

PIRET KOOSA

Negotiating faith and identity in  
a Komi village: Protestant Christians in  
a pro-Orthodox sociocultural environment



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**PIRET KOOSA**

Negotiating faith and identity in  
a Komi village: Protestant Christians in  
a pro-Orthodox sociocultural environment



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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Article I** Leete, Art; Piret Koosa 2012. “The Churches were Opened and Lots of Missionaries Arrived”: Dialogue between Komi Identity and Faith. – *Folklore. Electronic Journal of Folklore* 51, 171–190.
- Article II** Koosa, Piret 2013. Sowing the Seeds of Faith: A Case Study of an American Missionary in the Russian North. – *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 7 (1), 31–48.
- Article III** Koosa, Piret 2015. “Sometimes we’ll have to prove that we’re no crocodiles...” Evangelical Christians’ Stigmatisation as Sectarians in a Komi Village. – *Études finno-ougriennes* 47, 89–114.
- Article IV** Koosa, Piret; Art Leete 2014. Serving God by Being Neighbourly: Komi Protestants and Local Community Initiatives. – *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 39 (2), 39–57.
- Article V** Koosa, Piret 2016. Evangelical silence in a Komi village. – *Ethnologia Europaea* 46 (2), 58–73.
- Article VI** Koosa, Piret 2017. “If you’re really interested in scientific research, you should study the Bible!” Ethnographical fieldwork among evangelical Christians. – *Approaches to Culture Theory* 7, 53–71. [forthcoming]

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**Article I:** The article is based on fieldwork material collected jointly by both authors; the research design and theoretical framework were proposed by the co-author, both authors contributed to the analysis of the material and developing the discussion.

**Article IV:** The article is based on fieldwork material collected jointly by both authors; I proposed the research design and theoretical framework, both authors contributed to the analysis of the material and developing the discussion.

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# INTRODUCTION

## General aims, context and content of the thesis

This study explores the dynamics of post-Soviet religious life in the Komi Republic, in Northern Russia. After the demise of communism and the Soviet Union, the question of identity has been a central concern in Russia as well as in the Komi Republic. Consequently, religion has acquired an important social role as it is a means of creating and sustaining identity and culture. Religions which are perceived as “new” or “foreign”, however, have gained more and more negative attention since the mid 1990’s. Following the religious freedom law in 1990, numerous (locally) “new” religious groups began appearing. These faiths were introduced and promoted by foreign missionaries. One Russian peculiarity is that some of these religious groups, which are quite mainstream in other parts of the world, are termed “new”, despite their often actually having had a considerable history within Russia as well. Protestant Christianity and especially its evangelical offshoots are probably most notable examples of religions holding this peculiar position and being surrounded by popular controversies.

Russia thus provides a fascinating field of study. Although they are a minority, the social visibility and significance of evangelical Christians in Russia considerably exceeds their proportion in numbers. Looking at evangelical Christians’ interactions with the surrounding society allows for an examination of the tensions accompanying the growth of religious pluralism. It also raises questions of belonging and fosters a discussion regarding the links between religion and national and ethnic identity. In this study, I focus on the relationship between the Orthodox majority and a small evangelical Protestant minority group in Komi, village of Don. I examine the difficulties that a minority religion group faces in establishing itself as a legitimate religion in rural Komi and the strategies that the group members use to negotiate their presence in the wider society, which is frequently unsympathetic towards them. I also aim to analyse the ways in which the particularities of the specific social context have influenced local interpretations, expressions and practices of the faith. I have also sought to understand the motivations behind certain attitudes and views regarding the religious sphere. At the same time, I am interested in how the evangelicals use and adapt specific ideas and practices in ways that are meaningful to both their particular socio-cultural context as well as in context of their faith.

In the wider framework, this thesis contributes to the growing number of ethnographical studies on Christianity. Both worldwide and more regional trends over the recent decades attest to the viability of Christianity serving as a subject of ethnographic attention. Anthropological interest in Christianity has coincided with the growth of particular branches of evangelical Christianity throughout the world. In African and South-American countries especially, the expansion of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity has been conspicuous (e.g. Jenkins 2007). In Russia, evangelicals have not experienced

comparable growth in their numbers. In contrast to the occasional inflated accounts in the media, researchers have found that after heightened interest in the 1990s, the number of members in different evangelical congregations stabilised or even diminished (Panchenko 2013a: 216; Löfstedt 2012: 104–106) and their growth in the near future is predicted as being unlikely (Agadjanian 2012: 4).

According to different surveys and estimates, about 1 (0,6–1,5) per cent of the Russian population identifies itself as Protestant. In comparison, some 40–70 per cent of people identify themselves as Orthodox.<sup>1</sup> In order to get sociologically meaningful figures, the category of “practicing believers” is often used in the analysis of such data (e.g. Kuropatkina 2012: 134). While most of the Russian Protestant believers fall into this category, only a small proportion of the self-identified Orthodox are defined as “practicing” in sociological surveys. In comparison, people who identify themselves as Protestants, in most cases, practice their religion.

While one use of term “evangelical” refers to the mainstream Protestant Churches, the use of the term in this study is derived from the Anglo-American tradition of Protestant revival movements (see Noll 2004: 421–422). There are doctrinal differences between the teachings of particular evangelical movements, but all of them share some basic assumptions. Evangelical Christians emphasise the need for a personal religious conversion, which is often described or referred to as the “born-again” experience; furthermore, every true Christian has the obligation to evangelise, or to spread the message of salvation in Christ; the Bible is considered to be infallible and is fundamental authority in all matters related to faith and practice.

In the Russian tradition, the term “Evangelical Christian” is also used interchangeably with “Baptist”. Since the beginning of the movement, two larger strands have emerged within the Russian Baptist movement: “Baptists” and “Evangelical Christians”. The differentiation is related to the debates over the term “Baptist” which for some has too strong a connotations with the Western origins of the movement.<sup>2</sup> The use of “evangelical” reflects the desire to emphasise that the Bible alone is the source of all authority, not including the tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). (Coleman 2005: 8–9, 95) In this thesis, the term “evangelicals” is used in the broader sense, first and foremost following the vernacular use of the word by the group members at the centre of this study.

According to Mark A. Noll, diversity, flexibility and adaptability have characterised evangelical Christianity since its origins, and specific contextual

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. <http://www.levada.ru/2011/09/26/religioznaya-vera-v-rossii/>, last accessed 28.02.2017; <http://sreda.org/arena>, last accessed 28.02.2017.

<sup>2</sup> While the early Russian evangelicals did not deny the non-Russian influence on the development of their movement and expressed pride in belonging to an international communion, they stressed that this foreign influence and role was primarily catalytic. (Coleman 2005: 96)

settings have had particularly strong influence on shaping it in its various local forms. The evangelical traits have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact, or clearly demarcated groups of believers, and the diversity of local churches, parachurch agencies, national and international ministries, and networks of publications, preachers and personal contacts make up the worldwide evangelical body. (Noll 2004: 424–425) While international ministries of leading preachers have had a global reach, internationally circulated and popular books, films, TV-programmes etc, provide a certain measure of coherence for the worldwide evangelicalism (ibid.: 425; see also Wanner 2009: 173), local forms of Christianity offer a wide spectrum of different and distinctly unique manifestations and interpretations of faith and practice (e.g. Bielo 2009; Coleman 2004; Engelke 2007; Keane 2007; Keller 2005; Luhrmann 2012; Meyer 1998; Robbins 2004a).

### Anthropological studies on Christianity

The Anthropological interest in Christianity as an independent research subject is relatively recent (see review articles by Bialecki et al 2008; Lampe 2010). More commonly, Christianity has been viewed as a destructive agent in the context of the traditional world-view in the communities anthropologists have studied. Fenella Cannell (2006b: 4) has even argued that in some ways, Christianity has been a “repressed” topic in anthropology since the beginning of the discipline.

When anthropologists started paying attention to Christianity as a research subject in and of itself, the first accounts in this field of studies tended to focus on local forms of Christianity in rural and peasant communities and its syncretic forms (see Cannell 2006b: 10–11). Fenella Cannell has argued that anthropologists found these kinds of places and forms of Christianity more easy to comprehend as they were seen as being sufficiently distant from academia, while Protestant Europe and the United States proved to be more challenging to engage with professionally.

In the context of disciplinary anxiety over the religious experience in general, the topic of Christianity has provoked more angst amongst researchers than most other religious topics. For a social science that has developed within contexts of European enlightenment, Christianity is both tediously familiar and yet at the same time the most threatening of the religious traditions. (Cannell 2006b: 3; see also Robbins 2003: 192)

Nevertheless, over the last 15 years, numerous studies on different aspects of Christians and Christianity have been published (e.g. Cannell 2006a; Hann, Goltz 2010). This growth of scholarly interest in Christianity has partly followed the remarkable growth of certain branches of Christianity around the world despite the earlier predictions of the growth of secularisation. More recently scholars have turned their attention towards Christianity, especially its evangelical forms, as they have sought to examine this the increasing activism

and growing visibility of the religion as it reaches the most distant corners of the world (e.g. Engelke, Tomlinson 2006; Harding 2000; Pelkmans 2009; Wanner 2007).

There exists a relatively substantial body of studies concerning the Orthodox tradition of the Komi. The bulk of this research has concentrated on the historical developments and vernacular religious practices and interpretations. There are somewhat fewer studies that have examined Orthodoxy's presence and role in the contemporary culture of the Komi (but see Chuvyurov, Smirnova 2003; Sharapov 2001; Leete 2007; Koosa, Leete 2011; Ruseyeva 2008; Sharapov, Vlasova 2008). The communities and traditions of a traditional religious minority, the Old Believers', have also been examined (Chuvyurov 2001; Vlasova 2010). The vernacular animist tradition and its intertwining with Orthodoxy has also been generally examined retrospectively, and from a historical point of view (e.g. Napolskikh et al 2003). The Komi hunters' practices and beliefs have been discussed as continuously accommodating some animist assumptions (Lipin, Leete 2000; Leete 2007; Leete, Lipin 2012; 2015).

So far, Protestantism in Komi region has not aroused much scholarly interest as a subject of ethnographic attention. Yuri Gagarin's study on the history of religious life in the Komi region (1978) primarily concentrates on Russian Orthodox Komis and Old Believers, but does offer some insights into the early history of the Protestant communities in the region. More recently, Mikhail Matsuk (2004), Sergey Filatov (2005) and Roman Lunkin (Filatov, Lunkin 2016) have included Protestant churches in their sociological overviews of religious developments in the post-Soviet Komi Republic. Art Leete (2013) has provided an overview of the Komi Christian Church of Evangelical Faith and discussed the role of native language in the ideology and practices in this particular Church. Laur Vallikivi was the first to offer a thorough ethnographic analysis of the Protestant missions in the Russian North. He has published several studies (e.g. 2005; 2009; 2011; 2014) based on his fieldwork in the northern borderland of the Komi Republic. While Vallikivi's main focus is on the animist Nenets who have converted to Baptism and Pentecostalism, his studies provide a useful and thought-provoking comparative background for the material presented in this thesis.

In Russia, not only is the material on Komi Protestants rather scarce, the contemporary forms of evangelical Christianity also in general have received scant attention. Alexander Panchenko (2013a: 215) has recently critically noted that most authors who have written on Protestantism in the Russian context have done so mainly from historical or sociological perspective and have not tried to address the anthropological aspects and the related problems of the faith. While the sociological approach prevails in (especially in the Russian-language) literature on Russian Protestants, there are still numerous relevant works and authors who represent both the anthropological and sociological approaches.

Catherine Wanner's study on evangelicals in Ukraine (2007) was the first ethnographical monograph on Protestants in the post-Soviet context. While

Wanner discusses Ukrainian developments, there are significant historical and social similarities and contacts between Ukrainian and Russian congregations. Mathjis Pelkmans (2009a) has edited a collection of essays that focuses on conversions to Protestantism in a postsocialist context. Melissa L. Caldwell (2004; 2008; 2011) has studied the activities and the role of Protestant Churches in the context of pursuing social welfare. From a more sociological perspective, Sergey Filatov and Roman Lunkin (e.g. Filatov 2000; Strukova, Filatov 2003; Filatov 2004; Lunkin 2000; 2005; 2013; 2014a; 2014b) have extensively written on different branches of evangelical Christians in Russia. The evangelical scholar Mark R. Elliott (2003) has provided insights into Orthodox–Protestant relations. Alexander Agadjanian (2012) has edited a special issue of *Religion, State and Society* with emphasis on Russian Pentecostals (Kuropatkina 2012; Poplavsky 2012; Löfstedt 2012). Zhanna Kormina (2013), Alexander Panchenko (2013a; 2013b) and Sergey Shtyrkov (2013) have also written on the Pentecostals. Igor Mikeshin (2016) recently defended a PhD dissertation on Christian rehabilitation on the example of the Russian Baptist ministry.

### Overview of the empirical material

In the following, I will attempt to provide some general data to introduce the region discussed in this study and provide a description of the evangelical community that is the focus of this thesis. This brief overview includes numerical data, the geographical setting and a few historical insights. It will also touch on some key points that have shaped the region and attempt to situate the Komi Republic in the wider context of the Russian Federation. The socio-geographical setting of the Republic is important in order to understanding the founding of the Don evangelical congregation. The Republic of Komi is situated in the north-eastern corner of the European part of the Russian Federation. The majority (65%) of the republic's nearly 900 000 inhabitants are Russians, with the "titular nation" Komi make up 23% of the population. About 85% of the republic's territory of 416 800 km<sup>2</sup> is covered with forests and swamps. The density of population is 2,1 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

Historically settlements were established along the banks of the main rivers (the Petchora, and the Ezhva) and the geographical setting of contemporary towns and villages reflects this. In the absence of roads, transport by river remained extant for a relatively significant period of time. Even today some remote settlements are not accessible by roads all year around. The existing roads are often in a relatively bad shape as the heavy logging trucks that constantly transport cut wood from the forests contribute to the quick decay of the asphalt.

For centuries the Russian authorities have used the remote Komi region as a place of exile for their political opponents (see Jääts 2005: 176). In the 1930s–50s a large number of Soviet prison and labour camps were established in the Komi area. The region's population grew significantly due to the number of political and common criminals that were held in these camps, many of whom

went on to remain in the region after their release. In the context of this study, it is relevant to note that it was through the religious deportees that the Protestant faith was introduced to the Komi region.

The Soviet period also brought with it forced industrialisation. The development of coal, oil and wood industries was accompanied by abundant immigration from other parts of the Soviet Union. As a result of the intensive influx of newcomers (mostly Russians, but also Ukrainians and others), resulted in the Komi rather quickly becoming an ethnic minority in their own land. In 1926 the Komi made up 86,9% of the region's population. In 1939 this number was 72,5%. And in 1959 it fell to just 30,1% (Fauzer 1997: 59). Since the 1960s, the proportion of Komi in the overall population has not remarkably declined, indicating that certain stabilisation in the demographics has occurred. At the same time, there has been a general population decline in the region, which has coincided with the overall demographic decline in Russia. Today, the economy of the republic is based on its main industries, which are processing minerals (coal, oil, natural gas) and timber. The majority of the population lives in towns (nearly 80% of the population), while a little over half of the ethnic Komi live in rural settlements.

The empirical material presented in this study was predominantly collected from the Kulömdin (Rus. Ust-Kulom) district, which is located about 180 km east from the capital Syktyvkar. The field trips have taken me to a number of villages in the district including: Parma, Don, Mys (Rus. Myoldino), Pomösdin (Rus. Pomozdino), Ulyanovo, Kuzh (Rus. Kuzhba), Kebanyol, Tymser (Timsher), Yugydyag. However, the main part of the fieldwork material that this thesis is built on has been collected from the district centre of Kulömdin and from the village of Don. Some of the interviews were recorded in Syktyvkar.

The Kulömdin district is situated in the southern corner of Komi Republic. The District's territory encompasses 26,400 km<sup>2</sup> and its population is 26 858<sup>3</sup>. The district's centre is also called Kulömdin and its population is about 5000. The rest of the district's inhabitants are distributed between the approximately 60 hamlets and villages throughout the district. Of the 12 districts in the republic, the Kulömdin district has the second largest indigenous population with the Komi making up 76,9%<sup>4</sup> of the region's residents. This is what has probably supported the view that the district is "the main upholder of Komi national traditions and culture" as is proclaimed on the district's web page<sup>5</sup>, for example, but which is also a popular view among the Kulömdiners.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Russian census of 2010 ([http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol1/pub-01-05.pdf](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol1/pub-01-05.pdf), last accessed 1.03.2017).

<sup>4</sup> [http://komi.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat\\_ts/komi/ru/statistics/](http://komi.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_ts/komi/ru/statistics/), last accessed 1.03.2017.

<sup>5</sup> [http://усть-кулом.рф/?page\\_id=476](http://усть-кулом.рф/?page_id=476), last accessed 1.03.2017.

My study mainly focuses on a community of evangelical Christians in the village of Don. Don has a population of about 500 and is located approximately 15 km from the district centre. With the exception of a few public buildings made of bricks, the village architecture is mostly comprised of log houses built quite close to each other. Some of the houses are covered with wood panels, but these are mostly left unpainted. Most of the houses have a brightly painted porch. Those who can afford it, have metal roofs.

The village has a kindergarten, a primary school, a cultural centre, a medical office, a sawmill and two small shops providing foodstuffs and other necessities. There are few jobs available. While some people go to work in the district centre, many more are unemployed. Some live off tiny pensions, and grow vegetables, or go fishing and hunting to supplement their provisions. Selling food for additional income is common. During the summer, villagers will pick berries and mushrooms in the surrounding woods and then sell them to wholesalers. This offers the villagers the possibility of earning some extra income.

In 2003 three evangelical missionaries came to reside in the village. The impetus for their arrival came from an American missionary named William. William moved to Russia after his retirement in 1997 and began working in Moscow. After visiting the Komi Republic, he had come to understand that his charitable mission would be more needed in this kind of peripheral region as there were greater insufficiencies and fewer resources. In Moscow, William had met Andrei (originally from Nizhni-Novgorod, central Russia), a young philologist with a background in a Charismatic church. William asked Andrei to accompany him on his mission and work as an interpreter. When they arrived, another young man, a Baptist named Semyon joined the small group.

William's home church in the US was East White Oak Bible Church in Carlock, Illinois. It was established by a Mennonite congregation at the end of the 19th century, but became independent and non-denominational in the 1930s. According to the home page of the church, over 40 different denominational backgrounds are represented among the congregation members. Currently the church has about 1000 members.<sup>6</sup> In addition to personal funds, William's mission work has been supported by his home church<sup>7</sup>. In 2010 William moved

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ewo.org/about-us/>, last accessed 28.02.2017.

<sup>7</sup> The mission statement of the East White Oak Church reads as follows: "The East White Oak Bible Church missions program exists to glorify God by fulfilling the great commission to make disciples of Jesus Christ in all the world. We pursue this mandate by *evangelizing* unreached peoples and *establishing* national churches where they do not exist, and *strengthening* national churches where they do exist."

In addition to Russia, the church has organised mission trips to Germany, Zimbabwe, Bonaire, West Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Guatemala, and Colombia. While currently most of their nearly forty regularly supported missionaries work in the U.S., the church's goal is to have the ratio the other way around ([http://8cfed9061ee9051f2563-44c740bd4b477e759dfacf99ed9bf7e9.r41.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/r/0e5615327\\_1478636260\\_refining-our-focus-missions.pdf](http://8cfed9061ee9051f2563-44c740bd4b477e759dfacf99ed9bf7e9.r41.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/r/0e5615327_1478636260_refining-our-focus-missions.pdf), last accessed 28.02.2017)

to neighbouring district to continue his mission there. Andrei and Semyon stayed in Kulömdin in order to continue the ministry. In 2015, William became ill with meningitis, which left him bedridden and needing round-the-clock care. The board<sup>8</sup> of the William Wood Missions to Russia decided to continue supporting the ministry in Komi Republic and pastor Andrei and the missionary Semyon in their work in the Kulömdin district.

The missionaries describe their objective as serving God by providing practical help to the socially deprived. In addition to the practical help, the good news of the Gospel is supposed to reach people through charity. William emphasised that it was not his aim to start a new church, as there were already plenty of churches in Komi and in Russia. Both William and Andrei are strong proponents of the ecumenical approach. The Don missionaries' main message in this regard is that people should consciously choose to be Christians, but which branch of Christianity one prefers is essentially a matter of personal taste. The community that soon formed around the missionaries is also nondenominational, and is called simply the Christian Community of Don (Донская Христианская Община). Andrei became the pastor of the group. The group is not officially registered and is autonomous in the sense that it is not a branch of some larger organisation. When referring to the group in this study, I use the terms 'church' (церковь), 'community' (община) and 'congregation' (приход) interchangeably, which is in accordance with the vernacular practice of Don evangelicals.

While some people have a specific denominational background, the congregants usually refer to themselves as Christians or evangelical Christians. The character of the group is similar to the so-called new paradigm, or free churches, that have become increasingly common in America (see Miller 1998). Nondenominational Christian churches and congregations have historically been Protestant, but officially do not belong to any specific denomination. While these churches are open to different possible forms of worship, the emphasis is on the importance of the individual, conscious conversion and missionary activities places such as Don. The Don group is definitely part of this evangelical tradition. The nondenominational ideology that Don evangelicals promote is fairly unusual in Russia. The believers point out that Orthodox, as well as other Protestant denominations tend to have a rather strict understanding of the correct way to worship and, correspondingly, are usually critical of alternative approaches.

The Don congregation aims to establish active relationships with other Christians in the region. Their attempts to cooperate with the Orthodox Church in the district have not thus far met with success (see article IV: 47). They have, however been able to establish close relations with number of other Protestant groups. After settling in Don, the church established a friendly rapport with a Pentecostal missionary named Aleksei who was working the district centre.

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<sup>8</sup> The board members represent different churches that support William's ministry in Russia. The support for the ministry is collected by way of donations from the church members. (<http://wwmtor.org/06302015letter.html>, last accessed 28.02.2017)

Before he moved away from the district, Aleksei would occasionally be asked to come and preach at the Don church. There are also a few Baptist groups<sup>9</sup> in both the Kulömdin district, as well as in other areas, with which the Don group interacts. Additionally there are several bigger churches in Syktyvkar with whom the group keeps in frequent contact (see below).

The congregation has remained moderate in its size, with about 10–15 people who are stably connected with the group and who visit the services with certain regularity. There are a few more individuals who are loosely tied with the congregation – e.g. people who have come to God<sup>10</sup>, but now live elsewhere, but still sometimes visit. And there are also a few more random attenders. It is somewhat difficult to pinpoint the exact size of the community as there is no formal membership and some churchgoers are affiliated with other churches as well. Despite the differing levels of commitment, it is reasonable to view the members of the church, or those who say they have come to God, and take part of the congregation's life and relate to the evangelical message, as a community. The majority of the members are middle-aged and elderly women, something that also coincides with the composition of Orthodox majority congregations. Apart from the missionaries, there are few men who participate in the church life with any consistency.

The house accommodating the church's meetings stands out from amongst its neighbours. It is a private house that William bought after deciding to settle in the Kulömdin district. The house has been reconstructed to hold services. The cross-shaped window of the prayer room is renovated and covered with light yellow wall panels. In the yard, there are swings and other playground equipment for the children. Recently, Semyon has built a two-coloured tin-plate fence around the house.

The house has three rooms. The biggest room has a cross-shaped window at the back of the room across the entrance. This is the room where the congregation gathers. One of the rooms is used to hold Sunday school for the children and the third one is a bedroom. First William and then Semyon have complemented the house with several conveniences. There is a kitchen with running water and a bathroom with a flush toilet and a shower cabin. All of these amenities, especially the latter two are clearly exceptional when compared with the rest of the households in the villages.

William lived in the church-house until 2010 when he moved away to continue his mission in another district. Semyon and his family were renting another house at that time, but when the owner no longer wanted to continue the lease they moved into the church-house. It is now owned by Semyon. At first, Andrei and his family also rented a house in the Don village. In 2012 they

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<sup>9</sup> Among them is one group of unregistered Baptists.

<sup>10</sup> Using this expression, I again follow the vernacular use as this phrase is commonly employed when talking about one's newfound relationship to God and starting to visit the Don church.

purchased a house in Kulömdin from the Pentecostal missionary Aleksei who had moved away from the region for family reasons.

The Sunday morning services are the most regular part of the congregational life and consequently bring together the widest assemblage of people somehow related with the church. The churchgoers come from both Don and other nearby villages. Pastor Andrei and Semyon bring them by car. The people arriving earliest arrange the folding chairs into rows and place the lectern in front of the chairs. On the wall of the room there is a message board which usually holds some photos, quotes from the Bible, key points from sermons or informational letters. There is also a bookshelf with Christian literature and DVD-s. The back of the room is decorated with pictures of biblical scenes, with one on each side of the cross-shaped window.

The service starts at 10:00 with singing. Pastor Andrei leads the singing with his guitar, Semyon plays the synthesizer. In general, pastor Andrei picks out the songs that will be sung, but occasionally somebody from the congregation suggests a song and sometimes the pastor takes the hint. Some members of the congregation know the songs by heart, but mainly self-compiled songbooks are used. Most of the songs also have Komi versions, and some of the songs are sung in the Komi as well. Sometimes Andrei praises god with small phrases between the songs too, while continuing his guitar-playing. After the glorification, the pastor asks blessing for the children and then one of the women gathers them for Sunday school in another room. In the event that someone wishes to make some announcements, or share some news, they are given the opportunity to do so. Also, when there are some guests present, they are greeted. Pastor Andrei's sermon lasts for about an hour. Andrei's style of preaching is very active. He usually does not stay behind the lectern but moves around. He dresses casually, and not differently from his everyday attire. He starts out with a quote from the Bible and will often return to read specific verses from the scripture several times and explaining them. His manner of speaking is expressive and he uses his whole body to convey his message to the congregation. He will sometimes ask them to explicitly respond to some question. He refers to amusing everyday examples, from his own family life that the audience finds entertaining. If he references some very sad or shocking event, then the people will sigh audibly or exclaim a small prayer. Some of the congregants follow the sermon by making notes in their Bibles or in notebooks.

After the sermon, there is tea-drinking. A long table that is otherwise stored in the corner of the room, is placed in the middle of the room and seats placed around it. Most of the gathered people bring something with them to go with the tea – candies, home-made salads, home-baked pastries, slices of sausages and bread. Either Andrei or one of the children are asked to say a little prayer and then for about an hour the congregation drinks tea, eats snacks and chats amongst themselves. Afterwards the room is again tidied up – the table and chairs are stored in the back of the room, somebody sweeps the floor, some women do the dishes. The people from other villages are taken home by Andrei and Semyon.

## Reflections on fieldwork and study subject

This study draws from about 9 years worth of field data, from 2006–2015. I did the fieldwork together with Art Leete<sup>11</sup>. My total of 12 trips to Komi republic usually lasted for 2–3 weeks.

The empirical material analysed in this study was gathered by conducting interviews, but was also derived from informal conversations, and by attending church services as well as some other church-related events. In addition to the interviews with evangelicals, I have gathered other important material in the form of interviews with the non-evangelical and Orthodox villagers. I have also attended the services at the Orthodox church in Kulömdin and the Orthodox Sunday school for adults.<sup>12</sup> In a way then, my fieldwork could be viewed as multi-sited. At the same time, it is important to note that the communities of evangelicals and Orthodox are not bounded wholes. There are some members of the evangelical group who simultaneously value their Orthodox background and visit the Orthodox church. These members create the most obvious overlap, or a kind of continuum between the two communities. Further, I have occasionally included in this study references to thematic accounts from the media to characterise some wider tendencies and contextual circumstances that are likely to have impact on the manner in which some religious matters are regarded and discussed in the Komi villages.

Throughout my fieldwork trips, I have stayed with Domna Petrovna, who lives in the outskirts of Kulömdin<sup>13</sup>. Domna Petrovna is a former kindergarten teacher and is now in her seventies. She lives alone, but her children and their families live close by and often come by to visit. While she is not an active churchgoer, her general religious outlook and domestic practices are quite representative of the vernacular Orthodox tradition shared by the majority of the villagers. Her cautious and somewhat suspicious view of the non-Orthodox believers is also a typical attitude in the villages. As she was aware of my visits to the evangelicals, she was curious about the people there and what goes on during the services, but never expressed any concern over my affiliation with the group. My evangelical interlocutors have also enquired about the people I stay with in Kulömdin and about their relationship to religion, but my answers did not provoke any further remarks. One of the evangelical women knew Domna Petrovna because the latter used to be her teacher in the kindergarten and she frequently sent her regards.

Some specific challenges presented by the field site and by topic of research should also be mentioned here. Attention to problems of reflexivity and

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<sup>11</sup> In 2006 Jaanika Jaanits and Kristi Tinkus also participated in the fieldwork.

<sup>12</sup> In addition, I have also taken part of a home service of a Pentecostal group in Kulömdin and, in the company of the Don congregants, service of unregistered Baptists in Tymsher.

<sup>13</sup> During the first fieldwork trips I sometimes spent night at one of the evangelicals due to the fact that the bus connecting Don with Kulömdin did not run on suitable times. Later on, a relatively cheap taxi system was introduced in Kulömdin, which made moving between the villages much easier.

objectivity is essential in all anthropological research, but has been thought to be of particular importance in studies concerning religion (e.g. Lambek 2012; Wanner 2011: 223).

Over the years, I have conducted interviews or had informal conversations with most of the more regular evangelical churchgoers. The specificity of the group has probably influenced my access to them and their attitude toward me. There are perhaps two important factors that have facilitated our contact. First, while my spiritual status has remained somewhat obscure to some members of the community (see article VI), an expression of interest regarding matters of faith can easily be read as a willingness to convert and thus corresponds to the believer's obligation to evangelise by sharing their experiences. Second, as the legitimacy of the evangelical faith in the Komi countryside has been challenged, and having a sympathetic outsider interested in evangelical perspective on things, can perhaps be viewed as an active aid towards acquiring a more positive image.

One important aspect of the insider-outsider relationship that should be mentioned is the possible and probable difference in interpretations. While it is only natural that two parties can understand the same occurrence differently, I as an ethnologist have the power to shape the image of the group for a wider audience and thus it is crucial to be attentive to not suppressing the believer's meanings by imposing an outsider's perspectives. For example, while it seems to me that the Don group has not been very successful in gathering followers, the pastor has a rather different viewpoint on the issue (see Article II, 43). There can be discrepancy between what seems engaging from a scholarly perspective and what insiders themselves consider important. Pastor Andrei has seen some of my writings on the Don evangelicals (my articles are written in English and Andrei is the only one of the group who speaks the language), but his reaction has been rather indifferent. (See also article V) I suppose this indicates that academic perception and reflecting their group in my studies is not relevant in his view as it is not important.

There is a certain tension in my position as a researcher working in a religious context. When I am in the field and in communication with believers, I have taken on the role of the apprentice, and at times have even felt rather insecure. The hesitancy I have felt in some situations and contexts has had a great deal to do with what some of my non-evangelical informants, with reference to themselves, term "religious illiteracy"<sup>14</sup>. Having no former experiences of attending church services or interacting with explicitly religiously devoted people, I have not always been sure of how I was expected to behave, or what the proper questions to ask would be, or what the correct way to react to certain situations would be. When writing my articles, I am able to refer to theoretical literature and comparative studies to help me to make sense of my collected

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<sup>14</sup> There is slightly Soviet feel to such phrasing. By saying that they are religiously "illiterate" people mean that they are not sure how to behave correctly in the church – in the Orthodox church there is generally quite strict code of how one should dress and behave.

data, and there is time to reflect on the material and decide on the interpretations. In the “field”, however, one must often react immediately and thus cannot be sure of the best possible conduct in a given situation.

Yet another problem in the process of making sense of the field data has to do with confronting contradictions and variety when people recount of their lives as opposed to writing the experience up in an academic paper where it is necessary to present some concrete results and conclusions. Furthermore, the controversies and contradictions that I am able to detect might not be recognised as such by the community or its individual members. In any case, I have made my best effort to present people who have been willing to share their experiences and ideas with me in a way that would not trivialise their own viewpoints.

## **Evangelical Christians in the Russian Federation**

In contemporary Russia, evangelical Christians hold a peculiar position in the wider religious landscape. In order to understand better some of these particularities, an overview of some of the historical developments in Russia in general and in Komi region more specifically, is in order.

### **Religious life in Komi region**

For centuries Russian Orthodoxy has held a prominent position in the Komi culture. St. Stephen (of Perm) began his missionary work among the Komi in the second half of the 14th century. While the initial (forced) Christianisation of many other peoples is thought to have been only formal or superficial, it is commonly estimated that the acceptance of Christianity by most of the Komi happened relatively quickly (in the course of half a century) and rather thoroughly. Behind Stephen’s success was probably his unusual approach for that time, as he used Komi language for proselytising and during liturgies. In the 1370s Stephen introduced the Komi alphabet, or the *anbur*, and translated ecclesiastical texts into the Komi language. This Old Permic script was used until the end of the 17th century when the Russification wave replaced it with Church Slavonic. Nevertheless, even today St. Stephen’s Komi alphabet has strong symbolic meaning in Komi cultural history and has fostered the view that the Komi are an especially Christian Finno-Ugric people.

Stephen became the first bishop of the Komi when the Bishopric of Perm was established in 1382. It was the first bishopric for non-Russian people. It has been proposed (Vlasov 1996: 4) that the Christianisation of Perm (etymologically meaning ‘far-away land’, or ‘land at the end’) had a special conceptual meaning and status in the missionary objectives of the ROC.

Although scholars differ in their estimation of the degree to which the Komi embraced Orthodoxy, it is generally considered to be their traditional faith in both popular discourse and scholarly literature (e.g. *Istoria Komi* 2004: 173;

Zherebtsov, Melnikova 2016: 132). The majority of religious people in Komi today also identify themselves as Orthodox. According to a statement found on the Bishopric's web-page<sup>15</sup>, up to 92 per cent of the population consider themselves Orthodox, although there is no reference to the source of this data.

Since the 17th century communities of Old Believers (both Russian and Komi) have also settled in the Komi region, including in the area of the Kulömdin district, but they have not expanded nor have they incorporated other local groups into their faith. (See Chuvyurov, Smirnova 2003; Vlasova 2010) An Old Believers' chapel in Udora district remained open throughout the Soviet period, and was the only house of worship in the republic to stay continuously officially open.

In the uncertain times of the 1990s, nationally minded members of the Komi intelligentsia debated whether the ancient animist tradition or Orthodoxy would be ideologically better suited for Komi people. Eventually it was decided that too little of the pre-Christian animist world-view remained to sustain a renewed faith. Today, the interest in pre-Christian mythology is mainly reflected in the work of the ethnofuturist artists. While the Mari and Udmurt ethnofuturist artists propose the vernacular animist tradition to be a valid faith and ideology for contemporary people, the Komi ethnofuturists regard folklore and mythology to be a creative source, but still generally consider themselves to be Orthodox. (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 367) Nevertheless, in the media there has been sharp criticism of the ethnofuturists for renouncing Orthodoxy and for supporting paganism. There is an opinion in the artistic circles, that the Orthodox bishop is behind such disapproving comments, but publicly he has not spoken out against the use of elements of traditional culture (ibid.).

Lutheranism as the faith of some kindred peoples was also considered. In the mid-1990s under the influence of the Finnish pastor Arvo Survo, a congregation of the Ingrian Church was founded in connection with the national political party *Doryam as'nymös*, after its leader Nadezhda Mityusheva, who had previously been interested in the 'paganist' tradition, converted. Today the congregation has about 40, mainly Komi members. Its leader, pastor Sergei Yelfimov seeks to develop the Komi national culture. (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 384–385) In general, the social visibility and influence of the Lutheran congregation remains marginal.

While it is possible to evaluate the role, constancy and continuity of vernacular Orthodoxy variously, it is a historical reality that the official religious infrastructure in the Komi region was almost completely eradicated during the Soviet era. In 1916 there were 177 Orthodox churches and more than 200 chapels in the Komi region. (Rogatchev 1997: 199; Istorija Komi 2004: 173) Most of them were closed down during the 1930s. By 1941 there were no functioning congregations left. Most of the closed churches were turned into cultural clubs, schools and storehouses. More than 50 churches were torn down completely. After the war, as a result of appeals by “a considerable number of

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<sup>15</sup> <http://syktyvkar.eparchia.ru/nf03.html>, last accessed 1.03.2017.

believers” three churches were opened again – in Kotchpon (outskirts of Syktyvkar), Yb (Syktyvdin district), in Aikino (Ust-Vym district), and a prayer house in Ukhta (which closed again in 1961). Until the late 1980s these remained the only functioning Orthodox churches. (Rogatchev 1997: 200; Istorija Komi 2004: 432; 690)

In the Kulömdin district there were no functioning churches or Orthodox clerics by the end of the Soviet period. Some devout (usually elderly) women – sometimes with their grandchildren – occasionally visited the only working church near Syktyvkar. Still, Filatov (2005: 171) has estimated that in the Komi region Orthodoxy was actually preserved better than in many other parts of Russia. He explains that this occurred via the tradition of lay people officiating regular prayer meetings, which is characteristic of Orthodoxy in the Northern areas, as the remote villages often did not have a permanent priest even before the Soviet repressions. Hence, Filatov points out, already prior to the Soviet era lay people actually had a prominent role in religious life. Nevertheless, the Soviet regime repressed not only the official structures and priests but also the lay men who were religious leaders in their communities. The disappearance of male leaders resulted in the increased role of women in vernacular religious life. Male leadership was seen as more of a threat to the public order and official ideology by the authorities and thus was repressed more severely. Women, on the other hand were relatively less restrained in practicing religion. Throughout the Soviet Union, from the 1950s to 1980s elderly women were the main carriers of the faith. It was their motivated expertise that facilitated the continuity of Orthodox tradition among the population. (Mitrokhin 2006: 45) However, the vernacular tradition and practices sometimes diverged considerably from the dogmatic teachings and doctrine of the Church. In the post-Soviet period this has resulted in numerous conflicts and misunderstandings stemming from differences between institutional and vernacular interpretations of Orthodoxy. (Mitrokhin 2006: 45; Ilina and Ulyashev 2009: 162–163)

As a result of increased liberties for the believers at the end of the 1980s the number of church baptisms started to increase in the Komi region too, reaching its peak in the early 1990s. (Istorija Komi 2004: 690) At the time of this growing interest in religion in the society, the Komi Republic’s president Yuri Spiridonov devoted little attention to questions concerning religion or its role in public life. In addition to lacking interest of faith-related matters, the President supposedly also lacked basic knowledge regarding different religious denominations and traditions. In the early 1990’s the Baptists gained the President’s support, and as a result the construction of a Baptist church was started in downtown of Syktyvkar. The church would become the biggest Baptist church in Russia. Filatov (2005: 177) has judged the overall ignorance of the republic’s administration in regard to religion enabled the Baptists to achieve the necessary support for their undertaking. This suggestion is supported by the fact that in the mid-1990s Spiridonov decided upon a new course in religious politics by granting the ROC complete backing. In 1996 an official agreement of cooperation was signed between the government and the ROC. As the administration increa-

singly aimed to incorporate the ROC's position on different social and public questions, a relationship formed between the church and the political administration that has been characterised as "symphonic". (ibid.)

Spiridonov also started to support the formation of a separate bishopric, as at that time the Komi region was part of the Bishopric of Arkhangelsk. Behind the aspiration of restoring a separate bishopric was the idea that this would help to strengthen national Orthodoxy. (Filatov 2005: 172) In 1995 the ROC's Bishopric of Syktyvkar and Vorkuta<sup>16</sup> was established and Pitirim (Volotchkov) became the bishop. According to Filatov (2005: 178), the establishment of the bishopric brought immediate trouble to Baptists as the local law enforcement started to take interest in their financial activities. The local Baptist congregation has not been able to find the means to complete the construction of the Church of Christ the Saviour. The church's hall was built to hold 1500 worshippers, but its current congregation stands at about 200.

In 2001 Vladimir Torlopov was elected President of the Komi Republic (in office 2002–2010). Unlike Spiridonov, Torlopov was a practicing Orthodox, but at the same time he stopped imposing Orthodoxy on the Republic. (Filatov 2005: 179) According to Filatov, under Torlopov the Republic's officials ceased to discriminate against religious minorities and any faith community was able to get a registration without difficulties. At the same time, the administration of Syktyvkar (with Mayor Sergei Katunin, in office 2001–2006) adopted a more restrictive approach. For example, Protestant congregations were barred from renting rooms for their services. (ibid.) The most notable case of the authorities' attempt to restrict the activities of religious minorities is exemplified by the endeavours to close down several rehabilitation centres. However, in the opinion of Filatov and Lunkin (2016: 371–372) the procurator's office, the FSB and representatives of the ROC were behind these attacks rather than Governor's administration.

In 2010–2015 Viatcheslav Gaizer took over as the head of the Republic. He took a neutral position regarding religious affairs. (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 372) After Gaizer's arrest in 2015 for corruption, Sergei Kaplikov was appointed as acting governor. According to Filatov and Lunkin (2016: 373), immediately after his appointment the government started to take an interest in and showed a readiness to support the social efforts of different religious organisations.

Religious affairs in the Republic fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of National Politics. According to Filatov and Lunkin (2016: 372–373), the religious politics specialists have aimed to follow the principle of religious tolerance and refrained from adopting a hostile attitude towards religious minorities. The ministry has supported the Protestants' social projects and

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<sup>16</sup> In 2016 the bishopric was somewhat reorganised and is now called the Bishopric of Syktyvkar and Komi-Zyryan. The Northern districts now make up the Bishopric of Vorkuta and Usinsk, while the rest of the Komi Republic remains under the Bishopric of Syktyvkar and Komi-Zyryan.

rehabilitation centres.<sup>17</sup> Although the Orthodox bishop Pitirim takes part in certain official events, according to Filatov and Lunkin (*ibid.*: 373), there is no specifically close cooperation between the bishopric and the Republic's officials.

This brief sketch of the leading politicians' attitudes and actions towards religious groups and organisations illustrates the randomness and inconsistency of the Republic's actual religious policy and how much it has depended on the specific people in power. In general, governmental politicians have not demonstrated a specifically hostile or discriminating attitude towards evangelical groups or churches and the cases of discrimination are rather connected with the activities of the ROC. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the ROC is in a position to influence, at least to a certain extent, the authorities' attitudes and actions in regard to religious sphere. When it comes to smaller localities, the officials' attitude towards non-Orthodox groups tends to be considerably less tolerant.

### The First Protestants in Russia and in Komi

In the Russian Federation Protestant believers are popularly perceived as a very recent and essentially a non-Russian phenomenon. This view has been enhanced with the help of media coverage, which have concentrated on groups that were recently established during the post-Soviet era and which have often been founded under the initiative of foreign missionaries. Indeed, the Don congregation, which is the focus of this study, is one example of such recently emerged groups. At the same time, the history and presence of Protestantism in Russia actually extends back to the 19th century<sup>18</sup>, as does the more or less hostile and tension-laden relationship between the Orthodox and Protestants.

Even prior to the appearance of the first Russian Protestants there were folk movements known as Molokans and Dukhobors, as well as Strigolniks, Khlysts and Subbotniks. These faiths are characterised by features that have prompted some scholars to characterise them as "Russian folk Protestants" or "proto-Protestants" (see Shtyrkov 2004: 108 note 3; Lunkin, Prokofyev 2000: 85). The Church identified these folk Christian movements as sectarian. In general, they rejected the authority of the Orthodox Church, as well as church rituals and religious practices such as the cult of saints or icon veneration, and instead emphasised the importance of personal faith and a relationship with God. After the emergence of Protestant groups in Russia, many of the followers of these folk movements merged with them (see Lunkin, Prokofyev 2000).

The first indigenous Russian Protestant groups appeared in the 1860s with the influence of local Protestants of German descent. By the end of the 1880s the growth of what the ROC saw as false religious practices was so worrying to

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<sup>17</sup> This has caused accusations from the Bishopric over tolerating sectarians (see <http://komionline.ru/news/17121>, last accessed 1.03.2017 and <http://komionline.ru/news/16531>, last accessed 1.03.2017).

<sup>18</sup> Ethnically non-Russian Protestants were present in Russia already in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

the Church, that new kind of mission was established in order to counter these heterodox developments. The ROC responded with antisectarian and antischismatic missionaries. The free-church Christians (including the Molokans, Dukhobors, Baptists, and Evangelical Christians) were one of the main targets of these efforts to fight what was seen as heterodox errors<sup>19</sup>. Evangelicalism was not only perceived as spiritually harmful, but also seen as a threat to the Empire's civil stability and territorial integrity. As ignorance was considered to be the main source of the heresy, the ROC missionaries travelled around the country to educate the Orthodox laity and engage and subdue the dissenters in polemical debates. They also cooperated with the police by reporting illegal propaganda of non-Orthodox teachings. (Clay 2001: 38, 41; Coleman 2005: 21–22, 102) Polemical debates and antisectarian pamphlets were thus not the only measure deployed against religious dissenters. Until the 1905 Russian Revolution, Slavic evangelicals suffered imprisonment, banishment to Siberia, exile abroad, confiscation of property, state seizure of children from evangelical families, and state and Orthodox harassment of “sectarians” and “sectarian” worship (Elliott 2003: 36). The 1905 Edict of Toleration allowed Orthodox to convert and assured non-Orthodox Christian denominations legal right to practice their faith, but even after the edict the state's tolerance of Protestants was limited as was the state's ability to protect Protestants from persecutions by local officials or popular violence. (Coleman 2005: 23, 69–71) The first congregations of the Seventh-Day Adventists also began to emerge in the 1880s. Pentecostal groups appeared soon after their advent in America in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Nikolskaia 2009: 23) Baptists, Evangelical Christians<sup>20</sup>, Seventh-Day Adventists and Pentecostals were the major branches of evangelical Christianity and had sizable communities by the end of Imperial Russia.

Regarding evangelical Christians, the state was continually concerned about their supposed sympathetic and supportive attitude towards revolutionary movements, their national allegiances and their dangerous organisational ability, especially Baptists which were the most active and the fastest growing denomination. In the eve and after the outbreak of the World War I official and public paranoia about foreign (primarily German) influence and Protestants' political reliability intensified further and brought with it a new wave of persecutions and strict restrictions to their activities. (Coleman 2005: 72–78, 121–123; Nikolskaia 2009: 43–45)

During the first years of Communist rule, non-Orthodox Christians enjoyed unprecedented freedom to practice and spread their faith, and their numbers

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<sup>19</sup> Old Believers and “Orthodox heretics”, who regarded themselves as part of the official church, but were rejected and even excommunicated by the leaders of that church were the other major types of dissenters. (Clay 2001: 38)

<sup>20</sup> Evangelical Christians with an uppercase “E” refers to particular churches and union of churches, while evangelical Christians with a lowercase “e” include a number of Protestant movements and groups.

grew significantly. After the revolution of 1917 the Soviet anti-religious agenda was foremost directed against the ROC because of its close relationship with the tsarist regime and also because the Church valuables were an attractive prize for the new regime. At the same time, the Christian minorities who had suffered from the tsarist and Orthodox oppressions were now seen as allies in weakening the ROC. (Coleman 2005: 155–159; Nikolskaia 2009: 58–59, 65) In fact the social democrats had seen religious dissenters as potential allies in their revolutionary aspirations for some time. (Nikolskaia 2009: 41) Religious dissent was conceptualised as popular protest against the current state of things, while at the same time there were certain democratic and egalitarian ideas in the evangelicals' teachings that were recognised as being kindred.

However, beginning in the late 1920s with the consolidation of the Soviet system and increasing intolerance of ideological differences, all religious activists, not only the Orthodox clergy, were categorized as “enemies of the people”. Evangelical Christians were now perceived by the Soviet regime as being the dangerous “other”. While the label “sectarians” was borrowed from the tsarist ideological vocabulary, the image of the “counterrevolutionary sectarian” now entered the collective pantheon of “enemies of the people” alongside wreckers, saboteurs, kulaks, Trotskyists, and agents of foreign powers. The survival of religion in the Soviet society was depicted as the work of anti-Soviet forces acting upon the most backward groups of the population, that is rural women and the aged. (Korovushkina Paert 2001: 181; Leete, Vallikivi 2011: 132; Shterin 2012: 289)

Actually, according to Tatiana Nikolskaia (2009: 10), in early Soviet rhetoric the terms “sect” and “sectarians” did not have particularly negative connotations in comparison with “clergy” for example. The negative connotations associated with these terms occurred during the anti-religious campaign that was launched at the end of 1950s under Nikita Khrushchev’s leadership. At that time atheist propagandists, agitators, and scholars began target the specific beliefs and practices of individual religious communities (Baran 2014: 10). In the general fight against religious beliefs, Pentecostals and Baptists were prominent targets of the antireligious campaign. (Mikeshin 2016: 136; Wanner 2007: 67–70) References to some actual practices such as glossolalia and prophesying were among the motifs employed in the propaganda to demonstrate the bizarreness and “harmful fanaticism” of “sectarians”. As part of the campaign the “sectarians” were also linked to some quite unfounded accusations of anti-state conspiracies and even ritual murders (Panchenko 2013b: 227). Alexander Panchenko (ibid.: 230) has pointed out that the KGB’s (political police) fight against religious groups was not limited to arrests and court cases. A significant part of its antisectarian activities were carried out in secret, with one common method for pressuring religious activists being to organise propagandistic campaigns in the local press.

The Orthodox Church and its supporters consistently depict the non-Orthodox groups and believers as a very new and alien phenomenon in the Komi context too. But along with the Orthodox majority, small Protestant groups have

also existed here since the early 20th century. The first Protestants in the Komi region were the Germans who were deported there during the First World War. In the 1920s and 1930s, first indigenous Komi Protestant groups appeared. These were formed under the influence of local men who had converted to some Protestant denomination while away from the home region during their studies or army service; in one instance, such a group was led by two women who had converted during their studies in St Petersburg. In most cases, these small groups tended to be short-lived. Perhaps, somewhat ironically, the Soviet prison camps also proved to be another source of new Protestant groups. Already during the 1920's prison camps were established in the Komi area, the repressed clergy were deported there. Under the influence of former pastors and lay believers various groups formed that included Lutherans, evangelicals, Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses. The former prisoners and deportees who initiated such communities were predominantly from the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine. (Gagarin 1978: 259–260; Rogachev 1997: 200; also cf. Leete 2013) As a result of the Stalinist repressions in the 1940s a considerable number of German Lutherans were deported to the Komi territory. However, their (underground) congregations were exclusively comprised of ethnic Germans, with services and prayer meetings held in German, and as a rule, and in contrast to other Protestants, they did not engage in proselytising. (FM; also cf. Filatov 2005: 189)

In the 1950s–60s these groups gained new members from amongst the work-related immigrants. (Rogachev 1997: 200–201) According to Mikhail Rogachev, there were over 40 small groups of Protestant believers in the towns of Vorkuta, Inta, Ukhta, Petchora and Syktyvkar at the end of 1950's. The authorities constantly pressured these groups. Only some of them were officially registered and had the right to conduct services (the Baptist congregations in Syktyvkar, Vorkuta, Ukhta and Petchora and the Lutheran congregation in Syktyvkar). (Rogachev 1997: 201)

The autochthonous Komi religious movement called the *Bursylsyas* that emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Kulömdin region, should be mentioned here. (see Chuvyurov, Smirnova 2003; Koosa, Leete 2011) The *Bursylsyas* considered themselves to be properly Orthodox, but the official Church saw the movement as sectarian. While they generally followed the dogmas and rituals of the ROC, they also believed it was possible to communicate directly with Jesus and practiced prophesising, glossolalia, ecstatic prayers. Sometimes singing was used in order to achieve a trance-like state. Contemporary Komi Protestants have perceived the *Bursylsyas* movement as having features in common with the evangelical movement (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 385, 390). Concurrently, in the village of Mys, which was the centre of the *Bursylsyas* movement, no evangelical groups have emerged. Even nowadays the village has an image of being a kind of stronghold of vernacular Orthodoxy and religious continuity (see Koosa, Leete 2011: 55) and the theoretical closeness of the local religious traditions to some Protestant denominations has not resulted in conversions of the former to the latter.

Today, largest communities of Protestants are located in the towns of the Komi Republic. The capital Syktyvkar is the closest to Kulömdin district. In the following paragraphs I will briefly introduce the Protestant churches in Syktyvkar with which the Don evangelicals in the centre of this study have closer connections. These include the Baptist church of Christ the Saviour (Российский союз евангельских христиан-баптистов “Церковь Христа-спасителя”), the Komi Christian Church of Evangelical Faith (Кomi Христианская Церковь Евангельской Веры), and the Pentecostal church Source of Life (Источник жизни).

The Baptist congregation in Syktyvkar was initially established by deported Germans in the 1930s. Today the majority of the congregation of Church of Christ the Saviour is Russian, with the remainder made up of Ukrainians and Komis. The size of the Syktyvkar congregation is about 200, but there are also smaller congregations in the villages. There are quite a number of young people and members of the intelligentsia who are among the members. To avoid generational conflicts stemming from different worship preferences, a more traditional form and structure of the service is offered on Sundays, and more contemporary services aimed at the young are also held. Patriotism is considered to be important for the church. The representatives of the church have emphasised the importance of Russian national consciousness for their congregants. At the same time, the church has recently started to pay more attention to mission among the Komi population. For example, during the church holidays, greetings are said in the Komi language, and when undertaking mission trips to villages they try to include a Komi speaker too. (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 386; FM)

Vasili Popov (1921–1991) began as a member of the Baptist Church, and laid the foundation for the Komi Christian Church of Evangelical Faith (usually referred to as Komi vichko or Komi Church). Already since the 1960s he led a special group of Komi believers. Officially the congregation was registered in 1992. Popov’s inspiration was to create a special church for the Komi people. According to Filatov (2005: 193), this idea was influenced by the Lutheranism of the deported Germans. Actual independence from the Baptist congregation was achieved by emphasising Komi particularities, most notably emphasis was placed on the use of the native language. As manifestations of national specificity the services were held in the Komi language, religious folk songs were sung, and in his later years V. Popov wore a ryassa and incorporated other traditionally Orthodox elements to his appearance. After his death V. Popov’s sons Pavel and Daniil have continued his activities. Daniil Popov is currently the pastor of the church. With D. Popov as pastor, the character of the church has moved away from Baptism and moved somewhat closer towards Pentecostalism. At the same time, Orthodox elements are also continually present as is interest in Orthodox theology and history. D. Popov links the history of their Church with St Stephen of Perm. According to the Popovs, in the Orthodox context St Stephen was against Russification, therefore he could be considered a dissident (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 389; see also Popova 2009). The congregation

currently has about 100 members, with 7 affiliated groups in the districts (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 388). From the beginning Komi has been the main language of the services. According to D. Popov a respectful attitude towards the ancestral language is directly connected with the biblical commandment to honour one's father and mother. (Filatov 2005: 193–195; Leete 2013: 258–261, 270)

The Church of Christian Evangelicals-Pentecostals Source of Life emerged in Syktyvkar in the mid-1990s. The missionaries actively work among the Komi population; attention is paid to supporting the national culture. According to Filatov and Lunkin (2016: 391–392), the Komi make up the majority of the Source of Life members. The Source of Life as well as other Pentecostal churches in Komi devote their time to working with prison populations and with addicts. The Church has organised different conferences for discussing issues of faith and invited foreign speakers. Some members of the Don congregation have also participated in these conferences.

The Don congregation has collaborated together with all of the aforementioned churches in organising different faith based events, summer camps for children and youth, and Christian concerts and conferences. There are informal visits to each other's congregations, but individual contacts and mutual sharing of experiences are also common. When pastor Andrei has been absent, guest preachers from the Baptist and Komi churches have been asked to hold services in Don. While few of the core members of the Don congregation have a Baptist background, young people who leave the village for studies in Syktyvkar, tend to prefer to join the Komi church.

While the history of different Russian Protestant movements and groups reaches back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the evangelical and Charismatic churches that sprang up since the early 1990s are a new phenomenon in Russia's religious life. The younger generation has also introduced new trends to some of the pre-existing congregations (see Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 386). Lunkin (2005) has summarised that compared to the congregations founded in the pre-1990s era these new churches differ in the character of their youth culture, their eagerness to organise and apply new methods of missionary and social ministry work, and their willingness to speak out on social and political issues. Developments in the Komi Republic have also been influenced by federal politics and have broadly followed the general trends in the Russian society. I will look more closely into the dynamics of post-Soviet religious life and politics in which these new Protestant groups emerged in the next sub-chapter.

## The dynamics and peculiarities of the Russian religious life since the 1990s

The State of the Russian society after the dissolution of the Soviet society and the collapse of the communist ideology has often been characterised as having resulting a certain moral and symbolic vacuum. Consequently, the decline of these entities opened up new space for a variety of ideologies and world-views that had previously been repressed and unimaginable under the previous regime. Many people welcomed this new ideological heterogeneity, together with the concomitant rapidly expanding religious “marketplace” that seemed to offer something suitable for every taste and need. Simultaneously and increasingly not everybody saw this recently emerged diversity as positive development and felt uncomfortable with the transition from clearly prescribed official ideology to the seemingly “anything goes” state of affairs. There is a strong moral dimension in the perception of how the changes in the society have been perceived. Jarrett Zigon (2011: 3–4) argues that the ongoing search for coherent and widely accepted notion of morality is one of the main characteristics of the post-Soviet Russian society. After the previously prescribed communist ideology and accompanying morality, this unprecedented diversity of available moral strategies, both religious and non-religious, has often been seen as a potential danger to the supposed social and moral cohesion of collective life.

The Russian Orthodox Church as the historical state church sought to regain its former monopoly over the spiritual sphere in Russia. In the context of so many entirely new uncertainties and dislocations many ordinary people also looked to the Church for guidance. Both in popular and in scholarly writings the processes and trends in late- and post-Soviet religious life were frequently described as a ‘religious revival’ or a ‘religious renaissance’. However, scholarly observers and analysts are far from unanimous in their agreement of such a depiction and differ considerably in their arguments and estimations. For example, there is an idea positing that a certain core of vernacular religious knowledge and practices was preserved through Soviet time, which is often linked with the quite widespread notion that the (elderly) women are the keepers and carriers of religious tradition. (Dragadze 1993; Ilina, Ulyashev 2009; Keinänen 1999; Mitrokhin 2006; see also Koosa, Leete 2011) Others have determined that among lay people hardly any religious knowledge remained by the time of perestroika and that the current Orthodoxy should be viewed as a quite new phenomenon. (cf. Benovska-Sabkova et al 2010; Kormina, Shtyrkov 2011) Milena Benovska-Sabkova et al (2010: 18) stress that the spread of contemporary Orthodoxy has largely depended on urban centres – a fact that is at odds with the depiction of village grandmothers as preservers of religious traditions and as a source for the post-Soviet religious revival. Kormina and Shtyrkov (2011: 171–172) write that while the newly converted often invoke such a concept, the village immigrants to cities actually aimed to distance themselves from their low-status rural heritage – including religiosity. They thus place more emphasis on discontinuities, arguing especially concerning lay

religiosity that contemporary Orthodoxy should be viewed as an invented tradition.

The relationship between continuities and discontinuities in the Orthodox tradition is certainly a complex one. Continuity of some elements of religious knowledge and practices does not repudiate the fact that the Soviet period efficiently caused the demise of some basic religious knowledge. (Agadjanian 2011: 19) In the post-soviet setting lay people themselves have often expressed the feeling that they do not know “how to believe”. (Article I: 177; see also Lan-kauskas 2009: 114, 117) This notion is frequently paired with a somewhat romantic or nostalgic assumption that the previous generations, or one’s parents or grandparents, used to possess the knowledge of how to be proficiently Orthodox.

The clergy’s approach to vernacular religiosity has been far from straight-forward. On the one hand, seminary-educated priests tend to regard vernacular religiosity that does not always follow the Church rules as ignorant. It is not uncommon for them to sharply condemn certain knowledge and practices as being not genuinely Orthodox. (e.g. Benovska-Sabkova et al 2010: 18; Article I: 177) On the other hand, certain vagueness of normative borders is a core characteristic of the Orthodox tradition (see Agadjanian 2011: 23), as it has been quite accommodating to a variety of ideological stances and vernacular practices. While Agadjanian speaks of inclusiveness as a particular ethos in the Orthodox tradition (*ibid.*), Kormina and Shtyrkov (2011: 174–175) have also emphasised that there are certain pragmatic reasons for the ROC to accept what they would otherwise call irregular religiosity as being legitimate and Orthodox. According to such an inclusive approach, most citizens of Russia fall within purview of the ROC, and this in turn allows the ROC to make claims about its authority and legitimacy regarding its role in the society and in relation to its position to other religions.

The occasionally contradictory position of the ROC regarding lay religiosity, as well as the somewhat ambivalent role of Orthodoxy in ordinary peoples’ lives is not an entirely post-Soviet phenomena. Marat Shterin (2012: 289) has pointed out the paradoxical position of religion in Soviet identity politics – while religion was officially excluded as a marker of ethnicity, it was nevertheless preserved in the collective memory and the individual imagination as a source of ethnic belonging. Kormina and Shtyrkov (2015) have recently written about the cultural retrospectivism that started to emerge in the late 1950s and gained momentum in the 1960s as a background to the later religious revival. This approach led by intellectuals and artists brought religion in the form of objects such as icons and churches back to the public sphere, but reconceptualised it as a phenomena of cultural heritage and value. Religious objects obtained new status as objects of “our heritage” as religious semantics were replaced with secular ideology and the encounter with religious objects was supposed to induce aesthetic and patriotic feelings in the Soviet person, rather than religious sensations. These paradoxes came to the fore during post-Soviet era, as the ROC acquired great symbolic cachet and Orthodoxy came to be seen

as offering a unifying ideology for the new socio-political circumstances. For many people of Russia, being Orthodox is equated with national and cultural belonging and patriotism (e.g. Golovushkin 2004: 103; Krindatch 2004: 126; Löfstedt 2012: 93; Mitrokhin 2006: 37–38), Orthodoxy has come to function as a kind of public religion (see Agadjanian 2000).

It has also been argued that for the majority of Russians religious identification has, to a certain extent, simply replaced the discredited communist ideology, but instead of becoming believers, the majority of the populace is in fact quite indifferent to religion. (Heino 2000: 294; Löfstedt 2012: 93–94; Mitrokhin 2006: 52) Indeed, sociological surveys have produced remarkable results about people's self-identifications, and demonstrate that considering oneself Orthodox does not necessarily correlate with religious ideas or practices. At the same time, the ROC wields considerable authority in the society and influences the opinions and positions of many people, including those who are not members of the Church. (see Krindatch 2004: 117)

The ROC has been seen as a unifying spiritual and institutional force by the president and many other politicians as well. The government has regularly appealed to the authority of Orthodoxy in order to influence the national sentiments of its followers and support the legitimacy of the state. This was especially relevant in the 1990s when the new political elite was still establishing itself in the society. (Kuropatkina 2012: 133–134; Bogomilova 2004: 5; Shterin 2012: 296)

While both the clergy and regular believers have tended to conceptualise the post-Soviet interest in Orthodoxy and growth of self-proclaimed Orthodox believers in terms of a restoration of an earlier, pre-revolutionary model, this has been enacted as part of a profound socio-political transformation in a context that is fundamentally different from the pre-Soviet situation. (Benovska-Sabkova et al 2010: 16; Agadjanian 2011: 18; Kormina, Shtyrkov 2011: 171) Several features of contemporary Orthodoxy and its resurgence have their roots in the Soviet, rather than in the pre-Soviet period. Kormina and Shtyrkov (2015: 34) see the widely celebrated millennia of Christianisation of Rus as a logical outcome and continuation of the politics of cultural retrospectivism that grew out of the 1960s. During that time, the museological perception of religion in the minds of many Soviet people started to come alive. The Soviet leadership's change in its attitude towards the Church helped to facilitate the change.

Regardless of the specific historical and social particularities of the resurgence of Orthodox religiosity, some of the general tendencies of contemporary Western religiosity, such as the individualisation of faith, pluralism, the phenomena of “believing without belonging” and the idea of “belonging without believing” have also shaped present-day Orthodoxy and religiosity in Russia in general. (Bogomilova 2004: 4; Kääriäinen, Furman 2000: 34–35; 64; Mitrokhin 2006: 45–47) While Orthodoxy and the ROC have assumed the central position in the society, religious life in today's Russia is characterised by a diversity of forms and practices (e.g. Kormina, Panchenko, Shtyrkov 2015). The post-

socialist period has produced a reinvented and essentialised “Orthodox Russia”, with mass-media helping to facilitate a narrative of revival, and assisting in evoking a strong group identity closely linked with national ideals and goals. At the same time, the transition to a market economy and the spread of more global influences, has caused religiosity to become more individual. (Agadjanian, Rousselet 2010: 312) Different observers suggest that despite the prominent position of the ROC in the public sphere, as well as the state’s and society’s supportive attitude towards Orthodoxy, it cannot be said that Russian society in general has become more religious (e.g. Kormina, Shtyrkov 2015; Filatov 2004; Kuropatkina 2012: 135).

In 1990 a law was adopted that granted total freedom of religion and in 1991 the Soviet Union ceased to exist. These major changes boosted the interest in and the presence of religion in the Russian society, which already been growing since the second half of the 1980s. As the ROC and other traditional religious communities started to revive, they were simultaneously accompanied by a legion of foreign missionaries and religious organisations advertising their own particular messages and looking for followers. In addition to the revitalisation of the traditional religious communities and the influx of foreign missionaries arriving to the country, there were also a number of autochthonous Russian religious movements such as the White Brotherhood, the Last Testament Church (*Vissarionovtsy*), and the *Bogorodichnyi Center* (later called the Church of the *Derzhavnaia* Icon) that were also emerging (see Panchenko 2004). Although the religious landscape of post-Soviet Russia became extremely diverse very quickly, it still remained quite hierarchical.

In the new context of religious freedom, the ROC soon came to promote the concept of “canonical territory”, and began actively opposing the idea of a free religious marketplace. The church began pursuing restrictions on the activities of foreign missionaries. (Poplavsky 2012: 112; Shterin 2012: 295; Verkhovsky 2002: 334) Positioning itself as a guardian of national identity and culture, the “non-traditional” religious organisations and foreign missionaries came to be depicted as a threat to “spiritual security” of the Russian people – a view that has been widely adopted in the society (see Fagan 2013: 109–110).

In contrast to the numerous religious competitors, mainly from the western countries, the ROC had practically no previous experience with functioning in an environment of religious freedom, nor was it able to conduct the sort of modern missionary work that was being practiced by its rivals. (Baran 2006: 639–640) This motivated the ROC to seek the state’s support in what it argued as being an unfair competition on its “canonical territory”. The new and more strict laws on freedom of conscience and religious associations was adopted in 1997 and echoed the concerns that had been voiced by the ROC and its conservative supporters. It restricted the possibilities of registering religious communities. The preamble of the law differentiated between traditional and non-traditional religious organisations. While the category of “traditional” religions included Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity, Orthodoxy’s special position and role in the Russian history and culture is highlighted.

“Christianity” in this context is not specified, but presumably denotes Catholicism and (mainline) Protestantism, which are regarded as traditional to ethnic minorities. While non-Orthodox Christian traditions that are linked to ethnicity have generally met with more accepting attitudes, various other Christian organisations and believers that are deemed as being “non-traditional” or “new” have been confronted with heavy criticism. The use of the designation “new religious movements” is not congruent with its use in the Western countries where the term has been used to designate the religious groups that predominantly emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. In the Russian context this label has popularly been attached to a wide variety of religious communities, often including those that are mainstream in other parts of the world, but also those whose presence and history in Russia goes back to the pre-Soviet times.

An anti-cultist or anti-sectarian movement soon followed the newly emergent and rapidly developing trend of religious diversity. While the terms “sect” and “sectarians” were commonplace in atheist propaganda, thereby making them already familiar to people, a fundamental part of the post-Soviet anti-sectarian discourse is actually based on the American anti-cult movement. The American anti-cult movement emerged in the 1970s mainly as a reaction from concerned relatives over young adults joining new and unusual religions that have proliferated throughout the United States since the 1960s.

The professional anti-sectarian movement in Russia has been largely led by Aleksandr Dvorkin, who founded an anti-sectarian centre under the auspices of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1993. Dvorkin had close connections with the Western anti-cult circles, which became the main source for the information, images and solutions now proffered on behalf of the ROC. The Western anti-cult rhetoric was adapted to correspond to the Russian discourse. The term “destructive cults” became “totalitarian sects,” thereby adopting an element from the public discourse from the recently rejected historical period, and combining it with the lingering mistrust of sectarianism. Moreover, the NRMs were depicted as criminal organisations intent on seizing state power and destroying democratic institutions. (Shterin 2012: 296; see also Baran 2006: 643) Emily B. Baran (2006: 638; see also Shterin 2012: 296) indicates that the anti-cult movement enabled the ROC to legitimise its attacks on other religious organisations and groups. It has also facilitated the Church’s call upon the state to act on its behalf, as the ROC positioned as a defender against “totalitarian sects” which were said to violate citizens’ freedom of conscience through deliberate manipulation and deception.

In the mid-1990s there was a wave of anti-sectarian publicity in the mass media – with many newspapers printing case reports describing the psychological traumas, child abuse, divorces, and even major crimes and suicides connected with the sects’ activity in Russia (Agadjanin 2001: 354). Protectionist anti-cult rhetoric became a ritualised declaration of loyalty not only to the Orthodox Church, but also to the state (see Shterin 2012: 296). The anti-sectarian movement specifically and traditionalist/anti-pluralist discourse in general have succeeded in popularising the use of particular terms such as “sect”, “totali-

tarian sect” or “destructive cult” to the point that they are now part of the vocabulary of ordinary people. Moreover, while these terms are not part of any law, they are broadly used by state representatives and present in numerous official documents produced by regional authorities (Poplavsky 2012: 117; Fagan 2013: 95).

The Russian anti-sectarian rhetoric has been accompanied by and intertwined with anti-western discourses. Since the end of the 1990s, anti-Western sentiment has been growing in the society in general as well as in the political sphere and amongst the ROC administration. (see Verkhovsky 2002: 335) Vladimir Shlapentokh (2011) argues that the ruling elite specifically should be seen as being responsible for propagating xenophobic (and in particular, anti-American) ideology. Agadjanian (2001: 354; see also Fagan 2013: 95) writes that both Western mainstream denominations as well as other religious groups of Western origin have been the most frequent target of the reactionary criticism that depicts them as the main threat to the integrity of Russian culture. Moreover, official documents on national security have referred to the “negative influence of foreign religious organisations and missionaries”, thus marking certain religious groups as a potential threat to the state (Elliott 2003: 42; Golovushkin 2004: 107). High-ranking politicians have also called attention to the problem of “sects”. Olga Sibirieva (2013) notes that when president Vladimir Putin declared it necessary to improve the control over “totalitarian sects”, the president also mentioned the need to follow the principle of freedom of consciousness. It is however the first half of his statement that was invoked by officials and wider society.

In the early 1990s, it was not uncommon for the arrival and activities of foreign Protestant missionaries to receive rather positive press. This helped the missionaries to become relatively successful in attracting ordinary people to their services (e.g. Fagan 2013: 109–110; Poplavsky 2012: 114; Löfstedt 2012: 104). By the end of the decade this had changed. The position of evangelical (especially Pentecostal and charismatic) denominations in contemporary Russian society is rather defined. According to Roman Poplavsky (2012: 117) “Protestant” is often understood to be almost synonymous with “sect” in both political and Orthodox discourses, and this has helped shape the perception of Russian Protestant churches being secretive organisations with dubious practices. In this regard, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have been the most pressured and stigmatised communities of the Protestant believers (e.g. Panchenko 2013a; Polavsky 2012). Panchenko (2013a: 219) has argued that the conventional conception of faith in Russia allows for relatively little tolerance of charismatic and egalitarian religious groups. Specific practices (such as glosolalia), an emotional way of worship, and the avoidance of centralised hierarchical structures can be interpreted by potential members or bystanders as signs of the faith not being “genuine”, and even somehow frivolous or even dangerous. The discourse of discontinuity, a break from former life, which is basis of personal conversion, can be taken as proof of the “totalitarian” and “destructive” nature of these churches.

Thus, while the emphasis on breaking from the previous life that is an inherent characteristic of evangelical Christianity could be seen as being a potentially attractive for people emerging from the Soviet system, several circumstances have prevented the growth of Protestant denominations. One of these is peoples' perceptions of "new" religions having been strongly shaped by anti-cultist viewpoints communicated to wide audiences through the media. This has created and sustained negative stereotypes that sometimes have had deep historical roots. Political support of the ROC and its proffered discourses have established Orthodoxy as an arbiter of national identity and as a result even religiously indifferent people are be supportive of Orthodoxy while condemning other religious traditions as "foreign".

### Orthodoxy and "new" religions in Komi Republic

The dynamics of religious life in the Komi republic since the early 1990s has followed a course broadly similar to overall developments in Russia. Valeri Sharapov (2001: 148) has noted that along with guarding and developing the native tongue and folklore, the idea of revitalising national culture has also been connected with restoring the Orthodox churches in the Komi region. Lay people have frequently organised the restoration of local churches. (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 373; Koosa, Leete 2011; Sharapov 2001)

At the same time, a variety of new and unfamiliar religious groups, missionaries and spiritual teachers have appeared in the area to offer their particular solutions to the contemporary challenges. Most of the non-Orthodox religious groups in Komi Republic were registered between 1991 and 1995. Moderate growth since the second half of the 1990s has been interpreted as a sign of a certain crisis in regard to their activities. (Istoria Komi 2004: 692) Still, over recent years the number of officially registered evangelical (Pentecostal) congregations has grown somewhat<sup>21</sup>.

It has been suggested that non-Orthodox Christian missions might be more successful among the non-Russian population of the Russian Federation than they are among the ethnic Russians (see Filatov, Lunkin 2010: 375; Lunkin 2000; Löfstedt 2012: 106). Both the Russian nationalist agenda of the ROC and missionary strategies of evangelical churches could make them the more attractive to ethnic minorities. A recent sociological survey seems to present some support to this idea by demonstrating that a slightly larger number of Protestants can be found in the Republics of Tyva, Udmurtia, Altai and some other regions with larger ethnic minority populations. (See Arena 2012: 49) At the same time, the Komi Republic does not appear to offer similar example.

Bishop Pitirim is well known for his negative attitude towards non-Orthodox religious groups. He regards the Komi region as the canonical

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<sup>21</sup> [http://komi.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat\\_ts/komi/ru/statistics/government/](http://komi.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_ts/komi/ru/statistics/government/), last accessed 1.03.2017.

territory of the ROC, and views non-Orthodox religious activities as unlawful and harmful. Following Pitirim's lead, the bishopric has repeatedly and publicly condemned the Republic's administration for not granting special treatment to the ROC. The bishopric has asked the Republic's leaders to protect the interests of the Orthodox majority from proselytisation efforts of minorities by referencing the "very dangerous" equalisation of traditional and non-traditional confessions in Russia<sup>22</sup>. In 2011, as a result of assembly of the bishopric, the bishopric published an article on its web page making allusion to the Republic's administration, and accusing it of lack of thoughtful and balanced politics regarding the ROC.<sup>23</sup> The letter included complains that not enough respect is shown in the public sphere of the Republic towards the ROC and its clerics and that there is even "phobia of Orthodoxy" with some officials even going so far as to belittle Orthodox believers. In general, the argument held that that it is not democratic to ignore Orthodoxy as the faith of majority.

Ideologically Pitirim positions himself strongly as supporter of the state and a fighter for purity of faith. This includes the fighting against conspiracies, which he has ascribed to those who are not supportive of his views. Pitirim has continuously made patriotic statements condemning the West, "fifth-column", modernists, ecumenists and sectarians. (Filatov, Lunkin 2016: 367) As the bishop is also known for authoritarian leadership and is intolerant of alternative opinions among his clergy, this means that both the leadership of the bishopric as well as local priests express similar views.

Local representatives of the ROC have repeatedly expressed a fundamentally antagonistic approach to other religious traditions in the bishopric's newspaper and on its web page. These declarations have clearly demonstrated that different Christian denominations are lumped into the category of "sects" along with various beliefs of Eastern-origin as well as other religious communities.<sup>24</sup> For instance, hegumen Ignati (Bakayev) has provided a good example of this kind of branding of other religious communities as sects by linking their activities with both anti-state activities and psychologically damaging beliefs. Provoked by the public concert organised by the Pentecostal church *Bozhya Slava* (Glory to God), he wrote a statement to the mayor of Syktyvkar in which he asked him find possibilities to prohibit the "noisy pseudo-religious concert-meetings of the sect Bozhya Slava and the like". In the copy of this letter published in the newspaper "*Eparkhalnye vedomosti*", the hegumen (Hegumen Ignatii 2012: 6) writes:

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<sup>22</sup> <http://syktyvkar.eparchia.ru/o.htm>, last accessed 1.03.2017.

<sup>23</sup> <http://syktyvkar.eparchia.ru/nf03.html>, last accessed 1.03.2017.

<sup>24</sup> On the web page of the Bishopric there is a short article and a video clip, in which a well-known traditionalist and anti-cultist priest Oleg Steniaiev explains that only Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist and Reformed Church are to be considered Protestant and all others are in fact sectarians even if they themselves claim to be Protestants. (<http://syktyvkar.eparchia.ru/nlk199.html>, last accessed 27.02.2017) Elsewhere Steniaiev argues that a failure to categorise denominations such as Adventists, Baptists and Pentecostals as "totalitarian sects" causes them to evade due criticism (see reference in Fagan 2013: 97).

The motto of all demonic forces reads: “divide and rule”. And into the new Russia (because of the envy of her there can be no allies but God), so that she would not recover and strengthen, and so that the people would not become one Body, sects flowed: Moonies, Aum Shinrikyo, scientologists, Krishnaites, Adventists, Jehovahists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Neo-Pentecostals, etc. Such a huge choice of “beliefs” so that every Russian [россиянин] would choose “faith” according to one’s desire. Because the “fools”<sup>25</sup> allow the enemies of Orthodoxy to preach and act, without seeing in it the danger to the country and its people.

On his social media profile page bishop Pitirim also brands other Christian denominations as “zombifying sects” – while he does not articulate specific names of churches, it is clear that he means evangelical churches. People who join these churches are depicted as spiritually lazy and disrespectful of their tradition and ancestors:

Yes, it’s very sad that there’s many such people now who leave the Orthodox Church for different sects that allure them with dances, pop songs where they listen to the zombifying and flattering voice of a pseudo-pastor. Because that’s much easier than humbly standing in Church and praying to God as our ancestors of Holy Rus did.<sup>26</sup>

In recent years there have been several allegations concerning Pitirim’s immoral behaviour (e.g. Borisov 2010; Dvoeglazova 2014; Krupko 2011; Masiuk 2014; see also Filatov, Lunin 2016: 369). Thus, while having power over the politics of the ROC in Komi, Pitirim’s moral authority in the society in general is not very high. Nevertheless, the ideas and attitudes that the bishop holds and propagates to some extent influence over a substantial number of the people who consume these opinions through newspapers and TV-programmes.

As the religious life in the Komi countryside has remained relatively homogeneous, not many people have had direct encounters with non-Orthodox believers. Nevertheless, there are certain preconceived attitudes and opinions people tend to express in their comments on the changes and developments in the religious domain. Public discourses, views promoted by the ROC and rhetoric of leading politicians on both national and regional scale have had their impact on how the people in Komi villages perceive non-Orthodox believers and other religions. Despite the widely spread prejudices there are also more nuanced approaches and interpretations drawing on local history, knowledge and experiences. In the next subchapter, I will take a closer look at the relationship between a locally new religious group within traditionally Orthodox environment on the example of the Don evangelical community.

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<sup>25</sup> At the beginning of the letter there is a reference to the Bible: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Ps 14: 1; 53:1).

<sup>26</sup> <https://vk.com/id74284165> , last accessed 1.03.2017.

## The Evangelical community in the village of Don

In the beginning of this introduction I gave a descriptive overview of the Don community, about its inception and structure. Using the backdrop of described historical and social framework I will now focus more closely on the ideological premises and aspects of their activities, and will consider these in the context of the specific local sociocultural environment.

### Characteristic features of the group

As mentioned above, the Don Christian Community is supportive of the ecumenical or interdenominational agenda, and is characterised by inclusive approach towards people of different denominational backgrounds. Both ideological and practical considerations are combined to encourage the unity of Christians. Pastor Andrei has commented the issue in the following way:

In the Don Church we have very interestingly traditions and heritages from different churches coming together. /.../ And we respect and are friendly with all sane [gestures to make quotation marks] Christians who are based on the Bible, love the Bible and seek communicating with other churches. /.../ Usually it's the other way around, the reaction is like – no, we cannot associate with you, and that's a problem. I think that's a problem in Christian churches. /.../ Evangelical Christians in the Komi Republic and more generally in Russia are a minority, a very small minority, and if we start to divide even this minority, our influence is meagre. /.../ no one is saying that you should give up your denomination, let's arrange a new large denomination – no, there's no such talk like that. Be a Baptist, be a Pentecostal, but let's do some things together. I think that would be what God wants. There are more things that unite us than there are things that separate us.<sup>27</sup>

In the excerpt the emphasis is on the need for the evangelical branches of Christians to unite their forces to be more influential and moreover that in Russia such cooperative development is stunted because of the reluctance of church leaders who tend to keep to themselves. The Don group's ideology is accepting of various forms of worship and theological nuances, and according to Andrei, these differences should be valued – as long as they are not exaggerated and are in accordance with the Bible. When looking at how being a Christian is conceptualised within the Don group, Brian M. Howell's discussion of Christian identity and subjectivity seems relevant. In regard to contemporary evangelical Protestantism Howell (2007, see esp. pp 377–379) argues that the notion of 'commitment' rather than 'belief' is a central category in constituting the Christian subject and common identity with other Christians. Rather than

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<sup>27</sup> Quotations from online sources and by Don pastor or Kulömdin priest are identified with the speaker, in case of quotations from ordinary members of the congregation, the speaker's sex and year of birth are indicated.

doctrinal or theological nuances, personal commitment and practical activity are understood to be the hallmarks of true religion. While the pastor is certain of benefits of the evangelical movement, he also insists on the essential unity of all Christians:

For many centuries in Christianity there was no Catholic or Orthodox Church separately. There was basically one general Church, simply both in the East and in the West, but it was one Church. I think that's how it should be, because in the Bible we don't read about Baptists, nor Orthodox, nor Catholics, from the Bible we only read this – they were called simply Christians. /.../ To say that only our denomination is right, that everybody else get it wrongly, it seems to me, this is absurd. No Christians on the planet Earth own the 100% truth in understanding the Christian doctrine. We have to dig and dig, and understand and understand, what it was that Christ had in mind.

For the Don congregation such an outlook facilitates the acceptance of Christian diversity in general, but also accommodates various individual ways and levels of involvement within the group. While there are certain core members in the group, who can be considered to be fully devoted to the evangelical objectives and who have no problem articulating in a detailed manner their preference of evangelical faith, some others are much more loosely connected to the particularly evangelical mode of belief. Moreover, the group's inclusivity allows parallel or combined adherence as some of the women in the group also visit the Orthodox services. For example, one elderly woman who had been visiting services in Don for some years had herself (and her husband whose illness triggered this step) baptised in the Orthodox monastery but still continued to attend evangelical church. Another woman who baptised as an Orthodox in childhood admitted that for her, which church she attends makes no difference and if there were an Orthodox church open in the village, she might attend that instead. This kind of in-between positioning can be very conscious as is evident from a quotation from one of the congregants – she clearly distinguishes her motivations for going to the evangelical or Orthodox services:

I come here for the knowledge and I go to the Orthodox church for spirituality. I like the lighted candles and all... There are some here who say that you shouldn't go there [to the Orthodox church]. But I say, I like it there, we have the same God. I say, no-one knows which one is right. But indeed spirituality is not enough, [...] when I didn't know the Bible, I didn't know anything. (W, b 1956)

While the speaker refers to some evangelicals not completely approving of her shared loyalties, in general these kinds of multiple affinities or different doctrinal backgrounds do not appear to have to produce particular tensions or conflicts within the community. The most obvious sphere where some of the women in the group are challenged and silenced concerns the ideas and practices related to vernacular Orthodoxy.

The kind of non-denominational approach promoted by the Don evangelicals might be considered specifically suited for this particular context of postsocialist society, whereas it would be impossible in some other location. Here people can be genuinely indifferent about the distinctive features of different denominations or issues separating them theologically; these differences are not even known or fully understood nor are they considered to be important. Also, as Andrei points out, cooperating makes sense considering the overall low numbers of evangelicals in Russia. At the same time, while ordinary members (especially the younger generation) of different Protestant churches might be quite interested in communicating with other groups, pastor Andrei, as well as some other Don congregants with different denominational backgrounds, admit that it depends very much on the views of specific leadership. More often than not they tend to be reluctant to associate with other Protestant denominations.

As for some of the local women, the accommodating approach of the Don congregation allows them to maintain their Orthodox identity while giving new meaning and content to it through an evangelical perspective. At the same time, the Don church provides a strategic solution for their spiritual needs whilst an Orthodox church remains an inconvenient option for predominantly practical reasons.

Catherine Wanner (2009) used the example of Ukraine to show how evangelical communities foster practices, values and identities embedded in 'travelling cultures' that bypass the nation and de-territorialise identity and culture. This kind of tendency of evangelical culture is observable in the case of the Don congregation as well, as it was started through the initiative of an American missionary. Many of the books on issues of faith at the small library of the church are authored by American evangelicals and the translated films and tv-shows are also part of an effort to inculcate the Komi believers into an internationally shared evangelical experiences and values. Over the years, other believers from America and Germany<sup>28</sup> have visited the remote Komi village to see how William's mission work is progressing and also to make their own contribution.<sup>29</sup> Pastor Larry VanGundy from William's home church reflected upon his trip to Don in his blog as follows:

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<sup>28</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Catherine the Great invited German settlers to immigrate to Russia. Additionally, after the 1st and 2nd World War, a number of Germans were relocated to Komi. The descendants of these ethnic Germans kept their religious traditions through centuries and constitute the small "traditionally Protestant" segment of Komi population. In the beginning of 1990s many people of German origin returned to Germany but some of them still keep contacts with relatives in Komi and are stay in contact with Protestant missionaries.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Wuthnow (2009) writes, that while the American congregations are first and foremost locally oriented, most of them are to some degree involved in supporting trans-cultural ministries. Nearly three-quarters of U.S. church members say their congregation has supported a missionary working in another country during the past year. Participating in short-term mission trips is also rather popular; the practice originates from the 1950s and became increasingly popular during 1980s and 1990s.

We thank God for the privilege of seeing the answer to 12 years of praying for the work He was doing in Russia. When we first saw the “Prayer House” – the church in Don, and stepped over the threshold, it brought tears to our eyes to see the faithfulness of our God and the power of the Gospel. /.../ And it was awesome – as only God and His work can be – to see these living examples of the truly all-cultural relevance of the Gospel. We praised God for the amazing, transforming power of the cross in their midst, and His gift to us of bringing us to Russia to see it firsthand. A highlight for us was to sing “American-ish” songs all together – some singing in Komi, some in Russian, and Kerry and I singing in English. It was like a glimpse of heaven.<sup>30</sup>

This sort of journey provides to westerners the opportunity to experience missionising close “to the edge of the world” (see Article II; see also Vallikivi 2011: 103–105). In addition to experiencing the success of spreading the evangelical message in distant corners of the world, from the American point of view, the feeling of overcoming (mainly physical) difficulties or inconveniences in the course of such trip functions to strengthen their own religious identity. Getting a first hand experience of living standards different from the ones they are used to leads to new appreciation of what one has:

The folks in the villages live in what we would call very primitive homes. We take so much for granted here in the States. Safe drinking water, indoor plumbing for toilets, showers and bath tubs, thermostats, to name a few simple things. We have an enhanced gratitude for things now! (Pastor Larry VanGundy)

Perceiving the local living conditions as “primitive” also enhances the perception of the necessity of continuing the mission work in this geographical area. The characteristics of this specific socio-geographical locale also motivated William’s decision to choose it as a base of his mission work (see Article II).

On the other hand, these visits by brothers and sisters in faith are conceptually relevant for the members of Don community as well. Just as the American visitors find affirmation to the understanding of cross-cultural relevance of Christian message, believers in Komi find confirmation that they are indeed part of the larger, world-wide community of evangelicals. William’s initial arrival is interpreted in terms of God’s special care for the Komi people, as only God’s intention is seen as valid explanation for William’s decision to leave “the good life” in America for his mission in peripheral parts of Russia.

Scholarly discussions over the relationship of the global and local features of evangelical Christianity have been contradictory, with some emphasising its ability to replicate itself in canonical forms in different cultural contexts, while others have stressed its adaptability (see Robbins 2004b). Along with these discussions it is important to note that “while engaging their religion in a

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ewo.org/beyond-2000-north/huge-news-on-the-hub-and-highlights-from-russia/>, last accessed 28.02.2017. Original style of writing left unchanged.

consciously local way, local Christians experience their religion as global, transcendent and rooted in a-contextual truths” (Howell 2003: 235). Within the Don group, international contacts and exchanges with coreligionists from very different contexts enforce the sense of Christianity being rooted in transcendent realities outside any specific location and their being part of a global Church.

Outsiders frequently speak of the Don group as being foreign – in addition to Protestantism in general perceived as essentially non-Russian/non-Komi, the initial presence of the American missionary in particular has been seen as evidence of this foreignness. Some of the more radical critics have accused the evangelicals for pursuing an anti-Russian political agenda with the help of American money. More commonly the evangelicals are blamed for promoting alien cultural values. Indeed, commitment to “European values” such as an open civil society, respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual, and the rising civic consciousness has been considered to be one of the main characteristics of Russian Protestants (see Lunkin 2014: 136). At the same time, Russian evangelicals tend to declare their patriotism and political loyalty to the state and this applies to the Don group as well. Historically, evangelical Christians in Russia have generally been politically neutral and loyal to the state. As Protestantism was perceived as a foreign, or German faith, and was persecuted as such, the believers were forced into a defensive position and tried to prove their allegiance. (Nikolskaia 2009: 42–43; 50) This strategy is used to fend off doubts about their political reliability and belonging. This is the impetus behind the assurances of support for the authorities and praying for them as well. While arguing for people’s right to follow a religion of their choice and supporting the activist stance regarding social problems such as poverty and addictions could be interpreted as advocating certain western values, evangelicals remain conservative on several other issues. Oksana Kuropatkina (2012: 136–137; 141–142) has also written about the somewhat ambivalent attitude of Russian Pentecostals towards western liberal values. While they argue for liberal rights such as freedom of conscience, they are very critical of these aspects of western society that they see as detaching the rights and freedoms of the individual from his or her moral obligations. Pastor Andrei strongly disapproves of what he determines as Western or European relativism and as an overreach in regard to human rights (same-sex marriages and children’s rights for example), of which he interprets as a loss of moral core resulting from the “de-Christianisation of the West”.

Contrary to frequent accusations from outsiders, evangelicals do not consider American or European society and way of life in general to be an example for Russia. Most importantly, Christian principles as based on the Bible are seen as an ideal on which the society should be based. To move in the direction of this goal, it is necessary to first change individuals, as only broad-based grassroots movement can bring about real transformation in the society. To quote pastor Andrei:

Russia is not a Christian country, /.../ America is not a Christian country, although there are very many genuine Christians. /.../ If everyone were Christian, if all the laws were based on the Bible, if the society was not democratic, but theocratic, if God rather than humanism was central, that a person is the highest value [ironically]. It is the biggest misconception today, when it's said that humanism! /.../ In general, without God there's no future for Europe, no future for Russia, for no one at all. Without God, without genuine faith. A movement of the Holy Spirit is necessary for all of us in our countries. Like a Reformation. /.../ And by the way, in a way we also pass on this baton, even here in Don. Someone once started in Germany, yes, and now we continue this vision in Don. /.../ Christianity must not be imposed from above. It must grow naturally from below to above, evolutionally.

It is thus crucial for every Christian to make an effort to spread their faith by acting it out in their daily life. Since settling in the district the missionaries have been actively engaged in small-scale charity projects and this quickly introduced the group around the district. Evangelicals' dedication to practically addressing local social problems on the grass-roots level has enabled them to acquire more positive assessments among the villagers. (See Article IV) But although social outreach has been effective in helping to gain more positive reputation, it is essential theologically.

Even though everyday realities in the evangelical view are conceptualised and framed in terms of their religious outlook, they are not detached from the mundane. Through small actions in everyday life one is supposed to evangelise, a person's life should be lived in a godly way within the world and as such, set as an example to others. Mission work is not understood narrowly, but conceptualised very broadly. It is considered important to actively engage with "this world" – one's faith should not only be internal, it is necessary to articulate it not only verbally, but through behaviour and bodily comportment. It was William's intention in the first place – rather to live the "good news" than to preach the "good news"<sup>31</sup>. In William's case this approach was primarily motivated by his lack of common language with the people in Komi, but also by the fact that he did not consider himself to be a skilful preacher. But more importantly, conceptually practical and embodied engagement is central in expressing one's commitment to being a true Christian. Every believer should aim to improve the well-being in his or her immediate surroundings. Practically addressing particular small-scale local problems is at the same time conceptualised as serving the purpose of bringing about change on a broader scale in the society. Looking at the group in its particular social context, it could be

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<sup>31</sup> WWMtR board member pastor Larry VanGundy writes on the mission home page that William's mission in Komi, now continued by Andrei and Semyon, is both missional and incarnational. He explains the terms as follows: "Missional" living is the adoption of the posture, thinking, behaviors, and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message. "Incarnational" living is immersing one's self into a local culture (as Jesus did) and becoming Christlike to that culture. See <http://www.wwmator.org/december2016.html>, last accessed 13.03.2017.

argued that such an approach – making examples of themselves by way of living and behaving pleasingly to God and lesser emphasis on verbal efforts to convert people around them, is specifically suited in environment that tends to be at least sceptical of the evangelical presence and endeavours. (See Article V)

Both the Orthodox clerics and villagers understand the presence of evangelicals as challenging Orthodox religiosity. Critical responses to evangelicals include (rather vague) accusations of dubious doctrine and practices and being culturally alien and thus unacceptable in the Komi countryside, but also irritation over what is perceived as attacking local mode of religiosity. (See Article III) At the same time, while there are certainly some aspects of (vernacular) Orthodoxy that arise disapproval from the evangelicals, the latter actually avoid overt critique of the Orthodox. Negative encounters with the Orthodox or their antagonistic comments on evangelicals are usually rationalised by explaining these with people's low knowledge. The main point of critique in regard to the Orthodox concerns not approaching God directly but through different mediators and upholding what the evangelicals see as pagan remnants. In fact, Protestant critique of vernacular Orthodoxy (sometimes, Orthodoxy in general) can be rather similar to clergy's critique of folk practices (comp. Luehrmann 2010: 69). The Orthodox priest and his wife in Kulömdin have discussed local vernacular religiosity in the following way:

The Priest's wife Olga: Something material, mundane is believed, but the transcendent is thought up by themselves. It's not known, from where it came. They don't consider amongst themselves. Our grandmothers did [like this], so will we. You see. From where it started, when even the Orthodox cleric says, that is not necessary to do. Our grandmothers told us so, that means, we will do so.

Priest Aleksandr: Mhm. But sometimes it is so that a granny goes to the church for 10 years, prays, you see, and understands nothing. /.../ You see, you start to talk sometimes, to explain. But otherwise, you come to hold a prayer for the dead – there's a candle in front of the photo, the table is covered with dishes, a vodka glass and sometimes a cigarette is lit...

Priest's wife Olga: ...for the dead.

Priest Aleksandr: Yes. This is exactly very expressive paganism. /.../ It even happens that people don't see God, [they] start to prepare a pharmacy, how to find for themselves such a saint, whom to pray to be rid of an ail. Of course, one has to pray to God first and only then to ask the saints to pray for us. /.../ There's a lot of work [to educate people].

There is a tension between the dogmatic teachings of the Church and vernacular Orthodoxy, which has been sustained in the villages by elderly women. The priests often characterise vernacular Orthodoxy as superstitious and contaminated. While the Church acknowledges the role of such women in keeping

the Orthodox tradition through the Soviet time<sup>32</sup>, in the post-Soviet period conflicts between clergy and these vernacular experts have not been rare (see Luehrmann 2010; Koosa, Leete 2011: 56–57).

### Relationship with local culture and religiosity

I agree with observers who have argued that when the moderate knowledge of average ROC member about the tenets of Orthodoxy and the even narrower knowledge about the Protestant faith is taken into consideration, then it must be concluded that is not predominantly theological issues that cause friction between Orthodox and evangelical Christians. (e.g. Löfstedt 2012: 99) On the one hand, there are external informational mediums that affect the way evangelicals are perceived. These include the media, political leaders and popular opinion. On the other hand, there are still several other specific stylistic and conceptual differences that are commonly referenced in conversations over “what is wrong” with evangelicals from the Orthodox point of view. (See article IV) Regardless of the accommodating approach of the Don evangelicals, they actively challenge certain Orthodox/vernacular ideas regarding the religious sphere. I will address some of the most controversial issues in the following sections.

Perhaps most conspicuously, the tensions and conflicts between Orthodox and evangelicals frequently boil down to fundamentally diverging approaches on what it means to be a Christian or whom to consider believer. Even though the tentatively Orthodox villagers themselves can be quite critical in their judgment of whom to recognise as a “true believer”, the ROC is generally very inclusive in its take on whom to consider Orthodox. One can be a member of the church to a different degree and so-called cultural Christianity is quite accepted by the ROC, while being meaningless in the evangelical view. For the Orthodox “sincere” belief might not be conceptualised as the most important aspect of faith at all. Rather, following certain customs and practices correctly is given priority. That is to say that there is a difference in whether the emphasis in conceptualising one’s religion is external or internal. While the evangelicals place importance on correct behaviour and certain practices as well, these are necessarily conceptualised in the framework of actualising one’s faith. Some of the evangelicals with Orthodox background have conceptualised their conversion into “real” belief in terms of giving meaning to formerly simply performed ritual action. Evangelicals tend to be critical and suspicious of ritualised religious practices that they see as void of true meaning and unnecessary in communication with the divine. Moreover, from the evangelical perspective, certain popular Orthodox practices such as icon veneration or calendar rituals are seen as spoiled Christianity.

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<sup>32</sup> Since 2009, at the initiative of the bishopric, the Day of Orthodox Grannies is celebrated in the Komi republic on 24th of July. (<http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=71891>, last accessed 23.03.2017)

Different views on expressing one's faith also come into play in local assessment of evangelical narrative practices so characteristic to them. (See article V) While in the local view faith is largely private and interiorised<sup>33</sup>, the evangelicals have the obligation to spread the gospel by recounting how the Holy Spirit has manifested itself in their lives. Webb Keane has argued that according to Protestant conceptions, sincerity characterises the relationship between words and interior states, and to be sincere is to utter words that can be taken to be isomorphic with beliefs or intentions (2006: 316). Thus, according to evangelical understanding, the source of subject's authority derives from a sincere relationship to its own interiority (ibid). With his dramatic and in general lines locally well-known conversion story and arrival to Komiland, William has been central person the Don evangelicals refer to in their narratives to exemplify God's grace and presence in the world. Even though William has emphasised only having the role of a mediator (mediating the message about salvation through Jesus and power of God through his personal narrative and way of life), the confrontation with locals arises because he is imputed to have particular subjective agency and hidden agenda that does not accord with his declared intentions. Looking at the evangelical-non-evangelical interactions in Kulömdin, it appears that the evangelicals assume the effect of sincerity to be more total and downright than it really is. Actually, they have often failed to communicate their message because of the local discourse pragmatics that do not place so much value on the isomorphy of words and reality nor are accurate articulations of one's inner state a conventional part of vernacular narrative strategies. Local non-evangelical narrative practices leave more room for ambiguity and individual interpretations.

Questions on the role of individual and individuals' relationship with collective have received special attention in discussions over Orthodox and Protestant religiosities. While there are both collective and individual aspects in every religious tradition, in the Orthodox tradition collectivistic and holistic approach to personhood is central. Protestant Christianity with its emphasis on the need of personal salvation on the other hand has been seen as prime carrier of modern individualism. While observers also note the individualising tendencies of contemporary Orthodoxy (see Agadjanian, Rousselet 2010; Kormina 2010), according to Alexander Agadjanian and Kathy Rousselet (2010: 323–324), within Orthodoxy as a thick religious tradition (in which individual expression is tightly linked to collective identities centered around smaller or larger groups, and eventually, the “nation”), individuality, while always present, does not exceed the limits set by the tradition itself. The ethnographic material collected among the Kulömdin residents also largely appears to show the persisting conceptual emphasis on the collective even despite the obvious heterogeneity of

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<sup>33</sup> Kormina and Shtyrkov (2011: 172–173) note the tendency to regard religion as a private matter and being suspicious of public demonstration of one's religiosity as evidence of Soviet heritage in the contemporary religious culture. During this period, religion was abolished from the public into the private sphere of peoples' lives.

individual interpretations and views on the religious. (See article I) Ideological confrontation between evangelical and Orthodox parties has to do with different significance they attach or, sometimes, imagine the other one to do, to the role of personal and individual in religion. While the Orthodox tend to blame the evangelicals in excessive attention to individual, evangelicals actually emphasise the importance of community and participating in communal life quite a lot. Pastor Andrei has explained:

Christianity is a communal religion. We also have this name – Christian Community (община) of Don. This word comes from “communal” (общее). We have something in common. And the word “communicating” (общение) also stems from this. This means that we must live as a sort of family in a sense. That is, ideally, a Christian church is a group of people who know each other, know each other’s problems, live with each other’s problems, pray for each other. Not simply so that you came to a church, placed a candle and don’t know, who’s on your right and who’s on your left, who are these people altogether, simply left and came back – this is not a communal life. /.../ Christian life is a life in a community.

So, while it is a core conception in the evangelical understanding that every individual is ultimately personally responsible for his or her salvation, the role of the community and communion with fellow believers is nevertheless crucial in becoming a good Christian.

Emphasis on collectivity in vernacular Orthodoxy is manifested in various forms. A popularly shared narrative about elderly women, grandmothers, who upheld the faith through Soviet period can be considered as expressing such collectivity. With specific reference to the urbanised believers, Jeanne Kormina and Sergey Shtyrkov (2011: 171–172) have criticised the view according to which religious tradition was preserved in the Soviet period by village grandmothers who supposedly transmitted it to their grandchildren. Based on my fieldwork experiences I would still argue that namely because of the link with their mothers and grandmothers, for many villagers certain Orthodox practices and understandings are personally meaningful and significant even though their knowledge of official religious doctrines might be scarce. This is not to regard their Orthodoxy as “only cultural”. It seems to me that determining Komi villagers’ relationship to Orthodoxy as “merely cultural” disregards certain significant emotional aspects in this relationship. Orthodoxy is perceived as connecting person to his or her ancestors as well as to one’s fellow villagers. Differently from institutional representatives, who talk of ancestors in the Holy Rus, that is, often with certain pomposity refer to very general tradition, when villagers talk about Orthodoxy as religion of their ancestors, they usually mention very specifically their parents or grandparents. To be sure, there is fair amount of romanticising about the “religion of our ancestors”. It is rather common that people bemoan about the general lack of competency in religious matters – both their own and in general. Both clerics and lay people refer to the atheist campaigns of the Soviet period as the main cause of contemporary

“ignorance” and “incorrect” or syncretic practices and ideas. People often speak of their grandparents, people born in the early decades of the 20th century, as possessing religious piousness and proficiency that is now mostly lost. These ideas in mind, it is interesting to note that at the beginning of the 20th century young Komi intellectual, later internationally known sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968) described the worldview of Komi as “peculiar mixture of Orthodoxy, fragments of earlier beliefs and scientific knowledge from books and school” (Sorokin 1999 [1911]: 102). Sorokin regarded this kind of syncretism especially characteristic to the younger generation, judging the older generation to be quite religious while the “youngsters have already adopted the “newer trends” of 1905 and 1906” (ibid.). It is perhaps somewhat surprising how similar to descriptions of modern spirituality Sorokin’s characterisation appears to be and certainly reminds the reader to be cautious in imagining the worldview of earlier generations as some kind of intact and coherent whole.

The post-Soviet period has brought many fundamental changes in the society and in people’s everyday lives. Perhaps the changes in rural areas have been especially drastic. Along with many new opportunities that the past 25 years have brought, people have experienced the loss of some things and ideas that had seemed to be indisputable and stable. The sudden expansion of religious landscape has been part of these confusing transformations. Komi villagers have interpreted joining locally new religious groups in the context of lacking solid worldview. Actually, only a minority of the villagers are religiously active, and far from everybody unquestionably determine themselves as Orthodox. Nevertheless, there is a general consensus on the issue that if a person wants to follow a religion, it should be Orthodoxy. While remaining religiously indifferent is acceptable, joining a non-Orthodox religion is interpreted as challenging and contradicting locally approved conventions. People feel the need for certain sense of continuity and belongingness and Orthodoxy can provide means for this. Evangelicals on the other hand are cast as threat to the (imagined) consistent collective identity and coherence of the community. As such, evangelicals also function to activate the Orthodox component in the overall self-perception as a Komi villager. This element of the identity might not be salient in the course of the everyday, but emerges as a reaction to the Other.

It is not possible to deny the influence of Soviet and later on, post-Soviet and secularised society on the contemporary Orthodox religiosity, which is a heterogeneous phenomenon. Only a small minority of self-proclaimed Orthodox go to church, neither are people interested in accepting institutional control over their spiritual lives (see Kormina 2010: 281). Kormina (ibid.) has described the contemporary understanding of Orthodoxy by ordinary people as a tradition to which everybody has right to and that is as much religious as it is cultural; it is a democratic form of religiosity, and opposed to the demonstrative religiosity practiced by Russia’s postsocialist elites. Kormina also finds that Grace Davie’s concept of believing without belonging can be used in describing the mainstream religiosity in Russia (but also, on the other hand, belonging without believing). In case of the Komi villagers, although formal membership of a

parish or attending the church are not part of the lived religiosity of most people, idea of belonging to a (imagined) community that carries the Orthodox tradition continuously from previous generations, remains important.

Protestants have aimed to overcome the cultural barrier in various ways. Among ethnic minorities, one strategic choice has been translating the Bible and using the indigenous language in ritual contexts. It has been argued in regard to Russia's national republics that "translations of the Scriptures into the national languages, as well as the use of national themes and examples in preaching and a respectful attitude towards national history and culture, play a crucial role in the missionary work of Catholics and Protestants" (Lunkin 2000: 124). Paying attention to local ethnocultural specificities is indeed detectable in the evangelising practices of Don missionaries as well, even though I would not say it to play a substantial role. This aspect is mainly expressed by singing some songs in Komi language at the services (the services are held in Russian as the pastor is Russian, but there are also members who do not speak Komi); also, the pastor is showing interest in learning the language. Recently published Komi translation of the New Testament is given to people during mission-trips to other villages. Arguably, more important and meaningful than attention to elements of specifically ethnic Komi culture in regard to localising tactics of evangelicals has been accommodating approach to the Orthodox traditions. Pastor Andrei has been quite willing to acknowledge the Orthodox heritage and also made use of the locally/culturally familiar elements in contextualising the evangelical message. The nondenominational approach of the group allows such accommodating practices and thus allows the evangelicals to take into account the locally relevant issues of continuity. Employing certain national and cultural elements in their activities could also be interpreted as part of the strategy to fend off doubts about their patriotism and counter the accusations of preaching Western culture.

Evangelicals' relationship with local culture and Orthodox religiosity is thus complex and somewhat ambiguous. Even in case each side of this frequently confrontational discussion values similar principles and ideas, these concepts are understood as practiced not quite correctly by the other.

## SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES

### Article I

**Leete, Art; Piret Koosa 2012. “The Churches were Opened and Lots of Missionaries Arrived”: Dialogue between Komi Identity and Faith. – *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 51, 171–190.**

The first article included in this thesis focuses on issues of collective and individual identity among the Komi villagers in the context of post-Soviet religiosity. Although most people are not active churchgoers nor do they regard religion as an important part of their lives, Orthodoxy is understood as being an integral part of the traditions and the identity of village Komi. While constituting minuscule minority of the local population, evangelical Christians play a significant role in initiating discussions concerning identity, (ethnic) traditions, but also religious freedom.

The article examines the role and place of Orthodoxy in Komi identity and also discusses different modes of being Orthodox. Accordingly, we consider Komi villagers' perception of normativity and prevalent values, but also ideas about continuity. Both the non-evangelical/Orthodox and evangelical perspectives are represented in looking at the discussions over these matters.

A person's perception of him- or herself as an individual and as a member of a group differs to some extent. We argue that regardless of actually existing differences the villagers value the idea of certain commonness or sameness with their neighbours. This explains why even otherwise religiously indifferent people can hold the view that Orthodoxy is an essential part of 'true Kominess', while Protestants are designated as 'Americans', that is, as cultural others attacking the common cultural heritage. As non-Orthodox believers are perceived as a threat to (imagined) consistent collective identity, an otherwise predominantly passive Orthodox identity is activated.

### Article II

**Koosa, Piret 2013. Sowing the Seeds of Faith: A Case Study of an American Missionary in the Russian North. – *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 7 (1), 31–48.**

The second article of the dissertation offers a portrayal of an American missionary in a Komi village to illustrate the growing religious diversity in Russia at the grass-roots level. The study analyses the American's motivation to be in the Komi area, how he views the surrounding environment, and the American missionary in the view of local evangelicals and non-evangelicals.

I identify two distinct approaches according to which the missionary, William, perceives the Komi village environment. On the one hand, he perceives the

region as truly peripheral, located at edge of the “cultured world”; on the other he views it as a place of authenticity. Both these perspectives designate the Komi countryside as not only suitable target for mission work, but also as an environment in which to strengthen and actualise his own faith and evangelical identity.

William himself and his presence in a Komi village arouse considerable attention and different opinions. As the small evangelical congregation formed around him, for the outsiders the American missionary determined the whole group as American. In the historically Orthodox Komi villages evangelical Christians are perceived as culturally alien and William’s presence came to epitomise this otherness.

In looking how the group members talk about William, it is important to consider their different levels of commitment to the congregation. On the whole however, the American’s arrival in the Komi countryside is understood in the framework of God’s special care for the people in this corner of the world.

While there are heterogeneous views among both evangelical and non-evangelicals, a certain dominating discourse prevails through which William becomes a carrier of certain symbolic meaning for different parties. Although people have had limited possibilities to evaluate William’s personality, there exist local discourses of which William is an object of regard regardless of his actual or specific characteristics.

### **Article III**

**Koosa, Piret 2015. “Sometimes we’ll have to prove that we’re no crocodiles...” Evangelical Christians’ Stigmatisation as Sectarians in a Komi Village. – *Études finno-ougriennes* 47, 89–114.**

The article discusses the struggles of an evangelical community in establishing the legitimacy of their group in the historically/traditionally Orthodox environment.

First, I outline the negative attitudes toward evangelicals expressed by the local representatives of the ROC. I then consider the aspects of evangelical ideology and practice that the villagers with Orthodox background regard as somehow deviating from what is familiar to them and that are thus provoking critical comments. I conclude that the qualms about evangelicals are quite vague and unspecific and the attitudes towards the non-Orthodox believers are influenced more by the media than they are by real encounters. Discourses learned from the media are sometimes used to conceptualise even the actual contacts with non-Orthodox believers. For the majority of the village Komi the non-Orthodox faith is simply not acceptable (while non-belief/religious indifference is).

I then turn to analyse evangelicals’ reactions and responses to criticism. I describe the strategies they have employed in order to better integrate themselves to the Komi village environment. The evangelicals’ strategies aimed at

diminishing the othering are actually rather varied. However, most of these have remained unnoticed by outsiders and hence have not really worked in the expected way. Although not viewed unambiguously, evangelicals' social outreach projects have been the most successful way to acquire a more positive reputation and, to an extent, even make the evangelicals a welcome part of the community.

The evangelicals' basic message to those questioning the validity of their faith is that apart from having some form-only dissimilarities, their faith does not really differ from Orthodoxy. At the same time, the discrimination that they experience has a certain role in constructing their (Russian) evangelical identity as suffering for their faith it is interpreted as a sign of being a true Christian.

#### **Article IV**

**Koosa, Piret; Art Leete 2014. Serving God by Being Neighbourly: Komi Protestants and Local Community Initiatives. – *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 39, 39–57.**

The fourth article of the dissertation focuses on evangelicals' faith-based activism and welfare projects in the rural Komi and different responses to it. While Protestant social outreach projects can be considered as one characteristic of the post-soviet Russian religious landscape in general, engagement with these kinds of activities can also be regarded as an important part of Don evangelicals' accommodation strategy.

The study analyses evangelical social activism as enactment of particular spiritual-moral norms that allows them to gain a certain moral authority over the wider community. Thus, to some extent, through pursuing social justice projects evangelicals enhance tolerance towards the religious pluralism they represent.

The combination of charity and evangelising blurs the boundaries of this- and other-worldly dimensions of faith and confuses outsiders. Both the Orthodox and other non-evangelicals mostly interpret evangelical social welfare projects in terms of religious contest. But besides numerous doubtful or negative comments evangelicals' very personal and informal approach has also inspired some sympathetic responses.

Through their social projects evangelicals have become contributors in the sphere that is popularly thought to be administration's responsibility. To some extent the ROC is also to have certain moral duty to pursue social justice. As in view of the village people these institutions perform inadequately in this regard, evangelicals' contribution is interpreted as discrediting.

## Article V

**Koosa, Piret 2016. Evangelical silence in a Komi village. – *Ethnologia Europaea* 46 (2), 58–73.**

While the previous studies primarily focus on Don evangelicals' relationship with the wider society, this article discusses the questions related to self-transformation in the process of conversion. The article examines some aspects of constituting the evangelical self by paying attention to the non-verbal, embodied and emotional expressions of faith.

Becoming and being an evangelical Christian is commonly strongly associated with acquiring specific language and performing certain narrative forms. However, some recent studies have questioned the exclusively fundamental role of language in the process of conversion. My study aims to contribute to this body of scholarship that broadens perspectives on understanding conversion by concentrating on the emotional and sensuous features of being evangelical and paying attention to the role of silence in both, shaping the evangelical self, but also the image of evangelicals to outsiders. I explore how different kinds of silences are created as a result of how, when and what is said or left unsaid, and how these silences can be used for different purposes.

I argue that stemming from the particular cultural and social context participating in specific evangelical verbal practices can actually be challenging for the members of Don congregation. Furthermore, evangelicals' attitude to language is somewhat ambivalent as in some ways human language is considered deficient, while certain embodied practices and comportment are interpreted as reliable signs of religious commitment, but also employed as proselytising tools.

In conclusion I would suggest that Don evangelicals' emphasis on embodied, non-verbal expressions of faith at least partly stems from the specific pro-Orthodox environment in which they operate.

## Article VI

**Koosa, Piret 2017. “If you're really interested in scientific research, you should study the Bible!” Ethnographical fieldwork among evangelical Christians. – *Approaches to Culture Theory* 7, 53–71. [forthcoming]**

The last article included to this dissertation is dedicated to a reflective discussion of my position as a non-believing researcher studying evangelical Christians. I explore the ideological stances and contextual factors that have shaped our relationship. I start out by indicating how Christianity has been often viewed as a special kind of subject for ethnographic study.

While as an ethnologist I have a particular purpose to be in the field and an authoritative position in presenting my field data, the research subjects have their own specific agendas and purposes to be engaged in this reciprocal relation-

ship, and their ideas about what should be the outcome of our interaction can differ considerably from my own. While I as an ethnologist approach Christianity as one possible framework for understanding and being in the world, for the believers this view marks an inherently fallacious position. Even though the believers question my ability as a non-believer to really understand their experiences, there are several reasons for them to be in conversation with me. In discussing evangelicals' motivations and strategies in communicating with me, I bring out three distinct approaches. My aim in exploring these dispositions is to analyse the ambivalences in the negotiations between evangelicals and researcher. Investigating the uncertainties that accompany our conversations allows a conceptualisation of the ways in which certain common ground is searched for and created in the course of the to some extent always discordant interplay of religious and ethnographic fieldwork agendas.

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Evangelical movements and communities in today's world are very heterogeneous, and combine interpretations based on local traditions and global influences. This thesis has aimed to contribute to the knowledge about this diversity by ethnographically documenting the distinctive features and operating patterns of a specific group of evangelical believers in a particular cultural and social configuration.

Based on the ethnological fieldwork in the Komi Republic in the village of Don, this thesis offers a case study of evangelical Christians in a peripheral location, in a context that has not been overt success for this otherwise globally expanding type of Christianity. At the same time, it is a study of a religious minority group and this community's relationship with the wider society.

Since the late 1980s, along with changing political circumstances, popular interest in and public attention to religion in Russia has grown considerably. Orthodoxy as the historically and culturally most rooted religious tradition claimed and was granted a special and leading position in the religious landscape of Russia. At the same time, more or less explicitly this dominating position has been challenged in the context of exuberant religious diversity that quickly developed in the post-Soviet society.

In Komi Republic the post-Soviet developments in religious sphere have generally followed overall Russian patterns. There have been much new in the post-socialist society that have caused uncertainties and to what people have found challenging to react to. Locally new or little known religions have been one of these kinds of confusing and disquieting, but at the same time intriguing phenomena, generating discussions and controversies in both people's everyday lives and in the media.

Quite differently from many other places of the world, neither in Russia more generally nor in Komi more particularly the evangelicals have not experienced overt success in spreading their message. Evangelical Christian denominations have been somewhat more successful in gathering followers in urban areas, while their spread in the rural settlements has remained scarce. While claiming Orthodox identity is closely linked with ethnic and cultural belonging but also with expressing national loyalty, evangelicals are frequently regarded and branded as culturally and ideologically alien.

To some extent, the impact of anti-religious propaganda of Soviet time still bears upon the understandings and preconceptions middle-aged and older people have about locally not so familiar faith communities. At the same time, the post-Soviet media has often helped to facilitate and enforce the image of non-Orthodox religions and believers as foreign, representing non-Russian or even anti-Russian agendas and involved with dubious practices.

Personal choice of what is locally determined as a non-traditional religion challenges presumed cultural boundaries and local conceptions of identity. My

case study allows examining how the evangelicals as a marginal religious group negotiate their place in the society, possible ways of formulating alternative religious identities and diverging from what is generally considered as normative.

The six articles constituting the main body of this thesis focus on evangelicals' relationship and interactions with the surrounding society including different Orthodox, vernacular Orthodox and secular agents. The articles examine some key aspects of this frequently uneasy and ideologically charged interplay, but also point to possibilities of finding and creating a common ground and space for dialogue between the communities.

Trying to overcome social stigmatisation, evangelicals generally try to avoid confrontation with the Orthodox and rather seek for possibilities to appear compatible with the dominant culture. At the same time, this is not to suggest that anything is permissible or acceptable. Elements of local culture and customs are used consciously and pragmatically in the service of more effective evangelisation. While evangelical Christians employ context-specific interpretations and emphasise the flexibility of their religious practices, they view their religion as decidedly non-local and their identity as entrenched in a historically and metaphysically transcendent reality of God and the global Church (Howell 2003: 239).

Downplaying interdenominational disagreements and difficulties of communication is also important in terms of the ecumenical agenda of Don evangelicals as it helps to maintain the idea of overall Christian unity. As these different aspects are intertwined, it is not always possible to discern whether there are ideological or social reasons behind subduing certain issues or different understandings.

The dissertation also gives insights into individual understandings of religion, as well as how the members of the Don congregation create their own ways of being a believer. Joining a congregation and conversion have personal influence and importance for the individual involved. But as the difference Christianity can make in local life worlds is not restricted to existential sentiments, but also expressed in political and material realities (Bandak, Jørgensen 2012: 451), these personal transformations are relevant in larger social processes as well. Evangelicals understand their faith as inseparably entangled with the mundane aspects of everyday life and surroundings. This perception is distinctly expressed through active participation in the society, foremost by practically addressing and engaging local social problems. The evangelical faith-based activism has had a somewhat contradictory outcome. On the one hand, it has enabled the evangelicals to become practically valued operators in the local communities and gain certain moral authority on the other hand their social activism has made them targets of criticism by those unsympathetic to the evangelical project.

At first glance, evangelical discourses of change and discontinuity with a former life seems to be in a rather sharp contrast with the Orthodox approach that tends to emphasise continuity. Yet, as my fieldwork material demonstrates, the low-pressure atmosphere and ecumenical ideology of the Don congregation

creates space where one can integrate these traditions in their personal religiosity. Combining Orthodox and evangelical identities can also be viewed in the wider framework of contemporary spirituality in which individuals synthesise different traditions and practices suitable for their personal taste and needs.

Recent changes in the Russian legislation have stipulated increased regulation of religious organisations, their registration and especially of missionary activities, including a ban of missionary activities in non-religious settings and private residences. Consequently, already a number of evangelical missionaries have been arrested for violating the so-called Yarovaya law and fined (see Lunkin 2016). It remains to be seen whether and to what extent this new legislation will affect the operating patterns of the Don congregation.

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## **ARTICLES**

## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Usk ja identiteet komi külas:  
protestandid õigeusklikus sotsiokultuurilises keskkonnas

Väitekiri teeb sissevaate nõukogude aja järgse usu elu iseloomulikesse arengutesse Komi Vabariigis. Alates 1990. aastatest on Venemaa religioossetele maastikule ilmunud arvukalt kohalikus kontekstis uusi ja vähetuntud usugruppe. Samal ajal on jõudsalt kasvanud Vene Õigeusu Kiriku ühiskondlik positsioon ja tähendus. Ametlikule usuvabadusele vaatamata pole erinevad usugrupid kujunenud “religioosel turuplatsil” võrdsetel alustel võistelnud. Nõukogude korra ja identiteedi lagunemise järel on religioon omandanud olulise sotsiaalse rolli, seda on nähtud kultuuri ja identiteedi hoidmise ja loomise vahendina, usulist identiteeti on võrdsustatud etnilise ja kultuurilise kuuluvusega. Taolistest vaadetest tulenevalt on kohalikus kontekstis uusi religioossete grupe ja nendega ühinenud inimesi sageli kritiseeritud ja halvaks panevalt hinnatud.

Käesolev dissertatsioon käsitleb usulise mitmekesisusega kaasnenud sotsiaalseid pingeid, keskendudes õigeuskliku enamuse ja protestantliku vähemuse vaheliste suhete problemaatikale ühe väikese evangeelsete kristlaste kogukonna näitel. “Evangeelne” osutab siinse uurimuse kontekstis angloameerika protestantlike äratusliikumiste traditsioonile, tähistades kristlasi, kes rõhutavad isikliku uskupöördumise olulisust, evangeliseerimise tähtsust ja Piibli fundamentaalset autoriteeti usuküsimustes.

Uurimuse keskmises oleval kogukonnal eripäraks on selle oikumeeniline suunitlus ning avatus erinevate denominatsiooniliste eelistustega inimestele. Mitmed kogukonna liikmed on selles avatuses ja kristluse vormide mitmekesisust tunnustavas lähenemises leidnud võimaluse teadlikult kombineerida õigeusklikku ja evangeelset identiteeti. Esimest väärtustatakse tihti järjepidevuse kontekstis, teine on paljude jaoks võimaldanud tähenduslikult ümber mõtestada oma suhte religiooni ja jumalaga.

Kogukonna suurus pärast umbes viieteistkümmet tegevusaastat on jäänud tagasihoidlikuks, regulaarsemalt käib koos 10–15 inimest. Vaatamata sellele on nende kohalolu rajoonis pälvinud üsna suurt tähelepanu ning sageli esile kutsunud kriitilisi arvamusi, grupi liikmeid on süüdistatud kohalike traditsioonide reetmises ja võõra kultuuri propageerimises.

Käsitlen raskusi, millega vähemusreligiooni esindava kogukonna liikmed on vastamisi sattunud, püüdes legitimeerida oma kohalolu ajalooliselt õigeusklikus kultuuriruumis ning analüüsides strateegiaid, mille abil püütakse sobitada nende suhtes tihti ebasõbralikku keskkonda. Uurin, kuidas sotsiaalse konteksti eripärad on mõjutanud kohalike religioossete tõlgendusi, väljendusi ja praktikaid. Samuti käsitlen seda, kuidas protestandid kasutavad ja kohandavad teatud ideid ja praktikaid viisil, mis on tähenduslikud nii konkreetsetes sotsiokultuurilises keskkonnas kui ka nende usu kontekstis.

Uurimuse aluseks olev empiiriline materjal on kogutud Komi Vabariigis Kulömdini rajooni külates toimunud etnoloogiliste välitööde käigus aastatel 2006–2015.

Doktoritöö keskse osa moodustavad kuus artiklit, mille peamised väited ja järeldused järgnevalt esitan.

## **I artikkel**

**Leete, Art; Piret Koosa 2012. “The Churches were Opened and Lots of Missionaries Arrived”: Dialogue between Komi Identity and Faith. [Avati kirikud ja saabus palju misjonäre: komi identiteedi ja usu dialoog.] – *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 51, 171–190.**

Väitekirja esimene artikkel keskendub komi külaelanike kollektiivse ja individuaalse identiteedi käsitlustele nõukogude aja järgse religioossuse kontekstis. Valdav enamus inimestest ei käi aktiivselt kirikus ega pea religiooni rolli oma elus kuigi oluliseks, kuid sellele vaatamata käsitletakse õigeusku lahutamatu osana kohalikest traditsioonidest ja külakomiks olemisest. Ehkki evangeelsed kristlased moodustavad kaduvväikese osa kohalikust kogukonnast, on neil olnud identiteediküsimusi, traditsioone ja ka usuvabadust puudutavaid arutelusid ja vaidlusi käivitav roll.

Artikkel käsitleb õigeusu rolli komide identiteedis ning osutab õigeusklikuks olemise erinevatele viisidele. Uurimise all on komi külaelanike arusaamad normatiivsusest, üldistest väärtustest ning järjepidevusest, seda nii end mitteusklike kui õigeusklikena määratlevate inimeste kui ka evangeelsete kristlaste vaatepunktist lähtudes.

Inimese käsitlus iseendast indiviidina ja mingi grupi liikmena erineb teatud määral. Väidame uurimuses, et vaatamata tegelikkuses eksisteerivale mitmekesisusele ja vastuoludele hindavad külaelanikud ideoloogiliselt teatud sarnasust ja samasust oma naabritega. See selgitab ka asjaolu, miks isegi religiooni ükskõikselt suhtuvad inimesed võivad olla arvamusel, et õigeusk on lahutamatu osa “tõeliseks” komiks olemisest, samas kui protestante määratletakse “ameeriklastena”, st kultuuriliste Teistena, kes ründavad ühist kultuuripärandit. Muidu peamiselt passiivsena eksisteeriv õigeusklik identiteet aktiveerub kontekstis, kus mitte-õigeusklike usklike tajutakse ohuna kujutletud ühise identiteedi suhtes.

## II artikkel

**Koosa, Piret 2013. Sowing the Seeds of Faith: A Case Study of an American Missionary in the Russian North. [Külvates usu seemneid: uurimus ameerika misjonärist Põhja-Venemaal.] – *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 7 (1), 31–48.**

Dissertatsiooni teine artikkel keskendub ameeriklasest misjonäri tegevusele komi külas, tehes seeläbi rohujuuretasandi sissevaate Venemaal kujunenud religioossesse mitmekesisusse. Uurimuses analüüsitakse ameeriklase Komimaale saabumise motivatsiooni ning seda, kuidas ta ümbritsevat keskkonda mõtestab. Samuti toon esile, kuidas mõistavad ja käsitlevad ameeriklasest misjonäri tegevust kohalikud protestandid ja õigeuskliku traditsiooniga samastuvad inimesed.

Toon esile kaks eripärast vaatenurka, mille kaudu ameeriklasest misjonär William end ümbritsevat komi külakeskkonda tajub. Ühelt poolt määratleb ta regiooni tõelise äärealana, mis paikneb “kultuurse maailma” serval. Teisalt on tema käsitluses rõhuasetus paiga “autentsusel”, ta näeb siin alles olevat ehedust ja inimlähedust, mis enam arenenud kohtades on kadunud. Taolised tõlgenduslikud käsitlused teevad komi külakeskkonna sobilikuks misjoneerimiskohaks, aga ka keskkonnaks, mis võimaldab misjonäril oma usku ja evangeelset identiteeti tugevdada ja praktiseerida.

Williami isik ja tema kohalolu komi külas äratas märkimisväärset tähelepanu ja pälvis erinevaid hinnanguid. Et just tema isiku ümber kujunes väike kohalike evangeelsete kristlaste kogukond, määratlesid kõrvalseisjad tervet gruppi “ameeriklastena”, kultuuriliste võõrastena. Kohalikud protestandid tõlgendavad ameeriklase saabumist Komimaale jumala erilise hoole ja tähelepanu raamistikus. Ehkki nii evangeelse kogukonnaga seotud inimesed kui ka kõrvalseisjad on väljendanud erinevaid arvamusi, tulevad enim esile tõlgendused, mis osutavad, et William on eelkõige sümbolse tähenduse kandjaks.

## III artikkel

**Koosa, Piret 2015. “Sometimes we’ll have to prove that we’re no crocodiles...” Evangelical Christians’ Stigmatisation as Sectarians in a Komi Village. [“Mõnikord peame tõestama, et me pole krokodillid...” Evangeelsete kristlaste stigmatiseerimine komi külas.] – *Études finno-ougriennes* 47, 89–114.**

Doktoritöö kolmas artikkel käsitleb raskusi, millega evangeelse kogukonna liikmed on vastamisi sattunud, püüdes leida sotsiaalselt aktsepteeritud kohta traditsiooniliselt õigeusklikus külakogukonnas.

Esmalt visandan õigeusu kiriku vaimulike suhtumise protestantidesse ning protestantide kuvandi meedias. Toon esile, et komi külaelanike arvamus kohalikest evangeelsetest kristlastest on kujunenud pigem meedia vahendatud suhtumistel kui tegelikel kontaktidel. Osutan ka evangeelse usupraktika ja ideoloogia aspektidele, mis õigeuskliku taustaga inimestes võõristust tekitavad. Samuti

analüüsin evangeelsete kristlaste reaktsioone kriitikale ning toon esile strateegiaid, mille abil nad on püüdnud kohalikku külakogukonda integreeruda. Protestantide strateegiad, millega oma teisesust vähendada, on õigupoolest küllaltki mitmekesised, kuid on praktikas jäänud teiste külaelanike poolt suuresti märkamata. Kõige tõhusamalt on positiivsema kuvandi loomisel toimunud protestantide sotsiaaliprojektid. Protestandid on oma uskumise viisi valiidsuses kahtlejaile keskse sõnumina rõhutanud, et kui puhtvormiline külg kõrvale jätta, ei erine nende usk põhimõtteliselt õigeusust. Samas kasutatakse diskrimineeriva ja halvustava suhtumise kogemust teatud määral omaenda evangeelse identiteedi osisena – usu pärast kannatamist tõlgendatakse tõeliseks kristlaseks olemise raamistikus.

#### **IV artikkel**

**Koosa, Piret; Art Leete 2014. Serving God by Being Neighbourly: Komi Protestants and Local Community Initiatives. [Jumala teenimine olles heanaaberlik: Komi protestandid ja kodanikualgatused kohalikus kogukonnas.] – *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 39, 39–57.**

Väitekirja neljas artikkel keskendub protestantide religiooselt motiveeritud ühiskondlikule aktiivsusele ja heategevuslikele projektidele komi külades. Ühelt poolt on protestantide sotsiaalse abi projektid olnud nõukogude aja järgse Venemaa religioosel maastikul üldiselt iseloomulikuks nähtuseks, teisalt võib konkreetse kogukonna vastavasunaalset tegevust näha olulise osana oma sotsiaalsesse keskkonda sobitumise strateegiast.

Uurimus analüüsib protestantide sotsiaalse suunitlusega tegevust usuliste ja moraalsete normide praktilise rakendamisenä, mis võimaldab neil koguda kohalikus kogukonnas suuremat moraalselt autoriteeti. Seega aitavad protestantide heategevuslikud projektid teatud määral suurendada tolerantsust religioosse mitmekesisuse suhtes, mida nad ise esindavad.

Heategevuse ja misjoneerimise kombineerimine hägustab usu maiseid ja transtsendentseid dimensioone ning tekitab sel moel kõrvalseisjates teatud segadust. Nii õigeusklikud kui ka teised mitteprotestandid mõistavad evangeelsete kristlaste sotsiaaliprojekte eelkõige religioosse konkurentsi võtmes. Samas on protestantide väga isiklik ja mitteformaalne lähenemine teeninud arvukate negatiivsete kommentaaride ja kriitika kõrval ka omajagu positiivset vastukaja. Protestandid on panustanud valdkonnas, mida üldiselt peetakse kohaliku omavalitsuse vastutusalaks. Ka õigeusu kirikule omistatakse teatud moraalne kohustus tegeleda heategevusega ning lahendada sotsiaalseid probleeme. Et külaelanike hinnangul pole need institutsioonid oma kohustustega piisavalt tõhusalt hakkama saanud, nähakse protestantide panust eelnimetatud diskrediteerivana.

## V artikkel

**Koosa, Piret 2016. Evangelical silence in a Komi village. [Evangeelne vaikus komi külas.] – *Ethnologia Europaea* 46 (2), 58–73.**

Kui eelnevad uurimused keskendusid peaaesjalikult protestantide suhetele ühiskonnaga laiemalt, siis väitekirja viies artikkel võtab lähema vaatluse alla enese-transformatsiooniga seotud küsimused usklikuks saamisel. Artiklis käsitlen mõningaid aspekte evangeelse identiteedi kujunemisest, pöörates tähelepanu usu mitteverbaalsetele, kehalistele ja emotsionaalsetele väljendusvormidele.

Evangeelseks kristlaseks saamist ja olemist on tavaliselt tihedalt seostatud spetsiifilise keele ja narratiivsete vormide omandamisega. Samas on mõned hiljutised uurimused seadnud kahtluse alla keele fundamentaalse rolli usku pöördumisel. Artikkel püüab anda oma panuse sellesse usku pöördumise mõistmist avardavasse lähenemisse, keskendudes evangeelseks kristlaseks olemise emotsionaalsetele ja meelelistele mõõtmetele, aga ka vaikuse ja vaikimise rollile. Vaatlen, kuidas tekivad erinevat laadi vaikimised tulenevalt sellest, kuidas, millal ja mida öeldakse või ütlemata jäetakse ning toon välja eesmärgid, milleks taolisi vaikusid kasutatakse.

Väidan, et tulenevalt konkreetsest sotsiokultuurilisest kontekstist võib evangeelsetele kristlastele iseloomulike suuliste praktikate rakendamine Doni kogukonna liikmetele keeruliseks osutuda. Lisaks sellele on protestantide suhtumine inimkeelde ambivalentne, sest seda nähakse teatud mõttes puudulikuna, samas kui teatud kehalisi praktikaid ja käitumist tõlgendatakse usaldusväärse määrgina religioosest pühendumisest. Osutan kokkuvõtvalt, et Doni protestantide rõhuasetus kehalistele ja mitteverbaalsetele usu väljendamise viisidele on seotud konkreetse õigeusku pooldava sotsiaalse keskkonnaga, milles nad tegutsevad.

## VI artikkel

**Koosa, Piret 2017. “If you’re really interested in scientific research, you should study the Bible!” Ethnographical fieldwork among evangelical Christians. [Kui teid tööpoolest huvitab teaduslik uurimistöö, peaksite Piiblit uurima! Etnograafilised välitööd evangeelsete kristlaste seas.] – *Approaches to Culture Theory* 7, 53–71. [ilmumas]**

Doktoritöö viimases artiklis arutlen refleksiivselt enda kui mitteuskliku uurija positsiooni üle evangeelsete kristlaste seas välitööid tehes. Käsitlen erinevaid ideoloogilisi lähtekohti ja kontekstipõhiseid asjaolusid, mis on meie omavaheolist suhtlemist kujundanud. Osutan ka eripäradele, kuidas on kristlust etnoloogilise uurimisainesena sageli käsitletud.

Etnoloogina on mul välitöödel olles spetsiifiline eesmärk ja hiljem oman kogutud materjali esitades uurijana teatud autoriteetset positsiooni. Samas on ka uuritavatel meie vastastikusel suhtluses oma põhjused ja eesmärgid. Uuritavate arvamus sellest, milline peaks olema meie suhtluse tulemus, võib kohati minu arusaamadest märkimisväärselt erineda. Uurijana käsitlen ma kristlust ühe

võimaliku maailmas olemise viisi ja maailma mõistmise raamistikuna, samas kui usklite jaoks on taoline seisukoht põhimõtteliselt ekslik. Kuigi usklikud kahtlevad minu kui mitteuskliku võimes nende kogemusi tõeliselt mõista, leidub ometi mitmeid põhjusi, mis minuga suhtlemise nende jaoks mõttekaks teevad. Analüüsides usklite motivatsiooni ja strateegiaid meievahelises kommunikatsioonis, toon välja kolm lähenemisnurka. Minu eesmärk neid perspektiive käsitledes on uurija ja usklite vahelise suhtluse ambivalentsuse analüüsimine. Meievahelise suhtluse mitmetähenduslikkuse ja -mõõtmelisuse uurimine võimaldab mõtestada viise, kuidas otsitakse ja luuakse teatud ühisosa alati mingil määral mitteühilduvate etnoloogiliste välitööde ja usklite eesmärkide vahel.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

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- Koosa, Piret 2017. "If you're really interested in scientific research, you should study the Bible!" Ethnographical fieldwork among evangelical Christians. – *Approaches to Culture Theory* 7, 53–71. [forthcoming]
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