Summary. The Old Believers movement is an example of a cultural phenomenon that, although internally rich, is so different from the rest of the world that its single, homogenous depiction cannot be established. One can only attempt to define its essence and outline its mode of functioning, for the elements that are constant and common across different communities are so specific that they cannot be mistaken for anything else. Providing a historical account of the entire history of the Old Believers movement is rather impossible. However, what can and should be described are its “cells,” i.e. territorial communities, viewed from the “process” perspective, i.e. viewed as they are functioning in the course of time.

Keywords: Old Believers, culture, territorial communities

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Introduction

The Old Believers movement is a territorially dispersed and internally diverse ethinic religious movement, based on autonomous local communities electively combining into denominations (soglasiya, tolki) according to the choice of dogmas and rituals, originating from the late medieval form of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian cultural tradition, and distinctively characterised by features specific for national theocracy. It differs from new-rite Russian Orthodoxy in that it preserves dogmatic, ecclesiastical, and ritual principles from before the reform (the slowly-
progressing reform of Nikon, Alexis of Russia, and Peter the Great of 1653) in some of its branches, with certain deviations from this tradition caused by a sharpening or reduction in some of the factors (sectarian tendencies). From the ecclesiastical point of view, it is comprised of local, structurally diversified, and decentralised autocephalous Eastern Christian Churches and denominations, which nonetheless tend to be more common to sects in some cases.

Since 1653, both the spirituality and social life of Russians have seen the emergence of a certain dichotomy, realised in the coexistence of two systems and two traditions: one belonging to the Old Believers, not accepted by secular authorities, and the other belonging to new-rite Orthodoxy, treated as a foundation or even a tool of the centralist, authoritarian ruling system. These two systems evolved independently, stemming from a common source. The counterculture of the Old Believers was limited by its preservation of the past on the one hand, and intellectually free – particularly in terms of doctrine and spirituality, soaked with eschatological mysticism – on the other hand.

This ethnic religious movement can be classified as an unorganised or non-institutional religion. It is a collective attempt to realise a utopian vision of Christian society – as God’s Kingdom on earth. On Russian soil, the Holy Rus, to be specific. The placement of this Christian utopia did not originate in any philosophical solution or ideology, or in rulers’ or spiritual leaders’ will.

However, in the course of centuries it has been shaped by folk beliefs, which combine elements of Christian culture with their native pagan tradition and magical thinking in a surprising way [...].

This specific combination of traditions is full of strong mystical realism, realised in the belief that everyday reality is accompanied by another, spiritual reality, which is not less real than the everyday one but even more real. The empirical world derives its reality and its sense from a relationship with this spiritual realm and from serving it. In this way, Russian national theocracy was born as an element of the medieval view of the world.

The Old Believers in modern Poland are more or less assimilated descendants of the Great Russian people who settled in the area spanning from the Pskov-Novgorod Land, through Livonia, Lithuania, to Suwałki and the Masuria Regions, forming a continuous wedge of dense colonies isolated from the surrounding environment.

1 E. Przybył, *Religia niezorganizowana a kształt dziejów (na przykładzie historii prawosławia na Rusi i w Państwie Moskiewskim)*, „Przegląd Religioznawczy” no. 1, 1995, p. 125.
This migration wave, progressing since the middle of the 17th century, arrived in the Suwałki Region in 1779-1792, and arrived in the Masuria Region after 1820. A minor reason for migration to these regions was the repression perpetuated by the state authorities and the dominant Orthodox Church, which enjoyed extensive prerogatives and operative possibilities, while the major reasons were economic in nature. The current number of believers in this community is 1,000.

Extending the insights of Robert Crummey, it is possible to speak about the changing forms of the Old Believers movement. It develops the features of a relatively homogenous movement when repressed and endangered, whereas outside such situations it is scattered in terms of doctrine, organisation, and geographical location. Its character is a function of time and place. Nowadays, in the first twenty years of the 21st century, with its identity threatened by globalisation processes, it begins to integrate, or at least hostility between its various solgasiyas and tołks is becoming less pronounced. The belief in common theology, tradition, and the similarity of fate becomes more widespread; however, tendencies leading to unification do not occur.

The current situation made it necessary to redefine the significance of the Old Believers movement in Russian culture. Some of the important criteria are already known: preserving old Russian morality (from before the reform of Peter the Great), a strong moral code of conduct, an orientation similar to the one assumed by Calvinists – apart from religious conservatism, and finally a certain flexibility in temporal life, related with it. The Old Believers’ significance as an economic factor has been indicated multiple times.

Paradigms of the Old Believers movement

The mosaic-like and fleeting nature of the Old Believers movement makes it possible to describe only the sociological paradigms, and possibly psychological ones. It is obviously possible to describe them in the most general aspect, as an ethnic religion with folk and post-pagan roots placed in the specific complex of Russia and Russian

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4 Literally: (religious) agreement; understood here as a denomination of the Old Believers movement observing the same rules.
5 A branch within a solgasiya, a denomination.
7 Paradigm is understood as a set of notions and theories assumed to be effective in studies of a given reality.
identity. This complex highly individualises the classical solutions achieved by religious sociology, some of them characterise the Old Believers as an exception, while others focus on their distinctive specificity.

One of the aspects worth studying is their work ethic and entrepreneurship. The Old Believers’ model of work ethic and entrepreneurship cannot be classified according to Max Weber’s tripartite typology (classical Protestant, Scandinavian, Japanese). According to Galina Balakirevskaya, the Old-Rite model of work ethic is comprised of: personalist motivation for attaining life success, work asceticism, communal character, and a spirit of free civil activity. Economic activity was based on the religious community, mutual trust, and a self-aid and crediting system. For some time, Old Believers were against strictly defined private possession and preferred collective, family, and community models of ownership. This in-house model (Russian domovitost) was efficient in the first half of the 19th century, which was when capitalism developed in Russia; however, it started to decline after clashing with the free market of the second half of the 19th century, particularly with new kinds of financial institutions. Nevertheless, many Old Believer forms of entrepreneurial activity survived until the October Revolution of 1917, only partly accepting compromise.

Protestantism defined the ideology and ethics of capitalism in Western Europe in the 16th–17th centuries. According to Protestantism, becoming rich is a value in itself; it is a kind of grace given by God to the chosen ones. On the other hand, in the Old Believers movement, accumulating goods and becoming rich was not just available for the chosen ones, but for everybody, as it was the result of the work of man, and its purpose was derived from religion. While in Poland “nobility obliged” (noblesse oblige), in the 19th century Christian Russia “wealth obliged” (bogatstvo obyazivayet).

The Old Believers treated reliable and intense work as a duty towards God, and possession – as a means of salvation. Their presumption was that possessions acquired in an honest way and used appropriately cannot cause sin, and that wealth exists in order to be shared with others. It was convergent with the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas stating that private property exists in order to be shared with those who need it, after satisfying one’s own needs. Its first and primary role should be to provide for the Church and to help the poorer believers. Thus, it is not surprising that individualism, including the desire to get rich, was not as important for the Old Believers as it was for Protestants, and the names of Old Believer entrepreneurs are closely connected with the histories of particular parochial communities.

Based on these remarks, it is possible to supplement Max Weber’s typology with a fourth category, thereby providing a new ground for comparison.

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However, an attempt to transform this mosaic-like and fleeting nature into a singular image of the whole, using religious studies as a basis, is doomed to failure. Of course, it is still Eastern Orthodoxy in its Ruthenian and Russian form, but, despite this fact, it is extremely varied, depending on different locations within the vast area of Russia and beyond. It is an evident function of place and time. A very wide array of forms of organisation can be observed there, from the almost classical, hierarchical Popovtsy Orthodox Churches, through the Pomeranian Orthodox Church, devoid of hierarchy and basically functioning as a faith-and-prayer community, to amorphous, “differently” organised – or rather “unorganised” – groups of Beguny or even Chasovennye⁹, which do not have a unifying institution (such as a council, an association, a synod, or an assembly) and yet are characterised as unexpectedly homogenous.

Applying the free Church category can certainly be useful in this situation, but is it possible to use the notion of sect? It is true that Netovtsy-Nemolaki (also known as Spasovtsy) do not celebrate any kind of liturgy and do not worship icons, even though the latter is crucially important in Russian Orthodox Churches; however, their prayers, mostly limited to one Jesus Prayer and a few calls to the Saviour, are common for all Orthodox Churches. The whole array of behaviours and customs of a religious nature are also common, as are a soteriological worldview and establishment.

What can be defined as a common denominator of the noble Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church – the believers of which were sacrificing their lives and shedding blood during the Patriotic War, and, starving to death, managed to collect 1,200,000 roubles to help the Red Army, answering the call of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin – and the extremely pacific Beguns? How can the monasteries of the Popovtsy, even though they do not form building complexes but rather standalone hermitages, be compared to the skits¹⁰ of the Chasovennye, which are hidden near rivers and Siberian swamps? Is a similarity of monastic rules sufficient when nearly all Eastern Christian monasteries observe the same rules?

In consideration of the above, the remaining method that can be used in religious studies is the exemplification method, with elements of comparative research in such fields as settlement and colonisation geography, number, the relationship with the country and other religious communities, religious guidance and education, family life, spiritual culture and material culture.

On the other hand, a historiographic description of the Old Believers movement seen as a collection of communities is possible to formulate only as a draft histori-

⁹ A Bezpopovtsy denomination without clergy, but recognising the possibility of its return; very radical in its observance of religious principles and moral standards, spread mainly across the Urals and Siberia, and the two Americas; the number of believers is currently close to half million.

¹⁰ A small hermitage for a few people, usually governed by a larger monastery.
cal description, and only as one concerning the “natal period.” Additionally, it is also possible to provide a very rough estimate of the number of believers (3 million in 30 countries around the world). What constitutes a paradox, but is also contradictory to the basic principles of hyper-orthodoxy, is that this collection of communities is an ever-changing one, with the changes caused both by external factors (the individualist character of the path to salvation) and internal factors (the influence of the nearby environment and the influence of globalisation). The next factor is that Old Believer communities move from one place to another (even between continents) and “swarm”, emerging from each other due to doctrinal disputes or in order to find better living conditions from a religious point of view as well (isolation from the world full of sin). The mobility of communities is amplified by the mobility of particular believers. The Old Believers movement has some kind of “genetically encoded” escape-and-seek syndrome. Not only better conditions for living and practicing faith but also – in an individual sense – more beneficial “paths to salvation” are sought. The above facts are a result of a literal, evangelical understanding of human life on earth as a pilgrimage in two dimensions: the material and the spiritual.

Another paradox found among the Old Believers is their conservative orthopraxy, i.e. religious ritualism, as opposed to ever-changing orthodoxy, i.e. a doctrinal scheme. Taking part in Old-Rite services (which is not always possible due to defensive, isolationist tendencies) and permeating the structure of family life (which is similarly hard or even harder) apparently treated as a Church inside the family, one can observe an identical “map” of rituals, behaviours and customs in the whole Old Believer world. On the other hand, during a doctrinal discussion, one will come across a “fair” of solutions. However, once such solutions are chosen, they are taught, or rather reproduced, in a strict, almost “orthodox” fashion.

The very important teachings of the Old Believers concerning the Antichrist (which are a newly-developed feature, compared to the reformed Orthodox Church) are differently understood and taught in various soglasiyas and tolics.

As far as the two major branches are concerned: Popovtsy\(^\text{11}\) and Bezpopovtsy\(^\text{12}\), the first one refers to the teachings about the Antichrist in a superficial manner, regarding it as a historical remnant rather than as a living doctrine. On the other hand,

\(^{11}\) Old Believers respecting clergy re-born in 1846 in Bila Krynytsia in Austrian Bukovina; first as the Old Orthodox Church of Christ, and since 1988 the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church, currently the number of believers is close to 1 million.

\(^{12}\) Amorphous religious groups not respecting clergy, following Ruthenian Orthodox tradition that advocates the end of clergy caused by the emergence of Antichrist in the world in 1666; currently the number of believers is close to 2 millions.
in Bezpopovtsy communities these teachings are very robust, much more robust than in Bible Student movements.

“According to Pomorians, everything that is opposing Christ is Antichrist. The Fedoseevtsy see Antichrist as the zeitgeist of the times after 1666, for the reign of Antichrist is not material but spiritual; therefore, it is not possible to name a specific person, such as the Roman Catholic pope or the Orthodox patriarch of Moscow as is done in other Old-Rite denominations, mainly the Chasovennye (real, material Antichrist). The fact that the Old Believers were teaching about the beginning of the rule of Antichrist (the years 1666, 1699, and 1702 were successively chosen as the date of his emergence) constituted one of the main charges against them during the Moscow Synods of 1666 and 1667, which ended in their being anathematised. Radical reforms conducted by Tsar Peter I the Great (1672-1725; reigned in 1689-1725) caused the Fedoseevtsy and the Filippians to recognise him as an embodiment of the Antichrist. Tsarina Elizabeth (1709-1762; reigned in 1741-1762), who continued these reforms, was called a daughter of the Antichrist. Various persons were regarded as the Antichrist by different groups of Old Believers, e.g. popes, Emperor Nero, Patriarch Nikon, the whole Romanov family beginning with Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich, Napoleon, and even M. S. Gorbachev, as he has a sign on his forehead. Therefore, there are three basic tendencies regarding how the Antichrist is understood: the spiritual reign of the Antichrist in the form of evil and deviation from righteous religion, material reign in the form of a particular person, and the distribution of guilt over various persons or the whole Romanov family, beginning with Aleksey Mikhailovich, although Old Believers taught that he was only a harbinger of the Antichrist and the proper dynasty of princes of darkness was started when Peter I was declared emperor.”^{13}

The Old Believers, treated as a separate civilisation^{14} in Russia, had similarly different relations with the official Orthodox Church and state authorities in the course of history. Despite the fact that all solgasiyas and tolks from the middle of the 17th century to the beginning of the 20th century were united in their hostility towards the official Orthodox Church and state authorities, local communities entered into agreements with the authorities and the Orthodox Church throughout the whole history of this ethnic religious group, from some kind of legitimisation of the Vyg-Leksinskiy community (1694-1857), which was the source of the strongest Bezpopovtsy soglasiya, namely the Pomorians, to merchants and the industrial entrepreneurs of the 19th century. Nevertheless, all of them, including anarchist extreme groups,

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^{13} S. Pastuszewski, Leksykon religijno-kulturowy staroprawosławia, Bydgoszcz 2015, p. 58

^{14} S.W. Taraniec, Staroobriadczestwo w Rossijskoj impierii (koniec XVI – naczało XX wieka), Kiev 2012, p. 5.
believe that all authority is granted by God, although rule after 1666 is deemed to remain in the hands of Antichrist.

In contrast to other religions, such as the similarly diverse Russian Orthodox Church which is called a new-rite Church to contrast it with the Old-Rite movement, it is not possible to provide a holistic account of the history of the Old Believers movement. It is only possible to describe the histories of particular communities and their close correlation with the cultural conditions of a given local environment, which contemporary historians have started to do. Each of them not only has a different history, but also its own traditions and customs. This is true even for the institutionalised Popovtsy Churches and for the Pomorians, who have recently started to be very determined to unify their religion. However, the Pomorian Old-Orthodox Church is actually comprised of Churches from different countries grouped into autonomous affiliations of communities, which are connected through an annual Synod. In spite of this fact, many strictly Pomorian communities remain outside such affiliations. Occasionally an All-Russian Synod is organised, but it is neither necessary nor effective.

In conclusion, modern historiography has recorded successful research into the territorial communities of the Old Believers and research into issues such as the relationship between the state and Old Believers, the occurrence of the Old Believers movement in various classes of society, circumstances favouring expansion of the Old Believers movement, and circumstances impeding it, but a descriptive account of the complete history of this ethnic religious phenomenon has not been provided and probably never will be.

**A model description of an Old Believer community**

Religious communities differ according to:
- *The sacred* (of spiritual and material nature),
- doctrines,
- customs, tradition, and culture,
- the environment penetrating these communities and surrounding them,
- the activity of leaders and officers, as well as their character, which has an influence on these communities.

This applies to communities belonging to different religions and to those within a single religion. A territorial Christian community is not homogenous... and not fully Christian, as it contains very evident “additions” of natural religions and post-Christian spiritual and intellectual movements.
In an intellectual or analytical sense, Christianity – like other religions – has a number of dimensions (planes of order) that can usually be presented in the form of dichotomies: the transcendental and the human, the spiritual and the material, the internal and the external, the individual and the social. These dimensions can be determined (of course in a conceptual way) because religion is a whole, and this is true for both individuals and communities (such as families, communes, parishes, or Churches) where the Christian religion is realised.

The external border is set by the organisational framework of a community, its dogmas and rituals, its moral system, religious culture and tradition. It is not tight. The internal border is not set and not tight either; it moves inwards as the civilisation develops, thereby reducing the area of the core of Christianity, i.e. the source of its inalienable messages (love overcoming evil), values and attributes. Between the external and the internal border lies an internal borderland area, where Christian (i.e. pagan) values have been mixed, from the beginning of Christianity to the products of civilizational development spanning two thousand years.

A territorial community is surrounded by an external borderland, which varies according to its location on the globe. It is therefore more individualised than the internal borderland, which penetrates the community in some way.

The internal borderland is tolerated but not adopted. It does not become a part of the community but it characterises it. It can be compared to an air assault. For instance, the Chasovennye, five thousand of whom migrated from Manchuria and Turkey to the United States, formed a single community in Oregon but are divided into Harbinians, Xinjiangians, and Turks according to the place of their previous settlement. They differ noticeably in customs and culture, and even – to some extent –

Figure 1. The Borders of a Christian Territorial Community
in their practice of religion. Therefore, the external borderland is that part of external reality that is adjacent to the community to a certain degree.

Territorial religious communities, essentially referring to early Christian churches, are a characteristic feature of the Russian Old Believers movement. However, such communities differ from these churches in that, notwithstanding strong religious bonds, places where members of such communities settle and form multigenerational families are territorially compact, or even topographically isolated from the outside world, whereas members of early Christian churches were scattered among pagans. This was caused by the practically unlimited terrain of medieval Rus', where the place for living could be chosen at one's own discretion. And it was done by groups of Old Believers, either oppressed or running away from the Antichrist, which were hiding in distant **glubinkas** of Pomerania (Pomoria), areas near the Volga river, in the Altai Mountains, the Ural Mountains, Siberia, and outside the country – in Livonia and Turkey, since the middle of the 17th century. Harsh living conditions imposed group solidarity, which was conceptually rooted in Christian solidarity expressly extracted from the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers, stored with diligence and carefully analysed by religious refugees.

Regardless of the above, this type of community (**obshchina**) naturally developed in medieval Rus' after it converted to Christianity in 988, but it was also imposed by topographical and natural conditions. Its lay expression was **veche**. In distant regions, it lasted until the revolution of 1917, or even after that date in many cases, as the ruling Bolsheviks were not able to instantly build their totalitarian system that destroyed all original, isolated phenomena and healthy relationships between people. The Old Believers just preserved the structure of this medieval Russian social and religious community, the doctrine of which was also based on the solutions of Egyptian monasticism, and adapted it to suit their needs in an ultimately secular space. In the course of time, this secular monasticism has become one of the most characteristic features of the Old-Rite movement, of course together with national theocracy.

Many factors made it happen. The most important ones were the doctrine of hermeticism ("Do not be yoked together with unbelievers", 2 Cor 6,14) and hard Christian conservatism, along with distant and sparsely populated or unpopulated regions of Russia, where one could live without intense contact with the surrounding world. This conservatism was also accompanied by alternating repressions and a lack of acceptance (at the least) with public harassment practised by state authorities and most of society; these actions caused them to develop the besieged fortress syndrome. Even though the erosive influence of various **revolutions** (mainly the technological and moral revolutions of the 19th and 20th century) did not spare the
Old Believer communities, there are still some remnants of the old-fashioned ones in the valleys of Ural, the backwoods of Siberia, the steppes of Altai, in Canada, and in the *glubinkas* of South America, where many Old Believers escaping godless communism after the Second World War migrated to. Diving into nature and isolation from urban settlements underline the significance of the religious factor, including the division of life into the religious part and the material part.

A territorial Old Believer community contains the archetypes of both a family-based community and an early medieval territorial community (*opole*). Conversion to Christianity transformed the former type of community into a religious community, a church, and the latter type into a territorial community of believers united around a temple (a parish, an *obshchina*, a commune).

A classical territorial community, which was selectively hermetic and highly coherent, and ensured preservation of these archetypes, has already ceased to exist in Poland. The Old Believers have been atomised, similarly to the Roman Catholic majority, and the religious dimension – which was omnipresent in the lives of Old Believers – has been limited to Sundays and holidays, again just as with the case of Roman Catholics. Multigenerational, large families that allowed the Old Believers to improve their wealth in terms of quantity and quality for centuries no longer exist.

Even today, in some Russian provinces deep inside the country, one can encounter villages organised around a small church or an empty space where once such a church stood but was unscrupulously destroyed either by the Bolsheviks or time. In contrast to the church-building practice of Western Europe, such churches were usually built on the initiative of local communities, not by the request of rulers or representatives of governments. This was why they were *keleyniy*, i.e. resembled a house, were built from easily breaking materials (such as wood), and had modest appliances similar to those used in houses. The crosses, icons, and books moved during the successive exoduses of believers were more durable than their temples. It is not reasonable to look for features specific to medieval Western Christian parishes in Old Believer communities, as such parishes were politicised to some extent, e.g. due to laws of granting city rights, the protection of feudal lords, or orders, whereas Old Believer communities were created by groups of believers who were very protective of their autonomy and independence from the world or the institutional hierarchies of the Church. The Church was mainly a mystical institution and all subjugation to it was realised in approval of its religious and moral authority (the institution of *starchestvo*).

As Russian capitalism developed and, subsequently, many Old Believers suddenly became rich (which is another phenomenon that should be the focus of religious
sociological analyses)\textsuperscript{15}, some communities became dependent on rich custodians (\textit{popechitels}); however, they are not the subject matter of the discussion herein. For this situation caused the equality of all members of such communities to disappear, and made them lose their care for the public good – in other words, their evangelical ideals were twisted.

As opposed to the majority of modern Roman Catholic parishes, a classical, territorially compact Old Believer community is not a secondary group (as one could describe it in sociological terms), as being a member of such a community is somewhat natural and specific for the whole local geographical environment. As a primary group, it encompasses the whole life of an individual, from the beginning until the end, of course unless such an individual rejects group membership at some point. Even then, the question of symbolic or subconscious membership can still be discussed, for the principles of a religion, its rituals, symbols and religious behaviours become permanent elements of one’s personality, due to their omnipresence in the first stages of personal development and their close connection with national and cultural identity.

The power of these elements has been demonstrated in the case of Ioann Michajłowicz Persjanow (1929-2004) from Holny Wolmera in the Suwałki commune, who became an officer of the Security Service in 1952 and stated in a personal survey that he is an \textit{Old Believer atheist}\textsuperscript{16}, but after a dozen or so years of service, he started to advocate for the public rights for the Old Believers, thereby incurring his superiors’ wrath. He objected the rights of Catholics to have days off work during their holidays, whereas he needed to work during his Orthodox holidays. Nonetheless, “according to those who talk with him, he does celebrate these holidays” – as it was reported by Cpt. A. Doroszkiewicz on 26 September 1964.\textsuperscript{17} In the house of his parents, religious services that were not reported to the authorities took place, and he did not report this to his superiors. After he had finished his service as a captain, he became a social advocate of religion, and then he tried to become the \textit{nastavnik} of Suwałki. He achieved this goal in 2001 but due to some Canonical violations caused by his extraordinary impulsiveness and authoritarian tendencies, he was dismissed from this position by decree of the Synod of the Pomorian Old Orthodox Church in 2002.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibidem, p. 115.
Scattered across 30 countries of the world, Old Believers form highly diverse religious and social communities. This diversity is a consequence of separate histories and environments. Yet each of these communities shares an unchanging element, which is common to all Old Believers and makes way for communication and experiencing unification within a mystical Church. The solid base ensures survival, whereas the changing factors stimulate adjustment and adaptive abilities that... ensure survival as well. A large number of studies emphasises the extreme strictness of the standards and behaviours of Old Believers, while they are flexible to some degree, depending on the living environment. Otherwise, *the island of minority* would not be able to survive on *the sea of majority*. However, this flexibility is limited by the extent of the spiritual and religious core. For the Old Believers express a religiously motivated *non possumus*, which is not deeply concealed and not governed by fear or reason. Otherwise, the martyrdom of the first one hundred years of the Old Believers movement’s existence and the desperate wandering across the whole world would not have happened.

As social constructs, local Old Believer communities are rooted in religious and cultural values, passed down from generation to generation. They are composed of the medieval tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church (from before the reformation) on one hand, and from Old-Rite tradition including repression (*inter alia*) but also independently developed, new doctrinal and ecclesial solutions on the other. On a local level, this general construct of ideas generates local culture, utilises independently defined notions and a specific type of identification of cultural forms and

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**Figure 2. Variable and Constant Components of an Old Believer Community**

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<thead>
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<th>Variable components</th>
<th>Constant components</th>
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<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>The stigma of martyrdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Territory</td>
<td>The tradition of Old Russian national theocracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctrinal differences</td>
<td>Principles of faith and foundations, doctrines, rituals</td>
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<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Awareness of a common religious and historical source</td>
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<th>Social and community life</th>
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<td>Rituals, symbols, and religious behaviours that are not part of the ceremony</td>
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behaviours. At the same time, this local specificity is affected by environmental factors, globalisation, and conscious unification processes, provided that a given community belongs to a doctrinal and ritual association (soglasie) or even to Ecclesia. Therefore, an antinomy has been observed between internal interactions (or rather those originating from the abyss of history) and external interactions, closely connected to hic et nunc. Another observed phenomenon is a constant, condition-reactive process, a phenomenon broader than the generational reconstruction of solutions reached at a single point in time. This specific ahistorical nature of Old Believer communities results mainly from the lack of division into the sacred and the profane in the lives of Old Believers. For the sacred is irrespective of history, it transcends history. In the day-to-day contact of the contemporary world and the other world, this other dimension ultimately wins. Therefore, practical theology is one of the features of Old Believer territorial communities.

![Figure 3. The Process of the Formation of a Local Old Believer Community as a Social Construct](image)

Territorial compactness is an essential factor in the integration of Old Believer communities. As Hervé Carrier noted when he was studying Roman Catholic parishes in France, “only those parishes that are territorially compact to a sufficient extent and create hectic social groups enable individuals to rapidly identify with groups – in such cases participation in groups is facilitated by interpersonal relations. Religious identity will be functioning as a direct and local reference.”18 A reference group

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that is shaping the value and standard system binding an individual, polarising their psyche and their practical interests, is thus close to human beings, around them, or even beyond them. As a result, belonging to this group is factual, not aspirational.

As a primary group (with personal relations between individual members), an Old Believer community is tightly intertwined with other primary groups such as family or a group of neighbours, due to its dominating position on the intellectual and emotional plane as well as its omnipresence in particular areas through various means of stimulation (pressure) and social control. As a general principle, if a given environment is religiously homogenous, it also functions as a local community. This community is superior to the family in many aspects, chiefly due to its spiritual command translating into everyday behaviours.

This command does not belong to an individual or a council but to an authoritative group of elders, whose status results primarily from their charisma and religious and moral competence. Although usually a priest (in Popovtsy groups) or nastavnik (in Bezpopovtsy groups) is also a member of the group, the degree of its formalisation is low. Therefore, the strength of this command is based on such irrational factors as the strength of the spirit (charisma, internal inspiration, or intuition), competence with regard to religious knowledge, and strict adherence to social norms that are closely related to religion anyway. Consequently, an Old Believer community permeates family life not only through its means of stimulation and control but also through specific persons who are members of an ultimately amorphous group of elders. The father does not necessarily need to be an intermediary in this relation, although the father is predetermined to assume this role in the patriarchal family model that is somewhat natural for Old Believers.

**Literature**

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