

# “I’M NOT LIKE MOST OF YOU HERE, I’M JUST AN ALCOHOLIC”: A RUSSIAN BAPTIST THEORY OF ADDICTION

IGOR MIKESHIN, PhD  
Social and Cultural Anthropology  
University of Helsinki  
Unioninkatu 35, Helsinki 00014, Finland  
e-mail: igor.mikeshin@anthro.ru

## ABSTRACT

In my paper I discuss alcoholics in the Russian Baptist rehabilitation ministry by comparing them to drug addicts. In the outside world, as well as in the early stages of the rehabilitation program, alcoholics and illicit drug abusers are perceived as different cultural groups. However, during the program, rehabilitants learn Russian Baptist dogma and theology, and soon afterwards the distinction becomes obsolete for them. I address narratives of distinction and the Russian Baptist response to them. Then I reconstruct the Russian Baptist theory of addiction to demonstrate why alcoholism and substance dependence are not regarded as a problem, but rather as consequences of the real problem, which is a life in sin.

KEYWORDS: alcoholism • addiction • rehabilitation • Russian Baptist Church

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a comparative account of alcohol and illicit drug abusers in the Russian Baptist rehabilitation ministry called Good Samaritan. I will address the context of alcoholism in Russia and its interpretation in the ministry. I will emphasise a comparison of drug users and alcoholics in the discourse of rehabilitation, and then reconstruct a Russian Baptist theory of addiction according to Good Samaritan.

Good Samaritan is a rehabilitation ministry for addicted people founded in 2004. Initially occupying two rooms in the church premises in St. Petersburg, today there are more than thirty rehabs in northwestern Russia, one in the Moscow region, one in the outskirts of Voronezh, one in Finland, and one in Latvia.<sup>1</sup> The rehabs commonly occupy a rural house, part of a church building, a farm or former kolkhoz, or a small apartment. The rehabs are usually situated far away from the temptations of big cities, families, and drug dealers in an attempt to prevent rehabilitants from dropping out of the program. The program is free of charge, surviving on occasional donations and support from the congregations and local inhabitants. The rehabs are maintained by rehabilitants in the second stage of the program, but since they are often bad manual workers, due to their past, the premises are in poor condition.

The program lasts for eight months and consists of two stages. In the first stage, Rehabilitation, newcomers are introduced to the New Testament and the basics of

Christian life according to Russian Baptist interpretation. The schedule is very tight and mandatory for all present. At this stage rehabilitants study the Scriptures for the whole day, pass seminars,<sup>2</sup> pray, and glorify God in the form of singing with almost no free time. The second stage, Adaptation, involves working assignments meant to support the rehab, keep people busy, and teach them to interact and take responsibility.

The regime, spatial division, segregation of stages and genders enforce the strict rules (Mikeshin 2015a), as are a long list of limitations and prohibitions of anything considered *sinful*, like smoking, cursing, gambling, verbosity (speaking too much and in vain – *pustosloviye*), and so on. My fieldwork methodology was also affected by a ban on recording equipment, mobile phones, photos and videos, literature apart from the Scriptures (or complementary literature in the second stage), and especially on discussing drugs, drug use, and crime outside of the context of Scripture (for instance, reflections on the bygone life and application of Scripture).

The people in the rehabs have various backgrounds, but their habits eventually make their stories typical. Initially, most of the newcomers have no idea about the Baptist affiliation of the ministry and what the term Baptist implies. However, those who do not leave after the first few days are commonly impressed by the depth of, and dedication to, Bible study in the rehabs. Addicted life in contemporary Russia often involves prison sentences, homelessness, harsh and chronic illnesses, and abandoned families. All these issues are common for most rehabilitants of both genders. Such a background makes many rehabilitants disobedient and unstable, and hence many of them drop out of the program without finishing it. Those who complete the whole program, remain *in faith*, and join a local church, commonly maintaining remission for a long time. Most of those who quit the program relapse soon afterwards (Mikeshin forthcoming).

The rehabilitation program takes the form of studying, learning, and incorporating the Scriptures as the language of liturgy, communication, and even thought and reasoning (cf. Coleman 2000). This is based on the particular *literalist* reading of the Bible, influenced by the 150-year history of oppression and marginalization of Russian Evangelicals, the contemporary Russian sociocultural context, and especially the specificity of the Russian Synodal translation, made under the heavy influence of the Orthodox Church in the 19th century (Mikeshin 2015b). The rehabilitation process thus addresses the twofold nature of addiction, physical and psychological (Volkow and Li 2005), offering a twofold transformation – bodily, through prolonged isolation and abstinence, and moral through conversion to Christianity.

I conducted my fieldwork in the ministry in 2014–2015, staying in the rehabs as a full-time rehabilitant. This mode of presence was a condition of my research in the rehabs, but I was able to declare my research intentions at all times. Conducting interviews on the program was impossible, due to the limitations and lack of time in the tight schedule. Yet, I also participated in missionary trips, church services, festivities, seminars, leadership meetings, and many other events of the ministry and congregation.

For the ministers there was no difference between me being there to conduct research or to treat drug addiction (which I did not have), for the ministry is intended not to cure the body, but to bring people to Christ. The target audience of the ministry is obviously addicted people and the missionaries and ministers approach potential rehabilitants offering them help with substance use dependence. However, as addiction itself is seen

as part of a major problem, which is sin, the ministry deals with sinful human nature, rather than sobriety. Sobriety comes as a consequence and even evidence of repentance, just as good works come as a consequence and evidence of salvation by faith alone in the Evangelical dogma of *sola fide*.

## ALCOHOL AND DRUGS IN RUSSIA

It is the most difficult task to write an overview of the social and cultural role of alcohol in contemporary Russia. So much has been written and said on Russians and drinking, and yet one can hardly embrace the vast multitude of explanations of what causes alcoholism in Russia to the extent that the nation itself is often associated with vodka from the outside as well as in the inside. In my paper, I have to limit my account of alcoholism and rehabilitation to the most vivid references to the Soviet and post-Soviet past, although it is evident that the causes of Russian alcoholism can be traced to much earlier times (Herlihy 2002).

I focus on one important distinction for my study. Although there is a conventional understanding of alcohol and nicotine as drugs of abuse, with averagely high addictiveness and damage to health (Nutt et al. 2007), in Russia as well as globally alcohol plays a radically different cultural and social roles in Russia as compared to the rest of the world. Its specificity and the vast spread of marijuana and opiates in the USSR in the 1980s and 1990s, instigated by the war in Afghanistan, constructed a totally different image of illicit drug abusers. The dangerous and unpredictable junkie (*narkoman*), as compared to the familiar image of the boozer (*alkash*), was seen as a new growing threat to Russian morals, security, and health. No one would doubt similarities between the effects of certain drugs of abuse and alcohol, but there is much more social tolerance towards the consumption of alcohol to the extent that it is often considered a desired behaviour. Alcohol is a common ice-breaker, cure for stress, and marker of important events, good causes, and even masculinity. Some experience with, and willingness to drink, alcohol is expected from *normal* people, “like anybody else”, especially in the masculine context.

What makes the distinction even more remarkable is the legal status of alcohol (and nicotine), as compared to other drugs. One can buy, sell, produce, store, and transport alcohol with certain restrictions without a threat of spending ten years behind bars. In 2012, the prison sentences for drug-related crimes were increased in Russia, and today it is possible to serve more years, for instance, for one episode of drug dealing than for murder without aggravating circumstances. The narrative behind this claims that those selling drugs are killing dozens or even hundreds of people and hence should be dealt with more severely. Consequently, one fifth of the prison population in Russia were sentenced under the drug-related articles 228–234 of the Criminal Code. (FSIN 2014)

Such a situation, however, does not merely create problems for illicit drug users but for alcoholics as well. Compulsive drinkers recognize their addiction to alcohol much later than drug users. With the exception of marijuana and some other types of ‘light narcotics’, drug users, especially those who inject, are regarded as junkies, and they themselves start admitting it relatively quickly. Regular drinkers, on the other hand, are often regarded as “those who just like to drink” (*lyubyat vypit’*), as being “like any-

body else”, or as those who like company and parties. Drinkers, in turn, provide lots of conventional excuses for their relapses, such as claiming their right to “relax” or have some rest at the end of the busy week, referring to a stressful situation, merry company, a football game, some other serious cause, or tradition.

To summarise, I focus on the cultural perception of drugs and alcohol in Russian society. Apart from the biochemical similarities, alcohol and illicit drugs have radically different legal and cultural statuses. In certain situations, the consumption of alcohol is expected and generally approved, while even a moderate amount (more than six grams) of marijuana can put the user in prison. The public stigma of junkies is so strong that even abusers themselves generally share it, which substantially adds to their moral collapse. This collapse constitutes their life-stories and defines the cultural and psychological context in their first encounter with Good Samaritan.

### ALCOHOLICS AND ILLICIT DRUG USERS IN REHABS

The late acceptance of alcoholic addiction brings alcoholics to rehabilitation programs late. In the rehabs where I did my fieldwork, alcoholics were commonly older than illicit drug addicts, and many of them hesitated to fully acknowledge their problem. In the first days of the program, when it is time for introductions, alcoholics often say something like: “I’m not like most of you here, I’m *just* an alcoholic” (37-year-old Marat).<sup>3</sup> Many illicit drug addicts also support this distinction, especially in the early stage of the program, by mocking the alcoholics and their “petty” problems, and even calling them names, like “the politicals” (*politicheskiye*).<sup>4</sup> When asked why they were at the rehab, many of rehabilitants came up with creative answers that took attention away from their alcoholism:

37-year-old Vladislav: “I boozed up a little (*zabukhal chut'-chut'*). Well, actually I came here to find inner harmony and learn how to love people.”

30-year-old Vova: “I just want to quit smoking.”

32-year-old Dima: “I want to get rid of my sex addiction.”

54-year-old Sergey Ivanych: “Well, my wife sent me here. I didn’t know anything about it.”

67-year-old Andrey Viktorovich: “I came to get some treatment (*podlehit'sya*), and I’m very much satisfied with the therapy I’m getting here.”

Remarkably enough, the idea of treatment or therapy is something most of addicts are used to in other rehabilitation programs. At the same time, Christian rehabilitation at Good Samaritan rejects this notion for its focus on a bodily cure. Bodily transformation, the ministers claim, can only follow the moral and spiritual transformation of a converted individual. Without conversion, surrender to Jesus and being born again, an addict will sooner or later relapse. At Good Samaritan, this is apparently the case – the program only works if the dogma behind it is taken in fully, unconditionally, and wholeheartedly (Mikeshin forthcoming).

Due to late acceptance and many more temptations in the outside world, alcoholics at Good Samaritan relapse more frequently. Even in the rehab setting, when permitted to go out to work, alcoholics often bump into drunk people, liquor stores, and bottles

with leftovers. Once, a 38-year-old homeless alcoholic Misha was sent to clean the stairways in the neighbouring housing blocks with three other “brothers”. There he found a half-empty bottle of vodka. He managed to throw it away, and later he claimed that Satan was tempting him, an alcoholic, with this bottle: “This was not an accident, no doubt about it. No one among those three junkies with me found it. But I – the boozer (*siniak*) – did.”

The overall spread and tolerance towards alcohol consumption links it with the concept of bygone life (*vetkhaya zhizn'*). The life before repentance is regarded as selfish and sinful, and would inevitably lead to death – i.e. both physical and eternal damnation. Even in the testimonies<sup>5</sup> of people who have never been addicted, consumption of alcohol is listed as one of the common vices. A description of one’s bygone life often involves if not compulsive, then at least occasional, drinking (*vypivat' inogda*). One of the marks of genuine repentance for a common Russian Baptist is termination of drinking. Remarkably, for the whole history of Russian Baptists, they have been associated with total abstinence, which was in different contexts regarded as high morals, odd, or even hypocritical (Nikol'skaya 2009; Mitrokhin 1997).

Unlike illicit drugs, alcohol is mentioned and addressed in Russian Baptist theology, dogma, and exegesis. One of the regular questions the rehabilitants ask their elders during Bible study is why alcohol is considered a vice, while at the same time it is so much present in the Bible – even Jesus is depicted constantly drinking wine. The usual explanation the elders are taught to give addresses the historical and geographical context. Referring to the supplementary literature (for instance, the Russian translation of John F. MacArthur’s *Study Bible*), they describe the poor condition of water in Palestine, claiming that the actual beverage was water diluted with wine for disinfection. Moreover, the problem of compulsive drinking is addressed in the Bible using numerous examples (see, for instance, Ephesians 5:18), so there must be a clear distinction between drinking and abusing.

The following three stories of alcoholics in rehabs illustrate the variety of attitudes and reflections on drinking by abusers in the rehabs. All three men<sup>6</sup> are described in the beginning of their programs, when most people still have their convictions and ideas unaffected by Russian Baptist dogma, especially when it comes to their everyday addicted experience. Even those who admit the inability to control their alcohol consumption and, ultimately, to manage their own lives, often make a distinction between illicit drug users and themselves. Learning to reject this distinction is an important step towards understanding and accepting the narrative of rehabilitation at Good Samaritan.

## THE STORY OF MISHA

Misha was 38 at the time I met him in the rehab. He was an interesting story-teller with a great sense of humour, yet his life was far from joyful. Misha was brought to the rehab from the street, drunk, dirty, and with a frostbitten toe. The rehab literally saved his life, which he did not value much anyway, considering suicide as an option.

Misha grew up in a small town 120 kilometres from St. Petersburg. He described his childhood and youth as “normal”, growing up with an older brother and going to school. After the school, Misha served in the army, but after that he was sentenced

to eight years in prison for murder. The army and prison took a considerable part of his adult life, and later in the rehab he would tell many stories and provide examples based on that experience. In prison Misha worked, got along with other inmates well, and even managed to get a cell phone with Internet access, which was never allowed.

After prison, Misha returned home and found a job. When his brother asphyxiated on exhaust fumes in his garage, Misha was shocked and depressed and started drinking heavily. He recalled: "I didn't drink at all, neither after the army, nor after prison. It's when my brother choked, then I started, and fucked up (*prosral*) everything." He ultimately came to the point of drinking hard spirits every day, which he did not cease doing even after becoming homeless. He lost his apartment to some fraudulent scheme and was too busy drinking to do anything about it.

Living on the street, Misha made his living by collecting various metal parts. He spent most of his earnings on cheap booze and became indifferent to his life and fate. He tried to commit suicide even before losing his home, and in total he made three attempts to hang himself. Once, he would later recall, he went to a forest and tried to use a cable to hang himself, but it ripped apart. Misha passed out, but soon recovered. Still unsure that he was alive, he conducted a reality check by asking a passer-by for a cigarette and went home.

Later in the rehab, he explained this attitude towards his own life: "I don't give a damn (*pofig*) about what happens to me." When he speculated about the possibility of being cut by a nail, he said: "If I die instantly – I don't care. But I wouldn't like to suffer." He also added that he would not care more if he lost a leg: "It's never too late to hang myself. Even with one leg." Yet, in the rehab, Misha accepted the rules and agreed to revisit his life, though he still kept the suicide option open in case he found himself on the street again.

#### THE STORY OF OLEG

35-year-old Oleg came to the rehab from the northern city of Arkhangelsk. With lots of scars on his head, in danger of losing his sight due to a head trauma, and with a damaged arm, although despite this Oleg kept in good spirits and maintained a sense of humour. He had difficulties understanding some passages in the Scriptures, but was willing to discuss and comprehend the tenets of the Christian faith and a 'decent' life. He was hesitant to pray in public at first, but soon started doing so, and even repented on his knees during the Sunday church visit, though he was worried about his clean white trousers afterwards.

A considerable part of Oleg's life was spent in prison, where he served three sentences for robbery. He claimed that the cause of all three crimes was alcohol. Every time he got drunk he lost control and became violent, either fighting with someone or committing a violent crime. As is common among former inmates, he never disclosed details of his crimes, only blaming his alcoholism for them. He spent many years in prison and many of the stories and life examples he used for Bible study were from his prison past.

In between his prison sentences, Oleg got married and soon his wife bore a daughter. Their marriage, though, did not last long, and eventually Oleg's wife divorced him



when he was in prison. When he got out, she denied him contact with their daughter, not so much because of his drinking habit, but because he was a jailbird (*ugolovnik*). His violent behaviour also affected his family, and sometimes he even got in fights with his relatives, for instance, beating his father-in-law for calling him a “young jerk-off” (*molo-doy kozel'*) over a bottle of vodka.

During his stay in the rehab, Oleg sometimes talked about his daughter, but they were separated when she was small and he never really knew her. Oleg was mainly concerned about his recent girlfriend and her spiritual state. He said that she was baptized in the Orthodox Church, but he did not see it as a problem, for he would “make her a believer”. He also had trouble accepting the Russian Baptist model of decent behaviour with the opposite sex (see also Mikeschin 2015a), claiming that as a normal man he is a predator:

There is nothing wrong if I look at some girl, say, in a skirt. I'm a man, after all. We are predators. We need prey. Even if I undress her with my eyes, I just want to enjoy her beauty.

Oleg's attitude towards illicit drug users in the rehab was somewhat anxious. When they started discussing drugs and drug use, he frowned and asked them to stop. Once, a 29-year-old Matvey retorted: “Why does it stumble<sup>8</sup> you [an alcoholic]?” Oleg responded: “I feel sorry for you all! You're supposed to change your lives. You should force yourselves. God commands you.” Initially, he also shared an idea that he was *just* an alcoholic, although alcohol caused him and his family much trouble, yet he perceived it as something easier than drugs.

#### THE STORY OF MAX<sup>9</sup>

One of the successful rehabilitants who later became an elder and minister is the man I call Max, then 34 years old. Max grew up in the family of a military officer and doctor. He spent his early childhood in Central Asia, then the USSR, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Later, the family moved to Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), where Max went to school and lives to this day. He then went to a military college, but did not graduate. Later, he started working at a telecommunications company and soon after started his own business and became successful and wealthy. He was married twice. After the first divorce, his first wife took their son and emigrated to Australia. His second wife also bore Max a son, but later divorced him.

The cause and reason for both of Max's divorces, and for him eventually ending up in rehab, was his alcoholism. He started off in the company of friends and colleagues, but soon became addicted and began drinking alone. He first drank expensive and fancy alcohol, but with time he became much less picky and drank whatever was available. By the age of 33, when he ended up in the rehab, he had already experienced alcoholic delirium twice. Once he was left alone with his son for several days. He began to hallucinate intensely and behave inappropriately, and later realized that his son, who was less than ten at that time, was in great danger. After that occasion, his wife took the child and moved out of his apartment. Max started drinking even more heavily and, eventually, on another occasion of delirium, this time in the city centre, thought he was shooting lasers out of his fingers to fight aliens.

Despite owning a four-room apartment, Max was tramping around his neighbourhood, sleeping on common stairways of housing blocks, eating waste food, and, as he put it, "living with bums". Realising the extent of his problem, he tried to quit drinking by switching to drugs, something he considered a good solution. Once, Max's homeless friends told him that there was a soup kitchen organised once a week by the local Baptist church. So Max went several times to eat. During one of his visits, a minister, a former rehabilitant himself, asked Max if he wanted to go to the rehab. Max had lost the will to live and was actively considering hanging himself. He promptly agreed, deciding to give it a go. After spending a week collecting medical references, he was directed to the rehab.

In the first days of the program, Max had a horrible hangover. While slowly getting back to normal, Max started reading and participating. In the beginning, he did not feel there were solutions to his problems, but he started enjoying reading Scripture and "rediscovered" the Bible. At first, he was just reading it out of interest, and did not take the advice seriously. Vasya, his elder, claimed that Scripture had all the answers and solutions for Max, but Max could not figure them out.

Once, Max was reading Acts 17:27: "so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us" (NRSV). This passage struck him like a bolt of lightning. He realized that he was actually searching for God all of his life: he was looking for any meaning of life in Eastern philosophies, pleasure, books, various religions, and, ultimately, altering his mind with psychoactive substances. The second part of the verse – "though indeed he is not far from each one of us" – revealed the answer to all of Max's questions: "I realized that God is near me and always was. He loves me whatever I do and wherever I go. I just didn't want to notice his presence."

He went on reading and the next verse: "For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring'", revealed to Max that God is the giver of life, that he maintains life, and that we belong to God fully and unconditionally. Max, a sinner, always ignored God, or even rejected him, but this rejection led to a total moral and material failure. That same evening, Max asked Vasya to talk and pray face-to-face in the kitchen, and with his support and in his presence, repented with a sinner's prayer.

After repentance, "everything became in order" for Max (*vse vstalo na svoi mesta*) and most of all, Max got rid of the overwhelming feeling of emptiness and loneliness. At that moment, he felt the constant presence of God, craved for his will in the Bible, and started changing his life. Max realised that these changes would not come in the blink of an eye, but required persistent spiritual work, rejection and denial of worldly experience and self-reliance. A sinful nature and habits are strong, for one accumulates them for years, and Satan holds sinners tightly. Thus, one should not expect to radically change in a month or two. Even the eight-month program only gives direction, a vector for the spiritual growth and changes in life. At some point when already an elder of Rehabilitation, Max shared:

Right now, I'm not ready to leave the rehab and start solving my problems. Sooner or later, I won't be able to resist and I'll gulp (*zhakhnu*) a shot of cognac. Or even add one drop to my coffee to take delight (*posibaritstvuyu*). I need to solve many problems, and before I start dealing with the people I used to deal with and explain



to them why I don't drink, I've got to have as much fellowship with Christians, otherwise my old friends will pull me back there.

Max successfully completed his program and stayed with the ministry for several months to serve as a minister. Later, he became an active member of the umbrella Church in St. Petersburg and was baptised.

#### THE RUSSIAN BAPTIST THEORY OF ADDICTION

These three stories have much in common, though they show a different attitude towards alcoholism. All three rehabilitants admitted that alcohol destroyed their lives and they could not control it. Yet, Oleg, for instance, still perceived alcoholism as a less serious problem than intravenous drug abuse. He was puzzled when addicts treated their problems lightly and felt sorry for them. He realised that he should transform and change his life, but during the two weeks I spent with him in the rehab, he was still in doubt about the particularities of the Baptist faith and way of living.

Misha, in turn, also distinguished illicit drug use from alcoholism, although he did not claim any hierarchy. He was sceptical about his future, and saw the rehabilitation program as something that kept him alive but which could end at any moment, and thus leave him with no further reason to live. Misha's understanding of the program echoed a narcological concept of remission, which should be constantly maintained (see, for instance, Raikhel 2013). He knew that he could not stop drinking and control his life without help from others, and was thankful for each day he was able to live sober, not hungry, and with a roof over his head.

Max represents a different example. He accepted the Good Samaritan message fully and unconditionally, and constantly worked on his spiritual growth and better knowledge, understanding, and application of the Scripture. Although at some point he became at odds with the ministry of Good Samaritan, he remained in the church and became enthusiastically engaged in different ministries. Full acceptance of the program gave him an understanding of his alcoholism as an element of his bygone sinful life, rather than a problem in itself. Another rehabilitant, a 34-year-old intravenous user, Slava, once neatly summarised: "I didn't come here for a cure. I came here to comprehend how to live further." Initially, Max came to the rehab for a cure, taking his last chance to stay alive. Eventually, however, he realised that a bodily cure meant nothing and could not be maintained for any period unless he transformed morally, surrendering his life to Christ.

Max's example and his interpretation of the Scriptures reveals the discourse constructed in Good Samaritan, which I call the Russian Baptist theory of addiction. This theory explains that addiction itself, as well as many other vices, such as sexual immorality, cursing, lying, crime, pride, envy, and so on, is just one manifestation of the sinful bygone life. Living a self-centred life inevitably leads to moral destruction, the Baptists claim, and often to physical collapse as well. Curing addiction, thus, does not solve a problem; rather it only gives a false, temporary, sense of freedom from a harmful vice. Good Samaritan emphasizes a radical transformation of self, rather than just a bodily cure.

All newcomers in the program are commonly asked to undergo detoxification in advance, yet many are taken from the street or even get intoxicated on their way to the distant rehabs, thus there is a three-day rule. For three days, each newcomer is allowed to rest in bed and do nothing, except eating with the rest of Rehabilitation, if they want to. After those three days, they have to follow all the rules and the schedule like everybody else.

When the body of an addict is clean from substances, either through a medical procedure or just prolonged abstinence, the physical addiction soon ends. Cravings, hang-over, or dope sickness are normally caused by residual substances in the bloodstream and the effect they have on the brain. However, most of the addicts return to their habit soon after detoxification. The changes in the addicted brain are irreversible, and the brain at the same time creates psychological problems and suggests an easy and familiar way to solve them (Volkow and Li 2005). Many Russian addicts often abuse detoxification as a way to feel better, have a break, and lower the dose.

The state of psychological addiction after detoxification is commonly described with such words as emptiness, depression, apathy, or a feeling of having nothing to live for. Good Samaritan suggests filling this emptiness with Jesus, changing the vector of one's life towards God's plan and thus living a full and meaningful life. A common explanation used in the rehabs is based on Luke 11:24–26 (also rephrased in Matthew 12:43–45):

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, "I will return to my house from which I came". When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first. (NRSV)

Applied to an addict's life, this excerpt illustrates the need for moral transformation in addiction treatment. The unclean spirit of addiction can be relatively easily cast out of the individual. However, if one does not fill their heart, soul, and mind with something meaningful, the unclean spirit comes back, and with seven other spirits, "more evil than itself". In the rehabilitation context, these spirits could be pride ("I can abstain. I can control myself."), blasphemy ("I got rid of my addiction myself. God had nothing to do with it."), envy of the non-dependent, anger towards God, low spirits, and so on. Hence, "the last state of that person is worse than the first", and they "fall much deeper than they were before" (Max, explaining the moral collapse of those who drop the program).

When one lets Jesus into one's heart, one does not simply declare oneself a Christian and start following the rules. A genuine conversion implies letting God control the whole life of a repentant sinner. One gives up control, admitting inability to manage life on one's own and allowing Jesus into one's "house", which is not "swept and put in order", but dirty, broken, and abandoned, for only Jesus is claimed capable to fix it and set one's life on the right track. Once, Sergey, a former minister with 15 years of injecting experience, shared:

When my brother learned about my deliverance from drugs, he said: "Oh, you've got such a strong will!" What will? I could never do it alone! I am actually very weak. All I tried to do with my life on my own led me here [to the rehab]. Without Jesus you simply can't do anything.

Evangelicals are generally defined by their focus on the Bible as the inerrant and sufficient word of God, substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross, the individuality of conversion, and missionary activism (Bebbington 1989). Dogmatically, this is formulated in Luther's *five solae*, of which I here emphasize *sola fide*.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the Eastern Orthodox or Catholics, Evangelical Christians believe in salvation by faith alone, thus rejecting the doctrine of justification by good works. Even if good works are understood not merely as a moral behaviour, but rather as a deeper concept of orthopraxy – proper conduct – it is still rejected as justification in Evangelical soteriology. Good works are praised, but as a consequence and evidence of a born-again transformed individual. Consequently, as drug addiction is seen as a direct consequence of a life of sin, rehabilitation and remission are perceived as a consequence and evidence of sincere repentance and giving control over one's life to Christ.

What is the role of alcohol and alcoholism in the Russian Baptist theory of addiction? The stories of the three men I provided earlier, and many more stories of addicts at Good Samaritan, clearly show that those who distinguish between alcohol and drugs in the rehabs are only half way to accepting the narrative of rehabilitation, or are even in denial. The specificity of substance use dependence (including alcohol) is in its extreme psychological pressure. Rehabilitation only succeeds when the self experiences a radical transformation. Evangelical conversion is not always radical (see for instance Glazier 2003), but Russian Baptist conversion does require a complete break with the past (cf. Meyer 1998) and in the rehabilitation settings such a break is stressed.

Russian Baptists tend to share the cultural role of alcohol in Russia, and hence do not simply regard it as one of the addictions that lead people to the rehabs. As I mentioned earlier, many testimonies address alcohol as a sign of a bygone life, or even as a comparative example: "Even though I never drank or smoked, I was still a great sinner" (Viktor, a pastor who was converted in his youth as a student of physics and maths). Still, alcohol is regarded as one of numerous vices, one of the vivid and evident ones, which even makes it easier to treat.

Despite a common Baptist abstinence, some alcohol may be accepted in certain situations. Apart from the Palestinian context, discussed earlier, alcohol is used in medicine, cooking, or, remarkably, in Holy Communion (although the most conservative churches may use grape juice instead). The abstinence itself is not so much emphasized. Rather, sincere repentance and following God's will is regarded as the way to control one's body and desires. After all, the Russian Baptists often claim, "'All things are lawful for me', but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful for me', but I will not be dominated by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12, NRSV).

## CONCLUSION

This paper addresses the sociocultural role of alcohol in Russian society and the Russian Baptist community in comparison to illicit drugs. Drinking has always been a distinct phenomenon in Russian history, but illicit drugs, like opiates and marijuana, spread rapidly only in the 1980s and 1990s. Hence, there are two different cultural images of the drug user and alcoholic, both negative, yet the former is seen as much more dangerous and much less predictable than the latter.

Russian Baptists generally address this distinction. Although they regard drinking as one of the multitude of vices, they acknowledge its role in the Russian sociocultural context and often refer to it as an attribute of the old, bygone, and sinful life. The ministry of Good Samaritan deals with addicts directly, thus in the rehabilitation program the distinction between alcohol and drug abuse is deliberately removed.

The Russian Baptist theory of addiction regards alcohol or drug addiction not as a problem *per se*, but rather as a consequence and property of the 'real' larger problem, which is a life in sin. This life does not imply conscious immorality or intentional evil. The bygone life was one directed towards false values and purposes, the Baptists claim. The only way to adopt Christian living and ultimate salvation after death, thus, is total surrender to God and his will through the acceptance of Christ's atonement sacrifice and the unconditional acknowledgement of Biblical truth. A bodily cure, in this context, could be the consequence or even evidence of such a moral transformation, rather than a starting point or even ultimate goal.

In the initial stages of the program, many rehabilitants, both alcohol and drug addicts, share the cultural context of alcohol in Russia. Those who successfully pass through the program, or at least do not drop it too soon, eventually get rid of this context and distinction between alcoholics and illicit drug users. Such an understanding may thus serve as evidence of the process of conversion, which in Russian Baptist terms implies incorporating the Scriptures as a language of communication, thought and reasoning. The converts, on the one hand, stop seeing alcohol as a culturally distinct Russian phenomenon. On the other hand, they begin to realise that alcohol is no less dangerous and harmful than any other illicit drug that is abused, and thus one *cannot* contend that "I'm not like most of you here, I'm just an alcoholic".

## NOTES

1 The latter two rehabs house Russian-speaking residents of the European Union, who cannot legally stay in Russia for more than two months.

2 There are 15 classes, called seminars, covering topics such as the nature of God, the credibility of the Bible, and various aspects of the Christian life. During these classes rehabilitants write down the seminar material and learn it by heart along with two or three verses from the Scriptures. Rehabilitants should pass all 15 seminars in order to progress to the second stage of the program, although in smaller rehabs this rule is not strict.

3 All names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

4 "The politicals" is a reference to the distinction made in the Stalin-era prison camps. With this term, 'professional' criminals distanced themselves from those serving their sentences under political articles, which indicated their unfamiliarity with prison life and lower rank.

5 A testimony is a common Evangelical narrative used as an introduction and as an evangelizing technique. With their testimony, converted Christians *witness* about their lives, starting from their sinful past through the conversion and salvation by Christ, up to their current state.

6 I had almost no access to women during my stays, as it goes against the spatial segregation of genders rooted in the concept of decency (Mikeshin 2015a).

7 It is also remarkable that besides being a pejorative, in prison hierarchy *kozel* is someone who cooperates with the administration and thus they are particularly despised and hated.

8 The verb “stumble” is a biblical term. It refers, for instance, to Romans 14:21: “it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble”. (NRSV) In the rehab settings it is widely used.

9 The extended version of Max’s story is published in Mikeschin 2016: 71–77.

10 The other four *solae* are *sola Scriptura* (the Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice), *soli Deo gloria* (glory to God only), *sola gratia* (salvation by grace alone), and *solus Christus* (salvation through Christ alone).

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