

ARMASTUS, ANDESTUS, ALANDLIKKUS:
THE REDISCOVERY OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY
IN POST-SOVIET ESTONIA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present article* is to outline some of the basic characteristics of the post-Soviet 'renaissance' of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (under jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople), for example the conversion from Lutheranism to Orthodox Christianity and the processes of rediscovery, reinvention and 'Estonianisation' of Orthodox Christianity. The restoration of the autonomous Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, beginning in the 1990s, is due to the historic presence of Orthodoxy in Estonia, but also has the particularities of a new project that seeks contemporary horizons and copes with specific postsocialist problems. The paper takes a closer look at the specific dimensions of these processes through a study of a small Orthodox community: the parish of St. Alexander Nevsky church in Tartu. The author strives to demonstrate the living process of reinvention of Orthodox Christianity in Estonia and more generally the 'making' of religion. The small religious community in Tartu dealt with in the paper, shares a number of features of the transforming religiosity of Europe: emphasis on spirituality, openness to the impacts of globalisation, the hybrid character of certain religious practices. It is likewise an example of the fact that Orthodox Christianity may also be the free choice of people looking for moral perfection. This is one of the answers to the main research question about the reasons and character of a contemporary conversion to Orthodox Christianity.

KEYWORDS: Orthodox Christianity • Estonia • conversion • postsocialism

The rapid social alterations in the world of late modernity and the feeling of acceleration of history present scholars with old questions about the correlation between continuity and change in socio-cultural processes. The contemporary development of religion is one of the dimensions of this problem. The disintegration of socialism between

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1989 and 1991 gave impetus to the postsocialist resumption of religious life which some authors (Borowik, Tomka 2001: 8) define as an aspect of the global upsurge of the religiosity developing since the 1980s (Casanova 1994; Berger 1999; Davie 2000; Cannell 2006: 30). The advance of the religious movements in East and Central Europe is also a part of the sweeping postsocialist social change. According to the ingenious comparison of Irena Borowik and Miklos Tomka, postsocialist religiosity could be compared to a “resurrected body”, which “is, though, not identical with the old one” (Borowik, Tomka 2001: 8). In other words, the current development of religion in Central and Eastern Europe neither reproduces old pre-socialist models, nor follows Western European ones (Tomka 2001: 11).

Yet, “the politicization of religion under socialism meant that no aspect of religious identity after socialism could be free of the political” (Hann 2006: 6). The specific post-socialist upsurge of religiosity (marked by growing ethno-nationalism, *ibid.*: 6–7) is related to the capability of religion to give expression to the revival of old and invention of new identities.¹ The rising interest in Eastern Orthodox Christianity also demonstrates that globalisation² and nationalism (*ibid.*; Buzalka 2007: 9–12; Naumescu 2007: 27–56; Hann, Goltz 2010: 10) are not incompatible. However, the globalisation of Orthodox Christianity has been a new factor, challenging the simplified views of Eastern Christianity.³

The development of Orthodox Christianity in postsocialist Estonia, which is the subject of discussion in the present article, supports the aforementioned observations but that’s not all. In addition, it also shows how the geopolitical trajectories (Engelhardt 2010: 103–105) sketch boundaries between religious communities and mark their prints even on the most intimate nucleus of the personal and collective religious experience.

The existence of two Orthodox Christian churches – the Estonian Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (see *Eesti Apostlik-Õigeusu Kirik*) under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople⁴ – is specific to the religious situation in contemporary Estonia (Rimestad 2010).⁵ The objective of the present article is to outline some of the basic characteristics of the postsocialist ‘renaissance’ of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, for example the conversion from Lutheranism to Orthodox Christianity and the processes of rediscovery, reinvention and ‘Estonianisation’ of Orthodox Christianity in the postsocialist context. The main research questions are: What are the reasons for the post-Soviet conversion from Lutheranism to Orthodox Christianity? How is the religious tradition of Orthodoxy (which almost faded away under socialism) rediscovered and reinvented in contemporary Estonia?

I will take a closer look at the specific dimensions of these processes through a study of a small Orthodox community: the parish of St. Alexander Nevsky church in Tartu. The article is based on two very short field trips (ten days each) to Tartu, Estonia, in September 2009 and in November 2010. The modest scope of both the observations and conclusions is due to, and based on, the short length of the ethnographic fieldwork. The focusing of the research in a small community, however, has the potential to provide observations upon the local specifics of socio-cultural practices. Through the prism of the local context indeed I strive to demonstrate living process of reinvention of Orthodox Christianity in Estonia and, more generally, the ‘making’, creation, of religion. In reference to their historical tradition, the Orthodox Estonians in the university city of

Tartu reinvent old, as well as forge new, in their essence, religious practices. The case herewith examined is in eloquent support of the observations of authors who underline the pluralism of the “Christianities” (Hann, Goltz 2010: 18) or admit the importance of local religious traditions (Cannell 2006: 5), expressing their scepticism for the simplified concepts for the homogenising essence of Christianity. The text that follows discusses the historic trajectories of the Orthodox Christianity in Estonia, the methods of field-work, the development of the local religious community since the second decade of the 20th century, the Estonian Orthodox identity and the religious conversion in historical and contemporary aspect, the construction and overcoming of symbolic boundaries in the Orthodox Christianity, the forging of new Orthodox canonicity, the parish as a social community.

BRIEF HISTORICAL NOTES

Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church at the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople is a relatively small religious community little known outside Estonia.⁶ Currently, in Estonia about sixty church parishes are registered, organised into three eparchies (Tallinn, Pärnu and Tartu) (*Eesti Apostlik-Õigeusu Kirik*). In 1996, the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church claimed membership of 30,000 (Rimestad 2010). Although the earliest precedent of penetration of the Orthodox Christianity in the territory of Estonia is dated as early as the 11th to 12th century (and was subsequently shifted by the Catholicism; Phidas 2002: 268; Engelhardt 2005: 9–11; Rimestad 2010), the current community of Orthodox Christians is formed mainly by the mass conversions from Lutheranism to Orthodox Christianity that have taken place since the 1840s and 1880s (Engelhardt 2005: 11, 115–130; Ringvee 2008: 79). According to the census of 1897, “17,7 percent of the Estonians in Livland were Orthodox (roughly the same proportion as in the 1840s), while the figure for Estland was 4,6 percent” (Raun 2001: 80). Let me remind that the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church was declared autonomous by the Russian Patriarch Tikhon in 1920 (Ringvee 2008: 80), along with the beginning of the independent Republic of Estonia in 1918. The church was admitted under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in July 7, 1923 in a Patriarchal Act of Independence (τομοσ) (Papathomas, Palli 2002: 55–58; Ringvee 2008: 80).

After the occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union in 1940, the Estonian Orthodox Church passed one more time under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1941. During that time, believers numbered approximately 200,000 (Huttunen 2002: 402), 80 per cent of whom were ethnic Estonians. On the insistence of the Russian Orthodox Church, in 1978 the Ecumenical Patriarchate declared invalid the act of 1923.

When the Estonian state regained its independence in 1991, the Estonian institutions took steps to re-establish the autonomous status of the church, which took place in 1993. In 1996 the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued an act of restoration of the τομοσ of 1923 and granted an autonomous status to the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (Papathomas, Palli 2002: 67–70; Rimestad n.d.). Since 1999, the latter has been headed by Metropolitan Stephanos, theology professor, a Greek Cypriot by origin (*Eesti Apostlik-Õigeusu Kirik*).

The postsocialist renewal of Estonian Orthodoxy encounters consequences from the historic hiatus inherited from the Soviet period. The obliteration of the institutional structure of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church in the 1940s, followed by the mass closing of churches, puts the Estonian Orthodoxy along with the religious communities in Eastern Europe which (almost) ceased to exist during the era of socialism.⁷ Today's revitalisation of this community includes not only restoration of the institutional structure of the church but also the overcoming of the loss of cultural knowledge of religion. The latter is a common problem in post-Soviet world, and to a considerable degree in the postsocialist space. The strategies of the Estonian Orthodoxy for renovation and coping with the (post) Soviet legacy are discussed in the pages that follow, at the scale of a local church community.

FIELDWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

I shall present the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church through study of a religious community at the church of St. Alexander Nevsky (also known as *Karlova kirik*)⁸ with churchwarden Father Orenti (Mägi). I hope to show 'the human face' of this church, notwithstanding the limited scope of the study.

I chose to conduct a fieldwork among this specific community due to the influence of different circumstances. During my first stay in Tartu in 2009, I realised that my initial plan to work in both Christian Orthodox communities (Russian-speaking and the Estonian-speaking) was unrealistic. During my ten-day stay in September 2009, I was only able to establish contact with the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church. This was possible due to the help of my colleagues, ethnologists from the University of Tartu.

I conducted fourteen interviews during the fieldwork in Tartu in 2009 and 2010. I stuck to the empirical method of autobiographical interview; the language used was Russian or English. Autobiographical interviews were chosen as main fieldwork technique due to their capacities to shed light on conversions in their contexts. Father Orenti is the only one whose real name I keep, due to the publicity of his conducts which can be found at the website of the church; the rest of the interlocutors are referred to only by fictitious names.

The opportunity for observation was also limited due to the fact that Orthodox churches in Tartu usually conduct their services only at weekends. Some of the interviews, however, took place in the church. This, along with the fact that the most active parishioners visited the church during the week in order to communicate with the priest or to participate in activities related to maintenance of the church, which was then being repaired, allowed me also to gather impressions of the inner life of the community.

The parish of *Karlova kirik* has a membership of about one hundred and fifty, according to Father Orenti; however, only about fifteen of the believers attend church almost every day (Father Orenti, personal interview 16.09.2009). The circle of the most active parishioners is augmented by the regular congregants who attend the church weekly, or at the least, monthly. The interviews were conducted inside this 'nucleus'. On one hand, these are the people who are the 'engine' of the religious community and define its aspect. On the other, the concentration of the fieldwork on only the nucleus creates a risk of incorrect conclusions regarding the character of the community as a whole – a risk I don't want to underestimate.

Two types of believers can be outlined amongst the circle of active parishioners: young educated people (who are, with the exception of a seventeen-year-old high school student, people with a university degree between the age of twenty three and forty); and seniors. The relevance of this division between the young and the seniors is explicitly mentioned in the interviews. Middle-aged people are also visitors to the church of St. Alexander Nevsky, although their number is smaller and their presence affects the community less. The interviews were conducted exclusively among the group of the younger attendees. This was not a planned research strategy, but rather a result of the fact that I was directed to the younger people by Father Orenti, in his role of a 'gatekeeper'. In addition, conversion, which is my main research target here, takes place mainly among the young people in the parish. After the fieldwork reached the level of allowing for the first working hypothesis to be formed, I decided to continue my further interviews of the younger churchgoers. The reason for this was my concern that the interviews might ultimately be ineffective due to the language barrier between the seniors and I.

I sought a chance to support my field observations with evidence from the Estonian Historical Archives on the history of the church and the parish of St. Alexander Nevsky. The initial expectations to find rich evidence in Russian (especially from the Soviet period) did not come true. I found primarily documents in Estonian, and only some key evidence about the early history of the church in Russian. Correspondingly, archival documents have a rather auxiliary function in shaping the research methodology of the present article.

ST. ALEXANDER NEVSKY CHURCH IN TARTU (*KARLOVA KIRIK*): HISTORY AND THE PRESENT DAY

The church owes its unofficial denomination *Karlova kirik* to the place where it was built. Karlova today is a city district in Tartu, announced by a decision of the city administration in 1995 to be a "protected construction zone" due to its historic wooden architecture (*Tartu Agenda* 1999: 31). In 1913, however, when preparation for the construction of the church started, this was part of the suburban zone of Tartu. The church was built on land bought in 1915 by the clergy consistory in Riga, represented by the Estonian priest Anton Laar. (See *Krepostnoi Act*, a land sale contract signed on 4.05.1915 in Yuryev (Tartu), EAA.T-1655.3.599: 56.)

The St. Alexander Nevsky parish was formed in 1914, while the preparation (which had started in 1913) for the construction of the church building had started. The latter was finished in 1917 (EAA.T-1978.2.17: 1–6). The first priests were Anton Laar and Konstantin Kokla, both of whom belonged to the group of "Christian Orthodox leaders", according to the expression used by Engelhardt (2005: 26, 114) and played a significant role in the history of Estonian Orthodox Christianity.⁹ Anton Laar also served in St. Alexander Nevsky church from 26.10.1913 to 28.11.1919, and from 1.11.1928 to 23.02.1933. Konstantin Kokla also served during two different periods: 25.03.1915 to 19.04.1919 and 1.05.1934 to 1.11.1934. In addition to these two priests, four more priests and two more deacons served in the church until 1939. (EAA.T-1978.2.17: 1–6)

The destiny of the church and the parish of St. Alexander Nevsky shows the local dimensions of the larger historical narrative. In 1941, soon after the twenty-fifth anni-

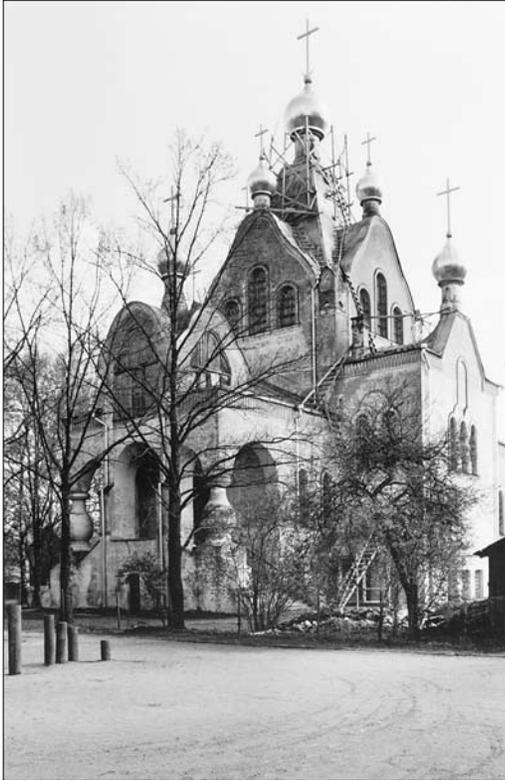


Photo 1. St. Alexander Nevsky church in Tartu.
Photo by Göte Ask. ERM Fk 2745:987

(ibid.) Today, the church building is being repaired and rebuilt slowly and with difficulty after being used for secular purposes between 1962 and 1996. The services are conducted in the renovated underground premises due to the fact that the parish does not have enough resources to repair the whole church space. An important part of the social practices of this Orthodox community takes place around the reparation of the church building.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND CONVERSION: HISTORIC DIMENSIONS

Conversion is a decisive factor for the historic formation of the community of the Orthodox Estonians and its identity. These two issues are discussed here together, due to their mutual connection. To begin with, “conversion is affiliation of a person to a new religious group, conceptualized as positive transformation of the nature and value of person” (Stark, Bainbridge 1996: 197). Researchers of different disciplinary affiliation define religious conversion as radical transformation of self (Asad 1996: 266; Spilka et al. 2003; Robbins 2007: 5–17), despite scepticism concerning the analogy to “Pauline experience” – the conversion of St. Paul (Stark, Bainbridge 1996: 195; Spilka et al. 2003: 344).

versary of the parish in 1939, the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church was attached to the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church as a consequence of the Soviet occupation. In 1962, *Karlova kirik* was closed due to another cycle of atheistic repressions in what was then Khrushchev’s Soviet Union. The church building was transferred to the Estonian National Museum in 1984, which preserved in it part of its collections. The atheistic policy was applied along with economic mechanisms targeting, among others, the de-Estonianisation of the Orthodox institutions, in addition putting the latter in an unequal position by applying excessively high rents for the (state expropriated) church buildings: “The Estonian parishes had to pay rent to the Soviet state – and the rent included the air too. A lot of parishes had to cease their existence.” (Father Orenti, personal interview, 16.09.2009)

The parish was established again in October 1994. The church building was returned to the parish in 1995 and Father Orenti started serving there in 2000.

The religious situation in late modernity demonstrates that apart from the exchange of one religious identity with another, other models of conversion can also be encountered. According to Danielé Hervieu-Léger, the second model suggests a change from indifference to religion, to religious commitment. The second model is similar to the third – “internal conversion”, which occurs when the personality rediscovers the religious identity which he or she had previously maintained only formally (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 120–125).¹⁰ The postsocialist shift from atheism to religious commitment provides new meaning to the very concept of conversion (Pelkmans 2009: 12–13). Although not exclusively, the term conversion is in most cases used to define change from one religious identity to another. In the pages that follow, this model of conversion is discussed predominantly in historic plan.

“I am Eastern Orthodox and I am an Estonian”: the first interview in September 2009 started with these words. This phrase is clear evidence of some tension in the identification of the entire community of Orthodox Estonians. When Estonia was made part of the USSR, the number of Orthodox Christians in Estonia was around 200,000 with ethnic Estonians greatly in the majority (Huttunen 2002: 402). Although a religion of the “relevant minority” (ibid.: 399), Orthodox Christianity has a traditional historical presence in the country (Phidas 2002: 267–273). The Soviet period, however, has changed the way in which Orthodox Christianity was perceived in Estonia, for at least two reasons. The first is the oblivion with which, during the same epoch, the “Estonian-speaking” Orthodox Church suffered (Huttunen 2002: 399–400); the second is the increase in the Russian-speaking population, which solidified the stereotypic identification of Orthodox Christianity with Russia. This stereotypical perception of “Eastern Orthodox, i.e. Russian” vs. “Lutheran, i.e. Estonian” (Huttunen 2002: 299; Engelhardt 2005: 96–97; 2009: 85–86; Rimestad 2010) is in accordance with the contemporary Estonian context.

The question of coping with the tension that surrounded the identification of ‘Orthodox Estonian’ is connected with the question of the current conversion from Lutheranism to Orthodox Christianity. Historic arguments provide a key to the answers to these questions. The mass conversion to Orthodoxy in the 1840s and 1880s¹¹ was accomplished through the influence of several factors: the imperial policy of Russification, “anti-Baltic German sentiment, Lutheran anti-clericism, recent crop failures and famine, and peasants’ misguided hopes for economic and social gain” (Engelhardt 2005: 115–116). What does the history of the parish at *Karlova kirik* present from the time of its establishment during the second decade of the 20th century?

The archives show that during this period a conversion was conducted in the parish, although in a way that is definitely different to the mass conversions of the 19th century. The record books from the second decade of the 20th century have documented a not insignificant number of cases of transition to Orthodox Christianity. The record book documenting child births in 1916 can be given as a random example. It shows that the number of Orthodox Estonians in the parish increased in two ways. The first is bi-confessional or bi-cultural marriages – between Orthodox Christians and Lutherans or between Estonians and Russians. Children from such families received Orthodox baptism and names. The second way is the conversion from Lutheranism to Orthodoxy. In each month of the year in 1916 acts had been registered, called incorporation, usually of adults and in one instance of a ten-year-old girl. The unction sacrament was performed in these instances, and the incorporated received a new Orthodox name (the old name

was kept when it matched the Orthodox name tradition, i.e. Maria). In some months the incorporated were the same in number as the newly born who were baptised. Although the number of documented rituals of unction and baptism is not considerable – usually four or five within a month – the facts demonstrate a definite tendency. (EAA.T-1978.1.13: 2–8)

While the 19th century conversions were conducted in a rural environment (see Ringvee 2008: 79), St. Alexander Nevsky parish in the city of Tartu had a different social pattern in the second decade of the 20th century. The parishioners were from the social strata of craftsmen, intellectuals (including scholars and students) and clerks, although there were some people of village origin as well. In fact, this is barely surprising for a community in an urban environment with university traditions. Unlike the mass conversions of the 19th century, conversion during the time when St. Alexander Nevsky church was established was individual, gradual and slow.

How can all this be explained in the context of the negative social reactions to the acceptance of Orthodoxy in the 19th century, as well as the wave of reconversions to Lutheranism that involved about a quarter of the converts? (Raun 2001: 80; Ringvee 2008: 79) In the years that precede the establishment of the independent Republic of Estonia (1918), the process of Estonianisation of Orthodoxy – in other words the vesting of the Orthodox canonic essence with “Estonian forms” – was quite an advanced one (Engelhardt 2005: 109). Due to the energetic efforts of the ‘Orthodox leaders’ along with the support of the lay people, the Orthodoxy was already institutionalised in the interwar period. The services were being performed in Estonian, with the support of a constantly enlarging liturgical literature and Orthodox songs not only in the native language but also with a clearly defined Estonian musical specificity (*ibid.*). In short, during the period mentioned Orthodoxy was already accepted as a tradition that became independent and perceived as a particularity of the national history (*ibid.*; Rimestad 2010).

The contemporary processes of conversion may be understood better in the context of the strong spirit of restoration in Estonia after the regaining of independence in 1991. The resumption of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church after 1991 was accepted as a resumption of some of the historic traditions inherited by the independent interwar Republic of Estonia (Rimestad 2010). Observations at a micro level in the contemporary religious community at *Karlova kirik* show that the perception of Orthodox Christianity as a ‘home-grown’ Estonian tradition is an important vehicle for the recovery of the parish, as well as for legitimisation of the personal choice to turn to Orthodox Christianity. Father Orenti, for instance, received Orthodox baptism in 1994 under the influence of an older Orthodox believer who made him understand that the Orthodoxy was part of the Estonian tradition. (Father Orenti, personal interview, 16.09.2009)

The historic arguments however, explain only a part of the reasons for the conversion and the revived interest in Orthodoxy in Estonia today.

POSTSOCIALIST CONVERSION IN THE ORTHODOX PARISH
OF ST. ALEXANDER NEVSKY, TARTU

The following analysis is based on autobiographical interviews conducted in 2009 and 2010. However, I do not refer to them as “narratives of conversion” (see Engelhardt 2009: 94–99), for three reasons: because the interviews have rather a dialogue-like form and in this sense the definition narrative would be conditional; because my interview partners were communicating with me in a foreign for them language which limited their freedom of expression; and finally, because I wouldn’t like to create the – incorrect – impression that this is the same genre as the narratives of conversion that appear in the environment of Pentecostal born again Christians, built mostly through a paradigmatic model of the New Testament story about the conversion of St. Paul (see for example Coleman 2000: 11, 29). Conversion exists as a motif in all interviews with one exception; however, it is not presented as a thunderous illumination, which is the miracle of St. Paul in the Apostolic Acts. The emotion exists, but along with a rational assessment of the priorities that the interviewed person connects with Orthodoxy.

All types of conversion defined by Hervieu-Léger are present in the interviews. The postsocialist manifestations of turn from atheism to religion are also attested. The latter is enhanced by the specific contemporary self-perception of secularism of the Estonians (Rimestad 2010) as a specific feature of their culture and mentality. The most serious research challenge, however, is the transformation from Lutheranism to Orthodoxy and this outlines a group of the next research questions: what have been the individual incentives for conversion from Lutheranism to Orthodoxy? What is the social status of the converts? What religious practices take place in the midst of the newly converted Orthodox Estonians? The responses will have restricted validity, corresponding to the scope of the study.

The conversion from Lutheranism to Orthodoxy relates mainly to the younger churchgoers in *Karlova kirik*. As far as they are the basis of the nucleus of the most active parishioners, however, it can be stated that their conversion is of high importance for the community. On this small group depends, to a significant level, the functioning of worship practices in the church: two deacons and two of the singers in the church choir belong to the community of the young converts.

The motivations for conversion, as well as the specific circumstances related to it, are different. The decision, however, is a result of personal choice.¹² Two of the interviews are evidentiary for married couples who have adopted the Orthodoxy. Even then, however, the decision was taken after a thorough reflection and based on personal considerations. This is the way Tamara was stimulated to adopt Orthodoxy from her boyfriend (later husband): “I was living with my boyfriend and one day he went to this church and got baptised; next month I was baptised”. This event, however, was prepared for by a continuous interest in religion during her adolescence and youth: “I remind myself to read the Bible and to think about religion” (Tamara, personal interview, 5.11.2010).

The social and educational status of neophytes is important in order to comprehend the character of and motivation for conversion. Those interviewed were people with university degrees except for three, who were college students, and one who was a school student. This parish is not a singular case in that respect. Engelhardt characterises the congregation of St. Simeon and the Prophetess Hanna in Tallinn as a younger

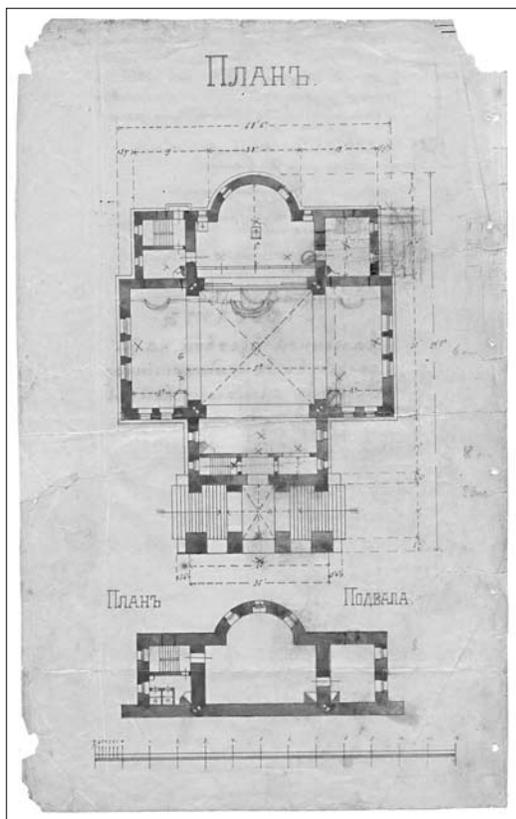


Photo 2. Ground plan of the building of St. Alexander Nevsky church in Tartu, 14.04.1914. EAA.T-1978.2.4a.

and more cosmopolitan¹³ group, where among the parishioners icon painters, designers, architects, musicians, military officers, former members of the Estonian National Assembly, students, translators, retired and school students can be found (Engelhardt 2009: 92). Huttunen (2002: 399) evidences a group of young athletes who adopted Orthodoxy at the end of the 1980s in Tallinn.

The liberal atmosphere and the cosmopolitanism of the university city of Tartu provide a good environment for the spiritual interests and moral searches of a small community of educated young people. The spiritual interests of the community are closely connected to the intellectual efforts made when defining its own identity. Both, in their turn, are visualised and materialised through the large parish library located in the church building.

The interviews have shown that the search for a genuine spiritual experience¹⁴ has been the main justification for the adoption of Orthodox Christianity. “I have touched the Holy Spirit”, says one

of the parishioners (Theodore, personal interview, 16.09.2009), a theology student, in this way expressing one of the dominant attitudes in this religious community. Six of the interviewed have degrees in theology or are current students in the subject. Studies in theology preceded the conversion of Father Orenti and one of the singers in the church choir. Driven by a strong religious orientation, Father Orenti wanted to have a career as a Lutheran pastor at a very young age – around twenty years old. This decision preceded his choice to adopt Orthodoxy.

The biographic trajectories demonstrate that spiritual interests (initially in Lutheran Christian environment) do indeed precede the informed and thought-through decision to adopt Orthodoxy. Two of those interviewed have family trees that include Lutheran pastors. Their parents had been sceptical or even adverse to their religious choice. One of the church singers was raised in a family of committed Lutherans. In the main the lasting and deep interest in the spiritual, cultivated within the family, had contributed to these young people ignoring the traditional – for Estonians – Lutheranism and choosing Orthodoxy. It would be a truthful statement that in certain cases conversion is undertaken by some of the most committed believers, who seek strong religious experience or more assertive answers for their religious questions.¹⁵

Another perceived attractiveness of Orthodox Christianity outlined in the interviews is the idea of the beauty and wealth of its ritual life, as well as the specificity of worship

practices: “In the Orthodox Church praying is more than preaching” (Theodore, personal interview, 16.09.2009). The interest in spiritual, instead of the ‘inherited’, collective religious identities is being appraised by scholars as a general tendency in the religious life of late modernity, particularly in a European context (see Davie 2000; Woodhead, Heelas 2000: 2–3). Engelhardt makes a convincing allegation that, “these converts are like other young, cosmopolitan converts in Western Europe and North America for whom the aesthetics, perceived authenticity and alternative nature of the Orthodox Christianity are profoundly appealing” (Engelhardt 2009: 92). This characteristic of the Orthodox Christian Estonians from the church of St. Simeon and the Prophetess Hanna in Tallinn applies to their confraternity brothers in *Karlova kirik* as well. Furthermore, the latter share the postmodern attitude towards Orthodoxy as well as fundamental tendencies typical to contemporary European religiosity based on personal choice and interest in spirituality.

Thus, if the mass shift from Lutheranism to Orthodox Christianity in the 19th century may be observed, inter alia, as an act of subscription to the religion of those in power in the Russian Empire, in search of empowerment, then how can we understand the contemporary conversion from Lutheranism to Orthodox Christianity? At first, today’s conversion is based on a personal choice. This is a gesture of modern individualism, where the right to commitment to religion is vindicated – a choice of an alternative attitude to the secular moods of mainstream Estonian society. On another hand, conversion in the social imaginary is also a paradoxical but not an illogical return to ‘one’s own’, ‘Estonian’ tradition of Orthodox Christianity.

CONSTRUCTING, AND OVERCOMING, BOUNDARIES IN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

Orthodox Christian Estonians encounter the challenge of the symbolic boundaries inherited from history. Ecumenical and cosmopolitan spirits and national restrictions are two opposing trends that define the scale of action in the renewed Estonian Orthodox community. This is valid both on national and local level.

The search for authentic religious experience overcomes the “problem of identification” created by the stereotypical Estonian perception of Orthodox Christianity as a “Russian religion”. Resistance to these stereotypes (see Engelhardt 2005: 97) includes different strategies for coping with the problem. Such a strategy is reference to the tradition of Estonianised Orthodoxy forged during the interwar period of the 20th century. “Estonia is traditionally an Orthodox country”, claims Maria (personal interview, 5.11.2010). Implications about the direct association with the Russian Orthodoxy are ‘evaded’ in a discreet way. Thus, the official internet address of the church contains its well known designation *Karlova kirik*, instead of the official, St. Alexander Nevsky. Perhaps this is an attempt to shake the one-way association of the church with its patron saint – one of the emblematic national Russian warrior saints. The introduction to the church choir in the social network MySpace is similar as it is accompanied by examples of a few different Orthodox saints under the name Alexander (*Püha Risti koor’s Photos*). The rejection of an essentialised equalisation of the religious with the national identity is actually a reference to modern (Western) Estonian values.¹⁶

The division of the two Orthodox Christian communities in Estonia is somewhat relative. The Orthodox parishes in Estonia are not ethnically homogenous, although ethnic Estonians are predominant in the parishes of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, whereas ethnic Russians are the majority in the Estonian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (Engelhardt 2005; Rimestad 2010). Apart from ethnic Estonians, *Karlova kirik* is attended by ethnic Russians: people born in bi-cultural Estonian-Russian families. Among the parishioners there is a Romanian married couple as well as a young woman who had recently adopted Orthodox Christianity and who was born in a bi-cultural Finnish-Estonian family. Thus, the parish of St. Alexander Nevsky demonstrates how spiritual aspirations unite believers beyond the symbolic as well as actual boundaries outlined by geopolitical ambitions or by stereotypes of mass conscience.

The communication and cooperation between believers in the two Orthodox communities in Estonia is an actual social practice although it takes place more on an individual level and beyond the stage of the public action. Two of my interlocutors have adopted Orthodox Christianity in Pühtitsa monastery – an important spiritual centre and a symbol of the Russian Orthodoxy in Estonia – and that has left deep marks in their spiritual biographies. Some of the priests who serve in parishes of the Estonian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are ethnic Estonians and vice versa: there are priests in the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church who are ethnic Russians. An important part of the liturgical music performed by the church choir of *Karlova kirik* was composed and consigned in 2004 by the wife of Father T., an Estonian who serves in a parish of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The attitude of Orthodox Estonians to Russian Orthodox Christianity remains ambiguous. On one hand, the aspiration to draw a boundary towards the Russian-speaking Orthodox community in Estonia is eloquent, as we saw, through different symbolic gestures or discourse practices. On the other hand, the symbolic barriers are reciprocally maintained by the Russian-speaking Orthodox clergy and believers. The latter sometimes express skepticism for the canonicity of Estonian Orthodoxy. In certain cases, the very essence of the religious cult has been disputed, while the specificity of Estonian worship practices has been demonised through expressions like “you serve demons”. (Marina, personal interview, 6.11.2010)

To my interlocutors from *Karlova kirik*, Russian Orthodoxy is a subject of differentiation as well as a point of reference concerning the authenticity of the Christian service. The acknowledgement of the spiritual qualities of Father Orenti by Russian priests is mentioned in the interviews with some pride: it was a Russian monk Father R. who sent one of the present parishioners to Father Orenti as an appropriate spiritual mentor. Furthermore, Father R. has visited the church of St. Alexander Nevsky in Tartu:

He has visited us here as well. His attitude is very warm. And yes, he said it is a good parish, young people. So, it's quite unusual, actually, among the Russian priests. Especially some five to seven years ago, because of these two churches. (ibid.)

When, for a certain person, religion is not only a central value but also the main life project, religious motivation can leave the geopolitical competitions and the symbolic boundaries related to them in the background.

During its resumption in the 1990s the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church was also helped not only by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but by the Orthodox community in Finland (Huttunen 2002: 399–402; John of Nicaea 2002: 307–344). Father Orenti, for instance, was ordained as a priest by Finnish bishops. As a whole, the transition under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate also means that Orthodox Estonians join networks of support and build spiritual experience with Orthodox believers from Greece, Finland, France and Great Britain, which is also internalised as a symbolic association with the West (see Engelhardt 2005: 7–8).

The emphasis on spirituality, which characterises the parish of *Karlova kirik*, as well as the liberal intellectual spirit of communication in it have been in outstanding contradiction with the national restrictions in Orthodox Christianity. This small religious community is actually developing within the context of globalisation (see Roudometof, Agadjanian, Pankhurst 2005). Most of those interviewed have visited the Orthodox monastery of St. John the Baptist in Essex, Great Britain (and others), which they quote as a model of piety. In the community, the conception that for the Orthodox believer it is mandatory to go at least once a year on a pilgrimage to a monastery has gained firm ground. Noteworthy is the fact that these journeys are made with the rather modest personal funds of the believers.

On the other hand, we should not neglect the observation that the outstanding interest in pilgrimages worldwide has been interpreted by researchers as a sign of lay influence due to tourism being a feature of life in the late modern period (Hervieu-Léger 1999; Davie 2000). The monastery of St. John the Baptist in Essex, however, means much more to the people from *Karlova kirik* than just a place of pilgrimage. In fact, this is the model according to which the liturgical practices in the church of St. Alexander Nevsky are organised:

When I came here [became a parishioner – M.B.], I was quite surprised, because of the style of Father Orenti. I thought: interesting, it's not Russian style, but as far as I know it's not Greek style either. And when I went to Essex and was there for the first time, I recognised immediately: this is the style of Essex. [...] Father Orenti has spiritually grown up in Essex, and so, of course, has his parish. (Marina, personal interview, 6.11.2010)

The cosmopolite mood of the young parishioners is in harmony with the linguistic and cultural pluralism of the monastery in Essex, and with the respect for the diversity of traditions that makes up the fabric of Orthodox Christianity. Most probably this is the explanation for the paradigmatic influence of the monastery on the parish in Tartu. The opportunity for Orthodoxy to be understood as an undivided spiritual concept expressed by a variety of traditions is almost explicitly stated in the interviews:

And there in Essex they have, as far as I know, forty monks and nuns – and fifteen nationalities. For example, the services almost never lean towards one language [...]: [they are] in English, in Russian, in Greek, sometimes in French. I have sung there in Estonian. [...] Traditions are so different. (ibid.)

THE FORGING OF RELIGION? IN SEARCH OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CANONICITY

The words cited sketch an image of Essex as a paradigmatic place where a new, modern and, in a certain sense, de-territorialised Orthodox Christianity is being constructed. Therefore, the non-acceptance of national limitations in the area of religion is comprehensible, even where the latter is related to the institution under whose jurisdiction the Estonian Orthodox Christianity currently resides: "It has turned out that in order to be Orthodox, you have to be a Greek", Father Orenti commented bitterly.

The acceptance of specific models of religious service by the monastery in Essex and their transference to Estonian soil also shows how a new canonicity is being forged. The example from Tartu provides an opportunity to witness the creation of a religious tradition 'live'. The 'renaissance' of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church is conducted as a "dialectic between restoration and renewal" (Engelhardt 2005: 27). On one hand, this is a search for continuity with the traditions inherited by the epoch of the interwar Republic of Estonia. On the other hand, the resumption takes the shape of renewal, also due to the imperative post-socialist realities, for example hegemonic secular ideologies and discussions and the loss of religious knowledge. These processes affect the 'style' of the liturgical practices in the church, which was cautiously selected and reselected by the clergy and its close circle of those active in the church (church singers, readers), as well as the character of religious practice among other believers.

The formation of a home-grown Estonian tradition in Orthodox Christianity from 1886 onwards was interrupted when the church was repeatedly returned to Russian Orthodox Church jurisdiction in 1941. Because much of the translation of liturgical literature into Estonian was left unfinished, this activity continues at present (Engelhardt 2005: 264). This is valid for *Karlova kirik* as well: "And in Estonia we have a problem: we don't have many texts in Estonian." The efforts of predecessors in this regard are highly appreciated ("they were very, very productive"), but there are still liturgical books that are untranslated: "We don't have this everyday Minea. And we don't have Octoih," and therefore the translation continues. (Marina, personal interview, 6.11.2010)

The search for a specific Estonian way to be an Orthodox Christian focuses on singing (Engelhardt 2005) and it is no surprise that the same is valid for the church of St. Alexander Nevsky. When describing their church, most of my interlocutors emphasise the beauty of church singing. Because singing is charged with high aesthetic expectations, an equally avid search for its optimal form continues today. While the musical practice of the choir in Tallinn cathedral of St. Simeon and the Prophetess Hanna aims at "Byzantification" (Engelhardt 2009: 89–103), and while the Orthodox singing in the border region of Setomaa is based on an ancient local "tradition" (ibid.: 101–127), the parish in Tartu strives to have its own musical signature. The main selection of church songs has been performed since 2004 in melodies composed today by Ms T. H., and the aesthetic qualities of this music are highly valued by parishioners. Greek and Russian melodies are also used.

In addition to the question "what shall be sung", the questions of "who" and "how" they sing are also discussed and renegotiated. One view (shared by the leader of the choir) puts aesthetic criteria first – the musical qualities of the performance; a second point of view – held by one of the singers – accents collective singing as a form of inclusiveness, a shared prayer, but also as a specific form of empowerment:

Our regent's conception is that if one can sing here, she [must] sing quite well, or he. So when she [the regent] can't come, then, I do things. So, I ask everybody to sing. [...] I like this more, that all people can sing. Must sing. It's not like only priest and deacon and singers, I mean, all community should participate. (Marina, personal interview, 6.11.2010)

During one of my visits to the church I observed that other parishioners thrive on singing: one of the churchgoers, not included in the choir, was holding note texts during the service and was obviously hardly able to control her desire to join the choir. The singing is a subject of discussion in the parish: "And, as you have seen... I mean, these young people, educated people... Everybody has his own opinion, their own taste." (ibid.)

One can see that the arguments that took place in the second decade of the 20th century regarding the admission or non-admission of collective singing during services – due to its connections with the Lutheran traditions (Engelhardt 2005: 111–113) – are being renewed almost one hundred years later. This is not an accident because the conversion left an imprint on the contemporary community which I discuss here. The canonicity of the musical practices in the church is part of the process of creation and reinvention and the religious community expresses its self and its ideas for religious commitment through this process.

A suitable formula of the service order is being forged in a similar way in *Karlova kirik*, this time by the priest. It is (as already mentioned) neither based on the Greek, nor on the Russian model but follows the practice created in the monastery in Essex. This decision is a symbolic gesture which rejects the boundaries of national attraction in the practices of Orthodoxy, and joins the local community with the cosmopolitan spirit of the monastery of St. John the Baptist. The tuning of the Orthodox canonicity to the particularities of the local context is also a part of the 'making of religion' that can be observed in *Karlova kirik*. This effects, for example, the performance of the sacraments, confession and holy communion. Unlike the Russian canon, where they are connected and performed consecutively, sometimes also during the service, in Tartu's parish they are performed separately, either because "we have Greek tradition here", or because of emphasis of the fact that "these are two different sacraments" (Marina, personal interview, 6.11.2010).

On another hand, the long Saturday all-night 'vigilia' conducted according to the monastic model (continuing for four to five hours) also have bodily aspects. The physical endurance of the participants is being challenged, not least the singers, whose performance has a great effect on the service not only through its symbolic and aesthetic load but also because they take a significant amount of the specific liturgical time. The priest "has high expectations" (ibid.) of his closest circle – the deacons and the singers, who along with him give life to the service. As a whole, however, the strategy towards the parishioners is emphatically inclusive and tolerant. This is another form of rejection of boundaries, this time between the parish and the outside world, where, through this tolerant approach, the opportunity for those wishing to join is left open.

A basic feature of the *Karlova kirik* religious community is the hybrid character of certain religious practices, spurred by the spirit of internal freedom and tolerance, particularly valued by believers. Most of the believers (the priest included) strive to observe the Orthodox fasts, but their efforts are often unsuccessful. The latter is calmly received, because the priority community values are different and emphasise the ethical aspects

of Christianity and the prospect of spiritual perfection. "Main thing is faith and how you treat other persons", states a twenty-three-year-old theology student (Theodore, personal interview, 16.09.2009), and another believer (who became a deacon during the period between my two fieldtrips) specifies that the most important thing for religion is the three As: "*Armastus, Andestus, Alandlikkus*" ('love, forgiveness, humility' in Estonian) (Anton, personal interview, 18.09.2009).

"The dynamic nature of Orthodox canonicity" (Engelhardt 2005: 26), the tolerant strategy of the priest along with modern shared values relating to personality and privacy encompass a specific combination of factors that are the basis of attitudes towards the confession (see *supra*). A believer's personal confession is directed according to an appointment with the priest at an out of service time, and can go on for hours. The discreteness and individual approach are distinctive to the way in which the priest approaches this matter: "Sometimes it lasts some hours." (Marina, personal interview, 6.11.2010)

The Lutheran influence, however, has been clearly perceived during fieldwork (reserved manners in the expression of faith, rationality in the organisation of religious practices). Comparing it with my field observations among the Orthodox communities in Russia (2006, 2007), I can note the Tartu believers' reservations about miracles, for instance: "For Christ, miracles were common life", Father Orenti says. "Therefore we must not look for them. Every day is a miracle." (Personal interview, 16.09.2009) Just as at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the Lutheran influence is one of the factors contributing to the formation of a specific Estonian version of the Orthodox Christianity.

THE PARISH AS A SOCIAL COMMUNITY

The parish of *Karlova kirik* is an internally cohesive social community based on religion. Key integrating factors have been, first, the group of the young believers which is the active half and is the engine of the parish; and second, the unifying role of the priest. He attracts believers with his charisma, giving a personal example and the tolerant¹⁷ unobtrusive stand rather of a spiritual interlocutor than of a preacher and teacher. On the other hand, he inspires with his ascetic commitment. The interviews include evidence about his crucial role in the formation of this vital religious community. Most of the young parishioners joined the church of St. Alexander Nevsky after 2000, when Father Orenti started serving there. "Some people just like Father Orenti's ceremony", Tamara clarifies (personal interview, 5.11.2010), and another of the most active parishioners refers to the priest as "a very good friend of mine" (Theodore, personal interview, 16.09.2009).

The parish is a social field for vivid communication and the sharing of different activities, both inside and outside of the physical space of the church. This fact enhances the positive self-perception of the community – "we are team here", "we are like a small family" (*ibid.*; Nathalie, personal interview, 3.11.2010). This mainly refers to the communication between the young believers, although among them are also people who bridge the young-older elements of the community. The active parishioners are involved in activities relating to the maintenance of the church. The interviews men-

tion diverse forms of social life among the young parishioners, like joint holidays in the church – “sometimes we have a festival in the middle of the week” (Nathalie, personal interview, 3.11.2010) – mutual assistance, exchange of visitations, celebrations of birthdays, spending summer holidays together (Tamara, personal interview, 5.11. 2010) of which most memorable is the celebration of Easter: “They make preparations. They can run around the garden ... You take your children and you go sleep there ... This kind of flexible attitude.” (Maria, personal interview, 5.11.2010)

The high level of internal cohesion in the nucleus of the community is in certain cases related to reduction and reorganisation of the personal social networks of some of the believers. Some of the interviews mention that the conversion and, more generally, the expression of religious commitment, has brought tension to the family and a lack of understanding from friends (see also Engelhardt 2009: 95), even a discontinuance of connections with some of them. In this sense, the religious community and its perspectives should not be idealised. As a whole, the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church meets different kinds of challenges, such as the lack of vitality in a fair number of its parishes (ibid.: 16). The parish of *Karlova kirik* is vigorous. However, it is small and the functioning of one or other of its activities may be under question for a certain period of time when the absence of a certain believer makes the human resources insufficient, obliging a substitute to be assigned. The modesty of the financial resources of not only this but of other similar Orthodox Estonian parishes is a serious obstacle to their development. (Tobias, personal interview, 4.11.2010)

It would be hard to make a prognosis about the future prospects of the parish. The community is marked by its internal dynamic, for instance the broadening of the composition of the church’s clergy and its helpers from the circle of the most committed parishioners, like the deacons and the singers. One of my interview partners had become a deacon during the period between my two fieldtrips. Those of my interlocutors who have children have baptised them in the Orthodox Christian faith. It may be claimed, in this sense, that the parish has a potential to grow, yet in proportion to the community’s size.

CONCLUSION

The resumption of religious life in the postsocialist space revitalised old, as well as creating new, religious communities. The restoration of the autonomous Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church was possible due to the historic presence of Orthodoxy in Estonia; in addition it has the particularities of a new project that seeks contemporary horizons and copes with specific postsocialist problems. The conversion is a key term for the study of the Estonian Orthodox Christianity. The community of Orthodox Estonians has emerged mainly through mass conversion in the 19th century and until the time of the establishment of an independent Republic of Estonia in 1918, Orthodox Christianity had already attained a specific local appearance. The Soviet period, however, interrupted this process and changed the way in which Orthodox Christianity was and is perceived in Estonia.

The postsocialist resumption of Estonian Orthodoxy is a response to the consequences of this historic hiatus. Contemporary conversion (from Lutheranism or from

a lack of faith) to Orthodox Christianity is not a repetition of the conversion from the preceding historical periods and needs to be examined in the context of the current global upsurge of religiousness. At the least, today's Orthodox Estonian community does not reproduce its historic predecessors, which can be observed in the changes that came into its social appearance. If, during the 19th century, Orthodox Christianity was accepted in the rural environment, in the first two decades of the 20th century it spread (slower and in the form of individual conversions) into the urban environment among craftsmen, employees and intellectuals. Today's conversion includes many people with university degrees. These changes in the community reflect the changes in the Estonian society as a whole.

The small religious community in Tartu dealt with in this study, which is hardly visible beyond its direct surroundings, actually shares a number of features of the transforming religiosity of Europe: emphasis on spirituality, openness to the impacts of globalisation, the hybrid character of certain religious practices. It is likewise an example of the fact that Orthodox Christianity may also be the free choice of people looking for moral perfection. This is one of the answers to the main question about the reasons for, and characteristics of, a contemporary conversion to Orthodox Christianity. Referring to the historic presence of Orthodoxy as a home-grown Estonian tradition is a strategy for legitimising this choice and for coping with the tensions related to the identification of "Orthodox Estonian" in a society which perceives itself as historically Lutheran, and, in essence, secular. The influence of cosmopolitan tendencies in contemporary Orthodox Christianity and the sharing of the fundamental values of late modernity are another strategy for forging a positive identity. Current conversion is a consequence of free choice. This is also a gesture of modern individualism through which the right of commitment to religion is asserted – the choice of an alternative behaviour that goes against the secular mood of mainstream Estonian society. The rejection of symbolic boundaries (related to the geopolitical imaginary) is a characteristic feature of this process.

The example from Tartu gives us a chance to observe the making of a religious tradition 'live' – a process in which the globalisation and the particularities of the local context play a specific role. The adoption of the multicultural Orthodox monastery of St. John the Baptist in Essex as a model of devotion and the transmission of specific worship practices to Estonian soil from there is a part of the reinvention of Orthodox canonicity. The tuning of the latter to the specifics of the local context is also a part of the 'making of religion', which can be observed in *Karlova kirik*. The community shares understanding for Orthodox Christianity as an undivided spiritual and moral essence expressed through a variety of traditions.

The religious community presented here is a vital although small one; yet, it meets a number of specific limitations and hardships. Probably compared to the scale of the world processes of upsurge and de-privatisation of religion, the example from Tartu may rather be taken as evidence of the revitalisation of separate religious communities. All that has been said so far justifies me in formulating the hypothesis that multidirectional new processes are developing in the core of the Orthodox religion, processes that have the potential to leave an imprint on the future evolution of this branch of Christianity.

NOTES

1 Anthropologists report that religious communities that existed underground or almost ceased their activities during the period of socialism, revitalise at present, as, for example, the Greco-Catholics do (Buzalka 2007; Naumescu 2007; Mahieu, Naumescu 2008).

2 Globalisation is conceptualised here “in terms of unprecedented growth of communication and economic and financial interdependence” (Roudometof, Agadjanian, Pankhurst 2005: 2).

3 For a critical analysis of stereotypical views on Orthodox Christianity see, for example, Hann, Goltz 2010: 1–3.

4 I will refer to this church as the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, in accordance with its designation in the Estonian language (*Eesti Apostlik-Õigeusu Kirik*), although in the English version of its official website the designation Estonian Orthodox Church is used.

5 Some authors categorise this state as schism; see Engelhardt 2009: 104, note 2.

6 Regardless of its low popularity, this religious community lately attracts a serious scholars' attention, in most cases by scholars outside Estonia. (See, for example, the cited here papers by Engelhardt and Rimestad.)

7 See note 2.

8 *Karlova kirik* ‘the church of Karlova’ (in Estonian). Karlova is a Tartu district where the church of St. Alexander Nevsky situates. The Baptist church of the Salem congregation that has been built nearby is also called *Karlova kirik*. In this article, the term *Karlova kirik* designates only the Orthodox church building and congregation.

9 About Anton Laar and Konstantin Kokla, see again Engelhardt 2005: 108–114.

10 The literature on the subject is mainly related to Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 120–125; Coleman 2000; Cannell 2006; Robbins 2007).

11 Except for the earlier penetration of the Orthodox Christianity in the geographic region of Setomaa (the last quarter of the 15th century; see Engelhardt 2005: 9; Ringvee 2008: 77).

12 For the widespread character of the latter see Hervieu-Léger 1999: 120.

13 Claim made in comparison to another parish of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church in Tallinn – the church of Transfiguration (ibid.).

14 I give different emphasis to the understanding of a genuine spiritual experience compared to “authentic Christianity” (Engelhardt 2009: 92).

15 Pastor Pavel Ignatov, who has been the senior presbyter in the Bulgarian Church of God for many years, made similar arguments regarding the formation of his own charismatic community through conversion in groups of the Bulgarian ‘traditional’ Protestant communities at the beginning of the 1920s (see Ignatov 2006).

16 “I remember once when I was in Pühtitsa [Kuremäe], when a babushka told about me: “Well, well, see: this is Marina – she used to be Estonian, but now she is Orthodox. [...] I don’t see this among Estonians or in the West you don’t see it.” (Marina, personal interview, 6.11.2010)

17 See Engelhardt 2009: 93–98 concerning the role of the charismatic person in shaping specific worship practices in a parish.

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EAA – Estonian Historical Archives (Eesti Ajalooarhiiv).

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