

Tradition, morality and community: elaborating Orthodox identity in Putin's Russia

Alexander Agadjanian

National Research University-Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia; Centre for the Study of Religion, Russian State University of the Humanities, Moscow, Russia

Abstract

This paper draws upon a number of official, semi-official and other public texts related to the current views of the Russian Church on social and political issues. Overall, in spite of a variety of opinions and nuances, a certain mainstream becomes apparent, as expressed through this body of texts. The most discussed topics include moral values related to the human body (such as abortion, euthanasia, reproductive technologies and sexuality) and issues such as blasphemy, juvenile courts and new technologies of personal registration for Russian citizens. 'Traditional morality' has become the signature discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church which is attempting to construct 'tradition' by drawing upon a partly imagined ethos of imperial Russia and the late Soviet Union. Traditional family values are central to the church's rhetoric. The authors of these texts see a presumed decay of traditional values as the main danger that must be opposed. They usually trace the source of this danger directly to the contemporary West. By contrast, they see Russia as a protective shield against these global influences. Either consciously or involuntarily, they translate their religious language of traditional morality into a political rhetoric of solidarity and patriotism. Such ideological rhetoric has direct political implications and analogies in the agenda of Putin's regime. This Russian appeal to 'traditional values', both religious and political, has recently acquired an extraordinary international relevance.

The agenda and the sources

In January 2015, Patriarch Kirill opened the plenary meeting of the so-called Inter-Council workshop (Межсоборное присутствие) with the following words:

We have gathered here because [...] we need the Church to develop a balanced, comprehensive, programmed assessment of the processes that are taking place in contemporary society [...] We possess everything to do this: we know from the Scriptures what the end of human history will be like, and we see that the prophecies are coming true. However, we should not sit on our hands and wait for dreadful times to approach. No, every Christian is responsible for the time in which he lives, and for whether there is a place for Christ in the hearts of his fellow contemporaries [...] We are the voice of today's Church, which, by expressing eternal truths of the gospels in intelligible terms, is to give a clear response to the challenges of our times. (Kirill 2015a)

This excerpt reflects the signature style of the current patriarch and the very core of the general agenda set out under his guidance since the 1990s, and especially after his enthronement in 2009.

First, we have a clear message of public engagement. The fundamental idea of an apocalyptic finale is not rejected, but it is suspended. A group of associates, who are

usually believed to have belonged to the legacy of Kirill's mentor Metropolitan Nikodim Rotov (1929–1978), have elaborated a distinctively active and expressive stance towards a variety of political and social issues. This engagement has an ideological foundation of a strong claim to establish the church as a powerful actor in a society which has been undergoing a postsoviet desecularisation.¹ The claim to be a weighty political entity requires a heavy rhetorical presence.

Second, Kirill sets forth a mission of 'translation' – in terms which strikingly remind one of the 'translation proviso' that Habermas developed upon the Rawlsian theory of public reason (Habermas 2011; Lafont 2013). His discussion of 'the eternal truth of the gospels' – a 'comprehensive doctrine' in Rawlsian parlance – should be expressed 'in intelligible terms' which would give 'a clear response to the challenges of our time'.

According to this agenda, a long list of texts-translations (in the above sense) has been produced in the twenty-first century, all of which claim to express the more or less official position of the church on various matters. The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church, adopted in 2000, was the first statement to inaugurate this era of engagement. In due time, a few institutions emerged either directly under the Patriarchate or under its tutelage or blessing, and all of them contributed to an extended summa of such texts. Within this corpus, we should distinguish the clearly official texts, which include documents and resolutions of the Land Councils, Bishops Councils, decisions of the Holy Synod, declarations by the traditionally active Department for External Relations and by other departments of the Patriarchate, as well as the Patriarch's speeches. Since the early 2010s, the Inter-Council Workshop (Межсоборное присутствие) has become another important instrument of discussions and eventual elaboration of official texts.² Documents that may be considered semiofficial include the resolutions of the annual Christmas Readings (Рождественские чтения) and the declarations of the World Russian People's Council (Всемирный русский народный собор). A larger group of unofficial texts comprises declarations of a number of associations created by local, provincial and central church initiatives, such as associations of Orthodox media, Orthodox women, Orthodox youth, Orthodox physicians etc.

To be sure, not only does the respective degree of official authority vary from text to text but also within the core official texts produced under the aegis of the Patriarchate. Crucial divergences emerge in part because the process of drafting official documents is complex. In each case, a group of internal and external experts

is established in accordance with a particular topic, and the drafters' agenda may be different in each particular occasion. Despite the final editing of all official documents by a group close to the Patriarch, differences in tenor and even vocabulary are sometimes easily discernible.

In what follows, I will not consider texts which attend to internal, ecclesiastical matters, such as details of canonical law, the status of monks, the management of seminaries and similar issues.³ I will rather concentrate on those texts which address external matters of the wider society, texts which are attempting, as the above excerpt states, 'to give a clear response to the challenges of our times'. We can extract from this mass of documents, with all the variety it represents, a common vector which seems to reflect a typical public ethos of the church. In this paper, my focus will be the morality discourse within this corpus of texts. This discourse seems to have been central to the church's agenda. As I will show below, this discourse has been closely connected with another prominent theme of Orthodox religious identity, and in turn, with the issue of Russia's national identity. Given this close connection, my other task is to correlate this set of ideas with the major political discourses of Putin's Russia.

An important clarification is necessary: my sources are predominantly public texts produced by those at the top of church-related bodies. They define the public image of Russian Orthodoxy and somehow affect – and reflect – the worldviews of broader strata of people, and presumably, some part of the political class and the state bureaucracy, who associate themselves with Orthodoxy. To what extent do these sources resonate with mass, grassroots attitudes and feelings? In order to understand this, we must draw upon a wider range of 'middle' and 'small' sources and narratives, down to local documents of various kinds, and community or personal ethnographies. This will be a task for further study.

The church's search for moral identity: a selective reception of the late Soviet conservative ethos

The central concept, which has been constantly reiterated and multiplied throughout this entire textual corpus produced from 2000 to 2015, is tradition, in all its combinations and derivatives. In this paper, I will use tradition and its variations as they appear within the studied texts and will try to define their intended meaning.

An emphasis on tradition has always been typical for Eastern Orthodox thought, as it

was, indeed, in Roman Catholic and other religious contexts. Yet the content and meaning of this keyword may have changed over time. What exactly does tradition mean in both the Orthodox and political rhetoric of the period under question? First, in a narrow, internal discourse, it means the ecclesiastic canonical tradition, the *predanie* (originally Greek *paradosis*), which signifies the inherited sum of texts, ideas, norms and customs. Tradition in a broader, more ‘secular’ sense has been mainly associated with morality, and this field has become the focus of the church’s presence in public debate. Morality seems to be the most natural and convenient discursive space in which a religious body can contribute to public debates. It is the field in which communication and negotiation between the religious and the secular can easily take place and in which ‘comprehensive doctrines’ can be translated into a commonly detectable language. The postsoviet societal anomie led to a situation of the clash and negotiation of ‘multiple moralities’ (Zigon 2011, 2–15). Jarrett Zigon discusses ‘a struggle over competing moral conceptualisations.’ The postsoviet changes were perceived as ‘increasing the negative effects of materialism and western entertainment’ and ‘a shocking rise of publicly expressed sexuality, the response to which was a widespread call for a return to traditional Russian and Soviet family values’ (Ibid. 4–5). Catherine Wanner distinguishes between ‘the official and ideologically infused Soviet moral code’ and its counterpart, ‘a secular-humanist morality that emerged among members of the intelligentsia in reaction to Soviet state power and perceived injustices.’ She then distinguishes, for the postsoviet context, ‘three sources, among many possibilities, that provide the foundation for moral codes’: Soviet state ideology, secular dissidents and religious communities (Wanner 2011, 218–219).

To this list of possible moral programmes, I would provisionally add at least three new secular options unleashed by postsoviet liberalisation. The first is the pursuit of individual self-interest in a new socio-economic context (‘capitalist’ or ‘achievement’ morality). The second is a celebration of autonomous privacy linked to a normative laxity supported and commercialised by the mass media (‘libertarian’ morality). The third is a rationalistic, ‘juridicised’ liberal morality of rights (‘legalistic’ morality). These three moral options – capitalist, libertarian and legalistic – might be quite different in their goals and structure, but they are clearly interconnected by their allusion to ‘western values’ and their link to new postsoviet freedoms. They have created a new space for the reinterpretation of community and individual subjectivity.⁴

These options could not be accepted within the Orthodox ethical framework and

therefore required a clear articulation of the special Orthodox position. Reconstructing itself within the situation of plural and multiple moralities, Russian Orthodoxy's public agenda gradually shaped itself into an opposition to the moral programmes of the new era. Paradoxically, while the 1990s was the time of the church's institutional liberation from the communist grip – and this was fully recognised as a beneficial change – the church actually served as one of the channels of transmitting continuity with the Soviet past, thereby assuming some substantial elements of the late Soviet, predominantly conservative ethos, in the sphere of morality. The affinity of elements of Soviet ethos with Orthodox morality was not infrequently construed in internet forums or press or other similar sources, but Patriarch Kirill himself also directly asserted such a connection.⁵ Some anthropological studies have shown how the transmission of moral ideas was carried out by the Soviet cultural workers and educators who refashioned themselves as Orthodox activists – what Sonja Luehrmann (2011) called the 'recycling' of late Soviet didacticism into the Orthodox rhetoric. Agata Ladykowska (2011) has shown how this moral 'continuity' was interpreted by provincial teachers. When speaking of the continuity of moral forms, Orthodox priests and activists were renarrating the late Soviet moral ethos in traditional Christian Orthodox language.⁶

To be sure, we must be careful when approaching this seemingly unlikely proximity of Soviet and Orthodox values. First, we should keep in mind the church's ambivalence towards the Soviet legacy: the regime's anti-religious repressions could hardly be denied, and yet people might 'keep the faith' – or at least an old moral code – in spite of repressions. In this interpretation, the thesis of 'continuity' is not specifically linked to the Soviet past, it is extended – and this has been a very frequent operation – into the pre-Soviet time. In the Patriarch's address to the Russian parliament in early 2015, for example, he firmly integrated the Soviet period into the narrative of uninterrupted, millennial continuity (Kirill 2015b).⁷ Second, we should keep in mind that the sense of affinity between the Orthodox moral didactic and the late Soviet ethos is largely based upon a common negative assumption – namely, a rejection of the imagined 'western liberal ethos' – a position deeply shared both by the ideologised moral code which dominated the Soviet public sphere and traditionally anti-western Orthodox rhetoric. This negative anti-liberal similarity makes morality conservative by definition and such paradigmatic conservatism had been celebrated as constitutive to the Russian civilisation's uninterrupted religious inheritance.

Third, and most important, while considering the resemblances between current

Orthodox morality rhetoric and late Soviet ethics, we must understand the highly selective process of references used by today's church leaders and activists. Orthodox morality politics is being constructed from various elements – some purely (dogmatically) religious, some presumably pre-Soviet – and thus references to the Soviet ethos must be selective as well. In some cases, such as homophobia, the continuity seems to be unquestionable. By contrast, in the case of abortion, today's church moralists would find no support within Soviet ethics since abortion was hardly seen as a moral topic at any level of the Soviet ethos.

The transmission of other parts of the moral package is much more complex. It is clear that we should distinguish the doxa of official Soviet morality from the habitus of practical moral behaviour, thereby representing the basic duality of official and real, public and private. This duality was fixed and exacerbated by the totalitarian ideological hegemony. For example, the propagated ideal of the 'solid Soviet family' must be distinguished from the unprecedented rate of divorce and widespread promiscuity common in the Soviet period; and while promoting family values in the twenty-first century with references to the past, the church tends to refer to the official ideal and to ignore the reality of the time.⁸

Still, enough evident commonalities make the continuity hypothesis workable, in spite of all the ambivalence of moral practices. The said duality of official/public and practical/private was 'regulated' by a phenomenon once called double-thinking (двоемыслие, двойное мышление) and explored extensively in the study of homo sovieticus by the sociologist Yuri Levada and his associates (Levada 1993). Doublethinking, according to Levada, is different from simple hypocrisy, a cynical violation of presumably one normative system; in reality, it was a more complex interaction of different normative systems. The gap between normative systems at public and private levels of the Soviet society might be obvious in some cases, yet there existed psychological mechanisms which allowed people to individually realise themselves within the space of official practices (see Yurchak 2005), and both levels might also share a number of norms.

Overall, in all the above-described complexity, the late Soviet ethos, which the Russian Orthodox moral rhetoricians are trying to co-opt in terms of 'continuity' was largely conservative in spirit, in line with what Anatoly Vishnevsky called the 'conservative modernisation' of the Soviet Union (Vishnevski 1998). This conservatism was especially obvious in comparison with the western cultural landscape in the aftermath of the

countercultural revolution of the 1960s, due to the Soviet Union's self-isolation. To make a tentative list of norms which constituted this moral programme, I would include: the rhetoric of the 'solid Soviet family' as the basis of a stable society, in spite of, and in contradiction with, the high rates of divorce and abortion; a tacit inequality of gender roles, in spite of official propaganda to the contrary; an emphasis on responsibilities rather than rights; an emphasis on intra-collective social control and solidarity (both as a mechanism of power and an accepted ideal); an emphasis on the priority of the 'spiritual' over the 'material'; sexual (self)restraint; homophobia; and the subjugation of individual interests and expressions to the collective good.

All of these elements can be easily given a Christian sacred canopy under the label of 'traditional values' which the Orthodox Church has done, but with new interpretations and emphases. The Soviet moral legacy has thus been selectively 'sacralised' and subsumed into a longer continuity of Russian Christian history, which has been associated, if only anachronistically, with both the pre-Revolutionary imagined *Gemeinschaft* and the Soviet collectivistic conservatism.

Family, community and the self: various implications

In this section, I review current Orthodox positions on a variety of issues which seem to differ greatly but are connected under the umbrella of the 'traditional values' agenda. There are two main layers within this agenda. The first layer refers to the constructing of the self, the ego-formation, a set of personal ethics; the second, to the imagining of the community. At the intersection of the self and the larger community, we find family. Family thus acquires a central place in this agenda, and the expression 'family values' is sometimes interchangeable with 'traditional values'. In this respect, Russian religious activism has joined the international conservative tide of other religious groups.

Abortion has become the new anchor subject in defining family values. In the context of generally weak pro-life sensibilities in Russia, the anti-abortion position was a new emphasis almost exclusively represented by the church. On this point, taken separately, the church clearly broke with the Soviet legacy. The Basis of the Social Concept (2000) denounced abortion, including abortive contraception, as a grave sin, and advocated the right of a physician to refuse the service (Osnovy 2000, XII.2). In his speech to the Federal Assembly in 2015, Patriarch Kirill said that it would be 'morally justified' to withdraw

abortion from the system of universal medical insurance because ‘it is sponsored by taxpayers, including those who categorically reject abortion’ (Kirill 2015b). Between 2000 and 2015, a successful lobbying campaign resulted in the change of legal provisions in the parliament, in particular, the right of physicians to refuse performing abortions, albeit with certain limitations.

Another hot topic supported by church actors has been the insistence on a ban of gestational surrogacy and In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and other kinds of assisted reproductive technology. The Basis of the Social Concept clearly criticised such practices, and a few lay actors have further supported this position, including the Congress of Orthodox Physicians which passed a resolution, calling for a reduction of ‘non-traditional’ interferences into human reproduction and for the granting of the right to assisted technologies only to men and women in marriage (Address 2011). Clearly, the traditional model of family is the main concern here. In a special 2013 resolution, giving ‘practical ecclesiastic guidance’ to priests, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) refused the right of baptism to families with children born from surrogate mothers. Although the resolution says that ‘each newborn child can be baptised’, the priests can deny baptism in some cases. ‘A child born through surrogacy can be baptised by the wish of those persons who bring him [or her] up if they are the child’s biological parents, or a ‘surrogate mother’, only after they recognise that such reproductive technology is morally reprehensible, and after they go through the rite of repentance’ (Baptism 2013). In the same way, the Patriarch says:

[T]he moral consciousness cannot cope with the legal authorisation of a so-called surrogacy that makes children and women the subject of a commercial or non-commercial transaction, thus perverting the very notion of motherhood, the mystery and sanctity of familial relationships. They say to us, ‘And what can a woman do who cannot give birth to a child?’. Adopt an orphan, as our people have always done. (Kirill 2015b)

In all such cases, the traditional family serves as an incontestable reference point. ‘Marriage is a divine institution rooted in the God-given human nature. In the Christian understanding, marriage is a spiritual and corporeal union of a man and a woman, which allows them to fully realise their human nature’ (Baptism 2013). According to the Patriarch, assisted reproductive technologies go even further by ‘interfer[ing] in God’s design of man [and] destroy[ing] human dignity and the value

of human relationships' (Kirill 2015b).

Other related hot topics include homosexuality, transsexuality, and same-sex marriage, all strongly opposed by the church.⁹ The Basis of the Social Concept reads: '[T]he divinely established marital union of man and woman cannot be compared to perverted sexualities. The Church believes that homosexuality is a sinful corruption of human nature, which can be overcome by spiritual effort [...]' (Osnovy, XII.9). The church has since established itself as the public anchor for resisting LGBT movements and views. As an example, consider a strong 2013 declaration of the Patriarchate's Department for External Relations concerning the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Britain and France. These changes, according to the document, 'testify to an upheaval in the understanding of marriage as such, which is underway in European societies. The legal recognition of homosexual unions and their equalisation with marriage is a revolution in the legislative regulation of familial relations [...] Especially dangerous is the legal norm that allows homosexual couples to adopt and rear children' (Statement 2013).

To resist these trends, the ROC has created alliances with conservative actors across the world. This includes the joint declaration with Roman Catholics after a conference at the Vatican in 2013, which strongly opposed the new 'gender culture' which leads to the 'elimination of the notion of sexual identity'. The declaration further states that marriage – a union between man and woman – 'answers the needs of human existence and is good news for today's world, including de-Christianised societies' (Communiqué 2013a). In the same way, the Patriarchal commission on family issues has bitterly reacted against the official endorsement by UNICEF of same-sex marriages; in this case, the authors referred to the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights which called the family 'the natural and fundamental group unit of society' (Statement 2014b).¹⁰

Yet another major case has been the church's resistance to the introduction of a juvenile court (ювенальная юстиция) – a set of legal norms which allows state or civil bodies to interfere for the protection of children's rights against family violence. The debate around this issue is especially instructive. Some elements of the reform of the juvenile justice system have been slowly introduced in Russia since mid-1990s, in line with Russia's new international commitments. It has gradually received strong opposition from the patriotic media and from some public actors, leading to a strikingly efficient negative mobilisation which reached its peak in the early 2010s with the

‘patriotic turnover’ which accompanied Putin’s third presidential term.¹¹

The substance of the debate was as follows: from the perspective of a sacralised traditional family, the issue was crucial because the juvenile court potentially violated the integrity of the family. In alliance with such players as the All-Russian Parental Resistance (Родительское всероссийское сопротивление) and the Union of Orthodox Lawyers (Союз православных юристов), the church itself has become one of the strongest opponents of the reform. The Bishops Council of 2013 devoted a special document to family legislation in general, and to the juvenile court in particular (Position 2013a). The document begins with a common theological emphasis on the family as a ‘God-given value’; the growth of juvenile criminality is explained by the ‘moral disorientation of society’. The main idea of the document is that the legislative trend ‘in some foreign countries’ to prioritise children’s rights over parental rights cannot be accepted in Russia, and that parental rights constitute a traditional priority supported by scriptural authority (e.g. the Fifth Commandment). Therefore, according to this argument, the ‘unjustified interference’ by the state or other external bodies into a family’s internal affairs or into any familial conflicts cannot be accepted. The Bishops Council further expressed a concern that such interference ‘could be used to implant a non-religious worldview and to limit religious freedom’ meaning that the juvenile court could prevent parents from pursuing a religious upbringing.

This Bishops Council document is an excellent example of how discursive trends intersect. First, we see the clearly perceived opposition between: (a) the model of the traditional family as the core of society and (b) individual rights potentially extended to children. Second, we see a clear stance against any external interference, including that of the state. According to this line of thought, the family indeed becomes the basic entity, fenced in from both sides, protected from individuals and from larger public entities. As seen above, proponents of this view believe that the family should also be protected from those with ‘non-traditional sexuality’ and from those who use ‘nontraditional methods of reproduction’. Interestingly, it should also be protected from the state which may promote, actually or potentially, such norms that could legalise ‘nontraditional’ practice or intrude into the sacred space of the family under legal pretexts. Indeed, the very notion of individual rights has been contested in principle (although not entirely rejected) in a few important texts, including the special document issued in 2008 (Osnovy uchenia 2008; see analysis in Agadjanian 2010; Stoeckl 2014). In fact, we see how Christian morality is placed in opposition to human rights (as interpreted in

terms of positive law). According to this line of thinking, morality is higher than rights, since morality has sacred foundations, while human rights do not. The theme of the opposition between morality and rights, and the priority of morality over rights runs through all texts analysed in this project. For example, one document states: 'Even if the system of juvenile justice does not contradict national legal standards, the possibility of its introduction must be coordinated with the traditional view on family values, the position of religious communities, and the opinions of the population' (Position 2013). In fact, broadly speaking, the priority of morality over law has gone uncontested within these texts. Abortion, gestational surrogacy (IVF), homosexuality and juvenile courts may be allowed in law, but they are also sins, and this moral judgement deprives the law of its valid foundation, and apparently challenges the secular state which generates and enforces this law. (This does not preclude the church's endorsement of the actual laws of the state in other cases.)

In the most general sense, the logic of opposing rights in favour of tradition, the law in favour of morality and the individual in favour of community can be illustrated within debates concerning blasphemy, which is rendered in the Russian context as 'the violation of believers' feelings'. A number of conflicts and causes célèbres within the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century were mostly related to artistic expression in various genres, culminating in the Pussy Riot 'punk prayer' - a case which was actually related more to the field of politics than to aesthetics or religion (Uzlaner 2013). In these cases, as Schroeder and Karpov (2013) have shown, moral deviance was identified and then criminally charged, thus setting a normative climate which facilitated a sensitivity to the violation of religious feelings. Such thinking was evident in a statement by the Russian Interreligious Council in response to the attack on Charlie Hebdo in France in 2015. While condemning terror, the Interreligious Council further argued:

Along with secularisation, the high principles of inalienable rights have lost their link to the sacral dimension of life, and the protection of personal freedom have transformed into the protection of self-will, opening doors to immorality, permissiveness, anarchy and tyranny. We do not approve the liberal-secular, relativistic approach to freedom, where there are no absolute values and criteria and where material well-being is the only thing to strive for. (Interreligious Council 2015)¹²

Thus, a reconstruction of the logic in question might state that the legal norm (the

freedom of speech) has a serious flaw (the lack of sacral legitimacy and of a moral foundation); therefore, a religious person must be protected from the intrusion into his/her 'emotional self'. Essential to such protection is a counter-norm, limiting, if not eliminating, the freedom of speech. Similar criticisms of freedom and its alleged relativism are apparent in other texts.

The church protects the family; it protects the community of believers. But what about the individual? In the discussion over the system of juvenile justice, we have seen how individual rights are subordinated to family values. Another strong case in this respect includes Orthodox protests against technologically advanced forms of personal registration. This movement stood against the introduction of individual tax identification numbers in the 1990s and early 2000 and beyond, as well as against plans to introduce universal digital identity cards. Although the initiative originated from the ultra-conservative clerical fringe, the official church reacted and produced declarations in response to the concerns of 'groups of believers'. The apogee of this debate was the Bishops Council's 2013 resolution declaring that the state possessing personal information creates the possibility of controlling and directing the human person in various arenas (finance, medicine, the family, social security, property, etc.); this leads to a real danger of interference into a person's everyday life, and, therefore, the Church supports the right of a person to refuse providing his/her personal data.

Such 'constriction of the limits of freedom' through the means of electronic control could potentially 'prevent believers from professing their Christian faith, making mandatory legal, political or ideological acts that may be incompatible with the Christian way of life'. In such a case, the document states, we will reach the End Times prophesied in the Book of Revelation (Position 2013b).¹³

One important point here is that the resistance to digital identity cards, as well as the opposition to the juvenile justice system and the concern of offending religious feelings, all contain a certain, usually indirect and hidden, suspicion of the state. This suspicion is stronger among certain ultra-conservative religious groups but seems to be much weaker among the official hierarchy, given the obvious trend towards partnership, which I will demonstrate below. And yet, a certain suspicion is, in my view, somewhat intrinsic and fundamental to the church as such. The state is at least seen as a potential danger, since it is linked with positive law and thus may enforce immoral legal norms or such norms which may contain moral offence. There is, indeed, some ambiguity in the

church's attitude towards the state, which goes back deep to the church's historical experience. However, as we will see later, this criticism of the state indirectly violating 'traditional values' (by enforcing supposedly immoral norms) is downplayed in order to make a positive appeal to the state as a protector of these values. As the political rhetoric under Putin has shifted towards conservative nationalism, the mainstream church's selfdistancing from the state, which could be recorded in the 1990s, has almost disappeared. Another interesting dimension is apparent in the above cases. In arguments against the juvenile justice system, it is obvious that the family is protected at the expense of individual rights. At first glimpse, arguments against blasphemy (or the violation of the religious feelings of believers) can be interpreted differently, as protecting the personal right of the believer over and against the individual right of the free speech containing the offence. If we were to take a closer look, however, we would see that the subjectivity of 'feelings' is assigned not to an individual per se but rather to a community of believers; what is being protected is not an individual's positive right, but rather an Orthodox community's negative right not to be offended. Likewise, arguments concerning the perceived dangers of one's digital identity seek to protect the Orthodox community's negative right not to be absorbed into an alien controlling agent (i.e. the bearer of alien values, who replaces one's God-given name with a de-personalised digital identity), rather than an individual's positive right (as contrasted with civil society's concerns for personal data control).¹⁴ In other words, a dangerous Big Brother intrudes into the moral self and traditional forms of life; in the following section, we will discover the identity of this Big Brother.

The global disintegration of traditional values and Russia's conservative Mission

The polemic over values is tightly connected to the idea of a Russian collective identity and to the idea of Russia's global mission to protect tradition. We find the first articulated principles of this polemic in Patriarch Kirill's earlier writings, analysed elsewhere (Agadjanian 2003; 2008). For rhetorical purposes, such writings constructed an 'Other': western, secular, liberal civilisation. The main deficiencies of the 'Other' represent an inversion of traditional values and create a basis for 'other' moralities, such as the pursuit of material success, libertarian laxity, formal legalistic rationality and moral relativism. The roots of these attitudes supposedly lie in the West.

In a few cases, Russian Orthodox actors lay the blame for the corrosion of values at the feet of western politicians, rather than of western societies, as such. In an elaborate report, ROC representatives at the Council of Europe reacted against the PACE resolution ‘Tackling discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity’ (June 2013), which openly criticised Russia’s law against ‘homosexual propaganda’. The ROC response lists PACE members who voted for this resolution, while mentioning the absence of a large majority of members during the vote. It concludes: ‘We must state that traditional values in Europe are being dismantled not because many Europeans no longer espouse them, but because politicians, who are supposed to protect them, ignore their duty and show a lack of organisation and cohesion’ (Communiqué 2013b). In most cases, however, the texts affirm that the dismantling of traditional values is a deep, sociocultural phenomenon, rather than the negligence (or conspiracy) of politicians. This anti-western, anti-liberal position sounds very close indeed to late Soviet, official conservative rhetoric, albeit with new content. For example, the Forum of Orthodox Women disregards political correctness and launches a vehement antiwestern invective:

Globalisation, in the context of the domination of the Western political and economic model, is targeted at the destruction of the historically formed spiritual and moral roots of various peoples, and leads in the end to the colonisation of many countries through the use of the newest technologies. Today’s weapon of mass destruction is the cult of vices, the promotion of immoral sects, and an opiate of diffused ‘universal values.’ (Statement 2014a)

The authors of the document take a protective stance against this state of decay by referring to the nineteenth-century philosopher Nikolai Danilevsky (1822–1885), who stated that each cultural and historical type of humanity has its own mission and its own value (Statement 2014a). This criticism of western universalism is a crucial theme. The World Russian People’s Council, a lay organisation initiated by the Moscow Patriarchate in the early 1990s, has developed the concept of Russianness in a series of resolutions at its annual meetings. In its 2014 Declaration, the Council repeats Danilevsky’s principle of multiple civilisations, but further claims that the very principle of international equality, which is now globally accepted, originally emerged in Russia. This fact, therefore, makes Russia ‘the main guarantor of the multipolar world [...] It is Russia that has every reason to remain the global stronghold of traditional family values, resisting the prophecy of immorality and the legalisation of a growing number of sinful activities’ (Declaration 2013).

While focusing primarily on morality, this Declaration turns its attention to a second major aspect of church rhetoric, communitarianism.

A society of solidarity is the social ideal of the Russian civilisation. It is based not upon conflict or competition, but upon the mutual aid and cooperation of all its members, of the various social, ethnic, religious and political groups. Russian history is permeated with this drive toward solidarity, and it is revealed in the principle of sobornost', the symphony of state and Church, the experience of a parish, a working team (артель), a circle of Cossacks, in a council (совет), [and in] a commune. Conflicts between people and power or between science and religion are not typical for our country. (Ibid.)

Social solidarity and the accompanying idyllic picture of a society with no conflicts and no competition (completely ignoring the country's dramatic historical experience) promote a romantic communitarian agenda which is a larger societal extension of moral and family values. Those who advocate such solidarity and unity are opposed to any attempts to

declar[e] values as something relative, functional and having no point beyond [the context of] particular individuals and their agreements [...] A moral majority consolidated around fundamental values has the full right to create [...] a social order of its own, despite the shouts of an aggressive minority that denies these ideals and values.' (Ibid.)¹⁵

Thus, the discourse of traditional family values is extended to the principle of a society of solidarity, and then further to a notion of Russian civilisation as the exemplar and the main protector of these sacred values and principles. Here again, a perceived vulnerability against imposed alien values has morphed into a claim presenting a 'moral majority' (i.e. all religiously based civilisations who share traditional values) over and against an 'aggressive minority' in western countries. The emphasis on communitarianism/solidarity, which resembles Roman Catholic and other religious agendas, also reverberates in the Russian case with the Soviet ideological arsenal.

Patriarch Kirill is certainly behind such rhetorical constructions. In his own speech at the Federal Assembly in 2015, he elaborated on a similar model. In his many texts since the early 1990s, he has tackled the issue of 'universal values' in relation to both an Orthodox Christian and a specifically Russian ethos. Over the course of about fifteen years, his criticism of the secular, western ethos has become increasingly stronger. In his

earlier texts, Kirill called for the ‘negotiation’ and even the ‘harmonisation’ of Christian and secular worldviews (mostly through the shared notion of personal freedom), but by the mid-2010s, this idea of interaction has disappeared.

He began his 2015 speech with an affirmation of the universality of traditional morality and justice, with its divine sources. Any relativity in these foundations leads to a cynical imposition of particular interests. According to the Patriarch, today ‘this morality has disappeared. When morality is stipulated by collective, corporate, class, ideological or other factors, moral foundations are ignored’ (Kirill 2015b).¹⁶ He vehemently rejects the ‘relativism of values’ seemingly alluding to the postmodern notion of the relativity of truth. In the speech, he applies this reasoning to the alleged universal truth ‘imposed by the global mass media’. In fact, he repeats the concept of ‘the opiate of universal values’ as discussed above. He goes deeper into this universalism/relativism dilemma, trying to uncover the roots of the western condition:

The idea of the absolute priority of freedom, of the freedom of choice, and the rejection of the priority of a moral norm, has become a sort of time bomb for western civilisation [...] The absolutisation of the freedom of choice excised from a moral position is a deadly thing for the human being and for society, since evil can also be a choice [...] This occurs because higher justice and higher truth is excluded from people’s consciousness. The effects of such apostasy are deplorable for society; it becomes unviable. (Ibid.)

Kirill then refers to those allegedly immoral norms, including same-sex marriage and the juvenile court, thereby further reinforcing his argument presuming that these norms contradict not only traditional morality but also ‘human common sense and survival instinct’. Interestingly, in making such a distinction (traditional values vs. the human survival instinct), he creates an opposition between what he believes to be real universal values (i.e. traditional values linked to common human instincts) and false universal values (i.e. ‘modern pseudo-values, ruinous for the human person and the entire civilisation’) (Ibid.).

Finally, Kirill turns to the Russian civilisation, presuming that it incarnates universal traditional values par excellence. In fact, he replicates a regular list of features observed in the other texts analysed here but places special emphasis upon a *Gemeinschaft*-kind of solidarity, non-competitiveness, and upon a ‘consensus of values’ (ценностный консенсус) that is supposed to unite all social groups, political parties and traditional religions. He calls it a ‘great religious-political synthesis’, creating a ‘solidarity society’

where all groups collaborate for the common good. He eventually creates a model of Russian cultural legacy out of five building blocks, corresponding to five periods of Russian history: faith (acquired by ancient Rus); great power statehood, *derzhvnost* (the Muscovite and Romanov imperial periods); justice (the Revolution); solidarity (the Soviet Union); and dignity (postsoviet development).¹⁷

The political projections of religious moral conservatism¹⁸

The language of various political groups in Russia has been very similar to the rhetoric of the Orthodox actors cited above. Since the 1990s, the elements just described were voiced in various contexts and combinations, with various degrees of a specifically religious component. The emotional tone of this rhetoric has been continually increasing.

With respect to religious rhetoric in political discourse, this analysis begins with two non-official cases before moving on to official political institutions. A typical example is found in the ‘St. Sergius Project’ (Сергиевский проект, referring to St. Sergius of Radonezh), which has produced the so-called *Russkaia doktrina* (Russian Doctrine). The project emerged in the mid-2000s but then disappeared within a few years. This group of business people and intellectuals professed what they called ‘dynamic conservatism’. The ‘doctrine’, written from the perspective of entrepreneurs, welcomed the market and downplayed the leftist communitarian discourse. Yet it also included several elements seen above, with a strong emphasis on the ‘traditional bases of Russian civilisation, tested by the centuries’, with a direct reference to the ‘Russian spirit’ (i.e. Orthodox tradition) and with a strong claim that Russia is ‘a system of rafters supporting the vault over all the peoples of the world’ (*Russkaia doktrina*).¹⁹

Another public project that correlates with Orthodox moral conservatism is the print and online publication of the volume *Rupture* (Перелом) by a group of intellectuals (Shchipkov 2013).²⁰ In contrast to the Russian Doctrine, this group claimed to promote a ‘left-conservative consensus’, essentially a leftist solidarity linked to a conservative alignment with justice and tradition. They rejected the ‘postmodern’ western condition with its ‘domination of a strangulated, emasculated rationality that broke with tradition and values’. According to this volume, global liberalism and the power of the western financial elite have suppressed ‘traditional values, communitarianism (общинность), non-commercial motivations, and deep passions (пассионарность)’. The presumed

result of this pressure would be a colonial dependence on global liberalism (Ibid., 23, 43 and *passim*). In contrast, the authors of this volume see Russian civilisation as uniquely predestined to keep traditions alive, and Orthodoxy works as the main ferment.

Two chapters speak of ‘Orthodox Ethics and the Spirit of Solidarity’, with a direct allusion to the Weberian thesis (Ibid., 3–15, 72ff). This parallel is evoked as proof of religious, traditional foundations of society, which are prioritised over ‘seemingly rational laws’ and the limited merits of the rule of law as such (Ibid., 21–22). The authors argue that the Russian response to presumed western domination should be a combination of morality and community (sobornost’ and the soteriology of Slavophiles’ ‘collective salvation’ are referenced), resulting in a ‘religious-communal mindset’ (религиозно-общинный тип сознания), even with the possible introduction of a special morally guiding ‘vigilant body over the state’ (блюстительный орган) (Ibid., 64, 67, 143ff). Given their affinity of thought, the solidaristic Left (or ‘moderate socialists’) in Russia tend to move towards the conservative Right (the church), and the church moves towards the Left, expressing the popular majority’s desire for justice. This provides a synthesis of the Left and the Right, a ‘Leftist Conservatism’ that is seen as natural and even inescapable in Russian conditions (Ibid., 40–41, 61).²¹

Despite certain differences in attitude towards the leftist legacy, both aforementioned projects have a common affinity with Orthodox moral-conservative discourse. This includes a resistance to alternative ‘modern’ types of morality (e.g. materiality/consumption-driven, formal rational/juridical and libertarian); a common anti-individualist emphasis on a pan-societal ‘consensus of values’ and the assigning of a particular mission to Russia to propagate traditions globally. In addition, both projects envisage the direct involvement of the Orthodox Church.

Similar ideas can often be heard in the debates and legislative work of the Russian parliament. The rise of state-supported patriotism and anti-westernism in the wake of the Orange Revolution of 2004 and especially of the Euromaidan Revolution of 2014 in Ukraine often corresponded to respective parliamentary initiatives wherein religious references were common. The Inter-Factional Parliamentary Group in Defence of Christian Values, established in the State Duma in 2012, has been lobbying for church-related causes. The 2012 Law on Education introduced a mandatory ‘religious cluster’ in public school curriculum, for which Orthodox activists had lobbied for many years; by 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science pushed again the idea of introducing the Orthodox classes to the entire period of schooling. A 2013 amendment raised the level

of criminalisation of ‘insulting believers’ feelings’. In 2013, a law was adopted which forbade ‘the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations’ among minors; furthermore, an amendment to the Family Code forbade the adoption of Russian children by people in same-sex unions or by non-married individuals from those countries where such unions were legalised.²² The rhetoric of parliamentary debates concerning all these initiatives varied in the extent of radicalism, but the overall tone was similar to the texts analysed thus far. The idea of the protection of morality as a matter of ‘spiritual security’ has had direct implications in the realm of foreign policy (see Payne 2010). The official Strategy of National Security adopted on 31 December 2015, lists, among Russia’s ‘national interests’, ‘the protection and development of culture, traditional Russian spiritual and moral values’ (Strategia 2015).

President Putin (or his speechwriters) has increasingly tended to include similar rhetorical elements in this official pronouncements. Addressing the Valdai Discussion Club in 2013, Putin stated:

Russia is experiencing not only the objective pressure of globalisation on its national identity but also the consequences of the two national catastrophes of the twentieth century, when we twice lived through the dismantling of the state. As a result, we received a terrible blow to the nation’s cultural and spiritual code. We faced the disruption of tradition, the disruption of a continuous history. We faced the demoralisation of society, the deficit of trust and responsibility. (Putin 2013)

He then engaged in a vehement anti-western invective:

We see how many Euro-Atlantic countries have de facto chosen the path of cutting ties with their roots, including their Christian values, which are at the foundation of western civilisation. They reject moral foundations and all traditional identities – national, cultural, religious, and even sexual. Their policy places large families and same-sex partnerships, the belief in God and the belief in Satan on the same level. On the extreme end of political correctness, they seriously discuss the registration of parties who openly intend to propagate paedophilia. People in many countries of Europe are ashamed to speak about their religious affiliation [...] And these countries are aggressively trying to impose this model upon everybody, the entire world. I am certain that this is a direct path to degradation and primitivisation, to a deep demographic and moral crisis. (Ibid.)

Putin then elaborated, ‘people will inevitably lose human dignity without the values of Christianity and other world religions, without the millennia-long history of moral norms and ethics (нормы морали и нравственности)’ (Ibid.). He developed the idea of

diversity, signifying the traditional religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and other religions) which form part of Russia's identity. At this point, however, he referred to the constitutional rights of all citizens, both religious and atheist. He directly referred to religious diversity and the diversity of ethnicities, thereby presenting Russia as a historical incarnation of Konstantin Leontiev's (1831–1891) model of 'flourishing complexity'. He spoke of a national consensus that downplays all forms of primordial and political differences. In other instances, he projected a model of diversity to the entire world, a model which was quintessentially developed in the history of Russia, which is by its very nature polycentric (multipolar) and is, therefore, opposed to the domination of a single superpower. This reflects Orthodox writers who juxtapose traditional civilisations with the pseudo-universal claims of secular western culture. The rhetorical consonance in many places is, indeed, striking.²³

Concluding discussion: the nature of Russian Orthodox conservative moralism

'Keeping tradition' and claiming authenticity are basic tropes used in Orthodox Christian churches. In this respect, there is nothing new or surprising in the fact that protecting 'traditional values' has become the leitmotif of church rhetoric. As the years have passed, this agenda has been projected beyond ecclesiastic borders into the society and politics. The Russian Church, at least its leadership, has developed a strong identity of being the main stronghold and guarantor of the traditional ethos within Russia and its surrounding countries (see also Stepanova 2015). To a growing extent, the ROC has now begun to take upon itself the role of such a stronghold for the entire world, thus considering its task a global mission (in collaboration with a spectrum of conservative actors worldwide).²⁴ These claims are not new but they were largely abandoned for a few generations and revived in the postsoviet era. With this new claim for mission, the church's former protective position of a vulnerable minority resisting an alien world, as typical in the 1990s, has gradually evolved into a claim of representing a growing moral majority in Russia and beyond.

Two main developments have contributed to this evolution. One was a steady rise in the overall approval of the church's significance among the population – irrespective of a variety of types of self-identification and belonging. Kääriäinen and Furman (2000) refer to this general approval as 'a Pro-Orthodox consensus'; or we could refer to

Orthodoxy as an ‘ambient faith’ – a natural, incontestable part of the cultural atmosphere – as did Wanner (2014).²⁵ A second development was the growing traditionalist rhetoric of the ruling political regime, especially with Vladimir Putin’s ‘second coming’ as president in 2012. The idea of Russia standing as a strong power resisting ‘unipolar globalism’ has become increasingly buttressed by the idea of Russia as a stronghold of traditional values.²⁶ When considering references to the role of Orthodoxy in official political rhetoric, on the one hand, and references to the role of the state in official church rhetoric, on the other, one cannot help but notice that religious and secular ideological rhetoric have concurred and, to some degree, have even converged. Although it is very difficult to prove a direct coordination of these two rhetorical trends, it is unlikely to be a mere coincidence.²⁷

The tandem wave of religious and political moral conservatism can be seen as part of a global Kulturkampf, with geopolitical implications (see Clifford 2012). Russian moral rhetoric – and some of its western, Arabic, Iranian, Indian and other analogues – targets the imagined, typified western liberal ethos. In a new astonishing development, this liberal ethos has been strongly challenged within the West itself, as displayed in the rise of the far right and the results of the US Presidential elections in 2016, with many extreme conservative groups directly celebrating the Russian promotion of traditional values (Feuer and Higgins 2016). Indeed, the ROC, in tandem with the Russian ruling elite, has become an international ‘moral norm entrepreneur’ (Stoeckl 2016).

Charles Taylor calls the liberal western ethos, targeted by the conservatives, ‘moralism’, or ‘code fetishism’ or again ‘nomolatriy’. Thus, according to Taylor, this dominant ethos has become ‘closed off’, or cut off, from the transcendental, from the ‘vertical dimension’, and has become focused on the instrumental moral code. The West, he writes, lost ‘the premodern sense that any code can hold only in a larger order that transcends the code[...]’ (Taylor 2011, 352). Taylor shows how this moralistic reduction of Christianity – followed by a de-Christianisation of morality – occurred in modern Europe to reach its final shape in either Kantian or Benthamian (utilitarian) morality. He then overviews various Romantic and Christian reactions from within the West against this dominant, presumably ‘horizontal’ moralism, cut off from ‘verticality’. Taylor’s own commentary about the ‘perils of moralism’ is, in fact, one of the more recent reactions against such a development.

Russian Orthodox authors join this row of critics in their own way. They develop their own moralism. Their criticism is much stronger than Taylor’s: when dealing with secular

liberalism, they tend to speak not so much of disenchanting moral norms, but rather of legal norms totally deprived of moral content, ‘relativistic’, and linked to postmodern voluntaristic subjectivity. Orthodox criticism indicates that the liberal West has lost not only the ‘vertical dimension’ but also morality as such, leading to complete normative chaos. To this picture of a complete laxity of norms – which is, of course, a gross simplification – the Russian critics offer their own fixation on a reified traditional morality. They choose morality as the field in which to ‘express the eternal truths of the gospels in intelligible terms’, as proclaimed in the first quote above. Morality is the field of public communicative space; within this space, ecclesiastical actors speak, predictably, much less about eschatology, asceticism or soteriology. If the western liberal ethos as detected by Taylor is a ‘de-Christianised moralism’, then the Russian Orthodox agenda is, at first sight, the reverse – the re-Christianisation of a conservative secular ethos which bears much affinity with the late Soviet ethos. Just what will be the overall results of this trend? This is still an open question. We have seen, at the very least, that it has led to some obvious and tangible ideological implications, putting the public role of the church in concordance with that of the evolving political regime.

Notes

1. For further discussion of postsoviet desecularisation, see the work of researchers such as Shterin (2012) and Karpov (2012).
2. The Inter-council workshop was created in 2009 to develop official views and documents to be then approved by Church Councils. The organisation includes about one hundred bishops, priests, nuns and laity who are divided into a few commissions, responsible for various themes.
3. Some of these texts go beyond purely administrative issues and are significant for the wider scope of believers’ identity, such as, for example, the long-awaited document entitled ‘On the participation of the believers in the Eucharist’ (Об участии верных в Евхаристии) (On the Participation 2015).
4. For an analysis of postsoviet politico-philosophical interpretations related to the formation of a new subjectivity, see Stoeckl (2008).
5. In May 2016 the Patriarch said that, in contrast to western societies, the Soviet culture preserved Christian values: even the communist authorities of the Soviet Union did not dare ‘to explode the moral foundations of the social life’. He continued, ‘this saved us: our literature, fine arts were permeated with Christian ideas, and the people’s morality remained Christian’ (Ria Novosti, <http://ria.ru/religion/20160525/1439347404.html>. Accessed on 3 July 2016.)
6. Panchenko (2011: 131ff) has shown a Soviet ‘genealogy of ethical techniques’, typical in collectivistic new religious movements, but a similar genealogy, in my view, can be found in the milieu of newly converted Orthodox. For further discussion of the Soviet genealogy of postsoviet moralities, see Steinberg and Wanner (2009).
7. I deal more with this speech and the narrative of the continuous, millennial ‘Russian civilisation’ below.

8. An emphasis on the family was part of the late Soviet official doxa. Overall, the Soviet moral code inherited a certain revolutionary indifference to family matters. In the early decades of the USSR, the ‘working collective’ (трудовой коллектив) seemed to have been central to official moral rhetoric, defining the individual’s self-fashioning (see Kharkhordin 1999). However, in the late Soviet period, this emphasis evolved significantly towards a more family-centred system, in line with the rehabilitation of private life and values of ‘private happiness’ (see Cherepanova 2012; Kaspe 2009-10; Shlapentokh 1989).
9. For an analysis of the current Russian Orthodox approach to sexuality, see Mikhailov (2013).
10. The UNICEF document in question is: Position Paper No. 9 (November 2014): ‘Eliminating Discrimination Against Children and Parents Based on Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity’. The norm referred to in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is Article 16.3. On the issue of LGBT rights, see Stoeckl (2014).
11. See an overview and analysis of the debate in Rousselet (2014).
12. The Inter-Religious Council is an NGO initiated by the Moscow Patriarchate and founded in 1998 to represent Russia’s four ‘traditional religions’ – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism.
13. The documents refer to Chapters 13 and 14 of Revelation, which describe the coming of the Antichrist and the victory over him. In particular, Chapter 13 contains the reference to the ‘number of the beast’ (666). Since the late 1990s, there has been a concern that this number may be secretly contained in new registries. Such apocalyptic misgivings were typical to the groups fighting registration from the very beginning.
14. See an analysis of the paradox of personhood, in connection to anti-registry sensitivities, in Agadjanian and Rousselet (2005, 33–35).
15. Other Orthodox actors may differ from this radical agenda of solidarity. For example, the Forum of Orthodox Youth, with all its strong support of ‘traditional values’, still calls for the creation of a competitive environment, free from state overregulation, to promote fair and successful businesses (Final Document 2014).
16. In his list of particularistic views, Kirill mentions, among others, ‘class’, but he symptomatically refers not to the Soviet communist particularistic ‘class morality’ but to a Nazi example. He spoke to the parliament with a communist party faction in the audience; but as we have seen and will see further, avoiding anti-communist rhetoric has deeper roots than mere political correctness.
17. Ibid. While speaking of the Revolution, Kirill bluntly refers to its foreign, alien sources, very much in conspiracy-theory mode, while still extracting a positive impulse of ‘justice’ revealed in the revolutionary years. ‘Solidarity’ is commonly linked to the Soviet experience. The link of postsoviet experience to ‘dignity’ is quite new and much less elaborated, although the concept of dignity has been prominent in recent debates about personhood and human rights.
18. In this paper, my task is not to discuss the institutional links between the state and the church and the vicissitudes of their real-political interaction. For such discussion, see Richters (2012), where we can find an outline of relevant events and legislation (p. 77–84) and an account of patterns of the church’s political engagement (p. 60–77). See also the analysis by Pankhurst and Kilp in a special issue of *Religion, State and Society* (Vol. 41, No. 3, 2013).
19. The group’s website has not been updated since 2007. Yet, in 2007, the then Metropolitan Kirill endorsed the project.
20. This is also available online at: http://www.religare.ru/25_1012.html. The editor, Alexander Shchipkov, is a former religious dissident and a well-known religious journalist and official.

21. Although views of the volume's various authors do diverge, I have taken the liberty to reconstruct the main building blocks across the volume.

22. I list only the legislation related to the topic explored here. Beyond this topic stand other legal acts favouring the church (as a generic 'religious organisation'), such as the amendments to the Land Code (regulating 'the right of permanent/perpetual use of land'), the Tax Code (full tax exemption), the Law on Cultural Heritage Objects (budget subsidies to certain church buildings) etc.

23. Towards the end of Putin's 2013 Valdai speech, he referred to civil society and the civic participation of individual citizens mentioning the tradition of *zemstvo*, or local selfgovernment; this adds a measure of ideological balance. The image of the 'civic nation' was still present, whereas we would not find such an emphasis in church rhetoric. Still, these elements were downplayed in comparison with the language of tradition. Since the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, references to civic and democratic values have significantly decreased in the official rhetoric.

24. A conservative moral agenda was the main contribution of the Russian Church in debates over the preparatory documents leading up to the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 (see Agadjanian 2016).

25. Catherine Wanner borrowed the concept of 'ambient faith' from Mathew Engelke (2012), who elaborates it as a response to the elusiveness of the boundary between public and private religion.

26. For an analysis of the foreign policy implications of the religious factor, see Curanovic (2012).

27. The degree of the church-state alliance is debatable. The famous *symphonia*, when applied to the modern situation, is, to my view, merely a misleading buzzword and an emotional metaphor (see also Hovorun 2016). As for the principle of separation as a constitutional norm, it obviously fluctuates with the continuing pressure of desecularisation. We do not know whether the Patriarch's views have directly affected the evolution of political language and positions or the extent to which any personal religious convictions of Putin or his close entourage are of some significance, as some commentators speculated. Yet in no way and on no occasion did any top politician promote the idea of the establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church as the state confession, in violation to the constitutional principle of secularity and neutrality. And notwithstanding the Patriarch's praises of the regime, he has never advocated for his church to become legally established as the state confession. I believe, therefore, that both sides have kept a certain strategic distance, an alliance at a distance; the church itself has developed a special term to describe it *sorabotnichestvo* (соработничество).

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RELIGION, STATE & SOCIETY 59

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