

“Jesus Was a Good Gangster”

Honor and Religion in the YouTube Channel *Grim Hustle*

Abstract

In May 2022, the YouTube channel *Grim Hustle* launched a series of short videos containing life advice, rules for life, and motivational speeches by a “Russian mafia boss”. Although the protagonist was soon identified as an actor, the channel gained more than one million followers within eighteen months of its launch. The channel’s main narrative is the call for a return to traditional values and habits, most notably honor, as an antidote to a modern, “broken” society that is dismissed as corrupting and oppressive. Traditional religion is promoted by the channel as a vital part of old values and habits. The article focuses on the representation of religion in the channel’s videos and how it is shaped by the underlying concept of honor.

Keywords

Honor, Social Media, Religion, *Grim Hustle*, Tradition, Life Advice

Biography

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Introduction

In May 2022, the YouTube channel *Grim Hustle* launched an initially occasional, later weekly series of short videos containing life advice, rules for life, and motivational speeches.¹ Within the vast range of similar videos that can

1 *Grim Hustle*, YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@grim.hustle> [accessed 20 January 2024]. All the YouTube material cited in this article can be accessed from this link; for

be found online, the channel stood out for two reasons: for its professional production and because the speeches were given by a “Russian mafia boss” named Андрюха (Andryukha), who stressed the importance of becoming “honorable” in what he called the “grim days” of today’s world. The alleged Russian mobster was soon identified as Andrej Kaminsky, a German actor of Russian origin best known for his appearance in the Hollywood movie JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4 (Chad Stahelski, US 2023).² The exposure of Andryukha as an actor did not harm the series’ success: it gained more than one million followers within eighteen months of its launch, mainly because of its appealing, well-produced content and Kaminsky’s captivating performance.

The series principally calls for a return to traditional values and habits, most notably honor, as an antidote to the “broken” modern world, which is dismissed as corrupting and oppressive. The following article analyses the series in light of its idea of “honor” and honor’s importance for modern societies. Religion is promoted by the channel as a vital element of old values and habits, and the second part of the article therefore focuses on the representation of religion on the channel and how it is shaped by the fundamental concept of honor. The analysis shows that the return to a traditional understanding of honor and religion is presented as a modern counterculture that will enable the audience to “steal back” their lives and their freedom.

***Grim Hustle*: Life Advice from a “Russian Mafia Boss”**

This chapter provides a closer look at the concept and content of *Grim Hustle* and gives a short explanation of its origin, namely *The GRIM*, a real-life foundation that defines itself as a “global members’ club for the exceptional”³, connecting successful and aspiring persons from various professions for mutual benefit. The YouTube channel and its protagonist Kaminsky, a co-founder of the foundation, therefore serve as a public voice of the GRIM.

ease of access individual notes also give short URLs. A single video in a similar style was uploaded in January 2016, but the series started in May 2022.

- 2 For further information on Andrej Kaminsky see <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1062441/> [accessed 20 January 2024].
- 3 <https://thegrim.me> [accessed 20 January 2024].



Fig. 1: Andryukha teaching and guiding a young man in the episode *How to Receive Ultimate Protection*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:02:26.

***Grim Hustle*: The GRIM's YouTube Channel**

The YouTube channel *Grim Hustle* is a public voice of The GRIM, a real-life foundation that defines itself as a “global members club for the exceptional”.⁴ The channel consists of a series of now-weekly short videos. Most of them feature Kaminsky, a co-founder of the foundation, in his role as the Russian mafia boss Andryukha, also called Дед Дрюха (Ded Dryukha). The Russian term дед (*ded*) means “grandpa” and is also used as an expression of seniority in mafia gangs.⁵ Andryukha usually appears in close-up and addresses viewers directly with life advice, rules, and recommendations on topics such as business, personal success, relationships, friendships, modern media, and dealing with fear and personal struggles. In a number of videos, he is depicted teaching and guiding a younger fellow mobster named Роман (Roman), also called Кулак (Kulak), or an unnamed adolescent man, underlining his role as a *ded*, an elderly father-figure (fig. 1).

Andryukha always speaks English with a Russian accent and some grammatical errors. He sprinkles in a few recurring Russian terms like братан (*bratan*, “brother”), родина (*rodina*, “home”/“homeland”), and, to call out institutions or persons he despises, сука (*suka*, “whore”/“bitch”). He speaks slowly, making his words sound more profound. In rare cases, the channel

4 The Grim Foundation, 2024.

5 One example is Aslan Usoyan (1937–2013), a Russian mafia boss also known as Дед Хасан (Grandpa Hasan).

features short clips with the younger mobster Roman as the leading protagonist. Roman also shares advice and insights with the audience. Moreover, the channel offers interviews with reintegrated real-life criminals speaking about their biographies.

The central topic of Andryukha's talks is *honor*. Most of them end with the catchphrase "be honorable". He presents traditional honor as an antidote to a broken modern Western society perceived as superficial, weakening, materialistic, hedonistic, and relativist. Therefore, men – although the channel is not explicit about it, it creates a very masculine scenery – live suppressed lives without meaning, purpose, and faith. They struggle to develop personally or financially. As a response, Andryukha calls on his viewers to rediscover the lost values and habits of the old. In a video called the *The GRIM Manifesto* he states:

You don't need this system. What you need is decent values. What you need is your family and a loyal clan. What you need is love for God, and no fear for death, and honor for your *rodina* and your ancestors. You would not be here without their love and their sacrifice, *bratan*. Forget all of the so-called values and goods of modern life: There is no love, there is no honor.⁶

In the same video, he provides a list of traditional values that includes truthfulness, discipline, sacrifice, sincerity, concise speech, humility, freedom, excellence, hospitality, patriotism, self-control, emotional resilience, respect for elders and ancestors, silence, secrecy, and protection. However, the channel has no revolutionary ambitions: it does not call for a change in society itself, but instead recommends building up small alternative systems of likeminded people upholding honor and tradition, forming "brotherhoods" to survive and thrive within modernity. As the quote above suggests, spirituality and traditional religion are to play a part in this counterculture but reshaped by the concept of alternative brotherhoods: "Be careful with organizations that claim to follow God. Join organizations that live upright, so God will want to join THEM."⁷

6 The GRIM Manifesto | Honor Over Everything, <https://t1p.de/sg0gt> [accessed 5 February 2024].

7 Text accompanying *Jesus Was a Good Gangster* | *Russian Boss Motivation*, <https://t1p.de/rvwk8> [accessed 6 February 2024].

The GRIM

“Organizations that live upright” is evidently a reference to the organization behind the channel, The GRIM. The only available information about the GRIM Foundation is found in its online channels and its website.⁸ The GRIM is defined as a members’ club of likeminded persons who strive for honor and success. Its mission statement is to “empower men and women to become independent, free and connected in decent values”⁹. A member is quoted on their website: “THE GRIM is an exclusive members’ club that is run in the tech-savvy way of a startup or VC, while leveraging traditional values: Loyalty, cooperation, honor. What a combination!”¹⁰ It offers a network for mutual mentoring, exclusive business opportunities, and close relationships along with access to exclusive mobile apps, AI-technology, cryptocurrencies, and regular real-life events, such as pilgrimages, masterclasses, and survival experiences.¹¹ Shared expertise in business activities, tax-optimization, and technology are promised to those selected to be members.

The organization is present on all major social media platforms. Although these platforms are heavily criticized in GRIM videos, content by GRIM is found not only on YouTube but also on Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, and LinkedIn. As clarification in light of its mafia-styled videos, GRIM distances itself from any criminal activities. Additionally, ten “club rules” on its website provide insight into its concept of honor and end with a reference to God:¹²

1. Trust Only THE GRIM, Members Are Selected for a Reason.
2. Never Lie to a Grim, Never Steal from a Grim.
3. If a Grim Is in Town, They Will Will [*sic*] Always Have a Bed, Hospitality Is Honor.
4. Once a Year, Go to the Dark Mountains with Your Fellow Grim. Pilgrimage in Honor.
5. Your Brother Is Not Always Right, but He Is Always Your Brother.
6. Respect the Old, teach the Young. Mentorship Is Honor.

8 The Grim Foundation, 2024. The site <https://thegrim.me> is registered in Estonia.

9 Description in <https://t1p.de/gvhjb> [accessed 6 February 2024].

10 The Grim Foundation, 2024, in the section “The Members”. The abbreviation VC stands for “venture capital”.

11 <https://www.thegrim.me/jobs> [accessed 6 February 2024].

12 <https://www.thegrim.me/rules> [accessed 6 February 2024].

7. Before Asking for Help, Be of Help. Serving Is Honor.
8. Good Business Is Offered First to THE GRIM. Wealth Is Honor.
9. Silence My Friend, Silence Is Your Master.
10. Whatever Happens, Never Lose Your Calm, God Is on Our Side.

Traditional Honor and Its Importance in Modern Societies

The appeal of the channel's main narrative is encapsulated in its use of the term "honor". In general, the English word *honor* is used to describe structurally related linguistic and cultural concepts such as *ird* (Arabic), *patjiv* (Romani), *namus* (Arabic/Turkish), *qeirat* (Persian), *Southern Honor* (American), and, not least, the Russian *chest'* (честь)¹³. As defined by Frank Stewart, traditional honor can be understood as a "right to be treated as having a certain worth [...] as a right to respect"¹⁴. This right must be earned by meeting certain social norms within a specific social system, an *honor group*. Honor thus is both a positive self-concept (entitlement to respect) and a positive social status (others know about this entitlement). This broad definition leaves room for variations in how this respect is earned, expressed, symbolized, and related to its respective groups.

Sheida Novin and Daphna Oyserman propose that honor can be understood as a fundamental and therefore universal category of moral thinking and feeling that fulfills a specific function within social systems.¹⁵ Having "deserved respect within a certain group" helps build trust, orientation, and social cohesion. Honor establishes stable and reliable relationships and hierarchies: people know who can be trusted and who is in a position to provide protection (including physical protection) in situations of uncertainty. A "word of honor" ensures trust and stability; the exchange of favors and assistance establishes a system of mutual obligations that can, if necessary, be counted upon. Honor also obliges the individual to be loyal to a specific group to ensure the group's material security and social reputation. This is especially important for societies that lack formal legal structures and are insufficiently capable of protecting individuals through state institutions like police or courts, or in societies in which those structures are perceived

13 For a historical overview of honor concepts in Russia see Kollmann 1999.

14 Stewart 1994, 21.

15 Novin/Oyserman 2016, 2.

as corrupt and ineffective. Here, honor-based customary law provides social orientation.¹⁶ Also some forms of organized crime – the Italian mafia is the obvious example – rely on strict codes of honor, group loyalty, authority, trust, mutual favors, and individual respect. This form of criminal honor has been popularized by a partly idealized depiction of mafia organizations in movies and TV-series.

In societies where legal structures are effective, honor can be the answer to perceived social and economic insecurity or disorientation: “In that sense”, Novin and Oyserman note, “honor provides a template for organizing social interactions and hence may be functional even among people and societies that do not highly value and endorse honor.”¹⁷ In such instances, honor is not a generally accepted function of social interaction and control, but rather a group-specific phenomenon – and this is exactly how honor is understood and used in *Grim Hustle*. The series conceptualizes honor in terms of Stewart’s “right to respect”, as firmly tied to a certain collective (especially the “brotherhood”), and as a means to build strong cohesive groups and trust within a society that does not follow honor codes. With its stylized mafia symbolism, it also plays with the romanticized connection of honor and organized crime. Although public institutions generally function in Western societies, the channel’s heavy criticism of them explains the need for different concepts. “Honor” is an alternative method of self-understanding and social interaction, primarily within the honor group; its roots in a certain tradition, in the “ways of the old”, help legitimize the Grim’s worldview.

The Role of Religion in *Grim Hustle*’s Way of Honor

Grim Hustle establishes a close connection between its understanding of honor and a traditional understanding of religion. Basic elements of traditional honor codes such as true authority, loyalty, strength, obligation, and sacrifice form a matrix that shapes religion and how religion is perceived. Andryukha is depicted as a faithful man, regularly appearing within religious sites such as churches, monasteries, and graveyards (fig. 2). References to God and faith can be found in various episodes, but six episodes,

16 Nisbett/Cohen 1996, 5–9.

17 Novin/Oyserman 2016, 9.



Fig. 2: Andryukha visiting an Orthodox church in the episode *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:01:19.

all from 2023, focus explicitly on religious themes and habits: In *Jesus Was a Good Gangster* and *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory*, Andryukha shares his understanding of Jesus Christ and how it helped him deal with pain and fear of death. In *Anti-Depression Habit #1*, he encourages his viewers to seek silence, not least by going on a pilgrimage, to find God. *God's Bet on Your Life* addresses questions of morality, maturity, and responsibility, while *How to Receive Ultimate Protection* makes reference to ancestor worship and the widespread folk belief in the curse of the Evil Eye.¹⁸

The sixth explicitly religious episode is an anomaly. *The Mafia Grandmother* does not provide the audience with life advice; it is a short film with English subtitles featuring the younger mobster Roman and his grandmother, who both speak Russian. It also brings up the folk-religious motif of the curse of the Evil Eye: Roman's grandmother sees something dark in her grandson and asks to pray for him. Roman shrugs off her plea, but she insists and starts reciting the Lord's Prayer (fig. 3). She then performs a folk-religious ritual: she uses a raw egg to identify the curse, cleanse the cursed person, and even figure out the identity of the person who uttered the curse.¹⁹ This ritual can be found not only in Greek or Russian Orthodoxy, but also in Latin American Catholicism and Iranian Shia Islam: using an egg serves, as Rose Wellman and Dionisios Kavadias suggest, as "a technology of transference and mediation, shifting the 'strike' from the body of the afflicted to an out-

18 Bowie 2007, 215–220.

19 *The Mafia Grandmother*, <https://t1p.de/f02gg> [accessed 5 February 2024].



Fig. 3: Roman's grandmother praying for him in front of Orthodox icons in the episode *The Mafija Grandmother*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:01:03.

side object"²⁰. In this episode, religious practice is again presented through the matrix of honor: it strengthens and protects the individual, with God as a powerful force on behalf of those loyal to him.

The strongest display of personal religion can be found in two episodes on Jesus Christ, *Jesus Was a Good Gangster* and *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory*. Andryukha reshapes the image of Jesus in light of his honor mindset, turning Jesus into a strong leader to look up to, into an image of loyalty and bravery in the face of death. Andryukha's narrative and perspective make Jesus an accessible role model for an otherwise rather unusual audience for the Christian message:

Jesus Christ was a good, honorable gangster. Let me explain why. Number one: He started from nothing, a poor carpenter, and rose to a King. In any time it is rare that a man goes from nothing to the top. Number two: He built his own gang, the disciples, and treated them very well. He knew that the number one of assets in life is your loyal people, your gang, your group, your brotherhood. Number three: Loyalty for him was number one: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friend." A good gangster put loyalty on number one because a rat in your ranks can bring your end very quickly. Number four: He said "no" to the state and break the law again and again until he was killed for it; and he died with honor. Number five: He reject all false authorities. He

20 Wellman/Kavadias 2015.



Fig 4.: Andryukha reinterpreting the Jesus narrative in the episode *Jesus Was a Good Gangster*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:00:11.

only accept the true one and he accept the pain if it served the highest authority: “My father, if it possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet, not as I will, but as You will.” Listen to that again. Number six: He have strong purpose in life and he never change it despite the biggest part of the society spit on him every fucking day. And of course, the most important reason, number seven: He understood that suffering and death will be your friend, your teacher. It will make you beyond powerful if you have lived your life in honor of God. Jesus Christ was a good honorable gangster, a true Stoic, and the Messiah at the same time. We all need role models for dark grim days. Be honorable.²¹

Jesus is defined here in terms of the values and principles of honor: strength, success, loyalty, resistance, freedom, sacrifice, and resilience. The traditional attribution “King” defines Jesus as a legitimate authority who is in conflict with false political and religious authorities and the social majority. Counter to a widespread “soft” healing and forgiving Jesus, the channel presents a heroic Jesus who is a timeless role model for those facing life’s hardships and at the same time adopts Jesus for its own worldview and agenda (fig 4.). The specific reference to Jesus as “Stoic” picks up on the contemporary rediscovery of the philosophy of Stoicism. In recent years, books and videos on how to embrace Stoicism in a modern lifestyle have proved popular for characteristics that are also claimed by *Grim Hustle*: as orienta-

21 *Jesus Was a Good Gangster*, <https://t1p.de/rvwk8> [accessed 8 February 2024].

tion, meaning-making, and source of resilience in a society that is perceived as insecure, superficial, and distracting.²²

The episode *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory* does not mention Jesus by name, but when read together with the former episode, it evidently also refers to him. Jesus is again presented as a true authority (“King”), a role model in times of hardship, and a mentor for dealing with fear of death. And again, he is directly associated with the channel’s main narrative of honor:

Death used to be my enemy, but then I made him my friend. Now he can't touch me anymore. How did I do it? I learned it from the King; the highest King there is. [...] The King showed me how to conquer pain. He showed me how to conquer death and transform death to glory. How? With the power of honor. The Lord is on my side, *bratan*, and He should be on your side too. The King of Kings showed you what it means to be honorable. You cannot escape pain, but you can transform it. You cannot escape death, but you can make him the best teacher of your life, because only death makes life significant and only God makes life glorious. All you need is the right values and the right people around you, people with soul. I cannot be stopped by pain. I cannot be stopped by death. [...] God is on my side, and I serve him every fucking day. Be honorable.²³

This speech has an almost missionary profile. Obedience, service, and loyalty, important aspects of traditional honor, are associated with God; turning to God is repaid with personal strength and resilience. Although the videos reference central motifs and narratives of the gospels, their conception of Jesus Christ does not align with traditional religious approaches. Jesus is not simply a model; instead, he is modeled after the channel’s specific interests. His resurrection and salvation – which make Jesus “Christ” after all – are not mentioned. Instead, the image of Jesus is shaped to fit exactly with the ideal role model for the channel’s worldview.

Religious motifs and terms also play a vital role in an episode called *God's Bet on Your Life* which is focused on morality and personal responsibility. In

22 Popular examples can be found in Irvine 2008, Robertson 2020, and the YouTube channel *Daily Stoic*, <https://www.youtube.com/@DailyStoic> [accessed 12 September 2024]. In a newer episode though, Andryukha explicitly distances himself from modern Stoicism, not least due to its lack of belief in God: *How Modern Stoicism Will Weaken You. Watch This!*, <https://t1p.de/4m51q> [accessed 12 September 2024].

23 *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory*, <https://t1p.de/59afk> [accessed 9 February 2024].

this video, Andryukha is shown talking directly to an adolescent to guide him into maturity and adulthood:

Before you were born, the God and the devil placed a bet on your life. The God said: “This is a good kid. He will live with purpose, and honor, and joy. He will lift people up. He will own gold and a house and raise a good family. I am betting on this kid.” The devil said: “I don’t believe you. I have created a system that will make this boy fall. I have created people that will make him angry, and violent, and finally apathetic. Apathy is my most powerful weapon; and I am betting I can take this boy down.” Always remember: There is a bet on your life. God wants to create; the devil wants to destroy. The devil wants to consume; God wants discipline. The devil wants indulgence; God wants your wellbeing. The devil wants your emptiness and misery. God is content, while the devil has never enough. But it’s easier to follow the devil than to follow God in these grim times. But there is a bet on your life, every fucking day. And your behavior every day will determine the winner. You have to decide: Will it be God, or will it be the devil? If God wins, you also win. If the devil wins, he wins alone. Be honorable.²⁴

Satan, almost *persona non grata* in modern liberal theology, is presented here without hesitation in his biblical role as “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). The speech plays with the classic motif of temptation by worldly things and calls for resistance and self-discipline. Worldly goods are not devalued but instead understood as a result of a good and honorable life. Using words and metaphors of traditional religion, Andryukha confronts his novice with a call to action, encouraging him to conquer fears and face the dangers of the world and to accept responsibility in life, which will bring meaning and personal success. He embeds this struggle in a greater metaphysical conflict between good and evil. Again, the channel combines motifs of traditional religion with its heroic honor mindset, here in an attempt to encourage and challenge a younger generation to embrace responsibility and ambition.

In the episode *Anti-Depression Habit #1 by Russian Mafia Boss*, the channel promotes silence and pilgrimage as part of an honorable way of life (fig. 5).

If you want to get your life on the right path, you need to get your feet on the right path. Your right path is the path of silence, the path of pilgrim-

24 *God’s Bet on Your Life*, <https://t1p.de/9ods9> [accessed 9 February 2024].



Fig. 5: Andryukha on a pilgrimage to a monastery church in the episode *Anti-Depression Habit #1* by *Russian Mafia Boss*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:00:01.

age. I don't care if you believe in God or the devil. I don't care if you have sinned or killed. Every day you are not on the right path you are sinning against yourself; you are killing who you are destined to be. I believe killing yourself is as bad as killing another human being. Get up now, stay silent, and go on a pilgrimage. Find a good place anywhere on your map. It might be a monastery. It might be a church. It just might be a dark forest. [...] Silence will bring out your strengths, your honor, your direction in life, your direction for the path in life you're destined to go. If you walk in silence, God is walking with you. Be honorable.²⁵

Silence is presented as an antidote to a society dominated by social media and continuous public discourse and self-presentation. The religious metaphor of the "right path" serves as guidance for people disoriented by modern media and social insecurity. Silence is a way to encounter God; again, God is on the side of those who are honorable.

Traditional Religion as Counterculture?

In connecting traditional honor and traditional religion with modern motivational videos, *Grim Hustle* offers a fresh approach within religious communication and imagery. It reacts to some of the (perceived) problems of

25 *Anti-Depression Habit #1* by *Russian Mafia Boss*, <https://t1p.de/v06bv> [accessed 9 February 2024].

contemporary society: disorientation, lack of meaning, distrust in media and politics, economic insecurity, isolation, and the influence of social media. These are primarily problems of the individual; the channel does not address broad social issues. *Grim Hustle* promotes an updated honor mindset that will allow the individual to withstand the temptations and contestations of modern society. It offers structures of orientation and meaning.

Honor has operated as a form of social control and reputation, but in modern societies it mainly serves as an instrument of individual orientation and meaning-making. It complements modern individualism with strong social ties, with a “brotherhood” for mutual benefit: as Nancy Kollmann has recognized, “Honor may traditionally have played the conservative role of upholding established social institutions and precluding change, but it also provided individuals a sense of belonging and a blueprint for negotiating the challenges of life.”²⁶ This modern understanding of honor helps the self but also “supports and enables tight kinship networks and group coalitions in which [...] resources are retained within the group, and societal norms are maintained”²⁷. *Grim Hustle* thus promotes traditional values like discipline, sacrifice, and, not least, religion within a cohesive, like-minded group.

Although the channel focuses on values and spirituality and criticizes modern society, economic success and making a career are still prized, but as a result of an honorable life. Not least in its name, the channel is connected to what Megan Carnegie recognizes as the *hustle culture*: “The hustle-culture narrative promotes the idea that there’s always more to strive for: more money to make, a bigger title or promotion to secure and a higher ceiling to smash. [...] this mindset stems largely from tech start-ups in Silicon Valley, and is perpetuated on social media.”²⁸ While the original ideal of hustle culture values work above all and endorses working on evenings or holidays as sign of ambition, *Grim Hustle* steps back from these extremes to insist on a weekly day of rest and silence, the practice of pilgrimage, and time spent with family and the respective “brotherhood”. An honor code that is exclusive and partial is hard to reconcile, however, with the Christian notions of universalism and all-encompassing mercy.

This return to values that the channel defines as “traditional”, specifically to honor and religion, serves as a form of counterculture in contemporary

26 Kollmann 1999, 247.

27 Atari/Graham/Deghani 2020, 382.

28 Carnegie 2023.

society, as resistance rather than revolution and without abandoning the gains of an affluent capitalist society. This form of counterculture is built not upon liberal and progressive values, but on tradition, on the ways of the old. In contrast to earlier times, though, traditional norms, values, and a certain conservatism are not imposed by society but freely chosen as an individual lifestyle and mindset contrasted with, or as an alternative to, the dominant public discourse.

When it comes to the ways of old, traditional religion has a part to play. Faith and religion are integrated into the whole project and simultaneously reshaped by its honor code: Christian faith is viewed through the lens of authority, loyalty, and sacrifice and seen as an expression of typical honor-based values. Simultaneously, it is presented as a powerful resource for an honorable life: an inspiration for heroic display, an antidote to fear, a source of rituals and blessings that strengthen the individual, and a place of silence and retreat to rediscover peace and calmness, and with a God who challenges individuals and calls them to action and to personal responsibility. Although some of these motifs certainly can be found in Christian tradition, what is depicted here as traditional religion can also be seen as contemporary secular thought presented and legitimized through the mere aesthetics of religious tradition.

The concept of religion in the channel's videos is also influenced by ideas and practices of (folk-religious) magic, for example in the ritual performed to protect against the Evil Eye or in the notion that acting the right way will automatically lead to divine blessing and thus positive effects. In a classic definition, magic can be understood as a variety of acts or practices to bring about desired effects, with the causes and effects having a certain "mystical" or non-scientific basis.²⁹ Traditionally magic cannot be separated from religion, as magical practices and forms of knowledge are interwoven with folk religion. *Grim Hustle* links religious forms of magic thinking and the secularized magic thinking of the New Thought movement. New Thought, which began in the early nineteenth century, promoted the idea that the right mindset will produce positive effects for the individual, preferably social and economic success. In the video *From Zero to Boss with these 5 Books, Part 2*, Andryukha recommends, alongside "all the holy scriptures", Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* (1937) and Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1939), two much-read books of the New Thought move-

29 Middleton 2005, 5562.

ment that stress the importance of spirituality and a good mental state primarily as means for material progress.³⁰

Additionally, in the context of the Russian war on Ukraine, including the involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church, the stylized “Russianness” of the videos may, whether intended or not, support the narrative that has Russian Orthodoxy as the antipole to a depraved Western society. Although the channel explicitly distances itself from “organizations that claim to follow God”, its videos echo the notion that the redemption of Western culture from materialism, liberalism, and relativism will come from the East, from Orthodox spirituality. Moreover, the idealization of patriotism through the repeated endorsement of love for one’s home country (*rodina*) plays into the Russian nationalism promoted by the Russian government and its online campaigns. Roman’s statement in *How to Become a Classic Man in 2024*³¹ that a man has only four loves in life: brotherhood, *rodina*, family, and God and his definition of love as “devotion” and “protection no matter what” have particular resonance in the context of Russian nationalism and the wars waged in its name – although *Grim Hustle* cannot be accused of explicitly supporting contemporary Russian politics.

Nonetheless, with Western Christianity seeming to be primarily concerned with social issues, the modern reinterpretation of traditional religion presented in *Grim Hustle* can be understood as a creative alternative or complementary approach to religion that might appeal to persons who otherwise do not feel they have access to religion or faith. Or does religion serve merely as aestheticization and legitimation of the channel’s worldview?

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30 *From Zero to Boss with these 5 books | Part 2*, <https://t1p.de/ejflj> [accessed 22 March 2024].

31 *How to Become a Classic Man in 2024*, <https://t1p.de/fvc6y> [accessed 22 March 2024].

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