

Placing Faith in Development: How Moscow's Religious Communities Contribute to a More Civil Society

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In summer 2009, members of Moscow's assistance community found themselves cycling through a seemingly never-ending circuit of meetings, roundtable discussions, and workshops. The U.S. Embassy, USAID, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Caritas/Catholic Charities, and the Aga Khan Foundation were just a few of the organizations hosting these events, which drew representatives from the many domestic and foreign development agencies, funding organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), charities, and more informal social justice interest groups that provide services in Moscow. The topics covered at these meetings were equally diverse: anti-racism/pro-tolerance initiatives, educational reform projects, health care for disenfranchised communities, strategic fund-raising and donor cultivation, and best practices for collaborating with city, federal, and international authorities to address social concerns such as elder care, maternal and child health and nutrition, and illegal migration, among others. Participants included an eclectic mix of Russian and foreign political appointees, clergy, career development professionals, and eager, untrained volunteers.

Despite fluctuations among attendees from meeting to meeting, there was still a sense of overlap and consistency, as participants frequently knew

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one another or one another's colleagues and partners from other contexts, including other such gatherings. Meetings followed similar agendas, prompting participants at the meetings I attended to joke among themselves about having lost track of which theme they were supposed to discuss this time. At each meeting, staff from the sponsoring organization first introduced the mission statement of the agency, identified and thanked the funders, described the institutional structure of the organization, and finally set concrete objectives for the meeting. After this introductory session, participants briefly described their organizations' programs and what they hoped to achieve from the gathering. Once the participants were acquainted with one another's activities, the meeting's leaders attempted to moderate the discussion toward alignment of the groups' varied goals and strengths around a shared set of programming goals and opportunities for continued networking.

In each of the meetings I attended it was always at this last point in the proceedings that participants who were frustrated with the bureaucratic structures derailed the conversation to focus instead on the "real" problems that they were ostensibly there to resolve. Ignoring the organizers' flustered attempts to return to the set agenda, participants commiserated about their common problems and then excitedly singled out their colleagues from religiously affiliated assistance programs for special attention. What was particularly notable at these meetings was that participants claimed that their colleagues from religiously affiliated programs were more successful at doing the kind of work that mattered, not just in terms of the practicalities of fund-raising, service provision, and obtaining support from Russian authorities, but most importantly, in terms of providing client-centered services that were humane, compassionate, and emphasized the dignity of clients. Frequently throughout the meetings, participants informed their hosts that they should be paying more attention to the work of the religious organizations. Toward the end of one particularly noteworthy roundtable focusing on anti-racism and pro-tolerance initiatives, staff from several high-profile human rights NGOs sighed repeatedly that they were too restricted by bureaucracy but that their religiously affiliated counterparts could do the real work that they and other secular groups only dreamed of doing. Such sentiments were not isolated occurrences; during the course of my research in Moscow over the past decade, I regularly encountered such views during interviews and meetings with Russian development professionals, government officials, donors, volunteers, and recipients.

The question of whether and why religious organizations are perceived to be better able to provide assistance services is part of a larger set of issues pertaining to whether religiously affiliated assistance programs belong within Moscow's development sphere at all. Rather than promoting the "democratizing" initiatives aimed at creating a vibrant "civil society" that are more familiar to the western development projects of the 1990s, religiously affiliated organizations have instead focused more on smaller-scale solutions to pressing social problems of poverty, homeless-

ness, addiction treatment, medical care, and human rights.¹ Additionally, religiously affiliated organizations are not necessarily bound by the same ideological and practical expectations for results, accountability, legal recognition, and networking as their secular counterparts, taking their cues instead from denominational ethics and institutional practices.² Consequently, religiously affiliated assistance programs either fit uneasily within, or often fall outside, the prevailing institutional logics that have shaped Russia's development sphere in terms of defining categories of assistance providers, thematic foci, and clientele.³

Yet even as these institutional logics of conventional development paradigms have excluded, or at least misrecognized, the work of religiously affiliated organizations in Russia, they have, paradoxically, actually created opportunities for these same groups to carve out a productive niche for themselves. Staff and supporters of religiously affiliated organizations contend that their value and effectiveness derive precisely from the ability of religiously affiliated organizations to address the gaps, and even negative consequences, caused by conventional development projects. Most notably, the Moscow-based faith organizations that I discuss here present an alternative vision of intervention that seeks to protect Russian citizens from what proponents see as the abandonment by the state resulting from previous democratizing and civil society initiatives.

Ultimately, the development-oriented work of Russia's religious communities offers a different vantage point for reconsidering the promises and consequences of Russia's neoliberal and democratizing transformations. Proponents within Moscow's faith-based assistance sphere contend that religiously affiliated assistance organizations are successful, not only because they parallel secular development programs in recognizing that remaking the values and practices of capitalism, democracy, and global human rights are central to creating a new postsocialist person, but more importantly because they claim to move beyond these approaches in order

1. For the "democratizing" initiatives, see Michael E. Urban, *Cultures of Power in Post-Communist Russia: An Analysis of Elite Political Discourse* (Cambridge, Eng., 2010); Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe, 1989–1998* (New York, 1998). For the aid provided by religiously affiliated organizations, see Melissa L. Caldwell, *Not by Bread Alone: Social Support in the New Russia* (Berkeley, 2004); Detelina Tocheva, "An Ethos of Relatedness: Foreign Aid and Grassroots Charities in Two Orthodox Parishes in North-Western Russia," in Jarrett Zigon, ed., *Multiple Moralities and Religions in Post-Soviet Russia* (New York, 2011); Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca, 2007); Jarrett Zigon, *HIV Is God's Blessing: Rehabilitating Morality in Neoliberal Russia* (Berkeley, 2011).

2. Mary Jo Bane and Lawrence M. Mead, *Lifting Up the Poor: A Dialogue on Religion, Poverty and Welfare Reform* (Washington, D.C., 2003); David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991).

3. Sada Aksartova, "Promoting Civil Society or Diffusing NGOs? U.S. Donors in the Former Soviet Union," in David C. Hammack and Steven Heydemann, eds., *Globalization, Philanthropy, and Civil Society: Projecting Institutional Logics Abroad* (Bloomington, 2009), 160–91. Analysts of post-Soviet development have similarly struggled to classify the work of religiously affiliated organizations, with most responses electing to qualify them as religious activities.

to tend to the well-being and transformation of the entire human being. Consequently, proponents argue that by privileging humanness and civility, religiously affiliated assistance organizations are better positioned to build a new Russian society that brings together citizens and the state in more harmonious, productive, and caring relationships.

In the discussion that follows, I will examine how religiously affiliated organizations work with and against the bureaucratic structures of development projects in Russia, with particular attention to what assistance practitioners identify as the gaps in these projects and the special abilities of religious organizations to address them. The experiences of these organizations reveal how diverse local actors—government officials, community leaders, staff from development organizations, funders, and recipients—simultaneously treat them as legitimate development partners while qualifying them as distinct from their nonreligious counterparts, especially those initiated and supported by western funders, in terms of the ideals and values that they encourage through their activities. To illuminate how religiously affiliated assistance organizations move into and out of particular relationships and expectations, I first trace the historical trajectory of Russia's faith-based assistance communities, with attention to how faith communities have moved into and out of public view, before considering how contemporary classificatory systems have both circumscribed assistance organizations and created possibilities for religiously affiliated assistance organizations to move outside these institutional structures. I then discuss how religiously affiliated assistance organizations capitalize on development structures to promote an alternative form of civil society and state-citizen relations, followed by a detailed ethnographic account of two roundtables that exemplify these efforts.

To illuminate and interpret the logistical and ideological relations underlying the "regimes of discourse and representation" that shape Moscow's post-Soviet development encounter, this analysis draws on my ethnographic field research among religious assistance programs in Moscow since 1997, with most data coming from research conducted between 2005 and 2009.⁴ At the center of this research is a network of religious and nonreligious assistance organizations that have been cooperating and collaborating to implement a wide range of projects. Within this network, a core group of Christian faith communities are among the most frequently invited and mentioned participants. Although these particular faith communities are not the only religious groups operating in Moscow, they were the ones who were identified and to whom I was most consistently directed during my interviews with officials from such diverse groups as USAID, UNHCR, United Way, Russian and International Red

4. On the "regimes of discourse and representation," see Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of The Third World* (Princeton, 1995); James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, 1994); William F. Fisher, "Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1007): 439–64.

Cross, the development office of the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian welfare agencies, and consortiums of foreign embassies.⁵

Finally, a note on terminology: one of the issues to be discussed is the problem of classification for Russia's development and assistance actors, and how categorical confusions over terminology affect religious groups and their efforts to provide assistance services. As the discussion will illustrate, religiously affiliated assistance organizations cover a broad spectrum in which one extreme is represented by those organizations with explicitly religious origins and affiliations (for example, congregational social ministries, the development department of the Russian Orthodox Church) and the other extreme by those that are adamantly secular and whose religious origins have been largely forgotten (for example, Habitat for Humanity, Oxfam). As a result, clear distinctions between "religious" and "secular" are difficult to make. Although "faith-based" is a standard term in scholarly accounts describing such diverse organizations elsewhere in the world, and was considered a reasonable generic gloss by my own interviewees in Moscow, this term has proven problematic within some circles of post-Soviet scholars.⁶ Nevertheless, given that "faith-based organization" (FBO) is the more usual term and less unwieldy than terms such as "religiously affiliated organization" and its variants, I will continue to use it here as an alternative term. Similarly, I will use "faith community" or "religious community" to refer to groups for which some form of practice more conventionally understood as belonging to the realm of "religion" (for example, spirituality, faith, belief, or ritual) is a shared and significant feature, as for individual congregations, informal prayer groups, or groups of individuals who come together for assistance activities through a shared set of beliefs about religiously inspired social action.⁷

Fitting Faith Communities into Moscow's Development World

Despite the relative absence of faith communities from accounts of post-Soviet development projects, within Moscow a growing network of faith communities is actively contributing to the city's social services and

5. In keeping with standard ethnographic practice, and to ensure the safety of these groups and their members, I have used pseudonyms for all organizations and individuals mentioned in this chapter, except those with an internationally recognized presence.

6. E. J. Dionne Jr. and Ming Hsu Chen, "When the Sacred Meets the Civic: An Introduction," in E. J. Dionne Jr. and Ming Hsu Chen, eds., *Sacred Places, Civic Purposes: Should Government Help Faith-Based Charity?* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 1–16; Omri Elisha, "Moral Ambitions of Grace: The Paradox of Compassion and Accountability in Evangelical Faith-Based Activism," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (February 2008): 154–89.

7. It is not my intent to argue issues from theology or theories of religion concerning the nature of "religion," "spirituality," or "faith." Rather, I would suggest that these terms are themselves similarly problematic when applied to qualify particular types of communities. Yet, given that the individuals who participate in these various communities come together at different moments for different types of shared experience—religious tradition, identity, belief, sense of spirituality, or faith—this flexible vocabulary effectively captures the ambiguities that exist on the ground.

development initiatives.⁸ These faith-based assistance programs represent a diverse set of Christian and non-Christian communities: Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Quaker, the Salvation Army, Jewish, and Hare Krishna, to name just a few among a large community.⁹ Some of these groups consist of individual congregations that sponsor social services as part of their outreach programming, while some are more formal aid projects formed through partnerships among multiple congregations, including across the Orthodox—non-Orthodox denominational and political divide. Other groups are constituted by communities of volunteers from a variety of theological traditions who come together formally and informally under ecumenical understandings of social action. One of the most active and visible of these groups is the local chapter of Sant’Egidio, a street ministry started in Rome by a Catholic priest that attracts socially progressive, young adult Russians from a range of religious backgrounds, including atheists. Still other communities are those created through partnerships between individual congregations and transnational denominational development agencies such as the Catholic agency Caritas, Lutheran World Relief, World Vision, and the Jewish Joint Distribution Council.

Increasingly, these faith communities are formalizing their activities by establishing registered nonprofits (a move that also provides them with tax benefits and certain legal protections), professionalizing their staff through training and occupational classifications, hiring professional fund-raisers and grant-writers, and competing successfully for grants from

8. On the absence of faith communities from accounts of post-Soviet development projects, see Steven Sampson, “The Social Life of Projects: Importing Civil Society to Albania,” in Chris M. Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, eds., *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models* (London, 1996), 121–42; notable exceptions include Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, and Noor O’Neill Borbieva’s article in this issue. On the growing network of faith communities active within Moscow, see John A. Bernbaum, “NGOs on Russia’s Leading Edge,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 11–13; Caldwell, *Not by Bread Alone*; Melissa L. Caldwell, “The Politics of Rightness: Social Justice among Russia’s Christian Communities,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 56, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 29–40; Michael Cherenkov and David Johnson, “Christian Responses to the AIDS Crisis in Russia,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 1–2. According to professional development staff in Moscow and scholars studying religious social programs across Russia, such trends are not unique to Moscow but are occurring elsewhere and with increasing visibility and success: Patty Gray, personal communication, Boston, November 2009; Tobias Köllner, “Built with Gold or Tears? Moral Discourses on Church Construction and the Role of Entrepreneurial Donations,” in Zigon, ed., *Multiple Moralities and Religions*, 191–213; Tocheva, “An Ethos of Relatedness”; Zigon, *HIV Is God’s Blessing*.

9. Colleagues have suggested there must be Muslim communities involved in social services, but I was unable to find direct evidence. Development and assistance providers in Moscow whom I approached for help in making contact with Muslim service providers repeatedly told me that they did not know anyone working in this area. Most intriguing was that several development/assistance programs I approached had significant Muslim communities among their recipients—all of whom received services from Christian communities. The imam of one of Moscow’s mosques was in fact a registered aid recipient with St. James Protestant Church’s NGO. The arrival of the Aga Khan Foundation (described later in this article) generated considerable excitement precisely because aid providers saw it as the first instance of Muslim assistance in Moscow.

Russian and international funding agencies. In summer 2009, for instance, the development directors for the NGO Sosedí (Neighbors), administered by the St. James Protestant congregation, received numerous invitations to meet with officials from a range of funding agencies—domestic and foreign, governmental and nongovernmental. Although St. James's staff anticipated that they had been invited to introduce themselves and their projects to the funding agencies, they instead discovered that it was often the funders who wanted to introduce themselves and their resources and to invite Sosedí to apply for grants.

The participation by faith communities in development activities, especially in terms of contributions to civic life, is not a new phenomenon in Russia. As early as the sixteenth century, religious communities were implementing projects to improve living conditions and civic life in the emerging Russian nation. Russian Orthodox missionaries promoted social welfare projects to contribute to Russian nation-building activities and, by extension, the church's efforts to enlarge its own sphere of influence.¹⁰ They were joined in the second half of the sixteenth century by clergy from the Lutheran Church in Russia who introduced ideological beliefs and practical measures based on Martin Luther's emphasis on education and strong civic support, including support for the military and voting rights.¹¹ By the nineteenth century, the scope of religiously funded welfare projects included poorhouses, work relief programs, and soup kitchens.¹² Although scholars tend to identify the source of what has been called a Russian "culture of giving" in the theology and practices of the Russian Orthodox Church, practices of benevolent activity were also promoted in Judaism, Protestantism, and Islam.¹³ In some cases, this support was institutionalized through individual churches, synagogues, or mosques, such as with the establishment of poorhouses and programs to feed, clothe, house, and educate the poor. In other cases, support was provided informally by individual believers who acted out of personal faith and a sense of spiritual responsibility.¹⁴

10. Michael Khodarkovsky, "Not by Word Alone': Missionary Policies and Religious Conversion in Early Modern Russia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 2 (April 1996): 267–92.

11. From materials contained in the Lutheran Church in Russia's Statement of Faith.

12. Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905–1929* (Bloomington, 2005); Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1996).

13. Scott M. Kenworthy, "To Save the World or to Renounce It: Modes of Moral Action in Russian Orthodoxy," in Mark D. Steinberg and Catherine Wanner, eds., *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies* (Washington, D.C. and Bloomington, 2008), 21–54; Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice*. In an article on unemployment and the emergence of industrial homes in late imperial Russia, Adele Lindenmeyr writes that an Orthodox pastor and a Lutheran layman were instrumental in introducing work relief programs that were more effective responses than alms-giving: Lindenmeyr, "Charity and the Problem of Unemployment: Industrial Homes in Late Imperial Russia," *Russian Review* 45, no. 1 (January 1986): 1–22.

14. Daniel H. Kaiser, "The Poor and Disabled in Early Eighteenth-Century Russian Towns," *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 1 (Autumn 1998): 125–55; Adele Lindenmeyr,

During the Soviet period, nonstate assistance was eliminated when the state secularized welfare services, brought them under state control, reclassified them as a form of social protection (*sotsial'naiia zashchita*), and transformed them into a system of entitlements. In 1929, the Soviet Union formally stopped religious groups from administering charitable programs.¹⁵ As a result, welfare was redefined, ideologically and practically, from a form of material compensation meant to improve the living circumstances of the most vulnerable members of society to a set of benefits guaranteed as basic rights of citizenship.¹⁶ These institutional changes coincided with the secularization of personal ethics and practices of benevolence. Values of personal compassion and giving that had been cultivated and reinforced by Orthodox and other religious traditions were redirected into civic duties to the nation. As charity was eliminated both through the official removal of terms for this concept from Soviet vocabulary and through its revaluation as an anti-Soviet activity, voluntarism was institutionalized and transformed from a private, spontaneous activity into a public obligation.¹⁷

By the late Soviet period, state assistance practices had changed again with the reemergence of citizen-led grassroots initiatives. The state's increasing inability to provide adequate welfare services for its citizens, coupled with the Chernobyl' disaster, spawned public concerns about impending economic and moral crises and galvanized both private Soviet citizens and sympathetic foreigners to form charitable groups that could respond to these problems. The capacity of assistance programs to promote civic activities was further illuminated in the skepticisms expressed by analysts who questioned whether these activities reflected genuinely altruistic ethics or opportunistic strategies for public organizing.¹⁸ These nonstate charitable groups also included religious communities that quietly provided support to local organizations and individuals in need.¹⁹

"Public Life, Private Virtues: Women in Russian Charity, 1762–1914," *Sigms* 18, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 562–91.

15. Anne White, "Charity, Self-Help and Politics in Russia, 1985–91," *Europe-Asia Studies* 45, no. 5 (1993): 788.

16. Adriana Petryna has used the phrase "biological citizenship" to describe how Soviet authorities reduced civic identities to the essential biological qualities of individuals. Benefits were then distributed according to these biological qualities of citizenship. Petryna, *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl* (Princeton, 2002).

17. The so-called *subbotniki* (Saturday) workers are perhaps the most familiar of these "voluntary" workers who engaged in construction, maintenance of community buildings, litter collection, public gardening, and other civic initiatives. See also Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (Oxford, 1989), 100–101. On charity as anti-Soviet, see Michael Bourdeaux, "The Quality of Mercy: A Once-Only Opportunity," in John Witte Jr. and Michael Bourdeaux, eds., *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls* (Maryknoll, 1999), 187; Adele Lindenmeyr, "From Repression to Revival: Philanthropy in Twentieth-Century Russia," in Warren F. Ilcham, Stanley N. Katz, and Edward L. Queen II, eds., *Philanthropy in the World's Traditions* (Bloomington, 1998), 319.

18. White, "Charity, Self-Help and Politics in Russia."

19. White, "Charity, Self-Help and Politics in Russia"; Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity in the late 1980s have been credited with facilitating the emergence

Following this initial revival, the repeal of the ban on religious charity and the end of state restrictions against religion encouraged other religious assistance groups to become more active in the 1990s.²⁰ Although the Russian Orthodox Church played perhaps the most important symbolic role in reclaiming the field of religious activity in the post-Soviet period, non-Orthodox Christian religious communities were also significant actors.²¹ Motivated by what they perceived as a complete absence of religious practice and spirituality in the Soviet Union, many foreign religious groups had long been preparing—spiritually and financially—for the moment when they could enter Russia and introduce their traditions. Not coincidentally, some (but certainly not all) foreign religious groups coupled their religious programs with social service projects such as translation services, language training, publishing, and telecommunications support, usually as means for disseminating the Bible and other religious texts and as incentives to attract potential converts.²²

Even as the objectives and projects pursued by faith-based assistance programs, the institutional and funding structures they have followed, and the personnel they have attracted have been similar to, if not identical to or even coterminous with, those of their secular counterparts, their origins as religiously inspired organizations have invited questions about the motivations and values underlying their activities. Both theological traditions and the personal views of supporters shape the types of projects these communities support and the extent to which explicit religious affiliation or practice is required of service providers or recipients.²³ Faith communities typically fall along a spectrum in which one extreme is constituted by groups that explicitly couple assistance with religious obligations on the part of both service providers and recipients. Orthodox and Jewish programs in Moscow are among those that require religious affiliation of recipients, and sometimes even attendance at services. While these conditions are acceptable to some Russians, including those individuals who strategically claim religious affiliation (and sometimes more than one

of western Christian aid in the USSR, especially from European Catholic and Protestant communities. Bourdeaux, "The Quality of Mercy," 190. As some observers have noted, the surge in charitable activity by religious groups at this time prompted Soviet citizens to compare the abilities of faith communities and the Communist Party to provide assistance. *Ibid.*, 189.

20. White, "Charity, Self-Help and Politics in Russia."

21. On the Russian Orthodox Church, see Chris M. Hann and Hermann Goltz, eds., *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective* (Berkeley, 2010); Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov': Sovremennoe sostoianie i aktual'nye problemy* (Moscow, 2004). On other religious groups, see Caldwell, *Not by Bread Alone*; Zoe Knox, "Religious Freedom in Russia: The Putin Years," in Steinberg and Wanner, eds., *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies*, 281–314; Gediminas Lankauskas, "On 'Modern' Christians, Consumption, and the Value of National Identity in Post-Soviet Lithuania," *Ethnos* 67, no. 3 (November 2002): 320–44; Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*.

22. Mark Elliott and Anita Deyneka, "Protestant Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union," in Witte and Bourdeaux, eds., *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia*, 197–223.

23. Melissa L. Caldwell, "Social Welfare and Christian Welfare: Who Gets Saved in Post-Soviet Charity Work?" in Steinberg and Wanner, eds., *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies*, 179–214.

affiliation) without committing completely to any one congregation, others find them too limiting. Russian Orthodox churches have come under particular scrutiny for restricting services to enrolled members rather than to all Russians. Staff with the development office at the patriarchate confided that while these regulations were necessary for practical reasons, they were undesirable in terms of providing assistance to those individuals who were truly in need, regardless of their religious backgrounds.²⁴

At the other extreme of this spectrum are communities whose religious origins are disguised and who do not demand religious affiliation or activity from either supporters or recipients. Notable examples are Oxfam and Habitat for Humanity, whose implementation is secular.²⁵ In the middle are groups that do not hide their religious origins but implement their programs as secular programs. While congregations like St. James Protestant Church and Blessed Redeemer Christian Church have created secular assistance organizations for ideological reasons having to do with the responsibility to help anyone and attract volunteers regardless of their personal religious backgrounds, an added benefit is that secular implementation satisfies Russian laws governing the interaction of “foreign” (that is, non-Orthodox Christian) religious communities with Russian citizens. These types of faith organizations also tend to work closely with other national and international development organizations, both religious and nonreligious, thereby further blurring or obscuring boundaries between faith-based and secular, local and global, private and public.

St. James, Blessed Redeemer, and the other faith organizations at the center of the network discussed here were clear about distinguishing between their religious origins and their secular implementation. For instance, the employees in the Moscow office of Caritas were practicing Catholics, including several priests, but their work was explicitly nonreligious. They worked independently of any of the Catholic churches in Moscow, and they provided their services through spaces rented or borrowed from local government agencies. Recipients were largely unaware of the program’s connections to the Catholic Church, a detail that Caritas’s staff were keen to maintain given anti-Catholic sentiments in Russia. Staff and volunteers with the nonprofit programs administered by St. James Protestant Church reported that their Russian recipients were so unaware that they were being helped by a church, thinking instead that the program was operated by the regional government, that they directed their complaints and demands for additional services to then President Vladimir Putin and regional politicians rather than to the church’s minister or church council. In fact, although St. James’s ministers volunteered frequently in the programs, very few recipients knew that they were clergy.

More significantly, mirroring global religious trends, Moscow’s FBO

24. Melissa L. Caldwell, “The Russian Orthodox Church, the Provision of Social Welfare, and Changing Ethics of Benevolence,” in Hann and Goltz, eds., *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*, 329–50.

25. See Baggett’s discussion about the secular nature of Habitat for Humanity: Jerome P. Baggett, *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion* (Philadelphia, 2001).

community is increasingly oriented around social justice concerns that transcend any one religious tradition. During interviews with staff and recipients from development programs and funding agencies that partnered with faith organizations in Moscow, I asked individuals to reflect on the religious nature of these programs. A recurring theme in their responses was the belief that the religious dimension was important only as an institutionalized expression of social justice ideals held by the staff, volunteers, and donors who provided the services.²⁶ In their comments, respondents suggested that religious communities were more legitimate and trustworthy channels for moral and ethical ideals than nonreligious communities, which respondents believed were vulnerable to political manipulation. As such, it is the emphasis on what are perceived to be objective, and not necessarily religiously based, ethical values that bring together supporters, volunteers, and recipients from diverse religious backgrounds. The extent to which individuals come together around shared ethics rather than a shared religious tradition is evident in faith communities like St. James, Sant'Egidio, and other Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant congregations in Moscow, where church members include Christians from diverse backgrounds, Jews, Muslims, and even atheists. The inclusion of such diverse religious orientations, as well as nonreligious orientations (that is, atheists), raises critical questions about whether forms of religiosity are necessary requirements for a group to be "faith-based." In other words, can a group be "faith-based" without the "faith"?

During an interview with Alison, a U.S. embassy official who brokers partnerships between American and other foreign funders and Moscow-based assistance programs, she reported that she preferred to work with faith organizations because they were not only the most reliable but also the least ideological in their motives. Alison commented that, in her experience, faith communities genuinely wanted to provide needed assistance, not use assistance as an opportunity to promote a particular political agenda. Continuing, Alison commented that she suspected that the minister of St. James was probably agnostic and that he was a minister only because it gave him the opportunity to do the social justice work he valued. In a subsequent interview, St. James's minister did admit that his commitment to social justice ideals was a primary motivation for his professional career. A longtime Catholic priest in Moscow expressed similar sentiments during our conversations, which typically veered quickly from discussions of church matters and theological questions pertaining to service to more expansive discussions of political philosophies of social justice, which he found more helpful for understanding and explaining his own social action ideals.

Interviews with staff and volunteers from St. James also revealed that many identified themselves as nonpracticing, and non-Christian in some cases, but participated in this church's activities because of the social justice orientation. One of the development directors for Sosedí confided that although as a progressive Catholic she was not always comfortable

26. Caldwell, "Politics of Rightness."

with the theological views expressed by parishioners at St. James during worship services, she connected closely with the liberal, progressive social values promoted by the congregation's NGO. I heard similar responses from staff and volunteers with many other faith organizations in Moscow: respondents claimed that they chose their assistance activities based on the programs' respective social justice values, thereby easily distinguishing between beliefs that were personal religious beliefs (either their own or those of others) and those that belonged to a larger realm of ethical beliefs, a distinction that recalls Robert N. Bellah's "personal religious belief" and "civil religion."²⁷

Such attitudes are far from universal within development circles, however; and assistance and development professionals acknowledge that faith communities fit uneasily within, and sometimes even disrupt, persistent stereotypes about faith-based organizations. Echoing a critique I have encountered frequently during presentations of my research to U.S.-based scholars, an American development scholar and practitioner at a Kennan Institute workshop insisted that faith organizations did not belong within the same category as "true" development organizations like USAID, because, she argued, faith organizations were merely charities that enabled religious congregations to proselytize to vulnerable Russians.²⁸ Several months later, however, when I was in Moscow at a private brunch at Alison's home, I happened to meet a highly placed USAID professional. When I asked this official about her work and the role of faith communities in USAID's partnerships in Russia, she responded that faith communities were extremely active partners and then effusively praised the faith organizations with which her office partners for being nonideological and effective service providers.

Moscow-based program managers with development programs and funding agencies related numerous accounts of the challenges of reconciling assumptions about the motives of faith organizations that were common among Russian government officials and foreign development officials with the actual approaches and impact of such groups. Michele, an American program manager for a Moscow-based, U.S. government-sponsored funding agency that directed foreign grants and resources to HIV/AIDS-prevention NGOs in Russia, reported that although faith-based programs were the most capable and reliable groups for administering health programs, it was virtually impossible to convince regional officials

27. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1–21. A longer discussion of how personal spiritual beliefs or experiences affect how staff, volunteers, and donors interpret and implement their work is beyond the scope of this article. Readers interested in the ambiguities of "missionary" as an identifying label for individuals engaged in faith-based service work are directed to Caldwell, "Social Welfare and Christian Welfare," and Hann and Goltz, eds., *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*; for an account of the ways in which Moscow's faith communities attract a more ecumenical, even secular, community of individuals brought together by shared social justice values, see Caldwell, "Politics of Rightness."

28. Sampson reports that church-related organizations were deliberately excluded from the "development" category in eastern Europe. Sampson, "Social Life of Projects," 129.

to work with these organizations. Michele complained that despite assurances by her staff that these faith-based organizations did not proselytize or promote religious agendas of any sort, regional officials preferred to forego the resources altogether, thereby sacrificing the well-being of their citizens. Benjamin, the British director of Moscow's Oxfam office, described similar frustrations in working with Russian and foreign development workers who categorically refused to create partnerships with other faith-based organizations because they were convinced that these groups were interested only in converting Russians to their particular tradition of Christianity, even when that was not the case. Especially ironic for Benjamin was that these same development workers overlooked, or were completely unaware of, the fact that Oxfam was itself a faith-based organization.

As these experiences and reflections from within Moscow's assistance community reveal, faith-based organizations elude easy or definitive categorization. Neither wholly religious nor wholly secular, they must find a delicate balance between the perceptions of their supporters and those of their detractors. Both supporters and detractors further contribute to these categorical confusions either by attributing religious motives that may not exist or by overlooking the religious connections that do exist. Collectively, these misrecognitions raise an important question about the extent to which these categorical confusions are unique to Moscow's faith communities or whether they are themselves part of a larger problem of confusion stemming from the overly bureaucratized nature of post-Soviet development and assistance more generally. Intriguingly, in their reflections on this bureaucratization, Moscow's development practitioners suggest that these misrecognitions actually create opportunities for action that faith-based organizations are better able to exploit than their nonreligious counterparts, a topic that will be addressed in the next section.

Bureaucratizing Development: The Politics of Classifying Assistance in Russia

Recurring concerns for scholars and other analysts of assistance organizations across the post-Soviet world are the consequences of bureaucratization, especially in terms of how issues, projects, types of institutions, and even clientele are defined and recognized.²⁹ Post-Soviet development and assistance activities have been marked by a dizzying proliferation of terminologies, each with its own lexicon and historical genealogy: development (*razvitié*), social welfare (*sotsial'naia zashchita*, literally "social defense"), social support (*sotsial'naia podderzhka*), charity and philanthropy (*blagotvoritel'nost'*, *miloserdie*), humanitarianism (*gumanitarnost'*), and voluntarism (*dobrovolets*, *volontery* [referring to the people who provide vol-

29. See Phillips's excellent discussion of what she calls "the politics of differentiation," especially in terms of how issues and participants in Ukraine have been variously defined and redefined through development processes: Sarah D. Phillips, *Women's Social Activism in the New Ukraine: Development and the Politics of Differentiation* (Bloomington, 2008), 1.

unteer labor]), to name just a very few.³⁰ This diversity of terminology is exceeded only by the diversity of projects pursued by assistance organizations: western-style civil society initiatives focused on capacity building, legal reforms, citizen empowerment, and voter education; economic reforms and incubator projects to stimulate new businesses; health care reforms; women's rights; educational reforms; cultural revival; and poverty alleviation, among many others.³¹

Bureaucratic distinctions affect whether and how particular institutions and projects are recognized, both legally and culturally, at the same time that they demarcate fields of action and delegate authority for these activities to particular types of programs. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of classificatory systems is debatable, as distinctions can be arbitrary and create ambiguity rather than providing institutional clarity.³² The experiences of Moscow's faith communities highlight the ambiguities of this institutional politics of classification well.

During an interview at United Way Moscow in fall 2009, I asked Marina Andreevna, the Russian director, to comment on her agency's relationships with religious charities in Russia and to describe any differences she perceived between religious and secular aid programs. Given that my contact with United Way had come through a Moscow-based Protestant minister who worked closely with the United Way and whose congregation was finalizing a proposal for a United Way grant to support several assistance programs, I was thus surprised at Marina Andreevna's emphatic reply that her agency does not work with or support religious organizations: "not any kind of religious organizations [*nikakie religioznie organizatsii*]," she stated.

Exchanging a meaningful look with her assistant, Marina Andreevna repeated the statement that United Way did not work with religious organizations, while simultaneously qualifying her statement with hand gestures and facial expressions to convey that her words were to be understood as an official "party line" statement, before going on to say that her agency worked very closely with "official nonprofit [that is, noncommercial] organizations [*ofitsial'no nekommercheskie organizatsii*]." She explained that federal regulations prohibited United Way from working with religious organizations because of the "religious propaganda [*religioznaia propaganda*]" allegedly promoted by religious groups, thereby limiting her agency's relationships to "secular organizations [*svetskie organizatsii*]."

30. E.g., David M. Abramson, "A Critical Look at NGOs and Civil Society as Means to an End in Uzbekistan," *Human Organization* 58, no. 3 (1999): 240–50; Aksartova, "Promoting Civil Society"; Julie Hemment, "The Riddle of the Third Sector: Civil Society, International Aid, and NGOs in Russia," *Anthropological Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 215–41; Phillips, *Women's Social Activism*; John W. Slocum, "Philanthropic Foundations in Russia: Western Projection and Local Legitimacy," in Hammack and Heydemann, eds., *Globalization, Philanthropy, and Civil Society*, 137–59.

31. E.g., Julie Hemment, *Empowering Women in Russia: Activism, Aid, and NGOs* (Bloomington, 2007); Phillips, *Women's Social Activism*; Michele R. Rivkin-Fish, *Women's Health in Post-Soviet Russia: The Politics of Intervention* (Bloomington, 2005); Urban, *Cultures of Power*.

32. Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

As if anticipating the apparent contradiction that I was about to note in my next question to her, Marina Andreevna then further qualified the category “nonprofit organization” by adding that this included the social ministries affiliated with the church whose minister had facilitated our meeting. Marina Andreevna praised the congregation for the scope and impact of its assistance programs and then noted that this church and several other Moscow congregations each had a “charitable foundation [*blagotvoritel'nyi fond*]” that the United Way supported. In her comments about the nonprofit status of religiously affiliated programs, Marina Andreevna used the names of the minister and his church and not the name of the officially registered secular, nonprofit NGO and charitable foundation through which they conducted their activities. Moreover, after having delineated the official semantic parameters of our interview, Marina Andreevna then went on to describe and praise in great detail the myriad assistance programs pursued by religious organizations in Russia, with special attention to projects affiliated with her agency.

Marina Andreevna’s strategic move to delineate carefully the specific, official terminology by which our conversation could proceed was significant for what it revealed, both about the bureaucratic structures that produce, circumscribe, and manage the diverse field of assistance programs that currently operate in Russia, and about the ways in which officials and organizations within this field find creative ways to navigate, and even transgress, these bureaucratic structures in order to pursue and support social services programs. When asked to explain why their organizations chose the terms and labels they did, staff and volunteers with both religious and nonreligious organizations typically grounded their responses in acknowledgement of the realities of funding and registration opportunities. The decision-making process underlying St. James’s process of registering its charitable projects with the Russian government in 2007 is illuminating. During the lengthy process of translating their activities into state-sanctioned bureaucratic language and structures, members of the church staff and church council found themselves debating the merits of different classificatory titles. They finally settled on the English term *non-governmental organization* for their English-language materials directed to non-Russian audiences, including donors from abroad, and the Russian terms *nekommercheskaia organizatsiia* (noncommercial/nonprofit organization) and *blagotvoritel'naia organizatsiia* (charitable organization) for their application for official Russian registration and to appeal to donors within Russia.³³ From the perspective of the Russian Federation and Russian funders, St. James’s NGO Sosedī was a completely secular, nonprofit development organization.

Although classificatory schema are meant to delimit the field of assistance into manageable units for greater effectiveness, including limiting

33. Church staff never used the word *miloserdie*, which was instead used by their Orthodox partners. This distinction was evident in a conversation between St. James staff and their partners from the social development office at the patriarchate, as they moved fluidly back and forth between *blagotvoritel'nyi* to describe St. James’s projects and *miloserdie* to describe Orthodox projects.

and even excluding the participation by other, potentially competing groups, the reality is that institutions can creatively work around them. Faith communities are especially flexible, owing to the fact that their projects can take multiple institutional forms and draw on different institutional histories. It is worth noting that many of the non-Orthodox Christian communities at the center of the assistance network described here have struggled to gain legal recognition from the Russian government as official religious communities, even in the case of communities that satisfy requirements for historical authenticity.³⁴ Yet these same congregations report that they have found it far easier to register their assistance programs as official nonprofits and have received more welcoming overtures from Russian officials for their assistance projects, which has in turn facilitated greater official acceptance of their religious dimensions.

Ultimately, what the ambiguities of these classificatory schemas reveal are the tenuous and even contradictory parameters of Russian development and assistance trends, as well as the very ordinariness and even secularism of faith organizations within this field. In the terms they use, the expectations they hold, the partnerships they forge, and the recognitions afforded to both religious and nonreligious organizations, Moscow's actors in the assistance community consistently treat faith organizations and their nonreligious counterparts in ways that suggest commensurability.

Yet this commensurability does not necessarily mean that distinctions between faith organizations and nonreligious organizations have completely dissolved. Rather, at the same time that Moscow's development practitioners include faith organizations as equivalent partners, they do so in ways that also recognize that faith organizations might have a unique role to play in the cultivation of a new Russian society. Most notably, proponents suggest that faith organizations promote an alternative vision of civil society that is more beneficial than the models that have typically been introduced by nonreligious programs.

The Place of Civility in Civil Society Projects

One of the defining features of western-inspired development models in the post-Soviet world has been the promotion of "civil society" as the means to address social problems and encourage the democratization of these countries.³⁵ Although civil society is, as Chris Hann points out, "closely linked to issues concerning the 'quality of life,'" civil society initiatives in Russia and other post-Soviet countries were oriented more to the structures of life through reforming the political and economic systems,

34. Russian Federation, Federal Law, No. 125-FZ of 26 September 1997, "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations [O svobode soveste i o religioznykh ob"edineniiax]," at legislationline.org/topics/country/7/topic/1 (last accessed 2 March 2012).

35. Aksartova, "Promoting Civil Society"; Kimberley Coles, *Democratic Designs: International Intervention and Electoral Practices in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Ann Arbor, 2007); Chris Hann, "Introduction: Political Society and Civil Anthropology," in Hann and Dunn, eds., *Civil Society*, 1–26; Sampson, "Social Life of Projects"; Urban, *Cultures of Power*; Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*.

notably by focusing on legal systems, market activities, civic education, the media, and, crucially, creating the mechanisms that facilitated the formation of NGOs.³⁶ By contrast, religiously affiliated organizations have typically come to development activities from different political philosophies about intervention and social stability. Moscow's religiously affiliated organizations, for instance, have interpreted the idealized, western-style civil society objectives as themselves the causes of Russia's social, political, and economic problems, and hence obstacles to improving "quality of life," and have thus positioned their programs as antidotes.

Religious communities have taken particular issue with the ways in which western "civil society" models are predicated on a particular spatializing logic of a sphere that is separate from the state but yet operates as an intermediary between the state and its citizens.³⁷ Sometimes called the "Third Sector," this separate realm requires the creation of "mediating structures" to set it apart and energize it.³⁸ These "mediating structures" have typically been rendered as voluntary associations or, for the case of post-Soviet projects, nongovernmental organizations.³⁹ Through these spatializing logics, western development models effected a distancing of the Russian state from its citizens, a move that was necessary for creating independent, autonomous, self-responsible citizens.⁴⁰

From the viewpoint of faith organizations, however, this type of move is a form of devolution in which the state withdraws from its citizenry and creates a gap.⁴¹ In Russia, faith communities have interpreted this distancing of state from citizen through intermediaries, not just as the abandonment of citizens by the state, but also as the violation of an implicit social compact between state and citizen. In sharp distinction from civil society models that credit the Third Sector with encouraging greater citizen activity through voluntary organizations, faith organizations see the creation of mediating structures as the deliberate exclusion of citizens from society and the fragmentation of an already existing community of service and care.⁴² Consequently, the work of faith organizations is not so

36. Hann "Introduction," 11. For an overview of these orientations, see Urban, *Cultures of Power*. See also Sampson, "Social Life of Projects," and Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*.

37. James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, "Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality," *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 4 (November 2002): 981–1002; Phillips, *Women's Social Activism*, 20; Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*, 83.

38. Hemment, "Riddle of the Third Sector." See also Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, D.C., 1977); Ram A. Cnaan with Stephanie C. Boddie, Femida Handy, Gaynor Yancey, and Richard Schneider, *The Invisible Caring Hand: American Congregations and the Provision of Welfare* (New York, 2002), 156–57.

39. Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*, 8.

40. János Kornai, "The Borderline between the Spheres of Authority of the Citizen and the State: Recommendations for the Hungarian Health Reform," in János Kornai, Stephan Haggard, and Robert R. Kaufman, eds., *Reforming the State: Fiscal and Welfare Reform in Post-Socialist Countries* (Cambridge, Eng., 2001), 181–209.

41. Ram A. Cnaan with Robert J. Wineburg and Stephanie C. Boddie, *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership* (New York, 1999).

42. From a different perspective drawn from careful analysis of the political philosophies underlying different theories of "civil society," Urban makes a similar point

much geared at creating and strengthening a civil society sphere that exists between state and citizen as it is oriented to filling that space in order to protect citizens who are increasingly distanced from the state.

Describing their activities as antidotes to Russian citizens' perceived abandonment by the state and citizens' subsequent loss of personal connections with the state, clergy, staff, volunteers, and even recipients with Russia's faith organizations have prioritized the compassionate dimensions of assistance provision as the means to create a more holistic and humanizing bond between citizen and society.⁴³ Ultimately, through this approach, religious communities seek to cultivate new forms of civility in Russian society. As participants in religiously affiliated programs repeatedly explained, the vibrancy and vitality of Russia's new civic society depends on the cultivation, not of self-interested economic actors, which they perceive as the goal of western civil society models, but rather of empathetic and compassionate citizens committed to the betterment of others as the way to better the self. Consequently, by emphasizing a holistic treatment of individuals, religiously affiliated organizations seek to promote a more inclusive, egalitarian, and nonhierarchical vision of Russian society that they feel better represents the ideals of democracy.

Underscoring these concerns about abandonment and dehumanization, faith organizations have typically focused their attentions first on programs that address both material and social needs—most notably, poverty alleviation programs. Through these programs, faith organizations deliberately couple material assistance with social companionship. For instance, Caritas's support programs for single mothers and their children include, not only food, financial support for expenses such as rent and medical care, and educational and technical retraining courses to help the mothers find better jobs, but also holiday parties and excursions to ensure that the children share normal childhood experiences. When Sant'Egidio's volunteers walk Moscow's streets to deliver sandwiches and beverages to the city's homeless residents, they make sure they spend time talking with the people they meet. Over time, volunteers have created close and mutually meaningful relationships with some of the people they have met, with volunteers and recipients celebrating birthdays, weddings, and other important occasions together.

Similarly, in 2007, volunteers with the soup kitchen program administered by Sosedí discovered that some elderly and disabled recipients were no longer able to attend the soup kitchen and that the regional welfare authorities no longer had the resources to provide in-home services for its shut-in citizens. In response to this perceived "abandonment" of citizens by the state, volunteers launched a "meals-on-wheels" program to provide food packages through weekly visits. As the volunteers described the program, however, it was clear that the food packages were secondary to the socializing component: volunteers were expected to make at least a

and persuasively argues that western models of civil society were based on a flawed notion of social capital that is not representative of Russian social life. Urban, *Cultures of Power*.

43. See also Cnaan, *Invisible Caring Hand*, 5; Elisha, "Moral Ambitions of Grace."

one-hour weekly commitment to each recipient because the visits typically involved lengthy conversations over tea.⁴⁴

Poverty is not the only form of abandonment identified by faith organizations as a result of this separation of state and citizen. Respondents also identified the entrepreneurial and consumerist practices encouraged by western development initiatives as causing a widespread decline in morality and social cohesion.⁴⁵ In 2007, a theme that repeatedly emerged in my interviews with participants representing diverse faith organizations was the concern that ongoing economic decline was causing Russians to lose hope and optimism and prompting individuals to dull the pain of these losses through destructive behaviors such as alcoholism, drug use, and hyper-consumerism. In response to these perceived problems, faith organizations have added addiction treatment programs and financial counseling programs.⁴⁶

Finally, faith organizations present what their proponents claim is an alternative vision of personalization by inverting the hierarchies of personal value articulated by secular development programs. In contrast to development programs that emphasize market evolution by targeting those Russians of sufficient economic means who can participate (or be trained to participate) in this new capitalist market, Russian faith organizations that frame their activities as necessary responses to processes of devolution identify the population to be helped as those individuals who have been most excluded from the changes taking place around them. As a result, faith organizations have typically served Russia's most economically and socially disenfranchised: the poor, the elderly, orphans, the homeless, prisoners, and refugees. In so doing, faith organizations emphasize that true development benefits all members of Russian society, regardless of class or position within the development relationship. The models of service promoted by faith organizations take this inversion further by encouraging people of means to subordinate their needs and interests to those of the people they are helping. The message that emerges—and one that was proposed by volunteers in several different faith organizations I followed—was that their own attainment of a progressive, financially secure middle-class lifestyle could only be achieved through helping the less fortunate realize their own personal goals. It is worth noting that religiously affiliated organizations depend heavily on volunteer labor rather than on cadres of professional aid workers. Even though volunteers with faith-based programs do much of the same work

44. It is worth noting that the woman who created the "meals-on-wheels" program adamantly described herself as nonreligious but approached St. James because she thought (correctly, as it turned out) that the church would be interested in supporting the project.

45. See also Zigon, *HIV Is God's Blessing*.

46. See also Galina Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope: Healing and Magic in Contemporary Russia* (New York, 2006); Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*; Zigon, *HIV Is God's Blessing*. Although religious organizations were not the only programs to do this type of outreach, it is notable that they have typically coupled these projects explicitly with commentaries on social decline.

as their professional counterparts, they see this volunteer work as a personal responsibility of service and not as a job for which they should be compensated.

By responding to these perceived gaps and oversights in Russia's emerging civil society, Moscow's faith organizations propose modes of assistance that seek to restore and protect the humanity of citizen-subjects. These more deliberately humane approaches are acknowledged in the frequency with which the restoration of dignity and self-worth is invoked as an explicit aim by staff and volunteers with faith organizations.⁴⁷ By focusing on the potential for humaneness in assistance projects, faith organizations create possibilities for thinking beyond simply a "civil" society to what several individuals suggested was a society with greater civility. It is precisely this approach that generated such excitement among participants at the roundtables described at the very beginning of this discussion and to which I turn in the following section.

Inviting Faith Organizations to the Development Table

In late summer 2009, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the UNHCR sponsored two of the many roundtables that regularly brought together different actors from Russia's development field to discuss common interests and explore networking possibilities. I found myself at these two meetings at the invitation of staff members from Sosedí. As mentioned previously, like similar meetings described elsewhere, these roundtables were bureaucratically scripted and revealed familiar development concerns with legal reform, technology development, and networking.⁴⁸ Yet in both instances, participants challenged organizers to rethink their assumptions about the functioning of Moscow's development field, the feasibility of western-influenced goals, and the significance of faith organizations.

The first roundtable was sponsored by the newly opened Moscow office of AKDN. Founded by His Highness the Aga Khan, Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, the AKDN is grounded in Islamic principles of social responsibility and compassion for the poor but is explicitly non-denominational and pursues projects that promote pluralism and draw together diverse groups of service providers.⁴⁹ This roundtable was an opportunity for AKDN staff to introduce themselves to Moscow's development community, especially those groups working in the area of medical and social services for migrants. Invitees included health care practitioners, social workers from state welfare agencies, professional staff and

47. See also Caldwell, *Not by Bread Alone*; Tova Höjdestrand, *Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia* (Ithaca, 2009); Zigon, *HIV Is God's Blessing*.

48. Abramson, "A Critical Look at NGOs"; Coles, *Democratic Designs*; Hemment *Empowering Women in Russia*; Phillips, *Women's Social Activism*; Sampson, "Social Life of Projects"; Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*.

49. The information about AKDN provided at the roundtable was limited. For more detailed information about this organization and its projects, see their Web site at www.adkn.org (last accessed 2 March 2012)

volunteers from nonprofit social services organizations, labor union leaders, and social science researchers from the Russian Academy of Sciences. They were joined by consultants from a media technology firm and by program managers from both the local AKDN office and the organization's international headquarters. While the majority of participants were Russian citizens, several were foreigners, including the South Asian–American director of AKDN's Moscow office and the American doctor and African staff person representing Sosed.

In their opening remarks, AKDN's program managers described the purposes of the roundtable. With the recent opening of their Moscow office, the foundation's officials were interested in expanding their activities throughout Russia, beginning with the Moscow region. The two AKDN employees leading the meeting claimed that because their staff lacked the necessary experience and social connections to initiate programs in Russia beyond a small, preexisting program in Dagestan, they wanted to create a network of organizations and professionals who could help them and one another. In trying to determine how best to focus their initial efforts in Russia, AKDN staff had settled on medical and social assistance for migrants. They were particularly interested in assisting undocumented foreign labor migrants, primarily from Central Asian countries, who were at risk of exploitation and violence and unable to access material, legal, or medical aid. This was a timely issue, as in the preceding weeks Moscow authorities had engaged in raids of undocumented laborers at their workplaces and living quarters.⁵⁰

Each organization was allotted fifteen minutes for their representatives to describe their clientele, services, and goals for the meeting. In the first session, several scholars and labor union officials described Russia's immigration policies and the general demographic trends among migrant populations. They focused almost exclusively on migrants from the former Soviet republics, which prompted agitated whispering among the physicians next to me as they discussed the fact that this perspective excluded the even more marginalized and vulnerable populations they served: homeless Russians and Asian and African economic migrants. One physician commented that she found it difficult to take the presentations seriously when the data were so biased and incomplete. The second session featured several social workers and immigrant activists, who focused their attentions on the legal problems facing migrants and how their organizations helped clients deal with state policies governing visas, work permits, salaries, and mediation of labor disputes with employers. This was followed by a brief presentation from the media consultants, who reported on the online networking forums and online advertising projects that were their firm's specialty.

At this point in the roundtable, Inna Arkadievna, an AKDN program manager, commandeered the conversation and invited participants to brainstorm practical measures to provide and disseminate information

50. See Natalya Krainova, "City Starts Razing Cherkizovsky," *Moscow Times*, no 4213 (19 August 2009), 3.

about services, including how best to publicize the organizations that provided services and the funders that supported them. Several attendees commented that they were not familiar with most of the organizations listed in the sample brochure displayed. Other attendees questioned AKDN's proposal to reach potential recipients through the Internet. One of the social workers pointedly argued that while a listing of organizations and their funders was nice, migrant laborers would benefit more from accessible information about services, and not biographies about the funders.

This heated discussion about the shortcomings of such conventional development priorities as networking and prioritizing information about services over actual services provided a productive segue to the final session of the roundtable, which was devoted to three programs that provide medical services to migrants. As Inna Arkadievna explained, because AKDN was interested in opening or supporting a medical clinic, they had invited representatives from three groups with technical expertise in operating medical clinics for migrants. Not coincidentally, these three programs each had a connection to a faith community. The representative of one group was a physician who accompanies volunteers from the Russian religious charity *Na Ulitse* (*On the Street, or Outside*) on their "street mission" outreach with Moscow's homeless population in order to provide informal medical consultation services. Three other physicians represented the secular NGO *Vrachi Druzhby* (*Doctors of Friendship*), which provides low-income medical care in collaboration with physicians and staff from another, explicitly faith-based medical charity. The third group of participants were the physician and office manager from the medical consultation clinic operated by *Sosedi*.⁵¹

Whereas the previous sessions had generated debate and, at times, irritation among the participants as they challenged one another to move past talking about problems to discussing how to solve those problems, this session elicited the most obvious and supportive excitement. More important, the discussions from this session provided strong examples of a very different model of the types of services that could be offered and how these services could be delivered to clients.

Svetlana Maksimovna, a physician from *Vrachi Druzhby*, went first. After identifying the populations her group served—illegal migrants and

51. I am deliberately vague in identifying these groups. Like other nongovernmental medical services programs in Moscow, particularly those affiliated with religious communities, these three programs attempt to keep their work quiet in order not to come into conflict with local authorities. Only licensed physicians are allowed to provide medical treatment in registered facilities to legal residents. Other activities can entail only "consultation," and physicians must refer patients to formal medical facilities for treatment. Despite recognition by local welfare officials that unregistered persons (both noncitizens and homeless Russians) desperately require medical services, and despite welfare officials' informal encouragement of NGOs and private physicians to provide this assistance, law-enforcement officials closely monitor these activities. Consequently, physicians who work in these more informal fields tread carefully in the types of services they provide, in how they represent their work, and in the extent of public visibility they are willing to permit.

refugees, including many from Chechnia and Africa—she described the social assistance models that she and her colleagues followed. Beginning with the provocative statement “I do not practice medicine,” she detailed a different set of technical procedures by which she and her colleagues first listened to their patients and then made referrals for emergency or other services if necessary. Her point was not that she and her colleagues denied necessary medical services to patients in need but rather that they believed that treating their patients as humans who might wish to talk to a friendly and sympathetic listener took precedence over a more instrumental relationship of dispensing prescriptions. Continuing, Svetlana Maksimovna described a second, more interventionist model of assistance that also privileged a compassionate, humane treatment of the patient. These cases typically arose when they were approached by a person who was especially vulnerable, both socially and financially, such as a mother with a child or an invalid. In these cases, her organization had an agreement (*dogovor*) with a nearby polyclinic that provides tickets for specialists who volunteer their services. In response to a question about the precise, technical nature (including financial and legal) of the relationship between Vrachi Druzhby and the polyclinic, Svetlana Maksimovna responded that the relationship was solely one of goodwill (*dobrovol'nie*).

The next presenter was Anatolii Sergeevich, a physician who accompanies Na Ulitse volunteers on their visits to Moscow's homeless community. After describing how he meets patients, provides basic first aid, and then refers them to other services, he strongly criticized AKDN's plan for an online resource program by explaining that it was impossible to expect homeless people to be able to use the Internet to access services. Instead, he argued, funding organizations needed to provide support for the actual needs of the people they were trying to help. In his comments, Anatolii Sergeevich insisted that the homeless deserved to be treated in ways that recognized their unique needs and circumstances, not in ways that further marginalized them. The final presenter was Michael, the African office manager from Sosedi. After reminding participants that his organization was “a charitable and not a commercial organization [*blagotvoritel'naia i ne kommercheskaia organizatsiia*],” Michael noted that Sosedi helped patients without regard to their citizenship or legal status. He then introduced one of the program's doctors, who briefly described their services and Sosedi's partnerships with several other medical NGOs and private physicians. In illustrating how they worked with clients, Michael and his colleague referenced similar themes of treating the whole person rather than simply following a clinical diagnosis.

In the animated discussion that followed these three presentations, the other participants expressed enthusiasm for the range of services provided and the explicitly humanitarian ethos of these religiously affiliated organizations. Although participants posed numerous questions to these presenters about the difficulties they faced with legal regulations, funding, and outreach, their real attention seemed to be focused on the ways these physicians were able to integrate a human connection—a warm

smile, a gentle touch, a listening ear—with the services they provided. Repeatedly, participants suggested that AKDN and other funders, other NGOs, and government agencies needed to learn from these groups the most effective and humane ways to provide development assistance to Russia's migrant populations.

Two weeks later, the Moscow branch of the UNHCR sponsored a roundtable for organizations working with migrants in order to promote racial tolerance in Russia. Although Sosedí was the only one of the groups in attendance at the AKDN roundtable to be invited to this meeting, the UNHCR roundtable closely resembled the one organized by AKDN in terms of the types of organizations invited and the overall goals (especially advocacy and services for migrants, networking, and creation of an on-line database and advertising materials). The conversation at the UNHCR meeting was also marked by a sense of dismay among participants who lamented a lack of understanding by the large development organizations about the real issues facing potential recipients and the work that was already being done by local groups. Most significantly, echoing their colleagues from the AKDN roundtable, participants at the UNHCR meeting singled out Sosedí and the other religiously affiliated organizations for special commendation and invitations for advice and collaboration. Repeating the views of several attendees, Alla Mikhailovna, the director of one of Russia's most active human rights NGOs, praised Sosedí's efforts to advocate for and assist Africans and other non-Russian migrants and commented, "They are able to do what we can only dream of doing."

Two themes that emerged from the AKDN and UNHCR roundtables were particularly noteworthy for illuminating the role of faith organizations in Russia's development sphere. The first was that precise boundaries between religious and secular do not necessarily exist—or even matter—to local practitioners, as participants described existing partnerships and expressed interest in pursuing more partnerships among religiously affiliated organizations and nonreligious organizations. In even more practical terms, distinctions between religious and secular were insignificant as participants at the AKDN roundtable described how physicians, volunteers, program staff, and hospital administrators moved between religious and nonreligious organizations in order to pursue a greater common good. The second common theme was that faith organizations were recognized for pursuing an alternative vision of social development. While representatives from the labor unions, media groups, and the other NGOs debated more familiar qualities of "civil society" pertaining to legal reforms, information and media networks, and the formation of citizen-focused social movements, what generated the most attention were the efforts of the religiously affiliated communities to encourage civility through holistic, humane assistance to the persons in their care. As the interactions at these two roundtables demonstrate, those individuals who are doing the actual work of providing assistance in Moscow perceive faith organizations as being able to do something very different, and more significant, than their secular counterparts.

Concluding Thoughts: Restoring Humanity to Civil Society

What, then, are the implications and consequences of claims by proponents such as those described in this article that faith organizations are not only legitimate actors in Russia's development sphere but are also better positioned to work around conventional development paradigms in order to pursue a different set of goals? As faith communities intervene publicly and directly in the problems of everyday life in Russia, they complicate the more familiar conceptual civil society topography marked by state, market, and citizen. Rather than creating and colonizing the space between citizen and state in order to foster new types of civil activities and values, faith organizations seek to redress the problems they identify as caused by the Russian state's withdrawal from its citizens by bridging the social and material distancing that occurs with civil society initiatives. What faith communities have done most effectively, according to the perspective of their supporters, is protect and maintain the human connections through which civic life emerges and flourishes, especially during periods such as the current moment when many Russians—assistance providers, beneficiaries, and ordinary citizens alike—continue to voice concerns that neoliberal trends deemphasize these more subjective, "human" qualities in favor of impersonality and objectivity.

Reconsidering the place of religious communities as legitimate and protective civil society actors also provides insight for understanding why religious bodies—the Russian Orthodox Church, most notably—have historically played such a significant role in both ordinary Russian daily life and national political affairs beyond providing systems of morality and safeguarding cultural heritage.⁵² By appropriating and reconstituting the civil sphere, faith organizations are not just actively transforming the relationship between the religious and secular spheres but also changing the tasks for which each sphere is responsible. Institutions and ideologies that may be more familiar to secular actors—state agencies, political parties, and businesses—are increasingly engaging in the work of policing tradition and morality, while institutions and ideologies more ordinarily associated with the religious sphere are increasingly engaging in the work of ensuring social stability. These reorientations of spheres conventionally delineated as "religious" and "secular" offer new lenses for considering the extent to which "religious" qualities such as faith and ideology are ever completely absent from the work of secular development organizations, a point raised by observers of development elsewhere in the world, but not yet satisfactorily addressed for Russia and other post-Soviet societies.⁵³

Moreover, the experiences of faith organizations provide insight into how domestic development is evolving in Russia. Despite the fact that aid

52. Hann and Goltz, eds., *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*; Mitrokhin *Russkaia Pravoslavnaiia Tserkov'*.

53. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," in Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, eds., *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham, 2001), 2; Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 25.

from foreign governments and foreign institutions was most prominent during the 1990s and early 2000s in Russia, today domestic faith organizations are funding development projects both throughout Russia and abroad.⁵⁴ The efforts of Russia's religious communities to cultivate ethics of tithing and donation among their congregants have inspired similar efforts among Russia's secular assistance and development organizations. In 2008, Russia's newly created charity and development agency, the National Charitable Foundation of Russia (Natsional'nii Blagotvoritel'nii Fond Rossii) launched a broad citizen-focused fund-raising campaign and began issuing grants to domestic assistance groups, including faith organizations. After meeting with the development agency's director during summer 2008, Sosed's director of development reported not only the agency's enthusiasm for Sosed's activities but also their strong encouragement for Sosed to submit a funding proposal. Meanwhile, one of Sosed's most important secular development partners was forced to close their legal, material, and social services programs for migrants after they were unable to secure additional funding. The successes of faith organizations thus present striking alternatives for enlisting and sustaining grassroots support in ways that create permanent communities of caring.

Finally, the work of faith communities in Moscow invites questions about whether they are more effective than their secular counterparts. Issues of efficacy are impossible to measure objectively, however, as the diversity of assistance programs within Russia prevents precise comparison. More problematic is that even though both faith-based organizations and secular organizations must follow detailed accounting practices for the Russian government, their own organization's administrators, and their funders, Russia's long history of informal economic practices means that the accuracy of financial figures and personnel information is often questionable. Nevertheless, one measure of efficacy may be that of official recognition from the Russian state. Over the past several years, the activities of NGOs operating in Russia have been curtailed, or even eliminated, through both official legislation and more informal means such as harassment, prompting high-profile development agencies such as the Ford Foundation and the Peace Corps (among others) to leave Russia. Curiously, during this same period, a growing group of faith communities, including St. James, have successfully navigated complicated federal requirements to register legally both their congregations and their non-profit NGOs. While it is inappropriate to speculate on the decisions by Russian officials, these forms of official legal recognition raise intriguing questions about how the state might view—or misrecognize—the activities of these particular NGOs. In these cases, it appears that faith organizations have achieved some degree of success by capitalizing on the categorical confusions and misrecognitions that are endemic to develop-

54. Bernbaum, "NGOs on Russia's Leading Edge," 11–13; Alexander Livshin, "Russian Philanthropy Now Making a Difference," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 9–11; Sergey Rakhuba, "Christian Aid in the Wake of Beslan Terrorism," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 4–8.

ment activities to gain formal recognition from, and a defined position within, the Russian state.

Whether this formal recognition is a benefit or a disadvantage remains to be seen, however. As faith organizations become more institutionalized and formalized, they may be vulnerable to the same problems affecting their secular counterparts. In the last several years, volunteers have become professionalized, resulting in their being promoted or poached to positions elsewhere, as has happened with development directors at several faith-based NGOs. In other cases, while faith-based NGOs have successfully competed for larger and larger grants from domestic and foreign funders, their internal contributions from congregational tithing have decreased sharply as parishioners believe that their support is no longer needed. In still other cases, the successes of these groups are attracting attention and requests for partnerships with other development programs, thereby prompting worries that faith communities are being stretched thin by trying to serve as many people and needs as possible. Consequently, there are growing concerns among some clergy and staff at faith-based NGOs about the potential limits to their activities and whether they will lose the personal touch that they find so valuable. In the end, however, these new experiences facing Moscow's faith organizations only further illuminate the ambiguous and tenuous gray areas of institutionalized development and its impact on whether vision and practice can actually align.