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**Abstract:** The recent “conservative turn” in Russian politics has raised to new levels the role of spiritual and moral values in political discourse. The new partnership formed between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the state, a modernized version of the traditional Byzantine *symphonia*, has also affected Russian foreign policy. One notable example is the emergence of the “Russian World” as a key concept in Russia's relations with Ukraine and the rest of the CIS.

Although the Church plays a subordinate role in this relationship, it is far from being merely the Kremlin’s puppet. By decentering the nation, this investigation seeks to shed light on the Church’s distinct approach to politics, and show where it draws the line on cooperation with civil authorities. Only by viewing the ROC as an autonomous political and eschatological actor, will we be able to appreciate how it influences Russian foreign policy.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has emerged as an influential actor in Russian foreign policy. This chapter explores the relationship between church and state in Russia. It examines the scholarly debate over the actual role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian foreign policy, as well as arenas for potential for conflict and cooperation between the church and the state in foreign policy.

### 1. Intro: Is the Russian Orthodox Church a “Tool of the State?”

A fundamental question needs to be addressed at the very outset. Does it even make sense to discuss the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian foreign policy?<sup>1</sup> For many scholars this topic does not exist. According to this view, there can be no foreign policy influence of the ROC because the ROC is not an autonomous political and social actor.

Most books published about the Russian Orthodox Church in recent years argue that little has changed Church-state relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. For one group of scholars the ROC is always a reliable tool of the state (Fagan 2013, Knox 2004, Mitrofanova 2005, Papkova 2011, Blitt 2011). Since there is no distinct ROC foreign policy agenda, it need not be examined separately from the state’s own foreign policy agenda.

A second group grants the ROC some autonomy, but contends that its freedom of movement is severely constrained (Marsh 2004, Curanović 2012, Richters 2012, Payne 2010). Its foreign policy agenda is therefore of some interest, but only as an expression of what has already been decided within state institutions. For both groups the foreign policy agenda of the ROC derives entirely from the Russian state.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper the term “Church,” when capitalized, refers to the entire Orthodox community. When uncapitalized, it refers to any other Christian religious denomination.

There is much in Russian history that supports this view, which makes its uncritical acceptance today so dangerous. Rather than looking at the how relations have changed since the collapse of communism, most scholars have tended to fall back upon familiar stereotypes.

The most common casual assumption that because the ROC supports the Russian state in many arenas, such support must derive from its subordination to the state, rather than a similarity of views. Assertions by ROC hierarchs that it is in partnership with the state, rather than subordinate to it, are generally dismissed, since it is assumed that the state would instruct the ROC to say just that. The argument is thus non-refutable.

A *prima facie* case for the autonomy of the ROC in foreign policy, however, can easily be made by pointing to religious priorities that have become part of part of the Russian foreign policy agenda. Professional diplomats are notably reluctant to adopt a “values agendas” of this sort because it complicates their work. When this happens in the case of religious or human rights concerns, therefore, it is generally viewed as an indirect measure of the influence of these outside actors on state policy.

I, however, propose that we go even further and take seriously not just the Church’s social agenda, but also its eschatological agenda. By decentering the nation from our investigation, new light can be shed on the Church’s own approach to politics, and where it draws the line on cooperation with civil authorities. It is my contention that, in areas where the interests of the Church and the state overlap, the influence of the ROC in society is now such that it cannot be simply ignored. Moreover, as that influence has grown, the ROC has gained a greater autonomy, pursue its own agenda, becoming a true partner of the Russian state.

To illustrate the rise of this influence, I will first briefly discuss the Orthodox approach to politics, then explore how this approach affects Russian foreign policy thinking through the concept of the *Russky mir*, or Russian World. Finally, I will look at areas where the agendas of the ROC and the Russian government are likely to diverge over time.

## 2. Theory/hypotheses: the ROC worldview and its foreign policy potential

### *Church-State Relations: Some Historical Context*

Orthodoxy’s perspective on proper church-state relations derives from the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. That fact that the Christian doctrine of church-state relations was first codified in the Eastern Roman Empire gives it several specific characteristics.

While the Patriarch of Rome (the Pope) faced the difficult task of preserving the Church in the face of the collapse of political institutions, so vividly described by St. Augustine in his classic *The City of God*, the Patriarch of Constantinople held onto his place of honor within Byzantine society (for a good overview see Gvosdev 2000). As a result, despite frequent conflict with the Basileus, Church-state relations evolved very differently in the Eastern and Western halves of Europe.

In the West, the Church first struggled to survive the collapse of the state, then it struggled to preserve its independence from state control, once the latter had been re-established. This march of Western progress, from the Renaissance, to the Reformation, to the Enlightenment, is often equated with the rise of the modern concepts of personal liberty and individual freedoms (Swidler 1986, Casanova 2003), while the loss of “Christendom”--the social and political manifestation of a common Christian social ideal--is usually seen as the price that had to be paid for the emergence of both individual and political freedom.

By contrast, the pattern of church-state relations that emerged in the East presumed that the Patriarch and Basileus continued to work together to accomplish God’s purpose on Earth. As described in Roman Emperor Justinian’s (482-565) *Sixth Novella*, their respective spheres of competence might overlap, but remained distinct:

There are two greatest gifts which God, in his love for man, has granted from on high: the priesthood and the imperial dignity. The first serves divine things, the second directs and administers human affairs . . . if the priesthood is in every way free from blame and possess access to God, and if the emperors administer equitably and judiciously the state entrusted to their care, general harmony will result, and all that is beneficial will be bestowed upon the human race (Meyendorff 1968, p. 48).

The ideal relationship between church and state was thus one of *symphonia*, or harmony, between religious and state institutions. Though this ideal was rarely achieved, it remained the ideal where Greek culture survived, after the fall of Rome. By the time of the Reformation much of the Middle East and Greece were under Ottoman rule, and Russian had emerged as the “Third Rome.” According to legend, as the last surviving ruler of an Orthodox country, it therefore fell to the princes of Moscow to preserve the “one true faith.”

Peter the Great’s reign created a new caste of people in Russia that were more sympathetic to Western patterns of development. In his effort to create a create his own version of a Lutheran consistory to supervise the ROC, Peter subordinated the church entirely. Peter the Great’s reign thus marks the end of *symphonia* and the beginning of modern, Imperial Russia. (Petro 1995, chapter 3). Over the next two centuries the intellectual elite drifted away from the weakened and socially isolated post-Petrine Church, embracing Western ideas that seemed to provide solutions to Russia’s backwardness. Among the most ambitious and radical of these solutions was Marxism.

The Bolsheviks interpreted Marx’s indictment of religion as a call to launch an all-out assault on the Church that nearly ended in its extinction. On the eve of the Russian revolution, the Russian Orthodox Church had more than 55,000 churches and some 66,000 priests. Two decades later, in 1939, only 300 Russian Orthodox churches remained, and roughly as many priests (‘Russkaya pravoslavnyaya tserkov’ 2016).

Today, a quarter century after the collapse of the Soviet regime, the situation looks strikingly different. Survey data shows that between 1991 and 2008 the share of Russian adults considering themselves orthodox grew from 31% to 72%, while the share not considering themselves religious dropped from 61% to 18% (Romeo 2015). Today the Russian Orthodox Church has

more than 34,000 churches and more than 35,000 priests ('Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov' 2016). If we are to believe a 2011 Ipsos survey of 23 European countries, Russia has become the most religious country in Europe (Weir 2011).

This "miracle of the rebirth of faith in our secular age," as the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus, Kirill (Gundyaev) calls it, has been accompanied by a seven-fold increase in corporate philanthropy, and a level of social activity that has made the Russian Orthodox Church "the largest and most authoritative social institution in contemporary Russia" (Anishyuk 2011, 'Slovo Svyateishego Patriarkha Kirilla' 2016). The rise of Orthodoxy has thus been good not only for business, but for political stability as well.

Some analysts, however, regard this new found piety as superficial. They point out that the vast majority of Orthodox do not attend church regularly and do not follow many traditional religious practices. But, as Stephen Prothero (2008) has shown, religious literacy is on the decline globally. What is different in Russia, and what makes it such a remarkable social phenomenon, is the conflation of confessional attachment with national identity, something that Jerry Pankhurst calls "the confessionalisation of political culture." (Pankhurst, J & Kilp, A 2013, p. 228).

As Andrey Shirin point out, "one cannot understand Russian politics without reference to Russian Orthodoxy and the influence this faith has had on the formation of the predominant worldview in Russian culture. The worldview of Russian Orthodoxy is holistic and organic. It does not have sharp divisions between various spheres of human society or branches of power" (Shirin 2016).

The Church's most obvious success has been to transform relations with the state from subordination to meaningful partnership by reasserting the centrality of symphonia in church-state relations. While many elements of the relationship have yet to be perfected, the Church is clear about how it would like this partnership to evolve. First, instead of a separation of church and state, there should be a "separation of sphere of competencies." Second, spiritual and secular authorities should cooperate in areas of common interest and mutual benefit. Third, whereas in the past the Church has been relatively passive, today it needs to be more assertive and work alongside the government to create a healthy spiritual and moral social climate, social peace and solidarity. Central to its teaching is the concept of the co-authorship of policy with the state. (Kirill 2009).

#### *Modern Day Symphonia and Foreign Policy*

This partnership between Church and state naturally extends to foreign policy. Here the Russian Orthodox Church seeks to heighten the role of religion in diplomacy and to assist in the construction of a multipolar world that respects diverse cultural worldviews (Lipich 2004). In each nation of the globe, Patriarch Kirill has said, the Church's task is to make that particular nation "a carrier of Orthodox civilization ('Metropolit Kirill otvetil' 2005)."

In his 2009 address to Russian Civil Service Academy, the Patriarch enumerated an extensive list of common areas of concern, where the ROC collaborates with state institutions. These include:

concern for the moral upbringing of young people, support for the institution of the family, fighting drug addiction, alcoholism and other dangerous vices, preventing crimes, caring for those in prisons, preserving cultural inheritance, overcoming national and religious intolerance, assisting the preservation of social peace and harmony, opposing the rise of radical and extremist attitudes, opposing pseudo-religious movements, helping to resolve international conflicts, promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue both within the state and globally, as well as in international organizations” ‘Vystuplenie Svyateishego Patriarkha’ 2009).

Taking note of “our common aspiration for the preservation of our spiritual and cultural identity of our brothers and sisters,” the Patriarch also pointed out that the ROC could assist Russian foreign policy by:

- Improving the situation of Orthodox churches around the globe;
- Improving contacts with Russians living abroad;
- Expanding the dialogue of religious communities in Russia with state structures and international organizations;
- Promoting a positive image of Russia, its history, culture and religion abroad.

To this end, the ROC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have set up several standing committees to coordinate their activities. One area where cooperation has proven fruitful is in re-establishing relations with Georgia, after the conflict of August 2008. It is worth noting that in doing so the ROC opposed the wishes of Russian state, which was promoting the territorial, cultural, and religious autonomy of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia (‘Russia church says’ 2011). Instead, it deferred to the wishes of the Georgian Patriarchate and continued to recognize the latter’s jurisdiction in these disputed regions (‘Obmen ‘tserkovnymi poslami’ 2009).

With respect to its eschatological agenda, the ROC has succeeded not only in focusing the Russian foreign policy establishment’s interest on the defense of Orthodox communities around the globe, which would arguably coincide with Russia’s national interest, but also on Christian moral values in general.

Shirin argues that State and Church interests coincide here because three main features of Western culture—consumerism, individualism, and secularism—have not been fully embraced by Russians (Shirin 2016). Its greatest success to date in this arena is Putin’s 2013 speech to the Valdai Club, in which he underscored the importance of traditional religious values to human dignity, and asserted that the abandonment of traditional Christian values has led the West to a moral crisis. Russia, Putin said, intends to counter this trend by defending Christian moral principles, both at home and abroad (Putin 2013).

We should therefore expect the ROC’s influence over Russian foreign policy to manifest itself increasingly in advocacy for the rights of Orthodox Christians, even if they are not Russian citizens, and in the promotion of Christian moral and social values in international fora. Where it does not have direct access to such fora, it will rely on Russian state channels to promote this agenda.

Today, therefore, the ROC provides intellectual and moral support to state policies not because it has to, but because it wants to. Indeed, to the extent that there is a moral framework guiding Russian foreign policy, it is the Church's moral framework. The Church promotes it because it is convinced that helping the Russian government to create a "congenial international order" will assist the Church in its threefold salvific mission--to save individual souls, to save all national cultures that have been baptized into Christ, and to save all mankind.

If we take seriously the eschatological nature of the Church's mission, how then might we best describe its foreign policy goals? Simply put, it is to save souls. Within its canonical territory it does so by promoting the re-baptism of Rus; beyond its canonical territory it does so by working alongside religious organizations in other countries to promote "all that is good in relations among peoples. . . [and by being] a force for peacemaking" ('V zavershenie vizita' 2016).

At first blush, objectives of Church and State seem so different that it is not even clear why they would ever overlap. The link between the two, as Andrei Tsygankov (2012) has pointed out, lies in Russia's sense of honor--the basic moral principles that are popularly cited within a culture as the reason for its existence, and that inform its purpose when interacting with other nations. A nation's sense of honor, therefore, serves as a baseline for what might be called the *long term national interest* which, for Russia, revolves around three constants: **first**, sovereignty or "spiritual freedom;" **second**, a strong and socially protective state that is capable of defending that sovereignty; and **third**, cultural loyalty to those who share Russia's sense of honor, wherever they may be. Each of these involves, correspondingly, the defense of Orthodox Christianity, the defense of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the defense of Orthodox Christians around the world.

To be clear, the state is always in the driver's seat when it comes to responding to immediate foreign policy concerns. But when it comes to shaping Russia's long term strategy, these culturally embedded ideals also play a prominent role. By re-assuming its traditional role as the supreme arbiter of morality in Russian society, the ROC has simultaneously become a key actor in shaping these strategies.

So far, we have focused on the theoretical and cultural framework within which the ROC and the Russian state operate. Ukraine serves as a good example of how the ROC helps to shape and condition Russia's long term foreign policy agenda.

### 3. How the ROC influences Russian foreign policy: the case of *Russki mir*

Well before the current crisis, in the absence of state actors willing to provide a culturally rooted vision of Russian-Ukrainian relations, the ROC promoted the idea that Russia, Ukraine and Belarus constitute a distinct community--a Holy Rus (*Svyataya Rus*), or a Russian world (*Russky mir* or *Rus'kii mir*), that shares a common spiritual destiny ('Doklad Patriarkha Moskovskogo 2013). The ROC thus assisted the state by promoting an enduring, historically rooted system of values, and later served as an instrument of political mobilization of state interests.

It is no coincidence that the ROC took the lead in the development of the concept of a *Russky mir*, or that Ukraine emerged as the key focus of such efforts. For several years after the collapse the majority of Russian Orthodox Church parishes were actually outside the Russian Federation. Responding to this unique historical circumstance, the ROC began emphasizing spiritual unity over the divisions that had been created by new national borders. The idea of a *Russky mir* emerged as part of the Russian Orthodox Church's response to fragmentation of its pastoral community with the collapse of the USSR.

The term "russky" in "Russky mir" is neither a geographical nor an ethnic concept. It is a spiritual identity born in the cradle civilization of Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarussians--Kievan *Rus* ('Vystuplenie svyateishego Patriarkha Kirilla' 2009). When Kievan *Rus* adopted Christianity from Constantinople in 988, Church hierarchs say, the Eastern Slavs were consecrated into a single civilization and given the task of constructing Holy Rus.

That mission has survived throughout Russian history. It survived the religious persecutions of the Soviet era and continues today in democratic Russia (Ryabykh 2010). The core of this community resides in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (at other times, Patriarch Kirill he has also added Moldova and Kazakhstan), but it can refer to anyone who shares the Orthodox faith, a reliance on Russian language, a common historical memory, and a common view of social development. ('Vystuplenie svyateishego Patriarkha Kirilla' 2009).

In June 2007, president Putin helped to inaugurate the *Russky mir Fund*, a state sponsored entity that promotes Russian language and culture throughout the world ('Stenografichesky otchet' 2007). The use of the same term in both a secular and religious context has led to considerable confusion, masking some important differences.

As used by the state, the term *Russky mir* is a typical public relations initiative. It strives to popularize Russia and the use of Russian abroad. It is an element of Russia's "soft power," increasing her influence among neighboring states, and improving Russia's image as a global power. From the state's perspective, the Russian Orthodox Church can be a useful tool for these purposes.

As used by the Church the term *Russky mir* is God's project, since it is by God's design that these nations were baptized into one civilization. The ROC thus sees its efforts as the realization of God's plan--the establishment of Holy Rus. To achieve this ideal the Church, here and now, seeks to reverse the secularization of post-Soviet society, a task that Patriarch Kirill has termed the "second Christianization" of Rus ('Patriarch Kirill challenges Church' 2010). From the Russian Orthodox Church's perspective, therefore, all governments within its canonical territory, including the Russian government, can be useful tools for this purpose (for a discussion of *Russky mir* as nothing more than an instrument of the state, see Hovorun 2016 and Feklyunina 2016).

Reaction to the Patriarch's use of the phrase has been mixed. It has aroused the most controversy in Ukraine, where the Greek-Catholic (Uniate) church and the non-canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievan Patriarchate (UOC-KP) dismissed it outright, while the Ukrainian

Orthodox Church that is in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), which serves approximately half of all Christians in Ukraine, has been cautiously receptive.

The latter suggests that national identity should, ultimately, be less important to a religious person than religious identity. As Metropolitan Paul (Lebed), head of the Kiev-Pechersk Laura, one of Orthodoxy's oldest monasteries, put it:

. . . to earn the right to call ourselves Holy Rus we must strive to make ourselves holy. . . the venerable Hilarion called our land Rus back in 1051. In this sense we are all Russians. But there is a state called Ukraine on this earth, and I am its citizen. In this sense, we are all Ukrainians. I see no contradiction here. As a Ukrainian I would note that there is no particular merit to being part of a nation. It is deeds that are called for. (Taksyur 2016).

But, just as this issue highlights the long term goals of the Church, it also illustrates the ROC's limited ability to affect immediate policy decisions. The very different approaches to the crises in Crimea and Donbass illustrate these limitations.

Most analysts view the annexation of Crimea as the state seizing the opportunity to secure a strategic advantage for Russia in the Black Sea region. Some feel it was an understandable move given the hostility of the Maidan leadership, while others argue that there was no prospect of that hostility ever actually threatening Russian interests.

At the time, president Putin constructed a narrative that portrayed the annexation of Crimea as both a defense against imminent threats to the Russian identity of this region, and as a return to its proper Russian cultural sphere--an objective in line with the objectives of the Russian World. Later, during his December 4, 2014 speech to the Federal Assembly, Putin explicitly melded the geopolitical and the religious aspects of the Crimean annexation into one, saying:

For Russia, Crimea, ancient Korsun (Khersones), Sebastopol have enormous civilizational and sacral meaning--just as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem has for those who profess Islam and Judaism. . . . this territory is strategically important because it is the spiritual source of the formation of our multifaceted but monolithic Russian nation and centralized Russian state. It was in this very place, in Crimea, in ancient Khersones, or as Russian chroniclers called it, Korsun, that Prince Vladimir was baptized, and [he] then baptized all of Rus ('Krym imeet sakral'noe znachenie' 2014)

Yet, with respect to the uprising in Donbass, which evolved nearly simultaneously, Putin took a very different position.

Rather than encouraging separatism in Eastern Ukraine, Russian officials quickly distanced themselves from the rebels, offering vague statements about the need to respect the will of the people. When the rebels scheduled their own referendum on secession, president Putin publicly urged them not to hold it. Russia did conduct military exercises near the Ukrainian border in late February, but returned these troops to their barracks in late April, after the beginning of Kiev's military campaign in Donbass. In May, Putin recognized the legitimacy of Ukrainian presidential

elections, and at the end of June, just as the military campaign in the East was ramping up, Putin asked the Russian parliament to rescind his authority to use troops outside Russia.

In the case of Crimea, Russian culture and Orthodox religion were used to popularize a policy that had already been deemed in the strategic interests of the nation. In the case of Donbass, however, similar appeals were ignored (some observers even say suppressed) because they did not correspond to Russia's strategic interests. The ROC appears to have had no discernible impact on immediate policy choices in either instance.

In the long term, however, the question of how to reconcile Russia and Ukraine is still very much on the agenda, and the ROC is the only institution providing a comprehensive alternative to the post-Maidan Ukrainian narrative. It does so by rallying the global Orthodox community behind the UOC-MP, which openly condemns the Ukrainian government's military operations in Eastern Ukraine and refers the conflict as a "civil war," ('Sait Soyuza pravoslavnykh zhurnalistov' 2015) and by expanding cooperation with the Roman Catholic to establish a pan-European Christian social agenda.

Its most dramatic international success to date has been the Joint Declaration of Pope Francis I and Patriarch Kirill signed in Havana in February 12, 2016. There the two church leaders came up with a formula for reconciliation on the contentious issue of Catholic proselytism in Ukraine. While the head of the Catholic Church stated that he deplores the "uniatism" of the past, "understood as the union of one community to the other, separating it from its Church," the head of the Russian Orthodox Church acknowledged that "the ecclesial communities which emerged in these historical circumstances have the right to exist and to undertake all that is necessary to meet the spiritual needs of their faithful" (Petro 2016).

Second, Pope Francis publicly indicated his hope that schisms within the Orthodox church "may be overcome through existing canonical norms," phrasing that clearly puts the Pope on the side of the Synaxis of the world's Orthodox primates, held in Geneva (January 21-27, 2016), which refused to invite the UOC-KP to participate in the Pan-Orthodox Church Council that took place in August 2016" (Petro 2016).

Finally, when referring to the hostilities in Ukraine, the Pope and Patriarch called upon their followers "to refrain from taking part in the confrontation, and to not support any further development of the conflict." This too is a notable step toward the view of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is the only one in Ukraine that has refused to support the Ukrainian government's "anti-terrorist operation" in Eastern Ukraine.

In response the Ukrainian government has thrown its full support behind the non-canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievan Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC). The latter identifies the independence of Ukraine and the resurgence of the UGCC with Paschal theology, while the head of the former has defined the Russian Orthodox Church as an aberration spawned by Satan (Denysenko 2015).

In this struggle for the hearts and minds of Ukrainians, the official Ukrainian press commonly associates the term "Russian World" with separatism, while in the rebellious Eastern provinces

the term is often seen as synonymous with the “Russian Spring.” As Fr. Nicholas Denysenko (2015) observes:

The irony of the intensity of the current religious narratives in Ukraine is that one is doomed no matter where they attend church. Those belonging to the UGCC are hopelessly nationalistic and seek the destruction of canonical Orthodoxy. Those belonging to the UOC-KP are schismatic and enjoy no support within global Orthodoxy. Those belonging to the MP are opponents of Ukraine and keep company with the likes of Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas. . . . the space of each church is occupied by scandalous sinners even as they champion old and new saints as models one should pattern their lives after.

Although effort to politicize the religious meaning of the *Russky mir* (“against the will of its authors,” as Denysenko notes) appear to be inflaming national and religious animosity, the ROC Church shows no sign yet of abandoning the concept.

The reason the church cannot abandon this concept, Patriarch Kirill has said repeatedly, is because it would be going against God’s will [ослушаться самого Бога] to turn one’s back on the spiritual development of the people that God has entrusted to the pastoral care of the Russian Church (‘Vystuplenie svyateishego Patriarkha Kirilla’ 2009).

Moreover, as the influence of the ROC in Russian society has grown, it has influenced the political rhetoric of Russian officials. Among many examples, one should highlight President Putin’s address in Kiev on the occasion of the 1025<sup>th</sup> baptism of Rus in 2013 (‘Konferentsiya’ 2013). This was also Putin’s most recent visit to Ukraine.

His remarks reflect nearly every religious motif of the *Russky mir*, including: the decisive spiritual and cultural significance of the baptism of Rus; the uniqueness of Orthodox values in the modern world; deference to Kiev’s historical significance (before the revolution it was “the second cultural and intellectual capital after St. Petersburg”, ahead of Moscow); and public recognition of Ukraine’s right to make any political choice it wishes which, however, “in no way erases our common historical past” (‘Konferentsiya’ 2013).

In conclusion, it is worth highlighting that the transnational perspective implicit in *Russky mir* puts the ROC at odds with one of the cornerstones of international politics--state sovereignty. While the Church says it respects the sovereignty of states, it takes no position on its merits (‘Vystuplenie svyateishego Patriarkha Kirilla’ 2009). Nation-states are neither good nor bad *per se*. They are merely the current framework within which God intends the Church to accomplish the restoration of Holy Rus (Ryabykh 2010).

The ROC thus sees the *Russky mir* as a spiritual complement to national sovereignty-- one that allows people to see their common heritage not as a threat independence, but as a valuable resource in a globalizing world. The Byzantine Empire served as a such model in the past. Today, says Kirill, the European Union and the Commonwealth of Nations serve the same purpose (‘Vystuplenie svyateishego Patriarkha Kirilla’ 2009).

That is also why, according to the ROC, there should be multiple political and cultural centers in the world, a view that coincides with Russia's official foreign policy position. The *Russky mir* is one such center because it provides "a system of values which is the basis for several modern states" (Ryabykh 2010).

In the promotion of Russian culture and language abroad, however, its eschatological mission differs from that of the Russian state. Whereas the state seeks to promote Russian national interest and culture, the ROC seeks to promote the larger identity and culture associated with Kievan Rus. This distinction, which is the result of a theologically steeped view of how the current conflict needs to be resolved, could become significant in long term Russian-Ukrainian relations.

#### 4. Future Developments and Issues

Having reviewed the benefits that each side currently derives from a harmonious church-state relationship, let us look to the future, to the prospect of the ROC serving as a source of conflict or of conflict resolution.

##### *The ROC as a Source of Future Conflict.*

One potential source of tension, with both the state and other religions, is that the Russian Orthodox Church does not see itself as just one constituency among many in society. It is, rather, the very "soul of the people and, at its deepest level the Church represents its people externally" ('V zavershenie vizita' 2016). Its purview therefore exceeds that of any other social groups, including the government, for while the government speaks to the values of society in the present, the Church speaks for the eternal values of Holy Rus'. As the Patriarch puts it: "From the time of the Baptism of Rus to the present, the Church bears a special responsibility for the spiritual and moral well-being of the people. . . Concern for the people's souls is the main component of the Church's service in the past, present, and future" ('Doklad Patriarkha Moskovskogo 2013).

In addition, the ROC accords itself a special privilege in offering social solutions ('Vsevolod Chaplin' 2012). This solution is to "Churchify" all aspects of society. To quote the patriarch, "The Church has a clear vision of reality, revealed to the world by God himself, and it is our mission to bring this vision to our contemporaries, with full confidence in its unique correspondence to the truth" ('Doklad Patriarkha Moskovskogo' 2013). The ROC therefore cannot support policies, no matter how socially beneficial, that results in movement away from its ideal of Holy Rus. What the Russian Orthodox is looking for can best be described as the modernization of society without its secularization.

Orthodoxy's casual dismissal of politics as having any intrinsic value ('Obshestvennaya deyatelnost' and 'Praktika zayavlenii' 2011) implies that ROC support for government policy is conditional upon its judgement about the spiritual benefits of that policy. Yet, while the Church does not see itself as a *political* actor, it does see itself as actively engaged in society. As Patriarch Kirill explains:

We cannot, through our silence, seemingly support the positions . . . that are deadly for people's souls. Without entering into political battle, we must remain true to our religious worldview, including in giving our assessment of the actions political actors . . . [especially those] whose program documents express ideas contrary to the teachings of the Church.”(Yannoulatos 2003, p. 74)

This effort to draw a sharp distinction between the “political” and the “social” has struck many observers as out of touch with the modern political realities of Russia and the world. (Stoeckl, Gabriel, Papanikolaou 2017).

On the other hand, the issue of democratic and religious freedoms will probably not emerge as a source of friction between the state and the Church. Not because the Church itself does not value personal freedom (indeed, as Nicolas Berdyaev (1926) points out, freedom is essential to the Church's goal of Churchification), but because both sides have set themselves the task of working together in harmony. It would therefore be out of character for either of them to disagree publicly. If conflicts arise, the ROC will most likely simply work without the state in arenas where their interest do not coincide, and in concert where they do.

Paradoxically, these broadly harmonious and mutually supportive relations between Church and state in Russia have themselves become a source of conflict with the West, for they lead to conclusions that some in the West find troubling

If Vladimir Putin's high popularity ratings derive in part from his very public embrace of religion, then both Putin's unpopularity in the West and his extraordinarily high levels of support in Russia, stem from the same source--the popularity of the traditional social values being advocated by the ROC. For many, this makes the West's conflict with Russia a Huntingtonian “conflict of values.”

The essence of this disagreement is summarized in Western literature as “the values gap.” And while the examples typically given are Russia's failure to abide by international (read Western) standards, they often can be traced to deep seated cultural disagreements about the role that religious institutions should play in shaping both values and policies.

Simply put, many in the West regard partnership between church and state as reactionary, whereas many in Russia regard its absence as a sign of moral decay. According to such logic, conflict between Russia and the West is unavoidable until Russia fundamentally alters its values (Petro 2013b).

This conclusion seems premature. After all, this is not the first time that religious differences have played a role in international relations and, as many astute observers have argued, it has not always been a negative role. While most look askance at the role of the ROC, it is certainly worth exploring the potential of Orthodoxy tradition generally, and the ROC in particular, to serve as a source of reconciliation with the West.

*The ROC as a Source of Conflict Resolution*

There are two ways in which the ROC might become a source of reconciliation between Russia and the West. One is by focusing greater attention on peacemaking activities, something that unites most major religions and also helps to expand our notions of traditional diplomacy. The other is to dismantle the notion of “the values gap.”

Douglas Johnston, a former diplomat, has co-authored several books and articles on what he terms “religious diplomacy.” He views religious or “faith-based” diplomacy as particularly well suited to “nonmaterial identity-based conflicts,” for it focuses attention on the transformative impact of appeals on the basis of shared spiritual convictions or values. Such appeals allows the participants to appreciate the emotional stakes involved in a conflict (Johnston 1994, pp. 3,5).

R. Scott Appleby (2003, p. 231) describes religion as “the missing dimension of statecraft.” Retrieving it involves: 1) identifying the genius of each religious tradition, and its ways of producing social harmony; 2) accessing the mystical, experiential, syncretistic dimensions of faith traditions; 3) engaging scholars, theologians, others who view conflict resolution as a normative commitment of their religious tradition; 4) developing experts on conflict resolution within religious communities; 5) drawing on NGO, state and private actors, to enhance religious-secular dialogue.

Edward Luttwak (1994, p. 10) argues that, in the process of conflict resolution, introducing the authority of religion can allow parties to concede assets by portraying concession as an act of deference to religion. In the West, he adds, an important obstacle to the development of a robust religious diplomacy has been what Luttwak (1994, p. 10) calls “a learned repugnance to contend *intellectually* with all that is religion or belongs to it.” He cites the example of Western ignorance of Byzantine approaches to conflict.

In fact, however, the Byzantine ideal of *symphonia* provides a highly adaptable and historically significant framework for what these scholars seem to be calling for. The ROC could help to encourage a broader and more sophisticated understanding of our neglected and often maligned common Byzantine heritage, which, as James H. Billington (1990) has observed, has been “a fixture of all the mistaken conventional wisdom” about Russia and Eastern Europe.

This is no less true today than when he said it more than a quarter century ago. It will take a great deal of time and effort to change the conventional wisdom, but without it the West will never be able to overcome the corrosive idea that some sort of mystical “values gap” permanently divides the two halves of European civilization.

We did not always think this way. Indeed, after the fall of the Berlin Wall it was widely assumed that Russia would re-join Europe. Unfortunately, precisely the opposite happened. As NATO expanded eastward, Russia was pushed away from Europe both conceptually and practically, thus fulfilling émigré Russian cultural historian Vladimir Weidlé’s (1952) warning that failure to see Russian culture as part of Western civilization would lie at the heart of both the West’s inability to overcome the Cold War, and Russia’s inability to overcome the legacy of Soviet communism.

To avoid even greater tragedy in the future, we should heed the warning of America's most venerated living specialist on Russia, the former Librarian of Congress James H. Billington (1997):

If Americans cannot penetrate into the interior spiritual dialogue of other peoples, they will never be able to understand, let alone anticipate or affect, the discontinuous major changes which are the driving forces in history and which will probably continue to spring unexpected traps in the years ahead.

To put it another way, if we cannot learn to listen to others as they whisper their prayers, we may well confront them later on when they howl their war cries.”

## 5. Issues for Further Exploration

I have proposed an approach that begins to take seriously the role of the Church both as a political and an eschatological actor. Treating the ROC as nothing more than a secular political actor is misleading. While it clearly is a political actor (as well as an economic actor, a legal actor, a cultural actor, an educational actor), we should never lose sight of the fact that the Church sees itself, first and foremost, as a *supernatural* actor, a tangible manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the world (Lossky 1998).

This dualism helps to explain both the ability of the ROC to help resolve conflicts among Orthodox countries, as well as its failure to do so in Ukraine, where political issues have all but driven out eschatological priorities.

In looking at how this relationship is likely to unfold in the future, therefore, I believe we must bear in mind both contexts, the political and the religious. Scholars should periodically review the degree to which the ROC is becoming a source of tension or consolidation, both within Russian society and in Russia's relations with other countries.

Such an approach has other interesting ramifications. If the popularity of the Russian leadership is, as I contend, partially the result of its utilitarian embrace of religious values, then that leadership and the political system is not only more stable than most Western analysts think; its behavior also becomes more predictable, if one includes the views of the ROC in those long term calculations.

Finally, I would encourage a re-examination of the relevance of the Byzantine inheritance, both for politics and international relations. In some respects that heritage diverges from the West, while in others there is still considerable overlap. A more systematic appraisal of the inheritance that we share could encourage a reappraisal of Byzantine political ideals along lines suggested by scholars such as James H. Billington (1997), Antonie Carile (2000), Deno Deanakopolos (1976), Judith Herrin, Warren Treadgold, Helene Ahrweiler (1975), Silvia Ronchey, Sergei Ivanov, as well as, more classically, Sergei Averintsev, Steven Runciman (1970) and Robert Byron.

The future may well depend on whether we can once again learn to appreciate the values that once composed these two, now estranged parts of European identity.

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