporary Ukraine was divided between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the West and Russia to the East. Occupation by these groups shaped regional culture in Ukraine. Western Ukrainians were more likely to be either Roman or Greek Catholic, with Polish influences in their language (Applebaum 2017, 5). Eastern Ukrainians were more likely to be Orthodox Christian under the Moscow Patriarchate and have Russian influences in their language. Since borders shifted so frequently, members of both faiths lived on either side of the divide.

In the late nineteenth century leading up to World War I, the spread of Orthodox Christianity among Ukrainians was encouraged by the Russian government as a means of spreading its own national culture. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Metropolitan of Moscow was established as the “supreme” head of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, and the following year, the Soviet government abolished its Synod of bishops (Magosci 2010, 521). In the wake of these events, some Ukrainians wanted to request more autonomy from the Russian head of the church, while others wanted to completely break (i.e. become “autocephalous” or self-governing) from the Moscow Patriarchate. A church congress in Kiev was attempted to discuss these matters, but the 1918 Bolshevik invasion in eastern Ukraine halted proceedings.

For three years, there was a struggle to create a Ukrainian Orthodox Church independent from Russia, and in 1920, these efforts succeeded. This church became known as the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (hereafter UAOC) (Bociurkiw 1988, 311). In the 1920's, the UAOC was a deeply important expression of Ukrainian identity, affirming Ukraine as separate from Russia. Perhaps most importantly, it affirmed a separate path toward national autonomy (Bociurkiw 1988, 318). As it happened, the hard-won independence of the UAOC was not to last. At Stalin's command, it was disbanded in 1929.

When the Nazis invaded in 1941, there was a revival of the UAOC, but the Germans intended to play them against the other Orthodox Christian bodies with ties to Russia (Wasyliw 2010, 156). When the Nazis were defeated in 1945, the Soviets once again rolled back the freedoms gained by religious groups. The Russian Orthodox Church then gained supremacy and elected a new Patriarch of Moscow (Wasyliw 2010, 157). In 1946, the abolition of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church forced people to either convert to Orthodox Christianity or at least pretend to do so (Scarfe 219). Many of these churches went underground and continued practicing their liturgies with the name "Russian Orthodox" on the door. In Western Ukraine, more localized folk traditions persisted, such as Ukrainian pronunciations of the Old Church Slavonic liturgy. In Central and Eastern Ukraine, the UAOC was once again abolished, and Orthodox Christian parishioners were subject to Russification of their liturgies. The Moscow Patriarchate claimed that there was only one Russian Orthodox Church encompassing all Slavic peoples (Ukrainians, Russians, and Belorussians). In spite of all this religious tension, the official Soviet government was still anti-religious in its policies, but it was willing to use the Moscow Patriarchate to eradicate Ukrainian nationalism.

Anti-Westernism

Anti-Western sentiments in Eastern European history are related to nationalism in that they tend to define some nations against others. This dovetails rather neatly with the Orthodox Church defining itself in opposition to Western Christianity, especially after its Ottoman captivity. In general, anti-Western trends in the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe can be traced back to Russia. In 1812, Napoleon invaded Russia and lost, due to tactical retreats made by the Russian army (Hosking 2012, 50-1). This victory highlighted differences in attitudes toward “the West” in Russia. The upper classes embraced Western philosophies, religious ideas, and socialism, hoping Russia would follow other European countries’ examples. “Slavophiles,” on the other hand, felt that Russia’s distinctiveness from Western Europe was its strength, and that Western ideals should be rejected as inferior (Hosking 2012, 53). Russian Orthodox Christianity was considered one of these distinct markers of national character. Count Uvarov, the education minister under Tsar Nicholas I coined a catchphrase in the early 19th century: “Orthodox Christianity, Autocracy, Nationality” (Hosking 2012, 54). This summarized the attitude that Russian greatness was due to the Orthodox Church, the tsar, and patriotic sentiments. Embracing this ideology, Tsar Nicholas I rejected ending serfdom and calls for a constitution.

The Slavophiles considered Orthodox Christianity to be one of the greatest contributions Russia could make to the world (Hosking 2012, 55). According to them, Russia’s preservation of the Byzantine legacy after the fall of Constantinople contrasted sharply with the Enlightenment values of Protestants and the excesses of the Papacy. However, Russia did share one idea with Western Europe at this time: that the essence of a nation’s people was embodied by peasant communities and customs (for a fuller discussion of this topic, see Bendix 1997 and Wilson

2006). Some intellectuals viewed Orthodox Christian laity as ignorant peasants immersed in folk practices, while others saw a romantic purity in their beliefs (Shevzov 2012, 27). The ideal of *sobornost*, frequently translated as “spiritual community,” but also implying the cooperation of village life was debated in its application to church life (Shevzov 2012, 27). Dostoyevsky, for example, wrote longingly of *sobornost* and specifically contrasted it with elitist Russian aristocracy (Hosking 2012, 78). He believed that the simple faith of peasants could save Russia and all humanity. Slavophiles saw *sobornost* as a uniquely Russian alternative to Western individualism, rationalism, and a *laissez-faire* economy. Slavophilia was not confined to Russia, though Russia used the movement to eradicate cultural opposition in its neighbors.

Communism

In Russia, the anger of the working class boiled over in 1917. A party had formed in the late nineteenth century known as the Bolsheviks, who believed a parliamentary system of government was corrupt and should be deposed (Hosking 2012, 84). Led by Vladimir Lenin, the first revolution took place in Petrograd, in which Tsar Nicholas II and his family were executed. Though there was a formal public election after the murder of the royal family, democracy did not win the day. Civil war ensued between the “Reds” (Bolsheviks) and the “Whites” (anti-Bolsheviks), and the Whites ultimately lost due to disunity in a vision for Russia (Hosking 2012, 96). They established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or USSR, in 1922. Of the four countries I discuss here, only Russia and Ukraine were part of the USSR. Nonetheless, Romania and Yugoslavia were parts of the larger Communist bloc.

The experience of the Orthodox Church under Communist regimes in these countries was not uniform. There were some periods of tolerance of the church, though the officially atheist government frequently used it for its own political ends. In some countries, Orthodox priests

were part of a secret police reporting to the government. In others, priests were deemed suspicious and sent to labor camps as a rule. In all cases, the Orthodox Church today in these countries still bears scars from this time. Many of my consultants who grew up during this period bear these scars as well.

Romania

In Romania, as the Communist Party became the official ruling party, and the Orthodox Church attempted to continue the Byzantine policy of *symphonia*, supporting government policy no matter the cost to both clergy and laypeople (Stan and Turcescu 2015, 82). A law was put in place in 1948 which required any positions in the Orthodox Church's hierarchy to be approved by the government, which would help the regime to use the church for its own ends. Leustean writes that one of the regime's goals was to make the country into an atheist society, viewing religion as a relic of the bourgeoisie (Leustean 2009, 92). In 1949, under Petru Groza's government (the first Communist leader of Romania), monasteries were closed, and "dissenting members of the Church were either arrested or pressured into retirement" (Stan and Turcescu 2015, 81). Publicly, the government made such gestures as allowing the canonization of local saints to give an outward impression of tolerance (Leustean 2009, 92-94). There was tension among clergy and laity, working to make sure that no one displeasing to the government would hold a clerical position.

Petru Groza established a secret police, called the *Securitate*, and most if not all clergy were involved with it to some extent. (Stan and Turcescu 2005, 673). Those who refused to cooperate were removed from their posts and usually sent to prison (Leustean 2009, 3). While exact statistics are unknown because records are not available to the public, most church

hierarchs benefitted from their collaboration with the regime, and being a member of the *Securitate* was a condition for promotion. To date, only one bishop has publicly released his own dossier, which he did in 1990, admitting to his involvement with the *Securitate* (Leustean 2010, 52). Priests and bishops spied on their congregations, gathering information during the sacrament of confession (Stan and Turcescu 2005, 666-674). Those deemed suspicious were then reported to the authorities. Any person who was an informer might also be a victim of information-gathering at the same time. It is also known that the *Securitate* spied on Romanian Orthodox believers in diaspora. The pattern of clerical involvement within the *Securitate* persisted for decades, and the organization itself outlived the last Communist dictator.

Throughout the Communist era in Romania, the *Securitate* imprisoned dissenters. Some testimonies claim that the experience of imprisonment significantly worsened under Nicolae Ceaușescu, who took over in 1965. Throughout the regime, those whom the *Securitate* sent to prison underwent horrific tortures. One significant public figure who was imprisoned under Ceaușescu was Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa. He was imprisoned twice, but he described his second imprisonment in 1978, under Ceaușescu, as much worse (Naughton, 1989). He endured both physical and psychological tortures, including being put in a cell with two convicted murderers who had been granted leniency if they would kill him. The Reagan administration lobbied for Father Calciu's release, which they secured in 1983.

Russia

While the patriarchy had been abolished, reinstated, and then abandoned again, during World War II, Stalin once again reestablished an Orthodox Christian patriarchate as an effort to kindle national patriotism (Kivelson 2003, 7). Stalin viewed the Orthodox Church as a useful tool for

foreign policy (Shevzov 2012, 29). Hosking writes that the Orthodox Church was an important way that average Russians thought about their national identity, in addition to Russian language and literature, folklore, art and music (Hosking 2012, 77). This differed from the sort of national identity understood and promoted in politics. The government saw Russian identity, ironically, as derived from its imperial heritage rather than in local, ethnic expressions of “Russianness.” Soviets imagined Russians as the inhabitants of a great state. Hosking writes:

Stalin had little interest in the ethnic customs of the Russian people, which were being destroyed even as the new Russification took hold. In particular, the Russian village commune and the Orthodox Church were being deliberately undermined as an objective of Communist policy. (Hosking 2012, 110)

After the war, the Orthodox Church survived in three forms—as an institution officially aligned with the Soviet state, as an established church abroad, and as an underground movement which was persecuted sporadically and brutally by the government. Even those priests who had cooperated with the government were not spared (Shevzov 2012, 28). Between 1917-1939 over 80,000 clergy and monastics were executed or killed in labor camps.

Stalin died in 1953, and his successors struggled mightily to figure out how to unify Russia and the rest of the Soviet Union. Hosking writes that some identified with an imperial vision of Russia while others found identity in local or folk traditions (Hosking 2012, 123). Some saw Stalin in a positive light as a strong leader while others saw him as the villainous persecutor of the Russian Orthodox Church. Nikita Khrushchev (1958-1964), who succeeded Stalin, led a passionately anti-religious campaign, not through violence, but through propaganda and financial restraints on churches (Shevzov 2012, 29). The existence of the Orthodox Church in Russia depended largely on those who were political dissidents, operating underground (Shevzov 2012, 30). Its survival also depended upon Orthodox churches in other parts of the

Soviet Union, such as Ukraine, where Khrushchev's policies were enforced most stringently in the Russian Federation.

Russians who left the Soviet Union established churches in many other parts of the world (mostly in the 1920's). Cultural and theological disagreements prevented these émigrés from being a unified coalition. For the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), for example, Russia was still seen as a motherland in captivity, and they endeavored to preserve deeply conservative views of the faith (Shevzov 2012, 30). Others, such as the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), creatively adapted to settlement in North America and chose to answer to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, though he did not recognize them (and still does not), rather than the Patriarch of Moscow (Shevzov 2012, 31). Still others settled in Western Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America and faced their own unique challenges. Shevzov argues that two important legacies of these émigrés were making Orthodox Christianity a global religion and helping to sustain the faith in the Soviet Union through academic literature, radio programs, iconography, and other resources (Shevzov 2012, 31).

Serbia

At the beginning of World War II, Yugoslavia was invaded by the Nazis. Under their occupation, the Church suffered heavy losses. As with the Ottomans, monasteries and churches were destroyed, but this time clergy and laypeople alike were sent to concentration camps (Ivanovic 2008, 224). Serbia's patriarch, Gavriilo Dožić was sent to Dachau. It is estimated that four Orthodox Christian bishops, 220 priests, and close to a million Orthodox Christian believers died in concentration camps (Cvetković 2012, 137). In Montenegro, over 120 priests and monks were killed, as well as the Metropolitan. A quarter of a million Serbs were forced to convert to

Roman Catholicism at this time. Buchenau describes the period from 1945-50 as one of destruction; any opposition to Communist ideology was being eradicated (Buchenau 2010, 61).

The primary leader of resistance against the Nazis was Josip Broz Tito, who succeeded in leading a Partisan faction to push them out. In 1944 he became Prime Minister and shortly thereafter developed a constitution declaring freedom of religion. The Serbian Orthodox Church was strictly controlled by the government. The church had its landholdings confiscated, religious communities were deprived of any state funding, and since so many of its clergy had been killed in the first and second World Wars, its internal structure was greatly weakened (Buchenau 2010, 62). Religion was banned from schools and public life in general (Ivanovic 2008, 224). Nonetheless, as a symbol of this religious tolerance, in 1946, Patriarch Gavrilo Dožić was invited to return to Yugoslavia, having survived Dachau (Ivanovic 2008, 63). He was viewed favorably as a native son from peasant origins. He was open to compromise with the government, but when Tito cut ties with Stalin in 1948 (separating from the Soviet bloc), the separation from the Moscow Patriarchate was painful for him and many other Serbs (Ivanovic 2008, 64). There was a pan-Orthodox Christian meeting in Moscow the same year, during which Gavrilo denied that any USSR Orthodox Churches were being used for political purposes.

The patriarch who succeeded him was a government puppet (Buchenau 2010, 64). With his compliance, the church was tolerated and used as a tool to enact government policies. In 1958, he was succeeded by German Đorić, and it was largely due to his diplomacy during his thirty-year reign that the Serbian Church survived Communism. During Patriarch German's tenure, threats to Serbian unity were a concern of both the Orthodox Church and the secret police force, with whom the church allied when it suited them (Buchenau 2010, 65).

Tito died in 1980, and this marked the decay of Communist policies toward religion. The gap which had existed between the Communist party and the Serbian Orthodox Church began to close, but Communist politics still pervaded the church (Buchenau 2010, 67). Slobodan Milošević took over in 1987, and once again, the Serbian Orthodox Church became an instrument of nationalism. In particular, Milošević used the anti-Western sentiments which had pervaded Orthodox Christian literature before World War I. This made him popular with the Serbian Orthodox Church at first, but he gradually alienated himself from them since he was not a particularly assiduous believer.

Ukraine

In 1930, churches were closed and priests arrested as part of the collectivization plan (Applebaum 2017, 133). Bolsheviks were eager to destroy churches, as they were seen as a symbol of the past. After these brutal attacks, some priests encouraged their parishioners to resist Soviet collectivization measures because they were convinced that the Soviet Union was the Antichrist (Applebaum 2017, 143-4). Resistance was therefore motivated by a fear of eternal damnation.

The Orthodox Church was an important symbol of Ukrainian identity, and Stalin sought to eliminate any and all resistance. Methods of collectivization were frequently violent (Yekelchik 2007, 109). Stalin next instigated a man-made famine (known as *Holodomor*) to force Ukraine and other republics like Kazakhstan to rely on Russian rations and suppress any nationalist movements (Applebaum 2017, 66). A total of 6 million people were killed by this famine in Soviet republics, with more than half this number in Ukraine alone (Yekelchik 2007, 112; Lovell 2009, 65). Stalin justified his actions by claiming that peasant resistance was a sign of

Ukrainian nationalism, and if left unchecked, would lead to revolution. Whether or not this was true, any fight left in the peasant class was destroyed by the famine.

From 1934-1938, Stalin waged terror on his own constituents, and millions were sent to the Gulag, or labor camps (Yekelchuk 2007, 114). The purge was certainly political in its origins, but it grew to include the arrest of thousands of party leaders, intellectuals, and regular citizens. Clergy were one of the particularly targeted groups, labeled as “enemies of the people” (Yekelchuk 2007, 115). Men were more likely to be targeted than women, and confessions of plotting against the government, whether true or false, were extracted by torture.

Stalin was succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev waged war on all religious institutions in the late 50’s and 60’s, including Baptists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jews, and Pentecostals (Yekelchuk 2007, 168). Where the Russian Orthodox Church had previously been used as a tool to stamp out Ukrainian nationalism (claiming that all Slavic peoples—Ukrainians, Russians, and Belorussians—were part of one church), under his leadership, close to 4,000 parishes were deregistered. They would not be registered again until the 1980’s. The KGB relentlessly harassed clergy and imprisoned them. The government was most threatened by Greek Catholics in the region, and they allowed a more expressive Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the area (Wasyliw 2010, 159). Due to lobbying from Ukrainians abroad, Pope John XXIII personally intervened with the Soviet government in 1963 to arrange for the release of the head of the Greek Catholic Church, who had been imprisoned (Yekelchuk 2007, 167).

Leadership came and went in the Soviet Union, but more relaxed measures toward religious traditions did not come into place until Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika*, or restructuring, in 1986. 1988 marked the celebration of 1,000 years of Christianity in Eastern Europe, and Gorbachev allowed the publication of religious materials in Ukrainian and

conferences by the Moscow Patriarchate. The following year, both the Greek Catholic Church and the UAOC asserted themselves for recognition with the government (Wasyliw 2010, 163). There was intense rivalry between the two groups, and the Greek Catholic Church in particular was suspicious that the UAOC was a ploy by the KGB to weaken their nationalist cause.

The Orthodox Church Today, Post-Communism

As Communist governments collapsed in the late 80's, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many turned to the Orthodox Church as a source of national leadership and identity in the chaos, since there was no longer a government institution to fill those needs. Nonetheless, the church had been deeply affected by its seventy years of state oppression.

Russia

In Russia, religious pluralism was initially threatening to Orthodox Church leadership, and missionaries or religious influence from outside the country was forbidden in the 1990's (Agadjanian and Rousselet 2005, 32). Attempts were made to curtail the religious freedoms of non-Orthodox Christians within Russia itself. Western churches especially were seen as having inroads to democracy because of their connections with societies outside of Russia (Agadjanian and Rousselet 2005, 31). Their presence threatened the Russian Orthodox Church's monopoly on the narrative of national identity.

Agadjanian and Rousselet have written that the Russian Orthodox Church has had difficulty grappling with the concept of freedom itself since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Agadjanian and Rousselet 2005, 29). They argue that rather than confronting an outside, liberal world, the Orthodox Church has chosen to selectively negotiate with it (Agadjanian and Rousselet 2005, 48). In the 2000's, Metropolitan Kirill, the current Patriarch of Moscow, sought

to articulate “eternal values” of Russian Orthodox identity (Shevzov 2012, 32). This document suggests an effort at negotiation with secular society, but semantic problems remain. Definitions of concepts like liberalism, globality, and even the human person engaged in these philosophies pose a problem between Orthodox Christian and secular modes of thinking. For example, in 2007, ten academics from the Russian Academy of Sciences wrote a letter to Vladimir Putin protesting the Orthodox Church’s involvement in all aspects of social life, especially the military and the education system. Courses were offered (and still are) in all public schools on “Orthodox culture” (Shevzov 2012, 33). The Moscow Patriarchate responded to the complaints that “the modern democratic standards which western societies have set do not necessarily correlate with essential Orthodox values” (Shevzov 2012, 33). In the Pew Research Center’s 2017 poll of Eastern Europe, a majority of Orthodox Christians there view the Patriarch of Moscow as a higher authority than the Ecumenical Patriarch, especially in Russia, where 69% of those polled felt this way. In countries with self-governing national churches, like Serbia, the patriarch of that country is frequently viewed as a higher authority than the Patriarch of Moscow. While tensions are certainly present in Russian society today between secular institutions and the Orthodox Church, the latter is without question a deeply influential player in civic life. It remains to be seen how it will adapt or negotiate with the global, post-modern world in the future.

Romania

In Romania, the Orthodox Church has never publicly admitted to being complicit with the Communist regime, though the Synod made “a partial apology” (Stan and Turcescu 2000, 1471). After the fall of Ceaușescu, Romania began the process of reshaping its identity, as did other Eastern European countries after the fall of Communism. The Orthodox Church in the Balkans and former Soviet Union could not smoothly integrate Church and State under the

regime (Stan and Turcescu 2006, 1120). The Orthodox Church in Romania has maintained close ties with the state. One example of this involves a fifteen-year dispute over building a cathedral in Bucharest, about which some Romanians felt it was an attempt to rewrite the church's role in history. Others felt that it symbolized "the central place Orthodox Christianity occupies in the heart and mind of the nation" (Stan and Turcescu 2006, 1120). As a result, some former protesters of the Communist regime actually advocated to maintain an old Communist monument rather than build an Orthodox Christian cathedral in its place.

As Flora and Szilagyi write, the Romanian Orthodox Church has returned to its established "ethno-national discourse of legitimacy" from before the Communist period (Flora and Szilagyi 2005, 111). This discourse has continued to create problems, of course, for those who are Romanian-born and Romanian-speaking but do not identify as Orthodox Christians (Stan and Turcescu 2006; Verdery 1993). As Stan and Turcescu write, the Orthodox Church and the Romanian state have an uneasy relationship; the former has tried and failed to gain parliamentary seats for church leaders (Stan and Turcescu 2000, 1476-7). Even so, scholar of public policy and religion, Liviu Andreescu, writes that political functions in Romania, such as the swearing-in of officials and public buildings, occur with the blessing of Orthodox Church hierarchs (Andreescu 2007, 455). There is still much public disagreement about how much separation should occur between church and state in Romania today. The Pew Research Center found that 46% of Romanians believe the government should support the spread of religion, where 51% support separation between the two; the missing 3% is not explained (Pew Research Center 2017a, 97).

Today, Romania has nearly 20 million believers (86% of the population), twice as many as in 1910 (Pew Research Center 2017b, 21). Stan and Turcescu write that despite how many

believers identify as Orthodox, there is still distrust of the “morally compromised” clergy, as the Orthodox Church has never issued a public apology for its involvement with the *Securitate* and many clergy who were involved have maintained their positions (Stan and Turcescu 2000, 1471). At the same time, Stan and Turcescu write that as every Romanian was to some extent “morally compromised” during the Communist regime, many are willing to overlook the Church’s shortcomings. Nevertheless, when St. Parascheva, the parish I studied, had an option to be headed by the Romanian Patriarchate or to be headed by an American metropolitan, there was a deliberate choice to come under the latter’s leadership due to ongoing distrust of the hierarchy in Romania.

Serbia

As in Romania, there is division in the way Serbian Orthodox history is remembered. Some see the Serbian Orthodox Church as a victim of the Communist regime (Buchenau 2010, 71). Others blame “red priests” such as Patriarch German for collaborating with them. While the former Yugoslavia is sometimes remembered as the most liberal of Communist governments in the Communist period, some of that freedom was surface-level. On the one hand, Yugoslavians were free to travel and associate with international organizations such as the World Council of Churches (Buchenau 2010, 71). On the other hand, Communism was viewed by many Serbs as a threat to its national unity rather than as an ideological enemy (Buchenau 2010, 74). The Serbian Orthodox Church worked closely with the Communist regime for many years, even inflating the numbers of Serbian losses in World War II to emphasize the threat to their national identity. Other nations were viewed as threatening genocide against the Serbian people (Buchenau 2010, 61). The aftermath of these historical events has led to deep nationalist sentiments in the Serbian Orthodox Church today.

In spite of spending most of the 1990's at war with Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, the past two decades have yielded growth for the Serbian Orthodox Church. More churches have been built in Serbia in the twenty years than in the whole previous century. In Montenegro alone, 200 churches have been erected. Similarly, seminaries were opened or re-opened in the 1990's, beginning a renaissance of theological learning (Cvetković 2012, 138). The Serbian Church today is entrenched in national politics. For example, the Serbian Orthodox Church recently moved to change its name to incorporate a historically sacred site in Kosovo, in the city of Peć. According to Reuters, one condition for Serbia to join the European Union included improving its relationship with Kosovo (Vasovic 2018). While the government of Serbia would like to mend those ties, the Orthodox Church is in opposition, and it holds considerable influence over citizens at home and in neighboring countries, including Kosovo.

Duhaček writes that not unlike the Russian Church, many view democracy, for example, to be a Western value incompatible with Orthodox Christian beliefs (Duhaček 2006, 923). Devout believers, while not a majority in Serbia, are still a significant voting faction (Duhaček 2006, 923-4). There is irony, of course, in voting against democracy. Duhaček writes that for these Serbs, democracy is not seen as ideal because it “has no certainties to offer and is often full of sacrifices” which are too demanding (Duhaček 2006, 924). While Communism has long since ended in Serbia, its legacy is still present in the Orthodox Church and the country as a whole. How the Serbian Orthodox Church will adapt or respond to global forces in the future remains to be seen.

Ukraine

In Ukraine, from the early 1990's until today, religiosity is a strong indicator of regional identity, and it was often used as a marker of dissatisfaction with Russia (Gee 1995, 385-6). Schisms in the Orthodox Church developed as a result of profound distrust from laypeople. The church lost credibility, in part, due to "its links with the Communist Party, its moral failings, and its present ties with the Russian Orthodox Church" (Gee 1995, 387). Its silence about social welfare during the Soviet period has been a continued source of resentment. Today, there are three branches of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine (Wasyliw 2010, 165). From smallest to largest, they are the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievan Patriarchate, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2015, 78% of adults in Ukraine identified as Orthodox (Pew Research Center 2017a).

Religious groups are still deeply tied to political factions in Ukraine as well. International studies scholar Joshua P. Mulford has written that "The impact of religious groups on the Ukrainian conflict is best featured in the Russian Orthodox Church's rationalizing the invasion of Crimea as Russia's divine right" (Mulford 2016, 89). Citizens take sides through their religious affiliations, by whether or not they support those who have been hurt by the conflict, or support nationalist narratives with religious undertones (Mulford 2016, 90). Similarly, Ukrainians in the diaspora give differing levels of support to causes in the nation. Mulford traces tensions between the two Orthodox Churches of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Kievan Patriarchate back to 2009, when Metropolitan Kirill (the head of the Russian Orthodox Church) supported Vladimir Putin's views on empire (Mulford 2016, 96). He writes that Met. Kirill sought help from international organizations for Russian Orthodox priests in Eastern Ukraine, but then promoted violence against religious leaders of other faiths (including non-Russian

Orthodox priests) (Mulford 2016, 96-7). A Russian Orthodox Army, consisting of 4,000 soldiers, operates in Eastern Ukraine as a terrorist group. In 2014, four leaders of the Pentecostal Church were kidnapped and murdered by these Russian separatists (Mulford 2016, 97). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievian Patriarchate seceded from the Moscow Patriarchate over this issue. The leaders of the former also have a nationalistic vision and support pro-Ukraine militias, but the conflict has created deep social rifts. Indeed, the Orthodox Church is a symbol for both Russians and Ukrainians, but their visions for Ukraine as a nation differ starkly (Mulford 2016, 98).

Orthodox Christianity in North America

After briefly examining these historical periods and ideological patterns in the history of the Orthodox Church in Europe, one can grasp the contrast of the North American situation. The earliest successful settlement of Orthodox Christians in North America included Russian fur traders in Alaska, in the mid-18th century (Ware 1997, 173). Professor of canon law and church history at St. Vladimir's Seminary, John H. Erickson (1999, 31-2) writes about the attempted Greek colony of New Smyrna in Florida in 1768, though they had no priest. In two years, hunger, disease, and harsh working conditions killed over half of the settlers. Survivors moved to St. Augustine. The first liturgy was celebrated by a Russian bishop in 1741 (Erickson 1999, 33). Over the next century, Russian missionaries came to Alaska and the mainland U.S., including St. Herman of Alaska, St. Innocent of Alaska, St. Juvenaly, St. John of San Francisco and Shanghai, and others (Erickson 1999, 35-51; Slagle 2009; Stokoe and Kishkovsky 1995). Of the first Orthodox-born believers in North America, two native Alaskans are venerated as saints today: St. Peter the Aleut and St. Jacob Netsvetov, who was also the first native Alaskan to be tonsured a priest (Slagle 2009, 177-9; Stokoe and Kishkovsky 1995, 9).

In the second half of the 19th century, as Eastern European immigrants settled and formed communities, they would correspond with clergy from their countries of origin and request a priest to come so a parish could be established (Ware 1997, 174). This was the beginning of cultural division in the Orthodox Church in North America. These Orthodox Christian immigrants increased in number following the Russian Revolution at the turn of the twentieth century. In Canada, the history of an Orthodox Christian presence is largely due to the settlement of Ukrainian immigrants (Ware 1997, 183). Historian Vadim Kukushkin writes that the first Orthodox Christian liturgy celebrated in Canada was in a Ukrainian farm settlement in Alberta in 1897 (Kukushkin 2007, 140). Not all Ukrainian immigrants in Canada were Orthodox Christians, however; many Ukrainians from Western regions in particular were Greek Catholic. At the turn of the century, the Russian Orthodox Church saw itself as a vehicle for spreading patriotism and political ideology, and a vigorous attempt was made to convert Eastern-rite Catholics on the Prairies, creating community rifts (Kukushkin 2007, 140). In addition to these complex dynamics, many Eastern European immigrants from Belarus or Ukraine came to the Prairies as itinerant laborers without families, and as such were not necessarily planning to settle and join church communities. Because of these factors, it is difficult to say how many émigrés who might have identified as Orthodox Christian were actually practicing; records of local societies and church registers suggest that only a fraction did (Kukushkin 2007, 144). Nonetheless, in Canada as in the United States, it was these émigrés who built the first Orthodox Christian parishes in North America, through their money and the work of their hands.

The first known convert to Eastern Orthodox Christianity in North America was a Dutchman named Nicholas Bjerring in 1870 (Erickson 1999, 55; Herbel 2014, 1-3). Ironically, Bjerring had previously converted to Roman Catholicism. He became disillusioned and

embraced Orthodox Christianity, in which he was ordained a priest and served a small parish in New York. Bjerring later became Presbyterian when the Russian Orthodox Church withdrew funds for his small parish to save money. Shortly before his death in 1900, Bjerring returned to Catholicism, writing that he believed this church was best-suited to address current social concerns (Herbel 2014, 2).

Two other converts affected the legacy of Orthodox Christianity in North America—Father Alexis Toth (1853-1909) and Father Raphael Morgan (c. 1869-1916). Toth was an ordained priest in the Carpatho-Rusyn Catholic Church who emigrated from Slovakia to the United States. He converted to Orthodox Christianity in 1892 after a falling-out with an Irish bishop and then evangelized widely, particularly among Eastern Catholic churches (Herbel 2014, 25-60). Morgan, a Jamaican immigrant to the United States and an Episcopalian minister, converted to Orthodox Christianity in 1907 believing that its incarnational theology offered a solution to racism. When he first became interested in Orthodox Christianity, he traveled to Russia, where he saw former black slaves freed and able to gain social mobility (Herbel 2014, 68). He was ordained to the Orthodox Christian priesthood in 1907, and upon returning to the United States, directed his evangelical efforts primarily to African Americans. One of his greatest contributions to North American Orthodox Christianity was to inspire the founding of the independent African Orthodox Church in 1921, which later came under the Greek Orthodox Church (Herbel 2014, 82-3).

Many of the most prolific Orthodox Christian authors in the U.S. today are converts themselves. These early converts to Orthodox Christianity paved the way for later figures, shaping North American Orthodox Christianity. Father Moses Berry, for example, was instrumental in founding the Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black, connecting the legacies of

American slavery, African American Christianity, and the ancient Christians of Africa (Altschul, 1997; Herbel 2014, 85-102). Father Peter Gillquist was part of the founding of the Evangelical Orthodox Church, and then later encouraged many churches of this denomination to become canonically Orthodox Christian (Gillquist 1992; Herbel 2014, 103-145). Frederica Mathewes-Green is a popular Orthodox Christian writer and journalist whose work is primarily dedicated to making Orthodox Christianity accessible for a Western audience (Mathewes-Green 2015 and 2006). Similarly, Frank Schaeffer, son of the famous evangelical pastor Francis Schaeffer, had a much-publicized conversion to Orthodox Christianity in 1990 and has written extensively about his experiences (Schaeffer 2008 and 1994).

In Canada, the most prolific Orthodox Christian author is not a convert, and he is a controversial figure. Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, a hesychastic theologian (a mystical prayer tradition in Orthodox Christianity), is a proponent of what he calls “theo-anthropology” and writes from his experiences as a monk (Puhalo, Gabriel, and Anstall 2017; Puhalo 2016; Sopko 2015). The foreword of a recent book about Archbp. Lazar is written by Brad Jersak, another author well-known in Orthodox Christian circles. He collaborates frequently with non-Orthodox Christian writers focusing on commonalities between traditions over denominational labels (see Jersak 2015 and 2009).

All of the Orthodox Christian converts I interviewed would be familiar with at least a few of the names listed above, and indeed, many of them read works by these authors in the process of their conversion. I found that many of the converts I interviewed turned to the accounts of other Orthodox Christian converts both to make sense of their own experiences and to find examples of how to live an Orthodox Christian life in a contemporary North American context. Sociologist Amy Slagle writes about this phenomenon in her study of American converts to

Orthodox Christianity when she discusses the narrative structure of Orthodox Christian testimonials mirroring those of some Protestant ones (Slagle 2011, 38-48). Often, there is an emphasis on an emergent journey rather than a single event. In turn, published testimonials provide a blueprint for some Orthodox Christian conversion narratives. These publications are the building blocks for a North American Orthodox Christian tradition.

The parishes in my study all belong to the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). These parishes were first administered by the Patriarch of Moscow, but following the Russian Revolution in 1917, they were granted temporary self-governance by the Patriarch of Moscow, should they lose connection during the crisis at home (Ware 1997, 176). Ware writes that the end result of this was “*de facto* an autonomous group” of American bishops (Ware 1997, 178). In 1970, the Patriarch of Russia formally granted autocephaly, or self-governance, to the OCA, yet not everyone recognizes this status. As Ware writes, the Ecumenical Patriarchate does not recognize the OCA since, in its view, it is the only entity able to grant autocephaly to an Orthodox Christian jurisdiction (Ware 1997, 178). The OCA shares full communion with most other Orthodox Churches nonetheless. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievian Patriarchate, for example, does not recognize the OCA.

Today, the OCA (which has churches in Canada, South America, and Australia) is a jurisdiction including 1.8 million members in the United States and half that many in Canada (Pew Research Center 2017b). In both Canada and the U.S., the greatest concentrations of Orthodox Christian believers tend to be near where the first churches were established to serve new immigrant populations. In Canada, it is on the prairies, where Eastern Europeans first settled. In the U.S., it is in Alaska, where the first communities were founded by Russian missionaries. While churches exist in North America which are part of jurisdictions with

leadership abroad, the OCA includes some Albanian and Romanian parishes, such as the one I studied. It has 456 parishes, second only to the Greek Archdiocese at 525 (Krindatch 2002, 537). The OCA is headed by Metropolitan Tikhon, and he is part of a council of bishops, including the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, that oversees Orthodox churches worldwide. While there is not enough data to show whether parish numbers are growing, staying the same, or dwindling, it can safely be said that demographics are changing. As some prior research (Herbel 2013; Slagle 2010 and 2011) has shown, and as my own research will demonstrate, in the U.S., at least, parishes increasingly include converts rather than those who were born into the faith.

Public awareness of Orthodox Christianity in North America is harder to measure than the numbers of adherents. Based purely on personal experience and anecdotes gathered from my consultants, I speculate that people are aware of Orthodox Christianity when there is a visible church nearby, especially in larger cities. For example, Chicago, New York, Ottawa, Pittsburgh, Toronto, and Vancouver all have cathedrals, but they are also populous areas. In my own experience, I have found more Canadians than Americans to be aware of the Orthodox Church perhaps due to the presence of Russian- and Ukrainian-Canadians. In the U.S., especially outside metropolitan areas, awareness is lower. This most likely due to two factors—its perceived restriction to “ethnic” enclaves and the fact that it is almost never mentioned specifically on American religious censuses, such as the Gallup poll. The 2003 Gallup poll is an interesting exception, because the question asked was “What is your religious preference: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish or an Orthodox Christian religion such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?” The statistical responses, however, did not include Orthodox Christianity. 9.1% fell into an “Other Christian” category, outside of Catholic and Protestant traditions (Newport 2004). In my own experience, when I have referred to my family as Orthodox Christian in conversation

with non-Orthodox Christians, I have frequently gotten the questions—“Are you Catholic?” “Are you Jewish?” and “Like Greek?” Though this is purely anecdotal, I believe it is a useful example of the religious categories of which people are aware, especially in the media. Films such as *My Big Fat Greek Wedding 1 & 2* granted some visibility to the religion, but through a specific cultural context (Zwick 2002; Jones 2016).

Conclusion

Of the consultants I interviewed, those who come from majority-Orthodox Christian countries are most connected to the baggage of history. The interplay between politics and religion in many of these countries has given believers a complex relationship with faith. The preservation of tradition, for example, may have as much to do with cultural tenets as with spiritual ones, and often the two are impossible to separate. National identity is deeply connected to Orthodox Christian identity in the majority-Orthodox countries discussed above.

For those who have converted to Orthodox Christianity, perspectives on history and politics will be different. For both Americans and Canadians, their national identities will not be connected with their religious identities in the same way as those from majority-Orthodox Christian countries. The ancientness of this tradition or the aesthetic beauty of the service may draw new people to the faith. By contrast, those who have practiced all their lives may not be moved emotionally by mystery so much as by an association with family or memories from the past. Some lifelong believers may take the history or aesthetic aspects of their faith for granted. Byzantine politics, Ottoman control, and the aftermath of Communism are all part of the legacy of Orthodox Christianity today, though not all believers are equally aware of it. In ways seen and unseen, historical forces are interwoven with each believer’s experience. These same forces

continue to emerge in new ways as they shape the future of Orthodox Christianity in North America.

Any study of religion is colored by its history. In the case of Orthodox Christianity, it is particularly important, in part, because traditions in the Church are so self-referential. When the Nicene Creed is recited every liturgy, it is useful to know why the Orthodox Christian version differs from its Catholic counterpart. It is useful to know why North America has the unique situation of being divided into numerous ethnic jurisdictions. This is not to say that every Orthodox Christian knows the history of his or her faith. Even without telling the story directly, traces of the legacies of empires permeate its corners—from the Byzantine to the Ottoman to the Communist regimes under which so many Orthodox Christians lived. Vernacular traditions developed in many countries in response to these political realities. For example, Natalie Kononenko discusses one belief about the afterlife among some Ukrainian Orthodox which seems tied to uses of passports in the Soviet Union (Kononenko 2014). To attend an Orthodox Christian liturgy is to go back in time, but also to see how time has changed its participants. In the next chapter, we will meet some of these participants and discover how they came to be Orthodox Christians in the first place.

Chapter 3: Globalization, Identity, & Tradition

Contemporary Orthodox Christianity is a product of globalization. It has taken root in many cultural contexts and evolved into many local variations—some with deep historical roots and others more recent. Globalization affects the very concept of what is local, as well as access to others' ideas and experiences the world over. On one hand, globalization is a process which supposedly expands the number of choices available to individuals, such as available religious groups and resources. On the other hand, Orthodox Christian thinking frequently seeks obedience and discipline, limiting available choices. The Orthodox Church at large has tended to respond to globalization by turning inward, and yet its members are deeply affected by global processes. This creates a tension between the desire to preserve Orthodox Christian traditions, both cultural and theological, and to adjust to the needs of diverse congregations (through language integration, for example). Some convert to Orthodox Christianity as a response to globalization; there is a desire for a stable, unchanged faith tradition in a rapidly changing world. Finally, there is a complex relationship between globalization and Westernization; there is some anti-Western sentiment in the Orthodox Church, and this can create an identity crisis for some Western individuals who choose to be Orthodox Christians.

In this chapter, I offer a working definition of globalization and look at some extreme responses to it among converts to Orthodox Christianity. Some of the questions I ask include, how has the Orthodox Church responded as an institution to global processes? How do North American converts discern the way their cultural heritage impacts adaptation in their faith? How does being Orthodox affect their views of Western culture? I conclude by asking how global forces will shape the future of Orthodox Christianity in North America.

Defining Globalization

Globalization seems to be a ubiquitous term these days; it would seem that even the most remote corners of the world are in its grasp, and yet it is notoriously difficult to define. Many scholarly definitions emphasize movement of resources across locales. Here I will offer three definitions of globalization, as each one applies to my research differently. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai defines it from an aerial view, as “a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order...between economy, culture and politics” involving “flows” of people, media, technology, money, and ideas (Appadurai 1999, 221). In Appadurai’s definition, people, and their ideas migrate across space and time by means of technology. In the case of Orthodox Christians in North America, both are true. Missionaries came to Alaska in the 18th century, bringing both Russian immigrant communities and ideas about Orthodox Christianity. If not for them, the first churches never would have been built on the continent. Theological books might not have circulated. In the present moment, the Internet allows Orthodox Christian believers in diverse contexts to share information about one another’s experiences quickly and easily.

Similarly, sociologist Pablo Lapegna defines globalization in terms of power; he describes it as “the increased density of interactions across boundaries and between institutions that produce, reward and regulate those interactions” (Lapegna 2009, 4). Lapegna’s definition emphasizes the production and maintenance of power, which is also pertinent to my subject. With the spread of Orthodox Christianity to new people and new contexts, the nature and purpose of authority is contested. Likewise, post-colonial studies scholars Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define globalization as “the process whereby individual lives and local communities are affected by economic and cultural forces that operate world-wide” (Ashcroft, et al. 2000, 100). In Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s definition, individual lives are emphasized, affected and

connected by forces greater than themselves. Individual believers are connected to a greater community of Orthodox Christians worldwide, but these individuals are differently affected by the same economic and cultural forces. Each of these three definitions has a slightly different emphasis, informed by the field of the individual writing it. All of these definitions are pertinent to my subject. It should be noted that some use the terms “globalism” and “globalization” interchangeably, as will be seen in the next section. Global studies scholar Richard L. Harris, proposes that globalism is the network of connections that makes the process of globalization possible (Harris 2002, 5). Both terms concern the exchange of goods and information at increasing speeds.

The Fear of “Globalism”

The year after I conducted my fieldwork research, two different figures in the Orthodox Christian community in North America were included on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Hatewatch list. Both figures were converts, and both were involved with organizations (one was a founder) which oppose “globalism” and “the West.” The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) flagged an organization called the World Congress of Families, which had its second convention in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2016 (Southern Poverty Law Center 2018; Hatewatch Staff 2016). SPLC’s Hatewatch Staff wrote that the meeting offered:

...a panoply of anti-LGBT and anti-choice voices and fearmongering about a “secular agenda” (with roots in western nations) bent on destroying society. The gathering also seemed to serve as a vehicle for pro-Russian and thus stridently anti-western voices, with Russian participants perhaps trying to influence Georgia and further push Russia’s anti-LGBT and anti-European Union messaging. (Hatewatch Staff 2016)

Father Josiah Trenham, a convert and prolific author, was a featured speaker at this event. In addition to strident remarks about homosexuality, other speakers decried the loss of “traditional

values” and the erosion of “traditional family” structures. The World Congress of Families includes members of other faith traditions, including evangelical Protestants, Catholics, and Latter Day Saints. The Orthodox Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia II, was present at the gathering and gave his blessing (Hatewatch Staff 2016). Every country which has thus far hosted their meetings—Romania, Georgia, and Moldova—has been a majority-Orthodox country. The World Congress of Families had its third meeting in September of 2018 in Chisinau, Moldova (Hatewatch Staff 2018).

A second example from recent news is Matthew Heimbach, a convert to Orthodox Christianity who founded the Traditional Workers Party (TWP), a Neo-Nazi group. In addition to espousing racial homogeneity, they also espouse traditional gender roles for men and women, anti-immigrant rhetoric, and anti-gay rhetoric (Southern Poverty Law Center 2016). Heimbach was scheduled to speak at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August of 2017, before violence cut the event short. The TWP carried banners that said “Orthodoxy or Death.” According to ProPublica, another Orthodox Christian and TWP sympathizer, Vassilios



Figure 4

Meme depicting Matthew Heimbach assaulting a counter-protestor with an Orthodox cross at the University of Knoxville, Tennessee. Photo courtesy of Orthodoxy in Dialogue (The Editors 2018b).

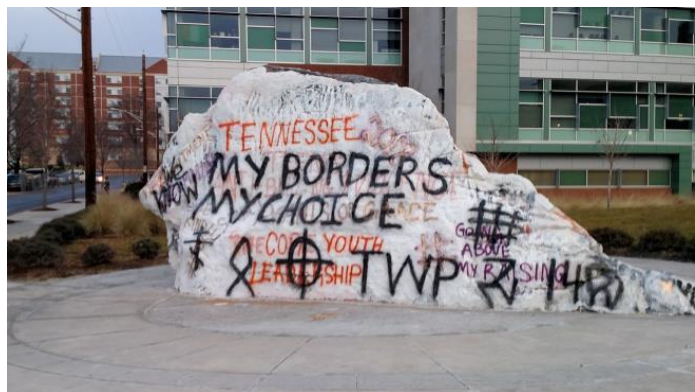


Figure 5

Free speech stone at the University of Knoxville. An Orthodox cross is depicted alongside symbols for the Traditionalist Workers Party and various white power symbols. Photo courtesy of Orthodoxy in Dialogue (The Editors 2018a).

Pistolis, made headlines at that same rally when he assaulted a counter-protester (Thompson 2018a and 2018b). In the following months, Heimbach would be pictured beating a counter-protester with a three-barred Orthodox cross at a different protest (see Figure 4).

A rallying cry of the TWP is opposition to “globalism” (Southern Poverty Law Center 2016; Parrott 2018). Another convert to Orthodox Christianity and member of the TWP, Matthew Parrott, wrote his own thoughts on American Orthodox Christianity or “Ameridoxy” in an article on the Traditionalist Worker Party website responding to another article on an Orthodox blog (The Editors 2018a). Parrott writes that “Ameridoxy is so contemptibly removed from its Holy Tradition roots that they excommunicate on the mere rumor that a catechumen might be ‘racist’” (Parrott 2018). Heimbach himself was apparently excommunicated from the Orthodox Church shortly after his membership in the TWP surfaced (Jones 2018). The Orthodox Church in America has also issued a statement disavowing hate groups (Assembly of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America 2017).

Parrott suggests that Ameridoxy is an “abortion relative to Orthodoxy worldwide. Fortunately, we don’t need their permission to be Orthodox” (Parrott 2018). While the TWP is now disbanded and Heimbach was, until recently, behind bars, his actions can be connected with historical trends in Orthodox Christianity (Barrouquere 2018). Some Orthodox Christian clergy have also been connected to white supremacist movements (The Editors 2018c). While the converts I interviewed describe their faith as emergent in the relationships around them, Heimbach and his organization took inspiration from nationalist influences in the Orthodox Church; examples of Orthodox Christian writers abound who have espoused nationalism or fascism (Cvetković 2012, 136; Hosking 2012, 53-55; Leustean 2009, 50; Scarfe 1988, 217; Shevzov 2012). In one photo, he is pictured wearing an Orthodox cross and a t-shirt emblazoned

with the name Corneliu Codreanu, a Romanian fascist from the 1920s who formed a militant group called the Iron Guard (Kelaides 2018; see Figure 6).



Figure 6
Matthew Heimbach at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, wearing a t-shirt glorifying Corneliu Codreanu (Kelaides 2018).

The patterns of these radicalized Orthodox Christian converts mirror those of violent Islamic extremists. A fundamentalist interpretation of faith gives the prospective group member a new identity, and there is a sense of superiority over those outside the group. Scholar of security studies Dina Al Raffie writes, “Geopolitics is presented through religious frames to further the

notion of a conspiratorial attack of the West against Islam, and sets the stage for the adoption of violent means by some” (Al Raffie 2013, 67). Scholar of Islamic Studies Sadek Hamid writes also that Muslims who are most likely to become radicalized are those who are seeking “a retrieval of a correct ‘pure’ religion, an authentic religious praxis free from historical deviations and accretions” (Hamid 2014, 352). Both of these descriptions closely mirror messages which can be found in Orthodox Christian literature, and when taken to extremes, they also produce radical terrorists. Ironically, Father Josiah also has a documentary in which he espouses conspiracy theories about Muslims in America (Patristic Nectar Films 2016).

In both Islam and Orthodox Christianity, a radical fringe of the religion is not representative of the vast majority of believers. Ethnographic research that focuses on individuals is of the utmost importance, especially when the loudest voices threaten to represent an entire faith inaccurately. Both Father Josiah Trenham and Matthew Heimbach demonstrate narrow views on what constitutes proper Orthodox Christian practice. Neither of them, nor those

in the organizations with which they associate, can tolerate diversity in practice. Matthew Parrott does not see “Ameridoxy” as a legitimate form of the faith at all (Parrott 2018). My own research demonstrates, to the contrary, that vernacular belief and practice are the lived realities of all Orthodox Christians, regardless of rank or country of origin. Each person negotiates cultural values with their religion differently. None of the converts whom I interviewed hold views like those described above. While some are politically conservative and some are politically liberal, none advocate for violence against those with whom they may disagree. Notably, the majority of converts whom I interviewed belong to communities with significant numbers of immigrants.

Extremists like Heimbach and Father Josiah may easily be able to espouse their radical views because they go unchallenged in their daily lives. The lived reality of parishes like St. Parascheva and St. Nicholas, by contrast, mean working through relationships with others who may speak different languages and be familiar with different traditions in the Orthodox Church. Folklorist Robert Glenn Howard, writing about a Christian fundamentalist community on the Internet, argues that vernacular religious groups on the web are outside institutional control, so individuals can limit their own influences (Howard 2009). As a result, their beliefs can go unchallenged. The geographical distance of members of the group from one another means that they may not have to overcome actual conflicts with each other.

Heimbach certainly used his influence to gain followers on the Internet. His group has an ongoing website, even though they have technically been disbanded. Father Josiah Trenham, who has gained prominence through Orthodox Christian media such as Ancient Faith Radio, goes unchecked, I would argue, because of his position in the Church. While there has always been a breadth of vernacular interpretation and practice in Orthodox Christianity, with the advent of the Internet, this diversity of belief within the Orthodox Church becomes especially visible.

On the other hand, the Internet also allows users to narrowly curate which forms of Orthodox Christian theology they wish to consume. One Orthodox Christian could choose to only listen to talks by Father Josiah Trenham on Ancient Faith Radio, for example, and another could listen to talks from a wide variety of clergy and laity from all over the world. The two believers might come to very different conclusions about the beliefs and practices of the Orthodox Church as an institution. The paradox of globalization is that while it may make the vastness of the world available, it also makes it smaller. Many convert to Orthodox Christianity out of frustration with the vast range of choices in North America. The ways in which different believers may choose to limit or curate their choices have consequences.

Tradition & Adaptation

Counter to some of the extreme reactions toward globalization by some Orthodox Christians, the communities I studied exemplify what folklorist Nicholas Spitzer calls “cultural creolization,” in which “new traditions, aesthetics, and group identities” form out of “peoples and cultures—usually where at least one has been deterritorialized by emigration, enslavement, or exile” (Spitzer 2003, 58). Spitzer specifically applies this to American society, in which “new cultural wholes” are constantly being formed, while at the same time “accounting for continuity of elements that remain distinct in local communities” (Spitzer 2003, 59). What counts as “authenticity” or “heritage,” Spitzer argues, is emergent in this process of constant culture creation (Spitzer 2003, 59). This is absolutely true of St. Parascheva, St. Nicholas, and St. Luke. North American cultural standards do continue to interact with believers’ expressions of faith among both Orthodox-born believers and converts. One subtle example of the interplay between Orthodox Christianity which I observed in both the U.S. and Canada is the amount of choice parishioners have in practice. Parishioners may choose the degree to which they fast. At St.

Parascheva in particular, women may choose whether or not they would like to abstain from communion while menstruating, and whether or not they would like to undergo the rite of churching after childbirth, as discussed in chapters six and seven. At St. Nicholas in Canada, the rite of churching is not optional, and while there is still diversity in practice, Father Isaac attempts to gently lead the congregation toward a unified expression of Orthodox Christianity.

I argue that the choice given to parishioners at St. Parascheva is a direct outgrowth of the way they understand the context of their faith in North America. Political and social scientist Elizabeth Prodromou points out that globalization, especially where religion is concerned, frequently occurs jointly with democratization, which she defines as, “an open-ended contingent process...informed by principles of equality and freedom” (Prodromou 2008, 255). Communication and transportation technologies, which have become widely accessible in the wake of globalization, allow for religious messages to be discussed and debated, which implies contestation of authority as well. Prodromou writes:

Democratization intensifies, reinforces, and distinctively expands the pluralizing effects of globalization on religion. Because its discourse, institutions, and processes are premised on axioms of equality and freedom, democratization ensures that religious belief and practice operate according to the principle of choice. Accordingly, religious belief...becomes volitional rather than a matter of inherited and immutable identity; likewise, religious practices become matters of discussion and debate, rather than fixed expressions of doctrine. (Prodromou 2008, 256-257)

The shift described here is one of both authoritative structure and personal identity. Plurality may be defined as either open-ended interpretation or tolerance for a variety of faiths. Interpretation can be contested, and more religions are available for exploration. While the Orthodox Church at large does not encourage this kind of open-ended interpretation, my research clearly demonstrates that it does occur in the spiritual lives of believers. Not only do they choose how to

apply tenets of the faith to their lives (and sometimes to omit them, as with churching), but they also choose how to interpret them in light of their experiences in North America.

Democratization affects the choices converts have in North America, to choose Orthodox Christianity in the first place. On the other hand, some find Orthodox Christianity appealing because of the limitations on choice (which they have chosen), and they have the agency to submit to authority rather than challenging it.

The use of the church calendar at both St. Parascheva and St. Nicholas required some adaptation of tradition. In many majority-Orthodox countries, feasts such as Christmas are celebrated on the Julian calendar, known as the “old calendar.” Both St. Parascheva and St. Nicholas use the “new calendar,” which closely aligns with the Gregorian calendar used by surrounding society, for calculating Christmas and other feasts. As with all other Orthodox churches, Pascha alone is still determined by the Julian calendar, which occasionally aligns with Easter as celebrated in Western Christian traditions. In the case of St. Parascheva, Romania is on the new calendar, so the use of the same calendar in North America was more an act of continuity than a break from tradition. In the case of St. Nicholas, there was some community unrest as a result of choosing the new calendar. In Russia, where many of St. Nicholas’s members were born, the old calendar is used. Changing to the new calendar may have violated what sociologist Dmitro Volkov calls the “spiritual core” of the tradition (Volkov 2005, 235). For some, giving up the use of Old Church Slavonic for English had a similar effect. The priest who preceded Father Isaac had to exercise his best judgment to find the greatest good for the greatest number of parishioners. As a mission in Canada, choosing the new calendar and the English language was a means of adapting to societal context and accommodating parishioners from a variety of cultural backgrounds, both products of globalization.

Another example of adapting Orthodox Christianity to the North American context is the blessing of the cars at St. Parascheva. This ritual occurs annually, during the summer, and it is an



Figure 7

Blessing the cars at St. Parascheva in the summer of 2015.

adaptation of the house blessing ritual during Theophany.

In house blessings, the priest traditionally goes around to the home of every parishioner and blesses it inside and out, using holy water. I observed the blessing of the cars during my fieldwork in 2015. During the blessing, each parishioner leaves his or her doors and trunks open, and

Father Ephraim sprinkles the inside and outside of each car with holy water (see Figure 7). The

congregation follows him in a procession around the church building while singing the hymn for the feast of the Sunday of Orthodoxy in both English and Romanian: “Oh Lord, save your people and bless your heritage. Give victory to Orthodox Christians over the Enemy, and preserve your people by your cross.”

This last ritual is especially pertinent when thinking about the effects of globalization on Orthodox Christianity because, as Father Ephraim pointed out to me, congregants spend at least as much time in their cars as they do in their own homes (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015).

Parishioners even put icons in their cars, and some have small Romanian flags, Orthodox bumper stickers, and other markers of identity and community on their vehicles. Folklorists Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin write that traditions are neither bounded nor essential; they are a model from the past interpreted in the present, “characterized by discontinuity as well as by continuity” (Handler and Linnekin 1984, 276). In the case of blessing cars, what is taken to be valuable from past tradition is the act of sanctifying—believers wish to integrate their faith in

being protected by God into their mobile, modern lives. Globalization and modernity are factors in the interpretation of tradition in the present. While the fixed houses of parishioners at St. Parascheva are still blessed during the season of Theophany, blessing their cars is an adaptation of tradition which acknowledges the reality that significant parts of parishioners' lives are spent in their vehicles.

In the introduction to the edited volume *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age*, Victor Roudometof and Alexander Agadjanian posit that in the twenty-first century, there are three broadly observable trends in how world religions respond to globalization: adaptation, conservatism, and religion operating as a “genre of identity” (Roudometof and Agadjanian 2005, 3). Adaptation often involves the de-territorialization of religion and a flexible authority structure. Roudometof and Agadjanian suggest Protestant and evangelical churches, the Ba’hai faith, Pentecostalism, and some New Age religions as fitting this category (Roudometof and Agadjanian 2005, 4-5). While these scholars do not view Orthodox Christianity as fitting the adaptation category, examples from my research clearly contradict this assertion. Through vernacular religious practice, individuals may vacillate among those categories as they negotiate faith with lived experiences. For example, the Orthodox Church as an institution may not have a flexible authority structure, but the way individual priests interact with their congregations and exercise economy may, in fact, demonstrate flexibility.

The second category, conservatism, is where Agadjanian and Roudometof place Orthodox Christianity. They discuss that while religion, like other cultural forms, is standardized in some ways, specific religious identities can still emerge by valuing difference for its own sake. Roudometof and Agadjanian write, “The revival of ostensibly traditionalist religious particularisms around the world is part of a broader relation that involves the reassertion of local,

religious, or ethno-national identities” (Roudometof and Agadjanian 2005, 6). Again, my research demonstrates that standardization in the Orthodox Church is an illusion. If anything, the extreme spectrum of responses to globalization show that there is not a unified position on modernity, democracy, and the West. Interviewing believers about their lives reveals as many interpretations of tradition as there are people. Diverse beliefs are always at play in the performance of traditions. To be sure, there are those who wish to see greater standardization, but there is not consensus as to what that might look like. Some converts, for example, wish to see an American Orthodox Christian identity supercede ethno-national expressions in the U.S. (Bringerud 2012). Others wish to see the opposite (Volkov 2005). Still others find a way to assert ethno-national identities in conjunction with North American ones, especially if church members are third-, fourth-, or more generations from their immigrant ancestors (Slagle 2010). Even traditionalists can adapt in the “spirit” versus the “letter” of Orthodox Christian practice (Forbess 2010).

Roudometof and Agadjanian write that the Eastern Orthodox Church as a whole tends toward “protective and communitarian” responses to globalization rather than “self-adjusting and individualistic” ones (Roudometof and Agadjanian 2005, 8-9). Furthermore, the Orthodox Church as an institution does:

...preserve or even enhance a sense of ‘proud difference’ that remains rooted in Tradition...[combining] several symbolic referents into a single genre of identity, whereby Church, ethnicity, and nationality become signifiers or a single collective identity. (Roudometof and Agadjanian 2005, 9)

Indeed, it is possible to observe communitarian responses to globalization in the Orthodox Church, especially in extremist examples. Nevertheless, my research shows that expressions of the faith are highly dependent upon cultural context. In North America in particular, where

Orthodox Christianity is neither common nor greatly visible, the faith becomes both a mode of asserting difference from surrounding culture as well as being a portable means of preserving cultural heritage. Converts to Orthodox Christianity are more likely to use their faith as a differentiating marker in society than those who are born into it. Similarly, Orthodox Christian emigres are more likely to use it as a touchstone of cultural heritage. As folklorist Roger Abrahams writes, globalization “underscores the fragility of inherited traditions” and the way they play into both individual and collective senses of identity (Abrahams 2003, 201). The way identities are defined—by nation, political affiliation, religion, occupation, social class...etc. are all affected by the increasing speed of technology and global processes.

Lastly, a third response to globalization, according to Roudometof and Agadjanian is to use religion as an index of identity, as “a new narrative of, or a cultural resource for, identity” (Roudometof and Agadjanian 2005, 7). This is a symbolic use of religion as a form of self-expression. As I discuss in subsequent chapters, Orthodox Christians do not use their faith as an identity marker in identical ways. Converts, for example, cannot necessarily consolidate ethnicity and nationality with their religious affiliation. They may even experience some alienation from those who do (see Bringerud 2012). However, some converts do rely upon Orthodox Christianity as an index for personal identity, often asserting “proud difference” from their surrounding culture. For some, it leads to negative attitudes toward surrounding secular culture as woefully “un-Orthodox,” but for others, it leads to a negotiation between the two.

National vs. Global: Orthodox Approaches to Territory

Political scientist Victor Roudometof has written extensively on globalization and Eastern Orthodox Christianity in European contexts. In his article “Greek Orthodoxy,

Territoriality, and Globality,” he outlines two European responses within the Orthodox Church toward globalization. The first response, as exemplified by the Church of Greece and others, is to make Orthodox Christianity part of a nationalist narrative. Roudometof writes that in the nineteenth century, Orthodox Christianity merged with modern nationalism, leading to “a modern synthesis between church and nation” (Roudometof 2008, 68). According to him, the Church of Greece and many other Eastern European Orthodox Christian national churches view globalization as a threat to this synthesis. The reason for this is the role of territory in the institution of the Orthodox Church.

Modern nation-states emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century, and religion played a role in the formation of national identities. Roudometof writes that the synthesis between church and nation relativized religious identity in such a way that it created:

...a fusion between local national traditions (“invented” or not) and a formerly universalistic religion, global in its scope and reach, in principle indifferent to a person’s national or ethnic identity. (Roudometof 2008, 71)

As Roudometof discusses the Greek case specifically, this means that Orthodox Christianity became synonymous with “Greekness.” He writes that there was a shift in thought between God as universal and God as the defender of a particular nation (Roudometof 2008, 72). As a result, those who subscribe to the synthesized relationship between religion and nation tend to resist globalization, since only in the home territory can the faith be “properly” practiced and experienced (Roudometof 2008, 74). This may also have ramifications for the Church’s role in national policy, for example, in countries where this relationship exists.

There is a second approach to globalization within Orthodox Christianity, which is to see it as an institution which transcends national boundaries. This approach is favored by the Ecumenical Patriarch. Roudometof writes that this Patriarchate views itself as a global

institution. The Ecumenical Patriarch is the figurehead of the Orthodox Church at large, honored as “first among equals” in regard to other bishops. Ware compares the Patriarch’s position to that of the Archbishop of Canterbury; he has an honorable position, but no right to interfere in the workings of local churches (Ware 1997, 7). Even so, according to Roudometof, “the Patriarchate views itself as the sole authority capable of conferring or withdrawing canonical status to local churches and the high clergy” (Roudometof 2008, 77). This particular point comes into play when discussing the establishment of Orthodox Christian churches in North America. In recent news, this also relates to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church being granted autocephaly.

To apply this second view of globalization and Orthodox Christianity to the North American context, we must look at the establishment of the first Orthodox churches there. The earliest missionaries came from Siberia to Alaska in the late 17th century (Erickson 1999; Stokoe and Kishkovsky 1995). These missionaries settled, intermarried with indigenous Alaskans, and the beginnings of a mission community were formed (Stokoe and Kishkovsky 1995, 7). The relationship between territory and the Church begun by these missions was a concern to “indigenize” Orthodox Christianity. That is to say, there was a commitment to translate the liturgy into local languages, to ordain priests from the local population, and to adapt the faith to local cultural traditions (Erickson 1999, 31-52). Historian, journalist, and priest respectively, Erickson, Stokoe, and Kishkovsky explain this in the ideal hope that different cultural groups could make Orthodox Christianity their own, on their own terms. This is not the only version of this narrative. Independent ethnographer Joanne B. Mulcahy describes indigenous women’s dialogue and knowledge of healing traditions on Kodiak Island, Alaska. In both European and Anglo-American colonization of the indigenous people in Alaska, Mulcahy describes exploitation, neglect, and attempted assimilation (Mulcahy 1993, 184-5). She gives a broad

summary of history to talk about contemporary women's traditions, but she does mention Russian Orthodox Christianity as part of this assimilation process. Specifically, her research reveals the male narratives of Russian Orthodox missionaries as subsuming women's traditions and ways of knowing (Mulcahy 1993, 185). A host of socio-cultural factors are at play here, to be sure, but it may be fair to say that cultural assimilation from an indigenous belief system to Russian Orthodox Christianity did not happen without conflict in Alaska. Even Stokoe and Kishkovsky describe violent conflicts between indigenous peoples and the Russian missionaries, though they downplay these events as few and far between (Stokoe and Kishkovsky 1995, 7). Not all missionaries brought their message with the same style or cultural sensitivity; there were differences among them and their vernacular interpretations of tradition, just as there were differences in attitudes among indigenous Alaskans.

These Alaskan missionary efforts were the beginning of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). The OCA was founded by Russian emigres fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution. OCA parishes were initially under the Patriarchate of Moscow, but were granted temporary self-governance because of the crisis, and their independence was formalized in 1970 (Ware 1997, 176). The Ecumenical Patriarch views the OCA's independence as illegitimate since it was the Patriarch of Moscow who issued it. The OCA still shares full communion with many, if not all, other Orthodox Churches. According to Roudometof, in spite of this, the Ecumenical Patriarch, through theologians and clerics affiliated with him, has expressed a view toward globalization as a "challenge and not as a threat" (Roudometof 2008, 77). Indeed, he writes that in this vein, "de-territorialized religiosity provides an opportunity to strengthen and adapt Orthodoxy to the twenty-first century" (Roudometof 2008, 77). Though this may seem paradoxical, Roudometof interprets this state of affairs to mean that the Patriarchate would like to see itself as a

“supranational institution” which arbitrates among all Orthodox churches worldwide (Roudometof 2008, 77-8).

Both the formation of the OCA and the Ecumenical Patriarch’s response to it demonstrate globalization’s de-territorializing effect in an Orthodox Christian context. The opposite effect can be found in the examination of Orthodox churches in North America which strongly identify with roots in other countries. Throughout the twentieth century, immigration of Orthodox Christians from Eastern Europe also had effects on the relationship between territory and the Church. Volkov describes these communities as seeking financial and clerical assistance from “mother Churches” in parent countries (Volkov 2008, 226). As a result, immigrant Orthodox Christian communities in the U.S. developed geographically overlapping jurisdictions by the mid-twentieth century and were administered by the “mother Churches” (Volkov 2005, 226). Contemporary organization of Orthodox churches in North America has largely continued on this territorial model, with Russian Orthodox churches still answering to a patriarch in Moscow, and Antiochian churches answering to a patriarch in Antioch, etc. As immigrants settle, have families and descendants in North America, successive generations may feel more defined by their citizenship than their cultural heritage, or defined by both in equal measure. Indeed, there are times when this cultural heritage is even alienating, as when services are done in Greek, and third- or fourth-generation Greek Americans do not actually speak Greek, for example (Roudometof 2008, 79; Slagle 2011, 124-142).

Volkov describes a trend in Orthodox churches in the past twenty years as seeking purity in religious practice, which he associates with “the defilement of the ethnic component of the Orthodox Church relative to its spiritual content” (Volkov 2005, 224). A shift is occurring in the present moment regarding the meaning of cultural identity relative to spiritual practice, no doubt

inciting some of the more extreme responses to globalization within the Orthodox Church. In fact, folklorist Dorothy Noyes writes that the illusion of “purity” has often been falsely juxtaposed with “hybridity” (Noyes 2006, 31). The notion of the value of the “pure” is predicated upon the idea that it is scarce and disappearing, and therefore must be saved. Folklorist John Szwed argues that even the word “hybrid” risks the suggestion that there was a “pure” past before the global encounter (Szwed 2011, 28). The Orthodox Church has never existed apart from politics. There has always been a struggle to discern an essential core of the faith apart from surrounding power struggles. It has survived for over a millennium precisely because of its ability to adapt to changing contexts while maintaining its roots in mysticism.

Volkov writes that scholars have often portrayed a mistaken dichotomy in American Orthodox churches between cultural absorption and resistance to it (Volkov 2005, 225). Where past generations of Orthodox Christians might have sought to assimilate so as not to appear conspicuously un-American, the present generation has “accommodated and been accommodated by the dynamic milieu which, in particular, allows for...distinctive religious persuasions” (Volkov 2005, 225). Religious and cultural symbols are flexible, and they can be applied to changing contexts. For example, I interviewed women who take Orthodox Christians rituals and find deeply personal meanings in them though their interpretations may differ from authoritative, mainstream theological meanings in the Orthodox Church. Orthodox Christian symbols can also be used for violent, white supremacist ends. Volkov’s opinion is that the meanings of cultural heritage are being redefined, and the shared meanings of the public domain are therefore being reconstructed (Volkov 2005, 225). The very notion of what heritage is in a globalized world is still emerging for my consultants as they convert to a faith tied to others’ cultural heritages, or as they cross national borders and make new lives for themselves. The

remaining question, then, is how the specific cultural heritage of national churches will affect Orthodox Christianity in the midst of this social change.

Globalization, Heritage, & Identity

According to Volkov, the two ideologies guiding the discussion around the place of cultural heritage in Orthodox churches in North America are “particularism” and “universalism” (Volkov 2005, 225). Particularism refers to the ethno-national jurisdictions and cultural differences which have prevented unification in the North American context. This is why there are Russian Orthodox Churches, Greek Orthodox Churches, Bulgarian Orthodox Churches...etc. rather than simply “Orthodox Churches” in North America. Universalism, on the other hand, is the idea that “salvation is a collective rather than individual project” and “*theosis*,” the unity between God, the individual, and all people, is a spiritual goal (Volkov 2005, 229). As Volkov points out, though, there can be friction between *theosis* and principles of absolutism and individualism (Volkov 2005, 229-30). Church officials are not elected to represent the laity; they are ordained. Their authority extends both over theological interpretation and parish life, and they are expected to abide by Church Canon.

This is one area where the democratizing effects of globalization can cause conflict. For example, there is a struggle between the ideal of spiritual universalism in Orthodox Christianity and the reality of ethnic particularism, especially in the context of North America, where cultural enclaves can become isolated from surrounding culture (Volkov 2005, 230). In his comparative research between two Orthodox Christian communities in North America, one Russian and one Greek, Volkov finds that isolationism is not the case in these places, but rather, parishioners adapt to surrounding culture while managing to preserve what they perceive to be the essence of the tradition (Volkov 2005, 236). In Volkov’s research, the language of the liturgy was

considered to be part of this essence for parishioners. In my research, I have found that my Orthodox-born consultants do not identify the essence of tradition uniformly. Each turns to his or her faith in a uniquely meaningful way to bridge the past and the present.

My consultants did not necessarily express particularistic attitudes toward the Orthodox Church even though it was a cultural touchstone for each. Leila, who emigrated to Canada from Romania less than ten years ago and is an occasional attendee of St. Nicholas, for example, goes to church twice a year, on Christmas and Easter, because at these times she feels a strong pull to “hear some prayers, pray inside the chapel” (Leila, December 3, 2015). More than the service itself, she feels a need to be near other Romanians, who are her family away from home. The church service itself is a touchstone for connecting with others in diaspora, with whom she shares inside jokes, carols, and the experience of building a home in a new country. Familiarity is part of what makes the Orthodox Christmas service valuable for Leila regardless of her theological beliefs.

Adina, who emigrated to North America decades ago from Romania, and a regular attendee of St. Nicholas, described attending church as a “grounding” experience in her life (Adina, November 8, 2015). She is grateful that there is an Orthodox church where she can go in Canada when she feels the need to go. For her, it is a faith which both meets her personal spiritual needs and ties her to memories of her family. Similar sentiments were expressed to me by Florina, who came to the U.S. from Romania decades ago and who regularly attends St. Parascheva. She first began looking for an Orthodox church in the Midwest because “I missed hearing the bells on Sunday” (Florina, July 26, 2015). Like Adina, she also has clergy in her family and feels connected to them through her participation at St. Parascheva. In Romania, she attended a cathedral with the same name as her church in the U.S. She said, “It was the

beginning of my life, and maybe it will be the end of my life.” The metaphor is simple, yet its meaning is profound. Even an ocean away, she has come full circle, back to her foundation and sense of self.

Globalization as a process calls the very notion of heritage into question, especially since it blurs the line between the local and the global. The same forces also call into question the relationship between heritage and identity. Folklorist Dorothy Noyes writes that under modern conditions of globalization, “Connections formed by history are sundered by the flood of present necessity. Particularities are forcibly submerged” (Noyes 2014, 28-29). In terms of the future of the relationship between the two in North America, these particularities will likely be forcibly submerged. Both new converts and new immigrants, in theory, may have the most particularistic approach to Orthodox Christianity. Both are strangers in a strange land, navigating a new landscape, whether social or spiritual. As time passes, though, separations like “convert” and “Orthodox-born,” for example, meld together. Immigrants become Canadian and American, and North American children are born into the Orthodox Christian faith. It is not that differences cease to exist between believers, but those differences may become less important over time.

This begs examination of what it looks like to “indigenize” Orthodox Christianity in North America. In other words, if Orthodox Christianity visibly takes on local cultural attributes in Romania, Ukraine, or Ethiopia, what might that look like in North America? What aspects of culture in North America might be described as its unique “heritage”? Abundant examples can be found in Orthodox Christian literature where discussion of missionary work is coupled with the expression “to baptize a culture” or baptize “what is good” in a culture. For example, on the official website of the Orthodox Church of America, the description of the first missionaries to North America is as follows:

Indeed, at the heart of the missionary approach of the monks from Valaam was a respect for the native cultures and customs and a desire to baptize what was legitimate and valid in the native cultural traditions. (Kishkovsky 2003)

This expression is used so often, that one of my consultants invoked it in the context of a mission trip he took to Mexico. Neil, a convert and longtime member of St. Parascheva, mentioned that his group discussed St. Innocent of Alaska, who approached indigenous communities. In Neil's words, St. Innocent

...redeemed what Christ has already placed in those cultures. Christ is everywhere present and filling all things. There is no place where Christ is not. Orthodoxy looks for truth, because whatever is true, and good, and beautiful belongs to Christ. (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015)

It remains to be answered how one knows what is "good" or "legitimate" or "baptizable."

Furthermore, who decides what is or is not? St. Innocent of Alaska, St. Herman of Alaska, St. John of San Francisco and Shanghai, St. Raphael of Brooklyn, and other Orthodox Christian figures have already done missionary work in North America, trying to decide what could be "baptized" in it. It is worth noting that these particular saints listed here all immigrated to North America specifically for missionary work. Most were from the Russian Orthodox tradition, save St. Raphael of Brooklyn, who was Lebanese by birth and part of the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Perhaps the trouble with being an Orthodox Christian in contemporary North America is the difficulty in determining cultural boundaries, or the diversity of cultures which make up the North American mosaic. Where St. Innocent and St. Herman, for example, were concerned with small communities, contemporary North Americans are living in a global age where the boundaries between the local and the global blur and affect one another. Father Ephraim remarked that "Orthodoxy is truly incarnational, in the sense that there is a transcendent Orthodox culture that gets expressed locally" (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015). On the other hand, he viewed Orthodox Christianity in North America as having "a unique problem, because we've

got so many cultures coming together at once, we don't know...what's universally Orthodox and what's local." Each incarnation of Orthodox Christianity must share theology with the others. Considering the relationships between the Orthodox Church and national governments elsewhere, there are abundant examples of confusion between the particular and the universal.

For example, is the social mobility of women "indigenous" to North America? Is the tradition of legalized same-sex marriages? If these are "local" in the contemporary North American context, can Orthodox Christianity, in fact, "baptize" these practices? Both of these issues in particular call into question the relationship between "capital T" theological traditions in Orthodox Christianity and "lowercase t" cultural traditions. There is an authoritative position expressed by the institution of the Orthodox Church on both women priests and same-sex marriages—both are not supported. It remains to be seen whether these positions are changeable in dialogue with surrounding North American cultural norms. How truth is discerned, evaluated, and by whom, are all part of this discussion. In particular, how the significance of gender differences is determined, and indeed, the significance of Jesus's own maleness, are part of this discussion. Priests who were born into Orthodox Christian communities in North America—whether as the children of converts or the descendants of immigrants, will be vital to this conversation. In particular, the separation of Church and State in both Canada and the U.S. as well as religious pluralism in those countries will surely affect the relationship between Orthodox Christian spirituality and society at large.

Some believers condemn political realities, and some converts feel pressured to choose between political and religious allegiance (see, for example, Webster 2017). Some converts develop anti-Western attitudes altogether in the struggle to balance facets of identity. In far less extreme ways, some of my consultants decried various aspects of their societies as they

perceived and experienced them—emphasis on individualism over community, the legalization of gay marriage, the “confusion” of gender roles between men and women, “imbalance” in work-family relationships. Some, such as my consultant Joy, saw these as recent social developments, and believed that there were better models for living to be found in post-World War II America, for example (Joy, July 9, 2015).

Orthodox Christian authorities worldwide have projected mixed attitudes toward “the West” and Westernization in general. In the introduction to their edited volume *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, theologians George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou write that “the West” has been used as the ideological opposite of “Eastern” Orthodox Christianity (Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou 2013, 2). Scholars trace this antipathy back to the Latin Church’s Crusades in the East and theological differences with the between the two halves of Christendom (Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou 2013, 6; Prodromou 2013, 197). In the Orthodox Church today, however, “the West” has less to do with location and more to do with an imagined, often secular Other against which the Eastern Orthodox Church can define itself. There are theological and political manifestations of the dichotomy between East and West—both in Western scholastic constructions of Orthodox Christianity and in Orthodox Christian constructions of the West. For example, historian Lucian Turcescu (2013, 211-2) discusses cases where majority-Orthodox countries such as Bulgaria and Romania have struggled to meet criteria to join the European Union in part due to conflicts between church and state priorities. Others such as Russia, he writes, have no interest at all in undergoing such a process. In the twentieth century, influential Orthodox Christian theologians such as Christos Yannaras and Vladimir Lossky interpreted Orthodox Christian mysticism as essentially irreconcilable with Western modes of thinking (Coakley 2013; Petrà 2013; Prodromou 2013, 198). These thinkers are less

controversial than Father Josiah Trenham, but they still stand as figures who believe it is futile for North American converts to negotiate their cultural and religious identities.

Historical writings of church fathers may likewise be unhelpful in discerning the application of Orthodox Christianity to contemporary North American culture. In some cases, this is because of profound differences in historical context; in other cases, it is because of interpretive latitude. St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, for example, exhorts Orthodox Christians to identify “good” from “evil” customs not only based on what contradicts Church Canon, notorious for the breadth of its vernacular interpretations, but also based on what aligns with “right reason” (St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite 2011, 21). No doubt it would be especially difficult to follow St. Nikodemos’s advice today; he exhorts Christians to avoid wearing fancy clothes and shoes, cologne and perfume, playing games, dancing, telling bawdy jokes, riding horses, or going to the theater (St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite 2011, 25-26). Suffice it to say that one man’s reason is another’s folly. Ethnomusicologist Jeffers Engelhardt, in a discussion of Russian and Estonian Orthodox liturgical practices, writes that local practices in churches are viewed with suspicion as “syncretic or canonically suspect” even when those communities are faithful to church Canons. Englehardt writes, “Such interpretations make perilous assumptions about agency and the authenticity of beliefs and practices” (Englehardt 2010, 104). Some fear that personal efforts to negotiate with holy traditions will lead to its dilution. There is danger of being guided by this fear, though: it leads to power struggles and ethnocentrism as exemplified by Matt Parrott’s disgust with “Ameridoxy” (Parrott 2018). In Englehardt’s own case study, he describes a border region between Russia and Estonia, where liturgical singing is contested as more or less authentic on the basis of cultural factors such as language, vocal techniques, and musical style.

These same kinds of cultural conflicts already exist within various jurisdictions of the Orthodox Church in North America, making it harder for new converts to apply Orthodox Christianity to their own cultural context. There is even a heresy in Orthodox Christianity called *ethnophyletism* or *phyletism*, which is defined as setting cultural concerns above spiritual ones (Orthodox Christian Laity 2012). The situation of overlapping jurisdictions of Orthodox Christian bishops in North America on the basis of cultural affiliation is often labeled in this way. Ware writes that when the Ecumenical Patriarch visited the United States in 1990, he was scandalized by this state of bureaucracy in the Church. He summarizes that “national loyalties, in themselves legitimate, have been allowed to prevail at the expense of Orthodox Catholicity, and this has led to a grievous fragmentation of ecclesial structures” (Ware 1997, 174). Here, Ware means universalism by the word “Catholicity,” not the Catholic Church. Ware wrote about this twenty years ago, and the current climate is similar today. Editors of the blog Orthodoxy in Dialogue recently wrote:

The Church’s division into overlapping ethnic ‘jurisdictions’ in North America, with multiple bishops having parishes in any given city—(here in Toronto where we study, we count parishes under at least *ten* canonical bishops, some resident in Canada, some not)—makes the Orthodox Church in the U.S. and Canada the most flagrantly ethnophyletistic ecclesial entity in the world. (The Editors 2017)

Theological historian Dellas Oliver Herbel attributes the persistence of divisions in North America along cultural lines both to the fact that “North America remains largely ignorant of Orthodox Christianity and because the Orthodox Churches are small in number in comparison with the general population” (Herbel 2012, 165). Herbel sees “intra-Christian” converts as the answer to factionalism in the Church, as they come from wholly different cultural contexts (Herbel 2012, 174). As a result of witnessing cultural division in the Orthodox Church, converts sometimes view themselves as Herbel suggests—as the ones who will translate Orthodox

Christianity in North America. On the other hand, some feel, as though they will never quite be legitimate heirs to the heritage of Orthodox Christianity as they lack cultural ties with it.

In his study of North American converts to Orthodox Christianity, Herbel posits that conversion is itself the expression of an American tradition of individualism (Herbel 2014, 3). He writes that in Western cultures, there is a “tradition of change, or an anti-traditional tradition.” Specifically, in American religious history, he notes that there is a tradition of modifying aspects of inherited religion to create a new tradition. Herbel writes:

The conclusion (Eastern Orthodoxy as *the* Christian Tradition over and against a diversified, fragmented American Christian landscape) may at first appear rather un-American, since it is not the creation of a new subset of Christianity, much less a new religion, but the road to that conclusion is, ironically, precisely an expression of the anti-traditional tradition. Furthermore...these conversion patterns themselves establish a tradition. (Herbel 2014, 5-6)

Restorationism is a theme Herbel found in his study of American conversions to Orthodox Christianity over time, and it is also a theme which I found in my own research. There is a sense that conversion to the Orthodox Church is a return to, or restoration of, an original Christianity rather than an invented version. As I discuss in chapter four, Orthodox Christianity can be manifest in contextually-specific ways and vernacular interpretations. It is seemingly resistant to global processes while at the same time being part of them through the flow of people and ideas.

Globalization & Conversion to Orthodox Christianity

In her study of Orthodox converts, Amy Slagle observes that since the 1980’s, a few high-profile evangelical Protestants converted to Orthodox Christianity, which made the faith more visible to others (Slagle 2010, 9). Since then, “educated, upper-middle-class Americans” tend to be drawn to Orthodoxy for “theological and/or liturgical reasons after years of active religious seeking and questioning” (Slagle 2010, 9). Its attractiveness to converts, as noted by

both Slagle and Roudometof and Agadjanian is its very resistance to surrounding social change (Slagle 2010, 9; Roudometof and Agadjanian 2005, 8-9). Slagle paradoxically found that while converts were drawn to the seeming stability of the Orthodox Church, it was the impact of globalization on the American religious landscape, at least, which made Orthodox Christianity an option for conversion in the first place. She writes that conversion is an act of agency rather than something that happens to believers. Through extensive personal reading and comparative religious research, converts discover their own needs, and yet must “acquire the skills and beliefs of Orthodox Christianity,” as their complexities are often foreign to new converts (Slagle 2010, 13). In Slagle’s study, converts are still guided by individualist principles when they come to Orthodox Christianity. She describes personal efforts at self-knowledge as well as researching theology before choosing one option in a marketplace of other religious options. Later in her book, she writes that the marketplace metaphor is used by converts to Orthodox Christianity much as it is used by American converts to other faiths. She writes that metaphors of conversion as a journey is not unique to Orthodox Christian converts but are “deeply engrained visions of what it means to be religious today and point to a general homogenization in the language used across American religious groups” (Slagle 2010, 39). Conversion is a process rather than a destination—movement through a marketplace which is itself evolving.

Conversion to Orthodox Christianity may be viewed as a response to the transience of contemporary life. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, in his book *Liquid Modernity*, describes the velocity of globalization as a force which undermines “solid modernity,” i.e. the expectation of constancy, whether in work, relationships, location...etc. (Bauman 2012, viii-ix). With globalization, these expectations are changed to fluidity, changeability, and mobility. As Bauman observes, for some, these options are inspiring, and for others, they are alienating and fearful.

Bauman postulates that under such conditions, those who thrive in solid modernity will turn to leaders, or perhaps belief systems, which offer a sense of stability to them. He writes, for example, that communities only survive when people take personal responsibility for that survival, yet individualism as a virtue has the potential to undermine this sense of responsibility. Bauman writes, that the paradox of being in a community is to have to admit “the freedom of individual choice denied on another” from time to time (Bauman 2012, 169-70). It is my belief that Orthodox Christianity offers an anchor of stability, both to those born into the faith and those who convert, in the face of changing conditions. For those born into the faith, it offers the constancy of traditions which one may associate with family and home. In fact, Bauman equates community with a family home writ large (Bauman 2012, 171). He specifically defines home as a birthplace where someone can trace his or her origin. Many of the Orthodox-born whom I interviewed described the faith in this way—choice is involved in participation, but for them, there are aspects of the Orthodox Church which have as much or more to do with birthright and identity as belief. Especially if Orthodox-born believers have immigrated to a new country, practicing the faith elsewhere is a means of making a sense of home portable. It is a connection to origin.

For those who convert, Orthodox Christianity also offers a sense of stability, but in different terms. In the teeming bazaar of religious options in North America, Orthodox Christianity is a faith which offers limits. Where Bauman writes that a deep sense of community belonging must require sacrifices of members, converts are challenged by Orthodox Christianity to do just that (Bauman 2012, 169-70). Whether through the discipline of fasting, gendered models of virtue, or the physical rituals of the liturgy, Orthodox Christianity is a faith which invites believers to make a sacrifice before God. In their fast-paced, contemporary lives, they are

asked to slow down, to connect, and to choose to allow their faith to guide them rather than what Bauman calls “the growing conviction that change is *the* only permanence, and uncertainty *the only* certainty” (Bauman 2012, viii). Recent world events and related media coverage would certainly suggest that this is a time of uncertainty, ranging from Brexit to the election of Donald Trump in the U.S. (see, for example, Cakebread 2018; Eichengreen 2017; and Fisher and Taub 2017). Personal investment, and the shared experience of that investment with others, is the bedrock for stability in Orthodox communities.

Some Americans in particular, observing the effects of globalization on their surrounding society, choose to reject these aspects of “Americanness” as incompatible with the stability of Orthodox Christianity. This, I would argue, is much in line with other particularist attitudes observable in majority-Orthodox countries, where to be Orthodox and Greek, for example, are seen as synonymous (Dubisch 1990). It would be impossible to argue that being Orthodox and Canadian or Orthodox and American are synonymous, not only because of the relatively recent presence of Orthodox Christianity in North America, but also because of the religious pluralism and diversity of multicultural societies (Prodromou 2008, 257). This may make those who convert with particularist attitudes not only reject aspects of their identities as North American, but believe that they possess a truth which no one else, pursuing other forms of religious liberty, can grasp.

A number of American converts whom I interviewed feel alienated by aspects of American culture. Milton, a convert who has attended St. Parascheva for decades, for example, referred to sociologist Robert Bellah’s work on American civil religion (Bellah 1991). Milton said:

Americans are so individualistic that...they don't know [who] they are. The whole idea of alienation, especially in our culture...you don't even have unity. And people say, "There wasn't ever unity." Well, yeah there was. I remember, growing up, it was a nice neighborhood. Not everyone went to church, but they were nice people. There was a sense of shared understanding of what kids should be doing, what they shouldn't be doing...that [isn't] there anymore. (Milton, June 5, 2015).

He followed this with a story about how, when his son was young, he was at a friend's house, and they watched an R-rated movie which scared him. Milton said, "It was so inappropriate, and I thought, 'What kind of parent would do that?'" He connected this back to his faith community, in which he has confidence about shared values and beliefs, much as in his own childhood. He said, of contemporary American culture, "I feel alienated from time to time." It could be argued that the perception of unity in the past was due to the visibility of agreement as opposed to difference, but also nostalgia for the "good old days." It depends on how values are defined, and by whom.

Irene, a convert and longtime member of St. Parascheva, expressed something similar when she spoke about the expression of piety in the U.S. at present. She said:

Culture does shape your worldview. Florina is a very pious person. And she's been a very important person to us to understand piety, you know what it means to be pious, because that isn't something that Americans understand. We're just totally blind to being pious unless we're born holy. We don't have good manners. We don't have a good sense of how to behave well. There are some people in our church who come to church in shorts. How can you walk into our church in shorts? People who dress so casually! That just rubs me the wrong way. I've spent a lot of time with Florina, who just wouldn't dream of doing that. She just kind of brings you around to understanding where you're going when you walk into a church. When you're with her, she just only talks about saints and things like that, and it gives you a completely different perspective on our faith. That's a good thing because we just don't think that way. She is just always in a mode of thinking about God. (Irene, July 1, 2015)

Irene looks up to Florina, who is both Romanian and Orthodox-born, for examples of correct behavior in church and the rest of life. This is, perhaps, another aspect of seeking the stability of

shared community standards—standards of respect and devotion. When Irene says that “Americans” do not understand piety, this of course excludes those who have sought out Orthodox Christianity and the kind of piety espoused within it. To whom does Irene refer? Is there only one way to express piety in Orthodox Christianity? Clearly, there are some who dress differently than Irene would in an Orthodox Christian context, and who still belong to the community. Irene is expressing frustration that her community does not have a single standard for modesty or piety. If it did, perhaps it would feel more solid and less transient, like the world outside the church. Has liquid modernity seeped into a stable institution, or are “solids” merely transfigured “liquids,” as Bauman proposes?

While some convert to Orthodox Christianity seeking absolutism in an uncertain world, others convert out of a sense of freedom which the mystical aspects of the faith afford. Amanda, who is married to Neil and also a convert at St. Parascheva, for example, described being deeply moved on her journey to Orthodox Christianity by reading a book called *The River of Fire* by Alexandre Kalomiros. She described her process thus:

I was reading a passage about how God’s love...[tears up] is like an all-consuming fire...and how, instead of being cut off by it, when you’re consumed by it, it burns away what is not true and pure and beautiful. It resonated with my soul at the time, and I just started crying and I thought, “This is what I’ve always believed about what true love would be,” instead of what I was told about God’s love, which is that it was to be feared and scary. (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015)

Amanda had never heard or read examples of divine love expressed in Christianity as she did in this book, and she wanted more of it. It was this expression of love that felt more deeply true to her than a dogma which condemns non-believers. One might argue that this approach to Orthodox Christianity is much more in line with globalist attitudes, as it is transcendent. This kind of love gives freedom, as many of my consultants expressed, and yet it also motivates

believers toward disciplinary practices such as fasting. Amanda went on to say that reading the book made her feel grounded in Orthodox Christianity as truth. She said:

It resonated with me [because] this is not some new way of describing God. This is old, and this church is based on [truth, so]...let's stay true to this. Let's not make shit up as we go along. Let's not figure out the newest cultural thing. (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015)

Amanda is attracted to Orthodox Christianity because she views it as something old, tested and constant. It is not fashionable, as “the newest cultural thing,” but rather stubbornly maintains its values. More than one convert whom I interviewed expressed that the Orthodox Church appealed to them because it would not change with the contemporary moment. For some, this is the means by which Orthodox Christianity's truth is measured—its apparent changelessness. Amanda also talks about the transcendence of the love of God in Orthodox Christianity as something which is outside of space and time, and as such, is mystical. For North Americans who convert to Orthodox Christianity, both its mysticism and those who do so out of rejection of their cultural surroundings seek something solid in the shifting sands of global processes.

At the same time, the application of Orthodox Christian beliefs to the particularisms of American or Canadian culture carry their own hang-ups. Gender roles and expressions are an area where conflicts between the two may be observed clearly. Furthermore, individualism as expressed in the American context in particular may be perceived to be at odds with Orthodox Christianity's emphasis on the communal (Herbel 2014, Prodromou 2008, Slagle 2010). Bauman writes of an imbalance between individualism and security. He writes:

The brittleness and transience of bonds may be an unavoidable price for individuals' *right* to pursue their individual goals, and yet it cannot but be, simultaneously, a most formidable obstacle to pursue them *effectively*—and to the courage needed to pursue them. (Bauman 1991, 170)

Thus, Bauman concludes that there is a paradox between individualism and communitarianism: the first explains the second, and the second is a result of the first. Applied to Western converts to Orthodox Christianity, when individuals pursue religious liberty, they may not be able to develop deep relationships with those who have chosen other life paths. However, without a community of like-minded individuals to support those goals, it is difficult to pursue those new paths holistically. This may be why some converts feel envy for those who are Orthodox-born from majority-Orthodox countries. There is the appearance of a like-minded community, or at least a community which knows the extent of its influence on members, forming a stable foundation from which to grow.

Conclusion

Globalization is a force which has produced reactions, both publicly and privately, extreme and moderate, among Orthodox Christians. It is a phenomenon which has tested the boundaries of community and heritage. The inextricability of religion and culture is, in some ways, a vestige of a bygone past hinting at romanticization and isolation. In the North American context in particular, focusing on cultural differences can create a “heritage” of division which becomes burdensome to future generations. When particularisms are expressed as cultural rifts within Orthodox churches in North America, new converts may internalize those rifts as necessary to the legacy of Orthodox Christianity, viewing their own heritage as irreconcilable with it. Especially when cultural practices conflate with dogma, the cultural past may dictate the cultural present, as discussed by Roudometof (Roudometof 2007). Is “Orthodoxy” truly owned by anyone? Some would say it is “owned” by the Church Fathers who have authoritative, though still vernacular, interpretations of tradition. In reality, these interpretations can be subverted by

those who practice on the ground. In spite of all, real people find this faith meaningful over and over again in ways which transcend culture.

Converts are creating a new kind of cultural legacy in the West which is still emerging. The longer Orthodox Christianity is present there, the more localized it becomes, in spite of cultural enclaves and anti-Western hate groups. Orthodox-born believers who come from other countries to North America may increasingly encounter something unique in its own cultural context much as Orthodox Christianity takes on localized expression elsewhere. Globalization challenges the notion of where the “local” ends and the “global” begins, which makes some feel alienated, lost in a barrage of cultural input where the only constancy is change. Turning to stability in a seemingly unchanging faith, whether for an Orthodox-born believer or a new convert, may increase a sense of stability. For converts, in a hyper-individualistic society, choices may feel overwhelming, and Orthodox Christianity is a faith which asks believers simply to choose obedience. Those who have grown up in the faith will have far more experience negotiating with tradition and may know their own power within this system. The needs of community members can be at opposite ends of an identity spectrum—on one end, the need belong to an “authentic,” continuous tradition, and on the other end, the need to find one’s place in a community by means of creative adaptation.

Chapter 4: Orthodox Christian Communities as Folk Groups

While there are solitary dimensions of this faith, Orthodox Christian worship is heavily community-based. In practice, the liturgy is a community creation. For both converts and immigrants, practicing Orthodox Christianity in North America ultimately implies embracing a certain (often new) community. Both are strangers in a strange land. For Orthodox-born émigrés, they are practicing a lifelong faith in a completely new context with others who do not necessarily share their frames of reference. For converts, they are adjusting to a new faith and learning how to fit it into their cultural context, where Orthodox Christianity is largely foreign. As the history of Orthodox Christianity demonstrates, communities survive invasions and bombs where buildings and towns cannot.

This chapter focuses on how the past religious backgrounds of different Orthodox Christians, whether converts or Orthodox-born, affect their values, experiences, and expectations of a church community. Believers' past experiences in religious communities impact the values that they bring to their present community, and how they interact with one another (if they do at all). Most importantly, they shape the reasons that each believer chose their present church, whether that is St. Parascheva in the Midwestern U.S. or St. Nicholas in Atlantic Canada. The questions I seek to answer include why converts converted in the first place; why both converts and Orthodox-born immigrants chose St. Parascheva to be their church, particularly if they have no Romanian background; why, by contrast, members of the Canadian community I studied choose to attend their mission; how both converts and Orthodox-born believers learned to practice their faith; and what kinds of expectations different people have of their church community. This chapter begins with a look at how community dynamics shape Orthodox Christians' experiences of their faith at both St. Parascheva and St. Nicholas.

Church Backgrounds

In order to appreciate the comparison between the congregations of St. Parascheva and St. Nicholas, it is necessary to briefly recount the history of the two parishes.

St. Parascheva

The parish of St. Parascheva was officially founded in 1910 by Romanian immigrants. Many came with the intent to “become rich and return to Romania” (Albean and Vanderstel 1994, 1206). These early immigrants primarily worked in the automobile and meat-packing industries. Father Ephraim cited an aphorism of the early Romanian immigrants, “\$1000 and home.” Some, however, arrived and stayed, becoming American citizens. An early priority for these first Romanians was learning English, which was achieved both through a local tutoring center and the Romanian Progressive Club, “an ethnic national social club dedicated to encouraging loyalty to the United States through citizenship instruction and developing an understanding between people” (Crocker 1994, 256; Albean and Vanderstel 1994, 1206). Further efforts at integrating into American culture were made through members of the community becoming Freemasons and the youth joining Boy Scouts.

The community has had fifteen priests since its founding, and in the first ten years of the parish’s existence, there was a high turnover rate due to outmigration back to Romania and receiving direction from the bishop to serve other church communities. I was able to collect stories beginning with Father Corneliu, the priest from 1987-1993. At that time, in the late 1980s, St. Parascheva had been about to close its doors due to low membership and Father Corneliu’s struggle with alcoholism. Milton, for example, was one of the first American converts to start attending the church about twenty-three years ago after his previous church went through

a crisis. He said at that time, there were about twenty people who attended St. Parascheva, all of whom were Orthodox-born Romanian-Americans except for his family, his friend Clive and his wife Joy, and a deacon. He said:

I don't use this word very often...it's pretty miraculous what happened. They were going to close the doors [of St. Parascheva, and] that year we didn't have Pascha because the priest was in rehab.

“Pascha” refers to Easter, the most important feast of the Orthodox Church year; for St.

Parascheva not to have a Pascha service indeed shows what dire straits the church was in.

The archbishop of the jurisdiction at the time happened to mention to another priest that he was looking at closing the doors of the community. The same priest, Father George and his wife Marlene volunteered to replace Father Corneliu in an attempt to revive the church. Father Ephraim said, “He was installed as the parish priest the same weekend that we were chrismated. There were simultaneous new beginnings, and from there, the church began to grow again.” Chrismation refers to a ritual of inclusion into the Orthodox Church. Both Milton and Father Ephraim’s narratives emphasize the confluence of events by which St. Parascheva did not, in fact, close its doors, but experienced a rebirth by means of new converts.

Both versions of this story take on the qualities of legend, describing miraculous events. A legend is defined by Timothy Tangherlini as a localized, historical narrative told as true, often dealing with supernatural phenomena. In the case of the two narratives above, the supernatural is God’s intervention in the life of a dwindling church (Tangherlini 1996, 437). Folklorist Haya Bar-Itzhak, in her study of Jewish saints’ legends, writes that these stories allow individuals to achieve communion with God (Bar-Itzhak 2005, 156). The quality of the saint’s faith is the embodiment of his or her close ties with God, and he or she is, in fact, God’s representative on Earth. For believers, this validates the existence of holiness and sacred mystery in the world:

proof of God's own existence. While the narratives of St. Parascheva's revitalization do not rely on saints per se, they do hinge on an act of God and are told as stories of spiritual experience.

Many of the new American converts had come to St. Parascheva following a crisis in another local church community which had been exploring Orthodox theology but was not necessarily prepared to convert to it (see Bringerud 2012 for more details about this church). Milton and Clive were the first Americans to come from this neighboring community, but others, including Father Ephraim, soon followed them. When Father Ephraim and his family joined the church as catechumens, Milton actually sponsored him in his conversion. Sponsorship in conversion is, in essence, becoming someone's "godparent" or mentor. A person who has been a part of the community for a period of time takes a new member as a mentee. Father Ephraim went on to eventually become the priest of St. Parascheva, and he is still the priest there today.

Today, St. Parascheva has about one hundred regularly-attending members, though there are perhaps twice that many in its extended social network of irregular congregants. Slightly more than half of the congregation are American converts, including the priest and his wife. Slightly less than a third of the congregation are Romanian émigrés, who have been in the U.S. anywhere between five and twenty years. Roughly 10% are American-born Orthodox Christians, frequently the children of converts, but also including the children of Romanian émigrés.

St. Nicholas

In 2003, there was a small, mostly transient, community of Russian émigrés in the area who sought a priest. The community raised money for a priest to visit, and eventually they got two: one Canadian priest with a Russian background, and his friend whom he invited from Russia. The community did not have their own building, and they rented spaces in local

Anglican and Catholic churches. The bishop of Ottawa was petitioned for the community to be officially recognized, and it was received as part of the Orthodox Church of America (meaning North America), in the diocese of Canada, and under the Quebec deanery, which covers Atlantic Canada as well as the province of Quebec.

A personal falling-out between the two priests divided the community, and some stopped attending altogether. As one parishioner explained to me, this is the reason why there are not many Russians who attend the church currently. In the aftermath of this conflict, those who remained raised money again, and over the next several years, a few priests came temporarily. In between priests' visits, the community had readers' services, which do not have communion, are shorter than a Sunday liturgy, and can be performed by lay people. One parishioner remembered that English was not the first language of most of these visiting priests, though the liturgy was mainly done in English to accommodate parishioners from various backgrounds. As Sergei, an Orthodox-born Canadian, remarked to me, "When people grow up Orthodox and come here, they create the church to serve [their needs]." Compromises had to be made, but not everyone was pleased with them.

When Father Isaac was installed as the priest-in-residence at St. Nicholas in 2013, for example, decisions had to be made regarding which calendar would be used. While English was maintained as the main liturgical language, parishioners are invited to say the Lord's Prayer out loud in any other language. Typically, this includes Arabic, Greek, Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian. Some parishioners were unhappy that the "New Calendar" system was chosen over the Old Calendar, which is most frequently used by Russians when observing feast days, for example. Nearly every person whom I interviewed conceded that it is impossible to make everyone happy, an emic example of the vernacular nature of religion. In the end, it is up to each

parishioner to decide what is most important to him or her: to have an Orthodox church nearby, or to be able to observe specific traditions.

Today, St. Nicholas is comprised of mostly Orthodox-born parishioners from majority-Orthodox countries, especially in Eastern Europe. These members may range from those newly-arrived in Canada to those who have lived in the country for decades. Father Isaac and his wife are the only regularly-attending converts, and they have been Orthodox for over a decade. The mission's membership is highly transient, as people come and go from the province for work. A typical Sunday liturgy frequently includes fewer than ten attendees.

These parishes have different histories and demographics. Considering the history of each of these parishes, we can now look at the reasons why converts chose Orthodox Christianity.

Choosing Orthodox Christianity for the First Time

Converts tend to choose Orthodox Christianity because of the ways in which it differs from their previous faith traditions. The majority of converts with whom I spoke at St. Parascheva, a Romanian Orthodox Church in the Midwestern U.S., had been Protestant Christians before. Former Protestants who have become Orthodox sometimes choose Orthodox Christianity because of what it is *not* as much as they choose it for what it *is*. Sociologists Scot McKnight and Hauna Ondrey, in a study of evangelicals who become Catholic, observed that, “behind the conversion of many was a previous conversion to evangelicalism” (McKnight and Ondrey 2008, 192). I found similar patterns in this study, and often conversion to Orthodox Christianity was preceded by disillusionment with evangelicalism. Nonetheless, converts still bring worldviews and expectations from their previous faith traditions with them. Mary, for example, who converted from a Protestant church and has attended St. Parascheva for over two

decades, said that at her previous church she felt manipulated by the emotional music (Mary, June 13, 2015). Esme, another convert of similar background and decades-long parishioner at St. Parascheva, said of the Orthodox faith, “There was a point at which I realized, this particular faith isn’t about me. It’s something that I can embrace because it’s bigger than I am” (Esme, July 13, 2015). She elaborated on this statement by discussing how much she enjoys liturgical rituals, such as the priestly procession with the Eucharist and the way the congregation is routinely dowsed with incense. She said, “This particular faith isn’t about *doing*. It’s about *being*,” in contrast to her previous experiences [my emphasis]. Esme said that this was both liberating and healing for her.

Both Mary and Esme talked about certain required forms of performative participation which would be evaluated by other parishioners and leadership in their Protestant experiences. Folklorist Richard Bauman defined performance as “responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence” (Bauman 1977, 11). In this case, Mary and Esme had to perform in order to fit in or belong in their Protestant churches. This conditional acceptance created a sense of isolation in Esme’s experience. The community’s expectations mirrored how she thought about God in that she had to “do the right thing” to be loved. The experiences described by Mary and Esme speak of church services that depended upon individual participation to succeed. While social drama may exist in any community of people, the Orthodox Christian liturgy is not dependent upon a full congregation to proceed. A priest and one other person are the minimum necessary to serve the Eucharist. Individuals in the congregation may sing or stay silent, sit or stand, but the liturgy will go on. Some Orthodox Christians describe the service using the metaphor of a river; one may swim in a river, stand in it, or observe it from the bank, but the river will continue to flow and give life no matter what. Furthermore, the format of a

Sunday divine liturgy is identical from one week to the next. It is possible to memorize the prayers, the order of service, and the hymns. Some of my consultants described finding a more meditative experience in the liturgy by allowing themselves to simply experience it rather than following along in service book. The world outside the church building may change, but the liturgy to which believers return week after week has a comforting continuity.

Esme described “being washed by” the Orthodox liturgy and being healed by it. Nothing is required of her, and she has freedom to negotiate how she participates (Esme July 13, 2015). Julia, who converted at St. Parascheva over twenty years ago, used a similar analogy when she said, “You know, if you stand under the shower long enough, whether you use the shampoo or not, you’re going to get clean” (Julia, June 30, 2015). Julia used this metaphor to talk about being changed by the experience of going to church versus whether or not she practiced Orthodox rituals, such as fasting or prayer, with discipline. Esme described one of her first experiences of Orthodox Christianity before she converted. In 1994, she and her husband were invited to attend a celebration of the 200th anniversary of Russian Orthodox Christianity in North America, held in Chicago; the first Orthodox mission was established in North American in 1794 in Alaska. Patriarch Alexei of Moscow was visiting, and Esme described how the event drew a huge crowd. Group responses such as “Lord have mercy” were done in many languages, and this in particular had an effect on her. Esme described feeling small in the midst of “the faith of the nations,” and the experience catalyzed her wholehearted conversion (Esme July 13, 2015).

Some have described Orthodox Christianity as a conformist faith, viewing it from the outside, yet this is not necessarily how believers experience it (Brandes 1990, 188). Clive, a convert at St. Parascheva who has attended for over three decades, said, “The people I’ve known who have converted to Orthodox Christianity have been some of the most individualistic people.

They're not herd-mentality people" (Clive, June 27, 2015). As discussed in chapter three, for some North American converts, conversion to this faith is an expression of the cultural value of individualism, where the experience of maintaining the faith from an Orthodox-born perspective may be completely different (Herbel 2014, 3). What is more, many of these converts are highly educated. The majority of my consultants held graduate degrees, and this is indicative of the community as a whole, including both converts and Orthodox-born members of St. Parascheva. Julia described women in the parish who "hold law degrees and chancellorships" in their day jobs, but in church, "They sing in the choir with their head covering on, and they're totally ok with that" (Julia, June 30, 2015). There is freedom in anonymity. Historian Nadieszda Kizenko, writing about contemporary Orthodox women's piety in Russia, found that her interviewees all expressed feeling respite from the cares of the world in church, including economic survival and romantic interest (Kizenko 2013, 614). A housewife whom Kizenko interviewed simply said that church was nothing like the rest of her life, and that alone was a comfort. The liturgy's power lies in shared group experience in which the individual self can disappear. I have been challenged on this point, because in reciting the Nicene Creed, every believer must say "I believe," emphasizing the individual. I would argue, however, that the Creed is still recited in group ritual with all members of the congregation, and therefore has more to do with group than individual participation.

Choosing a Specific Community

St. Parascheva is unique among Orthodox churches in general for a few reasons. Though it is a Romanian Orthodox church, its congregation is slightly less than half Romanian immigrants and their families, as well as Orthodox-born Americans with Romanian heritage. The other half of this community (which, on a given Sunday, may be 120 people) consists of

American families who converted to Orthodox Christianity as adults. There is a small segment of the community which fit in neither category—immigrants from other countries who are either converts or Orthodox-born, and Orthodox-born Americans who do not have Romanian heritage—highlighting the superficial and slippery nature of “groups.”

Folklorist Dorothy Noyes writes, “That groups are not homogeneous is the first realization of any scholar doing fieldwork” (Noyes 2003b, 13). Indeed, group identity is often situational. Folklorist Haya Bar-Itzhak, writing about Jews who immigrated to Israel, argues that “In Israel they experience their ethnic identity as Jews among Jews, which is quite unlike the ethnic identity of Jews among non-Jews in the Diaspora” (Bar-Itzhak 2005, 93). The same statement may be made about Orthodox Christians and cultural identity. This is especially true given the history of Orthodox Christianity and nationalist movements, as discussed in chapter one. From context to context, the “group” label under which a person may feel the greatest sense of belonging may change. Those who convert to Orthodox Christianity have the advantage of being in their country of origin and being able to speak the dominant language. In spite of this, I have met some converts who feel alienated from their culture of origin because of the values they have embraced in becoming Orthodox Christians. Someone who is both North American and Orthodox-born may not experience this conflict in the same way. New émigrés from majority-Orthodox countries face a double-challenge when coming to North America. There are linguistic and cultural barriers to overcome, and it may be difficult to find an Orthodox church nearby. Furthermore, if they do find an Orthodox church, they may not necessarily feel that faith is something which provides an immediate social bond with others. Language or shared experience may be more important, certainly in the beginning, than the fact that everyone at church is an Orthodox Christian.

I have written elsewhere about my own community of origin in the Midwestern U.S., which mass-converted to Orthodox Christianity (Bringerud 2012). Though the community made the journey into a new faith, they felt some significant cultural barriers between themselves and other Orthodox churches in the area, both in terms of language and tradition. Conversion did not automatically give them a sense of belonging in a wider Orthodox Christian community. In fact, they perceived themselves to have a very different identity as Orthodox Christians than those whom they called “ethnic Orthodox.” Sometimes this term was used pejoratively, but other times, it was used simply to mean those with an inherited cultural connection to Orthodox Christianity, indicating the speaker did not identify this way. Many scholars have written about the use of this term as a marker of otherness, whether cultural or racial (Anagnostou 2006, Brady 1996, Oring 1986).¹ Folklorist Elliott Oring argues that the use of the expression “ethnic” to designate a group, for example, is frequently “employed to designate groups *other* than one’s own” (Oring 1986, 24). Certainly the term “ethnic” can be used in a pejorative way to exclude others based on perceived differences. On the other hand, the term “ethnic group” is also used to connote a sense of shared history, tradition, and cultural descent, and this is how I use the term (Oring 1986, 29). In my own majority-white, formerly Protestant community of origin, church members may well have felt a greater sense of familiarity with non-Orthodox Christians with

¹ Folklorist Margaret K. Brady writes that in the U.S., the term “‘ethnic’ is usually applied to foreign nationality or immigrant groups, and is often extended to American Indians, African Americans, and other racial groups, and sometimes to specific religious group, irrespective of their national background” (Brady 1996, 227). The term clearly has racial undertones in this definition, evaluating any non-white group against an Anglo-American standard. Brady goes on to write that when the term “ethnic folklore” was first used, it was meant to refer to “a constellation of cultural traits that together distinguish one group from another,” though now it often is more related to the negotiation between cultural boundaries in groups (Brady 1996, 227). Folklorist Yiorgos Anagnostou proposes that “ethnicity” can also be a convenient way to market a product (to both those who are part of the targeted group and outside of it), such as festivals, museum exhibits, or “ethnic studies” (Anagnostou 2006, 387). He suggests that ethnicity is a convenient way to make individualism into something portable (Anagnostou 2006, 388).

whom they shared language and culture than with Orthodox Christians with whom they could not share those things.

“Group,” therefore, is not a stable identity marker; it changes in different contexts. In the landscape of Orthodox Christianity in North America, social networks may be a more useful way to study communities. Noyes discusses the multiplex of social relationships that bloom outward from one individual (Noyes 2003b, 16-17). Some people are on the outskirts of a community, either by exclusion or personal choice. Noyes writes that “it is not so much a question of different community members, but of the multiple interactive worlds of individuals” (Noyes 2003b, 18). In the community of St. Parascheva, where members are both new converts and lifelong Orthodox Christians of different nationalities, there truly are complex webs of social interaction. Different community members turn to one another to meet different social needs.

The cultural diversity of St. Parascheva makes it unique among Orthodox churches, as does its use of English. Though the church was founded over one hundred years ago by Romanian immigrants, the language of the liturgy is primarily English, with occasional Romanian phrases (such as “Lord have mercy” and “To Thee, O Lord,”) and hymns (such as communion hymns and those for seasonal feast days) here and there. For a fuller analysis of the use of English and Romanian at St. Parascheva, see chapter five. Father Ephraim, the current rector, explained to me that there is a delicate balance in trying to be linguistically relevant as a church in the U.S., while being sensitive both to the church’s history and to the needs of new Romanian immigrants.

Father Ephraim is an American convert to Orthodox Christianity. He converted over twenty years ago at St. Parascheva, and he became the priest there in the mid-1990s. He

discussed trying to avoid what he called the “ethnic ghetto paradigm”: an insular community which is not open to bringing in new, culturally different members (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015). In fact, one of the reasons cited by several converts for choosing St. Parascheva over any of the other six Orthodox churches in town was that it did not feel culturally alienating. Language and music were often cited as reasons why the local Greek, Serbian or Antiochian churches were less appealing to converts. One of my consultants said that St. Parascheva appealed to her because of all the Orthodox churches in town it seemed to be “the least ethnic.” She clarified her statement to mean that the church felt “very inclusive, very warm and welcoming.” Among my American interviewees who had joined the church when it had low membership, the qualities of hospitality and love were repeated over and over again as applied to the Romanians whom they met there. Clive, a convert who has been with the parish for decades, remembered a previous priest, Father Corneliu, who insisted on doing the liturgy in English despite struggling to speak it. The rest of the congregation followed his lead. Clive said, “They sang it terribly, but they sang it [in a] heartfelt [way].” I will address language as a significant factor in liturgical and community experience later, but these anecdotes reveal certain initial expectations about community from American converts. These expectations include familiarity, kindness, hospitality, and not feeling alienated by the presence of Romanian culture, including language.

Orthodox-born church members, including Romanians, had somewhat different expectations of community when they chose St. Parascheva. Halyna grew up in a Ukrainian Orthodox church elsewhere in the U.S. When she moved to the Midwest a few years ago, she knew almost immediately that St. Parascheva was going to be a good fit for her after visiting because of the cultural diversity there (Halyna, August 18, 2015). Victor, an Orthodox-born American of Romanian descent who has attended St. Parascheva for over a decade, mentioned

the warm and welcoming qualities of the parish, but it was just as important to him to maintain a connection with his heritage (Victor, June 19, 2015). His first memory of life was in an Orthodox church, and all the churches he has attended have had congregations comprised of Romanians and Romanian-Americans; his faith is deeply connected to his community. Florina said that when she moved to the U.S. she did not speak English and felt isolated. She said, “I was crying all the time because I could not hear the church bells on Sunday. My husband brought a phone book and looked up all the Orthodox churches in the area. He found St. Parascheva because it was the only Romanian one. In Romania, the cathedral where I went as a child was also called St. Parascheva. It was the beginning of my life, and maybe it will be the end of my life.” (Florina, July 26, 2015). When she met Father George, who was the priest at the time, she said, “I kissed his hand and I wept. I really felt that I found where I belong. The liturgy at that time was all in English, but the service book was in Romanian as well, so I used it to follow along. I could sing in English.” For her, finding St. Parascheva was an important part of her spiritual well-being, how she learned English, and also part of how she found other Romanians with whom to socialize. Now that she speaks English, she actively socializes with English-speakers as well.

Both Victor and Florina discussed choosing St. Parascheva because there were those who shared their social and cultural experiences as a Romanian-American and a Romanian immigrant, respectively. Some American converts have chosen St. Parascheva for similar reasons. There is a significant segment of these converts who migrated from another local church which went through an internal schism in the early 1990s (Bringerud 2012). After a few people transitioned from the first parish to St. Parascheva, more followed. Not unlike Romanians who joined the parish to be with those with whom they share important life experiences, this segment

of American converts also wished to preserve a sense of community with particular people. Jeff is one of the converts who made this transition between communities. He explained that it was important for him and his wife to maintain relationships with people from their previous community. He said, “We grew up with these people, we raised our kids together, we had and still have a wonderful history of communion with these folks” (Jeff, June 16, 2015).

Sometimes choosing a church is a luxury. St. Nicholas is the only Orthodox mission in its province. The community rents space out of the school of theology on the local university campus. There are between ten and fifteen regularly-attending parishioners, though this by no means represents the complete social network of the community. I interviewed Marko, a Serbian university student who attended St. Nicholas Mission. Marko told me that in Serbia, he rarely went to church, and most people he knew behaved similarly. The experience of coming to Canada, he said, “pushed” him toward church. Marko described being physically far from the “geographical center” of Orthodox Christianity (Marko, October 27, 2015). He felt that the faith was “mainstream” in Serbia, whereas in Canada it is peripheral or even ignored. He wondered whether he rejected church at home for the same reason he embraced it in Canada—to rebel against what is mainstream.

Marko described that he and his brother, who immigrated at the same time, felt lonely in a new country, and the church community made them feel comfortable because they could speak freely and “say things we wouldn’t say in front of other Canadians.” He elaborated that Canadian customs of conversation include being non-confrontational and avoiding subjects that might be controversial. For Marko, there is something disingenuous about this. One cannot be sure of the true feelings or motives of the other person. Though there are few Serbians at St. Nicholas, he feels understood by other Eastern Europeans he meets, and able to express himself. For him,

finding a church community started as an opportunity for cultural familiarity and ended with a sense of deeper meaning.

Marko's experiences mirror those described by folklorist Mariana Dobрева-Mastagar in her study of Macedono-Bulgarian émigrés in Toronto. Dobрева-Mastagar observed that churches in the homeland might not foster social activities with the intent of building community (2016, 121). They exist to serve the spiritual needs of those who come, and congregants often leave the church afterward. By contrast, the churches she studied in Toronto frequently had parishioners stay after services to socialize, and the church participated in organizing other activities for fellowship. Dobрева-Mastagar discusses that some scholars see the shift in church activities toward social functions in diaspora as evidence of secularization, but she disagrees (Dobрева-Mastagar 2016, 9). Many factors are involved, including relationships with culture in the homeland, relationships with culture in the new place of settlement, proficiency in the new language, and, especially for those who grew up in former Soviet bloc countries, knowledge of religious traditions at all.

Leila expressed seeking out the Orthodox community as a social network. When she first arrived in Canada, she was invited to attend St. Nicholas Mission because of her Romanian friends, who wanted to expand the community (Leila, December 3, 2015). In a study of transnational religion, sociologist Peggy Levitt points out that "Religion is one of the principal ways that migrants stay connected to places beyond where they settle...religious pluralism and the globalization of religious life have become part and parcel of the same dynamic" (Levitt 2007, 107). Participating in the Orthodox community in Atlantic Canada may have just as much or more to do with finding points of "home" than it does religious belief. Other members of the

community cared less about the fact that Leila was Romanian and more about the fact that she had been baptized in the Orthodox Church.

In fact, Leila said that she did not necessarily believe in the Orthodox interpretation of Christianity and she attends other churches. However, she identifies as Orthodox because her parents baptized her in that tradition, and Romania is a majority-Orthodox country. Leila rarely attends Orthodox services because of her disagreements with Orthodox theology. She grew up going to both a Protestant and an Orthodox church with her two grandmothers, and this has shaped her beliefs. Leila prefers the Protestant services, but she feels the need to go to an Orthodox church twice a year, for Christmas and Easter. On these holidays, it is important to her to socialize with other Romanians because of shared traditions, jokes, and language. The Romanian community in Atlantic Canada substitutes for the extended families who remain in Romania. In the same vein, when Leila had her second child, her Romanian friends threw her a baby shower, and people she had never even met—whether other Romanians or others connected to the church network—showed up. There is a blurry line between cultural and religious identity for Leila and many other Orthodox-born immigrants. Shared experience often takes precedence over diverse beliefs.

Learning to be Orthodox in Community

The transmission of religious knowledge and practice occurs differently for the Orthodox-born and converts. For the Orthodox-born, these traditions are learned in a community context that includes family as much as it might include wider circles like church or town. This is especially true for believers from Orthodox-majority countries. For adult converts, they may start with reading literature about theology, and later observe and imitate those around them in

church. Converts who joined St. Parascheva understandably needed to learn how to *participate* in the faith, as there are rituals and beliefs which make Orthodox Christianity different from other Christian traditions. It seems that for the earliest converts in the community, the learning was a dialogue between the old and the young, the American-born and the immigrants, and the Orthodox-born and the converts. In learning how to be Orthodox, early converts engaged in another kind of learning; they learned how to be a community.

Esme said that she did not believe she could have embraced Orthodox Christianity as fully as she did if she had not been able to watch and learn “from others who have been immersed in this their whole life” (Esme, July 13, 2015). Father Ephraim proposed that there are two ways of knowing, the intellectual and the intuitive, which he identified as the Greek “*nous*.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines “*nous*” is defined as “a: an intelligent purposive principle of the world” and “b: the divine reason regarded in Neoplatonism as the first emanation of God” (Merriam-Webster 2001, 793). In his experience, Orthodox Christianity integrates and balances those two kinds of knowledge. He reflected on his previous Christian experiences, which he said were “about categories, study, and labels,” in order to “figure it out” and “control it” (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015). He attributed the need to categorize as a facet of Western Protestantism, and a vestige of the Enlightenment. Fr. Ephraim cited Descartes’s “I think, therefore I am” in particular as a paradigm which places human—and in Fr. Ephraim’s interpretation, individual—reason at the center of reality. By contrast, he said, “And then there’s this mystery of the human person, of the heart, the soul. And God will just kind of...zing us.” He likened this to the first time he walked into an Orthodox church. The experience filled him with awe, and he said, “This is the most real thing I’ve ever seen.” Knowing my field, Fr. Ephraim

connected these experiences, which he described as outside of intellectual reason, with folklore.

He said,

All of the ancient cultures used to just *know* that you understand things not only with your head but with your heart. That's why fairy tale and myth and folklore are so important, because they speak to that non-rational place in us where we learn truth. (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015)

This statement affirms the attitude, which I have observed among many converts, that Orthodox Christianity has survived for such a long time both because it is true and because it fills the human need for mystery. Fr. Ephraim felt that the intuitive experience was especially important to him as a convert because “the noetic side of things has been lost in Western culture” and invalidated.

Folklorist David J. Hufford has written about Western scholarship, especially about religious belief, devaluing esoteric knowledge in favor of empirical knowledge. He discusses how academics use a scientific paradigm to gain a monopoly on rationalism and impose social control over those whose experiences fall into “non-empirical” categories (Hufford 1983, 26). Tangible kinds of evidence are privileged over the intangible evidence of personal experience. Hufford also discusses the “incommensurability of different theoretical systems,” as a problem of scientific worldview (Hufford 1985, 187). Since empirical and esoteric modes of thinking answer different questions, it is impossible to use one as a substitute for the other. Hufford advocates for a phenomenological approach to the study of belief, as this is the only way to truly understand experience (Hufford 1982a, 1982b, 1995).

In his previous experiences, Father Ephraim felt that he had to choose between his intellectual and intuitive modes of thinking about his faith. Although I agree with Hufford's arguments, Fr. Ephraim's example shows that in Orthodox Christianity, things are not

dichotomized. When I posed a binary between an Orthodox emphasis on exterior reality and a Protestant emphasis on interior reality, Fr. Ephraim said:

It's not that simple. The language I would use is the difference between being an individual and being in a community. An individual is someone who is self-defining and isolated from anybody else...but a *person* is defined as someone who is in a relationship. So, in the Orthodox experience, whether we're conscious of it or not, both happen at the same time. You do have a personal relationship with God. But it's also deeply communal, *suprapersonal*. They're not diametrically opposed, which again, is another reason that Orthodoxy makes sense to me. It treats the world as it really is. (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015)

In his experience, individuals are adrift without communities. It is only in the context of relationships that they become fully realized people. Fr. Ephraim actually suggested that communities were necessary for people to "be spiritually awake," because individuals could be lost in their own minds and realities. Converts learn this dynamic by observing those who have been Orthodox for longer periods of time.

Sometimes the reality of the communal means friction. Julia described American converts as unknowingly "trampling" on the culture of the original members of St. Parascheva. The first converts to come to St. Parascheva encountered a dwindling church with barely twenty members, all of whom were aging. Julia suggests that though the influx of converts was admittedly strange and, at times, ignorant, the original members seemed grateful for new faces and were hospitable. The converts were changed by the examples set by this older community of people. Clive described Ioan, an older Romanian man whom he met when he first came to St. Parascheva. Clive and Ioan did not speak one another's languages, but Clive was moved by seeing the way Ioan participated in the liturgy despite the fact that it was in English. Clive was briefly a chanter in church, despite not being a great singer, by his own admission. Ioan did not speak English, but he tried to help Clive by singing with him, writing pronunciation notes for

himself under the words. Clive saw Ioan cry during liturgy, and he said, “There was no self-consciousness. His piety came right from within, and it was so heartfelt, and so emotional. So the liturgy for him was not this dry, repetitive event. It was something really living” (Clive June 27, 2015). Clive learned an attitude toward community and the purpose of church, as he observed Ioan’s behavior.

Father Ephraim suggested that village life in Romania might be a model for community where people are aware of each other’s struggles and help one another. More than one American convert I interviewed at St. Parascheva expressed to me a kind of nostalgia for village life, as they imagined it; they saw it as an alternative model for community to the secular ones they saw around them in North America. This nostalgia is twofold—in part, it is a turn toward a tightly-knit community in an urban area, but it is also a desire to turn toward a spiritual community in a secular society. Several convert members of St. Parascheva grew up in small towns and know the complexities of living in close proximity to one’s neighbors, however the sense of stability it provides is comforting.

Sociologist Stuart Tannock writes that one use of nostalgia is to critique a “loss of identity, lack of agency, or absence of community” (Tannock 1995, 454). Tannock, furthermore, points out that though the turn to the past is meant to find something missing in the present, this does not necessarily mean that the past moment was happy, peaceful, or even stable. Father Ephraim does not completely idealize small communities; he refers to busybodies, for example. Nostalgia is a means of critiquing the present, which, in Father Ephraim’s experience, can be isolating and disconnected. Folklorist Ray Cashman, discusses nostalgia as a means of leaving “a conceptual space between now and then, to resist, if nothing else, the finality and conclusiveness

of the changes wrought over the past century” (Cashman 2006, 147). Drawing from the past is a means of building an identity in the present.

For converts, this is especially important, because so many I interviewed came to Orthodox Christianity out of a sense of dissatisfaction, either with other faith-based communities or with society at large. To convert is to renegotiate how one relates to the world as well as to God. In this complex process, many converts feel the distance between the faith they practice and their surrounding culture. It can be tempting to look to those who grew up in majority-Orthodox countries and feel envy at the blurred lines between sacred and secular culture. Martin, for example, described seeing wedding pictures of a Romanian couple from church in which they processed through the entire village. He observed seamlessness between biological family and neighbors. In my observation, some converts feel distance with their biological families after conversion, because of the way the faith changes their perspectives about the “outside” world. Church community may feel closer than biological family because of shared beliefs and experiences.

Family & Community

Where American converts perhaps learned new models for community from the older members of St. Parascheva, I also heard stories about how community shaped Orthodox-born members. For most Orthodox-born people I interviewed, family and religious community are one and the same, and they reinforce one another. One of my consultants, Gavril, grew up in an Orthodox community in Romania and emigrated to the U.S. about ten years ago. He never doubted the existence of God and always felt his watchful eye. His parents, for example, said, “I don’t know if you lie to me, but God knows” (Gavril, July 7, 2015). The idea that even if his

parents could not see him misbehave, God could still see, proved to be an effective disciplinary tool. Gavril uses the same tactic with his own children today.

In Gavril's anecdote, as with earlier examples, the community becomes a lens for reality, and by extension, God. People watch out for one another, but they also literally watch each other. In Gavril's narrative, the community is actually a mirror for the sight of God, because like Foucault's panopticon, even if parents cannot see their child, there is always someone else who can (Foucault 1977, 195-230). Florina, who came to the U.S. from Romania over twenty years ago, expressed a similar sentiment when she said, "You cannot hide from God" (Florina, July 26, 2015).

I interviewed both converts and Orthodox-born church members who expressed family as an educational model for both God and community. Bill, an American convert who has been at St. Parscheva for two decades, observed that, in his experience, "If you come from a happy home, you will bring the happiness of that home to whomever or wherever you go. If you have happiness in your home, you can bring that to the Church, the whole Church" (Bill, July 12, 2015). He pointed out that it is not possible for a priest to serve a divine liturgy if there is not at least one member of the laity present, meaning that community, even symbolically, is an essential part of the most important ritual in Orthodox life. Each person matters. Bill said that when a person adopts this mentality, he or she will begin to see all people as sacred.

For some who have converted at St. Parascheva, the fact that they are dedicated to a church community creates a sense of conflict with their biological family. Martin, for example, has been at St. Parascheva for over twenty years. He grew up in a large extended family. Today, he spends more time with his adopted church community. He has struggled to balance his

commitments to each, especially because he is employed by his place of worship as a choir director.

Halyna, who is Orthodox-born, has moved around frequently, and each time she moves somewhere, choosing a church is an integral part of settling. She described how the church community becomes her family and maintaining those relationships is essential to spiritual health. Church provides a sense of belonging, and for her, this is related to feeling part of a place's history through its people. Speaking of her own upbringing in a Ukrainian Orthodox church, she said, "I think that's one of the great blessings of being born into Orthodox Christianity, because maybe your family has been there for generations, and you have that whole sense of that family lineage in there, and you have the generations together, which is just such a treasure" (Halyna, August 18, 2015). Intergenerational relationships are one of the strengths of St. Parascheva. There, as in Halyna's childhood church, parishioners are surrounded by the parish's history, even if they themselves are new members.

Community is an emergent process, and there is a delicate balance in making space for everyone as the community grows. Both Americans and Romanians seek a sense of belonging through St. Parascheva. Where the American converts have purposely sought out a faith-defined community, Romanians are often seeking a culture-defined community (of which faith is an important part). There are few options for places where Romanians can easily find one another. A Romanian Orthodox church is a self-explanatory point of contact. Where the Americans may have been shopping around for a faith community to fit their needs, the Romanians are simply seeking a place of familiarity as they adjust to a new country. The different expectations and needs of these demographic groups at St. Parascheva create different criteria for a sense of belonging, and this tends to cause separate social circles.

Expectations & the Social Experience of Community

While the idea of coming to church to “be” as opposed to “doing” is freeing for some converts like Esme and Julia, for others it is a significant transition from their previous Christian traditions. Ksenia, a Russian woman who has attended St. Parascheva for about a decade, commented that she felt church communities were frequently superficial social groups in the U.S. She discussed what it was like to grow up in the Soviet Union, where talking about faith was forbidden. Ksenia explained that many Russians were raised without faith during this period, and in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new generation is trying to reconnect with the faith of their ancestors in the 21st century. She suggested that faith communities in the U.S. may emphasize fulfillment of social needs over spiritual ones (Ksenia, August 23, 2015). Esme, for example remarked that converts often complained that a social divide exists at St. Parascheva between Romanians and Americans. Sometimes this is the product of a language barrier, and other times it is simply having more in common with fellow immigrants. While Esme is sympathetic to this reality, other Americans (who comprise the majority of converts at St. Parascheva) expect to connect with others in the community socially, likely because of precedent in their previous faith communities. I interviewed Americans and Romanians alike who said that they did not know many people by name from the other’s culture group. In my interview with Mary, she suggested that when converts are new to the church, they are more visible than new Romanian members because they typically undergo public conversion rituals where other community members become their godparents. By contrast, she said, “The Romanians don’t ‘join.’ They just come, because they’re already Orthodox” (Mary, June 13, 2015). Mary invokes a sense of cultural ownership when she says that Romanians don’t “join.” Recall Leila’s identification of herself as culturally Orthodox, though not necessarily in

agreement with its theological precepts. This also alludes to the different needs of new Romanian members and American converts. Americans who join St. Parascheva, on the whole, are not simply joining a new church, but are transitioning to a new branch of Christianity, complete with baptism and chrismation rituals. Romanians, on the other hand, are more often than not looking for a community with shared experience and language as well as for a spiritual home. The differences between these experiences can contribute to the way segments of the community group themselves. Gavril has lived in the U.S for fifteen years, and he echoed Mary's statement about the American-born church members. He said, "I have no idea when people convert in our church. I know the Romanian community, but the American community... We rarely have these conversations with them." Gavril also mentioned that the frequency with which families attend has a bearing on who they know. He described church as an important social hub for Romanians similarly to the way that Ksenia described "superficial" social club interactions among Americans at churches. Like Marko's experience in Canada, Gavril finds that he cannot express himself fully in front of Americans. Being around other Romanians with shared references and jokes is a welcome respite.

Catherine, a millennial who was born at St. Parascheva to convert parents, suggested that it could be difficult to get to know new people both because of shyness and because of the size of the congregation (Catherine, July 8, 2015). After the influx of converts in the early 1990's, the church population boomed. Many new converts had young children in the church, and eventually those children had children in the church. In the past ten years there has also been an influx of new Romanian immigrants, many, like Gavril, have young families. Though some view the size of the congregation as a blessing, it also means that Americans and Romanians do not

necessarily have to interact with one another. There are enough people that one can find someone who is easier to converse with than another.

In the 1990s this was not the case. The congregation had no more than twenty people in total, so socialization occurred between Americans and Romanians out of necessity. In fact, the Americans were outnumbered by Romanian heritage members. The small size of the community meant that there was greater intimacy in the community, and coffee hour after church was a small gathering with bagels and coffee, where everyone could get to know one another by name. Today, coffee hour after the church services involves a full-scale lunch prepared by a rotating group of parishioners. Several interviewees complained that the congregation has grown too large for the current parish hall, located in the church basement, to adequately accommodate all of them. There are many children running around, and it is loud with so many people in a small space. The social experience of community, for some converts, has changed significantly over time. In a smaller group it was easier to know everyone else and to be personally known. For Milton, who is a self-described introvert, a larger, crowded community is alienating. It seems significant to me that this experience is distinctly different than liturgical crowd immersion. In ritual, there is order and a place for everyone. In coffee hour, the same crowd can easily burst into chaos.

One side effect of the community getting larger is that it is no longer necessary for all members of the community to know one another. People have the luxury of selective association. In the last chapter, I referenced folklorist Glenn Robert Howard's study of an online religious community weakly linked by a general interest in a certain topic (Howard 2009, 425). Howard concluded that the Internet allows people to selectively limit their sources of influence, and avoid having their beliefs challenged. Though Howard focuses on the virtual world, the example of St.

Parascheva shows that his ideas can also apply to real-life settings. The relatively large size of this community has not necessarily resulted in more multivocal interactions and social exchange. In fact, as in Howard's case study, it has created social factions (and Howard discusses ensuing negative effects). However, unlike online communities that can limit their communication with the outside world, the parishioners at St. Parascheva are still part of one church. Intriguingly, these different factions may have a positive effect on the overall community.

At the St. Nicholas parish, by contrast, some of the friction about expectations happens less between cultural groups and more between the Orthodox-born congregants and the priest, who is a Canadian convert and has been Orthodox for a little over ten years. There are differences between the Slavic Orthodox tradition and Greek Orthodox tradition, for example, regarding feast days. There had been some inter-community conflict before Father Isaac's arrival, and according to Vera, a Russian émigré who has been in Canada for over a decade, there were some congregants looking for a scapegoat for their dissatisfaction. Vera described how when Father Isaac chose the new calendar route, he attempted to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number. He recognized that there were many ethnicities represented in his congregation, and more of the regular parishioners were accustomed to the "new" calendar, used by Greeks and Romanians. Some Russians chose to separate from the community over this. Vera described that some Russians were disappointed in no longer celebrating particular saints' days which are important in Russia but not necessarily in other majority-Orthodox countries. Father Isaac, as a Canadian and a convert, has the difficult task of trying to serve a multicultural congregation. Some of these customs are especially meaningful for Orthodox-born immigrants who are looking for familiarity in a new place, which may magnify their disappointment when the whole church does not celebrate them. At the end of the day, as Vera says, "I think that

people could be intolerant to anything in their lives. Their beliefs or their habits, like food habits, everything... everybody [must decide] for himself if he needs church or something else” (Vera, October 29, 2015).

Leila came into disagreement with Father Isaac about the interpretation of baptismal tradition. When her children were born, both Leila’s family and her husband’s family pressured them to have Orthodox Christian baptisms for their children even though they themselves were not active church-goers. For her first child’s baptism, Leila was able to go to Romania and find a priest who was willing to accommodate her preferences. Traditionally, Orthodox Christians perform infant baptisms in which the child is naked and fully submerged. Leila was not comfortable with either of these things, and when she approached the first priest, he would not compromise with her. Leila asked a second priest who was willing to modify tradition for her. Baptism is a sacrament in the Orthodox Church, and as such, it is taken seriously. I was surprised that a priest was willing to compromise on this practice. According to Leila, in Romania, priests would rather draw people to church by negotiation than to be concerned with the correctness of traditional rituals. This is augmented by the fact that since the Communist regime interrupted the transmission of Orthodox tradition in Romania, some adults were not raised with a consistent Orthodox practice, and are therefore unfamiliar with tradition. This also contributes to an atmosphere of flexibility. Leila was confident in her ability to negotiate with a priest there because there are so many Orthodox churches in Romania that it is possible to find at least one priest with whom one can feel comfortable.

When Leila had her second child, she sought out baptism in Canada, and she was surprised that she was not able to negotiate as easily with Father Isaac. She said, “He was shocked that I even asked for things. He said, ‘I will ask the bishop if I can do that’” (Leila,

December 3, 2015). In fact, Leila believes that the only reason he negotiated with her even a small amount is because she threatened not to baptize her child at all if some of her requests were not met. In the end, Father Isaac baptized the baby traditionally, and Leila was unhappy. She said, “The ‘Orthodox Orthodox’ [were willing to listen to my requests]. And this priest, he wasn’t even Orthodox, right? He just converted. So he is more ‘Orthodox’ than the ‘Orthodox.’” Ownership of tradition and the word “Orthodox” is contested in Leila’s statement. Father Isaac possesses the authority of his clerical office, but Leila suggests that his lack of experience or cultural background makes him less qualified to interpret that tradition. I suggest that two different traditions are at play. Leila’s tradition is informed by priests flexibly accommodating parishioners to encourage more people to participate in church. She attributed her ability to leverage for options in Romania to the fact that Orthodox Christian traditions had been interrupted by Communist policies in the past. Father Isaac’s tradition is informed by his seminary education in Greece and the influence of monastic practice there. One approach embraces the outside world while the other seeks careful distance itself from it.

There is a clerical tradition in the Orthodox Church known as *oikonomia* or economy. Timothy Ware refers to this as “a departure from the rules of the Church, so as to assist the salvation of particular persons” (Ware 1997, 311). Economy involves discerning between the “spirit” and the “letter” of a tradition so as to give a person spiritual aid. Economy is also closely tied to the way in which a person understands divine guidance. Anthropologist Alice Forbess interviewed nuns about mysticism and divine charisma in a Romanian Orthodox monastery (Forbess 2010). Rules, she found, were “not considered to be self-explanatory, and their application is subject to intuition rather than reason” (Forbess 2010, 147). Furthermore, while written doctrine was valuable, it was understood to be a framework for spiritual revelation rather

than an end in and of itself. The cases of Leila's two baptisms described above illustrate two different traditions with regard to the exercise of priestly economy and the extent of a layperson's agency. In one case, the priest's interpretation is to display latitude so as to maintain parishioners, and in the other, the priest's interpretation is to preserve tradition as he understands it and not innovate.

Though Leila is a layperson, she rests her personal claim to authority not only on her experiences of variety in interpretation, but also on Orthodox Christianity as her birthright, as opposed to Father Isaac as a Canadian convert. In essence, this too is related to knowledge of vernacular practice. I interpret her use of this strategy to mean that she views knowledge of diversity of Orthodox Christian practices as essential to being an Orthodox Christian rather than believing in a single, authoritative way to interpret Church tradition. Rather, she is aware of a range of precedent behaviors. For some who convert to Orthodox Christianity hoping for a single, unbroken, monolithic tradition, it may be difficult to appreciate the complex interplay between vernacular traditions exercised by authority figures and those vernacular traditions exercised by laypeople. Diversity in practice and interpretation may be seen as aberrant rather than as a tradition in and of itself. However, converts also innovate within the context of Orthodox Christian tradition, especially in personal interpretation. In chapter seven, I will discuss in greater detail the way laypeople create choices for themselves within the framework of Orthodox theology.

Though Leila does not ascribe to Orthodox Christian theology herself, "Orthodox" acts as a cultural label just as much as "Romanian" does to describe her shared experiences with others. Leila feels free to interpret traditions in her own way, and she describes Romanian priests as also having this interpretive power; for them, change is the survival of tradition rather than its demise.

When Leila describes Father Isaac jokingly as “more Orthodox than the Orthodox,” she is alluding to his concern to carry out the practices of tradition correctly. At the same time that Leila says that Father Isaac is “not even Orthodox,” she also admits that “He’s more Orthodox than I am. That’s for sure.” To her, she said it all comes down to belief in the end. She says that while she disagrees with Father Isaac, she admires and respects his piety.

The ways in which Leila and Father Isaac practice Orthodox Christianity respectively illustrate the difference between oral and written traditions. Anthropologists Hann and Goltz write,

In Eastern Christianities, perhaps to a greater extent than in the West, there has always been a continuum between written canonical tradition and what believers have actually done...Orthodox Christianity is perhaps best seen as a highly reflected pre- and postscriptural oral culture...[a] *living* mode of communication. (Hann and Goltz 2010, 15)

Often, those who are born Orthodox are born into an environment saturated with the oral traditions of theology, where oral tradition exists both at the clerical and lay levels. Some of these oral traditions are cultural and some are more philosophical/theological, but all are learned by observation and repetition. North American converts, on the other hand, usually come to Orthodox Christianity as adults and do not have this benefit of learning about the diversity of Orthodox Christian practice within a single family, culture, or country. In a quest for performing Orthodox Christianity correctly, there may be a focus on *orthopraxy*—“correct behavior” as much as or more than *orthodoxy*—“consistent and continuous belief” (Hann and Goltz 2010, 15). In short, those who are Orthodox-born, in some ways, have more examples at their disposal in terms of change and the application of tradition in everyday life. This is best observed by learning Orthodox Christianity in a community context.

Not all Orthodox-born congregants in the Canadian mission view converts, or having a converted priest, in the same way. Nina, a university student from Russia, prefers Father Isaac to priests she knew in Russia. “Russian priests are more radical,” she said (Nina, November 5, 2015). She mentioned the involvement of priests in government propaganda, which in her opinion, is outside the purview of the Church. “Since Father Isaac is from a different culture, his attitude is more understanding, but he is still strict.” Nina respects Father Isaac for his practicality and consistency. She cited, in addition, that Father Isaac is well-educated, with a doctorate. In Russia, she explained, “I have met some priests who don’t know much. They give generic responses to concerns over practical ones.” Marko also has great admiration for Father Isaac in his conversion. He found Father Isaac’s conversion inspiring because of how relatively unknown Orthodox Christianity is in North America and how countercultural it is.

Marko said of Father Isaac, “To work alone, to give up everything to serve, and decide to pursue your own faith is amazing to me” (Marko, October 27, 2015). Marko has also developed more of a personal relationship with Father Isaac than he ever did with a priest in Serbia. He said, “In Serbia, the priest doesn’t necessarily know your name, your background. He doesn’t necessarily know what’s going on with you.” Marko acknowledges that the fact that he didn’t go to church often probably contributed to this, but he, like Nina, suggests that Father Isaac may be a bit more devoted to getting to know parishioners personally, and he appreciates that. As St. Nicholas is a small mission and churches in Eastern Europe may be much larger, it may be easier to develop these relationships. Both Marko and Nina have become more frequent church-goers since coming to Canada, and they both attribute this to feeling personally connected to Father Isaac.

Conclusion

In the Orthodox Christian communities I studied, the cultural heritage of Orthodox Christianity means shared experiences which contribute to a sense of identity. Those who are Orthodox-born may choose to engage or not with cultural legacy in the performance of their identities, just as converts may choose whether or not to engage in their own cultural legacies as they fuse Orthodox Christianity into their lives. Converts are in the process of developing shared experiences with other Orthodox Christians, though these may have to do more with experiences in the present rather than over-arching shared culture or history. Converts, instead, are learning how to be tradition-bearers for their own families and potentially even newer converts. Their resources for balancing adaptation and preservation are emergent as they seek examples of the application of Orthodox Christianity in everyday life from the Orthodox-born (Toelken 1996, 39). The needs which each of these groups seek to meet in community are different. The ways in which they measure their choices are different. At one end of the spectrum, those in diaspora are seeking to find a community with others to share experiences of culture and history. At the other end of the spectrum, converts are looking for examples to follow and a community with whom to share belief. Choosing a community, for many, is as important as choosing a religious tradition: the relationships built and maintained therein shape the way they experience God in one another. In the next chapter, I will examine the role of ethnicity and cultural heritage in community dynamics.

Chapter 5: Orthodox Christianity & Cultural Heritage

Wherever Orthodox Christianity finds itself, it marinates in and melds with the cultural landscape. As immigrants from various countries brought this faith with them to North America, diverse traditions abounded. The faith itself is an artifact from a previous life, like an icon passed through so many generations, and yet it is also something which adapts to its new surroundings, as believers do. While Orthodox immigrants negotiate their own heritage in a new country, converts embrace someone else's heritage. Alternatively, some seek to separate faith and heritage, though this seems a fruitless battle.

In this chapter, I will explore the relationship between faith and culture, as well as the maintenance of that relationship. Some of the questions I ask include the following: What counts as heritage? What is ethnicity? Why is church a site for heritage preservation? What are material versus customary ways of maintaining heritage? What is "American," and what is "Romanian"? What is the role of language in the maintenance of heritage? Do converts participate in the heritage of Orthodox-born believers who have preceded them? Is heritage a product of nostalgia for an imagined past, or is it also something alive in the present?

Defining Heritage

It is difficult to write about personal heritage without also writing about identity—inherited, invented, or adopted. With regard to heritage at St. Parascheva, notions of "Romanianness"—that is to say, the expressive qualities of being Romanian, whether in language, material culture, or customs—have changed over time. Ideas of "Americanness" have also changed. At the parish's founding, congregants were exclusively Romanian immigrants interested in becoming American. Their Romanian-American descendants were native English

speakers maintaining ties to both family and spirituality by attending the church. When this membership began to dwindle—both because of the passing of members and the drifting away of their children, an influx of American converts entered the church. They learned to be Orthodox from these aging Romanian-Americans, and they began to shape the church's culture. In the 1990s and later, there was also an influx of new Romanian immigrants, which re-started this cycle. All of the members of St. Parascheva, past and present, have engaged with the church's Romanian heritage differently from one another. Some of these differences manifest in material culture, custom, language, and memories of the past.

Much of the folkloristic work on heritage focuses on the heritage industry through globalization and especially commodification (Hufford 2003; Kapchan 2014; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998 and 1995; Noyes 2014). Heritage has even been described as tradition which is no longer living. Noyes, for example, has written that heritage may either recuperate a dead tradition or kill a living one in order to give it a second life elsewhere, such as in a museum. She writes, "There the tradition no longer serves ordinary social purposes but is an object of veneration in its own right, a monument of cultural identity" (Noyes 2009, 248). Noyes discusses the fetishization of both tradition-bearers and the "objects" of tradition, "while eventually debasing it into a commodity" (Noyes 2009, 249). Folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has written of heritage tourism, for example, as a "value-added" industry in which "virtuality" substitutes for "actual" realities (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 150-176). Tourism, after all, needs a destination (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 132). These definitions of heritage are particularly pertinent in the face of globalization, where the ownership of traditions is contested globally and locally, even by such organizations as WIPO and UNESCO, which ostensibly seek to protect them (Noyes 2014). WIPO is the acronym for the World Intellectual Property Organization and

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Both are agencies of the United Nations concerned with intangible cultural heritage.

Many of these definitions of heritage in folkloristic literature are not applicable in quite the same way to my own research. My focus is not on an industry of mass-production or tourism, but on three small religious communities in which heritage is part of a lived identity-building process, both for individuals and the community as a whole. Folklorist Valdimar Hafstein has critiqued earlier definitions of heritage and expanded them by comparing the concept of cultural heritage to the environment. He specifically writes that while the environment is a real thing, the way in which it is used as a classifying category to connect seemingly disparate events like smog in Beijing and a Newfoundland cod shortage, is a phenomenon of the present. He writes:

Much like the environment, cultural heritage is a new category of things, lumped together in novel ways under its rubric...Like the environment, heritage does not seek to describe the world; it changes the world. Just like the environment, the major use of heritage is to mobilize people and resources, to reform discourses, and to transform practices. Like the environment, then, heritage is about change. Don't let the talk of preservation fool you: all heritage is change. (Hafstein 2018, 9)

According to Hafstein, culture is a resource, and “In this context, heritage provides a strong but flexible language for staking claims to culture and making claims based on culture” (Hafstein 2018, 9). My own use of the word “heritage” connotes cultural legacies and nostalgia, and it blurs with theological traditions as well. As Hafstein says, it is a term used to affect discourse and practice as people are constantly confronted with the changing circumstances of life. In the context of my research, I find two definitions of heritage to be apt. The first is from historian David Lowenthal, who distinguishes heritage from history. He writes, “History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes” (Lowenthal 1996, xi). The second definition comes from archaeologist

Laurajane Smith, who, in describing her research on fishing in Australian Aboriginal communities, writes,

It was in fact ‘heritage work,’ being in place, renewing memories and associations, sharing experiences with kinswomen to cement present and future social and familial relationships. Heritage wasn’t only about the past—though it was that too—it also wasn’t just about material things—though it was that as well—heritage was a process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present. (Smith 2006, 1)

Folklorists may liken both of these descriptions of heritage to Henry Glassie’s famous definition of tradition—the creation of the future out of the past (Glassie 2003, 176). Lowenthal’s definition imbues heritage with a political purpose in the present. Smith’s definition describes a process of identity-building as engagement with the past. Both definitions encompass the interpretation of tradition, like Glassie’s definition, but Smith’s also emphasizes the role of relationships in this process. Heritage is built out of traditions, but in order to remain living, it must adapt. It is the version of the past which is most useful in the present moment. Barre Toelken describes tradition as pulled between the “twin laws” of folklore—conservatism and dynamism, or stasis and change (Toelken 1996, 39). In this chapter, I will use the term heritage specifically to refer to traditions of identity-making and the processes of conservatism and dynamism which individuals apply to them.

Heritage is a concept that is often closely tied to ethnicity or sense of place. Like heritage, ethnicity is a slippery concept to define. Globalization scholars Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin write that ethnicity is defined as much by those who are within a group as those who are on the outside (Ashcroft, et al. 2000, 76). Furthermore, there is no single, overarching characteristic of all ethnic groups, but criteria may depend upon the purpose for which a group is set apart. The components of ethnicity depend upon time and place, and may change with context. According

to Ashcroft, et al., the most basic way to define ethnicity may entail a group either setting itself apart or being set apart by others on the basis of cultural or national characteristics (Ashcroft, et al. 2000, 76). I find Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's definition to be too narrow—what about third- or fourth-generation members of an originally immigrant community? What about an immigrant who has learned a new language perfectly and does not socialize often with others from his or her home country? What about refugees? What about dual citizens? What about a group only labeled from the outside, who does not self-identify as a group?...etc. These are only a few reasons why ethnicity is a sensitive topic. Indeed, identity is a complex topic, and ethnicity is only one star in that larger constellation.

Folklorist Andriy Nahachewsky discusses “full-time” and “part-time” engagement with one's own ethnicity. “Fulltime ethnicity,” according to Nahachewsky, is often defined by the place of one's birth and the options available to a person occupationally or socially. He applies this to the study of Ukrainian Canadians—both those who have immigrated and those who are descendants of immigrants generations later. He suggests that, in this context, “fulltime ethnicity” might mean moving only within settlements of other immigrants, never losing a Ukrainian accent in spite of learning English, and only being able to have a career building railways or farming for men and as a domestic laborer for women (Nahachewsky 2002, 176). Nahachewsky points out that there are both benefits and costs to being a “fulltime ethnic”: on the one hand, there is security in a community, but on the other hand, it may mean lost opportunities and prejudice from the outside world.

A third- or fourth-generation Ukrainian Canadian, by contrast, will have a different experience. They may feel equally at home in mainstream environments, like any other

Canadian, or at home in an environment expressive of Ukrainian traditions. As Nahachewsky writes:

Her Ukrainian identity does not circumscribe her social world...Her ethnicity is to a large extent a voluntary, situational, and part-time identity. If and when this Canadian does choose to engage her ethnic heritage, she does it for the certain advantages it offers including a sense of belonging or spiritual comfort. (Nahachewsky 2002, 176)

Nahachewsky describes this part-time involvement as “new ethnicity.” This is defined, to an extent, by voluntary participation and convenience—if an ethnic community is restrictive or irrelevant to the personal experience of third- and fourth-generation descendants, there is a greater likelihood that they will distance themselves (Nahachewsky 2002, 176-177). On the other hand, as with “fulltime ethnics,” if the benefits outweigh the costs, it is advantageous to identify with a cultural group as a means of being distinct.

There are differences in perspective about ethnicity from those who are within a group as well as those who look in from the outside. Folklorist Pauline Greenhill tells the story of a lecture series she gave in which she showed a film of a Ukrainian Easter celebration (Greenhill 1994, 3). The film was made by a Ukrainian Canadian, and Greenhill used it to discuss folklore and ethnicity. A Ukrainian woman in the audience was upset by Greenhill’s characterization of these religious rituals as folklore, but then dismissed the traditions represented therein as being peculiar to Bukovinians, Ukrainians who live in a region bordering Romania. I interpret this story to illustrate several aspects of evaluating ethnicity. The Ukrainian woman may not have viewed religious ritual, for example, as being distinct to Ukrainian culture, or even something to be labeled “folklore.” She also drew a distinction between different kinds of Ukrainian ethnicity—Bukovinians are a group which she saw as engaging differently with cultural heritage than herself. In terms of presenting religious rituals as folklore, I have encountered similar

situations to the one Greenhill describes. For example, I once described an Easter ritual as “folk drama” to an Orthodox Christian believer, and the other person warily asked me to explain my meaning. Many other folklorists have written about the challenges of negotiating popular definitions of words like “folklore” and “myth” with those used by academics (Santino 1996, 577-8). The term “folklore” itself has a history of being used pejoratively, and if we do not explain our own meanings by the words we use, we run the risk of both misunderstanding and being misunderstood (Behar 1996; Narayan 1997). Particularly in the sensitive realm of religion, few believers will appreciate being labeled as practitioners of “folk religion,” especially if the word “folk” is used synonymously with “backward.” This is not at all what I mean by the word “folklore.” Rather, I mean tradition as it is shaped by the community which practices it.

Greenhill’s anecdote is brief, and we do not have more information on that particular woman and her background, but we do get a glimpse of her own perception regarding tradition and Ukrainian culture. Greenhill argues that culture, and therefore ethnicity, is invented and emergent, not simply a resurrection of historical traditions (Greenhill 1994, 4). Identity, like tradition, is an invention. It may be formed in the tension between an individual’s perception of him- or herself and the perceptions of others near and far from that individual. Post-colonial studies scholar Homi Bhabha writes:

...identity is never an *a priori*, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an ‘image’ of totality. The discursive conditions of this psychic image of identification will be clarified if we think of the perilous perspective of the concept of the image itself. For the image—as point of identification—marks the sight of an ambivalence. (Bhabha 1987, 120)

Identity can never be a fixed, single entity; only projections from the outside onto a person create the illusion of a fixed image. Bhabha writes that forging an image of identity, or even borrowing an available image is only possible when other possibilities are negated through displacement or

differentiation. He writes, “The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss” (Bhabha 1987, 120).

In line with these ideas, to call oneself Orthodox is not a single, fixed identity. It is at the intersection of multiple semiotic systems. This label is variously a touchstone for cultural memory, a sense of belonging, personal experiences, and religious beliefs. These smaller categories all have idiosyncratic dimensions to them as well.

To apply Nahachewsky’s theory of ethnicity, the Orthodox Church is a site which enables both “fulltime” and “new” engagement with ethnicity. For someone who has come from a majority-Orthodox country to a new place, regardless of spiritual belief, an Orthodox church may become a symbol of both what is familiar and, sometimes, what has been lost. It may be a symbol of distrust and danger as the result of the Orthodox Church’s relationship to certain governments. For a third- or fourth-generation descendant of the same immigrants, church may be a touchstone to a more distant heritage. Simultaneously, the church can be the site of deep spiritual comfort regardless of cultural affiliation or degree of engagement. The Orthodox Church can fill all of these symbols at the same time, in varying degrees for different people.

Church as a Site for Heritage

Folklorist Dell Hymes writes that identity itself can be “traditionalized” (Hymes 1975, 374). Diaspora, for example, is a context in which we see the creation (and negotiation) of identities through the maintenance (or creation) of heritage. Folklorist Roger Abrahams writes that:

...maintenance or disappearance of cultural forms, or the invention of new forms of expression, are highlighted in situations of both the host and guest and with the creation of isolated sites in which the dispersed peoples are interred. (Abrahams 2003, 201)

Abrahams refers to sites like ghettos and prisons, but this is just as applicable to social sites. A Romanian Orthodox church, for example, is functioning more broadly than just as a place of worship. By its very name, it is also a site of cultural expression.

In her study of American converts to Orthodox Christianity, sociologist Amy Slagle did not find that “convert” and “ethnic” as labels made a significant difference in social groups (Slagle 2011, 125). Rather, she observes, “Significantly, convert and ethnic Orthodox Christians do not represent reified groups but, rather, boundaries of recognized similarity and difference constantly created and re-created in the course of social interaction” (Slagle 2011, 126). I believe it is significant in Slagle’s study between two Greek Orthodox churches that there were no recent immigrants in either parish; the majority were “second-, third-, and fourth descendants of immigrants” (Slagle 2011, 125). The last wave of immigrants in one parish occurred in the 1950s (Slagle 2011, 30). In the second parish she studied, only 25% of roughly 500 parishioners were converts (Slagle 2011, 31). These demographics affect social and cultural interaction in communities in general and Orthodox churches in particular. At St. Parascheva, I observed that between sixty and eighty people attend regularly for Sunday services, though that by no means represents the full extent of the community. Father Ephraim pointed out that we could measure membership in a variety of ways. He estimated 100 regularly tithing members. Of those in attendance during the school year, however, he estimated 120-140 on a given Sunday, with 50-60 of those being under the age of eighteen. I conducted my fieldwork during the summer months, when many members of the congregation were vacationing. There is also a segment of the community who is socially connected but does not attend regularly for various reasons including illness or age, language difficulties, or lifestyle. On average, about 20-30% of those in regular Sunday attendance speak Romanian as a first language. Victor, an American of

Romanian descent who speaks Romanian himself, estimated that on a given Sunday, there may be between twenty-five and fifty Romanians who have been in the U.S. for anywhere between five and twenty years. I observed a particularly high turnout of Romanian parishioners one Sunday, when Father Ephraim was out of town, and there was a visiting Romanian priest. After the service, there were several who stayed to do confession with the priest in Romanian. With something as personal as confession, it is easy to see why a parishioner might want to do this sacrament in his or her first language.

Roughly 60% of those who attend regularly are American converts, including the priest. The remaining 10% or so are non-American converts, Orthodox-born Americans, or descendants of Orthodox immigrants. This is the reason why the meaning of “Romanian Orthodox Church” on the door is contested. Who defines what that means? Will it mean “an English-speaking, American church honoring Romanian founders,” “a Romanian-speaking church which promotes Romanian culture in America,” or somewhere in between? Expectations of these demographic groups vary. Americans, for example, are more likely to want to promote Orthodox Christianity in general and bring more Americans into the church. Romanians, on the other hand, are more likely to seek a familiar space, and if they want to bring anyone to church at all, it would be other local Romanian immigrants.

The children of these new immigrants at St. Parascheva are likely to have a different relationship to their heritage and their surrounding cultural context than their parents. Sociologist Herbert J. Gans discusses third-generation immigrants as likely to have:

...a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday behavior. (Gans 1979, 9)

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett makes a similar observation in her study of immigrant and ethnic folklore; she writes about third-generation grandchildren of immigrants having a curiosity to rediscover their grandparents' culture of origin in contrast to their own parents who may be preoccupied with assimilation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1986). Gans writes that nostalgia for heritage can be directed toward an idea of tradition in general or something specific, like family values. According to him, the nostalgic wish for a return to an idealized past may be displaced onto sites like churches and schools, "asking them to recreate a tradition, or rather to create a symbolic tradition" (Gans 1979, 9). In other words, a communal gathering place like a church can be a repository for cultural heritage.

Folklorist Joy Fraser discusses the preservation of ethnic tradition as taking on the weight of moral responsibility, especially where identity and tradition are perceived to intersect (Fraser 2008, 182). Since the Orthodox Church is an institution at the intersection of religious belief and cultural identity, the preservation of cultural tradition can take on literal moral responsibility. Priests, as spiritual leaders, may also be expected to be custodians of cultural heritage, or at least to provide a point of contact with the past, which parishioners can choose to visit or leave at will. This puts Father Ephraim, as an American convert to Orthodox Christianity, in an interesting position, and it illuminates why some Orthodox-born believers do not view converts as "real" Orthodox. If the preservation of cultural heritage is viewed as part of moral and spiritual responsibility, how could a converted person from another culture fill this role? Furthermore, how could a person who has not grown up in a particular cultural tradition have the ability to guide its adaptation in contemporary circumstances? Of course, this highlights the very paradox of the Orthodox Church at the corner of the past and present—its spiritual function may transcend a particular moment in time, but its cultural function relies on bridging the past and the

present. Furthermore, it can be created through exhibition, which differs from the living, evolving resource of tradition.

Folklorist Deborah Kapchan writes that “Heritage production works through a re-signification of everyday life” (Kapchan 2014, 20). For the person in diaspora, that which perhaps was taken for granted before immigration may gain new significance in a new context as a tie back to the homeland and part of the construction of identity. In discussing immigrants and their descendants, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that each of these groups can and does produce “folklore of ethnicity,” but the process occurs differently for each person (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1986, 46). In the specific case of St. Parascheva, the Romanian Orthodox church I studied, I would posit that converts are also capable of adding to this equation with exoteric folklore *about* ethnicity—that is, ideas formed about a perceived group by those outside it regarding what ethnicity is, how it is expressed, and its relationship to Orthodox Christianity in particular. As discussed in chapter four, American consultants, for example, talk about being inspired by their ideas of Romanian villages, but also about being inspired by the Romanian-American parishioners whom they met. Exoteric folklore about Romanian culture is formed both by personal experience interacting with members of the community, but also desire.

In terms of creating an identity in the present out of the resources of history, the Orthodox Church is already an institution which prides itself on being slow to change and to preserve the faith. Sometimes attitudes toward the past complicate the Church’s relationship to the present. For example, how and when is it appropriate for tradition to be adapted to circumstance? Orthodox bishop Timothy Ware has criticized the Church’s tendency to preserve theology and a host of other traditions. He writes, “It is absolutely essential to question the past...Orthodox have often been far too uncritical in their attitude to the past, and the result has

been stagnation” (Ware 1997, 197). The act of discernment between cultural and spiritual priorities has challenged even celebrated patristic authors and is no less difficult for new converts to Orthodox Christianity today. Heritage is a medium for nostalgia, and a means of evaluating the present through the past.

Material Displays of Ethnicity

The presence of distinctly Romanian traditions in church life are sundry. With the exception of language, more of these exist in private, domestic spaces than shared, public ones. As such, they become opportunities for Romanians to connect with one another, but they do not involve the participation of Americans in the parish. One notable exception is the *parastas*, a funeral custom which, while not exclusively Romanian, takes on specific Romanian variation. Other “visible” expressions of Romanian heritage are material—cloths beneath icons, a few of the icons themselves as well as the saints they depict, and carved woodwork.

In many ways, these examples of material culture function as what sociologist Herbert J. Gans calls “symbolic ethnicity.” Gans discusses this as a voluntary display of cultural affiliation. In a discussion of third-generation descendants of immigrants, he suggests that “identity becomes the primary way of being ethnic, ethnicity takes on an expressive rather than instrumental function in people’s lives” (Gans 1979, 9). This contrasts to uses of culture as a means of directing family life or determining occupation. Furthermore,

Ethnic symbols are frequently individual cultural practices which are taken from the older ethnic culture; they are “abstracted” from that culture and pulled out of its original moorings, so to speak, to become stand-ins for it. (Gans 1979, 9)



Figure 8

Icon of Christ crucified and Christ the Good Shepherd on a donated altar cloth at St. Parascheva.



Figure 9

Icon of St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre on a donated Romanian altar cloth at St. Parascheva.

As noted by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett earlier, context is a significant part of symbolic ethnicity. For example, there is Romanian embroidered fabric on display in the church, beneath icons. In Orthodox tradition, it is common practice to venerate icons—touch and kiss them. People come into contact with these fabrics up close every time they venerate the icons above them. Figures 8 and 9 show examples of these fabrics. The iconostasis, seen in the

background of Figure 8 was carved in Romania and

sent to the church to be assembled in 2000. I cannot speak for the beautiful woodwork in Figure 9, though I did find photos of those icon stands as far back as the 1970s. They were donated to the parish long ago, before Father Ephraim was the priest, and no one with whom I spoke knew exactly how old they were or who had donated them. These fabrics, therefore, are neither used nor spoken about in a way that connects them with a particular tradition of embroidery. They beautify and emphasize the icons above them, but their primary function is to be a visible display of symbolic Romanian

ethnicity.

Cashman discusses nostalgia and its relationship to material objects from the past. Where words are ephemeral, he argues, an object is a tangible witness to the past. Those objects may “take on a second life as symbols through display,” signifying “a wealth of experience and even contradictory evaluations” (Cashman 2006, 148). The kind of witness born by the material altar cloths at St. Parascheva will be read differently depending on the knowledge of the viewer. For example, if a parishioner is familiar with embroidery patterns from a particular region of Romania, he or she will be able “read” the significance of those patterns, and perhaps even relate nostalgically to them, if he or she is from that region.

A convert parishioner will not be able to read that information from altar cloths, but perhaps he or she can relate abstractly to the fact that there is a longstanding tradition in many historically Orthodox cultures of beautifying sacred spaces with personal objects (Honkasalo 2015, 81-82; Kenna 1985, 361; Lesiv 2012, 231; Turner 1999, 50). As it is unknown who made these altar cloths, they are separated from a narrative of origin, let alone the specific tradition of their creation. They are abstract symbols of the presence of Romanian heritage in the church building.

Personal expressions of culture take place in more intimate contexts; for example, my consultant Halyna observed Romanian folk costume, by which I mean rural or village forms of cultural expression, worn at a baptism. While I did not have the opportunity to document any traditional Romanian clothing in my fieldwork, Halyna described the clothing thus:

...the people in the family...were dressed up in...their embroidered shirts, or a belt, or a skirt, which is common to our culture...it was a connection to my heart...I made a point of telling them how much I enjoyed it, and that I was Ukrainian, and one of the ladies actually had a blouse from that area...It had a lot of black on it and a lot of geometric shapes.

Halyna is familiar with Ukrainian regional embroidery patterns especially from her experience wearing traditional clothing in folk dance. She recognized some similarities in Romanian embroidery patterns from the region which borders Ukraine. With regard to heritage and folk costume, folklorist Pravina Shukla writes that only “those aspects of tradition that are designated as worthy of preservation” tend to be chosen to represent heritage (Shukla 2011, 145). Wearing Romanian traditional clothes takes on a specific meaning in an Orthodox church outside of Romania. Like religion, clothing can become a symbolic stand-in for complex cultural legacies. Folklorist Mariya Lesiv notes that in post-Soviet Ukraine, folk costume “is now charged with a political connotation and is widely regarded as ‘national costume’” (Lesiv 2013, 143). I believe this observation may also be applicable for Romanian traditional clothing as an expression of pride and belonging.

As a marker of symbolic ethnicity, folk costume is a visible, voluntary performance. Fraser actually discusses postmodern concepts of ethnicity as costumes, which can be tried on, modified, or discarded at will (Fraser 2008, 195). As with costume, religious belief as an identity marker, offers strategies for degrees of participation, personalization, and display. Costume and belief differ, of course, because belief is far more permeable; it is intangible, tied up with personal experience and worldview. On the whole, belief is a messier business than the aesthetic presentation of costume. Nonetheless, both costume and belief are part of the constellation of ethnic identity, and as Nahachewsky writes, ethnicity is learned as much as it is inherited (Nahachewsky 2002, 175). By deliberately choosing to wear Romanian ensembles to the baptism, one family at St. Parascheva welcomed a baby into both the Orthodox Church and a distinct cultural identity.

A major signifier of ethnicity at St. Parascheva is icons. These icons are significant as symbols of ethnicity at St. Parascheva because markers of both Romanian and American

affiliation are articulated in them. Figures 10 and 11 demonstrate distinctly Romanian elements in the church, both through the persons depicted and in aesthetic style. Figure 9 shows St. Parascheva of Iași holding a scroll which reads, in Romanian, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” In addition to being from the Biblical Beatitudes, these are also lyrics to St.



Figure 10
St. Paracheva of Iași, on the iconostasis at St. Parascheva.



Figure 11
St. Nicholas, in the basement fellowship space of St. Parascheva.

Parascheva’s troparion (a type of hymn). A number of rich traditions surrounding St. Parascheva throughout the Balkans are documented by folklorist Mirjana Detelić, especially in regard to weaving. For the purposes of this discussion, it must suffice to say that she is significant in Romania because her relics are housed in a cathedral in the city of Iași (Detelić 2010).¹

¹ Iași is also spelled Yashi. St. Parascheva’s name is variously spelled Paraskeve, Paraskevi, and Petka, and in Romania she is sometimes known as Sfânta Vineri, as the equivalent of “Paraskevi,” which literally means Friday in Greek (Detelić 2010, 94).

St. Nicholas, in Figure 11, represents multiple layers of meaning—this particular icon is a holdover from the parish’s early days. His icon used to be in the nave but was moved in an early 2000’s renovation. It now hangs in the church basement, in the space used for social gatherings after services. This renovation period, in the early 2000’s, replaced a Western style of iconography with the Byzantine style (exemplified by Figures 6, 8, and 10). The oldest known icons in the world date from the 6th century A.D. (Kenna 1985, 348). The Byzantine style is two-dimensional so as to communicate the humanity of the subject, but also the other-worldliness of sainthood (Kenna 1985, 349). All icons, even those in Western styles, are painted in such a way as to reference the Byzantine Empire (Kenna 1985, 350-1). While Byzantine iconography, coupled with folk artistic elements, is the oldest style in Romania, in the late 19th century, painters came from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and brought neo-classical painting styles with them (Draghici-Vasilescu 2005, 78-9; 97-144). Western painting styles became more popular in Parascheva’s choice to change from this Western style of iconography back to a Byzantine style, Romanian iconography as painters went to university in Western Europe. Despite St. the carpentry on all the wooden fixtures in the nave is Romanian. In this way, one form of symbolic ethnicity was replaced by another. Both icons feature Romanian language, though technically, St. Parascheva’s also features English, as she is identified by the word “saint” rather than the Romanian *sfânta*.

There are also elements of American identity alongside Romanian elements in sacred imagery. On the other side of the iconostasis (Figure 10), parallel to St. Parascheva, is St. Herman of Alaska (Figure 12). These two saints visually bridge two cultures with one faith. North American saints are particularly significant for converts, as they exemplify that Orthodox



Figure 12

St. Herman of Alaska on the iconostasis at St. Parascheva

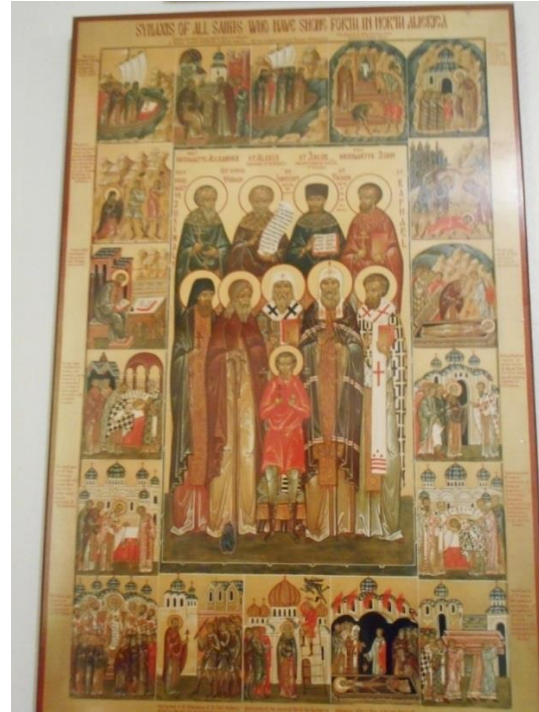


Figure 13

Icon of the saints of North America, in the narthex of St. Parascheva.

Christianity can become “native” to the United States as it appears to be in Eastern European countries, some parts of Africa and some Middle Eastern countries with a historic presence of Orthodox Christianity. Figure 13 is an icon found in the narthex or entryway of St. Parascheva, and it depicts ten canonized saints of North America, most of whom were Russian missionaries to Alaska.

Slagle has discussed the commemoration of North American saints in Orthodox hymnography and iconography. Despite the fact that the vast majority of twelve total North American saints were missionaries, she writes:



Figure 14
Iconostasis at St. Parascheva.

Rather than signifying the nation as a whole, these North American saints represent an Orthodox Christianity in relationship to this non-Orthodox context, an idealized portrait of encounter with “others” of various sorts both outside and within the Orthodox Church. (Slagle 2009, 175)

Since these twelve saints are mostly missionaries, a defining characteristic of all their narratives is encounters with cultural “others.” Slagle compares this to the present-day reality of Orthodox churches in North America, in which many parishioners—Anglo-American, Arab, Armenian, Eritrean, Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian, to name a few—are cultural others to each other. Slagle also discusses the tension between two attitudes in the North American Orthodox Church—to “make America Orthodox” or to withdraw from involvement with other religious traditions (Slagle 2009, 176). North American saints like Herman, Innocent, Tikhon, and Raphael are commemorated in hymnography and legend as being culturally sensitive and interested in adapting to local cultures rather than replacing them (Slagle 2009, 177-9). All saints’ legends, like history, are open to multiple interpretations. Slagle, for example, notes the

purported antisemitism of St. Innocent (Slagle 2009, 188n31). Historian Sergei Kan discusses some of the complex factors which went into Tlingit conversion to Russian Orthodox Christianity, including Russian and American colonialism (Kan 1987, 36). Finally, folklorist Joanne Mulcahy discusses the effects of Russian Orthodox patriarchy on the cultural traditions of indigenous women on Kodiak Island (Mulcahy 1993). However, Slagle notes that it is significant how the Orthodox Church chooses to remember these saints—as celebrants of cultural diversity (Slagle 2009, 184-5).

Orthodox Christianity is a religion of the senses—the smell of incense, the taste of communion, the sound of singing, the touch of venerating holy objects and people, and the sight of icons. Material displays of ethnicity fit neatly into these spiritual traditions. Beautification of sacred space is desirable, and various traditions the world over fill this need. At St. Parascheva, material culture can be read in several registers. From one perspective, it is a visual representation for how cultural gaps can be crossed in an Orthodox community. From another perspective, it evokes identities, both in terms of a nostalgic past and an emergent present.

Language: A Microcosm for Cultural Dynamics at St. Parascheva

Language is a topic about which parishioners care deeply at St. Parascheva. While some people with whom I spoke had stronger feelings than others, language always was attached to identity. Some new Romanian immigrants do not speak English well, and they rely on services to have at least a little Romanian in them to be familiar. Some Americans feel that Romanian language in services is inaccessible and will be a turn-off for potential newcomers (presumably English-speakers). Still others believe that since “Romanian Orthodox Church” is the sign on the door and the heritage of the community, it is important to include at least some Romanian in services to honor the parish founders.

While it is beyond the scope of my research to discuss American politics and attitudes toward immigration, it is safe to say that “American” and “English” are conflated categories in this example. Generally speaking, those who convert have the luxury of already being in their country of origin when they do so, and becoming Orthodox Christian sets them apart from other Americans, even in an exotic way. Those born into the faith who leave home and start life in the U.S. may work hard to fit in at their jobs or in their secular lives, but if they choose to attend an Orthodox Church, it represents something familiar and comforting from the past. As discussed in chapter three, some converts are extremists and may look to Orthodox-born hardliners as influences, though these attitudes are by no means representative of all Orthodox-born believers. Some converts view their immigrant, Orthodox-born neighbors as the most “authentic” practitioners and seek to emulate them without understanding the broader context. Finally, other converts are simply looking for what their own, American equivalent to these cultural idiosyncrasies might be. The topic of language highlights parishioners’ various practical needs, fantasies of authenticity, nostalgia, and the desire to adapt. To get into some of these issues, we must first discuss the use of language over time in the parish’s history.

Out of ninety Romanian Orthodox parishes in the U.S. and Canada, St. Parascheva is one of the only ones that uses English prevalently in the liturgy. According to a study by Alexei Krindatch, in Romanian Orthodox parishes in North America, there is a 4:1 ratio of Romanian and English languages in services (Krindatch 2002, 544). This is largely due to the influence of two Romanian Orthodox monasteries in the U.S.—The Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration (known as Holy Transfiguration) and Dormition of the Mother of God (known as Holy Dormition). Holy Transfiguration is in Pennsylvania, founded by the former Princess Ileana of Romania in 1967, who became the abbess there (Pakula 1985, 423; The Orthodox Monastery

2018). It was the first English-speaking monastery for Romanian American women. Later, three nuns from Romania founded Holy Dormition in Michigan, and this monastery is a frequent retreat for parishioners at St. Parascheva (Dormition 2018). The former priest-in-residence at the monastery, Father Roman Braga, was a key figure shaping attitudes toward language at the parish. He translated many liturgical materials from Romanian into English. In Father Ephraim's view, Father Roman's perspective was to "help America become Orthodox" as opposed to "preserving Romanianism" in the U.S.

The priests in St. Parascheva's past have had varied relationships with English. Some parishioners still remember Father Corneliu in the 1980s, who struggled to do the liturgy in English, but was committed to the task all the same. Father George, who replaced Father Corneliu in the following decade, was the American son of Romanian immigrants. One of his conditions for even coming to the parish was that the service would be done entirely in English. According to one parishioner, it was Father George "who really set the tone" for liturgy as it is still performed at St. Parascheva today. Some parishioners feel that doing the liturgy in English has "swung the pendulum too far the other way" from doing the liturgy entirely in Romanian. Finding compromise between the two is more easily said than done when different parishioners have different needs.

Martin, the choir director, described that in Father George's upbringing, most church services were in Romanian, and the children of immigrants did not always understand what was happening. Father George's own wife, Marlene, was such an example. Martin speculated that for Father George, "There was a fear that this [wouldn't] be an inviting place for converts, for Americans," if too much Romanian language was used (Martin, June 20, 2015). However, there was an influx of new immigrants from Romania in the early 90's after the fall of the Ceaușescu

regime, and many did not speak English. Interestingly, for one of these parishioners, Florina, church was a key activity which helped her to learn English. She used a liturgical book, available at the parish, which was printed in both Romanian and English to follow along. She said, “To concentrate in another language, you are immersed in the prayers” (Florina, July 26, 2015). In addition, Father George encouraged her effort by giving her a bulletin with a saint’s life story printed in it, and she translated the story with the help of a dictionary.

Father George’s successor, Father Anthony, was a convert to Orthodox Christianity who learned Romanian himself and wanted to introduce more of it into the liturgy. Martin and Father Ephraim took up the mantle after Father Anthony, and they work together today to try to incorporate “little drips” of Romanian into the service (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015). Martin finds that a little bit “goes an awfully long way.” As a musician, Martin is in a unique position to give the gift of familiarity to new immigrants. No one who regularly sings in the choir at St. Parascheva is Romanian, and so when the choir sings hymns in Romanian, it is an effort. There are hymns which are repeated several times in the liturgy, and Martin will do it once in English, once in Romanian, and then a final time in English, so the meaning is clear to all.

Gavril, who has lived in the U.S. about ten years, estimated that under Father Anthony’s rectorship the amount of Romanian in the service was 5%, but that it is increasing under Father Ephraim and Martin’s stewardship. He complimented Martin’s ability to sing in Romanian, saying that he has “no accent at all,” but if someone tries to converse with him in Romanian, he does not understand, often leading to humorous encounters. Gavril is grateful for Martin’s efforts. He said, “Romanian people, when they hear him reading in Romanian or singing in Romanian, they have a deep, profound connection with the church in the Romanian language”

(Gavril, July 7, 2015). Part of this connection, no doubt, is related to nostalgia. Victor, who is a second-generation descendant of Romanian immigrants, explained,

[Some Romanians] don't feel that it's Orthodox because the liturgy is in English. If the language was Romanian, if we had a Romanian priest, we could probably start a separate church here and fill it. (June 19, 2015)

This may be the case for both first-generation speakers as well as their children, sometimes. On the other hand, Martin described how Father George and Marlene were second generation, and yet they felt alienated by Romanian language in services. By contrast, Catherine, who grew up as the child of American converts at St. Parascheva and went to a Romanian-American Orthodox summer camp, observed of her second generation peers that there can be a disconnect between two languages. She said that if Romanian is the language of family and church life, English is less meaningful, as the language of secular activities. For example, Catherine drew a comparison with the comedian Amer Zahr, who says in one routine, "Arabs never swear in Arabic, because then God can hear you" (Catherine, July 8, 2015).

Father Ephraim says that no matter what choice he makes about language in the service, there will be complaints. He gave an example of one parishioner who asked for more Romanian in the liturgy, but he and his family tended to leave the service early and missed the Romanian hymns. Esme, a convert, supported the use of Romanian in the service when she said, "It's hard to go to church where you're not comfortable" (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015). On the other hand, Florina, whose first language is Romanian, disagrees. In her opinion, learning to do the liturgy in English is crucial for evangelism. Victor, who is bilingual, says that in his opinion, language is often an excuse for not coming to church. After all, Florina used the liturgy to teach herself English.

Father Ephraim carries a heavy responsibility as both the steward of a heritage not his own and the pastor of a diverse congregation. I heard many American converts speak of those in the congregation who disliked the use of Romanian in services, but I encountered few of these people myself. One parishioner expressed to me that he felt Romanian language inhibited his own spiritual connection because he had no idea what was being said, and it was hard to concentrate.

Language is, in many ways, the bridge between heritage and faith. Irene, a convert and choir member, spoke about the reactions she has seen and observed from Romanians seeing Americans convert. She said she had observed resentment among some Romanians, citing the attitude that “only people who are born Orthodox are Orthodox” (Irene, July 1, 2015) She connected this sense of ownership with language. The experience of growing up in a majority-Orthodox country is connected with hearing prayers in one’s native language, as Catherine suggested earlier. Sociologist Dmitro , in a study of Serbian Orthodox Christians in the U.S., writes that “The symbolic significance of the Church Slavonic language as a part of the *orthopraxis* (proper practice of faith)... supersedes the simple matter of knowing or not knowing the English language” (Volkov 2005, 235). Those whom Volkov interviewed all speak English and use it regularly in their social and professional lives, but language was an important part of separating their social sphere from their spiritual one. In his study, he found that these church members perceived Church Slavonic language to be an essential part of the “spiritual core” of their faith (Volkov 2005, 235). If this is true of the Romanians at St. Parascheva, it would make sense that some would perceive those who do not speak Romanian to be unable to participate fully in the Orthodox Christian faith.

A unique perspective on language was offered by Raj, an immigrant from India who converted to Orthodox Christianity two years ago. Though he is a polyglot, neither English nor Romanian are Raj's first languages. He said, "I don't think spiritual connection needs any kind of language" (Raj, June 14, 2015). He went on to make the point that no matter where a person travels in the world, in an Orthodox church, the liturgy will be identical. If a person knows the liturgy well enough, it will be possible to follow the service even in a foreign language. As neither Irene nor Raj grew up with Orthodox Christianity, and have encountered it as adults in a culture to which it is not native, it makes sense that they would not view language as a "core" aspect of Orthodox spirituality (Volkov 2005, 235).

Irene talked about any and all people having a "right" to the faith. This statement may be interpreted as stemming from American values of individualism and democracy. Irene chose to convert to Orthodox Christianity, and she views religion as a choice all believers are entitled to make rather than an inherited trait. Political and social scientist Elizabeth Prodromou (2008, 266) writes that to proselytize one's faith is a direct outcome of religious pluralism in a democratic society. These cultural values contribute to the reasons why American converts are more likely to want to bring other American converts into their church and Romanian emigres are more likely to want to bring in other Romanian emigres (who are already Orthodox Christians).

As discussed in chapter two, Leila thinks of Orthodox Christianity as a cultural birthright, and as mentioned earlier, Mary believes that Romanians "don't join, they just come." Mary's statement may be interpreted as another facet of exoteric folklore about ethnicity—that a cultural connection to Orthodox Christianity is a marker of authenticity. Her interpretation of the Romanians' connections to Orthodox Christianity is bolstered by attitudes like Leila's. Folklorist Daniel Wojcik writes that one purpose for developing exoteric folklore is to construct one's own

identity in contrast with an Other (Wojcik 1996, 224-5). In the case of St. Parascheva, I believe that many American converts do not antagonize the Romanian members of their community as much as they envy their cultural connection to the Orthodox faith. Mary's statement points to a concern I have seen among some converts—that no matter how hard they try, they will never truly be Orthodox, because they do not have cultural “credentials,” as it were. Romanians may have similar exoteric folklore of their own about the Americans: at best, their interpretation of the faith will be different than those who are Orthodox-born, and at worst, it will be incorrect.

I do not have sufficient data to discuss how my consultants view their own identities as Americans and Romanians. I can, however, refer to folklorist Bill Ivey's analysis of American identity and the Enlightenment. Ivey writes that after Native Americans were pushed to the margins of society by Anglo settlers, “the mainstream, elite society that consolidated power lacked a deep historical and linguistic coherence of its own; lacked the sense of identity that tribal people and European nations derived from a sense of shared, deep heritage” (Ivey 2018, 42). Instead, Enlightenment values such as the equality of all men were the direct foundation of American identity. I believe Ivey's statement points to something I observed in my research. The cultural envy of some converts toward Orthodox-born believers from majority-Orthodox countries may come from perceiving these newcomers to be connected to a deeper, shared language and heritage. The relative youth of the U.S. as a nation-state may breed what Ivey calls “a desire for venerable, shared, nationalistic identity” connected to a historical past (Ivey 2019, 42). While I can only speculate on the ways my consultants view their identities, I believe that both converts and the Orthodox-born desire a sense of belonging, and they turn to Orthodox Christianity to fill that need in different ways.

Language, of course, has social as well as spiritual meaning at St. Parascheva. Irene mentioned that her husband learned some basic phrases in Romanian, such as “Thank you,” “How are you?” and “Welcome to our church.” According to her, these are “polite phrases that make people’s eyes light up” (Irene, July 1, 2015). A little bit goes a long way toward making others feel welcome. In choir, she herself has learned to read Romanian hymns and responses. She and her husband view language as a dynamic of neighborliness rather than part of the spiritual essence of their faith. Though Irene does not view Orthodox Christianity as exclusive to the domain of cultural birthright, gestures like these show respect toward Romanians at St. Parascheva because so many of them have labored to learn English. Since language may be connected to of faith in an important way for some émigres, perhaps the efforts of converts to learn some Romanian could yield both social and spiritual understanding in their community.

A Heritage of Suffering

One aspect of the heritage of Orthodox Christianity which Eastern European immigrants to North America often share is the memory of living under various Communist governments. Converts in North America may have read about this or seen documentaries, but they will not possess personal memories of the suffering endured by those who lost family or were themselves imprisoned for their faith. As a result, the legacy of Communism may be used differently in the faith of Orthodox-born immigrants from Eastern Europe and North American converts. For the first demographic, there is intensely personal loss involved in remembering, and for the second demographic, the stories of Communist persecution take on the quality of saints’ legends in that they are distant proof of the truth of faith. These categories are not hard and fast; there are certainly Orthodox-born immigrants I met who would speak of the martyrdom of those who

suffered and died for their faith. The real difference between the two groups, though, lies in memory and its role in identity formation.

It is fairly typical for converts to Orthodox Christianity to talk about Communism as a monolithic enemy of Christianity during the Soviet period. Depending on their generation, some converts' attitudes may well be influenced by American politico-religious propaganda of the time, such as that of the televangelist Billy Graham (Pierard 1980, 109-110). However, numerous studies show that different relationships between Church and State existed in different localities. For example, in Romania, there were bishops and priests who were in league with the regime and offered intelligence based on the confessions of their parishioners (Stan and Turcescu 2005, 666-674). These clergy collaborated in order to avoid being sent to labor camps, as many of their colleagues were. They would later defend their actions after the fall of the regime by saying that their collaboration enabled the Orthodox Church's survival. Many Romanian laity lost faith in their religious leaders over this (Stan and Turcescu 2000, 1471). In Serbia, on the other hand, many clergy were simply imprisoned or killed (Buchenau 2010, 62).

The infrastructural hole left in most Eastern European countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union was swiftly filled by churches, regardless of their relationship with the former government. The Orthodox Church became the new symbol of a national identity for many of these countries in the absence of a Soviet identity. This of course is problematic for citizens of those countries who do not identify as Orthodox Christians who may feel as though they need to choose between their faith and their nationality (Karimova 2013; Zigon 2011). For example, the Orthodox Church in Russia is perhaps more involved in national politics today than it ever was historically (Roudometof, et al. 2005; Rouhier-Willoughby 2008; "Metropolitan Kirill" 2003).

Narratives of Orthodox Christianity as part of a national identity contribute to the attitude that to be Orthodox is a kind of birthright. Shared memories of experiences either of oppression or simply of life under Communist regimes may create a sense of identity among Orthodox-born believers. Rouhier-Willoughby suggests that in Russia, at least, this has as much to do with belief as it does with establishing an identity separate from “the West” (Rouhier-Willoughby 2008, 5). In Russia especially, “Western” values such as equality are seen as potentially hostile to Orthodox Christian values (Kizenko 2013, 595). The combination of viewing Western converts as Others and lack of shared experiences can sometimes be an unspoken source of conflict between some Orthodox-born Eastern Europeans and Western-born converts. The latter often come to Orthodox Christianity independently of their families or social groups and enter into it with no pre-existing shared experiences or heritage with Orthodox-born believers. A host of American conversion memoirs can be found, including (but not limited to) Carlson 2014, Corbman 2005, Gillquist 1992, Green 1997, and Huneycutt 2009 and 2007. The Orthodox Christian Resource Center even has a bibliography online of books to help people in the process of conversion (Klimon 2012). Not only are converts engaging with Orthodox Christianity in a Western cultural context, but they may not appreciate the tremendous sacrifices which were made to preserve the faith when it went underground in some parts of the world. The risks taken in an effort to preserve the faith is another aspect of heritage—even if that preservation verges into the stagnation of tradition, the memories of suffering at the hands of Communists will not be forgotten. Many Romanians I spoke to were proud that the faith survived this persecution, and took it as evidence that Orthodox Christianity is true.

Victor encouraged me to watch both a documentary about the Communist years in Romania and also *Bless You Prison*, the dramatization of one woman’s diary of her experience in

a concentration camp (Margineanu 2002). Victor, like others I interviewed, sees the suffering of those depicted in the films to be evidence of the truth of the faith. For Victor, this didn't have to mean Orthodox Christianity specifically, as he said, "It bothers me a little bit when we identify and separate ourselves from the rest of the body of Christ. We're all Christian, we're all brothers and sisters, in my feeling." The film *Bless You Prison* depicts a woman who comes to God through her experiences of torture and suffering. Victor said:

It will give you just an idea of what they went through. We can't understand being Americans...but it will give a little bit of a perspective...it's really difficult to explain to someone, because unless you have family that has endured it...and it took me probably ten or fifteen years to get all the experience from my family...I mean the abuse is unbelievable. And it scars you.

Victor went on to connect this with how faith can bring people through all kinds of hardship, including illness and abuse. He described praying with his aunt who had cancer in a Romanian chapel in which "on each of the marble steps are the names of all those who were killed during Communism from different areas...The Holy Spirit was very present there too...it was her faith that kept her alive for the last three years of her life, there's no doubt in my mind." Throughout our conversation Victor gave many examples of how the Communist regime in Romania tried to kill the faith and failed, and the film was yet another example of that.

Orthodox Christianity emphasizes the lives of martyrs for the faith as part of this mode of thinking. In fact, every Orthodox liturgy includes hymns to saints, many of whom were martyred, called *troparia* and *kontakia*. In addition, *synaxaria*, or lives of the saints, are routinely read at Saturday Vespers services. This body of literature is augmented by contemporary publications of the lives of Orthodox Christians who died at the hands of both Communist and Nazi regimes in Eastern Europe (including Alexander and Bouteneff 1998; Bouteneff 2001; Hackel 1981; St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood 2012). The insinuation is that the faith of those

who suffered is what enabled their survival. In fact, in *Bless You Prison*, the protagonist attributes her sanity in prison to being able to write psalms on the walls of her cell. Later, in yet another prison, she is in a cell with women who are Atheists, Catholic nuns, Roma, and other affiliations different from her own as an Orthodox woman. Nevertheless, when someone mentions that it is Pascha, Orthodox Easter, the women stand together and sing “Christos A Inviaht,” or “Christ is Risen,” the traditional hymn sung in Paschal services. Women in other cells hear them singing and join in, against the protests of prison guards who try to stop them. This act of defiance unifies the women and visibly strengthens them, even as they are imprisoned. I watched this film with my mother, who is herself a convert to Orthodox Christianity. My mother’s response to this scene indicated that she believed this was proof of the power of Orthodox Christianity—it strengthened even those who were non-believers in the prison. My response was different. I saw this scene as an illustration of the blurry line between national identities and Orthodox influences. The shared act of solidarity certainly strengthened the women, but they were also using a shared local tradition to rebel regardless of belief. As the diversity of imprisoned women attested, Orthodox Christians were not the only people being persecuted by the Communist regime, yet most of the women knew the song “Christos A Inviaht” simply because they were Romanian. The song invoked a Romanian cultural identity by means of an oral tradition which preceded Communism. I interpreted the demonstration as having less to do with belief in Orthodox dogma and more about strength in the shared experiences of oppression and defiance.

The sense of cultural identity attached to Orthodox Christianity is in many ways inextricable from a heritage of suffering. Comparisons may be made with Judaism, in which Jewish identity is inextricably tied to the loss of the homeland of Judea, experiences of

antisemitism in diaspora throughout history including pogroms, and outright persecution including the Holocaust (Gez 2011, 56). Orthodox Christians also lost a homeland when the Ottomans conquered Byzantium, and this loss continues to affect attitudes toward church sacred tradition, especially anti-Western protectionism (Ware 1997, 92; Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou 2013, 21). Martyrs for the faith are venerated for their suffering, and their life stories are routinely commemorated in both icons and church services. Many Orthodox Christian theologians, both historically and in the present day, have written homilies and literature about suffering as a means to edification for believers (Damick 2014; Kronstadt 1984; Powell 2016; Sysoyev 2014; Talagan 2014; Velimirovic 1996). While suffering is certainly part of the greater historical legacy of Orthodox Christianity, Communism is its most recent manifestation, affecting the lives of believers in Eastern European countries.

Many of the Eastern Europeans I met had suffered themselves or had family who suffered at the hands of Communists for their faith. Vera, who came to Canada from Russia over ten years ago, described the first time she went to church, brought by her aunt. She said:

My aunt was a child of the blockade. You know Leningrad, during the Second World War...It was a very tough time for them, and people who survived cannot remember what they did to survive. It's very hard to even to think about it. My aunt lost all her family during that blockade, and [at that time], she was not in church. She was in a Communist youth organization in the Soviet Union. When her mother was dying, she said, "Please...go to the church to remember me." And when her mother died, after a while, she was just passing by some church, and she said that something just drew her to the church. That [was] the beginning of her...church life. She went through very hard times, because it was prohibited in Russia to go to the church. She had a good job, but she had to hide her cross and hide her faith and hide going there, so it was very difficult. (Vera, October 29, 2015)

The person who taught Vera to be Orthodox was a woman who had lived through tremendous difficulties. Her aunt had to hide the cross around her neck, the symbol of her faith, for fear of arrest, abuse, or even a labor camp for resisting the government's official atheistic policies. Like many people who lived through this period, Vera received a heritage of suffering as part of both her Russian and Orthodox identities. Adina, a Romanian woman I interviewed in Canada, described circumstances in Romania as somewhat different from Russia. She said:

My grandfather was persecuted because he was a priest, and my mother suffered because she was the daughter of a priest. She was expelled from university. Priests were relatively wealthy people, some more than others, but people who were educated also suffered. Everybody who could say something against the Communists suffered. My father came from a village, so he was a little "clean." He had a very good position, and he could get even a better position, professionally, but he didn't because he was married to a priest's daughter. My grandfather hated Communists. He and some other priests met in the park and they would talk against the Communists. He died before the Soviet Union's collapse, and I'm sorry he couldn't see that, because he would have been so happy...People were still religious, but they didn't go to the churches. They would maybe only go at Easter and Christmas, because people could see who goes and who doesn't. But people still got their religion. It wasn't like China, where actually the Communists almost destroyed their religion. (Adina November 8, 2015)

Adina had at least one family member who was clergy, and this marked her family as a target, affecting both her parents. Though her family taught her their faith, it is clear from her anecdote that this was a secret identity.

In addition to strengthening the faith of those whom I met, suffering also personalized it. The martyrs they talked about were not abstract saints but real people—trusted elders, friends, family, and respected members of their communities. This shared, personal heritage of suffering also unites immigrants in diaspora. A Serb and a Romanian may not speak one another's language or have the same culture, but they may both come from majority-Orthodox countries

with similar histories in regard to the survival of that faith. This expands the notion of the Orthodox community beyond national identity to shared experiences and historical heritage.

North American converts, however, will not share these experiences, and relate to them in various ways as fellow Orthodox Christians. Halyna, for example, is an American, Orthodox-born parishioner at St. Parascheva. She grew up in a church with both Ukrainian immigrants and their descendants, which shaped her perspective on the experiences of others under Communism. She is grateful to have grown up listening to the stories of those people. She sees parallels between the experiences of the Ukrainian immigrants around whom she grew up and those of Romanian immigrants whom she has met at church. Halyna pointed out that in addition to being persecuted for faith, many former Soviet satellite countries struggled with “Russification,” including forbidding the use of local languages in favor of Russian, and referring to all persons within the U.S.S.R. as Russian themselves (Halyna August 18, 2015). Growing up in the U.S., Halyna took every opportunity she could to do presentations and write papers in her classes to educate fellow students about her family’s culture. Folklorist Joy Fraser writes about the act of carrying on ethnic traditions out of a sense of moral responsibility; Halyna’s sense of responsibility was to be sure Ukraine was not lumped together with Russia, either literally or figuratively (Fraser 2008, 182). Halyna’s relationship to her heritage also recalls Nahachewsky’s discussion of “new ethnicity,” or voluntary cultural engagement (Nahachewsky 2002, 176). She has chosen the degree to which she identifies with her family’s cultural background, and she uses it strategically as a means to connect with others for whom Orthodox Christianity is at the intersection of culture, family, and history. This allows her to empathize differently than Americans who have converted to Orthodox Christianity.

When converts meet people who lived through Communism in Eastern Europe, it can change how they understand their own faith. Father Roman Braga, noted for his translation of Romanian hymns, was imprisoned for more than ten years in a famous Romanian prison in the town of Pitesti, where brutal torture occurred. One of my consultants was married to someone who grew up in this town, which brought a close sense of reality to these stories. Father Roman's experience of being persecuted for his faith affected the way he communicated his faith to others, both Orthodox-born and converts alike. Father Ephraim spoke of Father Roman as having "discovered a deep faith through that persecution" in Pitesti (Fr. Ephraim, June 25, 2015). Simon, the child of American converts who grew up at St. Parascheva and is now the deacon there, met Father Roman when his parents brought him to a Romanian monastery in Michigan. Simon described him as "a real, living link to Orthodox monasticism and Orthodox spirituality" because of his suffering in prison (Simon, June 29, 2015).

Meeting Father Roman during the formative period of his childhood shaped Simon's faith. Father Roman had died months before I did my fieldwork,² and Victor gave me a copy of *Beyond Torture: The Gulag of Pitesti, Romania*. In this documentary, Father Roman and another priest, Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa (whose imprisonment is discussed in Stan and Turcescu 2006) are interviewed about their time in Pitesti. Torture was designed to humiliate and "re-educate" prisoners through psychological and physical means, including starvation, electric shock, and severe beatings (Hartwick 2007). According to the documentary, while people were imprisoned for diverse reasons, and all suffered greatly, some tortures were specifically intended

² The monastery where Father Roman reposed has his obituary on its website (Hinshaw 2015). He was recognized in the international Orthodox community as a holy person, and a popular Orthodox magazine, which typically covers the Church in Russia, posted his life story on their website the day after his death (Pravoslavie 2015).

to humiliate the religious. Some would be forced to reenact the sacred ritual of communion, for example, while profaning the prayers and using feces in place of bread and wine.

Father Roman and Father Gheorghe express forgiveness toward their torturers, and this made a deep impression on Simon when he watched the documentary. In the film, Father Roman says, in his experience, suffering a little led to hate, but suffering in the extreme led to forgiveness. He recounts that his faith was only “quotations from books” until he experienced life in prison, and he thanks God for that experience. Simon commented that Father Roman, “shared in a martyric experience. He represented a living witness to God’s love, because even though he suffered so much, he wasn’t crushed by despair” (Hartwick 2007). When Simon compares Father Roman to martyrs in the Orthodox faith, he is calling him a living saint. Unlike those historic figures, though, Simon knew Father Roman, and his story personalizes the example of sainthood Simon has been given. As a child, he had not been aware of Father Roman’s story, but now that he has a fuller picture of his life, he is even more moved by his kindness toward others. The legacy of Father Roman’s suffering has become part of the story of Simon’s own faith, and of many others at St. Parascheva.

Conclusion

At St. Parascheva, the cultural heritage of Orthodox Christianity means shared experiences which contribute to a sense of identity. Those who are Orthodox-born may choose to engage or not with cultural legacy in the performance of their identities, just as converts may choose whether or not to engage in their own cultural legacies as they fuse Orthodox Christianity into their identities. The heritage of both culture and suffering give the Orthodox-born aspects of identity through shared experience. Converts are in the process of developing shared experiences

with other Orthodox, though these will likely not be cultural or historical. Instead, they are learning how to be tradition-bearers for their own families and potentially even newer converts. Their resources for identifying the tension between conservatism and dynamism are nascent as they seek examples of the application of Orthodox Christianity in everyday life from the Orthodox-born. The needs which each of these groups seek to meet in community are different. At one end of the spectrum, those in diaspora are seeking to find a community with whom to share experiences of culture and history. At the other end of the spectrum, converts are looking for examples to follow and a community with whom to share belief.

Heritage is transformed in transmission. The Orthodox-born at St. Parascheva will likely have to rely on American converts (and their Romanian-American children) to be the future of their parish. The Americans have learned about the nature of community from the older Romanians who came before them in the model of the village: there is solidarity in shared experience and suffering, in which people must support one another to survive in spite of their differences. In order for a community to survive, room must be created for passive tradition-bearers as well as active ones. In the next chapter, I will look at Orthodox Christian traditions surrounding gender, and how those categories are both maintained and challenged by believers.

Chapter 6: Gender Roles as a Path to Humility

Subverting one's personal desires is a much-emphasized spiritual goal for both men and women in the Orthodox Church, and discipline and obedience are the practices by which this is achieved. However, these manifestations of humility have gendered outcomes. For example, traditions of modesty may require women to cover their hair or wear long skirts to hide their shapes and faces in many Orthodox communities, where neither are required of lay men. Some argue that encouraging men to grow beards is a manifestation of covering their faces in humility, although this is most likely the result of Platonic ideas of the body inhibiting enlightenment, and therefore letting go of its maintenance (Miller 2012; St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite and Monk Agapius 1957, 153, 167, 341, 403-5). Furthermore, a number of canons of the Orthodox Church exhort men to grow beards in order to distinguish them from women, especially to avoid causing other men to lust after them (Èulogos 2007, 7.22.3, 7.22.168, 7.22.170, 7.22.248). Priests and other ordained offices do wear long robes, and while this is an effort to de-sexualize their bodies, like women, the ultimate goal is to emphasize emulating Christ. Women's modesty has a different goal. Some of the questions which I address in this chapter are how gender roles are used as a tool for spiritual discipline, how they affect concepts of modesty, how prescribed gender roles can reflect believers' lived realities or not, and how attitudes toward authority are connected to obedience.

Gender-specific roles in marriage and family life require different forms of discipline and obedience for men and women, ideally mirroring Christ's headship of the Christian Church. Discipline and obedience typically require women to let go of aspirations toward formal spiritual leadership or serving roles as acolytes, deacons, or, most notably, as priests. In a very few communities, women may be deaconesses, but it is still a hotly debated topic (Dearie 2017;

FitzGerald 1999 and 1998). In each of these examples, a woman's body is the defining factor of her function—to be hidden, obedient, and humble. Men's spiritual discipline and obedience tends to have different outward manifestations. Furthermore, their eligibility for leadership roles in the Orthodox Church means that their experiences and expressions of piety are often more visible than women's.

Obedience to the Priest's Prescription

In order to discuss either discipline or obedience, we must discuss to *whom*. God is, of course, the ultimate recipient of a believer's obedience, but in the Orthodox Christian tradition, a priest is the human stand-in for God's loving presence. This is a formidable task for any person, but it helps that a priest can show human empathy to his congregation as they, too, struggle to fulfill their own paths toward spiritual discipline. In this process, the priest becomes the vessel for God's authority. That is to say, he is the mouthpiece for God's forgiveness through the sacrament of confession. His vernacular interpretation of the scriptures is likewise understood to be divinely guided.

There was a spectrum of opinions among those I interviewed regarding the nature and scope of a priest's authority, and these opinions tended to fall into the overlapping categories of cultural expectation and personal experience. Orthodox Christian theologian Anton C. Vrame discusses the relationship between authority and interpretations of Church tradition through four patterns of "observable behaviors of the Orthodox parish, monastery, diocese...as related to lived expressions of the Orthodox tradition" (2008, 280). His use of the phrase "lived expression" is strikingly similar to phrases used by social scientists who study religion, including "lived religion," "everyday religion," and "vernacular religion" (Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008; Orsi

2002; Primiano 1995). Orthopraxy is a term referring to action, whether in private practice or public ritual. He uses the examples of fasting, social and liturgical customs as practices diversely enacted within the faith. Vrame's four types of orthopraxy are modeled on Jewish denominations of praxis, including: "1) Ultra-conservative/Fundamentalist, 2) Traditional, 3) Reform, and 4) Reconstructionist" (Vrame 2008, 282). The four categories are separated from one another based largely on responses to modernity: is it more desirable to adapt to surrounding culture, or is it better to resist the secular world? Vrame suggests a number of topics to which these orientations might apply, including piety, social issues, authority, and, appropriately for this chapter, the role of women.

When Vrame applies his model to ideas of Orthodox Christian piety, for example, at one end of the spectrum are ultra-conservatives, who may appear "anachronistic," duplicating practices from the "Old World" exactly (Vrame 2008, 292). According to Vrame, in this worldview, women have "second status," their modesty is strongly emphasized, their role in church life is limited, and the sexes are divided during services (Vrame 2008, 292). Next, traditionalists might still maintain practices from the Old World but be adaptable to realities in the New World. Traditionalists encourage men and women to maintain traditional roles, with women doing "caretaking" types of jobs. Reform Orthodox might insist that original practices be adapted, and reconstructionists would be more likely to invent new forms for New World realities (Vrame 2008, 293). Reform believers advocate for women's greater involvement in church life, and "ritual purity" practices are viewed as "anachronistic" (Vrame 2008, 292). Lastly, reconstructionist believers seek complete equality between the sexes, including advocating for women in the priesthood.

Vrame cites a survey of Orthodox clergy in North America by sociologist Alexey Krindatch, in which the majority of clerical responses fell under the traditional category.¹ Vrame (2008, 286) writes that we can reasonably assume most lay Orthodox Christians qualify as traditional, following the attitudes of their priests. According to his chart, traditionalist laity look to clerical authority for guidance, with a goal of “self-directing behavior” (Vrame 2008, 293). My research, though, suggests that belief and practice are not mutually exclusive, and both involve complex processes of negotiation based on personal needs, discussed more extensively in the next chapter. Therefore, if a layperson behaves outwardly as a priest directs, it does not necessarily correlate with his or her inward attitude about those practices; this chapter will discuss attitudes surrounding obedience and clerical authority. Folkloristic methodology is well-equipped to address divergence in belief and practice, especially in theories like vernacular religion. Vrame’s methodology, by contrast, is common in the field of religious studies, for example, where individual beliefs or practices are typically contrasted against authoritative prescription.

For example, both converts and Orthodox-born believers may lean on family examples in terms of expectations about gender roles and authority. Adina, who is Orthodox-born and was raised in Romania, has a direct familial connection to the priesthood because her grandfather was a priest. She said she used to question the rules about church when she was a child. Why, for example, could she not enter the altar, but a boy could? Adina was curious, and she entered the altar anyway. Though her grandfather was not happy, he forgave her. Adina described him as “a very understanding person” and “not very rigid” (Adina November 8, 2015). She said that she

¹ I was unable to access the original study, as the site is expired. However, I was able to find a summary of the study, published as a brochure for Orthodox parishes. Where the full study covered all dioceses in the U.S., the brochure emphasizes only the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and the Orthodox Church in America (Krindatch 2007).

respected his wishes after that, not because he was strict, but rather, because “he was a fantastic person.” When a loving relationship exists between clergy and laypeople, respect follows. A different priest with a more authoritarian style might not have achieved the same result as Adina’s grandfather did. She suggested that her grandfather’s experience as a parent and grandparent made him a better priest in this way.

It could be argued that Adina’s experience with a gentle priest had more to do with the fact that he was her grandfather as well. However, she went on to meet many other priests who exhibited a variety of attitudes toward rules. She said:

I met many, many priests in my life, as a young adult. All my grandfather’s friends were priests, and I met them both as priests and in everyday life. Some of them, character-wise, I didn’t like them at all. Some of them were lovely people. What I learned is that it’s not how the priest is. That’s not my problem. He’s not perfect. I’m not perfect either. It’s actually my relationship with God that I need to preserve, even if I don’t like what the priest does.

Adina’s memory of her grandfather’s gentle demeanor set a high bar for other priests whom she met. Her experience with him taught her that not all priests interpret or enforce rules in the same way, which recalls Leila’s baptismal anecdotes in chapter two. She offered the example of some churches requiring men and children to take communion first, with the women second, a practice which makes her feel like “a second-class citizen” (Adina November 8, 2015). Adina knows that this and other practices are inconsistent across churches, and she said she may not obey certain rules if she does not like them. She reflected upon the relationship between some gender-specific rules in the Orthodox Church and the secular world in which she lives and works. She remarked, “Even in this secular world, we say ‘Oh, women are equal to men.’ Come *on*.” In her experience, North American society pays lip service to the equality of the sexes, but her professional experiences have not always reflected this. Adina is a professor who holds a PhD in a male-

dominated field. She said, “Even in the secular world...there is not always equality, so what about the Church?” (Adina November 8, 2015). Adina expressed that the Orthodox Church has maintained its own traditions for so long, that she is not sure if or when it will change. Nonetheless she said, “Even in the universe, there is diversity, and diversity always helps” (Adina November 8, 2015). While I disagree with the way in which Vrame categorizes Orthodox believers, I find that his theoretical framework has a more complex applicability. I will use his categories here in reference to my consultants’ attitudes on particular issues, but not to categorize individuals as a whole, since one person may have views that fall variously along the spectrum depending on the topic (as well as divergence between belief and practice). On Vrame’s spectrum of Orthodox Christian practice, Adina may fall more towards the reform or reconstructionist categories, whereas she described experiences in Romania as fitting into both the “ultra-conservative” and traditional categories.

Adina understands some of these interpretations of the role of women to be cultural or societal rather than strictly theological in the Orthodox Christian tradition. She contrasted Romania, which she described as a historically “male-dominated society” with North America, in which she said “there is more dialogue about women” in society at large. There is reason to believe that Orthodox Christianity in North America may adapt to wider cultural values or practices with regard to gender equality. Adina concluded by saying, “Somebody who converts will find those things much more difficult to accept, I think, in my opinion, than me” (Adina November 8, 2015). In a society where Orthodox Christianity is an uncommon religion, the conflict between cultural values and certain spiritual practices may be more difficult to reconcile than in a country where there is more overlap between the two.

Sacred Roles & Authority in Family Relationships

In my interviews with both converts and Orthodox-born believers, I noticed that parishioners tended to evaluate both priestly authority and prescribed gender roles based on their personal experiences, often in family contexts. I interviewed Neil and Amanda, a converted husband and wife who have attended St. Parascheva for over fifteen years. They described themselves as observing traditional gender roles in terms of Neil setting the “bottom line” for decisions. However, they said that “the bottom line is negotiated” in how gender roles emerge for them in daily life (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015). Ideally, a similarly flexible relationship exists between priests and parishioners—the unique needs of each parishioner are known to his or her spiritual father, and he may respond accordingly. In chapter two, I introduced the term *oikonomia*, or economy, as a strategy used by priests to adjust tenets of the faith to meet the needs of individual parishioners. The word literally means “housekeeping,” and it is meant to mirror God’s love for humanity (Guroian 1981, 235-6). Marriage, however, has some essential differences from a priest’s relationship to his parishioners. Neil and Amanda have, for example, made a choice together to structure their relationship in a particular way; neither person is dictating the terms of the relationship to the other. When the bottom line is negotiated, it is between them alone. A priest, on the other hand, is beholden to superiors when he expresses vernacular interpretations of authority and theology. He is the one who chooses how to answer whether gender roles are biological or social, and how God intends for these to be manifest. In many ways, his relationship to his parishioners is not completely personal; it reflects a larger hierarchical structure in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Amanda did suggest that her comfort with traditional gender roles both in her relationship with Brian and her relationship with the Church might stem from her family experiences growing up and its impact on her identity. She said:

I never had brothers, and my dad is very nurturing...my dad is probably more nurturing than my mom is. So...I mean, part of it's just how I grew up. I never felt like [being a woman] was a negative or an inferior position.

Several things stand out to me about Amanda's statement. She states that she has never felt disrespected on account of being a woman. In addition, Amanda has no brothers, with whom she potentially could have experienced difference, and her father is described as nurturing. Not unlike Adina's story of obeying her grandfather's rules because she loved him, Amanda's story also demonstrates a trusting relationship with male authority. This may explain, at least in part, why traditional gender roles are part of Amanda's preferences in both her home and in her faith: in her experience, these models have been associated with peace, love, and stability. I found a similar pattern among other women parishioners whom I interviewed, who associated a male priesthood with their own loving fathers.

Neil and Amanda's attitudes toward gender roles are indicative of a wider trend in American Protestant Christianity as well. Sociologist Victor P. Bartkowski examines the notion of "headship" in American evangelical families. He writes that "there is mounting evidence that traditional gender ideologies in evangelical homes often give rise to progressive practices" in which male leadership often becomes negotiated partnership (Bartkowski 2007, 163). This seems to echo what Neil and Amanda expressed about Neil being the head of the household and family while still maintaining a partnership with Amanda. They called their system "traditional," though it certainly has nuances which might not be present in other forms of patriarchy. Both stressed that their arrangement is consensual, and Neil said he did not think of himself in any way as

being “over” Amanda. There is marked flexibility between them. Bartkowski uses the term “New Man,” borrowed from sociologist Bradford W. Wilcox’s 2004 study of gender roles and family ideology in mainline Protestantism, to describe contemporary evangelical masculinity.

Bartkowski describes this archetype as:

...sensitively attuned to the needs of his wife and children rather than egocentric, willing to express his emotions openly rather than stoic, and governed by the sensibilities of egalitarianism and partnership rather than domineering. (Bartkowski 2007, 156)

Bartkowski suggests that this is because by citing “husband headship,” Christian couples can separate themselves from secular models of partnership which emphasize individualism. Instead, “self-sacrifice is valorized and divinized” (Bartkowski 2007, 164). He writes, furthermore, that evangelicals stress that leadership is not “decision-making authority,” but is rather a form of servanthood (Bartkowski 2007, 164). This model fits with the Orthodox emphases on humility and community over individualism.

Ksenia, a Russian woman in her forties who has worshipped at St. Parascheva for about ten years, has a similar perspective. She said she disagrees with many of her friends, both Russian and American, since she supports traditional gender roles. She said, “A man is the head of the household, not that the female is lesser than the man, but give men credit first. He has to live with her, so she’s running the family” (Ksenia, August 23, 2015). This is similar to the attitudes Adina described in Romania; this attitude falls under Vrame’s “ultra-conservative” category. Despite her differences of opinion with her Russian friends, Ksenia still attributes her own beliefs to Russian culture. The workings of a church could be compared to the way a household is run, in Ksenia’s description: the priest is the leader of the community, the figurehead who spiritually guides the congregation. Women in the congregation are often busy

behind the scenes organizing social events, cooking for them, and ultimately creating spaces in which the work of community can happen.

When Ksenia says that men should be given credit first in households in spite of women doing administrative work in that space, it is possible to interpret this through the Orthodox Christian lens of humility (Larin 2008, 276). The specific application and manifestation of humility in daily life is difficult to measure. Is the violation of a prescribed gender role prideful because it violates biological nature, in the Orthodox Christian perspective, or because it violates a cultural construct? Adina and Ksenia's examples both suggest that gender roles are a cultural construct, even as they take different perspectives on them.

Literature by Orthodox Christian authors, especially clergy, suggests that the theological purpose of separate sexes is marriage, and the purpose of marriage is procreation (Orthodox Church in America 2018b). In the Orthodox Church, marriage refers exclusively to heterosexual relationships. Priests do dispense *oikonomia*, however, in their approaches to whether or not the purpose of marriage is only for procreation, belying vernacular theological interpretations of this sacrament. This structure is explained as being the best mirror of the Kingdom of God, with a divine father at the top of the pyramid. This mirrors the Orthodox Church's history as being part of an empire. Some clergy, such as Father Josiah Trenham, advocate for strictly defined roles for men and women toward this goal, as in his lecture series "The Good Husband" and "The Good Wife" (Trenham 2012). Each lecture in the series is titled after an aspect of the "ideal" husband or wife, including "leader," "domestic pastor," "lover," "provider," and "faithful friend," in the husband series, and "helpmate," "soul of the family," "homemaker, nourisher, and steward," "lover, domesticator, and healing drug," and "faithful friend" in the wife series.

Other authors, such as Archbishop Chrysostomos, write that to “dogmatize” gender roles runs the risk of oppression. He goes on to write that if Orthodox Christianity is practiced “appropriately,” there is no need to rigidly define roles in relationships, because a transcendent peace will arise, in which “each knows his role, not out of the imposition of another's will, but out of humility before God” (Chrysostomos 1981). He then draws a comparison between a man believing himself to be over a woman and a priest believing himself to be over his congregation “whom he serves.” Both Father Josiah Trenham and Archbishop Chrysostomos advocate for roles, but the first favors a clearly-defined structure where the second believes that roles will peacefully and naturally emerge so long as all parties are practicing humility.

Vrame argues that part of the spectrum of worldview in orthopraxy is related to views about a priest’s authority (Vrame 2008, 292). The ultra-conservative viewpoint favors absolute obedience to authority, and the reconstructionist viewpoint, at the other end of the spectrum, favors complete democracy with individual freedom to choose. Father Josiah Trenham may fall under the ultra-conservative category, where a parishioner requires the priest’s permission for many life choices, and the parishioner may need to be directly exhorted to specific action to achieve humility. Archbishop Chrysostomos may fall under the traditionalist category in which the purpose of hierarchical authority is to eventually lead to a parishioner’s self-directed behavior; if the priest is exhibiting humility in his own relationship with his congregation, then parishioners may go and do likewise. Even the degree to which an Orthodox Christian will refer to his or her priest’s opinion on these matters may depend on where he or she falls on the spectrum, as well as where the priest falls. Ultimately, due to the spectrum of orthopraxy in Orthodox Christianity, there is not a consistent expression of gender roles or clerical opinion on the matter.

Monasteries & Modesty

Women's monasteries are spaces that operate somewhat differently than typical churches. Women hold authority in monasteries. Furthermore, some rules which would ordinarily apply, such as women's exclusion from the altar space, do not apply in female monastic settings. My consultant Christina, a millennial and convert who attends St. Parascheva, described that in her experience, monasteries sometimes call laypeople from the surrounding community to assist during services (Christina, August 12, 2015). Visitors to the monastery are included in this context, such as when members of St. Parascheva make trips to Holy Dormition Monastery in Michigan. A priest will come to serve the liturgy, but the nuns will do almost everything else, including jobs usually reserved for deacons and altar boys. Women's monasteries are, therefore, held up as examples of contexts where usual gender roles and boundaries do not apply. Christina sees the Orthodox Church as a diverse series of contexts. If women were truly prohibited from entering the altar space, the nuns would have to seek exclusively male assistance from the congregation, and they do not.

Monastic life is held up as an ideal for all Orthodox Christians, men and women alike. Many of the women I interviewed look to nuns as examples specifically because their lives are dedicated to obedience which is meant to give way to humility and holiness. Those who make regular retreats to Holy Dormition Monastery in particular develop relationships with the abbess and other nuns there. Some seek counseling, others a place of peace. My consultant Halyna described women's monasteries as places to learn about being a woman in a sacred context. She used beauty and sexuality as specific examples. Halyna views Western culture as bombarded by images of sex which devalue women as people and compared this with images of women in a monastery. She said that the nuns "are so truly beautiful in such a different way, so peaceful and

whole,” and she desires to achieve that in her own life (Halyna, August 18, 2015). In Halyna’s experience, women’s monasteries are places where beauty can be discovered within oneself without being defined by a male gaze. For her, dressing modestly helps to focus the mind in prayer, and that challenge extends to her daily life when she is not visiting a monastery.

Orthodox Christian nuns wear clothing which resembles the Muslim chador. Typically, there is a long black dress and a black head covering extending below the chin, which may vary in style among nuns according to local tradition and rank. Halyna’s description of suggested dress for visitors at monasteries mirrors the nuns’ dress code. She suggests that this interpretation of modesty might also be ideal for church in general. I question whether this standard of modesty is not defined by the male gaze. Those I interviewed describe nuns as idealized version of womanhood, completely focused on the divine as opposed to earthly concerns. Halyna, for example, thinks of modesty as a way to remove distractions to focus on God, and nuns’ monastic garb is the epitome of modesty. I offer a personal anecdote in this regard. I once attended a Russian Orthodox church with my mother, wearing what we both deemed to be a modest dress. When we sat down in the church, an elderly lady approached me. She did not speak English, and I did not speak Russian. She handed me a scarf. I assumed she meant for me to cover my head, and I obliged. She shook her head and instead stuffed the scarf down the front of my dress so as to hide my décolletage.² My mother was surprised, and so was I, but I took the hint and wrapped the scarf around my neck in order to respectfully comply. This anecdote illustrates the subjectivity of modesty, but also calls into question the reasons for emphasizing it. My own gauge for what constituted modest clothing was not in line with this parishioner’s, but whose gaze was most important? Was it the elderly woman’s? The priest’s (who spoke both English

² My partner and I now humorously refer to this as the “baboobshka incident.” I must mention here that I have worn this particular dress to other Orthodox churches, and I have never had an experience like this one.

and Russian, and made no remark on the matter)? God's? Which of us is the standard by which God's position on modesty is illuminated? It might have been helpful to ask a nun's opinion on the matter if one had been present.

Several of the women I interviewed made a conscious choice to wear a headscarf out of modesty on Sundays. The headscarf and monastic standard of modesty in general are traditions



Figure 15

The author wearing a headscarf at a Russian Orthodox church in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

which are learned differently by the Orthodox-born versus those who convert. Cultural context affects



Figure 16

Russian and Mongolian women worshipping in the same church in Ulaanbaatar.

vernacular interpretations of modesty. The Russian Orthodox Church, for example, tends to encourage both head coverings and skirts for women (see figures 15 and 16). My stepmother, who is Russian, wears pants to church sometimes, but she wraps a scarf around her hips as a compromise. Some would consider this radical. Likewise, I once met a woman who did not own a headscarf, but modified a heart-printed pillowcase to do the job. Some women wear short, basic, head coverings, and others, as in Ethiopia, wear long, sheer head coverings.

Historian of religion Nadieszda Kizenko notes that there is some latitude in Russian practice here; according to her, even the most casual church attendant will wear a head covering, but a skirt indicates stricter piety (Kizenko 2013, 607). As noted by folklorists Olson and Adonyeva as well as independent scholar Katja Sarajeva, this is related to pre-existing cultural practices in addition to Orthodox theology (Olson and Adonyeva 2012, 66; Sarajeva 2010, 161). By contrast, the Greek Orthodox Church is more relaxed on the topics of headscarves and skirts for women. In a collected work of correspondence between parishioners and one Greek Orthodox priest, Stanley Harakas writes of head coverings that their historical significance had more to do with maintaining societal gender roles than modesty (Harakas 1987, 37). In his vernacular interpretation, head coverings today are one of many ways to manifest these roles, and therefore not obligatory in and of themselves.

Adina, who grew up in Romania and attends St. Nicholas, mentioned that many of her choices about how to behave in church were because “I was brought up like that” (Adina, November 8, 2015). Despite her grandfather being a priest, she was brought up with freedom of choice. Adina said that no priest in Romania had ever told her to wear a skirt, though she was encouraged to wear a head covering, which she does not. Adina says that visiting a monastery is “a different story.” There, she does not wear shorts or a short skirt, and she does wear a scarf over her hair. Wearing a head scarf is not something she is comfortable doing, and she rarely chooses to do so except occasionally on holy days. Adina, who had clerics in her family and grew up in Romania, had people around her to teach her about behavior and dress in church; she witnessed diverse vernacular interpretations of modesty. Those who convert as adults make these choices based on watching others, asking their priests, and observing. Covering the hair can be a difficult choice to make for some converted women, and many do not choose to do it. Irene, a

convert at St. Parascheva, for example, said, “My husband would like me to cover my head. And I told him, ‘When the *Preoteasa* does it, I will do it.’ When that happens, I will not think of it as oppressive” (Irene, July 1, 2015). *Preoteasa* is the Romanian title for a priest’s wife, and this woman not wearing a headscarf is a powerful statement about choice and bodily autonomy. I did not ask the priest’s wife about her choice not to wear a headscarf, but in many ways, she sets the tone for other women in the parish. Julia, another convert parishioner at St. Parascheva, discussed outward appearance as belying an inward state. Our discussion focused largely on discipline and obedience, about which Julia described herself as “legalistic” (Julia, June 30, 2015). Nonetheless, she does not choose to wear a headscarf or use prayer beads as part of that discipline. This is a choice she makes independently, outside of the realm of family or cultural example, because she is a convert.

At both St. Parascheva in the Midwestern U.S. and St. Nicholas in Eastern Canada, neither head coverings nor dresses or skirts are compulsory for women. The choice is left entirely up to women themselves, and the results are diverse. Mary, a convert and congregant at St. Parascheva, said, “In our parish, women can be who they are.” She went on to give examples of those who do and do not wear makeup or head coverings to church as part of different ideas about “looking your best for God.” She emphasized that there is freedom at St. Parascheva for these differences. She did say that when she visits a monastery, “I *am* told to wear a head covering, [and] I am totally uncomfortable with it, but I do it out of respect for them” (Mary, June 13, 2015). In this case, perhaps the specifics of modest dress are less important to her than the gesture to think of others; this may be read as spiritual discipline toward humility. By this mode of thinking, the gesture of outward modesty is a sign of an inward state of heart. This same worldview is visible in other Orthodox practices. For example, in folklorist Natalie Kononenko’s

study of Orthodox folk belief in Ukraine, she found that practices surrounding the preparation of a deceased body for burial were important because it is believed they will affect what happens to the soul (Kononenko 2014, 62). In applying this to modesty, then, covering the body will transform the heart to be humble. Modesty may be seen as a form of humility, and yet the way modesty is expressed is dependent upon cultural context and individual, vernacular interpretation.

On a family trip to a men's monastery one summer, Neil and Amanda experienced a cultural conflict between their vernacular understandings of modesty and those of the monks there. Neil said that women were not allowed in certain spaces within, and there was a designated room for women, requiring headscarves. Amanda did not wish to wear one, so she decided not to go in at all, and instead enjoy the garden outside. She said she has often asked herself since, "Why wasn't I offended?" (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015). Embedded in Amanda's self-directed question is an expectation that perhaps, as a contemporary Western woman, she *should* be offended. It was such an important question to her that she asked it twice over the course of the story. Neil *was* offended, because he could see no theological reason for excluding women. Amanda, on the other hand, viewed it more as a boundary. She respected that the monks preferred not to share space with women in church, but she also knew that she would feel disrespected waiting in a room apart, wearing a headscarf. In the end, she found a compromise while maintaining her boundaries.

Monasteries exist apart from secular society for a reason. Groups of men and women have chosen to devote their lives to God in such a way as to avoid the kinds of distractions experienced by parishioners living in the secular world. Their responsibilities are not to spouses or family members with whom they live, but rather to one another as a community. These

communities are segregated by gender for purposes of modesty and avoiding temptation. When visitors come to the monastery, they take away lessons about community living. In some cases, lessons about the nature of modesty are taken away, most especially by women; only for these visitors does outward dress seem to be a marker of an inward state of piety.

Discipline, Obedience, & the Body

There is a worldview among some Orthodox believers, both presently and historically, that spiritual obedience and discipline are necessary to cope with the inevitable suffering of life. Stories about martyrdom feed into this mindset, as those who did suffer and die for their faith are held up as role models for virtuous behavior, with Jesus as the ultimate example (Ehrman 2018, 156-158). It is not necessarily encouraged for Orthodox Christians to seek martyrdom, but the discipline of obedience is promoted as a way of training the body to prepare for suffering, which is seen as an inevitable part of life, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Many of my consultants cited the emphasis on discipline as part of what drew them to Orthodox Christianity. I heard similar sentiments from both women and men, though I believe both groups are differently affected by standards of obedience.

Simon, the deacon at St. Parascheva, criticized the secular world for using sexuality as a primary source of identity, and connected a cultural “preoccupation” with sexuality to “sexual temptation” (Simon, June 29, 2015). Temptation is something to be overcome in Orthodox Christianity, and discipline is the means to that end. In interviews with male converts, I noticed a pattern in which sexual desire was viewed as something to be conquered and overcome as an aspect of discipline. Women did not comment on overcoming sexual desire as such or even about

temptation. There was instead a focus on rule-following, such as abstaining from sex Saturday night before communion on Sunday, and modesty, as discussed earlier.

Generally speaking, female converts viewed limitations in the church as an aspect of spiritual discipline. Christina, for example, said,

[In] obedience to God, in living the spiritual life, we're supposed to try and become saintly. We're supposed to become...there are examples of saints who were horribly mistreated and they endured with humility, so I would sort of look at it in that same way.

She went on to tell a story about a Greek monk who was falsely accused of impregnating a woman, and he did not choose to argue a case for his innocence. Rather, he chose to help raise the child. According to Christina, the truth came out only after the monk's death, when the child's mother admitted the monk was not the father. Christina mentioned how serious such an accusation would be for a monk, and she described his actions as the epitome of humility. She said, "I would think that it would have possibly been very difficult to not want to defend one's self in that situation, but to what end?"

Accepting an exclusively male priesthood was sometimes described as a step toward that goal. Joy, a decades-long parishioner at St. Parascheva, for example, talked in chapter four about not aspiring to the priesthood because the Virgin Mary did not, and Mary is the archetype of humility. When I asked her to say more about this view, she said, "It's not *knowing* your place, but having a *sense* of your place" (Joy, July 9, 2015). She described finding integrity and discernment in being aware where one belongs. Joy interpreted the Virgin's example in terms of praying for her children and being willing to suffer as the result of loving them deeply and letting them go. She gave an inverse example of holy womanhood from the Biblical figure of Eve. In Orthodox tradition, the Virgin Mary is sometimes called "the second Eve," because her actions

and those of her son Jesus, were redemptive for Eve's sins. Joy viewed Eve as domineering over Adam's God-given authority, and as a result, they were shut out from the Garden of Eden. Joy saw this as a warning about upsetting cosmic order; it falls apart when the individuals within it are not practicing obedience and humility in the roles God gave them. This recalls Kontouma's discussion of certain interpretations of Orthodox Christian theology in which "the sin of Eve" is viewed as the reason men are more ascetically perfect than women (Kontouma 2012, 433). Florina echoed Joy's statement when she said, "Christ is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman. We are made from Adam. God took a rib from Adam and made Eve" (Florina July 26, 2015). Adam came first, and this is taken to be a sign that Eve, as the created being, is subservient to Adam, the icon of the creator.

Julia spoke about accepting the state of being created as part of the discipline of humility. She suggested that perhaps "masculine/feminine" was not the most accurate dichotomy for humanity, and perhaps "creator/created" was better. She said:

And supposedly, the scriptures say that man and woman were put there to try to give a glimpse of that relationship. I know it feels very subservient and awful to have to be the created one, subservient to the masculine creator...which is interesting, because in real life, we're the ones that bear life.

In both Florina's and Julia's examples, "masculine" is a stand-in for "divine creator," and "feminine" is a stand in for "creation" (Julia, June 30, 2015). No sooner does Julia compare men to God as creator, however, then she considers women having the ability to "create" by giving birth; as she shared these thoughts, I witnessed the process by which she constructs her vernacular worldview. She weighed and considered multiple interpretations before choosing the one that aligned best with her own experience—the perspective of being a created being.

Some of the women I interviewed suggested that dissatisfaction with women's exclusion from the priesthood was simply a condition of the corruption of the secular world, devoid of notions of obedience or humility. Irene, for example, suggested that the role of women is "a modern problem." She went on to express that Western culture in general does not have a healthy view of women, and she cited the example of her son at university, who was uninterested in dating women because "They're predators" (Irene, July 1, 2015). Florina expressed similar sentiments, quoting 1 Corinthians 14:34, which says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be submissive, as also says the law." She considered St. Olympiada, who was a deaconess, celebrated the previous day. "That was different," she said, "Like in a monastery, virgins or widows can read the epistle or go behind the iconostasis, but widows must have a clear life and not be wild" (Florina, July 26, 2015). Both Irene and Florina used the word "wild" to describe women's undesirable behavior, and they suggested that discipline and obedience lead to a calming of this wild state. Florina suggested that women ought to be in nurturing roles because they are "often more spiritual than men." This seems ironic, given the exclusion of women from the priesthood. Nonetheless, the discipline of Orthodox Christianity, whether in a physical or psychological sense, is countercultural to many other forms of Christianity in North America, and it is often this very thing which draws converts.

Milton, a convert who has attended St. Parascheva for over thirty years, for example, described fasting as being like going to the gym. Going regularly makes a body stronger, but not going regularly is "just hurting yourself. In a culture like ours, it's good to say no" (Milton, June 5, 2015). Discipline allows one to better cope with difficulties in life. Orthodox Christianity is appealing to some converts because its message is the opposite of an apparent cultural hedonism.

Julia was drawn to the physical discipline of Orthodox Christianity because of her experience as a professional dancer. She compared the rituals of the Orthodox Church to the physical preparation which precedes a performance. She said, “It’s not unlike the military...It starts with a desire, but it doesn’t end with a desire. You have to kind of hone your skill.” Julia said that through every stage of training to become a dancer, a trainee has to ask themselves whether or not they still want it, in spite of all the work. She said, “You have to keep saying yes so many times. And I think Orthodoxy asks that of us” (Julia, June 30, 2015).

When spiritual transformation occurs for members of the Orthodox Church, it is largely as a result of their own vernacular interpretations of what is happening to them. While the liturgy may exclude women from various forms of participation, many find fulfillment in it by their own efforts. Desire motivates Julia’s discipline, and as a result, spiritual practice is imprinted into her body as a gateway to heaven. She sees the repetition of the liturgy as a rehearsal for heaven. Outward action, even simply going through the motions, is meant to give way to an inner spiritual state. In Julia’s description, the liturgy even becomes an unearthly state of being, a bridge from earth to heaven.

One of the most poignant narratives I collected in this research was about discipline to spiritual practice at the end of life. Amanda described helping to care for a woman named Deborah as she was dying of cancer. Deborah was known in the community as an opinionated, sometimes abrasive person, but Amanda experienced her in a position of complete vulnerability as she was dying. Amanda told me about her experience helping Deborah bathe in the last days of her life. As each layer of clothing was peeled off, she said Deborah “had this beautiful, soft, Christ-like spirit, which was there all along,” but which had been masked by other struggles in her life, such as hurt, fear, and depression (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015). Amanda attributed

this peaceful presence to the fact that Deborah had loved God throughout her life and had maintained spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and reading. She said, “This is the fruit of a life of following these ascetic disciplines, because at the end, when it’s all stripped away, like it will be for all of us...what’s left is beauty” (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015). This story is compounded by the fact that Deborah died the very next day, her spiritual discipline a bridge from earth to heaven. This experience affected Amanda deeply, and she continues to come back to this memory when she struggles with spiritual discipline today. She said that while she feels like “a rebellious kid” about many of the disciplines, she believes that they can transform her if she allows them into her life. She suggests that the fruit of this discipline occurs when a person does not resist the process. Is it discipline which leads to an open heart, or is it an open heart which can gain wisdom from discipline? Perhaps the answer is different from person to person. Repeated throughout this chapter is the idea that outward action leads to an inward spiritual state, but perhaps the opposite is also implied—that an inward spiritual state will be known by means of outward action. When all is stripped away, what is left is transformation.

Gender Roles & Identity

Gender roles exist as an aspect of discipline and obedience in Orthodox Christianity, and it is implied that they reveal something that is already true about humankind. Mary, for example, believes that Orthodox Christianity reveals the “Biblical truth about what it means to be a man or a woman. There is no role confusion here” (Mary, June 30, 2015). She also said that while there are some gender roles in Orthodox Christianity, she does not see these as being unique to the faith. Adina said something similar earlier, when she talked about the difficulty of succeeding and having her opinions respected in a secular, male-dominated field. Mary’s second point is that

Orthodox Christianity is the embodiment of Biblical truths about men and women, and she suggests that these prevent role confusion.

Appropriate roles for men and women, then, are thought to be modeled in the Church through Christ and his mother, or Christ and the Church as a feminine symbol. To transgress these roles with a male priesthood is seen as a sin of pride; it is imposing human ideas over divine ones. Neil, for example, said that “killing your pride” toward the goal of humility sometimes means laying down one’s own opinions. He felt that since “Christ was incarnate as a man,” if a woman were to be a priest, she would not be able to represent Christ “in reality.” He explained, “My marriage is sacramental because it represents Christ and the Church, and I represent Christ, and [Amanda] represents the Church, [but] I’m not over her. I’m not more important than her” (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015). This hearkens back to their discussion about the bottom line being negotiated in their relationship. Here, Neil specifically talks about these gender roles as sacramental. Husbands and priests alike represent Christ, and all women, therefore, represent the Church, also called the “Body of Christ.” Questioning this divinely-ordained model, then, is suggested to be prideful; ego and over-valuing one’s own opinions are at fault when this model is either ignored or when it fails.

Neil was thoughtful on this topic, and he went on to say that there are verses in the Bible which refer to all believers as priests, rather than men specifically. 1 Peter 2:5, for example, refers to “You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Neil said, “We believe that Christ was actually incarnate as a man, so for me, if I all of a sudden had a priest who was a woman, for me it would feel very odd.

It would feel like my dad was wearing a dress” (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015). All Orthodox priests wear long cassocks (*riasas*) which convert priests especially (often jokingly) call dresses. I do not think it was Neil’s intention to make a joke, but there is a pronounced irony here. For Neil, as for many other Orthodox Christians, Christ’s humanity is closely tied with his masculinity. Priests are meant to stand in for the presence of Christ, and for Neil, the maleness of a priest is an important characteristic of his Christ-like presence. In our interview, he mentioned other Christian traditions in which women can be clergy, but felt these were not sacramental. In Neil’s view, Orthodox Christianity encourages men and women to follow gender roles as they *ought* to be rather than how they *are*, which again relates to disciplining the body toward humility and obedience.

It may appear contradictory to view gender roles as disciplinary ideals to which people should aspire and simultaneously downplay gender as an aspect of personal identity. Simon said that sexuality is not the “be-all, end-all,” and suggested that this is a contemporary issue. Irene also suggested that the “role of women” is a “modern problem.” Julia suggested that perhaps it is less helpful to think about discussions of “masculine and feminine” and more to think about roles of “creator and created.” These tie into two other parallel statements made by Joy and Amanda respectively. When I asked Joy about her disagreements with feminism, she said, “I don’t specifically think of myself as a woman. I think of myself as a person” (Joy, July 9, 2015). Similarly, Amanda said, “I don’t feel like gender is a huge, defining part of who I am” (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015). I believe that both Joy and Amanda’s statements are marked by the interplay of several kinds of privilege: they are white and middle-class, both said they had not personally experienced disrespect for being women, they are both well-educated, and both are well-read about their faith. These factors shape how much power they have over their own lives,

including how they view and represent themselves in the world. These two statements by no means represent the sentiments of all Orthodox women, all converted women in general, or those at the specific parishes I studied. Nevertheless, a pattern emerged among my consultants regarding ideas about discipline and humility.

Joy took particular care in discussing God's intent for gendered differences between men and women, and yet, she thinks of herself as a person more than as a woman, and Amanda said something similar. Why might these converted women insist that gender defines them less than other aspects of their personhood, when some Orthodox-born women whom I interviewed, such as Adina or Leila, found gender distinctions such as those described by Joy and Amanda, to be unjust? This, of course, does not apply to all Orthodox-born women either, as Florina and Ksenia, for example, both defended religiously sanctioned gender roles as proper.

In my opinion, the answer is twofold: privilege and conflict about individualism. First, I use political theorist Sonia Kruks's definition of privilege as:

[Structural] differentiations that variously affect the life chances and well being of large groups, and do so in ways that produce morally *unacceptable* differences in their levels of well-being. (Kruks 2005, 180)

Kruks goes on to include "the power exclusively to define knowledge and truth" as part of her definition of privilege (Kruks 2005, 181). Moreover, Kruks writes that privilege is frequently invisible to those who possess it. Those with male privilege, for example, may not recognize differences in treatment between men and women, which I believe permeates much of the discussion about sex in Orthodox Christianity. Theologian Maria Gwyn McDowell, for example, writes that when men and women are separated in the liturgy in some Orthodox churches, personhood becomes reduced to a gendered body (McDowell 2013, 85-87). Both Joy and Amanda are fortunate to be in a community where they are loved and respected, and they do not

feel that their identities are defined by others. Their life experiences have taught them that truth is complex, and systems of power are not always reflections of divine reality. They may cleverly subvert a system which tells them that their sex will shape their piety by choosing not to think of themselves primarily as women. This does not mean, however, that the Orthodox Church itself will evaluate them as people independently of their bodies.

McDowell argues that the physical actions of liturgy tell a story; while the language does not necessarily exclude women, the actions do so implicitly (McDowell 2013, 78). It is visibly apparent that women do not belong behind the iconostasis or near holy sacraments. The ritual enactment of the liturgy is meant to establish ideal, divinely-inspired relationships among participants to sanctify the community and the world. McDowell discusses Orthodox Christian theological literature at length which professes the sanctity of all persons, including the Mother of God as the ultimate example of a sanctified female body (McDowell 85-87). Nonetheless, to return to power of participation in liturgy, the communion rituals of the Orthodox Church and its reasons for excluding women from the priesthood do not reinforce the lip service paid to the sanctity of women's bodies.

The state of not needing to be concerned about one's sex in an Orthodox church is a privileged position indeed. W.E.B. Du Bois, scholar and civil rights activist, coined the term "double-consciousness" to describe "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," as part of the American Black experience (Du Bois 1994, 5). This term has been appropriated in feminist theory to describe the female experience. Du Bois described the conflict of "two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body" (Du Bois 1994, 5). In Du Bois's experience, the attempt to pursue these ideals met with prejudice in the white society around him. While women in the

Orthodox Church, hopefully, may not experience the open prejudice Du Bois describes, women are a class apart from men. Their double-consciousness is manifest in concern for their own modesty, so as to prevent others from being distracted, but also in an awareness of how others may evaluate their humility.

Marxist and feminist theorist Shulamith Firestone argued that the socialist and feminist revolutions both aimed not only to end class privilege but class distinction. If this were achieved, she argued, “genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally” (Firestone 1972, 11). Firestone did not say that differences between men and women would cease to exist in ending sex distinction; she says they would cease to *matter*. Where Christ sees neither male nor female, as Joy cites, it can be argued that the Orthodox Church does the opposite. It would seem that sex distinction, in fact, matters quite a lot in the Orthodox Church.

Feminism & Individualism as Antithetical to Humility in Orthodox Christianity

Definitions for feminism can be broad-ranging, sometimes focusing on empowerment, sometimes oppression, sometimes on women specifically, and sometimes, more implicitly, focusing on a specific cultural context. I prefer to use the definition proposed by culture critic bell hooks, who defines feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (hooks 2000, 1). She writes that this definition emphasizes sexism as the focus of feminism. This definition does not elaborate on what constitutes sexism, however, and that makes it broad enough to apply cross-culturally. Lawless suggests that to do ethnography in a feminist way, for example, requires the process to be “reciprocal, balanced, built on exchange and dialogue” (Lawless 1993, 6). While ethnography involves descriptions of people and

cultures, Lawless suggests that to do so in a feminist way involves listening and building relationships.

Often, in the Orthodox Christian context in North America, talking about feminism is also a discussion about individualism. For Orthodox Christianity, consideration of feminism would mean the focus is shifted from concern for a collective whole to concern for a portion of that whole, even temporarily. Religious studies scholar Alexander Agadjanian and political scientist Kathy Rousselet write about “person and group in Russian Orthodox discourse” (Agadjanian and Rousselet 2010, 313). According to them,

The Orthodox critique of the ideology of human rights alleges that to concentrate on the individual is to ignore the community, which is the bearer of common values and traditions. Therefore, if we are to talk about rights at all, group rights must be superior to individual rights. Secondly, for the Orthodox, when the individual’s rights, freedom, and self-realization are considered the highest value, there is a danger of total anomie, a *bellum omnium contra omnes*³... Thirdly, as Western individuals are autonomous entities, they tend to be free from foundational meanings and norms, moral and divine; they are simply ‘mechanical atoms’ whose freedom is only limited by the freedom of others. Fourthly and finally, it follows that although the human being is indeed central to the entire Christian tradition, he/she is not an individual (*individuum*), who is ‘the measure of all things,’ but a person (*lichnost*’) possessing personhood (same Russian word), whose dignity is not given as ‘natural and inalienable,’ but bestowed by God through creation after His image and His likeness, as an ontological possibility, a potential, that he may be fully realized through communion with God. (Agadjanian and Rousselet 2010, 314)

Feminism tends to take hold in cultural contexts which recognize individual autonomy and a need for shared resources to allow equality to exist. The model suggested by Agadjanian and Rousselet is also concerned with sharing, but it has the potential to gloss over the fact that not all members of a community are treated in the same way. Orthodox scholar Vassa Larin writes that, “the concern that something may be ‘degrading’ for a woman is foreign to Orthodox spirituality,

³ “The war of all against all,” quoting Thomas Hobbes about the state of mankind in *Leviathan*.

which focuses on humility...” (Larin 2008, 276). This also makes sense in a community context, in which no individual is more important than another.

Similar ideas are expressed by Russian Orthodox bishop Seraphim Sigris in his book of meditations on community called *A Life Together*. He uses the Russian word *sobornost*, of which he says, “While it does mean ‘united,’ and in that way represents the Greek idea, it is a unity of things in a conciliar form: in a council or coming together or, we might say, in community” (Sigris 2011, 31-32). Sigris is careful not to promote either collectivism or individualism; he appears to advocate for a balance between the two. He writes, “The free union of *sobornost* is a unity of love, absolutely opposite to the unity of the herd, and of collectivism” (Sigris 2011, 39-40). He goes on to say that “The grounding of *I* in *we*, then, is not a demand against our nature, but is a coming home. In every case it is through action—in the act of prayer, of contemplation, or in our active relationships—that we know ourselves and others” (Sigris 2011, 41). Sigris offers a mystical contemplation on the nature of self within community, suggesting that the self cannot be known except through relationships with others. His writings are in line with the fourth point made by Agadjanian and Rousselet: the self is most realized in relationship with God, and community life is central to that process. Sigris returns to the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, in which all people spoke a common language, but when they disobeyed God, they were divided by language and misunderstanding. Sigris interprets this story to mean that “human arrogance is behind all these divisions of group from group, family from family, person from person” (Sigris 2011, 26). This supports Larin’s assertion that in Orthodox Christianity, to cause conflict is to deviate from the discipline of humility. Sigris concludes his meditation on the Tower of Babel by suggesting that a unified humanity, free from conflict and arrogance, “would

indeed reach up to and join with God” (Sigrist 2011, 26). He finds urgency in this lesson especially in an age of globalization.

With this in mind as the vernacular perspective of an esteemed Orthodox Christian hierarch, I consider the concept of feminism. Where bell hooks and other feminists define feminism based on the problems it addresses (i.e. sexism and other forms of inequality), Orthodox Christian writers often define feminism as an attitude which seeks conflict. Frederica Mathewes-Green, for example, a popular Orthodox author among converts especially, wrote a book entitled *Gender: Men, Women, Sex, Feminism*, in which she describes feminism as inherently competitive. She writes, “The term ‘feminism’ unnecessarily divides the world into competing teams, into those who supposedly have power and those who do not” (Mathewes-Green 2002, 83). She furthermore writes that Jesus makes no distinctions between male and female and that feminism implies “that issues pertaining to women [can] be separated from, [are] more important than, other issues” (Mathewes-Green 2002, 16). Mathewes-Green’s arguments appear to only address women who are feminists. It is unclear how her arguments may apply to any non-female feminist. In a slightly different stance, Farley recognizes that “feminism is not a single, homogenous movement, but a powerful river with many streams” (Farley 2012, 19). He discusses the Women’s Movement as modeled on the American Civil Rights Movement. He sees the latter as a victory against oppression because “race is irrelevant to our basic humanity and to our entitlement, in a liberal democracy, to basic political rights” (Farley 2012, 19). If Farley asserts that race is irrelevant to basic humanity, it seems an open question as to why gender would be so relevant to humanity in his vernacular interpretation of Orthodox Christianity. According to Farley, feminism attempts to appropriate similar rhetoric unjustly. He writes that “the argument goes, feminists are also entitled to have their demands met. Refusal of any of

these demands is stigmatized as discrimination, and those refusing them are denounced as simply unenlightened bigots, as tragically backward as those who once denied the civil rights of African Americans” (Farley 2012, 19). Here, Farley and Mathewes-Green are in agreement. Farley writes that unlike feminism, the concern of Christianity is “to throw the harsh spotlight of truth upon our own sins” (Farley 2012, 17). Both authors seem to address mid-twentieth-century American forms of feminism and find it largely incompatible with Christianity as they understand it. Both cite humility as the salve which heals all wounds and feminism as antithetical to that healing process.

Both Farley and Mathewes-Green may have more in common with contemporary feminist scholars than they realize. A shift beginning in the early 1990s critiqued feminist theory for ignoring the factors of race and cultural difference on a global stage (Abu-Lughod 2013, 7; hooks 1999; Spivak 1988). Folklorist Amy Shuman writes that women in developing countries, for example, may identify more strongly with their cultural communities or social class than with women as a universal category. These women may also be suspicious of forming alliances with women in privileged positions who are part of the hegemony from which these oppressive systems originate (Shuman 1993, 353). Abu-Lughod writes, for example, that “third world feminists and women of color in the West” have confronted white liberal feminists for condemning patriarchy in other cultures without understanding that “racial difference, class position, and geographic location shape women’s experiences differently. How can we treat women as an undifferentiated category?” (Abu-Lughod 2013, 12). Representation is at stake. Shuman writes that the “entitlement to represent” is perhaps one of the most foundational concerns of feminism on the global stage, and may well be applied to other subjects in a transcultural arena (Shuman 1993, 353).

Yet Judith Butler asked, at the end of the twentieth century, whether women could be monolithically represented. She writes, “The feminist ‘we’ is always and only a phantasmic construction, one that has its purposes, but which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent” (Butler 1999, 181). Feminism is not a single movement but rather a family of theories. The term “feminism” (not unlike the word “Orthodox”) is perhaps most useful when it is defined for a specific context. It is not difficult to see why misunderstandings arise over the use of this term. Where Agadjanian and Rousselet write of an Orthodox fear that “when the individual’s rights, freedom, and self-realization are considered the highest value, there is a danger of total anomie,” I contend that Abu-Lughod, Butler, and Shuman tackle this same subject in the context of representation.

Lawless suggests that successful representation occurs in the context of a relationship with reciprocal communication (Lawless 1992 and 1993). I find parallels between Lawless’s and Sigrist’s respective assertions that an individual is most fully realized in relationship with God through the icon of community. A wealth of scholarship applies feminism to personal narrative, emphasizing the discovery of truth through dialogue (Kalčík 1975; Ochs and Capps 2001; Personal Narratives Group 1989; Shuman 2005; Thomas 1997). Folklorist Jeannie Banks Thomas suggests that this dialogism is marked by gender relations. According to her, where Western men’s narratives tend to be heroic, with closure at the end, women’s contain overt omissions, which Thomas suggests mask details that the listener does not want to know (Thomas 1997, 38-9). The uncertainty and discomfort with univocality in women’s stories unseats a heroic narrative, offering alternative versions.

The ability to tolerate multiple voices and experiences in dialogue is one strategy feminist scholars suggest, not only for ending sexism but for building relationships. The Personal

Narratives Group argue, “Traditionally, knowledge, truth, and reality have been constructed as if men’s experiences were normative, as if being human meant being male” (Personal Narratives Group 1989, 3). Part of Kruks’s definition of privilege entails the ability to define truth. In the Orthodox Church, the person with the authority to interpret tradition, and thus, define truth, is always male. Furthermore, the assumption that normative experience is modeled on a single gender, or even that experiences within one gender are homogenous limits accurate representation of the other half of the Orthodox Church. It also closes off communication routes. The strategy of allowing uncertainty in a narrative is both individual and communal; it positions the *I* in the *we*. Contrary to being combative, this strategy encourages listening and finding common ground.

While feminism as a movement may have the unified goal of ending sexism, a variety of theories and strategies of analysis emerge from it. Similarly, the Orthodox Church contains a range of cultures and perspectives. One approach to diversity is to attempt to simplify it by emphasizing what all people are believed to have in common, such as theology (though, as the next chapter will demonstrate, the reality is far more nuanced). This approach fears conflict as a consequence of difference. A second approach is to engage with diversity as a means of deeper, honest relationships. My consultant Clive spoke of a book study at St. Parascheva in which the group discussed the recent legalization of gay marriage in the U.S. He described how people respectfully exchanged opinions even when they disagreed with one another. Clive posited that this kind of disagreement was able to happen in the community because there are pre-existing, loving relationships there. People were not necessarily threatened by their differences of opinion, but able to listen to one another. Clive said, “It seems to me, you’ve got to have both love and truth. And you can’t have truth unless you are allowed to talk about things” (Clive, June 27,

2015). Truth emerges in dialogue. In this case, it is the truth of deeply loving relationships. Clive acknowledges that the difficulty in broaching disagreement with one another is not necessarily institutional but individual. He said, “In the Church, which upholds dogma, I found freedom of expression.” It may be profitable to ask whether relationships in communities can override dogma. In fact, the answer to this question may be unique to each person; different priests would respond differently, according to their vernacular understandings of theology. This comes back to the diversity of experience and opinion coexisting within a community, whether that community be a local church or the Orthodox Church as a whole.

Certain kinds of difference are not always tolerated in the Orthodox Church, depending on whose opinion is being solicited. Some theological differences coexist in communities by virtue of silence rather than dialogue. Building upon the work of folklorist Francis Lee Utley (1945), folklorist Marion Bowman discusses how “cultural tradition, informal transmission and personal experience of *efficacy*, are likely to be as important as authoritative texts or the opinions of religious professionals” (Bowman 2003, 286). I argue that this process also occurs with ideas about gender in the Orthodox Church.

Vernacular Feminisms

The strategy I call vernacular feminism involves creating choices in a limited system. The two-part term “vernacular feminisms” involves the vernacular, suggesting the specificity of context, and the plural, suggesting diversity of expression. Like Primiano’s theory of vernacular religion, vernacular feminisms is meant to focus on the creative individuals who shape their own agency rather than imposing a monolithic idea of empowerment upon them. Certain forms of Western feminism might view Orthodox Christian women as oppressed by their patriarchal

religion; anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod has written about this phenomenon of the Western gaze toward Muslim women and whether they need to be saved (Abu-Lughod 2013). Rather, it is context which makes an attitude or an action empowering. Feminist theorist Keya Maitra has written about a concept developed by Chandra Mohanty called “feminism without borders.” Maitra theorizes that two prerequisites are necessary for agency: a perspective of one’s self and the myriad intersectionalities of culture, place and history which ground that self, and then to acknowledge interconnectedness and consensus with other women without glossing over intersectional differences (Maitra 2013, 361-2). While Maitra’s definition of feminist agency is more expansive than those which do not take a diverse set of cultural contexts into account, her definition of agency is political. My own collaborators might be at least somewhat aware of their own intersectionalities, but they do not have consensus with one another about what agency might mean. Feminist theorist Tanya Zion-Waldoks, in a study of Orthodox Jewish women as political activists, writes that women who belong to conservative religions may exercise a dual resistance (Zion-Waldoks 2015, 76). Their religious authorities may view feminism as incompatible with their religious beliefs, and feminists may view conservative religion as incompatible with their political goals. Zion-Waldoks concludes that agency is relational rather than a necessary form of autonomy, submission, or resistance (Zion-Waldoks 2015, 77). This is in keeping with my own findings discussed in this chapter. The supportive relationships built in the communities I studied enable interpretive creativity for the women I interviewed.

The range of interpretations among both my consultants and scholars highlights not only different ideas about what feminism is, but also different uses of those ideas. Feminism may be conceived of as a movement, as in the 60s and 70s; it may be an attitude about gender, as suggested by both Joy and Amanda; it may be a communicative strategy, as suggested by

Lawless and Thompson. Though my consultants define feminism differently, and many do not identify as feminists at all, I would like to suggest that as Orthodox Christian women in North America, they are not only affected by a society in dialogue with feminist ideas, but that they employ strategies of empowerment in practicing their faith which I call vernacular feminisms.

I asked Mary, for example, what she thought feminism was, and whether it was compatible with Orthodox Christianity. She replied that feminism is “the ability for women to be able to do what they want to do.” She went on to acknowledge that Orthodox Christianity may not be compatible with feminism for women who wish to be priests or deaconesses, the latter of which is “a hot-button issue” in the Orthodox Church today. Despite these limitations, Mary emphasizes that women are still free to choose another faith if these limitations are disagreeable to them.

Choice does not happen in a vacuum, and if choices are available to women, it does not mean that all women will wish to imagine or make the same choices. Privilege as a factor in how identity is shaped. Differences in mode and degree of privilege are part of the reason why empowerment does not always look the same from one person to another, and why actions are not inherently “feminist” or “un-feminist.” For example, in the next chapter, two women interpret rituals in ways which are specific to them. One interprets churching as honoring the work a woman has done to give birth, and another interprets abstaining from communion while menstruating as a form of personal discipline. This is not how all Orthodox women would interpret these actions, but their interpretations are deeply personal and empowering for them.

These women find very different forms of agency in the same ritual. Many of the women I interviewed do not necessarily think of themselves as feminists, and they may not even consciously be

looking for agency. In his discussion of vernacular religion, Primiano outlines a concept he calls uniculture, which is defined as “a processual system of conscious and unconscious knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs particular to the individual to which he or she refers and which she or he employs as the basis of everyday living” (Primiano 1995, 49-50). Like

My theory of vernacular feminisms is my etic perspective on the process by which contemporary women make Orthodox Christianity *work* in their lives.

Throughout this chapter, I have quoted Orthodox Christians in two communities, all of whom have different ideas about what gender is and what it means. Despite these differences, I believe it is significant that both St. Nicholas and St. Parascheva create an environment where there is freedom to make certain choices. Some women choose not to commune while menstruating and others do. Some women choose to wear head coverings and others do not. Men and women choose what obedience will look like in their lives and what that means to them spiritually. Men and women decide what gender means in their self-perceptions as Orthodox Christians, and each does so in a unique, vernacular way. Congregants also choose how much weight they give to the words of their own priest, other clergy, or ancient Church Fathers in terms of how they live their lives. Some of these choices are visible externally where others are inward. Visible choices, of course, are easier for authority figures to evaluate than internal ones, unless a parishioner chooses to share those choices with his or her priest.

My consultant Helen said sarcastically, “In Orthodoxy, they don’t get called rules. They get called choices.” In Helen’s experience, the word “choice” is sometimes used by clergy as a tactic to mask the exercise of their own authority in interpreting tradition. Nonetheless, contemporary Orthodox Christians, especially women, continue to find ways to make the faith work for them through their interpretive choices. For many of the women whom I interviewed,

their own positive experiences in their church communities are what give them meaning. The Orthodox Church as a political institution is not the source of their peace and joy, but rather the personal relationships which believers build in local communities where they are known and loved.

Conclusion

While obedience through discipline is a spiritual goal for all Orthodox Christians, the examples to which men and women may aspire fall along gendered lines, as in the case of modesty. How believers respond to these expectations is dependent upon their views toward authority, which may differ among converts and the Orthodox-born based on past experiences. Priests exercise economy in their relationships with parishioners in their vernacular understandings of tradition, and in the best cases, these relationships are negotiated.

Discipline and obedience are understood to be necessary tools to cope with the suffering of life, and this is ultimately meant to prepare believers for eternity with God. Some of my consultants suggested that gender roles were an important way to live a disciplined life. As not all women whom I interviewed think of themselves in these terms, though, vernacular theologies are involved in understandings of both gender and obedience. While Orthodox Christian authors tend to define feminism narrowly, as destructive to community, I suggest that my consultants employ vernacular feminisms, or strategies of empowerment. Both converts and Orthodox-born women negotiate with the institution of the Orthodox Church in subtle ways, especially since they live in a society in dialogue with feminism. Empowerment looks different for each woman, because each has different needs. Vernacular feminisms are strategies by which women create

choices for themselves in a religious system that otherwise limits them. In chapter seven, I will discuss vernacular theology, which is also an interpretive strategy among Orthodox Christians.

Chapter 7: Vernacular Theologies about Gender

Considering the multiplicity of personal interpretations of tradition in the Orthodox Church, the question remains how individuals use these traditions to meet their personal needs. There are sometimes dramatic differences in worldview among those who share the Orthodox Christian faith, even within the same community. This begs the question, what is “Orthodox”? To what extent can beliefs and attitudes differ while still falling under the “Orthodox” label? Certainly, a person may be a practicing Orthodox Christian and hold “un-Orthodox” views, but when there are differences in theological interpretation even among Church Fathers, one wonders both what counts as “Orthodox” and who has the authority to draw the line.

The Orthodox Christian theologian David Bentley Hart responded to criticism that his book was not, in fact, in line with Orthodox theology by writing, “Of course it is” (Hart 2007, 95). He went on to describe a host of contradictory theological ideas, from the “neo-Palamite” to the “Sophiological,” all of which have been called “Orthodox” at some point by clergy. One of my consultants recently paraphrased Hart’s argument as, “Of course it’s Orthodox theology. I’m Orthodox, and it’s theology.” This is the heart of what I propose to call *vernacular theology*. Vernacular theology, like vernacular feminisms, involves interpretation and application of spiritual belief to individual life experiences, and the two may even overlap. Where vernacular feminism involves women developing strategies of empowerment, vernacular theology involves choices about how to meaningfully connect Orthodox Christian practices and teachings to one’s own life.

Theology, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “the study of religious faith, practice, and experience, *esp*: the study of God and God’s relation to the world” (Merriam-Webster 2001, 1218). In short, it is a system of spiritual explanation for God’s relationship with

the world. Orthodox Christian scholar Andrew Louth describes theology as a kind of “understanding” (Louth 2013, 5). He writes,

[H]ere is where theology begins, according to the Orthodox tradition, at least as I understand it: in a mysterious togetherness, mediated by silence...full of sounds and smells that seem to interpret this silence rather than dissolve it. (Louth 2013, 5)

In this mystical definition, there is tradition, community, and silence, all of which are subject to interpretation (the silence most especially). As all authority figures in the Orthodox Church are male, so are the vernacular interpretations of theology which hold the most institutional weight. As such, I pay particular attention in this chapter to the vernacular theologies of women, especially about their place in the Orthodox Church.

Feminist literature of the late twentieth century often dichotomized women’s roles as submissive or subversive (Kodish 1993; Lawless 1993 and 1998; Radner 1993), which ignored the way that domestic activities can be spiritually significant and empowering for women in patriarchal traditions (Honkasalo 2015; Keinänen 2010; Olson and Adonyeva 2012). Folklorist Maja-Liisa Honkasalo writes that “In order to understand women’s religious agency, it is crucial to consider registers of corporeality such as sensibility, affect, desire, and sentiment” (Honkasalo 2015, 69). To think of women as only active or passive in terms of their religious agency obscures nuanced perceptions of their own empowerment.

Vernacular religiosities have been explored by scholars in a variety of contexts and spiritual traditions (e.g., Bowman 2003; Bar-Itzhak 1990, 1993, 2003, and 2009; Crawford 1993; Jason 1972; Kononenko 2006; Primiano 1995 and 1985; Rouhier-Willoughby 2013; Sandell 2014; and Wilson 2006). However, Orthodox Christians in North America, including those who have converted to this form of Christianity as adults, are underrepresented in academic literature.

Orthodox women specifically have only been studied in a post-Soviet context, and even then, it is usually in terms of *practice* rather than *theology* (Honkasalo 2015; Keinänen 2010; Kizenko 2013; Kononenko 2006; Lindquist 2006; Olson and Adonyeva 2012; Rouhier-Willoughby 2008). The Orthodox Church excludes women from holding clerical offices, restricting their involvement in church life to such activities as singing in the choir, the raising of children, and coordinating social events. How do women negotiate the traditions of the Orthodox Church in the context of North American society that is affected by feminist ideas?

The vernacular theologies created by Orthodox Christian women reflect individual worldviews shaped by their own lives and religious tradition. If women's folklore is the discourse that women create about themselves and others, women's experiences must be studied on their own terms (Locke 2008). Vernacular theology is a strategy by which believers interpret who God is and how they might follow him. For Orthodox Christian women, two important examples in this endeavor are the images of the Mother of God and the "Bride of Christ," an anthropomorphic expression referring to Ephesians 5:22-32, which describes the ideal relationship between a husband and wife as imitating Christ's relationship with the Christian Church, the "body" of his followers. Specifically, husbands are exhorted to "love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body" (Eph. 5: 28-30). The same passage says that "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5: 32). In this way, husbands are meant to imitate Christ in both loving and sacrificing themselves for their wives, who symbolize the Church, and wives are meant to respect their husbands in imitation of believers following Christ.

In this chapter, I will explore how vernacular theology is a means of personalizing the Orthodox Christian faith to accommodate elements of the faith that are otherwise difficult to reconcile with their other cultural values. These include the role of women, men, developing a relationship with the Mother of God, or how twenty-first century women can relate to the Mother of God as both a virgin and mother. Vernacular theology, in other words, is a form of agency. I explore personal experience narratives of both converts and Orthodox-born believers. While I drew from both men's and women's experiences, I take particular interest in women's narratives since their interpretations of theology do not hold clerical, authoritative weight in the Orthodox Church. As such, vernacular theology takes on a particular kind of agency for them. This is not to say that men cannot or do not achieve agency in this way. The Orthodox Church treats men and women differently, and this context creates layers of meaning in their beliefs and actions. Addressing personal experience narratives, Amy Shuman writes that "[t]ellability, questions of what is sayable and what is unsayable and under what conditions, plays a huge role in managing what counts as truth in narrative interactions" (Shuman 2012, 144). I will demonstrate how vernacular theologies, communicated through and reinforced by personal experience narratives (that, in turn, display many tellability-related nuances), can be empowering for twenty-first century Orthodox Christians, especially women, who negotiate between contemporary sensibilities, such as egalitarianism, and the Orthodox Church's historical canons.

Vernacular Theology & Orthodox Christianity

Orthodox bishop and scholar Timothy Ware explains the Orthodox Church as "a family of self-governing Churches...held together, not by a centralized organization...but by the double bond of unity in the faith and communion in the sacraments" (Ware 1997, 7). While there are governing bodies for Orthodox churches in many countries, each body "is in full agreement with

the rest on all matters of doctrine, and between them all there is in principle full sacramental communion” (Ware 1997, 7). By Ware’s definition, the word “Orthodox” (with a capital “O”) can be applied to these shared doctrines, which cross national and cultural borders. Within majority-Orthodox countries, certainly, there are both clerical and lay traditions—practices and beliefs—which are not necessarily shared by all Orthodox believers, but which may be local traditions. In the vocabulary of Orthodox Christianity, these are distinguished as Traditions with a capital “T” and traditions with a lower-case “t.” Ware outlines six kinds of Tradition in the Orthodox Church, which hold the weight of doctrine: the Bible, councils of the Church, the liturgy, authoritative Church Fathers, Canon law, and icons. The line between the capital and lower-case t’s of tradition can be blurry, even in these six categories. Canon law and the writings of Church Fathers have historically involved individual opinions, which have relied on antiquated information about human biology, for example, or specific cultural contexts. Ware writes that “The Orthodox Church has never attempted to define exactly who the Fathers are, still less to classify them in order of importance” (Ware 1997, 204). Ware also admits that “It must be confessed...that at the present day many of the Canons are difficult or impossible to apply, and have fallen widely into disuse,” and he advocates for the revision of some of these Canons (Ware 1997, 205). Without elaborating further, perhaps these examples can illustrate some of the difficulty in distinguishing what holds the weight of dogmatic theology and what is held as *theologoumena*, or theological opinion (Ware 1997, 213).

I have attempted to summarize the complicated dynamics of Orthodox Christian theology above, but this leaves me with a problem: what can I (or anyone) reasonably call “Orthodox”? A glib response might be to follow capital-T Church Tradition, but some of these traditions are not held by everyone. A brief example of a disagreement about what is or is not “Orthodox”

occurred between myself and my consultant (and friend), Jeff. While not a priest, he is in many ways as well-read in theology as if he had been ordained. In fact, Jeff is so knowledgeable about Orthodox theology that he has taught catechism for converts at St. Parascheva. I was arguing with Jeff about women and privilege in the Orthodox Church. Our dialogue was as follows:

L: I'm sorry, there are no women priests who will ever have a perspective that will be seen as having the same weight as anyone else's.

J: That's where you're wrong. The blessed Mary, the mother of God...

L: Was not a priest. And she was also a virgin and a mother, which I think none of us will ever achieve.

J: You're missing the whole point. The whole point is that as a male Christian, I want to be like Mary. She is my role model. There is no one I would rather be like than Mary, because these categories of Western, hierarchical...privilege...You used the word privilege...all these things are not Orthodox. (Jeff, June 16, 2015)

This dialogue is important for several reasons. First of all, it made me aware of the categories I was bringing to bear on my research that may not be shared by my consultants. More than one person I interviewed postulated that in its ideal state, Orthodox Christianity is not supposed to be about hierarchy and privilege, but rather about spiritual discipline and obedience, which has become bureaucratic over time. Second, when Jeff said that categories like privilege and hierarchy "are not Orthodox," it reminded me of David Bentley Hart's statement that "of course" his writings are Orthodox because he is (Hart 2007, 95). Hart is a controversial figure in Orthodox Christianity due to his belief in universalism (the salvation of all people), being a socialist, and comparing early Christianity to Communism (Hart 2017, 2016 and 2015). His opinions are by no means representative of the Orthodox Church at large (Farley 2017, Pahman 2016).

Both Jeff's and Hart's statements made me wonder how each of them evaluates what counts as "Orthodox." Is it the spiritual activity people do in the privacy of their own homes? Is

it the writings of Church Fathers, who do not agree with one another? Is it what a priest says? Is it what your grandmother taught you? Can a tradition followed by some and not others still be called part of Orthodox Christianity? Furthermore, to suggest that some traditions followed by Orthodox Christians are not part of Orthodox Christianity at all leads to even more complications. In a best-case scenario, they may be “cultural customs of some Orthodox Christians,” and in a worst-case scenario, they may be branded as heresies. Some of these traditions concern local saints who have not been canonized or “officially” recognized by the wider Orthodox Church (Rouhier-Willoughby 2008). Some traditions concern specific beliefs about the afterlife (Paraskevopoulos 2011), bodily resurrection, salvation (Louth 2013, 149-159), healing, the nature of men and women (Behr-Sigel 1987, Farley 2012, Hopko 1999, Limouris 1988), and any of a variety of topics encountered by humans in their daily lives. This serves to reinforce Primiano’s theory of vernacular religion, which states that religion as it is lived is individual, and this is not an aberration on an ideal form of religious practice. Rather, every person of faith, regardless of his or her status in the community, is practicing a unique version of that religion, informed by personal needs.

In both St. Parascheva and St. Nicholas, those who are Orthodox-born are likely to be familiar with traditional folk beliefs, whether or not they ascribe to them personally. Their lives will dictate how these beliefs are applied or discarded. Converts, on the other hand, may encounter individual beliefs and practices without realizing that they are not Church doctrine. Sometimes they adopt these beliefs and build upon them to fit their needs. Other times, they develop their own vernacular theologies, combining aspects of their pre-Orthodox Christian traditions (often Protestant) and their present ones. Both of these circumstances involve vernacular theology—negotiating traditional beliefs (whether doctrinal or local) with individual

value systems. Let us now turn to some specific examples of vernacular theology among North American Orthodox Christians.

Women & Ritual Purity

Two examples of how the Orthodox Church treats men and women differently include women abstaining from taking communion while menstruating and going through a purifying ritual called “churching” after childbirth. Orthodox priest and author Lawrence R. Farley discusses activities women are forbidden from doing while menstruating, including, “the prohibition against baking prosphora (the bread used for communion), kissing an icon, getting a blessing from the priest, and entering the nave of the church” (Farley 2012, 161). This list also includes prohibiting women from entering a church until forty days after giving birth, at which time she undergoes the churching ritual, during which she is made symbolically clean of her bloodshed by the priest.

Other Orthodox Christian writers have written about concepts of ritual purity with regard to women in the Orthodox Church (Hopko 1999, Kontouma 2012, Larin 2008). Suffice it to say that there is a spectrum of theological opinion—from Canons, to the writings of Church Fathers, to priests today—pertaining to women, menstrual cycles, childbirth, and communion. These practices go back to Jewish traditions of ritual purity in Leviticus 12, and in Orthodox Christianity have been both longstanding and supported by the writings of some Church Fathers (Farley 2012, 161-177). At St. Parascheva, these rituals are voluntary, and I met both women who observed them and those who did not. Among the women I interviewed (a total of twenty three, including eight Orthodox-born women and fifteen converts), I have found that it is slightly more common for women raised in the faith to follow these practices, but I also met converts

who observed them. An example of a traditional, even stereotypical, explanation of women abstaining communion was given to me by Florina. She echoed Farley's list of prohibitions when she explained, "When women have a period, you don't take communion, touch the icons, or have anything to do with your husband Saturday night" (Florina July 26, 2015). She learned these traditions from her grandmother, who learned them from her mother. In her experience, rules about cleanliness extended to women's spatial presence in the church. Florina told me that her mother was the granddaughter of a priest, and she was both spiritually-minded and pure. When her mother was a young woman, the church got a new altar, and it had not yet been consecrated by a priest. It was necessary for a woman to clean it, but only a pure woman would do. Her mother and aunt were in their late twenties, unmarried, and virgins. They were so holy that they were selected by the priest to be worthy of the honor of cleaning the altar." She added, "You cannot hide from God," to emphasize that purity of body was just as important as purity of mind and heart when taking communion—a perspective that applies to both men and women.

Christina is a convert who has attended St. Parascheva for less than five years, though she has been Orthodox for perhaps twice as long. She did not take communion on her cycle, but her understanding of the practice is different than Florina's. She explained her views to me this way:

I don't receive communion once a month. I think someone told me once that it had to do with the whole "Eve/sin" thing. I didn't like the way it sounded when they were explaining it like that, so that kind of got me thinking. Before then, it wasn't something that I worried too much about, and [now], it's just kind of a matter-of-fact thing.

L: Why do you do it?

C: I think of it in sort of the same way that I think of fasting in general. Maybe it's a little different in that it is outside of your control, and you still have to find the humility to be obedient. It's not something that you're doing on purpose. [When] the person was talking about the whole "Eve/sin" thing, I had trouble with that,

because it sounded very much like the whole “original sin” thing, that we all are guilty because of what Eve did, which is not Orthodox. I mean, I don’t think that this person actually said it was a punishment, but it sounded like, “She sinned, this is the sign of her sin, and you carry this.” That might not have been what was meant. I just remember that was the one time I felt bothered by the tradition, because I hadn’t heard anyone talk about it that way before, and I just don’t feel that way about it. (Christina, August 12, 2015)

Since Christina is a convert to Orthodox Christianity, this was a practice she adopted as an adult catechumen. When I asked her how she learned about it, she could not remember a specific person introducing her to the practice, but she thought it must have come up in the process of asking other questions. Christina discusses the practice as an opportunity to learn humility through obedience. As such, abstaining from communion has a spiritually transformative effect, which she compares with fasting. Christina does not view this practice as a punishment for Eve’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden, a view which she describes as “not Orthodox.” This contrasts with Florina’s view, which is directly related to a woman’s purity of mind and body through both sexual abstinence and a mental spiritual state. I asked Christina to elaborate on how she sees abstaining from the Eucharist as similar to fasting, which both men and women do. She said:

It’s different from fasting from food in the physical part of it. Choosing to eat or not eat is still your choice, but you don’t choose the church calendar either. You don’t choose when you’re going too fast and when you’re not going too fast. In that way, it is something that both men and women do in different ways, because men and women both fast from foods. It’s that humility and that opportunity to be obedient, whether you like it or not, because I would like to have a steak today, but I’m not going to. It’s good for us to not always have to be in control of choosing what we do and when we do it. [It’s good to] take that opportunity to be humble, whether or not we understand it, and be ok with it, because you don’t know everything, and maybe you don’t understand the reality of why you’re doing something. I tend to think in a sort of physical, worldly manner, and it can be hard to understand and come up with explanations, but then you read a book where a very holy person talks about the same thing, it sounds different and the

explanation makes so much more sense because he talks about it from a spiritual point of view. I don't feel like I'm being rejected or anything like that. (Christina, August 12, 2015)

Christina emphasizes choice in her statement. It is her ability to choose whether or not to fast and the consistency of that choice which becomes her spiritual discipline. When I asked Christina more about obedience and the discipline of abstaining from communion, she said, "Sometimes you just have to let go of your rational notions about things and accept that you don't know everything." Not understanding the complete spiritual meaning of the practice and letting go of the *need* to understand is another aspect of this discipline. This may be part of the reason why reading the words of a saint on this topic is inspiring; these words may speak more to Christina's spiritual reality in her obedience than focusing on an external, purely physical explanation.

One difference between the vernacular theologies of Orthodox Christian converts and the Orthodox-born is the way in which tradition is learned. Florina described learning her knowledge of ritual purity from her mother and grandmother (Florina July 26, 2015). Similarly, there were priests in her family. Not only her worldview, but those of her family, have confirmed the power of physical and mental purity for her. The power of individual perception has brought other women at St. Parascheva to different conclusions about belief, however. Christina, a young American convert at St. Parascheva, abstains from communion once a month just like Florina, but her understanding of the practice is derived from her value system that discipline is meaningful. The choice to abstain from something is more spiritually transformative for her than the idea that she is inherently unclean for shedding blood. It is harder to reconcile the latter idea with her cultural context. Family context, individual perception, and larger cultural context are important factors for each Orthodox Christian who develops vernacular theologies. Florina, for example, has inherited some of her views in the context of a long-standing Orthodox Christian

tradition in Romania, and her needs in life confirm the usefulness of these views. As discussed in the introduction and in a great deal of scholarship, Eastern European forms of Orthodox Christianity have been shaped by particular, nuanced, socio-political contexts (see, for example, Agadjanian and Rousselet 2010, Forbess 2010, Honkasalo 2015, Kononenko 2006, Olson and Adonyeva 2011, and Rouhier-Willoughby 2008). Kononenko discusses a Ukrainian case study, for example, in which local Orthodox Christian traditions helped lay people to maintain tradition in the absence of clergy under Soviet control (Kononenko 2014). By contrast, the North American Orthodox Christian converts I have interviewed have not previously been exposed to localized forms of Orthodox Christianity. Their cultural legacies come from family, surrounding culture, individual needs, and religious traditions, often Protestant, to which they may have belonged *before* converting. As such, the development of vernacular theologies happen differently for them. Kononenko describes “folk Orthodoxy” as “obligation- and taboo-fuelled” in her particular case study (Kononenko 2014, 50). In my case studies with American converts, I find that both the desire to reconcile individualism with Orthodox theology and the desire for discipline motivate their strategies in vernacular theologies.

Perhaps the most significant example of vernacular theology I encountered was related to the churching of women. It is common practice in the Orthodox Christian world for women who have given birth to stay away from church for forty days, after which time a churching ritual is performed to cleanse the mother from the impurity of giving birth. The ritual begins with the mother, baby, priest and deacon standing in the narthex, or area outside the main worship space of the church. Prayers are said, and then mother and child are able to enter the nave, or main worship space, of the church. If the baby in question is a girl, the ritual is completed in the nave, symbolically (re)incorporating mother and child into the congregation. The baby also formally

receives a name during this ritual. If the baby is a boy, the priest will take him behind the *iconostasis*, or icon wall, which separates the altar from the nave. There, he will take the baby around the altar and touch his foot to its four corners, since the baby may one day become a priest. The baby is then returned to the mother and the ritual closes the same way as it does for a girl baby.

In this service, a prayer for the new mother includes, “Wash away her bodily uncleanness, and the stains of her soul, in the fulfilling of the forty days. Make her worthy of the communion of Your holy Body and Blood.” This prayer refers to both the physical and spiritual cleanness of the mother. Theologian Vassa Larin writes of this passage, “Today it is often said that a woman stays out of church for forty days after giving birth because of physical fatigue. However, the cited text speaks not of her capacity to participate in liturgical life, but of her *worthiness*. The birth (not conception) of her child has, according to these prayers, resulted in her physical and spiritual defilement” (Larin 2008, 290, emphasis mine). In my own research, I have encountered many women who cite fatigue as a reason to observe the forty days of distance from church. This is still an example of vernacular theology—an attempt to reconcile such restrictions with personal needs and make them logical in the present day, in a world that is in dialogue with feminist thought. Larin’s article goes on to describe both canons and writings of Church Fathers that disagree about the “im/purity” of women in childbirth and menstruation. In fact, even those Church Fathers who permit women to commune while menstruating cite that it should be permitted so that no one judges others in the community rather than because menstruating women are “clean” (Larin 2008, 287-288). Larin also discusses the cultural context of these Fathers influencing their theological interpretations; even these clerical authorities are not exempt from vernacular belief.

Larin argues that even though contemporary Western women may struggle with such restrictions, “the Orthodox Church traditionally has no socio-political agenda...the concern that something may be ‘degrading’ for a woman is foreign to Orthodox spirituality, which focuses on humility...” (Larin 2008, 276). This explains why, when I asked many women about undergoing churching and Orthodox restrictions on menstruation, they consistently replied that they did not feel “degraded,” “disrespected,” or “denigrated” in any way; the rationale is similar to Christina’s explanation of abstaining from communion while menstruating as a consistent discipline of choice, like fasting. At St. Parascheva, the practice of churching is voluntary; just like abstaining from communion, no one is pressured to do it. This increases women’s agency, and this perhaps makes the tradition more palatable. In general, I found that women’s foci were not on what they cannot do, but rather on what they can do. In a contemporary context, it is not surprising that some have found creative ways to reconcile ancient, and in many ways foreign, beliefs with their contemporary lives.

Esme, who has attended St. Parascheva for decades, converted after her children were born, so she never had to be churchied. She regrets this, and she explained her views on churching as follows:

E: I love it. I wish I had done it. In giving birth, you have participated in an act of God, and you have touched upon creation as only a woman can do with God. It’s a purification in itself, and you are so close to God that you need this...purification. I don’t look at it as negative. It’s kind of like extra confirmation of that close proximity to God.

L: What are you being purified *from*?

E: You are closer to God in that act of creation, in bringing [life] forth...unlike anything you will ever do in your life. And so I think it’s a statement of the reality that you’ve just gone through. I’m sure there are women out there who, in their delivery, *never* felt a closeness to God! [I laugh] But you know, for me, that is

one of those experiences that is unlike any other experience known to humanity, which is why, I think, God chooses to come the way He does, by entering into the womb. And for Mary, then, to say yes to God and to have that experience of touching God, He has sanctified that experience for all of us who do that. I think [churching is] a way of affirming that. [When] women choose not to do it, I always feel bad for them, because I feel like, “Oh! You’re missing something!” I know that sometimes the prayers can be a little penitential, but penitential, in my mind, is always good! To me, it’s more a rite of purification, which doesn’t always mean you were pure before. I think it’s a statement of truth, [of] what *is*. Just like confession is not really about going and saying all your bad things. It’s about stating what is *true*. My brokenness is true, and this is how I’m broken. God is good, and that’s true. It’s a stake you put in the ground and say, “At this moment, in time and space, I am participating in an act which states what is true, and I need purification because I desire purity.” Much of what we do is a reminder of what runs the universe. (Esme, July 13, 2015)

I asked Esme how she came to this profound understanding of churching. Referring to birth, she said, “For one thing, the experience itself teaches you that.” She also suspected she had read something somewhere, though she could not recall a specific book or author. She acknowledged that not everyone would see birth or churching in the same way she does. When Esme talks about churching as a “rite of purification,” she states that even if the prayers are penitential, it does not mean that the person was pure before giving birth. Christina expressed something similar about churching when she said:

The world is fallen. I think using the word “unclean” is a little complicated. It has societal connotations. I think it’s more [a] symptom of corruption. This is kind of what we were talking about earlier—theological language vs. everyday language. To me, the “theological cleanliness” concept is that this occurs because of the corruption of the fallen world, which doesn’t make it a dirty thing to do...but [it’s] not the opposite of unclean. I just don’t think the word “uncleanness” means the same thing. (Esme, July 13, 2015)

Christina does not think of “uncleanness” in a physical way. Like fasting from communion, she sees it as a spiritual purification. The woman who gives birth is not necessarily impure because of giving birth, but rather because she lives in a world which is corrupt. Esme says, “My

brokenness is true” in a similar way. She desires purification for herself and the newborn child in the midst of a broken world. Esme continued,

I feel so bad for women who don’t do it, because even the Virgin does it! And if we pattern our life after Christ and after the Virgin, and she does it, it’s a feast. The Feast of the presentation in the temple is February 2nd. [You’re] coming back to the temple and bringing your sacrifice. That’s what that is. (Esme, July 13, 2015)

I took a few things away from Esme’s vernacular, theological explanation of churching. First, she has given birth herself, and she took deep, personal meaning from that experience rather than being told by someone else what birth-giving is supposed to mean. In giving birth, she felt a profound connection with the divine which she sees as a unique blessing for women—she was participating in creation in a special way. She sees churching as an affirmation of that blessed moment. Esme also references choice in her explanation. She says she feels badly for women who choose not to be churching, because they will not experience this affirmation. Furthermore, she links this with purification as a choice. She says she needs purification not because she is unclean but because she *desires* purity. No one else has told her that she *must* be cleansed. Esme’s interpretation and worldview stem from her own choices and desires.

In Esme’s vernacular, theological explanation of churching, she connects being churching with the Biblical account of the infant Christ’s presentation in the temple by his mother Mary (Luke 2:22-24). This example reminds me of research anthropologist Julie Cruikshank conducted among Yukon Native Elders. When she tried to collect life stories from these women, Cruikshank was puzzled by how they interwove myths into their lives, including lists of place names and creation stories. The myths were used as both explanations of and models for living. Cruikshank describes these themes as shared knowledge which connects past and present generations through oral tradition. She posits that “myths are not clear-cut reflections of either

past or present, but statements about the human mind. They point to the tendency of myth to invert normative social behavior and suggest that one purpose of symbolic narratives is to resolve issues that cannot be worked out in everyday life” (Cruikshank 1990, 3). The Yukon Elders’ weaving traditional and personal narratives together contradicts Western assumptions about what, in fact, constitutes the “personal” at all. Individual lives are connected to older, shared narratives which invite the discovery of cultural truths through dialogue, an idea also theorized by Mircea Eliade (1971).

When Esme invokes Christ’s presentation in the temple, she is describing churching as a ritual re-enactment of this sacred story. Therefore, women who undergo the churching ritual are connected back to the Virgin Mary by re-enacting an aspect of her life. In that sense, the churching ritual can be read as “suprapersonal” and even mythic. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the scholarly debate about the definition of myth, but I will rely on one of the twelve approaches to myth identified by folklorist Lauri Honko. He describes “Myth as an integrating factor in man’s adaptation to life: myth as world view” (Honko 1984, 47). Myth, in other words, can be a way of reconciling society, culture, and nature with individual needs. Honko writes that in this use of myth “it is possible to create an individual, but at the same time traditional, way of viewing the world” (Honko 1984, 47). Honko approaches myth primarily as a sacred narrative form, though the particular function of myth identified above indicates that myth can be present in a person’s life through both actions and attitudes as much as through narrative telling.¹

¹ For a recently published study on contemporary uses of myth as scientific worldview, see Schrempf 2012.

It is possible for one's life to be guided by a sacred story, but our own needs, too, can affect the way we interpret sacred stories, or perhaps how we choose which sacred stories best match our lives. Linguistic anthropologist Elinor Ochs and developmental psychologist Lisa Capps argue that in personal narratives, "our identities are malleable and are altered as we narratively reflect on life events. In this way, autobiographical memory both guides and is guided by narrative. Both are in flux, ever subject to reformulation" (Ochs and Capps 2001, 255). The Virgin Mary was cited throughout my research as the second most venerated figure in Orthodox Christianity and a saint upon whom to model behavior for both women and men. Anthropologist Jill Dubisch conducted a study among Orthodox Christians in Greece, where men also reported that they sought to emulate the Virgin Mary (Dubisch 1995). Her book delves into this paradox in a cultural context where certain expressions of manliness are valued. Women, however, are in the position to directly emulate Mary's motherhood, as confirmed by the churching ritual. This creates a kind of blueprint for maternal piety.

A similar phenomenon is observed in folklorists Svetlana Adonyeva and Laura Olson's study of women's memorates (supernatural experience narratives) in rural Russian communities. Adonyeva and Olson discuss "plots and scripts" by which life stories are shaped (Adonyeva and Olson 2011, 137). They describe these terms as "culturally instilled ways of thinking that help people construct and describe the past, and those that interpret the present and postulate future behavior" (Adonyeva and Olson 2011, 138). As a cultural practice, narration reveals both cultural imperatives by which people live and the expectations individual women have for their lives. I argue that scripts are similar to what folklorist Alan Dundes called "units of worldview" (Dundes 2007, 120). He described these as assumptions, or "unstated premises which underlie the thought and action" of a group of people, though we could just as easily apply this to

individuals (Dundes 2007, 123). Plots and scripts create available models for narrative, making personal experience tellable. Shared narrative structure allows for one person's experiences to be decoded by many individual worldviews and used to reinforce them.

Vernacular theology makes a dialogue of monologic doctrine. Folklorist Amy Shuman writes,

Collective narrative is both powerful and unstable. By establishing or confirming a shared version of events, a collective narrative shapes normative, hegemonic, or overdetermined worldviews. Personal narratives can confirm, subvert, appropriate, or otherwise disrupt or assert the power of collective narratives and vice versa...nothing makes a narrative more contested than the dispute over ownership of experience and the rights to interpret it, but implicit in that dispute can be the question of whether or not the experiences one claims are really one's own. (Shuman 2005, 54)

In other words, personal experiences can contradict widely-known (or widely-believed) narratives. Esme's experience and those of other women I interviewed contradict the narrative commonly espoused by Orthodox clergy that childbirth is a source of uncleanness for mothers, or at least they contest the meaning of purity. It must be asked—is childbirth one's own to interpret? As Cruikshank writes, myth does have the power to subvert social norms, but also to reinforce them. Aligning one's experience with myth, then, can either force conformity with the blueprint of sacred narrative or justify transformation, depending on the interpretation of that myth. Both clergy and laypeople in the Orthodox Church have vernacular interpretations of these sacred narratives, largely because they have different personal experiences from one another. Perhaps it is significant that the sacred story of the Virgin Mary's own churching has a visibility that would be acceptable by male authority, but its interpretation for mothers is private, "domestic," and need not involve clergy at all.

Mary as an Icon for Orthodox Women (& Men)

Inevitably, whenever I asked questions about the place of women in the Church, the Virgin Mary was invoked, though the interpretations of her significance were vernacular and diverse. One example of this occurred in my conversation with Simon:

L: Do you think it's difficult to be Orthodox and a woman?

S: It's difficult to be a man and Orthodox. The call of Orthodoxy is self-denial. And it's going to manifest differently in a man and a woman. And there are different canons for various things that affect only men and only women, and it's easy to get preoccupied with one or the other...[H]ave you heard the example of the Theotokos, though?...[When] women in the church and women priests [are mentioned], my mind tends to go there a little bit. I wonder if that's part of the question. (Simon, June 29, 2015)

"Theotokos" literally means "God-bearer," and it is the Greek title by which the Orthodox refer to the Virgin Mary. The example which Simon takes from Mary is her self-denial and obedience. This is a different way of relating to her than Esme, who connects to Mary through childbirth and the churching ritual. As Jeff mentioned earlier, both women and men are encouraged to follow her example, but differently. How exactly to emulate Mary is another subject of vernacular theology. I had a similar dialogue with Simon to the one I had with Jeff about women and the priesthood:

L: I think that Mary represents two ideals that are impossible for any other woman to repeat simultaneously, which is that she was a virgin and a mother. And I think that both of those ideals are said to be ideals by male authority figures. So, women's piety is prescribed to them by male authority figures.

S: It was given by God. [tears up] He became man. A human being. He lived as a virgin in the flesh. Sexuality is important and inherent to who we are, but Jesus Christ showed us, as did his mother, that's not the be-all, end-all, which very much is a huge preoccupation in this day and age, and understandably so. (Simon, June 29, 2015)

Here, similarly to his previous statement, Simon once again looks to Mary as an example of discipline and obedience. She said yes to God, but in Simon's interpretation, her womanhood is expressed in such a way that supercedes sexuality. Her motherhood is co-present with the state of being a virgin, and Jesus, too, is a virgin in Orthodox Christian theology. Simon takes a similar example from both figures in disciplining the body in a monastic way. As Simon offered his vernacular interpretation of Jesus's incarnation into a human state, he became misty-eyed. This theological belief has a meaning which is deeply personal to him, even though he is an ordained deacon. His interpretation of the significance of Jesus's virginity is yet another example of vernacular theology. Simon's statement calls to mind those made by both Esme and Christina about being imperfect people in an imperfect world and desiring purification through the discipline of obedience.

Esme sees Mary as affirming many states of being a woman all at once. She said:

I have never felt like Orthodoxy actually demeans women. I mean, after Christ, who is venerated the most, in terms of the saints? A woman. She's on the iconostasis. She wasn't a rabbi, she was a mother. And a virgin. She covers all those states of womanhood in her person, and I've never really felt that women were esteemed properly [in other traditions]. (Esme, July 13, 2015)

Esme is once again relating to Mary from her own life as a woman. Like all Orthodox Christian women, Mary was not a priest. She was both a virgin and a mother, which are both states of womanhood celebrated in Orthodox Christianity. To Esme, Mary is all women, and she sees all women venerated in Mary's own veneration.

Mary came up often when I asked questions about women and the priesthood specifically. Joy, like Simon, saw Mary's obedience as an important reason to venerate and emulate her. She emphasized Mary as a servant of God. Joy said:

[In] terms of being a feminist, Mary didn't seek to be a priest, but she's the greatest intercessor there ever has been. She is not denigrated in her personhood by not being allowed to be a priest. But she's a mother, and mothers teach the next generation how to love God and how to love their fellow man, and what greater thing [is there] than being able to do that? (Joy, July 9, 2015)

Notice that both Esme and Joy use similar language—they find that Orthodoxy neither demeans nor denigrates women. I took this to mean that, in their interpretations, for disrespect to happen against women, it would entail asking them to do something that directly contradicted the example of the saints, especially the Mother of God. Furthermore, it would entail addressing them in a disrespectful way. The idea that discrimination may be inherent in the hierarchical system is a concept foreign to Orthodox Christian thought. Liberation theologian Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza coined the term *kyriarchy* to refer to “interlocking structures of domination” (Fiorenza 1992, 8). Fiorenza objects to simply using “patriarchy,” because focusing only on sex or gender may ignore other forms of privilege that create social hegemony, such as education, race, or economic status. Recall Larin’s statement that Orthodox Christianity emphasizes humility over egalitarianism (Larin 2008 276-7). She herself uses the word “degrading” to illustrate what Orthodox Christianity is not. I also took Joy’s statement to mean that if Mary did not aspire to be a priest, women should emulate her by also not aspiring to positions of authority as such. According to Joy, the example set by Mary is to be a mother, live humbly, and pray for others. Joy continued:

What I see in the Church is Mary is very forthright, and she is a mother, but she has authority, because she's worshipful; she does the will of God. She listens for the will of God, and because she does those things, of course we bow down and thank her for her tireless intercessions for people, even now. She's very active in the world. That's the other thing that's very strong with me; I see that. Protestants are too worried about [Joy makes a warning noise], but if you really believe in eternity, you realize that the saints are praying very hard for everyone, and we are all in this together. This spans time and space, and they do come to our aid. (Joy, July 9, 2015)

In the context of the interview, Joy's warning noise seemed to indicate that in her experience, Protestants find the Virgin Mary to be a source of discomfort. Joy sees Mary as a strong, authoritative figure because of her relationship to Jesus as his mother; motherhood empowers her. In addition, she sees Mary as part of a community of saints, including the living, who are all "in this together," praying for one another. Mary's power in the world is expressed in the power of her prayer, and that is also an example set for women. Honkasalo notes that prayer is a primary way in which Karelian Orthodox Christian women express their agency. She writes, "With these attempts, in my view, they were ritually holding together a world that often seemed to be falling apart" (Honkasalo 2015, 72). Similarly to Esme's description of churching as ritually connecting new mothers to the Virgin Mary, Joy's description of prayer powerfully aligns herself and others with the Mother of God through the act of prayer. She is empowered by means of her vernacular theology.

My last example of a vernacular theological approach to Mary comes from Neil, whom I interviewed in conjunction with his wife. He said,

I don't pray as much to the Theotokos as much as I do to Christ, which may be heretical. But I feel like the Theotokos is strong, and—this may sound weird—maybe masculine to me? She is strong, and she is powerful. I think in the Orthodox Church, there's a balance [between Christ and] the Theotokos, who is acknowledged in every service. In our church, the icon of the Theotokos in the back is bigger than the icon of Christ, because she's also the icon of the Church. (Neil and Amanda, July 15, 2015)

Neil describes the Theotokos as a counterpoint to Christ. Interestingly, he sees the power of the Mother of God as "masculine," which makes me wonder if he sees the power of Christ as "feminine." Alternatively, it could be that the kind of power ascribed to the Theotokos is so uncommon when expressed by a woman as to seem foreign, though there is an Orthodox hymn to Mary which begins with the words "Steadfast protectress of Christians." In Neil's vision,

Mary is a protector, a mother of both Christ and the Church as a whole, though she is also emblematic of all Christians, since she is presented as a human participant in the life of God on earth.

What I think is most poignant about all of the examples above is that Mary, as the icon of the Church, also becomes the personal reflection of each individual who draws inspiration and strength from her. For Simon, she is an icon of obedience. For Esme, she becomes a connector through all the stages of womanhood. For Joy, she quietly demonstrates the power of prayer. For Neil, she is a strong, even masculine, protector.

Personal Experience Narrative & Vernacular Theology

Theology and narrative are closely linked. This is nowhere clearer than in studies of myth (Dundes 1984; Schrempf 2012). I posit that theology is a way of applying myth to daily life, and vernacular theology comes through in individual personal experience narratives which negotiate between conservatism and dynamism in applying tradition to worldview. What I am calling “vernacular theology” is the specific theoretical application of what has been called “everyday religion” (Ammerman 2007), “lived religion” (a term used differently in McGuire 2008 and Orsi 2002), “vernacular religion” (Primiano 1995), and “domestic religion” (Sered 1992). When Meredith McGuire (2008, 12) uses “lived religion,” she means “the actual experience of religious persons” as opposed to “the prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs and practices.” When Robert Orsi uses “lived religion,” he means the media by which people “make and unmake worlds,” including “institutions and persons, texts and rituals, practice and theology, things and ideas” by which people narrate and interpret their own experiences (Orsi 2002, xxxvii-xxxix). Sered defines domestic religion as:

A process in which people who profess their allegiance to a wider religious tradition personalize the rituals, institutions, symbols, and theology of that wider system in order to safeguard the health, happiness, and security of particular people with whom they are linked in relationships of caring and interdependence. (Sered 1992, 10)

Theology is even mentioned in Sered's definition of domestic religion. In the case of the people I studied, the personalization of theology was less to protect others around them and more to deal with otherwise problematic aspects of faith, such as agency for women, how men can relate to the Mother of God, or how the same figure, both virgin and mother, can apply to twenty-first century women. Honkasalo, in her study of Finnish-Karelian Orthodox women, writes that "Domestic religion...emerges as a performance of agency" (Honkasalo 2015, 68). Vernacular theology is such a performance of agency. Vernacular theology, furthermore, connects impersonal doctrine to personal outlook. For example, though churching has been widely interpreted, by both clergy and laypeople, with the vernacular theology of cleansing mothers and babies from bloodshed in childbirth, women like Esme describe the experience of birth as sacred. For her, to interpret churching in the traditional way would mean, to a certain extent, admitting that women are unclean when they give birth, or at least admitting that aspects of tradition do not apply to her. To the contrary, she expresses the profound experience of meeting God in the act of creating life. Indeed, to give birth may be seen as imitating God in the act of creation.

Vernacular Theology & Tellability

Folklorists know that all tradition exists in a tension between the forces of conservatism and dynamism (Toelken 1996, 39-40). In the case of Orthodox Christianity, the conservative aspects are often those which are outwardly manifest in ritual and language (certainly in the liturgy and Canons). Dynamic aspects are often subtler—perhaps in the counsel of individual priests and in personal experience narratives and vernacular theology. For example, some of the

vernacular theology espoused by my consultants would be encouraged by traditional clergy, especially viewing the Mother of God as a model for obedience or prayer. Esme's interpretation of churching, as she admitted, would "probably not" be accepted by clergy. This highlights what is *tellable* in an Orthodox context (Esme, July 13, 2015).

Shuman defines two related concepts: "storyability (what gets told) and tellability (who can tell it to whom)" (Shuman 2005, 7-8). To readdress Shuman's quote from the introduction, what is tellable affects what counts as truth (Shuman 2012, 144). To apply tellability to a quote in chapter five, one of my consultants said, "In Orthodoxy, 'modern' is a dirty word." Another one of my consultants said, "In Orthodoxy, they don't get called rules. They get called choices." Larin writes that concepts of degradation are unknown in Orthodoxy, because there is so much emphasis on humility. She writes, "When we experience drawbacks, limitations, grief, etc., we learn to recognize our sinfulness and grow in our faith and dependence upon God's saving mercy" (Larin 2008, 276-7). For this reason, egalitarianism is not a concern in Orthodox Christianity, because the focus is meant to be on obedience rather than systems of power.

Nonetheless, North American society *does* concern itself with concepts like egalitarianism and feminism. In an Orthodox Christian context, if a practice like churching does feel degrading to a woman, is it tellable? In her study of abuse narratives, folklorist Elaine Lawless points out that "[I]n our mainstream, largely Christian culture, values such as love and forgiveness help to sustain relations of dominance...Religious texts make victims feel guilty if they do not patiently and lovingly submit to abuse and forgive their abusers" (Lawless 2001, 82). I am not intending to suggest that all priests are abusive or that all Orthodox Christians are abused by clerical authorities. Rather, I am suggesting that some Orthodox Christian rhetoric emphasizing not thinking for one's self (i.e. It is prideful, it could cause dangerous disagreement

in communities, cause others to sin, or be heretical) has the potential to shame parishioners and priests alike into silence. Indeed, parish priests are in a particularly difficult bind because their own *theologoumena* will be judged by their bishops who have the power to move or defrock them. Women especially find themselves in a position of trying to make sense of theology and traditions which do not reflect their values as North Americans, especially if they consider egalitarianism a basic right.

Personal Experience Narratives & Truth

In his study of supernatural beliefs in a francophone Newfoundland community, Gary Butler found that these beliefs were not uniformly distributed among members, and furthermore not everyone had the same knowledge of a belief tradition. Butler writes:

Just as a familiarity with the propositions underlying the belief system of one's culture does not necessarily indicate an acceptance of their truth, neither is the mere expression of such traditional knowledge within contexts of natural performance an indicator of individual performer belief, positive or negative.
(Butler 1990, 3)

My research shows that communities built around belief do not necessarily share the same values, needs, or understanding of tradition. In the context of Orthodox Christianity, individuals may hold personal beliefs which differ from dogmatic theology and others in the community. While not necessarily discussed openly, disagreements range from localized traditional beliefs (e.g. the belief that God will strike down someone unprepared for communion), to beliefs about what is up to personal choice (e.g. being churching or taking communion while menstruating) to doctrine (e.g. the Orthodox belief in the life-long virginity of Mary). I have encountered these and other diverse beliefs within the same Midwestern Orthodox community.

Political scientist Benedict Anderson suggests that language may be one of the only ways individuals define the boundaries of community. He writes, “Through...language, encountered at mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed” (Anderson 1983, 154). Though Anderson is referring to the role of language in nationalist thought, this phenomenon is certainly applicable more locally. If I apply this concept to the community of St. Parascheva, it does not mean that parishioners’ values are the same, or even that their beliefs are the same, only that they share expressive categories, such as narrative. Personal experience narratives, like legends, can have the function of creating dialogue about reality. In defining reality with regard to legend, folklorist Linda Dégh writes that, “along with belief and objective truth, non-belief, objective untruth and non-reality are the most constant components of the definition, but they are not always used in the same way” (Dégh 2001, 51). Folklorists, she writes, are after “the subjective truth, the emotional truth” (Dégh 2001, 317). A monologic theology will not reach a person in their subjective, emotional truth. Indeed, the emphasis on humility in Orthodox Christianity would discard this as a valid category for truth. As my research on vernacular theology has shown, this does not render emotional truth as irrelevant to those I interviewed. Vernacular theology, just like personal narrative, challenges truth to be dialogic, especially about what something (like churching or the Mother of God) is “supposed” to mean.

Linguistic anthropologist Elinor Ochs and psychologist Lisa Capps write, “Personal narrative is a way of using language or another symbolic system to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order, to demystify them and establish coherence across past, present, and as yet unrealized experience” (Ochs and Capps 2001, 2) When two people converse and share personal experience narratives, there is a sense-making process between teller and listener which

may not necessarily be resolved (Ochs and Capps 2001, 15). Literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin writes that “Text...always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects” (Bakhtin 1986, 106). Considering this negotiated space between two subjects, Ochs and Capps introduce the concept of “narrative as theology” (Ochs and Capps 2001, 225). They examine prayer as a dialogue with God in which conflict or struggle is shared (Ochs and Capps 2001, 229). Ochs and Capps are discussing prayer said out loud in terms of narrative convention and community support, but it is also worth examining how prayer is related to individual needs and conceptions of God as a result. They compare both praying and narrating as “a quest for moral clarity” (Ochs and Capps 2001, 242). Dialogue is open-ended and emergent as individuals “actively work out a situational theology” pertinent to the circumstances of their lives (Ochs and Capps 2001, 250).

A wealth of feminist scholarship tells us that personal experience is gendered, and that factor emerges in the personal narratives told by men and women. A collaborative group of interdisciplinary scholars, writing under the name The Personal Narratives Group, apply feminist theory to women’s narratives. They write that a woman’s life could never be written taking gender for granted (The Personal Narratives Group 1989, 5). The construction of identity in stories is gendered, as are dynamics of power. In the case of Orthodox Christian theology, the understanding of God is interpreted by an all-male clergy, whose vernacular interpretation dictates how the world is understood. Practices concerning the ritual cleansing of women after childbirth and abstaining from communion during menstruation speak to this fact. Despite their authority, an all-male clergy cannot dictate how a woman will make meaning in these practices. A creative, vernacular theology is at work here, reconciling individuals’ lives with dogma. Similarly, the figure of the Mother of God is interpreted dialogically by parishioners at St.

Parascheva as a mirror of their own worldviews. Men and women alike find meaning in her life story and symbolism based on what they know to be true in their own lives. Vernacular theology is simply a specific religious manifestation of the greater processes of conservatism and dynamism which affect all traditions, making them relevant in individual lives.

Conclusion

What I think is most poignant about all of the examples above is that vernacular theologies allow individual believers to engage with Orthodox Christianity in ways which best meet their needs. Sometimes those needs are divergent from one another, but community is sustained by the shared identity of being an Orthodox Christian. Vernacular theology as a strategy helps people to deal with aspects of their faith which do not otherwise fit their needs. Despite the shared outward identity of being Orthodox, belief is “hidden” by being personal, and this protects individuals from being ostracized. I believe communities are united by shared practices to a greater degree than by shared belief. As in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, where he discusses nationalism, the Orthodox Church, globally and locally, is an imagined community, a projection of each individual within it who forms this vision based his or her values (Anderson 1983).

Vernacular theology is emergent as a response to dialogue (i.e. changing life circumstances). Though narrative truth is dialogic, theology tends to be monologic. Those who convert to Orthodox Christianity find in it a mystical theology which tends to differ from their previous traditions. Beliefs are built on individual understanding, but individual needs and interpretations of the world are not all the same. All believers engage with their faith through the lens of their own lives, leading to a diversity of belief and practice. This creates a “tellability” issue to a certain extent, because Orthodox Christian authorities do not necessarily encourage

personal interpretation of theology (or life—hence the conundrum of *theologoumena*, or priestly theological opinion) due to an emphasis on humility, the de-centering of the self. Strategies of vernacular theology reconcile personal needs and impersonal dogma for individual believers. Shared belief is not necessarily what unites belief communities so much as shared traditions. The next chapter is a case study of the outcome of differing vernacular theologies among authority figures on one particular congregation comprised almost entirely of converts to Orthodox Christianity.

Chapter 8: Cleanliness is Next to Godliness: A Case Study in Clerical Authority & the Price of Obedience¹

The previous chapter was about the theoretical components of Orthodox Christianity in North America, especially creative agency among Orthodox believers. This chapter will address a case study in a different Midwestern Orthodox community, in which the vernacular theologies of clergy differed from one another, and the congregation responded by sacrificing a meaningful practice. Their sacrifice was an act of humility toward authority, but as this case study will show, sometimes believers themselves are negatively impacted by their own piety.

This chapter involves a case study in St. Luke's parish, comprised almost entirely of converts, in which women filled an important ritual function: holding a napkin beneath the communion chalice to prevent spillage. When a new bishop was installed over their jurisdiction, this bishop forbade women from doing this service, and there were both personal and spiritual consequences for the women who stepped down. Even though the interpretations of male church authorities are inconsistent, their voices nonetheless hold greater power than those of lay women.

Folklorist Marja-Liisa Keinänen, in her study of Karelian Orthodox women, writes,

Women...have often been barred from formal positions...because of their purported nature, sexuality and bodily functions, notably menstruation and childbirth. Moreover, the restrictions pertaining to women's bodily states have limited their participation in official ceremonies in a number of ways. Since the scholarly focus has tended to be on prescriptive traditions, we have frequently learned more about the restrictions and taboos concerning women—what women are not allowed to do—than what, in spite of the restrictions, they actually have done or do. (Keinänen 2010, 13)

¹ This paper was written for Mariya Lesiv's Ethnography of Belief class at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I later presented it at the 2014 American Folklore Society Meeting, where this paper won the Don Yoder Prize for the Best Graduate Student Paper in Folk Belief or Religious Folklife.

I will respond, in this chapter, to Keinänen's challenge to fill this gap in literature. Thus far, literature on contemporary converts to Orthodox Christianity in North America does not discuss gender as a factor in lived spiritual experience (see, for example, Herbel 2012, Krindatch 2002, Lucas 2003, Tarasar 1975). An exception is Amy Slagle's study on people who "marry in" to Orthodoxy and convert in Philadelphia (Slagle 2010).

Like the previous chapter, this chapter explores attempts by converts to reconcile longstanding traditions regarding women in the church with their own cultural attitudes in a 21st century, Western context. Unlike the previous chapter, however, this community is almost entirely comprised of American converts to Orthodox Christianity (there are only two members of the congregation who are Orthodox-born, and both are American-born as well). This creates an added dynamic to the creation of vernacular theologies, because unlike at St. Parascheva or St. Nicholas, in this parish, the community's dominant, American culture is not challenged by the perspectives of believers from majority-Orthodox countries. Nonetheless, believers in this community strive to live in humility, according to Orthodox Christian tradition, but struggle to reconcile their cultural values with those of their authority figures. This church has its own sense of place as a community, but it struggles to find where it belongs within the larger Orthodox landscape.

Briefly, for historical context, St. Luke's was originally founded in the 1970s as a charismatic, evangelical community, and then in 2002, they converted *en masse* to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The vast majority of congregants are Midwestern American converts to Orthodox Christianity, with perhaps only one or two exceptions. It is beyond the scope of my research to go into all the reasons for the church's mass-conversion, but suffice it to say that ideas about historical tradition and authenticity went into play in their decision to become

Orthodox (see Bringerud 2012 for a fuller description). St. Luke's chose to join a branch of the Orthodox Church known as the Orthodox Church in America (hereafter OCA). The diocese to which they belonged was the Diocese of the Midwest, hereafter DOM-OCA. Each diocese is subdivided into six deaneries, and each deanery is headed by a parish priest. The DOM-OCA has eighty-one churches, and the reader may see why a bishop might appreciate deaneries in this capacity.

About ten years after their conversion, their bishop died and was replaced by a bishop who interpreted church tradition differently. He sought to increase formality in services, and part of his strategy to this end included setting strict boundaries for women with regard to the sacraments. Women, who had exclusively assisted the priests at St. Luke's with the communion ritual previously, were now forbidden to do so. Though the new bishop's vernacular belief was likely informed by the traditional belief that women's bodies are a sinful distraction, and though St. Luke's as a whole strongly disagreed with the ruling, their obedience was part of their understanding of piety. Furthermore, a localized sense of place is what made Orthodox Christianity meaningful to the community in the first place, and it helped them to overcome this particular challenge.

Napkin-Holding as Spiritual Experience

Shortly after the congregation of St. Luke's converted to Orthodox Christianity, Father Maximos, the rector at the time, wanted to find more outlets for women in the congregation to participate in the service, given that they were excluded from being acolytes, deacons, and readers. He asked a few women to help with holding napkins during the communion part of the service. As my youngest consultant, Grace, said, "As soon as we were Orthodox, women were

always holding it. It was Father Maximos's way of getting us involved, which was nice, because I know women wanted to do more than just bake the bread” (Grace, July 8, 2014). St. Luke’s was and continues to be an unusual Orthodox church in several regards, and this may be attributed to the fact that they are a parish comprised almost exclusively of converts. While baking communion bread, or *prosphora* is an important job traditionally assigned to women, there are men in the community who share the responsibility. In addition, it is unusual for women in an Orthodox church to hold napkins under communion chalices, as acolytes or deacons are typically given this role. Nonetheless, with their bishop’s permission women became the sole napkin-holders at St. Luke’s at the time of the parish’s mass conversion.

Most, though by no means all, of the women who held communion napkins at St. Luke’s found the experience to be meaningful. My consultant Carol said that, in general, napkin-holding made her feel as though she were “part of the whole experience of Orthodoxy. That made me feel like I was doing something that counted.” She later said, “I think it [gave] us purpose” (Carol, June 29, 2014). Given the limited opportunities for women to participate in the liturgy in the Orthodox Church, I find this especially significant.

Some of those who held napkins connected the action with their experiences as mothers. Jeanette, for example, said, “[Some] said they enjoyed having the women do that, because it made them feel like when their mothers fed them and wiped their faces, and just that feeling of the Church being our mother” (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). In the Orthodox Eucharist ritual, the priest feeds each communicant, and the napkin-holders wipe away or catch the excess communion, not unlike a parent feeding an infant. Jeanette connects the nurturing action of helping to feed the divine Eucharist to others with the image of the Church as a mother, and in so doing, broad symbolism becomes concrete in ritual. The individual experiences of these women

gave this ritual intimate meaning unique to each participant, whether a napkin-holder like Jeanette, or a member of the congregation.

Father Simeon's wife, Elizabeth, was not a napkin-holder herself, but a communicant. She mentioned that she connected women as napkin-holders with Saint Veronica, who, according to legend, wiped the face of Jesus with a cloth when he was on his way to be crucified. The story culminates in the miraculous appearance of the face of Jesus on the cloth. Elizabeth said, "To me, washing the face of Jesus is not too much different from picking up the crumbs of Jesus's body, which is what the napkins do. I would think that would sanctify [this] particular role for women in the church" (Fr. Simeon and Elizabeth, July 14, 2014). Napkin-holding is meant to capture the crumbs of the divine sacrament which might fall from the lips of a communicant. Indeed, if communion falls on the floor of the church, according to canonical tradition, the priest must kneel down and consume it off of the floor (Mironko 2008; Èulogos 2007, 7.22.161). Then, the square of carpet upon which it fell must either be cleaned in a running stream or in water later poured over plants. Alternatively, the spot must be burned. I have seen this occur in person, and it is a dramatic event. This demonstrates the importance placed upon the substance of the communion itself and how much care is taken to handle it. A great deal of trust was placed in the women who did this job. Moira remembered a time when a new napkin-holder was participating, and the communion fell on her shoe. Moira said, "She had to burn her shoe or whatever, and that was kind of traumatizing. We had some instruction about [it]. I think Father Maximos said if something falls, just try to hold [the napkin] there, and he would scoop it up" (Moira, July 10, 2014). None of the women I interviewed, however, were quite certain what happened to the napkin after the service.

Part of what I interpret to be meaningful about the process of feeding the communion is the amount of vulnerability involved on the part of communicants. Moira compared the “intimacy” of napkin-holding to Forgiveness Sunday, a Lenten ritual in which every member of the congregation asks one another for forgiveness (Moira, July 10, 2014). For Moira, there was vulnerability in assisting others in the Eucharist. Abigail, similarly, said, “When we go before the priest to take communion, we really do open ourselves up. It just felt like a wonderful, humbling thing to be able to do, to participate with all those people” (Abigail, July 27, 2014). Similarly, Jeanette said, “In the Eucharist, people are most like their true selves. And I saw that on people's faces when they would come up. I saw the joy, the peace. That was the best thing for me, just looking into everybody's faces and just seeing what they were feeling” (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). For both Abigail and Jeanette, there was something vulnerable both for them and communicants in helping to serve. They were moved by the openness of the communicants, and in turn, communicants, perhaps, felt a maternal aspect of God that has limited opportunities for expression in the context of an Orthodox liturgy. Some will undoubtedly use the vernacular interpretation of connecting veneration of the Virgin Mary to the experience of feminine aspects of God in Orthodoxy. My own vernacular interpretation is to view this as a separate role, as Mary is the *mother* of God, not God himself.

Madeline echoed a feeling of connection with communicants. She said, “There were times when, even though we normally had two hands on the napkin, I had one hand on the napkin and I could put my other hand on the person, like if it was someone who was sick” (Madeline, June 15, 2014). She compared touching the shoulder or back of communicants with another ritual observed in St. Luke's. If a congregant is going to have surgery, go on a journey, or undertake something similarly difficult, that person will stand at the front of the church, and

the rest of the congregation will gather around him or her with a “laying on of hands.” This ritual is an example of a carryover tradition from St. Luke’s pre-Orthodox days. Madeline said, “If you can’t reach the person [who is sick...etc.], then you put your hands on the person [in front of you]’s back.” In this way, the entire congregation is literally connected to one another and to the person for whom they are praying in a physical manifestation of spiritual support. This ritual is a healing ritual, and by connecting it to communion, Madeline suggests its ability not only to be a “spiritual medicine,” as one priest called it, but also to reify community ties, both physically and spiritually.

Women Allowed as Napkin-Holders

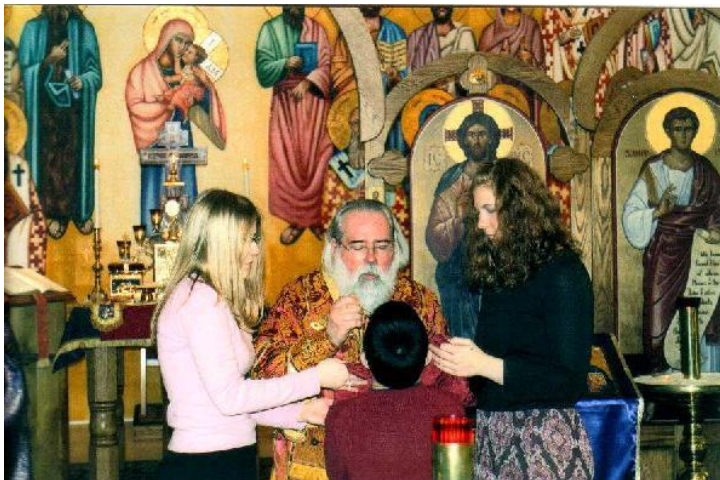


Figure 17

Archbishop Job serving communion at St. John’s, assisted by two female parishioners. Courtesy of Joshua Coolman, 2008.

It was unusual for women to be allowed to assist in the serving of communion in Orthodox Churches generally. More churches in the OCA observed this practice than in any other jurisdiction at the time, though this likely had to do with the policies of the parish’s then-presiding bishop, Archbishop Job (Osacky). At St. Luke’s, parishioners

remember him fondly. Jeanette said, “Archbishop Job was very gracious and accepting of how we did things here at St. Luke’s, and as much as possible tried to let us continue with what we had been doing.” As St. Luke’s was in the process of adjusting to being Orthodox, Archbishop Job was sensitive to the community’s pre-existing culture and traditions, and he did not want to demand too many changes of them at once. For example, the community had a number of hymns

which had been written by its members; Archbishop Job allowed the community to keep its music while stipulating appropriate liturgical moments at which it might be used. A different bishop might have asked for a complete “makeover,” ignoring the community's liturgical history. Carol echoed Jeanette's comments when she said:

Archbishop Job did not care. He liked the way our church was, and he was on the liberal side, because he didn't want everything to change in our church, and he was there when the women were doing the napkin-holding. (Carol, June 29, 2014)

Carol uses the word “liberal” to describe Archbishop Job, for his attention to the community's pre-existing (and Western) traditions. As Father Timothy, the current rector, says, “‘Modern’ is kind of a swear word in Orthodoxy.” As in many faiths, change is a tricky subject. Hierarchs like Archbishop Job are meant to help congregations balance cultural adaptation with spiritual continuity; the catch is that the interpretation of spiritual traditions can vary across dioceses, church history, and cultures. Archbishop Job would have been completely within his rights as acting bishop to ask the community of St. Luke’s to change any and all of their practices to conform to more “mainstream” interpretations of tradition within the Orthodox Church.

One of the ways in which Archbishop Job demonstrated his “liberalism” was by allowing women in the congregation to assist in serving communion. Carol and several others whom I interviewed said they were directly asked by Father Maximos to hold napkins. Others said that they were asked later, by the napkin-holders themselves. In total, about eight women assisted in napkin-holding, and I was able to interview five of them. As Madeline put it, “There were a lot of concessions made simply because Father Maximos requested” (Madeline, June 15, 2014). Father Timothy could not remember whether the bishop had ever been asked specifically about the napkin-holding issue at St. Luke’s, though there is evidence that he was aware of it and did not protest.

Father Timothy speculates that women may have started assisting in communion in the first place because Father Maximos sought to emulate a church in Columbus, Ohio, where the dean of their diocese was located. Father Timothy said, “I know Father Maximos checked a lot of stuff out with [the dean], as was appropriate, rather than wandering out on his own.” Since St. Luke’s was a recently-converted congregation, they were seeking practical examples in other churches within their diocese rather than “wandering out,” guessing at the boundaries of church tradition. Father Timothy’s hypothesis was supported by Abigail, a former napkin-holder. She said, “I do remember Father Maximos saying that we had special permission from [Arch]Bishop Job to do this. Not a lot of the churches do this” (Abigail, July 27, 2014). She recalled that another church in Ohio had the same practice, though Archbishop Job was also the head of that community. Abigail makes the point that since St. Luke’s looked to other churches in their own diocese for examples regarding napkin-holding, they may have been less aware of how uncommon it was for women to hold communion napkins outside of their own diocese.

Madeline, however, had heard that women did not typically perform this service. She said:

My understanding is that, as far as the Orthodox Church as a whole is [concerned], ladies were never permitted to do that. At St. Luke’s, we did it. I think Father Maximos had obtained permission at that time for ladies to do that. But during that time, there was an occasion when we had a visiting priest, and when the ladies came up to hold the napkin, he wouldn’t let us. (Madeline, June 15, 2014)

Madeline could not remember who this priest was, or what his jurisdictional affiliations were.

Nonetheless, he continued to observe tradition as he understood it, without verbal confrontation.

Madeline elaborated:

I think that was a time when he just held it himself and people picked up the other end of it, which I thought was funny, because we're ladies, and we still had to hold the end of it! [laughs] (Madeline, June 15, 2014)

Madeline wished the former napkin-holders could have had some warning beforehand, because the resulting confusion “was kind of awkward.” The clergy were aware of their differences with other Orthodox churches in this and other circumstances. In Madeline’s story, their response seems largely to have been passive toward the visiting priest, but they continued to allow women to participate as long as they had their bishop’s permission.

Father Timothy said that he was aware “that it was a controversial issue” outside the DOM-OCA in other jurisdictions, because he was approached by other clergy about it. He specifically remembered meeting an Antiochian priest who “got a funny look on his face” when he said that he had seen pictures of women holding communion napkins on St. Luke’s website. Father Timothy said he “defused” the situation, assuring the other priest that his bishop had blessed them to proceed (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014). The priests at St. Luke’s were spared the ire of disagreeing clergy by appealing to authority—their archbishop, to whom they are directly responsible. Archbishop Job’s allowance of women holding napkins stemmed from his interpretation of tradition. When Archbishop Job died, he was succeeded by a new bishop who had an alternative understanding of tradition.

“A New Sheriff in Town”: Clerical Responses

Archbishop Job died in 2011 and was succeeded by Bishop Matthias (Moriak), formerly the rector of a monastery, the same year. The transition between bishops was a delicate matter. Nicholas Denysenko explains this transition in his article “Liturgical Maximalism in Orthodox Christianity: A Case Study,” writing:

After Archbishop Job's death, Bishop Matthias inherited a diocese that had assumed a leading role in calling for action and beginning the process of restoring trust between rank-and-file clergy and laity and the church's hierarchy. Bishop Matthias's archpastoral directives are thus designed to guide the diocese in the period immediately following a serious scandal where the trust between lower clergy and laity and the hierarchy is fragile at best. (Denysenko 2013, 341)

For the sake of brevity, I will explain this scandal only as money-laundering among OCA hierarchs (Orthodox Christians for Accountability, 2006). The directives of the new bishop were issued at the annual clergy convocation in Chicago in 2012. The newly-consecrated Bishop Matthias had spent the year traveling extensively throughout his diocese, visiting all the parishes. According to the DOM-OCA website, this diocese contains eighty-one parishes spread out over eleven states (“Parish Directories”). Father Timothy, who attended this convocation and heard the bishop in person, said that Bishop Matthias did not, in fact, visit St. Luke’s during this time. The bishop had visited the church once before his consecration, but it was not for a Sunday liturgy. Father Timothy said, “There was a long list of things that he had observed or heard about that he had not wanted to continue, and among those was the practice of the women holding the communion napkins” (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014). A second, current rector at St. Luke’s, Father Simeon, described the responses he observed among clergy at the convocation. He said:

When Matthias said women can't hold napkins, almost to a man, the people at that convocation were shocked and dumbfounded that this was even an issue. I almost thought we were going to have a massive rebellion. There are priests I have talked to who have said, “This is just stupid. It's just going to cause trouble.” It's not necessary. (Fr. Simeon and Elizabeth, July 14, 2014)

Father Simeon’s response belies his sense of priorities. According to him, it is not “necessary” for a bishop to exert his authority by forbidding half of his diocese from participating in the distribution of communion. Father Simeon and other clergy at the convocation also objected to the ideology behind this directive, which can be traced to certain vernacular beliefs, common in the Orthodox Church, about the ritual uncleanness of women.

Still, despite Father Simeon's disagreement with Bishop Matthias, his priestly office obligates him to be obedient to his bishop. Father Timothy explained to me that when priests are ordained in the Orthodox Church, they are obligated to sign papers pledging their allegiance to both the current bishop and any man who will follow him. Father Timothy said, "What we understand is that if we choose to operate outside of those boundaries then there [will] be...some disciplinary action" (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014). Some of these disciplinary actions include being defrocked outright or simply being removed from the post of parish priest in one location and not being reassigned elsewhere, putting the priest out of a job.

Father Timothy did not particularly agree with Bishop Matthias's directive either, but he believed the bishop to be completely within his hierarchical rights to change the interpretation of tradition on the issue of women assisting in serving communion. He said:

My reaction was, "You are the bishop of this diocese and you can certainly dictate what the appropriate practices will be," so I didn't come away from it feeling as though he had violated his role as the bishop. It's just that the tone of it was "There's a new sheriff in town." (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014)

Father Timothy's observation of the bishop echoes Denysenko's assessment of the tone that Bishop Matthias wished to set in his diocese. What upset Father Timothy more than the directives toward women was the way the bishop spoke about his predecessor. He said, "The thing that was a bit disappointing was that there was some disparaging of Archbishop Job and that he was just too lackadaisical." In other words, Bishop Matthias justified his own interpretation of church tradition by claiming his predecessor had relaxed his standards. Given that St. Luke's converted largely because of admiration for Archbishop Job, this did not strengthen Bishop Matthias's credibility with them. Father Timothy said, "We would hope that directives would arise out of pastoral concern. I wouldn't begin to comment on what Bishop

Matthias's motives were at the time, but just the way that it was delivered seemed a bit heavy-handed” (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014).

Breaking the News to the Congregation

Father Maximos did not distribute the entirety of Bishop Matthias’s letter to the congregation, but rather issued his own letter, quoting portions of the directives. The way the discussion is worded in the bishop’s letter, it is not women specifically who are forbidden from holding the napkins. He included this excerpt from Bishop Matthias’s original missive:

Beginning September 1, 2012, I would like those holding the Communion cloths to be those who have been trained to hold it properly, in order to avoid any possibility of an accident occurring during the distribution of Holy Communion...I would like the task of holding the Communion cloth to be reserved for those designated by the Church to do this. In hierarchical order they are: first, deacons; second, ordained sub-deacons; third, blessed sub-deacons; fourth altar servers; and lastly, those that are allowed within the sanctuary.

Though women are not mentioned overtly, they are strongly implied, since they are forbidden from entering the priesthood and from approaching the altar altogether. Father Maximos himself comments upon the directives of the bishop, writing, “I am committed to my Bishop and will follow where he leads.” Later in the letter, he writes, “I give thanks for the many years our godly women have served us by holding the napkin during the distribution of the Holy Gifts, now, in order to comply with the Bishop’s directives, the men will have to step up to serve the People of God in this capacity.” He ends his letter by urging the community to:

Guard our oneness of mind and heart with all vigilance and sobriety. We can let these issues become the cause of strife and disunity. We will be tempted to sin with our hearts by judging the Bishop, especially if we don’t agree with him or sin with our mouths, especially if we don’t agree with him or each other. Beloved in Christ, let us rise to the occasion and Trust [*sic*] the Blessed Holy Trinity is working through this for our salvation.

Where Bishop Matthias does not mention women explicitly, Father Maximos admits freely that women will be those most deeply affected by the bishop's directives, and he expresses appreciation for them. However, Father Maximos frames his solidarity with the bishop with his own clerical obedience and encourages members of the congregation to do the same. The women in the congregation reacted in various ways.

Abigail said,

It hurt my feelings, because women are the ones who bake the bread. And then of course, it's really just a loaf of bread, but we still do it with honor and respect and with certain tradition before it's presented to the priest as part of the liturgy.
(Abigail, July 27, 2014)

Abigail was concerned that women would not be allowed to bake the bread anymore either, as she did not understand "where his reasoning was coming from," and whether there would be further ramifications of his decision. To what extent would the ideology of women keeping their distance from communion be enforced?

Father Simeon said, "Women are definitely better napkin-holders than men. I'm serious! They know all the people. They have no qualms about telling me, 'This gal hasn't been baptized,' 'This guy, this gal gets a blessing' ...etc. Pragmatic" (Fr. Simeon and Elizabeth, July 14, 2014). The priests relied heavily on those women to keep an eye on details for them, and furthermore to keep a steady hand. When Jeanette reflected on her experience of napkin-holding, she said, "There were times when I would kind of worry because the priests would drop some of it, and we had to be very careful to try to catch it, and that was a bad thing" (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). Indeed, not long after women were replaced as napkin-holders by sub-deacons and any male volunteers at St. Luke's, there was an accident in which the communion was spilled.

Carol said, “Mary Magdalene was a person ministering to Christ. Why can we not minister in some way besides baking bread and being behind the scenes? Why can we not be a part of the service?” (Carol, June 29, 2014). The answer to Carol’s question is complex, and it begs at least a brief look at the history of women’s bodies in the Orthodox Church.

Menstruation, Monasticism, & the Fear of Women’s Bodies

The precedent of disallowing women to participate in serving communion is tied to the reason they are not allowed to enter clerical offices in the first place. As medievalist Vassa Kontouma writes in her article “Women in Orthodoxy,” “To understand the place of women in Orthodoxy, it is necessary to understand it as a part of Byzantine tradition” (Kontouma 2012, 433). There is a dis-unified series of church Canons regarding the conduct of people in general and women in particular with respect to sacred space.

The point, though, is that in the Orthodox Church, historical and cultural circumstances set precedents for vernacular interpretations of tradition, both for clergy and laypeople, and re-interpretation rarely happens after that (Ware 1997, 197). The Orthodox Church generally hangs its authority on changelessness over time. With regard to women and the priesthood, for example, Ware writes that “after two thousand years we have no right to innovate in a matter of such importance” (Ware 1997, 293). On the other hand, “no right to innovate” would seem to ignore the diversity of vernacular religion for both clergy and laity. While there are, as yet, no female priests in the Orthodox Church, there are various opinions about whether or not they can be ordained to the diaconate, for example (Dearie 2017; Farley 2012, 137-160; FitzGerald 1999 and 1998).

At St. Luke's, not unlike St. Parascheva, churching is observed at the discretion of specific individuals. Father Timothy said, "We don't strictly observe the forty days here," and while the churching prayers make him uncomfortable, he continues to observe them, because, "I know that some of the women, they just wanted to do that. They wanted to stay away" (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014). When I suggested that they were given personal choice about the matter, Father Timothy said, "Yeah. And that's where I am with head-coverings and the whole nine yards. If that's where they are, and they've chosen that, then yeah. That's what I believe." An important aspect of this scenario is that women are given choices about how to perform their own spiritualities. Freedom to choose in this way may be a legacy of the choice to convert, as opposed to being born into the faith. At St. Luke's, women attend church freely at any point after giving birth, but may still choose to go through the churching ceremony later on.

Some Orthodox clergy believe so strongly in the uncleanness of menstruation that they cite it as the very reason for their exclusion from the priesthood, as they should not be in the altar area while bleeding (Farley 2012, 162). In Bishop Matthias's letter, he makes no mention of women specifically, but says rather that "It can be said that those who hold the Communion cloth are, in fact, assisting the priest with the distribution of the Holy Eucharist." He then lists those "designated by the Church" who are allowed to perform the task, in hierarchical order. In the previous paragraph, he makes mention of the communion cloth as a "sacred vessel" because it lies upon the altar, which women are forbidden to approach. While Bishop Matthias makes no mention of women specifically, his directives are in line with this ideology about the uncleanness of women. Few of the women whom I interviewed were aware at all of this ideology as the underlying reason for their restriction from both the priesthood at large and napkin-holding in particular.

Jeanette had heard of women being forbidden from taking communion in the Greek Church while menstruating, but was unaware of its connection to napkin-holding at St. Luke's. She said, "I think that goes back to Judaism. I think you were not allowed to be in the temple when you were on your period. I think that's where it comes from, and there's a lot in Orthodoxy that stems back to that" (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). Nonetheless, she was untroubled by it. She laughed and said, "They have nothing to worry about from us old women anyway, because we don't have that problem anymore." Furthermore, as long as she was allowed to take communion at St. Luke's, little else mattered to her.

Other women whom I interviewed immediately began asking questions about this line of reasoning about ritual uncleanness. Carol, for example, said, "That's so ridiculous! Maybe the first Sunday I took communion I was 'unclean' instead of when I took communion later. And what about irregularity? There are a lot of women who are irregular. It's a moot point!" (Carol, June 29, 2014). Carol is, of course, referring to how difficult it might be to enforce denying women communion during their cycles. Abigail echoed Carol's concern when she said, "I think, especially if it has to do with the uncleanness of menstruation, then it would just seem logical that if you're on your period, don't hold the napkin. Could it be that simple? It could, but of course it's not" (Abigail, July 27, 2014). The vernacular interpretation of tradition by the hierarchy to whom these women were responsible did not match at all with their experiences or their own vernacular theologies. Nonetheless, it is the vernacular interpretation of this bishop which dictates how these women may serve in their parish.

Father Simeon said,

A menstrual cycle isn't some kind of a plague! Theoretically, if a woman takes the Eucharist on four consecutive Sundays, I'm supposed to ask her when she had her

period. You think I'm going to do that? No! This is stupid. It's just wrong. We'll probably go back at some point when the smoke all clears from the departure of Father Maximos and [reinstate] women. (Fr. Simeon and Elizabeth, July 14, 2014)

These quotes from former napkin-holders and Father Simeon all suggest that no one at St. Luke's agrees with the ideology of the uncleanness of women. Indeed, the suggestion that St. Luke's will return to having women hold napkins shows that congregants at St. Luke's are upholding the bishop's directive as a courtesy only, and the priests are upholding it because of their ordination vows of obedience.

My own interpretation of attitudes toward women in the Orthodox Church is that male clergy, historically at least, have feared the female body. When I mentioned this theory to Jeanette, she said, "As far as fear of women, I think there is some of that coming out of primarily monastic tradition because they had to be so very careful, you know" (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). I agree with Jeanette. Folklorist Elaine Lawless, in her book *Holy Women, Wholly Women*, discusses concepts of the body surrounding female clergy. She writes that "A woman exposes sexuality in a manner that cannot be denied or disregarded" (Lawless 1997, 217). It is easy to see how this could be threatening to a clerical tradition that has historically been monastic. Priests in the Orthodox Church are allowed to marry, but only monks can be elevated to higher orders such as being a bishop. Lawless discusses celibate priests in the Catholic tradition, though I believe this can be applied to monastic Orthodox clergy as well. She writes that the Church,

Officially deems that an *asexual* male, a man who does not engage in sexual activities, one who is a more pure and holy representative of the Father (who, after all, did not actually copulate with Mary to conceive his son), can be a priest. The celibate male priest and the asexual Virgin Mother, then, become representatives for the ultimate human potential for godliness... (Lawless 1997, 217)

Lawless writes that the priest's flowing robes contribute to the pretense that he is an asexual being. As priests are commonly understood to represent Christ, this asexuality may be a symbolic stand-in for holiness. Jesus also, conveniently, is a virgin, like his mother, or at least *asexualized*. It is convenient, then, that those who are unmarried are also in positions of the greatest authority in the Orthodox Church. There is no woman to offer alternative perspective. Kontouma writes that in Orthodox theology, "The ascetic ideal of perfection, in which virginity and chastity play the first part,...gives rise among certain theologians to the expression of a misogyny based on the "sin of Eve" (Kontouma 2012, 433). Historically, not only priests, but the theologians who composed the Canons of the Church were also ascetics, again threatened by the power of sexuality. According to Lawless, woman's body is somehow always synonymous with sexuality where a male body can pretend not to be. Lawless writes, "The [priest] does not *signify* sexuality...By and large, sexuality is not an aspect of religion because it is not a visible component of the male-dominated hierarchy. Sexuality is part of the 'other,' which is represented by the *female*" (Lawless 1997, 219). This absolutely applies to the Orthodox Church. Even the Virgin Mary, who is the most celebrated figure in the Church, is celebrated for her chastity, not for a holistic vision of sexuality as part of something sacred. As Lawless writes, "Gender is never really just gender—it is merely sexuality disguised and denied" (Lawless 1997, 226). Therefore, the exclusion of women from the priesthood and other kinds of participation in the liturgy is really about their visibility. No matter how old, young, round or thin, standing on either side of a potentially celibate priest during the spiritual climax of the liturgy, the presence of their physical bodies is somehow suggestive of the taboo of sexuality.

The Interpretation of Tradition

I quoted Father Timothy earlier as saying that “modern” is a “swear word” in The Orthodox Church. When I asked him to explain further, he said, “Orthodoxy is a fairly small world, at least outside of Russia, where the culture is sort of baptized [in] it” (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014). Father Timothy mentions Russia because the OCA was initially founded by Russian immigrants and bears traces of its lineage, but he could just as easily have mentioned other countries in Europe, Asia, or Africa in which Orthodox Christianity has a longstanding relationship with surrounding culture. The landscape of Orthodox Christianity in “the West” is varied and often inconsistent with regard to traditions like napkin-holding. Nonetheless, one of the hallmarks of Orthodox Christianity is its reverence of historical tradition and fear of change. As Timothy Ware writes,

When Orthodox are asked...to sum up what they see as the distinctive characteristic of their Church, they often point precisely to its changelessness, its determination to remain loyal to the past, its sense of *living continuity* with the Church of ancient times. This idea of living continuity is summed up for the Orthodox in the one word *Tradition*. (Ware 1997, 195-6)

According to Ware, it is the “duty” of Orthodox Christians to transmit tradition “unimpaired” to future generations, as they are the guardians of a sacred inheritance. This can mean, however, that customs are passed on indiscriminately, without discerning between the spirit and the letter of sacred tradition. Father Timothy, for example, said, “Particularly in the ethnic churches, they have all these things that go along with the liturgical practice that have absolutely nothing to do with liturgical practice” (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014). He said, for example:

There are very different attitudes about the place of women in the church, just to be blunt, and I think only in America does this become an issue. [In some ethnic churches], a woman doesn't go into an Orthodox Church without her head covered. It's just not done. She'll be roused out by some little nun or whatever, you know?

As a second example, he said,

The public criticism of hierarchs that takes place in this country does not take place in Russia or Greece or whatever. Which is not to say that there are not controversies, but you know, they're pretty princely over there. And we have our 24 hour news cycle over here, and...they really can't make a move without some blogger putting something out there... I think in Western culture, we have this need to know and right to know most of the time...People will use that as an argument for "We need to give up this idea of having an American Church." I don't think I buy that.

Father Timothy is referencing strains of anti-Westernism in the Orthodox Church. Again, the line between cultural and theological traditions is blurry in Orthodox Christianity (For a discussion of the "indigenization" of Orthodox Christianity in other parts of the world, see McGuckin 2012). Discerning among vernacular theologies presents a difficulty for a majority-convert church who are trying to graft Orthodox Christianity onto their own cultural experience.

In terms of napkin-holding, both Abigail and Carol went on to comment about the ancientness of this particular ideology and suggested that it should be changed to suit contemporary circumstances. This begs an examination of the nature of tradition and why it prevails. Abigail, for example, said, "It also seems that if we're the Orthodox Church of America, we should be allowed to relax the traditions of some of the cultures from which we got our faith" (Abigail, July 27, 2014). Abigail is negotiating between historical trends and her 21st century, Midwestern experience of Orthodox Christianity.

Father Simeon said,

If I were the rector, we would have continued with women holding the napkins, because I think it's wrong. I probably would have gotten censured, because when you talk about tradition, we don't have an "Old World" ethnic tradition. We have an American tradition. Another tradition that is changing is [that a baby] girl is not allowed to be taken into the altar because she's unclean. Well, we take them in the altar. There's no reason for it. (Fr. Simeon and Elizabeth, July 14, 2014)

Father Simeon interrogates the theology behind the ritual he must perform as an Orthodox priest. He chooses to follow his own conscience in interpreting tradition rather than answering to an authority with whom he does not agree. The key, however, is the inability of Orthodox hierarchs to enforce what they cannot observe. As converts, clergy at St. Luke's may have the luxury of being able to ask forgiveness rather than permission when they independently interpret Church Tradition. They are empowered by their perceived ignorance.

In her study on Tatar Muslim women and competing religious traditions, communications scholar Liliya Karimova writes, "what should or should not be a religious norm—is often focused on the outward (bodily) practices and religious rituals, as opposed to the abstract theological underpinnings of a certain...tradition" (2013, 40). This is also the case with napkin-holding at St. Luke's. The bodily ritual of taking communion involves being fed by a priest, lessening the agency of the communicant. Women are even more restricted than male parishioners, however, in that, technically, they can only commune at certain times and they cannot assist in serving communion to others. Hierarchs who enforce these rules derive more from the cultural underpinnings of tradition than theological ones. As my consultant Grace said, "God never said women can't. Who made it up?" (Grace, July 8, 2014). As all members of St. Luke's are converts, many are concerned with the theology behind their actions, but few are aware of simultaneous cultural factors affecting tradition. Karimova calls this "the complexity of the relationship between one's religious identity and sources of religious knowledge" (Karimova 2013, 45). In the case of St. Luke's, religious identity is aligned with the Orthodox Church, but sources of religious knowledge are wide-ranging, from Orthodox Christian theology, the directives of hierarchs, personal spiritual experience, past religious experience, spiritual books

that are not Orthodox (C.S. Lewis and Henri Nouwen are two popular authors), and surrounding cultural norms.

Shared experience is essential to building a community identity. At St. Luke's, the shared experience of conversion to Orthodox Christianity is an essential part of its local culture. In his article "Conversion and Communitas," folklorist William Clements uses Victor Turner's concept of "communitas" to refer to "unstructured or minimally structured...community of equal individuals submitting only to the authority of the supernatural or its representatives" (Clements 1976, 41). This state is meant to be temporary, or liminal, as part of a larger rite of passage of conversion and eventual incorporation. I have written elsewhere about St. Luke's as a "liminal" community due to its American values amid a more culturally diverse Orthodox landscape (Bringerud 2013). However, part of the culture of St. Luke's rests in its egalitarianism. Clements writes, "According to the ideals of Christianity, communitas is preferable to structure...Since normative communitas is innately doomed to reversion to structure, the folk Christian may make an effort, as communitas slips from him, to recapture his original experience of this unstructured state" (Clements 1976, 41-42). In Clements's study, he is referring to Pentecostal Christians who use emotionalism to achieve this state. This statement is applicable to St. Luke's, however, in that it shelters itself from oppression by quietly subverting authority. Since this effort involves the complicity of the entire community, led by its priests, this has the effect of strengthening a sense of shared identity. St. Luke's has a stronger sense of place as a local community than it does as an Orthodox one.

Sense of Place

In his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan says that “Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other” (Tuan 2008 3). In applying this to St. Luke’s, I believe that the Orthodox Church is a *place* which fills this need for security for the people of St. Luke’s. There is a category to which they belong. Furthermore, there is security in feeling that it is an authentic faith, preserving a continuous historical tradition. Many Orthodox Christians describe changelessness as the most important and distinctive aspect of their faith, and that they are the guardians of tradition. The parish as place differs from the theological body of the Orthodox Church as place; the parish is the site in which Orthodox Christianity is lived on a day-to-day basis. However, one can potentially exercise a great deal of control over the other where tradition is concerned.

In his book *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, folklorist Kent Ryden describes the way in which sense of place can have emotional ramifications. He writes,

Regional folklore encapsulates and transmits the intimate and otherwise unrecorded history of a place; it reveals the meaning of a place to be in large part a deeply known and felt awareness of the things that happened there. Such history can be either directly experienced or learned through tradition (and thus in some cases may be apocryphal); it can be personal, it can pertain to the folk group as a whole, or it can refer to people outside the group. (Ryden 1993, 63)

Ryden’s ideas can be applied to the experience of St. Luke’s in several layers, not only including the sense of the Orthodox Church as a region of Christianity, St. Luke’s as a place within Orthodox Christianity, but also St. Luke’s as a neighborhood community in the Midwest. Members of the congregation committed to moving into a rough part of town in the 1970s with the intent of starting an evangelical church, and they stayed there through their experience of conversion to Orthodox Christianity. Abigail, for example, related to me that she felt God intended for her family to live in that neighborhood, and it is this calling which guided her

decision to stay, both in the church and the neighborhood itself. When her children struggled variously with friends and school in the neighborhood, Abigail said:

I had to keep telling myself, “This was where God planted me.” This was His will. My children didn't continue at St. Luke's, but I cannot let myself think that we made a mistake, because I can't question my faith in God. (Abigail, July 27, 2014)

For Abigail, sense of place is both her sense of belonging in the neighborhood and the church community. She has mapped the memories of her life into the community, and even her belief in God hangs on this sense of place. Abigail and others chose to settle in a particular Midwestern neighborhood, and thus make that space meaningful. Ryden writes that “regional folklore indicates the emotions which local residents attach to their place and the components of their place, feelings which arise from a knowledge of place-based history and identity” (Ryden 1993, 66). Abigail describes her community as a family. She said,

I feel like I will always be a child in the Church. I am there to worship, to be in the family of God, and to see what my role is. And it could change, you know. But even in a family with young children, they have chores or duties that make them feel good about serving their family, and to me, [napkin-holding is similar]. (Abigail, July 27, 2014)

Abigail's sense of place in the community was related to holding the napkin during communion, and now she is searching to find out how else her sense of being a “child” in the church can be expressed. She contrasted her role with those of “our priests, our deacons, our subdeacons, [and] people in authority in the church.” Abigail does not call those with authority parent-figures, but it is certainly not a far leap, given that priests are called “father,” and bishops are called “master.” Abigail locates herself in this cosmos, and the family structure is yet another means by which she creates a sense of place.

Grace also described her sense of place in the community in familial terms. She said, “I truly love our close-knit community, our church. And that is definitely one of the reasons I stayed [after the napkin incident]...If I needed anything, I could call anybody on that church phone list, and they would help me...I can trust everyone in my community” (Grace, July 8, 2014). Grace has a toddler, and she elaborated on the level of trust she has for all members of St. Luke’s by saying that she feels confident that she could leave her child with any of them. She locates her sense of place by how much trust she has for others in the community. She is secure in the knowledge that people in the community can lean on one another if anyone needs help.

Madeline explained:

I am Orthodox not because of the Orthodox faith but because of the people. From the very first time I came to St. Luke’s, it reminded me of what it says in Scripture about the very early days of the church, when people would say, “See how they love one another!” I want to be a part of that. (Madeline, June 15, 2014)

Madeline’s quote is powerful, and it locates the power of St. Luke’s in its sense of place as a community. When new members convert to Orthodox Christianity by joining St. Luke’s, it is not necessarily The Orthodox Church that they are attracted to as much as the loving members of the congregation and the personal relationships congregants have with their priests.

One last quote that I felt was key to an understanding of sense of place at St. Luke’s came from Jeanette, who said, “Personally, I don’t feel that anyone has asked anything of me that was too difficult. And I believe that God is going to sort it all out in the end...I know that our priests love us and respect us, and I have no problem with it” (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). At St. Luke’s, the trust that community members have in one another extends to the priests themselves, who must administer the theological interpretation of more remote bishops. Since congregants trust

their clergy, even though they may disagree with Bishop Matthias's ruling, their trust in their priests overrides that disagreement. They feel supported by their clergy, and that is enough.

In terms of contrasting the sense of place at St. Luke's with sense of place elsewhere, Jeanette said, "I just try to respect where people come from. If I'm going someplace where women have to have their heads covered, I respect that, and I don't get angry about it... You have to meet people where they are" (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). For Jeanette, meeting people "where they are" means not imposing her sense of place in the church upon other people at other churches. This can be extended to the way in which she views Bishop Matthias's interpretation of tradition, affecting St. Luke's. She believes his own sense of tradition informs his decisions, and she is not threatened by his difference. Jeanette's quote connects with Primiano's discussion of vernacular religion in which he says that since all religion involves interpretation, all individual practice is inherently vernacular (Primiano 1995, 44). As I approach this case study, however, I see a problem in between authority and obedience. All religious interpretation and individual practice may be inherently vernacular, but it is certainly not all created equal. Those in positions of authority in the church, especially bishops and others removed from small communities, carry greater consequence.

Authority, Piety & Obedience

As my consultant Carol said, "If we're part of the Orthodox Church, there are some rulings we have to go by, even if we feel that it's not totally right" (Carol, June 29, 2014). Carol even went so far as to say, "I think it is the Church that eliminates... I don't believe that that is God's way of thinking." Carol expresses what I believe is crucial to the understanding of sense of place in the Orthodox Church at St. Luke's. For some, obedience to authority as the divinely-

inspired interpreters of tradition is more important than one's own understanding of the will of God. In her study of a Romanian Orthodox monastery, anthropologist Alice Forbess argues, "Rules are not considered to be self-explanatory, and their application is subject to intuition rather than reason" (Forbess 2010, 147). This creates some conflict about whether the spirit or the letter of church doctrine is more important, and certain monks are sought out for interpretive counsel who possess "charisma" or divine revelation.

Members of St. Luke's, while obedient to hierarchical directives, do not rely solely on them for divine interpretation. Recall Abigail's anecdote about belonging to the neighborhood and church community of St. Luke's because of feeling that God led her family there. Complications between answering to an authority's interpretation of the will of God versus an individual's occur especially in the experience of congregants coming from Protestant traditions in which there was greater emphasis on a personal relationship with God. Carol, for example, grew up in an Episcopalian Church, which she described as a "liberal" atmosphere.

Jeanette, by contrast, grew up in a Pentecostal church, in which women "had to wear long skirts, they could not cut their hair, there was no makeup. And, you know, there are times when things like that kind of get stirred up in me, those memories, and I have to deal with that. I don't want to let that become a stumbling block" (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). As Jeanette sees it, the struggles that she has "personally, [have] nothing to do with the Orthodox Church." She has a broader perspective on the relationships among God, clergy, and laity. She said, "For me, it is the true faith, and I know it's not carried out perfectly because we're people. We're fallen, we're sinners. But I believe in God, and I believe in the faith. And I think when things happen that are not carried out perfectly, God has a way of taking care of that." As it happens, Bishop Matthias

was barely in office for two years before he was asked to step down as bishop due to a scandal with one of his own parishioners.

Abigail's perspective on the same issue was that priests and deacons have great responsibility, and therefore, they must be kept in prayer. She said, "If you really believe that the one to whom you are obedient is praying about these things, and feels in their spirit that this is what God is telling them to do...we just need to trust that. We need to keep our priests and our deacons, and all those who are part of our liturgy in prayer" (Abigail, July 27, 2014). The rest, as they say, is in God's hands.

Madeline's perspective on obedience is informed by the time she spent as a Roman Catholic nun. She said, "Of course, obedience there was really critical...You just did what you were told, and didn't ask any questions. That was just part of the lifestyle...one of the vows that you take is the vow of obedience" (Madeline, June 15, 2014). As a consequence, Madeline had no expectation that she would be asked to be obedient to rules that made sense; the rules themselves were not necessarily the point. She said, "You don't have to understand it. You don't have to like it. You don't have to agree with it, but you have to obey it. The same [goes for] civil laws." By comparing canon "law" with civil law, Madeline demonstrates that in all walks of life, sacred or secular, people are obligated to do things they don't agree with, and there are consequences to disobedience. She elaborated with a story about why obedience is spiritually valuable to her. When she first began attending St. Luke's, Madeline was not permitted to take communion, because she was not yet Orthodox. Though she was thinking about joining St. Luke's, she had not yet officially converted, and suddenly abstaining from the Eucharist was a difficult experience for her. She prayed as other congregants took communion around her, and she had a personal revelation. Afterwards, she said,

I told Father Maximos, “Father, I experienced a far greater union with God in that moment—some people call it a spiritual communion—than I ever had when I received it.” The desire was so great that God just extended a tremendous grace to me. I was glad that I was being obedient. (Madeline, June 15, 2014)

Madeline’s story is a powerful testament to the value of obedience and delayed gratification.

Abstaining from Eucharist caused Madeline to remember why it was important to her in the first place, and she appreciated it more after that.

For each of these women whom I interviewed, obedience had a spiritual dimension to it. I asked some of the women whether obedience and piety were synonymous. Moira said, “Not in my opinion...I feel like some of those rules...aren't really even progressing toward piety” (Moira, July 10, 2014). Madeline was surprised that I would ask such a question and said she hardly found a correlation between the two at all. She said that she felt piety was “an external manifestation of your internal communication or communion with God” and that it depended on an individual’s concept of piety. She gave the example of a woman in a Catholic church kneeling at a communion rail wearing a chapel veil. Despite her external appearance, she might not be an obedient person. She said, “In my mind, piety is not necessarily a desirable thing. I mean, the inner feeling is what is important, and not whether you’re sitting or kneeling or standing, or whether your arms are raised or folded on your lap. Where’s your heart and your mind?” (Madeline, June 15, 2014). Madeline was clear about where she felt boundaries lay between piety and obedience. Piety might be considered the evidence of faith, where obedience was a humble, inward response to God. The line is less clear for others, though. In creating spatial boundaries for women, the Orthodox Church expects obedience to those rules. Women, in turn, are honored for their obedience as a sign of their piety. The Virgin Mary is honored in the Church primarily because of her obedience to God in being a vessel for the birth of Jesus, and hers is the example that Orthodox women are exhorted to follow (Dubisch 1990, 132).

For all the women I interviewed, obedience to God was achieved primarily through obedience to authority. Their faith in God came before the belief that an authority would necessarily be right in his interpretation of divine will. However, I was skeptical of this power structure. Blind obedience could surely be open to abuse by someone with a hunger for power. In terms of the place of women in the Church, it seemed to be that subjugation was surely being achieved under the guise of spiritual obedience. Which battles were worth fighting for?

Choosing Your Battles

Abigail admitted that she believed authority had been abused in the church in the past, and could still be abused in the present. She said:

But the power of prayer is the biggest power we have been given. It's not *our* power in prayer, but...we are kind of opening ourselves up to God when we pray, because we're asking for *His* will to be done, not what *we* want to do. And as everybody knows, it's hardly ever immediate. (Abigail, July 27, 2014)

Abigail also believed that God would convict abusive authority figures to repent for their sins. I interpret her statement to mean that abuse of power by hierarchs is not necessarily equal to a loss of agency. Prayer is her most powerful tool, and no bishop can take that away from her. For Abigail, the biggest concern was how people would be affected if they had anger or pain as a result of abused authority. Pain and anger can affect a person's ability to feel empowered by prayer. Thus, for Abigail, anger itself could be more spiritually harmful than an abuse of authority. She said:

For those in authority in the church, to whom much is given, much is required. If they fail in these ways, they are amoral, and the person that they wronged, especially if it's a young person, may have a lot of questions and a lot of fear. They may transfer that [distrust] to anyone else in authority, especially in the church. And then it could be that they feel God let them down. (Abigail, July 27, 2014)

I find Abigail's comment to be especially poignant because of her earlier quote about being a metaphorical child in the church—a child of God. Abigail's humility before God is not equivalent to vulnerability before clergy, however. She is careful to distinguish between God and church authority. She is more concerned that young people are not able to make that distinction and will be more hurt, as a consequence, by the human failings of clergy. Abigail responds with her own power “to pray for everybody,” to safeguard the vulnerable from harm and the priests from failure to shepherd.

Jeanette emphasized that priests are not only responsible for parishioners; parishioners are responsible for themselves. She said,

You have personal responsibility too. I mean, if a bishop tries to convince you that you should be doing something that in your heart you know is not right, you don't just say “Ok.” I'm just saying that I'm not particularly troubled about [napkin-holding] personally. (Jeanette, June 21, 2014)

Jeanette and most of the other women I interviewed said that napkin-holding in itself was not important enough for staging a rebellion. On the other hand, if the rule about denying women communion every fourth Sunday were enforced at St. Luke's, they might feel differently.

Jeanette said, “I would have to think about that. I can't imagine that our priests would do that.

But, our priests may not always be our priests.” Madeline said, “That's one that I probably just wouldn't obey...I would say, ‘Well, this is between You and me, God, what do you think?’

[laughs]” (Madeline, June 15, 2014). Moira, similarly, said, “I do not feel oppressed as a woman

in our specific congregation...I think there are a lot of man-made rules, and I'm ok with them being there...I don't always follow them” (Moira, July 10, 2014). Moira went on to say that,

“There is a right and wrong. Not everyone has their own compass...maybe I'm empowered by it...But I have a line of my own too. I don't just [obey] because some monks thought this was a

good idea.” Moira does not see herself as subjugated by doctrine or specific clergy. She has her own moral compass, and she uses her own sense of right and wrong to make decisions.

Each of these women had vernacular approaches to their faith which differed from the vernacular approach taken by their bishop during these events. Ultimately, not being allowed to hold napkins anymore did not pose a real threat to how these women conceived of their own agency. Madeline said, of holding napkins, that, “It’s just one of those things that’s not that big of a deal” (Madeline, June 15, 2014). To her, as long as someone was available to hold the napkin, male or female, it was unimportant who actually did it. Moira suggested that it was actually a relief not to have to hold the napkin anymore. She said, “We used to have schedules; people didn’t show up,” and thus, the burden tended to fall on the same women (Moira, July 10, 2014). Furthermore, if there were extra services for Lent or another Church season, then it would be even more difficult to organize who might be available to assist. Moira summed up, “I was willing to pass the torch on to someone else.” Madeline and Moira were practical about women no longer being permitted to hold napkins. For them, it matters less *how* they participate in the church than *that* they are participating. Grace expressed something similar when she said, “Maybe I’d be more upset if there weren’t more things that women can do. I can bake the bread, I can decorate the church. I just think our church really tries to include everyone” (Grace, July 8, 2014). Grace’s comment comes back to sense of place. A sense of inclusive community is more important at St. Luke’s than policing equality in ritual. Indeed, it was Father Maximos who asked Archbishop Job in the first place if women could be napkin-holders, because he was specifically looking for ways to include more people. Agency is located in choice, and the women of St. Luke’s are empowered by priests and, formerly, an archbishop, who try to create options.

I argue that the women in this congregation are empowered by their sense of place in St. Luke's. As converts, they are influenced by the traditions which brought them into Orthodox Christianity, and yet they were able to choose Orthodox Christianity for themselves. Furthermore, they are surrounded by cultural dialogue in the United States, which includes both the topic of women's rights and the questioning of authority, from church leaders to the president. Father Timothy said,

I would say that the public criticism of hierarchs that takes place in this country does not take place in Russia or Greece or whatever. Which is not to say that there are not controversies, but you know, they're pretty princely over there. I think in Western culture, we have this *need* to know and *right* to know. People will use that as an argument for "We need to go back to the Mother Church" and "We need to give up this idea of having an American Church." I don't think I buy that. (Fr. Timothy, July 7, 2014)

I interpret Father Timothy's statement to mean that there is a place for an American Orthodox Church in the global landscape of Orthodox Christianity, and its role may be related to forming new sensibilities about authority. He connects this to a certain "Western" sense of entitlement, the "right to know," born of individualism, which is foreign to the foundations of Orthodox Christianity as a faith based on obedience

Conclusion

Timothy Ware writes,

In Byzantine and post-Byzantine times, Orthodox have often been far too uncritical in their attitude to the past, and the result has been stagnation. Today this uncritical attitude can no longer be maintained. Higher standards of scholarship, increasing contacts with western Christians, the inroads of secularism and atheism, have forced Orthodox in this present century to look more closely at their inheritance and to distinguish more carefully between Tradition and traditions. (Ware 1997, 197)

Ware is a theologian, and I am a folklorist. I see in the case study of St. Luke's a host of traditions, from different sources which are vying for importance. There is difficulty

distinguishing between which traditions stem from doctrine (Tradition) and those which stem from cultural custom (tradition). The Orthodox Church's cultural customs are patriarchal and as such do not overtly create opportunities for the participation of women. Converts at St. Luke's, however, have found their own ways to participate non-traditionally—from men baking prosphora to women holding napkins—by either appealing to the interpretive authority of liberal higher-ups or flying under the hierarchical radar. They have been fortunate to have negotiating, reciprocal relationship with their superiors in the past. As Jeanette said, “Our priests may not always be our priests,” and only time will tell how much interpretive freedom St. Luke's will have in the future (Jeanette, June 21, 2014). Uncritical attitudes may have to give way to a deeper examination of their inheritance. When that time comes, their loyalties—to the St. Luke's community or to the Orthodox Church—will be tested.

Conclusion

My consultant Julia had a creative metaphor for describing the Orthodox Church. She described it as a pie encrusted in mold. Julia said:

The Orthodox Church, for all outward appearances, must look so dusty and dingy and full of incense and covered in crusty hierarchies and years and years of human small-t traditions. But to me, it's the whole pie.

She went on to say that the deepest, most valuable parts of the pie can only be seen by cutting into it. Despite the manmade mold, she said, “We in the Orthodox Church, I believe so strongly, have all the information we need. All of it.” This metaphor worked well to illustrate that in the Orthodox Church, there are deep teachings about faith and community to which innumerable cultural barnacles are attached, some of which masquerade as theology (or are, in fact, individual vernacular theology which tries to take on the authority of mass dogma). Nonetheless, the pie is not fractured; it is whole. It may be useful to ask whether the wholeness of the pie filling can be accessed through this moldy exterior, or if the interior can be damaged by this exterior. My consultants would likely say yes to the former and no to the latter—after all, for those who converted, they managed to find something deeply personal and meaningful within the foreign, and for those who were Orthodox-born, they stayed in their faith toward a meaningful outcome in spite of knowing the Orthodox Church's shortcomings well. The *way* in which that outcome is meaningful, however, differs from person to person.

I came into my research expecting that I would find a hard-and-fast dichotomy between those who convert and those who are born into Orthodox Christianity. I likewise expected that those who convert to the faith would necessarily have to reject Western culture in order to embrace a counter-intuitive belief system. Perhaps I also expected that the Orthodox-born might find greater latitude in interpretive practice in North America than in their countries of origin. I

was wrong about all of these things, and it is my privilege to have interviewed so many about their experiences which disproved my hypotheses.

When I consider my objections to the Orthodox Church, many of them are predicated upon a rigid institution. As several of my consultants pointed out, Orthodox Christianity has survived, in many ways, *in spite* of its hierarchical structure rather than because of it. Clive, for example, told me the story of St. Nectarios who was not treated justly by his bishop, but Clive concluded, “He’s now regarded as a saint. No one’s canonizing his bishop!” The moral of this story is that injustice may be inevitable, but some are remembered as being on the right side of history. Clive said:

The responsibility for keeping the faith is not given to any one office; it is given entirely to the people of God. [There is] this very hard-to-pin-down notion in Orthodoxy of where the infallibility of the Church resides, because we don’t have anyone who can speak fully for the faith.

He repeated that the Orthodox Church is a conciliar institution. It is not a democracy, because there is definite hierarchy, but decisions are made in priestly dialogue. Clive concluded that because of the conciliar nature of the Orthodox Church, “We don’t *need* someone who has been given a guarantee in advance of the Truth.” Esme said something similar when she acknowledged that there had been abuses of authority in the Orthodox Church’s past, but she maintains that:

God is good. And the Church is still alive and kicking...Horrible things happen, but ultimately, the goodness of God has the potential to heal what is broken. And it may not be this side of eternity, but the next. I think the history of the Church is one that evolves and is absolutely impacted by the lives of the people who are in it.

Esme sees the Orthodox Church as an institution made of imperfect people. Her faith is not in the institution as much as it is in God and the long view of history. She summarized her view by saying, “The Church is always people.”

My research demonstrates that what keeps the Orthodox Church afloat in a globalizing world is not an inflexible institution but the creative individuals within it. The work of adaptation is done significantly by the laity—how they share traditions with one another, learn new languages, and negotiate between the old and the new. Orthodox Christianity is not only realized in unique ways in each country where it finds itself; it is also realized uniquely in every local community. It is the people of the faith who decide what it will be, even if the process of adaptation can be painfully slow.

While institutions cannot dictate individual spirituality, the former can make the latter more difficult. Between the international politics of the U.S. and Russia, of which the Orthodox Church is a part (Higgins 2018), to the crisis of some Orthodox Christian converts in North America joining hate groups (The Editors 2018a, b, and c), there is no question that political entities have a stake in defining what Orthodox Christianity will look like in the future. These entities are not served by values like equality or democracy, which have been foundational in North America, leading some to a crisis of how to adapt the faith in a Western context.

In my research, I have observed that those who convert to Orthodox Christianity engage differently with historical and cultural legacies than those who are born into the faith. Likewise, different individuals value different aspects of their faith. Converts may be more drawn into the beauty and mystery of liturgy, and the Orthodox-born may be more drawn to comfort in the

familiar. The experiences of each individual affect his or her expectations of community as well. Individuals are challenged to grow in their interactions with one another.

The transmission of tradition takes on new forms in North America, in the lands of Orthodox Christian diaspora. Those who were born into the faith may understand different aspects of it to be essential rather than those who came to it later in life. Their different experiences of the faith have revealed to them different facets of its riches. Together, in a new context, both converts and Orthodox-born believers decide what aspects of the church's heritage will become its legacy in North America.

Women in particular play an important role in this process. They are empowered by the freedom to interpret tenets of Orthodox Christian doctrine in ways that fit their own lives through vernacular theology and vernacular feminisms. Sometimes, when these narratives do not fit the vernacular interpretations of authority figures, this interpretive freedom is quietly subversive. Some priests take a hands-off approach to individual spirituality while others, as in chapter five, place overt limitations on the interpretation of tradition. Currently, mainstream interpretations of Orthodox Christian tradition, especially with regard to modesty and discipline, have specifically gendered outcomes, meant to mirror Christ's relationship with the Church. The cultivation of discipline and obedience for both men and women is meant to help believers cope with the inevitable suffering of life and thereby bring one closer to God.

In the twenty-first century, there have been varied responses to globalization within the Orthodox Church. On one end of the spectrum, there are Orthodox Christians who embrace a nationalist, protectionist narrative, opposing globalization. On the opposite end of the spectrum, represented by the Ecumenical Patriarch, there is the position to view the Orthodox Church as an

institution which transcends national boundaries. The latter could be a useful model for Orthodox Christianity in North America, especially considering the roles diaspora and cultural hybridization have played in its development. However, jurisdictions along national cultural lines and anti-Western sentiment both at home and abroad have made this difficult. This may be especially troubling for those who convert to Orthodox Christianity seeking a sense of stability in a frenetic world.

The long history of the Orthodox Church exemplifies the Twin Laws of Folklore (Toelken 1996, 39). All traditions exist between the compulsion to ossify and the necessity to adapt. Individual Orthodox Christians have long mediated between the “spirit” and the “letter” of their faith, whether members of the clergy or the laity. For most, adaptation is a personal, quiet process, possibly unknown to other members of their community. Even those who view the Orthodox Church as a bulwark against global processes are working within a specific vernacular interpretation of their tradition. Folklore is the study of tradition in communities. It is a field with a unique focus on human relationships and the shared experiences which sustain them. My study of converts to Orthodox Christianity in North America is, at its heart, a study about the inner workings of communities. Most of those whom I interviewed find that the peace that they experience in the liturgy far outweighs clerical politics. The riches of their faith are realized in their love for one another, and each relationship is a site for experiencing God. These relationships are the mortar by which they will build a “future out of the past” (Glassie 2003, 176).

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Appendix A: Timeline of Orthodox Christianity¹

This timeline highlights some of the events addressed in chapter one.

0 CE/AD—Jesus Christ is born

33—Jesus Christ is crucified, and his disciples travel throughout the Roman Empire spreading his message

49—Jews are expelled from Rome (we may ask whether this was due to clashes with Christians)

80—Emperor Domitian institutes emperor worship among Roman citizens

284-305—Diocletian is emperor of Rome

285—Diocletian splits the Roman Empire into two halves, with the Western capital in Rome and the Eastern capital in Byzantium

301—Armenia adopts Christianity

303—Diocletian issues four edicts ordering church buildings to be destroyed, sacred writings burned, clergy to be imprisoned and forced to make sacrifices to the emperor, Christians to lose civil rights, and all people must sacrifice to the emperor on pain of death

306—Constantine I (the Great) assumes power

312-313—Constantine makes it legal to practice Christianity via the Edict of Milan; the religion becomes popular over the next 70 years in the Empire.

325—The First Ecumenical Council is held in the city of Nicaea; the bishop Arius is condemned as a heretic (his teachings become known as the “Arian heresy”); Jesus is declared “consubstantial,” or of a single essence with God the Father

330— Byzantium is renamed Constantinople

337—Constantine dies and converts to Christianity on his deathbed

380—Theodosius I (379-395) declares that Christianity is the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, and it is illegal to practice any other faith. The Church and its clergy begin to emulate imperial hierarchy, customs, and style.

381—Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople writes and adopts the Nicene Creed

410—Rome is sacked by the Visigoths; Western half of the Roman Empire falls

¹ Events in the timeline which are not discussed in chapter one are from Bray 1997.

431—The Third Ecumenical Council condemns Nestorius as a heretic

432—St. Patrick brings Christianity to Ireland

451—The Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon condemns belief in monophysitism (i.e. that Jesus was only human, as opposed to both human and divine simultaneously); churches in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Syria break with the church in Constantinople. These churches will later become known as the Coptic Church.

553—The Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople attempts to reconcile with monophysite believers, but fails

589—A synod (meeting of bishops) in Toledo, Spain, adds the Filioque Clause² to the Nicene Creed. Theological tensions begin to grow between the Eastern and Western halves of Christendom; both sides begin competing to convert new groups.

680—The Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople attempts to reconcile with monophysites and abandons the effort

726—Emperor Leo II condemns those who pray with icons (iconoclasm) and begins to persecute them in Western Europe

787—The Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea condemns iconoclasm

800—Charlemagne becomes Holy Roman Emperor in the West

811-843—The Byzantine court revives iconoclasm

862—Cyril and Methodius start a mission to convert the Slavs

863 or 846—Bulgaria converts to Christianity

988—The Kievan Rus' convert to Christianity

1014—Rome officially adopts the Filioque Clause to the Nicene Creed; Constantinople no longer commemorates the pope as an honored bishop

1054—The Great Schism—the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople excommunicate each other, creating the Catholic and Orthodox Churches respectively. The Byzantine Empire and the Holy Roman Empire no longer support one another militarily, hastening the fall of Byzantium.

² This clause, more or less, has to do with the doctrine of the Trinity, i.e. a sacred mystery in which God is thought of as three persons in one nature, including Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Filioque Clause claims that Jesus “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” where the earlier version of the Creed said Jesus proceeded only from the Father. This clause is important, because it later became a reason why the Catholic and Orthodox Churches separated from one another.

1067—Seljuk Turks invade Byzantine territory

1095—Emperor Alexius I seeks help from the pope to resist the Turks; the First Crusade is launched by the Roman Catholic Church.

1182—Massacre of the Latins, in which Catholic residents of Constantinople were killed by the Orthodox

1203-1204—Siege of Constantinople by Latin Crusaders

1219—The Serbian Orthodox Church, led by St. Sava, becomes independent of Constantinople

1237—Mongols overtake Kiev and occupy the territories of the Kievan Rus'; the Mongols' tolerance for religious diversity led to a golden age for the Orthodox Church. Orthodox leaders in Kiev and Muscovy became spokesmen for the Rus' to their Mongol overlords.

1325—Muscovy becomes the seat of the Rus'ian Metropolitan

1362—The Grand Duchy of Lithuania overtakes Kiev and gains most of contemporary Ukrainian territory. This shift in land ownership contributed to Western Ukraine having more Western European cultural influences and Eastern Ukraine having more Russian influences.

1438-1439—Council of Florence attempts to reunite the Eastern and Western Churches, but fails

1453—The Ottomans conquer Constantinople, and the Byzantine Empire comes to an end.

1459—Serbia is conquered by the Ottomans. The Orthodox Church was oppressed by the Ottomans, and it became a symbol of resistance against them.

1538—Romanian territories of Moldavia and Wallachia subdued by the Ottomans. Again, the Orthodox Church is a symbol of resistance and Romanian culture.

1547—Russian monarchs begin to be called tsars, after “Caesar,” in remembrance of Byzantium.

1569—The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is established, contributing to Western European cultural influences in Ukrainian Orthodox Christianity.

1596—Council of Brest—Orthodox bishops from Kiev unify with Rome, creating the Greek Catholic Church (or Eastern Rite Catholic Church). This event would later prompt a split in the Russian Orthodox Church.

1598—The Ecumenical Patriarch confirms the Russian Orthodox Church as a Patriarchate.

1620—Kiev once again gains Orthodox Christian leadership, moving away from Greek Catholicism

1666-1667—A Synod renounces Russian “Old Believers” (practitioners who resisted the reforms of Bishop Nikon) creating a schism in the Russian Orthodox Church

1741—First Orthodox Christian liturgy is celebrated in North America, in Alaska, by a Russian bishop

1794—Russian missionaries introduce found the first successful Orthodox Christian mission in North America, on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

1812—Napoleon invades Russia and loses. Both the invasion and Russia’s victory lead to an anti-Western narrative. Russian Orthodox Christianity becomes a symbol of national character in contrast with the West.

1870—Nicholas Bjerring becomes the first person in North America to convert to Orthodox Christianity

1877—Romania gains independence from Ottoman rule. The Orthodox Church is a symbol of new national identity.

1878—Congress of Vienna liberates Serbia and Montenegro from Ottoman rule. The Orthodox Church, again, becomes a symbol of new national identity.

1879—The Church of Serbia is recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch

1881—Ukrainian language is banned in Eastern Ukraine by Russian rulers. This is part of a larger historical pattern in which Russia views Ukraine as its own territory, including control of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

1885—The Church of Romania is recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch

1897—First Orthodox Christian liturgy is celebrated in Canada on a Ukrainian settlement in Alberta.

Late 19th century—First wave of Romanian Diaspora to the U.S. and Canada, mostly young men looking for work opportunities. Church communities are established by these groups.

1914—World War I begins; Treason trials held in Ukraine accusing Orthodox believers of Russophilia.

1917—Bolshevik Revolution in Russia (March-November); churches founded by Russian emigres in North America are granted temporary autocephaly by the Patriarch of Moscow

1918—World War I ends

1918-1924—Russian civil war is ongoing

1920's—Russian Diaspora to the U.S. and Canada in the aftermath of war and revolution. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia is established.

1920—The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church is established.

1921—The African Orthodox Church is founded in the U.S. by Father Raphael Morgan

1922—The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is founded.

1923—Orthodox churches in Romania, Poland, Antioch, Greece, Constantinople, Bulgaria, and most of North America adopt the new calendar for feast days (“Revised Julian Calendar,” mostly aligning with the Gregorian). The Russian Orthodox Church maintains the Julian calendar.

1929—Joseph Stalin becomes the leader of the Soviet Union; Corneliu Codreanu starts the Romanian Orthodox right-wing political movement, the Iron Guard; the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine is forcibly united to the Orthodox Church

1930—Churches in Ukraine are closed and dismantled.

1930-1932—Stalin instigates a man-made famine to quell resistance in parts of the USSR; 6 million people die.

1934-1938—Stalin sends millions of his constituents, suspected of resistance, to labor camps, including religious believers

1938—King Carol II of Romania forms a dictatorship deposing the Iron Guard (a fascist, nationalist Orthodox group); clergy in Romania are forbidden to use spiritual authority in support of political propaganda

1939—World War II begins; King Carol II declares neutrality; Ukraine is annexed by Russia

1940—King Carol II is deposed, replaced by Michael I, and Ion Antonescu becomes Prime Minister. Over 9,000 right-wing Orthodox believers are imprisoned. Romania joins the Axis powers.

1941—Nazis invade Yugoslavia and Ukraine; monasteries and churches are destroyed, and believers are sent to concentration camps.

1943—Antonescu is deposed in a coup led by Michael I; Romania joins the Allied forces. Soviet troops occupy parts of Romania.

1944—Josip Broz Tito, of the Communist Party, becomes Prime Minister of Yugoslavia. Patriarch Nicodim of Romania urges believers to support the USSR (in *symphonia*) to resist Nazis.

1945—World War II ends; Nazis are defeated

1946—The Greek Catholic Church is abolished in Ukraine; believers are forced to convert to Orthodox Christianity or at least pretend to do so. Communist president Petru Groza is elected in Romania.

1947—Michael I is forced to abdicate and leave Romania.

1948—Patriarch Justinian, a Communist sympathizer, is elected in Romania. The Greek Catholic Church is abolished in Romania; believers are forced to convert to Orthodox Christianity or at least pretend to do so. Romanian government must approve any members of Orthodox clergy. Tito cuts ties with Stalin, separating from the Soviet Bloc. A pan-Orthodox meeting is held in Moscow, and the Yugoslavian patriarch denies that the USSR is using the Orthodox Church for political gain.

1950—Protestant denominations are grouped together by the government in Romania.

1953—Stalin dies, and Nikita Khrushchev takes over leadership of the USSR; he uses the KGB to persecute all religious believers through the 1960's. In Romania, Petru Groza steps down, and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, leader of the Communist Party, replaces him as Prime Minister.

1958—Soviet troops withdraw from Romania. There is a crackdown on clergy and intellectuals, since the government fears the populace will have anti-Communist sentiments.

1959—There is a wave of arrests in Romania targeting clergy who formerly supported the Iron Guard.

1963—Pope John XXIII intervenes with the Soviet government to secure the release of the head of the Greek Catholic Church

1965—Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej dies of lung cancer; Nicolae Ceaușescu replaces him as General Secretary. Ceaușescu initially uses the Orthodox Church as a vehicle for propaganda.

1970—The Patriarch of Russia formally recognizes the Orthodox Church in America as autocephalous; the Ecumenical Patriarch does not recognize this decision.

1977—Greek Catholic Church is reinstated in Romania. Ceaușescu begins sending religious people and dissidents to labor camps.

1980—Tito dies in Yugoslavia; Communist policies toward religion decline.

1986—Mikhail Gorbachev takes over the USSR and institutes *perestroika*, or restructuring

1987—Slobodan Milošević takes over Yugoslavia.

1988—Celebration of 1,000 years of Orthodox Christianity in Eastern Europe

1989—Nicolae Ceaușescu is murdered on Christmas Day, and the Communist regime officially ends in Romania.

1990—Frank Schaeffer converts to Orthodox Christianity, bringing some publicity to the faith in North America.

1991—Fall of the Soviet Union.

1991-1992—Yugoslavia breaks up into Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and others.

1991-1995—Wars in Croatia and Bosnia over national identity among Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholics, and Bosnian Muslims.

1998-1999—Wars in Kosovo over national identity among Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholics, and Bosnian Muslims.

2007—Russian Academy of Sciences writes a letter to Vladimir Putin protesting the involvement of the Orthodox Church in public education and the military. The Moscow Patriarchate responds that the Orthodox faith may not be negotiable with Western democratic values.

2008—Kosovo becomes an independent nation; Serbia opposes their independence, seeing it as the cradle of Orthodox Christianity.

2009—Patriarch Kirill of Moscow supports Putin's views on empire, promoting violence against members of all other faiths.

2014—Four leaders of the Pentecostal Church in Ukraine are kidnapped and murdered by Russian separatists; Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate secedes from the Moscow Patriarchate as a result.

2018—Serbian Orthodox Church plans to change its name to Serbian Orthodox Church-Pec Patriarchate to incorporate ownership of a religious site in Kosovo. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople takes measures toward granting autocephaly to Orthodox churches in Ukraine; the Russian Orthodox Church protests, viewing Ukrainian Orthodox churches as within its purview

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Acolyte: Also called an altar boy, this is an assisting role usually filled by boys, but occasionally adult men. Duties frequently include lighting candles or carrying implements for priests, such as the Bible, tapers, and ripidions (ceremonial fans). Acolytes do not need to be ordained to serve, and they are the lowest rank in the hierarchy allowed to go behind the *iconostasis*.

Cantor: Also called a reader, a cantor is a designated singer who leads the congregation in the service. Since all Orthodox services are sung and there are call-and-response portions of the service, a cantor is indispensable.

Catechism: Teachings in theology. Aspiring converts to Orthodox Christianity are usually required to go through some form of catechism class with a priest before being received into the church.

Catechumen: A person undergoing *catechism* with the intent to convert to Orthodox Christianity.

Chrismation: A rite of passage by which a *catechumen* becomes a member of the Orthodox Church.

Churching: This is a ritual undergone by women forty days after giving birth. The mother will have stayed away from the church for forty days, without *Eucharist*, and this ritual is necessary to allow her to enter the worship space and receive *Eucharist* once again. The ceremony is usually performed just outside the doors to the nave (central worship in the church building), and the woman is prayerfully cleansed from the uncleanness (physical or spiritual) of childbirth. There is a churching ritual for the baby as well, symbolically incorporating them into the church community. Traditionally, male babies are carried behind the *iconostasis* in this ritual, as they may one day be priests, deacons, or acolytes, while female babies are churched in the nave.

Convert: A person who was not born Orthodox, but becomes Orthodox by choice, usually as an adult. A person may come from another Christian tradition and still convert to Orthodox Christianity.

Cradle: Some converts to Orthodox Christianity refer to those who are Orthodox-born as “cradle-Orthodox,” or “cradle” for short.

Deacon: This is an ordained position in the Orthodox Church just below the position of priest. Deacons have specific roles in the liturgy, including censing the church and congregation, and being part of call-and-response prayers.

Eucharist: Also called communion, this is bread and wine, understood to mystically be the body and blood of Jesus Christ, consumed during the liturgy. This ritual is modeled on the Last Supper, celebrated by Jesus and his disciples before his crucifixion, which in turn took influence from a number of Jewish rituals.

Fasting: This is a routine practice during different seasons of the church calendar. It is typical to fast from both meat and dairy products, though there is great individual latitude, based on

personal needs. In addition, many Orthodox Christians abstain from meat and dairy products on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Icon: A sacred, painted image depicting a saint, an event from the Bible, or any other holy scene in Orthodox Christian tradition.

Iconostasis: A wall of icons separating the nave of the church building from the altar space.

Liturgy: Also called the divine liturgy, this is the worship service performed on Sundays (and some feast days) culminating in *Eucharist*.

Oikonomia: Economy, or latitude in how a priest dispenses guidance toward parishioners based on their individual needs.

Parastas: The Romanian word for a memorial service. These are done at specific time intervals during the first year after the person's death. They may also be done annually on the anniversary of death. The service is also called a *mnemosynon* in Greek and a *panikhida* in Slavonic.

Pascha: The Orthodox term for Easter. Pascha is not always on the same date as Western Christians' celebration of Easter, as it is calculated by lunar calendar from the date of Passover.

Preoteasa: This is the Romanian title for a priest's wife. Where a priest is called "Father" in English, if he is married, his wife will have a title also. Other languages call her *Matushka* (Russian), *Khouria* (Arabic), and *Presbytera* (Greek).

Prosphora: The loaf of bread used for the Eucharistic ritual. In Orthodox Christianity, the loaf of bread is made with a specific traditional recipe while certain prayers are said. The loaf is stamped with a symbol before it is baked which marks it as *prosphora*. This important work has traditionally been the purview of women in the Orthodox Church, though today it may be baked by anyone in the congregation.

Reader: Sometimes called a cantor, this is an office of the Orthodox Church below that of acolyte, involving leading the congregation in prayer and song. Someone who has been *tonsured* (see below) to the office will wear a black cassock.

Riasa: The Romanian word for the robe, or cassock, worn by ordained men, including cantors, deacons, and priests. *Riasas* may be worn under additional vestments for priests and deacons, but when in the church building especially, a black or gray *riasas* is worn over street clothes.

Theologoumena—Theological opinion, usually referring to a priest's opinion. Singular form, *theologoumenon*.

Theophany: This is the festal celebration of Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist (or Forerunner). In the Orthodox Church, it is a time for blessings with holy water—both congregants themselves during the liturgy, and also their homes in house blessing rituals.

Theotokos: Literally “God-bearer” in Greek. This is the Orthodox term for Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.

Tonsure: This is a ritual by which four locks of hair on the top of the head are cut in the shape of a cross, as an act of obedience. This ritual may be part of a larger ordination service through which someone becomes a priest or a deacon, but it may also be used for infants during baptism, or to designate someone to the office of *reader*.

Vespers: An evening prayer service without Eucharist. A priest is not required for a vespers service.