

[Mathijs Pelkmans](#)

Temporary conversions: encounters with Pentecostalism in Muslim Kyrgyzstan

Book section

Original citation:

Pelkmans, Mathijs (2009) *Temporary conversions: encounters with Pentecostalism in Muslim Kyrgyzstan*. In: Pelkmans, Mathijs, (ed.) *Conversion after socialism: disruptions, modernisms and technologies of faith in the former Soviet Union*. [Berghahn Books](#), Oxford, UK, pp. 143-162. ISBN 9781845456177

© 2009 The Editor

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28057/>

Available in LSE Research Online: July 2013

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's submitted version of the book section. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Chapter 8

TEMPORARY CONVERSIONS: ENCOUNTERS WITH PENTECOSTALISM IN MUSLIM KYRGYZSTAN

Mathijs Pelkmans

On a February Sunday morning in the provincial capital Jalal-Abad in southern Kyrgyzstan, approximately 150 members of the Pentecostal ‘Church of Jesus Christ’ gathered for a service in a rundown building recently purchased by the congregation.¹ The service started, as usual, with forty-five minutes of singing and music. Unfortunately, the microphones did not work because of a problem with the electricity supply, causing difficulties for the pastor in his attempt to create the optimum atmosphere. When the power supply was restored some fifteen minutes later, the pastor announced with delight that once again satanic forces had been defeated. Later on, in his sermon, pastor Kadyrjan reflected on some of his recent experiences.² A week earlier he had been invited to the house of an ailing Kyrgyz³ girl in the nearby mining town of Kok-Jangak. Kadyrjan described how he had entered the house and had immediately felt ‘the ice-cold atmosphere’ which indicated the presence of evil. He explained:

There were pieces of paper with Arabic phrases everywhere: above the door, on the wall, next to her bed. Such a piece of paper floated even in her water jug. The girl had received medicine and had been treated by a *köz-aichyk* [clairvoyant] and a *moldo* [mullah], but nothing had helped.... She feared that if she closed her eyes she would die instantly. Then I told her about Jesus. She didn’t understand at first. But when I started to pray, she started to understand, and protested that she was a Muslim. Nevertheless, she agreed to talk about [faith] and she started to feel better. Later I took her out of the house into the sun and she really felt better. When I left she asked me if I could visit her again. I promised her that I definitely would! Praise the Lord!

There were more references to the hazards of *okkultizm* (‘occult practices’) that morning, along with reminders of how to lead a good Christian life. They all converged on the central message that evil was omnipresent and that these

multifarious forms of darkness could only be conquered through faith and the invocation of God through prayer.

Pastor Kadyrjan would stress the power of prayer whenever I met him. One of his favourite examples was that since 1999 – when he established his church in Jalal-Abad – he had witnessed a partial transformation of the city.⁴ According to Kadyrjan, the ‘spirit of death’ (*dukh smerta*) that used to cover the town had partly dissolved, resulting in inhabitants becoming more energetic and innovative. He attributed the (perceived) decline of crime, the appearance of proper shops (rather than market stalls) in the city and improved hygiene in the streets to the collective prayers of his Church. Kadyrjan also regularly mentioned the mining town Kok-Jangak, the place where he had visited the sick girl. Over the previous four years he had made efforts to establish a congregation in Kok-Jangak but each attempt, he explained, had been sabotaged. His most recent endeavours had seemed successful when sixty people attended services for several months, but by early 2004 the majority of these attendants had stopped coming. Instead of being disillusioned, Kadyrjan was convinced that these difficulties contained an important sign: ‘It means that [Kok-Jangak] is under the spell of Satan, and, if that is so, it must mean that Kok-Jangak is somehow a strategic place’. In Kadyrjan’s view, the establishment of a vibrant Church in Kok-Jangak would deliver a serious blow to Satan’s powers, and thereby ease the advance of Christianity in other locations as well. For the time being, Kadyrjan and his assistant in Kok-Jangak had intensified collective praying on top of a hill overlooking the town in an effort to change the atmosphere in Kok-Jangak.

Kadyrjan’s ruminations are the basis for the empirical enquiries addressed in this chapter. Indeed, how can the Church’s success in Jalal-Abad and its failure in Kok-Jangak be explained? Moreover, what are we to make of the fact that many of the Kyrgyz converts to Pentecostalism converted only temporarily? The invisible forces invoked by Kadyrjan should not be readily discarded, as they resonated with locally experienced realities. As I will show, part of the Church’s success could be explained by its ability to draw upon local registers of spirituality. Moreover, the messages the CJC promoted, resembling the gospels of ‘prosperity’ and ‘health and wealth’ discussed by Coleman (2000), had a particularly seductive quality in a part of the world where residents faced intense economic deprivation and could no longer rely on the state for basic healthcare, social benefits or pensions, as had been the case during the Soviet period. However, a narrow focus on Pentecostal cosmologies cannot explain why the CJC had been successful in Jalal-Abad but had failed in Kok-Jangak.

To understand the chequered advance of Pentecostal Christianity, then, we need to move beyond a focus on the attraction of messages (ideas, ideals, ideologies, cosmologies) and emphasize that these messages need to be acted out in real life in order to become relevant. In other words, this chapter will focus on the relationship between advanced ideas and the social fabric within which they obtain their experienced reality, in order to gain insight in the complex dynamics of (temporary) conversion to Pentecostal Christianity. Ultimately, I suggest, in order for Pentecostal Churches to sustain their success, their ‘power of prayer’

has to convince people that it is delivering tangible results. Moreover, these perceived powers need to outweigh the negative social consequences of conversion to Pentecostalism in a Muslim context. As I will show, both aspects proved more problematic in Kok-Jangak than in Jalal-Abad. This essay, then, sheds light on the complex dialectic between the ideas advanced by Pentecostal Churches and the social realities of Pentecostal conversion.

The focus on temporary conversions, moreover, serves to challenge the tendency, discernable in many contemporary anthropological studies, to see conversion ultimately as a unidirectional process. Recent debates have centred on the question of whether conversion trajectories should be seen as a breach or passage, whether individual conversions are ever complete, and whether we should stress continuity or discontinuity in Christian conversion (Coleman 2003; Austin-Broos 2003; Robbins 2007). However, all these approaches take for granted that conversion progresses in one direction only. I argue that this is due to a failure to take into consideration the broader social fields within which conversion unfolds, a failure which resonates with what Bruce Kapferer (2005) has termed the 'retreat of the social' in anthropology. By drawing attention to the larger social field or 'conversion context' (see Vaté, Chapter 3, this volume), and by acknowledging that the 'ultimate' end result of conversion trajectories is far from certain, it is possible to arrive at a fuller understanding of the ideological and social realities of conversion experiences.

The Church of Jesus Christ in Kyrgyzstan

Evangelical Churches – particularly Pentecostal ones – made significant inroads into Kyrgyzstani society after the end of socialism. According to official data (Mamausupov 2003), the number of Protestant congregations now dwarfs the number of Orthodox Christian churches which traditionally catered to the large Russian minority.⁵ The difference is particularly pronounced in Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek, where three Orthodox churches compete with forty to sixty Protestant churches. Though the majority of Russians may still identify with Orthodox Christianity, in terms of active membership Protestant Churches have gained a remarkable lead. Moreover, the success of Protestant Churches in Kyrgyzstan has not remained limited to people from Christian backgrounds (like Russians and Ukrainians) or to other ethnic minority groups (such as Koreans and Tatars); they increasingly attract an ethnic Kyrgyz following as well. Up to 1990 there were virtually no Kyrgyz Christians,⁶ but ten years later Baptist and especially Pentecostal Churches boasted a significant Kyrgyz membership. Recent estimates of the number of Kyrgyz converts to Christianity vary widely, from 10,000 to 100,000 (Iarkov 2002: 84; Murzakhililov 2004). The advance of Protestant Christian Churches in Kyrgyzstan has astonished observers, even motivating some analysts to speak of 'the Christianization of the North, which competes with Islamization in the South' (Tabyshalieva 2000: 33; Murzakhililov 2004). It is, however, premature to make such bold generalizations. Although the

growth of Protestant Churches is significant given the short time span in which it has occurred, it is uncertain whether it will further grow in scope or die out in the years to come. It is, however, a process that is influencing the contemporary religious and social landscape in Kyrgyzstan.

The Church of Jesus Christ (CJC) stands out among the new Christian groups: it is at once the largest, the fastest growing and the most controversial Church in Kyrgyzstan. The CJC was established in 1991 by a small group of Russian Pentecostals who were dissatisfied with the 'legalistic' attitude of the older Pentecostal Church which had been active during the Soviet period. According to Vasili Kuzin, the co-founder and senior pastor of the CJC, the Church grew rapidly from its very start. In 1994 they had 500 to 600 members, but by 2003 Church membership had reached 10,000 (this number does not include irregular attendants). Moreover, whereas in the first half of the 1990s the Church attracted many Christians from other denominations and was almost completely Russian, in 2004 approximately 4,500 of the 12,000 members were Kyrgyz. The Church is well embedded in transnational networks. In addition to its forty-five congregations within Kyrgyzstan, the CJC has seven congregations in Germany, three in the U.S. and two in Russia. The Church also has links with international Christian networks such as Calvary International, the Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith and Derek Prince International.⁷ But at the same time, the Church differs from many others in that it is not a 'missionary church' but led by Kyrgyzstani citizens. The CJC was, in this sense, similar to new Pentecostal Churches elsewhere, characterized by an 'increasingly complex web of transnational networks, where flows of people, money and images circulate with growing speed and intensity, defying all attempts to pin them down to any particular source or destination' (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 1). This combination of transnational involvement and local organization has allowed the Church to adjust flexibly to problems that were important at the local level, while also being able to muster international support when necessary.

The rapid growth of (neo-)Pentecostal Churches worldwide has often been associated with the attractions of the 'Gospel of Prosperity' (Coleman 2000: 27–40). Likewise, part of the attraction of the CJC is its advancement of a kind of 'enchanted modernity' that not only offers salvation but also insists that prosperity, health and success can be attained by faithful prayer. It does so by offering entrance into tightly organized community life. In Bishkek, the CJC developed into a fully fledged institution which occupies a huge building (a former theatre) in the centre of the city. It has its own television studio and press, the latter publishing a continuous stream of books and brochures written (mostly) by pastor Kuzin. The church has a canteen and provides English language, computer, drama, and dance classes to Church members. Many members take part in such groups, while all are expected to participate in 'home church' (*domashniaia tserkov'*) meetings which gather at least once a week. These 'home churches' can be seen as the pillars of Church discipline. Home church leaders are responsible for making sure that members contribute the tithe, while from these groups members are recruited for participation in one of the ministries or for

positions higher up in Church hierarchy. Moreover, home church meetings are the principal sites where Church members discuss their successes in combating addiction and poverty, and testify about the ways in which God is changing their life, thus reinforcing the Church's ideology in an intimate setting.

The Church's rapid growth, its hierarchical structures and emphasis on the gifts of the spirit have each contributed to controversies surrounding it. Those who are antagonistic readily accuse the CJC of bribing people to attend church (even though members are required to pay the tithe), or claim that the leaders transform Church members into 'zombies' who are no longer able to think for themselves.⁸ Government officials started efforts to crack down on the CJC through the closure of several churches in 2003 and by filing a massive tax bill which was believed to be aimed at crushing it.⁹ The Church is also controversial among some foreign Christian missionaries. In personal conversations, they blamed the CJC for 'false teaching', of having started a 'personality cult' around its leader, and they described the Church's rapid growth as 'a kilometre wide but only a millimetre thin', referring to what they saw as a lack of spiritual growth among its membership.

In 2004, the CJC had forty-five officially registered daughter churches on Kyrgyz territory. By and large the 'planting' of these churches followed a pattern reflecting Christian expansion in Kyrgyzstan more generally (see also Pelkmans 2007a). In the early 1990s, the Church's activities were restricted to the capital Bishkek and its immediate 'Russified' surroundings. Around 1995, daughter churches were established in provincial capitals and some district centres in the north of the country. In the late 1990s, the CJC expanded its activities into the Ferghana valley in southern Kyrgyzstan. This meant a move from a region which has a strong Russian presence and is locally seen as secularized, to a region which is seen as more Islamic. These geographical shifts paralleled changes in the ethnic make-up of the Church. While during the early 1990s the CJC had attracted most of its members from among the Russian minority, later in the decade it was increasingly having success among ethnic Kyrgyz.

The particularities of this geographical expansion were clearly visible in the southern province of Jalal-Abad, where I conducted fieldwork in 2003 and 2004. Pastor Kadyrjan of the Church of Jesus Christ in Jalal-Abad city (the provincial capital) was proud of his accomplishments. Five years ago, in 1999, he had gone out 'on faith' to Jalal-Abad, meaning that he received no funding from his home congregation in Bishkek. He told me that he felt confident of being able to set up a new branch of the Church in Jalal-Abad, because his Kyrgyz background would enable him to make easy contact with the Kyrgyz population (at the time he was one of the few Kyrgyz pastors, although he only spoke Russian). After Kadyrjan and his family had settled in Jalal-Abad, he and his wife Ainura actively started praying in the bazaars in town. Kadyrjan mentioned that people at first did not understand their intentions. He and his wife were repeatedly mistaken for 'people who prayed professionally' and who could be paid for their services. But after a difficult first year, by 2004 Kadyrjan's congregation had grown to 250 regular attendants. Moreover, he had overseen the planting of seven new branches of the

Church in small towns throughout the province. Three of these churches boasted over fifty members while the others had twenty to fifty regular attendants.¹⁰ Perhaps even more striking was that the vast majority of these attendants (both in Jalal-Abad and in the other provincial towns) were Kyrgyz, and that thus, it seemed, the church was making inroads among the majority population.

These apparent successes, however, obscured some of the more interesting patterns of conversion. Kadyrjan claimed, for example, that besides the 250 people who were currently members of his Jalal-Abad congregation, 500 to 600 others had converted and attended services as well as the home groups. A number of these converts had moved to other Churches, but probably the largest part had lost interest, grown disillusioned with the Church, or for other reasons ceased to be involved. Kadyrjan himself understood this to be a consequence of a larger supernatural battle between good and evil. Significantly, the frequency of ‘temporary conversions’ was even larger in small-scale communities like Kok-Jangak.

The rapid growth of the CJC, as well as the large numbers of people who had left the Church after joining, raises questions concerning the attractions of, and disillusionment with, Pentecostal Christianity. To illuminate these, I will start present a rather lengthy description and discussion of one conversion account. This account exemplifies the attractions of Pentecostalism, as well as the tensions between this form of Christianity and the realities of social life in southern Kyrgyzstan.

A Narrative of (Temporary) Conversion

Aikan is a Kyrgyz woman in her late twenties and a single mother of three children. In 2004 she held an administrative job in Kok-Jangak for which she received a meager wage of 800 Som (€16) per month. Two things in particular attracted her to the CJC: ‘that they healed my child and that they stressed that men should take care of their families’. Aikan had been an active member of the Church between 2000 and 2003, both during the time that she had lived in Jalal-Abad and after she moved back to her native Kok-Jangak. However, when I first met her in April 2004 she had just received a warning from the leader of her congregation urging her to ‘return to the Church’. The way Aikan talked about her experiences reflected her ‘in-between-ness’, simultaneously involved in and detached from both the Church and the rest of the community, without being antagonistic to either side.

Aikan’s first contact with the CJC was in 2000, not long after she and her second husband Almaz moved from the mining town of Kok-Jangak to Jalal-Abad city. She told me that they had moved in order to get away from their respective families, who were unhappy with their marriage (his family disliked the fact that Aikan had been previously married; her family criticized Almaz’s inability to earn a decent living). But moving away from their families did not seem to end their problems. The relationship between the two grew increasingly tense when Almaz failed to find a job in Jalal-Abad. Aikan commented on this period: ‘It was almost as if I was the husband and he was the wife. I commanded

the house, I earned the money. And on top of that I also had to take care of him!' Barely managing to make a living, the situation got particularly difficult when Aikan's oldest son (from her first marriage) fell ill. Aikan took him to the hospital, but they sent her home saying that they could not help her.

So then I went to a *bakshy* [spiritual healer].¹¹ He wrote something on a piece of paper and he made knots in a thread which he then burnt. But whatever he did, it didn't help. When I talked with a friend about it, she told me I should go to pastor Kadyrjan. [After arriving at his home, Kadyrjan] asked if I believed in the living God. I said: 'Well, if there is one I will believe'. So he asked me, 'Do you want your son to get better?' And I said, 'Sure!' Then he started to pray. I just [cynically] thought: 'Right, the doctors couldn't help him, and now this guy will heal Maksat?' I didn't believe it when we left, but three days later [the illness] was gone.

This experience marked the start of her involvement with the CJC. I asked Aikan if she had experienced any doubts when she became involved with the church: 'No, not at all! With me it was rather the other way around. I was proud to be a believer, to go to this church.... I didn't doubt anything. I simply – well, I quickly adopted that belief'. Not only in this instance but also on other occasions Aikan described her conversion as straightforward and relatively unproblematic. Only when I pushed her did she reflect on something which had initially seemed both strange and attractive to her: speaking in tongues. 'The first time I heard it I was very surprised, and then I also wanted to learn to do it. Well, I didn't really learn it, it just happened. It was when I received baptism [of the Holy Spirit]. At that moment I had a fever and a toothache, but when I was baptized, both [ailments] disappeared'.

As said, there were two things that particularly attracted Aikan to the church. The first was that her son had been cured by the pastor's prayers. The second reason related to her discontent with her marriage, and in particular to her wish that her husband would take more responsibility.

I liked it when they said that at home the husband needs to command, that the husband should be the one who works, and that women should be able to ask their husbands for household money.... When my husband forbade me to go, I told him: 'What they say over there is good. They say that at home the husband should be in command, whereas with us it is usually me who scolds [*rugat*] you'. So then he agreed that I would attend church, and a few months later he also started to go. After that we both had well-paying jobs and we had a lot of money.

It is perhaps ironic that Aikan embraced the Church's patriarchal views in her effort to achieve equality of responsibility. She was not the only person who expressed these ideas, however, and they seem therefore telling of the difficult position experienced by women in southern Kyrgyzstan and that the patriarchal views of the church were seen as empowering women. A similar pattern has been noticed in other studies of Pentecostalism, which show that by urging men to go from being 'king of the street' to being 'master of the household' conversion to

Pentecostalism tends to ‘domesticate’ males (Robbins 2004: 133; Chestnut 1997: 113). Moreover, the ideas espoused by the Church also had a tactical importance, because Aikan could employ them to make her husband more sympathetic to the Church (perhaps because they flattered his ideas of masculinity), while insisting on his responsibilities as a provider. However, in December 2001, roughly a year after she had become involved with the CJC, Aikan’s husband disappeared and moved to Bishkek. Because the couple had been living in an apartment of her husband’s relatives in Jalal-Abad, Aikan and her children no longer had a place to live. In this crisis situation pastor Kadyrjan supported her by giving Aikan \$40 toward buying a \$100 apartment in the centre of Kok-Jangak.¹²

During her three years of involvement with the CJC, Aikan had ample negative encounters with ‘non-believers’. People used to ask, for example, if they had orgies on special Sundays (replaying Soviet propaganda about the Baptists)¹³ and how much she was paid to show up at the church. Reactions were also often negative on evangelization trips, with people calling her ‘a traitor’ and blaming her for having ‘sold her religion’. But when she lived in Jalal-Abad it did not matter all that much. As a counterbalance to negative reactions, there was the Church and a relatively large community of ‘believers’¹⁴ on whom she could lean. However, this balance was disrupted after she moved back to Kok-Jangak. For one, the negative confrontations became more direct, and they were no longer restricted to encounters during evangelization activities. Muslim men who tried to win her back to Islam visited Aikan several times in her apartment. Although she insisted that she did not care about such visits, and gave detailed reports of how she had replied to their accusations, she still mentioned that one of the hardest things about living in Kok-Jangak was that everyone knew her as a Christian.

On top of the negative reactions Aikan had to face, it turned out that an increasing number of people in her immediate surroundings turned their backs on the CJC. Home church meetings had taken place in Aikan’s apartment, and used to be well-visited, but more and more people ‘became afraid and stayed away. The *moldo* [mullah] had visited them, or their parents did not agree’. Likewise her brother, who had converted not long after Aikan, visited her one day and said: ‘Aikan, it turns out that it is a Russian God and not our God. Ugh! I won’t go there anymore’. Other former converts argued with her, saying that ‘if God is alive, then Kok-Jangak wouldn’t have fallen apart and people wouldn’t live in such poverty’. Aikan’s reply to such comments had been that ‘only the old things are being taken apart. After this everything will be built up again – and better than before’. The question was, however, whether she still believed these things herself.

On several occasions Aikan told me about the successes of her prayers. Among the things she mentioned was that she had been praying for a daughter and saw her prayers rewarded when her third child turned out to be a girl. After she moved back to Kok-Jangak and got by on poor-paying temporary jobs, she began praying fervently for a real job. ‘I prayed for finding a job that could be combined with taking care of my children. And then I was given [an administrative function]. I didn’t really search for it; they just came to me and offered me the job’. However, she spoke of both fulfilled wishes without emotion,

which indicated that she did not perceive them as miracles (anymore?) Given the harsh realities of life this was not so surprising. The wage she earned was barely sufficient to buy enough flour, potatoes and cabbage for herself and her children. And under these circumstances, a third child (even if a daughter) hardly seemed a blessing.

Moreover, her prayers did not deliver her most intense wish. Aikan had prayed often and intensely for her husband to return. Finally, after two years, he visited her house: 'He stayed here for fifteen minutes, and then left again, saying he had to go back to Bishkek the very same night. He simply told me that he wouldn't come back and that, if I wanted help with the children, I should bring our daughter to Bishkek'. Aikan elaborated on the disappointment she felt when this happened:

I used to be an obedient girl, but that my husband finally came to then leave me again was like a slap in my face [*udar*]. You know how difficult it is to raise children. You need to feed them, clothe them, and all the time I am worrying. I am still interested, that is not the thing. Simply, how can I tell you? I am simply tired of this life. I find it interesting when they talk about God.... As long as they sit in my house [during home church meetings], I listen intently and then I think 'I should probably do as before'. But it doesn't work out. And I can't get myself together. Sometimes I sit by myself and I think, 'What has God given me?' OK, he gave me an apartment, he gave me work, but I prayed for my husband for so long. And what happened? He came and said, 'No, I won't live with you'. So where did my prayers go to then?

Aikan's disillusionment was perhaps further intensified by what she experienced as lessening support from the people in her Church. The Church leader in Kok-Jangak still urged her to return, but pastor Kadyrjan had already given up on her case. 'She lives in sin', he told me. According to Kadyrjan this evil was in her family, in which the 'spirit of divorce' (*dukh razvod*) was still hovering. He went on to say that this was a typical problem for many Kyrgyz. His response seemed to indicate that he thought that Aikan's problems were, at best, a result of a lack of faith. The CJC was a forward-directed movement, taking on board those who could keep up speed but hardly paying attention to those who, in their terms, were 'backsliding'. Aikan was probably not completely aware of the negative way her Church leaders talked about her. She always talked about Kadyrjan in positive terms, though once she confided in me: 'I don't like this life. I have angered everyone: God, the people in the Church, even my relatives'.

Attractions and Disappointments

Both the attractions Aikan experienced when she first became involved with the CJC and her subsequent disappointment contain important clues to understanding the interplay between Pentecostal Christianity and the social environment in which it operated. In this section I highlight three themes that surfaced in Aikan's

story: community, healing and disruption. The first theme refers to the community of believers and its moral messages; the second focuses on the promise of healing and the successes and failures of prayer; and the third looks at the reactions members of the CJC faced. These themes enable me to contextualize Aikan's story and provide further insight into what conversion to Pentecostalism meant in this particular postsocialist Muslim context.

Community: Members of the Church of Jesus Christ


In Jalal-Abad, stereotypes abounded concerning the type of people that converted to Christianity in general and to Pentecostalism in particular. Popular views characterized them as utterly poor, out of their mind (*sumashedshie*), and alcoholics or drug addicts. Such stereotypes were used locally to provide explanations of the success of Pentecostal Christianity, and simultaneously to keep the 'threat' at bay. Moreover, these stereotypes were used to give credence to rumours that people were paid to attend services, that missionaries were 'buying souls' and that the involved Churches were dangerous 'totalitarian sects'.¹⁵ The Church leaders themselves did not seem to be particularly worried about such stereotypes, as to them the make-up of their Church proved that 'Jesus died for everyone', and that, just as in the New Testament, the weakest people were the ones who are called first. Moreover, they told anecdotes (in private and during sermons) to explain the lack of conversion among the elite. Pastor Kadyrjan, for example, told me that high-ranking police officers and government officials had expressed interest, but were unwilling to give up all the sins (drinking vodka, taking bribes and deceiving others) that were necessary for carrying out their jobs.

Although stereotypes are often misguided explanations of social phenomena, this does not exclude that, when stripped of their moral content, they refer to actual social patterns. These patterns do not, of course, explain conversion, but are indicative of how the social environment informs conversion and how, in turn, conversion implies a critique of society. As such, an exploration of the make-up of Pentecostal Churches enhances not only an understanding of the social factors conducive to conversion, but can also serve to contextualize the experiential dimension of conversion to Pentecostalism. The statistical data I present in this section are based on responses to a written survey carried out between February and April 2004 among 120 members of the Church of Jesus Christ in Jalal-Abad city.


The vast majority of church members were Kyrgyz.¹⁶ Women were in the majority by far, making up 75 per cent of total membership. Concerning age, it was striking that the members of the CJC were almost evenly spread between fifteen and fifty years of age, while as many as 12 per cent were over fifty.¹⁷ Level of education was equally wide-ranging: only a small minority (5 per cent) indicated not having completed basic school education; the majority (63 per cent) had finished secondary education, while a significant percentage (32 per cent) had obtained a degree from a university or a teaching school.

The educational and ethnic background of converts provided a qualification to the locally popular idea that only social outcasts and the 'powerless' join

Pentecostal Churches. However, data on residence and civil status showed that membership of the CJC was tightly related to social cohesion. Of the surveyed Church members, 71 per cent were migrants to Jalal-Abad city, the majority having migrated there after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition, another 13 per cent lived in nearby villages and attended services in the city. Only 16 per cent were born in Jalal-Abad itself. In other words, conversion was most likely to occur among rural Kyrgyz who had recently migrated to Jalal-Abad city, a pattern that may be explained as follows. Migrants – as newcomers – were likely to be poorly integrated into the social fabric of the city and thus more inclined to join a movement that provided close-knit social ties. Moreover, promises of health and prosperity may have been especially attractive to those who had to establish their own niche in a post-Soviet urban setting. Seen from the reverse perspective, migrants were removed from their original social surrounding and thus less pressured to conform to social (and religious) expectations.

 **Figure 6.1.** Ethnic affiliation and civil status, female church members (18 years and older)

	N	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Remarried
Kyrgyz	69	16	18	16	10	9
Russian / Ukrainian	9	1	2	6	0	0
Tatar	8	1	4	1	1	1
Uzbek	2	0	2	0	0	0
Other	3	1	0	1	0	1
Total	91	19	26	24	12	11

 **Table 6.2.** Ethnic affiliation and civil status, male church members (18 years and older)

	N	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Remarried
Kyrgyz	19	8	7	2	0	2
Russian / Ukrainian	4	3	1	0	0	0
Tatar	5	1	2	0	0	2
Uzbek	2	0	1	0	0	1
Total	30	12	11	2	0	5

Another striking pattern emerges when looking at the civil status of respondents (figures 6.1 and 6.2). The data shows a strong over-representation of divorced, widowed and remarried women. Together, they made up over 50 per cent of all female church members. This pattern was less pronounced among males: only a small minority was divorced, and approximately 23 per cent of male church members were divorced, widowed and remarried. A partial explanation of the discrepancy is that men tended to remain better integrated in kin networks after a divorce, as residential patterns after marriage are primarily patrilocal. Moreover, they have better chances of remarrying than women. Women are thus more likely to end up living alone after divorce, which, in combination with the hardship of being a single mother, makes them more open to a new community and alternative ideologies.

The patterns observed in Jalal-Abad broadly correspond to observations made of Pentecostal Churches elsewhere. Robbins notes that the majority of converts to Pentecostal Christianity ‘have been rural migrants to cities, people at the lower end of the social class scale, or rural stay-at-homes displaced from the centre of their own worlds by social change’ (Robbins 2004: 123, after Martin 1990: 190–1). To displaced people, Pentecostal Churches, with their high intensity community life and emphasis on morality, offer both social security and purpose in an insecure world. This argument was partly confirmed in the stories of converts. They stressed the friendliness of people in the Church and the mutual support that ‘believers’ provided each other.¹⁸ Moreover, the Church gave them a sense of moral superiority over the non-believing population. One woman stated: ‘There is a big difference in friendship with believers and with non-believers. Non-believing men immediately want to get you in their beds and women just want to drink alcohol [together], while believers only encourage you to do the right thing’. The messages of Pentecostalism challenge the ‘corrupt’ world in which they operate. Thus, part of the attraction of Pentecostal Churches in Kyrgyzstan is that they ban alcohol and drug consumption, and aim to restore patriarchal family structures. Moreover, by explaining poverty and illness in terms of a corrupt world under the spell of Satan, they provide very concrete answers to problems related to the social and economic dislocations of Soviet and Muslim space, a point which leads us to the next section.

Healing: The Promises and Fruits of Prayer

Numerous converts told me that they first became interested in the CJC after they had heard of the healing powers ascribed to pastor Kadyrjan. As in the case of Aikan, who came into contact with the CJC during her search for medical aid, many approached the CJC with the hope of being cured of illnesses or addictions. And like Aikan, they had previously visited local spiritual healers without obtaining the desired effect. As one informant said, ‘I thought that they [Kadyrjan and his wife] were kind of shamans (*shamandar*), especially when I heard them speak in tongues’ during a service. Healing was also an important element in conversion experiences. Maksat, a middle-aged mechanic, told me ‘I believed as soon as I saw my prayers fulfilled’. A former alcoholic mentioned that one night she went into the street and cried out ‘Jesus, if you are the living God, please help me’. After that she collapsed and woke up in the house of a Church, having lost the desire to drink alcohol.

Healing through prayer was a central element in the services of the CJC, filling its newspaper *Tvoi Put* (‘Your Way’), and was a recurring theme in the book series published by the church, seen in titles like *Power in the Name Jesus Christ*, *Breaking the Chains of Slavery* and *Lord, Help Us to Pray*.¹⁹ While the emphasis on prayer was a common feature in all the Church’s branches, there were important differences between the themes highlighted in the services in Bishkek and those in Jalal-Abad. Whereas senior pastor Kuzin in Bishkek would regularly invoke the dangers of immorality in the city and talk about alcoholism and drugs, I never heard him preach about the ‘evil’ residing in local forms of spiritual healing. By contrast,

in Jalal-Abad, references to spiritual healing were very common, such as the example at the beginning of this chapter in which pastor Kadyrjan told of his experiences with ‘occultism’ in Kok-Jangak. The difference with Bishkek indicated the ability of the CJC to adjust its messages to the particular context in which it was operating and that, in the view of Church leaders, ‘occult practices’ were more common in southern Kyrgyzstan than in the Bishkek. It is important to note that Kadyrjan did not dismiss local healing practices as ineffective superstition (as communist and secular ideologies did), but rather incorporated these practices in his ideas of spiritual warfare, something which took on new qualities in Kok-Jangak. The local Church leader, Gulia, tried to identify the evil spirits present in the town. In her analysis the main types of evilness were ‘witchcraft’ or ‘sorcery’ (*koldovstvo*), the ‘spirit of destruction’ (*dukh razrushenie*) and the ‘spirit of poverty’ (*dukh nishcheta*). But she was open to suggestions that would improve her analysis. She explained that she asked all visiting ‘believers’ about their opinion concerning the evil spirits that needed to be confronted and defeated.

Thus, although the discursive techniques that accompanied conversion entailed a critique of Kyrgyzstani society, turning to the power of Jesus did not necessarily imply a radical transformation of converts’ convictions. Indeed, there were remarkable similarities between the world-view promoted by the Church of Jesus Christ and indigenous notions about spirits, as well as between Christian faith healing and traditional Muslim healing.²⁰ As some authors have noted, the distinctive quality of Pentecostalism is its preservation of people’s convictions concerning the reality and power of the spiritual worlds from which they have broken (Robbins 2004: 128; Meyer 1996: 211). This goes some way to explaining why Pentecostal discourse made sense to local ‘believers’ and why conversions, like Aikan’s, could be relatively fast. It does not explain, however, why those involved felt that Jesus was a more powerful means of reaching their goals than other forms of healing. A cynical (or secular) answer to this question would be that the CJC was more efficient in promoting its success stories than ‘traditional’ healers. Indeed, the Church actively encouraged interpreting positive events as gifts of God and as examples demonstrating the effectiveness of prayer. In services and home church meetings new converts learned – often literally – to interpret their experiences in terms of Pentecostal ideology.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the credibility of this teaching was ultimately dependent on the success of prayer. Although Church leaders stressed that if prayers remain unanswered it was due to a lack of faith or lack of devotion in prayer, this type of explanation only worked to a certain extent. Ultimately, the failure to deliver tangible results could lead to disillusionment. This was a particular problem in Kok-Jangak. The poor conditions in the town, the lack of work and the lack of potential husbands (more men than women had migrated to Russia for work) meant that prayers for stable jobs, success in small businesses or finding a husband were not very likely to be successful, as Aikan’s story illustrates. Moreover, since belief in the success of prayer was, to a large extent, dependent on recognition by other Church members, disruptions in the community of believers challenged the credibility of the power of prayer.

Reactions: Moving into New Frontiers

Although conversion to Pentecostalism may be seen as an emancipatory strategy for those involved, the act of conversion complicates relations with wider society. In Kok-Jangak, the act of conversion was bound to draw explicit negative reactions from Muslim neighbours, kin and local leaders; in Jalal-Abad city many converts also reported tensions in their social surroundings. In the survey detailed above (see figures 6.1 and 6.2), more than 60 per cent of Kyrgyz respondents mentioned negative reactions to their conversion including heated arguments, prohibitions (by parents) on visiting the church again, and (temporarily) deteriorating relations with relatives. Another 10 per cent characterized reactions as very negative, and mentioned that responses included violence, expulsion and prolonged attempts at bringing them back to Islam.

The attempts of the CJC to establish a viable Church in Kok-Jangak were particularly instructive in this respect. Since 2000, the CJC had been active in Kok-Jangak. The first attempt to establish a church failed because of tensions between Russian Pentecostals living in Kok-Jangak as well as their disagreement with Kadyrjan's insistence on the role of the tithe and his promotion of the Kyrgyz language in the church. In early 2003, a new team of Kyrgyz missionaries became active and established a new church, which at a certain point had as many as sixty members, the majority of whom were Kyrgyz. At the same time, Islamic activity was increasing, with Muslim leaders starting to react to the growing success of Pentecostal Christianity. For example, the local imam and several town-officials co-operated in a successful effort to kick the Pentecostals out of the buildings they had rented. Church leader Gulia told me that she had made repeated attempts to gain access to a new building, either by renting or purchasing. But each time the owner withdrew from the deal when finding out about Gulia's religious affiliation and the intended use of the building. Moreover, local *moldos* (mullahs) and visiting *davachis* (in this context, 'Muslim missionaries') visited Church attendees and their relatives to convince them of their 'mistakes', after which the number of people attending services dropped to around twenty people. Several of those who turned away from the Church after their 'conversion' commented that they had found out that 'after all, Jesus is a Russian God'.

In Jalal-Abad city similar negative encounters did not necessarily have a negative impact on the CJC's prospects. Rather, such encounters confirmed the ideas of Church members about the 'corrupt' nature of Kyrgyz society and as such increased the cohesiveness of the Church. Moreover, negative reactions provided valuable material for testimonies, thus adding to the heroism of 'true believers'. In Kok-Jangak, however, there were far fewer possibilities for retreat. Whereas Church members in Jalal-Abad were predominantly migrants who could move relatively anonymously in the city, those in Kok-Jangak were in contact with their relatives on a daily basis and depended more heavily on the social networks that had formed over their lifetime. As such, it seemed likely that any further progress of the CJC hinged not only on overcoming the resistance of Muslim leaders and the town elite, for it was equally dependent on the emergence

of a social-economic environment that would lend credence to the ‘power of prayer’, and on the stability of the group of ‘believers’ which could serve as a viable alternative community.

The Social Realities of (Temporary) Conversion

By analysing the relationship between the ideas of the CJC and the social fabric within which they obtained their experienced reality this chapter has sought to understand the complex dynamics of (temporary) conversion to Pentecostal Christianity. These dynamics were influenced by the ideology and structure of the CJC, the motivations and actions of its members, and the responses from (predominantly) Muslim relatives, neighbours and community leaders. This set of conditions led not only to the creation of Christian niches in a predominantly Muslim environment, but also to the appearance of new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, which in turn influenced conversion trajectories.

The CJC’s rapid growth in Jalal-Abad city and its failures in Kok-Jangak provided important indications for the kind of environment that is conducive to the ‘gospel of prosperity’. The attraction of Pentecostalism was linked to the destabilization of Muslim and socialist contexts, but its prolonged impact depended on the possibility of demonstrating the fruits of prayer through the achievements of its members, and was thus interrelated with the socio-economic dynamics of the locality in which it operated. Whereas (limited) economic recovery in Jalal-Abad enabled the Church to highlight tangible successes of prayer, the continuing economic decline in Kok-Jangak inhibited demonstrating the same effectiveness. Moreover, the smaller scale of Kok-Jangak and higher density of social relations between inhabitants meant that the negative implications of conversion were more readily felt. In other words, the idea that the messages of Pentecostalism thrive on social, economic and political collapse risks ignoring that Pentecostalism needs an environment that offers (at least limited) social and economic opportunities to its members.

The stories and data presented in this chapter also offer important suggestions relevant to debates about the ‘nature’ of conversion. Joel Robbins (2007) has recently attacked what he termed anthropology’s obsession with ‘continuity-thinking’ in studies of Christian conversion. This obsession, he argues, has led to a failure to grasp experienced ‘discontinuity’ in conversion. The obsession with ‘continuity’ is strikingly present in some recent attempts to ‘soften’ understandings of conversion. Rambo, for example, argues that conversion rarely involves a complete transformation and that conversion trajectories attest that ‘most human beings change incrementally over time’ (2003: 214); Coleman (2003: 15–27), for his part, suggests that conversion is a project that is never finished, while Austin-Broos (2003) wishes to replace an understanding of conversion as ‘breach’ with one that sees it as ‘passage’. Perhaps these suggestions are relevant to situations in which conversion is relatively uncontroversial, but certainly not when religion itself has become highly

politicized. At the same time, the frequent occurrence of temporary conversion (at least in Kyrgyzstan), highlights that simply replacing ‘continuity’ with ‘discontinuity’ is not going to solve the issue either. In fact, both kinds of conceptualization reveal an individualist bias and assumptions of unidirectional change, and also fail to consider the social context in which conversion unfolds. As I showed throughout, conversion trajectories derive much of their shape from encounters with others – both within their new religious community and the larger social environment in which they live.

It is useful to briefly revisit Aikan’s experiences to illustrate the multi-levelled nature of continuity and discontinuity. Aikan’s conversion trajectory seemed to indicate a ‘sincere’ conversion that was nevertheless terminated, as summarized in her comment that with her ‘it was rather the other way around’. This ‘other way around’ meant that a relatively straightforward entrance to, and intensive involvement in, the Church of Jesus Christ, was followed by postponed doubt and eventual withdrawal. Intriguingly, her ‘straightforward’ conversion was, at least in part, made possible by the fact that the CJC drew on locally relevant religious registers, thus suggesting the ‘invocation of the old in the new’ (Meyer 1996) on the level of personal experience. But although this might be interpreted as indicating a ‘fuzzified’ conversion (Austin-Broos 2003), Aikan’s encounters in the wider social matrix preclude such a conclusion. Boundary crossing between Islam and Christianity – whatever the motivations and understandings of those involved – was bound to have a far-reaching impact on converts’ lives. Even if converts themselves had only ‘halfway’ changed their convictions, this did not necessarily mean that they could also socially balance themselves ‘halfway’ between Muslim and Christian communities. Like Aikan, all converts (certainly those in Kok-Jangak) were confronted with the repercussions of their decision, which compelled them to make further steps. These further actions led in some cases to intensified involvement in the Church and further exclusion from one’s previous social surroundings. In other cases it led to an outright rejection of Pentecostalism.

In fact, if we wish to salvage the analytical usefulness of ‘(dis-)continuity’ thinking, we need to be sensitive to the numerous moments and levels at which ‘(dis-)continuity’ occurs and interrelates. Thus, temporary conversions to Pentecostalism were enabled by the continuity (or semblance) of Pentecostal and ‘indigenous’ ideas of spirituality, which led to a radical (or discontinuous) experience of personal conversion, meanwhile causing tensions or ruptures in established social networks, which in Aikan’s case forestalled her personal conversion and led to withdrawal from her new-found belief (but in other cases the experienced tensions led to a more ‘complete’ conversion).

Intriguingly, of all the conceptualizations of conversion, Nock’s classical definition of seventy-five years ago – conversion as ‘a definite crossing of religious frontiers, in which an old spiritual home was left for a new one once and for all’ (1933: 7) – is the most straightforward definition of conversion as ‘discontinuity’. It is obviously problematic in its suggestion of completeness (‘definite crossing’) and certainty (‘once and for all’), but it may be worthwhile

drawing renewed attention to conversion as a ‘crossing of religious frontiers’. If we want to understand how personal religious transformations are entwined with the social settings in which they occur, we need a focus on boundaries and on the forces that define their rigidity and porosity, highlighting how sociality impacts on the cultural, social, symbolic and temporal features of conversion acts. In this particular postsocialist Muslim environment it was far less likely that conversion would ‘incrementally progress over time’, as Rambo (2003: 214) characterizes the ‘normal’ pattern of individual religious change. If conversion was a ‘journey’ or ‘passage’ at all, it was a rough one, bumping into and across social and cultural boundaries. As such it also contributed to shaping new complex frontiers between Christian and Muslim realms.

Notes

1. The Church’s name in Russian is *Tserkov’ Isusa Khrista*. The Church of Jesus Christ should not be confused with the Mormon Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, with which it has no relation whatsoever.
2. Except for public figures, I have replaced the names of informants by pseudonyms.
3. The use of the terms ‘Kyrgyz’, as well as ‘Russian’, ‘Uzbek’, and ‘Tatar’, reflects local definitions. This means that they indicate official ethno-national categorization as inscribed in passports and other documents. By contrast, ‘Kyrgyzstani’ refers to citizens of Kyrgyzstan, irrespective of ethnic affiliation.
4. It may be a bit of an exaggeration to call Jalal-Abad a ‘city’ as it only has just over 90,000 inhabitants, but I will use the term to emphasize its difference in size from Kok-Jangak, a ‘town’ with only a tenth of Jalal-Abad’s population. Moreover, Jalal-Abad is the fourth-largest ‘city’ in Kyrgyzstan.
5. Russians and Ukrainians made up 24 per cent of the population of the Kyrgyz SSR in the late 1980s. By 2001 this had dropped to 12.6 per cent (Ibraimov et al. 2001: 91).
6. Before the Soviet period only a few Protestant missionaries were active among the Kyrgyz (see also the introduction to this volume). Their activities had no lasting effect, except that nowadays they are venerated in evangelical circles for their pioneering work (Reimer 1992). Other Christian players in the area, notably the Russian Orthodox clergy, never actively engaged in missionary activity among the Kyrgyz, in effect accepting (and reinforcing) an ethno-religious division between Orthodox Russians and Muslim Central Asians.
7. See, amongst others, <http://www.ccmcentralasia.org/> and <http://www.dpmuk.org/Publisher/Article.aspx?id=41555>.
8. Such sentiments did not thrive only in Kyrgyzstan. See Baran (2006) for an excellent analysis of the anticult movement in 1990s Russia.
9. Source of information: Forum 18 News Service, 17 June 2003 and 20 August 2004; http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=398 and http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=83
10. Only two of these ‘church-plants’ were registered with the authorities. The other five had not undergone the lengthy procedures of registration, nor did they have a full-time pastor.
11. The term *bakhsy* is often translated as ‘shaman’. Many of my informants, however, used it to describe any spiritual healer, whether drawing on Islamic healing practices, employing shamanic elements or demonstrating affinities with forms of ‘modern’ magic so well described by Galina Lindquist (2005).
12. Aikan returned to Kok-Jangak because of the extraordinarily low prices of apartments in there compared to Jalal-Abad. These low prices were caused by large-scale emigration from the town after the coal mine was downsized and eventually closed.
13. See for example Beermann (1968: 68–9) and Lane (1978).

14. The quotation marks around the word ‘believers’ indicate the term’s controversial implications in a predominantly Muslim environment.
15. See McBrien and Pelkmans (2008) for an extensive analysis of ‘secular’ reactions to the occurrence of conversion.
16. Kyrgyz made up 73 per cent of respondents. Uzbeks formed the most under-represented group: 3 per cent of church members versus 30 per cent of the population. Tatars were the best represented group: 11 per cent of church members versus 3 to 4 per cent of the population. This over-representation seems related to the low cohesion of Tatar communities in the region and their ambiguous position between Russians and Central Asians.
17. The following cohorts were distinguished: ages 15-19 (14 per cent); 20-29 (30 per cent); 30-39 (22 per cent); 40-49 (22 per cent); 50+ (12 per cent).
18. See Wanner (2003) for similar observations in her discussion of Pentecostal Churches in Ukraine.
19. A complete list of the titles (in Russian) can be retrieved from <http://www.uucycy-kh.com/ru/book.html>.
20. Elsewhere (Pelkmans 2007b) I discuss the similarities and differences between Pentecostal and ‘indigenous’ forms of spiritual healing in more detail.

References

- Austin-Broos, D. 2003. ‘The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction’, in A. Buckser and S. Glazier (eds), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1–12.
- Baran, E. ‘Negotiating the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Post-Soviet Russia: The Anticult Movement in the Russian Orthodox Church, 1990–2004’, *Russian Review* 65: 637–56.
- Beermann, R. 1968. ‘The Baptists and Soviet Society’, *Soviet Studies* 20(1): 67–80.
- Chestnut, A. 1997. *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Coleman, S. 2000. *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2003. ‘Continuous Conversion? The Rhetoric, Practice, and Rhetorical Practice of Charismatic Protestant Conversion’, in A. Buckser and S. Glazier (eds), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 15–27.
- Corten, A. and R. Marshall-Fratani. 2001. ‘Introduction’, in A. Corten and R. Marshall-Fratani (eds), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*. London: Hurst, 1–21.
- Iarkov, A. 2002. *Ocherk Istorii Religii v Kyrgyzstane*. Bishkek: Tsentr OBSE v Bishkeke.
- Ibraimov, O. et al. (eds). 2001. *Kyrgyzstan: Entsiklopediia*. Bishkek: Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Iazyka i Entsiklopedii.
- Iarkov, A. 2002. *Ocherk Istorii Religii v Kyrgyzstane*. Bishkek: Tsentr OBSE v Bishkeke.
- Kapferer, B. (ed.) 2005. *The Retreat of the Social: The Rise and Rise of Reductionism*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Lane, C. 1978. *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union: A Sociological Study*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Lindquist, G. 2005. *Conjuring Hope: Healing and Magic in Contemporary Russia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Mamaiusupov, O. 2003. *Voprosy (problemy) religii na perekhodnom periode*. Bishkek.
- Martin, D. 1990. *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- McBrien, J. and M. Pelkmans. 2008. ‘Turning Marx on His Head: Missionaries, “Extremists”, and Archaic Secularists in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan’, *Critique of Anthropology*. 28(1): 87–103.
- Mamaiusupov, O. 2003. *Voprosy (problemy) religii na perekhodnom periode*. Bishkek.
- Martin, D. 1990. *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Meyer, B. 1996. ‘Modernity and Enchantment: The Image of the Devil in Popular African Christianity’, in P. van der Veer (ed.) *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity*. New York: Routledge, 199–230.

- Murzakhalilov, K. 2004. 'Proselytism in Kyrgyzstan', *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Journal of Social and Political Studies* 25(1): 83–87.
- Nock, A. D. 1933. *Conversion*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Peel, J. 1977. 'Conversion and Tradition in Two African Societies: Ijebu and Buganda', *Past and Present* 77: 108–41.
- Pelkmans, M. 2007a. "'Culture" as a Tool and an Obstacle: Missionary Encounters in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(4): 881–99.
- . 2007b. 'Establishing Credibility: Secular Legacies and New Spiritual Realities in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan'. Paper presented at the conference 'Cool Passion: The Political Theology of Conviction', 23–25 May, University of Amsterdam.
- Pelkmans, M., V. Vaté and C. Falge. 2005. 'Christian Conversion in a Changing World: Confronting Issues of Inequality, Modernity, and Morality', *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Report 2004–2005*, 23–34.
- Rambo, L. 2003. 'Anthropology and the Study of Conversion', in A. Buckser and S. Glazier (eds), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 211–22.
- Reimer, J. 1992. *Seine letzte Worte waren ein Lied*. Lage: Logos Verlag.
- Robbins, J. 2004. 'The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33: 117–43.
- . 2007. 'Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity', *Current Anthropology* 48(1): 5–38.
- Tabyshaliev, A. 2000. 'The Kyrgyz and the Spiritual Dimensions of Daily Life', in R. Sagdeev and S. Eisenhower (eds), *Islam and Central Asia: An Enduring Legacy or an Evolving Threat?* Washington, DC: Center for Political and Strategic Studies.
- Wanner, C. 2003. 'Advocating New Moralities: Conversion to Evangelicalism in Ukraine', *Religion, State and Society* 31(3): 273–87.

