

- dox nun who died at the Nazi camp Ravensbrück for her work helping the Jews. According to the author, the story of Maria's service "is important. I am sure of this, for many of my fellow Russians." See Zola Krakmal'nikova, *Russkaia ideia materi Marii* (Uhltingen, Germany: Stephanus Edition, 1997), p. 2. Although she lives in Moscow, it is significant that Krakmal'nikova feels she must address her "fellow Russians" from abroad (Germany), and seek international support for her critique of the contemporary Russian church.
- 44 See the testimony of Father Michael Akse'nov-Mcerson (born Jewish in Moscow, now rector of Christ the Savior Orthodox Church in New York), "Solov'ev v nashi dni," in S. M. Solov'ev, *Zhizn' i tvorcheskaia evoliutsiia Vladimira Solov'eva* (Brussels: Zhizn' s Bogom, 1977), pp. ix–x. In a series of interviews with Russian Jewish converts to Orthodoxy conducted in Moscow in September 1997, most interviewees mentioned the influence of Solov'ev and Nikolai Berdiaev.
- 45 V. S. Solov'ev, *Sobranie sochinenii Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 2d ed., 10 vols. (1911–14; reprint ed., with two additional volumes, Brussels: Zhizn' s Bogom, 1966–70), 5:194–394. Letter to N. N. Straklov (1890), in *Pis'ma V. S. Solov'eva*, ed. E. L. Radlov, 4 vols. (1908; reprint ed. Brussels: Zhizn' s Bogom, 1970), 1:60. For a detailed study of Solov'ev's writings on the Jews, see Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, "Vladimir Solov'ev on Spiritual Nationalism, Russia and the Jews," *Russian Review* 56, no. 2 (1997): 157–77.
- 46 Solov'ev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4:135; reprinted in Krakmal'nikova, ed., *Russkaia ideia*, p. 16.
- 47 Krakmal'nikova, interview, 1993.
- 48 Krakmal'nikova, "Russophobia, Antisemitism, and Christianity," p. 12.
- 49 Krakmal'nikova, ed., *Russkaia ideia*, p. 218.
- 50 Agursky, "Fundamentalist Christian Anti-antisemitism in Modern Russia." It is perhaps telling that Krakmal'nikova, like the reactive dissidents in the Soviet period, has so often had to look for support abroad.
- 51 Krakmal'nikova, ed., *Russkaia ideia*, p. 218.
- 52 See, for example, Solov'ev, "O narodnosti i narodnykh delakh Rossii," *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5:24–38.
- 53 Solov'ev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5:391. See also 8:316: "Dia cheloveka v etom vozrozhdennom sostoianii individual'nost' — kak i natsional'nost' i vse drugie osobennosti i otlichia. — pereslaet byl' granitseiu, a stanovitsia osnovaniem poloziitel'nogo soedineniia s vospoinaiushchim ego sobiratel'nym vsechelovechestvom ili tserkov'iu (v ee istinnom sushchestve)."
- 54 Solov'ev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6:24.
- 55 This problem was made clear to me by Mikhail Gorelik, a Moscow journalist who joined the church in the 1960s but has since left, and has now established some ties with the more traditional Jewish community. Although he remains friendly with activists on both sides, he does not integrate the two sides of his own biography. Interview with the author, September 1997.
- 56 Krakmal'nikova, "Russophobia, Antisemitism and Christianity," p. 23.

■ CHAPTER 20 ELLIOT BORENSTEIN

No use blaming the mirror if your mug's on crooked. — Proverb used as the epigraph to Gogol's *Inspector General*

SUSPENDING DISBELIEF: "CULTS" AND POSTMODERNISM IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

In the final days of the 1996 Russian election campaign, former dark-horse presidential candidate General Aleksandr Lebed stunned Russian liberals and foreign observers alike by using his first speech on Boris Yeltsin's behalf to launch an attack on an unlikely enemy: "[A]ll these Mormons are mold and filth which have come to destroy the state. The state should outlaw them. They should not exist on our soil."¹ From a purely practical point of view, Lebed's attack might well seem puzzling: one need only open any Russian newspaper at random to be convinced that unchecked organized crime and rampant poverty are far more pressing problems than an influx of earnest, clean-cut young missionaries. Certainly, Lebed was playing to a much smaller and more receptive audience than the international press: this speech to his supporters in the Union of Patriotic and National Organizations of Russia may well have helped deliver a portion of the "patriotic" vote to Yeltsin. But Lebed's attempt to court

the Russian chauvinists only opened him up to ridicule at the hands of his Kremlin rival, presidential Chief of Staff Anatoly Chubais: "It is quite possible," quipped Chubais, ". . . that [Lebed] confused Mormons and Masons. Such things happen."² Chubais's biting remarks hit the retired general on two fronts simultaneously: first, they made Lebed appear ignorant and barely literate;³ more important, Chubais was implying that Lebed's rhetoric fit comfortably within the Russian chauvinist anxiety over the "Jewmasons" (*Zhidomasony*) who purportedly masterminded the downfall of the Soviet Union and are said to be plotting the imminent collapse of its successor, the Russian Federation. As a result, Chubais's main supporters, the Russian liberal intelligentsia, were unable to set aside the misgivings they already harbored about a general who professed admiration for General Augusto Pinochet of Chile. For his part, Lebed refused to soften his stance, asserting a few days later: "I am categorically against bringing in foreign beliefs which are anti-human."⁴

Lebed's tirade, which was met with predictable outrage by the Church of Latter-Day Saints and the U.S. Senate delegation from Utah, is by no means an isolated incident in contemporary Russia. Ever since the Soviet Union relaxed its restrictions on religious organizations, foreign missionaries and new religious movements have repeatedly come under fire: the Lebed incident is different only in that it was directed at the sixth-largest church in America.⁵ Although Lebed's specific target (Mormons) may have been off the mark, the general thrust of his diatribe reflected (and manipulated) the growing anxiety throughout the former USSR regarding new religious movements, popularly known as "cults."⁶ Given the unconventional behavior and appearance of some of the more prominent new religious movements' adherents (the Society for Krishna Consciousness immediately comes to mind), it should come as no surprise that such groups are looked on with suspicion. The Supreme Soviet responded to pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church by attempting to ban foreign missionaries on Russian territory in July 1993; in 1997, Yeltsin signed a law severely limiting the activities of all but a select few religious organizations. When politicians like Lebed or religious leaders like Aleksii II rail against foreign missionaries, they express an age-old strain of Russian xenophobia. But the "threat from abroad" is only part of the story: the former Soviet Union has, in a few short years, produced a number of "cults" of its own. Although foreign movements such as the Unification Church hold primacy of place in the Russian nationalist demology, their homegrown counterparts are also worthy of note. If the Krishnas, Japan's Aum Shini Kyo, and the followers

of Reverend Moon symbolize the danger to Russia's cultural patrimony posed by foreign ideological imports, new Slavic religious movements such as the Mother of God Center (Bogorodichnyi tsentr) and the Great White Brotherhood (Velikoe beloe bratstvo) are, to their opponents, the embodiment of a Russia gone mad, a cultural cancer metastasizing into ever stranger and more virulent growths within the body politic. This metaphor of disease is repeatedly invoked by politicians, religious leaders, and journalists: again and again, new religious movements are denounced as a "plague." In examining the rhetoric surrounding cults in contemporary Russia, I hope to demonstrate that any talk of "disease" is a far from accurate diagnosis. Rather than being a distortion of truly Russian values, new religious movements are, if anything, a distillation of a number of important trends in contemporary Russian culture. The very features that irritate Russian anticultists characterize post-Soviet society in general: both the "cults" in the former USSR and their detractors provide a vivid snapshot of the Russian postmodern condition.

Russian Relativism: From the Silver Age to the New Age

When discussing new religious movements in Russia, it is easy to point the finger at the "ideological void" left by the collapse of communism: today's youth presumably lack a strong set of values by which to make sense of their lives. Such an approach is hardly new, and it has its share of adherents among anticultists in the West as well. Although I do not take issue with this idea (which, given the recent upheavals in the former Eastern bloc, appears self-evident), I propose that we look at the contemporary situation in terms not of lack, but rather of excess: today's God-seeking Russian faces a veritable spiritual smorgasbord whose likes haven't been seen since the Silver Age (1880–1917). The spiritualist legacy of the decades before the revolution was unabashedly eclectic: in the Theosophy of H. P. Blavatsky, Indian mahatmas rubbed elbows with Jesus Christ, and dilettantes throughout Europe peppered their language with exotic Buddhist borrowings. Spiritual seekers in contemporary Russia are equally syncretic, if not to say omnivorous, in their approach: the program of the most noteworthy post-Soviet cult, the Great White Brotherhood, was a New Age goulash of chakras, karma, Kabbalah, and even music theory. On a more anecdotal level, it is not at all uncommon to encounter intelligent, educated Russians who casually refer to the "truths" inherent in astrology and who credit the extrasensory powers of any number of ESPers and

swamis, from television's psychic healer Anatoly Kashpirovsky to Brezhnev's favorite clairvoyant, Dzhuna.⁷ Many beliefs held by followers of new religious movements seem almost conventional when set against the backdrop of almost daily reports of UFOs and miraculous extrasensory phenomena. The New Age and new religious movements occupy different points on a spectrum of syncretic belief: if the New Age is unrelentingly eclectic, willing to accommodate elements of a nearly infinite set of conflicting belief systems (Christianity, Buddhism, and paganism, for instance), a new religious movement such as the Great White Brotherhood may draw on the same sources but turn the resulting religious mélange into a strict dogma. Nevertheless, it is possible that New Age eclecticism renders the apparent contradictions of cult dogma more palatable, the faculty of skepticism having atrophied for lack of exercise. The post-totalitarian order has proven to be a hotbed of political cynicism, but when it comes to questions of faith, Russians continually astound foreign observers with their capacity for belief.

Although the adherents of "cults" such as Aum Shinni Kyo and the White Brotherhood may appear fanatically committed to a single idea, their dedication is predicated on the ability to reconcile (or at least not question) the widely disparate elements of their faith's doctrine. Here Mikhail Epstein's analysis of Soviet and post-Soviet culture is particularly illuminating: in his "Relativistic Patterns in Totalitarian Thinking," Epstein argues that Soviet Marxism, rather than being "the most rigid and stagnant component of twentieth-century intellectual development," was actually the most relativistic of all possible ideological systems: "it constantly changed and expanded its set of ideas in order to maintain its power."⁸ During the Brezhnev era, "ideology was gradually transformed from a system of ideas into an all-encompassing ideological environment that retained all possible alternative philosophical systems as latent components within itself. Existentialism and structuralism, Russophilism and Westernism, technocratic and ecological movements, religious and neo-pagan outlooks—everything was compressed into the forms of Marxism, creating a sort of postmodern pastiche."⁹ Conversely, one could argue that the demoralizing of all opposing points of view resulted in relativizing everything that was not considered Marxism: fascism and liberal democracy were both simply "anti-Soviet," and thus functionally equivalent. The next step, according to Epstein, occurred under Gorbachev, when totalitarianism gave way to a postcommunist "universalist" ideology: "Universalist ideology tries to eliminate all oppositions and use the entire range of ideas as if they were complementary."¹⁰

Such relativism could not help but have an impact on questions of faith. Scientific atheism lumped together all religious traditions, from Christianity to Buddhism to paganism. "Soviet atheism," Epstein writes, "produced a type of a believer who is impossible to identify in denominational terms: he is simply a believer, *vernikshchii*."¹¹ This type of believer does not regularly attend an established church, but neither does he or she rail against organized religion. The faith of the believer is instead what Epstein calls "poor religion" or "minimal religion": a spirituality devoid of rituals and regulations.¹² The believer knows that there is a spiritual dimension to life, but does not think it has been perfectly defined by any particular faith. Such believers, I would argue, believe in nothing in particular and everything at once; their skepticism toward claims to absolute truths is based on a faith in the idea of a "portion of truth" (*doia pravdy*).

Two surveys conducted in the early 1990s confirm that, far from undergoing a revival of traditional religion, Russia has witnessed the rapid growth of nontraditional belief.¹³ Although in the 1990 survey 46 percent of respondents identified themselves as Russian Orthodox, only 19 percent called themselves Orthodox the following year. This sharp decline was not matched by a drop in "believers," however; the main rival to Orthodoxy proved to be neither another established church nor atheism, but rather an amorphous category called "Christians in general": they constituted 22 percent of all respondents in 1990 and 47 percent in 1991.¹⁴ D. E. Furman explains the sharp contrast between the two surveys as largely the result of people identifying themselves with Orthodoxy in 1990 out of a sense that "religion occupies an important place in the bourgeois-democratic societies of the West," along with the expectation that Orthodoxy would play the same role in the new Russia. This "superficial" affiliation quickly wore thin, hence the rise in "Christians in general." Even the term *Christian* must be understood in the loosest possible sense, because a large number of those who chose this identification were "people with the most indefinite, eclectic world view, with a heightened interest in Eastern religious teachings, in spiritualism, in modern parascientific and parareligious mythology built around parapsychology, UFOs, etc."¹⁵ Thus it would seem that Russia has quietly entered the New Age; in spirit if not in climate, the country appears well on its way to becoming the Southern California of Europe.¹⁵

In terms of sheer variety, then, foreign new religious movements seem to be a manifestation of the same "cultural invasion" that characterizes the Russian marketplace: "cults" are to churches what Snickers bars are to kiosks. Those

who fear for Russia's cultural integrity can point to the ingenuity and sheer variety of foreign missionary activity, on a scale made possible by vast financial reserves. Indeed, the manner in which these organizations allocate their resources leaves them open to charges that they are purchasing respectability with foreign currency, as any visitor to the L. Ron Hubbard Reading Room at Moscow State University's Journalism School can attest.¹⁶ The Unification Church, whose leader was received by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Kremlin in 1990, has most recently come under fire from the Russian Commission on Religious Organizations for sponsoring a public school course entitled "The World and I."¹⁷ The Japanese Aum Shiri Kyo, whose activities in its home country have been curtailed while the group is being investigated for allegedly masterminding nerve gas attacks on Tokyo's subway, uses its wealth for a startlingly wide range of activities, from the sinister to the sublime: while Aum's apparent interest in purchasing Russian nuclear weapons has, for good reason, drawn a great deal of attention, the Japanese movement is also said to have contributed eighty thousand dollars in computer equipment to Moscow State University and several hundred thousand dollars worth of medical supplies to Russian hospitals, as well as sponsoring its own Russian symphony orchestra.¹⁸ But the most successful of all foreign groups is also the first one to set roots in Russian soil: the Society of Krishna Consciousness, or the Hare Krishnas. Their presence in the former Soviet Union dates back to 1971, although Krishnas were routinely persecuted until 1988.¹⁹ When the government relaxed its controls on religious activity, it was the Krishnas who developed the first, and most thorough, campaign for Soviet souls. The Krishnas were quite possibly the first group to exploit the commercial potential of the metro in Moscow; in 1991, posters calling on Russians to read *The Bhagavad-Gita as It Is* adorned every metro car; thanks to a model of capitalist efficiency, those who were intrigued by the advertisement had only to step off the train and walk up the stairs to buy the book, which was sold in most major metro stations.²⁰

On the surface, the public outrage over "cults" in Russia is a backlash against this very relativism. Orthodox Church leaders are highly defensive against sectarians who poach on "their" territory; and for his part, Lebed framed his rejection of Mormons as a defense of "mono-religious" Russia against Western cultural expansion.²¹ Furman distinguishes two tendencies in the new religious consciousness in Russia, both of which are a retreat from Marxist atheism: "The first leads to belief in God and to Orthodoxy. The second, which is 'drowning out' the first, is a movement toward an amorphous,

eclectic consciousness that is neither confessional . . . nor even religious or antireligious."²² Furman argues for a strong correlation between the two opposing religious tendencies and the contemporary political climate; Orthodox respondents to the 1990 and 1991 surveys showed "a very obvious and vivid combination of a purely ideological and symbolic anticommunism with a relative 'softness' toward the actual institutions of Soviet power, strong authoritarianism, and 'anti-Western' tendencies."²³ Even the 1991 attempted coup had, according to Furman, a religious dimension: "The leaders of the attempted coup were supported more by atheists and the Orthodox, while 'Christians in general' and persons with a heightened interest in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Zen Buddhism, and flying saucers gathered around Yeltsin." Certainly, this is a vast generalization to make on the basis of two surveys, and one could hardly expect Yeltsin's advisers to actively court the "flying saucer" vote. It also underplays the role of supernatural belief on the antidemocratic end of the spectrum.²⁴ The defenders of Orthodoxy often betray a surprising faith in the very New Age beliefs they so harshly condemn. In *The Black Trail of the White Brotherhood*, the anonymous Russian Orthodox authors assert that the crimes of the Great White Brotherhood should interest all those around the world who are battling "ultra-brain control" (*ul'trazmozgovyi kontrol' nad ljud'mi*). During their initiation, new members are supposedly subjected to "extrasensory efforts with the help of an upside-down cross," after which a cross with "Kabbalistic signs" places a "code" (*kod*) on the zone of the "third eye," or "agni-chakra."²⁵ To a large extent, the prophets of new religious movements and the crusaders against them share the same language.

Waiting for the End of the World: The Great White Brotherhood

Although a number of home-grown new religious movements have sprouted throughout the former Soviet Union, one group in particular forced the ex-Soviet public to realize that "cults" were not merely an imported problem: the Great White Brotherhood of Maria Devi Kiristos.²⁶ Most Russians became aware of Maria Devi only in 1993, owing in part to the White Brotherhood's massive campaign of self-promotion. Thanks to the dedication of Maria Devi's followers, who plastered copies of her portrait on practically every window of every metro car in the capitals, millions of people all over the Slavic region of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) quickly became acquainted with the picture of a stern-looking young woman who held the middle and index

fingers of her right hand pointed toward heaven as her eyes serenely gazed back at her observers.²⁷ If the portrait is supposed to supplant its Christian predecessors, as claimed by one young woman who tried to sell me "an icon of the Lord God Jesus-Maria Herself," it is an icon for a less domestic age, displayed in public transportation rather than in a corner at home. Like any divinity worthy of the name, Maria Devi Khristos was omnipresent, at least on paper; indeed, the sheer number of White Brotherhood flyers prompted the Russian newspaper *Komsomol'skaia pravda* to call the special pre-apocalyptic White Brotherhood page of its youth supplement "Cut and Paste Maria Devi!"²⁸

Although Maria Devi Khristos was the official head of the Brotherhood (and without a doubt its primary object of worship), the movement was founded by Yuri Andreevich Krivonogov, a scientist who was born in the Voronezh region of the Russian Republic in 1941. At some point not long before the establishment of the brotherhood, Krivonogov abandoned his scientific career in favor of more mystical pursuits. After deciding that he was "Adam and the Sun," he took the name "Iuann Swami" and founded the Alma Institute of the Soul in 1990. While lecturing on psychic phenomena and "healing" the sick in Donetsk, Ukraine, Krivonogov met Marina Tsvigun, a married thirty-year-old woman whose life before her godhood was as mundane as her later exploits were sensational. In "The Earthly Path of Maria Devi Khristos," Tsvigun describes herself as a journalism graduate of Kiev State University, who, as a reporter, "openly fought the Mafia, lawlessness, and the party *nomenklatura*."²⁹ Before meeting Krivonogov, the future Mother of the World had already become convinced of her own divinity after a near-death experience caused by an overdose of anesthetic during an abortion.³⁰

Tsvigun and Krivonogov soon developed a following and convinced approximately one thousand people that the world was coming to an end. According to Tsvigun and Krivonogov, the appearance of Maria Devi rounded out a set of trinities that had been left incomplete by Judaism and Christianity: God the Father and God the Son are at last joined by God the Mother, and the Old and New Testaments have been superseded (or fulfilled) by the Final Testament of Maria Devi Khristos.³¹ Tsvigun herself is the final incarnation of God, "Jesus-Maria," both Christ and the Mother of Christ.³² Since June 1, 1991, the "program" of IUSMALOS (an acronym formed from "Iuann Swami," "Maria Devi Khristos," and "Logos," and used as an alternate name for the brotherhood) had been "activated," and would culminate in the apocalypse 1,260 "biblical" days later.³³ Maria Devi, the "Woman Clothed in the Sun" foretold in Revela-

tion, would fulfill the prophecies of the New Testament and fight the Antichrist Emmanuel, whose power now holds most of the world in its sway.³⁴ On November 24, 1993, Tsvigun was to crucify herself in Kiev, which was now the "New Jerusalem" of the "promised land" located in the "Slavic region of the CIS."³⁵ Tsvigun usually referred only to her own sacrifice, but Krivonogov repeatedly claimed that he would die on the cross along with his "wife."³⁶ Three days after their deaths, Tsvigun and Krivonogov would rise again and lead the faithful to paradise, leaving Maria Devi's enemies behind to perish by fire in a worldwide cataclysm.

Such talk made many in Kiev understandably nervous, especially since Tsvigun's and Krivonogov's (literally) inflammatory rhetoric was compounded by popular misunderstandings of the "program" of IUSMALOS. Reporters and government officials expressed the fear that Maria Devi's followers, who were repeatedly told by Tsvigun and Krivonogov to be prepared for martyrdom, would prepare for the world's end through mass self-immolation, turning the streets of Kiev into a slaughterhouse that would make "Heaven's Gate" and Jonestown look like child's play. Indeed, the government and the media had no idea as to the scope of the problem that faced them. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to dismiss the White Brotherhood as an insignificant disturbance of the peace; after all, as headline after headline would eventually declare, the world did not end. But the story being told in November was quite different, as Kiev nervously awaited the anticipated onslaught of 144,000 death-crazed, brainwashed fanatics. By the beginning of November, "Brothers" from all over the former Soviet Union began answering Maria Devi's call to come to the Ukrainian capital, and President Kravchuk authorized "emergency measures."³⁷ The group's arrival exacerbated tensions between Ukraine and Russia, because most of Maria Devi's followers were Russian citizens, and because a truck from St. Petersburg carrying three tons of White Brotherhood literature had been stopped in Ukraine.³⁸ Ukrainian government officials made numerous appeals for calm and cooperation in the first week of November, but with little effect. Approximately 250 followers of Maria Devi had been arrested on November 1, and many of them declared a hunger strike.³⁹ Schoolchildren were given special lessons on how to defend themselves from the Brotherhood, and schools rearranged their class schedules so that children would not have to walk home at night.⁴⁰

The denouement of the whole affair was more comic than tragic, much to the relief of Kiev's citizenry. By mid-November, guards had been posted all around

Saint Sophia Square, the site of Maria Devi's intended crucifixion. On November 11, a group of "Brothers" managed to enter the Saint Sophia cathedral disguised as tourists. Once inside, they threw off their robes, approached the altar, and tried to hold a service.⁴¹ They barricaded themselves within the cathedral, and when OMON (the special forces) attempted to force them out, the "Brothers" attacked them with fire extinguishers (the irony was apparently lost on all concerned). Some members of the special forces suffered minor injuries, and the iconostasis was also damaged, but the brief "last battle" between the forces of the Messiah and the "servants of the Antichrist" was won by OMON.⁴² Among those arrested were Krivonogov and the Lord God Herself. On February 9, 1996, Marina Tsvigun received a four-year sentence for seizing public property and endangering the welfare of her followers. Krivonogov, whom Maria Devi had already renounced and divorced, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on the same charges and also for creating a public disturbance and resisting arrest. Several dozen of their followers wept as the sentences were read.⁴³

Although the activity of the White Brotherhood clearly reached its peak in 1993, not all of Maria Devi's followers abandoned her. The split between Tsvigun and Krivonogov has allowed the "Mother of the World" to claim that her teachings were distorted by "Cain" (the name she now prefers to call the former Ioann Swami) without renouncing her own divinity. She continued to issue written pronouncements to the faithful from prison, although the size of her flock had shrunk drastically. Of the thirty to forty White Brothers who composed her Petersburg congregation, there are now only eight. Having abandoned both their white robes and their nonstop leafletting, Maria Devi's followers reportedly sing songs based on Tsvigun's poetry and ask for contributions from passersby. The Brotherhood's temporal leadership apparently announced another end of the world (this time scheduled for late 1996), but, like most sequels, the event failed to generate the same excitement as the original.⁴⁴ In the summer of 1997, Tsvigun was released from prison to little fanfare.

Sacred Simulacra

Much like the Soviet Union itself, which collapsed under its own weight rather than through any cold war nightmare of nuclear Armageddon, the Great White Brotherhood's downfall was anything but catastrophic: instead of the promised "bang" of the Day of Judgment, Maria Devi's church collapsed with a pathetic

juridical whimper. Even Maria Devi's apocalypse was subject to bureaucratic scheduling problems. Although it was originally planned for November 24, 1993, at the end of October Tsvigun and Krivonogov moved it ahead to November 14. Here one recalls Stalin's determination to accomplish the First Five-Year Plan in four years: it is not enough to promise a miracle; the impossible must be achieved in a manner that outpaces the expectations of the believers themselves. Within the context of post-Soviet confusion, the denouement of the Great White Brotherhood had a certain logic: the brief time between the failed coup of August 1991 and Yeltsin's storming of the Russian parliament building in October 1993 was by and large the era of the nonevent. If history had not ended, it had at least paused, thereby only heightening the sensation that something pivotal was about to occur; post-Soviet reality certainly provided fertile ground for fantasies of an apocalypse that would be repeatedly postponed. Like Maria Devi's followers, Russians and their Ukrainian neighbors lived in constant expectation of terrible calamities that doggedly refused to occur: the rumored famines and all-out civil war, the whispers of a plan to sell Lenin's body to the highest bidder at a public auction (a rumor started unintentionally by American humorist Christopher Buckley), and the unsubstantiated allegations that top government officials were trading in a mythical nuclear substance called "red mercury." The claims of both the leaders of the Great White Brotherhood and the movers and shakers of the new political order seemed to grow in scope at the same pace as the ruble's plummet. Indeed, the economic metaphor is perhaps more apt than the "disease" imagery offered by anticultists in the mass media: hyperinflation was, after all, yet another catastrophe that Russia narrowly managed to avoid. Or, more to the point, hyperinflation did occur, but in an entirely different realm from economics: there was a hyperinflation of rhetoric.

When examined closely, the Great White Brotherhood proves to be a fundamentally rhetorical phenomenon — or rather, not a phenomenon at all, but a simulacrum. The scandalous rise and fall of Maria Devi bears all the hallmarks of Jean Baudrillard's "hyperreality," in which reality is supplanted by its representations. As I have argued elsewhere, the Great White Brotherhood was a creature of the mass media; if Maria Devi and her propaganda machine were the movement's mother, its father was not "Swami" Krivonogov but the post-Soviet press.⁴⁵ The literature of the Brotherhood repeatedly refers to the 144,000 "saints" who make up Maria Devi's following, and who were to watch her be crucified in Kiev. Most reports took Tsvigun and Krivonogov at their

word, neglecting to mention that the figure 144,000 comes directly from Revelation 7:4, and should therefore not necessarily be considered an accurate assessment of the Brotherhood's size. Ironically, in their evaluation of the Brotherhood's unsubstantiated boasting, the reporters for such respected publications as *Izvestia* and *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (as well as for scandal sheets such as *Shehit i mech'* and *Moskovskii komsomolec*) proved just as gullible as the post-Soviet consumer when faced with the dubious claims of pyramid schemes (MMM) and weight-loss scams (Herbal Life): both journalists and their readers were duped by false advertising. When all was said and done, only about seven or eight hundred followers of Maria Devi were arrested, and there is no evidence to suggest that a significant number of "Brothers" remained at large.⁴⁶ If the exaggerations of the group's membership were consistent with the impossible promises of the postcommunist market, they were also positively Gogolian: Maria Devi had saved far more "dead souls" than live ones.

Even if the leaders of the Brotherhood had not been arrested, it is unlikely that events would have unfolded according to the scenario so vividly depicted in the popular press: despite claims by journalists and government officials, it appears that the Great White Brotherhood had no plans to commit mass suicide.⁴⁷ Thus the mass media took the already exaggerated claims of the Brotherhood and inflated them further, acting in concert to create the illusion of an enormous threat to civic order. Although one can hardly claim that the leaders of the Brotherhood intended their faith to be a symbol of post-Soviet turpitude, the journalists who covered the movement tended to use the Brotherhood as yet another sign that Russia and Ukraine were suffering from a profound moral crisis. If we set aside all questions of morality (admittedly a difficult task when dealing with questions of faith), we discover, if not a crisis, then a projection of the concerns and anxieties of contemporary Russia. This, too, is probably no credit to Krivonogov and Tsvigun, who need not have been conscious of these issues to exploit them; rather, they resemble the proverbial infinite number of monkeys who, given an equally limitless number of typewriters, randomly hunt and peck their way to the complete works of Shakespeare.

The Russia We Have Lost

The propaganda both for and against the Great White Brotherhood (which, as far as the popular consciousness was concerned, was essentially equivalent to the Brotherhood itself) highlights the problem of the Russian cultural patri-

mony in an age of pluralism and uncertainty. The ubiquitous portrait of Maria Devi, which deliberately evokes the traditional religious art of Russian Orthodoxy, is both a post-Soviet and a postmodern icon: dressed in a white robe, headress, and shawl, with jewelry and a headband, she has a vaguely Eastern look; but her crucifix, shepherd's staff, and the two raised fingers of her right hand point to the Christian tradition. Although her face is not at the center of the portrait, the observer's eye is inevitably drawn to it because the headband and her right hand enclose it within a partial frame. To the citizens of Russia or Ukraine, that face bears a distinct and inescapable message: the woman who has draped herself in this mishmash of Christian and Eastern wardrobe is unmistakably Slavic.⁴⁸

Maria Devi's Slavic roots were crucial to the Brotherhood's public image, because the Great White Brotherhood, counter to the usual pattern of sectarian activity in the former Soviet Union, was a movement that claimed to export missionaries rather than import them. According to the Brotherhood's pamphlets and its newspaper, *USMALOS*, Maria Devi, Ioann Swami, and their lieutenants had traveled throughout Eastern and Western Europe, and ITAR-Tass quoted a Baptist minister's brief account of his encounter with Tsvigun in Jerusalem.⁴⁹ At least to a limited extent, the Great White Brotherhood partook of a long-standing tradition of Russian messianism, in which "Holy Russia" will bring salvation to a sinful world. Like the Old Believers and the many sectarian movements that cropped up in tsarist times, the Brotherhood claimed to be a more faithful representative of Slavic spirituality than the "corrupt" Orthodox Church. The leaders of the Brotherhood located themselves within the tradition of Russian religious dissent both verbally and visually: the ubiquitous icon of Maria Devi shows the Mother of the World making the two-fingered, Old Believer blessing rather than the three-fingered sign favored by the Russian Orthodox Church since the reforms that led to the Great Schism of the seventeenth century.

In their writings, Krivonogov and Tsvigun are unsparing in their criticism of the official church, casually referring to its priests as the "black cockroaches of Orthodoxy." Yet the Brotherhood's challenge was based not on a complete refutation of the Russian church, but rather on the assertion that the church had strayed from the true path. Such an approach, which facilitated the incorporation of Orthodox symbols and even liturgy within the doctrine of the Brotherhood, made a great deal of sense in the post-Soviet context: as Furman's survey suggests, the Russian "return to Orthodoxy" was hampered by the church's

close ties with the old regime. When Tsvigun writes that "all the churches today are befouled by the loathsome spirit of Satan," when she asserts that Russian Orthodox priests are "defiling the former sacred place with vomit and organs," her admittedly crude phrasing merely recapitulates the accusations that the church made a "deal with the devil" when it made its peace with the communist regime.⁵⁰ In the tradition of Avvakum, who referred to the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church as the "hound of hell," the Brotherhood managed to attack the church for falling under the sway of the Antichrist while appealing to "true" Orthodox sensibilities; one member of the Brotherhood who claims to be a former priest writes, "I have nothing against Christianity or the church in general; I'm against what is happening in it today!"⁵¹

In its appropriation of the mantle of "Russianness" from the Orthodox Church, the Great White Brotherhood rather deftly addressed Russia's postimperial malaise. On the surface, the Brotherhood adapted to the new realities much quicker than most inhabitants of the former USSR; at a time when the ungainly "Commonwealth of Independent States" by no means came trippingly off ex-Soviet tongues, Krivonogov's and Tsvigun's diatribes blithely referred to the CIS as though it had existed for decades. The CIS provided the Brotherhood with an easy vehicle for eliding the terminological difficulties posed by the Soviet Union's collapse. Although the movement clearly saw itself in opposition specifically to the Russian church and considered itself the heir to the Russian cultural patrimony, the most significant events relating to the story of the White Brotherhood took place in the now-independent land of Tsvigun's birth: Ukraine. At a time when nationalism threatened to turn Russia and Ukraine into bitter enemies, Maria Devi refused to see any difference between the two. Most of her references to the Commonwealth are directed toward the CIS as it was originally constituted: an umbrella term for the Slavic republics of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus: "The CIS is becoming the center of Satanism (the Slavic region is the Promised Land)."⁵² But Maria Devi's acceptance of the CIS is part and parcel of the "new medievalism" of her message; for her, the fragmentary remains of the Soviet Union are nothing less than the Promised Land of "Ancient Kievan Rus."⁵³ At the heart of Maria Devi's New Age theology is an appeal to nostalgia for a long-lost, prelapsarian "Russia" that transcends contemporary nationalism. Indeed, the very ubiquity of the Brotherhood's propaganda can be seen as a peculiar bond among the three newly independent states; as one commentator wrote in 1993, "A man from Kiev travels to, say, Moscow, sees [Maria Devi's] photo pasted on the subway

car or on a shop window, and it's as though he never left the Ukrainian capital."⁵⁴ Even as Maria Devi's followers look forward to their postapocalyptic paradise, their rhetoric and tactics also harken back to a golden age, appealing to the postimperial nostalgia that quickly took hold in Russia.

The question of Russian identity is crucial to several new religious movements in Russia, and perhaps constitutes the most obvious difference between home-grown religions and their imported counterparts. The failure of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is seen as having compromised itself in the Soviet period, is always a subtext to the teachings of Russian new religious movements, and many of them make their attacks on official Orthodoxy explicit. Like the Great White Brotherhood, the Mother of God Center, founded by defrocked Orthodox priest Ioann Bereslavsky, styles itself as the "one true faith," and considers the official Russian Orthodox Church to be a force for evil. If Tsvigun and Krivonogov proclaimed *rusmarlos* to be the true expression of Slavic spirituality, Bereslavsky takes these claims even further: the Mother of God Center is, in fact, the true Russian Orthodox Church, and only the center can bring back the "truths" of Orthodoxy that were distorted by the Russian patriarch's "red church."⁵⁵ Other new religions, such as the Bazhov Academy of Secret Knowledge (*Bazhovskaia akademiia sokrovennykh znaniĭ*), appear more concerned with reconstructing the lost traditions of "holy" Russian culture than with attacking the Orthodox Church. Founded in the Cheliabinsk oblast' by Vladimir Sobolev, the Bazhov Academy claims that the Urals are the "energy center" of all of Russia, and that the navel of the world can be found in Arkaim, the homeland of a lost people located not far from Magnitogorsk. Among the key figures in their cosmology is Ernak, the conqueror of Siberia, whose heroic feat united Europe and Asia. Even contemporary public figures have their role in the academy's vision of Russia's sacred mission; in Sobolev's hands, Mikhail Gorbachev becomes the reincarnation of the Grand Prince Mikhail Romanov, and thus the tsar of all the Russias. Much of the teachings of the academy are based on interpretations of folktales written by the Sverdlovsk author Pavel Bazhov (1879–1950), who is said to have encoded sacred truths in his seemingly innocuous children's stories. Steeped in folklore and national traditions, the academy sponsors conferences and folklore festivals, and has close ties with the local government; a Bazhov festival in 1995 is said to have attracted six thousand participants.⁵⁶

After looking at several different native Russian "cults," one almost gets the impression that their leaders ransacked the same public library for inspiration,

or that the component parts of the country's national myth were sold off to new religious movements at an ideological privatization auction. In 1992, *Megalopolis Express*, then a new weekly tabloid with a dubious reputation, published a series of articles that purport to expose the existence of a previously unknown community living in secret passageways under Moscow. These so-called Tolstoyites apparently descend from the Tolstoyans who attempted to put the Russian writer's religious ideas into practice, but an editor's note to the first article on the subject calls the group a "Kind of hybrid of the ideas of Lev Tolstoy and Vladimir Ulianov [Lenin]."⁵⁷ It is difficult to see precisely what their beliefs and practices have to do with either Tolstoy or Lenin: the group supposedly advocates "absolute freedom, conscience and uncompromisingness," and practices free love, theft, prostitution, and murder.⁵⁸ Their children are raised on an eclectic diet of literature whose enumeration says much about the cultural agenda of the reporter, Nikolai Popov: "the children study the classics from Aristotle to Berdiaev, from Ovid to Pushkin, from Pythagoras to Lobachevsky." By arranging the names as a series of contrasts between ancient Greek and Russian culture figures, Popov treats the Russian patrimony and the Greeks as two equally valuable (and equally dead) traditions. Moreover, Popov recapitulates a classic Russian millenarian pattern by implying that, in all fields of endeavor, it is Russia that completes the march to progress begun by the Greeks. To the best of my knowledge, no other newspaper picked up the Tolstoyite story; and given the reputation of *Megalopolis Express* and the sensational nature of the articles, it is more than likely that the Tolstoyites are the product of the reporter's imagination. Yet even if the Tolstoyites are a fabrication, the use of a classic Russian author as inspiration for the sect suggests that a concern with Russia's cultural heritage is an essential part of the deep structure underlying new religious movements in Russia today: it is the Russian *sperifika* (specific character) that makes the forgery at least somewhat convincing.⁵⁹

Totalisectarians

The existence of so many different new religious movements created a problem for ambitious groups such as the Great White Brotherhood. Inevitably, the leaders of the Brotherhood found themselves hurling invective not only at the "usual suspects" such as Patriarch Aleksii II, Yeltsin, and Leonid Kravchuk (then president of Ukraine), but also at rival prophets who were equally sure

that *they* were the authors of a new and final testament. For all its talk of unity, the Great White Brotherhood encountered the same problem faced by utopian visionaries throughout history: the Brotherhood's pretensions to global truth easily revealed themselves to be parochial. Indeed, the very term most commonly used to describe new religious movements in Russia (*sektas*) connotes factionalism and obscurantism dating back to the Schism of the seventeenth century, thereby implicitly relativizing any new religious movement's claim to global truth. The competing claims of so many would-be messiahs diminishes their "divine" status: the Promised Land begins to resemble a feudal estate divided among so many quarrelsome godlings.

In between diatribes on the evils of contemporary Orthodoxy, Tsvigun and Krivonogov used the pages of *HUSMALOS* to fulminate against Ioann Bereslavsky's Mother of God Center. Although it has garnered far less media attention than the Great White Brotherhood, the Mother of God Center appeared on the scene several years before Maria Devi. Early in his prophetic career, Bereslavsky was quoted as saying that Moscow's streets would be filled with thousands of plague-infested corpses if the city failed to accept his teachings; but by the time Maria Devi won her *succès de scandale*, Bereslavsky had tuned his rhetoric down several notches.⁶⁰ Maria Devi's lurid description of the hellish fate reserved for nonbelievers is a classic millenarian vision, while the reformed teachings of Bereslavsky might well be called "apocalypticism with a human face": the world is to be transformed rather than destroyed, all thanks to the mercy of the Mother of God.⁶¹ Even discounting the differences in their respective scenarios for the culmination of history, the nature of Bereslavsky's center ensured that he and the White Brotherhood would be mortal enemies. Where Tsvigun claimed to be both Christ and the Mother of God incarnated in one form, Bereslavsky built his center around the worship of Christ's mother and declared himself her messenger.⁶² In a poem dated March 20, 1993, Tsvigun declares Bereslavsky a "false prophet" and "traitor" who has sold himself to Satan.⁶³ On June 14, 1993, followers of Maria Devi disrupted a Mother of God service in St. Petersburg and distributed pamphlets referring to Bereslavsky as "kike filth" (*mezhist' zhidovskaiia*). Bereslavsky responded by calling "Maria Bludevi" (Maria Devi Slut) a "village cow and androgynous freak" whose genitals were invaded by an evil spirit while her soul was making one of its periodic trips into space.⁶⁴ Such fierce turf battles between the two cults could scarcely have had a salutary effect on the image of either organization.

Nevertheless, it is the totalizing ambitions of some new religious movements, rather than their intramural sparring, that provoke popular concern. Perhaps the clearest indication that new religious movements serve as a barometer for anxiety over the totalitarian legacy is the manner in which "cults" have been tarred with the brush of totalitarianism. The same authors who call for greater state control over religious affairs, and for an increased role of the Orthodox Church in public life, routinely refer to new religious movements as "totalitarian sects."⁶⁵ This term, which is used to describe religious movements that aspire to total control of the believer's life, has cold war roots that are even deeper than one might suspect. The accusation leveled at "totalitarian sects" by their critics is that they engage in "coding" (*kodirovaniye*) or "modeling" (*modelirovaniye*), the Russian equivalent of brainwashing. According to a Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) dossier on White Brotherhood leader Yuri Krivonogov, the Brotherhood's gun "is a master of bio-energetics and hypnosis, which he uses to neutralize a person's will and make him obedient and incapable of resistance." Krivonogov's "coding" turns his victims into "zombies" (*zombi*) "during their 'christening' or 'initiation' into the 'Great White Brotherhood.'"⁶⁶ Where did Krivonogov and other would-be messiahs develop these skills? In the laboratories of the KGB, of course.

Here we are dealing with the justifiable paranoia of a culture in which psychiatry was used as a weapon against dissidents rather than a tool to treat the sick, and in which the information vacuum left by the state-controlled press was filled largely by a formidable rumor mill whose productive capacity outstripped that of any actual Soviet factory. Ironically, the KGB served (and continues to serve) the same function fulfilled by "Communists" in the fantasies of right-wing extremists in the West: they can always be invoked to explain the inexplicable. As Boris Falikov puts it, "There are more than enough specialists in demonology in our country, which is, in itself, symptomatic." Falikov reports hearing his acquaintances argue that the entire White Brotherhood was a KGB mind-control experiment gone wrong, a theory that had earlier been used to explain the equally baffling phenomenon of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's popularity.⁶⁷ A number of sources claimed that Krivonogov had worked as an engineer or computer scientist in a laboratory specializing in "psychotropic weaponry."⁶⁸ One journalist insists that the young Krivonogov learned to "zombify" people while working at an artificial intelligence laboratory: "According to reliable data . . . the laboratory was dedicated not only to the creation of electronic intelligence, but also to the transformation of human intelligence into artificial intelligence."⁶⁹ The fact that such a claim would make no sense to

anyone with even the vaguest understanding of the nature of artificial intelligence is of little import; with this rhetorical sleight-of-hand, the post-Soviet cult is revealed to be a totalitarian genie let out of a KGB-manufactured bottle.

The irony of such charges of brainwashing is twofold. The accusations leveled at "totalitarian sects" betray an implicit faith in the claims of cult leaders to possess supernatural powers. In the frequent accusations of "zombification" and "coding," as well as in the tendency to treat science, religion, and mysticism as merely a verbal repertoire from which one may mix and match elements, we see evidence that the leaders of new religious movements and their opponents in the mass media turn to the same sources to frame their arguments. Maria Devi Khristos, the Living God of the Great White Brotherhood, claimed that the servants of the Antichrist were "subjecting thousands of naive people to his influence with the help of their television and radio programs," and that Russian Orthodox priests had been "adding a special psychotropic element" to the Eucharist, "making the parishioners into weak-willed slaves of the Satanists."⁷⁰ Throughout Russian history, religious dissenters have painted the authorities as servants of Satan on earth; Peter the Great, whose attempts to transform the country along Western models alienated a large segment of the population, and Patriarch Nikon, whose reforms in church ritual led to the Schism, are perhaps the most prominent figures to be identified with the Antichrist.⁷¹ Yet the attempt to identify "coding" with a plot to destroy traditional Russian values has itself been infected by foreign discourse: Russian critics are echoing the "brainwashing" debate in the United States, which itself grew out of the experience of Western POWs in communist reeducation camps.⁷² In America, the debate over brainwashing constituted the translation of the Red Scare into the realm of religion; now it has been appropriated by the defenders of Orthodoxy in the name of Russian cultural purity.

Relatively Russian

The irony surrounding the anxiety provoked by new religious movements in Russia is almost palpable: while the opponents of "cults" routinely charge that the phenomenon is the result of pernicious foreign influences, their own discourse has been colonized by the rhetoric of the Western "anticult" movement, which, for its part, displays cold war roots. In these unstable first years of the post-Soviet era, appeals to a simpler, more authentically "Russian" past are by no means uncommon, as demonstrated not only by Stanislav Govorukhin's popular documentary *The Russia We Have Lost* (1992), but also by the fre-

gency with which Russian historical and folk heroes appear in television commercials and by the massive circulation of pictures and calendars bearing the images of the last Romanovs. The propagandists both for and against new religious movements in Russia are fighting over more than the souls of potential believers: the prize at stake is the Russian cultural patrimony itself. Each side claims to be the heir to the Russia of a long-lost golden age, when the quarrelsome, unruly peoples that now populate the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus were supposedly of one faith, one blood, and one mind. Yet their competing claims for authenticity are inevitably a pastiche of myths, symbols, and rhetoric whose sources cannot be considered exclusively or fundamentally "Russian." Rather than simply debunking their opponents, those who purport to be the bearers of indisputable truth, whether they be Orthodox, nationalist, White Brothers, or worshippers of the Mother of God, manage only to further relativize both their own claims and those of their enemies. Even totalitarianism has been cut down to size: if the term *totalitarian sect* is a rhetorical hand-me-down from the cold war era, it is one that subjects the totalitarian model to significant alterations, since, despite all pretensions to the contrary, postcommunist cults function on a drastically smaller scale than that of the Soviet government.

While the ideological struggles between new religious movements and the establishment (i.e., the press, the government, and the Orthodox Church) lead only to further relativism, they can also be seen as evidence of an oblique tendency toward a rather unexpected form of unity. All parties to the debate speak the same language: a language that combines nostalgia for a long-lost mythical past and strong faith in the supernatural with the fear of an impending apocalypse, whether it be the end of the world forecast by the likes of Maria Devi or the huge social upheaval expected by her opponents as a result of her predictions. Both cultists and anticultists offer versions of the same eschatological narrative to an anxious public. Inundated with propaganda both for and against new religious movements, contemporary Russia has proved itself to be their ideal audience, providing what authors of fantasy have traditionally demanded: the willing suspension of disbelief.

Notes

- 1 "Russia's Strongman Lebed Supports Yeltsin's Reforms," Reuters, June 27, 1996.
- 2 Michael R. Golden, "Russian Vote Sets Off Battle, This Time in Yeltsin's Camp," *New York Times*, July 6, 1996, p. 1.

- 3 The Russian words for "Mormon" (*mormon*) and "Mason" (*mason*) are both stressed on the final syllable, and thus sound much more similar than do their English counterparts.
- 4 "Russia's Lebed, on Eve of Vote, Wants More Powers," Reuters, July 2, 1996.
- 5 Reliable statistics on the number of foreign missionaries on Russian soil are hard to come by, in part because the anecdotal evidence of their presence is so overwhelming as to obviate the need for a survey. Recent statistics released by the Department of Ethics and Law in *Moskovskie novosti* claim that the "missionary boom" has peaked: 1995 saw the number of registered missions decrease from 318 to 209 (*Moskovskie novosti*, March 17–24, 1996, p. 34; trans. in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 48, no. 13 [1996]: 20). The number of unregistered missions is, of course, unknown.
- 6 Because "cult" carries a heavy load of ideological baggage, I will place the word in quotes. Many contemporary religious scholars prefer the term "new religious movement" to avoid the negative connotations associated with the word "cult." For an extended discussion of the problem with terminology, see James T. Richardson, "Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular Negative," *Review of Religious Research* 34, no. 4 (1993): 348–56. I am grateful to Professor Richardson for sharing his unpublished manuscript, coauthored with Jane Dillon, "The 'Cult' Concept and Ideological Hegemony: A Politics of Representation Analysis."
- 7 Sergei Filatov claims that more than 70 percent of urban Russians believe in astrology, although he does not cite any source for this statistic (Filatov, "Sovremenniaia Rossiia i sekly," *Nastraniata literatura*, no. 8 [1996]). Kashpirovsky is a faith healer who repeatedly appeared on Soviet television during the perestroika era, using his "powers" to cure the diseases of both his studio audience and viewers at home (David Rennick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* [New York: Vintage Books, 1994], pp. 255–63). Evgenia "Dzhuna" Davtashvili attracted Brezhnev's attention in 1980; her psychic powers prompted him to give her a government job as what she obliquely calls "sort of a Krenlin doctor" for Brezhnev and others. Like Kashpirovsky, Dzhuna claims that she can cure a wide range of ailments, from allergies to AIDS, using either her hands or the "Dzhuna stimulator," a machine with a picture of her hands on it ("Russians Turn to Mystic Healer," Associated Press, April 23, 1995).
- 8 Mikhail N. Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, trans. from Russian by Anesa Miller-Pogacar (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 161.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 160.
- 11 Mikhail Epstein, "Response: 'Post' and Beyond," *Slavic and East European Journal* 39, no. 3 (1995): 363.
- 12 The results of these two surveys were presented in a round table published by *Voprosy filosofii* in 1992, and subsequently reprinted in English translation as "Religion and Politics in Postcommunist Russia," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (1994): 50–95. The surveys were conducted in Moscow, Pskov, "and a number of other cities and villages in July–September 1990 and in August–October 1991"

- (p. 52). The survey was sponsored by the Russian Academy of Sciences and interpreted by D. E. Furman and S. B. Filatov; the size and composition of the sample were not specified. As L. N. Mirokin argued in the round-table discussion, the results must be taken with a grain of salt (p. 92) because of both the unreliability of survey techniques in the Russian Federation and the traditional reluctance of Russians to speak openly to pollsters. Nevertheless, even with a wide margin for error, the data can be considered indicative of general trends in the early 1990s.
- 13 The very existence of "Christians in general" or generic "believers" can easily be underrepresented by surveys, especially if the results are taken out of context. The 1996 *Moskovskie novosti* survey claims that the Orthodox "account for 75 percent of the religious believers in Russia" (*Moskovskie novosti*, March 17–24, 1996, p. 34). The wording is, however, misleading because the article reports a study of religious centers, congregations, and other organizations rather than of believers. By definition, "Christians in general" or "believers," would be absent from the results because they do not form a congregation.
- 14 Furman, "Religion and Politics," p. 57.
- 15 David Lyon suggests that the New Age and postmodernism share a number of common features, including "the critique of secularization, itself seen less as a description of religious doctrine than as part of a metanarrative of secular modernity" (David Lyon, "A Bit of a Circus: Notes on Postmodernity and New Age," *Religion* 23 [1993]: 119).
- 16 L. Ron Hubbard is the founder of Scientology. Scientology came to Russia in 1991, and by 1992 the organization sponsored management courses for "New Russians" throughout the cities. *Dianetics*, Scientology's primary text, was published in a Russian translation in 1993 (Filatov, "Sovremennaiia Rossiia i sekty").
- 17 Filatov, "Sovremennaiia Rossiia i sekty"; Peter Rutland, "Sects Infiltrating Schools," *OMRI Daily Digest*, December 27, 1995.
- 18 The arms purchases, both successful and attempted, are discussed in a number of publications, including Murray Sayle, "Nerve Gas and the Four Noble Truths," *New Yorker*, April 1, 1996, p. 66; and David E. Kaplan and Andrew Marshall, *The Cult at the End of the World* (New York: Crown, 1996), pp. 69–76, 190–205.
- 19 Oxana Antic, "The Spread of Modern Cults in the USSR," in *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Sabrina Petra Ramet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 260–61.
- 20 Sabrina Petra Ramet cites an article in *Moscow Magazine* claiming that the number of Krishna followers in the USSR grew from 3,000 to 100,000 between 1988 and 1990 ("Religious Policy in the Era of Gorbachev," in Ramet, ed., *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, p. 31). Whether or not the numbers are accurate, the Krishna movement has certainly become much more visible in the past decade. The 1996 *Moskovskie novosti* survey cites the Hare Krishnas as the largest new religious movement in the Russian Federation, with an estimated 10,000 followers (*Moskovskie novosti*, March 17–24, 1996, p. 34). For a history of the Krishnas in the USSR, see Antic, "Spread of Modern Cults," pp. 260–68.

- 21 "Russia's Lebed."
- 22 Furman, "Religion and Politics," p. 58.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- 24 On the role of the occult in contemporary Russian chauvinist circles, see Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundred: The Rise of the Extreme Right in Russia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 149–53.
- 25 *Chernyi sled* "Belogo bratstva": *Danilovskii listok* (Izdatel'stvo Sviato-Danilova monastyrja), p. 3.
- 26 Detailed English-language summaries of the rise and fall of the Great White Brotherhood can be found in Eliot Borenstein, "Articles of Faith: The Media Response to Maria Devi Khristos," *Religion* 25 (1995): 249–66; and Borenstein, "Maria Devi Khristos: A Post-Soviet Cult without Personality," *Mind and Human Interaction* 5, no. 3 (1994): 110–22.
- 27 Although the focus of this essay is the Russian Federation, the Great White Brotherhood was equally active in Ukraine and Belarus. The significance of Maria Devi's "pan-East Slavic" perspective is discussed below.
- 28 "Vyzhzh' i zaklei Mariu Devi!," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, Ekstremnyi vypusk, November 12, 1993, p. 22.
- 29 [Marina Tsvigun], *Ia Es'm' Lindov' i Sbornik Bozhestvennoi poezii* (*USMALOS*, no. 8 [1993]), p. 128. This official biography, along with Tsvigun's credentials, was disputed in the Russian and Ukrainian press. For more on Tsvigun's "earthly" life, see Borenstein, "Articles of Faith," pp. 251–52.
- 30 Aleksandr Marusik, "A mama zhdet svoju boginju . . .," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, November 10, 1993, p. 2. The implications of the roots of Tsvigun's delusions of godhood in a botched abortion were not lost on observers of the movement. Aleksandr P'iankov (*Vechernii klub*, November 12, 1993) ironically refers to Tsvigun as "that victim of Soviet gynecology," while Valerii Vyzhlovich ("Epidemiia 'Belogo bratstva': Istoriiia boleznii," *Izvestiia*, November 26, 1993, p. 6) reports that Tsvigun's ex-husband explained on Ukrainian television, "It all started after her seventh abortion." Andrei Ign'ev ("Mariia Devi Khristos: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo. Zhizn' kak tvorchestvo," *Nezavisimaa gazeta*, July 12, 1993, p. 5) asserts that Tsvigun's greatest problem is "an unquenched thirst for motherhood," which explains not only her rather bizarre poems to her baby son Jesus, but also the motive behind her participation in the cult: she is a childless woman who steals other people's children.
- 31 *USMALOS*, no. 8 (1993), pp. 1–2. Although the idea of "God the Mother" could be considered simply an obvious addition to the Christian "divine family," it seems, like much of the Brotherhood's doctrine, to have its roots in the Theosophy of H. P. Blavatsky. Blavatsky describes the three "Logoi" (Father, Mother, and Son) who were the "antetype" of the Christian trinity in *Collected Writings*, vol. 10 (Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1978), p. 332. Even the name of Maria Devi's religious movement seems to be lifted from Theosophy: Blavatsky claimed that her writings came to her through a mystic link to a "Great White Brotherhood" of mysterious *mahatmas* (Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher Than Truth* [Princeton:

- Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 31). Although the name "Great White Brotherhood" has definite racist overtones, such connotations were not explored in Maria Devi's literature.
- 32 *Uchenie Marii Devi Khristos* (Nauka o Svyete i ego transformatsii. Osnovnye formuly, 1993), p. 13.
- 33 *IUSMALOS*, no. 8 (1993), p. 2.
- 34 *Uchenie*, pp. 21–22.
- 35 *IUSMALOS*, no. 8 (1993), p. 2.
- 36 *IUSMALOS*, no. 11 (1993), p. 7. The view that both Krivonogov and Tsvigun were to be killed is supported by Filatov ("Sovremennaiia Rossia i sekty").
- 37 V. Ignatov, "Maria Devi gotovitsia k raspriatiu, a kievskaiia mulitsia — k massovym besporiadam," *Segodnia*, November 4, 1993, p. 1.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 1; Leonid Kapeliushnikov and Natalia Zinets, "'Beloe bratsivo' v predverii konisa sveta," *Izvestia*, November 2, 1993, p. 6.
- 39 Kapeliushnikov and Zinets, "Law Enforcement Organs Appeal to Public Order," *Uryadovyy kuryer*, October 30, 1993 (rpt. in *FBIIS, Daily Report—Central Eurasia* [November 3, 1993], pp. 61–62); Kapeliushnikov and Zinets, "'Beloe bratsivo,'" p. 6; Halyna Kryvenko, "Sect Mass Suicide Threat Moved Ahead to 14 Nov.," *Molod Ukrainy*, November 5, 1993 (rpt. in *FBIIS Daily Report—Central Eurasia* [November 9, 1993], p. 58); "Appeal on Activity of Sect," *Uryadovyy kuryer*, November 4, 1993 (rpt. in *FBIIS, Daily Report—Central Eurasia* [November 5, 1993], p. 58); "White Brotherhood Members on Hunger Strike," *Molod Ukrainy*, November 2, 1993 (rpt. in *FBIIS Daily Report—Central Eurasia* [November 5, 1993], p. 57).
- 40 Oleg Karmaza, "Reportazh s konisa sveta," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, November 16, 1993, p. 3; Kapeliushnikov and Zinets, "'Beloe bratsivo,'" p. 1.
- 41 Mariia Starozhitskaia, "Zaderzhany 700 chlenov 'Belogo bratsiva.' Konets sveta otmennaiasia . . ." *Izvestia*, November 26, 1993.
- 42 Andrei Borodin and Sergei Kisilev, "End of the World Postponed—Leaders of White Brotherhood Arrested in Kiev," *Segodnia*, November 13, 1993, p. 1, trans. in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 45–46 (1993): 27.
- 43 "Ukraine Court Sentences Doomsday Cult Leaders," Reuters, February 9, 1996.
- 44 Filatov, "Sovremennaiia Rossia i sekty"; Boris Falkov, "Beloe bratsivo," *Znamia*, no. 8 (1996), p. 192.
- 45 Borenstein, "Articles of Faith," pp. 249–66.
- 46 Borodin and Kisilev, "End of the World," p. 27; Starozhitskaia, "Zaderzhany 700 chlenov," p. 1. For a more detailed discussion of the role of this misperception in the Maria Devi hysteria, see Borenstein, "Articles of Faith," pp. 254–55.
- 47 Nowhere in any of the Brotherhood's materials that I have examined is there a mention of mass suicide; instead, only Maria Devi (and perhaps Krivonogov) were to die on the cross. For a discussion of the roots of this misconception, see Borenstein, "Articles of Faith," pp. 253–54.
- 48 Even the name "Maria Devi Khristos" suggests a cross-cultural hybrid: "Christos"

is, of course, both the Russian word for "Christ" and a distinctly Greek lexical import, while "Devi" comes from the Sanskrit word for "goddess."

- 49 ITAR-Tass, "K'stati," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, November 16, 1993, p. 3. Tsvigun's litany of countries she visited can be found in the pamphlet *Stupaitie za mnoi, deni moi!*
- 50 *Stupaitie za mnoi*, emphasis in the original.
- 51 Serge Zenkovsky, ed., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales* (New York: Meridian Books, 1974), p. 447. Anonymous, "Ispoved' byvshego sviashtenika (fil o metrozosti zapusteniia v sviatlykh mestakh)," *IUSMALOS*, no. 8 (1993), p. 6. The author notes that the numbers on the license plates of top church officials add up to 666: "Do you think this is by accident?"
- 52 *Stupaitie za mnoi*.
- 53 "Pete moi u vodu zhrvuiu," *IUSMALOS*, no. 10 (1993), p. 3.
- 54 S. Kisilev, "Belaiia gorachka. Pochemu chekisty ne mogli naiti shab 'Belogo bratsiva,'" *Novaya gazeta*, November 10, 1993. One sign of the near universal recognition of Maria Devi's image is a parodic series of "xerox art" produced by Ekaterinburg artist Sasha Shaburov. In photo after photo, Shaburov put his own face on a number of classic cultural icons, from Vera Mukhina's monumental statue "The Worker and Collective Farmer" to the bust of Nefertiti. Included in the series is a portrait of the artist as Maria Devi, over the inscription "Sasha Shaburov Khristos."
- 55 Filatov, "Sovremennaiia Rossia i sekty."
- 56 All my information on the Bazhov Academy comes from Filatov, "Sovremennaiia Rossia i sekty."
- 57 Nikolai Popov, "Sect in the Moscow Catacombs," *Megalopolis Express*, no. 13, March 25, 1992, p. 7, trans. in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 44, no. 12 (1992): 32–33.
- 58 Popov, "Sect in the Moscow Catacombs."
- 59 Inventing nonexistent "cults" in order to advance a cultural agenda is hardly the sole purview of tabloid journalists; in his monograph *New Sectarianism*, Mikhail Epstein describes more than a dozen different sects that have been formed in Russia since the 1970s: "Khazarians," "Blood Worshipers," and even "Pushkinites." The result is both a commentary on recent cultural trends and an extended Borgesian joke (fiction in the form of scholarship). See Mikhail Epstein, *Novoe sektanstvo* (Holyoke: New England Publishing Co., 1993).
- 60 Svetlana Kolosovskaiia, "Chumannai volna," *Smena* 3 (1994), pp. 20–36.
- 61 Filatov, "Sovremennaiia Rossia i sekty."
- 62 Bereslavsky's center did, however, predate the Great White Brotherhood; Falkov claims that it was Bereslavsky's prophecy of the Mother of God's imminent reappearance in March 1990 that led Tsvigun to believe she was the Mother of the World (Falkov, "Beloe bratsivo," p. 186).
- 63 Mother of the World Maria Devi Khristos, "Moskovskomu Izheproku o Ioannu (Bereslavskomu) (direktoru Bogorodichnogo tsentra)," *IUSMALOS*, no. 4 (1993), p. 3.

- 64 Aleksandr Shchepkov, "'Bran' Bogorodichnogo tsentra s 'Belym bratstvom': Koinmedia, perekhodnashchata v dramu," *Nezarizninaia gazeta*, June 16, 1993, p. 2.
- 65 The term *totalitarian sects* appears throughout the Russian-language literature on new religious movements; for an example in English, see "Boom of Religious Cults in Russia Provokes Fear," Reuters, May 11, 1995.
- 66 Georgii Alekseev, "Khishchniki v belykh odezhdash, ili kuda ischezaiut nashi deti?" *Shehit i mech*, July 8, 1993, p. 8; Viktor Smitnov, "Brat'ia, apostoly . . . i propavshie deti," *Rossiiskie vesti*, November 10, 1993; Aleksandr Shipkin, "Tzhepropoki v Kieve," *Rossiiskie vesti*, November 13, 1993. None of the Brothers who were detained after the Kiev incidents confirmed such rumors, even after they had been "cured" by Ukrainian psychiatrists and released into the custody of their parents (Vyzhutovich "Epidemiia," p. 6). Nonetheless, the living conditions for the brotherhood's rank and file did not exactly encourage freedom of thought. Ludmila Grigorieva a researcher in Russian sectarianism from Krasnoyarsk, infiltrated the White Brotherhood and spent two months with them. Her findings confirmed some of the stories found frequently in the popular press: Maria Devi's followers fasted throughout most of the day and ate a small portion of food only at night; most of their day was spent in prayer; "Brothers" were rarely allowed to sleep longer than four or five hours at a time. While these methods are, arguably, coercive, neither drugs nor the supernatural appear to have played a role (Filatov, "Sovernennata Rossia i sekty").
- 67 Falikov, "Beloe bratstvo," p. 191.
- 68 Alekseev, "Khishchniki," p. 8; Nikolai Burbyga and Aleksei Grigor'ev, "'Olets nebesny' i 'Mater' Mira: pokhishchait detei, sovershait finansovye aferu v psevdoreligioznoi sekte 'Beloe bratstvo,'" *Izvestia*, July 28, 1993, p. 3.
- 69 Valerii Lapikura, "'Beloe bratstvo': zombi ili fanatki?" *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, November 9, 1993, p. 5; Boris Falikov also makes much of the "artificial intelligence" connection, calling the "program" of IUSMALOS a "cosmic computer game, in which God battles the devil" (Falikov, "Beloe bratstvo," p. 189).
- 70 *IUSMALOS*, no. 8, 1993, p. 1.
- 71 James Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 142-44, 158, 180.
- 72 The "brainwashing" controversy was inaugurated by Edward Hunter, who introduced the term in his study of Chinese "thought reform techniques" (*Brainwashing: The Story of the Men Who Defied It* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1956]). The term was appropriated by the anticult movement to describe alleged coercive indoctrination techniques. The debate continues to the present day, although a number of convincing studies have found flaws in the brainwashing model. For more on this debate, see David G. Bromley and James Richardson, eds., *The Brainwashing/Deprogramming Controversy: Sociological, Psychological, Legal, and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983).