

## NEW TEXTS

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# Humility and The Gift: The Elective Affinity of Institutions and Ethics in Orthodox Parishes



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### Abstract

This article analyzes the economic ethics of modern Orthodox laity belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church. The article is based on an array of interviews with priests, and Orthodox laypersons (as well as non-believers and Catholics for comparison purposes). Data were collected via several projects from 2004 to 2014. Data (in-depth interviews from the recent projects 2012–2014 amount to 395) are analyzed by means of the grounded theory methods, including substantial and theoretical coding, theoretical sampling, and constant comparative method. Theories used include the concept of elective affinity between the motivation of economic activities and types of economic organization (Weber) and the typology of economic systems by K. Polanyi.

This study attempts to show the elective affinity between the ethics of humility and the principle of economic integration known as reciprocity networks of mutual support of both churched and unchurched Russians, centered in the parishes and functioning on the basis of the logic of gift giving. Such a coupling of motivation and informal economy, invisible to the GDP, performs important functions in contemporary Russia which has a mix of economic types (such as generating of social capital or development of moral density and solidarity in local communities. They in it's turn fulfill some economic functions — i.e. avoiding getting into the debt bondage or some others). The article deals with (the activated by humility ethics) reciprocity and its consequences for the community seeks to challenge the established view on Orthodox Christianity as an ‘unproductive’ culture, hindering economic development.

**Keywords:** economic ethics; Orthodox Christianity; gift; humility; Max Weber; Karl Polanyi.

### Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century, Max Weber [Weber 1990] and Ernst Troeltsch [Troeltsch 1912] reformulated the question<sup>1</sup> of the relationship between religion and the economy to illustrate that the development of certain types of Protestantism fostered the development of capitalism and economic development. By the 1950s–1960s, the link between capitalism and development was firmly established in the social sciences, particularly, in economics [Rostow 1960]. In brief, the idea was that the development of the free market promoted the economic growth of a country (measured by GDP which is up to this point often perceived as ‘welfare’ index, though not designed for this purpose). It was also argued that independent individuals, equipped with values of self-realization and calculative rationality,

<sup>1</sup> For the history of the problem prior to Max Weber, see [Münch 1993].



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and maximizing their utility would promote the economic development of the country in the best possible way. Both theoreticians and empiricists, the supporters of liberalism, conducted a number of studies intended to identify the set of factors which boost progress and development<sup>2</sup>. Culture, and religion as its most important component, was recognized as one of the most important factors [Harrison, Huntington 2000]. By exploring connections between religion and economic development, modern scholars often emphasize different parts of development such as trust level, different economic values (market preference, competition and so on). In the most cases of Christian denominations researchers turn to only two — Protestants and Catholics. In this case Protestantism best promoted development (for example, [Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti 1993; La Porta et al. 1997]). If we add other denominations or religions (Islam, for instance), we may see similarity between Catholicism and Protestantism (see, for example, [Guiso, Sapienza, Zingales 2003; Lehrer 2004]). Orthodoxy has been equated with cultures which do not foster economic development (see, for example, [Snegovaya 2011 on the basis of Grondona 2000]). Proponents of liberalism suggest that unproductive values and cultures should be reformed and changed on productive ones [Yasin 2003].

In this situation, in order to be able to evaluate the potential costs of such reforms, the problem is to describe the motives and actions of the Orthodox laity in economic life, to conceptualize this behavior in respect to the problems of productivity, and to confirm the hypothesis whether Orthodox economic activity in modern conditions can be presented as potentially productive in the context of the available typologies of economic life.

This article first presents the theoretical foundations of this study in the works of Max Weber and Karl Polanyi. Next, we describe the stages of theoretical sampling and qualitative data collection, on which this article is based. Third, we provide evidence from interviews of the vocabulary of motives, that of ‘humility,’ as observed in Russian Orthodox laity. The conclusion suggests economic consequences of this motive and related activities.

<sup>2</sup> The danger of interpretation of GDP growth as social progress has been emphasized by many outstanding economists since 1960s (among these Simon Kuznets, Hicks, Samuelson, Nordhaus and Tobin) [Van den Bergh 2009: 118]. Van den Bergh systematized a large number of well-founded criticism aimed at this misuse of GDP. To name a few, GDP omits non-market transactions (while the latter may be crucial for survival in unfavourable economic conditions), while highlighting average income, it ignores the income distribution and the happiness studies showed little correlation between the happiness and GDP (the growth of GDP being sometimes in inverse correlation with happiness).

In Russia, the GDP is still given special attention, meaning the neglect of reciprocity in the context of social relations and economic policies. What is more, GDP increases when reciprocity is replaced by the anonymous arm’s length relationship [Fleurbay 2009]. When addressing modern Russia, authors tend to mention the low efficiency of formal institutions, while compensating by the development of informal ones requiring social capital, social network involvement, and trust. This is not reflected in the GDP, and may be considered as insignificant due to the substitution of the concepts of GDP and social welfare. The politics of strengthening relations of reciprocity is actually contrary to the widely accepted goal of increasing GDP. Because of this, as will be shown in the article, this widely shared scientific and political misuse of the GDP may have great implications for the actual development, especially in small towns.

## Theoretical Foundations of the Study

### 1. Weberian Framework

One of the basic premises of this study is the premise Max Weber tried to justify in *The Protestant Ethic* [Weber 1990], namely, the functioning of a specific economic system requires a specific motivation ('form of capitalism' has an elective affinity with the 'spirit of capitalism') and without such motivation an economic system cannot emerge. It is the dominant form of culture (at the time when Max Weber was writing his work) that defines the vocabularies of motive for the subjects of economy. This premise of Weber is used today (or was used in the recent past) by such different authors as Harrison and Huntington [Harrison, Huntington 2000], Inglehart and Welzel [Inglehart, Welzel 2011], Hofstede [Hofstede 2002], Schwartz [Schwartz 2008], Triandis [Triandis 2007], DiMaggio and Powell [DiMaggio, Powell, 2010] and others. Detailed reviews of research on the influence of culture on economy and religion can be found in Wuthnow [Wuthnow 2005] and Iannaccone [Iannaccone 1990, 1998].

We should move on directly to Weber's constructions. Three of Weber's ideas will be important for our analysis of economic ethics of Orthodox laity:

1. Economic ethics / motivation,
2. Elective affinity (Wahlverwandschaften).

At the time of Weber's research, the notion of ethics was associated with individual action, aimed at one or another object or situation (belonging to the world). This action made it possible to achieve the ultimate transcendent good or at least corresponded to it [Albrow 1990].

In the *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber actually used the concept of 'ethics' relatively rarely and never provided its consistent elaboration. In fact, only once did he treat it in some detail. In this passage Weber distinguished ethics from doctrine and practice [Weber 1990: 137–138]. On the basis of this threefold division, Weber described the Calvinist doctrine of pre-election to salvation, examining the "Westminster Confession" of 1647, and then raises a problem which is the problem of religious Christian ethics. For Weber's Protestant, the question of ethics is formulated as follows, "Am I elected to salvation or not." Having described the Protestant ethics and the specific version of the Reformed answer to the question, "How can I be saved," Weber went on to describe the economic ethics of Protestantism. This description is mainly contained in the chapter, *Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism* [Weber 1990: 184–208]. In order to understand the meaning of economic ethics in Weber's understanding and what is its basic question, we should turn to the quotations from that chapter of *The Protestant Ethic*:

Unwillingness to work is symptomatic of the lack of grace. <...> For everyone without exception God's Providence has prepared a calling, which he should profess and in which he should labor. <...> It is true that the usefulness of a calling, and thus its favor in the sight of God, is measured primarily in moral terms, and thus in terms of the importance of the goods produced in it for the community. But a further, and, above all, in practice the most important criterion is found in private profitableness. For if that God... shows one of His elect a chance of profit, he must do it with a purpose. Hence the faithful Christian must follow the call by taking advantage of the opportunity [Weber 1990: 188–190].

Considering the above fragments, the basic question of economic ethics can be formulated in the following way: "How do my economic activities (operate in the world) demonstrate to myself and others that I am among

the elect in order to be saved?”<sup>3</sup> The answer to this question should indicate the mode of action, which would include a validation procedure of what the person is doing and what happens to him in terms of salvation.

Thus, the economic ethics of a soteriological religion should include the answers to the question of how they should act in the world in order to be saved. Yet there is another difficulty in the fact that the answers of religious actors to fundamental questions concerning the meaning of economic activities in Christian Orthodoxy may differ from the principles guiding those same actors in their daily economic practices or activities. Therefore, it is desirable to carry out a separate analysis of the ‘declared’ and ‘actual’ economic ethics manifested in their practices.

One of the main lines of criticism aimed at Weber’s theses in *The Protestant Ethic* was that one should ascribe the idea of ‘calling’ to Protestantism, since the **written** documents on economy, such as the statements of Luther and Calvin concerning work and interest, contained very different prescriptions, judging both by specific instructions and by the general tone of the documents [Samuelson 1964; Robertson 1933]. However, Weber indeed claimed that the emergence of a particular capitalist ethos was triggered not by direct instructions regarding economic activities, but by general instructions on the path of salvation [Weber 1990]. To analyze the direction in which ethics could influence economy, instead of speaking about causality, Weber used the notion of elective affinity. Weber took his idea of elective affinity from Goethe, who in turn borrowed from the chemists of the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries [Howe 1978: 373–74]. This idea claimed that just as two elements do not always react and form some new substance, not all ethics would join one or the other organizational form or ‘types of life orders.’ In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber showed that in order for an economic boom to occur, the organizational forms of capitalism (which existed in many places and over a long time) had to appear in a position of elective affinity with particular economic ethics. Richard Howe interpreted the concept of Weber in the following way: “Where the judgments constituting two or more of its terms intersect, a transition point between the terms is defined. Where two or more of those terms share a predicate in common, they are in that respect ‘adequate’ to one another, or, in the sense of Mellin’s table of conceptual affinities and Kant’s idea of reason before it, they possess inner affinity” [Howe 1978: 379]. According to Howe, all Weber’s typologies are built upon this principle. In other words, in order to speak of ‘causality,’ it is necessary to look for the intersecting elements in the various patterns which describe, for example, a typical motivation of economic activities and the typical structure of its organization.

## *II. Types of Society / Economy Organization. Elective Affinity between Ethics and Types of Social Organizations*

One of the widely accepted typologies of the connection between the organization of the economy and society was offered by Karl Polanyi. In his works Polanyi, following the institutional logic in analysis of economies<sup>4</sup> [Polanyi 1977], distinguished between the formal and substantive approach to economy, and insisted that the formal approach is in fact the acceptance of one of the three forms of economy formed in the course of history, identification of its organizational structure, and treatment of the structure as theoretical, normative, and timeless, ignoring the set of conditions which caused it. Defining and distinguishing economics, Polanyi suggested a typology which takes into account its major factor, ‘the form of integrating’ the movements of the elements in the economic process (goods, labor, logistics, etc.):

...it is suggested here that economies be grouped according to the form of integration dominant in each of them. Integration is present in the economic process to the extent that those movements of

<sup>3</sup> Instead of the notion of “pursuing economic activities,” Weber already uses a concrete notion of ‘professional calling.’

<sup>4</sup> In the framework of polanyian approach “Institutions have to be understood as socially constructed entities in which economic processes are culturally codified in such a way that the fluidity inherent in economic movements acquires stability. This involves understanding the specificity of the culture of the market where it is present” [Moucourant, Plociniczak 2013: 514].

goods and persons which overcome the effect of space, time, and occupational differentials are institutionalized so as to create interdependence among the movements. ...Forms of integration thus designate the institutionalized movements through which the elements of the economic process — from material resources and labor to the transportation, storage, and distribution of goods—are connected [Polanyi 1977: 35].

Polanyi identifies three such principles of integration — redistribution, reciprocity, and exchange.<sup>5</sup> His definition of the three types of economies as forms of integration is as follows:

As a form of integration, reciprocity describes the movement of goods and services (or the disposal over them) between corresponding points of a symmetrical arrangement; redistribution stands for a movement towards a center and out of it again, whether the objects are physically moved or only the disposition over them is shifted; and exchange represents a movement in a similar sense, but this time between any two dispersed or random points in the system [Polanyi 1977: 36].

Polanyi pointed out that it was necessary to distinguish between personal attitudes, supporting structures, and forms of integration. He wrote that the emergence of a certain form of integration does not depend on one or another type of personal attitude, and until specific institutions were in place which would support a certain type of integration, this form would not reach wide distribution. We may assume that Polanyi would agree with Weber's idea of affinity between personal attitudes and the supporting structure, as seen in the following idea of Polanyi: "They certainly also denote definite kinds of personal attitudes and actions, those of mutuality and barter; but diffuse individual acts of mutuality or barter lack the essentials of effectiveness and continuity on the societal plane" [Polanyi 1977: 37]. It can be assumed that if this affinity was not there, we would not be able to speak about any "definite kinds of personal attitudes and actions," since they would be distributed in a random way.

As a summary, we can present a table, comparing the main types of the economy as they are introduced by Polanyi (Table 1). Due to the fact that the approach of Polanyi has gained wide popularity, many authors have made an additional comparison of the three forms of integration, identified by him. Some of these developments are also included in the Table 1.

Thus, our goal in this study can be reformulated as the search for a common element in a certain type of economy (form of integration), and a typical motivation (personal attitude) manifested by Orthodox Christian actors. We may assume that all three types of forms of integration can be seen in Russia today. It is difficult to say which of them is dominant; probably in different areas of life and/or in different areas of Russia one would see the dominance of different forms.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the following discussion will concentrate on (1) the vocabulary of motives among Orthodox actors, in other words, an Orthodox ethics of economic actions, and (2) the search for a common element in the motivation logics and patterns of economic actions.

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<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, these three types of economies are also three types of solutions for the Hobbesian problem of social sciences — the answer to the question of how society is possible? Hobbes' own answer is rather the 'hierarchy / redistribution' kind [Hobbes 2001] Cf. another version of this same tradition [Graeber 2015], liberal-economic answer [Smith, Nicholson 1887; Akerlof 1994; Hayek 2005; Shelling 1956], and the answer based on the notion of gift exchange [Mauss 1996; Sahlins 1972: 157–169].

<sup>6</sup> We may assume the direction of the Orthodox engagement into the economy/social life of Russia, if (and only if) we will be able to confirm the elective affinity between form and spirit (the personal attitude). This assumption in turn is based on the idea of Troeltsch that certain versions of Christian sets of doctrines already entail the main types of social organization for the denomination which follows them [Troeltsch 1912]. In other words, the set of doctrines of a denomination considers some types of personal attitudes and supporting structures acceptable, while others — not so. It should not be understood in the sense that the denomination prohibits something (see Weber's argument in the controversy with the anticritics [Münch 1993]), but in the sense that it simply cannot perceive some things at all, and therefore cannot consider them significant.

Table 1

## Comparison between the Main Types of Economies

Author	Indicator	Compared Types	Key Notion	Nature of Correlation
Polanyi [1977]	Form of integration	redistribution	exchange	reciprocity
	supporting structure	centricity	market	symmetry
	personal attitude	cooperation	barter	mutuality
Thompson, Frances et al. [1991]	Means of collective action in society	hierarchies	markets	networks
Gough [1994]	Taxonomies of economic systems operating as	state	market	community
Ostrom [1990]	Organizational forms which enable collective action in these contexts	state	private sector firm	voluntary co-operative associations
Barsukova [2004]	Type of social relationships	patron-client relationship	commodity exchange	reciprocity
	Status of the good	tribute	commodity	gift
	aim	receiving additional benefits from the position in the hierarchy	profit maximization	collective survival

## Research Methodology. Data Description. Theoretical Sampling

Based on the theoretical context of the Weberian approach and the conceptual framework of substantivist anthropology [Polanyi 1977; Sahlin 1972], combined with our previous empirical work analyzing the Orthodox community from 2004–2012, we constructed the following project design. We use theoretical sampling as enumerated in grounded theory [Glaser 1978; Strauss, Corbin 2001; Morse 2000, 2010].

This study comprised research in several stages, all of which were guided by three major themes:

1. Orthodox parish community and social work of the Church.
2. Economic ethics and motivations of Orthodox laity.
3. The role of debt and the elective affinity between ethics and actions.

These three themes represent the logical continuation of the work which began in 2004. Our research was aimed at analyzing economic ethics, actualized in the practices of the communities which emerged around the monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church [Zabaev 2012]. The earlier study from 2004–2006 resulted in the description of the categories of obedience, humility and blessing which in our opinion are the core categories of Orthodox ethics manifested in the practices of modern Orthodox actors<sup>7</sup> [Zabaev 2015]. An additional outcome of this project was understanding the distinction between the categories of ethics which were manifested in the practices of monks, novices, and lay people who were in contact with monasteries, and the categories of economic ideology which surface in the texts of economic doctrines, as well as pastoral and popular Orthodox literature. The ideology forms around the categories of ‘helping your neighbor,’ ‘self-sufficiency,’ ‘good morals,’ etc.

<sup>7</sup> Elaboration of this argument (and polemics over it) can be seen in the following studies [Chirkov, Knorre 2015; Knorre 2014; Rousselet 2013; Khudyakova, Pepelyaeva 2013; Dubovka 2015; Medvedeva 2015; Kiselev 2014; Titaev 2013; Titkov 2012].

Accordingly, at the beginning of our project on economic ethics of the laity, we formulated the following expectations:

1. There is no single category describing the economic ethics of the modern Orthodox laity showing varying degrees of involvement in the life of the Church. This happens due to the fact that they employ:
  - 1.1. different intra-Orthodox discourses offering their different vocabularies of motives for ‘correct’ Orthodox actions;
  - 1.2. different discourses describing the motivation to action in the modern world<sup>8</sup> outside of Orthodoxy; reception of these vocabularies of motives largely occurs beyond control of the carriers of the Orthodox tradition.<sup>9</sup>
2. At the same time we were able to formulate an alternative expectation: the economic ethics of the Orthodox laity is described by the category of humility.

Our assumption that the Orthodox ethics of humility shares an elective affinity with hierarchical systems of social organization [Zabaev 2009] requires attention to concrete manifestations of Orthodox actions. Moreover, it is necessary to take into account a typology of economic actions and methods of organizing economic systems. For doing that, after the phase of the project on motivations (stages 3, 4 and 5), we focused on elaborating the theory for gift giving (the family of theoretical codes, per [Glaser 1978]). For the empirical verification of additional expectations formulated following this theory, we conducted fieldwork in stages 5 and 7 in Arkhangelsk Region, Ryazan Region, and Chita Region.

The list of our main assumptions made for verification through field research, as well as the direction of how these assumptions evolved, are summarized in Table 2.

### **Vocabulary of Motives. Humility**

The main thesis of this section can be formulated in the following way: since many actors operate today in the organizational field with different institutional logics, the vocabulary of motives among Orthodox actors is becoming enriched by categories from different sources.

The Russian Orthodox Church herself explicitly or implicitly also upholds one motive in her vocabulary — humility — which is of Orthodox origin. This motive, we suggest, has the possibility for becoming a primary motive due to the fact that it is rooted in Orthodox doctrines and shares an elective affinity with the logic of organizing the life of the Church.

As a result of interviews with Orthodox participants on the parish life, we were able to compile a relatively lengthy vocabulary of motives for Orthodox economic activities / labor: Christian Self-Upbringing, Moral Attitudes in the Working Team, Serving the People, Productivity, Self-Development and Interest, Humility<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> In the sociology of religion, E. Pace demonstrated how ‘communication’ of religions and mutual enrichment with different categories takes place [Pace 2011]. The subject of cultural diffusion was discussed within very different fields. With regard to Russian theology, G. Florovskiy’s concept of ‘Western captivity’ of Russian theology has received wide recognition [Florovskiy 1988]. See the criticism of this position in [Khondzinskiy 2012; Antonov 2006]. For the role of the category of ‘development’ in the textbooks of management, see [Boltanski, Chiapello 2011].

<sup>9</sup> From the proportion of those who are sympathetic to Orthodoxy and those who are in contact with priests, as well as taking into account the amount of persons per one priest in modern Russia, it is clear that we cannot speak about any unified perception of texts issued by the Russian Orthodox Church.

<sup>10</sup> The list of the identified motives is presented in another article (forthcoming). Here we just list them.

Table 2

**The Study, “Economic Ethics of the Orthodox Laity.” Theoretical Sampling**

	Phase	Number of respondents	Dates of fieldwork	Geography	Method
Theme 1: “Orthodox Parish Community and Social Work of the Church”					
1	‘Community’	69	2012–2013		Interview
2	‘Social Work’ <sup>12</sup>	154	2013	Moscow Region, Irkutsk Region, Khabarovsk Kray, Samara Region, Yaroslavl Region, Rostov Region, Altai Kray, Tyumen Region, Krasnoyarsk Kray	Interview
Theme 2: “Economic Ethics and Motivations of the Laity”					
3	‘Economic Ethics. Educated in Orthodoxy’	10 (Moscow)	2013–2014	Moscow, Minsk	Interview
4	Interview on Economic Ethics., ‘Priests and Parishioners’	9 (priests)			
6 <sup>13</sup>	Summer of 2014	Moscow, Moscow Region, Chita Region	Interview		
5	‘Tour of the Deanery’	18	Summer of 2014	Chita Region	Participant observation
6	Catholics	12	Summer–Autumn of 2014	Moscow	Interview
Theme 3: “The Role of Debt and Elective Affinity between Ethics and Actions”					
7	‘Debt’ <sup>14</sup>	117	Spring–Summer of 2014	Moscow, Arkhangelsk Region (Arkhangelsk, Kargopol); Ryazan Region (Ryazan, Kasimov)	
	The total number of interviews	395			

<sup>11</sup> The complete name of the Project is “Social Work Organization on The Russian Orthodox Church Parishes in the First Half of XXI. Sociological Analysis”. Research Grant: RNF 12-03-00565.

<sup>12</sup> Field research at stages 3–6 was conducted as a part of the Project, “Economic Ethics of Orthodox Laity in Modern Russia. Sociological Analysis.” (Research grant of Russian Foundation for Humanities № 14-33-01031).

<sup>13</sup> The complete name of the project is “Life in Debt. Social Meaning of Debt Practices in the Life of Communities in Russia.” Research Grant of St. Tikhon’s Orthodox University.



## *Motives from Orthodox Vocabulary. Struggle for the Interpretation of Humility (From Heroics to Obedience)*

The vocabulary of motives that surfaced in the narratives of the respondents is quite varied (in contrast to, for example, modern Russian Catholic vocabulary, which appears to be more consistent — partly due to the unified one-year catechization<sup>14</sup> course obligatory for those wishing to join the Catholic Church<sup>15</sup>). We think that in the future one of these motives, namely the motive of humility, has great chances to become an ‘official’ legitimate motive of Orthodox economic activities. Our assumption is based on the following ideas:

1. It is the only motive which demonstrates a clear link with the vocabulary of Orthodox dogmas.
2. It shares an elective affinity with the currently existing organization of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Despite the fact that this motive currently has a dominant meaning in discourse (associated with obedience), we can still see that there are various reinterpretations of the concept ‘humility’ in the Orthodox setting of our day. The range of meanings of the term widely varies from obedience or submission on the one hand to heroic actions on the other hand. Below are some examples from interviews.

*R.: I earned money by private taxi driving <...>. Such a Christian work ... you truly humble yourself... For example, some drunken company may get into the car or a drunken man who behaves in some disorderly way and may say anything that comes to his mind, may offend you, may hit on you — anything you can imagine... For example, I could drive people to some event which was held in the vacation hotel where I once went for some corporate event way back when I was working as the head of a broadcasting station. I myself was in that role, lived in a luxurious suite — and now I come here as a simple cab driver. Well, it humbles one, it really does. The sign of that is that I had tears when I came there (female, age 34, Minsk).*

*R.: Was not Alexander Nevsky humble? And even Alexander Suvorov, was he not humble?! A person who goes to give his life, knowing that there is something higher even compared to his life — is that not humility? Humility can be defined as peace with God, always, even in the most extreme situations. When they beat you or when you beat someone, you have to be humble without losing peace with God, you need to do the will of God. If you are really defending people holding a gun in your hands, if you do not let a rapist, a scoundrel, a murderer go on with his crime — you can be a humble person. <...> Humility. The Lord is humble — when he expelled the merchants from the temple, was he not humble? Today humility is understood as a kind of lack of will and a passive submission to the external circumstances. I am treated badly, but I bear this. What for? You should not tolerate what cannot be tolerated ‘for the sake of humility.’ With love — please do, this is very difficult. But we step back before difficulties, forgetting that Christ is the victor. We step back before difficulties, pretending that we are falsely humble, we keep silent still boiling inside; there is no peace with God, or with the others, or with yourself. <...> This is not humility, this is a distortion of the Christian church life, complete distortion (Archpriest, age 65, Moscow).*

## **Humility and Types of Economic Systems**

Following the logic of ‘elective affinity’ proposed in *The Protestant Ethic*, we turn to the task of detecting a common element in some logic of motivation and in a particular type of economic system. At this point, our supposition is that in the first place we need to search for an elective affinity between three types of economic

<sup>14</sup> Catechization is the course of teaching Catholic dogma, discipline and ethics.

<sup>15</sup> From the interviews with Moscow Catholics, it can be concluded that the love to God and to people is the leading motive in their work life. For more detailed information see our forthcoming text on this issue.

systems and the logic of humility. We think that only such a motive out of the entire vocabulary of motives among Orthodox actors (1) is rooted in the Orthodox doctrines (“is exclusive to Orthodoxy”), (1a) is present explicitly or implicitly in the main body of Orthodox literature,<sup>16</sup> and (2) describes a model of action in terms of balance between goals and means, rather than dividing the goals into those pleasing God and those not pleasing God.

We suggest that the motivation of ‘humility’ will not appear to be in elective affinity with every type of economic life. The following examples demonstrate how the respondents working for companies in the free market, in hierarchical structures, or operating in the networks of mutual assistance, categorize their activities. In the following examples we focus on whether the category of humility surfaces in their narratives, and how it marks a specific type of economic organization.

### *Humility and the Market*

1. Humility does not yield, when it is forcefully united with the market motivation and its legitimate range of goals. Entrepreneurs sometimes quit doing business.

*R.: It was 1990. I did everything. I worked wherever they paid. Then by gigantic efforts I created my own business. Thus, shoving my conscience deep in my pockets, I decided start doing business, because, speaking somewhat pretentiously, without soiling your conscience, you cannot do this work... Because you have to do all sorts of dealings repugnant to human nature: with the police, with crooks. <...> Several years ago (a long time ago), I decided to become a priest, so I came here to study, and my business exists separately from me. Some other people do it. Well, for me to subsist, because I cannot be seriously engaged here and there at the same time.*

*I.: Did you talk about it with the priests? Did you raise these problems with them?*

*R.: Yes. But what can they tell me? Be patient, pray. If only they told me: here, this is a job for you! No. Nobody would say so.*

*I.: Did you follow the recommendations they gave you?*

*R.: And what would they know about the business? I have my own recommendations. Had I followed their recommendations, maybe I would have lost my business long ago. Theoretically, I know everything about business myself. I follow their recommendations concerning life (male, age 49, Moscow).*

1a. In the case of necessity, a respondent’s world may become divided into two realms: in one realm the Orthodox logic is allowed, while the logic of market success operates in the other realm.<sup>17</sup> This often happens among ‘successful’ rich Orthodox, those Orthodox who became churched after they had become successful in business.<sup>18</sup>

*The absolute ideal is as Christ said, “Whoever is greater among you, should be the servant to all.” And He girded and began to wash the disciples’ feet. Moreover, when Peter was troubled by this, the Lord told him, “If I do not wash your feet, you will have no part with Me.” This is the ideal — when*

<sup>16</sup> See [Zabaev 2007].

<sup>17</sup> It is very probable that such a division correlates with the description in [Nelson 1949].

<sup>18</sup> Sometimes the logic, described by Gooren for the Pentecostals, is involved [Gooren 1999].

*the power of the person, the potential of his personality, is aimed at serving his neighbor, which is based on service to God. I do not know to which extent these categories are close to the modern business... I can only say with regret that this is not implemented in my company (male, age 33, Moscow) [Pal'cheva 2005].*

Humility, which is unanimously recognized as the most important virtue, cannot be considered a guiding principle in the working world. It is as if work becomes 'excluded' from the scope of this idea and may even displace humility, forming a separate, parallel world. The data shows that people who work in the market and consider themselves Orthodox separate humility and working processes in the companies which operate in the market.

### *Humility and Hierarchy*

2. Humility makes it possible to form monolithic hierarchies by fostering a motivation which is easily embedded into patron-client relationships.<sup>19</sup> It may be supposed that ethics of humility help the actors involved to avoid situations of potential conflicts, thus promoting the conservation of existing structures instead of change and reformation of those structures.

2a. However, humility in hierarchies and patron-client relationships may be expressed in other types of behavior, such as opportunism, time-serving, or parasitism, where the subordinate person, in accordance with the model of patron-client relations, begins to extract additional benefits from his position.<sup>20</sup> Passivity is easily wrapped in humility.

*Everything seems somehow mismatched; some elementary things are not complied with, that is, if the assignment is given with a deadline, no one cares at all if the deadline is not kept for months. At the same time everybody knows that no one will yell at them, and for some reason everyone takes advantage of that. That is, on the one hand, it is a very big plus that there is much more love in Orthodox structures, much more human attention, more relation to each other. But at the same time, instead of being grateful for that, instead of appreciating that, some kind of consumer attitude emerges. And a person thinks, well, they will not fire me anyway. It is not customary for the Orthodox to fire people, everybody has gotten used to the situation; everybody will be humbled; everybody will bear all my shortcomings. And everybody uses this. Of course, I am reducing everybody to the same level. But I see it in myself, that I behave just like that sometimes (female, age 33, Moscow).*

Much was written about the humility of this type in the milieu of monks, monastic and married clergy, and seminary students, especially in respect to the Synodal period [Pomyalovskiy 1949; Rostislavov 1866]. Moreover, this type of humility can very easily be deduced from the monastic literature. In the situation after the period of forced secularization, in the absence of a sufficient number of those who bear the living tradition, many of those who sincerely wish to join the Orthodox Church, primarily focus on the literature of monastic origins. It was not without reason that the saying "angels are light for the monks; monks are light for the laity" is widespread in the Orthodox discourse. The majority of canonized saints were monks (and there are no lay people among the saints apart from holy soldiers and martyrs), and so on. The entire logic of the Orthodox discourse seems to push people to perceive things which happen in the world around them through a monastic lens.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For the substantiation of this hypothesis as applied to Soviet socialism, see [Zabaev 2009]. See also [Popov 1987; Bek 1971].

<sup>20</sup> See [Graeber 2015; Barsukova 2003, 2004].

<sup>21</sup> In more detail, see [Zabaev 2012].

### *Humility and Gift Giving*

3. Humility shares an elective affinity with gift giving, and being consistently implemented it leads to a number of positive effects, such as the growth of communities and social capital of people, which, in turn, positively affects changes in individual behavior of the believers (as an example in the economic realm, we can mention the deliverance from erratic bank loans).

As we remember, Marcel Mauss viewed the gift as a sum of three types of operations: to give, to receive a gift, and to give back. Analyzing the concept of Mauss, G. Yudin wrote,

Yet, Mauss, apparently, made a mistake in his main point, believing that the main anthropological transformation inherent in the market economy is the undermining of the third principle of gift exchange — “one needs to give in return more than what was received.” In fact, modern utilitarianism strikes the most serious blow at the second principle — “it is necessary to receive a gift.” Switching from the mode of gift exchange into the mode of market interaction indicates the refusal to accept the challenge of gift exchange. Instead, the desire to ‘pay back’ comes to the foreground, that is, the desire to reduce the content of interaction to the value of the subject of exchange, to evaluate it and immediately withdraw from the interaction by paying a price [Yudin 2015: 37–38].

It should be mentioned that the Orthodox actors themselves understand humility, among other things as elimination of pride (the absence of pride).

*R: But always, always, you certainly want to solve your problems on your own. Maybe it's some lack of confidence in yourself, like what if... But it often does not in any way depend on whether you believe or not, but there is such a thing: well, I have to handle everything myself, I am a grown-up, I have to solve my problems with my own efforts. And at the same time, during these three years, the church, the parish have taught me that there is nothing shameful in saying, hey, guys, I have a problem, I would be very grateful if you help me solve it. <...> <The parish> heals pride. Why, why don't we want to ask for help? Because somebody told us, someone persuaded us, that we need to be absolutely successful, that everything always should be amazingly great, one hundred percent. But why does everything have to be always good? Sometimes something may go wrong, or for some reason something may not work out well for you, because no one is perfect (female, age 37, journalist, Ryazan).*

The people who live this way, are not susceptible to succumbing to consumer debt, since in the case of need they would borrow from their friends, as the following quotes illustrate.

*Now you can borrow, and now people would say, you'd better take it — well, knowing some situations, they say: you'd better take <money> from me, you'd better ask me, you will return it later. But... Here, I say, there is the thing that I'm a small, but proud birdy, yes (female, age 37, journalist, Ryazan).*

Prior to joining the community, in the event of financial need the same respondent would not go to her friends, acquaintances, or family, but would resort to bank loan services.

*R.: Once I <took> a bank loan, I was so crazy — we broke a thermometer at home, and mercury spilled. We have a very old parquet floor; and <the mercury> got inside, and I could not do anything to get it out it leaks again. And I simply went crazy, I went and took a loan, and bought a vacuum cleaner. But I took the loan in “Home Credit,” so in the end this vacuum cleaner cost me probably*

*seventy thousand <rubles> instead of the three thousand which I paid for it. That is, I paid, paid, paid, paid, paid, paid, and paid for, like, five years. Finally, I took another bank loan to close the first one (female, age 37, journalist, Ryazan).*

Moreover, the most successful persons in community development, for example, reopening a church on a new territory, etc. are those who have mastered the mechanics of gift giving. Some emphasize the second operation (ask and accept a gift), but still start with the first stage — first giving the gift, as if (in addition) bestowing a set of reciprocal obligations on another person.

*R.: I said: Semen Lvovich, here is some <holy> water the priest sent — will you take it? — I will. — And I say: our roof is leaking. And right away, without a pause, I did not let him even breathe. That's it, he will not refuse. One needs to somehow know how to ask. I don't know, you probably can't teach that to the young people. Yet one needs to learn. <...> It needs to be done. But not for myself, for the church I will ask. For myself, it won't work out, I only may ask for Alexey Petrovich <church rector>, (female, age 70, retired, Kasimov).*

Sometimes the gift giving cycle turns out to be one of the important resources of a priest who does not have any additional funds for restoring the church, or maintaining and developing the community. In doing this the priests are always in a difficult situation — a typical view of life and parishioners automatically emerges as a part of such an 'institutional logic.'

*R.: I don't think there is something bad about it, but of course, nothing is written in the Lives <of saints> about it. The priest, especially the rector, is always in such a situation, especially in a small town or village. Imagine, a woman comes to me, and I am talking to her, asking about her life, about her family; I need to devote to her some time. I know that if her husband is the driver of a Kamaz truck, this means that I have two opportunities to bring something <on the truck>. And so does every priest. Of course, after he takes the things, I will thank him, I will show him where the money or his efforts went, and will keep showing afterwards (male, age 45, clergyman (Archpriest), Samara Region).*

On the other hand, 'normal' priests understand that it is wrong to allow this view to evolve. Both from the perspective of the Gospels (the relation to a person as an end and not as a means) and from the logic of the gift (the obligation of the reciprocal gift especially in a situation where there are no established reciprocal institutions like the Kula Ring), reciprocity emerges or is reinforced only when the party accepting the gift does not have a feeling that he is being used, or in other words, when the gift becomes sudden, unconditional, not expecting a payback [Yampol'skaya 2012]. A giver should behave in accordance with the oft-quoted verse in Matthew 6:3: "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth", meaning not merely 'not expecting' anything in return (or planning), but even not 'knowing' that a favour was actually done.

*I.: This means, that there is always some kind of calculating intention?*

*R.: Yes, but a very specific one. Probably life itself tells you what to do. How can I explain this? It is a calculation of Gospels. We have one priest — his parish is near the train shed, near the final station. The cars are always checked and washed there, and the sleeping homeless are always taken out of the cars. Then he did not think of doing anything with them, let alone construction work. He just really believed. The homeless were taken out; they wandered around the village; he would feed them in his parish, give them clothing, arrange documents for them, help as he could. They even were at his home all the time. His wife and his son got lice from them. But he did as he read in the Gospel — it told to give shelter and feed, and he fed. And then it turned out that there were many different skilled*

*workers among them. They found an abandoned ZIL truck and fixed it; they fixed a MAZ truck with a crane, and they did different construction works. Now if somebody needs to start building, they go to his rectory. But I know him, he does not expect anything even now — he only lives like ‘you need a bag of pasta for a week to feed the people, where can I get it?’ This is his whole calculation — he simply reads the Gospels and does as it is written (male, 30 years, Ryazan region).*

As can be seen from the previous example, the development of the gift giving skill does not mean an easy or parasitic life. Sometimes one needs to wait for the reciprocal gift for a very long time. And almost the only way to wait for it is to not expect it at all. The following example illustrates a situation where a young parish rector with no connections and no money is appointed to a destroyed village church, where there was no parish life for over seventy years. He arrives with his family, and his task is to restore the church life in the village.

*R.: Only 10% survived from the church; 90% was destroyed. I basically found ruins... Everything was cut off for seventy years. My ministry started <...> of 1990. Today I have twelve active parishes on the territory of the district; four old churches are being restored; two new churches are being built; I did the paperwork for getting the land for three churches, and in one village a building was given for a prayer house. Seven priests serve in the district (male, age 45, clergyman (Archpriest), Samara Region).*

The rector pointed out that having no resources and being in an environment at best indifferent to the Church, he began simple work with the people. He started to establish a pattern of gift giving, building up a network of relationships and support with the only resource that he had — the network of emotional support:

*R.: I tried to build relationships with the heads of the rural settlements, school principals, leaders of organizations. All birthdays, all names days, holidays, <I would send> greeting cards to all of them, and flowers to some of them, that is, I tried to visit them all, and to spend some time with all of them. <...> They also started to communicate, they too began to congratulate each other with the New Year, Christmas, Easter, began to send each other greeting cards. The church initiated this tradition. (male, age 45, clergyman (Archpriest), Samara Region).*

And then he says that he started to receive gifts in response.

*R.: It happened once that I was driving through the village, and there goes the former Party leader of the kolkhoz. I stop, get a book which I had with me, and say, “Happy Birthday, Petr Alexandrovich.” He broke into tears. For so many years he worked in the kolkhoz as the Head, and until now no one has come and congratulated him. I honestly saw him by chance, and I remembered that it was his birthday, and for him it was a big deal. And later he started rebuilding the church in <the village in the district>. He began to help, to do things <...>, began to inspire people that the church should be restored. In each village there is such a ‘cell,’ the core, the backbone. And then something starts to revive there (male, age 45, clergyman (Archpriest), Samara Region).*

The pattern of gift giving was also launched by him in a different way. In addition, he began to organize all-village (not within-church) events in order to dismantle the stereotypes related to the Church and engage people in a common cause.

*I began then to put up a Christmas tree on the territory; we have several thousand visitors over the Christmas week here in the area. In fact, all the Christmas festivities happen here on the area. Teachers, educators know perfectly well that we organize several charitable Christmas pageants on the territory of the church. Even the employees from village cultural centers would come and start circle*

dances and various other activities. <...> <School students> dance here, perform stage plays and other things. Whether it is freezing cold or not, a snow storm or not, they all gather here. In this way everything started. Then, we had a Christmas ski race. Not only from one school, school students come here from all over the district, we organize it here in the park. I borrow a kitchen truck from the Helicopter Academy <...> mobile kitchen trailer, buckwheat, tea, everything is free. A Christmas ski race was conducted in one more village; the Theophany ski race was organized in another village. They all wait; we come. We go to the Christmas ski race, and all rural settlements come (male, age 45, clergyman (Archpriest), Samara Region).

Obligations accompanying the gift gradually started to work. With a certain time lag, the rector received gifts in response:

R: *I worked for seven years and did not see the results of my work, and began to despair. Only after the seventh year, I began to reap the results of my efforts and work. People's attitude began to change; the parishioners, the heads of villages, directors of enterprises. It was very difficult to break this stereotype. There were times when I would come to some production facility, speak about the problems, and receive an answer like, "I don't have money or building materials for priests. I have it only for people"... a couple of years later, this person asked forgiveness of me* (male, age 45, clergyman (Archpriest), Samara Region).

As we can see from the above examples, there is a place for reciprocal gift giving practices in parish life. Moreover, we can also see that the actions of Orthodox actors manifest very different connotations of gift giving practices — literal calculating intent [Mauss 1996; Polanyi 1977], gift giving in such a way that the act of giving should be immediately forgotten [Derrida 1992], and building a networking of regifting [Sahlins 1972] with the simultaneous generation of social capital and informal authority, and parasitizing on the schemes of gift and humility in the hierarchy / clienteles [Graeber 2015]. We may assume that, at least on the level of the parish and its environment, it is precisely the gift exchanging practices, and not market or command-and-control practices, which are most influential.

## Conclusion

The political scientist Maria Snegovaya is a scholar who probably expresses most clearly the liberal agenda in the modern scholarly community in relation to Orthodoxy. In the *Vedomosti* newspaper [Snegovaya 2014] she again raised the issue of paternalism as a part of the national unproductive culture, evidently contrasting it with liberalism as a productive culture [Snegovaya 2011]. These formulations follow a long line of similar statements. Neutral economic and political argumentation in dissertations are accompanied by passionate appeals by the same authors in the media to reform, by which they mean to reform according to a market viewpoint and the culture of pro-ductive individualism. In this article we have tried to document a different point of view and demonstrate the potential impacts of a traditional (or unmodernized) religious viewpoint in the society of late modernity, opposing the neoclassical economics with anthropological and sociological approaches.

Is there anything in common among the image of Alexander Nevsky<sup>22</sup> which, according to an Orthodox priest, is humility, for “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (Jn. 15: 13), an old woman asking for the church, a priest who organizes New Year's ski races or Christmas celebrations for several villages, a businessman giving money to the priest so he would buy an apartment for someone, a

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Nevsky served as Prince of Novgorod, Grand Prince of Kiev and Grand Prince of Vladimir in XIII c. He rose to legendary status on account of his military victories over German and Swedish invaders while agreeing to pay tribute to the powerful Golden Horde. He was canonized as a saint of the Russian Orthodox Church by Metropolitan Macarius in 1547 (Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Nevsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Nevsky) (accessed 22 November 2015)).

woman who got rid of ‘erratic’ bank loans with the help of voicing her needs in a parish, or a church which in three years taught its parishioner that there is nothing wrong with asking — is there anything in common among these things?

We believe there is. This is the pattern of gift giving as it is presented in the classic studies of Mauss [Mauss 1996] and Malinowski [Malinowski 1932], and was most vividly described by M. Sahlins. The essence of this system is that it is three-positioned [Sahlins 1972: 150], unlike the two-position exchange (that is characteristic of a hierarchical type of structures). In all the above examples, we may discern three positions: a woman asking from someone not for herself but for the church; Alexander Nevsky laying down his life for his friends; Christmas festivities which are organized not for the parishioners; breaking the link between a need and an erratic bank loan, ensured through the use of a third position, etc. A short definition of this principle is “to not ask for yourself.”

The question of ethics in soteriological religions is a question of what is sacralized as a means towards salvation. Weber’s Protestants sacralized success. We may assume that one of the principles of Orthodoxy is to sacralize a three-position pattern of gift giving, which can be potentially actualized from any of the positions. In other words, a humble person is a person who can give, accept a gift, and knows that he has to give a gift in response.

Our work attempts to point out aspects of Orthodoxy which are important for social and economic life. We attempted to show that the economic ethics of Russian Orthodoxy, which can be categorized as the ethics of humility, appears to share an elective affinity with the principle of economic integration known as reciprocity. This form of integration and this type of personal attitude work in the direction of reinforcing social solidarity. In the next step, as we have shown, this solidarity has important economic functions, for example, the deliverance of people from hysterical consumerism, in particular, from erratic bank loans, in Orthodox parishes (communities with high moral density) due to the operation of the networks of support<sup>23</sup>. Such a type of economy is often categorized as the ‘informal economy’ [Hart 2010] and is not counted in GDP. This does not mean that it is either useless or unproductive. The rate of informal economy varies from country to country and this rate is quite high in post-communist countries. We think these results should be taken into account when discussing the ‘unproductivity’ of the motivations in any religion, and the impact of these motives on a nation’s economy and social activity.

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<sup>23</sup> For the discussion about positive relationship between social capital and economic growth see, for example, [Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti 1993; Whiteley 2000; Schneider, Plumper, Baumann 2000; Neira, Vazquez, Portela 2009].



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