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THE TRIAD OF NATIONALITY REVISITED:
THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE STATE IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

by

Robert D. Potts

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(History and Political Science)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2016

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Abstract

The Orthodox Church has been intimately wrapped up in the Russian state since Russia's conversion to Christianity in 988. The relationship between the two is most succinctly wrapped up in Tsar Nicholas I's so-called triad: "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality." This paper seeks to explain the manner in which the Orthodox Church reasserted itself as a force in Russian politics after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 up through the first administration of President Vladimir Putin. The church under Patriarch Alexy powerfully reinserted itself into affairs of state during the August 1991 coup attempt, while its relationship with the state after the independence of Russian Federation was driven far more by the government. The 1997 law on religious freedom represented a sea change in the collaboration between church and state, paving the way for much more open collaboration in domestic and foreign policy.

Additional consideration is given to ethnodoxy, an idea proposed by University of Western Michigan sociologist Vyachslav Karpov which explicates how the church can exert such powerful influence in a country with very low statistical levels of religiosity. The cultural impact of Orthodoxy on Russian consciousness pre-1917 was brought forward by first the church and later the state as the Soviet Union broke apart to help develop a new Russian identity rooted in tradition. This church-state collaboration extended beyond simple ethnic nationalism and came to a core part of the policymaking apparatus of the Russian government.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Philip H. Bailey, former professor of literature and fellow Russophile. Phil sparked my love for Russia through his own love of books and always pushed me to consider questions more deeply. In so many ways he remains my inspiration and I feel privileged to have called him not only family, but friend.

Acknowledgments

Many debts small and large have accumulated in the process of preparing this thesis. First and foremost, I must extend my thanks to Prof. James Warhola, my advisor, who decided to take on my project during his sabbatical semester and respond to my ceaseless emails from his travels in South Africa, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Our conversations have been ever rewarding and I have learned immeasurably from your recommendations and our interactions. This work truly could not have come together without your support.

Secondly, Professors Kyriacos Markides, Richard Blanke, Paul Holman, and Mimi Killinger each chose to serve on my committee despite our strange scheduling conflicts and have borne with us every step of the way. Your sound advice, flexible presence, and understanding of this unorthodox progression for an Orthodoxy paper are all appreciated.

Nancy Lewis at the Raymond H. Fogler Library contributed indelibly to this work through her ability to track down key resources to which I otherwise would not have been able to gain access.

Professor Nathan Godfried of the History Department helped me along the path to this thesis through the fall 2015 capstone course; his insights into my exploration of *perestroika* in the Orthodox Church moved me strongly into this thesis.

Lastly, to Alyce Lew, the consummate friend, sympathizer, and sounding board. I don't know how I would have gotten this far in school, in Honors, and in this thesis without your insight. Большое спасибо!

Nationalism in contemporary Russia both has its roots in the distant past and has emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation emerged in 1991 as a multiethnic state unified on lines other than the ideological basis of Marxism-Leninism that typified the Soviet period. Seeking a new basis for unification and a return to stability after the tumultuous 1990s, the Russian state eventually turned to an increasingly close relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. The Church had formed an important part of Russian national mythology dating far into the past, and had more recently cultivated a practice of government collaboration to survive through the Communist era. With the Russian Orthodox Church, Presidents Yeltsin and Putin found a willing partner in the development of a new Russian national identity rooted in perceived longstanding traditions. The church and state have used this partnership both to drive this national cohesion and to direct policy priorities both domestically and abroad.

The lengthy history of the Russian Orthodox Church and its interactions with the state necessitates a certain level of historical analysis before any serious discussion of modern relations can be embarked upon. The thousand-year history of Orthodoxy in Russia is a complex one, the close relationship between religion and state policy a practice with deep roots. Until the Russian Revolution, the state carefully cultivated a connection between Orthodoxy and Russian identity so strong that it has persisted in some form through the dramatic changes of the past century. The focus of this paper is on the present day cooption of Orthodoxy by political forces in the creation of Russian national identity; with a brief coverage of the prior history of this relationship, the modern situation will become far clearer.

Prince Vladimir of Kiev adopted a very specific form of Christianity in AD 988, one which held to dual Byzantine ideas of government hierarchy and church-state relations. In government, Orthodox theology held that the structure of Earthly governance should mirror heaven—one authoritative figure on top of a wholly centralized system. During the late medieval era this took the form of the consolidation of power under the Muscovite princes who eventually took the title “tsar”—a russification of Roman “Caesar.” Grand Prince of Muscovy Ivan IV (otherwise known as Ivan the Terrible) was the monarch who first took on this title. This centralized apparatus persisted into the Soviet period, pushing the state in a centralizing direction under strong leaders such as Vladimir Lenin or Joseph Stalin. Church-state relations were a more confusing aspect of this legacy; the Russian Orthodox Church holds to a theology known as *symphonia*. *Symphonia* emerged as the contrasting belief to the Western doctrine of the two swords, arguing that instead of existing separately, the spheres of church and state should work together to create good governance. This viewpoint, arguably initiated by the Emperor Constantine but clearly embedded in Byzantine state character by the reign of Justinian in the early 6th century, holds that the political leadership and ecclesiastical leadership are called to work together as instruments in an orchestra—different in spheres of influence but equal in power.¹ The policy was officially adopted in Russia under Ivan IV with the promulgation of Стоглав (Stoglav; The Book of One Hundred Chapters) in 1551.

While abandoned by the state with the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917, *symphonia* remains the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church today. The

¹ J.W. Warhola, lecture in *Medieval Political Theory*, Orono, Maine, 8 September 2015.

Russian Orthodox Church supported the coalescence of supreme power under the Muscovite princes during the struggle against the Mongol-Tatar yoke and continued to provide theological underpinnings for their dominance into the 20th century. From 988 until that point, “mutual aid linked the two together irrevocably, both in institutions and in the mind of the people, while the princes’ problem of maintaining political independence from emperor and patriarch left the church perhaps less independent of the state than at Byzantium.”² Tsar Nicholas I made this relationship even more explicit in 1833 when he promulgated his “Triad of Official Nationality”: *pravoslaviye, samoderzhaviye, narodnost’* (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationalism). This descriptor laid out the foundations on which the Russian state was based in no uncertain terms—the church sitting right atop alongside the government. This pattern of relations broke down following the Soviet rise to power; while a centralized leadership model could persist through the ideological shift, such a collaborative effort in the realm of governance clearly could not and the state had little interest in propping up an antiquated, superstitious body.³

The position of the church was weakened during the Soviet period, but its role in Russian society also underwent a powerful evolution. The locus for a mildly pro-Church reorientation can be found at the outbreak of World War II and the Orthodox response therein; Dr. Philip Walters, editor of *Religion, State, and Society*, notes that in the aftermath of Hitler’s invasion, “the first to appeal to the patriotic spirit of the Soviet

² Dev Murarka, “Religion in Russia Today: Renewal and Conflict,” in *Economic and Political Weekly* 28 (1993): 2842.

³ For a generalized coverage of Russian history including the conversion of Prince Vladimir and later relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state, see Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark Steinburg, *A History of Russia*.

people and call on them to resist the fascist aggressor was Metropolitan Sergi.”⁴ More commonly known as Patriarch Sergius of Moscow, Sergi was the effective leader of Russian Orthodoxy from 1925-1944. Soviet estimates from the mid-1930s concluded that around 57% of the population remained Orthodox believers at the time; the results of a question on religious belief were suppressed from the 1937 Soviet census and the question did not reappear in 1939. Regardless of specific numbers, it is evident that the Church remained a potent force in a moral sense to influence the Russian population; Stalin recognized this and in 1943 met with Sergius to form an alliance which would typify relations for the next 50 years, the tacit agreement mentioned above. While Walters notes that a campaign of deception to convince the world that the Russian Orthodox Church was operating as an autonomous institution took place, he does take a fairly optimistic view of Church autonomy from 1943-59 and after 1964. This view has been seriously challenged by more recent scholarship and seems unlikely to hold up to a historian’s scrutiny; a better descriptor of the period would perhaps be continuous low-level harassment and tight state control.⁵

⁴ Philip Walters, “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet State,” in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (483, 1986), 139.

⁵ This particular topic is one frequently addressed as a key antecedent by modern scholars writing on the Putin administration’s relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. See for example John Anderson, “Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church: Asymmetric Symphonia?” in *Journal of International Affairs* (61:1, 2007).

It can be said that the character of the Russian state through its various iterations has maintained certain similarities. Each Russian state has been to varying degrees autocratic, highly centralized, heavily militarized, and expansionistic in outlook. While the latter two are less than germane to the topic of this study, the former are in many ways a product of the historically pervasive influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on society. An autocratic power structure was both needed to throw off Tatar domination and in line with the stated church goal of mirroring the model of heaven on Earth. Centralization was again critical to both of these goals. Even amidst an official policy of atheism, this cultural impact of Orthodoxy could not be undermined over the course of the seventy-year history of the Soviet Union. It can additionally be said to persist today.⁶

Religious affiliation declined markedly during the Soviet period, making it difficult to explain the central role which Orthodoxy occupies in modern Russian national consciousness. While early in the Soviet period when repression of the Church was at an all-time high, “the loyalty of the Soviet public to the virtually nonexistent church remained substantial,” this affiliation later dramatically declined.⁷ By the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, only 31% of Russians identified as Orthodox Christians while 61% professed no religious affiliation.⁸ Interestingly, at the same time that 31% professed an Orthodox identity, only 11% of Russians described themselves as at least “somewhat religious.” Here can be seen the first inklings of the suggestion that affiliation with Orthodoxy is not tied so much to genuine religious belief as to its long-term impact on the Russian cultural psyche.

⁶ Information on the historic development of the Russian state distilled from the lectures of James Warhola in “Russian Government and Politics” at the University of Maine during the autumn semester 2015.

⁷ Walters, “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet State,” 139.

⁸ Pew Research Center, “Russians Return to Religion, but Not to Church,” Washington, D.C. (2014), 1.

Ethnodoxy

Before progressing to discuss in detail the role of the church in the collapse of communism and the emergence of a new Russian identity, the issue of belief must be addressed. As noted above, by the mid-1930s around 57% of Soviet citizens identified as religiously Orthodox.⁹ Shortly afterward, the question vanished from Soviet censuses and data is thus unavailable. It seems clear from post-Soviet surveys, though, that religious affiliation continued to decline throughout the Soviet period and that by the Gorbachev years believers were a distinctive minority. The question remains, then, how the Russian Orthodox Church was able to exert influence among a population that did not believe in its dogma. University of Western Michigan sociologist Vyacheslav Karpov coined the term ethnodoxy to explain this phenomenon in a 2012 paper which employed modern Russia as a case study. He describes ethnodoxy as, “an ideology which rigidly links a group’s ethnic identity to its dominant faith.”¹⁰ In short, the concept suggested that in a nation state where popular identification has long been linked to a religious identity, the secular bond can come to be conflated with a dominant religious tradition, as in the case of Russian Orthodoxy. The people may not come to believe in the tenets of the religion, but their group identification with it persists into a more secular era. A modern example of this phenomenon could be the large number of Americans who do not attend church services but continue to identify with Protestant Christianity. Karpov discusses the emergence of so-called “ethnic religions,” faith groups to which one belongs without believing. In short, “at the societal level, the power of beliefs conflating

⁹ Walters, “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet State,” 139.

¹⁰ Vyacheslav Karpov, Elena Lisovskaya, and David Barry, “Ethnodoxy: How Popular Ideologies Fuse Religious and Ethnic Identities,” in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (51:4, 2012), 639.

faith and ethnos profoundly manifests itself in highly secularized settings, where individual-level piety is relatively low.”¹¹

Ethnodoxy as a concept sought to explicate the unique situation in modern Russia wherein religious belief among the population is exceptionally low, but regard for and identification with the Russian Orthodox Church remains exceptionally high. Karpov suggested that an identification with Orthodoxy had become a core tenet of Russian ethnic nationalism; his conceptualization created seven core criteria for applying the term and found all seven of these present in the Russian case. This connection meshed closely with the highly unusual nature of Russian self-identification—there is not a single Russian identity in the Russian language, and connotations are key. Some small consideration of the Russian language terminology is here essential in understanding the emerging role of Orthodoxy.

In the Russian language, two separate words are used to refer to the English “Russian:” *russki* and *rossiyski*. *Rossiyski* refers to the political context, a citizen of the Russian Federation or previously of the Soviet Union; the term is roughly analogous to the former term *sovetski*. *Russki*, on the other hand, refers to Russian in the ethnic or cultural context. It is this second “Russian” which has been wrapped up in Orthodoxy—Russians grew to expect that if someone was ethnically Russian, then they would be at least culturally Orthodox. A warmth toward the Church persisted even as religious identification decreased. At the time of Karpov’s study, “85 percent of Russians agreed or strongly agreed with the idea of inborn faithfulness...”¹² Karpov’s study established

¹¹ Ibid., 639.

¹² Ibid., 648.

this conflation which helps to explain the continuing relevance of the Russian Orthodox Church. His work is novel and difficult to compare as it is such a step away from its preceding scholarship; his conclusions seem well-researched and have not been significantly challenged. Barring subsequent evidence to the contrary, Karpov's argument is the most likely and efficient explanation for continuing affinity for the Russian Orthodox Church amidst late Soviet religious repression. With this idea established, the remarkable events beginning in the late 1980s become far more understandable.

Legacies of *Perestroika* in the Church

While the Soviet Union was deeply embroiled in the spirit of *perestroika* by 1988, the Russian Orthodox Church held its fifth *sobor*—the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, a binding meeting of church hierarchs similar to the ecumenical councils of the Catholic Church. New policies enacted by 1988 *sobor* along with the loosening of government control over the church led to a growing involvement of the Church in Russian nationalist politics. During the Gorbachev period, a split developed between two major camps of Russian nationalists. One group, broadly the conservative nationalists, opposed Gorbachev's changes and sought to restore a more fundamental Soviet system of rule, allying themselves with a fading group of reactionary neo-Stalinists. On the other hand, a group of liberal nationalists emerged in a loose alliance with Western-style liberals—of this group the most prominent individual would be Boris Yeltsin, later President of the Russian Federation. This group of liberal nationalists sought to separate themselves from the negatives of the Soviet legacy and cultivate a strong Russian sense of belonging, rather than strictly Soviet. They were broadly pro-

democratic, pro-free market, and resembled Western liberals in all but one major respect—a substantial component of their unique Russian identity was wrapped up in Orthodoxy. John Dunlop explained that “the liberal nationalists are distinguished from Western-style liberals by their often fervent attachment to Russian Orthodoxy and to Russian traditions, and by their especially pronounced abhorrence of Marxist-Leninist ideology.”¹³ While Dunlop erred in predicting that the liberal nationalist attraction to Orthodoxy as a component of Russian identity would lead to the formation of a strong Christian Democratic political party, he made an important point about the changing concerns of Russia’s leadership. Like Gorbachev before them, the leaders of the liberal nationalist movement recognized the potent force which the Russian Orthodox Church could bring to bear for their controversial cause; in order for liberal democracy to be successful, a uniquely Russian identity separate from Soviet ideology needed to be cultivated. Only the Russian Orthodox Church could offer the pre-Soviet continuity to lend credence to this formation.

This is not to say, though, that the relationship between the liberal nationalists and the church elite was a particularly strong one. To the contrary, “Many liberal Russian nationalists are implacable opponents of the hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate, whom they see as carriers of the bacillus of *sergiyevshchina*.”¹⁴ In other words, the nationalists saw much of the higher echelons of the Orthodox Church as being little more than an ecclesiastical *nomenklatura*, failing to truly represent a change from the Soviet regime.¹⁵

¹³ John B. Dunlop, “The Russian Orthodox Church and Nationalism After 1988,” in *Religion in Communist Lands* (18:4, 1990), 300.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 301.

¹⁵ NB: *Nomenklatura* is a term referring to the intellectual and political elite of the Soviet Union. *Sergiyevshchina* is a philosophy promulgated by Patriarch Sergi in 1927 which held that the fate of the USSR and the Orthodox Church were one and the same—essentially a declaration of loyalty to Soviet

Liberal nationalists feared the level of influence which the KGB could still exert over the Church and especially raised concern at the questionable election of Patriarch Alexy in June 1990—typical conventions of mourning for the previous patriarch and democratic election of his successor were not necessarily followed. Along with Alexy’s meteoric rise in the church and his support from the KGB, liberal nationalists feared this meant that the organization had been further dominated by the security services and thus began to distance themselves.

On the other hand, the influence of the Orthodox Church on the conservative coalition only increased throughout this period. As the neo-Stalinist cohort continued to wane in influence through a series of poor tactical maneuvers, the conservative nationalists with a strong affinity for Orthodoxy took on a larger role in the coalition—eventually this group came to embrace Alexy’s Orthodox Church as the liberal nationalists grew more vocal in their criticism of the leadership. Dunlop was far clearer about this group than about the liberal nationalists, leaving no doubt that, “most leading conservative Russian nationalists appear to be either Russian Orthodox believers or persons sympathetic to Orthodoxy as an embodiment of the Russian spirit.”¹⁶ The only core difference between many conservative nationalists and the Orthodox Church hierarchy was a rejection of world ecumenism by the nationalist cohort. A strong monarchist bent among conservative nationalists lined up particularly strongly with the Church’s conception of *symphonia* with the sole exception of this dispute.

leadership. This philosophy was reviled as a betrayal by Orthodox dissidents and represents one of the major factors in Russian Orthodox Churches attempting to break away from the Moscow Patriarchate.

¹⁶ Ibid., 303.

While liberal and conservative nationalists had extremely different aims ranging from a restoration of absolute monarchy to the development of a Western-style democracy, they were united around the conflation of Russian nationalism with Russian Orthodoxy. Across the board and even as both groups had serious problems with the Church leadership, it was understood that Orthodoxy formed a core and inseparable part of Russian cultural identity. Each group would seek to move Church leadership in its direction, but neither considered jettisoning the Church from their carefully cultivated ideologies of nationalism.

Evolving *Symphonia*

The relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and political power which grew out of the *perestroika* reforms of the 1980s can be understood as an attempt to recreate *symphonia* in a modern political context. As two instruments in the same orchestra, the Church and the state should not be discordant to each other—this principle drove the Church’s public support of government initiatives even as they may not directly follow the Church’s own preference. Gorbachev likewise sought the legitimating power and influence of the Orthodox Church in order to overcome hardline communist opposition to his reforms.¹⁷ A new coalition was formed between the pro-*perestroika* Soviet leadership and the Orthodox Church hierarchy which granted the Church substantial new privileges and the restoration of great amounts of confiscated property including the historically significant Danilov Monastery and the Trinity Lavra of St.

¹⁷ For a firsthand discussion of this move toward Orthodoxy, see Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1987). For a secondary interpretation, consider Christopher Marsh, “Russian Orthodox Christians and Their Orientation toward Church and State,” in *Perspectives on Church-State Relations in Russia*, ed. Daniel, Berger, and Marsh (Waco: J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, 2008), 85-88.

Sergius, the so-called spiritual center of the Russian church.¹⁸ The Church was permitted to establish an independent governing structure and even violate state laws without repercussion in exchange for its support, as was seen most notably in the case of the Arzamas charity collection.¹⁹

This relationship only continued to grow as Soviet power began to decline amidst the emergence of regional nationalism. Unlike the other state republics, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was not wholly unified by a strong ethnic identity; it had substantial minority populations and had been created through centuries of imperial conquest. Nationalist forces coopted the common tradition of Orthodoxy as a core value in the establishment of a definitive Russian identity. This drove an increasingly close collaboration with the Orthodox Church hierarchy which has persisted into the present day. The Orthodox Church was clearly the weaker partner in the church-state relationship, but it was still able to exert dramatic influence on specific areas and was given wide leeway to operate insofar as it did not conflict with state aims.

One major subcomponent of this evolution was the reassertion of ecclesiastical independence on the part of autocephalous churches in the former Soviet republics.²⁰

¹⁸ For information on the détente between church and state leading up to the 1988 *sobor* see Helen Bell and Jane Ellis, “The Millennium Celebrations of 1988 in the USSR,” in *Religion in Communist Lands* (16:4, 1988) and John B. Dunlop, “The Russian Orthodox Church in the Millennium Year: What it Needs from the Soviet State,” in *Religion in Communist Lands* (16:2, 1988). The Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, also known as the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius or the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius, was built in 1345 by Russia’s most highly-regarded saint, Sergius of Radonezh, in honor of the Holy Trinity. Located in the city of Zagorsk, it served as the seat of the Patriarchate of Moscow for much of the Soviet period, until the Patriarch was allowed to return to Danilov Monastery in Moscow in 1983. For more general information about the site, consult the Orthodox Encyclopedia.

¹⁹ Bell and Ellis, pp. 307-312, a broad coverage of the events of the 1988 *sobor*, includes specific discussion of illegal activities undertaken by the ROC without facing state penalty such as the Arzamas charity collection.

²⁰ Autocephaly is a term that refers to national churches in Eastern Orthodoxy whose head bishops do not report to any higher figure. Autocephalous church structure is the organizational format of Eastern

Under the Soviet regime, the church structure had been consolidated around Moscow for organizational purposes, but this flew in the face of Orthodox tradition and theology. As Soviet power collapse, groups such as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reasserted their independence from Moscow, leaving a smaller but more ethnically cohesive Russian Orthodox Church in the wake. This trend served to strengthen the corroboration between Orthodoxy and Russian national identity which had already begun to establish itself firmly in the Russian consciousness.

Yeltsin's Outreach to the ROC

President Boris Yeltsin, as was above mentioned, enjoyed a mixed relationship with the Orthodox Church. Events such as the election of Patriarch Alexy in 1990 had served to dampen liberal nationalist enthusiasm for Orthodoxy as a component of Russian nationalism. Yeltsin, feted across the West for his enlightened and liberal democratic ideas, did not fit in the mold of the typical Orthodox-minded politician. He was a Westernizer; strong proclivities towards Orthodoxy had always been the province of the Slavophiles in Russia's great directional debate.²¹ And yet, religion held some excitement for the people in the aftermath of the Soviet experiment. "In 1990, many Russians saw religion in the same rosy glow in which they saw everything non-Soviet, from rock music to fast food to monarchism. If the Soviet Union had been against it, they

Orthodoxy, with the Patriarch of Constantinople recognized as a key figure in the wider church, but only as "first among equals."

²¹ Two intellectual movements emerged in the 1840s in Russia, those of the Westernizers and the Slavophiles. Slavophiles favored the pursuit of Russia's own unique development, highlighting its non-Western attributes, while Westernizers felt that Russia should seek to emulate the West in culture, civil society, and political structures. Generally speaking, Slavophiles have prevailed in Russian discourse.

were for it—or thought it at least worth a try.”²² Russians were curious about a centuries-old aspect of their lives that had been kept under tight reins, ready to look on the Orthodox Church with new eyes even if their president wasn’t overly enthusiastic.

The new Russian government still faced the obstacle of constructing a uniquely Russian national identity, though. Through both the imperial and Soviet periods, Russia had been a vast multiethnic state and the Russians just one component of that, albeit an important one. A post-Soviet Russian government was faced with the task not only of deconstructing the apparatus of Communism, but also fostering the creation of a cohesive new identity for its citizenry. Ethnic Russians formed a far greater proportion of the new Russian Federation than they ever had of previous Russian states, but were still not an absolute majority and further their group identity had been de-emphasized rather than reinforced during the Soviet period.

The crystallizing moment between President Yeltsin and the Russian Orthodox Church came during the attempted coup of 1991. A faction of hardline Soviets led by Vladimir Kryuchkov, the head of the KGB, arrested President Gorbachev of the USSR on August 18, declaring a state emergency committee was taking control of the Soviet government. While he avoided arrest like Gorbachev, Yeltsin found himself barricaded into the House of the Soviets (the so-called Russian White House) surrounded by tanks and without much outward support. When he was able to reactivate a radio broadcast, Yeltsin chose to make a fateful call to what may have been his only ally with any degree of influence in Moscow, the newly elected Patriarch Alexy:

²² Erasmus, “Russians feel less positive towards religion now than they did in 1990,” *The Economist*, 31 July 2015.

The tragic events that have occurred throughout the night made me turn to you, to reach the nation through you... Our state has been violated and along with it the newly emerging democracy, and freedom of choice for the electorate. There is once again the shadow of disorder and chaos hanging over our country.

At this moment of tragedy for our Fatherland I turn to you, calling on your authority among all religious confessions and believers. The influence of the Church in our society is too great for the Church to stand aside during these events. This *duty* is directly related to the Church's mission, to which you have dedicated your life: serving people, caring for their hearts and souls. The Church, which has suffered through the times of totalitarianism, may once again experience disorder and lawlessness.

All believers, the Russian nation, and all Russia await your word!²³

Both a call to arms and a paean to Orthodoxy, this address puts in explicit terms several key observations regarding the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian life. Yeltsin's opening statement, that he hopes to reach the nation through the Patriarch, was a powerful recognition of the influence which the Orthodox Church could still hold over the population of the atheist Soviet Union. The Patriarch remained just about the only free person in Moscow who could publicly speak out against the coup with any degree of influence.

Yeltsin suggested that the Church had a *duty* (emphasis his) to oppose the coup attempt, not simply that it was in the Church's interest to oppose a return to earlier Soviet policies. This assertion harkens back to the earlier relations between the Orthodox Church and the state in Russia. The concordat between church and state, rooted in the old ideas of *symphonia*, involved the church supporting the legitimate state with all the weight it could bring to bear. Even as the Soviet state was atheistic and antagonistic towards the Orthodox Church, Yeltsin still expected the Patriarchate to stand by the

²³ Boris Yeltsin, "Appeal to Patriarch Aleksy II," in *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, John Garrard and Carol Garrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 255.

legitimacy of government. The coup attempt was framed not as an assault on the government, but on the Russian people themselves who the Church was bound to protect. Despite any misgivings that the Patriarch may have had about Gorbachev's regime (although these would certainly have been less than previous Patriarchs may have felt towards previous First Secretaries), it still represented the embodiment of the people more so than Kryuchkov's conspirators.

The final exhortation of Yeltsin's address would seem to lend some credence to Karpov's theory of ethnodoxy. Rather than just declaring that Orthodox believers awaited the Patriarch's response, Yeltsin boldly declares that, "the Russian nation, and all Russia await your word!"²⁴ A group far larger than the faithful sought the guidance of the Patriarch in such a trying time—Yeltsin carefully places the entire Russian nation under the shepherding of the Patriarch of Moscow. This assumption ties into the traditional conflation of Russian nationalism and Russian Orthodoxy; the classic formulaic of "*pravoslaviye, samoderzhaviye, narodnost*" (Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationalism) articulated by Nicholas I in 1833 still held sway after seventy years of Communist rule.

One aspect of this address worth noting is the distinction between the Russian nation and all Russia that Yeltsin drew. Part of Yeltsin's goal as President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was to reassert Russian nationalism and identification with Russia as an entity separate from the wider conglomeration of the Soviet Union. Even in his attempts to counter a Soviet coup, Yeltsin would not speak about the Soviet people. It is likely that Yeltsin's reference to the Russian nation in this

²⁴ Ibid., 255.

context is referential to the historical community of ethnic Russians with their shared values. Ethnic Russians who had a deep background in Orthodoxy may not believe in God on an individual level, but overall held a great deal of respect for the institutional church that represented the only body of continuity throughout their history; on every measured survey indicator, a large majority of the population comes out in favor of Orthodoxy, including a surprising, “85% of Russians [that] agreed or strongly agreed with the idea of inborn faithfulness (i.e., that any Russian, even if s/he is not baptized and does not go to church, is Orthodox in his/her heart).”²⁵ All Russia, on the other hand, probably referred to the extent of Russia’s domains—an area roughly contiguous to the Soviet Union, but again Yeltsin would not choose to phrase it this way. This last phraseology would be meant to appeal to those non-ethnic Russians who might still identify with Orthodoxy, such as the nascent Ukrainian Orthodox or Georgian Orthodox communities in the other Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs); while Yeltsin was only President of the RSFSR, the importance of Russia within the Soviet Union and Yeltsin’s presence in Moscow meant he was better equipped than most to speak to the entire Soviet Union.

The Patriarch Involves Himself in Politics

This was a pivotal moment for the Russian Orthodox Church; Patriarch Alexy had the chance to re-engage with the Russian population at a time of trial and make a significant choice that would impact the future of the state. At first he moved rather subtly. Shortly after Yeltsin’s address, Alexy was presiding over a liturgy at the Cathedral of the Assumption inside the Kremlin. John and Carol Garrard recount that,

²⁵ Karpov et al., 648.

“instead of remembering the ‘authorities’ and ‘the army’ as was customary, he prayed ‘for our country protected by God and its people.’”²⁶ Long a backer of the Russian (and Soviet) armed forces and state authority, here the Patriarch took a seemingly semantic but significant stance against the institutional forces lining up to overcome the people’s will. In particular, the Patriarch’s omission of the Army from his blessing on a significant feast day liturgy would have given several in the military pause. This formulation was quickly followed by a fax sent around the world, in which the Patriarch demanded that the people should hear from Gorbachev himself and declared that,

We call upon all parts of the Russian Orthodox Church, the whole of our people, and particularly our army at this critical moment for our nation to show support and not to permit the shedding of fraternal blood. We raise the heartfelt prayer to our Lord and summon all true believers in our Church to join this prayer begging Him to dispense peace to the peoples of our land so that they can in future build their homeland in accordance with freedom of choice and the accepted norms of morality and law.

Aleksy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, 20th August 1991 Moscow²⁷

This more explicit reference to the army and its duty amidst this crisis demonstrates the ultimate concern that the Patriarch had was to prevent an outbreak of violent bloodshed. Prior to Alexy’s fax, word had gone out that 10 tanks and associated soldiers had gone over to Yeltsin’s side and were defending the White House. The first concern that he sought to address, thus, was the prevention of immediate Russian bloodshed. This tactic seems to have been effective; when the junta tried to order the army to move against Yeltsin, the orders were refused—Soviet officers would not fight their own compatriots.

²⁶ John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 18.

²⁷ Aleksy II, “Announcement of the Moscow Holy Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Aleksy II,” in *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, John and Carol Garrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 256.

More broadly, Patriarch Alexy spoke to “the whole of our people,” in this announcement. Like Yeltsin’s reference to the Russian nation in his own earlier address, the Patriarch is calling out to a group that is perceived as unified by the common bonds of Orthodoxy: the people of Russia. While the Patriarch does speak to “all true believers in our Church” a couple of sentences later, his first specific reference to an audience remains the whole Russian people. Yeltsin and Patriarch Alexy here share the same goal of fostering a unity among the Russian people that was thoroughly de-emphasized during the Soviet period. By choosing to stand with Yeltsin’s Russia, Patriarch Alexy is aiming to rebuild the close linkage between the state and the church which typified pre-Soviet Russia. At the same time, he called for President Gorbachev to address the nation on the state of affairs—Alexy was not willing to explicitly stand for Yeltsin himself, but instead pushed for the legitimate voice of Soviet governance to speak.

A minor but significant aspect of this announcement is the title by which the Patriarch chooses to refer to himself. The pronouncement is signed, “Aleksy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia,” the traditional title of the Patriarch of Moscow. This was not, however, the title he was accorded or recognized with by the Soviet government. As part of the Church’s deal with Stalin around the onset of World War II, the title of the Patriarch had been revised to “Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus’” because Russia was no longer a significant legal entity. Rus’ had a nice historic sound to it and allowed the Patriarch’s jurisdiction to extend throughout the various SSRs, while also de-emphasizing the exclusionary Russian nature of Moscow’s Patriarchate in line with ostensible Soviet goals of erasing ethnic divisions within the USSR. Just as Yeltsin chose to refer to the Russian nation and all Russia, rather than the Soviet Union, when he exhorted Alexy to

take a stand on the coup, Alexy chose to fall back on his own historic title which referred specifically to the state of Russia. Both the President of the yet-to-exist sovereign state and the Patriarch of its historic church used this opportunity to re-assert the identification of the people with their “Russian-ness.” The two parties both recognized and sought to take advantage of the position of the Church to build up a strong new Russian identity in opposition to the revanchist Soviet forces under Khryuchkov.

This particular address was also a very savvy political piece. On its most basic level, this document challenged the legitimacy of the coup which had taken place. Before getting to any of his exhortations to the people or the armed forces, the Patriarch zoned in on the controversy surrounding Gorbachev’s retirement. His address began with the observation that, “this situation is troubling the consciences of millions of our fellow citizens, who are concerned about the legality of the newly formed State Emergency Committee which has declared that it has taken supreme power in the USSR.”²⁸ This was followed quickly by a demand to hear from President Gorbachev himself his own views on these circumstances. The address thus served as a call to restore law and stability in society like Yeltsin’s initial address, but it also reached out to Gorbachev rather than Yeltsin himself. Before ever appealing to the people, the Patriarch specifically reached out to the legitimate governing institutions. Along with this, it is worth noting that he directed his appeal to the government and not the party institutions; “we hope that the Supreme Soviet of the USSR will give careful consideration to what has taken place and will take decisive measures to bring about the stabilization of the situation in the

²⁸ Ibid., 255.

country.”²⁹ The Patriarch specifically did not ask the top party apparatus for action, but the top governing body. Perhaps a bit like Alexy’s title, this telling tidbit suggests that any allegiance that the Church may have developed to the Soviet leadership was to the governing institutions themselves, not the Communist Party which occupied them. A traditionally conservative force in society, the Church would back the legitimate governing organs even when it did not like the policy of those holding office.

The August 20 fax was not the full extent of the Church’s weight mustered against the coup attempt. Less than 24 hours after this announcement had been released, fighting broke out and two young men were shot while another was trampled under a tank outside the Russian White House. Angry crowds swarmed and military vehicles were set on fire in protest. The Patriarch learned of these events almost immediately and took an unheard-of step for Church officials in the Soviet period: he got on the radio and made a live public address. This powerful statement appealed to the people to let their better sides shine through, an approach that was, “more personal and more magisterial,” in John and Carol Garrard’s words.³⁰ The Patriarch attempted to unify the long institutional power that his office held with a connection to the Russian past and previous struggles. To this end, Alexy opened his address with “Brothers and Sisters,” the same formulation that Joseph Stalin used in his wartime radio addresses after the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. Stalin had called on his brothers and sisters to stand up and repel invaders; Alexy now called on these same brothers and sisters to prevent the outbreak of civil war.³¹ This address represented the first time that the Patriarch of

²⁹ Ibid, 256.

³⁰ Garrard and Garrard, 22.

³¹ Ibid., 22.

Moscow had spoken unfiltered to the whole of his people at least since the Russian Revolution, if not the first time in history:

Brothers and Sisters! The delicate civil peace of our society has been rent asunder. According to the latest information, open armed conflict and loss of life have begun. In these circumstances, my duty as Patriarch is to warn everybody for whom the word of the church is dear and carries weight: Every person who raises arms against his neighbor, against unarmed civilians, will be taking upon his soul a very profound sin which will separate him from the Church and from God. It is appropriate to shed more tears and say more prayers for such people than for their victims.

May God protect you from the terrible sin of fratricide. I solemnly warn all my fellow-citizens:

The Church does not condone and cannot condone unlawful and violent acts and the shedding of blood.

I ask all of you, my dear ones, to do everything possible to prevent the flame of civil war from bursting forth.

Cease at once!

I ask soldiers and their officers to remember that no one can set a price on human life and pay it.

I ask the Most Holy Mother of God, the Protector of our city, at this time of the Feast of the Transfiguration, not to withdraw Her protection from us, but to preserve all of us.

O Mother of God, help us to reconcile ourselves to one another, to the truth, and to God!

Aleksy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia³²

While couched in liturgical language, Alexy's address was at heart an appeal to morals and to shared Russian identity. References to the Mother of God as a protector of Moscow date back almost as far as the city of Moscow itself, and go even further to when the city of Constantinople asserted the same protection. One of the most famous images

³² Aleksy II, "1:30 A.M. Address (*Obrashchenie*) to Compatriots," in *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, John and Carol Garrard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 256.

from surviving sources on the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 is the Patriarch in full regalia processing along the city's bombarded walls with an icon of the Virgin Mary believed to have been painted by St. Luke himself. The same practice had been employed in previous Russian conflicts; both Dmitry Donskoi and Alexander Nevsky's legends are often linked to the intervention of the Theotokos.³³ It is no surprise, then, that, "these references to Mary as the "Protector of our city" tapped the deepest memory of the Russian people."³⁴

The reference to Theotokos quickly had its desired effect. The closing appeal of Alexy's speech was not really unique, it was a truncated form of, "the famous *troparion* written to the Kazan Icon of the Theotokos credited with saving the city in the early seventeenth century."³⁵ This would have been one of the most familiar prayers to Russian Orthodox believers and a classic point to turn in troubled times. The very same words had been employed during the Polish invasion of 1612, then again in the Swedish invasion of 1709, and a third time at Napoleon's 1812 invasion. Reaction among the gathered crowd at the House of the Soviets was swift; "upon hearing Mater Bozhia, the Russian Orthodox believers in the crowd began crossing themselves and bowing, thus completing with their bodies a direct and dynamic relationship between the patriarch and his flock."³⁶ The people confirmed that Alexy's words still held sway, a fact that was not at all clear prior to the August coup.

³³ *Theotokos*, a Greek phrase, is the Orthodox title for Mary. In the West, the phrase Mother of God (*Mater Dei*) is frequently used, but this is not a good translation of the phrase, as the Western usage has a different connotation than the Eastern. A more accurate Latin translation might be *Deipara* (God-bearer, Birth-Giver of God).

³⁴ Garrard and Garrard, 24.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

On a personal level to Alexy, this is the same imagery that Patriarch Alexy I employed during the German invasion in 1941; the closest equivalent to Alexy's August 21 radio address in Soviet history was when Stalin allowed Metropolitan Alexy of Leningrad and Novgorod to make a speech from Moscow's *Bogoyavlensky* (Epiphany) Cathedral. Alexy had chosen his regnal name in no small part because of Alexy I's actions in 1941, a moment when Russia's fate stood in the balance and the church stood up to rally the people. Even Stalin recognized the profound capacity of the Orthodox Church to inspire Russians, so, "on August 10, 1941, the Red Army was retreating on all fronts, and German Panzers were racing towards Moscow. Desperate to rally the people, Stalin turned *not* to the party but to the ROC."³⁷ While not broadcast across the nation by radio and while not yet the Patriarch, Alexy I's inspirational speech dove deep into the trove of Russian historical memory, citing Kutuzov, Nevsky, Donskoi and St. Sergius of Radonezh among others. It also involved appeals to Theotokos, just as Alexy II would employ fifty years later. There is little doubt that the Patriarch recognized the striking similarities between August 1941 and August 1991 as he chose to make this address: it was in times of severest crisis that the Church could break through Soviet barriers and make a public stand with the people.

Patriarch Alexy assumed great personal risk in making this speech. Beyond the question of ramifications for the Church breaking rules that had been laid out regarding its conduct, he was making a very public appeal to the Theotokos for relief. Within the Russian Orthodox Church, whether one's prayer is answered or not is treated as a reflection on whether a person is sufficiently faithful. Were bloodshed to proceed

³⁷ Ibid., 22.

further, the Patriarch would have undermined his own faithfulness in the eyes of the people, of the Church, and of the government. Had the coup succeeded, it is almost certain that Alexy would have been removed from power and met an ignominious end. Even were the coup to be defeated, he may still have struggled if it came at the cost of the serious internecine bloodshed that he fervently prayed against. This ultimately did not come to pass and indeed, the Patriarch's reputation among Russians was only enhanced by his timely intervention here, but that he was willing to assume this risk to make such a statement is telling.

The Public Reaction and Re-Emergence of Religiosity

The impact of this speech was immediate, and for good reason. Garrard and Garrard point out that the KGB's favorite time to initiate action was 2 A.M. due to a natural lethargy in the body's circadian rhythm. Patriarch Alexy was aware of this because a similar situation had unfolded in Lithuania around 6 months prior, in which the KGB sent troops in at 2 A.M. over the Patriarch's objection. This time, there was no 2 A.M. assault; after hearing the Patriarch's address, members of the army outside the House of the Soviets became unwilling to move in, especially not through the crowd of people that was forming in support of Yeltsin. In a stunning public display of religiosity, priests went up to the soldiers around the tanks and offered them bibles. Noted Russia scholar and former Librarian of Congress James Billington recalled this scene vividly, considering, "particularly remarkable...the distribution of 2,000 New Testaments to the young would-be attackers and another 2,000 to the defenders of the White House by the founder of the Russian Bible Society, Father Alexander Borisov. Such actions blurred the distinction between the opposing groups and suggested that there might be something

deeper to which both sides might rally.”³⁸ Religion was a unifying force among Russian people, the distribution of bibles symbolic of a profound connection that no government orders could overcome.

The crowd around the White House quickly grew after Alexy’s moonlight appeal for calm; primarily young and male before the Patriarch’s involvement, a much wider subsection of the population quickly filtered onto the *Krasnopresnenskaya* embankment. Billington was in a meeting with elderly female librarians when the speech began, and remembered that, “spontaneously and without discussion, they all left to join the young men on the barricades and other elderly women who had been rebuking soldiers in the tanks.”³⁹ Long discounted by both the Soviet government and Western observers as an irrelevant, outdated group, these women who had attended church for their entire lives despite harassment and oppression created even greater tension on the military members in the square. They were no longer being asked to oppose simple political dissidents—other young men and politicians—but their mothers and grandmothers, and in Russia one does not trifle with one’s *babushka*. Yeltsin had galvanized the nascent political opposition around himself, but the Patriarch was able to galvanize society as a whole.

A far larger crowd developed away from the White House, however, and made their way to Lubyanka Square, the headquarters of the KGB. Here, the famous statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the father of the Soviet Union’s secret police, was pulled down live on CNN around the world. Garrard and Garrard report, however, that after the news broadcast cut away, believers who had heard Patriarch Alexy’s prayer had erected an

³⁸ James Billington, “Christianity and the Russian Transformation,” in *Anglican and Episcopal History* 64:1 (1995): 6-7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

Orthodox cross in its place and painted the phrase, “*sim pobedishi*,” on its plinth.⁴⁰ This phrase is no doubt more familiar to the Western reader in Latin than in Old Church Slavonic, *in hoc signo vinces*. Even as the security services removed the cross, the Emperor Constantine’s vision remained on Dzerzhinsky’s former mount. There is some poetic simile here; Constantine was the emperor who finally triumphed over paganism, brought his people to Christianity, and founded the city of Constantinople which would become the epicenter of Orthodoxy. Just as Constantine conquered the forces of godlessness at the Milvian Bridge in A.D. 312, Russian Orthodox believers were overthrowing the forces of institutionalized atheism and repression in 1991.

The Creation of Church Power in the Late Soviet Period

The massive and unexpected popular reaction to the Patriarch’s call to arms reveals that in 1991, the Church held far more power in Russia than most analysts realized. Even with comprehensive access to media outlets and government propaganda officials, neither Yeltsin nor Kryuchkov could generate the level of support that Alexy managed with one short radio broadcast. Since the Church spotted a thaw in the government stance towards religion in the early 1980s, its elite had worked tirelessly to build a quiet body of support and reassert influence where possible. This was abetted by the Soviet desire to utilize the Church as a propaganda tool for Western audiences; the body was allowed to develop sufficient autonomy that it was able to build up a base of influence that such a shrewd operator as Patriarch Alexy was easily able to employ when the opportunity presented itself.

⁴⁰ Garrard and Garrard, 31.

The response to the 1991 coup attempt is thus best understood as the first manifestation of a carefully generated, reinvigorated Church presence in the twilight of the Soviet Union. The Patriarchate had played upon its historic role in society and connections to redevelop itself, building important relationships that would come through when conflict erupted. As suggested earlier in this paper, one of the most significant relationships that was rebuilt was that between the Orthodox Church and the Red Army. Like in many other societies throughout history, the members of the Soviet armed forces had the firm support of their church and a long-standing relationship. This has manifested more recently in such odd events as the blessing of tanks by Orthodox priests before they departed for Georgia in the 2008 South Ossetian conflict. Some form of relationship between the Red Army and the Orthodox Church had first been firmly developed during World War II under Patriarch Alexy I. This relationship had only been built upon in the 1980s, so that when Alexy II chose to interject himself in politics, he, “had been cultivating wingless allies with boots on the ground: the generals of the Red Army.”⁴¹

The tactic paid off quickly. Alexander Rutskoy, the Vice President of the RSFSR and a major Afghanistan war hero, spoke out backing the Patriarch after his fax had been sent; this man carried a great deal of weight with the military crowd, his backing would have been consequential in the eyes of many Red Army officers. Even before Alexy had publicly spoken out against the coup attempt, the KGB’s Alpha Unit had refused to carry out an order to storm the White House. Garrard and Garrard link this refusal to a situation in Vilnius around six months prior, one in which there were many casualties and

⁴¹ Ibid., 26.

the Patriarch excoriated the Red Army and the government for such inappropriate action. At the time, Alexy spoke directly to the soldiers who carried out the raid about sin and a parable of John the Baptist. This apparently so affected the members of the Alpha Unit, supposedly the KGB's most ruthless men, to such an extent that they were willing to refuse orders from the Communist Party. The result of the coup, then, was that, "the alliance between the patriarchate and the military that had existed in the catacombs was just beginning to surface into public view."⁴² Having built up close connections with the military elite, Patriarch Alexy was able to rely on their support to prevent further bloodshed as the situation deteriorated.

Church power had been carefully cultivated below the surface during the 1980s through the fostering of new relationships with society's power brokers and an effective model of operation that did not outwardly challenge the Soviet system. This left the church in a strong position to exert influence when the system started to crack under its own pressures. Writing shortly after this time period, Billington suggests that,

Russians today are living through what they call a 'time of troubles,' when one form of legitimacy has been rejected, but no new form has yet been fully accepted. In such a time, Russian Christianity brings with it the special authority of having survived its targeted extinction under the Soviet system—and having provided a previously flagging faith with what Russians call the "new martyrs," perhaps the greatest number of Christians persecuted or killed for their faith in modern times.⁴³

By the late 1980s, the Soviet experiment had in many ways lost its legitimacy. A moribund economy, political repression at home, and a series of foreign policy blunders abroad had eviscerated trust in government. At the same time, there was no credible opposition with a claim to real legitimacy; this is essentially what Yeltsin, Rutskoy, and

⁴² Ibid., 27.

⁴³ Billington, "Christianity and the Russian Transformation," 10.

their compatriots were attempting to create out of the events of August 1991. As Billington ably recognized, this left the church as the only body with the organizational stability, respect, and legitimacy necessary to command the hearts and minds of the people. There was no continuity to pre-revolutionary Russia outside of the Orthodox Church by this time period; no other organization had survived in anything approaching its original form.⁴⁴ Further, the so-called martyrdom of believers at the hands of a now-distrusted Soviet government added to the prestige of the church in popular eyes. Through political savvy and a keen understanding of history, Patriarch Alexy led his church to a real position of power in society able to seriously influence the outcome of events as the Soviet Union fell apart.

Religious Freedom and the New Russian State

This did not mean, however, that Orthodoxy would rise to an immediate position of power in the emerging Russian Federation. The level of optimism that accompanied the fall of Communism in Western circles cannot be overstated. Observers presumed that the new Russia would adopt European democratic norms and integrate into the “common European home” which Gorbachev had made a centerpiece of his détente initiatives—not revert back to the pre-1917 status quo of superficial *symphonia*. President Yeltsin was feted the world over and talked the talk on the development of a strong democratic society in Russia, including in the realm of religious freedom. Less outwardly concerned with the Orthodox Church which had helped secure his success in the 1991 struggle for power, Yeltsin became a staunch defender of religious freedom and pluralism against a

⁴⁴ The nearest approximation would be the Academy of Sciences, which had a history dating back to 1724. However, this body was heavily purged during the Soviet period and it had never approached the level of influence over society which the church held both before and after communism.

backdrop of increasing calls to restrict minority religious groups. For several years, he resisted efforts by the legislature and the Orthodox Church to adopt more explicitly pro-Orthodox government policies.

The influx of new religious missionary movements in the post-Soviet space was swift and unrelenting. Gorbachev's 1990 law on religious freedom had opened the door for religious activism irrespective of one's citizenship and independent of government oversight, so foreign missionaries flooded into the country seeking converts. Among the most numerous groups arriving in Russia at this time were Western Protestants. Of the more mainstream denominations, Lutherans and Baptists attempted to gain a foothold in Russia amidst the religious revival of the first years after communism's collapse. Other groups such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Salvation Army also made appearances in cities and small towns across Russia. This was not, however, without controversy. The Orthodox Church viewed such action as an affront; Russian Orthodoxy had been an active participant in international ecumenical movements throughout the Soviet period and knew that other denominations recognized its ancient form of Christianity.⁴⁵ The ingress of religious groups from other non-Russian denominations was interpreted as a slap in the face, their target converts an already-Christian group of people who fell within the Moscow Patriarchate's natural influence. It should come as no surprise, then, that efforts to restrict the liberal 1990 legislation would rapidly emerge.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Since World War II, the Russian Orthodox Church had actively participated in all world church movements such as the World Council of Churches at the behest of the Soviet government, which hoped to use its presence there to sell the illusion of religious freedom within the Soviet Union to Western audiences.

⁴⁶ For more information on the situation for non-Orthodox religious groups, see Fagan chap. 3, *Rites of Spring*.

The first major attempt to curtail religious liberty and grant additional privileges to the Russian Orthodox Church came in August 1993, only about a month before the constitutional crisis that would lead to the reconstitution of the legislative bodies and Yeltsin's consolidation of power. The Supreme Soviet attempted to amend Russia's landmark 1990 law "On Freedom of Worship," an exceptionally liberal document protecting freedom of conscience and practice of religion. These amendments would have strictly curtailed religious liberty for the new foreign-based faith groups that had entered Russia since the loosening of Soviet restrictions. Yeltsin's official response condemned the effort, stating that the proposed changes would contradict, "equal rights of individuals to enjoy freedom of conscience and religion in the territory of Russia, regardless of their possession of Russian citizenship."⁴⁷ The President thus emerged as a defender of both the Constitution and newfound rights in Russia, a position which placed him at least partially against an Orthodox Church body which was interested in regaining its historic privileges from the Russian state.

The Orthodox Church was concerned by the fact that new Christian groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Lutherans were coming into Russia in increasing numbers and attempting to convert people that the church saw as part of its own body faithful. Proposed changes were thus rooted in a desire to protect the Orthodox from being overcome by better-resourced foreign pressure. After Yeltsin came out of the 1993 power struggle with his position consolidated, it seemed that this aim was doomed for defeat, but instead the rejection of the law was followed by, "four years of intense

⁴⁷ President Boris Yeltsin to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, 4 August 1993, quoted in W. Cole Durham, Jr., Lauren B. Homer, et al., "The Future of Religious Liberty in Russia: Report of the De Burght Conference on Pending Russian Legislation Restricting Religious Liberty," in *Emory International Law Review* 8:1 (1994): 10.

pressure brought by the Orthodox Church and by nationalist groups protesting the activities of outside missionary organizations and newly emergent indigenous religious groups.”⁴⁸ The bulk of this skepticism was directed at Protestant movements with little history in Russia, but it is worth noting that the Roman Catholic Church also faced Orthodox opposition to its attempts to re-enter the Russian sphere. Even this organization which itself had a lengthy history in parts of the Russian Empire was targeted to the extent that Pope John Paul II was prevented from ever attaining a Russian visa and visiting the country after decades of attempts.

Fear of losing their influence in society if multi-confessionalism became the norm in Russia kept the church invested in the question of amendment to the landmark 1990 law. After the floodgates of missionary activity had opened in 1991, an Orthodox priest decried the situation, lamenting that, “Moscow isn’t a Babylon for secondary cults, for Protestant congregations who resemble wild wolves rushing in here or Catholics like thieves using their billions to try to occupy new territory.”⁴⁹ In the church’s view, Russia had its own longstanding faith tradition which had deserved preeminence in the new post-Soviet space. Patriarch Alexy publicly expressed his conviction that, “unless the government affirmed Russia’s traditional faiths against the aggressive actions of other religious groups and sects...the renewal of Russia’s own spiritual traditions stood little chance.”⁵⁰ This position did manage to attract a fair degree of support amongst both legislators and the wider population. Derek H. Davis suggests that this is because the

⁴⁸ Wallace L. Daniel and Christopher Marsh, “Russia’s 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience in Context and Retrospect,” in *Perspectives on Church-State Relations in Russia*, ed. Daniel, Berger, and Marsh (Waco: J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, 2008), 29.

⁴⁹ Father Artyom, quoted in Anita Deyneka, “Stepping Back from Freedom,” *Christianity Today*, 17 November 1997, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

1990 law, “was perhaps an idealized vision of what Russia might be in theory, but nevertheless an overestimate of what Russia was prepared to be in practice.”⁵¹ As the novelty of religious freedom wore off and actively proselytizing groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses grew to be the face of foreign religious movements, the popularity of measures restricting their freedom of movement seemed to rise.

Even as he developed a closer relationship with the Orthodox Church in other areas around the 1996 election, President Yeltsin remained firm on his opposition to watering down the idealistic 1990 religious freedom law. When the first draft of the proposed 1997 law ultimately reached his desk on July 23, he responded to the President of the State Duma and President of the Federation Council that the law, “contradicts the basic foundation of the constitutional structure of the Russian Federation, and generally recognized principles and norms of international law.”⁵² This opposition was taken further in his scheduled national radio address two days later. Yeltsin appealed to the Russian people in defense of his stand, recognizing that, “Russia needs such a law badly...to defend our people’s moral and spiritual health, to erect reliable barriers in the way of radical sects that have already dealt enough harm, crippling the spiritual health of many of our citizens, young people, first and foremost,” but also reasserting that, “a democratic state cannot infringe on minorities’ interests (no matter what seemingly noble interests might dictate such a move).”⁵³ The incorporation of both a very real concern for

⁵¹ Derek H. Davis, “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Future of Russia,” in *Journal of Church and State* 44 (2002): 663.

⁵² Boris Yeltsin to President of the State Duma G.N. Seleznev and President of the Federation Council E.S. Stroev, 23 July 1997, “Yeltsin Threatens Not to Enforce Law if Veto Overriden,” report of the Press Service of the President of the Russian Federation, archived at <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/9707.html>.

⁵³ “Yeltsin’s Radio Broadcast,” 25 July 1997, archived at <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0907.html>.

the spiritual health of the people in Russia (and an implicit linkage of that health with Orthodoxy) and a concern for democratic norms and basic rights highlights the long-running dichotomy in Russian politics between considering themselves European and considering themselves unique.

The struggle over the place of religious freedom in the new Russia was simply one more reckoning of the age-old Slavophile versus Westernizer debate; the Orthodox Church had never gotten along well with Westernizers and the Slavophile position usually tended to win in the end. At the same time, these categories are oversimplifications of the deep mixed loyalties inherent in Russian-ness. Yeltsin has always been considered a Westernizer, but his actions here reveal an acute awareness of and respect for the historical position of Orthodoxy in Russian society, the fundamental non-European-ness that Russia has never been able to break away from. Patriarch Alexy, on the other hand, represented the classic Slavophile, fearing that outside influence would dilute the unique traditions of Russian faith, but still favoring a policy of ecumenism in the church's relations with the wider Christian community. In short, Alexy hoped to maintain positive relations with world Christianity and win Russian Orthodoxy a seat at the table in any future discussions, but this did not extend to allowing world Christianity into Russia. In the end, Yeltsin was himself in the minority on this issue and ultimately caved, signing a law that he had vetoed three times prior in the past four years without any real changes having been made. This is not on its face surprising. Geraldine Fagan of Forum 18, a religious freedom NGO, suggests that, "Russian national identity is classically regarded as inseparable from mainline Orthodox Christianity...to both its

supporters and sceptics, religious freedom is therefore alien to Russian culture.”⁵⁴

Yeltsin was fighting to defend a value that many would argue his countrymen simply do not share. While this author would consider such a claim an overstatement, it is certainly not an unusual point of view.

Regional bodies had not universally accepted the 1990 law, providing a template for the opposition to Yeltsin which emerged between 1993 and 1997. Certain groups, especially Hare Krishnas, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses attracted much attention outside of Moscow, where, “early on regional courts began trespassing over the law by restricting religious liberty to those groups they found distasteful...local and regional courts had few qualms about violating these legally-guaranteed liberties when they were seen as causing harm to Russia’s cultural environment.”⁵⁵ Specifically targeted groups often found their freedom to operate severely restricted beyond the terms of what the 1990 law would permit, but often did not get sufficient relief from legal avenues. This regional action provided an important reference point for advocates in favor of harsher national restrictions on religious freedom and was an example that could be cited to demonstrate how such policies could work in practice. As support for more restrictive measures grew at a national level, “the new legislation took its cue from the regional religious laws by introducing discrimination between associations according to their degree of establishment within Russia.”⁵⁶ This precedent guided the creation of the 1997 legislation that President Yeltsin would ultimately commit to sign.

⁵⁴ Geraldine Fagan, *Believing in Russia—Religious Policy After Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 7.

⁵⁵ Daniel and Marsh, 28.

⁵⁶ Fagan, 66.

Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations

The law that was ultimately passed in 1997 contained several articles that demarcated three types by which a religious body could be categorized: religious organizations, religious associations, and religious groups. Religious groups are the simplest of the three categories, referring to an informal meeting without legal status such as a bible study among friends. The two other categories, however, are the instrument by which the state aimed to curtail the privileges of new foreign-based religious organizations while recognizing pride of place and privilege for the Russian Orthodox Church. This law continued to pay lip service to ideals of religious freedom; “the 1997 law again declares that Russia is a secular state, but it gives a privileged place to Orthodoxy as coterminous with the state from its very beginnings.”⁵⁷ In this manner the state could claim that it was endeavoring to protect the rights that had come to be expected after 1991, but also clamp down on those foreign organizations which both the Russian Orthodox Church and the state deemed deleterious to stability.

It is worth noting that this law only targeted these foreign religious groups, not the other longstanding minority faith groups in Russia. The aim was not to restrict religious freedom of the people, per se, but to restrict the freedom of action of foreign groups; “this was tolerance Russian-style: the ‘traditional’ faiths of Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism were to be allowed to ‘own property, to have radio and television stations, and to disseminate religious literature.’ They would be exempt from taxes and able to conduct services...”⁵⁸ These groups had a history in Russia dating back centuries, not so far as

⁵⁷ Garrard and Garrard, 173.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

the Russian Orthodox Church but long enough that they could be safely considered established. Further, they were accustomed to the parameters of working within the Russian state. Groups which received the category of “religious association” would not enjoy such privileges, although they had the opportunity over time to progress into greater rights. Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism did not seem to represent the same threat to Orthodoxy’s cultural dominance that Western Christian sects seemed to in the early 1990s.

The clear targeting of non-Orthodox Christian groups with this legislation becomes even more evident when one approaches the manner in which Orthodoxy itself is referenced within the statute. Geraldine Fagan observes that, “while it did not have legal force, the law’s preamble set the relevant tone. It recognized Orthodox Christianity’s ‘special role’ in Russia’s history, spirituality and culture...”⁵⁹ This interpretation was heavily supported by the Orthodox Church, which had developed an increasingly negative view of its Western brethren beyond their longstanding theological differences. Orthodoxy was not made a state religion in any official context, but the law, “codified the idea that being Christian and being Orthodox are one and the same thing.”⁶⁰ Special privileges were carved out for the Russian Orthodox Church, including the distinction of being the only religious organization to be granted government financing for, “the restoration, maintenance, and protection of buildings and objects which are monuments of history and culture.”⁶¹ Unique material benefits such as these were considered by many observers as tantamount to state establishment, although the law

⁵⁹ Fagan, 66-67.

⁶⁰ Garrard and Garrard, 173.

⁶¹ John Witte, “Introduction,” in *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*, ed. John Witte and Michael Bordeaux (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 14.

took great pains to not explicitly do so. The Russian perspective was different, one rooted in the thousand-year comingled history of the Orthodox faith and the Russian state. From this perspective, “the law explicitly identified Orthodox Christianity with Russia’s national memory and heritage, which had to be recovered and strengthened, and the church as an institution stood at the center of these efforts.”⁶² As an effort began to reconstruct a Russian identity separate from the Soviet experience, the Orthodox Church was an important partner and a powerful legitimating force; the continued surging presence of non-Orthodox Christian movements would only dilute its effectiveness at this task.

The 1997 religious freedom law was at the same time backward and forward looking. The state was aligning itself with Orthodoxy to look back on an era of greater stability and cooperation; Daniel and Marsh argue that, “in its conception, the 1997 law reverted to a ‘traditional’ relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Russian state, a symphonic relationship, in which the church and state worked together harmoniously to manage worldly affairs and prepare inhabitants for entrance into the world to come.”⁶³ These terms should sound familiar, as *symphonia* was the relationship which the Orthodox Church had idealized throughout this period. While the situation was not so simple (Russian history has always been replete with examples of the state bucking the church and this certainly has not changed since 1991), this is the framework in which the 1997 law approached the Russian world. Russia had grown increasingly unstable in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union and was searching for a new base to situate itself. Billington suggests that the driving factor for state action in

⁶² Daniel and Marsh, 30.

⁶³ Ibid., 33.

this time period was, “the search for authority...as newly freed peoples search for unique identities in a world of creeping technological uniformity and for a source of responsibility amid the fluidity of freedom, they are rediscovering their own deeper cultural traditions.”⁶⁴ The state was seeking to create conditions for stable growth in Russia, and the best way to foster such was to look back to Russia’s traditional roots of stability—its Orthodox heritage and a closely-guarded relationship between the institutional church and the state.

One major effect of this legislation that applied across the board of faith traditions was the reassertion of government oversight of the ecclesiastical sphere. In the intervening period from 1990 to 1997, there had been shockingly little government involvement in religious organizations’ affairs. In sharp contrast to this attitude, “the 1997 law imported a second key concept from the regional religious laws: the restoration of close regulation of religious life. Gone was the 1990 law’s provision forbidding the creation of government organs or posts devoted to freedom of conscience issues...”⁶⁵ A more Soviet-style system was created wherein religious groups had to register with the state, providing large amounts of information about their activities, membership, and finances in exchange for categorization and approval. State bureaucrats could reject registration applications, and religious groups which failed to register could face liquidation under article 14 of the new law. The Orthodox Church was never at risk of failing to meet the requirements of the law—it was, after all, tailor-written to the

⁶⁴ James Billington, “The Search for a Modern Russian Identity,” in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 45:4 (1992): 33.

⁶⁵ Fagan, 68.

Orthodox situation, but it still faced a greater amount of scrutiny than it had for the past several years.

The 1997 law, then, can be framed as an Orthodox victory over multiconfessional forces. Strict new requirements and potential for government oversight would limit the extent to which oppositional Christian movements could emerge, at least for fifteen or so years, the term of time for which an organization was required to be active in Russia to qualify for enrollment as a “religious organization.” Further, organizations had to be able to document an over 50-year history of activity in Russia to use the word “Russian” in their name—an incredible requirement considering the wide use of the term by multinational corporations such as Nestle marketing inside the Russian Federation and one which functionally restricted this term to the Orthodox Church.⁶⁶ Many political scientists concluded that, “passage of the 1997 law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations signaled the usurpation of Russia’s newly enshrined pluralism by the old Orthodox-centred model of Russian national identity.”⁶⁷ The state had recognized both the value of Orthodoxy as a political tool and the inherent danger in permitting the continued growth of foreign religious forces to a goal of maintaining stability, controlling the population, and fostering a greater national identity. The 1997 law has laid the framework for most church-state interactions in Russia since its passage, including the growing collaboration between Russian Orthodox Church and government organs. In the time since, Orthodoxy has come to more profoundly influence both the domestic and the foreign policy of the Russian government.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 69.

The Orthodox Church and Foreign Policy Post-1997

Since the passage of the 1997 law setting up a framework for church-state relations, the Orthodox Church has become closely involved in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. The goals of the church to re-establish its connections with the Russian Orthodox diaspora which had split off as the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) during the Soviet period and reclaim its lost property overseas meshed well with the new government's desire to reassert itself throughout the so-called *russkiy mir* (Russian world) and rebuild Russia's international prestige. Like the Soviet government following World War II, the Yeltsin and Putin administrations would co-opt the Orthodox Church to extend their foreign policy vision around the globe. The Orthodox Church would benefit from this to the extent that its relations with other Orthodox and the wider Christian communities would improve along with its influence on world ecumenical affairs. Ecumenical reconciliation has led to a widening of the Moscow Patriarchate's flock, a rise in its pre-eminence at international gatherings, a restoration of church property outside Russia.

Looking back on the period of the late Yeltsin and early Putin administrations, an increasingly close collaboration between the organized church and the Russian Foreign Ministry emerged. Daniel Payne, a senior research fellow at the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University, notes that,

During the reign of Alexey II, especially during the Putin administration, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) expanded its role, uniting its mission with that of the RFM to secure the rights or 'spiritual security' of the Russian diaspora as

well as to reacquire property that had formerly belonged to the Russian Empire and had been lost during the Communist period.⁶⁸

The prestige of both the Orthodox Church and the Russian government has been raised around the world as a result of this collaboration. The utilization of Orthodoxy as a component of nationalist foreign policy harkens back to the equivalence of Russian identity and Orthodoxy that has already been addressed in this paper. In effect, “the church by collaborating with the foreign ministry has signaled that the church is indeed united with the state in promoting a greater Russia through the spread of Russian Orthodox Christianity.”⁶⁹ This symbiotic relationship has been a useful component to regulate the definition of Russian-ness for the wider diaspora in which both church and state have taken a great interest.

Payne points out that the conjoining of religion and foreign policy was more a hallmark of the Putin administration than of Yeltsin; this makes sense in line with Yeltsin’s previously expressed hesitance to align himself with Orthodoxy over the democratic ideals of religious freedom. While some collaboration certainly occurred especially after 1997, the clear point at which this relationship grew deep was the advent of the Putin administration with its goal to make Russia proud of itself again. The administration’s approach to the church in foreign policy was clearly laid out in the *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation* released in 2000, which stated that,

Assurance of the Russian Federation’s national security also includes protecting the cultural and spiritual-moral legacy and the historical traditions and standards of public life, and preserving the cultural heritage of all Russia’s peoples. There must be a state policy to maintain the population’s spiritual and moral welfare,

⁶⁸ Daniel P. Payne, “Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?” in *Journal of Church and State* 52:4 (2010): 712-713.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 713.

prohibit the use of airtime to promote violence or base instincts, and counter the adverse impact of foreign religious organizations and missionaries.⁷⁰

Many of the same forces which drove the adoption of the 1997 law restricting religious freedom in the Russian Federation can be plainly seen in the language of the concept; the government saw the dominance of Orthodoxy as far more significant than simply a religious question, it was a matter of state security that the influence of Orthodoxy on Russian life be preserved. The Putin administration has in many respects been driven by a suspicion of any Western influence within their perceived Russian sphere, a point made evident by the specific reference to foreign religious organizations in the security concept. Orthodoxy, having been conflated almost completely with Russian identity by this point, represented a core national value which was at risk from foreign intervention. Likewise, the spread of Orthodox-based Russian values around the globe became a strategy which would strengthen and secure the Russian position.

Domestic Policy Post-1997

The influence of the church on Russian policy extends well beyond the realm of foreign policy. Indeed, in recent history the Orthodox Church's positions on domestic policy have attracted far more media attention. Robert C. Blitt of the University of Tennessee College of Law recently observed that, "the ROC today enjoys unprecedented influence on virtually every aspect of Russian government policy, an arrangement that coincides with the vision set out by the Moscow Patriarchate in its *Basis of the Social*

⁷⁰ "National Security Concept of the Russian Federation," 10 January 2000, available at http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/589768.

*Concept.*⁷¹ Throughout President Putin's tenure, the government has grown to pull the church into nearly everything it does. Government institutions, including longstanding bodies which had effectively carried over from the Soviet period, adopted their own unique saints and prayers. New churches were constructed for state-owned buildings.⁷² This should not necessarily be surprising, considering the circumstances of President Putin's own background and inauguration.

A common refrain in Pres. Putin's biographical notes is that he was unique among his KBG colleagues during the Soviet period for expressing a personal belief in God. Throughout his public life in the Russian Federation, Putin has stressed his strong personal religious faith while paying lip service to the state's multi-religious character. At his inauguration in 2000, Patriarch Alexy did not play the same public role that he had in Yeltsin's 1996 inauguration, a critical time when church support was instrumental for defeating a Communist Party challenger to the Presidency.⁷³ However, Putin's inauguration was immediately followed by a prayer service at the Cathedral of the Annunciation in which the Patriarch directed Putin, "'to remember about the great responsibility of the leader to his people, history, and God,' and...to take care of the people's welfare, both material and spiritual," and promised that, "the Russian Orthodox Church would help the secular authorities in their efforts to revitalise the country."⁷⁴ Putin was given three icons, including one of St. Alexander Nevsky, Russia's famed

⁷¹ Robert C. Blitt, "Wither Secular Bear: The Russian Orthodox Church's Strengthening Influence on Russia's Domestic and Foreign Policy," University of Tennessee Legal Studies Research Paper #173 (2012): 89.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷³ Sarah Karush, "Putin's Inauguration Heralds Start of New Era," *The Moscow Times*, 11 May 2000.

⁷⁴ "A ceremonial prayer on the inauguration of the new President was held by Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, in the Annunciation Cathedral, where Mr Putin arrived after the inauguration ceremony," 7 May 2000, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/38090>.

defender and patron saint, with the direction to follow in Nevsky's noble footsteps. He left his inauguration with the assertion that, "it was thanks to the guidance of the Russian Orthodox Church that Russia had preserved century-old traditional spiritual and moral values, which would have been otherwise irretrievably lost."⁷⁵ The tenor for church-state collaboration in politics was clearly set by this very public exchange between President Putin and Patriarch Alexy.

One of the most significant areas where the Orthodox Church has sought to make itself felt domestically is in the realm of military affairs. Like Patriarch Alexy appealing to the soldiers during the 1991 coup attempt, the church had always enjoyed close ties with Russian soldiers and a virtual monopoly on their spiritual life. Blitt notes that, "one of [the] areas where the Church has tirelessly pursued the opportunity to express its views is access to Russia's military."⁷⁶ A new chaplaincy program championed by Putin would provide Russia's traditional faiths with military access, but was set up in such a way that only the Orthodox Church would be fully able to take advantage of its offerings. For instance, "the terms governing the chaplaincy program require adherents of a 'traditional' religious faith to account for 10 percent of a military unit before the state will authorize an official chaplain."⁷⁷ Based on population figures, this renders it highly unlikely that Islamic, Jewish, or Buddhist chaplains of any number could find approval to actively serve as a unit chaplain. Blitt takes the next step to indicate that this means the state directly pays the Orthodox Church for religious activities; while technically true, this should be taken with a grain of salt as the practice of military chaplaincy programs is also

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Blitt, 96.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 98.

widespread in many other militaries—criticism of bias in Russia’s program ought to be directed at the adherence percentage requirements, not the pay scale.

Education represents perhaps the most significant area where the church sought to gain an increased policy role after the passage of the 1997 religious freedom law. With strong influence on education policy, the church would be in a powerful position to shape the mindset of future Russian citizens. The church’s *Basis of the Social Concept* clearly lay out policy priorities in this area, declaring that,

It is desirable that the entire educational system should be built on religious principles and based on Christian values... The danger of occult and neo-heathen influences and destructive sects penetrating into the secular school should not be ignored either, as under their impact a child can be lost for himself, for his family and for society... The Church is called and seeks to help school in its educational mission, for it is the spirituality and morality of a person that determines his eternal salvation, as well as the future of individual nations and the entire human race.⁷⁸

The same fear which directed pressure towards the passage of the 1997 law is here again evident, couched in ecclesiastical language which connects one’s personal salvation with the fate of the nation. Education is the baseboard from which the Orthodox Church could implement its vision for a holy Russia in the 21st century, if only proper access could be granted. This hope would not be fully realized during the Putin administration, but church influence would continue to increase and by the time of the Medvedev presidency, the church and its values had been carved out a place in Russian education.

Overall church influence can be most noticed in Russia on domestic social policy. As indicated above, education forms a major part of this, but so too do issues such as the

⁷⁸ “Basis of the Social Concept,” Art. 14(3), 2004, available at <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/socialconcepts/xiv/>.

treatment of homosexuals in Russia or tolerance for religious dissent in the public sphere. Not so much a problem in the early Putin years, these areas have attracted serious note in international media over the past several years. The question over gay athletes would face persecution over attending the Sochi Olympics in 2014, for instance, filled Western news discussion and social media for days.⁷⁹ While such policies were not observed in the Yeltsin and early Putin years, the time period to which this examination has confined itself, important antecedents emerged at this time. A general trend since 1991 has been an increase in the power of the church to influence Russian affairs as the state has found new manners in which to co-opt the church for its own aims. As this process continues to unfold, Orthodox positions on social issues increasingly become the domestic policy of the Russian government.

Conclusion

The Russian Orthodox Church has enjoyed a significant resurgence in influence since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Already having enjoyed greater freedoms under Gorbachev, the church was able to act decisively in 1991 to back the Russian people and new leadership under Boris Yeltsin in the August coup. Patriarch Alexy had carefully built up connections within the Red Army and exercised remarkable tact in his public appeals, provoking dramatic responses from the people against the coup leadership. This impact was perfectly typified by the image of protesters pulling down Felix Dzerzhinsky's statue in Lubyanka Square and placing on its pedestal an Orthodox cross with the words *sim pobedishi*. Amidst the chaos surrounding the collapse of Soviet

⁷⁹ For discussion of social issues in the Russian Federation, especially women's and gay rights, see Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

power, the Russian people were only too willing to fall back on their shared Orthodox heritage for stability, for comfort, and for group identity.

A profound religious resurgence took place in overwhelmingly atheist Russia around the early 1990s. Vyacheslav Karpov conceptualizes this process using the term “ethnodoxy,” suggesting that it was Orthodoxy’s historical connection with Russian identity and not any real sense of belief that drove this. For much of pre-Soviet history, Orthodoxy had been intimately wrapped up with the Russian state; both the Patriarchate and the new government were intensely aware of this and sought to take advantage as they were trying to develop a new Russian identity in the wake of Soviet collapse. Religious belief did increase throughout this period, but church power in state affairs increased to a far greater degree.

The influx of international Christian proselytizing movements brought on by 1990’s religious freedom law created a significant problem for both the government and the Orthodox Church. The Patriarchate was incensed by fellow Christians attempting to win converts in their land; they saw Russia as an Orthodox domain and an already-Christian realm which did not require such assistance. The government in kind saw the foreign proselytizers as an avenue for the West to push new ideas into the country which would undermine Russian unity and risk upsetting the volatile stability. This led to the passage of a new law in 1997 which severely restricted religious freedom and laid out a framework for the Orthodox Church and the government to work together on policy initiatives. The 1997 legislation has remained in force and operated as the guiding document for church-state relations since this time.

Under the auspices of the 1997 legislation, the church has become more involved in both Russian foreign and domestic policy. Appeals to the diaspora to extend Russian influence have aided both church and state, helping to further the concept of *russkiy mir* and extend the soft power of Russia across the globe. Domestically, the Orthodox Church has pursued closer involvement in both military affairs and education policy—two areas where a profound impact can be had shaping the character of the country and its future citizens. Rooting education in Orthodox values is meant to inculcate that these values are a part of Russian identity, not only of Orthodox belief. In each of these areas, the church's policy initiatives can be seen as an extension of the overarching goal to coalesce a new Russian identity around the Orthodox faith and history.

The Russian government and the Orthodox Church have built up a new type of relationship since the fall of communism in 1991. This new *symphonia* is rooted in shared goals for control of the population and influence in the new Russian state and the world. Careful effort has been put into building up Russian identity around the tenets of Orthodoxy while avoiding the official state establishment of the religion and professing publicly a state policy of multiconfessional religious freedom. With each successive presidential administration, the relationship between the church the state only seems to grow closer as the state becomes willing to support more and more church policy priorities and the church moves to endorse new state initiatives which do not conflict with its teachings. Orthodoxy has become a core component of modern Russian identity by a long process of careful design on the part of both Patriarchs and Presidents.

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After graduation, Rob plans to continue broadening his language skills and working in policy research with an eye towards pursuing a PhD.