



‘A Prophet Has No Honour in the Prophet’s Own Country’¹: How Russian Is Russian Evangelicalism?

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Abstract

The article discusses how the history of forced marginality and isolation of Russian-speaking evangelical Christians has shaped their theology and social ministry. Russian evangelicalism is a glocal phenomenon. It fully adheres to universal evangelical tenets, while it is shaped as a socioculturally and linguistically Russian phenomenon. Its Russianness is manifested in the construction of a Russian evangelical narrative formulated as a response to the cultural and political discourse of modern Russia, and to Orthodox theology and application as evangelicals see it. This narrative is constructed with the language of the Synodal Bible in its present-day interpretation. Russian evangelicals are constantly accused of western influence, proselytism in the canonical land of the Russian Orthodox Church, and mistreating and misleading people. The article also argues against these accusations, emphasizing the history, hermeneutics, and social ministries of Russian evangelicalism.

Keywords: *Russian evangelical Christianity; glocalization; quinque solae; Russian Synodal Bible*

This article is an account of Russian-speaking evangelical Christianity, and its history and impact on present-day Russia. Reviewing the one-hundred-and-fifty-year history of evangelicalism in Russia, I demonstrate how the oppression, marginalization, and isolation of evangelicals in late Imperial and especially Soviet Russia shaped its present-day theology and social ministry. I further discuss the glocal nature of evangelicalism in Russia – its universal dogma and its local implications and applications. Second, using the example of evangelical tenets and Protestant dogmatics, I explore the construction of the Russian evangelical narrative, and its historical,

¹ John 4:44 (NRSV).

sociocultural, and especially linguistic context. The major distinguishing characteristic that makes Russian evangelicalism Russian is its history of oppression, marginalization, and isolation and the particular Russian translation of the Bible they use. Finally, I elaborate on my ethnographic study of the Baptist rehabilitation ministry to provide an empirical example of the practical implementation of biblicism. I therefore use a combination of methods: historical review; theological analysis; and the examination of ethnographic data.

Evangelicals are often portrayed in the Russian media, politics, and everyday life as a movement with three derogatory characteristics. First, they are seen as something alien to Russian culture and faith. The fact that evangelical Christianity differs from Orthodox Christianity often labels it as heresy, and therefore a proselytizing sect. However, Russian Orthodox Christianity as a social phenomenon is very heterogenous, and there is therefore no general attitude to evangelical movements (Lunkin 2017a). Second, Protestantism is seen as an agent of foreign influence, mostly western. Since the times of Khrushchev's anti-religious propaganda the *sectarians* (*sektanty*) have been seen as puppets of western ideology. Researchers of Russian Christianity also link this with the legislature on the freedom of conscience of 1997, which lists Christianity (precisely, Orthodox Christianity), Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism as 'traditional' religions (Federal Law 1997). Protestantism is therefore not perceived as one of them (see, for example, Filatov and Strukova 2003). Roman Lunkin (2017c) also regards these views in the context of the overall lack of religious freedom in today's Russia. Third, evangelicals are often associated with numerous New Age and new religious movements that earned a reputation for fraud and brainwashing in the nineties. Most of their ministries and missions are therefore met with suspicion and hostility. I aim to deconstruct all these accusations against evangelicals and Russia, and discuss their role in Russian history and society.

What is Russian evangelicalism?

Three main questions about Russian evangelical Christianity are relevant to my argument. What is evangelical Christianity? What is shared, and what is specific about its Russian-speaking branch? What makes Russian evangelicalism significant, and how does it relate to the study of present-day Russia? These questions do not merely disclose the role and niche of Russian evangelicalism in Russian society; they also respond to the widespread allegations against Russian evangelical communities as 'fraudulent western

sects'. In briefly discussing these questions in this section, and throughout the whole article in detail, I will also challenge the emphasis on the western influence and sectarianism of Russian evangelicals.

To begin, I use the term evangelical Christianity in its conventional sense, defined, for example, by David Bebbington, as a movement within Protestant Christianity that is characterized by the emphasis on the Bible as a sufficient and inerrant authority for faith and practice, Christ's substitutionary atoning sacrifice, the believer's personal conversion, and evangelizing activism (Bebbington 1989). Christ is seen as the only mediator between God and humans, and through Christ alone can one attain the kingdom of heaven. Evangelicalism is commonly made visible by the most active and most conservative movements, especially in the United States, and is thus often confused or equated with its most radical wing, known as fundamentalism (Marsden 2006).

Russian evangelicals obviously lack the political influence that their fellow believers in the US enjoy, yet they are similarly conservative theologically. However, an important clarification is needed. As is obvious from my further historical overview and discussion, I focus on the 'old' groups of Russian evangelicals, leaving aside numerous and very visible neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements in Russia that mostly emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In no way do I claim these movements are not evangelical, yet they are so diverse and complex, and differ so significantly from the 'old' congregations, that they should at least be methodologically indicated as a separate phenomenon. Such separation is not always clearly stated in sociological and anthropological studies; rather, the 'late evangelicals' are seen as descendants of the 'old' ones (Panchenko 2013; Wanner 2007). Neo-Pentecostal and charismatic communities do not generally share the theological conservatism, cultural and historical niche, and lifestyle of the 'old' communities on which I am focusing. Yet they are likewise active in the ministries of social support and are even sometimes associated with those ministries to the public, which leads to suspicion of 'dangerous sects'.

Russian evangelicalism generally fits Bebbington's model, yet its history, marginal position within the Russian religious sphere, and evangelizing and missionary narratives that have consequently been constructed have redefined its theology, dogmatics, and morals in a very specific and very Russian way (Lunkin 2017b). What does 'Russian' mean in Russian evangelicalism? In the Russian language there are two different words for 'Russian': *Russkii* roughly signifies ethnicity and language; *Rossiiskii* signi-

fies nationality. Russian evangelicalism (as well as its different variations: Russian Protestantism, the Russian Baptist movement, etc.) is conventionally defined as *Russkii* (see, for example, Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaia 2009). I do not imply any ethnic context, for Russian evangelicalism was never limited to a territory, or Russian ethnicity or identity. The communities and believers were very active in most of the territories that belonged to the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and modern Russia, including, for example, Finland and Central Asia, but also beyond them – in Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, and Canada; and the prominent evangelical leaders, to say nothing of their congregants, were people of the most diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

In using *Russkii* of evangelicalism, I emphasize the Russian language. Although Ukrainian-speaking communities played a significant role (Wanner 2007), the phenomenon formed and centred on the Russian language, even in Ukraine. Unlike the Orthodox Church (which uses Old Church Slavonic for the liturgy and Scriptures) and foreign diasporas, modern Russian has been the dominant language of worship, preaching, evangelism, and hermeneutics (with additional services held in local languages). Yet most importantly, the Russian language of evangelicals is the language of the Russian Bible. Although the Russian Synodal translation of the Bible is used by the vast majority of Russian-speaking Christians worldwide (even the Orthodox Church uses it in situations other than liturgy), the evangelical emphasis on the sufficiency of the scriptures places it at the centre of the Russian evangelical narrative of faith and practice. The language of prayer, sermons, glorification (choral singing), missions, and ministries, and even of everyday communication, thought, and reasoning, is shaped by the reading of the Synodal Bible. I have argued elsewhere that for the Russian Baptist Church, for example, the learning and internalization of the biblical narrative as it is interpreted in the particular community are the essence and mechanism of conversion (Mikeshin 2016, 159–191).

The Russian Synodal translation of the Bible has a peculiar history. It was undertaken in the nineteenth century by the Russian Bible Society. The translation took sixty years, was initiated during the reign of Alexander I, banned by his successor Nicholas I, and resumed under Alexander II. The Old Testament is based on the Masoretic Text, and the entire translation is greatly influenced by the Old Church Slavonic Bible. Despite the non-denominational mission of the Bible Society, most of its translators were Orthodox clerics (Tikhomirov 2006). Moreover, the text itself is rhythmic and poetic, which also often affects its perception and interpretation. The

creation of this translation can be compared if not to the Reformation, then at least to the history of the Vulgate, for it was the first Bible in a modern Russian anyone literate could read. The translation thus created the conditions for the emergence of evangelicals.

Before I attend to the question of the significance of Russian evangelicalism, I will briefly outline the movement's history in Russia. I will then identify the main traits of this history, and how they have shaped the evangelical movement in present-day Russia.

The history of evangelicalism in Russia

My argument focuses on three denominations: the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists. These three main movements, represented by various congregations and unions, have split and merged at different times and been active in Russia for roughly a hundred and fifty years, unlike the recently restored Lutheran communities, Salvation Army, Mormons, and other traditionally foreign groups, as well as the already mentioned charismatic groups that have emerged in the last twenty-five or thirty years.

Protestant communities and churches have been known in Russia for centuries, especially under Peter the Great, who integrated many foreign experts and specialists in the Russian economy, government, and culture. However, before the second half of the nineteenth century, Protestantism was mainly represented by foreign diasporas. The first Russian-speaking Protestant communities consisting of Russian citizens appeared in the 1860s. The movement emerged in three main regions. Under the influence of Dutch Mennonites and German Lutherans and Baptists in Ukraine, the communities of 'Shtundists' formed². They were known for their meticulous study of the Bible, uncharacteristic of the Orthodox Christians who relied on the authority of clergy and Holy Tradition (for both dogmatic and pragmatic reasons – a huge part of the population was illiterate). In the Caucasus the Molokans, an old anti-clerical group of Russian Christians persecuted as a dangerous heresy, were increasingly influential. Many Molokans found their teachings had much in common with Baptist theology, and a large number converted to the new faith, which was more structured and institutionalized. Finally, in the capital city of St Petersburg, the evangelical movement spread in aristocratic circles under the influence of a wealthy retired colonel

² *Stunde* means 'hour' in German. In Mennonite and Baptist communities it meant the time for a Bible study.

Vasily Pashkov and his English spiritual advisor Lord Radstock. Neophyte aristocrats soon actively engaged their servants in preaching, giving up their noble status and privileges in congregational meetings (Nikolskaia 2009).

Since the outset of its institutionalization, Russian evangelicalism has been subject to persecution, mostly for spreading 'heresy' and converting Orthodox people to a different faith (illegal in Imperial Russia). After the 1905 liberalization act and until the late twenties, Russian Protestants enjoyed a period of unseen freedom and skyrocketing growth (Coleman 2005). During Stalin's repressions, evangelicals lost a significant number of pastors and active congregants, some of whom managed to emigrate, though most perished. The liberalization of religious policy in the second half of the Second World War, when Stalin's government re-established the Moscow Patriarchate and allied itself with the Orthodox Church for ideological support, led to the registration and unification of the most loyal Protestant communities. The Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists was established between 1944 and 1945. It embraced the churches of evangelical Christians, Baptists, Mennonites, and some Pentecostal congregations.³

In 1961, after the start of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, the Baptists split into two camps that disagreed on the question of state registration and obedience to the legislature (Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaia 2009; Sawatsky 1981). The legislature prohibited missionary activities, religious education for children, the baptism of young people under thirty, and even children's church attendance. The rebellious reformed groups could not accept these prohibitions, for they saw them as contradicting the very principles of Christianity. Oppression and marginalization severely hit the unregistered groups (Sawatsky 1981), and these groups served as the basis for the frightening image of 'sectarians' as agents of western influence. During Brezhnev's 'period of stagnation' the oppression continued, including lengthy prison sentences, the deprivation of child custody, and the demolition of houses of prayer or private houses used for the purpose. Believers responded with the creation of underground networks, including printing houses and a Council of the Relatives of Prisoners – one of the most developed dissident organizations of its time. The persecution and oppression lasted until the liberalization of religious policy during perestroika (Nikolskaia 2009; Sawatsky 1981).

After perestroika began, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia faced a significant religious awakening. Various religious

³ Most Pentecostals, however, later left the union because of significant theological disagreements. See also Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaia 2009.

movements, old and new, flooded the country. The already existing congregations faced a huge influx of neophytes. Traditional evangelical churches grew in number, though now they had competitors in various Christian denominations and new religious movements. Evangelicals were at last allowed to spread the gospel, and the most active communities immediately started missions and ministries. The missions spread to the most distant areas like the far north to embrace all the peoples of Russia and thus fulfil God's call to spread his word (Vallikivi 2014).

In summary, besides some relatively short periods of growth and freedom, Russian evangelicals constantly faced persecution, marginalization, and isolation. They were perceived as a 'foreign sect' in a religious sphere dominated by Orthodox Christianity and Islam. They were represented as the most spectacular example of the 'opium of the people' in a formally atheistic Soviet society, with direct accusations of western support. The evidence of this support was seen in the constant smuggling of religious literature and Bibles, and campaigning on behalf of 'prisoners of faith' in Germany, Netherlands, the United States, and other countries in the Western Bloc (see, for example, Sawatsky 1981). Finally, in spite of this support, Russian evangelicals were profoundly isolated from their fellow believers abroad, having very little (and usually very formal) contact with foreign evangelical communities.

The marginal status of evangelicals continues in contemporary Russia, though without much persecution (at least thus far – see Lunkin 2017c). However, they often face discrimination and prejudice, and are perceived as a heretical and alien movement that is both dangerous and suspicious. They are rarely present in the media, and their internet activities mostly reach only fellow Christians. However, evangelicals no longer experience forced isolation, and they are therefore most active in areas where state services fail. Almost every evangelical community runs ministries for addicted, imprisoned, homeless, elderly, suicidal, orphaned, and terminally ill people. Along with NGOs and various twelve-step rehabilitation programmes, evangelical Christians are the most active actors in social support in Russia (Lunkin 2017a: 9; Mikeschin 2016). Their marginal status therefore helps them deal with marginal people, thus occupying an important if unseen niche.

The major narratives of Russian evangelicalism

Isolation and marginalization throughout the Soviet period naturally influenced the theology and hermeneutics of evangelicals. Their already

peculiar hermeneutics, based on the Synodal translation of the Bible, became extensively shaped and formulated as a response to the realities of modern Russia: Orthodox dominance in the religious sphere, and the challenges and moral values of Russian society. There are numerous examples of how these responses are formulated. I will provide the two most spectacular examples of glocal evangelical narratives – fully complying with the universal principles of evangelicalism, while characteristic of its Russian branch. The first example deals with theology, and I address it in this section; the second is an ethnographic case, which I address in the section entitled ‘The Good Samaritan ministry’.

The first narrative echoes David Bebbington’s four principles of evangelicalism, though it addresses them in more detail, and moreover, retrospectively relates them to the Reformation and development of Protestantism. *Quinque solae* (‘five only’) – the five principles of the Protestant faith formulated by Martin Luther – were initially formulated as a response to Roman Catholic dogma and its implementation. In the Russian context these principles are interpreted and reformulated as a response to Orthodox dogma and the sociocultural and moral problems of the Russian people. It is important to note first, that the Orthodox dogmatics formulated in the Orthodox Church itself are much deeper and more complex than their evangelical interpretation, and second, the *quinque solae* are rarely referenced. Instead, I use them to group the dogmatic statements of evangelicals and their implementation, and to emphasize the glocal nature of Russian evangelicalism and its historical succession.

The first principle, *sola scriptura* (by scripture alone), states that the Bible is the only authority for the Christian’s faith and practice. Moreover, the Bible is claimed to be consistent, inerrant, and sufficient. Evangelicals acknowledge that the translations may be inaccurate, but the original scripture (and evangelicals believe there is one initial original version of scripture) is God-breathed and therefore the true and pure word of God, which cannot be doubted or questioned, but must be misinterpreted by imperfect and sinful human beings. In the Russian context *sola scriptura* is influenced by the specificity of the Russian Synodal Bible, the Orthodox and Old Church Slavonic influence on it, and its application.

Sola fide (by faith alone) is another paramount tenet of Protestantism. It proclaims justification by faith alone, not by good works, and thus calls for personal conversion. Initially formulated as a response to the Catholic doctrine of good works, it serves the same purpose in debate with Russian Orthodox Christianity. Russian Orthodox soteriology states that men are

justified by faith in God and good works. Naturally, good works do not merely imply moral behaviour, as evangelicals often interpret them, but an orthopraxic system of proper conduct, involving, for example, association with the universal church within the context of apostolic succession. However, for evangelicals any morality, good conduct, or piety is a consequence and evidence of salvation. When a person repents and transforms their life, they begin to crave God's will, which results in good works. However, justification comes only through faith, and no matter how moral a person may be, without genuine personal conversion there is no salvation. In the response to Orthodox Christianity *sola fide* is used as an argument against infant baptism and church attempts to monopolize the Russian land and people. It is also used in response to non-believers and to common questions such as 'Why do good people go to hell?' and 'Why can't I be good for good's sake?'

Solus Christus (Christ alone) or *solo Christo* (by Christ alone) proclaims Christ as the only saviour and mediator between God and humans. Salvation can only be granted to those who accept Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross, and there is no other justification for humans. Besides the abovementioned debate on good works, evangelicals use *solus Christus* to argue against clergy and patron saints. Evangelical pastors and deacons do not play this role: the principle of the universal priesthood means every Christian can and must spread the gospel, and anyone versed in the Bible can preach it. (However, in conservative Russian churches this is a task exclusively for men⁴).

Soli Deo gloria (glory to God alone) proclaims that only God should be worshipped. This tenet argues against the doctrines of both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches concerning the worshipping of saints and the Virgin Mary. Evangelicals regard the saints as dead people, whether they were pious or not, and Mary is seen as merely a mortal woman, though appointed to one of the greatest missions in human history. Their worship is therefore considered idolatry and heresy. Moreover, Russian evangelicals commonly interpret human obsessions with money, fame, sex, or even pride as an obsession with one's own self, idolatry, and the worship of false gods. *Soli Deo gloria* therefore serves as an argument against these worldly issues.

Sola gratia (by grace alone) proclaims that humans do not deserve to be saved, but God's grace grants them salvation and forgives them their sins. This tenet complements the others in emphasizing Christ's atoning sacrifice

4 In extreme situations when men were absent, Russian evangelical women were sometimes engaged in preaching. See Beliakova and Dobson 2015, 40–79.

and sinful human nature. It calls for personal conversion, arguing against infant baptism and individual piety as justification. In evangelicalism *sola gratia* is also associated with the debate on predestination between Calvinists, who claim that God by his sovereign grace elects those to be saved, and Arminians, who argue for the freewill salvation of all who have heard the gospel message. Most Russian Baptists are Arminians. Their call for repentance and gospel message focuses on free will and accountability before God.

In the next section I continue by discussing the Russianness of Russian evangelicals, their authenticity, and ingenuity. I address these issues in the context of accusations against evangelicals, the strongest of which concern their assumed foreign influence and fraudulence.

Western sectarians or Russian Christians

I now address the history and role of evangelicals in their construction as a 'fraudulent western sect'. The oppression of evangelicals, and especially their marginalization during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, led to the construction of their image as sectarians (concerning the pejorative connotation of the word 'sect', see Wilson 1970). Despite their long history, cultural and spiritual roots, and long periods of isolation from global Christianity, most evangelicals are still perceived as a western-influenced movement, foreign to Russian culture and Russian Christianity, and often fraudulent. For example, the notorious anti-sectarian Orthodox apologist Alexander Dvorkin describes Baptists as 'a classical sect – it is a relatively small culturally secluded organization. The main sense of its existence lies in opposition to the country's major religious tradition' (Dvorkin n.d.). Dvorkin thus reflects the widespread take on Protestant Christianity in Russia, namely through the prism of the Orthodox Church as 'the Russian church'. However, there is no evidence of Baptist antagonism towards the Orthodox Church. Russian evangelicals do argue against Orthodox dogma and theology, and their application in everyday life: their primary goal is to preach the gospel as they see it, and such references are inevitable, given the claims to a monopoly on Christianity constantly made by Orthodox apologists.

The long history of evangelicals in Russia, especially their forced isolationism, contradicts the idea of a direct western influence. Russian evangelicals constantly sought that influence, primarily in the form of spiritual and financial support. However, this support was never substantial, and the vast majority of evangelical congregations was never fully financially

dependent on any foreign body.⁵ In Soviet times smuggled Bibles from American printing houses served as evidence of direct western influence and support; nowadays it is mostly the history and foreign origins of evangelical churches, and the simple fact that they are not Orthodox. However, evangelicals themselves claim their right to be called and perceived as Russian (Lunkin 2017b). They see Russian evangelicalism as a fact, and several generations of congregants who lived through oppression as justification for such rights (Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaia 2009).

The idea of *fraudulent sectarians* has much to do with a huge wave of various religious movements after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The liberalization of religious movements led to a previously unseen spiritual awakening. Many foreign and completely new religions, cults, and spiritual organizations of every kind emerged in Russia (see, for example, Lindquist 2006), and already existing communities faced an influx of neophytes. In the 1990s there were many scandals and criminal cases involving fraud schemes and the 'zombifying' of devotees. The 'totalitarian sects' (a term coined by Dvorkin) became a new threat in the Russian media and society. The persistent stigma of *sectarians* meant all minority religious movements were often associated with totalitarian sects. Hence, the paramount activities of evangelicals, namely numerous ministries of social support and missions, were and still often are associated with deception and conversion. For example, the paper advertisements of the Baptist rehabilitation facility that I studied were once marked in thick black ink, stating: 'Beware of sect!' Yet, as I have showed before, the evangelical ministries are often the only source of support for stigmatized and marginalized people in Russia, and missions may serve a similar purpose for larger groups (see Vallikivi 2009).

In summary, there are three main features of the glocalization of Russian evangelicalism: three aspects that place it in the global evangelical movement, while distinguishing it as a phenomenon that is inseparably linked with Russian history and culture. First, the one-hundred-and-fifty-year history of marginalization and isolation, enforced by oppression and repression, has forced Russian evangelicals to develop their own applied theology (although they did not manage to develop their own systematic theology: Bintsarovskiy 2014) and hermeneutics, their own way of life and mode of thought, without consultation, collaboration, or support from their brothers and sisters in faith abroad. Second, these ways of living and worshipping

⁵ Again, I do not include recent charismatic and neo-Pentecostal communities or Protestant churches that do not fit my definition of evangelicals, for congregations openly supported by foreign bodies are among them.

were forced under constant need to react and respond to Orthodox Christianity, as the dominant actor in the Russian religious sphere, and Russian sociocultural challenges, including Russian philosophy and literature, Soviet and post-Soviet ideologies, economic and political crises, wars and military conflicts, alcohol and substance abuse, crime, and so on. Third, Russian Christianity in general, and evangelicalism with its strong emphasis on *sola scriptura* in particular, is based on the language of the Russian Synodal Bible. This very specifically church-influenced nineteenth-century translation of is often interpreted by twenty-first century converts. At the same time Russian evangelical dogma, creed, theology, and hermeneutics remain in the framework of global evangelicalism, share its fundamental tenets such as *quinque solae*, and are commonly identified as evangelical by both secular (Mitrokhin, 1997; Coleman 2005) and Christian scholars (Sawatsky 1981; Nikolskaia 2009; Karetnikova 1999; Wiens 1924).

In the next section I offer an example of this Russian evangelical narrative, influenced by the sociocultural context of contemporary Russia. This example will demonstrate how evangelical tenets are implemented in transforming individuals not only spiritually and morally, but also bodily.

The Good Samaritan ministry

In 2014 and 2015 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the rehabilitation ministry for the addicted people run by the Russian Baptist Church (see more on this study in Mikeschin 2016). The 'Good Samaritan' ministry runs more than thirty rehabilitation centres in northwest Russia and some other regions, including Latvia and Finland. The centres are isolated from big cities, and they are operated by former rehabilitants under a strict regime and rules. The programme lasts eight months and consists of two parts, rehabilitation and adaptation. Rehabilitation focuses exclusively on the study of the New Testament and the basics of the Christian life. Adaptation includes the study of the entire Bible and work assignments to maintain the centres' premises and earn some extra money.

Conversion and substance abuse treatment go hand in hand, representing essentially two aspects of a single complex process called Christian rehabilitation. Substance abuse can be represented roughly as a twofold addiction, chemical and psychological. Chemical addiction can be treated relatively easily, but psychological addiction remains till the end of the addict's life, because psychoactive substances cause irreversible changes to the addicted brain (Volkow and Li 2005). Conversion to the Russian

Baptist version of Christianity offers a powerful basis for moral transformation, a reason to live, and a meaning for life. Good Samaritan addicts focus on spiritual transformation, which is achieved by reading, learning, and eventually internalizing the language of the scriptures as the narrative of faith, interpersonal communication, and even thought and reasoning (cf. Coleman 2000). Roughly speaking, the more one adopts the biblical narrative, the more one is considered 'mature in faith'.

Besides the specificity of the Russian Synodal Bible, Good Samaritan rehabilitants do not simply learn the narrative it offers. Most have a very specific life experience, including prison sentences and street life, and at the end of their programme they are somewhat superficially familiar with the biblical texts. This background means they interpret scripture using the everyday logic to which they are accustomed – street wisdom, prison morality, and the 'junkie' experience (Mikeshin 2015). This *lay hermeneutics* is a spectacular example of the multiplicity of biblical *literalisms* and diversity of *evangelicalisms*, even in a single context (see also Bielo 2009).

The most spectacular example of a construction of lay hermeneutics that is heavily influenced by the 'junkie' and prison experience is provided by a man I shall call Andrei, whom I met when I stayed for two weeks in one of the centres in a rural area close to the Finnish border in November 2014. Andrei, then thirty-four, had served four prison sentences for drug-related offences, including his first in a maximum-security prison. He had spent most of his adult life injecting drugs and in and out of prison. During my stay he was an elder supervising the first stage of the programme, rehabilitation. His history of prison and addiction constantly came out in how he spoke and behaved, and the examples he gave when interpreting scripture.

Although he identified as a repentant and transformed believer, he acknowledged that his past would always be his constant struggle, for '[one's] flesh will never repent'. He was neither proud nor ashamed of his experience, yet he strove to change his life further. In his everyday routine he often used prison names for things (for example, *dal'niak* for toilet or *shkonar'* for bed), and most others (including me) naturally followed his example. However, he often emphasized the difference between prison and a rehabilitation centre. Most importantly, in supervising others he refused to see himself as a kind of guard. Prison guards are commonly despised by inmates, and in the rehabilitation context elders are regarded like anyone else, if more experienced, trustworthy, and versed in the Bible. Once Andrei noticed during the reading time two 'brothers' waking their friend so Andrei would

not notice. He became angry and told them bitterly: '[It's] like prison! Why are you making me a guard? We're here before God, not people.'

Most of the examples of sinful behaviour and vice he needed in explaining or discussing a biblical verse he naturally took from his life experience. For example, in discussing Romans 6:20–23,⁶ he explained: 'For we were never ashamed of boozing, smoking, [and] swearing. It was pretty normal for us. So now we don't have to be ashamed of being Christians, of not cursing.' Likewise, concerning Ephesians 4:29,⁷ he commented: 'Any evil talk⁸ isn't necessarily cursing (*mat*). It's these discussions, say, on wine, drugs, [or] crimes.'

In speaking about the sinful nature of humankind, he once illustrated it as follows:

Every epistle is addressed to the believers in the first place; but believers still have this bygone (*vetkhaia*) nature inside them. One day, I was going through the [prison] camp and found a thrown-in package (*zabros*). Although I was repentant already, I could not help checking inside. When I opened it, I found that it was fake, filled with flour. Someone had been tricked, apparently. I decided to check on my friend, also [a] repentant [believer], so I brought it to him. I entered the barracks and found him. 'Here,' I said, 'look what I found.' I knew for a fact he had repented and given up drugs. But when an addict sees that, his first reaction is obvious. What do you think he said? 'Whoa, [you've] got a syringe? (*baiian*)'.

Many of my interlocutors in rehabilitation settings involved their peculiar backgrounds in their hermeneutics as examples, moral standpoints, or practical implementation in the context of life in rehabilitation. They were not only from prison, but also from street life, homeless experience, and many other life situations they faced. The narrative of conversion in the context of rehabilitation is a bright example of a glocal narrative of Bible-believing Christianity. Using the context of global evangelicalism, following its fundamental tenets and principles, in Luther's and Bebbington's terms, Russian evangelicals formulate and interpret this narrative as a response to

6 'When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (NRSV).

7 'Let no evil talk come out of your mouths...' (NRSV).

8 In the Russian Synodal Bible, 'no evil talk' is translated as 'no rotten word' (*gniloe slovo*).

the dominant Orthodox Christianity and sociocultural, political, and moral challenges of contemporary Russia they face every day.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how oppression, marginality, and isolation have shaped Russian evangelicalism as a largely unseen yet essential feature of contemporary Russia. Russian evangelical Christianity is a glocal phenomenon. It fully adheres to global evangelical tenets and at the same time is shaped as a socioculturally and linguistically Russian phenomenon. Its Russianness is manifested in the construction of the Russian evangelical narrative, formulated in response to the cultural and political discourse of modern Russia, yet, most importantly, to Orthodox theology and its application as seen by evangelicals. This narrative is constructed with the language of the Synodal Bible in its contemporary interpretation.

Russian evangelicals are constantly accused of being western-influenced, proselytizing in the canonical land of the Russian Orthodox Church, and mistreating and misleading people. Diverse evangelical ministries for marginal groups, numerous missions, and an active moral position serve as evidence of the important role they play in contemporary Russian society. Their long tradition in the Russian lands and hardships and challenges throughout the Soviet period, both explicitly aimed against them and shared with the country in hard times, justify their role in Russian history. Despite its foreign roots, which are also true of the Orthodox Church, Russian evangelicalism is an inseparable part of modern Russian history, culture, and society, and my article is an attempt to demonstrate how Russian it really is.

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