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Orthodox Culture in Russia.
The Difficulties of Connecting with a Lost Tradition

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From the Editors

The funding from our present sponsor, the ‘Gerda Henkel Foundation’, comes to an end in the middle of this year. We would like to thank the ‘Gerda Henkel Foundation’ for its generous support that has allowed us to publish *kultura*. Russian Cultural Review over the last two years and produce many interesting issues.

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The editorial staff of *kultura*. Russian Cultural Review
Hartmute Trepper, Judith Janiszewski, Matthias Neumann

editorial

The interaction between religion and culture has been a traditional subject for reflection among philosophers, theologians, sociologists, specialists in religious studies and cultural studies experts. The inseparability of these two areas of human thought is clearly evident. However, every generation reassesses the question of where the boundary between them lies.

In contemporary Russia, Orthodoxy possesses both the largest flock and, in the form of the Russian Orthodox Church, the most powerful religious organisation. However, far from being steeped in tradition, Russian Orthodoxy is in fact in the process of being reintroduced. By the end of the Soviet period, the number of those who actively participated in Orthodox culture or could perform its most basic rites was so small that the Russian Orthodox Church is now being compelled to convince the Russian people that they cannot live without it.

The real traditions of Russian piety, which for the culturally literate are represented by the writings of Dostoevsky and Leskov, the paintings of the Itinerants (*Peredvizhniki*) and the rest of the cultural legacy of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, lie in the past. The churches built between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, Andrei Rublev's frescoes, antique icons and polyphonic chant have become the destinations of pilgrimages and tourists, but have little to do with contemporary Orthodoxy. Moreover, the *babushkas* of the rural parishes and the young lecturers in the university chapels number far less than the masses which filled the churches before the Revolution.

This issue of *kultura* therefore aims to present the current state of Russian Orthodoxy. It begins with some concrete examples of the different groups in Russian society that today make up the Church. Olga Sibireva is working for the Moscow NGO 'Sova Centre' on a project that monitors the interaction between religious and state bodies. For the last six years, she has also been working on her own project looking at grass roots Orthodoxy in Ryazan oblast. Olga Sveshnikova is a historian and sociologist at the University of Omsk. Their depictions of parish life in the Russian provinces portray the real situation in which those who form the foundation of the Church – the believers – find themselves. In addition, they also describe the methods that priests are using to attract new parishioners.

Sofia Kishkovski, a member of the Russian Orthodox diaspora in the USA, has worked in Russia as a journalist for many years; at present, she writes for the 'International Herald Tribune' and the 'New York Times'. She describes a particularly important aspect of contemporary Orthodoxy – the influence of the Orthodox emigration on the Russian Orthodox Church.

In her second article for this issue, Olga Sibireva takes a broader look at the situation. She analyses the general trends in the understanding of culture within Orthodox circles. She takes an interesting approach to the subject by describing the small group of regular churchgoers, not only in terms of their daily culture, with special emphasis on their clothing and language, but also their cultural tastes.

Lastly, the relationship between the interests of the Church, the state and society is a topic high up on the agenda in Russia today. Irina Kosals, a journalist from Moscow who writes about the family and education, looks at the issues surrounding the school course called 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture', which the Church presents as a form of 'cultural studies'. At the moment, these attempts by the Church to smuggle 'piety' into secular schools under the guise of 'culture' are provoking heated argument. The discussion over the boundaries between religion and culture has descended from the lofty heights of philosophy and theology to the base but lively domain of political reality.

From the Russian by Christopher Gilley

editorial

About the Guest Editor:

Nikolai Mitrokhin is a historian, sociologist and noted authority on contemporary Orthodoxy. He is based at the Research Centre for East European Studies in Bremen and is currently working on a project 'The Subjective View. The Personal Opinions of TsK Members and their Influence on the Domestic and Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union, 1964–1985'.

Rural Orthodoxy. Parishes in Ryazan Oblast

Olga Sibireva

sketch

Despite the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church is governed by a single set of canons, the character of urban and rural parishes differs significantly. This article aims to provide a quick overview of these differences by looking at Ryazan oblast, which lies 200 km south-east of Moscow. At the beginning of 2007, this area had 332 parishes, 79% (263) of which were rural. Not every village has a church in use and many churches count the inhabitants of several villages as their parishioners.

When talking about the rural parishes, it is necessary to say something about the demographic situation in central Russia. Many of the villages here are dying out because anyone capable of work migrates to the cities. In Ryazan oblast, a village with several hundred residents is considered large. During the summer, many city dwellers move to the rural areas to take their children and grandchildren on holiday as well as to grow vegetables in their gardens.

The number and composition of a rural church's parishioners therefore depends on the season. In summer, thanks to the arrival of those with summer houses in the village, the number of parishioners increases while their average age falls. In winter, the majority of churchgoers are local inhabitants, mostly women over 60 years old, the stereotypical *babushkas*. In the cities, they do yet not form the absolute majority of believers, among whom the largest group are women between 40 and 60 years old.

The character of the congregation dictates the life of the parish. This centres on the church; other forms of organising the flock are not widespread. The *babushkas*' energy is normally sufficient to ensure that church services, including the choral accompaniment essential to the Orthodox rite, take place on Sundays and on feast days, and to keep the church tidy. All other activities depend on the enthusiasm of the parish priest. He is the only ordained person in the village; the rural areas do not have deacons. For this reason, by no means every church has, for example, a Sunday school. This fact is not simply a consequence of lack of initiative within the parish, but is also due to the small number of children in the rural areas and the unpopularity of lessons for catechising adults in the diocese.

Charitable work, which is also rare in the urban churches, appears in the rural parishes in only one form: the delivery of excess Easter cake or painted eggs to nearby children's or old people's homes at Easter, and the provision of gifts for the remembrance of the dead on the Orthodox Church's various All Souls' Days. I am only aware of two exceptions to these types of charity in rural parishes: one church regularly provides material help, including funding for medical care, to the children of fellow villagers; another contributes to the rehabilitation of former prisoners. However, both cases came about due to the personal initiative of the priest

sketch

without the participation of the local community. In general, rural priests often have to do things completely alien to the urban clergy in Russia. Given the poor state of public transport, almost all have to taxi members of the congregation lacking their own means of transportation to church. There are also more exotic tasks: for example, one village priest able to use the Internet prints out the following week's weather forecast for his aged *babushka* parishioners (because television and the press do not publish the forecast for each region).

It is also necessary to mention the spread of 'popular Orthodoxy', a range of practices not approved by the official church and which the clergy treat as superstition. In particular, it is in the rural areas that the custom of 'accompanying the soul' – a part of the funeral rites combining church prayers with spells and magical rituals to ward off the return of the recently deceased – exists.

The participants in such rituals claim to be the keepers of a long tradition. Usually, the *babushkas*, who act as 'mourners', are the successors of those who under the Soviet regime performed the Orthodox rites in the absence of churches or priests, often supplementing these rites with charms against the evil eye.

I am not aware of open conflicts between the *babushkas* and the priests. Two relationship patterns are much more common. In the first, the priest does not hinder the 'mourner's' activities (normally because they are convinced that any attempt to do so would be futile), but he does tell his parishioners why these practices do not correspond to Church teachings. In the second, the priest tries to legitimise the 'mourner' by delegating some of his work to her and thus limiting her activity – for example by giving his blessing to her reading of the Psalter after explaining to her how to do it correctly.

The most active churchgoers, who rarely number more than ten in the small parishes, naturally do not use the old women's services. However, the majority of the villagers cannot see the difference between the Church and the spiritual leaders from among the laity. They have no problem mixing the ecclesiastical and popular traditions, and often even prefer the latter.

The priests, hoping to rectify the situation, are trying to replace the old customs with new traditions. Indeed, they are sometimes able to control the expressions of popular piety. An example of this compromise is the way in which the village church's patron saint's day is observed. In many villages, this was celebrated even under the Soviet regime, albeit in a different way – normally with a hearty and well-lubricated feast. Following the reopening of the churches in the 1990s, the clergy added the custom to its armoury, presenting it as a 'revival' and trying to mould it to their needs. Now, these festivals contain both ecclesiastical and worldly components, combining a church service and veneration of the patron saint with a village fete supported by the entire community and the local administration.

From the Russian by Christopher Gilley

About the Author:
Olga Sibireva is a sociologist of religion. She works at the Research and Information Centre Sova in Moscow. The Centre deals with nationalism and xenophobia, religion and society, political radicalism and human rights abuses. (*http://sova-center.ru/194F418* – in English)

A Young Parish. The New University Church in Omsk

Olga Sveshnikova

portrait

Omsk is a city in the south of Western Siberia with a multiethnic and heterogeneous population of 1.2 million. The church of St. Tatiana of the Fedor Dostoyevsky Omsk State University is one of 18 working churches in the city. Its history began in 1994, when the Patriarch Alexius II gave his blessing to the opening, in the university, of the first Orthodox department of theology[1] in the Russian higher education system. It was not possible to find funds to build a chapel for the university. Instead, the city council donated a former nursery school adjoining the university, and the school was transformed into a church. On 2 May 2003, it was consecrated as St. Tatiana's Church in honour of the Russian patron saint of students. Thanks to the students' donations and hard work, the unprepossessing two-storey building became a unique church complex. In addition to the church itself, there is a church shop, a lecture hall with belfry, a baptistery, a refectory with kitchens, a Sunday school and an icon-maker's workshop.

The church's only priest, its dean and to a great extent its builder is Fr. Alexander Alekseev, a history graduate from Omsk, a seminarian at the Moscow seminary and a lecturer in theology. A strong believer in the church as a family, his care for his flock combines strictness with warm-heartedness. He manages to find the right words for everyone in his congregation, including the very youngest members, but also for the students, sponsors and university authorities. Thus, Fr. Alexander's activity can be summed up with the truism that 'a parish can only be as good as its priest'.

The parish is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it boasts a community of young Orthodox believers, most of whom are students. They come from all of Omsk's universities and study very different subjects. The majority attend St. Tatiana's during their time at the university. They often arrive with extremely vague religious ideas, but then get involved in the parish's activities and by the end of their university course have become regular churchgoers. The majority stop taking part in the life of the parish when they leave university. However, many continue to maintain their connections with it and visit the church. Former students bring their children to St. Tatiana's for communion from all over the city.

Secondly, the student community in the parish is very active. They sew the church vestments, make candles themselves, painted the church's walls and organise religious festivals for the children of the parish. Students from the Pedagogical University's department of art and design laid a mosaic above the church's entrance and in the baptistery. The young people of the parish spend their free time together. On Candlemas, there is a day of celebration for young people featuring football, tea and traditional Russian games.

Thirdly, the university parish conducts educational work. The church has two Sunday schools, one for children and one for adults; it also offers intensive summer courses on liturgy, and, for young Orthodox believers, courses named after the apostle John the Evangelist. The latter are led by the daughter of the theology department's first chairman, Kseniya Petrova, who is also a graduate of Omsk State University. The lessons take place every weekday from 6.00 to 8.00 pm. Example courses include 'An Introduction to Orthodox Psychology', 'Hagiography' and 'The Sacred Writings of the New Testament'. On average, there are about 20 participants. Despite the formal specialisation of the courses, people of different ages attend them. The activities are led by parishioners for parishioners, i.e. the better educated teach those who know less.

1 The department of theology provides qualifies theologians to work in state and public organisations or teach in universities and schools. Because of the lack of a seminary in the diocese of Omsk and Tarsk, it also provides training for the priesthood.

portrait

The parish's youth take an active part in the life of the diocese, for example attending Orthodox exhibitions and conferences, and going to an inter-confessional conference every year. The church provides the basis for student and pupil conferences and lectures on ethics.

The church's choir represents another interesting aspect. The conductor is Elena Mikhailyuk, who studied conducting at Omsk State University. Under her leadership, everyone in the church, from the youngest to the oldest, sings. At the moment, there are rehearsals for women, men (in which the church's dean also takes part) and members of the Sunday school. The choir, of course, is the best trained. However, everyone sings the Lord's Prayer and the Creed together; this is very rare in today's Russian Orthodox Church.

The permanent parishioners include the *babushkas* from the neighbourhood. They form their own community within the parish. They keep the church clean and are responsible for the kitchen and the church shop. Another important group are the local residents, most of whom are aged between 40 and 50. Normally, one rarely meets such people in church. However, at St. Tatiana's, they are, in fact, the main sponsors of the parish. On the most important church feast days, which for the university parish include New Year's Day and St. Tatiana's Day, the university's lecturers and managers come to the church. The vice-chancellor gives the university parish organisational support.

The warm, benevolent atmosphere in the church encourages people to come again and again. Six years ago, when the church was founded, sometimes only the priest and choir were present at the services. Now, even during the week, when few services are held, around 50 parishioners come to worship. On feast days, the church does not have space for everybody, and parishioners have to stand in the vestibule. During the week, lay parishioners themselves read the Akathistos twice per day.

From the Russian by Christopher Gilley

About the Author:
Olga Sveshnikova is a historian and sociologist at the Fedor Dostoyevsky Omsk State University, teaching Soviet and post-Soviet social history in the department of sociology.

Multicultural Omsk

Throughout its history, Omsk has been a centre for the Russian colonisation of Siberia, a place of exile for criminals sentenced to hard labour and the victims of repression, and a destination for those evacuated and deported during the Second World War. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the city developed on account of the Soviet military industries based there. This helped bring about the creation of a multiethnic and multiconfessional population. In 2005, according to the mayor of Omsk's website, more than 79 religious communities were registered. This included 33 Protestant parishes, 26 Orthodox parishes (of which 23 belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church and 3 to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia), 6 Muslim communities and 4 Catholic parishes.

focus

From Contraband to Mail Order. Religious Books for Russia from America

Sophia Kishkovsky

Since the death of Patriarch Aleksy II, religious and political leaders have repeatedly described the canonical union in 2007 of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), formed by émigrés who fled the Bolshevik Revolution and opposed any cooperation with the Soviet regime, as one of the key events in Russian church life after the collapse of the Soviet Union. President Vladimir Putin's encouragement of the reunion has been interpreted as part of his effort to weave together the Red and White strands in Russian history into a common narrative.

The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) is another church that historically has had a strong connection to Russia. A small charitable group formed by émigrés associated with the OCA, Religious Books for Russia (RBR, rbrbooks.org), has made an important contribution to distributing religious literature in Russia and in this way has had an impact on the ROC.

RBR was created in 1979 by Catherine Lvoff, after it had become clear that in the Soviet Union religious literature was desperately needed. Lvoff and other tourists and students carried small numbers of Bibles and prayer books in their luggage when visiting the Soviet Union. Soon RBR started to translate into Russian, publish and distribute books by theologians from St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary (SVOTS) in New York, which is widely respected both in religious and broader academic circles. Of particular importance were works by Fr. Alexander Schmemann and Fr. John Meyendorff.

During perestroika, it became possible to ship the books to Russia rather than smuggle them. Once Communism had collapsed and the demand for books had grown even greater, RBR started publishing its books in Russia – working with local publishers of religious literature – as a means of reducing expenses and continuing to distribute books free-of-charge to a wider circle of readers across Russia.

In 1991 Sophie Koulomzin became RBR's president. Through RBR and her association with the St. Tikhon's Theological Institute in Moscow, books by Koulomzin, who was in her nineties, but still extremely energetic and writing new books, were distributed across Russia at a time when there was a serious shortage of religious literature for children. I have seen her *Zakon Bozhii*, or religious instruction textbook, for sale at church bookstands from Pskov to Siberia.

RBR now distributes its books to all the seminaries of the Russian Orthodox Church. A Russian translation of *The Sacred Gift of Life: Orthodox Christianity and Bioethics* by Fr. John Breck, an American Orthodox theologian, has also been distributed to associations of Orthodox Doctors across Russia. It addresses such issues as euthanasia, abortion, in-vitro fertilisation and stem-cell research.

Among the recipients of RBR books is a seminary in Yekaterinburg where as late as 1998 books by Schmemann and Meyendorff were burned and denounced as too liberal. They were burned together with books by Fr. Aleksandr Men from Moscow, who was despised by many Russian nationalists for his Jewish roots and ecumenical views and was axed to death in 1990.

In a sign of how times have changed, all of the seminaries have received through RBR, sometimes at the special request of the diocesan bishops, copies of *The Diaries of Fr. Alexander Schmemann*. The diaries were published by Russki Put', the publishing house of the Russia Abroad Foundation, a repository of émigré archives that was started with the help of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Fr. Schmemann was also famous in dissident circles for his Radio Liberty broadcasts.

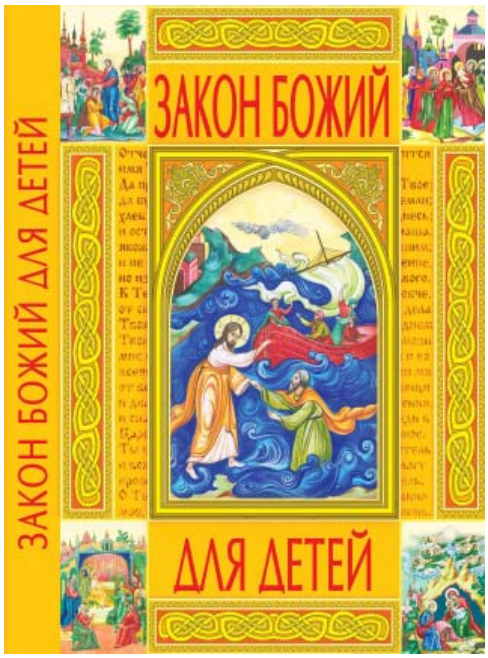
Four years after the *Diaries*' initial publication,

they remain a sensation, still actively discussed in articles and blogs, with roundtables and conferences devoted to them. The book appeals to the intellectual laity and even some secular intellectuals, who say it has helped them understand Orthodoxy and who are fascinated by Fr. Schmemann's thoughts about Russian history and literature. Russian priests say the diaries have helped them understand how to cope with their overwhelming demands and reconcile conflicts between the sacred and the secular. As with Fr. Schmemann's other books, especially 'The Eucharist,' what strikes many is how his love of the liturgy shines through.

The desire for such literature is not limited to Moscow. Requests to RBR for books often come from the far corners of Russia, including from a village priest in Pskov who serves two dozen villages, a prison and an orphanage, and a priest in Kolyma, once the darkest corner of the Gulag.

'Thank you for the books! Here on the edge of the country it is indeed difficult to find the books one needs', wrote Fr. Igor Terentiev, the priest from Kolyma, in a letter to the Moscow representative of RBR. He also requested a DVD set of sermons by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, the émigré bishop who led the Moscow Patriarchate's diocese in London and was a symbol of enlightened Orthodoxy. Such touching requests are the basis for appeals sent out by RBR to a mailing list of private donors. These are not wealthy people but usually American Orthodox believers of modest means who are of Russian descent or interested in helping Russia. As RBR's autumn 2008 appeal makes clear, even a small donation can go a long way. $100 is enough to supply a parish with 30 books and $35 sufficient to send 10 books to a seminary.

RBR is also reaching out to a more secular audience through a distribution programme with Moscow's State Library of Foreign Literature, which has sent RBR books to over 2000 libraries across Russia.



Zakon Bozhii *(The Law of God). Orthodox Teaching Material for Children. Source:* http://www.bao-book.com/books/show/id/431

About the Author:
Sophia Kishkovsky is an American journalist who has covered Russian religious life since the 1990s. She now writes for The New York Times, The International Herald Tribune and other publications in the United States and Europe. Kishkovsky is a board member of *Religious Books for Russia*.

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analysis

Where Satan Still Lives. Orthodox Subculture in Russia

Olga Sibireva

Following the collapse of the atheist Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox faith has had to win back a place for themselves in society. This article discusses the difficulties involved in reconnecting with a tradition that experienced 70 years of violent repression. Some members of the Orthodox community are looking to an imaginary past as a source of their ideals and are increasingly shutting themselves off from the rest of society. This is the reason why the intelligentsia – for whom enlightenment is a central part of its self-image – calls the Orthodox community a 'subculture'. At the same time, other Orthodox groups are trying to find a way of living that includes both modernity and belief.

According to sociological surveys on religious belief, about 55–60% of the Russian population consider themselves to be Orthodox. However, a considerably smaller percentage attends church, with only 7.5% going even once per year. Even at Easter, the most important Christian feast day, information from the Interior Ministry shows that no more than 3.3% of the population goes to church. Churchgoing Orthodox believers – varying estimates set them as making up between 0.5% and 4% of Russia's population – are a clearly delineated subculture with a distinct mindset and external characteristics. An important boundary defining this subculture is its opposition to 'mainstream' culture.

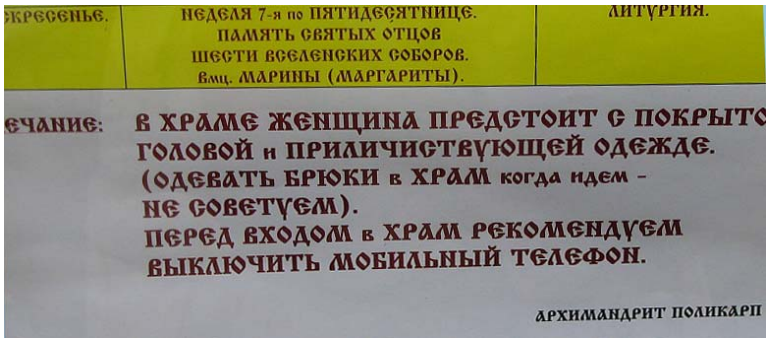
The majority of Russians express their Orthodoxy simply by wearing a cross, hanging a few small icons in their home or car and eating Easter cake at Easter. It does not prevent them from dressing in contemporary fashions, listening to pop or rock music, watching Hollywood films with sex scenes, going to the ballet or reading various – often shocking – novels, such as those of Vladimir Sorokin. Regular churchgoers deem most of these activities as unacceptable. For them, Orthodoxy governs not only their choice of clothing and external appearance, the language they use and the food they eat[1], but also determines the films they see, the books they read (including novels specifically written for them) and, recently, even the rock music they listen to. This article will not discuss in detail the basic ideological values possessed by the members of this subculture. It is only necessary to recall the most important of them: salvation of the soul, patriotism (both in its ethno-national and statist forms) and traditionalism (patriarchy). Almost without exception, the patriotism found among religious groups and movements contains an explicit rejection of the West and Western culture as the domain of the Antichrist – a renunciation that often takes on the form of open hatred. However, a closer look at the Orthodox subculture shows that there are also changes taking place that flow against this dominant current.

Clothing and Language as the Hallmarks of a Subculture

Membership of this subculture is above all reflected in the churchgoers' external appearance. Devout churchgoers believe that a Christian must dress modestly so that his or her appearance does not lead into temptation, i.e. inflame erotic thoughts in the opposite sex. The Orthodox believers think that ideally women should do their bit by wearing skirts or dresses that reach the ground, scarves that cover their hair (tied in braids or a bun) and jumpers with long sleeves; they should also renounce makeup. Men must wear trousers rather than jeans, shirts, jackets – or, if they are a little daring, a jumper – and a beard. All these clothes have to be dull or dark in colour. The rest of society believes that a woman with a feminine haircut, unobtru-

1 For example, particular periods or rules of fasting.

analysis



'Women in church must cover their heads and wear appropriate clothing (trousers are not suitable when attending church); we request that you switch off your mobile phones. Archimandrite Polikarp'. Photo: Olga Sibireva.

sive makeup and a skirt higher than the ankles or jeans can still look modest. However, among regular churchgoers, this would not do; in certain parishes, non-conformity with the dress code can lead to conflicts with the zealously pious and even result in being barred from entering the church.

The Orthodox believers themselves explain this choice of clothing with ancient traditions. However, nineteenth-century literature tells us that the custom was to come to the Sunday service in beautiful, festive – but not outrageous – attire. It is clear that the fashion among today's churchgoers is an attempt to reconstruct a tradition that in reality never existed.

Some churchgoing women, above all the younger ones, have begun looking for ways to observe these demands without appearing frumpy. In the press and on the Internet there is an active discussion in which the more liberal churchgoers are defending their right to dress tastefully, arguing reasonably that style and modesty are not mutually exclusive. The creators and purveyors of women's clothing have come to their aid, specialising in 'Orthodox fashion' or 'clothes for pilgrimages'. One of the best-known Orthodox brands – '12 Feast Days' – has a chain of shops across Moscow and in a number of Russian towns. However, their prices are on a par with some of the more expensive shops selling imported clothing of a much higher quality.

In addition to their external appearance, devout churchgoers are united by their 'slang', which consists of a mixture of archaisms and Church Slavonic. The poor knowledge of Church Slavonic among the majority of Orthodox believers has led to the misplaced use of 'pious' expressions which often replace contemporary Russian terms even when describing current situations. Anthropologists have even started creating dictionaries of this language. For example, the use in Church circles of a simple 'thank you' ('spasibo') instead of, for instance, 'God bless you' ('spasi, Gospodi') unambiguously betrays one as an outsider.

High and Low. Historical Frescoes and Pseudo-Tradition

The Western reader usually associates Orthodoxy with the medieval icons of the Novgorod school, the outlines of Suzdal's churches and the beautiful, austere singing of male choirs. However, contemporary Russian Orthodox culture is completely different. Above all, there is a deep aesthetic conflict between the university-educated, humanist, artistic intelligentsia, many of whom see themselves as believers, and the great majority of churchgoers and clergy. The former want developments in Church art to take into account contemporary achievements while also preserving the remarkable legacy of the Church's history, for example its frescoes and icons. The latter group sees the historical artefacts primarily as practical objects used in worship, and understand the word 'culture' to mean the 'neo-Russian' style of the 1880s and the 'merchant' splendour of the pre-Revolutionary period – golden cupolas, vivid paints and emotive depictions of children and animals.

analysis

One reflection of this is the fashion, which appeared in the mid-1990s, within the Church for contemporary secular artists who specialise in spiritual and patriotic topics. 'Realists' such as Ilya Glazunov – whose work inspires the contempt of intellectuals and the adoration of those in power and the 'common people'– along with his pupil Pavel Ryzhenko and fellow artist Vasilii Nesterenko also enjoy great popularity in Orthodox circles. Orthodox and monastic shops distribute copies of their work, while announcements of their exhibitions adorn the notice boards in church entrances and the pages of the religious press.

Orthodox Film Production

Fifteen years ago, the majority of priests believed that television and video recorders were tools of depravity. In the 1990s, however, church shops started selling videos and, later, DVDs of documentaries and feature films. These not only present the views of Church circles on various matters, but also create their own artistic reality, describing the expectation or performance of miracles and salvation from perfidious foes. This branch is enjoying an indubitable boom. On the on hand, this is a result of the increasing accessibility to means of copying, distributing and editing picture and sound over the last decade. On the other hand, the boom is due to the emergence of a strong demand for such productions among churchgoers and the regional television channels that broadcast patriotic and Orthodox programmes.

The sheer volume of videos and films being produced brought about the establishment of a number of annual Orthodox film festivals in the mid-1990s. The largest, 'Golden Knight' ('Zolotoi vityaz') and 'Radonezh'[2], bring together hundreds of participants from throughout the 'Orthodox world' – Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. The national mass media ignores such events and the prize winners generally do not reach the big screen or the major television channels. The only film to gain a large audience over the last 15 years was *Ostrov*, filmed by the well-known secular director Pavel Lungin[3] in 2006. This film takes place in the 1970s and presents Russian Orthodoxy in an unequivocally positive light. It was the winner at a number of professional international film festivals and entered the general Russian distribution network.

Orthodox Belles-Lettres

Strong demand among churchgoers has also created a special market niche in different genres of belles-lettres. Priests and their wives, professional writers and former soldiers are producing fairy tales, short stories, novellas, parables, essays, autobiographical notes, adventures and novels that discuss the eternal Orthodox themes: miracles, Russian popular saints, the successful defence of the Russian people against the West (which is in thrall to Satan), the values of the patriarchal family.

Orthodox fantasy writing has achieved enormous popularity over the last decade. The progenitor of this genre in Russia is Yuliya Voznesenskaya[4], a writer with a dissident past who was exiled and interned in a prison camp, and eventually emigrated to Germany in the 1980s. In the 2000s, she wrote a number of books aimed at young readers that combine Orthodox attitudes with adventures in a medieval chivalric setting. Her books have undoubtedly found a receptive audience, as is evident from the constant reprints, and have acquired a separate life as computer role-playing games. Other authors are competing to be the Orthodox

2 Radonezh is the birthplace of St. Sergius, who represents the liberation of Russia from the Tatars.

3 *1949; his other films are Taxi Blues (1990), Luna Park (1995), The Wedding (2000), Tycoon: A New Russian 2002.

4 Books in English – The Star Chernobyl (1987), The Women's Decameron (1986), Letters of Love (1989).

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J.K. Rowling. In one of the stories, Orthodox boys, commanded by a former KGB colonel, secretly infiltrate Great Britain and unveil Harry Potter and his friends as the servants of Satanists.

The Struggle to Win Young People's Attention

All in all, the Orthodox subculture is developing very dynamically in contemporary Russia. On the one hand, the number of those willing to buy the products associated with it runs into the millions. On the other hand, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Church is becoming younger in that the average age of parishioners has fallen; its intellectual leaders have understood the need to keep attracting young people in order to preserve the Russian Orthodox Church as an institution. For this reason, the older generation must accept that young people prefer other forms of professing their faith and allow a certain degree of liberalisation within the Church. Patriarch Kirill even made an appearance before a rock concert in Kyiv six months before he was elected Patriarch, the first Russian Orthodox archbishop to do so.

It is no coincidence that the attempt to reach out to members of other subcultures is one of the few innovations that outside observers have noticed in Orthodox missionary work. There are well-known priests who specialise in ministry to rockers, goths and other non-mainstream groups which frighten 'normal' believers. This phenomenon has also given rise to arguments within Orthodox circles, but it also possesses quite a number of supporters. However, for the time being, such work remains restricted to just a few isolated experiments.

The Most Popular Contemporary Prose Written by Churchgoers for Churchgoers (*Nikolay Mitrokhin*)

Voznesenkaya, Yuliya, *Put Kassandry, ili priklyucheniya s makaronamy* [Cassandra's Way, or Adventures with Macaroni] , Moscow: Lepta (2002 – print run of 10,000; 2006 – print run of 15,000). Fantasy. A dystopian novel about the rule of the Antichrist and the imminent end of the world; Cassandra, reborn as a result of the miracle of love, finds her way to God.

Kucherskaya, Maiya, *Sovremennyi paterik. Chtenie dlya vpavshikh v unynie* [The Lives of Contemporary Saints. Reading Material for the Despairing], Moscow: Vremya (2004 – print run of 1,000; 2005 – 3,000; 2007 – 7,000). Notes by a churchgoing Moscow intellectual about Church life written as short, anecdotal stories.

Lykhachev, Viktor, *Kto uslyshit konoplyanku* [He Who Hears the Linnet], Tver: Russkaya provintsiya (2001 – print run of 3,500; reprint by Sibirskaya blagozvonnitsa in 2007 – print run of 20,000). Detective novel. The criminal is hunting for an old icon that is being carried by a Journalist dying of cancer through Russia as part of a crucession. At the end, the journalist is healed, he marries and settles down with fellow Orthodox believers in a small town in order to set about saving the country.

Sysoeva, Yuliya, *Zapiski popadi* [Notes by a Priest's Wife], Moscow: Vremya, 2008 (print run of 2,000). Description of life in an Orthodox priest's family.

Chudinova, Elena, *Mechet Pariszhskoi bogomateri* [The Mosque to the Mother of God in Paris], Moscow: Lepta (2005 – print run of 12,000; in the same year, published with Eksmo and Yauza with a print run of 13,000; 2006 – print run of 13,000). Dystopian novel about the conquest of Russian and Europe by Muslims, and the resistance to it by Orthodox partisans.

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Orthodox Glamour

A lively revival has also taken place in the work on another missionary front – among the glamorous mass media. Until the beginning of the 2000s, the only regularly published Orthodox illustrated magazine either wrote about recurrent plans to recreate the USSR, and the Western intrigues to hinder them, or revealed the secrets of Lenten cooking. Later, a number of publications appeared simultaneously that discussed questions of real interest to the contemporary urban public. For example, *Foma* (Thomas)[5] was originally an Orthodox student journal at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, the most 'glamorous' of Russian universities. Now, it is written by a team of professional journalists, has a print run in the tens of thousands, is sold in both church shops and normal newspaper stands and deals with the problems that young people face. Slightly less popular is the illustrated *Merry Garden* ('Neskuchnyi Sad')[6], put together by a group of journalists who used to work for the large secular publishers – something that is very rare for Orthodox periodicals. The journal centres on contemporary charity work. Recently, these publications, as well as their less well-known imitators bankrolled by oil companies and patriotic bankers, have been publishing interviews with popular celebrities who wish to proclaim their devotion to Orthodoxy even if their lifestyle or form of employment is not acceptable to the conservative priests in the provinces. On the one hand, the employees of these and similar publications betray their dislike of 'a spiritually impoverished West wallowing in its own depravity' and the 'Islamic conquest of Europe'. At the same time, in their blogs and on the pages of their articles, they discuss the necessity of demonstrating to Russian society that churchgoers are 'nor-

5 After Thomas the Doubter. Subtitle: 'An Orthodox Journal for People Who Have Doubts. An Independent, Non-Commercial Medium for Religious News in Education and the Arts'.

6 In English, Pleasure Garden – Place of Remembrance for the Martyr and Philanthropist Yelisazeta Fedorovna (Moscow).

Stand with handmade quilts, cushions and pinafores. Photo: Olga Sveshnikova

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mal'. A few years ago, there was an animated discussion on the Orthodox Internet about an article by Pelaga Tyurenkova published on a popular religious site in which the young journalist accused many churchgoing women of trying to dress well but only wearing cheap imitations. She called upon them to change their image and buy Hermès bags.

Conclusion

Orthodox intellectuals from Moscow and St. Petersburg are trying to breach the walls of the 'ghetto' or 'reservation' – both terms have been used for some time by the intellectuals – into which the Orthodox faithful have voluntarily retreated as part of their search for a non-existent tradition in the 1990s. In the meantime, the rank and file of the Church – the designers of 'Orthodox' clothes working for little-known companies and the singers of religious and patriotic repertoires – will continue to interpret the subculture's values according to their own understanding of beauty; the inventions they come up with to please their potential customers will once again set in motion the discussion about the high and low forms of Orthodox subculture.

From the Russian by Christopher Gilley

Reading Suggestion:

- Serge Schmemann, Russian Orthodox Church. Soul of Russia, *National Geographic*, April 2009, pp. 112–137.
- Zoe Katrina Knox, Russian Orthodoxy, Religion, and Society: After Communism, Routledge, 2004, ISBN 0415320534, pp. 272.

Announcement of a celebratory church service with the deceased Patriarch Alexei II. Photo: Private archive N. Mitrokhin.

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A Bone of Contention between Church, State and Society. Orthodox Religious Education in Schools

Irina Kosals

*Arguments about whether it is possible to teach religion in state and municipal schools have raged ever since the beginning of the 1990s and continue to this day. The Russian Orthodox Church, whose influence on state and society has increased significantly over the last two decades, is always talking about the necessity of raising children in the spirit of 'traditional Orthodoxy'. Accordingly, it is attempting to bring about the introduction of a form of religious teaching in secondary schools similar to that employed before the 1917 Revolution and literally known as the 'Law of God' (*Zakon Bozhii*). However, there are a number of legal obstacles to this being done today: the Russian Federation's constitution, which promotes the principle of a secular state;[1] the law 'On Education' establishing a secular system of state education, and the active disinclination of a large part of society to infringe upon these principles.*

From Atheist Schools to the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture'

Until the beginning of the 1990s, religious education simply did not exist in the state education system, which was based on an atheist worldview. However, this also collapsed with the fall of the USSR. In 1993, the Russian Federation's Ministry of Education found a number of priests teaching the 'Law of God'. It issued a decree banning religious teaching in schools as an infringement of the constitution.

However, this decision was later, at least in part, reconsidered. In 1997, the law 'On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations' was passed. This stated that all citizens have the right to a religious education of their choosing and that religious organisations are entitled to set up their own teaching institutions. The administration of state schools can grant 'religious organisations the opportunity to teach religion outside normal teaching hours' at the request of parents if the children agree and the local organs approve. In effect, this means that classrooms can be used for Sunday school lessons or optional courses on religion in addition to the compulsory lessons. The school simply provides the premises; the religious group has to do the rest of the organisation – i.e. work out and write up a curriculum, choose textbooks, appoint teaching staff, find the necessary funding and oversee attendance.

After a couple of years, it became clear that the Russian Orthodox Church could not independently organise courses on Orthodoxy in state schools. On the one hand, they lacked money and teachers. On the other, the pupils did not want to burden themselves with additional lessons on this topic. For this reason, the Church's hierarchy turned to lobbying for Orthodox education in schools in the form of a secular cultural subject as part of the so-called regional and school components.

According to the law 'On Education' from 1992, the Russian school curriculum was divided into three parts officially known as 'components': federal, national-regional and school. In the schools of Russia's national republics, the 'regional component' includes lessons in the national language, customs, literature and history, while the oblasts' schools have a regional component that, on the whole, looks at the history, geography and nature of the local area. At the school level, the headteacher is able to choose from the dozens, if not hundreds, of courses offered across the country by non-governmental organisations or enthusiasts' associations that have been accredited by the regional or federal education authorities.

By the end of the 1990s, about a score of Russian regions offered a subject that became known as

1 Article 14 defines the Russian state as secular. Article 28 guarantees every citizen freedom of conscience, i.e. the right to profess any religious confession or none at all.

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the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' (FOC) as part of the supplementary curriculum in both the regional and school components.

The Discussion around the 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture'

FOC was a compromise between the Church and state. 'We chose this form of Orthodox education firstly because under the existing law religious subjects can only be taught as a secular discipline and secondly due to the fact that many teachers and parents were not prepared to allow the "Law of God" to appear in schools', explained one of the driving forces behind FOC, the Archbishop Kurskii Yuvenalii, in 1998.

FOC was registered as a cultural subject that acquainted pupils with the Orthodox literature, history and culture specific to their local area. Many supporters of FOC argued that only an understanding of Orthodoxy would enable pupils to internalise their country's cultural heritage and decipher the metaphors and references in the works of great Russian writers and artists.

As early as 1997, although the Minister of Education recognised FOC as an optional course, he banned those without pedagogical training from teaching it, thereby barring the majority of priests from entering the schools. Nonetheless, the Ministry hardly interfered in the teaching of the subject. The local education authorities received the responsibility for supervising the content of textbooks and the methods employed.

In the meantime, no single, unified FOC course has appeared. The teachers responsible for FOC use a number of textbooks, often with very different methodological approaches. Moreover, they understand 'Orthodox culture' in very divergent ways: from lessons on secular literary classics that use Christian symbols as a means of 'induction into the Orthodox faith' to church books which have not been adapted to the needs of children to learning prayers by rote. Despite the regulations, such lessons are not always voluntary.

The 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' by A.V. Borodina, a text book for primary-school children. Source: www.pravslovo.ru

The Church was unhappy with this situation because the subject spread across the country very slowly. In autumn 2002, the FOC question ceased to be a matter for enthusiasts. In response to lobbying by the Church, the Russian Ministry of Education distributed a letter signed by the Minister Vladimir Filippov to the regional education authorities that recommended teaching FOC for one hour per week in junior schools and two hours in secondary and high schools. The Ministry's letter provoked a large and critical reaction among society and in the press. It was described as a blatant infringement of the principles of secular Russian education. Indeed, many points in the Ministry's programme closely resemble the courses taught in Orthodox seminaries.

FOC's supporters tried to come up with practical arguments. They claimed that an education with 'spiritual roots' would not only link youngsters to the cultural space of Russian history that the Communists had sought to destroy, but would also discourage underage sex, drug abuse, alcoholism and

crime among young people. The course's opponents countered that the subject would, as practical experience had already shown, simply instruct children in how to perform rituals. It would also inculcate not only religious sentiment but also ethnic intolerance. They said that they did not want to create conflicts between classmates concerning such issues; they also did not want to see children return home from school more fanatically devout or better versed in religious rites than their parents, as this would create conflict within the family.

Soon, pressure from society and even resistance from those responsible for promoting FOC forced the Ministry to disavow the letter, which nevertheless had enabled the subject to reach new regions. According to the Ministry for Education and Science, between 2003 and 2007, 39 out of 86 of the Federal Subjects of the Russian Federation taught Orthodox culture in their schools. In 2006, FOC became a compulsory subject in the regional 'component' of the curriculums of the Belgorod, Bryansk, Kaluga and Smolensk oblasts. In 2007, the Voronezh oblast joined this list.

From 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' to 'Spiritual and Moral Culture'

The political and social centralisation initiated at the beginning of the 2000s also affected the sphere of education. In 2007, the State Duma approved a revision to the Russian Federation's law 'On Education' that abolished the regional and school 'components'. The intention was to replace them with a number of courses set at the federal level from which every school could choose. This meant that after 1 September 2009 FOC could no longer continue in the form in which it had existed for the last ten years.

A response came from the highest organ of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Holy Synod, in the form of a special declaration that was highly critical of the decision. However, in November 2007, noting that its protests did not provoke action, the Church submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Education for the course 'Spiritual and Moral Culture' (SMC). Its designers envisaged that this would include the subject 'Orthodox Culture'.

According to the concept, when pupils reached a certain age, their parents would choose the subject for study, just as they now select which foreign language their children will learn. However, instead of English, German or French, the options would be 'Orthodoxy', 'Judaism', 'Islam' or 'Buddhism', to be studied from year 1 to year 11.

This choice reflects the Orthodox clergy's association of ethnicity with religious belief and its conviction that Russia only possesses four widely spread 'traditional' religions, i.e. those handed down from the Middle Ages: Orthodox Christianity for the Slavs, Islam for the Turkic peoples, Judaism for the Jews and Buddhism for the Kalmyks, Buryats and Altai. On the other hand, Protestantism (which arrived in Russia in the seventeenth century and is now competing with Islam for second place after Orthodoxy in the list of registered religious communities), the faith of the Old Believers, Catholicism, pagan cults and shamanism (found in the Volga region, Siberia and the Far East) have no place in this scheme and are not mentioned in the SMC programme. The proposal does, however, suggest subjects with the laconic names 'Morals' and 'Ethics' for atheists and agnostics.

However, there is no indication of what this will look like in practice. No-one knows who will work out the curriculum and the methodological approach for teaching the other cultures in the framework of SMC. Equally unclear is the question of where teachers can be recruited and how they will be trained. The plan only mentions that those teaching the subject must have the approval of the relevant religious authorities.

The Russian Federation's Ministry of Education and Science accepted the Church's proposal. It

entrusted the task of working out the curriculum to a specially created inter-confessional working group of the state Russian Academy for Education (RAE). This was headed by the RAE's president, Nikolai Nikandrov, who in the past had been a prominent and active supporter of introducing FOC.

The working group's sittings witnessed objections to the Russian Orthodox Church's proposal not only from the representatives of Muslims, Jews, Catholics and Protestants, but also from employees of the Ministry of Education. The opponents of the plan believed that dividing the cultures of the country's peoples into separate subjects for study could create inter-confessional and inter-ethnic conflicts in the classroom. For this reason, they advocated the introduction of a single subject in state schools that would acquaint the pupils with the religious traditions of all the peoples in Russia.

The Recognition of Theology in Russia

The SMC plan contains another very important aspect: it foresees that graduates of seminaries and religious colleges will enter the schools as teachers if the state recognises their degrees.

In fact, discussion about state recognition for theological diplomas and academic degrees began at the beginning of the 2000s. Before this, in both the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, the state did not recognise qualifications from religious educational institutions. This meant that the state did not provide funding to prepare the needed number of specialists for these professions.[2] The Russian Orthodox Church, which in the 1990s faced difficulties in independently financing the training of its clergy and those responsible for providing religious education and catechisation, decided to ask the state for the money to do this.

2 The Russian state pays universities to train a certain number of specialists on the list of recognised state professions. Other specialists receive training at the expense of non-governmental bodies such as companies and private individuals.

By this stage, the Russian academic community was set against such a move. In the Russian academic tradition, theology and its related disciplines were not taught in the universities even before the Revolution. The universities had been in constant opposition to the religious teaching institutions. The academic system did not see such subjects as 'academic' in any way. For this reason, when, at the beginning of the 2000s, there was serious discussion of accepting theology as a fully fledged academic discipline in Russia, during which the normally fiercely anti-Western Church chose to appeal to the European example, many academics voiced their opposition.

Particularly broad prominence was accorded to an open letter to the Russian president from ten academics headed by the Nobel laureate Vitalii Ginzburg protesting against the 'growth in clericalism among Russian society'. In February 2008, the Church responded with the 'Appeal by 227 Professors and Lecturers to the President of the Russian Federation in Connection with Granting Theology Academic Status and Teaching Religious Subjects in School'. Its authors demanded both the official recognition of theology and the introduction in schools of a variation of the course teaching Orthodox religious culture on a voluntary basis. They described the opponents of religious education as 'militant atheists and haters of Russia'. The discussion in the academic community continued with the appearance of the 'Open Letter from Academics against the Introduction of FOC in Schools and Theology in Universities and the Higher Attestation Commission' signed by around 8,000 academics and addressed to the president. The large number of signatories and their academic prestige was remarkable. In both aspects, the opponents of theology as an academic subject greatly outweighed its supporters.

This discussion put the brakes on the state's recognition of theology. However, the election of a

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new Patriarch – Kirill – set it back in motion. In February 2009, the Minister of Education, Andrei Fursenko, who in the past had been a prominent opponent of FOC's extension, proclaimed that soon the graduates of Church-run universities, of which there are now three, would be able to defend their doctoral theses as secular disciplines and receive a state diploma. At the same time, the Minister thanked the Russian Orthodox Church for its help in drawing up SMC within the framework of the new state curriculum.

However, the demand within society for the teaching of such subjects is small and is more likely to fall than rise given the increasing unpopularity of the Church among the educated and civically active population. On the other hand, there is demand for a general course on the history of world religion rather than a confessional subject. According to data from 2008 collected by the Levada Centre, the country's largest sociological research organisation, the number of those who think it is possible to teach the history of religion and/or the basics of religious morality in school if pupils and parents request it has barely changed over 17 years (whereas in 1991 it was 59%, in 2008 it was 60%). In contrast, the number of those who want a return to the 'Law of God' in secondary schools has fallen from 20% to 12% and the number of those who categorically reject religion in the classroom has doubled from 10% in 1991 to 20% in 2008.

A Placard from the Free Radicals: 'GOK lessons have no place in state schools'. Source: http://grani.ru/Society/Xenophobia/m.125432.html *(Anna Karpiuk)*

For this reason, although the overall question of teaching 'Orthodox Culture' within the framework of the course 'Spiritual and Moral Culture' has been decided, when one takes into account society's ambiguous view of it and the embryonic state of the proposal, one can assume that it will be a long time before it is introduced. During that time, the Russian Orthodox Church will work with the Ministry of Education to train educators to teach the subject in schools. It is unclear what the representatives of the other confessions will do and where they will find pedagogical staff because there has been no sign from the state that it is willing to help them in this.

From the Russian
by Christopher Gilley

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analysis

READING SUGGESTION:

- Joachim Willems, Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture (FOC): a new subject in Russia's schools, *British Journal of Religious Education*, Volume 29, Issue 3, September 2007, pp. 229 – 243.
- Joera Mulders, The Debate on Religion and Secularisation in Russia Today, *Religion, State and Society*, Volume 36, Issue 1, March 2008, pp. 5 – 20.

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kultura 3-2009 will appear at the end of June/beginning of July 2009. It will look at MONEY: money as the subject of the arts and everyday language, the way in which people's attitude to money has changed. Jakob Fruchtmann, Bremen, will be guest editor.