# MARTIAL SYMPHONIA: ORTHODOXY AND STATEHOOD IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Jacob Zayshley

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Political Science

York University

Toronto, Ontario

July 2026

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Abstract

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church has reemerged as an active participant in Russian public affairs. The character and implications of Russian church-state relations, however, remain in dispute. Framed in light of Russia's ongoing conflict in Ukraine, this study provides a systematic examination of Russian church-state relations from their origins toward the present day. Centrally, it is argued that a cooperative relationship has taken shape, facilitated by the formation of close ties between the Church and institutions of the Russian state, as well as a convergence of interests in matters pertaining to both domestic and foreign policy. This partnership, in turn, has influenced the Russian state's orientation toward Ukraine and the West. What follows constitutes a case study in the intersection between religion and politics within the Russian context; the work proceeds, likewise, through examination of existing literature alongside statements made by state officials, clergy, and other relevant actors. The result is a comprehensive account of contemporary Russian church-state relations informed by historical context and contributive to an understanding of Orthodoxy as an active participant in post-Soviet state formation.

Dedicated to Laverne Wilson (1949-2023)

Вічная пам'ять.

Acknowledgements

While it may not be a good thing to be indebted in general, it is a blessing to incur debts of gratitude. Of these, I have many. I would first like to thank my supervisor, Sergei Plekhanov, for his wise counsel and for the many excellent discussions we have had since the beginning of my doctoral studies. His feedback, along with that of Glenn Goshulak and Piotr Dutkiewicz, was integral to the formation of this dissertation. Many thanks are also due to Terry Maley, Philipp Harland, and Nicolai Petro, who took great care in their readings of the text in preparation for the examination and asked questions thoughtful—and indeed thought-provoking—in equal measure. It was a profound pleasure to work with all of you.

My gratitude to my mother, Erin Zayshley, my father, Randy Zayshley, and my sister, Versailles Zayshley. Their dedication to family is reflected in all that they do. To my mom, I thank you for the many lunches we shared watching *The Office*, for the feedback on my writing and defence preparations, as well as for your stalwart patience in hearing of every new detail I learned about Russian church-state relations. To my dad, my gratitude for your steadfast support, for the trips we've taken from Dublin to Dauphin, and for the many hunts we have embarked upon to find vintage records and D&D books. To my sister—I could not be more proud of you, and thank you for the many talks, snacks, and jokes we have shared over the years. You are as wise, thoughtful, talented, and funny as can be. Mom, dad, Versailles—I love you all, with all of my heart, and this dissertation would never have come to be without you.

I must also here thank my uncles—Ricky Zayshley and Ron Zayshley—who helped me since childhood develop a love of learning and an appreciation for Ukrainian and Russian culture. My thanks to their families: Matthieu Ardenis, Elizabeth Zayshley, Olivia, Lewis, and Ellie, as well as to my aunt Shonaugh and uncle Jay Cameron, and cousins Paige, Christian, Nicholas, and Sarah. Further gratitude is due to my grandparents, Brian and Barbara Anderson, Iris Shewchuk, Lorne Iverson, Randy Sr. and Patty Zayshley. I want to also recognize here my late great-grandmother, Marie Shewchuk, who introduced me to Orthodoxy and left me her prayer book after falling asleep in the Lord in 2013. Recognition further to Sandy, Wayne, and Zak Shewchuk, as well as Lexi, Nick, and Bowie Ryall.

I am indeed deeply indebted to my entire family. All save the newest—but no less appreciated—names listed in the two paragraphs above either visited or cared for me during the most harrowing period of my life—a fight with cancer which began when I was nine years old. Overcoming that trial was, in every sense of the term, the result of a collective effort. Great gratitude is due to Dr. Sheila Pritchard, Dr. Erik Skarsgard, Dr. Tom Warshawski, and many other doctors, nurses, and staff at B.C. Children's Hospital, Kelowna General Hospital, and Vernon Jubilee Hospital. My thoughts are further with Spencer Dolling (1995-2008), his brother Foster, and his parents, Steve and Tracy Dolling.

My journey as a student, naturally, has been enriched by many teachers. My thanks to Mike Allen and Dvoira Yanovsky, two educators of the highest calibre, who matched their instruction with inspiration and encouragement that would accompany me long after my graduation from Vernon Secondary School. Thanks further to David Lane, my supervisor during my studies at Cambridge, as well as Ruslan Dzarasov, a friend and colleague of mine at the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics. At York University, I would also like to recognize the insightful teaching of Michelle Mawhinney and Heather MacRae, a graduate program director truly dedicated to her work, the wellbeing of the department, and its students. Special thanks to Irina Zhalnenko, as well—my great tutor in the Russian language and friend of many years.

Now, of course, it is time to address my friends. My thanks to Mitchell Horst, Kory Kury, Nolan Wiens, Zachary Goldsmith (to whom I owe a dram in addition to my gratitude), Taylor McKnight, Marley Moon Olfert, Ethan Geller, Greg Poggemoeller, and Connor Rothwell—all friends of mine since elementary or high school, each of whom I have had the good fortune of keeping in contact with. Thanks further to Jackie and Caroline Liu, Oliver Brown, Cory Hunter-Park, Greg Robson, Paddy Gilbert, Oliver Vierkins, James Hurst, Courtenay Smith, Anna Whytock, Adam Brown, Rhys Madden, Henry Hietala—all brilliant and goodhearted people befriended during my studies at the University of St Andrews. To new friends and colleagues made at York University as well, including Mykyta Matvyeyev, Dalton Rawcliffe, Rob Butrym, Mitchell Harris, Yasha Seissan, Pablo Roy-Rojas, Martin Barakov, Clay Duncalfe, and Massimiliano Muci.

My studies in Scotland would not have been possible without the generous support of the McEuen Scholarship Foundation. To John Aylen and Elise Aylen, I express enduring gratitude—as one may surmise from the comments above, my studies at St Andrews were indeed life-changing.

Further thanks to Svetlana Mudrova and to the faculty and staff at the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, where I worked during the pandemic, and to Olga and Dennis Shultsev, Vladimir Zayshley, Victoria Babaeva, and Anna Makarova.

To Kai Carachelo, Owen Fitzgerald, Ryan Meneley, and Matt Whitwell—"the boys", as they are known from the prairies of Saskatchewan to the Sparrow Hills of Moscow—thank you for the many calls, the visits, the great discussions, and the many dice rolled in pen-and-paper games over the years. To Markus Christian Hansen and Adam Strømme—also "the boys"—thank you for your steadfast support, exemplary wit and wisdom, and comradely solidarity. My life has been blessed with many friendships, and with people anyone would indeed be blessed to befriend.

Many thanks are further due to the parish communities of St. Mark the Evangelist Orthodox Church in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Vernon B.C.'s Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Assumption of St. Mary, and Toronto's Holy Myrrhbearers Orthodox Mission. Special gratitude is due to Fr. Rodion Luciuk and Matushka Denise, Fr. Chad Pawlyshyn, Fr. Geoffrey Ready, Fr. Vladimir Lysak, my godfather Andrey Mokretsoff, Eleonora Usenkova, and my friends Keenan Blahey and Ian Bodnaryk. I thank each of you for acquainting me with (as well as providing witness to) the beauty and richness of the Orthodox tradition.

This work is dedicated to my late grandmother, Laverne Wilson, who passed away during the second year of my PhD studies. I miss you dearly, grandma, and not a day passed in the writing of this dissertation that I did not think of you. I love you, and know in my heart that you have found peace and respite in the Lord; may your memory be eternal.

It would of course be irresponsible to imagine that a few words—cursory and incomplete as they are—could indeed settle my many debts of gratitude. Nevertheless, they have been written with great joy

and in happy reflection of many memories. To those names listed above—as well as to any I have regrettably neglected to mention—God bless and keep you, for all of your days.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AA | Association Agreement |
| ATO | Anti-Terrorist Operation |
| DECR | Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate |
| DRAFLEA | Department for Relations with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies |
| EP | Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople |
| EU | European Union |
| FOC | Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture |
| JFO | Joint Forces Operation |
| KGB | Committee for State Security |
| MFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Russia) |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| RMF | Russkiy Mir Foundation |
| ROC | Russian Orthodox Church |
| ROCOR | Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia |
| SMO | Special Military Operation |
| UAOC | Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church |
| OCU | Orthodox Church of Ukraine |
| UGCC | Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| UOC-KP | Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate |
| UOC-MP | Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate |
| VNIIEF | The All-Russian Research Institute of Experimental Physics |
| WCF | World Congress of Families |

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

On February 24th, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the beginning of a "special military operation" (SMO) in Ukraine. The resulting conflict, still ongoing at the time of writing, has not only called into question the territory and sovereignty of the Ukrainian state, but also the stability and coherence of the international order in general terms. A preliminary explanation of the war's outbreak is easily articulated: tensions between Russia and Ukraine soared to new heights following the Maidan in 2013–2014, the annexation of Crimea, and the apparent failure of peacemaking efforts in relation to separatism in the Donbas region. These factors, combined with the prospect of Ukrainian membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—perceived by the Russian state as a direct threat to national security—provided incentives for armed conflict. Others have framed the conflict as an attempt by the Russian state to "restore", in geopolitical terms, an imperial status and reach lost after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Regardless of how one frames the matter, the question remains: how did we get here? In other words, why have relations between the West and post-Soviet Russia deteriorated into something resembling a new Cold War? That a plethora of factors was involved is obvious, and such can indeed be said of any notable development in global politics. An essential task of social science, however, is to wade into the informational thicket, make informed decisions regarding the relevance of the disparate pieces of data encountered, and return with a contribution to knowledge on a topic of public concern. In recognition of this, I have elected to examine Russian church-state relations and make the case that Russia's behaviour on the world stage cannot be fully comprehended—or perhaps even effectively grasped—without reference to the dynamics and evolution of this relationship. Such constitutes the overarching inference that may be drawn from what follows; the details and specifics of the argument are presented below.

## Section I. Debates, Significance, Thesis

It is worthwhile to note some academic determinations made about Russian church-state relations in the post-Soviet era to clarify the present study's point of departure. In the first place, it has become clear that

the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has experienced renewal or "resurgence" as a prominent public institution (J. Garrard and C. Garrard, 2008). In other words, it is no longer actively marginalized by the state—as was the case under Soviet rule—and has re-emerged as, among other things, a participant in Russian politics. Furthermore, it is also true that the Church has successfully established ties with a variety of state institutions (Blitt, 2011; Richters, 2013; Adamsky, 2019a), including those involved with public education, foreign policy, and national defence. It has further initiated the articulation and propagation of its own, independent political perspective (Stoeckl, 2014; 2016; 2023). The ROC's efforts to maintain its canonical territory throughout the post-Soviet sphere have also emerged as subjects of analysis (Richters, 2013; Krawchuk et al. 2016). That the ROC has supported the SMO, likewise, has also been noted and discussed (Kilp and Pankhurst, 2022; Negron, 2024).

Though disparate in their emphases, these studies and others point to the revival of Russian church-state relations as a matter of scholarly concern. Such relates, in turn, to a larger debate on whether the ROC pursues its own interests, or whether it has essentially reprised its place as a passive promoter of the state. On the one hand, for example, Richters (2013) and Stoeckl (2014) have suggested that the ROC does indeed display its own political behaviour that is not reducible to or entirely commensurate with that of the Kremlin. On the other hand, others such as Anderson (2007) have argued that church-state relations are fundamentally "asymmetric", with the Church's political influence limited and peripheral; the ROC has also been likened to a "tool" of Russian soft power (Blitt, 2021). Further, within the context of international political discourse, the war in Ukraine has provoked an uptick in accusations that the ROC is essentially controlled by the Kremlin or the KGB[1]. Stated in plain English, the fundamental question is whether it is true that "in Orthodoxy, God is Caesar's junior partner", as Huntington (1993: 70) once quipped. That this question has important ramifications for academic inquiry into—as well as policymakers' engagement with—Russian politics has only become more evident with time.

[1] See, for example, Zelensky (2025), Grassley (2025), as well as a resolution passed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2024).

The position advanced in this work is the following: Russian church-state relations are not characterized by one actor dominating the other; rather, conditions particular to the post-Soviet era have incentivized close cooperation on the basis of shared interests. Additional to this, however, I argue that the Church has indeed taken on a role resembling that of an "agenda setter" for the Russian government reflected in identity formation, public legislation, and even foreign policy. This is not to suggest that it is in fact the ROC which "controls" the Russian state, but rather that the imprints of its beliefs, institutional concerns and political priorities have become increasingly discernible in official policy and discourse since the fall of the Soviet Union. To present this claim via counterfactual, it is less likely that Russia's post-Cold War "divergence" from the West would have occurred—or at least would have transpired as it has—had the ROC failed to reassert itself as a prominent actor in public affairs following the end of state atheism. Indeed, as argued below, the Church has positioned itself as *Russia's*—not simply the Russian government's—spiritual and historical foundation, the essence of its particularity, and as the basis of its right to choose its own political path independent of the influence of foreign states or models of development.

Had Ukrainian Orthodoxy not found itself split in the nineties, likewise, it is more difficult—albeit not impossible—to imagine the tensions between Russia and Ukraine that escalated in fits and starts in the 2000s and 2010s, as well as the development of a close relationship between the ROC and Russian foreign policy that eventually became oriented toward war. As highlighted later in this study, the fragmentation of Ukrainian Orthodoxy—combined with the influence of other religious actors—played important roles in several "breaking points" in Russia-Ukraine relations, including the Orange Revolution and the later Maidan movement. All of this is to say, while this work focuses on Russian church-state relations in particular, this relationship cannot be described adequately without reference to a broader international context in general and that which has taken shape from the Moscow Patriarchate's presence in Ukraine in particular. Discussion of Ukraine, therefore, is present not only due to its relevance to current affairs, but also because it is pivotal to apprehension of contemporary Russian church-state relations.

The conceptual endpoint and central explicandum of the present study is what I term "martial symphonia", or the orientation of cooperative church-state relations toward armed conflict. This is not, in other words, a normative or theological term, but rather one employed to describe a particular configuration of Russian church-state relations that has recently coalesced into something available to description and analysis. To accomplish this, it is necessary to integrate existing scholarship and sources into a coherent account of the relationship between the ROC and the Russian state. Such constitutes the essence of this work's contribution to political inquiry: a synthesis of disparate threads in the literature into a cohesive narrative explaining the emergence and logic of contemporary Russian church-state relations. This analytical undertaking is in turn facilitated by the adoption of a particular textual structure and theoretical approach, the details of which I now turn to disclose.

## Section II. Structure, Sources, Method

The next chapters each adopt a structure similar to this one, opening with a brief introduction to the subject matter followed by three sections. The first and second sections present relevant empirical information, while the third section provides an analytical summation of the preceding discussion to ground what follows in the next chapter. This structure obtains until the concluding chapter, where there is a discussion of the theoretical ramifications of the work as a whole. I have adopted this "tripartite" structure for each chapter, as I consider it conducive to an orderly presentation of the material as well as the conclusions reached on the basis of the latter.

Though the central category of the analysis—the martial symphonia—surfaced only recently in Russian church-state relations, its origins—and, to some extent, fundamental determinations—are informed by historical developments long preceding the formation of the Russian Federation as a modern nation-state. In recognition of this, the next two chapters detail Russian church-state relations from their inception to the fall of the Soviet Union. This enables discernment of the key precedents, experiences, and interests that inform and shape this relationship in the post-Soviet era. The overarching chronological structure of this work, likewise, has been adopted for the sake of clarity in the presentation of the *evolution* of Russian

church-state relations over time, as well as the continuities and ruptures that contribute to the reproduction of these relations in the present.

The research underpinning this study is primarily comprised of academic literature and publicly available statements by Russian Orthodox hierarchs and state officials. These are accompanied, in some instances, by statements of other actors and public opinion surveys. This study is thus *qualitative* in its analytical orientation and provides reconstructions of both historical and contemporary perspectives of relevant actors to facilitate explanation of their actions; this approach to analysis, likewise draws inspiration from a theoretical point of Wendt (1999: 186-187):

> Given cause to interact in some situation, actors need to define the situation before they can choose a course of action. These definitions will be based on at least two considerations: their own identities and interests, which reflect beliefs about who they are in such situations; and what they think others will do, which reflect beliefs about their identities and interests.

There is indeed a real sense in which political circumstances do not speak for themselves; instead, these must undergo articulation, which, in turn, may enable or foreclose certain courses of action. Within the context of this study, therefore, public statements are treated not only as potential descriptors for beliefs or interests, but also as departure points for behaviour. Engagement with the speech of others, of course, requires interpretation; such, in turn, makes close attention to historical context and developments antecedent to the discussed statements all the more necessary. In this way, and in broad terms, the present study may therefore be characterized as *constructivist* to the extent that it displays an emphasis on the contextual development of political beliefs, discourses, and articulated interests as integral to the dynamics of Russian church-state relations.

Summary.

What follows, as indicated above, is an examination of the Russian Orthodox Church's political activity and relations with the Russian state. It is argued that an essentially symbiotic relationship between the two has formed—largely through the initiative of the Church itself—and that this relationship has contributed significantly to the ideas associated with contemporary Russian statehood, sovereignty, and security. Ukraine's religious "divergence" from Russia, represented by Orthodox schisms and the Moscow Patriarchate's competition with other religious groups within Ukraine likewise contributed to a pro-West political divergence attempted in the mid-2000s and essentially "completed" by the mid-2010s. In turn, this religious and political divergence has been interpreted as a threat to the interests of the Russian Church and state alike. In this context, the *symphonia* became oriented toward conflict with the West in general and Ukraine in particular. The resulting war is thus in part an expression of this relationship's *martial turn*.

Nevertheless, in order to understand the character of contemporary Russian church-state relations, it is necessary to examine developments preceding the fall of the USSR and even the October Revolution itself. Chapter 2 is thus devoted to discussion of the historical origins of the Russian Church and state, as well as the "early" precedents set in this relationship. Chapter 3 then moves to discuss the Soviet era, which contributed significantly to the concerns and priorities the Church would carry into the Russian Federation. The fourth chapter details the development of a new church-state relationship which began to take shape in the nineties; the fifth, in turn, describes the consolidation of this relationship as well as its emergence as an element of Russian foreign policy in the 2000s. Chapter 6 addresses a period beginning with Putin's third term in office and concluding with the announcement of the special military operation in Ukraine. The seventh and final chapter discusses the Russo-Ukrainian war in light of what has been established throughout the analysis and provides further comments on the relevance of this study to politics in theoretical terms.

The journey taken by Russian church-state relations is a long one, but is nonetheless one well worth charting and analyzing for the sake of *politics* as a subject of academic inquiry and as a collective enterprise of global concern.

## CHAPTER 2. THE EMERGENCE OF CHURCH AND STATE

To understand the contemporary behaviour, beliefs, and concerns of the Russian Orthodox Church, it is first necessary to examine the institution's history at varying degrees of magnification. The ROC, like many religious organizations, has a long historical memory that continues to influence its views, practices, and orientation toward the outside world. In this particular instance, it is even necessary to take note of historical developments preceding the adoption of Christianity by the Kievan Rus' in 988. In what follows, a sketch of Orthodox history is provided with an emphasis on "ruptures"—key developments which contextualize the institutional and ideational characteristics of the ROC in the present day. This discussion moves from the history of the early church to the period of repression during the Soviet era examined in the third chapter; a brisk journey over much territory, to be sure, but one with important stops along the way.

### Section I. From Pentecost to the Baptism of the Rus'

It is necessary to begin "at the beginning", as it were, because the ROC is part of a communion that long predates its own emergence as a distinct institution. Orthodox history preceding the emergence of the ROC, of course, does not exhaustively account for the specificities of the institution's behaviour in the present day; the legacy of this long history, however, was inherited by the ROC and continues to inform its identity, structure, and relationships in the modern world. The broadest—and arguably most fundamental—contours of this historical influence, likewise, receive their content from the emergence and institutional consolidation of the early church.

The Christian movement began with the ministry of Jesus. The early church, however, identified its fundamental origins in developments following the crucifixion. In John 20:21-23 (ESV), the disciples receive their fundamental instructions from the risen Christ: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you… Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." Fifty days after the resurrection, the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles, granting them the ability to speak in tongues necessary for the proliferation of

the Gospel. This event, Pentecost, has been considered the "beginning" of the church proper since the early days of the Christian faith (McGuckin, 2020: 10).

Whether one views these events as historical or mythical is beside the point. The upshot, rather, is that these events form bases of self-identity for the church from its origins onward. There are at least two distinct aspects of this identity: in the first place, the church related itself to a mission taking the form of a divine mandate to reconcile souls. Second, and related, the church did not view itself as an entirely earthly institution; it was understood, rather, as something at once present on earth and called toward the transcendent. The contemporary church, considered as an actor, does not view itself as an institution describable in purely sociological or historical terms; neither would it characterize itself as a simple collection of like-minded believers. As McGuckin emphasizes (ibid. 17), this self-conception has an important influence on the behaviour of the Orthodox Church:

> Orthodox writers throughout history have seen the church as a congregation that includes, as still active participants, the angels and the saints of earlier ages, as well as the believers who are currently alive on earth. The living faithful are seen, therefore, not as the owners of the corporation but rather as junior members of a communion that extends far beyond them in space and time, and that is only partially embodied within time and space in any historical reality … Christians of the present age, then, are not seen as having either the power … to alter the charter of what the church is, in order, for example, to update the scriptures' prescripts to modern conditions and attitudes.

To this extent, the Church is profoundly "conservative", not in a strict political sense, but rather in relation to the preservation of its received beliefs and practices. Such are included in the broader term *apostolic tradition*, a category referenced when disputes arise within the church. This notion took shape during early debates over the proper interpretation of scripture and other matters of concern to the church, and essentially takes the form of a theological analogue to the Roman legal concept of precedent (ibid. 52). Sources of precedent include scripture, prayer and liturgical traditions, the teachings or examples set by

great theologians and saints, as well as the results of synods and ecumenical councils. Simply put, the contemporary Orthodox Church identifies with the missional, transcendent identity of the early church and retains the latter's emphasis on precedent as a means of informing standards of behaviour and dispute resolution.

There are other organizational characteristics of the Orthodox Church that took shape in the early centuries of the Christian faith. Chief among these: the consolidation of a common institutional structure (ibid. 42-44). Such was partially facilitated by trade, as early church communities were often found in the maritime cities of the Roman Empire; these interlinkages helped "best practice" regarding forms of worship, prayer, and liturgy overcome the significant distances which often separated local churches. Crucial also was the spread of the epistles of Saint Paul and other martyrs, whose letters helped inform and cohere the teachings of the early church. Finally, the emergence of offices headed by an *episcopos* (in this context, "bishop") institutionalized the process of overseeing and coordinating the activities of city churches as well as those located in their suburbs and villages. By the fourth century, bishops of major cities rose to a status similar to that of imperial magistrates, exercising an authority now regional in scope.

As episcopal authority increased, so too did the significance of disputes within the church; disagreements among hierarchs became matters of imperial concern. In the early third century, a pivotal controversy erupted between Archbishop Alexander of Alexandria and Arius, a presbyter from Cyrenaica. The former taught that the Son was co-eternal with the Father, while the latter argued that the Son was created at a definite point in time, the Father alone eternal. At stake, of course, was the church's understanding of Jesus, his nature, and relationship to the Father—matters of crucial significance to a community conceived as a commission of Christ.

The Roman Emperor Constantine, a convert to Christianity, was both aware of this dispute and eager to see it resolved. In 325, he summoned all bishops to his temporary palace in the city of Nikaia, or Nicaea, where the debate would receive doctrinal decision: the Son was "homoousion" ("of the same essence") with the Father. In other words, this assembly determined that the Son was co-eternal with the

Father; Constantine then had the defeated Arius exiled. Several crucial precedents had been set, and not only in the form of the Nicene Creed that continues to serve as the doctrinal basis of the vast majority of Christian churches around the world. In the first place, this type of assembly, an *ecumenical council*, would remain pivotal to the resolution of church disputes in the centuries to come. Second, the active participation of the Roman emperor, both in the inception and results of the Council of Nicaea, would set an important precedent of cooperation between church and state. Momentum began to shift away from the overt persecution or relative indifference that characterized relations between the Christian church and the Roman state in the centuries prior[2].

Transformations in church-state relations took place against a background of changes to the Roman state itself; chief among them, the gradual splitting of the Empire into "Eastern" and "Western" parts. After half a century of civil war, foreign invasion, economic breakdowns, plagues, and famines, it had become clear to Diocletian that the Empire had become too large for one emperor to manage. Thus, in the late third century, he introduced the system of the Tetrarchy, by which power over the vast territory of the Roman State would be vested in two emperors in the West, and two emperors in the East. This particular system did not survive long, but the rationale for it persisted, and after the death of Theodosius I in 395, no single emperor would again rule both East and West. This fragmentation was mirrored in the church, as well as in church-state relations, albeit at a slower and more subtle pace.

Of crucial significance here is the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, which left the populations of this vast territory without a resident emperor. Multiple kingdoms eventually supplanted the political authority of a centralized empire, and European monarchs would often find themselves struggling with the Roman papacy for power and influence. In other words, and in broad terms, church-state relations in the West were often fraught with tension, and would eventually culminate in skepticism toward close ties

[2] Despite this, Nicene Christianity's relationship to the Roman state remained in flux until the end of the fourth century. Constantius II, Constantine's son and successor, would favour the Arianism rejected at the Council of Nicaea. His cousin, Julian "the Apostate", as his Christian title suggests, turned away from Christianity and instead favoured the restoration of Roman paganism. Nicene Christianity would not become the official religion of the Empire until 380 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Theodosius I.

between secular and spiritual authority. The Eastern Roman Empire, which formally persisted until 1453, however, saw the development of a different model of relations between church and state. There, distinctions were much less clear-cut. The Byzantine emperor was at once a supreme secular power and a sacral figure, ecclesial and civil law indivisible; later Protestant theologians would criticize arrangements of this sort as "caesaropapism", a blending of powers corrosive to both. And indeed, Byzantine emperors possessed and would often exercise substantial influence on church affairs[3]. Decisions reached by the seven ecumenical councils held between 325 and 787, in turn, were considered not only spiritual matters pertaining to one's soul and salvation, but also possessed legal significance for the citizen's relationship with the state (Hackel, 1971: 7).

The closeness that characterized church-state relations in Byzantium—described in ideal terms as "symphony" by Justinian I—would further solidify the precedent initially set by Constantine during the Council of Nicaea. Eschewing strict separation between spiritual and secular authorities in favour of dynamic interaction between the two, this model continues to occupy important space in the political imagination of Eastern Christianity: "Politics, seen as the structuring of human society, is never understood in the Orthodox Church, to this day, as a secular matter. It is regarded, rather, as a fundamental part of the church's mission to bring Christ's presence and message into the ordering of human lives at the macro level" (McGuckin, 2020: 126). The "symphonic ideal" of the Orthodox Church, likewise, is neither theocracy nor caesaropapism, but can be likened, rather, to a piece of music in which separate tones of church and state complement one another. The closeness of association implied by this concept, precise relations of power aside, would later surface in Russian history and remains an important aspect of Russian Orthodox thinking on church-state relations in the present.

[3] The Patriarch of Constantinople, for example, required imperial approval, and emperors sometimes issued ecclesiastical edicts unilaterally. At other times, they exercised direct influence on church councils. The patriarchal office itself was likely the result of efforts to endow the church with a structure paralleling that of the bureaucracy (ibid. 3).

The fragmentation of the Roman Empire corresponded to growing divisions between a "Western" and "Eastern" church, and over the centuries, enduring disputes would eventually culminate in the two breaking communion in the eleventh century[4]. Among the central doctrinal issues was the *Filioque* ("and from the Son")—an addition to the Creed of Nicaea which began to appear in Latin churches in the late sixth century. The controversy provoked by such amounted to a debate over whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, or from both the Father and the Son. Acceptance of the latter notion waxed and waned in the West, and it was not until the eleventh century that the phrase would be spoken at Mass in Rome. From the perspective of the debate's participants, the stakes could hardly be exaggerated: what was in question was not only the binding power of the first Ecumenical Council, but the church's beliefs about the Holy Spirit and its relations to the other members of the Trinity.

The Filioque controversy, which remains a key point of contention between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, was further accompanied by disputes over the use of unleavened bread for the Eucharist (Holy Communion) and the proper authority of the Roman pope. These issues, of course, were combined with the challenges of maintaining cohesion between churches separated geographically, politically, linguistically, and culturally. This widening array of differences eventually found expression in an incident now infamous: in 1054, a papal legate led by Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida arrived in Constantinople in response to letters from the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos and Patriarch Michael I Cerularius. During the previous year, Cerularius had ordered the closure of all churches practicing Latin forms of worship. The pope's representatives intended to deny Cerularius the title of "Ecumenical Patriarch", instead insisting that he recognize the Roman pope as the head of all churches. Cerularius refused, and the pope's representatives excommunicated him. In turn, Cerularius excommunicated Humbert and the rest of his company.

[4] This was preceded by another major schism which persists to this day between the "Roman" and "Oriental" churches.

This incident is traditionally considered the formal beginning of the East-West schism. The significance of what had transpired, however, would not become clear to the Christian world until later, and friendly relations between East and West would remain in place for some time. Unfortunately, however, cascading bloodshed in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries would further cement the barrier between Eastern and Western Christianity. The first massacre took place in April 1182. It was largely incited by Emperor Andronikos I Komnenos, who popularized the idea that the former empress, Maria of Antioch, curried favour with Constantinople's Latin population with a promised opportunity to plunder the city. An infuriated mob entered the city's Latin quarter and began an indiscriminate massacre. Among the victims was papal legate Cardinal John, who was beheaded; Andronikos then forced Alexios II, Maria's son, to sign an order for his mother's execution. The former empress was strangled, and Alexios would later suffer the same fate.

These events exacerbated tensions between Byzantium and Latin states, and three years later, Latin forces led by William of Sicily exacted revenge through the sacking of Thessalonica, the second-largest city of the Eastern Empire. The ensuing massacre claimed thousands of lives, and the people of Constantinople blamed the disaster on Andronikos, who was eventually deposed and killed. The Fourth Crusade (1202–1204) would further see the siege and sacking of Constantinople. This led to approximately two thousand civilian deaths and a thorough looting of the city's wealth. Despoiled were many churches, including the Hagia Sophia, seized or destroyed was much of the city's art, a veritable catalogue of Greek and Roman history. Pope Innocent III, who had called the crusade, was furious to hear about what had transpired, a sentiment echoed by his church in a spirit of sorrow eight centuries later[5]. The damage was considerable and long-lasting: the sacking of Constantinople not only severely weakened the Byzantine Empire, which would eventually fall to the Ottomans, but also all but irrevocably scarred relations between the Eastern and Western churches. If doctrinal differences and an assortment of others more "earthly"

[5] Pope John Paul II expressed regret over the sacking of Constantinople in 2001 and 2004. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople (2004) accepted the apology in a speech on the eight-hundredth anniversary of the sacking of the city.

shifted relations between the two toward suspicion in preceding centuries, the explosions of violence at the end of the twelfth century—for which both sides were responsible to varying extents—created a wide chasm. Attempts at reconciliation would follow at various points, but the East-West ecclesial divide remains potent to this day.

The development of tensions between the Latin and Greek churches would exercise a significant impact on the history of the Slavs, even prior to the solidification of the split in the opening centuries of the second millennium. During his struggle against the influence of Frankish priests in the mid-ninth century, Prince Rastislav of Great Moravia appealed to Pope Nicholas I for Christian missionaries who could speak and perform the liturgy in the Slavic dialect of his kingdom. He received no response, however, and turned to Byzantium for support. Sent were two Slavic-speaking brothers: Constantine (later Cyril) and Methodius. The two developed an alphabet for the "Old Slavonic" language and had, along with their disciples, translated liturgy and scripture for the use of Slavic clergy. Cyril was also the founder of the first "Diocese of Rus'", which was located in what was then the Khazar Empire. Simply put, the Eastern church had already made significant inroads into Slavic lands prior to the Baptism of Rus' in 988.

Vladimir the Great, who initiated the Baptism of Rus', began his reign as an ardent pagan who attempted to formalize a standard pantheon for the diverse Slavonic, Finnic, and Lithuanian tribes comprising his state. This initiative was scrapped, however, in favour of a turn to the monotheism that seemed to be prevailing in the surrounding world. By what appears to be some process of elimination, the *Primary Chronicle* reports that Byzantine Christianity was ultimately selected for the beauty of its churches and liturgy[6]. Vladimir himself was baptized in Cherson, a city on the outskirts of contemporary Sevastopol—an aspect of his story that would regain significance a millennium later, as shall be discussed later in the analysis. He would then return to Kiev to baptize his family and subjects, and despite the political considerations which likely motivated Vladimir's decision-making, it would appear that his conversion was

[6] Regardless of the historical plausibility of this story, beauty has remained an important emphasis in Russian Orthodox theology, architecture, and iconography.

sincere. His decision was perhaps the most enduring of any made by a Kievan prince, for the Eastern Orthodox Church would maintain a significant relationship with the Russian state and society for much of the next thousand years—and indeed, to this very day.

## Section II. From the Church Statue to the Most Holy Synod

The Russian Church found itself in a unique position after Vladimir's conversion. In the first place, it was subordinate to the Church in Constantinople[7]; its leadership therefore enjoyed an "extra-territorial" status above that of local princes. Such, Pospielovsky (1998: 25) suggests, helped the Church take on the role of a mediator in Russian politics. While metropolitans themselves rarely involved themselves in domestic disputes, monks and parish clergy were more active: in 1128, for example, the latter convened a *sbor* (assembly) to prevent a war between the princes of Kiev and Chernigov. As an institution of Byzantine inheritance, likewise, the Church served as a conduit for transfers of the Eastern Empire's complex civil service, legal codes, welfare system, education, and theology[8].

On the other hand, Vladimir's Church Statute outlined a model of church-state relations which contrasted with those of Byzantium. As noted above, for instance, there was no formal distinction between ecclesial and secular law in the Empire. Not so in the Rus', where a separate ecclesial court was established with jurisdiction over cases involving the moral transgressions of laymen. And while the Byzantine emperor was a sort of blend of superlative secular and sacral authority, the Church Statute stipulated that royal power in the Rus' was ultimately subject to the norms of Christian morality (Pospielovsky, 1998: 25). Taken together, these distinctions suggest that the Kievan inheritors of "symphony" may have attempted to emulate the ideal more closely than the notion's Roman parents.

Such particularities of the Church, which was at once "Byzantine" and "Russian", played an important role in rendering coherence to the Russian state over time. An important element of this was

[7] This status would continue, at least officially, until the late sixteenth century.
[8] Meyendorff (1989: 14, 17) goes so far as to argue that Byzantium's significant political and cultural influence on Russia was "accomplished almost exclusively by the Church"; he further concurs with the view that the Church was key to the maintenance of Russia's national unity during the twelfth century.

linguistic—the Eastern Church's practice of proselytizing and translating worship materials into local languages facilitated the development and spread of Old Church Slavonic. This language would begin to serve as a "national coalescing agent" that would contribute to the transformation of varied eastern Slavonic tribes into a single nation over the centuries to come (ibid. 28). Princely infighting would continue, however, greatly simplifying the work of Mongol invaders in the thirteenth century. Batu Khan's Golden Horde conquered much of the Kievan Rus' between 1237 and 1238, with Kiev itself falling in 1240. During this time, the Church found itself the principal surviving presence of a conquered state:

> With the collapse of a single undisputed center of Rus', and its replacement by the proliferation of practically independent appanages busy fighting one another, the concept of a single Russian state or of a common heritage of Rus' was practically erased from the memory of both politicians and the general populace. The only institution that remembered the term Rus' was the Church. Only her chief bishop bore the title of "Metropolitan of Kiev and All Rus'," which the metropolitans retained even after having moved their de-facto residence to the northeast. Therefore the "capital" of what remained of the country was not where a great prince or grand duke sat, but where the metropolitan of All Rus' resided[9]. (Ibid. 37)

Despite differences in religious belief, the Mongol occupiers held the church in great esteem; hierarchs gave the respect demanded of them, and served as mediators between the Khans and Russian princes. The "Tatar Yoke" meant frequent, bloody raids and excessive taxation of the Russian population, but otherwise left the fundaments of society largely intact. Their rule, therefore, contrasted sharply with that promised by the Teutonic armies granted papal blessing to seize and convert Russia to Latin Christianity. Alexander Nevsky was successful in his efforts to repel their invasions, however, and in 1279, the Tatar Khan Mangu-Temir issued a charter of immunities which provided further protections for the

[9] This would eventually be Moscow.

church. A century later, Dmitry Donskoy would visit the revered Sergius of Radonezh, a monastery abbot who granted his blessing to Donskoy's effort to overturn Tatar rule in Russia after receiving assurance that all peaceable methods of resolving their disputes had been exhausted (ibid. 40). Sergius is said to have prophesied the Grand Prince's victory over the Tatars, and sent two monks to join the ensuing battle at the fields of Kulikova. To summarize, the church is closely associated with the survival of Russian culture during the period of Mongol rule, the repulsion of invading Western armies from Russian lands, the emergence of Moscow as a Russian capital, and the eventual end of the Yoke. If Vladimir the Great's conversion in the tenth century laid the foundations of a Christian identity to the Russian nation, the drama of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries all but cemented the Orthodox Church as a cornerstone of an emerging Russian statehood.

The fifteenth century, however, would see a major shift in the Russian Church's relations with local authorities and the wider world. This was precipitated by the decline of Constantinople. At its Justinian peak, the Eastern Empire's territories extended from the Levant to the western ends of the Mediterranean; by 1400, it consisted of little more than its capital and some holdings on the Aegean Sea. The threat presented by the Ottomans led John VIII Palaiologos, penultimate emperor of Byzantium, to seek aid from Rome at the Council of Florence in 1439. Decided was that Byzantium would receive military support to fend off the Ottomans; in exchange, however, the Orthodox Church would give up its disputes with the Catholic Church and submit to papal authority; in other words, an end to the schism on Latin terms. Under intense pressure from pope and emperor alike, the Greek delegation to the Council accepted. The results of this agreement, however, amounted to much less than what was likely anticipated: reunification was rejected outside of Constantinople and Byzantium did not receive its promised troops (ibid. 44). The Russian Church, outraged by the Greeks' decision, rejected the deal and closed its ecclesial relations with

Constantinople, electing its own archbishop in 1448 without the approval of the larger Patriarchate; in effect, the Russian Church declared its own independence[10].

Two other effects of the fall of Constantinople are relevant here. First—the appearance of the "Third Rome" concept. As discussed above, both church and state closed the fifteenth century in positions differing considerably from those they occupied at the end of the fourteenth century. Russia's ecclesial authority was no longer an effective subordinate to the Greek hierarchy, and the Russian state was no longer a subject of Mongol rule. The Grand Duchy of Moscow emerged a sizable polity, and the only remaining independent Orthodox state in the world. These particularities soon found lasting cultural expression through the pen of Philotheus, a monk from the city of Pskov. In *The Tale of the White Cowl*[11] and in a letter addressed to the sovereign, Grand Prince Vasili III, Philotheus portrayed Russia as a third and final Rome. On his account, the first Rome had succumbed to heresy and the second (Constantinople) to the Muslims, leaving Moscow the world's lone bastion and protector of all Orthodox Christians[12] (ibid. 46). Therefore, the monk reasoned, Russia's sovereign was duty-bound to rule justly and in accordance with Christian principles. To this extent, one may argue that the letter echoes the sentiment of Vladimir's Church Statute in the latter's emphasis on a state distinct from the church and yet beholden to Christian teachings. The "Third Rome" concept has since re-emerged in modern Russia[13], taking on varying forms both religious and secular in character, at times in step with and at others departing significantly from the spirit of the monk's letter.

A second effect of the fall of Constantinople and ecclesial independence was a substantial reconfiguration of relations between Russia's spiritual and state authorities. For as mentioned above, the

[10] The Greek Church rescinded its agreement with Rome after the fall of Constantinople; schism would persist between Moscow and Constantinople until around 1560, however. The Polish-Lithuanian rulers of the western Rus', for their part, rejected Moscow's claim to ecclesial independence and instead oversaw the establishment of the "Metropolis of Kiev, Galicia and all Rus'" with Constantinople's blessing. In effect, a split had occurred not only between the Greek and Russian churches, but within the Russian church itself.
[11] Curiously, the *Tale* depicts the movement of the priestly vestment from Rome to Constantinople and then to Novgorod, rather than Moscow.
[12] As in, not simply Russians.
[13] Discussed in Chapter 6.

Russian church's subordination to Constantinople translated to a status of extra-territorial authority that permitted the institution a special range of manoeuvre in domestic politics. Thus, in these specific conditions—and not without a fair measure of irony—increased autonomy went alongside a decline in effective influence. Russian bishops would still confront local rulers and occasionally win, but the overarching tendency would be toward more state interference in church affairs (ibid. 45); the lopsidedness of this relationship would intensify in fits and starts until the end of the twentieth century.

Predictably, the shifting terrain of church-state relations was accompanied by debates over the proper relation between the two. Two camps took shape in the early sixteenth century: the "Josephites" (Иосифляне) and the "non-possessors" (нестяжатели). The Josephites (led by Joseph of Volokolamsk) believed in the necessity of church property and an "aristocratic" episcopate as the only sure means of maintaining influence among Russia's noblemen. The non-possessors (led by Nilus of Sora), meanwhile, opposed the notion that the Church should accumulate wealth and land, and generally betrayed a more critical attitude toward state authorities. The non-possessor Metropolitan Varlaam, for example, publicly criticized the Grand Prince Vasili III for inviting appanage princes to Moscow with promises of safety before arresting and executing many of them (ibid. 62). He was replaced by Daniel, a more compliant Josephite who permitted the grand prince to remarry after he had consigned his previous wife to a convent for "failing" to produce an heir – a significant break with Orthodox consensus.

The episcopacy of Metropolitan Macarius would see the ascension of Russia's first tsar, or emperor, Ivan IV (1533–1547) and the effective victory of the Josephites over the non-possessors. Despite the role played by the church in the tsar's ascension, however, leading clergy were not exempt from his terror. Macarius' successor, Athanasius, came into conflict with the tsar over the conduct of his *oprichnina*, a secret police force established to root out sedition; the circumstances surrounding his resignation and death remain unclear. The tsar then offered the metropolitanate to the missionary and diplomat German, who also took issue with the oprichnina and was consigned to a monastery until his death soon after (ibid. 66). In 1566, Philipp II was named metropolitan and would be strangled to death by Malyuta Skuratov, an oprichnina

chief, a mere three years later[14]. Josephite clergy hoped the crowning of Russia's first tsar would elevate the prestige of church and state alike; in the short term, however, they instead received new martyrs.

The anticipated increase in prestige came four decades after the death of Ivan IV with the arrival of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Jeremias II, to Moscow. He had journeyed from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth[15] to Russia in an effort to raise money for his church, which was struggling under Ottoman rule. Though received with hospitality in the Kremlin, he was effectively placed under house arrest, forbidden to leave Moscow until agreeing to officially recognize the Russian church's claims to autocephaly. Jeremias eventually agreed to the enthronement of Russia's first patriarch, Job; he then returned to Constantinople and announced his decision to the other patriarchs. Thus born was the Moscow Patriarchate in 1589, accepting the status of fifth in seniority after the four ancient churches of the East (ibid. 67). Nevertheless, the establishment of the patriarchate was negotiated by Boris Godunov, regent to Tsar Feodor I, and likewise did not indicate more autonomy or authority for the church *within* Russian politics. On the contrary, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, church autonomy vis-à-vis the state would decrease substantially.

The formal and totalizing subordination of the church was preceded by a period of struggles with foreign powers, the laity, and the nobility. Swedish and Polish invasions served as a partial catalyst, for they exposed the existence of considerable technological and scientific gaps between Russia and Western Europe. These gaps made for an ideological fissure within Russia itself. Some became suspicious of the Orthodox Church, and instead looked to Catholicism or Protestantism as alternatives capable of eliminating

[14] The metropolitan had been deposed on charges of "sorcery" and "dissolute living" after refusing to allow the Tsar to venerate the cross. This was done in protest of massacres carried out by the oprichnina.

[15] Established in 1569. Here, Jeremias consecrated Michel Rohoza as Metropolitan of Kiev, Galicia and all Rus'. Rohoza sought support from Rome in his efforts to reform his church. The result was the Union of Brest, which took place in 1595-1596 and transferred his church's jurisdiction to papal authority. The Orthodox metropolis therefore ceased to exist, and was replaced by an institution today known as the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Once Galicia came under Austrian occupation in the eighteenth century, Austrian authorities countered Polish and Russian cultural influence by establishing two Greek-Catholic academies encouraging local Ruthenians to think of themselves as a nation distinct from both powers. The Greek-Catholic Church thus emerged as a key source of a developing notion of *Ukrainian* as a distinct national identity, rather than a territorial signifier (ibid. 102). More related to this in Chapters 5 and 6.

Russia's "backwardness". Others, particularly the Zealots of Piety, desired to see the Church play a more active role in public life to combat corruption in bureaucracies, courts, and trade. Among their obstacles stood the *Sobornoye Ulozheniye*, a 1649 law code which placed monastery lands under state control and submitted the Church to the authority of secular courts eager to punish clergy who actively criticized state officials (ibid. 69). Patriarch Nikon, who was enthroned in 1652, shared the zealots' desire for the elevation of the church, going so far as to proclaim the patriarch's primacy over the tsar in his efforts to reform the *Ulozheniye* (ibid. 74). This, predictably, alienated state officials and the nobility alike.

A crucial point of division, however, emerged between Nikon and the Zealots over ritual practices. The resulting *Raskol*, or Great Schism, was partially rooted in a perfect storm of historical contingencies; in the first place, the patriarch and tsar alike anticipated the overturning of Turkish rule in Constantinople and the restoration of the Byzantine empire. Secondly, the Pereyaslav Agreement of 1654 opened an opportunity for the unification of the Moscow Patriarchate with the recently reestablished Metropolis of Kiev, Galicia and all Rus'[16]. Constantinople and the Metropolis of Kiev, however, followed Greek ritual traditions which differed from those of the Russian church; and Nikon, heeding common criticisms from visiting Greek clerics, was eager to eliminate these perceived barriers to shared worship with Constantinople and unity with Kiev. He thus set upon a program of reforming Russian worship materials and liturgical norms to match what was prescribed by the Greek Church. Though the reforms seemed minor, they were interpreted as a heretical betrayal of Russian Orthodox tradition as a whole by the Zealots and much of the laity. Led by Avvakum Petrov, many broke with the official church, believing Nikon to be the Antichrist. The whole episode proved calamitous: Nikon's break with the Zealots over liturgical and ritual practices precipitated a rift in Russian Christianity that persists to this day[17], while his belief in the primacy of the patriarch over the tsar, as mentioned above, drew the ire of Russia's secular authorities. In 1667,

[16] An Orthodox hierarchy established in 1620 which, as its title suggests, rejected the Union of Brest.
[17] The "Old Believers" or "Old Ritualists" (староверы) today number 400,000 in the Russian Federation, and several thousand remain in the larger post-Soviet sphere. At the height of the *Raskol*, it is estimated that up to one-third of Russia's population may have joined the Old Believers. Those who remained with them would endure severe persecution in the centuries to come.

Nikon was defrocked and his views about the patriarchal office were condemned; his liturgical reforms, however, remained in place and the "Old Ritualists" were anathematized.

The balance of power between the Russian church and state was beginning to shift dramatically in favour of the latter; formal subordination would arrive during the reign of Peter the Great. As a young man, Peter was incensed by the encyclical accompanying the enthronement of Patriarch Adrian, which echoed Nikon's formula of patriarchal primacy over the tsar (ibid. 105), and during his Grand Embassy to Europe, he became acquainted with Anglican clergy and English royalty who encouraged him to think of the church as something subordinate to the state. After the death of Patriarch Adrian in 1700, Peter selected a professor from the Kiev Academy to be consecrated with the title "Exarch, Keeper and Administrator of the Patriarchal Throne"—'exarch' here meaning a representative of the tsar, given that no new patriarch had been enthroned. Peter would also select Ukrainians[18], rather than Russians, to lead the church and its seminaries, as he considered them Westerners sympathetic to his reforms. Moreover, Ukrainian bishops were relative outsiders to the established Russian clergy, and thus relied on the tsar for support (Pospielovsky, 1998: 106). In 1716, all bishops were ordered to swear an oath of personal loyalty to the tsar, and forbidden to interfere in state affairs (ibid. 110). Five years later, the patriarchal office was formally abolished and replaced with a state-administered Synod; bishops, likewise, were now to swear loyalty not only to the tsar, their "ultimate judge"[19], but to the entire royal family (ibid. 111). Much more could be said of Peter's reign in relation to the church, including the arrests, torture, and murder of bishops, the banning of works which defended the patriarchal office, the commencement of Orthodox missions as a representative of the Russian state to foreign territories, the conversion of monasteries and restrictions on monasticism; it will suffice to say that the church was effectively neutralized as an autonomous voice in Russian society and politics.

[18] Indeed, as Wanner and Yelensky (2019: 252) note, around 70% of the Church's leadership was from Ukraine or Belarus in the first half of the eighteenth century.
[19] This inclusion was considered blasphemous by the clergy and was removed from the oath in 1901.

This configuration of church-state relations persisted mostly intact until the early twentieth century. The Church, in Peter's words, had become "the religious team"; an institutional appendage of the state coaxed by varying mixtures of privileges and terror into compliance. The symphonic ideal of complementary—but nevertheless distinct—spheres of spiritual and secular power was again eschewed; the Petrine and post-Petrine state would instead generally serve as conductors to a church conducted. This arrangement afforded government officials and the episcopacy certain privileges while it lasted, but would ultimately prove disastrous to church and state alike as new movements emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to challenge the tsar, upon whose authority *both powers* now depended.

Summary.

An extended—but by no means exhaustive—historical discussion may seem an odd way to open an examination of recent developments. Russian President Vladimir Putin, for instance, caused dismay to many commentators, including his interviewer at the time, when he opted to address a question about the origins of the Russo-Ukrainian war with a "Russian history lesson" that lasted nearly half an hour. This approach to the question echoed an essay[20] published months prior to the commencement of the invasion. One might be tempted to interpret these comments as deflections, comments intended to obscure the true nature and origins of the war—*for the past is a foreign country*. What matters, on this logic, is the here and now, the actually-existing configurations of international relations and determinations of geopolitics.

What such approaches may neglect is that this belief is ultimately just that: a belief. To this extent, it is relevant and exerts influence only to the extent that it occupies—or dominates—the minds of policymakers. Such, however, is a contingent matter, far from given, and thereby perilous to the exact extent it is assumed by researchers. Under certain circumstances, this assumption may not hold water; for the past, like the world, is what one makes of it. In other words, it matters little whether events happened five years,

[20] "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" (Putin, 2021). The essay argues that this *unity* is rooted, first and foremost, in the "Ancient Rus" and the "spiritual choice made by St. Vladimir [which] still largely determines our affinity today."

decades, or centuries ago; if they are significant to a policymaker, so too may they prove important to their policies. Perhaps doubly so, when current realities of international politics bring to mind historical experiences and cultural memories alive and well in the minds of statesmen.

The history presented above (and in the next chapter) is especially important for understanding the contemporary Orthodox Church, where historical precedent is not simply a collection of trivia, but is instead integral to its identity and institutional structure. Essential are the following points. First, the Russian Orthodox Church inherits much of its identity and structure from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and its early church forebears. This translates to a sacral self-conception—for the church regards itself as both an earthly community and as a transcendent instantiation of Christ's glory *fundamentally unbeholden* to "worldly" powers. In terms of institutional characteristics, the ROC inherited its emphases on precedent, the authority of tradition and the episcopacy, the symphonic ideal, notions of canonical jurisdiction, and the patriarchal office from the Byzantine Church. It also took on—and developed independently—a fundamental suspicion toward what is now known as "the West"[21]. Such was rooted in the events of the Great Schism, the Northern Crusades, and the moves to imitate Europe initiated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—each of these, for the Russian Church, taking the form of traumatic interactions with the West.

Second, it is crucial to recognize the close connection between the church and Russian statehood itself. Vladimir the Great's decision to adopt Orthodoxy gave a common faith and language to the disparate tribes of the Rus', and the church was instrumental to the survival of the idea of "Rus'" during the period of Mongol occupation—which the church helped moderate and end, as well. The church also played an important role in the ascent of Moscow as a national capital, as well as the transformation of the state from a principality into a *tsardom*. The latter, however, would steadily come to subjugate and dominate the church, while at the same time deriving legitimacy from it. This connection would not be severed until the

[21] And, to a lesser extent, the Ecumenical Patriarchate itself, given the latter's capitulation to Rome at the Council of Florence, the ensuing schism, and the fiasco that occurred after the Nikonian reforms. More on the contemporary relations between the ROC and Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chapter 6.

Soviet era, which, as will soon be discussed, would weaken but not wholly eliminate the church-state nexus, and indeed set the stage for the ROC's revival as a social and political force. For now, it will suffice to say that the ROC is an institution with a long historical memory, and one that plays an important role in its behaviour and relations with the Russian state today.

## CHAPTER 3. CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN THE SOVIET ERA

The previous chapter examined the prehistory and history of Russian church-state relations from a *bird's-eye view*. Arriving at the twentieth century, however, it is now necessary to up the degree of magnification. This is not simply due to its temporal proximity to current affairs, however; the Soviet era stands as a special epoch of Russian church-state history in its own right, its dramatic twists and turns pivotal to the emergence of a new relationship toward the end of the millennium. This chapter, like its predecessor, is less concerned with providing a general overview of Russian church-state history than highlighting historical aspects of this relationship relevant to their contemporary configurations and Russian statehood after the dismantlement of the Soviet Union.

### Section 1. Revolutions, Splits, Terror

The ROC met the early twentieth century in a position of limited manoeuvre, for it remained under state control facilitated by the Holy Synod and yet was largely dependent on parishioner donations for its finances (Pospielovsky, 1984a: 20). Nikonian Orthodoxy was the state religion, which afforded clergy close relations with government officials and certain protections against competing faiths, but little in the way of autonomy. To much of the public, therefore, church and state were all but inseparable; close association between the two would prove perilous, however, as the Tsarist state—with its formula of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality"[22] —confronted crises that called the legitimacy of the empire's leadership into question. This period of turbulence was inaugurated[23] by the defeat of Russian forces in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, which brought long-brewing discontent among workers, peasants, and soldiers frothing to the surface. This was also a period in which tensions between clergy and state officials became more evident, as the former pined for greater institutional independence and the reestablishment of the patriarchal office (Morison, 1991: 193).

[22] Promulgated during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1796-1855) by Count Sergei Uvarov (Robinson, 2019: 12).
[23] Revolutionary undercurrents existed in Russian society prior to the 1905 Revolution, but the latter constituted the first mass movement for social change.

Though loyal to the tsar in the main, certain clergymen openly advocated for social reform. Most notable here is the case of Georgy Gapon, leader of the Assembly of Russian Workingmen who organized a peaceful procession of workers to the Winter Palace on January 22nd, 1905, following the outbreak of strikes in St. Petersburg. Gapon hoped to make his appeals for reform directly to Nicholas II, but the latter was not in the city. In his nephew's stead, Grand Duke Vladimir ordered police and cossacks to attack the demonstrators, leading to at least one hundred deaths and many more wounded or arrested[24]. This "Bloody Sunday" provoked further mass strikes across the empire, the quelling of which involved around 20,000 executions and tens of thousands of arrests[25] (Blom, 2008: 148). As a concession, Nicholas permitted the establishment of the State Duma, a legislative assembly of limited power[26]. To the state's surprise, all six priests elected to the First Duma became part of leftist or centrist factions, and seven of the eleven elected to the Second Duma did the same.

The development of a socialistic segment of the clergy was rooted in a variety of factors. Among them were the 1879 educational reforms made by the Holy Synod's overprocurator, Dmitry Tolstoy, who eliminated the automatic accessibility of university enrolment to seminarians and heavily restricted seminary access to children from secular families (ibid. 179). The results were seminaries increasingly populated by students from clergy families who possessed little desire to follow in their fathers' footsteps but lacked the funds to attend university, while motivated candidates from non-clerical families were deterred from enrolling in seminaries. In other words, many seminaries became hotbeds of discontent that, combined with the increasingly atheistic or agnostic orientations of the Russian intelligentsia[27], created conditions ripe for political radicalism. And indeed, the ranks of revolutionary politics in Russia's 19th and

[24] Gapon managed to escape the city, but was later killed by members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party after they learned of his police contacts, which he attempted to present as an advantage for the workers' movement.
[25] Such measures put an end to the folkloric view of the tsar as a friend or fatherly figure to the people against the predations of the nobility; in retrospect, it is likely that the autocracy's handling of the events of 1905 served as an enabling condition for the revolutions of 1917.
[26] In 1906, newly-issued "Fundamental Laws" emphasized that the tsar remained the possessor of "supreme autocratic power", which was reflected in his influence over the Duma's session scheduling and capacity to pass independent legislation (Moss, 2005: 97).
[27] This trend would decline in the early twentieth century, which saw a religious renewal among Russia's intelligentsia (Shevzov, 2020: 39) led in large part by former Marxists such as Sergei Bulgakov and Peter Struve.

early 20th centuries would draw significantly from former seminarians and the children of clergy families. Clerical attraction to socialist politics—along with a more generalized discontentment with the Tsarist state—set the stage for the emergence of renovationism, a movement I return to discuss below.

Socialist clerics nevertheless represented a fraction of a larger clerical whole that was viewed by many as a spiritual cloak to a struggling and weighty autocracy. As intimated above, this position was partially involuntary; the Church was required to disobey its own canons, for example, to fulfill its legal obligations to the state, and authorities often interfered in church affairs without bothering to consult with their own appointees in the Holy Synod. And, as Shevzov (2020: 42) highlights, existing laws ascribed Orthodoxy to the "Russian people" from birth, with conversions permitted only after 1905—in the face of the public, therefore, the church could appear like an assemblage of state functionaries and informants, believers of varying devotion, along with agnostics and atheists; a state-directed episcopate presiding over an amorphous, often-alienated "mob" (Sokolov, 1906) rather than a conventional faith community, to put the matter plainly.

Pockets of dissent, therefore, did little to negate the church's overarching reputation as a passive proponent of state policy. During the interlude between the revolutions of 1917, the church began to openly acknowledge long-developing divides between itself and significant segments of society; as a professor of philosophy argued in an address to clergy and laity, the church did little to call out abuses and excesses associated with tsarism, and thus any present attempts to align with the workers would be perceived as disingenuous, met with the retort: "Why, under the previous order, did you not say the things you are saying now? Why were you silent then?" (Kudryavtsev, 1917). This sentiment, although somewhat hyperbolic, reflects the damage of the blows dealt to the church's reputation in the years leading to the downfall of the autocracy.

The February Revolution occurred over the course of March 8th –16th, an output of widespread and mounting dissatisfaction with the tsar. Beginning with a strike at Petrograd's Putilov Factory—the largest industrial plant in the city—demonstrators demanding higher wages were soon joined by women workers

calling for an end to food shortages and the wartime rationing system. The state's attempts to use force to contain the situation failed as deployed troops deserted to the demonstrators' cause. On March 13th, members of the State Duma resolved to form a new government, and the royal family was arrested soon afterward. The church now lacked both a patriarch and the tsar, and the top-down form of ecclesial administration that prevailed in the post-Petrine period had translated to a deficit of communication from the lower clergy to the upper rungs of the hierarchy. Effectively, the Church entered the revolutionary period without a cohesive institutional structure; clergy thus at once wished to rid themselves of fetters imposed by the old regime and re-establish traditional, canonical forms of church administration. Even the Synod itself recognized the need for change, refusing the requests of overprocurator Nikolaev Raev to condemn the revolutionary movement and appeal to the nation to support the monarchy[28] (Pospielovsky, 1984a: 25).

A short-lived Council for Affairs of the Orthodox Church was established that month. Its meetings of clergy from dioceses throughout the country declared support for the Provisional Government, requested that bishops be elected by clergy and laymen—a return to traditional church practices—and called for the redistribution[29] of large estates to help struggling peasants (ibid. 26). Questions concerning the future relationship between church and state began to be raised; at a conference held in June 1917, varying views were endorsed. Some, such as Professor Prokoshev, advocated for the full separation of church and state, while Evgenii Trubetskoy and Sergei Bulgakov argued that a full divorce between the two would be undesirable (Vvedensky, 1923: 43–46). Each agreed, however, on the need for religious freedom in Russia, which the Provisional Government indeed inaugurated. The latter was largely indifferent toward the church, the two only coming into significant conflict over a decision to nationalize parochial schools, which the church opposed. The Petrograd Soviet, a militant body of workers and soldiers that competed with the Provisional Government for national influence, regarded the church with much more suspicion, presaging decisive shifts that would occur later that year.

[28] After the tsar's abdication, his younger brother Michael Alexandrovich was offered the throne, but the latter deferred acceptance until the decision could receive ratification by an elected assembly. The Synod, for its part, supported this.
[29] Excluding church lands deemed necessary to support rural clergy.

The institutional tumult following the February Revolution—combined with uncertainties regarding the future relationship between church and state—convinced many clergymen and laity alike that the church would need strong leadership to weather future turbulence. Discussions concerning the potential restoration of the patriarchate began in earnest during a Sobor initiated in August 1917[30]. Such would come to pass on November 5th, as the Metropolitan of Moscow Tikhon was selected to serve as Russia's eleventh patriarch—just two days prior to the Bolshevik insurrection in Petrograd[31].

The Bolsheviks moved quickly in their efforts to eliminate the Church as a substantial public institution; on November 8th, Vladimir Lenin issued a decree nationalizing all land, including that held by the Church. This would be followed on January 23rd with a decree that formally separated the church and state, barred the church from all education (both public and private), and stripped religious organizations of any existing rights to personhood or property ownership under the law. On January 28th, all bank accounts belonging to religious organizations were nationalized. Deprived of its previous legal rights and funding, the ROC's position became more precarious as Russia descended into civil war and reports of violence against clergy and laypeople steadily became commonplace[32]. In May 1918, Patriarch Tikhon made an address to Lenin, referencing these attacks on the church and calling for an end to ongoing persecution. This did not happen; over the next two years, twenty-eight bishops, thousands of priests, and laymen were killed for religious activity (Pospielovsky, 1984a: 38). The patriarch, for his part, was deprived of ration cards and would come to rely on food donations; Leon Trotsky later advised shooting him, but Lenin thought this would only give Orthodox Christians a significant new martyr (Walters, 1991: 252). He was later placed under house arrest in April 1922; despite the treatment he and the church received from the Soviet government, however, Tikhon refused to bless—publicly or privately—the anti-Bolshevik White

[30] The first of its kind permitted since the reign of Peter I.
[31] Tikhon was selected by lot, echoing an early church practice recorded in Acts. Had the election been determined by a simple majority, the staunchly conservative Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky would have won – a figure returned to later.
[32] Revolutionary violence against the clergy was not unprecedented (Leonov 2016: 71-72); several killings of clergy and armed attacks on churches occurred during the 1905 Revolution and the interlude between March and November 1917. Armed attacks, arrests, and killings increased dramatically after the decree of January 23rd, however (Shevzov, 2020: 52).

Army in what he regarded as "fratricidal war", and ordered the clergy to stay outside of politics (Struve, 1967: 33).

Efforts to unmoor the ROC from society were not simply the output of pent-up anger with the institution's association with Tsarism. Had this been the case, one might expect the period of persecution to be sporadic, unthinking, and more likely than not short-lived. The opposite obtained, however; repressions against the church were regular, calculated, and took place over the course of several decades. At its root, the Soviet state's hostility to the ROC (and religion in general) was fundamentally ideological, grounded not only in a militant commitment to materialism, but in the belief that the abolition of capitalism would spell the disintegration of religiosity in general[33]. Despite the revolution's uprooting of the church's economic base through the nationalization of its lands, the seizure of its bank accounts, the elimination of existing subsidies for the clergy, and campaigns to confiscate anything of value from churches, all combined with concerted efforts to publicly humiliate the clergy and counter resistance with terror, the ROC did not fade away into oblivion. The revolution succeeded, however, in provoking splits within the Church, which the Soviet government moved to capitalize on.

Of these splits, three are particularly important here; each, likewise, exposes intersections between Orthodox canon law and the politics of the revolutionary era. Two of these splits were directly facilitated or supported by the Soviet state, while the third was effected by clergy who fled Russia in the aftermath of the revolution, and each resulted in the formation of ecclesial jurisdictions separate from the Moscow Patriarchate. The most prominent of these in the early Soviet period was "Renovationism" or the "Living Church" movement, which was largely composed of the socialistic (or otherwise discontented[34]) sections

[33] Lenin regarded "any religious idea, any idea of any god at all" as "the most inexpressible foulness... accepted by the *democratic* bourgeoisie" (1973: 122, emphasis in original), and argued that religion would disappear once deprived of an economic basis: "It would be bourgeois narrow-mindedness to forget that the yoke of religion that weighs upon mankind is merely the product and reflection of the economic yoke within society" (1978: 86). Trotsky (1923), for his part, believed that religion was already effectively dead in Russia, persisting by inertia alone, and that film and other forms of entertainment could easily replace what was offered by the church.

[34] Particularly significant tensions existed between "white" married clergy, whose opportunities for advancement within the church were limited, and "black" unmarried bishops and monks who commanded the leading positions of

of the clergy discussed above. The movement's transformation into an organized "camp", however, was initiated by the Politburo and facilitated by Soviet secret police forces, who, on Lenin's orders, offered special protections to clergy who supported the confiscation of church valuables to address famine in the Volga region. Their cooperation was rewarded—by the end of 1922, the state had handed nearly twenty thousand churches over to renovationist clergy (Pospielovsky, 1984a: 61).

The methods of the Renovationists were uncompromising—in August 1922, the first All-Russian Conference of the Living Church resolved to rid their parishes of clerical opponents and dismiss any Parish Councils unaccepting of renovationist clergy (Meerson, 1991: 220). A second conference held the following year decided to hold a trial aimed at laicizing Patriarch Tikhon and abolishing his office altogether; the patriarch and those who remained loyal to him, naturally, rejected these decisions as non-canonical. Tensions, meanwhile, began to emerge among state authorities over the tactics of antireligious campaigns. "Leftists", including Trotsky, continued to advocate for a hardline stance to destroy the church, while "centrists" and "rightists" believed that a more relaxed and long-term approach would prove conducive to party aims (Walters, 1991: 266). The latter course was incentivized by ongoing efforts to appease the peasantry—in line with the logic of the New Economic Policy—as well as desires to normalize relations with the British government.

Both priorities spelt trouble for the Renovationists; in the first place, it had become clear that the peasant laity had little interest in the Living Church, and Patriarch Tikhon was released from house arrest. The Soviet government then attempted to facilitate a reconciliation between the Renovationist and Patriarchal churches, but this effort fizzled out, taking with it the political relevance of the Living Church. Nevertheless, Metropolitan Sergius—a former renovationist—took leadership of the ROC after the Patriarch's death in 1925 and declared unconditional loyalty to the Soviet government, further disincentivizing the latter's efforts to prop up the Living Church.

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the episcopacy. Ambitious, married priests desired the ability to join the ranks of the bishops, but could not do so in the patriarchal Orthodox Church.

Another significant split occurred with the emergence of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), which held its founding Sobor in 1921. Noted in the previous chapter was the considerable influx of Ukrainian clergy into ROC leadership positions after the Petrine reforms; the opposite, however, was true for the Ukrainian church at the beginning of the twentieth century (Bociurkiw, 1991: 228). The Ukrainian episcopate, likewise, was dominated by ethnic Russians loyal to Metropolitan Khrapovitsky (ibid. 229). The church's subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate, therefore, appeared a serious obstacle to Ukrainian self-determination. An episcopate broadly aligned with Moscow, likewise, meant that only priests and laypeople (rather than a bishop) would ordain the UAOC's first metropolitan, Vasyl Lypkivsky—a violation of Church canons (Bremer, 2016: 5)[35] denounced by the ROC in Ukraine (Bociurkiw, 1991: 242). The UAOC found a temporary ally in the Soviet government, which was at that point pursuing a policy of Ukrainianization and eager to create fissures within the Patriarchal Church; by the end of the 1920s, however, both policies had been largely abandoned, persecutions began in earnest, and by 1936, the UAOC no longer existed.

A third split was headed by clergy who had aligned themselves with the Whites during the Russian Civil War. This pro-monarchist camp was angered by the Patriarch's decisions to refrain from blessing their armies and forbid clergy participation in pro-White activity (Pospielovsky, 1998: 220). On November 20th, 1920, Tikhon issued an encyclical permitting the creation of temporary autocephalies should local dioceses lose contact with the larger Patriarchate; after fleeing Crimea along with remnants of General Wrangel's White forces, Metropolitan Khrapovitsky and other émigré bishops argued that the encyclical justified their creation of a "Temporary Higher Church Administration", formalized in Karlovci, Serbia, in 1921. This "Karlovci Synod", later known as the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), broke off relations with the ROC in 1927 after refusing instructions from Metropolitan Sergius to declare loyalty to the Soviet government. After the Second World War, the Moscow Patriarchate would again appeal to the Karlovcians to return to the church; Metropolitan Anastasy responded with his own appeal to the Russian

[35] The UAOC did not treat church canons as binding in general (Bociurkiw, 1991: 241).

people, arguing that the patriarchal church was Soviet, rather than Russian, and had completely capitulated to communist authority (ibid. 295). ROCOR's split with the ROC would persist until 2007.

Despite the development of these splits—two of which received support from the Ecumenical Patriarchate[36]—the ROC began to grow substantially in the latter half of the 1920s, gaining two thousand churches from 1926 to 1927 in the Russian Republic alone (Pospielovsky, 1998: 257). 1929, however, marked the beginning of an all-out offensive against religion[37] by the Soviet government; such coincided, in part, with the beginning of the first five-year plan and collectivization. The aims of liquidating private enterprise and prosperous peasants (kulaks) directly affected the ROC, as the latter was considered a private enterprise for tax purposes, and such left the church largely dependent on peasants who could afford to donate (Pospielovsky, 1984a: 166). Thus, and not without some irony, authorities labelled religious organizations "counterrevolutionary agencies of the kulak and the nepman"—relationships materially predicated by state policy itself. The period of terror that ensued in the 1930s would see over one hundred thousand clergy—along with many more laypersons—arrested, exiled, and executed (Yakovlev, 2002: 165). Parish closures and demolitions also resumed, and by 1939, "not a hundred churches remained open for worship" (Struve, 1967: 57).

Section II. War, Nationalism, Collapse

On June 22nd, 1941, the Germans commenced Operation Barbarossa, the largest invasion in human history. Metropolitan Sergius made his position clear that same day: all parishes were to support the Soviet Union[38] and none were to consider defecting to the invaders (Pospielovsky, 1998: 269). And over the course of the war, the ROC led a large-scale donation drive that collected 150 million rubles for the war effort (Metropolitan Alexei, 1944). It would appear that some "goodwill" was being established between church and state; the most significant shift, however, would be facilitated by international concerns. Stalin hoped

[36] The EP requested that Patriarch Tikhon step down and maintained friendly relations with the Renovationists until 1939 (Pospielovsky, 1984a: 64); the Patriarch of Constantinople also granted a *tomos* of autonomy to the Temporary Higher Church Administration without the authorization of the Moscow Patriarchate (Pospielovsky, 1998: 219).
[37] No faiths were spared.
[38] Notably, the Metropolitan emphasized defence of the Soviet Union as equivalent to defence of the Russian state.

to sway British public opinion in favour of opening a second front against Germany; to this end, part of his strategy involved an attempt to assure the Anglican Church that the ROC was prospering and not in fact experiencing persecution (Pospielovsky, 1998: 286). He then requested information from the metropolitans regarding the church's most pressing needs; the result of these discussions was a Sobor that elected Sergius to the patriarchal office, which had been vacant since the death of Tikhon.

In German-occupied territories, churches and ecclesial relations proved significant to Nazi strategy. In Ukraine, the UAOC was reestablished; German-supported Ukrainian nationalists, meanwhile, engaged in a terror campaign in 1943 against clergy who remained aligned with the Moscow Patriarchate (ibid. 282-283). In Belarus, the Germans attempted to coax existing clergy into declaring autocephaly and thereby cut off ties with Moscow, but this initiative proved to be a non-starter for the clergy, among whom nationalist sentiments were considerably weaker (ibid. 279-280). Throughout their occupied territories, the Nazis hoped that reopening churches and eliminating taxes on clergy—as well as encouraging declarations of autocephaly from Moscow—would help turn local populations against the Soviet Union. Such produced mixed results; more significant in the immediate were the reopenings, which led to an influx of 7500 churches to the Moscow Patriarchate after the war's end. A further 3000 were gained from newly annexed Soviet territories, combined with nearly 2500 seized from Ukrainian Greek Catholics. These influxes, along with the enthronement of Patriarch Sergius, left the ROC in a much stronger institutional position than it occupied prior to the war.

The war had also seen, however, further entrenchment of simmering tensions between the churches of Moscow and Constantinople. The latter had gained the attention of the American government in 1940[39], and, following the German invasion of Greece, the Office of Strategic Services—a predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency—began work with Archbishop Athenagoras[40], whose eventual election to the

[39] This began with a letter from Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle (1940) to President Roosevelt suggesting that contact be established with the Greek Church in Constantinople. The latter was considered an influential actor in the Near East, and there were fears at the time that the USSR might attempt expansion southward toward the Dardanelles. Roosevelt (1940) responded favourably to the idea, but direct contact with the EP did not begin until 1941.
[40] Then head of the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America.

office of Ecumenical Patriarch in 1948 was largely facilitated by cooperation between the American, Greek, and Turkish governments (Serçe, 2022). A staunch anti-communist, Athenagoras was viewed as a counterweight to the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate, which, having emerged from the war reconsolidated, now appeared to position itself as the primary leader of Orthodoxy on the world stage. Such was evinced, in part, by Patriarch Alexei I's[41] attempt in 1947 to convoke a pan-Orthodox council to discuss a variety of ecclesial and canonical issues; the EP argued in response that it alone possesses the canonical authority to convene such a council (Kitromilides, 2019: 83). Other ROC initiatives followed, usually centring around the invitation of foreign patriarchs to heavily publicized and well-provisioned celebrations —such as the fifth centennial of the ROC's autocephaly[42]—with the ostensible aim of drawing Orthodox Churches outside of the Eastern Bloc further into the orbit of the Moscow Patriarchate.

In retrospect, such activity likely reflected a coincidence of interests between the ROC and the Soviet government. For the church, survival remained paramount, given that public declarations of loyalty to the Soviet state had not spared the clergy from intense periods of persecution; its postwar resurgence and troubled history with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, likewise, combined to make plays for ecclesial primacy possible. Such in turn coincided with the interests of the Soviet state, which evidently began to view the clergy as more than mere "parasites"; from the postwar era onward, they could also serve as proponents of Soviet foreign policy. That the ROC "totally supported" the latter was affirmed by Patriarch Alexei I (Simansky) himself, and was further reflected in the patriarchate's foreign policy statements, which repeatedly displayed an uncanny resemblance to positions taken by the Soviet government[43] (Konstantinov, 1967: 88-99). That the ROC could also serve as a religious counterweight to the influence of the Vatican and as a competitor to the Ecumenical Patriarchate was evidently not lost on Soviet authorities, either.

[41] Successor to Patriarch Sergius after the latter's death in 1944.
[42] It is worth noting that this meant celebration of the Russian Church's 1488 *break* from Constantinople.
[43] Including, for example, repeated critiques of American foreign policy, denunciations of the Hungarian Revolution, and dismissals of accusations of violations of civil liberties in the USSR as anti-communist propaganda.

Despite the limited rapprochement that occurred between church and state in the postwar years, the Communist Party had not abandoned its ideological commitment to the elimination of religion. Such was evident from the beginnings of this détente: in 1944, for example, the party's Central Committee declared the need for renewed initiatives to combat religion through "scientific-educational propaganda" (Powell, 1975: 38) and in 1947, a large-scale antireligious campaign was initiated throughout society[44]. In 1950, however, articles in the Soviet press began to argue that religion would not simply wither away under socialism; in 1954, likewise, the Central Committee called for the intensification of antireligious propaganda in response to the church's appeal among Soviet youth (Pospielovsky, 1984b: 329-330). At the end of the decade, Nikita Khrushchev launched a comprehensive campaign against religion that renewed parish closures en masse and "unleashed a wave of beatings, imprisonment, rape and murder" against the church (Duncan, 1991: 318). The logic underpinning this offensive aligned with Khrushchev's promise to show the last priest on television by the end of the seventh five-year plan, the veracity of which matched his projection that communism would be achieved "in the main" by 1980.

It was during Khrushchev's repressions that the ROC began to diversify its approach to the state and Soviet public. It would continue to act as a proponent of Soviet foreign policy on the world stage, but paired this with a domestic emphasis on the church's significance to the history of Russian statehood. Initially, this strategy was poorly received; Patriarch Alexei I was berated at a Kremlin conference in 1960 after listing church contributions to Russia, and his speechwriter was forced into retirement (Pospielovsky, 1984b: 335). Nevertheless, the Patriarch's emphasis on *Russian* history and the *Russian* state aligned with sentiments that had bubbled to the surface of public discourse[45] by the mid-sixties; notable here was the establishment of the All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments, whose membership grew rapidly over the following decades (Robinson, 2019: 168). The movement denounced

[44] Carried out by Komsomol, a Communist youth organization.
[45] Such was also partially facilitated by the relative rehabilitation of pre-Soviet Russian history that took place under Stalin, which made room for consideration of certain tsars as progressive figures (Duncan, 1991: 320).

Khrushchev's renewed attacks on churches, and in 1966, an essay by Vladimir Soloukhin[46] appeared in *Molodaya Gvardiya*[47] which condemned, among other things, the Soviet practice of giving new communist names to sites of cultural significance to Russia.

The Brezhnev period (1964–1982) marked the end of large-scale repressions against the church and would see the further development of public fascination with historical Russia as a contrast to the Soviet state[48]. Such was compounded by a dissipating enthusiasm for Marxist-Leninist ideology and renewed interest in Orthodox writers such as Nikolai Berdyaev, Vladimir Solovyov, and Fyodor Dostoevsky (Duncan, 1988: 319). The church, for its part, found itself pulled in several different directions at once; Orthodox dissidents such as Gleb Yakunin, Nikolai Eshliman, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1972) expressed deep disappointment at the hierarchy's docility and cooperation with the authorities, while bishops feared that any attempted shifts away from this relationship might provoke severe reprisals (Pospielovsky, 1998: 338). Although severe state responses had become significantly less likely during the Brezhnev era, the Orthodox hierarchy remained on a tight leash: after the death of Patriarch Alexei I in 1970, for example, the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) cooperated with the KGB to ensure that Metropolitan Pimen, a bishop considered passive by his predecessor, was selected for the patriarchal office over Metropolitan Nikodim, whom the late patriarch praised as a talented leader (ibid. 332). Further evidence of close interaction between ROC hierarchs and the CRA arrived in the Furov Report, which was leaked to the West in 1979 and included lists of bishops considered cooperative or hostile to state policy, along with those in need of more surveillance (Oppenheim, 1991: 293)[49].

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[46] Soloukhin was later forced to assure the public of his atheism in 1982 after previously expressing belief in God (Duncan, 1991: 323).

[47] A monthly literary magazine founded as an organ of the Komsomol. In 1970, the Politburo decided to fire its editor and compel the publication to tone down its cultural conservatism (Duncan, 1988: 38).

[48] Soviet authorities had in fact encouraged a type of patriotism—especially during the Second World War—but such was distinct from a plainly *Russian* nationalism. Officially, the Soviet Union discouraged the latter and instead proposed "that the various peoples of the Soviet Union would eventually merge into one Soviet nation"; this view caused tension with nationalists and Party members who believed that Russians were on track to become ethnic minorities within the country (Robinson, 2019: 169).

[49] The report also indicated that Patriarch Pimen and Archbishop Alexei (Ridiger) —the future patriarch—were largely cooperative with state authorities (ibid. 301-302).

Despite this close interaction between ROC hierarchs and the CRA, the church continued framing itself as an essential component of Russian history, to the chagrin of the authorities[50]. 1980 marked the six hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo; this led to "an outburst of Russian nationalist feeling in the Soviet media… which was unprecedented since the Stalin era" and afforded the ROC another opportunity to publicize itself (Duncan, 1991: 321). The Leningrad Seminary and Academy had also managed to sidestep an informal ban on its acceptance of students possessing degrees from secular institutions; as a result, some Communist Party officials soon found their own children joining the ranks of the priesthood (Pospielovsky, 1984b: 457–458). The changing atmosphere seemed to have little effect on the Party, however, and the later administrations of Andropov (1982–1984) and Chernenko (1984–1985) saw some efforts to reignite anti-religious initiatives.

Three major shifts in ecclesial politics—as well as its relations with the state—would begin to take place in the final decade of the Soviet Union's existence. The first of these was an end to the antagonistic orientation of state policy toward religion. Such was not necessarily inevitable; the beginning of Mikhail Gorbachev's term as General Secretary actually saw renewed press campaigns against the intelligentsia for "flirting with God" (ibid. 353)[51]. Nevertheless, Gorbachev also regarded the intelligentsia as an important ally in the state's efforts to raise public standards of morality and combat alcoholism. Meanwhile, on the international stage, Gorbachev sought to put an end to the costly Cold War—such encouraged a turn to democratization, and with it, moves to realize the religious freedoms nominally guaranteed by the Soviet constitution.

Put plainly, policy priorities of the Soviet government—both domestic and foreign in orientation—had coalesced into a political atmosphere conducive to the re-emergence of the ROC to public prominence, which is exactly what occurred in 1988—the year that marked a millennium since the baptism of the Rus'.

[50] Then party secretary Konstantin Chernenko (1983) gave an address to the Central Committee in which he blamed international imperialism for planting religiosity in the USSR and injecting it with a nationalist, anti-Soviet orientation.
[51] Several months prior, Gorbachev (1987: 405) echoed his predecessor's concern about "reactionary nationalist and religious survivals". Unlike Chernenko, however, he primarily blamed the intelligentsia for this, rather than international forces.

In preparation for the celebrations, the Moscow Patriarchate organized three international theological conferences that saw the participation of clergy, theologians, and secular scholars alongside each other for the first time. Soviet media covered the third of these conferences extensively (ibid. 355), and in 1987, a torrent of articles appeared in the press commenting on the significance of the upcoming millennium and reassessing the history and place of religion in Soviet society[52] (Duncan, 1991: 327). Gorbachev, for his part, publicly met with the Patriarch and the rest of the Holy Synod in April of the following year[53], and promised to change state legislation to address the clergy's many grievances[54]. Two months later, the millennial celebrations were televised and received widespread publicity both within the USSR and abroad. The struggle against religion inaugurated by the October Revolution was effectively dead, and the state, press, intelligentsia, and clergy each played a role in its burial.

The softening of the state and media's approach to the church, however, does not exhaust the processes which were set into motion during this period; a second significant shift in ecclesial politics was initiated by Metropolitan Alexei (Ridiger)[55] to develop a relationship with the struggling military. By the late eighties, the Red Army was deeply demoralized—the invasion of Afghanistan had led to thousands of casualties without victory, the Warsaw Pact had collapsed—effectively signalling defeat in the Cold War—and, to top it off, the perestroika years had seen the public blame the military for many of the social, ideological, and financial problems afflicting the Soviet state (Adamsky, 2019a: 19). Conditions, therefore, were ripe for the ROC to offer moral support; in 1989, Alexei successfully petitioned the state for access to the relics of St. Alexander Nevsky and organized a televised ceremony at Leningrad's Kazan Cathedral to commemorate him. During the service, the Metropolitan led a prayer of eternal memory to all soldiers "who had fallen in defence of the Motherland." Such was particularly significant to the Red Army, which

[52] These betrayed significant breaks with press narratives that had prevailed prior to glasnost; denunciations of the previous antireligious campaigns began to appear alongside effective repudiations of the view that religion was eradicable.
[53] The first meeting of its sort since the wartime meetings with Stalin.
[54] In 1990, Gorbachev delivered on these promises with the proclamation of the "Law of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic on Freedom of Worship", which ended, among other things, the state's official promotion of atheism.
[55] Elected patriarch in 1990.

understood this as recognition of its sacrifices in Afghanistan; losses largely ignored, downplayed, or purposefully concealed from public view by the party (J. Garrard and C. Garrard, 2008: 50–51). This marked the first public effort of the ROC to lay the foundations of future ties with the military, the dynamics of which will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting here that Alexei's connections with the authorities[56] likely helped facilitate this display of support, and Alexei would continue his campaign of requisitioning saintly relics in the years to come. Many of these were considered "lost" by the Soviet government, but would be located with ease by Alexei, a fact celebrated by the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* (1991). Such suggests that Alexei had become adept at negotiation with the state and privy to knowledge accessible through close association with these same authorities. To this extent, and not lacking some measure of irony, decades of close contact between the state and church hierarchy likely helped facilitate the rapid re-emergence of the ROC as a significant social actor during the late eighties and early nineties—an outcome opposite to that originally desired by the state.

A third shift in ecclesial politics echoed the canonical drama initiated during the Russian Revolution and Civil War, for as the Soviet Union disintegrated, so too did the jurisdiction of the ROC fracture. In effect, the end of the USSR also meant the collapse—or significant minimization—of ROC influence over churches throughout the former Eastern Bloc. The Church would experience its most serious losses in Ukraine, however. The first of these was represented by the independence of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which had been banned and forcibly integrated into the ROC in 1946 after the annexation of Ukraine's western borderland regions (Wanner and Yelensky, 2019: 258). The UGCC managed to survive underground, however, and the perestroika era provided an opportune moment for reconsolidation. This was predicated, in the first place, by Ukrainian nationalist sentiments centred in Galicia, which regarded the ROC as an instrument of Russian domination; in the second, by the return of Ukrainian Catholic priests

[56] First evinced by the Furov report.

from imprisonment and exile (Pospielovsky, 1998: 363–364). In 1988, the Ukrainian CRA indicated that the UGCC was no longer banned, and, after a meeting between Gorbachev and the Pope a year later, the UGCC was officially legalized. The majority of parishes in Western Ukraine then separated from the ROC (Bremer, 2016: 8); such was contested by the Moscow Patriarchate, which argued that these parishes legally belonged to the ROC. Ukrainian Catholics argued in turn that the parishes were not the rightful property of the ROC, as the Soviet government had seized them from the UGCC by force decades earlier. Western Ukrainian authorities, for their part, sided with the UGCC, and the Vatican provided the funding necessary for a solid ecclesial administration to be set up in short order (ibid. 10).

The independence of the UGCC, however, was further accompanied by the (re)emergence of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kievan Patriarchate (UOC–KP). The former had persisted in exile after its liquidation in the thirties, and in 1989, an ROC priest in Lviv switched his parish's jurisdiction to the UAOC. Then, in 1990, a synod was held to elect Metropolitan Mystyslav of Philadelphia as patriarch; this church would also split, however, after the defrocked Metropolitan Filaret declared his status as Mystyslav's exarch. Mystyslav, along with the majority of the Galician UAOC rejected this; autocephalists in Volhynia and eastern Ukraine, however, followed Filaret and soon formed the UOC-KP. The import of these developments will be discussed in greater detail later, but for now, it will suffice to note the end of the USSR saw the ecclesial territory within Ukraine subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate shrink considerably[57]. This became a major concern for the ROC in the late eighties and early nineties, and has only increased in relevance since.

As the USSR continued to dissolve, the ROC—quite predictably—did not go out of its way to defend it. Patriarch Alexei II denounced the Soviet attack on Lithuania in January 1991 and asked Gorbachev to refrain from using force to put down independence movements in the Baltics (Pospielovsky, 1998: 368). He denounced the attempted August Coup of the same year, and, along with it, communism in

[57] It should be noted that, at the time, the Orthodox world—including the Ecumenical Patriarchate—did not recognize these splits as canonically legitimate, for they were initiated unilaterally without the permission of the ROC.

general. A new chapter in Russian church-state relations was poised to begin, and both actors would enter this on terms substantially differing from those present in the early twentieth century.

Summary.

The twentieth century saw the ramifications of the Petrine reforms to Russian church-state relations come to a head; the ROC's lack of independence vis-à-vis the Tsarist state landed the former in serious trouble as the latter began to flounder and crumble in the early twentieth century. The February Revolution, for its part, potentially opened a path toward separation of church and state—although this was not altogether desired by clergy and Orthodox intelligentsia. The October Revolution, however, foreclosed this option and instead delivered not conventional secularism, or "neutrality" of the state vis-à-vis religion, but rather a state whose success was ideologically bound up with the abolition of religion. As far as Russian Orthodoxy was concerned, such was by no means a dictate of realpolitik: the church showed little interest in defending the Tsarist regime during the February Revolution, it explicitly refused to take sides during the Civil War under the leadership of Patriarch Tikhon, and displayed a remarkable degree of loyalty to the Soviet state until the latter's concluding years. That this allegiance was significantly grounded in fear after extended periods of mass terror, arrests, and executions of the clergy and laity is beyond doubt, but it would nevertheless remain in place in the decades following Khrushchev's final push to eliminate religion. At bottom, Soviet policy vis-à-vis the ROC is inexplicable absent consideration of the state's Marxist-Leninist *identity* and the *beliefs* about religion that accompanied this identity. And, even after it had become clear that the goal of eliminating religion was no longer feasible, any formal retreat on this matter would involve some significant repudiation of the state's ideological commitments and thus, in turn, essential claims to legitimacy in the face of the public.

Going forward, there are three other matters to take into account. First, the ROC served as a distinctly Russian foil to the Soviet state's explicitly transethnic identity. It was, for all intents and purposes, the most significant institutional representative of pre-revolutionary Russian statehood remaining in existence. Indeed, after Stalin's rehabilitation of certain aspects of pre-Soviet Russian history, part of the

ROC's survival strategy involved repeated emphasis on its connections to the historical inception, struggles, and victories associated with Russian statehood[58]. The cultural conservatism which took root in Soviet society during the sixties and seventies, meanwhile, stressed the preservation of churches, icons, and other "artifacts" connected to Russian history. In the eighties, these developments gained further momentum from the six hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo and the millennial anniversary of the Baptism of Rus', when public fascination with Russian (rather than Soviet) culture reached heights all but unprecedented in the country's history[59]. Thus, ironically, the church's efforts to prove its patriotic value to the Communist Party had the side effect of producing substantial contributions to the type of nationalism that would eventually challenge Soviet statehood itself.

Second, and related, close contact between state authorities and clergy produced a hierarchy experienced in dealing with the state. The ROC had to submit to the control of the CRA and the influence of the KGB in order to function, but a by-product of this relationship was a church well-positioned to make strategic moves in the late eighties and early nineties. It is likely, for example, that Patriarch Alexei II's cooperation with the authorities largely enabled his efforts to regain possession of church relics, which in turn facilitated heavily publicized ceremonies conducive to the ROC's public revival and efforts to develop relationships with other social actors—most notably the military—that could prove useful to a newly independent church.

Third, while splits are by no means unprecedented in the history of the ROC, the twentieth century saw a dramatic increase in challenges to the ROC's canonical authority and territory. Some of these, such as those headed by the Renovationist movement and UAOC, received direct support from the Soviet state in its efforts to fracture the ROC. The Karlovcians, for their part, found themselves used as a political instrument of Nazi Germany, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate—while not a split—came under the influence

[58] This was paired with a vocal support of Soviet foreign policy and the latter's suspicious attitude toward the West, which the Church already possessed prior to the Soviet era and maintained after the fall of the USSR.
[59] With the partial exception of the Great Patriotic War, which saw a revival of a nationalism that explicitly presented the Soviet state as a continuation of Russian civilization.

of the United States during the onset of the Cold War. The final years of the Soviet Union, likewise, saw the reemergence of a Ukrainian nationalism that supported ecclesial independence from the Moscow Patriarchate.

Taken together, the developments in church-state relations that took place during the Soviet era left the ROC in a position at once opportune and perilous. On the one hand, it would enter the post-socialist era severely scarred from painful schisms and decades of persecution, its reputation tainted by submission to and cooperation with state authorities, and its canonical territory outside of Russia facing serious new challenges. On the other hand, the institution now effectively possessed centuries' worth of experience dealing with state administrations varying from stifling to outright hostile in their behaviour and attitudes toward the clergy. Finally, and in no small part due to the closeness of church-state relations that had characterized preceding centuries, the ROC would engage with the newly forming Russian Federation as the sole surviving institutional link to Russian statehood dating back to the days of the Kievan Rus'.

# CHAPTER 4. THE REEMERGENCE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Having established the historical context for contemporary church-state relations, the analysis now turns away from centuries to discuss a single decade, namely that which followed the dismantlement of the Soviet Union. What follows retains a roughly chronological structure, beginning with an examination of the conditions in which the ROC found itself in the early nineties and closing with the end of Boris Yeltsin's presidency. It was during this decade that the ROC reemerged as an important participant in public life, reconsolidated its institutional presence and connections to state authorities, and began to articulate an independent perspective on Russia's place in the world.

## Section I. Fractured Territory, Bridged Institutions

As discussed above, the dissolution of the Union left the ROC in a political landscape suffused with new opportunities and challenges. In the first place, the Church gained new rights and freedoms following the liberalization of laws pertaining to religion and the abolition of the Council for Religious Affairs. The Church had also benefitted from extensive media coverage of the millennial celebrations and other ceremonies; the breakup of the Soviet Union, meanwhile, meant a larger proportion of Orthodox believers in relation to Muslims, Protestants, and Catholics within the newly formed Russian Federation (Krindatch, 2006: 279). The ROC's religious primacy, however, would soon be challenged from abroad; Russia's transition to the nation–state system, meanwhile, was not followed by the Church, whose canonical territory extended beyond the new state's borders. These developments would place the ROC in an extraordinary position in which much influence could be lost or gained.

To understand the ROC's behaviour in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War, it is first necessary to note that the newly established religious freedoms within Russia—as well as the independence of former Soviet states—presented significant threats to the canonical reach of the Church. Ecclesial movements aimed at autocephaly and independence from the Moscow Patriarchate developed in Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, Ukraine, and much of Central Asia. Taken together, these could have translated into the loss of approximately 60% of the Moscow Patriarchate's parishes (Davis, 1996: 279), as

well as several significant sources of income (Richters, 2013: 86). In effect, this would have made the Patriarchate of Bucharest larger than that of Moscow, thereby all but extinguishing the latter's claim to leadership in the Orthodox world. Adding to the ante, the opening of Russia to foreign proselytism meant influxes of religious competitors at home; thousands of Protestant (and a smaller number of Catholic) missionaries[60] made their way to Russia and set up hundreds of new churches. The dramatic increase in missionary activity was initially exaggerated by domestic media (Krasikov, 1999: 261), and missionary organizations sometimes cooperated with the ROC, but was nevertheless regarded in general by the Church as encroachment on Orthodox territory[61].

Thus, while a largely inert, passive approach to domestic and foreign affairs may have proven conducive to the ROC's survival during the Soviet era, the changing religious landscape of the post-Soviet sphere militated against the continuation of this strategy. No longer, likewise, could the Moscow Patriarchate rely on the "imperial" political and territorial configuration of the Tsarist or Soviet state to maintain its authority over Orthodox parishes outside of Russia. The future of church-state relations within Russia, meanwhile, took its place among the many open questions regarding the newly-established (and constitutionally secular) state's identity, political commitments, and development strategies. To put the matter plainly, the Church of the early nineties found itself largely *on its own*; its place within Russia and the latter's "near abroad", likewise, would largely depend on its own capacities for independent initiative. Much of this activity would be directed toward redefining the Church's relationship to Russian society in general, the state and its armed forces in particular.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Patriarch Alexei II initiated efforts in the late eighties to establish connections with the Soviet military. The dissolution of the USSR, naturally, had not resolved the Armed Forces' issues, but indeed exacerbated their concerns about the future. In January 1992, three weeks

[60] From the United States, Europe, and even South Korea. Hundreds of Russian-speaking Ukrainian evangelicals also made their way to Russia to start establishing new churches (Löfstedt, 2020: 286).
[61] Of the many missionary groups that came to Russia, Protestants saw the most success. In Russia's Far East, for example, Protestant communities grew in the nineties to outnumber those of the ROC (Dudarenok and Fedirko, 2020: 176).

after the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union, five thousand senior commanders of Russia's armed forces gathered for a meeting in the Kremlin to discuss this topic (Adamsky, 2019a: 19). To the surprise of many, among the keynote speakers was Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk. His speech[62], for present purposes, is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, the Metropolitan expressed sympathy with and support for the Russian military, positing a strong connection between the responsibilities involved in military service and the moral character of servicemen:

> Self-sacrifice is the denial of oneself for the sake of others. This is a moral and spiritual feat, and a person who is internally weak and wicked is not capable of accomplishing it… Therefore, a warrior, like no one else, needs to maintain high ideals and moral integrity. Undermining these ideals deprives a soldier of the moral motivation for his military work and transforms him into a mercenary. An army without high moral ideals not only loses the ability to defend the Fatherland, but becomes a force dangerous to its own people. It is no coincidence that the moral and ideological decay of the enemy army has always been an especially important task for opposing sides.

Second, Kirill outlined what he perceived as a dangerous geopolitical situation latent in the breakup of the USSR into fifteen sovereign states. His argument develops as follows: the historical community of nations occupying Russia extends back, in the case of the Slavs, to the baptismal font of the Kievan Rus'. The peoples comprising this community have recently formed independent states. While this is understandable for a variety of reasons, it would be a mistake for politicians to take the principle of state sovereignty to extremes, for the peoples of these newly-formed independent states still remain one, united by centuries of living together. Ignoring this is just as dangerous as the past mistake of ignoring national differences. He thus calls on the nations of the former Soviet Union to voluntarily limit their exercise of state sovereignty

[62] See Lukichev (2016: 78-82) for the full text.

to avoid planting "a bomb that will surely explode someday". He closes this argument with a story relating these issues to the military and Russia-Ukraine relations:

> There are also special moral reasons for the Church to raise its voice on this issue today. I will again refer to the experience of my communication with the Baltic sailors. The commander of one of the formations of the Baltic Fleet is in this room. I talked to him on January 13 in the city of Baltiysk, and he told me his story. He is in the Baltic Fleet, his son is an officer in the Black Sea Fleet[63]. But what happens if father and son take the oath of allegiance to different states? Well then, what if these states, God forbid, ever decide to sort out their relations by force of arms! Will the father raise his hand against his son, and the son his hand against his father? Today, all of us, all of you, my dear brothers, as well as politicians, have a huge, epochal responsibility: in the face of our great history, in the face of our much-suffering people, to do everything to harmoniously combine the free national development of sovereign states with the centuries-old historical community of their peoples.

The Metropolitan's speech communicated the ROC's willingness to form a relationship with the Russian military, as well as the Church's misgivings regarding the breakup of the Soviet Union. The address was favourably received (Adamsky, 2019a: 21), and over the following years, more formal ties between the Church and the armed forces would be established. In June 1993, Kirill attended a Kremlin ceremony for military academy graduates, after which he secured a meeting with Defence Minister Pavel Grachev. Discussed was the possibility of cooperation between the ROC and the military on the spiritual and moral education of military personnel (Lukichev, 2016: 11); an agreement was further reached to begin the work of outlining the objectives of this partnership, which was formalized in March 1994 with a joint agreement

[63] At this time, the Black Sea Fleet's national allegiance was ambiguous. Both Russia and Ukraine would assert claims to the ships and bases associated with it (Zaborsky, 1995).

signed by the Patriarch and Defence Minister legally entitling the ROC to, among other things, meet and acquaint servicemen with Orthodoxy (J. Garrard and C. Garrard, 2008: 217).

The aim of this agreement was, on the one hand, to enlist the aid of the ROC in the military's efforts to combat alarming levels of desertion[64], corruption, dedovschina[65], suicides, and alcoholism afflicting its institutions. On the other hand, the ROC also stood to benefit considerably: the agreement marked a milestone in efforts to redevelop exclusive[66] ties to the Russian state and society at large. As Lukichev (2016: 11) emphasizes, this document not only established a formal basis for cooperation between the church and armed forces, "but also became a kind of precedent for building relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and other security agencies of the ministries and departments of the Russian Federation."

The Church hierarchy moved quickly to maximize contact between clergy and servicemen. Indeed, one month after the signing of the joint agreement, the Holy Synod declared this cooperation to be among the Church's most important objectives (Mozgovoy, 2005). Moves were then made to appoint clergy at all levels—from the upper rungs of the hierarchy to local parishes—responsible for fostering connections with the armed forces (Lukichev, 2016: 100). Kirill, for his part, focused much of his attention toward those branches of the armed forces considered the most strategically significant (such as the nuclear-armed Strategic Missile Forces) along with the Navy and Airborne Forces, where servicemen often operated under conditions especially risky or stressful (ibid. 77). To further coordinate clerical relations with the military, the ROC established the Department for Relations with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies (DRAFLEA) in 1995. DRAFLEA would serve as a formal point of contact between clergy and military

[64] This reached a height in 1994 as the Russian army finally departed from East Germany—a veritable insult to injury following the other "humiliations" that accompanied the end of the Cold War (J. Garrard and C. Garrard, 2008: 219). Defence Minister Grachev reported that 60% of conscripts failed to report to their units that year.
[65] Physical and psychological abuse of junior conscripts by senior servicemen.
[66] As Adamsky (2019a: 22) notes, "the military internalized a subtle message: only representatives of the ROC would get access to the soldiers." J. Garrard and C. Garrard (2008: 220) also highlight that while the joint agreement stipulates the equal opportunity of Buddhist, Jewish, and Muslim servicemen to practice their faiths, Christian confessions outside of Russian Orthodoxy were omitted.

personnel, and would advocate for the full reintroduction of a military priesthood[67], an institution existent in the Russian military prior to the revolution.

Among the most politically significant ties established during this period were those between the ROC and Russia's nuclear scientists and servicemen. Like the broader military, the latter had found themselves in a desperate situation in the wake of the dissolution of the USSR. As Adamsky (2019a: 34) emphasizes, "[p]olitical support, ideological meanings, social status, and public respect, even basic food supplies—all of it had vanished at once. The industrial functioning of the atomic project and social-economic maintenance of its closed cities was falling apart." Initially, it was a convergence of sacral and secular geography that placed the ROC and VNIIEF[68] into contact: the heart of the Soviet Union's atomic project was located in a closed city known as Arzamas-16, previously known as Sarov for its proximity to a monastery home to one of Russia's most famous holy men, Saint Seraphim. After regaining the latter's relics in 1990, Patriarch Alexei II organized a widely-publicized procession of around twenty thousand pilgrims to return Saint Seraphim to Arzamas-16 (ibid. 32). The nuclear scientists of VNIIEF hoped the patriarch's visit would allow them to raise awareness regarding their poor living conditions and improve their public image[69]. After the procession, Alexei and Kirill met with the leadership of the nuclear research institute and found common ground. It was from this point onward that the ROC would devote special attention to cultivating relations with Russia's nuclear industry, acting as a key advocate of the latter before the state and society at large (ibid. 37).

In retrospect, it is somewhat unsurprising that church hierarchs launched such extensive efforts to develop ties with the military during the end of the Cold War. As noted above, the liberalization of religious policy initiated by Gorbachev granted a broader range of manoeuvre to—but also complicated, and to some extent imperilled—the ROC's position within Russia and abroad. The Moscow Patriarchate possessed

[67] Discussed in the next chapter.
[68] The All-Russian Research Institute of Experimental Physics.
[69] The high costs of the atomic project, the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, and enthusiasm for international disarmament had all cast a shadow over the work of nuclear scientists (ibid. 34).

limited means of influencing the fate of its territory outside Russia's borders[70]; its newly gained freedoms and public popularity, however, could be leveraged to develop institutional connections conducive to the maintenance and potential elevation of its place within Russian society. In this context, the military was all but the perfect candidate for ecclesial outreach. Like the Church, the armed forces were themselves confronted by major institutional challenges in the wake of the USSR's collapse; the Church, however, was well-positioned to present itself as a solution to some of the unique issues confronting the military. Cooperation between the two, likewise, would secure the ROC a "non-political" foothold in a state constitutionally committed to secularism. It would not be long before the Church would begin to score significant victories through relations with civil authorities, as well. It is to this relationship that the analysis now turns.

Precedents for warming relations had been established just prior to the dissolution of the USSR: Patriarch Alexei II attended Yeltsin's inauguration as President of the RSFSR in July 1991, and in the following month agreed to publicly support Gorbachev against a coup attempted by communist hardliners. Yeltsin would further attend a televised Easter service in 1991, evidently for political purposes[71], signalling interest in association with the ROC. Despite these developments, the broader church—both clergy and believers alike—was divided in its reception of Yeltsin's political orientation. As White and McAllister (2000: 368) note, "[t]he church was hostile to communism, as an atheist doctrine, and yet it was not so clearly committed to democracy or pluralism, or to private ownership." In other words, much of the ROC did not share Yeltsin's initial enthusiasm for market reforms, liberal democratic governance, and warming

[70] In Estonia, for example, the ROC launched a concerted effort to maintain control of its Soviet-era parishes. Lawsuits against the Estonian government as well as appeals to the European Union (EU) and international organizations for support, however, largely came to naught (see Richters, 2013: 75-95 for an extended discussion of these disputes). Such was largely the output of a legal mismatch between the ROC's arguments—couched in reference to canon law—and the secular norms enshrined in the Estonian constitution and observed by actors in European politics. Put in plain terms, the specific legal framework used to legitimate the ROC's claims to parishes outside of Russia possessed little to no purchase in secular courts; the Church's capacity to defend its de jure authority over this territory was correspondingly constrained.

[71] Yeltsin was an atheist, and his participation was thus interpreted as an attempt to curry favour with Christian voters.

relations with the West. Simultaneously more radical and vocal was Metropolitan Ioann (Snychev)[72], who emerged as a figurehead for nationalists blaming Jews for Russia's past and present woes. Patriarch Alexei, therefore, found himself in a difficult position: close alignment with Yeltsin could exacerbate tensions within the church, perhaps even leading to splits, while seclusion from the presidency would likely hinder the ROC's efforts to attain a more secure position in Russia's newly liberalizing society.

In an ostensible effort to thread this needle, the Patriarch attempted to advocate for the Church's independent interests vis-à-vis the Yeltsin administration. In April 1993, for example, Alexei requested the government establish a commission composed of state officials and representatives of Russia's major religions with the power to permit or restrict foreign religious missions for the next five to seven years. Such, Alexei hoped, would grant the church time to organize and educate its clergy to weather the introduction of Western religious missions (Pospielovsky, 1998: 375). The Supreme Soviet prepared a bill; facing criticism from liberal commentators both foreign and domestic, however, Yeltsin vetoed it.

The tensions raised by this decision—as well as Yeltsin's larger programme of reform—came to the fore during the constitutional crisis of September-October 1993 which resulted in a standoff between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet. The ROC officially maintained neutrality, the Patriarch exhorting both sides to refrain from violence and offering to mediate their dispute. Some priests and bishops, however, openly sided with parliament (ibid. 375). The church hierarchy, for its part, condemned the violence initiated by the anti-Yeltsin opposition on October 3rd—but did not denounce the armed reprisals of Yeltsin. After the latter's victory, two significant developments took place in the organization of both church and state: the ROC moved to minimize political factionalism within its structure (as well as bolster its claims to political detachment) through a ban on clerical participation in elections and legislative bodies at all

[72] Successor to Alexey's previous position as Metropolitan of Leningrad.

levels of government[73] (ibid. 357). This move aligned with public preferences[74], and set a general precedent: regardless of their interactions, ranks of clergy and policy-makers would not intermix. A referendum held in December, likewise, secured a new constitution for the Russian state that prioritized the powers of the presidency. Both developments signalled the formation of a sort of parallelism: the primacy accorded to the presidency now mirrored that possessed by the patriarchal office. Relations between the former and the latter, likewise, would set the tone for those between state and church at large.

Following the constitutional crisis, Alexei continued to present the Church as a friendly but free agent vis-à-vis the Yeltsin administration. During the spring of 1994, for example, Yeltsin requested that all public figures sign a statement indicating willingness to place the interests of the nation above those of individual factions; almost all Church leaders signed, save for Metropolitan Ioann, who instead signed a document calling for the public to overthrow the government (ibid. 373). The radicalism espoused by Ioann and others indicated that the Church remained a site from which communists and nationalists could draw electoral support against Yeltsin. Alexei made moves to limit the influence of Ioann and the nationalists within the Church itself; McGann (1999: 14) suggests, however, that Alexei may have been content to allow them to exert pressure on Yeltsin and the State Duma[75].

During the First Chechen War, the Patriarch and a Chechen Mufti together called for a cessation of bloodshed from all sides (Patriarch Alexei II, 1995a); this pacifistic line came to an end in October 1995,

[73] Gleb Yakunin (see Chapter 3) famously refused to withdraw his candidacy—such served as the pretext for his defrocking in November 1993. This ban seems to obtain less force in the UOC–MP, however, whose Metropolitan Agafangel of Odesa and Izmail ran twice in Ukrainian regional elections. Yurash (2005) further details extensive involvement of the UOC–MP in Victor Yanukovich's 2004 electoral campaign.

[74] The Moscow Patriarchate received numerous letters from believers complaining about priests running for office (ibid. 357). Clerical participation in heated political debates was deemed unseemly. Later FOM surveys (1998a, 1998b) found further evidence of public skepticism of direct interaction between clergy and politicians: only 40% of Russians approved of politicians participating in religious ceremonies, for example, while 30% plainly disapproved. In addition, 56% voiced disapproval of clerics attempting to influence the choices made by voters in government elections.

[75] This claim should be qualified, however, by the following considerations: Uertz (2001: 135) suggests that the Church intentionally delayed acting on a 1994 resolution to draft a social statement until after the presidential elections of 1996 – ostensibly to avoid providing political fuel to communists and other groups who were attempting to associate their policies with Christianity. In addition, as J. Garrard and C. Garrard (2008: 114-116) note, there was a fairly dramatic conflict between Alexei and Ioann that lasted until the latter's death in 1995. The appearance of flirtation between the Patriarch and the "red-brown coalition" (McGann, 1999: 14), therefore, was likely a bluff.

however, when Alexei (1995b) instead called for Russia's young men to join the army "to serve the Motherland." Many were shocked by this about-turn, interpreting it as a capitulation of the Church to state policy priorities[76]. I would suggest, however, that the move was likely motivated in large part by the developing relationship between the ROC and the military described above: by 1995, formal ties between the two had been established, and among the many complaints about the war were references to high rates of dedovschina and suicide within the armed forces—that is to say, the types of issues to which the clergy presented themselves as a solution. That the Church came to regard the war as an opportunity to deepen its ties with the military is indeed indicated by a line within the October address itself: "Your stay in the army will contribute to even deeper interaction between it and the Church for the benefit of Russia and our people." The Patriarch's apparent change of mind on this "fratricide" (1995a), therefore, likely represented as much a pursuit of the ROC's institutional interests as it did a gesture of goodwill to Yeltsin.

Nevertheless, that the interests of the President and Patriarch had become intertwined to a significant extent became clear during the 1996 elections. Yeltsin, for his part, appeared eager to foster a strong association between himself and the Church in the minds of voters; television cameras followed him visiting churches, participating in liturgies, and making public appearances with Alexei. He even went so far as to participate in a televised meeting with Alexei in the Kremlin Cathedral Square on the final day of the presidential campaign, perhaps in violation of Russian election law[77] (Hockstader, 1996). The Patriarch implored voters to "make the right choice" regarding Russia's future. It is clear that Alexei had already made his choice[78], likely in view of anticipated political gains that would add more fuel to the at once public and political resurgence of the Church. The analysis now turns to these developments, as well as a shifting orientation of the church and state to the international sphere.

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[76] See, for instance, Feofanov (1995).

[77] The law banned political appearances on the final day of a presidential campaign. It could be argued that a meeting with a spiritual authority falls short of a "political appearance", but Alexei's appeal to the electorate suggests otherwise.

[78] The Patriarch would later attend Yeltsin's 1996 inauguration, just as he did in 1991. Interestingly, it appears that regular attendees of Church services would have preferred a different electoral outcome: in contrast with less active believers, this group favoured the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and its candidate Gennady Zyuganov (Dubin, 1996: 18).

Section II. Domestic Victories, Foreign Challenges

The willingness of Patriarch Alexei II to publicly associate with President Yeltsin was likely due in large part to the latter's commitments to the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. Indeed, as early as 1992, and likely in recognition of the Patriarch's support during the August Coup, Yeltsin signed a decree to establish a fund for the "Re-creation of Moscow" with the cathedral at the top of the list of projects to be completed (J. Garrard and C. Garrard, 2008: 89). In 1994, the President further approved a request that the federal government fund 85% of the associated costs (McGann, 1999: 18). Given the hefty price tag of the project—some 300 million dollars—as well as Moscow's approaching 850th anniversary, it is highly likely that the city's former mayor, Yury Luzhkov, footed much of the bill[79]. Only the lower crypt was completed in time for the 1997 celebrations, but this sufficed for a four-hour liturgy followed by a large procession and the presentation of an icon of the Hodegetria[80] as a gift to Luzhkov.

The reconstruction of the cathedral represented a major symbolic victory for the ROC. Given that the original cathedral was demolished by the order of the Politburo in 1931, the return of Christ the Saviour communicated institutional survival through and beyond a period of extreme persecution[81]. It would further signify the restoration of the Church to a prominent place in the public sphere. Such indeed corresponded to the process by which the cathedral returned to Moscow's skyline, which involved much cooperation between the Patriarch, the Mayor of the capital, and the President. In other words, the reconstruction resulted in an overt, material representation of the Church's capacity to successfully engage with the newly-

[79] McGann (ibid.) argues that this would also help explain why, despite criticisms from the project's chief designer, Patriarch Alexei opted to push for the completion of basic reconstruction by 1997 – if Luzhkov had agreed to cover a significant portion of the expenses, he likely expected the cathedral to be ready for the anniversary.
[80] This is a specific type of icon which depicts the Virgin Mary pointing to her child, Christ, as the source of salvation. As J. Garrard and C. Garrard (2008: 91) note, this gesture had symbolic significance operating on multiple levels. One of these likely had a political slant: Alexei had called upon the Mother of God during his denunciation of the August Coup, the failure of which likely saved Luzhkov's political career. The Patriarch, likewise, publicly attributed the coup's failure to the influence of Mary. It is likely that the gift, therefore, communicated not only gratitude to Luzhkov, but also implied that Luzhkov—as well as others who sided with Yeltsin in 1991—should be thankful to the Church.
[81] To a certain extent, this echoed the motivation for the original cathedral's nineteenth-century construction as a memorial to the Russian lives lost in war with the secularizing armies of Napoleon.

(re)forming Russian state. The Church's next major victory would require only textual changes, rather than substantial funding and thousands of hours of labour, but nevertheless provoked more political resistance.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the dismantlement of the USSR, attended by a liberalization of political norms—rights to freedom of expression included—facilitated the creation of a veritable "free market" not only for private enterprise, but also for religious belief. Such helped facilitate the introduction of foreign missionary activity, which the ROC viewed as a threat to Orthodoxy's religious primacy in Russian society. The Church therefore desired limitations on foreign proselytism; such, however, would all but inevitably conflict with the state's constitutional commitment to secularism. At the time, however, the ROC possessed a formidable argument at its disposal: after seven decades of severe repression, restrictions on seminaries and theological education, and the closure of thousands of parishes, the Church was in a less than favourable position to withstand the tide of Protestants, Catholics, and other religious groups entering the country. Given, likewise, the end of Marxist-Leninist ideological hegemony, the ROC was expected to help fill in an ideational vacuum that saw much of the population feeling demoralized; initial enthusiasm for a turn to Western culture, meanwhile, was proving less than stable[82].

Put plainly, conditions were ripe for a test of the state's commitment to secularism. The task, from the Church's perspective, was to lobby for the replacement of a 1990 law which, as Krindatch (2006: 273) writes, "considered the religious life of society as a free market that is regulated only by natural competition." This effort to overturn this law led to a protracted and polarizing conflict between the Patriarch and President that, in many ways, gave expression to long-brewing tensions over Russia's path and post-Soviet future. On the Moscow Patriarchate's side were nationalists (such as the Liberal-Democrats' Vladimir Zhirinovsky) as well as communists, who also desired to curb the influence of Western religious

[82] By 1996, for example, 48% of Russians viewed Western culture as having a negative impact on the country. This figure would increase to 67% by 2002 (Obshestvennoe, 2002: 160, as cited in Krindatch, 2006: 279). As Stoeckl and Uzlaner (2022: 33) suggest, this was likely related to an extraordinary influx of "religious movements, New Age spirituality, new sexual freedom including pornography, Western music, fashion and hairstyles, new drugs … against the backdrop of painful economic reforms and inconclusive political transformations that resulted in poverty, increased crime rates, alcoholism, rising abortion rates, and other problems."

activity in Russia[83] (Dunlop, 1999: 29). A new bill aimed at accomplishing this—titled "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association"—was introduced in July 1996, and was approved by an overwhelming majority in the State Duma the following year. This came as a shock to the West, which interpreted the bill as a break from religious liberty in Russia; President Clinton, twenty-six members of the U.S. Congress, representatives of the European Union, and human rights organizations urged Yeltsin not to sign the bill into law[84]. Yeltsin vetoed the bill, arguing that it was unconstitutional and violated international law (Dunlop, 1999: 30). While Yeltsin was praised by international press for this decision, Communists and other members of the Duma criticized the President for allowing the West to "trample on Russia" and "brainwash the younger generation" (CRS, 1999).

Patriarch Alexei (1997), for his part, argued that change to Russia's religious legislation was necessary to defend the Russian people and society "from the tyranny of destructive pseudo-religious cults and foreign pseudo-missionaries"[85] and claimed that foreign powers were applying a double standard to Russia, given their possession or support for "much less liberal laws on religion"[86]. He further characterized the proposed law as a strong compromise between the varying interests in Russian society, and emphasized that it would create new opportunities for cooperation between religious organizations and the state in "charity, cultural, and educational activities, as well as in other socially significant areas." Finally, he claimed that, given parliament's nearly unanimous approval of the bill, its rejection could "create tension in Russia between the authorities and the majority of the people". Effectively, the Patriarch suggested that the adoption of the bill was in the state's best interests.

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[83] Alexander Borisov (1997), a Moscow priest, suggested that communist support was cynical, aimed at embarrassing Yeltsin on the international stage and depriving his government of access to foreign loans.

[84] American Congress went so far as to threaten to cut off $200 million in aid to Russia should the bill be passed into law (Moffett, 1997). The cuts were prevented by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, but she would nevertheless urge Russia to replace the law after its adoption (Congressional Research Service, 1999). Hereafter, this source is abbreviated as CRS.

[85] Within this discourse, as Knox (2005: 116) notes, "cults" of both foreign and domestic origination were regarded with suspicion. The Church of Scientology, Aum Shinrikyo, the Mother of God Centre and the Church of the Last Testament were presented as evidence of the destructive effects of extensive religious liberties.

[86] The Patriarch's statement does not list specific examples of this.

On August 6th, 1997, Alexei and Yeltsin met and the latter reportedly agreed to support much of the bill's substance (CRS, 1999); the President then met with representatives of several religious confessions and signed into law a modified version of the original bill on September 27th (Kazmina, 2009: 184). Such, once again, represented a considerable win for the ROC. The preamble alone, though lacking legal implications (Krindatch, 2006: 273), acknowledged the "special role" Orthodoxy has played in Russian history, and declared Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism integral to the historical heritage of the Russian people. The law stipulated, among other things, that the rights conferred to religious communities would depend on their registration with the Russian government, which could be attained through documentation to prove at least fifteen years of existence within the country. In effect, this meant more obstacles to—as well as fewer rights protecting—foreign missionary activity in the country. This legislation did not prohibit or terminate the latter altogether, of course, but nevertheless signified a significant win for the Church in its confrontation with foreign proselytism. The process by which the bill became law, as well as its contents, likewise, reflected the growing capacity and confidence of the Moscow Patriarchate to publicly advocate for its own interests and engage with domestic political blocs to achieve its objectives.

Two other matters related to the adoption of the 1997 law are relevant here. First of these is the gradual appearance of a new "bridge" between church and state in the sphere of public education. While the previous legislation of 1990 indicated that state schools would be secular, the decade would see considerably less oversight of public education (Mulders, 2008: 15). These conditions helped facilitate the establishment of contacts between clergy and teachers, which, in certain cases, led to the appearances of priests in secular classrooms. The Moscow Patriarchate, however, desired a more official presence within the education system[87], and the signing of the 1997 law contributed to a pretext for this. Though the law had reaffirmed the state's commitment to secularity in public education, Vladimir Filippov, then Minister of Education, sent a letter in June 1999 to regional educational authorities claiming that the law permits

[87] Church hierarchs also expressed concern about the quality of education provided by local priests, evidently wishing to standardize and regulate their instruction (ibid. 15).

religious education in public schools if written consent is received from parents and the education is not treated as compulsory (Richters, 2013: 38). An agreement on cooperation was reached between the Ministry and the Church that same month in recognition of Orthodoxy's "special role" in Russia's history, and the Ministry further pledged to organize a course on the "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture" (FOC). A "Coordination Council for Interaction" between the two institutions was established to facilitate future cooperation, and the Patriarch instructed "all diocesan bishops" to focus their attention on the organization of Orthodox education in public schools (Kommersant, 2002).

Though much controversy, discussion, and debate were to follow, the adoption of the 1997 law helped facilitate the attainment of significant milestones in the ROC's efforts to integrate itself into Russia's public education system. The willingness of the Ministry of Education to begin formal cooperation with the Church, however, was based on more than the law's letter and spirit alike; indeed, as Filippov (1999) argued in an address to the Patriarch and other clergy, a decade's worth of efforts to reform the education system had failed to instill the new generation with "moral and civil values". Likewise, he emphasized, the state officials seemed to consider education a matter of "secondary importance", leading to incomplete and irregular funding, bribery and corruption within schools, and extraordinary burdens on teaching staff. Thus, in addition to a request for the Church's aid in reforming the education system, the Minister also asked that the ROC help extracurricular organizations lacking state support and lend its "enormous moral authority to affirm in public opinion a caring attitude toward school, teachers, and students". This was ostensibly aimed at encouraging state officials to take on more responsibility for the education system.

One might note that the calculus behind the development of a relationship between the Church and education system bears a striking resemblance to that which led to formal cooperation with the military: like the armed forces—and particularly the nuclear industry—Russia's education system struggled with the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. It likewise found state and public support in short supply while confronting, among other problems, antisocial behaviours and practices that complicated the proper functioning of its institutions. The Church presented itself as a solution to these issues, capable of both

countering undesired practices and leveraging its influence to advocate on behalf of these institutions in the face of the public and state alike. Formal agreements and bodies were then established to facilitate cooperation, and with these, new bridges between the Church and state infrastructure.

Returning to the 1997 law, it is further worth noting that, for all intents and purposes, its signing arguably represented the first major and extremely public "break" with the reform path encouraged by Western powers after the fall of the USSR. This was by no means a definitive break, but nevertheless sufficed to evoke uproar from American and European officials, who previously supported (or at least acquiesced) Yeltsin during some of the most turbulent moments of his administration, including the constitutional crisis, the First Chechen War, and the presidential elections of 1996. Western support for Yeltsin was predicated on his reputation as an ally to the development and cementation of liberal democratic norms in Russia; the proposed 1997 law, as an expression of the interests of the Church, communists, and nationalists, likewise, was regarded by Western governments and press as a step backward in the project of post-Soviet reform. Effectively, a line had been drawn in the sand separating the preferences of domestic political forces from those of foreign powers, leaving Yeltsin in the entirely unenviable position of having to choose between the two. In the end, his decision to sign the bill into law[88] did not signify an abandonment of existing commitments to reform, but nevertheless set an important precedent for the assertion of Russia's right to "chart its own course" in the post-Soviet era.

While the adoption of the 1997 Law indicated the potential for renewed ideological conflict between Russia and the West, geopolitical issues opened and left unresolved by the end of the Cold War had placed further strain on their relations. Initially, just as the Yeltsin administration displayed enthusiasm for a liberal democratic approach to post-Soviet development, so too did former foreign minister Andrei

[88] The capacity of communists, nationalists, and the Church to exert pressure on Yeltsin was likely facilitated, in part, by the public's relative indifference toward religious freedom as a political good: in 1997, for example, only 40% of Russians voiced support for full legal equality for all churches, while 28% desired overt restrictions on non-traditional religions (Mtchedlov, 1998, as cited in Krindatch, 2006: 279). A later survey's respondents indicated that they considered "freedom of conscience" the least significant of human rights (Obshestvennoe, 2004: 124, as cited in Krindatch, 2006: 278), and in 2015, only 14% of Russians reported belief in freedom of religion as a necessary attribute of democracy (Mchedlova, 2016: 114).

Kozyrev demonstrate commitment to the construction of friendly relations with the West. The latter, however, worked to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through inclusion of post-socialist Central European states[89] and elected to bomb Bosnian Serb positions during the Bosnian War (1992-1995)[90]. Both developments provoked fears that the post-Cold War order would be dominated by the West, leaving weakened states like Russia without a meaningful voice in international affairs[91] (Sakwa, 2021: 583). Yeltsin, for his part, remained committed to presenting Russia as a "great power"; a contradiction thus formed between the state's desired status on the international stage and the subordinate role it was poised to occupy within the newly unipolar order. Kozyrev attempted to balance these considerations in his approach to foreign policy, but by the mid-nineties, political momentum had shifted away from his "Atlanticist" orientation, and he resigned from his position in 1996.

Kozyrev's replacement was Yevgeny Primakov, whose tenure as foreign minister marked a turn away from the "romantic" or "idealistic" approach to the West that accompanied the end of the Cold War. The hallmark of his time in office, as Sakwa (ibid. 522) notes, was the notion of "multipolarity": a geopolitical concept that rejected the legitimacy of "American hegemony" in international affairs, emphasizing instead the desirability of a more diffuse distribution of power. To this end, Primakov advocated closer alignment with India and China as a counterweight to U.S. influence. Though he did not reject the trappings of the international order altogether—indeed, he still desired good relations with the West and respected international institutions—his time in office signalled a turn toward a more critical, pragmatic, and competitive disposition toward the U.S. and its allies. The end to the earlier "honeymoon

[89] Here, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, whose membership was finalized in March 1999. The inclusion of these Central European states aroused fears of NATO encroachment toward Russia's borders. As Kozyrev (1999: 11, 13) would later write, "NATO was established to contain communism; yet this former enemy is gone… What is the raison d'etre of NATO today? Who is its real enemy?... NATO's advance toward Russia's borders cannot but be seen as a continuation, though by inertia, of a policy aimed at containment of Russia."

[90] Serbia was a historical ally of Russia and was viewed as a counterweight to NATO influence in the region.

[91] Also uncertain were Russia's obligations to the 25 million Russians who found themselves living "abroad" after the dissolution of the USSR, and, by extension, the Russian state's overarching relationship with its newly independent "near abroad" (Sakwa, 2020: 519).

phase" between Russia and the West received symbolic expression on March 24th, 1999, as Primakov decided to turn his Washington-bound flight around after hearing that NATO had begun to bomb Serbia.

The Yeltsin administration's disputes with the West—particularly in relation to the Yugoslav Wars—were echoed and amplified by the Moscow Patriarchate. Positioning himself as an ally to the Orthodox Serbs[92], the Patriarch (1999a) denounced NATO's attacks on Serbia as an example of "[t]he crude economic and political pressure that Western states have been practicing in recent years" devolving into open violence. During a visit to Belgrade to celebrate the Divine Liturgy with Serbian Patriarch Pavle, Alexei (1999b) further framed NATO's actions as the work of "several powerful and rich countries" who determined themselves to be the ultimate adjudicators of good and evil, eager to trample "on the will of people who want to live differently." This was paired with an assertion that the true intention underpinning the attacks on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was to "destroy the post-war world order… to impose on a people an alien order based on the dictate of brute force."

On the surface, it may have appeared that the Church was reprising its Soviet-era role as a passive proponent of the state's foreign policy. On the contrary—ecclesial commentary from the late nineties instead indicates that the ROC's skepticism toward the West and the emerging post-Cold War order was not only geopolitical in character, voiced out of sympathy for Russia's national interests, but also theological. Put plainly, the ROC began to articulate, in more overt terms, a broader critique of liberal democratic norms and their desirability on a religious basis; such suggested dissatisfaction not only with the West's purported lack of respect for international law, but also with its apparent insistence that other nations emulate its liberal democratic political, economic, and social model.

In an article titled "Circumstances of Modern Life", Metropolitan Kirill (1999) outlined the fundaments of this critique, arguing that the disparate conflicts of the post-communist era betray a common dynamic: "the resistance of the conservative principle and traditionalist worldview to the forced, if not

[92] Alexei (1999a) also requested the Serbs find ways to live in peace with Kosovo's Albanians, lest "fratricidal strife" repeatedly erupt between the two.

violent, assertion of neoliberal values." These values, according to the Metropolitan, emerged in embryonic form through the placement of man "at the core of an anthropocentric universe as the measure of all things"—a process initiated during the Renaissance, advanced by the French Revolution, and finally enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Kirill argues that Western Christianity failed to counter, and instead adopted, this "neo-pagan" substitute for the notion of man as a fallen image of God's beauty. The Orthodox "spiritual and cultural tradition", he laments, "was not represented in any way by Soviet diplomacy in developing modern standards of interstate relations and human rights … In other words … modern international standards are essentially exclusively Western and liberal standards." These standards, according to Kirill, have proven effective at regulating inter-state relations, but create conflict when attempts are made to move them into the domestic politics of sovereign states. Thus, he reasons:

> [T]he essence of the problem is found not in the fact that the liberal standard formulated at the level of international organizations is today considered the basis of international politics, but rather in that this standard is proposed as mandatory for organizing the internal life of countries and peoples, including those states whose cultural, spiritual and religious traditions are basically not represented in the formation of this standard.

Kirill closes his commentary with a call to Christians to "lay the foundations of a truly multipolar community based on standards that, while ensuring the rights and freedom of people, would preserve, rather than destroy, the values rooted in their spiritual-cultural and religious traditions."

While a document detailing the Church's official stances on political, social, and cultural issues would not appear until the following year, Kirill's article reflected the Church's growing confidence as an independent commentator on international affairs and Russia's relationship with the West. Effectively, the ROC was beginning to frame the state's disputes with the West over the post-Cold War order as a part of a larger ideological conflict provoked, rather than resolved, by the fall of the Berlin Wall. And according to

a document publicized by the World Russian People's Council[93], this struggle would possess global significance, for "[i]t is clear to us that without Russia, the world will lose perhaps the most important thing, which is appeal to God and conscience."

Summary.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union cast Russian society into a period of pronounced social, political, and economic turbulence. Russia's transition, likewise, involved adaptation not only to norms of free enterprise and competitive elections, but also to the nation-state system—developments that at once inspired hope for the future and wonder at new opportunities alongside feelings of despair and national humiliation. It is indeed difficult to exaggerate the drama of this period in which, for better or worse, fortune would favour those capable of decisive action to stake claims on the future of the state. It was under these conditions that the Russian Orthodox Church, under the leadership of Patriarch Alexei II, utilized its hierarchical structure, public popularity, and accumulated political acumen to regain a prominent position in Russian society.

The early nineties presented a constellation of prospects and perils to the Church. On the one hand, it was now free from state domination for the first time since the February Revolution and was looked to as a source of national rejuvenation and spiritual revival after the departure of Marxism-Leninism and scientific atheism. On the other hand, the privatization of industry went alongside the effective privatization of belief, leading to a sudden influx of religious competition, and the breakup of the USSR left the now *international* reach of the Moscow Patriarchate's canonical authority in a fractured and precarious state. The ROC possessed limited capacity to influence the fate of its parishes abroad, and instead initiated concerted efforts to leverage the above-mentioned advantages into the formation of a new relationship with the Russian state and society at large.

The Church negotiated its return to public life with a variety of actors. In each case examined, the ROC had something to offer the other party; to the armed forces and Ministry of Education, the Church

[93] See DECR (1999)

offered to help revive morale and counter abuses, corruption, and other issues that had become endemic in the early post-Soviet years. It also offered to advocate on behalf of these struggling institutions before the public and the state. In return, access to the military and public education—though limited in extent at this time—would provide the ROC with integration into "non-political" components of the newly developing state apparatus. This engagement allowed the Church to begin partnerships with authorities responsible for national defence and the education of future generations—areas key to modern statecraft—while maintaining a claim to operation within the confines of the constitution's commitments to secularism. In effect, the Church benefited from the state's disarray in the nineties; this permitted it to take on responsibilities ostensibly abdicated, and, in doing so, adopt a patronal role for public institutions that perceived an incapacity or unwillingness of the government to address their post-Soviet "growing pains".

With regard to executive power, Alexei cultivated a positive relationship with the Yeltsin administration through his support for the latter during the August coup attempt of 1991, the constitutional crisis of 1993, the First Chechen War, and the federal elections of 1996. In most of these cases, the Patriarch distanced the Church from overt partisanship, but nevertheless provided support of varying explicitness to Yeltsin's preferred outcomes. In other words, the Church lent legitimacy to Yeltsin during some of the most crucial moments of his presidency. A reflection of this relationship took material form with the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, which symbolized not only the revival of Russian Orthodoxy, but also an about-turn from Soviet-era hostilities in church-state relations.

Despite this, there still existed a pronounced ideological divide between the Yeltsin administration's aspirations for a pro-West, liberal democratic orientation to Russian society and the Patriarchate's more conservative, traditionalist outlook and long-held skepticism toward the West. Viewing itself as *the* holy and historical repository of Christian truth, the Church was largely unwilling to countenance competition from Protestant and Catholic missionary groups entering the country. In addition, the Patriarchate feared it lacked the institutional preparations necessary to counter this challenge to its canonical territory. The Church thus lobbied the state to recognize Orthodoxy's "special role" in Russian history and set in place

legal protections for the country's "traditional religions". This effort coincided with the interests of other domestic political forces, such as the communists and the nationalists eager to see Western cultural influence in Russia curbed[94]. So too, however, did it evoke substantial protest from the United States, the European Union, and international human rights groups concerned that the proposed law would mark a break from Russia's commitments to religious freedom. In the end, Yeltsin opted to appease domestic rather than foreign political interests, and in doing so helped secure the Church state support in its efforts to defend its canonical jurisdiction within Russia.

Another set of controversies developed concurrently on the international stage as the Yeltsin administration confronted a West ostensibly unwilling to take heed of his administration's opposition to NATO expansion and interventions in the breakup of Yugoslavia. This was reflected in a change of course discernible in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which dropped its initial post-Soviet enthusiasm for a warm relationship with the West in favour of a more pragmatic, competitive approach that emphasized multipolarity in international relations. The Russian state's geopolitical disputes with the West over the configuration of the post-Cold War order had yet to take on an explicitly ideological character, however; liberal democratic norms, both at home and abroad, effectively remained "the only game in town". Nevertheless, it was during this time that the Church began to formulate and publicize its own critique of the West that went much further in its skepticism toward the desirability of the West as a model and inspiration for Russian development post-socialism. Simply put, the end of the nineties saw the Church intensify its efforts to begin translating its historical beliefs into an ideational competitor to liberal democracy. This project will be examined in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

[94] In general terms, the ROC's status as a highly trusted public institution associated with a political orientation critical of the West made it a potential ally and source of legitimacy for the LDPR and KPRF. Nevertheless, it is clear that Alexei favoured cooperation with the Yeltsin administration. In retrospect, therefore, it appears that the Church's engagements with nationalists and communists served two distinct ends: first, they bolstered the ROC's claims to political neutrality, and second, they placed pressure on Yeltsin to interact with the Church *on terms favourable* to the Church. Post-Soviet political pluralism, therefore, played its own role in the return of the ROC to public affairs.

During the nineties, the ROC did not lapse into its Soviet-era passivity; neither did it simply follow the state's lead as it had done under the control of the Petrine Holy Synod. Rather, it actively engaged with Russian politics in the pursuit of its own institutional interests and scored significant victories along the way. The Church would enter the new millennium with a firm foundation for the development of relationships with state infrastructure, a religious primacy within Russia all but undisputed, and an increasingly skeptical attitude toward liberal democratic norms as political and social goods. It is to this era, marked by the first two terms of the presidency of Vladimir Putin, that the analysis now turns.

# CHAPTER 5. THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Having reestablished itself as a fixture of Russian society and politics in the nineties, the dawn of the new millennium saw the ROC occupying a far more stable position than it had possessed only a decade prior. This chapter charts the major developments in church-state relations that occurred during Vladimir Putin's first term as President of the Russian Federation through his return to office in 2012. Over the course of this period, the ROC became a more active participant in Russia's foreign affairs; while the Church continued to pursue its domestic interests and consolidate its institutional presence within Russia, its objectives abroad came to align with those of the state, enabling a new range of manoeuvre. It is during this period that a more overtly cooperative model of church-state relations found expression in both the inward- and outward-facing aspects of Russian politics.

## Section I. Spiritual Security and the Orange Revolution

The late nineties saw political support for Boris Yeltsin dissipate; his administration had long struggled to imbue the newly emerging market economy with the trappings of stability, and a sharp devaluation of the ruble in August 1998 precipitated rising unemployment and poverty rates alongside declining incomes. The government's handling of the crisis in Chechnya, combined with an apparent inability to meaningfully address post-socialist corruption and cronyism, further soured his administration's reputation. Yeltsin's ailing health and association with public intoxication, likewise, did little to inspire public confidence. Nevertheless, the stakes associated with a change in administration were high; Yeltsin's relatives and other close allies, for instance, reportedly feared the prospect of legal prosecution, while his financiers worried that a new government might renationalize the property they attained following the dismantlement of Soviet socialism (IISS, 1999). It was in this context that Vladimir Putin, a figure relatively unknown to the public and considered loyal to the Yeltsin administration, was appointed to the position of Prime Minister in 1999.

Yeltsin resigned that same year[95], and a surge in popularity—spurred by a friendly media campaign and decisive action in Chechnya—helped secure victory for Putin's presidential campaign in March 2000.

In contrast with his predecessor, Putin appears to be more sincere in his displays of religiosity[96]. And indeed, prior to his inauguration, he was led by Archimandrite Tikhon to receive a blessing from Archimandrite Ioann (Krestiankin) (Adamsky, 2019a: 95). Patriarch Alexei II had a seat of honour at the inauguration ceremony itself, but did not deliver a speech; his opportunity to address the new President would arrive afterward during a service at the Kremlin's Cathedral of the Annunciation (Anderson, 2007: 185). That Putin seemed to desire approval from the Church while keeping the civil and religious inauguration celebrations separate was indicative of an ongoing commitment to secularism in the public sphere qualified by acknowledgement of the ROC's "special relationship" to Russian statehood. Such did not necessarily imply special treatment in all areas, however; during this initial period, the state facilitated fewer property transfers to the Church, reduced financial privileges[97] granted to parishes, and blocked the ROC's attempts to formalize its presence in Russian classrooms (Mitrokhin, 2009: 310-311).

It is likely that this initial "cooling" in church-state relations was partially rooted in uncertainty regarding the ROC's orientation toward the new administration's ideological preferences. Tensions with the latter, for example, were publicized in the *Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*[98] (2000), a document outlining the ROC's positions on a variety of political and social issues. In the first place, the authors of the document declare that "[t]he pursuit of wealth makes a baneful impact on the

[95] After Yeltsin's resignation, Putin requested the Patriarch's blessing to serve as the country's acting President (Krindatch, 2006: 272).
[96] See Adamsky (2019a: 90-98) for discussion. Evidence includes, inter alia, frequent pilgrimages to Christian holy sites and monasteries, the construction of chapels for private prayer near his official and vacation residences, and his connection to Archimandrite Tikhon, who allegedly serves as his personal confessor. Regarding his apparent reticence to disclose his beliefs publicly, Putin (2000a) once told NBC News that "parading [one's convictions] always smacks of insincerity."
[97] Including tax breaks and lower utility costs.
[98] Hereafter referred to as the *Social Concept*. Metropolitan Kirill (2000) framed the document as an attempt to articulate Church positions on burning questions confronting society at the beginning of the 21st century. Its novelty derived in part from the fact that, as Stoeckl and Uzlaner (2022: 19) emphasize, Russian Orthodoxy did not possess a "tradition of systematic reflection on social issues" in centuries prior.

spiritual condition of a person and can lead him to complete degradation"; this anti-commercialism—long ingrained in Russian Orthodox thought (Dinello, 1998: 47) but now publicly reemphasized—made for a stark contrast with the enthusiasm for business and money-making encouraged by the state (Richters, 2013: 45). More controversially, the document suggests that monarchical power is indeed "God-given", and that civil disobedience is permissible under certain circumstances. Both positions elicited ire from the Kremlin: officials such as Maxim Meyer (Fagan, 2001) decried the document's "monarchist slant"—which contravened the President's stated commitment to democracy[99]—while the commentary on civil disobedience apparently provoked fears that the Church might eventually attempt to incite rebellion against the secular state[100]. Putin reportedly went so far as to cancel a meeting with Orthodox hierarchs in response to the contents of the *Social Concept* (Smirnov, 2000).

Compounding these tensions were divisions within the Church vis-à-vis government policy. The focal point of dispute was a plan by the Ministry of Taxes to assign an individual number to each taxpayer: the proposed INN (*individual'nyi nomer nalogoplatel'shchika*). During the late nineties, Igumen Tikhon (Shevkunov) of Moscow's Sretensky Monastery issued warnings about the advance of the Antichrist from the West; a development apparently evinced by the discovery of the number 666 within the bar codes of consumer goods (Verkhovsky, 2002: 338). Some lay believers then found the number in the INN and initiated a campaign against its implementation. This placed the Church leadership in a difficult position: it was not convinced that the INN represented the literal "Seal of the Antichrist"—and, at any rate, did not consider it a matter worth picking a fight with the government over—but also did not wish to alienate "fundamentalist" clergy and believers and thereby risk schism. Archimandrite Ioann (Krestiankin), a figure well-respected among Orthodox conservatives, intervened in the debate in January 2001 with a video appeal denouncing the radical rhetoric employed by opponents of the INN and argued that the matter had no real

[99] See Putin's inauguration speech (2000b) and Annual Address to the Federal Assembly (2000c).
[100] Tyakhta (2000) suggests that the authors of this section of the *Social Concept* may have instead had Ukraine in mind, reasoning that if the Ukrainian state were to procure the Ecumenical Patriarchate's recognition for Ukraine's "schismatic" Orthodox churches, churches aligned with the Moscow Patriarchate could call for civil disobedience against this decision.

bearing on one's salvation (ibid. 339). Tikhon and other fundamentalists took the Archimandrite's side; a meeting of the Theological Commission of the ROC held the following month, likewise, declared the INN "a matter of personal choice [that] has no religious significance" (Department for External Church Affairs[101], 2001a)—a conclusion to the debate in official terms.

Taken together, both developments represented the re-surfacing of issues in church-state relations left unresolved in the nineties: the publication of the *Social Concept* evinced the persistence of ideological tensions between the Patriarchate and the Kremlin, while the INN debate demonstrated that the ROC's leadership had not fully neutralized its more radical contingent as a potential source of friction with the state[102]. Oddly enough, however, it can also be said that both "episodes" contributed to the formation of a new basis for church-state relations that took shape in the early 2000s. To ground this point, it is necessary to examine the *Social Concept* and the INN debate as expressions of the ROC's developing skepticism toward globalization and the proliferation of liberal democratic norms.

According to the authors of the *Social Concept*, globalization has involved attempts by the "rich elite" to establish a "universal culture devoid of any spirituality". Such is rooted in an international legal system which prioritizes "the earthly life of man… over religious values" and public institutions which, "in their open confrontation with faith and the Church, [aim] to oust them from public life." The threats posed by this homogenizing "spiritual and cultural expansion", the authors argue, should be countered by joint efforts of the Church, state, civil society, and international organizations "to protect the identity of nations" from the dictates of "the centres of political, economic and informational influence." The authors summarize their strategy for curbing the spiritual erosion of "Christendom" as follows:

> [T]he Church seeks to assert Christian values in the process of decision-making on the most important public issues both on national and international levels. She strives for the recognition of the legality of religious worldview as a basis for socially significant action

[101] Hereafter abbreviated as DECR.
[102] Discussed further in the second section of this chapter.

> (including those taken by state) and as an essential factor which should influence the development (amendment) of international law and the work of international organisations.

While the *Social Concept* expressed the leadership's critical attitudes toward globalization in general or abstract terms, the INN controversy was perceived by much of the broader Church as a direct and tangible confrontation between "globalism" and Russian Orthodoxy. This was partially due to fears that the INN could eventually involve the transmission of individual details to a worldwide database controlled by the West or other actors hostile to Russian citizens (Verkhovsky, 2002: 339). This conspiratorial—and at times overtly anti-Kremlin—discourse shifted toward a more "moderate" and "patriotic" consensus[103], as Verkhovsky notes:

> [A]ttention shifted away from the bar codes themselves and onto the broader idea that globalisation leads unswervingly to the kingdom of Antichrist, and that in the face of this trend it is the mission of Russia and of the Russian Orthodox Church to defend the national and religious identity. The central issue was… [now] that Russia should not take not (sic) a step backward in the global confrontation.

Taken together, the *Social Concept* and the evolution of the INN debate communicated the solidification of the ROC's contention that Russian church-state relations should feature, among other things, cooperation to defend Russia against Western "encroachment" in terms of politics, culture, and spirituality. This, likewise, aligned well with a new *National Security Concept* signed by the President on January 10th, 2000, which emphasized protection of Russia's "spiritual-moral legacy and historical traditions" as a component of national security. According to the authors of the document, the "spiritual and moral welfare" of the population must be protected by state policy, which should also counter "cultural-religious expansion into Russian territory by other states".

[103] Likely facilitated in part by the Church leadership and the ostensible willingness of the State Duma to discuss concerns surrounding the INN.

These words would serve as important pretext to the development of a relationship between the ROC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA); in this way, it may be argued that while the *Social Concept* and the INN debate created or exposed rifts between church and state vis-à-vis domestic politics, their emphases on a need to protect Russian identity against foreign influence converged with emerging national security aims. Such may help explain why the ostensible cooling of church-state relations in domestic politics during the early 2000s did not extend to—and was indeed contrasted by—the relationship between the Church and Russian foreign policy officials.

The origins of this connection appear to extend back into the mid-nineties: from 1994–1996, Metropolitan Kirill served on the MFA's Council for Foreign Affairs. It seems that communication between the ROC and the MFA continued in the years afterward; at a conference on "Religion and Diplomacy", then Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov noted the "fruitful cooperation" that had taken place between the MFA and ROC (DECR, 2001b). Kirill, a keynote speaker at the conference, praised the MFA for helping church-state relations overcome the "alienation" of the Soviet era, and emphasized "the restoration of historical justice towards the Russian property of religious organizations and the protection of the rights of compatriots abroad" as the most crucial areas of cooperation between the two institutions[104]. This interaction took on a more formal basis in 2003 after an official visit of the Patriarch to the MFA, which led to the formation of a "Working Group" for future cooperation (Lavrov, 2007).

The development of this relationship represented another step in the steady transformation of "spiritual security" (духовная безопасность) from a buzzword[105] into something resembling an organizing principle of church-state interaction. The term, Stoeckl (2022: 38) suggests, originally gained political traction as a counter to the US, EU, and international organizations which in the late nineties and early

[104] Kirill further expressed gratitude to the MFA for consultations with the ROC relating to Estonia and Ukraine – countries where, as noted in the previous chapter, the ROC stood to lose access to parishes.
[105] According to Elkner (2005), the concept's origins may be discerned in Yeltsin's 1992 "Law on Security", where an emphasis on "spiritual values" marked an about-turn from the atheistic security paradigm of the Soviet era. The term itself appears to have emerged during the mid-nineties (Stoeckl, 2022: 40) as foreign proselytism became increasingly controversial in Russian political discourse (Payne, 2010: 714). As Fagan (2013: 101) further notes, the term experienced an exponential increase in media usage from 1995 to 2006.

2000s began to re-emphasize religious freedom as a fundament of global security. Within the Russian context, the notion of religious freedom was closely associated with foreign proselytism—and by the early 2000s, the latter was increasingly associated with foreign interference in domestic affairs. Critics such as Nikolai Trofimchuk[106], for example, argued that missionaries, regardless of their personal intentions, effectively served to advance their home countries' interests within Russian territory (Anderson, 2007: 194). Other commentators, such as Rostislav Prokopishin (2001), alleged that religious "cults" were in fact instruments integral to U.S. geopolitical strategy vis-à-vis Russia. Concerns of this sort—evidently shared to some extent by the authors of the 2000 *National Security Concept*—effectively blurred distinctions between the interests of church and state; spiritual security increasingly resembling a component of national security.

Events abroad further evinced this convergence of concerns and priorities. Ukraine is particularly relevant here. Prior to the country's 2004 elections, former President Leonid Kuchma—who had held office since 1994—was broadly regarded as friendly toward Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate[107]. As one may surmise from this study's third chapter, however, Ukraine's post-Soviet religious "arena" significantly differed from that of Russia. While the collapse of the USSR left the ROC's religious primacy within Russia *effectively* uncontested, the same development left the Moscow Patriarchate's Ukrainian presence in a much more precarious position: the UOC-MP not only faced new competitors in the form of the UOC-KP, UAOC, and UGCC, but also suffered from its associations with Russian (and Soviet) rule over Ukraine.

In this context, the UOC-MP possessed incentive to accomplish in Ukraine what the ROC managed to achieve in Russia: recognition of "special status" vis-à-vis the state and legal protections from religious competition. Many of Ukraine's political elites, however, betrayed a preference for the UOC-KP as an Orthodox Church bereft of canonical subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate (Mitrokhin, 2010: 234).

[106] Then head of the religious studies faculty at the Russian Academy of State Service.
[107] In a letter to Kuchma just prior to the elections, Patriarch Alexei stated that church-state relations in Ukraine were set on a "good foundation" and were overcoming Soviet-era difficulties. Nevertheless, the same letter indicated that the Patriarch believed Kuchma could do more to support "canonical Orthodoxy" through the adoption of new laws – likely meaning restrictions on the UOC-KP and UAOC.

The UOC-MP's competition—especially the UOC-KP and UAOC—recognized, likewise, that they stood to lose much should the UOC-MP succeed in its efforts to build the "Russian model" of church-state relations in Ukraine. Such was in turn reflected in their political preferences, which increasingly displayed a desire to distance Ukraine from Russia, support the Ukrainian language and patriotism, and see the development of closer ties with Europe and the West in general (ibid. 238-239).

By 2004, these divisions found electoral expression in the "orange" and "white-blue" campaigns of Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych, respectively. Yushchenko, for his part, mobilized all religious confessions save for the UOC-MP (ibid. 239). Further, during his tenure as Prime Minister (1999-2001), he had organized the visit of Pope John Paul II to Ukraine and requested that the Ecumenical Patriarchate consider granting autocephaly to the UOC-KP. The first move indicated a liberal-minded openness toward "Western" religious influences, while the second communicated that his tolerance (and even support) extended to the UOC-MP's primary competitor. Both initiatives, predictably, alienated the UOC-MP and ROC alike[108]. Yushchenko's apparent enthusiasm for closer relations with the West, meanwhile, contrasted Yanukovych's friendliness toward Russia and ostensible status as Moscow's preferred candidate[109]. The UOC-MP generally backed Yanukovych[110], who presented himself as an ally receptive to the Church's needs and concerns, and the Church hoped that his prospective presidency might translate into favourable shifts in its relations with the Ukrainian state.

After the first round of voting, no winner could be declared as no candidate had received the required 50% of votes necessary for victory. Yushchenko and Western observers, however, argued that the

[108] DECR (2001) favourably reported on Orthodox protests against the papal visit, quoting an appeal demonstrators addressed to Kuchma: "the Vatican and the schismatic groupings have openly and bluntly identified with those forces which seek to oust you, the lawfully elected President."
[109] Just prior to the first round of voting, Putin (2004a) visited Ukraine and commended achievements of Kuchma and Yanukovych alike; the President further noted that he would be happy if Ukrainian political forces developed at the grassroots level to support relations between Ukraine and Russia. On the whole, the visit and the interview were perceived as a tacit endorsement of Yanukovych's presidential campaign.
[110] As Mitrokhin (ibid. 237) notes, however, there existed some notable political divisions within the UOC-MP—bishops in Western Ukraine, for example, were much more likely to desire autocephaly from the Moscow Patriarchate and many distanced themselves from the broader clergy's displays of support for Yanukovych.

election results had been falsified in favour of Yanukovych. Leaders of the UOC-KP, Catholic and Evangelical organizations communicated agreement through the publication of an appeal on the eve of the second round warning against electoral falsification (Obrashcheniye, 2004, as cited in Mitrokhin, 2010: 243). On November 23rd, 2004, Yanukovych was declared the winner of the second round by Ukraine's Central Election Commission; that same day, Putin (2004b) congratulated him on his "convincing victory" in an election "fierce, but open and fair". The results were again deemed illegitimate by Yushchenko's supporters and foreign election monitors, and large-scale protests erupted, centred in the Ukrainian capital. Clergy and monastics from almost every major confession—save for the UOC-MP—contributed to mass mobilization[111] (Mitrokhin, 2010: 243). On December 3rd, Ukraine's Supreme Court annulled the second round's results and ordered a revote to take place toward the end of the month, which Yushchenko won.

The outbreak and results of Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" proved disturbing to both the ROC and the Russian state. The Church, for its part, became increasingly aware of the tenuousness of its relationship to Ukraine as canonical territory; the UOC-MP, perhaps unsurprisingly, failed to counter the religious "united front" that rallied behind Yushchenko, its own demonstrations for Yanukovych attracting few (Mitrokhin, 2010: 243). After Yushchenko's victory, likewise, suspicions regarding the UOC-MP's loyalty to Ukrainian statehood meant a loss of political clout to the UOC-KP. Any suggestion that the UOC-MP might receive special recognition or status vis-à-vis the state was now, for all intents and purposes, a non-starter. Ukraine's new president instead desired the full independence of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, i.e., a unified church without canonical subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate. Put plainly, political momentum had not only shifted against the UOC-MP, but also against the Patriarchate's presence in Ukraine in toto.

[111] "Clergy… and even their leaders, delivered sermons and led pro-democracy prayers on city squares…", the UGCC established a "coordination centre" for the organization and promotion of demonstrations, and a representative of Crimea's Muslim population declared his support for the protest movement.

The Russian government, meanwhile, treated the Orange Revolution as an indication of foreign interference in Ukrainian affairs[112]. While refraining from blaming Western governments directly, Putin told *The Guardian* (Steele, 2005) that his government was aware of the foreign financing behind Ukrainian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), actors that played an important role in the organization of "grassroots" opposition to Kuchma and Yanukovych[113]. Fears began to spread that the West would utilize similar means to destabilize Russia: as former director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) Nikolai Patrushev (2005) argued in an address to the State Duma, foreign intelligence services made use of NGOs "under the guise of implementing humanitarian and educational programs in the regions of Russia, [to] lobby the interests of the corresponding states and collect classified information on a wide range of problems." He further emphasized that NGOs would continue to threaten national security so long as Russia lacked the legislation necessary to moderate their activities. Compounding this momentum toward restrictions on the political activity of civil society was the outbreak of large-scale demonstrations over controversial reforms to Russia's social welfare system; several state officials deemed the unrest an output of "provocateurs" intent on mobilizing discontents for their own political ends (Corwin, 2005).

It was in this context of suspicion regarding the origins and outbreak of the Orange Revolution, as well as the appearance of domestic tensions, that the Russian government moved in January 2006 to adopt new legislation to regulate and surveil NGO activity. According to the President (2006), the law was specifically motivated by desires to protect Russia's "internal political life" from the interference of foreign governments. Despite its appearance as a sort of secular analogue to the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience, however, the new legislation initially also applied to religious organizations and, in the same year of its adoption, was used to deny registration to Rainbow House, an organization whose advocacy for

[112] Georgia's "Rose Revolution" of 2003, which resulted in the resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze, served as a precedent for this interpretation. A week after leaving office, Shevardnadze appeared on Russian television, claiming that his country had experienced a coup orchestrated by foreign actors—specifically Western election monitors and the Open Society Institute, which funded youth activists and opposition media (Horvath, 2011: 3). According to MacKinnon (2007: 154), the National Democratic Institute – an American NGO with a presence in Kiev – detected in Georgia a model for revolution that could be replicated in Ukraine.

[113] For a discussion of the strategies employed by the American state and allies in the fomentation of the Orange Revolution and other regime change initiatives, see Sussman and Krader (2008).

LGBT rights threatened to "undermine spiritual public values" (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Church hierarchs, for their part, appeared to support the spirit of the law as a response to "all types of social and so-called 'human rights' organisations which… are actively financed by foreign secret services and openly conduct provocative and anti-Russian activity" but aligned with other confessional groups to lobby for exemptions for religious organizations, which were granted[114] the following year (Fagan, 2007a).

In effect, the 2006 "NGO Law" extended the logic behind the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience to the secular sphere of Russian civil society; just as the 1997 Law challenged the ROC's religious rivals, the 2006 Law complicated the emergence of ideological competition from secular institutions. In other words, the new legislation not only supported the interests of the state, but also advanced those of the Church. Beyond this, the events abroad which provoked the law—involving the contributions of the UOC-MP's rivals and "West-aligned" NGOs to the outbreak of a colour revolution—communicated that the presence of the Moscow Patriarchate in Russia's "near abroad" was intertwined with national security proper. This newly developing "outward-facing" aspect of Russian church-state relations would see further development in the years leading to Putin's third term in office.

## Section II. Actually-Existing Symphonia

On May 17th, 2007, an event of historic significance occurred: in a ceremony attended by the President and Moscow's Mayor Luzhkov, Patriarch Alexei II and Metropolitan Laurus signed the Act of Canonical Communion, signalling the return of ROCOR[115] to the fold of the Moscow Patriarchate. The end to this schism was symbolic on multiple levels. In the first place, the reestablishment of communion represented the tying up of a "loose end" left by the Soviet past. Originally, the émigré church severed its connections to the ROC over the latter's allegiance to the Soviet government; unity between the churches, likewise, communicated a reconciliation which could only occur in a new, *spiritually-renewed* Russia that had moved

[114] Even after the amendments, religious organizations were still required to report on any donations received from "outside organizations" (Kommersant, 2006, as cited in Blitt, 2008: 749).
[115] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of ROCOR's origins.

past old divisions between "Reds" and "Whites" (Mitrokhin, 2009: 315-316), at least as far as ecclesial matters were concerned. In this way, the Act not only eliminated ROCOR's "schismatic" status, but also added credibility to the ROC and the state's efforts to "revive" the Russian nation after an era of militant atheism and internationalism. Trust and recognition from ROCOR, as Fagan (2013: 34) suggests, would also contribute considerable legitimacy to Putin's leadership.

In terms of the ROC's interests, unification also meant the effective neutralization of a threat; prior to the reestablishment of communion, the Moscow Patriarchate had lost around two hundred parishes in Russia and Ukraine to ROCOR (Mitrokhin, 2009: 315). Switches in parish allegiance were generally motivated by criticism of the ROC's "ecumenism"—that is, contact and engagement with other confessions and faiths—as well as suspicions that the Patriarchate's leadership (like that of the state) remained dominated by former collaborators with or agents of Soviet intelligence services. After the Act of Communion, therefore, fundamentalists within the ROC lost access to an alternative church body to which they could defect and attract like-minded discontents. More than this, the merger meant the addition of some four hundred parishes abroad and four hundred thousand members to the Patriarchate's flock (Blitt, 2011: 411); having gained presence in the United States, South America, and Western Europe (Sataline, 2007), the ROC now increasingly resembled a "global church".

This aligned with objectives of Russian foreign policy – as Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov (2008, as cited in Payne, 2010: 5) put it, the Act represented "a new stage in our efforts to consolidate the Russian World"[116]. And indeed, the restoration of communion reflected the development of a new aspect to church-state relations, centred on the ROC as an institutional link of the Russian diaspora to its "Motherland". This would serve a variety of purposes both religious and political: the international expansion of the Moscow Patriarchate—facilitated by the construction of new churches or transfer of

[116] This would be echoed by former President Dmitry Medvedev (2009a), who emphasized that the Act "ended the tragic split between the Russian people and gave decisive impetus to consolidating the Russian world, making our ties with our compatriots all around the globe stronger than ever."

existing ones[117]—aimed to address the "spiritual needs" of diasporic Russians as well as defend the rights and liberties of their communities (Lavrov, 2008). According to Church hierarchs, these communities faced the threat of cultural assimilation and a "militant secularism"[118] orchestrated by "European politicians who are attempting to destroy the traditional, churchly way of life" (Hilarion, 2004); MFA officials, meanwhile, had begun to emphasize the protection of Russians abroad as a component of state security (Payne, 2010: 717). In this way, and perhaps paradoxically, the MFA-supported expansion of the ROC was framed as a *defensive* manoeuvre that would contribute to the security of church and state alike; the interests of both, as indicated by their cooperative efforts to restore communion with ROCOR[119], were becoming increasingly difficult to disentangle.

Such was publicly acknowledged by Putin (2007) during a press conference; when asked about the place of Orthodoxy in Russia's future, as well as the country's nuclear strategy, the President replied:

> Both themes are closely related. Because traditional confessions of the Russian Federation, and Russia's nuclear shield, are those components that strengthen Russian statehood and create the necessary preconditions for providing the state's internal and external security. And from this we can draw a clear conclusion about how the state should relate, today and in the future, to the one and to the other.

Later that same year, the Russkiy Mir[120] Foundation (RMF) was established by presidential decree to "develop the Russian language at home, support Russian language study programmes abroad and generally promote Russian language and literature around the world" (RMF, n.d.). The linguistic focus of

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[117] According to Blitt (2010: 414-416), the MFA "is virtually omnipresent in the Church's construction efforts abroad", which has seen the appearance of new parishes in "strategic locales" across Africa, South America, Western Europe and Asia. In 2006, Metropolitan Kirill travelled to North Korea to consecrate a new parish in Pyongyang (DECR, 2006), one of the few Christian churches present in the country to this day.
[118] That the ROC understood itself to be involved in an international effort to reintroduce religion to the public sphere was indicated by Metropolitan Kirill (2006), who emphasized in a conference at Strasbourg that, wherever the Church has a presence, "it speaks out for the teaching of Orthodox culture in secular schools, for the introduction of chaplaincies, the presence of religious topics in the media and the social ministry of religious organizations."
[119] Putin himself played an active role in this process, holding several meetings with ROCOR's Metropolitan Laurus (J. Garrard and C. Garrard, 2008: 196).
[120] "Russian World".

the organization was soon paired with an emphasis on the affairs of the ROC, and a formal cooperation agreement between the two was signed during the RMF's third annual assembly. At the opening ceremonies of the assembly, the recently-enthroned Patriarch Kirill (2009a) delivered a "programmatic speech", in which he declared that the "Russian world"—consisting primarily of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus—is rooted in the Orthodox faith[121], "which we found at the common Kiev baptismal font". Orthodoxy, likewise, was framed alongside the Russian language and culture as crucial to Russia's capacity to confront globalization as an "independent subject" and maintain its position of influence in the international order. The Patriarch's concerns were indeed reflected in the spheres of cooperation outlined by the agreement itself, which aimed, inter alia, to preserve the "civilizational integrity" of the Russian world (DECR, 2009). And, given that the RMF (n.d.) is a "joint project" between the MFA and Ministry of Education and Science, the agreement effectively formalized the integration of Orthodoxy into Russian strategy on the world stage.

Prior to the Assembly, changes had occurred in the leadership of both the government and the Church. Having served two consecutive terms in office, Putin was not eligible to run in Russia's 2008 elections without violating the constitution; he would instead take the position of Prime Minister after the election of his preferred successor, Dmitry Medvedev. Patriarch Alexei II, meanwhile, passed away on December 5th, 2008, at which point Metropolitan Kirill was elected patriarchal locum tenens. As one might surmise from this and the previous chapter, Kirill was well-positioned for enthronement; the Metropolitan was highly active in church affairs and played a major role in facilitating the reintroduction of the Church to public life, both in a cultural and political sense. Moreover, he was well-known to Russian society and favourably

[121] It is worth noting that at some points during the speech, Kirill appears to use the terms "Russian world" and "Holy Russia" interchangeably. According to Suslov (2020: 188), however, Kirill generally appears to prefer the latter term, likely due to its stronger religious (and weaker political) connotations. With this in mind, his speech's emphasis on Orthodoxy as the basis of the Russian world should perhaps be read more pointedly as a comment on the concept's secular overtones.

received by the Kremlin[122]. To this extent, he appeared like a natural successor to the late Patriarch, and had indeed already taken on some of the latter's responsibilities prior to his passing (Chawryło, 2015: 19).

During his enthronement ceremony on February 1st, 2009, Kirill (2009b) spoke to attendees—including the President and Prime Minister—of the patriarch's responsibility to act as "the protector of the canonical boundaries of the Church". This, he argued, had taken on special significance given the emergence of "independent states in the space of 'historical Rus'"; while emphasizing respect for their sovereignty and wellbeing, Kirill maintained that the patriarch is also duty-bound to preserve the "spiritual ties" between the peoples of these states for the sake of the "system of values that the united Orthodox civilization of Holy Rus' presents to the world". So too did he declare his desire to further develop church-state relations on a friendly and cooperative basis permitted by the constitution. Medvedev (2009b) concurred, expressing hope that Kirill's enthronement could make for "new conditions for a fully-fledged dialogue and accord… between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State."

New conditions for cooperation, however, were just as much created by Medvedev himself. The new President was more open about his Orthodox faith than his predecessor, and his wife, Svetlana Medvedeva, has the reputation of a devout believer. And while Medvedev presented himself as a liberal-minded reformer intent on modernizing Russia, two significant shifts communicated further movement away from the state's constitutional commitments to secularism.

The first of these occurred in the state's public education policies. As discussed in the previous chapter, the ROC initiated efforts in the nineties to reintroduce Orthodoxy to Russian classrooms. This project was successful on a limited, local or regional basis with the support of then-Minister of Education Vladimir Filippov (Fagan, 2007b); his replacement Andrei Fursenko, however, blocked any efforts to federalize the ROC's "Foundations of Orthodox Culture" (FOC) course and instead advocated for the

[122] As noted by Chawryło (2015: 19), Russian state media launched a large-scale campaign in support of Kirill's potential enthronement. That being said, Blitt (2010: 1341-1342) suggests Putin may have actually preferred Metropolitan Kliment for the patriarchal office, who was apparently perceived as a more compliant candidate.

development of a secular course about world religions (Mitrokhin, 2009: 313). Putin seemed to share similar views[123], and in September 2007, the State Duma moved to eliminate regional discretion in determining certain components of their curricula; the ROC feared this would translate to the disappearance of the FOC from the Russian school system in toto. After a meeting between Medvedev and representatives of Russia's traditional confessions on July 21st, 2009, however, the President announced a pilot project which would make courses on religions—as well as secular courses on ethics and comparative religion—available to Russian students. This program was deemed successful, and the "Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics" course became compulsory in 2012. In effect, this not only secured the place of the FOC within the Russian education system, but expanded its availability nationwide[124].

The second shift related to the Russian military. Again, as noted above, the nineties saw the beginning of a comprehensive initiative of the ROC to establish ties with the armed forces; central among the aims clergy hoped to achieve was the re-establishment of the military priesthood[125]. Similar to the case of the Russian education system, initial success was informal: during the early to mid-2000s, the Church formed a "functioning but unofficial clerical infrastructure within the military"[126] (Adamsky, 2019a: 98). Some officials, such as Military Prosecutor Aleksandr Savenkov, were in favour of formalizing this presence; in 2006, his office drafted legislation with this intention[127]. Others, like General Nikolai Pankov,

[123] During an address in Belgorod, where the FOC course was effectively compulsory, Putin reiterated the Church's separation from the state and noted that any changes to this would require changes to the constitution (Fagan, 2007b).
[124] The FOC course itself is not compulsory, but is rather an optional module available out of a choice of six. Despite heated debate and media coverage about religious involvement in education and other fields, only 6-9% of Russians—regardless of religious association—reported belief that religious organizations could have a negative influence on these spheres (Mchedlova, 2016: 113).
[125] Kirill publicly expressed his support for this Tsarist-era institution's revival at the 1st All-Russian conference on "Orthodoxy and the Russian Army" held in October 1994 (Lukichev, 2016: 15).
[126] In 2002, Dmitry Smirnov—former head of the ROC's military liaison office—stated that there were 450 priests operating 150 military churches within the armed forces (RFE/RL, 2002). He also declared the full reintroduction of the military priesthood a top priority for the ROC.
[127] At this time, fears provoked by Ukraine's Orange Revolution still loomed in Russia's political atmosphere (Mitrokhin, 2009: 309). The Church, for its part, was viewed as a potential bulwark of patriotism within the armed forces and law enforcement, should a colour revolution be attempted in Russia.

opposed the proposal, noting the significant number of Muslims within the military[128]. Nevertheless, momentum was shifting in the ROC's favour—aided in part by problems of morale and discipline persisting in the Russian military[129]—and in the summer of 2009, Medvedev announced a staged approach to the integration of chaplains into the armed forces (Herspring and McDermott, 2014: 57). Priests would not receive military ranks, but would work full-time and receive payment as civil servants.

In this way, 2009 proved another monumental year for the ROC; two major initiatives of the nineties were completed. The Church's influence in the Russian education system and presence within the military would no longer persist on an essentially ad-hoc basis, but instead received full legal sanction and state support. To be sure, the opportunities opened by Medvedev were also available to Russia's other *traditional religions*, but the ROC was poised to benefit more as Russia's largest and most extensively-resourced religious institution[130]. As Medvedev's decisions went into effect, Kirill (2010) declared that there was no longer any "single fundamental issue" in church-state relations, and that "at the legislative level … we do not have issues today that would affect the very essence of the Church's mission, [nothing to] distort, [or] limit the Church's capabilities." In this way, by the end of the 2000s, something resembling a fully-fledged *symphonia* between the church and state was beginning to emerge: cooperation between the two in foreign affairs was now fully reflected in domestic politics. Likewise, all of this transpired without revisions to the constitution or a Petrine-style subordination of the Patriarchate; such likely helps explain why, against accusations of contributing to a church-state merger, the ROC maintained that it had "never in its history been as independent from the state as it is today" (Legoida, 2011).

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[128] The Council of Muftis of Russia indeed opposed the proposal, arguing that it contradicted existing legislation and the constitution (Parsons, 2006). The Council also expressed concern that it could exacerbate the already pronounced interreligious tensions wrought by the ongoing war in Chechnya. Herspring and McDermott (2014: 55) note that many officers also feared that the creation of a chaplaincy could mean the entry of "radical imams" into the military.

[129] According to the Ministry of Defence, the first six months of 2009 alone saw 181 non-combat deaths. Dedovschina, suicide, and fatal accidents remained persistent issues (Herspring and McDermott, 2014: 57).

[130] Evidence of more overtly preferential treatment came from a decision to permit the ROC to review and comment on "all legislation considered by the Duma" (Odynova, 2009). The following year, Medvedev signed a law to help facilitate the transfer of state-owned property (previously nationalized by the Bolsheviks) back to the Church, effectively resolving another "dispute" between church and state (Curanović, 2024: 386).

Six days after Medvedev's announcements regarding the future of Russia's military and education system, Kirill made his first official visit to Ukraine as Patriarch. While the trip possessed spiritual significance—coinciding with two anniversaries in Church history[131]—it also served other purposes. Chief among these was the strengthening of the Moscow Patriarchate's position in Ukraine, which, as noted above, was challenged by the UOC-KP, the UAOC, and the Yushchenko administration in general[132]. During a visit to the Svyatogorsk Lavra in the Donetsk Oblast, Kirill (2009c) framed existing schisms as politically motivated, and insinuated that their persistence renders Ukraine liable to divine punishment. At the Pochaev Monastery, meanwhile, Kirill (2009d) argued Europeans had renounced their Christian roots in favour of a fleeting, materialistic happiness easily dislodged by economic turbulence[133]. Against this and other types of "idolatry", as the Patriarch (2009e) emphasized at Chersonesos, Crimea, stands Prince Vladimir's "great Christian Eastern civilization, to which we all have the good fortune to belong".

With Ukraine's next presidential elections scheduled for 2010, the political import of Kirill's speeches and sermons across the country was clear: Ukrainians should elect a candidate friendly to the Moscow Patriarchate and "Holy Rus'" rather than one that favoured "schismatics" and secular Europe. Translated even further, this meant the Patriarch's tacit endorsement of Yanukovych's pro-Russian political and religious orientation against Yushchenko's desires for a single autocephalous church and Ukrainian membership in the EU and NATO. Upon the former's victory, the Patriarch was invited to the Ukrainian capital where he led a prayer service for the newly-elected president at the Kievo-Pecherska Lavra (DECR, 2010a). The UOC-MP, for its part, issued an appeal (DECR, 2010b) to Yanukovych a day after his inauguration in which it called for, inter alia, the introduction of "the study of the fundamentals of Christian

[131] Anniversaries of the baptism of Vladimir the Great and the gifting of the Pochaev Mother of God icon. Notably, both events are significant to Russian and Ukrainian believers alike, which dovetailed with Kirill's emphasis on religious and historical unity between the two.
[132] In 2008, Yushchenko invited both Alexei II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew II to Ukraine for the 1020th anniversary of the baptism of Rus'. The President hoped that Bartholomew would grant autocephaly to a unified Ukrainian Church (Tonoyan and Payne, 2010: 256-257), but this did not happen during his visit. During Kirill's visit to Ukraine the following year, he insisted to Yushchenko that Ukraine already possessed a unified Church – the UOC-MP – and reiterated that autocephaly was not an available option (ibid. 258).
[133] Namely the global financial crisis, which had begun the previous year.

ethics, Orthodox culture and God's Law in educational institutions of all levels", military priests into the Ukrainian army, and the restitution of Church property taken during the Soviet era. The UOC-MP, quite evidently, viewed Yanukovych's victory as an opportunity to replicate Russia's model of church-state relations in Ukraine; this would not come to pass, however, for reasons discussed in the next chapter.

In retrospect, it is evident that Kirill's visits to Ukraine in part represented practical expressions of the "Russian world" concept—efforts to preserve the integrity of "Russia" not simply as a nation-state established in 1991, but as a civilization born in 988. This aligned with and indeed united the interests of both church and state: if Ukraine was to perceive itself as part of this civilization, such would militate against the expansion of NATO[134] toward Russia's borders as well as the loss of canonical territory beyond them. Within the context of Russian politics, therefore, uncertainties regarding Ukraine's future formed bonds between church and state that incentivized closer cooperation.

Other developments in foreign affairs which took place during Medvedev's presidency further entrenched emerging tensions between Russia and the West. The first of these was Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's August 2008 attack on South Ossetia, a region controlled by separatists backed by Russia. This served as a trigger for a 16-day war between Russia and Georgia; Medvedev (2011a) later argued that Saakashvili likely initiated the conflict with hopes that the U.S. would provide assistance. The second major rupture occurred in March 2011 during the Libyan Civil War, which in turn led to a public clash between Putin and Medvedev. The latter abstained from a United Nations Security Council resolution to impose a no-fly zone over Libya, effectively creating a legal basis for NATO intervention in the country. Putin (2011a) likened the resolution to a "medieval call for a crusade" that permitted invasion of a sovereign country—an emerging "trend in US policy" consistent with past interventions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Medvedev (2011b), on the other hand, had no fundamental qualms with the resolution, emphasizing that the "Libyan leadership's absolutely intolerable behaviour" toward its people made any

[134] NATO's North Atlantic Council formally announced plans to integrate Ukraine and Georgia into the alliance during a 2008 summit held in Bucharest.

talk of "crusades" unacceptable and dangerous. According to Sakwa (2020: 209), this public rift between the president and prime minister likely ended any opportunity for the former to run for a second term.

At a United Russia party congress held in September 2011, Medvedev announced his support for Putin's candidacy in the March 2012 presidential elections. Though there were suspicions that Medvedev's presidency served as a sort of stopgap measure to permit a third term for Putin, the news—along with controversies surrounding 2011's parliamentary elections—provoked the outbreak of a protest movement in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and other cities. By this point, the ROC had also found itself a subject of public criticism[135] for its commercial activity, the reported wealth of its hierarchs, and moves to regain ownership of lands and religious artifacts held in museums (Adamsky, 2019a: 174). Liberal critics likewise took issue with the Church's stances on cultural expression and same-sex relations, as well as the introduction of religious education to the public school system (Freeze, 2017). A striking moment of this public backlash occurred on February 21st, 2012, as a group known as Pussy Riot took to the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour to stage a performance against Putin and Kirill in particular, as well as the closeness of the ROC and Russian government in general.

Given that the protest movement targeted both church and state, it is somewhat unsurprising that the two formed an even closer "alliance" during this period. While the Church avoided openly siding with the government – and at some points, even expressed sympathy with demonstrators[136] – Kirill (2012a) spoke favourably of Putin, arguing that his leadership, along with "a miracle of God", helped Russia exit the

[135] According to an opinion poll published by VCIOM (2012a), 50% of Russians detected Church influence in domestic affairs while a further 43% sensed this influence in Russia's foreign affairs. The majority—some 75%— felt that the Church should stay outside of politics; nonetheless, the public's views on the ROC's actual role in social and political affairs were more varied. While 19% thought that the ROC was too involved in society and the state, 43% believed that the Church had not overstepped its bounds, and a further 23% believed that its social and political influence should actually increase. Public opinion on Russian church-state relations, therefore, was mixed, rather than plainly critical. To the extent that the 2011-2012 protest movement involved criticism of church-state relations, therefore, it likely represented views closer to those of the minority of respondents who considered the Church's involvement excessive. As Mchedlova (2012: 414) further notes, public trust in the ROC increased by 15% in the immediate period preceding her publication, suggesting that critical attitudes toward the ROC were not predominant even at the height of the protest movement.

[136] During the Christmas celebrations of 2012, Kirill stated on state television that "society must have the right to express its discontent" and that "[i]f the powers that be remain insensitive to expressions of protest, it's a bad sign… The authorities must adjust… and correct the course" (Bratersky, 2012).

"horrible, systemic" crises of the nineties[137]. The authorities, meanwhile, elected to prosecute Pussy Riot for "derogating the spiritual principles" of the state[138] (Ponomariov, 2013: 188). These expressions of mutual support, likewise, were accompanied by similar narratives regarding the demonstrations' origins and intentions. Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, for example, insinuated that they represented the interests of forces both foreign and domestic intent on fomenting a colour revolution (Smertin, 2012). Putin (2011b), for his part, seemed to share a similar view, having directly accused former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the U.S. State Department of inciting the protests. If the experiences of Georgia, Ukraine, and other countries provoked fears of Western-backed regime change in Russia, the 2011-2013 protest movement solidified these concerns into another developing basis for church-state cooperation.

Summary.

The early to mid-2000s were marked by contradictory trends in Russian church-state relations. On the one hand, the Church's advancements in domestic politics slowed considerably after Putin's initial ascent to power; efforts to formalize a military priesthood and federalize a presence within public education—along with other initiatives—appeared to stall as non-starters for the new administration. This was likely due, in part, to the fact that Putin found himself in charge of a multi-confessional state which, as hostilities in Chechnya continued to demonstrate, struggled with interreligious tensions that could be inflamed by overt displays of "favouritism". In addition, the publication of the *Social Concept* and outbreak of the tax code controversy indicated that the post-Soviet ROC had gained in political confidence and independence; what this would mean for the Church's relationship with the Kremlin, at the time, remained uncertain.

On the other hand, however, this cooling of church-state relations within the domestic sphere was contrasted by the rapid emergence of a "partnership" between the two in foreign affairs. The *National Security Concept* gave an early indication of the development of this relationship, a practical expression of

[137] Kirill (2012b) later expressed the view that "aggression against the Church" expressed during this period was akin to an attack on Russia's "cultural core [and] civilizational code" by those interested in testing the authorities' will to enforce the law.
[138] The case was notable not only as a state defence of the ROC against "blasphemy", but also as Russia's first major criminal proceedings in which a secular court appealed to Orthodox canon law (Ponomariov, 2013: 188).

which became manifest through the state's participation in the ROC's efforts to re-establish communion with ROCOR. Such not only served as a symbolic "bookend" to the Soviet era, but also effected a dramatic expansion of the Moscow Patriarchate's ecclesial jurisdiction—and, by extension, links between Russian diaspora communities and their *motherland*. As the Church gained a presence throughout the world, so too did the developing notion of the "Russian world" gain an institutional basis. It is thus unsurprising that the RMF and ROC would later formalize their cooperation; the Church, by that point, had already become the most widespread and visible "bearer" of Russian culture, language, and traditions abroad.

The essential predicate of church-state cooperation in foreign affairs is "spiritual security", the conceptual origins of which took shape as foreign missionaries representing non-Orthodox faiths experienced discursive association with foreign political interests. Buttressed by the clergy's presentation of Orthodoxy as something crucial to the wellbeing of the military, the youth, and Russian society as a whole, the notion of spiritual security emerged as a sort of recognition that the Russian state's interests abroad were closely bound up with those of the Moscow Patriarchate. Nowhere was this made clearer than in Ukraine 2004–2005, where the UOC-MP's religious competitors rallied behind the pro-Europe, pro-NATO presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko and helped bring about the annulment of the election results that would have meant his defeat and, in its stead, a pro-Russia presidency of Viktor Yanukovych. The involvement of foreign NGOs in the outbreak of the Orange Revolution, likewise, exacerbated concerns that Russia might be the next "target" for regime change. In this way, the Moscow Patriarchate's comparatively weaker position in Ukraine directly contributed to an outcome perceived as detrimental not only to Russia-Ukraine relations, but also to the security of the Russian state itself. Laws against NGOs were enacted in response, legislation which effectively yielded further terrain in civil society to the Church and other *patriotic* institutions.

Thus, by the end of Putin's second term, momentum in domestic politics was again beginning to shift in the ROC's favour. Changes in the Patriarchal and Presidential offices transformed this momentum into practical gains for the Church: the reintroduction of military chaplains on a formal basis, the

federalization of the FOC course in Russian education, and the restitution of church properties. It is likely that a combination of Medvedev's more public religiosity and less certain place in Kremlin politics —along with Kirill's highly active approach to engagement with state authorities—helped create conditions ripe for these breaks with the status quo. It was around this time that the Church faced increasing criticism for ostensibly effecting a "merger" with the state, and not without reason—by this point, for all intents and purposes, a type of "symphonia" had been achieved: not only had there appeared fairly extensive institutional links between the ROC and the Russian state, but the interests of the two seemed to align as far as domestic and foreign policy was concerned.

This latter point is crucial: church-state dynamics were not characterized by one actor simply dominating the other, but were rather rooted in coincidences of interests begotten by the fall of the USSR, the post-Cold War geopolitical landscape, and the Church's structure as an international institution. This helps explain the relative lack of friction between church and state that became a focus of social ire during the transition of the presidency from Medvedev back to Putin: the ROC did not understand itself as a "state church", a "ministry of ideology", etc., but rather as an independent actor capable of engagement with government authorities on a voluntary basis, lobbying for its own interests, and advocating for its own political and social preferences. That the Church initiated such concerted efforts to re-establish itself in the nineties, and that the state steadily became more and more receptive to it over the course of the 2000s, were to some significant extent outputs of circumstances outside of the control of the Kremlin and Moscow Patriarchate alike. Church-state cooperation, likewise, often aimed at influencing domestic and foreign affairs in ways that would be difficult to accomplish in isolation from one another.

Public backlash against this relationship, rather than driving a wedge between church and state, pushed the two closer together; the protest movement of 2011-2013 did not introduce the two to the notion that their "security" was intertwined, but rather confirmed, in effective terms, an already-existing interdependence. This was again indicative of a larger change that occurred over the course of the 2000s that separated the decade from that one preceding it: in contrast to the more ad-hoc, transactional "give and

take" basis of church-state relations that prevailed in the nineties, the 2000s had seen the development of this relationship on the more stable basis of shared security interests both at home and abroad. Over the coming years, these interests would encounter new challenges—particularly in Ukraine—that would push the existing symphonia to take on a "martial" dimension. Such, likewise, would ultimately find expression in a war within the proclaimed confines of the *Russian World* and *Holy Rus'*.

# CHAPTER 6: THE ROAD TO WAR

By the beginning of President Putin's third term, Russian church-state relations had developed into a fully-fledged partnership reflected in both domestic law and foreign policy. Such was founded upon a harmonization of interests facilitated by crises outside and within Russia's borders. Over the course of Putin's third and fourth terms in office, symphonia between church and state became "martial" in character, armed conflicts the emerging locus of cooperation. This is the final "stage" of church-state relations addressed by this study and the focus of this chapter, which opens with Putin's "conservative turn" in 2012 and closes with the onset of the "special military operation" in 2022. This end point was chosen not only for its proximity to the present day, but also because it represents a culmination of the developments and tendencies in Russian church-state relations described from the beginning of the analysis.

## Section I. From the Conservative Turn to the Anti-Terrorist Operation

Following his third inauguration ceremony held on May 7th, 2012, Putin and his wife attended a prayer service held at the Cathedral of the Annunciation. Patriarch Kirill (2012c) affirmed that the re-elected President possessed the "people's confidence", but warned of "well-organized groups or individuals" who present their own views as those of the broader public, making for a need to "distinguish between spirits"[139]. Such was almost certainly stated in reference to the persisting protest movement against Putin's return to the presidency—indeed, some 20,000 had taken to Moscow's Bolotnaya Square a day prior—and communicated the Church's solidarity with the authorities[140]. Over the next two months, many activists were arrested and brought to trial; amendments to existing laws pertaining to NGOs, likewise, were enacted

[139] A reference to 1 Corinthians 12:10.

[140] It is worth recalling that several months prior, Kirill appeared to express some measure of sympathy with—or at least acknowledgement of—the demonstrators' grievances. The Pussy Riot performance of February 2012, however, likely provoked the Patriarch's turn toward less ambiguous support for Putin (Stoeckl, 2017: 2013).

on July 20th, requiring, inter alia, that any NGO that engages in "political activity" and receives foreign funding be registered as a "foreign agent"[141].

The period following Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 is often described as a "conservative turn" in Russian politics. This term, as Robinson (2020: 11-12) suggests, communicates little on its own given the difficulties of defining conservatism in general and the heterogeneity of "Russian conservatism" in particular[142]. Before addressing the aptness of the term, it is worthwhile to examine several particularities associated with the legislative changes of this period. Consider first the origins of the aforementioned law on foreign agents. While running for his third term in office, Putin (2012) argued that the "popular sovereignty" restored to Russia after the tumultuous nineties should be bolstered by "internet democracy"; specifically, he proposed that online petitions receiving over one hundred thousand signatures should require consideration by the State Duma. Demands for a law "On control over foreign financing of non-profit organizations" then appeared online (Rodin, 2012), anonymous advocates alleging that the U.S. had already spent $200 million on NGOs operating in Russia (Flikke, 2015: 110). According to Alexander Sidyakin (2012), the Duma deputy who converted the proposal into a bill, the intent was to ensure that citizens know that the NGOs that "call them to protests" act as foreign agents.

Accelerating momentum against "foreign influence" in civil society notwithstanding, the late 2000s and early 2010s saw the development of close contact between the ROC and NGOs that aligned with the former's social and political preferences. Particularly notable here is the World Congress of Families—a U.S.-based NGO that promotes a "traditional, heterosexual family model and conservative gender roles"

[141] The term "foreign agent" (иностранный агент) has a distinctively negative connotation in Russian linked to Cold War era espionage and intrigue against the USSR. Among the many organizations affected by the new law was AGORA, a human rights group that provided legal defence to members of Pussy Riot, despite the fact that the association was not actually registered as an NGO (Flikke, 2015: 118).

[142] An additional issue is chronological – Składanowski and Smuniewski (2022: 869, 884), for example, argue that the *turn* had been observable since Putin's 2007 "Munich Speech", in which the Russian president openly criticized the U.S.-led "unipolar model" of international relations, and after which his references to Western democratic values became more rare.

(Stepanova, 2021: 104)[143]. Between 2010-2012, three conferences centered around "pro-family" themes were held with the direct participation of the WCF, ROC clerics and Russian government officials. In his written address to the first of these—the "Sanctity of Motherhood" forum held in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour—Putin (2010) stated that "all… of our public organizations' projects are united by a single goal: participation in the moral and spiritual recovery of society." He then linked this recovery to the "strengthening of the family and the preservation of the people"—a process to be facilitated by the combined efforts of the ROC and the state authorities, now ostensibly joined by *friendly* NGOs. In this way, as Stoeckl and Uzlaner (2022: 49) note, a somewhat paradoxical situation developed in which a "Russian moral conservatism" influenced by transnational actors made gains while state action against "foreign agents" remained the order of the day.

The emphases of these conferences found legal expression in 2013 with the passing of a law against "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships"[144], which was in turn accompanied by legislation against the adoption of Russian children by same-sex couples[145], bans on pride parades, and tightened regulations on abortion[146]. These moves, closely associated with the "conservative turn", were ostensibly motivated in part by demographic concerns[147]. Putin (2013a) also emphasized, however, that the new legislation was "not triggered by the federal centre", but rather reflected "the attitude of Russian society"[148]

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[143] According to Stoeckl (2020: 225), the WCF actually originated after a 1995 meeting in Moscow between pro-family activist Allan Carlson and Ivan Shevchenko, the chairman of an Orthodox association.

[144] According to Levintova (2014), Larry Jacobs (former Managing Director of the WCF) agreed that his organization played an important role in getting "anti-gay" legislation passed in Russia. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile noting that the ROC's *Social Concept* (see previous chapter) coined the term "propaganda of homosexuality" (Zhuralev, 2018: 298) a decade prior to the WCF's arrival in Russia, and the Church actively lobbied for the 2013 legislation.

[145] The law also banned adoption for unmarried individuals from countries where same-sex marriage is legal. Similar to the case of the "propaganda" law, an American NGO – the National Organization for Marriage – lobbied for its introduction (HRC, 2014).

[146] Termination of pregnancy at twelve weeks remained permissible on any grounds; at twenty two-weeks, however, rape would now be the only grounds for termination. Since 2012, consultations – supported by the ROC – aimed at discouraging terminations became obligatory in public hospitals (FIDH, 2014).

[147] During a conference in Amsterdam, Putin (2013a) emphasized that both Europe and Russia were in the throes of a "demographic crisis" and that he would prefer to see the issue resolved through increased birth rates within Russia, rather than by immigration.

[148] According to VCIOM (2012b), only 6% of Russians polled in 2012 reported encountering instances of "homosexual propaganda" on television, online, etc. Nevertheless, 86% supported a "ban on the promotion of homosexuality among minors" and 42% believed "non-traditional sexuality" should be prosecuted (VCIOM, 2013). Interestingly, in 2007,

and its regions; in line with this logic, he suggested that the legalization of gay marriage could provoke a violent response from the public. At the 2013 Valdai Conference, the Russian President (2013b) went even further, accusing "Euro-Atlantic" countries of rejecting their "Christian roots that constitute the basis of Western civilization" and "implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan." Such attacks on "traditional values", Putin (2013c) would later argue, were not only anti-democratic—"carried out on the basis of abstract, speculative ideas, contrary to the will of the majority…"—but also disastrous for international relations, where "attempts to push supposedly more progressive development models onto other nations" created chaos and bloodshed throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

At this point, one might notice two themes common to the legislative shifts of the "conservative turn" described: in the first place, both the "foreign agents law" and the "anti-gay law" were presented as the organic demands of the public—indeed, to ignore these would be "anti-democratic". Both, likewise, were framed as defensive measures taken to protect Russia from foreign influence—be it through the funding of domestic NGOs or the erosion of the country's *traditional values*. Nevertheless, this too needs qualification: for while the decisions made were framed as the democratic reflection of public opinion, the Kremlin simultaneously argued that changes occurring in the West—shifts equivalent to dechristianization—in fact smacked of a crisis in Western democracies, where policies were allegedly enacted against the *will of the majority*. For the purposes of this analysis, therefore, it is necessary to point out that the "conservative turn" in legislation was accompanied by "populist"[149], "Christian", and "anti-globalist" turns in political discourse. These themes pre-existed the conservative turn itself—and, as has been discussed, underwent articulation by the ROC at varying points—but combined and came to the fore

only 19% of Russians reported this view. A similar increase could be detected in public opposition to same-sex marriage. This data indicates that the conservative turn was, to some extent, accompanied by shifts in the beliefs and attitudes of the wider public.

[149] A distinct populism; as emphasized by Putin during his 2012 election campaign, "popular sovereignty" had already been restored to Russia. This was not, therefore, primarily framed as a struggle between the Russian "people" and the country's "elites", but rather as a fight for Russia's freedom to choose its own path of development against the "demands" of Western elites supressing the public will in their own countries.

in the aftermath of Putin's return to the presidency in 2012. The significance of this shift will become evident later in this chapter; for present purposes, it is now necessary to shift attention to a crisis concurrent with the conservative turn that took place in Ukraine.

As noted in the previous chapter, Yanukovych's victory in Ukraine's 2010 presidential elections was perceived as an opportunity for the UOC-MP to develop closer ties with the Ukrainian state. And indeed, Yanukovych's government appeared to favour the UOC-MP; the Ukrainian president made regular appearances at the latter's ceremonies, allocated state funds to the construction and restoration of its parishes (Volik, 2025: 27), and granted the Church an indefinite no-fee lease to the Kievo-Pecherska Lavra (Rogoża and Chawryło, 2023: 2)—the oldest and most prominent monastery in Ukraine. Nevertheless, such measures did not extend into legislation overtly favouring the UOC-MP; the Church's stated desire[150] for the formalization of a military chaplaincy and the introduction of Orthodoxy to "all levels" of the education system, for example, did not materialize[151].

A more pressing matter for Yanukovych was Ukraine's relationship with the European Union. Initially, his administration appeared intent on establishing a free trade area between the two, and on December 19th, 2011, the Ukrainian government and EU officials concluded negotiations for an Association Agreement (AA). At this point, the Yanukovych administration appeared committed to the development of closer ties with the EU; Brussels, however, made clear its desire to see Ukraine enact judicial reforms[152]—as well as changes to existing legislation related to the freedom of press and assembly—as preconditions to the finalization of the AA (Council of the European Union, 2011). The Kremlin, meanwhile, communicated its opposition to the agreement through warnings that the AA might result in the cessation of existing free

[150] See DECR 2010b.
[151] One reason for this, according to Wanner and Yelensky (2019: 284), is that the UOC-MP was reticent to support open state discrimination against other confessions.
[152] The EU was particularly concerned by the treatment of Yulia Tymoshenko (Barroso, 2011), who was convicted on charges of abuse of office and given a seven-year prison sentence in October 2011. EU officials regarded the case as politically-motivated, given Tymoshenko's vocal opposition to Yanukovych. She was released in February 2014 following a parliamentary vote.

trade arrangements between Russia and Ukraine (Lyutova, 2013); and indeed, in the months leading up to the scheduled signing of the AA, Russia initiated a series of bans on imports from Ukraine[153].

On November 9th, 2013, the stick was ostensibly paired with a carrot as Putin reportedly met with Yanukovych to offer lower gas prices and an end to Russian sanctions on Ukrainian goods should the latter agree to back out of the EU deal and instead join the Eurasian Customs Union (Heritage and Balmforth, 2013). At the time, Ukraine was in the throes of a severe recession; Yanukovych was effectively forced to decide whether closer economic ties with the EU were worth the political costs of structural reforms[154], a breakdown in trade relations with Russia, and the loss of any prospective relief from Moscow[155]. It was in this context that Yanukovych made the fateful decision to refrain from signing the Association Agreement, which was scheduled to take place in Vilnius at the end of the month. Protests urging Yanukovych's signature began as early as November 18th (Hudson, 2018: 1367), and soon transformed into a general movement *for* closer ties with Europe and *against* the Yanukovych administration—especially after violent clashes[156] with police forces began on the 30th.

The Euromaidan movement, which culminated in the removal of Yanukovych from public office in February 2014, involved protests diverse in composition, drawing in student activists, opposition parties, and nationalists. The movement also exposed—although not for the first time—a large chasm between the UOC-MP and other religious groups in Ukraine. The UGCC[157], UOC-KP, and Ukrainian evangelicals, for

[153] For details and Ukraine's response, see Cenusa et al. (2014: 1-5).
[154] Existing loans from the International Monetary Fund were conditional upon economic reforms; EU financial assistance, likewise, was also dependent on the fulfilment of these conditions (European Commission and Government of Ukraine, 2013). These reforms stipulated controversial measures—such as increasing the retirement age for women from 55 to 60 years (Matuszak, 2011) and cutting wage expenditures in the public sector—which may have threatened Yanukovych's chances in the scheduled 2015 presidential elections.
[155] On December 17th, Putin announced plans to invest $15 billion in Ukrainian securities (Nechepurenko, 2013). It is likely that the Ukrainian government anticipated an offer of this sort *ex ante* in return for the country's withdrawal from the AA; see Konończuk (2013) for discussion.
[156] These involved the removal of 300-400 activists using batons, stun grenades, and tear gas. The authorities' explanation for this was that a Christmas tree needed to be placed on the Maidan for the holidays (Wanner, 2022: 95).
[157] The UGCC was especially active and prominent during the Euromaidan. The Ukrainian Catholic University, centered in Lviv, was the first educational institution to publicly declare civil disobedience and demand the government's resignation. Its students, likewise, were among the first gather in protest against Yanukovych (Avvakumov, 2016: 35). On January 6th 2014, a letter from the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture demanded that the discontinuation of the UGCC's religious activities—an effective ban threat that perturbed even the UOC-MP.

example, quickly aligned themselves with the movement; "tent churches" emerged on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), prayer vigils and choirs appeared on the streets, St. Michael's Monastery rang its bells to warn the public of armed attempts to disperse the demonstrations, and priests led by UGCC clergyman Father Buryadnyk put themselves between riot police and protesters, reciting prayers before the authorities until their withdrawal (Hudson, 2018: 1368). And indeed, the movement itself often framed its struggles with the state in religious terms; demonstrators killed by government forces, for example, were titled the "Heavenly Hundred" and "martyrs of the Maidan", while the toppling of a Lenin monument in the capital was symbolically likened to the fall of the "highest god of the enemies" (Boeckh, 2016: 207).

The UOC-MP, meanwhile, quickly found itself in a difficult position, for the Church had generally supported Yanukovych since his initial presidential campaign in 2004. Nevertheless, many lay believers attended the protests, and some priests attempted to dissuade the use of force against demonstrators (Olszański, 2014). The terminally ill primate of the Church, Metropolitan Vladimir (TASS, 2013), for his part, called for common prayer against enmity and bloodshed, and issued a biblical warning to the authorities: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand"[158]. Prior to the outbreak of the protest movement, the Primate had further indicated support for both European integration (Chornomorets, 2013) and the eventual attainment of autocephaly (Drabynko, 2016). By the end of February 2014, however, Vladimir's health had deteriorated to a point at which he could no longer fulfill his duties; after a period as the *locum tenens*, Metropolitan Onufriy was elected Primate with the blessing of Patriarch Kirill (Olszański, 2014).

As Suslov (2016: 137) highlights, 2014 saw a considerable shift in the orientations of the UOC-MP and ROC toward the events unfolding in Ukraine. From February to March, Onufriy appeared to continue his predecessor's "pro-Ukrainian" line, supporting the notion of autocephaly (ibid. 137) and petitioning

[158] Matthew 12:25.

Kirill to convince Putin to withdraw the troops that began to appear in Crimea days after Yanukovych's removal (Denysenko, 2014: 253). The Patriarch's (2014a) response contained no direct comment on Crimea; Kirill instead promised to attempt to persuade "all those in power" to avoid civilian casualties at all costs, and insisted that Ukraine's future must be decided by its own people, "without external influence." Despite this ostensibly non-committal reply, the Patriarch's absence from the March 18th signing of the treaty of accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation suggested either his disapproval of the annexation or an unwillingness to associate the ROC with it[159]. Put plainly, in the Spring of 2014, both the UOC-MP and ROC—insofar as their public statements and actions are concerned—appeared far removed from an overtly "pro-Russian" stance on the Ukraine crisis.

During the summer months, however, a change in tone steadily became discernible. On June 16th, Metropolitan Onufriy (2014a) argued that Ukraine had become the focal point of a larger conflict between the "economic, political, and… spiritual interests [of] the West and the East"; Europe, according to the Primate, had adopted legislation contrary to Christian teachings—Ukraine should not, therefore, push for closer relations with the EU, but rather "maintain unity with those who uphold the Divine law." Onufriy[160] thus implied his opposition to the official course of the new government headed by President Petro Poroshenko (2014), who announced plans to move forward with European integration during his inauguration speech on June 7th. Kirill's discourse on Ukraine, likewise, had shifted considerably by August. In an address to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Kirill (2014b) asserted that "Uniates and their schismatic allies" were attempting to effect the "eradication" of Ukrainian Orthodoxy and listed attacks on

[159] According to an unnamed "high-ranking Church official" interviewed by the European Council on Foreign Relations (Liik et al., 2019), the Patriarch's absence was indeed intentional. The Church's ostensibly moderate stance, Suslov (2016: 141) argues, made for a striking contrast with the "vehemently anti-Ukrainian propaganda" which appeared in Russia's secular press.

[160] Three days after this interview, the UOC-MP began "personnel shifts" aimed at the dismissal of pro-autocephaly clergy (Suslov, 2016: 137).

UOC-MP clergy that had reportedly taken place over the course of July[161]. From August onward, Kirill further ceased referring to Ukraine as "holy" (Suslov, 2016: 146).

Taken together, the discursive shifts of the UOC-MP and ROC between spring and summer 2014 hinted at a new interpretation of the Ukrainian crisis as a flashpoint in the ongoing clash between the secular, progressive West and Orthodox civilization within *Holy Rus'* itself. The principal "turning point", for its part, seems to have been the Ukrainian government's Anti-Terrorist Operation, launched in April 2014 against separatists in the Donbas region. This was the point at which incidents involving violence against UOC-MP clergy—as well as seizures of its parishes[162] (Zakvasin and Lushnikova, 2018)—began to occur more frequently. Aggression toward the UOC-MP, for its part, was rooted in the severe escalation of tensions between Ukraine and Russia that took place over the course of 2014; to some, the Church's links to the Moscow Patriarchate increasingly resembled shackles to the Kremlin fettering the development of a free Ukraine. The ROC, likewise, understood the ecclesial import of these events: a push toward Ukrainian autocephaly—a veritable rupture within *Holy Rus'*—had become all but inevitable. As far as the Moscow Patriarchate was concerned, therefore, neutrality toward the *new course* of Ukrainian politics was no longer conducive to the institution's long-term survival outside of Russia.

The religious dimensions of the Ukrainian crisis soon found analogues in Russian political discourse. In November 2014, the ROC and Ministry of Culture organized a multimedia exhibition titled "Orthodox Rus'. My History. The Rurikids" to showcase historical events pivotal to the formation of Russian statehood. Accompanying the exhibition was a conference—"Moscow – the Third Rome"—which saw presentations by Archimandrite Shevkunov, Natalia Narochnitskaya, Aleksandr Dugin, and other prominent Russian academics and public figures (Stroganova, 2014). The "Third Rome" concept has been

[161] Several attacks were reported earlier in the month by Onufriy (2014b) in an address to Poroshenko. In his statement, the Metropolitan directly attributed the violence to Ukraine's security forces and requested the President's personal involvement in efforts to end the "violation of the rights and freedoms" of believers in Donetsk.
[162] Approximately fifty parishes were seized from the UOC-MP between 2014 and 2018.

the subject of many interpretations religious or secular in character, "isolationist" or "imperialist"[163], but is often associated with the notion that Russia occupies a special—perhaps even sacred—place among nations. This was indeed communicated by Dugin's address at the November conference, for example, which presented Russia as the *katechon*, the biblical restrainer of the Antichrist's arrival and rule over the Earth[164]. Considered on its own, such rhetoric is not necessarily noteworthy; the appearance of a church- and state-sponsored conference dedicated to discussion of the Third Rome and held "a stone's throw away from the Kremlin" (Østbø, 2016: 238), however, suggested that the dramatic events of 2013-2014 worked to entrench the "conservative turn" in thinking about Russia's role in global affairs.

Such, in turn, soon found expression in foreign policy discourse regarding the Middle East in general and Syria in particular. The latter, at the time, remained in the throes of a civil war that pitted a variety of rebel factions against the government of President Bashar al-Assad. Facing the threat of persecution by ISIS and other radical organizations, the majority of local Christian groups remained loyal to Assad (Adamsky, 2019b: 61). This made for another basis for cooperation between the ROC and the Russian government, for Assad was considered an important ally to the Kremlin, and the Church had emphasized concern for the Middle East's Christian populations since the onset of the Arab Spring (ibid. 51). The Church thus supported Russian intervention in Syria as a measure necessary for the defence of Christians ignored by the West, which, according to Metropolitan Hilarion (2014a), was "interested in only two things in the Middle East: Israel and oil, [with] no interest in the fate of Christians." Vsevolod Chaplin (2015) went even further, framing the intervention as a "sacred struggle"[165]; Kirill (2016), likewise,

[163] See Østbø (2016) for an in-depth discussion of contemporary political interpretations of the "Third Rome" concept.
[164] Laruelle (17: 2024) frames *katechonic* themes as elements of Kremlin discourse, as well. This "strategic narrative", on her account, is closely associated with Russia's emphasis on the defence of traditional values from the influence of the West; here, Russia, the persisting bastion of traditional values, fulfills its role as katechon by delaying the arrival of the kingdom of the Beast.
[165] As Curanović (2018: 262) notes, Chaplin's comments were poorly-received by Syrian Christian communities and were regarded as scandalous for Russian diplomacy. The Archpriest resigned from his position as Chairman of the Synodal Department for the Cooperation of Church and Society soon after.

characterized the conflict as a "holy war" against terrorism. Such terminology was not only novel for the post-Soviet Church, but would also prove premonitory.

The opening years of Putin's third presidential term saw dramatic shifts in Russian and Ukrainian politics, the ramifications of which would not become evident until later. What can be said at this point is that this period saw the Russian state attempt to decisively differentiate its domestic and foreign policy preferences from those of Western powers; the Ukrainian state, meanwhile, moved in a different direction. The political turbulence that accompanied the crises of 2013-2014, likewise, saw the ROC lose much of its institutional interest in friendly—or at least neutral—relations with the Ukrainian state. The stakes involved with Ukraine's *religious question*—left unresolved and indeed exacerbated in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union—reached new heights without any indications of future abatement. It was in this context that Russian political discourse began to venture into territories at once familiar and nevertheless uncharted; possibilities once considered unthinkable, likewise, would soon experience articulation in terms both secular and spiritual to devastating material effect.

## Section II. From Autocephaly to the Special Military Operation

The events which transpired in Ukraine from 2013 to 2014 were of great interest not only to Russia and the broader international community, but also to Eastern Orthodox churches around the world: the Euromaidan movement, the removal of Yanukovych, the outbreak of conflict within Ukraine's borders and the annexation of Crimea—each of these made evident that the splintered state of Ukrainian Orthodoxy contributed to turbulence in the country's politics. The creation of a unified church was the stated preference of many Ukrainian politicians, who reasoned that the independent Ukrainian state should have an independent church. The ROC evidently desired the unity of Ukrainian Orthodoxy as well, but not necessarily its independence; unity, in this context, would likely translate to the marginalization or assimilation of the UOC-KP and UAOC.

Some hierarchs of the UOC-MP, for their part, flirted with the notion of autocephaly; by the end of 2014, however, this option increasingly appeared a non-starter due to the ROC's opposition. To "lose"

Ukraine would not only translate to a dramatic reduction of the Moscow Patriarchate's canonical reach, but could also provoke something resembling an identity crisis for the Church—if the ROC lost its "Jerusalem", its sacral origin sites, what would this mean for the Church and its role as the founder and sustainer of *Holy Rus'*? And what would this mean for Russian statehood, in light of the sum of the developments described throughout this study? To put the matter plainly, the question of Ukrainian autocephaly is bound up with questions fundamental to Russia not simply as a modern nation-state, an ethnic or linguistic community, a calculus of geopolitical and economic interests, but also as a *story*; a thousand-year-old collection of memories, hopes, fears, victories, defeats, promises, and tragedies. In practical terms, what is to be made of this story is up to those who engage with it; at any rate, Ukraine's "separation" from Russia—symbolically crowned by the *canonical* formation of a unified and independent church—could severely complicate existing tendencies in its interpretation and communication by church and state.

The "threat" of autocephaly steadily became more real after Russia took Crimea. Although no canonical Orthodox churches condemned the annexation, March 2014 saw the development of plans to convene a historic pan-Orthodox council—the first of its type since the Second Council of Nicaea in 787—to discuss, among other things, "autocephaly and its manner of proclamation" (Leustean, 2018: 203, 208). At the time, this was a topic of debate[166] between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople represented in polemics between Metropolitan Hilarion and Metropolitan Elpidophoros (Brusanowski, 2016: 51-54), primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Put plainly, the debate concerned the authority necessary to grant autocephaly. Elpidophoros (2014) argued that the Ecumenical Patriarch, as the Archbishop of Constantinople, is the "*first-hierarch without equals* (primus sine paribus)"[167] and thus possesses the right to grant or remove autocephaly unilaterally; in response, Hilarion (2014b) accused Elpidophoros of attempting "to implant Roman Catholic ecclesiology on

[166] Indeed, there was no pan-Orthodox consensus on the procedures involved with the conferment of autocephaly (Mykhaleyko, 2019: 480). This remains the case to this day. For a discussion of the methods by which autocephaly was granted in the past, see Brusanowski (2016).
[167] Emphasis in original.

Orthodox soil" and instead argued that the granting of autocephaly should be a "pan-Orthodox process" resulting in a *Tomos*[168] signed by all autocephalous churches. This would effectively give the ROC and other churches veto power over efforts to grant autocephaly to a Ukrainian church.

Mere days prior to the Great and Holy Council of 2016, Ukraine's parliament appealed[169] to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to issue a Tomos of autocephaly, arguing that the absorption of the Kiev Metropolis into the Moscow Patriarchate in 1686 was uncanonical and that the modern Russian church was "a moral accomplice of Russian aggression and hybrid war against Ukraine." This push for autocephaly, likewise, was accompanied by a series of legislative moves against the UOC-MP. The first of these 2016 draft laws aimed at simplifying the processes involved in the transfer of a parish from one church to another on the initiative of parishioners; according to Shestopalets (2019: 57), the intent was to nullify the ability of UOC-MP clergy to impede transfers of their parishes over to the UOC-KP[170]. Two further draft laws concerned the status of religious organizations whose "official administrative centres" are located in Russia, the "aggressor state". Together, these laws were poised to grant the state the right to revoke the UOC-MP's registration, oversee the appointments of its hierarchs, and require the Church to change its name to the "Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine"[171], the latter a longstanding proposal of the UOC-KP's Patriarch Filaret (ibid. 58). The writing was on the wall: political momentum in Ukraine had turned decisively against the Moscow Patriarchate and toward Constantinople.

The Holy and Great Council convened in Crete from the 19th to the 26th of June 2016. In the weeks prior, however, several churches—including the ROC—announced that they would not attend[172]. As a

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[168] Greek for "section"; in an Orthodox context, a decree.
[169] See Verkhovna Rada (2016).
[170] This law was revised and passed as Bill No. 4128-d in 2019. Though the law permits only "religious communities" to initiate a parish transfer process, Onufriy (2019) alleged that, in practice, municipal councils and political parties mobilized their own affiliates to gather the votes necessary for transfers, sometimes employing violence against parishioners themselves.
[171] The bill to rename the UOC-MP was passed in 2018.
[172] The first of these was the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, followed by the Patriarchate of Antioch, and the Georgian Orthodox Church. Each cited their own reasons for absence; see Leustean (2018: 209-210) for discussion. The ROC, for its part, proposed a pre-council to sort out "resolve all issues because of which the Churches are refusing to

result, the issue of autocephaly was removed from the Council's agenda (Olszański, 2018). The absence of several patriarchates represented a major blow to what was supposed to be a monumental event in church history and provoked a sharp reaction from Patriarch Bartholomew (2016) during his opening address to the Council:

> Every strike against the Council strikes at the very hypostasis of our Church and strikes even those who are striking … Especially when absence from the Council occurs after its convocation has already been agreed upon and signed by all[173] of us, then our integrity and seriousness is placed in question to the detriment of the whole image of our holy Church towards those within and those outside her.

As noted in previous chapters, tensions between the Ecumenical and Russian patriarchates are by no means historically novel; the ROC's absence from the Council, however, likely expressed—and further contributed to—an acute deterioration of this relationship. And indeed, only a month after the Council, the Patriarchate of Constantinople formed a synodal commission responsible for reviewing the Ukrainian government's request for autocephaly (RISU[174], 2016a). On August 1st, a representative of Bartholomew invited to Ukraine by Poroshenko went so far as to affirm that the Church of Constantinople regards Ukraine as part of its canonical territory (RISU, 2016b).

These shifts aside, the push for autocephaly did not make a breakthrough until April 2018. During this month, both Poroshenko[175] and Samuel Brownback—then US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom—met with Bartholomew[176], and on April 20th, the Ecumenical Patriarchate decided to

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participate" (Hilarion, 2016) or a postponement of the Council, reasoning that no pan-Orthodox consensus could be reached without the participation of each local Church.

[173] The Council's convocation agreement was signed in January 2016 by all participants except for the Antiochian delegation (Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2016).

[174] Religious Information Service of Ukraine.

[175] At the time, Poroshenko's public popularity was in decline. It is likely that he hoped securing autocephaly would boost his chances in the presidential elections scheduled for the following year (Mudrov, 2019: 271). And indeed, the Ukrainian President positioned himself at the forefront of all developments related to the conferment of autocephaly (Mykhaleyko, 2019: 495).

[176] See Ecumenical Patriarchate (2018a, 2018b).

formally initiate the process of granting autocephaly to Ukraine (Papagermanos, 2018). Brownback again met with Poroshenko in September (Priamyi, 2018); that same month, Joe Biden met with UOC-KP's Patriarch Filaret (Arnold, 2018). Bartholomew, for his part, moved forward with the appointment of two exarchs to Ukraine in preparation for the granting of autocephaly (Mykhaleyko, 2019: 481). Together with these exarchs, the Ecumenical Patriarchate (2018c) proclaimed communion with the UOC-KP and UAOC and revoked the above-mentioned 1686 decision on October 11th, 2018. At this point, it had become clear that the U.S. had an interest in the establishment of a canonically-recognized autocephalous church for Ukraine, and likely contributed momentum toward its creation. It was also evident that, despite attempts by Kirill and Putin to dissuade Bartholomew[177], the Ecumenical Patriarchate would not reverse the process it had set in motion.

The Russian Security Council met and discussed the October 11th announcement the following day (Presidential Executive Office, 2018). Four days later, the ROC (DECR, 2018) announced the termination of communion with Constantinople, arguing that the latter had encroached upon Moscow's canonical territory and unduly recognized the "schismatics" without concern for the UOC-MP. Putin (2018) and other Russian state officials, likewise, denounced Bartholomew's decision as a product of American interference in Ukrainian religious affairs—"another step in tearing Ukraine from Russia, not just politically, but also spiritually" (Lavrov, 2018). It is worth noting that both statements framed Bartholomew's decision as something disastrous for human rights in Ukraine; Putin warned of bloodshed that could result from this "politically motivated … flagrant violation of religious freedoms" and Lavrov associated the decision with broader attacks on the linguistic rights of Russian speakers in Ukraine. Metropolitan Onufriy (2018), for his part, also appeared to anticipate persecution directed against the UOC-MP, but called on the Church to pray for Ukraine's authorities, rather than "disdain or hate them".

[177] See Volik (2025: 29).

Bartholomew signed the Tomos on January 5th, 2019, granting autocephaly to the newly-formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). This meant the transformation of the UOC-KP[178] and the UAOC into a single ecclesial body; out of the UOC-MP's eighty bishops, however, only two joined (Mykhaleyko, 2019: 498). Despite having desired the status of a patriarchate (ibid. 483), the OCU would be established as a metropolis, required to seek the "authoritative opinion and conclusive support" of Constantinople on any "major issues of ecclesiastical, doctrinal and canonical nature" (Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2019). In addition, the OCU's jurisdiction was limited to the territory of Ukraine; this meant that any parishes previously associated with the UOC-KP outside of Ukraine were to become subordinate to the Ecumenical Patriarchate alone[179]. In practical terms, therefore, the formation of the OCU did not result in the unification of Ukrainian Orthodoxy; neither, likewise, did it translate to full ecclesial independence; for Ukrainian parishes outside of Ukraine, the reverse actually obtained. Canonical recognition of the OCU by the broader Church, meanwhile, remains partial[180].

The conferment of the Tomos further shed light on the constellation of interests that had emerged around religion in Ukraine. Poroshenko (2019), for instance, celebrated autocephaly as the conclusive severing of "the last ties that connected us with Moscow" and its claims to Ukraine as canonical territory. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (2019), likewise, praised the decision as a "historic achievement" for Ukraine and reiterated American support for the rights of Ukrainian religious groups to operate "without external interference"—implicitly that of Russia. Among the churches of Ukraine itself, 64% of Greek Catholics expressed full support for the establishment of a single local church, a position which was shared by 56% of the UOC-KP and 15% of the UOC-MP (Rating Group, as cited in Mudrov, 2019: 274). Taken together, the comments of the Ukrainian president, the geographical distribution of domestic support[181], and the fact that UGCC faithful were more positive about the autocephaly proceedings than the UOC-KP itself

[178] Filaret (2019) insists, on the contrary, that the UOC-KP still exists and that he is still its Patriarch.
[179] According to Mykhaleyko (2019: 484), this was to affect approximately sixty-nine parishes around the world.
[180] As of the time of writing, four (including Constantinople) of the fourteen autocephalous churches have recognized the OCU.
[181] Full support for autocephaly was indicated by 51% of respondents from western regions of Ukraine, 39% from those in the centre, 27% in the South and 25% in the East (ibid.).

indicate that autocephaly was not only associated with the unification of the fractured state of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, but also political, religious, and cultural independence from Russia in general. Indeed, this was to represent "the fall of the Third Rome as Moscow's most ancient conceptual bid for global domination" (Poroshenko, 2018).

The Ecumenical Patriarchate's recognition of the clergy of the UOC-KP and UAOC, combined with the creation of the OCU and the appearance of laws aimed at the marginalization of the UOC-MP – each of these developments signalled to the Moscow Patriarchate that it stood to lose everything in Ukraine. To Kirill (2018), this was effectively a conspiracy of Ukrainian authorities and the United States—dovetailing with the institutional interests of Constantinople—to destroy the UOC-MP and thereby sever the "last bond" uniting the Orthodox peoples of Russia and *fraternal Ukraine*. And, as indicated above, this complemented existing claims of the Kremlin about the Ukrainian government—namely that the latter actively persecuted its Russian-speaking population. That the developments associated with the conferment of autocephaly might lead Russia and Ukraine into deeper conflict was indeed implied by Putin (2019) at the 10th anniversary celebrations of Kirill's enthronement:

> I would like to reiterate: the Russian state and authorities consider any interference in church affairs absolutely unacceptable. We have respected and will continue to respect the independence of church life, especially in a neighboring sovereign country. Nevertheless, we reserve the right to respond and do everything possible to protect human rights, including freedom of religion.

If 2019 saw something resembling the fulfilment of Ukraine's Maidan movement in religious terms, 2020 would see Russia's *martial symphonia* granted vivid symbolic expression – both in fundamental law and on the outskirts of Moscow itself. This began with Putin's (2020) January announcement of proposed changes to the constitution to "create a solid, reliable and invulnerable system that will be absolutely stable in terms of the external contour and will securely guarantee Russia's independence and sovereignty." To this end, the Russian President proposed a variety of changes and invited the public to contribute its own

ideas. Among those who participated was Kirill (2020), who called for God to be referenced in the constitution. This proposal was approved and submitted to the State Duma in March. Among the other proposals was an element of "divine law" (DECR, 2016): the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman[182]. This would effectively translate to the movement of Russia's "traditional family values" into the fundamental law[183] (Demydova, 2020: 153). Also included was a proposal of Konstantin Zatulin (2020), who advocated for a constitutional emphasis on the relationship between the state and "compatriots" living abroad. This, he argued, would not only contribute to the protection of their rights against abuse by foreign governments, but would also represent a "huge step forward for the consolidation of the entire Russian world[184]." These amendments and others[185] passed the State Duma and formally came into effect after a public vote held on July 4th, 2020. Taken together, the inclusion of God, the definition of marriage, and the emphasis on the state's ties to diaspora populations—all of this, likewise, under the overarching aim of bolstering state sovereignty—pointed toward the consolidation of a constitutional basis for the defence of *traditional values*[186] and the *Russian world*, conceptual axes along which church-state cooperation now tilted.

The constitutional amendments, likewise, were accompanied by the opening of the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces (MCRAF) on June 22nd, 2020. The Cathedral was funded by a mixture of private donations and state expenditures, and was built in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Soviet victory in the Second World War to serve not only as a "centre for spiritual and patriotic education", but also as a site of training for the military clergy (Adamsky, 2019b: 60). Prior to its completion, Defence

[182] This amendment was proposed by Deputy Chairman Pyotr Tolstoy (2020) with the support of the ROC.
[183] This also aligned with the Kremlin's emphasis on constitutional amendments as means to protect and bolster state sovereignty. Sergey Naryshkin (2019)—director of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service—for example, argued that the promotion of "radical feminism" and LGBT rights by Western countries was aimed at priming targeted states for colour revolutions.
[184] Zatulin is quoting Mikhail Drozdov (2020), Chairman of the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots.
[185] The amendments were accompanied by a reset on Putin's terms in office; in effect, he would now be permitted to run for office again in 2024 and in 2030.
[186] According to Mchedlova (2024: 778-779), public support for the state promotion of traditional values has increased considerably in recent years; approximately 40% of the public, however, expresses ambivalent or skeptical views toward this direction of state policy.

Minister Sergei Shoigu[187] (as cited in Wesolowski, 2018) emphasized a desire "for every square meter of the cathedral to be symbolic"—and indeed, every aspect of the resulting construction spoke to an ecclesial-martial fusion: mosaics depict the Red Army and Russian soldiers under saints and angels, the church's steps were made from melted tanks and weaponry of the Wehrmacht (Shoigu, 2020), and the building itself is located in Patriot Park, a broader exhibition of military history and hardware. This artistically depicted closeness between the spiritual and material defences of the *Motherland* further implied that a coherent national identity could be synthesized in the sacral; each of the terrestrial twists and turns of the state, all of the bloody traumas and immense sacrifices of its people—in a word, the entire earthliness of Russian history—is presented as recognized, reconciled, made whole, comprehensible, and redeemed in heaven.

When the constitutional amendments and the opening of the MCRAF are considered in light of the 1993 constitution and the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the post-Soviet transformations of Russian politics and church-state relations become all the more clear. Like the 1993 constitution, the amendments of 2020 further contributed to the power of the presidency; unlike it, however, the amendments were approved without much difficulty (Demydova, 2020: 159). While the 1993 constitution emphasized the secularity of the state, the amendments introduced God and codified a pillar of the ROC's *traditional values*. And while the 1993 constitution makes no mention of the relationship of the state to the larger Russian diaspora, the amendments made evident the state's willingness —or even a self-ascribed obligation—to support the rights of these populations against infringement abroad. Finally, just as the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour pointed to the revival of the ROC and the formation of a new basis for church-state interaction, the MCRAF highlighted the depth of interconnection that now obtained between the two, extending to institutional cooperation for the sake of national security itself. The martial symphonia, in other words, no longer subsisted as something resembling an unconscious, seemingly unintentional side-effect of church-state interaction and the gradual coalescence of their interests, but now

[187] It appears that the MCRAF's construction was an in fact an initiative of Shoigu that received Kirill's approval (TASS, 2018).

instead emerged as a cognized and embraced circumstance reflected in both the art and laws associated with Russian statecraft. What had yet to be fully unfolded at this point, however, was the import of this relationship for international politics; this was indeed reflected in Putin's reported reaction to the appearance of his visage on a mosaic[188] within the MCRAF: "Someday our thankful descendants will appreciate our merits, but it's too early to do so now" (Roth, 2020).

At this point, the now consolidated composition was nearing its crescendo. A clear line had emerged in the sand: the Maidan had signalled Ukraine's political separation from Russia, while the attainment of autocephaly expressed this divorce in religious terms. The annexation of Crimea and the severing of communion with Constantinople, for their part, communicated Russia's response. Against the backdrop of the Joint Forces Operation (JFO[189]) in Ukraine's East, where many of the country's ethnic Russians and UOC-MP faithful lived, there was little in the way of abatement to escalating tensions[190]. Over the course of 2021, these would instead reach new heights: Russian troops amassed near the Ukrainian border in April, provoking fears of full-scale invasion, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky pressed for NATO membership as a deterrent and guarantor of the country's sovereignty. This was evidently unacceptable to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021a, 2021b), which in December published draft treaties with the US and NATO stipulating that, inter alia, the latter halt its eastward expansion and refuse membership to any former Soviet states. Both U.S. President Joe Biden (2022) and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (2022) expressed openness to continued diplomacy with Russia, but maintained that Ukraine's membership in the alliance could not be prohibited out of respect for its right to self-determination. On

[188] This depiction, along with that of Stalin, was removed before the MCRAF's consecration (Kostina and Tadtaev, 2020). In its stead, a depiction of a religious procession of the Korsun Icon of the Mother of God that took place during the annexation of Crimea.

[189] The ATO was concluded and replaced by the JFO on April 30th, 2018, communicating that the Ukrainian government's opponents in the Donbas were no longer regarded as "militants or terrorists", but rather as forces under the command of the Russian military (Ukraine Crisis Media Centre, 2018). Given this, leadership for the operation was transferred from Ukraine's Security Service to the Armed Forces.

[190] Formal and informal truces occurred—most notably through the Minsk Agreements and the "full and comprehensive ceasefire" of 2020—but each proved relatively short-lived.

February 17th, 2022, the MFA (2022) in turn announced that this "lack of readiness" to establish guarantees pertaining to Russia's security would necessitate a "military-technical" response.

Such took shape mere days later. On February 21st, Putin (2022a) delivered an address in which he announced recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic. This was framed, in part, as a response to the decisions of Ukraine's "aggressive and nationalistic regime" which, according to the Kremlin, infringed upon the linguistic rights of Russian speakers, planned the total destruction of the UOC-MP, and displayed little commitment to a peaceful solution to conflict in the Donbas. In other words, the President alleged that the Ukrainian government intended to use legal means and armed force to end whatever remained of the ties between the peoples of Ukraine and Russia. Acting on this logic—and against the ostensible threat of NATO's expansion—a "special military operation" was announced to "demilitarise and denazify" Ukraine (Putin, 2022b). The die was thus cast; Kirill (2022) now called for all to be delivered to God's justice and judgement, "including those who assume the gravest responsibility, [that of] widening the gap between brothers, filling it with hatred, malice, and death."

Summary.

While the first two decades of the post-Soviet era saw the development of something resembling symphonic relations between church and state, the period of 2012-2022 would see this relationship shift in orientation toward pronounced ideological tension with the West in general and armed conflict with Ukraine in particular. Beginning with the "conservative turn"—which, in truth, may also be described as a *Christian populist* or *anti-globalist* turn—the state presented itself as a bulwark of traditional values and a contrast to Western polities held captive by *elites* who ignore majority opinion, conduct diplomacy with other countries in bad faith, and attempt to effect the full expulsion of the church from public life. This was essentially an appeal to popular sovereignty, or the notion that the Russian state should not be evaluated simply in terms of its economic performance, receptiveness to the social models and cultural norms of Western countries, etc., but rather by its capacity to defend "Russia", Russia's particularity, and the Russian people from the

homogenizing tendencies that accompany globalization. Resistance to the latter as an expression of sovereignty, one might recall, has been a major and consistent theme of post-Soviet ROC discourse, articulated and rearticulated long before the chasm between modern Russia and the West revealed itself.

Concurrent with the *turn* were major moments of identity formation for the Ukrainian state. Initially, this was an open question; indeed, just prior to the Maidan, Ukrainians reported warmer feelings toward Russia than to the European Union and the United States (ISI, 2013: 16). Nevertheless, a plurality favoured economic association with the EU over the Eurasian Customs Union and the majority felt that Ukraine was "headed in the wrong direction" under Yanukovych (ibid. 4, 10). This divide was reflected in religious terms during the Maidan itself, with the UGCC, UOC-KP, and other religious groups actively supporting the protest movement for closer association with Europe while the UOC-MP appeared much less enthusiastic. The Kremlin, for its part, reacted to the ousting of Yanukovych as a direct challenge to its security interests and moved to annex Crimea. This, along with the outbreak of conflict in Donbas, placed the UOC-MP in a particularly awkward position; it possessed a strong institutional presence throughout much of Ukraine, but the country's territory itself was now called into question by Russia and pro-Russian separatists. In this context, the political momentum shifted decisively against the UOC-MP, which would soon find itself the target of new legislation, parish seizures, and sometimes violence.

Such—combined with the Poroshenko administration's clear preference for a united Orthodox church bereft of association with the Moscow Patriarchate —led the ROC toward a disposition similar to that of the Russian government. Should the effort to attain autocephaly succeed, this could translate to a substantial reduction of its canonical reach and, perhaps even more significantly, do serious damage to the notion of *Holy Rus'*. Such, in turn, would present danger not only to the ROC's reputation and status, but also to its institutional identity as a founder and active participant in the historical formation of Russian statehood born at the *baptismal font of Kiev.* Given frosty relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which seemed to regard itself as possessing the authority to confer autocephaly unilaterally, the ROC thus possessed incentive to withdraw from the Holy and Great Council of 2016—a major offence to

Constantinople. Despite the latter's ostensible openness to granting Ukraine autocephaly, however, real momentum toward this end did not manifest until 2018; Poroshenko pushed for autocephaly as a public win for his administration amid declining popularity and incoming elections, and the American government involved itself for the purposes of supporting Ukraine's "religious freedom"—namely, freedom from the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The issuing of the *Tomos* and the creation of the OCU by no means spelled an end to the long-standing ecclesial divisions in Ukraine. It was, however, interpreted (and in fact presented) as a symbolic zenith of the larger process of effecting Ukraine's complete separation from Russia—not simply in geopolitical terms, but also as a *nation* composed of an independent state, a distinct people, and an autocephalous church.

By the late 2010s, therefore, Ukraine had once again emerged as a locus of interests shared between the Russian church and state. For both, the stakes involved with Ukraine's future had become intertwined with both national and *spiritual* security. That there remained little to distinguish the two concepts was reflected by the 2020 constitutional amendments, the construction of the MCRAF, and, finally, the initiation of the special military operation. This, I have argued, is the martial symphonia: church-state cooperation not only in domestic affairs, but in foreign policy, and ultimately war. This particular configuration of relations between religious and political authority in Russia emerged out of the distinct conditions confronting both church and state after the fall of the USSR. Other conditions obtained in Ukraine—where nothing resembling symphonia emerged—and these contributed to the formation of a different political and religious path for the country. The pursuit of a different course, however, collided with the Russian nexus of church-state interests; this collision, likewise, oriented the symphonia toward the taking up of arms.

The resulting conflict, now in its third year at the time of writing, was not the product of the decision-making of any single actor in isolation. Nor was it simply undertaken for "religious" reasons, e.g., for the sake of the UOC-MP or the defence of the ROC's canonical territory. It would also be a mistake, however, to characterize the war as the output of geopolitical, economic, or strategic considerations

assumed to speak for themselves; there was nothing latent in the international order or political economy which guaranteed Russia's post-Soviet divergence from the West. It was rather up to Russia's political leadership to interpret and analyze the conditions confronting the newly (re)established state. It would not do so alone, however, but rather alongside a resurgent, transnational church closely associated with the foundations and history of a statehood which now needed to be constructed and articulated anew. As the Church moved—mostly on its own initiative, it is worth emphasizing—to provide support for the Russian state and in turn create close associations with its machinery, so too did distinctions in their interests begin to blur. This, in turn, produced a logic of cooperation, and, to some evident extent, a similar conception of Russia, its specificity, its place in the world, and its relations to others. The ROC was not the only non-state participant in this process, of course, but the evidence suggests that its participation was decisive.

Nevertheless, in the final analysis, it cannot be said that the Church is plainly "responsible" for the war. I have come across no evidence, for instance, to suggest that Kirill or other clergy actively pushed for the special military operation prior to its inception. I have argued, rather, that the post-Soviet church possessed specific interests informed both by historical experience and its beliefs; interests in the development of a close relationship with the state, in proffering resistance to the latter's somewhat short-lived embrace of the West, and, perhaps above all else, in maintaining its institutional integrity and *canonical territory*. As it succeeded in associating with—and in some cases even integrating into—the state and public legislation, and in shaping political discourse through an emphasis on traditional values, a vision of "Russia" extending beyond its borders, and a consistent opposition to Western norms and globalization, so too did it find itself actively promoting state interests, for the latter themselves steadily became congruent with the bulk of the Church's own interests. Ultimately, Ukraine emerged as a key locus of this constellation of interests; as Ukrainian authorities communicated decisive breaks with Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate, therefore, so too did momentum accelerate toward direct intervention. Priests accompany soldiers on the battlefield, both blessed by Kirill in a war he called "holy"; this may be startling, but not necessarily surprising, for this is the martial symphonia in action.

This concludes the main empirical portion of the present study, although some comments on developments since the war's onset open the next chapter. What follows concludes the work with analysis of its theoretical implications, as well as a summary of the argument and discussion of an avenue for future research.

# CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

Described and analyzed above are Russian church-state relations from their historical origins to the onset of the "special military operation". It has been argued, centrally, that contemporary church-state relations are largely the product of particular conditions that confronted both the ROC and Russian government in the wake of the dissolution of the USSR. These conditions incentivized cooperation, the "fullness" of which I have termed *symphonia*; developments internal and external to this relationship likewise oriented the actually existing symphonia toward direct conflict with Ukraine.

A religious colouration to the war, moreover, has since come into sharper focus. Such has indeed been reflected in the discourses of its participants; during an Easter address, for example, Zelensky (2024) declared that the Russians "have broken all the commandments, coveted our house, and come to kill us. God knows it. And we believe that there is a chevron with the Ukrainian flag on the shoulder of God." Metropolitan Epiphanius (2025), primate of the OCU, likewise, denounced Putin as a "servant of Satan, who pretends to be a 'servant of righteousness,' [and] deserves God's merciless judgment and punishment, for he himself is godless and merciless, hypocritical and untruthful!" In line with these statements, and ostensibly continuing the work of the Poroshenko administration, the Ukrainian government has moved to initiate the process of outlawing the UOC-MP, provoking threats from both Putin[191] and Kirill[192]. The UOC-MP, for its part, has condemned the war as "fratricidal", but nonetheless appears to concur with the ROC's assessment that the conferment of autocephaly to the OCU was one of the principal reasons for the conflict (Krawchuk, 2022: 179-180; 185).

Something resembling a full synthesis of the ROC's perspective on the war—integrating long-standing themes of anti-globalism, accusations that the West had abandoned and betrayed Christ, and that

[191] "You know, what is happening with regard to the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine is a unique situation. This is a gross, blatant violation of human rights, the rights of believers. The church is being torn apart right before everyone's eyes. This is like execution by firing squad, and yet the world seems to ignore it. I think those who engage in such actions will get it back" (Putin, 2024).

[192] "[N]ot a trace will remain of the schismatics, because they are fulfilling an evil, diabolical will, destroying Orthodoxy in the land of Kiev" (Kirill, 2023).

Ukraine served as a proxy for conflict with the Russian people—appeared in the Decree of the 25th World Russian People's Council[193] (Moscow Patriarchate, 2024), a document worth quoting at length:

> The special military operation is a new stage in the national liberation struggle of the Russian people against the criminal Kiev regime and the collective West that stands behind it, which has been waged in the lands of southwestern Rus' since 2014. During the SMO, the Russian people, arms in hand, defend their lives, freedom, statehood, civilizational, religious, national, and cultural identity, as well as the right to live on their own land within the borders of a unified Russian state. From a spiritual and moral perspective, the special military operation is a Holy War, in which Russia and its people, defending the unified spiritual space of Holy Rus', fulfill the mission of the "Restrainer[194]," protecting the world from the onslaught of globalism and the victory of the West, which has fallen into Satanism.
>
> After the completion of the SMO, the entire territory of modern Ukraine must be placed within Russia's exclusive zone of influence. The possibility of a Russophobic political regime hostile to Russia and its people, or a political regime controlled from an external center hostile to Russia, must be completely excluded.

Attempts at the discursive expansion of the war's meaning and concomitant significance have also appeared in Kremlin statements. One might consider here, for instance, the Russian President's (2022) speech at the accession of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, as well as the regions of Zaporozhye and Kherson to the Russian Federation:

> Let me repeat that the dictatorship of the Western elites targets all societies, including the citizens of Western countries themselves. This is a challenge to all. This complete renunciation of what it means to be human, the overthrow of faith and traditional values,

[193] An organization headed by Patriarch Kirill.
[194] Or the "katechon" – see previous chapter.

> and the suppression of freedom are coming to resemble a "religion in reverse" – pure Satanism. Exposing false messiahs, Jesus Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount: "By their fruits ye shall know them." These poisonous fruits are already obvious to people, and not only in our country but also in all countries, including many people in the West itself.
>
> The world has entered a period of a fundamental, revolutionary transformation. New centres of power are emerging. They represent the majority – the majority! – of the international community. They are ready not only to declare their interests but also to protect them. They see in multipolarity an opportunity to strengthen their sovereignty, which means gaining genuine freedom, historical prospects, and the right to their own independent, creative and distinctive forms of development, to a harmonious process.

What appears to be occurring, in other words, is something resembling the conceptual evolution of the political themes that accompanied the beginnings of the *conservative turn*: emphases on the West as a site of anti-democratic sacrilege aimed at the subjugation of Russia; Orthodoxy and "traditional values" as enablers and facilitators of Russia's continued sovereignty in the wake of this alleged onslaught. Such, in turn, is now paired with an appeal to the peoples of the West and the rest of the world: through the defence of its own interests, Russia also advances those of the broader international community. This is ostensibly accomplished not only through resistance to the aggressive "Satanism" of Western elites, but also through the establishment of a precedent for other countries to emulate: a right to pursue their own paths and act on their own interests as nations. Put plainly, the Russo-Ukrainian War not only expresses the gradual entanglement of post-Soviet church-state interests, but also appears to be contributing to the formation of an ideology untethered to any particular *nationality* that nonetheless reflects the concerns, emphases, and priorities underpinning a distinctly *national* relationship.

Nevertheless, it remains too early to explore this apparent development in detail; the war is ongoing, and its full geopolitical and ideational ramifications are unlikely to become evident until long after its conclusion. The theoretical implications of the developments described and analyzed throughout the

previous chapters of this study, however, are now available for discussion. I thus turn to these matters briefly, before moving to summarize the overarching argument presented in this work.

## Theoretical Implications

The present study has focused on the behaviours and tendencies discernible in Russian church-state relations with an emphasis on beliefs, perceptions, and incentives related to varying historical conditions. In light of this, what can be said in general terms about these two actors? First, and likely most plainly evident, the political behaviour of the ROC has remained fairly consistent. There have only been a few moments—namely, during the debates between the Josephites and the non-possessors, the Patriarchal term of Nikon, and the revolutionary era—in which it appeared that the Church might independently work to either separate itself from the state or, on the contrary, openly press claims to primacy within that relationship. The Russian state, for its part, has undergone dramatic transformations and reconstructions over the course of its history, most of these accompanied by notable shifts in its relations with the Church. The particularity of the present moment is largely a product of the fall of the USSR, which left in its wake an independent Church and an independent state largely bereft of obligations to one another. Nevertheless, challenges confronting both actors compelled the clergy to seek close association with secular authorities; the turbulence involved in early post-Soviet statecraft, likewise, incentivized openness to these manoeuvres.

In general terms, the Moscow Patriarchate displays deeply "conservative" behaviour. Not necessarily in a political sense—for the ROC has managed to find itself "at home" in a variety of ideological contexts—but rather in an institutional sense. This includes not only an emphasis on the continuity of its beliefs and traditions—a theological organizing principle in its own right—but also on avoiding the outbreak of schism within its ranks. Such experiences, like those associated with turns of the Russian state toward "foreign" ideologies or models of development, have often constituted traumatic episodes for the Church that called into question its survival as a coherent institution. This concern for the future likely goes some way in explaining the Patriarchate's consistent efforts to develop close relations with the state; the influence resulting from this relationship may provide insurance against threats to its institutional integrity

and presence within Russian society. This resembles risk-averse behaviour, but is not without its own risks, as both the Petrine reforms and the October Revolution demonstrated.

At a more fundamental level, the ROC is an inheritor to the legacy of Byzantine Christianity, which had seen the solidification of close relations between church and state not only in practical terms, but also as a *normative ideal*. Also passed down was an identity separate from that of the Western church. The invasions of the 13th and 14th centuries, for their part, all but cemented the close association between the Church and "Russia" considered as a nation. This point relates to one crucial to understanding the character of Russian Orthodoxy in general—its religious narrative does not end with the Apocalypse of John or the Creed of Nicaea, but has rather integrated the stories of saints, martyrs, warriors, rulers and other "national heroes" into its own identity and practices of continual remembrance and commemoration. To this extent, it is a genuinely living and "expanding" religion; the Church's *revelation*, or self-disclosure, in like manner, presents itself as integral to the unfolding of Russian history. In this way, it matters little whether the crossing of the Rubicon of the "Third Rome"—some decisive move to "bind" Russian Orthodoxy with Russian statehood—occurred in 988, 1240, 1380, 1721, or any other posited point; closeness between church and state has persisted even when the two found themselves in violent contradiction, and lends a strong ideational component to present-day cooperation.

The institutional conservatism of the Church is likely also rooted in and reinforced by its structure as a hierarchy—this, as noted in Chapter 3, makes for a sort of parallelism: the authority of the Patriarch within the ROC mirrors that of the President within the Russian state. And indeed, much of what appears above involves the relations between these "executive" authorities. It follows that much indeed depends on who occupies these offices; the transitions from Alexei II to Kirill and Putin to Medvedev, for example, appeared pivotal to the procurement of key legislative changes the Church desired since the fall of the USSR. Nevertheless, it also appears clear that the factors involved in present-day cooperation between church and state are partially rooted in circumstances outside of the control of both; see, for example, previous discussion of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution and Maidan. The general, overarching tendency

of Russian church-state relations in the post-Soviet era is the movement from limited cooperation on a more or less informal, transactional basis toward one more full-bodied and based on shared interests in both domestic and foreign policy. This may change in the future; the historical precedents for "symphonic" relations will remain, however, and the latter may find new reasons to reproduce themselves.

Beyond these general observations, little of concrete theoretical import can be stated responsibly. The case examined throughout the present study has no implicit bearing on church-state relations in the broader context of "global Orthodoxy", for example, preceding discussions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate notwithstanding. Neither would it be appropriate to draw conclusions regarding church-state relations considered as a broad category outside of the Orthodox and Russian context. I would argue, however, that the case examined and analyzed has implications for the analysis of "religion" as a subject of political inquiry. In specific terms, these may be articulated as follows: first, the Russian case does indeed display a remarkable reversal of "secularization" considered as a broad process in which religious identity and organizations undergo a steady retreat from public life. On the contrary, the post-Soviet ROC has successfully regained much "lost" territory within this sphere. In fact, one might characterize the resurgence of Russian Orthodoxy as a moment of an ongoing tendency toward the resurfacing of religion and religious organizations—as well as their interrelations—at the forefront of global politics. And, in retrospect, it appears that the Russian case displays a logic similar to other cases of "revival"—traditional religion as a defence of state sovereignty, national autonomy, and culture against the apparent encroachments of the *West*, *liberalism*, *globalism*, etc.

Perhaps unlike other instances of religious resurgence, however, I am not convinced that the Russian case should be interpreted as a moment in a broader "anti-modern" project. Despite the many commemorations of anniversaries and reverence paid to the Romanov family, for example, the Church hierarchy does not appear particularly nostalgic for the past in distinctly political terms or intent on participating in a fundamental overhaul of Russia's political system. Should democratic processes someday produce a leadership hostile to the Patriarchate's influence in public affairs, this situation might change—

the *Social Concept* indeed seems to imply as much—but overall, there seems to be little evidence of ecclesial interest in "turning back the clock", as it were. Such indeed aligns with what was noted above: the Church hierarchy generally appears to be risk-averse and more interested in preserving and consolidating its positions than in undertaking something resembling a radical political project. That being said, the ROC is not without its "fundamentalists"—for the most part, however, the hierarchy has been successful in moderating their influence, as demonstrated, for example, in the aftermath of the constitutional crisis, the tax-code controversy, and the re-establishment of communion with ROCOR.

A second point: the present study arguably shines light on the difficulties involved in treating *religion* and *politics* as distinct and separable categories. This is not to imply that the ROC has engaged with state authorities and the public simply as yet another political actor—but rather that this engagement, in both its process and results, blurs lines between the sacred and the secular. This appears evident in a dual sense. First, insofar as the Patriarchate's political activity is consistent with its own beliefs and identity; second, to the extent that this activity has participated in shaping the ideational and policy outputs of the Russian state as a *secular authority*. In other words, just as the Church identifies as a body both earthly and divine, so too is this "self-belief" reflected in its engagement with and influence upon Russian politics. This point becomes clearer when considering, for example, developments related to the *conservative turn* or the *special military operation*; both are instances of state activity, both involve secular references to matters of state concern, but both are also related to the Church and religious reasoning. There is a real sense, therefore, in which the secular frames of these "events" are not only accompanied by religious frames, but also *paralleled;* the two bundles of discourses are mutually intelligible, translatable, and are easily employed at-will and interchangeably by the Kremlin and Patriarchate alike. Such suggests that the boundary between religion and politics in general is in fact a matter of negotiation; within the Russian context, a hard distinction is now of scant analytical utility.

At bottom, the contestation of this boundary—be it considered a bulwark in need of reinforcement or as a wall primed for demolition—likely reflects the logic of multipolarity itself. If there is indeed no

longer any one "centre" in global affairs, but rather several, then the normative appeal of the type of secularism often associated with the West and liberal democracy may encounter considerable resistance and competition. Indeed, past decades indicate that processes of (re)negotiating religion's place in public life are already underway around the world, Russia included. It is up to peoples and policymakers to decide this matter for themselves, for all that is solid is indeed melting into air; possibilities once considered profane, likewise, now find themselves declared *holy*.

Summary.

Over the course of this study, I have examined the development of Russian church-state relations. This has taken place at varying degrees of magnification, beginning with discussion of the early history of the Church and concluding with the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Centrally, I have argued that the relationship between ecclesial and secular authorities in the Russian Federation has coalesced into a *martial symphonia*. This term is employed to describe not only cooperation in domestic politics, but also in an armed expression of foreign policy. While existing scholarship on the subject of Russian church-state relations addresses varying developments, periods, and themes, this work draws on these and other materials to present a synthesized, coherent account of this relationship in the post-Soviet era. The end result is a unique picture in which neither state nor church "dominates" its counterpart. Nevertheless, the analysis has also made a case for the view that the identity, policies, and priorities of the contemporary Russian state, both at home and abroad, have been significantly affected by its interactions with the Russian Orthodox Church.

The guiding methodological framework of the study may be described as constructivist, insofar as an emphasis has been placed on beliefs, perceptions, and the discursive articulations of "external circumstances" which variously enable certain courses of action and preclude others. To this end, the study has made extensive use of statements by public officials and clergy to help reconstruct the reasoning behind decisions made in response to changing social and political conditions.

I will now move to summarize the central argument that emerges from the preceding chapters. This study began with discussion of the historical context informing church-state relations in the twentieth

century. Examined was the emergence of Christianity, the Byzantine Church, as well as the genesis and development of Russian church-state relations. It was argued, centrally, that the Russian church inherited much from its Byzantine parent, which was in turn informed by the early church. Perhaps most significantly, Byzantine Christianity reinforced the notion of close and cooperative church-state relations as a normative ideal—such gave birth to the notion of *symphonia*. The differences which steadily accumulated between Constantinople and the Western Church, likewise, resulted in schism between the two. Both developments proved important to the Russian Church, which contributed to the survival of *Rus'* during the periods of Mongol occupation and the Northern Crusades. In the centuries following the fall of Constantinople, the Church was elevated to the status of a patriarchate and continued to negotiate its relationship with the emerging Russian state via debates between the Josephites and non-possessors, as well as in the wake of the *raskol*. Toward the end of the period discussed, Tsar Peter I submitted the Church to strict state control as Russia moved to emulate and "catch up" with the West.

The use of the ROC as an instrument of state authority further entrenched close association between the two; this connection would prove calamitous in the early 20th century as a revolutionary movement formed in response to Tsarism. Some clergy participated in this movement and indeed welcomed the February Revolution of 1917 as an end to the Church's subordination to state authorities. This moment proved short-lived, however, as incoming Soviet power launched extensive campaigns of persecution against the clergy and its faithful. Such was associated with the emergence of breakaway churches in Russia, Ukraine, and abroad. Despite (or perhaps due to) the Bolsheviks' efforts to demolish the ROC, the latter opted to declare loyalty to the state and rallied public support for the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Following the war, the Church cooperated with the Soviet state in the propagation of the latter's foreign policy, but still remained under its strict control. Nevertheless, the Church also—perhaps somewhat inadvertently—became a symbol of *Russia* in contrast to Soviet statehood; the "victory" of the former over the latter was partially expressed by the 1988 millennial celebrations of the baptism of Rus'.

After the fall of the USSR, the ROC was presented with a wide array of new opportunities and challenges. In the first place, the end of Soviet rule and the newly regained independence of the Church communicated the possibility of constructing a new relationship with state authorities. The latter was incentivized in part by the sudden appearance of a religious "free market" which Church hierarchs felt ill-equipped to deal with. The state, meanwhile, was in flux; the constitutional crisis of 1993, war in Chechnya, crises in the Russian military and education system, as well as the transition to democratic governance in general further incentivized engagement with the Church. The latter was eager to provide support in a variety of ways, and succeeded in developing close ties with both political elites and the larger state machinery. The Church's crowning achievements in the nineties included the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour as well as the adoption of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience, which was eventually signed into law by Yeltsin despite vocal opposition from U.S. officials. Taken together, the 1997 Law and the state's dismay at NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia marked something of a turning point, indicating real potential for the divergence of Russian domestic and foreign policy from the West in both ideological and geopolitical terms. Little love was lost, however, as far as the Church was concerned; the ROC was not particularly enthusiastic about the transition to capitalism and liberal democracy to begin with, and indeed began to more openly criticize the West, the post-Cold War geopolitical situation, and globalization during the late nineties.

Looming in the background of all of this was another fundamental issue related to the Church's maintenance of a transnational structure while Russia made its transition to the nation-state system: within the post-Soviet sphere, the ROC's canonical territory came into question. This was particularly true in Ukraine, where Orthodoxy was effectively split into three churches, only one of which recognized canonical subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate.

Following Boris Yeltsin's departure in 1999, Vladimir Putin took office; this was perhaps the first major test of the durability of the relationship the Church had been working to cultivate with the state. Initially, controversies involving tax legislation, the publication of the *Social Concept*, and other matters

indicated lingering tensions between the Kremlin and the Moscow Patriarchate. Nevertheless, *spiritual security* began to emerge as a theme of foreign policy, a focus likely further entrenched by fears of colour revolution emanating from Ukraine in the mid-2000s. The Orange Revolution, for its part, exposed a growing divide between the UOC-MP and other religious organizations of Ukraine. Such communicated, in part, that Ukrainian church-state relations differed considerably from those emerging in Russia; while the ROC was succeeding in developing a close relationship with the state, the UOC-MP confronted serious opposition to its efforts to secure favourable ties with the Ukrainian government. The Kremlin's participation in the restoration of communion with ROCOR, as well as its increasing emphasis on connections to the broader—and often church-centred—Russian diaspora in turn revealed new avenues for church-state cooperation in the realm of foreign policy. Medvedev's presidency, as well as the enthronement of Patriarch Kirill, likewise, eventually led to the formalization of the ROC's presence within the Russian military and education system. For all intents and purposes, therefore, the fundaments of *symphonia*—as such relates to domestic and foreign policy—had taken shape prior to Putin's return to office in 2012.

The state's ideological embrace of the Church's emphasis on traditional values and skepticism toward the West, for its part, did not fully reveal itself until the beginning of Putin's third term. Such appears to have been motivated, in part, by the protest movement which took shape in late 2011 and by NATO intervention in Libya. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, the UGCC, UOC-KP, and other religious groups rallied in support of demonstrations against Yanukovych. After the latter's departure, tensions rapidly escalated between Russia and Ukraine as a pro-Russian separatist movement emerged in the Donbas and Moscow moved to annex Crimea. In this context, the UOC-MP became associated with "Russian aggression" and found itself the target of armed attacks, negative press coverage, and, eventually, legislation ostensibly aimed at its marginalization. This, combined with the processes involved in the formation of the OCU, further communicated to the Moscow Patriarchate the vulnerability of its presence within Ukraine. Any perceived or proclaimed threats to the "Russian world" and national security were now accompanied by those directed toward the integrity of "Holy Rus'" and spiritual security. This parallelism formed in the

concerns and priorities of both the Russian Church and state contributed to momentum toward the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. At this point, the existing symphonia took on a martial dimension, presaged by the intervention in Syria and now expressed in a war discursively framed as a conflict not only with the Ukrainian government, but also with the broader "West" as a geopolitical and ideological hegemon.

In terms of future avenues for research, there is one in particular that I would argue is worth undertaking: a comparative analysis of post-Soviet church-state relations that includes an examination of Belarus. It has been suggested in this study that the difference in the "models" of church-state relations which emerged in Russia and Ukraine likely contributed to their political divergence; Belarus, however, stands out as a historically Orthodox country and member of *Holy Rus'* that has retained a close relationship with Russia. This, of course, is likely due in large part to Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko. I would hypothesize, however, that the relative coherence of Belarusian Orthodoxy—which, in comparison with Ukrainian Orthodoxy, appears to have experienced much less momentum toward fragmentation during the Russian Revolution, the Second World War, and the nineties—may have contributed to the maintenance of stable relations with Russia. Such an analysis could help shed further light on the political import of post-Soviet church-state relations, which, as this study demonstrates, have already proven themselves consequential to the making of politics and history in the twenty-first century.

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