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Postsecular Conflicts

**Debating tradition in Russia
and the United States**

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Contents

Introduction: What Are Postsecular Conflicts?

Kristina Stoeckl

7

Part I – CONSERVATIVE POSITIONS

“All the great renewal movements came from below...”

Interview with Rod Dreher

24

“The great battles lie ahead”

Interview with Allan Carlson

37

“This is not the traditional culture war”

Interview with R.R. Reno

53

“Let us create another culture war”

Interview with Alexander Dugin

57

Part II – CRITIQUES

“We need something else now. We need holiness...”

Interview with Alexander Filonenko

72

The Misfortune of Tradition

Sergey Horujy

86

Two Understandings of Tradition in Russian Orthodox Theology

Andrey Shishkov

112

I Am a Traditionalist, Therefore I Am

Aristotle Papanikolaou

123

The Rhetoric of Traditional Values in Contemporary Russia

Sergey Chapnin

128

Epilogue: Reflections on Globalizing Culture Wars

Dmitry Uzlaner

139

Contributors

151

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Kristina Stoeckl

Introduction:

What Are Postsecular Conflicts?

Every human society is heterogeneous and characterized by internal diversity. This truism is particularly evident when we think about religious diversity in modern societies. Secularization has changed the social position of religion. Modern societies no longer conceive of human coexistence as regulated by divine commands, but as the result of autonomous collective self-determination. The “sacred canopy,” which according to Peter Berger once enveloped the entire social and temporal order, has ceased to exist.¹ In the secular age in which we live, multiple religious creeds are on offer and unbelief has become, for many, the default option.² And yet, religious pluralism was, for centuries, the cause for wars. In Europe, kings and rulers tried to curb the explosive power of religious pluralism within state borders: religious homogeneity was imposed on territories in the Peace of Westphalia (1684), and non-conforming heretics were exiled. As José Casanova points out in his book *Europas Angst vor der Religion* (Europe’s fear of religion), the settlement of the newly discovered Americas by groups of Europeans escaping the religious wars in their home countries enabled European societies to preserve an artificial religious uniformity that did not correspond to the actual state of diver-

1 Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

2 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

sity.³ Today religious diversity exists even within relatively homogenous European societies through the rise of numbers of non-believers, through new religious movements, and through migration. The societal changes usually subsumed under the label “1968” have likewise furthered diversity through greater individualism and the diversification of the political spectrum. European societies today are internally highly diverse in terms of worldviews, religions, and everyday ways of life. From the point of view of sociology, this pluralism is inevitable and cannot be reversed. It is the defining feature of modern societies.

If the pluralism of modern societies is the result of their history, what attitude can individuals as historical agents develop in this regard? This is, in the broadest sense of the term, a political question. Political philosophy distinguishes two trends in the attitudes of people vis-à-vis the pluralism of their societies. The first is a conservative stance that views changes in society with suspicion and sees old, predefined structures as guarantors of social unity. The second is a progressive stance, which welcomes change and would like to throw the burden of what is old overboard in favor of diversity.

This edited volume gathers materials and debates that are located in the first, in the conservative, and also in the second, the progressive camp. Some of the presented material is anti-liberal, even on the extreme right of the political spectrum; it praises “tradition” as a bulwark against diversity. Other texts are closer to the progressive side; they engage in the difficult task of evaluating what “tradition” can mean under conditions of diversity.

The progressive stance is often called liberalism, but in this introduction I would like to reserve the term for an analytical position from which to evaluate the two camps (and the authors presented in this volume): postsecular political liberalism as represented by John Rawls and – in German speaking countries – by Jürgen Habermas.⁴ Postsecular political liberalism operates under the assumption that pluralism is not a (deplora-

3 José Casanova, *Europas Angst vor der Religion* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2009).

4 For a definition, see: Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner, “Four Genealogies of Postsecularity,” in *Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity*, ed. Justin Beaumont (New York: Routledge, 2019).

ble or commendable) state of affairs, but a norm. It is the norm of the polity that we call liberal democracy.⁵ The main representative of this idea of postsecular political liberalism, John Rawls, says that the framework of norms in a polity is the result of an overlapping consensus.⁶ By this, he means that the citizens of a state should be capable of finding a consensus about basic laws even if the reasons why they think that these laws are good are not the same. Rawls does not assume that those who give one reason know the reasons of other people or even value them. They might despise them, but as long as the outcome is the same, the overlapping consensus is real. Jürgen Habermas expresses a similar view using the concept of deliberative democracy, but the implications are different.⁷ He formulates a more demanding concept of the mutual understanding of citizens. Habermas imagines that citizens should be able to explain to each other the reasons why they support a given understanding of good political order over another. When Habermas talks about a *postsecular society*, he intends a pluralist society that is no longer governed by just *one* worldview that is always right and determines the political and social horizon, but one that must bring diverse ideas about what a “good life” is actively into accord.⁸

How realistic, how viable is this vision of postsecular society? Habermas reminds the participants in public discourse of the need for “mutual translation.” He advocates a “complementary learning process” based on the readiness of religious citizens to translate their views into a language comprehensible to non-religious people and on the willingness of secular citizens to *really* pay attention to what their religious co-citizens have to say.⁹ Habermas assumes that more “translation” between religious and

5 Alessandro Ferrara, *The Democratic Horizon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

6 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

7 Jürgen Habermas, “Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls’ *Political Liberalism*,” *Journal of Philosophy* 92 (1995), 109–131.

8 Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006), 1–25.

9 Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in Der Öffentlichkeit: Kognitive Voraussetzungen für den ‘Öffentlichen Vernunftgebrauch’ religiöser und säkularer Bürger,” in *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

non-religious people could lead to better mutual understanding and thus to a better quality of the democratic process.

Against Habermas, one could argue that there already exists a sociological model that conceptualizes the moral and religious diversity of modern societies, only in less consensual terms: the model of *culture wars* described by James D. Hunter.¹⁰ In the United States this concept denotes the conflict between representatives of a culture holding on to traditional teachings, values, and life plans on the one hand, and the representatives of a culture of change and individual freedom on the other. Where Habermas's idea of *postsecular society* highlights consensus, the *culture wars* model highlights conflict. Both operate under the assumption that pluralism is the default condition of modern societies, but they come to different conclusions. Habermas's conclusion is optimistic, Hunter's is pessimistic. Culture wars, Hunter writes, precede shooting wars.¹¹

This introduction is not the place to settle the question whether conflicts over values in modern pluralistic societies always take the form of a postsecular consensus or a culture war. Instead, what this introduction, this edited volume, and in general the whole *Postsecular Conflicts* research project¹² tries to do, is to define in greater detail the conditions of these conflicts. By "conditions" we mean what actors, what political dynamics, and what ideas and intellectual genealogies are at play in today's postsecular conflicts?¹³

10 James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

11 James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture War* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

12 The Postsecular Conflicts (POSEC) research project is a research project and group active at the University of Innsbruck from 2016 to 2021. It is funded by the European Research Council under the Horizon 2020 framework (ERC-STG-2015-676804).

13 The handshake between two figures, one symbolizing the United States and the other Russia, on the cover of this edited volume is a reference to James D. Hunter's book *Culture Wars*. The cover of *Culture Wars* (1991) showed an arm-wrestle between stars and stripes, symbolizing an American society in conflict. Twenty years later, the conservative side in this conflict is in friendly relations with Russia. The handshake on the cover symbolizes the transnational moral conservative alliances and the global dynamics of postsecular conflicts studied in this volume.

Postsecular Conflicts

Postsecular conflicts are conflicts over values in modern pluralistic societies. We propose the term as a neutral, descriptive category; one that allows us to analyze constellations of conflict without seeing them, a priori, as grounds for postsecular consensus (the optimistic outcome) or for culture wars (the pessimistic outcome). The following four features are characteristic of postsecular conflicts:

First Defining Feature: Postsecular Conflicts Revolve around the Definition of Explicit and Implicit Norms.

The first feature of postsecular conflicts is that they arise when it comes to codifying norms into laws. In modern pluralistic societies, explicit and implicit norms of living together are being called into question. One example that illustrates this fact very well is the question of “marriage for all”: In 2017, the German parliament passed a law that gave heterosexual marriages and homosexual partnerships (legal in Germany since 2001) equal status. All the parliament did was to change the wording of article 1353 of the German Civil Code from “marriage is entered into for life. The spouses have a mutual duty of conjugal community” to “marriage is entered into by two people of different or the same sex for life.” Representatives of the Christliche Demokratische Union and the Christlich-Soziale Union in particular voiced concerns before the vote that the change might be unconstitutional. They argued that marriage for all would be possible only by changing the constitution (*Grundgesetz*). Article 6 of the German *Grundgesetz* grants marriage and the family special protection by the state. It does not mention explicitly that only a man and a woman can marry, but when the *Grundgesetz* came into force in 1949, this was self-evident. The question whether social change should result in a change of the constitution led to controversy among German legal experts. They had to answer the following question: What was the deeper, implicit meaning of the article of the German constitution that grants special protection to marriage and the family: a heterosexual relationship, the procreation of offspring, or simply mutual solidarity? The German example goes to show

that often it is not the rights granted by the law that are questioned, but their interpretation. Either an interpretation of the law that has its roots in history is challenged or underdetermined concepts in the law result in new interpretations – for instance in the idea that “marriage for life” can also be entered into by same-sex partners.

During the last few decades the legal systems of Europe have moved in the direction of an increasingly inclusive pluralist social model. This involves the complete equality of religious, cultural, and sexual minorities. Since the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* prohibits discrimination, many countries have changed their laws to do away with unequal treatment. The drivers of these changes are frequently the European Court of Human Rights, the European Union, or the United Nations treaty framework. The process, which is called *norm diffusion* in the scientific literature,¹⁴ can either take place “top-down” or “bottom-up,” depending on whether lawmakers react to existing discrimination by changing the laws or whether an affected individual reminds his or her government of its duty (e. g., by taking a case to the European Court of Human Rights) to observe the international anti-discrimination regulations it signed. In short, the explicit and implicit norms of living together in society, which reflect a largely unquestioned status quo rooted in history, are being challenged. These explicit and implicit norms in many cases involve the domains of public or even private morals as well as religion and culture.

Second Defining Feature:

There Is No Clear Solution to Postsecular Conflicts

The second feature of postsecular conflicts is that there are no obvious or direct ways of resolving them. This is also why in the theoretical literature consensus is either envisioned as indirect (“overlapping”) or absent (“culture wars”). In situations where a generally valid solution to moral or religious conflicts is not possible, the commonly applied political answer

14 Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink, “The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices: Introduction,” in *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*, ed. Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

is exemptions. The best known type of exemption is the right to refuse an action on grounds of conscience, for example, conscientious objection to military service. In contemporary postsecular conflicts, the instrument of “exemptions” encounters two kinds of limits.¹⁵ The first limit is set by those who are supposed to profit from the exemptions. This is the case when actors refuse the benefit of exemptions because they want to give shape to the political and legal system as such, as would be the case of claims to outlaw abortions in a country where medical personnel have the right to refuse to conduct abortions on grounds of conscience.¹⁶ The second limit to exemptions, however, is nowadays set by the majority as well, who are less and less prepared to accept exemptions. It takes a certain amount of tolerance among members of the majority to accept that people in their midst may refuse to perform certain acts or activities for conscientious reasons. This tolerance is dwindling, as, for example, attempts to change the law on conscientious objection in Italy demonstrate.

Third Defining Feature: Postsecular Conflicts Are Transnational

The third feature of postsecular conflicts is that they are transnational. Even though conflicts normally arise in national contexts, transnational dynamics may come into play and change the conflict on a national level. This transnational aspect of postsecular conflicts is one of the main topics studied by the *Postsecular Conflicts* project, which has investigated the role of transnational norm entrepreneurs in areas such as family values, anti-abortion mobilization, or homeschooling. “Transnational” means that controversies that mobilize only small minorities in a national context can create political leverage on the international level through the work of transnational advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations. Transnational actors that appeal to international courts, like the

15 Kristina Stoeckl, “Political Liberalism and Religious Claims: Four Blind Spots,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 43 (2017), 34–50.

16 Susanna Mancini and Kristina Stoeckl, “Transatlantic Conversations: The Emergence of Society-Protective Anti-Abortion Arguments in the United States, Europe and Russia,” in *The Conscience Wars: Rethinking the Balance between Religion and Equality*, ed. Susanna Mancini and Michel Rosenfeld (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220–257.

European Court of Human Rights, influence domestic politics, including causes on both the progressive and the conservative agenda.

The following example clarifies this third, transnational feature of postsecular conflicts. Homeschooling is forbidden in Germany and only a small group of people in Germany have challenged the legal situation, mostly for religious reasons. One was the Wunderlich family, a strictly observant Christian family that refused to comply with the German law on compulsory schooling. The parents were faced with penalties, including temporary loss of custody of their children. The Wunderlich family found legal support with two US-based advocacy groups that are active on a transnational level, the Alliance Defending Freedom and the Home School Legal Defense Association, which took the case to the European Court of Human Rights. The advocates contended, among other things, that the fact that homeschooling is formally recognized as a right in the vast majority of countries that are party to the European Convention of Human Rights means that this right should exist in Germany also.¹⁷ The example makes clear, first, that religious and moral conflicts that concern only small minorities in domestic contexts can acquire international significance through the work of transnational advocacy groups and, second, that norm diffusion mechanisms like strategic litigation, commonly associated with the American culture wars and the court system in the United States, have become a global strategy.

Fourth Defining Feature: Postsecular Conflicts Do Not Evolve along Religious-Secular, but along Conservative-Liberal Fault Lines

The fourth point to be made about postsecular conflicts is that they are not conflicts between secular and religious worldviews, but between liberal-progressive positions and conservative-traditionalist positions. When Habermas coined the term “postsecular society,” he had in mind debates between religious and secularist actors. In some difficult moral debates, he contended, religious actors may have sensibilities that secularists do not share. Habermas also assumed, however, that the religious actors

17 Roger Kiska and Michael P. Donnelly, “Application to the European Court of Human Rights,” Case of Wunderlich v. Germany, Application no. 18925/15, 2015, 8.

engaged in public debate would already have come to terms with the challenges of modern consciousness, such as religious freedom or the priority of profane science. He thereby set a high threshold for religious actors to enter the public sphere, which is also the point he has been most criticized for.¹⁸ As a matter of fact, religious arguments in the public sphere range from liberal-progressive to conservative-traditionalist positions. On some issues, for example, social justice, liberal-progressive religious actors will have more in common with secular liberals than with conservative-traditionalist religious actors.

To summarize: Postsecular conflicts revolve around the definition of explicit and implicit norms, they have no clear solutions, are transnational, and evolve along the conservative-liberal fault line. *Postsecular conflicts* is the term we use, in the context of this research project, to define in greater detail the conditions of these conflicts over values in modern pluralistic societies – without, a priori, seeing them as grounds for postsecular consensus or for culture wars. By asking what type of actors, what political dynamics, and what ideas and intellectual genealogies are at play in such conflicts, we hope to identify conditions under which conflicts over values develop into one or the other; in other words, when such conflicts may actually lead to democratic consensus or, instead, to polarization and culture wars.

Shifting Coordinates of the Conservative Worldview

In the first part of this edited volume, we publish four interviews conducted in the context of the *Postsecular Conflicts* research project. The four interviews – with Allan C. Carlson, Rod Dreher, R. R. Reno and Alex-

18 Cristina Lafont, “Religion and the Public Sphere,” *Philosophy and Public Criticism* 35, nos. 1–2 (2009), 127–150; Maeve Cooke, “Salvaging and Secularizing the Semantic Contents of Religion: The Limitations of Habermas’s Postmetaphysical Proposal,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60, no. 1/3 (2006), 187–207.

ander Dugin – are selected as representative of the conservative political vision implicated in today’s postsecular conflicts. They define the contours of a coherent worldview on the political right in the twenty-first century – in the case of Dugin even on the extreme right. In the interviews, we asked our interlocutors to define their attitude with regard to liberalism, Russia, the concept of the culture wars, and religion. What we gather from their answers is that the coordinate system of the “conservative mind” has changed since the time of the Cold War.

The coordinates have, firstly, shifted from left to liberal. While the main antagonist for a thinker in the politically right and conservative camp during the Cold War was the leftist (Marxist, Communist), it is now the “liberal.” In an ideological framing deeply rooted in the political panorama of the United States, for our conservative American interlocutors Marxism and liberalism represent the same thing. Sometimes they use the term “left-liberalism” to draw a more subtle distinction, given that conservatives, on the whole, endorse liberal economic ideas. This wholesale identification of Marxism and liberalism also existed in the European context, but it was never as mainstream as in the United States; instead, in Europe, the identification of Marxism and liberalism belonged to the ideology of the Far Right. It owes more to Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger than to concrete struggles between social conservatives and social progressives on questions of public morality in the post-World War II years. In fact, a Russian thinker like Dugin had to learn – to his amazement – from his interlocutors of the French *Nouvelle Droite* “why I hated Communism. But I also understood why the West was not an alternative” (p. 62).

The coordinates have, secondly, shifted from the West to the East, to Russia. Whereas the main antagonist for a conservative thinker during the Cold War was the Communist East, the new antagonist is now inside the West. It is the “dying West,” as the American conservative Pat Buchanan wrote in 2001, and by which he means contemporary secular and liberal society.¹⁹ Conservatives interpret political correctness not as a way to manage radical pluralism in the public sphere, but, as Rod Dreher puts it, as “a threat” (p. 26). American conservatives’ fascination with

19 Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Culture and Civilization* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001).

Russia is based on admiration for the unbridled Russian disdain for political correctness and the robust defense of Orthodox privileges inside the Russian state over and against minority rights. The admiration for Russia is paradoxical, because the country restricts not only the freedoms of LGBTQ+ people, but also of minority faiths. This contradiction notwithstanding, one of our interviewees, R. R. Reno, concludes that American social conservatives “have become kind of pro-Putin” (p. 55).

The coordinates have, thirdly, shifted from religion to tradition. Whereas the main conflict line for conservatives during the Cold War was between religious and secular (especially atheist) worldviews, the new front line is now between traditionalist religious views and liberal religious views. Religious teachings are evaluated on their conservative and traditionalist and not evangelical or theological credentials. This idea is exemplified by Carlson, who welcomes the leadership of the Patriarch of Moscow because he considers Pope Francis of the Catholic Church “as kind of pulling back on these social issues” (p. 48). The exact meaning of “tradition” and “traditional values,” however, is only vaguely defined by the people interviewed in this volume. It comprises a heterosexual family model, patriarchy, conservative social mores, and anti-modernist content from Christian teaching. This limited understanding of tradition is criticized by the authors included in the second part of the volume, who all object – from within Orthodox theology – to the identification of Orthodoxy with conservative traditionalism.

The coordinates have, fourthly, shifted from democracy to authority. While conservatives during the Cold War defended democracy over and against autocracy, which was associated with the USSR (and also against critics from the left who saw in Western democracy a hegemonic project), the conservatives of the twenty-first century no longer trust democracy. They ask, in the words of Reno, for “strong gods,” for authority.²⁰

The four interviews presented here are first-hand material for an analysis of the ideas and intellectual genealogies at play on the political right. Anti-liberalism, Russia, tradition, and authority emerge from this material as the four angles of the conservative coordinate system.

20 R. R. Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the Future of the West* (Washington, DC: Gateway Editions, 2019).

To some extent, the conservatism of the beginning of the twenty-first century brings us back full circle to the continental European conservatism of the 1920s and 30s, which was just as anti-liberal, fascinated with the East, traditionalist, and authoritarian. But it also adds some new elements that need to be weighed carefully in future analysis, like the narrow focus on questions of private morality (sexuality, family, abortion).²¹

It should be added that these four interviews constitute only a small part of a large body of interview data compiled in the context of the *Postsecular Conflicts* project. They stand out because they represent in a particularly clear manner the problematics addressed in that project. The interviews are also special because the interviewees agreed to waive confidentiality and to see their conversation published. Sociologists do not often give authentic “voice” to the subjects of their research and rarely publish interviews at full length. Instead, they anonymize their interviews, they code and analyze them and feed the data into a scholarly argument that is different from the story told by the interviewed persons. As scholars we do not share and we may not like the intellectual positions that we encounter during our fieldwork and that constitute the material for our analysis and publications in the Postsecular Conflicts project.²² As part of our publication strategy, in this edited volume we lay open some of the data collected in this project, in order to encourage scholars to engage firsthand with the overall historical, political, sociological and intellectual picture that emerges from this material. The analysis of the dynamics that determine today’s postsecular conflicts requires the critical study of ideas on the political and Christian right and the tracing of the intellectual genealogies at play in the transnational connections between moral conservatives.

21 Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga, eds., *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

22 See the publications of the project here: <https://zenodo.org/communities/postsecularconflicts/>.

Orthodox Critiques of Traditional Values Conservatism

The second set of texts in this edited volume represents viewpoints and debates that are closer to the progressive side in postsecular conflicts. They are not mirror images of the conservative camp; they do not represent the conservative's imagined liberal, Western, secular, and democratic antagonist. Instead, our intention with this selection of one interview and four essays is to offer an insight into attempts to critique and contextualize the conservatives' predilection for traditionalism, Russia, and Orthodox Christianity "from within." All of the authors in this second part are Orthodox Christians; they come from Russia, Ukraine, and the United States. In their texts, they engage in the difficult task of evaluating what "tradition" can mean under conditions of modernity and in the face of attempts to claim tradition exclusively for the conservative cause.

For Alexander Filonenko, the conservative fascination with Russia, with Putin, and with Orthodoxy is a sign of the failure of the Orthodox Church. Politicization of Orthodoxy, he says in his interview, is the opposite of bearing witness to one's faith. His view is echoed by Sergey Horujy, who writes about the need to "protect Tradition from the Traditionalists." Horujy scrutinizes the ideas expressed by Dugin critically and in detail. For this prominent and authoritative scholar of the Orthodox theological tradition, traditionalists like Dugin "steal the past and hijack the future." Andrey Shishkov adds analytical clarity to the debate by offering a brief genealogy of two understandings of tradition in Orthodox theology, one liberal, one conservative. For Aristotle Papanikolaou, following Alasdair MacIntyre, "the viability of a tradition depends on how well it can answer the challenges and questions of a particular era." Tradition understood in this way presupposes the willingness for debate and mutual recognition of divergent positions. Tradition, he argues, must not be used as a "conversation stopper" between progressive and conservative views, but as the shared basis for conversation. Sergey Chapnin, finally, engages in the work of terminological archeology to find out when the concept of "traditional values" entered the Russian Orthodox discourse and became

dominant. His analysis brings to the fore contradictions in the Russian traditional values discourse which those who propagate this discourse tend to ignore or gloss over.

What unites the authors in this section is not only their underlying intention to challenge the conservative discourse on traditional values. They also share a specific method for developing their criticism, namely genealogy: in order to understand what concepts mean today, one needs to understand where they come from and in which context they operate and unfold. The epistemic stance of self-reflexivity prohibits them from identifying with the conservative fascination with Russia and traditionalism that we find expressed in the interviews in the first section.

Mapping Postsecular Conflicts

Postsecular conflicts, as explained above, revolve around the definition of explicit and implicit norms, they have no clear solutions, are transnational, and evolve along the conservative-liberal fault line. Defining the conditions of such conflicts in detail means diving into the empirical reality of the type of actors, the political dynamics, and the ideas and intellectual genealogies that are at play. This edited volume presents firsthand material and debates that offer a glimpse into this vast empirical reality: the actors are intellectuals, activists, politicians, and church leaders; the political dynamics are struggles over the values and norms that inform political community; and the ideas and intellectual genealogies put at stake the meaning of tradition.

Postsecular conflicts can be “mapped” in two different ways. The first intellectual map is the one behind the concept of the culture wars. It is a map in black and white, which traces an unbridgeable antagonism between a conservative coordinate system of anti-liberalism, the East, authority, and tradition, and a liberal coordinate system of liberalism, the West, democracy, and secularism. It expresses an antagonism between two public moralities, between two social “sacreds” that cannot be reconciled and that are bound to clash. The second intellectual map is the one behind Habermas’s concept of postsecular society. This map is dif-

ferent, it comes in a varied range of colors and shades and it outlines the different areas of possible overlaps between these two coordinate systems.²³ The former map is not wrong; it can explain many of the dynamics that the first part of this edited volume documents (see the epilogue by Dmitry Uzlaner). But it is not exhaustive. We also need the second map in order to explain phenomena like the defense of tradition from within tradition, as exemplified by the authors in the second part of this volume.

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23 I am grateful for this insight to José Casanova, who attributes the former view to Durkheim, the latter to Kant.

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Part I

CONSERVATIVE POSITIONS

“All the great renewal movements came from below..”

Interview with Rod Dreher
(in Bratislava, Slovakia)

In 2017 you published your bestselling book *The Benedict Option*, in which you argue that conservatives in the United States have lost the culture wars. What is your vision of the culture war battlefield in America two years later? Has anything changed since you published *The Benedict Option*?

I am still absolutely sure conservatives lost. When I published *The Benedict Option*, it was shortly after Donald Trump was inaugurated as president [of the United States]. In fact, when I finished the manuscript for the book just before the election, I wrote it as if Hillary would win. After Trump’s election to president, my hope was that he would appoint some judges to the United States Supreme Court who had a much stronger view of religious freedom and free speech. Judges aren’t religious leaders, they’re cultural leaders, and I wanted them to be able to preserve the space for traditional groups, religious and political, to act. Trump has done that, but he has been such a disaster on many other levels. He has discredited a lot of religious conservatives who supported him. And so when Trump leaves office, there will be a tremendous, serious backlash against conservatives.

So you are saying that American society is today even more polarized than it was two years ago?

Yes. Back in 2015, before I wrote *The Benedict Option*, and as I was starting to work on it, I got a phone call from an American doctor. His mother was an immigrant from Czechoslovakia. She spent six years in a Czech prison as a political prisoner when she was young. She's very old now and lives with him. The doctor called me and said, "I have to tell you, my mom says to me, 'I'm starting to see signs in this country, the United States, that remind me of when Communism came to Czechoslovakia.'" And I thought, "That's crazy!" I mean, maybe she's an old woman, maybe she's exaggerating, so I contacted an old friend who is a mathematician at the University of Cambridge. He and his wife defected from Hungary in the 1960s. So I wrote to him, because I knew I could trust him. I told him what the Czech woman had said and I asked, "Is that true?" He said, "Absolutely, yes. My wife and I are sitting here in Cambridge" – he's retired – "we're watching TV every day. We're reading the newspapers and we're thinking, 'This is like when Communism first came to Hungary.'" And I said, "But can you explain why?" He said, "It's mostly the absolute refusal of the Left to allow dissent. If you get on the wrong side of them, they will stop at nothing – even telling lies – to destroy you professionally and personally." He said, "That's what Communists did." And that stayed in my mind. After that, every time I would meet somebody in the US or the UK who grew up in the Soviet Union or in Eastern Europe, I would ask them the same question. I would tell them what the Czech woman said and would ask, "Do you see this too?" Every one of them says, "Yes, absolutely." My new book will be about this.

In fact, we are conducting this interview in Bratislava, where you are collecting material for your new book. What do you take away from this trip?

I feel, more strongly than ever, that people who are political, cultural, and religious conservatives need to organize in a deeper, cultural way to prepare for much more difficult times. Here in Bratislava this morning, I went to a house out in the suburbs where during Communism there was

a samizdat¹ printing press in the basement. You had to go through an underground, concrete tunnel, to come up the other side. I interviewed the people who did that. They were telling me that the thing that gave them the most courage during those years was friendship. Their faith, yes. But also friendship in small groups. Because that way, you knew that you weren't alone. So that is something I'm focusing on a lot right now.

You are comparing today's political, cultural, and religious conservatives with dissidents during the Cold War. But dissidents against who and what?

Against the liberal mainstream. A few years ago, the issue that divided was same-sex marriage, now it is transgender. The US Supreme Court has agreed this year to hear a case – three cases combined into one – that will decide whether LGBT individuals will be included under federal civil rights law, which abolished race discrimination. What will happen if the court decides yes? It will mean that every church, every religious school, every institution that follows traditional Christian teaching on sexuality, will be considered by the law as if they were run by the Ku Klux Klan! And what that means, strictly speaking, is that they could have their special tax status taken away from them. Now, that doesn't sound like a big punishment, but so many churches and religious schools operate on such a low budget, that if they were to lose their tax status, they would have to close. Religious conservatives have to prepare for this. Since *The Benedict Option* came out, it has sold well. It has sold about 64,000 copies in the US, and it's been translated into ten languages, but I'm still having trouble convincing American conservatives that they are under threat. Solzhenitsyn said in the introduction to a 1983 English-language edition of *The Gulag Archipelago*, that there is always this “fallacious belief” that what happened to Russia under the Soviets could not happen to people like us. “Alas,” he wrote, “all the evil of the twentieth century is possible

1 Samizdat was a form of dissident activity across the Eastern Bloc in which individuals reproduced censored and underground publications by hand and passed the documents from reader to reader (Wikipedia).

everywhere on earth.”² Americans don’t know that. They just think that everything is going to continue like this forever.

This is a dramatic comparison. Can you explain your vision of today’s culture war battlefield in more detail?

I get e-mails all the time from Christians and conservatives who work in Silicon Valley and who tell me what’s happening at their company. But they say, “Please don’t publish this. If they found out, I would be fired.” But it’s not just there. It’s in big companies like Apple and Facebook that have a national reach. They are forcing changes in laws around the country. This is the new trend. It’s also coming down to the level of local schools. I live in a small southern city – Baton Rouge, Louisiana. A Baptist pastor there – it’s a conservative place, Trump country – a Baptist pastor at a big church told me last year, “I had a woman in my congregation come to me and say, ‘I need your help. My daughter goes to a public school in the city. She’s thirteen. She came home from school and said, ‘I’m a boy.’ And I went to see the counselor at the school to say, ‘What is going on here?’ The counselor said, ‘Ma’am, you need to accept your son as he is.’” This is happening at a level that most Americans who are my age or so – I’m 52 – don’t even see. But the kids, they completely believe in this, so it’s just a matter of time. There doesn’t seem to be any stopping point. After transgender – what then? I have a friend who finished high school, and she had a girl in her class who said she was a wolf. A transspecies. She wasn’t kidding. And if you didn’t call her a wolf, you could get in trouble. This is not in New York, this is in Louisiana. It is happening, I believe, because there has been a massive change in how ordinary people think about their own identity – that their bodies and their selves are nothing but expressions of will – and because the Internet has destroyed all hierarchies of thought and information. This is a modern version of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism, and it spreads with the speed of lightning.

2 Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (Harper & Row, 1985).

According to the All-Russian Census, there are several hundred elves in Russia.³

Oh! Good to know. I think that one of the most frightening things is that everything is changing so fast. I was reading some dissident literature from the Communist period, and people didn't think that what the intellectuals said would matter. But then, suddenly it mattered very much. Czesław Miłosz, the Polish writer, said in his book *The Captive Mind*, and I'm paraphrasing this, "In the twentieth century, people in Eastern Europe found out that the obscure writings of intellectuals could matter very much in their everyday life."⁴ In the same way, if you read this postmodern academic stuff, you can't make sense of it, but it is changing the elites. And the elites are the ones that are controlling the future. When I look at the US now, I think about Spain in 1931, when the trouble started there that eventually led to a civil war. I don't think that we will pull guns against each other in the US, but the polarization is so great now and there's no center left. I don't know where the limit is.

Social scientists argue that the middle is vanishing and extreme opinions on the left and right spectrum are increasing. Do you agree that the middle is disappearing?

Yes, absolutely. And this is what makes me think of Spain. When the Spanish Republic was declared in 1931, the Left took power and immediately began to burn churches. Well, at the next election, there was a backlash from the Right, who began to persecute the Left. And so, what eventually happened over the next couple of years was that everybody lost faith in democracy, because democracy was a system that could allow their enemies to take power. And the middle vanished by 1934. By 1936, they were shooting at each other. Well, I don't want to be too alarmist but you're right, there is no middle. I'm a conservative, but I don't think I'm an extremist. I end up voting for whoever the Republicans put up, not

3 Itogi Vserossijskoj perepisi naselenija 2010 goda: bol'she jel'fov i men'she hobbitov [Results of the Russian Census 2010: the number of elves increases, the number of hobbits decreases], *Taday*. 20 December 2011 [<http://www.taday.ru/text/1365028.html>].

4 Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*. (Vintage Books, 1953), 3.

because I believe in them necessarily, but because I'm so anxious about what the Democrats would do to religious liberty and free speech, which are my most important issues. And I feel like I can't take the chance to vote for them. Even though, on their foreign policy, I'm more likely to be Democratic. On economic policy, I'm more likely to support the Democrats. Culture is the scary thing. It's not even that I don't like what they would do, it's that I have absolutely no trust in them, and I'm afraid of them. They consider traditional Christians to be bigots, no better than racists. In a famous speech in 2015 at the United Nations, Hillary Clinton said that religions must be made to change, to liberalize on abortion and things. I don't want a liberal telling conservative religion to change. Religious liberty is a sacred value in America.

Do you see signs of culture wars also in Europe?

Yes, definitely. And American conservatives like me have looked at the Visegrád countries as maybe a third way, but being in Slovakia I realize that they are not doing well...

What do you mean by third way?

A third way between Western neoliberalism and the Russian model. Maybe countries in Central Eastern Europe can hold on to traditional values, pro-family values. At least they don't have the same sort of collapse of moral values that we're seeing in the West, over abortion, gender ideology, and so forth. But from what I'm learning in this new round of interviews – and I've talked to some people in Hungary too – is that the young see the material prosperity of Western Europe, and they want that more than anything else. So we'll see. But I do have so much hope when I come here and meet individual Europeans, young people, forty and under. To see how undeceived they are about things. And how happy they are. They know that they're minorities as conservatives and as religious people, but they're not despairing. I was in Spain earlier this year, presenting the Spanish translation of *The Benedict Option*. I visited the cathedral in

Valencia, where I saw a relic of a hand and part of an arm. It was a relic of Saint Vincent of Saragossa, the first martyr of Spain, killed in the persecution of the Roman emperor Diocletian in the year 304. And there was his hand there, at the cathedral. And you could see it and you could pray there, in front of it. And I thought, this is something that Europe has that we don't have. They still have the architecture of Christian culture. They have the cathedrals. Maybe people don't go there like they used to, but it's still there as a sign. People saw the burning of Notre Dame in Paris, and it worried them. I think it was a sign to them, like, this could go away if you don't love it. But they have the relics of the saints. They have so much architecture. It's not the same thing as having an active religious faith, but in the US, if people stop going to a church, they tear it down and put a shopping mall there. That doesn't happen in Europe so much. I think a lot about something that Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev of the Russian Orthodox Church has said on a number of occasions. He said that practicing Christians – Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant – have to come together. The things that divided us in the past, they're important, we can't ignore them completely. But the challenge from post-Christianity and a hostile post-Christian culture is so great that we need to try to help each other. So that's kind of what I do in my travels in Europe.

In Europe there are strong institutional churches, which frequently have state privileges and certain access to powerful elites. You instead have argued that Christians should refrain from political power and concentrate on their own small communities. Do you think that a Benedict Option for Europe will work?

It has to, because the institutional church leaders are so weak. Look at the Catholic Church in Germany. It's so weak; it so desperately wants to compromise with the world. When I spoke in Rome last fall at the presentation of the Italian translation of *The Benedict Option*, I met a well-connected German Catholic. He told me, "You know, we Germans know that in twenty or thirty years the institutional church will collapse, because there won't be enough Catholics left even for the church tax." The Benedict Option encourages people to plan for that time. People like me, we're building networks of families. We're raising our kids in the faith, in a seri-

ous way. And we want to help them to marry each other, because we know that it will be our responsibility to carry on the faith, even as the institution is collapsing. I think that's true everywhere.

If I understood your position correctly, you don't believe in the strong, institutional European churches, as you think that they are already corrupted by the system. But you believe in small new communities of believers that, on the grassroots level, will develop some kind of alternative.

Yes. Well, actually, I should make it clear – I'm not a Protestant. I believe in the episcopacy, in the structure, it is something that we have to have. But I think that if you're looking to the institution itself for renewal, you're not going to find it. Catholics have told me that in the history of the Catholic Church, all the great renewal movements came from below. And I think that there's no reason to think it will be any different this time. If you look at the things that the bishops say – in the US or even in Europe – there's nothing inspiring in most of it. But when you go meet the local people, at the ground level, and meet some priest who really has the faith, they know what they have to do.

You mean, they have the faith in the sense that they defend this conservative traditional vision of family?

Yes. And they live by it.

How has your experience of conversion to Catholicism and then to Orthodoxy shaped your vision of the institutional church?

I was maybe twenty-five when I became a Catholic, and I became very tribal. I was in Washington at the time, working there, and I was so proud to be Catholic. My identity was in Catholicism, and I thought it was so strong. In fact, it was weak, because I was so convinced up here, in my head, but had not done the deep work of conversion. I made a classic

intellectual error: believing that being intellectually convinced was sufficient. And God allowed me [to fall]; it was a merciful fall. By writing for years about the sexual abuse crisis, I had my ability to believe in Catholicism taken from me, bit by bit, with great pain. Later, I came to understand that I was paying the price for my spiritual and intellectual pride. When I became Orthodox, I said, “Don’t be the kind of Orthodox [Christian] as you were a Catholic.” Let me be clear: this was not the Catholic Church’s fault; this was my fault. But it really appealed to me, the idea of this strong, triumphalist church, the bishops taking a stand, and all that. In fact, as the abuse scandal showed, for many of these guys, their words were false. My most shameful moment as a Catholic came in the year 2000. I was a columnist for the *New York Post*. The *New York Post* sent me to the Holy Land to cover the pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II. You can imagine, to be a faithful Catholic and to be standing at the Sea of Galilee, with the successor of Peter – it was incredible. And on one of the days, I was standing with other journalists in the courtyard of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Latin Patriarchate, the headquarters of the Catholic Church. We were waiting for the Pope’s car to come in from Bethlehem. We were standing and waiting and waiting. I saw, on the other side of the courtyard, an American cardinal. I said, “Oh, it’s him! And he’s one of the good ones; he’s a good conservative and I’m going to go over there and kiss his ring and kneel down, because I’m a good conservative Catholic. I’m not like those liberal Catholics who won’t kiss the cardinal’s ring.” So, I went over there; I made a big show of kissing his ring. Well, this was Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston. Within two years, he was exposed as being completely corrupt with the abuse scandal. And I was so ashamed of myself. There’s nothing wrong with kissing a cardinal’s ring. But there is everything wrong with doing it for the reason that I did it, you know. I did it in bad faith, I did it out of pride, and I did it out of triumphalism. I think that Orthodox people who are like that, too, can set themselves up for a very big fall. Protestants as well.

Also in the United States some religious leaders, especially Evangelicals, are close to political power and the present government.

When Trump goes, the Evangelicals are going to be devastated, because so many of them have placed so much value on him, and they are trying to keep alive or resurrect this old nationalistic idea. If you go on YouTube and look at First Baptist Church in Dallas, Robert Jeffress, the pastor there, is one of Trump's biggest supporters. They have flags in the church. They have "Salute to America Sunday." You can't believe it! But the young people involved there, they see that and think, "This is hypocrisy." My Evangelical friends are really worried about what's going to happen, because the nationalism and hypocrisy of the older generation has burned them out. Now, I didn't vote for Trump the first time. I may vote for him in 2020, simply because of religious liberty, but I'm trying not to convince myself or rationalize it by saying he's a good guy. I think he's the less bad choice.

From reading your book, I got the impression that you think that there's an imminent decline of Western civilization, and that's why you have to retreat. It's not about tactics or the strategy of politicians; it's more about certain historical changes.

Yes, that's true. I'm not an American TV evangelist; I'm not saying the end of the world is here. But the end of a world is here, and I don't know how much longer liberal democracy will last. I think that we have lost the transcendent moral and metaphysical basis that made liberal democracy work. When you run out of gas in your car, and the gauge says "empty," your car will still move a little further, we say you are "driving on fumes." Well, I think that we are, in that sense, driving on fumes in the West. Whether it goes to the Far Left or the Far Right, I don't know. The most important thing to conserve is the ability to see a transcendent realm. Augusto Del Noce is an Italian political theorist whom I discovered recently.⁵ He died in 1989, but he was writing brilliant things in the late 1960s. He said that Marxism in the West changed in the 1960s to focus on culture, because it knew that economic Marxism was finished. In 1968, he said that what's happening is if these people continue to have success, then they will elim-

5 See more: Rod Dreher, "Do You Know Del Noce?", *The American Conservative Blog*, 9 January, 2018 [<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/do-you-know-del-noce/>].

inate the possibility of transcendence and that people will lose a sense that there is a transcendent realm or that we can have access to it. I think that was prophetic. I think that has happened, and it's happening even more. Well, I think the chief political project – if it can be described as a political project – has to be trying to keep a space open, however small, where people can see beyond this life.

I want to ask you about your view of Russia. I understand that you've never been to Russia, but there is this image of Russia as a country of traditional moral values, and I know that some American conservatives admire Putin, because they see him as the guarantor of this traditional morality. What is your vision?

I've never been to Russia, but I have some Russian Orthodox friends. This past Sunday, on Pascha, we had a party at our parish in the afternoon. We had RT showing live from Moscow, from Christ the Savior Cathedral. We were watching it on YouTube, and it was so beautiful. And I said a little prayer to thank God that this can happen in Russia again. At the same time, I also know this is theatre, and to have the church in a position of power again is not the same thing as converting Russia. You know from my publications that I lost my Catholic faith. And I lost it because, in part, I had so much faith in the institution. So when I became Orthodox, I made a vow to myself and to God never to get involved in thinking about the church as a political animal or as a political institution, even though that aspect unavoidably exists. It is very easy not to be confused about the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the state in America, because there are so few Orthodox believers, and we have no power at all in the public square. Maybe that is a kind of blessing. At the same time, we American Orthodox have no way to conceive of the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the state in Russia. So that's a roundabout way of saying that I don't think much about the relationship of church and state in Russia. I trust my friends there who are very critical of it, but they're also men who go to church, who go to the liturgy, who pray and try to do good works and live a holy life and not get involved there. One thing I noticed is that in the US, we like to project ideals onto what we don't know. So other conservatives look at Putin, and

they think he's strong. Look, he's standing up for traditional values. And hey, I'm generally grateful for that, but at the same time, if you try to say critical things to certain Americans about Putin, they don't want to hear it. Similarly, here in Europe, I found – in Slovakia, and everywhere I go – conservatives don't want to hear anything negative about Trump; they just don't. It is somehow important for them to believe that Trump is a better man than he is.

When was the first time Russia appeared on your radar as a stronghold of traditional values? Do you remember this moment?

Do I remember the moment? Pussy Riot, that's when. It became huge news in America, and all decent Americans thought that the musicians were being persecuted by Putin, never thinking, "Wait a minute, they had no right to do what they did!" If they had gone into a mosque or a synagogue and done that, there would be a different story here. Part of that is my Orthodoxy, but if I was a Catholic, I would feel the same way. It made me realize that Russia is a place that has more respect for these values than the United States.

But if in America somebody goes to the altar and tries to do something similar, I think he'll also be arrested, no?

He may be arrested, but it won't be seen as a great sacrilege. And if he did it to a well-known conservative church, he would be cheered for it by many liberals in the media. It would be seen as a sign of standing up for what's right, of "speaking truth to power," to use a phrase favored by liberals. If he did it to a black church, that would be a different story, it would be seen by the media and by the mainstream commentators as a racial thing. But again, that's because the media are secular, and they interpret church only through politics. To get back to your question – probably Pussy Riot is when I started paying attention, because it was so unusual. And because the way the Russian government reacted to that drew such a strong criticism from American liberals. Nobody – not even conservatives – were

defending the Russian government. But for me, as an Orthodox Christian who used to be Catholic, there are some things that are absolutely sacred. And to be a good liberal should not require you to think that if someone profanes an altar in a cathedral, that it's okay. You're supposed to be okay with that, because "we're all good liberals here."

From a Russian perspective, I would say that we have the opposite side of the same problem: in Russia there is a conservative ideological dictate. So the problem is not liberal ideology as such, but this general trend toward suppressing basic human rights and freedoms for the sake of ideological reflections.

We conservatives in the West need to understand this better, because it is so opposite to our experience. As I said before, I think that what we're seeing now is a transition to a new paradigm where the far-left progressives are setting the tone for the society. And traditional Christianity, which used to be in that place, has lost. And it's going to continue, I would say. Perhaps the unpleasant truth that is now emerging is that there is no space, and no constituency, for authentic liberalism. You know, even though I am a conservative, I do not want to live in an authoritarian state, and generally do not want to force my convictions on my fellow citizens. But maybe it's the case that under liberalism, and in the absence of a basically shared sense of transcendent order allowing for diversity in unity, either left-wing authoritarianism or right-wing authoritarianism will govern our societies. Perhaps it will not be possible to govern otherwise. One way or the other, the future is not bright.

Interviewed by Dmitry Uzlaner on 2 May 2019

“The great battles lie ahead”

Interview with Allan Carlson (in Moscow, Russia and in Verona, Italy)

The first question is about the history of the World Congress of Families. The story of your encounter with Anatoly Antonov and Viktor Medkov in Moscow 1995 is well-known.¹ But what happened next? Can we say that Russian participation in the World Congress of Families was basically absent for many years after this first meeting?

That really wasn't true. I went to Prague after I came to Moscow, where I attended a conference held by the Civic Institute. The Civic Institute was one of the anti-Communist groups that emerged during the Velvet Revolution there, and they went on to become a think tank and tied to a political party. They put on a small conference, it was not a major conference, it was kind of an experts' conference, but they had a number of politicians and judges on family issues and family policy. That was in 1995. When I was there, I proposed this idea of a world congress meeting. And I talked to the fellow who ran the Civic Institute and asked whether he and his group would be willing to work on such a meeting, maybe Prague would be a good place to hold this. And he said yes. So, we put it together and the first World Congress of Families was held in Prague in 1997. Antonov helped me plan the speakers' list. We had about 700 people come. A large number of that were Russians. I would guess about 100

1 Kristina Stoeckl, *The Rise of the Russian Christian Right: the Case of the World Congress of Families. Religion, State and Society*, forthcoming.

people. So, they were a very visible part of the thing. There were at least half a dozen Russian groups who came and set up panels. Some had to do with teaching Russian children folklore, and what Russia was like before the Communists came and suppressed all that. One was teaching Russian history through puppets, family values through puppets. So, there was a large Russian presence at that event. And that continued, the next congress was held in Geneva in November of 1999. And, again, Antonov was part of the planning committee. We had friendly countries. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation became a partner. We had a number of Muslims involved, strangely, several Iranians, you know, Americans hardly ever talk to Iranians.

But where are the Muslim participants now? One can no longer see them at the Congresses ...

They're not here anymore. But they were, they were very prominent in Prague, and there were quite a few in Geneva. A fair number of Muslims were in Geneva. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, their ambassador to the United Nations was involved in all these meetings. The third Congress, we had plans, ambitious plans, to hold it in two cities at once. And we liked the tie to Islam. Partly because of the voting bloc, the pro-family, pro-life voting bloc at the United Nations, with the Muslim countries, the Vatican, the Holy See, and occasionally some other countries which had a conservative, usually a Catholic government, some in Latin America, some in Eastern Europe, like Slovakia and Slovenia. So we were going to hold a two-city meeting. Dubai, the Muslim connection, and Mexico City. Hold them simultaneously, and there would be joint sessions through TV connections and so on. I had a sense that the Muslims were looking at a different way to relate to the West, and they thought maybe shared values, shared traditional values was the way to go at that. And we'd raised some money, we even had American Evangelicals on board, which was astonishing, because they're the ones who are seen as the most hostile to dealing with Islam other than to convert them.

But then 9/11 happened, and it's hard to explain to somebody else, it had a peculiar effect in the United States. But when I heard what was

happening, when I saw the pictures of the buildings falling down, I just knew in an instant that our dealings with the Muslims were over. Not so much legally but culturally and otherwise, we were not going to be able to do this two-city thing. So we just put it on the shelf. I had other things I was getting involved in. So the World Congress was put on the shelf for about a year and a half. I stopped pushing it, we just waited.

And what happened next?

Mexicans came to me, a group of prominent Mexicans, I didn't realize until later how prominent they were. But people who'd visited, had been to the Geneva event, and wanted to do something similar in Mexico. So they came to Rockford, and they were very well-connected people, particularly to Catholic groups, and lay Catholic organizations, and to the Catholic Church. Among them was a member of the Pontifical Council for the Family, at the time directed by the cardinal archbishop who ran that, Lopez Trujillo, who had spoken in Prague and spoken in Geneva. And so we just went ahead and did one in Mexico City (2004). And again, they raised most of the money there and it was a very good event.

The Russian presence there was much more modest, was less than it had been at the other two events. Antonov and Viktor Medkov were there. A large number of Russians came to the Congress in Poland in 2007. So, it is true that an event was not held in Moscow till 2011, which was the demographic summit, and things kind of ramped up again to a different level with that. But no, Russia was heavily involved, particularly in the first two Congresses.

Do you see a shift in the WCF? I mean, initially the key participants were scholars, demographers. Now we see more religious participation, for example, representatives of different churches. Can we say that the World Congress of Families is moving from an academic to a more religious format?

Yes, partly I agree, but there were religious people all along. Again, the first two Congresses had strong support from the Pontifical Council for

the Family. Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo was a great friend. The Mormons have always been involved, to a greater or a lesser degree. They were heavily involved in Salt Lake City, but even more so in Geneva. Brigham Young University paid half the bills. So, it's always been there. When we held the demographic summit in Moscow in 2011, the opening session was like it used to be in the United States, whenever you had a public event in the fifties, sixties, you'd have a Protestant, a Catholic, and Jew. It was like that in Russia at the opening of the demographic summit, but it was a bit more diverse. You had the Orthodox, you had a Jew, you had a Protestant, you had a Muslim, and somebody else, I can't remember who it was. What I remember and what I find so funny is that everyone had really great hats, the religious hats, and I thought these are great hats, because in America people don't wear hats. The Muslims had hats, the Orthodox had hats, the Catholic had hats, really great hats. You may be right, there may be somewhat more emphasis about it, but even this event² is kind of a grandchild of the first World Congress.

But even here you still see the religious element is intermingled with the research side, and the two have always been in my mind, as a Christian but also as someone who's done the academic side of things. The two are not in conflict. I'm a natural law person, and investigations of social phenomena using quantitative methods are going to tell you pretty much what you would know if you read natural law theory about certain things. Children do best when they grow up with both of their natural parents, the safest way to avoid sexual disease is to marry someone and be faithful, a whole lot of things like that which honest science tells us, is also what conventional Christian ethics tell you. I've never seen a conflict between the two. At least not on anything deeply important.

Compared to the beginnings of the World Congress of Families, the first meeting with Antonov in 1995 Moscow, the event in 1997 Prague, where do you see the World Congress of Families now? Do you consider this a success story? Could you have ever planned on that?

2 Carlson refers to the Global Home Education Conference (GHEC) held in Russia (Moscow and Saint Petersburg) on 15th–19th May, 2018.

That's a good question. Actually, at the beginning, I didn't expect it to be any more than one time. I expected the session in Prague would be a sort of a free-standing event. I didn't anticipate having them more frequently or having more of them or certainly not having one every year, which is what we have been doing in the last five years. So in that sense it was a success. But it was not one that was planned. It caught some sparks, hit the grass, and things started to go. And it moved in some directions I didn't anticipate at the beginning but were related to what we did. Is it a success? Well, what's changed now? I think the most significant change has been that early on, we worked on a really tight budget, we did not have government sponsorship officially or otherwise or even indirectly until the meeting in 2007 in Warsaw where the Law and Justice Party was. This was their first time around and they helped. At the World Congress of Families in Verona in 2019 we had the support of the League Party. In Moldova in 2018 the Moldovan president was our host. And in Hungary in 2017, the Fidesz Party was our host and cosponsor. That's different. So something has changed.

The World Congress of Families has succeeded in getting the support of the European populist Right, which didn't exist in in the 1990s. Back in the 1990s, what was your political vision? Did you aspire to reach out to the political center with your message on family values? How do you evaluate the fact that you are now closely connected to the political Right in a political situation that is increasingly polarized?

Well, polarization's taking place all over. Certainly, in the United States we know polarization really well now. This is what happened. We're dealing with a conflict of values that I think is much more fundamental than other post-World War II conflicts over values, for example the conflict between Communism and liberal democracy. The current conflict is over the most fundamental things: What is a human being? What is marriage? I mean, that's not an incidental question. It's perhaps one of the most fundamental questions. What is the purpose of life? Do we exist so that we carry on from our ancestors to our posterity, are we a link in a chain? That's a very fundamental thing. I think that conflict is there.

Our struggle could have gone to the political center. I learned to think about family policy from the Myrdals, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal in Sweden. There was a tension in their work which I talked about briefly in the book I did on Swedish family policy.³ Alva Myrdal started off as a socialist feminist and atheist and internationalist. Gunnar Myrdal, there was always a conservative tug to him, which I didn't fully understand, even when I met him and interviewed him a number of times. But ten years after his death, they released papers. A box of his earliest papers. Which showed that as a young man – and I'm talking about somebody at age 18 or 19 – he was not a social democrat. In fact, he was an extreme right-wing young man. God, soil, country, pro-aristocracy, he opposed women's suffrage, he was a strong Swedish nationalist Christian. This was around 1917, 1918, 1919. So at the time when the Great War was coming to a close, he was very much "hard Right." He favored monarchy and all that. And what happened was that this world of his fell apart by 1919. He worked for a while as part of the Farmer's Party. He was kind of a country lawyer his first year or two. But he met Alva by accident on a bicycle trip and they fell for each other. To put it informally, she took him on as a project and turned him from what he had been into a social democrat. But there was always this underlying theme in Gunnar Myrdal's thought. Their program for pronatalist, pro-marriage policies reflects a kind of moderate Swedish nationalism. And which, of course, was countered with the whole socialist ethos that, "Oh, we're not nationalist anymore." It was certainly not national-socialist, in the German sense, but there was a kind of nationalistic socialism. I'm not trying to say that they had anything to do with Nazism but that's kind of where he was. He made the shift from an authoritarian right-wing person to an authoritarian left-wing person without a whole lot of change. And, in fact, the Swedish welfare state of the 1940s and 1950s – which included some of what the Myrdals wanted, not what Alva wanted, but it was more in line with what Gunnar wanted – it was genuinely pro-family. It was genuinely pro-marriage. In fact I have no real quarrel with what the Swedes were doing in the 1940s and 1950s. Technically a socialist country, their textbooks on marriage and family

3 Allan C. Carlson, *The Swedish Experiment in Family Politics: The Myrdals and the Interwar Population Crisis* (Transaction Press, 1990).

and sexuality could have been published by any Christian organization at the time. So, things there could have stayed that way. And I am planning one of these days to write a defense of the Swedish welfare state, but the welfare state of 1955 – not what it is today.

Your Swedish example is not unique in Europe. Most European countries have a tradition of strong coordination between state and church, with the churches having had, in the past, a last word on legislation regarding marriage, divorce, or abortion. This model of state-church coordination in Europe is now coming to a close. Europe is itself arguably nearing the situation of the United States, where in a context of dis-establishment religious organizations and the religious grassroots from below take their claims into politics. The World Congress of Families is an example of this trend. The churches are not necessarily very happy about this development, because it disrupts the older model of cooperation.

That may well be the case. I agree that we, the World Congress of Families, have had an impact. Let's take the example of the Italian "League," or what used to be called "The League of the North." The party started pretty much as a negative party. It was Pagan, anti-immigrant, anti-Sicilians, and all that sort of thing. I think what they've got now is a positive agenda. A pro-family, positive agenda. I think maybe we've contributed to that. I hope the commitment to our agenda is genuine. I cannot judge whether Salvini's support, the League's support for the World Congress of Families, is a cynical act on their part. I hope not. I think in Hungary this support was definitely genuine. Most of the actors of the Fidesz Party are living closer to the core of values we're talking about here. But I understand these problems. What may happen next? I don't know what is going to happen with the French National Front. There again, that's another negative party with Pagan roots who've had some strange policies sometimes. I remember one that bothered me. You may remember a couple of years ago the issue with Muslim women and beaches. They were wearing hijabs. And the National Front said that it was un-French not to wear a bikini. Wait a sec? Modesty and women – well, you know, okay, you don't have to be required but you shouldn't condemn it. I mean, what's wrong with that? I think that's perfectly fine.

What you are pointing to is the contradiction between a political agenda that is prevalently anti-immigrant and anti-Islam, and a political agenda that is more traditionally Christian conservative.

In my view, the Christian democracy that came out of World War II had its roots in French Christian democratic writers of the late thirties, mid-forties. And in the ideas of German writers, such as Wilhelm Röpke. I write about this in my book *Third Ways*.⁴ These thinkers had a consistent family policy that was tied to the model of a modest, real welfare state; a welfare state that took cognizance of children, marriage and families, and tradition. This was the same in Italy, too. This model worked until at some point the Christian Democratic Parties stopped being Christian and became just some center-right parties run by ambitious politicians. Resurrecting Christian democracy of the original kind would be a great thing. Resurrecting the original model of the European Union – I’m all in favor of what the European Union was.

You mean the European Union of Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann?

Yes. A political union that would leave family policy and sexual policy to the member states. That is how it was in the United States initially. Family policies, as they called it back then, were the provenance of the states. The federal government had nothing to say or do about it. I think that was a good system. But all that fell apart slowly between 1865 and 1965. In Europe, that separation has dissolved much more recently and much faster. Starting in the 1990s. I am not against the European Union. I cheered the European Union when it first came out. But I think it’s gotten off track. It has gotten off track because the Christian democrats, who really helped put it together, lost their ideology, gradually dissolving into just a “party of the center-right,” increasingly mostly interested in economic questions.

4 Allan C. Carlson, *How Bulgarian Greens, Swedish Housewives, and Beer-Swilling Englishmen Created Family-Centered Economies – and Why They Disappeared* (ISI Books, 2007).

Why do you think this change came about? Do you blame this development on secularization and the cultural revolution?

Yes. When the cultural revolution or the sexual revolution or all the revolutions tied up together came along, there was no one there, really, to defend the old way, the old system, the old models. Partly because everybody got complacent. Things were going pretty well in the United States, say between '45 and the mid-seventies. The Vietnam War was a symptom as well as a cause of the trouble. But for twenty-five, thirty years things pumped along really well. And then it fell apart. And why? Well, part of it again, complacency by leaders who shouldn't have been complacent. People forgot why things were working well. I've written about American family policy which was never consciously structured quite the way it was in Europe. But we got it right. I'm a persona non grata in many American conservative circles because I've defended the social policies of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal from the 1930s. Because they were pro-traditional family, very much so, pro-marriage, pro-baby. Back then the Democrats were the party of the family. They had not bought into the cultural-sexual revolution. The Republican Party was the party of Wall Street. The Democrats were the party of the main street.

Do you consider yourself to be a "typical American conservative"?

No, I would not consider myself and the aims of the World Congress of Families typical for American conservatives. We're not the people who get invited to speak at a conservative political action committee. This is because of my support of the social policies of the New Deal which were grounded in a real ideology or at least a consistent set of principles.

Do you consider yourself to be representative of the libertarian tradition?

In a way all Americans look like libertarians to Europeans, and I've written for some libertarian journals. So I have done, I have written that and I believe that. What makes me not so libertarian is that I think the cor-

porate sector, particularly finance capitalism, is also a threat to the family. While the state has every interest in weakening the family, so do the high levels of finance capitalism. The family gets in the way of the efficient allocation of labor. The family, particularly the family that feeds itself in its garden or does some home production and repairs things, is not a good consumer, it limits the potential of the consumer market, so capitalism in the abstract has no real place for strong families. I believe in free markets, but capitalism and free markets are not the same thing. In fact, mostly, capitalism winds up with the big guys taking control of the government and running it in their favor and making sure the little guys don't have a chance to compete. Crony capitalism. I greatly love family-held companies, companies that are run by families, real families, and they don't tend to be socially destructive; they tend to be socially creative and socially supportive. But it's the big guys in New York, the finance guys, they don't have much of an interest in such companies. And that's where I'm not a libertarian, because I think that unrestrained capitalism of that sort has its own destructive possibilities.

So could this understanding of a restrained capitalism be the reason why your ideas find resonance in Europe?

Maybe. If you ask me what my economic views are, I'm actually close to the ideas of G. K. Chesterton and the distributist movement of Hilaire Belloc. There were some uncomfortable things in that movement, but mostly, it was good. What do I think the state should do? I think the state should strengthen families. How does a state do that? Some of it is counterintuitive. It can do things creatively. In fact, one of the good things that I think's happening in Europe now is that you're adopting a model that I really like. In particular, not to use allowances so much anymore. Giving state allowances for families and state allowances for this and that. Instead, European states are more and more giving tax benefits, which I think is the right way to go at it. It is a good model when families are raising children, they don't pay as much tax or they pay no tax at all, which is I guess sort of the Hungarian model right now. Sometimes family allowance policies start out pretty good, but they're subject to a lot of political

manipulation. And eventually, even in Sweden, the allowance was not so much a family allowance but a mother's allowance. That was not what Gunnar Myrdal intended. In fact, he favored tax policy. He favored generous tax cuts for families and not allowances which could be tailored, ideologically, to meet certain goals. So, you see, my economic ideas come from there. I'm an untypical American conservative. I favor broader property ownership. I'm in favor of things that shock people in America. We should limit the size and the number of Walmarts or we shouldn't even allow a Walmart to exist. And there's a way to do that – again, using tax policy. You do progressive taxation on corporate income.

Let us shift the conversation to the engagement of the World Congress of Families in Russia. One thing we found out in our research is that there were other pro-family groups in Russia active at the time, during the 1990s. For example, Focus on the Family organized events in Russia during the early 1990s. When you first got into contact with Russians, were you at all aware of that? Were you aware that Russia had become a kind of mission territory for groups from the US?

That's true in a much broader sense. Everybody on the right flooded into Russia. The economic Right, and the Russian experiment of cowboy capitalism, it came with American encouragement, from American support, quite broadly. And that turned sour, for at least a lot of Russians. But you are also right, there were groups like Focus moving in and so on.

What does Russia bring to the World Congress of Families?

Some commentator of the late 19th century or maybe it was early 19th century, looking ahead, said that the world would have two great nations. It's not going to be France, it's not going to be England, it's not going to be Germany. The two great nations of the future are the United States and Russia. And I think that was true. And I think that remains true. It certainly was true for most of the 20th century, although Russia had a bad time for a while, but it's kind of coming back together again, it's becoming an important nation again. It's kind of finding its feet again. So

the first thing Russia brings to the World Congress of Families is Russia itself. The other thing Russia brings is the Orthodox tradition. Over the last ten to twelve years, the Orthodox Church has broken out of its shell and is taking its place as a global religion. And that's particularly important now that under Pope Francis, the Roman Catholic Church is pulling back on these social issues. For whatever reason, Francis has decided not to emphasize pro-family and pro-life activities as much as his two predecessors, who put those things right at the very center of the Catholic Church's international witness, not so much now. I think the fact that the Orthodox Church is becoming a public witness internationally on these questions is a huge development. It's not just small, it's huge. It seems to be something that's going to survive the current patriarch. Even American Protestant Churches are going through a confusing phase right now. The leadership of the pro-family people there is gone, there have been a number of people that either retired or died in the last five or ten years. It appears that a new generation is coming. Probably the most prominent guy is going to be Franklin Graham, Billy Graham's son. He's very strong on these questions, and his father was actually not that great on these questions. He pretty much stuck to evangelism, and he didn't get involved on the social issues. His son is deeply involved, and has been for some decades. So that's changing, too.

Relations between Russia and America today are not the best, can this influence your cooperation?

They're quite bad; well, they're awful. But until I'm prohibited from doing so, I need to work with and strengthen our connection with the Russian Orthodox Church. We're not here to praise or to condemn Putin. That's not what we're about. But we are supportive of most of the pro-family initiatives that the Russian government has taken. But yes, if you praise Putin right now, you get yourself in trouble. Like pro-family people in the Baltic States. They're kind of paralyzed right now, I mean, if you're too pro-family, they say you're for Putin, right? Well, no, it's not.

The leader of the Russian chapter of the World Congress of Families is Alexey Komov. His connection with Konstantin Malofeev is well documented, as are Malofeev's ties to ultra-right Russian groups involved in the war in Eastern Ukraine.

One thing I do want to make clear: We never received – as long as I was running the place, which was until I retired in 2015, when I stopped being responsible for the finances – we never received a dime from any Russian source. Our ideas have been picked up in Russia and in other parts of Europe because of a shared understanding around some fundamental issues. I can't bear responsibility for all sides of this cooperation. I'm a writer and an author. I'm thrilled when somebody sees something that I've written and they like it and they use it and they take it and they go forward with it. And I can't be entirely responsible for it. I'm surprised where this has gone and I'm not quite sure what to make out of what's going to happen tomorrow. If I'm responsible for that on some level? I probably am. Although I come out of the American experience, I've studied the European and the Swedish model, I've looked at the history of Christian democracy. What I try to say is a universalist thing. I am a Christian. Christianity is a universalist creed. It's not just for my little tribe back home. It's for everybody.

How do you see the goal of the World Congress of Families? Where should everything lead to, in your vision?

I wrote that in my natural family manifesto.⁵ There's a section called "Vision." It's a couple of paragraphs: it's happy families, larger families, stronger marriages, more autonomous families, happy children, neighborhoods that are alive again with children, where mothers and fathers are both more economically engaged in their homes. And I'm a great believer in the re-functionalization of home, that's why homeschooling is so important, it's just one way to re-functionalize a home. Homes that don't do anything are weak, and fragile, and easy prey for grasping corpo-

5 Allan C. Carlson, *The Natural Family: A Manifesto* (Spence Pub, 2007).

rations or aggressive states. Families that do things for themselves, that educate their own children, raise some of their own food, run a small business in the home, make things in the home, all of those make the family strong. I'm not a materialist, but I guess love is not enough to hold a family together in the world. It has to have a material dimension to it. And it has to have a functional dimension to it. My vision is to find ways to re-functionalize families. And again, homeschooling is a perfect example of a function that naturally belongs to the family. It was taken away in the 19th and 20th centuries, and is now coming back. And again, the conditions now are much more favorable. I understand why, say, a Russian peasant family in 1890 probably was not set up to home educate their children beyond just being a peasant. They didn't have the time, didn't have the knowledge, they didn't know how to read themselves, or something like that. Things have changed now, and it's possible to be generous to mass state education, maybe it was a necessary stage to lift a great number of people out of illiteracy and out of general ignorance, and to create the conditions where education could come home again. That was not entirely true in the United States, even in the early American colonies almost all children were literate, particularly in New England, the New England Puritans deeply believed in educating their children and the boys and their girls so they could read the Bible, so they could become good Protestants. So literacy was quite common. But in other places, not so much. Not among the Scotch Irish in the hills of West Virginia and so on, they were a different kind of people, less literate.

Modern societies are pluralistic, and individuals have different visions of what makes a good life. The vision you just described is not commonly shared. Do you see this world of families as existing somehow parallel to, let's say, the world of feminism? Like, you just don't touch us, and we don't touch you? Or would you like to see the world develop more in the direction of re-traditionalizing the whole society? Do you see yourself more like a fraction inside a pluralistic society or as a potentially hegemonic force?

Well it may be a fraction inside, but have you read the book *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth* by Eric Kaufman?⁶ He's an English political scientist. He looks at differential demographics, who's having more babies. What communities are having more babies, what are having less? Salafi Islam, Mormons, there's certain ultraconservative groups of Lutherans, even in places like Finland, who have big families. The Old Order Amish in the United States, Hasidic Jews have huge families. And his argument is that, you know, if these current trends continue, in about a century and a half the religious vision is the world's future. Secular liberals are just not having children. However, the flaw in Kaufmann's argument is that secular liberals have found ways to indirectly or directly take other peoples' children by putting them in state schools and teaching them new values, which are not the values of the parents who brought them into the earth. The families in Germany, Sweden, Norway who homeschool are being harassed or imprisoned.

But if you do homeschooling, then you need some universities and so on. You need institutions that would defend you from society for all of your life.

They're there. It's all very small now, it's on the margins, but every great change in human development comes from little groups on the margins. Kaufman talks about the Old Order Amish, a German-speaking people, they go back to the 17th century, they're Anabaptists, they stick to themselves, don't take government welfare, are exempted from all this government benefits, they take care of themselves, as we would say they self-insure. There were only 5,000 of them in 1900. Today, it's about 350,000, and it's all natural growth, they have big families. Now they're starting to slow down a little bit, but they're still having really big families, instead of maybe nine or ten on average it's still six or seven, and they're spreading across the country. The Amish are buying up marginal farmlands, and they can make a living on farmland where a regular American farmer can't anymore. Because they use child labor, they focus on specialty crops, they live

6 Eric Kaufmann, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth* (London: Profile Books, 2011).

simply, they don't borrow money, and they actually do really pretty well. They're repopulating the American countryside. It's happening without anybody really being quite aware. And one day, you just wake up, and you say, "Oh my gosh, look what's happened. Everything is changed." That is where I think it might come from. It's going to be from groups on the margins, who keep quiet, stay to themselves, one day you wake up and find out "God, they're everywhere." I think that's a way in which something may change. At the very least you carve out your little world, you defend it, you find friends and allies, you be smart politically. I think it's going to be really interesting times ahead. The hegemony of moral liberalism is not going to last; secular liberalism has lost its sustaining mythology. So, the great battles lie ahead. We'll see how it turns out.

*Interviewed by Dmitry Uzlaner (Moscow, Russia, May 2018)
and Kristina Stoeckl (Verona, Italy, March 2019)*

“This is not the traditional culture war”

Interview with R.R. Reno (in New York, USA)

Rod Dreher in his book *The Benedict Option* argues that American conservatives have lost the culture wars. Do you agree with this view or can we still speak of culture wars in the United States?

I think that we can speak of culture wars in America today even more so than ever. Trump put the wall at the center of his campaign rhetoric. The wall is an image of two visions of the future. One is a sort of utopian, borderless world with fluid interactions of all human beings in a universal community. The other is the vision of a particular national community, and the wall represents the reconsolidation of this vision. I would say, therefore, that this is not the traditional culture wars – about abortion, gender, and sexuality – that have been so prominent in American cultural politics, but is culture wars over two divergent visions of community. This is true as much for the United States as it is for Europe. You see, I was born in 1959, so I am socialized into a certain consensus about 20th-century history. This consensus is “never again.” “Never again” is a very powerful cultural imperative, in particular in Europe. But when Trump went to Warsaw, he offered a different reading of 20th-century history and a different imperative. In his speech in Warsaw, Trump dwelt on the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, and the message was, instead of “never again,” “let us honor the courage and let’s live like that.” So, his message was not “never again,” but, “let’s do that again”! This was very striking to me.

Some commentators reacted very critically to that speech and called it ethno-nationalist and dangerous.

The question is: are we on the cusp of neo-fascism, or are we on the cusp of a kind of dissolving globalism? If you think it's the dissolving globalism, then you will welcome Trump's speech. If you think we're on the cusp of neo-fascism, then you recoil in horror. This is the situation of American politics; Trump is a divisive figure for almost exclusively cultural reasons, for reasons over different visions of the future and of community. If you look back to the leading political and intellectual figures of the post-Second World War era, we see that they were all instrumental for creating that 20th-century consensus. My intuition is that this consensus is now becoming unraveled – which makes sense, it's been seventy years, that is a long time for a consensus to hold sway. We underestimate how deeply the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 and its final dissolution in 1991 have put into question the cultural consensus organized around Cold War imperatives.

Can you explain this in more detail?

By Cold War consensus I basically mean a center-right and center-left consensus. This is very well discernible in the American politics. I give you an example: In 1940, the United States Supreme Court said that a Jehovah's Witness child was obligated to say the Pledge of Allegiance. They did not have a right, a religious right of conscience, to opt out of what was thought to be the indispensable tool for consolidating solidarity and unity. And in 1943, the very same Court reversed itself on the Jehovah's Witnesses and said that children of Jehovah's Witnesses had a constitutional right to opt out of this collective ritual. I think this was a turning point, it was in 1943 when the American elites became worried that we would become our enemy to defeat our enemy. And so I think that from that point onwards, the consensus center-right and center-left was that America had to open things up and loosen things. Racial discrimination in the United States is, if you will, a sort of American Auschwitz, it is our "never again." People on the center-right typically said "well, not too fast

with cultural deregulation”; people on the center-left said “not too fast with economic deregulation”; but everybody generally agreed that we would be a better society if we were more open, more fluid, more inclusive, more diverse, less regulated, more dynamic, more innovative, more creative. All those terms, innovation, creativity, diversity, inclusion, they all connote fluidity and openness. And they were largely shared between the Right and the Left.

And this consensus is now being unraveled?

Exactly. The end of the Cold War has made the cultural consensus of the Cold War era, built around “never again,” “diversity over unity,” and “openness over closure” both more powerful and more dysfunctional. It became more powerful, because there was no opposition any longer, and it became dysfunctional, because it took on a life of its own and was no longer serving the purposes for which it was originally created. That is true in Europe as well, I think.

I agree with you that your analysis also holds true for Europe. Also in Europe we are living through battles over what makes for a good society between a cosmopolitan and a nationalist vision. In this context, I wanted to talk with you about Russia. From your observation, when did people searching for reconsolidation and unity over cosmopolitanism and diversity start to look at Russia as a potential partner?

American social conservatives have indeed become kind of pro-Putin. It is really about Putin, not about Russia and not about the Russian Orthodox Church. I think that the starting point for this positive vision of Putin was in 2013, when the British government threatened to cut off foreign aid to Uganda because of their anti-gay laws. On this occasion, Putin began to make statements against the decadent West. He began to position himself in the context of the unravelling consensus we talked about earlier. During the Cold War, America used to be leader of the free world versus the totalitarian world, right? In 2013, Putin started to position Russia as the leader of the moral world versus the decadent world. That was was a

brilliant strategic move on his part; perhaps it's sincere, perhaps it's cynical, in a certain sense it doesn't really matter, because it achieved its goal: it undermined the West's geopolitical and cultural consensus.

Why is gay marriage such a central issue in the affirmation or undermining of this cultural consensus?

The question of gay marriage has created a feeling of existential threat to conservative Christians in the United States. When the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage across the country, it did so on the grounds of protection of freedoms. The protection against racial discrimination has been extended to include discrimination on the basis of sex, and now of sexual orientation. Social conservatives, who dissent with this move, felt threatened. And they began to look for a protector, for a champion: "Who's going to fight for me?" And there's Vladimir Putin, waving his Russian flag, saying "I'll fight for you!"

So you would say that 2013 was the moment when both sides began to realize that there was an increasingly globalized battle over cultural issues?

Yes, that is my assessment. The Obama administration made gay rights a real priority, also in foreign policy. From my point of view, it was strategically crazy on the part of the United States administration to do that, because it injected our cultural conflicts into the global scene. The Obama administration basically created the opportunity for Putin to make a counter move.

Interviewed by Kristina Stoeckl, November 2017

“Let us create another culture war”

Interview with Alexander Dugin
(in Moscow, Russia)

You are a prolific writer and your books have been published not only in Russia, but also abroad. Could you tell us more about your career as a writer?

My biography is my bibliography – this is a phrase by Julius Evola, but it also applies to me. I have written and published over sixty books since the late 1980s. My books have been devoted to different topics: traditionalism, geopolitics, the philosophy of politics. Much later, I defended my PhD in philosophy, then a PhD in political science, and then another PhD in sociology. For six years I held the chair of sociology of international relations at Moscow State University (MSU). Then I went to work in television, at Tsargrad TV. I am now engaged in the international Eurasian movement and I am completing a book series of twenty-four books called “Noomahia.” Right now I’m writing the last volume, the first twenty-three are ready. This is my biography; I have written sixty books by the age of sixty. What do I do the rest of the time? Well, the rest of the time, I’m either writing books or thinking about what I’m going to write. My biography is my bibliography. As for the question of why these books are translated into European languages, I don’t think that this is a question of contacts or personal influence. It’s just that my books are interesting. If they’re being translated, it means they’re being read. And if they are

read, it means they are interesting. I have my own vision of why people in the West read my books. I believe that the West is in a colossal crisis, in a fundamental crisis. A lot more than any Western man can comprehend. The West is not even in the face of death, it is inside death. The West is dying. Someone is happy about it, someone is hypnotized by it, someone does not understand what is happening. The West hasn't just walked up to the abyss, it is already in there. And somebody, some people in the West, wake up as they are falling and ask, what is going on? It is a small number of awakened people that have the feeling: something is wrong. Something went wrong. *Etwas ist nicht richtig* [Something is not right]. This realization, "something went wrong," makes them pay attention to a variety of alternative views.

Do I understand you correctly that you describe your own philosophy as such an alternative view, a view that explains the perceived crisis of the West?

Yes, exactly, but I do not simply explain how to correct this crisis, I offer a systematic, a generalized critique. A global critique. The farther everything goes, the more a global view is required; the deeper the situation goes, the larger it becomes. As Nietzsche used to say, "The desert is growing." And this growth of the desert does not require specific adjustments, it requires generalizations. In the spirit of Heidegger. But Heidegger has been cursed by the Europeans, and with him the whole classical European Logos. There is almost nothing left. Today, the small islands of critical thought are no longer found on the left. Because of the way in which Marxist discourse has been handled in the West, the leftist potential for critique is gone. It has been successfully dissolved, decontaminated, digested. So what remains is the potential for a critique of the West from the right, from the perspective of traditionalism and from a total, radical criticism of modernity, as we find it in Heidegger (but Heidegger has been forgotten). And here is exactly where Russia comes into play. Russia has always been aloof from this modernization process, it has always had its own position, its own opinion. At the same time, from the European perspective Russia is a myth. The myth that there is another Europe, in the perception of most it is a very scary, negative, barbaric Europe. But when it

comes to the feeling that something is wrong in the West itself, the perception of Russia changes. Europeans become interested in Russia. And well, here I am! I combine the fact that I am Russian and the fact that I am a traditionalist. People in Europe had already noticed me and started to read my books in the early 1990s. I first had a book published in Spain, and only afterward my first book was published in Russian. It was always the traditionalists, the conservatives, who were interested in me.

Let us go back for a moment to the late eighties, it was the time of perestroika, the time of transformation, but still Soviet society was quite closed, also intellectually closed. And it was in those years that you started to read Julius Evola and René Guénon. How come? How did it happen that you started to work on these texts and translate them?

You could say that it happened by accident; you could say it was providential. I was a very Soviet person, that is, I had a Soviet family, Soviet parents, I was born in Moscow. Yet all the time, I was deeply anti-myself. Maybe it was some form of mental or psychic disorder, I don't know, it's hard to tell. But I hated my sociological self, my sociological personality. Hated the whole community around me. I hated them deeply. With no reason to do so! If I had been, for example, an Armenian, a Jew, or a German, I could have said, "I'm here in the Soviet Union temporarily, I came here to live." Well, like in a hotel. Or if I had been an aristocrat, for example, I could have said, "Hey, the Bolsheviks here, they burned down my family palaces." Had I been Jewish or a German, I could have looked for my way to the promised land or to the West. That is, I would have had a reason to distance myself from my sociological person. But I did not have this option, and I was outraged by myself, I felt a distance between me and my sociological self. I was not satisfied with my apartment, my parents, my school, what I saw on TV, what I heard, read, saw in the movies. I just saw that it was some kind of hell. Hell is hell. Yet, at the same time, when I became interested in Western culture, I saw that it was hell, too.

And then I met people who saw the world in the same way. Who, like me, were in some sort of absolute metaphysical opposition to everything. Just everything. It was hypernihilism. They weren't even dissidents,

because the dissidents usually had some positive program: they could go somewhere, pack up things, emigrate, or shout slogans in the square. Many of those whom I met – most of them actually – collaborated with the KGB. My acquaintances were not dissidents. Chiefly, I mean Yuri Mamleyev, Yevgeny Golovin, Geydar Dzhemal. Mamleyev had already left abroad by then, but Golovin and Dzhemal were there. When I met them, I saw that they treated the world around them the same way as I did. It was almost by instinct that I found them. Before meeting them, I didn't know anything, I couldn't do anything. And in this circle I was told: if you want to find a justification for such a nihilistic position, go learn languages, one, another, a third, fourth, fifth language. And go read those books that explain to you why you see your life as hell. And that's when I read *The Crisis of the Modern World* and *The Reign of Quantity and Signs of Times* by Guénon, that is when I read Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and Nietzsche.

In this way I started to bring order into my ideas. I got an explanation why I perceived the environment as hell while everybody else around me seemed to think it was just normal. I started to understand that my position was actually the reasonable one and that I'd been taken to a madhouse or to jail or hell. I understood that we are in Kali-Yuga, in the dark age. If you think in a Christian context, this is the kingdom of the Antichrist. An age of loss of spiritual dimension, the Bolsheviks, their atrocities, Western materialism. There was the explanation!

Again, it is not that I rejected the world because I didn't find my place in it. I had normal parents, absolutely decent people. They didn't drink, they didn't fight. My father worked for the KGB. Mom was a doctor. Grandma worked for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee. I mean, I was a regular person. Like millions of Soviet people. Medium, not the first, but not the last. Without any traumas. I wished that there was something wrong. Just to have an explanation. And thanks to these people, thanks to this small group, I got acquainted with the critical worldview that gave me the explanation. It was the right-wing critique of the modern world.

The left-wing critique of modernity was no option?

The criticism on the left didn't suit me. First of all, we lived in a left-wing society. Secondly, I was completely dissatisfied with materialism and an explanation of everything through economic processes. I needed some more serious religious, metaphysical justifications, and I found them in the right-wing critique. Heraclitus has a phrase, the essence of which is that at first I did not know anything until some point, and then I began to know everything. This is the moment I'm very clear about. It's 1981. I didn't know anything until 1981. Nothing. It's just that... And then, after 1981, I knew everything. Everything stayed the same, I hadn't changed, I hadn't even improved my knowledge. I just went through some kind of barrier. Now I knew everything. And it has stayed like that since, from 1981–1982 until now, I feel the same way.

You say that you have moved from a situation where you knew nothing to a situation where you knew everything. The point of transition comes with the discovery of the right-wing critique of the modern West. Can you explain in more detail how and when you make this discovery?

This was in 1981. In that year I met the three people I just mentioned. All three had had the exact same experience as me in the past, in the fifties, in the sixties, in the seventies. They were older: Dzhemal was ten years older than me, Golovin was twenty years older than me, and Mamleyev was thirty years older. They had been discovering this *Rechte Kritik* [Right-wing criticism] for decades already. The ideas resonated very much with our Russian Orthodox tradition, but we did not know that back then. We started with the Western *Rechte Kritik*, with the right-wing critique of modernity. So this body of Western thought was already known to them. Of course, at the time there didn't exist any translations, but they knew the books. Partly Dzhemal had a library, partly Golovin. For the first time, I got to know these ideas from their retellings. They told me about them. Then I quickly learned two or three European languages within six months. Besides, I signed up for the Lenin library. I even faked an entry

card because they wouldn't let me in. And with this library card, I went to the library and sat there, studying *Rechte Kritik*. I spent about a year there. Found Evola's book, *Pagan Imperialism*,¹ the only book by him that was in the Lenin library. A lot of people have asked me why I translated it – well, there just weren't any others. I saw it, and I translated it. And it's still being reissued somewhere. That was 1981. It was all happening instantly. That is, the process of moving from being a *Nicht-Wissender* to a *Wissender* [non-knower to a knower] took place rapidly. In the same way, the study of languages proceeded very quickly. There was no gradual progression for me, it was first one thing, then another. Through the Western critique of the West I understood why I hated Communism, but I also understood why the West was not an alternative. So this insight of mine took shape in 1981, at most in 1982. And nothing has changed since then. It became the basis of my thought and I gradually began to select Russian authors to build on it: conservatives, Slavophiles, Eurasians.

So the Russian, the Orthodox context joined after that?

Yeah, only after that. In the beginning, when I thought about philosophy, I even thought in French, Italian, German. For me, Evola, Heidegger, and Guénon were much closer than any Russian thinker. For me, they were like my kin. I thought in their categories. And the Russian thinkers came only later. You know, Guénon said: "We need a sacral tradition." I looked around and saw: oh, the Russian Orthodox tradition! I had been baptized as a kid, but I started to go to church because that is what Guénon said. Because according to him there needed to be faith; because according to him there needed to be anti-modernity. Evola said we should be against the Communists and liberals. I was against the Communists myself, but I didn't know the liberals, there weren't any around. But since Evola said we should hate them, I hated them. Back in 1981 I could have killed somebody at the word "liberal"; and also at the word "Communist."

1 Julius Evola, *Pagan Imperialism* [1928/1932] (N.p.: Gornahoor Press, 2017); Russian edition: Iulius Evola, *Iazycheskii imperializm*, trans. Aleksandr Dugin (Moscow: Arktogetia, 1990).

Heidegger taught me how to criticize the Western European tradition, he taught me the need to find a fundamental ontology. I couldn't find Heidegger in German at first, but I got hold of him in French and learned him by heart in French. Then I found him in German, read the books again and again. I read Heidegger all the time. You can't read him all the way to the end, he is an infinite author. And the fact that the Germans today are purging this treasure from their German philosophy is for me evidence of some kind of oligophrenia, a mental retardation. There's nothing more beautiful than Heidegger. His philosophy is the greatest thing that happened after Plato. Heidegger is a miracle! Well, Schelling, Hegel, they are also great of course. When I was in Freiburg, a German professor told me: "Look, I was running the chair of phenomenology here. Now it has been closed down and replaced by gender studies, by queer studies." This is a perfect example of what is happening to Europe. While in China and Iran, Heidegger is now recognized as the greatest thinker of our time.

You found your intellectual interlocutors in Western critics of the West early on. But this was still an intellectual universe, a universe of letters. When did you personally meet with representatives of this Western tradition of criticism of the West?

That was in the late 1980s, when it was already possible to travel abroad. In 1989, I came to Paris for the first time – I had started a letter exchange with somebody there. A year before, I had found the addresses of different people in Paris who occupied themselves with traditionalism, Guénonism, alchemy, Gnosticism, and had started to correspond with them. This exchange of letters resulted in an invitation to Paris. There, I met with Alain de Benoist, I met disciples of Guénon, of Evola, admirers of Heidegger. It was the beginning of an intense dialogue.

The Soviet Union still existed at the time, and I had a very negative attitude toward Communism. Unconditionally negative. A complete, totally negative attitude toward Communism. But I only had a theoretical aversion to liberalism through reading Evola and Guénon. And this aversion was fully confirmed by experience. Everything I saw in the West was absolutely disgusting. It was just the other side of the same material-

ism I abhorred in Communism. Maybe I saw the West through the eyes of my teachers, but at least the West didn't surprise me.

When I met Alain de Benoist in 1989, he said to me, "But you're better off!" I replied, "What do you mean 'better off'? Communism is the worst evil." He said, "No, the worst evil is liberalism." Over and over again I heard from the Western critics on the Right that I didn't yet understand what a nightmare liberalism was. In the beginning, I couldn't believe it. I thought it was some kind of construction. And then it turned out they were right! There is nothing worse than liberalism, and that's why it won. You see, there was something in Bolshevism that was not quite modern, not quite Western. Back then I didn't see it, I refused to see it because I was anti-Soviet and I wanted Soviet power to end. But the moment the Soviet Union collapsed, I stopped being anti-Soviet. In 1991, I saw what bastards our liberals were. The Communists had been monstrous, but what came after them was worse! Those who came to power after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they were just scum. Everything was bad in the Soviet Union, but among all the bad things, some were even worse. These were the liberals who came to power in the 1990s. So you see, it all came together: my new friends on the right told me that maybe we had not yet lost everything, that Soviet society had somehow preserved something. Really, at first I did not know what they meant. It was only later, when I saw what happened after the Soviet Union, that I fully understood what they had been telling me. And this is when I founded the National Bolshevik Party: it was a party of *Rechte Kritik* with, on top, *Linke Kritik* [Left-wing criticism]. I wanted to gather all sources of critique in order to oppose liberalism, because Communism no longer existed, but liberalism did.

And from that moment onward, a pretty serious interest in my ideas set in in the West. In 1994, a French magazine published an article that said that Mr. Dugin expresses the sharpest, the most terrible, but also the most adequate ideas about the state of affairs in Russia. That is, by 1994, there were people in the West who followed my publications. From then on, my articles started to be being translated, published, I started to give interviews to the Western press.

Why didn't you first turn to religious critiques of liberalism, such as the Catholic critique of liberalism? Religious critiques of modernity have been around for a long time. Why didn't you pay attention to this in the first place?

I've overlooked that question a little bit. I have a strong antipathy towards Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council. I've met with Catholic traditionalists, they're okay, but they have extremely narrow views. And most Catholics are just conformists. I think that a Catholic critique of liberalism is possible only in Latin America. And only among some circles. I am thinking, for example, of the so-called "theology of the people" (*teología del pueblo*). It was formulated by right-wing Jesuits, right-wing Catholics. These were Peronists and Catholics at the same time. But again, these ideas exist only in very narrow circles, and from an intellectual point of view I find them very weak. Compared to Heidegger, compared to the traditionalists, it's just a pathetic babbling. And compared to Orthodox criticism, too.

How do you explain that your texts were interesting to readers in the West?

You see, in the 1990s there was really a lack of bright figures on the side of the *Rechte Kritik*. There was only one real outstanding intellectual among them, and that was Alain de Benoist, the founder of GRECE.² When I started to travel to the West, I realized that the tradition of the conservative revolution had somehow been interrupted. The tradition of Heidegger had been interrupted. The tradition of Guénon had turned into some completely idiotic Masonic scholastic circles. The Evolaists, even worse, a bunch of hooligans, extremely right-wing and more interested in street actions than intellectual work. So there was a real intellectual vacuum, and I think that this is one of the reasons that many people became interested in me. I wasn't just repeating what Evola, Guénon, or de Benoît had written, I was offering my own perspective. Besides, Russia was exotic. Presenting my own reading of Guénon or Evola or Heidegger was met with

2 Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne, founded in 1968 by Alain de Benoist to promote ideas of the Nouvelle Droite.

interest. Maybe I didn't understand everything in their works to the last detail, and maybe precisely because of this my work became even more interesting. My Western readers were impressed by this *new reading* [English in the original]. It was fresh, because of Communism. It was exotic, because of Russia. And all this has contributed to consolidating my reputation as a new and important thinker of traditionalism and *Rechte Kritik*.

At what point does the North American context enter into your debates and contacts? I mean, the United States. At what point did you discover the American Christian Right and their criticism of liberalism? For instance, is Pitirim Sorokin an important figure for you?

I discovered Pitirim Sorokin very late, when I was already teaching sociology at MSU. I didn't know him before, but he's an absolutely brilliant writer. His cyclical understanding of history, his criticism of our sensate civilization. And the prediction that our time will come one day, the time he called ideational culture. This is our cyclical, traditionalist view, which I fully share. But, to your question, I met the Americans through *Telos* magazine and Paul Gottfried. Paul wrote a preface to my book *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning*.³ That was in the 1990s. But I didn't have any important contacts in the US, just some acquaintances. For example, I was acquainted with the late Adam Parfrey, who edited the book *Apocalypse Culture*.⁴ He was a kind of postmodernist critic of everything, and we exchanged letters in the 1990s.

As soon as the Internet came up, I put all of my writings online. Just everything. Without worrying about copyright. There was one English translation of a text of mine that had been prepared by an Italian, it was a very bad translation, because it was not his native language. I didn't even bother to correct it, I just put it online. And so my ideas started to live. Gradually, certain circles emerged in the US that were interested in me. By then, I was already focusing on National Bolshevism and Eura-

3 Alexander Dugin, *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning* (Whitefish, MT: Radix, 2014).

4 Adam Parfrey, ed., *Apocalypse Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 1990).

sianism. I discovered Eurasianism in the late 1980s, but at first I thought it was just something like traditionalism. Eurasianism and National Bolshevism became my trademarks. Russian traditionalism, National Bolshevism, and Eurasianism. The Americans have always perceived European traditionalism with the Russian factor in mind. That is, by the end of the nineties, they were talking about de Benoist, Robert Steuckers, and Dugin. In the American reception, I was already a part of the New Right, only from Russia.

I want to talk with you about the concept of the “culture wars.” It signifies a confrontation between progressive, liberal forces, and traditionalist, conservative forces in American society. How do you evaluate this concept?

I think that today the parameters of the cultural wars have changed a lot. Today we are not talking about progressives against conservatives. The picture has changed dramatically – and this is largely reflected in my works on “the fourth political theory.” Before, during the Cold War, there was indeed a dispute between conservatives and progressives in society, a conflict that determined the policy and cultural agenda. After the end of Communism and the victory of liberalism, we now live in a unipolar world. It is unipolar not only in terms of strategy, but also in terms of ideology. This unipolarity is embodied in the word “liberalism.” Liberalism is neither right nor left. Liberalism is, in fact, as a combination of right and left. It combines right-wing ideas about economy and free market ideology and left-wing cultural politics. Progressives have usually advocated left-wing politics, individual rights and freedoms, and social justice. And the rightists were in favor of conservative values, family, church, and big business. And today the following has happened: liberals have merged a rightist economy and a leftist politics. Liberals have created their own progressive-conservative ideology. It is progressive in terms of values, but conservative in terms of economics. That is, the cultural wars have changed their parameters – this process took place throughout the nineties, and in the 2000s things became finally clear.

Remember, there used to be an abyss between these two components. There was a split between them. It was a prohibited zone. You couldn't

go there. Not from the right side, not from the left side. If the Right was moving towards the Left, they were breaking the law of anti-Communism. And if the Left was moving towards the Right, they were breaking the law of anti-fascism. But you see, this is all a liberal manipulation; the old version of the cultural wars – the Right against the Left – has served the liberals to define the discourse. However, our idea is to get out of this impasse. We – I do not want to attribute the merit of these ideas only to myself – have suggested: let us create a worldview that will combine a right-wing politics with a left-wing economy. Let us attack the liberals. That is, let us create another culture war configuration. Not of conservatives against progressives, but of the center against periphery. Or the liberals against the anti-liberals. I call this “the fourth political theory” – it is not right, not left, not liberal. When you see it like this, the term “culture wars” acquires a completely different meaning. This is precisely the meaning of populism. Trump stands for such a populist movement against global liberal elites and also the European populisms, right and left, are examples of this.

Speaking about populist parties in Europe, in Italy we have had a coalition of a leftist party and a rightist party. Is that the kind of coalition between a left economic politics and a right value politics that you have in mind?

Yes, exactly, and I would even say that I am partly responsible for it. I am on excellent terms with Matteo Salvini. He has visited me here in Moscow, we had a conversation. I speak Italian and I have had a lot of supporters in Italy since the early nineties. Many of today’s politicians were young people who came to see me in the early 1990s.

What role does religion play in your “fourth political theory”?⁵

That depends on the specific context. For example, my book about the fourth theory has been very successful in Iran, where it is perceived as an apology of the Iranian revolution. It is perceived as the glorification of Shia Islam, although there is not a word about Shia Islam in it. I believe that every society has its own specific identity. It can be religious or non-religious, that does not matter, but there’s always an identity. Take China – there is no formal, established religion in China, but there is a great deal of interest in my “fourth political theory.” And to come back to Italy: I think that right-wing populism in Italy protects Catholics more than Catholics protect themselves. The League protects Christian identity more than the current Vatican.

I want to push you further on the topic of Christianity. What is the role of Christianity, specifically of the Orthodox Church, for traditionalism? If we are within the Orthodox tradition, not “Tradition” with a capital letter, but within the Orthodox tradition, then we do not believe in “Tradition” with a capital letter, but we believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church through which we find salvation. How do you bring together faith in Tradition with a capital “T” with Christian soteriology?

That is a very interesting question. Indeed, traditionalism in the West started either Islamic, as in Guénon, or Pagan, as in Evola or de Benoist; actually, in de Benoist it is certainly polytheistic. I think this is due to the fact that in the West, Christianity has endured as a religion, but it has ceased to be a tradition. In my understanding, tradition functions as some kind of metaphysical map, a mental frame, in which a lot of things can find their place. The church fits in there, but also, let’s say, Chinese society: it is a traditionalist society, but not a religious one in our sense. Then there is a second map, a second mental frame, and that is modernity. We can place the church in this map too, only this will be a modern-

5 Title of a book by Alexander Dugin published in 2009, in which the author states that he is laying the foundations for an entirely new political ideology that integrates and supersedes liberal democracy, Marxism, and fascism.

ist church. This is what happened to Catholicism and especially Protestantism, they are a combination of religion, formally called by the same name, and modernity.

So you are saying that salvation comes not through Christianity, but through tradition?

For me it is important to have these two maps, these two frames: modernity and tradition. The church can find its place in either of the two. The Western churches have become modernist churches. Orthodox Christianity is different. Eastern Orthodox Christianity fits well into the traditionalist frame. But modernism is also penetrating the Orthodox tradition, and we have to stay vigilant.

Interviewed by Kristina Stoeckl & Alexander Mikhailovskiy, November 2018.

Part II

CRITIQUES

“We need something else now. We need holiness...”

Interview with Alexander Filonenko
(in Moscow, Russia)

Nowadays we often hear about “traditional values”? What does this concept mean and what is behind it?

“Traditional values” are a construction that operates very differently in different contexts and situations. To me, it is particularly interesting and important to analyze how the language of safeguarding traditional values is applied in today’s political, social, and religious context. If we take a closer look, we will see that, regardless of creed, regardless, it seems, even of the region of the globe, communities are divided not by worldview, not by the type of values, but on much deeper grounds. This is the division between people who defend “traditional values” and people whose position is much more difficult to define sociologically and politically – I call them “witnesses.” People who testify about the experience of meeting with Christ. These two types of people are found inside any parish, be it Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox.

I am from Ukraine, and the Ukrainian crisis for me personally exemplifies this deadlock, this division of parishes. If in Europe and in America this division is peaceful, in Ukraine it has led to a real conflict. In Ukraine, it has become impossible to say that these are just two ideological positions; there is something deeper. So this is why we need to criticize tra-

ditional values: of course, the idea of values is not terrible, but we live in strange and terrible times, when the discourse of defending traditional values poses a threat. A threat inside the church, inside each parish.

The second thing to add to the discussion on “traditional values” is that the people defending traditional values really operate in a modernist secular matrix: they postulate what there *is* and what there *ought to be*, a moral ideal, essentialist and proper. In fact, it’s vulgar neo-Kantianism. It turns out that there is no one more secular in the church than the defenders of traditional values. Paradoxically, the bearers of traditional values are the most secular members of the community, who are concerned about the ideal and a certain set of norms and values. And so it seems to me that the phenomenon of a community defending traditional values is an example of secular communities in a postsecular context.

Is there any way to have a positive, constructive conversation about traditional values? Or do we inevitably enter into the space of ideology and geopolitics and begin to protect something from someone?

Positive examples? In 2013, a group of curators gathered to prepare a European exhibition in which Orthodox and Catholics could testify together to the beauty of Christianity. I remember a very revealing episode at a gathering with fellow curators, during which we were deciding about the topic of our next exhibition. We wanted the exhibition to be about the hottest, the most pressing topic of today. Together we decided to make an exhibition about the family. But even as we had reached consensus on this topic – the family is really very important, it is a traditional value – when we began to talk about how to develop the exhibition, how to offer a story, it turned out that immediately there were two positions. For me, these are the positions I was talking about above.

The first position was this: let’s talk about the fact that the family is being destroyed. Let’s demonstrate through sociology, through the demographic situation, how rapidly the institution of the family is being destroyed. Further, let’s show that the church is concerned and prepares protective documents and carries out some defensive actions. The logic was clear: something is disappearing, we are protecting it.

Then there was the second position. One of the curators said, “Look, if the family is breaking down, it is unlikely that Christians are those in the community who are able to protect it, and it is definitely not interesting to tell anyone about this, because if we start to protect the family, we have lost in advance.” It’s much more interesting to look at this situation differently. First, a family that disappears and a Christian family are different things. And it is bad that Christians themselves do not understand the difference between family and Christian family. Today, when people talk about the traditional value of family, they usually mean a very modern family, a nuclear family – father, mother, and children – no one mentions grandparents, grandmothers, the family home, and so on. As a rule, we are dealing with a situation where Christians protect the family, but it does not matter to them that it is not a Christian family.

For Christians themselves, we need to better understand the novelty of the Christian family. Why is it beautiful? And if it is beautiful for us, then we should have an exhibition to show that even if the Christian family is disappearing, even if there are two left in the world, we should show it to everyone so that people can see whether it’s attractive to them or not. The only way to talk about Christian values is to show their attractiveness, and a person can freely take a position in relation to this attractiveness. For me, that’s the way to bear witness.

I am very suspicious of all these attempts to defend tradition, because this position is not actually church-like. The problem with the Russian Orthodox Church is that it constantly reacts. The position of the Russian Orthodox Church in the public today is as follows: an event happens – the Church reacts. People hear nothing but the reaction of the Church and they think that is the way it should be. But for me personally, it doesn’t matter whether the Church reacts or not. It’s important to me that she bears witness. The notions of bearing witness and of reaction are different. Today’s Church doesn’t bear witness, and that’s the problem.

How often do we hear the Russian Orthodox Church speak in public about the beauty of Christianity, which is beautiful for the whole world, not just for Christians? For example, the canonization of Mother Teresa by the Catholic Church was such a testimony. It’s not just an avowal of holiness within one’s church, it’s an offering for everyone where people can’t avert their eyes, no matter who they are – atheists, skeptics, Mus-

lims, Buddhists. At such moments, people understand that before them is the testimony of the beauty that Christianity offers. That's what witness means to me. And the question of liberalism or conservatism is only secondary.

What is your attitude to the discourse of traditional values as it exists in Russia and as it is broadcast abroad by the Russian Orthodox Church, including in the Ukrainian context?

I am from Kharkiv, Ukraine, and I am a parishioner and member of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. In a situation where members of one and the same Church kill each other, it is impossible to talk about values. Today traditional values are protected by tanks and they lead to the murder of parishioners of one and the same Church. You see, in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine there are not two different churches, because on the one side you have a metropolitan and on the other side you have a metropolitan, and they belong to the same church and meet at the Council in Moscow.

When, for example, in Crimea, the metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate blesses the missiles aimed at Kiev, it seems normal for the Russian community, because everything should be blessed. There are missiles in Crimea, why not bless them? And what does the press service of the Moscow Patriarchate do? It reports in all the news outlets that missiles are blessed and that in case something happens they will reach Kiev. For me, as a member of this Church living in Ukraine, that is a somewhat strange position. There is a patriarch who, on the one hand, wants to embrace the entire Slavic world, and on the other hand, he does not remember his parishioners in Ukraine at all. He doesn't remember them in public. He does not talk to them, maybe he prays for them, but the Ukrainian Orthodox who are faithful to the Russian Orthodox Church know nothing about it. For me, this is not just a psychological problem or a particularity of this patriarch, it is a much more fundamental situation. We have a situation of numbness, when the conflict within the church has reached a point that there is nothing to talk about. We need something else now. We need holiness.

This very conflict – this very division – I see it all over the world. It’s not specific to Ukraine. It’s not specific to Russia. The horror is that this is the specificity of all Christian parishes. We see these divisions everywhere. Even in Europe, only more civilized. In Europe, at least to my experience, the different camps still talk to each other. One part of the parish goes to demonstrations in defense of the family, against abortion, against gays, and so on, and the other part of the parish says: strange people, well, let them go, it’s their choice. I’m not going to go. I will go to the canonization of Mother Teresa. That is, whereas in Europe there is still a space of tolerance, where people can coexist and accept a situation of disagreement, here in Ukraine we are facing a much more fundamental conflict from which demons are born.

The Russian situation is exactly the same as in Ukraine and I would like to comment on it as a member of the Orthodox Church. Five years ago it would have been absolutely impossible to have a section called “The spiritual and moral security of the state” at the Christmas Readings.¹ It is completely incomprehensible to me how this is possible. That is, it is impossible for a Ukrainian to imagine that the Russian Orthodox Church holds a conference with such a section. And of course, this section is dedicated to the protection of traditional values. But these values are unknown, are alien to me. This section at the Christmas Readings, I take it as a kind of a marker: does the Russian Orthodox Church perceive of itself in connection with the issue of state security? Whose state?

The matrix of church-state relations in Ukraine is completely different from Russia. In 2014, one analyst from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church said that for him the most important result of the Maidan² is that it ended a situation in which, for all these years, the Orthodox Church has been too close to the state and has not noticed society at all. The situation of a weakened state and a strong society, as it is today in Ukraine, leads to confusion in the Russian Orthodox Church, not because it does not have a position, but simply because it has never seriously talked to society. The Russian Orthodox Church believed its partner in conversation was the

1 The biggest conference of the Russian Orthodox Church organized every year in Moscow.

2 The revolution in Ukraine that happened in 2014 and led to a serious deterioration of relations between Russia and Ukraine.

state. As soon as this partner disappears, it's as if the whole public space of the church disappears. This is the Ukrainian situation. In Russia, it is the opposite. The partner is interested, and there is a very serious conversation between the state and the patriarch. The public discourse of the church is determined by its dialogue with the state, not with society.

You mentioned that this division inside single churches is not limited to the Russian or Ukrainian situation. What about Europe?

As far as Europe is concerned, I have had the privilege of giving lectures all over Italy for several years. I saw many different parishes and in all of them I got the sense of an internal division between those who bear witness and those who react. For example, once I gave a lecture on the new martyrs of the Russian Orthodox Church in the south of Italy. After my lecture, an old lady came up to me and said: "Thank you for reminding us tonight what kind of fathers' children we are." That was amazing! Imagine: here comes a man talking about Siberia, about the Gulag, about people she is hearing about for the first time in her life, and she realizes that she is reminded of her own fathers. To me, this is the point of testimony that allows us to come together today. When we are not talking about ourselves, our identity, our concerns, our traditional values, but about those whom we love. And it turns out that this love is shared. That's one path I'd like to better understand and explore, both politically and socially. This is essential for Ukraine today, and maybe not so fundamental for Russia.

I can also say the following about Europe: For many years people have been talking about the crisis of Europe and about the role Christianity in European history. Many people today describe the crisis in Europe as a situation where the church has to make decisions about values, has to protect and defend. As if the identity of the church were linked to its ability to defend itself. It seems to me that the contribution of Ukraine and Russia to the European debate is significant, because thanks to what is happening in our countries, Western European Christians can learn that the position of defending values is not safe for the nature of the church. The church ceases to witness, and for many people it becomes simply an institution that is defensive, conservative, and reactionary.

Are the experiences of Ukraine and Russia somehow connected? Or are these two completely different stories within the same church?

The history of Russia and Ukraine is one story. These are not two or three different stories, they are different plots within the same narrative. I mean, this is essentially the story of the post-Soviet person figuring out his life. In Ukraine that same post-Soviet person somehow discovered the theme of human dignity. Not because there was a human rights campaign, not because we held more conferences, but because a person was put in a situation where he was deprived of everything and they were going to take away his dignity. He may not have thought about dignity until that day, but when he found himself in that situation, he realized that he was ready to stand there until death in order to preserve his dignity. What we saw in winter at the Maidan is really a rediscovery of the theme of dignity. And it is a surprise – when the most cowardly person suddenly finds out that such a theme exists. Ukraine in this sense has taken the path of rediscovering the theme of dignity and reopening the issue that your existence is seriously connected with the possibility of openness to the world.

In Russia there was resentment. This is quite obvious to me. The solemn speech of the president of Russia regarding the annexation of Crimea³ was terrible for me not only because Crimea was annexed, but because I saw Russia's entire political discourse falling into resentment. That is, until that point it was obvious to me that there were a variety of discourses in Russia. Political positions, something else, but for me this famous Kremlin speech was a sign that the state had made a choice. It went the way of resentment.

Since the Russian Orthodox Church has a strong relationship with the state, it could not avoid this position. The patriarch was absent from Putin's Crimea speech. Interestingly, Russians read this as if he was sick. And there was no comment on where the patriarch was. As if Russians weren't interested in why there was no patriarch at the historic speech. For Ukrainians, it was a sign of optimism, as if the patriarch wanted to

3 The speech of the president of the Russian Federation on 18 March 2014. The full text of the speech is available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (accessed 19 May 2020).

say that he did not agree. A small ripple went through Ukrainian society: they said, look, for the first time the church distinguished itself from the position of the state. But then it became clear very soon that this was not the case; the Russian Orthodox Church took certain steps to confirm not only its loyalty, but also its agreement with this position of resentment.

The situation of the Russian Orthodox Church today is different from the situation during the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, the Church was loyal, but it did not agree. It is impossible to imagine that at the time a religious person would talk about the new martyrs and simultaneously praise Stalin as a father, patriarch, and bearer of traditional values. Such a position was unimaginable in the Soviet Union. You were on the side of the Church, or you were defending some Soviet narrative. What happened in Putin's Crimean speech was the combination of the Red and the Orthodox myths. This was of course not entirely unheard of inside the Russian Orthodox Church, but it had not been mainstream. Now it has become mainstream.

I am not one of those who believe that a close relationship of church and state is a mortal sin. Relations with the state have always been difficult for the Orthodox Church. The problem is that today there is no relationship with society and the Church's only connection to society is its attitude of reaction to what is happening.

But why is the position of “protecting values” so problematic? There are values, they are disputed, and they need to be protected so that they can be passed on to subsequent generations ...

Values do not need to be protected in order to be passed on to subsequent generations. That's not how values are transmitted. We must not concentrate our energies on the alleged crisis of values, but instead find the place from which these values are resurrected. The defenders of traditional values are trying to protect what they have, but that is not enough. In my opinion, in the current situation, we have only one way. To return to the place values come from. It's not a way to protect values, it's a way to reproduce them. If we need family in society, we don't need to protect it. We need to return to the place where it was born.

Where is this place?

Exactly! Now that's the beginning of a real public debate. For example, Fukuyama's discussion of trust in his famous book: how is trust built?⁴ Some believe that trust, memory, and values are formed, first of all, in the relationship of the child and the mother, who then transmits these values to the relationship with the father, the family, society, and so on. Some think it's friendship. I believe that the Church as a witness of Christ is an invaluable place for society to revive the value of trust. Church is the place where values are produced. They are made there. Not because Christians impose their worldviews, propagate their ideas, and defend their values. That's not what this is about. Christians live in such a way that in some cases their lives become attractive to non-Christians and as a result Christian values penetrate into the public sphere. That's what we saw in the case of the Nobel Prize for Mother Teresa of Calcutta. That is, maybe the majority of people in the world do not even know from what religious order she is, how she lives, what she prays, they have not read theological books. But it's obvious to everyone that they're dealing with some kind of beauty that is universal. This is the universality of the saints, their ability to transcend confessional boundaries. I mean, saints are saints to everyone. The experience of holiness is penetrating even for atheists. The Church today is facing two possible ways forward: either the Church returns to the revival of values, by which I mean starts to bear witness (first of all through education), or it continues in its defense of values, which is what we are mostly seeing today.

The problem with the focus on the protection of traditional values is that it remains unclear what these values actually are. They are traditional, so do they come from the past? But which past? Shall we return to Kievan Rus? Well, that's a long way off. If we speak about defending traditional values, we surely need some kind of lived experience of these values. So maybe go back to the past Soviet experience? Isn't the code of the builders of Communism a crypto-Christian product, isn't that the proof that not everything was so bad in the Soviet Union? Today's defenders of tra-

4 Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

ditional values in Russia are obliged to combine the Soviet and Christian narratives, otherwise they are deprived of the opportunity to appeal to lived human experience. Logically speaking, this is absurd, but from the point of view of the program of protection of values it is the only possibility.

What do you think about the dialogue between different faiths? Can values and their protection become the basis for new ecumenical interactions? Or do the same problems arise here? And what could become the new agenda for such interaction today? That is, what is the alternative to “protecting traditional values” in the context of ecumenical interaction?

I frequently participate in interfaith dialogues. When representatives of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Greek Catholic communities in Ukraine meet, there is always the difficulty to decide what we are going to talk about, what will be our agenda? As a rule, these talks were about what separates us: how we differ in our teachings, how our attitude to the Pope differs, what's different about our understanding of history. The agenda was usually dictated by some challenge that we must respond to. But at one point we realized that we have an abyss of difficulties, we will not work them out at one conference, not even at ten or a hundred conferences. So what can we give to each other? Something that would be valuable to each of us? The answer was: the saints of our traditions! So we started to build the agenda of our meetings on this basis: let's look at the best that there is in every tradition and confession. This is the experience of the saints. And it turns out that when everyone talks about what makes him or her alive, personally, it's important for everyone. It was at these meetings that we discovered holiness as a lens for examining problems.

So for me, there are two types of interfaith meetings. There are conferences that discuss the defense of something, conservative groups that find out how exactly we are in trouble, how the world is trying to hurt us behind the scenes. This is one kind of interfaith cooperation. I'm not interested in it. For me the second position is attractive – when I as Orthodox listen to what Catholics say about what they love. When they, in turn, are not interested in what I think of the crisis in Catholic theology,

but when they are wondering what I think of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (Bloom).

I don't think there are conferences where these two types of people meet. And that's a problem. It turns out that there is a great deal of separation between these communities. They no longer have anything in common, no shared space. It seems to me that the problem today is not to determine the differences – liberal, conservative, traditionalist, fundamentalist – but to determine the subject of our common contemplation. Not the subject of our common politics, but the question who the saints are for us.

For me, one of the strongest public gestures of the Russian Orthodox Church was the canonization of the new martyrs in 2000. We had a little more than 300 of our own Slavic saints in the Orthodox Church. Three hundred and something at the beginning of the 20th century! Since 2000, the Russian Orthodox Church has canonized more than 1500 saints.⁵ Doesn't it mean something big to the life of the Orthodox Church that the number of saints honored in its calendar has increased by five? It must mean something! If the Church canonizes, it is up to us to strive to understand who these people are. To learn their names, learn what they looked like and how they bore witness. In the past, canonization in the Church usually happened in the opposite way: whenever there was persistent public veneration of a person, the Church eventually recognized this person as a saint. In 2000, the opposite happened. The Church canonized over 1,500 people with an offer for all of us to become familiar with them. And what do we see today in the Church? Strange as it may seem, the defenders of traditional values don't look at them!

For me, the opportunity to look at a martyr's experience is the opposite of searching for and defending traditional values. They were all people who were certainly traditional, but they did not defend traditional values, they simply lived a life that was so beautiful even in unbearable conditions that this life could bear witness to faith in spite of hell. So even in hell, this

5 In 2000, the Russian Orthodox Church canonized a new group of saints – new martyrs who were killed or persecuted after the October Revolution of 1917. See Karin Christensen, *The Making of the New Martyrs of Russia. Soviet Repression in Orthodox Memory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2019).

testimony was available, and so the Church survived. The Church did not survive because she was defending traditional values, but because she bore witness to the beauty of faith. When we talk about the new martyrs today, people immediately say: “Christ said, I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” What does it mean, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it? If you ask people what this means, the typical answer goes like this: there was a Church, the state struggled with it, the Church withstood the attack of hell during the whole 20th century, and now this attack has come to naught. This is the triumphalist tale. Well, I tell you: hell doesn’t attack, the gates stand where they stand. What does it mean, “the gates of hell shall not prevail”? Gates don’t have an engine, they are not moving. And it is clear that Christ means the opposite, that there is a power of testimony in the Church such that the gates of hell cannot hold that light and they break, so the light shines in hell. This is a different interpretation of the experience of the martyrs.

Don’t you think that the narrative of defending traditional values has some kind of internal anguish, some tension that leads defenders of these values to embrace extreme positions ...

Yes, I also notice the striking similarity of the discourse on the protection of traditional values to conspiracy theories. Why not defend these moral positions normally? Why do you constantly need to involve some schemes about conspiracy? How does this fusion of discourses happen, why does one generate the other? I think it’s an old-fashioned problem of modernity. My teacher was Zygmunt Bauman, who shocked Europe with the statement that the Holocaust was an outgrowth of modernity.⁶ That the Holocaust is only possible in a modern society. It seems to me that the defenders of traditional values are also an outgrowth of modernity. These are people who defend an ideal and at the same time know that this ideal is not represented by anybody. Either you say that you adhere to values that no one holds, including yourself, which is certainly

6 See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

a humorous position, or you have to offer some kind of conspiracy model that explains where these values reside beyond our everyday perception. They say that there are communities that keep these values, but as lay-people we do not see them, we do not know them, and cannot. There is a strange fusion of a radical modernist position, a vulgar dichotomy of is and ought with conspiratorial language. We cannot point to a real Christian experience in which these traditional values exist. We're protecting something that's not there. And we can't admit it openly. We can only say that traditional values are like the city of Kitezh,⁷ which still exists somewhere, and we just need to understand where it exists – on Mount Athos, maybe beyond the Urals, maybe with a single monk who hasn't left his cell for fifty-three years. We see a conspiricization of holiness. It is a deeply paradoxical situation: the Russian Orthodox Church has canonized over a thousand new saints and has invited us to know them by name, to learn about them as people who make up the face of the church in difficult times. And what is happening instead? Today, the figure of the holy is covered in conspiracy theories. Who are the saints for the advocates of traditional values? What does humanity mean for those who represent the anti-humanist milieu of the Church? What is humanity for those who say they are not interested in humanism or human rights? Who do they follow within the Orthodox Church, not as an ideological leader, but as an example of humaneness?

Does today's Russia have any specifics in terms of traditionalism?

There is a wonderful book by Mark Sedgwick, prophetically translated into Russian.⁸ It is constructed as an intellectual biography of René Guénon and his followers. This book is remarkable for the fact that it was written more than ten years ago and its last chapter is on the fate of traditionalism in Russia. And it already shows to what extent the situation of tradi-

7 In Russian mythology a city that mysteriously disappeared in the 13th century under the waters of the lake Svetloyar when the Mongols wanted to conquer it.

8 Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

tionalism in Russia is strange. It is the only country in the world where traditionalism has managed to break out of the marginal field. To come together with the authorities. This simply has never happened anywhere. All of traditionalism's attempts to flirt with power in other contexts have not led to anything. This only happened in Russia.

How do you see a way out of this situation? Is there any reason to hope for an alternative to “protecting traditional values”?

I would like to stress once again that the way out is to raise the topic of holiness and the subject of the testimony of faith in the public space. A sign, a sociological symptom for me was the TV series *The Young Pope*. It's a really curious phenomenon: many people said, “What an abomination!,” “It's a parody of the Church!” But when we look at the part of society that was delighted with this series, we see that it resonated with people who are not represented in the Church. These people said, “We expect you, dear Christians, to do just that.” This was the first time the unrepresented spoke. The great hope is that they see hope in the Church and that hope is in the experience of holiness. Not in the Church as a new power, finance, network, control, but in the Church as a witness to the truth. For me, hope is in this position of a witness. In philosophy and social theory, it seems to me, there is still no developed toolkit to talk about testimony. This is what Paul Ricoeur tried to do in his old age when he said that after 300 years of a philosophy of suspicion, we must create an equally powerful philosophy of witness and recognition. But it was never created. This work hasn't been done yet.

Interviewed by Olena Kostenko on 31 January 2017

Sergey Horujy
The Misfortune of Tradition
Why Tradition Needs to Be
Protected from Traditionalists *

*Alle solche Urteile, wie diejenigen von der Art, wie meine Seele den Körper bewegt oder mit andern Wesen ihrer Art jetzt oder künftig im Verhältnis steht, können niemals etwas mehr als Erdichtungen sein und zwar bei weitem nicht einmal von demjenigen Werte als die in der Naturwissenschaft, welche man Hypothesen nennt, bei welchen man keine Grundkräfte ersinnt, sondern diejenige, welche man durch Erfahrung schon kennt, nur auf eine der Erscheinungen angemessene Art verbindet, und deren Möglichkeit haben kann und also nur schöpferisch oder chimärisch, wie man es nennen will, dichtet.*¹

*I. Kant, Träume eines Geistersehers,
erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik*

* This article was first published in Russian in the journal *Voprosy Filosofii* 9 (2017). The current text is a slightly amended version previously published in English as: "The Misfortune of Tradition, or Why Tradition Needs to Be Protected from Traditionalists," *Social Sciences* 49, no. 1 (2018): 69–86.

1 "All such opinions, as those concerning the manner in which the soul moves my body, or is related to other beings, now, or in future, can never be anything more than fictions. And they are far from having even that value which fictions of science, called hypotheses, have. For with these no fundamental powers are invented; only those known already by experience are connected according to the phenomena; their possibility, therefore, must be provable at any moment" (Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Illustrated by Dreams of Metaphysics*, translated by Emanuel F. Goerwitz [New York.: The Macmillan Co., 1900], 118).

Since the beginning of the third millennium Russian politics, the church sphere, public life, and mass media have increasingly been dominated by conservative trends and sentiments. The all-embracing conservative trend and atmosphere are asserting themselves aggressively, but it can readily be seen that as distinct from the Soviet period, the prevalent course – “the general line” – is not informed with any complete ideology and does not have a robust ideological or philosophical foundation. Its intellectual support and theoretical basis represent disparate religious, philosophical, historical, or political constructs, journalistic musings, ideological schemes that tend to be unprovable, para-scientific, archaic, and downright fantastic. This chaotic body of ideas and attitudes may appear to have a kind of ideological cohesion because it has a common element, a *sui generis* common denominator in the shape of *tradition*. “Adherence to tradition,” “reliance on tradition,” “preserving and protecting tradition (or traditions)” – these and similar formulas are heard constantly and everywhere like an incantation, a cloying commonplace in Russian public discourse. On closer inspection, however, this commonplace is an empty place. In nearly all contexts – official, journalistic, and even academic – the meaning of the cure-all called tradition remains fuzzy and it is unclear what concrete traditions are meant.

Moreover, we discover that in the majority of contexts there is no sign of an attempt to clarify the mysterious concept and identify exactly what traditions we should draw on. More often than not this question is sidestepped by substituting the term “tradition” with the still vaguer term “traditional values.” Today the traditional values discourse holds sway everywhere in Russia, while the content of this formula is expressed in a vague and declarative form through such notions as “family,” “morality,” and “social order.” This is in striking contrast with unambiguous and powerful old slogans such as *Blut und Boden* [Blood and soil] or “world revolution.” So, it would be wrong to say that the traditional values discourse performs the function of a state ideology or even the much-touted “national idea.” Rather, it is a palliative, a Band-Aid.

However, there is a plethora of varyingly marginal, exotic, and extremist ideas on the topic of tradition advocated by small groups and subcultures. An odd picture emerges. The dominant conservative-traditionalist idea manifests itself in the ideological field in such a way that the center

of this space, which should be occupied by concepts shared by the majority or imposed by the authorities, is essentially vacant, while the periphery is replete with a multitude of traditionalist theories, concepts, and schemes of varying (but never totally scientific) standard, marginal and radical to varying degrees. The feature that they all have in common is cavalier treatment of tradition: they all promote a biased and distorted treatment of traditions – ideologized, stylized, mystified, etc. – and often describe imagined “ancient traditions” as the basis for their para-scientific theories. In other words, the authors do not immerse themselves in tradition and its experience, but highjack tradition, producing various kinds of distortions and simulacra.

The aim of this text is to provide a concise analytical description, classification, and assessment of the phenomena that crowd the field of present-day Russian traditionalism. Let us start with a brief catalog of the main phenomena in this field.

Exposition

Obviously, conservative thought in Russia draws above all on the religious tradition of Orthodoxy and the secular tradition of the monarchy. In Russian culture both have had a long and controversial history that defies a straightforward and unambiguous assessment. The relations between the two have seen many twists and turns. Present-day traditionalism, too, offers various interpretations, but they all share the view that there must be a close alliance, a unity of the two traditions. Such a union has been the rule throughout the history of the Orthodox world until the 20th century, including the Russian Empire. The most salient example, however, is the Byzantine Empire, the first Orthodox kingdom that lasted a thousand years. For the Russian conservative consciousness this example has acquired the status of a paradigm and an archetype, so that the modern concepts and platforms that advocate a marriage of Orthodoxy and monarchy can be considered to be part of the general current of *Byzantinism*. The term is polysemantic, its conceptualization going back to two antip-

odes, Ivan Gagarin² and Konstantin Leontiev. For the purpose of this study I chose to focus on the narrow interpretation of Byzantinism as a trend in modern Russian ideological life.

There is no doubt that Byzantinism is the mainstream of Russian traditionalism today. But the trend is not monolithic, it has various subdivisions. The divisions, however, are not sharp and do not rule out important unifying factors: thus, all the Byzantinist theories represent the Byzantine Empire as a positive example for Russia and the West as a dangerous and hostile entity. Nevertheless these theories are very different in terms of their main thrust, their emphasis and goals, and in many other ways. The most visible division is between the more pragmatic, political, and geopolitical Byzantinism and the more mystical and eschatological Byzantinism. The first variety uses relatively moderate and rational discourse and clearly seeks to gain the recognition of the authorities and become the state ideology. A perfect example of such Byzantinism is the well-known television film *The Lesson of Byzantium* by archimandrite, now bishop, Tikhon (Shevkunov). These strivings have had some success: Byzantinist

“empire-building ideologies advocating a vertical integration [...] of various peoples and states around Moscow and Russia [...] are used by the Russian political regime. [...] For a long time the Byzantinist narrative appealed mainly to marginal patriotic intellectual circles. However, in the early 2000s it caught the eye of the people in the corridors of power where the mobilizing potential of this ideologeme was appreciated. The concepts of the Orthodox civilization, post-Byzantine space, ‘the Russian World,’ the Third Rome, etc., came to be discussed.”³

2 On the role of Gagarin in the history of the concept of Byzantinism, see N.V. Sinitsyna, *Tretii Rim: Istoki i evoliutsiia russkoi srednevekovoi kontseptsii (XV–XVI vv.)* (Moscow: Indrik, 1998), 29.

3 A. N. Okara, “Novaia Vostochnaia Evropa v XXI veke: Sposobno li vizantiiskoe nasledie izmenit’ Rossiiu i ves’ mir?” *Razvitie i ekonomika* 4 (2012): 136.

All these concepts, which are included in the sphere of political Byzantinism, have become part of the official discourse.

The second variety has from the outset developed outside the limits of scientific critique: it is the discourse that blends real and sacral history and refuses to distinguish authentic sources, hagiographic narrative, apocrypha, and legends. These tools are used to build mystical and fantastic schemes of history, and mainly of the end of history complete with the advent of “the last time” and the enthronement of the Antichrist. These two varieties occupy different places in the public domain: while the former, as has been said, looks to the center, which it seeks to gain control of, the latter has long been consigned to the fringe zone although it leaps into prominence from time to time (as in our day). However, the differences between them are more external than internal: at the end of the day political Byzantinism rests on the same religious and historical foundations and ideas, though it prefers not to discuss them owing to their exotic character. I will consider these foundations below.

Along with Byzantinism, *Eurasianism* is undoubtedly among the most influential ideological trends in Russia today. Its relevance to our theme, i. e., traditionalism, is not immediately apparent. Typologically, the early Eurasianism of the Russian émigrés in the 1920s was clearly an avant-garde and not a traditionalist trend, which is why its proponents were described as “Slavophiles of the Futurist era” (Fyodor Stepun). However, today’s Eurasianism, or neo-Eurasianism, is a different phenomenon. It is still more heterogeneous than Byzantinism, comprising a whole spectrum of versions. But the important thing is that it is clearly evolving in the direction of traditionalism. With the exception of “left Eurasianism,” oriented toward leftist philosophical trends,⁴ the discourse of tradition and the principle of reliance on tradition are present in all the main varieties of modern neo-Eurasianism. However, unlike Byzantinism, Eurasianism cannot link its basic idea of Eurasia as a distinct type of civilization and culture with any tradition that has ever existed. Therefore if

4 See, for example, R. Vakhitov: “Modern followers of the left-Eurasian paradigm seek to find similarities of the theories of the civilizational approach [...] and Western neo-Marxism, notably in the philosophy of Antonio Gramsci and, to a lesser extent, the Frankfurt School thinkers.” Vakhitov, “Klassicheskoe levoe evraziistvo,” in *Evraziistvo: Issledovaniia i publikatsii* (Moscow: Parad, 2014), 291.

neo-Eurasianism is to gravitate toward the traditionalist discourse, tradition has to be interpreted in a special way.

Traditionalism in the narrow sense – associated primarily with the names of René Guénon and Julius Evola – provides a suitable interpretation. The core of this theory is a special approach to tradition: it proceeds from the premise that the whole spectrum of world religions, cultures, and civilizations has its source in a single “primordial,” “pristine,” or proto-tradition, the ancient sacred tradition that is still unknown to science. “The traditionalists claim that all sacred knowledge has a single source in the original tradition.”⁵ Each of the theories within this kind of traditionalism propounds its own version of what the proto-tradition was, seeking to represent it as a reconstruction of genuine prehistorical tradition and find convincing arguments to explain why this tradition is unknown to science.

It is clear that all this is outside the sphere of scientific cognition and belongs to some para-scientific or non-scientific paradigm. We will consider this in more detail below, but at this point let us just note that this extrascientific paradigm, which simulates scientific discourse and method, opens broad opportunities – proposes a matrix, if you like, for producing constructs distanced from science to varying degrees, based on all sorts of imagined “traditions” that may serve various ideological, political, religious, and other purposes. There is great demand for these opportunities in the current Russian (and world) situation. As a result, *traditionalism in the narrow sense* is a highly visible and influential phenomenon in Russian culture, ideology, and to some extent in politics. Content-wise, it is divided into separate conceptions each asserting the existence of some proto-tradition that it uses as the basis for historical, historiosophic, religious, or political schemes and constructs. To evaluate these concepts it would make sense to distinguish among them, above all in terms of how far they are removed from reality and how much fantasy has gone into them: a “tradition” may be the one hundred percent invention of an arm-chair historian or a modification of some real tradition, leavened with varying degrees of arbitrariness, distortions, and additions.

5 G. Dzhemal, “Prorocheskaia eskhatologiya i traditsionnaia doktrina tsiklov,” in *Eskhatologicheskii sbornik* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2006), 476.

Let us use this principle to compile a brief catalog of the main present-day traditionalist concepts, starting with moderate ones and moving gradually to those that blatantly disregard reality and science.

(1) The spectrum of neo-Eurasian concepts contains a relatively moderate version whose authors, while taking liberties with historical and cultural data, still avoid undisguised additions and distortions. Such moderate traditionalism has produced the widely known theories of Lev Gumilyov and, among modern authors, of Aleksandr Panarin, who claimed the existence of “a single tradition that is archetypically common to the peoples of Eurasia,”⁶ but did not venture to describe it, saying that such reconstruction would be a task for the future.

(2) Evgeny Shiffers (1934–1997), a brilliant film and stage master, came up with a very original version of traditionalism. His spiritual quests led him to a syncretic mystery-like fantasy that blends Tibetan Buddhism and mystical Orthodoxy.⁷ Shiffers had and still has a small but staunch following and his extraordinary sensitivity to the spiritual tradition puts him in the category of traditionalists and not simply New Age–style dilettantes. He puts forward his own version of Eurasianism connected with the idea of the “Eurasian proto-motherland.” However, Shiffers does not introduce the concept of the primordial tradition, so in our classification his concept is in between traditionalism in the narrow and in the broad sense.

(3) In the broad sense it can be said that Eurasianism is close to *Tengrism*, another post-Soviet branch of traditionalism. Tengrism claims that the proto-tradition is the cult of the god of heaven Tengri, and this cult is the most ancient monotheistic proto-religion, which is supposed to have been practiced by all the peoples of Central Asia long before Buddhism and Islam. According to the radical version of Murad Adzhayev (Murad Adzhi), Tengrism, which sprang up among the Turkic peoples in Altai, was the source of all the cultures and religions of India, the Middle and Near East, North Africa, and Europe, where it turned into Christianity. In the Asian regions of Russia and the former Soviet republics Tengrism

6 A.S. Panarin, *Rossiia v sotsiokul'turnom prostranstve Evrazii* (Moscow: Parad, 2014), 463.

7 E.L. Shiffers, *Religiozno-filosofskie proizvedeniia* (Moscow: Russkii Institut, 2005).

is widely recognized and is included in textbooks in some places; there are many organized groups of its followers.

(4) A Russian analog of Tengrism, albeit on a smaller scale, attempts to present the paganism of the ancient Slavs as a proto-tradition often covered by the blanket term *Rodnoverie* (Slavic native faith). Similar attempts are made by a number of small neo-Pagan movements such as *Velesov krug* (The circle of Veles), *Bayanova tropa* (The path of Bayan), and others, which preach the revival of the pantheon, myths, rituals, and customs of Pagan Slavs. They have no unity or any coherent construct of a proto-tradition. However, they often have a political orientation, which usually gravitates toward Russian nationalism.

(5) Traditionalism in the narrow sense should also include the well-known *Salafiyah* trend in modern radical Islam (*salaf* means “forefathers” in Arabic), which advocates a return to the original Islam of the time of Mohammed. Salafi trends and groups are active today all over the Islamic world, including Islamic regions in Russia. The proto-tradition here is the Islam of the early Muslim preachers, about which infinitesimally little is known, so that, like in other traditionalist trends, it is not so much about reconstruction as about arbitrary construction of the basic tradition. While it is common practice to include Salafis in traditionalism in the broad sense it has also been noted that by its nature the movement meets the definition of traditionalism in the narrow sense. The typological kinship of the Salafi ideology with the doctrine of the Aryan Nordic proto-tradition in German Nazism has been noted.

What exactly was it like – the world of nascent initial Islam? [...] Various attempts have been made to reconstruct it [...] The end product turned out to be a utopia that had never existed in reality. An extreme manifestation of Muslim reaction is today represented by people like Osama bin Laden. [...] These groups are sometimes called Salafite movements. [...] They create an imaginary world [...] and we discover a striking similarity between the imaginary world of ultra-reactionary Muslim movements and the reconstruction of imaginary German Aryanism [...] German Aryanism was an ultra-reactionary reconstruction of the past that never was. [...] It was argued that if the Germans had acted

like their Teutonic ancestors they would again control Europe. Here we discover an analogy with the ultra-reactionary Muslims who claim that if the Muslims of the world had acted like their righteous and devout ancestors they would again be in control of the Middle East.”⁸

Here we see yet another important feature of proto-tradition projects: the ultimate driving motives of these projects are usually political, geopolitical, and ideological goals and plans. From the outset, they separate these projects from the task of impartial research, of establishing the true historical and spiritual reality. As we shall see below, a natural correlation arises: the more radical and extremist the external motivations, the more blatantly unscientific and remote from the truth and reality the imagined “traditions” tend to become.

(6) The resemblance of Islamic and Aryan-Nordic traditionalist projects may appear to be formal and artificial. But this is not so. Russia today has at least one more example of such a resemblance. It is the traditionalism of Geydar Dzhemal. Dzhemal, a Shiite Islamist also known as “the metaphysician of Tradition,” in his treatise *Orientation-North* (1997) presents a philosophical transcription or parallel of the Nazi theosophy of Herman Wirth (1885–1981) with its theory of the northern land, Arctogeia, a land of superhumans called Hyperboreans. According to Dzhemal, the north is “the point where Cosmos ends,” “the last frontier of reality,” “the pole of the impossible,” and the orientation toward the north means the orientation toward getting rid of the “plague of being,” the cult of death, apocalypse and chaos. The universe is cyclic, ruled by the principle of “cosmic fire,” “titanic will” – this is the set of motives that resonate with the Teutonic mythology in the Nazi edition. An important feature of Dzhemal’s traditionalism is political activism of a markedly extremist kind; he was a government member of one of the warring Islamic groups in Tajikistan. The basic premises of Shia extremism have much in common with Salafism; thus, in an interview he proclaims the aim of Islamic

8 Z. Kogan, “Dialog avraamicheskikh religii,” *Mirovoi Obshchestvennyi Forum “Dialog Tsivilizatsii” Vestnik* 1 (2006): 195–96.

policy to be “people’s self-government corresponding to the democratic spirit of the original Islam.”⁹

(7) Extreme features of radial traditionalism are highlighted by the multifarious activities of Alexander Dugin, a noted political figure, journalist, and author of numerous books. Characteristically, he refers to his version of traditionalism as “total traditionalism.” It is a compilation, a hodgepodge of elements of many traditions and teachings obviously prompted by the exigencies of Russian politics. Let us look at its main components. The main content of “total traditionalism” is the Nazi Hyperborean geosophy of Wirth (Dugin and Dzhemal come from the same Moscow intellectual or occult underground circle), which is now presented in an upfront and detailed way; most of Dugin’s books were published by Arktogetia, a publishing house he founded. Dugin mostly presents his theories on the conceptual and methodological platform of René Guénon (1886–1951), who introduced substantial changes in the traditionalist discourse, generalizing it and shaping it into a coherent system. Added to this basis are new elements that adapt it to the modern Russian context. Chief of them are Turanism,¹⁰ due to which “total traditionalism” includes Eurasianism in its orbit (Dugin’s position is often described as neo-Eurasian) and Russian Orthodoxy.

The author chose to give prominence to the last element exactly at the time when he emerged on the Russian political scene: he had concluded that “Trinitary Orthodox metaphysics,” “which provides a full and perfect expression of all the most valuable revelatory vectors,” is the highest point of the development of tradition.¹¹ But his concept of Orthodoxy is somewhat peculiar: Dugin reveals a “strikingly literal, even totally structural [...] coincidence between the Christian tradition [...] and the paradigms of Hyperborean sacrality so brilliantly unpicked and restored by

9 See G. Dzhemal, *Osvobozhdenie Islama* (Moscow: Ummah, 2004).

10 Turanism is “a late 19th- and early 20th-century movement to unite politically and culturally all the Turkic, Tatar, and Uralic peoples living in Turkey and across Eurasia from Hungary to the Pacific. Its name is derived from Tūrān, the Persian word for Turkistan (i. e., the land to the north of Iran).” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 11 December 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Pan-Turanianism>.

11 A. G. Dugin, *Absoliutnaia rodina* (Moscow: Arktogetia, 1999), 153.

Wirth.”¹² Dugin has not contributed anything new to the body of fundamental ideas of traditionalism, nor has he discovered any new proto-tradition. However, his derivative and eclectic constructs are skillfully presented and appeal to the masses, attracting a following. They bolster his political activities, which peaked during the war in Donbass. Today Dugin is undoubtedly the most influential figure in Russian traditionalism, both in the narrow and broad senses.

Anatomy

The above impressive list of traditionalist concepts and movements clearly shows that traditionalism in Russia today is a significant element of the ideological and political situation. In starting to analyze and assess it, it has to be acknowledged that for all its heterogeneity and diversity, it has an important common feature: all these elements treat tradition as an instrument, a tool and means of achieving political and ideological goals that are extraneous to tradition. Traditionalism as such cannot set as its goal the simple and unbiased scientific study of tradition. Likewise, it does not seek to simply take part in tradition and become immersed in its living experience. Traditionalism is by no means the same as life within a tradition and faithfulness to tradition, and those who live in tradition are anything but traditionalists. Traditionalism either produces a certain construct that it bills as proto-tradition (traditionalism in the narrow sense) or manipulates some real tradition to fit some political, ideological, or religious project (traditionalism in the broad sense). For traditionalism is always a certain project, and tradition has to provide its foundation, and to this end it is fitted into a corresponding Procrustean bed inevitably distorting and twisting and subjecting it to vivisection. Or it is simply invented on somebody's commission.

Hence any traditionalism fulfils an assignment involving methodological or epistemological arbitrariness or plain subterfuge by passing off

12 Ibid., 745.

a fresh-baked construct as an ancient tradition or interpreting some real tradition, taken off the shelf for some extraneous reason, in an arbitrary way. And of course it seeks to present its concepts not as a loose hypothesis or a literary composition, but as a scientific truth. Thus, fulfilling an assignment presents a problem that different traditionalist trends tackle in their own way. However, it is easy to see some common principles and methods behind these solutions. By revealing them we may gain an insight into the way traditionalism works and peer into its secret laboratory.

One approach to solving the problem readily suggests itself: the required concepts, theories, and views should be presented in a way that is impeccable from the scientific point of view. To this end they should be given a science-like form, which is not a major challenge; but in addition, and most importantly, the substance of these concepts should be unassailable. On that key point intuition again comes to the rescue: the concepts should be taken from outside of the domain of standard scientific discourse with its norms and rules and the requirement of being in accord with the existing foundation of scientific principles and data, of being provable and verifiable, etc. In other words, one should find some *vacant space*, some discursive *Lebensraum* or Wild West, a space that is out of reach of existing science and in which anything can be declared to be a science. There are actually ample opportunities for finding such space. I will now name the two main strategies used by traditionalism before taking a closer look at how they are implemented.

The simplest and most obvious way is manipulating the chronotope. Academic science has yet to provide a detailed and authentic study of all the remote epochs while the body of sources and testimony in written and material culture shrinks dramatically as we go further back in time. Beyond a certain point in historical time lie areas of the global chronotope about which infinitesimally little is known – the space of the “pre-historic” or “proto-historical” existence of man; so, given the will, it is quite possible to colonize these spaces, filling them with the kind of content that is required for a traditionalist project, populating it with ethnic groups and races, and ascribing to them a suitable culture and most importantly, “a tradition.”

It will readily be seen that the majority of the abovementioned trends in modern Russian traditionalism – projects meeting the definition of

“traditionalism in the narrow sense” – follow the simple model of finding “vacant space” that can be filled arbitrarily. They differ only in the choice of the “vacant space” and the thoroughness in elaborating their teachings. As regards the choice of space, the body of trends mentioned here offers the following options:

- Proto-North (Hyperborea, Arktogeia) + proto-Russia (Dugin);
- Proto-North + proto-Islam (Dzhemal);
- Proto-Islam (Salafites);
- Proto-Slavdom (Slavic native faith, or *Rodnoverie*);
- Proto-religion of Central Asia (Tengrism).

The claim to belonging to such special (fictional!) space is usually established by the prefixes “proto-” and “paleo-.” Attaching these symbolic prefixes to categories of standard historical, ethnological, cultural-civilizational discourse has been a standard method of traditionalism since the times of Guénon, and one of the main methods of colonizing “vacant space.” This is how a traditionalist teaching is created: “proto-civilization,” “proto-language,” “paleo-continent,” etc., may be introduced in the vacant space and with a certain amount of effort a coherent alternative world history can be fabricated. To build such theories their authors even introduce traditionalist imitations of the main human sciences, which are called “sacral” or “symbolic” disciplines: thus sacral history, sacral geography, linguistics, and ethnology appear, corresponding to the proto-tradition and its space. However, only some projects attain such a global scale: among the Russian teachings it is the Dugin project and outside Russia the classic traditionalist projects of Guénon, Evola, and Wirth.

Another widespread strategy of gaining “vacant space” does not claim to present a newly discovered “ancient tradition” and is in that sense less radical. The main tool of this strategy is not the chronotope, but discourse, its key method being a mixing of totally different types of discourse. If discourses with diametrically opposite rules are mixed together, the result will be a free-for-all kind of discourse without any rules of rigor or correctness, so that any arbitrary propositions can claim to be true. This is the kind of strategy cultivated by traditionalism in the broad sense, which in

Russia is above all represented by Byzantinism. We have already pointed out its two varieties: the moderate one, leaning toward politics, and the radical one with a mystical-eschatological thrust. I will now proceed to explain their methodological and epistemological principles, which are, for our purpose, pretty much the same, only modern Byzantinism uses them with caution whereas radical Byzantinism goes to extremes.

As pointed out above, any traditionalism seeks to implement a certain project. The nucleus of the Byzantinist project is a blend of Orthodox and monarchic or imperial principles. Such a blend should be presented in a form that the broad popular consciousness, especially political circles and the educated part of society, find convincing. This calls for a scientific discourse; but, as I have stressed, no traditionalist project can be justified from the scientific standpoint, which makes it imperative to go beyond scientific discourse.

The concepts of Byzantinism are linked with Orthodoxy and draw mainly on the discourses of Holy Scripture and holy history and less frequently on the discourses of dogmatics, hagiography, etc. These are specialized discourses belonging to the sacral sphere in Christianity, and by borrowing elements thereof and drawing on their data Byzantinism is included in the category of *confessional discourses* (unlike traditionalism in the narrow sense, which presents its proto-tradition discourse as a discourse of scientific truth unconnected with confessional limitations). Such discourses combine sacred and secular elements. Because they follow different rules, how they are combined is crucial. Correct confessional discourses take into account the fact that sacral discourses call for special hermeneutics and special methodologies of reading, and use rules that are rooted in the foundations of the corresponding religion. Because of this the assertions and conclusions of sacral discourses have a different sphere of validity than secular discourses, and this difference is scrupulously taken into account in correct confessional discourses, as exemplified by Christian theology. Considering the nature of the discourses is particularly and vitally important in the case of mystical-eschatological discourses. This is a special kind of sacral discourse whose subject is real or supposed events of the direct encounter of man with sacral reality, such as visions, revelations, and transformations of systems of percep-

tion. Their organization, logic, and epistemology are far removed from and diametrically opposed to the characteristics of scientific discourse and require a special kind of treatment.

However, there are a host of incorrect confessional discourses in which secular and sacred discourses are mixed and blended indiscriminately. In such cases discourses of the sacred are exploited without taking into account their special nature on a par with secular and scientific discourses, which leads to various errors and false assertions. Going back to Byzantinism, I maintain that it has to be categorized as incorrect discourse. Indeed, the most actively used discourse here is apocalyptic, one of the most radical and offbeat mystical-eschatological discourses, in which incorrectness is taken to an extreme. By combining incompatibles, blending together opposite discourses into something that looks like science, Byzantinism ends up with a discourse that is “vacant space” or, to use an earlier expression, free-for-all discourse that follows no rules, is open to arbitrary statements, and makes it possible to “prove” anything. We can readily see it by taking a closer look at the notion of *katechon*, which forms the ideological nucleus of modern Russian Byzantinism.

The term “katechon” (Greek τὸ κατέχον “that which withholds” or ὁ κατέχων “the one who withholds”) goes back to the New Testament (2 Thessalonians 2:2–3,6-7:

“the day [of Christ] shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition. [...] And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [ὁ κατέχων] will let, until he be taken out of the way.”¹³

13 Quoted from the New King James Version, <https://azbyka.ru/bibliia/?2Thes.2&acgr>. Compare a different translation from the New International Version: “the day of the Lord [...] will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction[...]. And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.”

This is one of the principal texts of an apocalyptic and prophetic character that says that the coming of the Antichrist (“the son of perdition,” “the mystery of iniquity”) and his freedom of action are restrained by “ὁ κατέχων.” Since ancient times interpretations of the text have sought above all to guess what exactly St. Paul meant by the cryptonym “that which withholds,” or “katechon.” Various versions were put forward, with the main and long-established version of St. John Chrysostom identifying katechon with the Roman state. His argument goes as follows:

“When the Roman Empire is taken out of the way, then he [the Antichrist] shall come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one willingly submits himself to the Antichrist.”¹⁴

The identification of katechon with the power of Rome, and the claim that Rome prevented the coming of the Antichrist, contributed to the positive (re)assessment of the Roman Empire in Orthodox thought (and indeed in general Christian thought because this identification was characteristic of the Western Church Fathers as well – Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian, Augustine). Along with other factors the idea of empire as katechon also contributed to the emerging Byzantine ideology of the sacralization of power.

Later the so-called *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara (7th–8th centuries) linked “the one that withholds” in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 not with the Roman Empire, but with Byzantium (the Greek kingdom). This early Byzantine prophetic text exerted a considerable impact on historical thought in Muscovite Rus. For example, Philotheus of Pskov transfers some of the theses of Pseudo-Methodius concerning the Greek kingdom to the Moscow tsardom in his writings elaborating the idea of the Third Rome.¹⁵ However, neither Philotheus nor other authors treat

14 St. John Chrysostom, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 12 tt.*, vol. 11, book 2 (Moscow: Respublika, 2003), quoted from “Early Church Fathers on the Timing of the Rise of Antichrist,” Biblelight.net, <http://biblelight.net/fathers-on-antichrist.htm> <http://newadvent.org/fathers/23054.htm>.

15 For text and translation of the *Apocalypse*, see V.M. Istrin, *Otkrovenie Mefodii Patarskogo i apokrificheskie videniia Daniila v vizantiiskoi i slavianorusskoi literaturakh: Issledovanie i teksty* (Moscow, 1897). For an interpretation of “one who withholds” by Pseudo-Methodius, see Sinitsyna, *Tretii Rim*, 265–66.

the katechon as implying such a transition to Rus. Nowhere – neither in Russia, nor in Byzantium, nor in the West – is the text of 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 6–7 and its concept of “the one who withholds” used as the basis for any historiosophic or political-state concepts. They are confined entirely to eschatology, remaining within the special genre of apocalyptic prophecies and its main theme, i. e., the Antichrist. This genre is typically highly marginal, its authors are isolated figures and its audience is formed by ill-educated circles who tend to trust fantasies and easily fall prey to the spirit of alarmism and fanaticism. Its content can be described as “concrete eschatologism” and an authoritative Orthodox historian claiming to be “an apologist for Byzantinism” cannot help issuing this warning: “Concrete eschatologism has always easily degenerated into superstition.”¹⁶

In calm epochs the audience for this genre is small. But there are periods when apocalyptic discourse, talk about the Antichrist, “the last times,” and “the last kingdom” gain greater prominence, moving from the periphery closer to the center of public attention. The cataclysms of Russian history in the 20th century inevitably served as a catalyst for the interest in apocalyptic discourse. Present-day Russian Byzantinism is one of its manifestations and the form it has assumed is centered on the idea of the katechon. The idea is elaborated further to link it directly to Russia. This “Russian edition” is attributed to Sergey Nilus: part 3 of his well-known book *The Great in the Small* (1905/1911) presents, next to the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a modernized scheme or matrix of apocalyptic discourse totally oriented toward Russia as the key actor in the final act of world history that is already upon us.

The pattern is canonical: immediately before the end of world history the Christian Scriptures predict the coming of the Antichrist, “the son of perdition,” and his enthronement; the coming is already approaching (“the mystery of iniquity doth already work”), but it cannot occur as long as there is a katechon in the world. The new element is that this katechon can only be provided by Russia. “Russia is the last bulwark.[...] If Russia [...] becomes remiss in piety then what is predicted in the Apocalypse is sure to happen.” Apocalypticism is concrete and, according to

16 A. V. Kartashev, *Vossozhdanie Sviatoi Rusi* (Moscow: Stolitsa, 1991).

Nilus, the katechon is embodied in the leaders of Russian autocracy and Orthodoxy. Thus the Antichrist failed to triumph during the European troubles in 1848 because

“autocracy was in the strong hands of Emperor Nicholas I; Orthodoxy was safeguarded by the two Filarets, ‘the holy and the wise,’ and a cloud of hierarchs like stars in the firmament. St. Paul’s ‘the one who withholds’, ὁ κατέχων (2 Thessalonians 2:7), had not yet been taken out of the way.”

Emperor Alexander III was an equally strong katechon: “Russia and its peacemaker tsar were for the whole world what St. Paul designated by the word ὁ κατέχων (“the one who withholds”). [...] Such is the world significance of the reign of Alexander III.” Thereafter the need for the Russian katechon and its world importance continued to grow because “all the efforts of covert and overt, conscious and unconscious servants and workers of the Antichrist [...] are now directed toward Russia.” In the political and state sphere the Antichrist’s servants “strenuously propagate liberalism”: according to the *Protocols*, the Zion Elders state that “we have infected state bodies with liberalism, a lethal poison.”¹⁷

It is worth noting that although Nilus is extremely focused on Russia, his matrix records universal features of a certain type of consciousness: fanatical extremism fueled by an eschatological itch and building schemes of the end of the world. This type has since been very much in evidence. The anti-Semitic part of Nilus’s scheme was taken on board by Nazi doctrine and was actively used by Nazi propaganda. Today Nilus’s matrix is given a new lease on life by Islamic extremism, based entirely on the Muslim substratum in the framework of the latest traditionalist ideology of the Islamic State (IS). The gist of this ideology was thus summed up by an IS militant: “This revolution is [...] the end of the world preceded, according to Hadiths,¹⁸ by the victory over the West in Syria, the revival of the

17 S.A. Nilus, *Velikoe v malom* (Novosibirsk: Blagovest, 1994), 373, 365, 386–87, 396, 487.

18 The Hadiths are the collected sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.

Caliphate and the advent of the Prophet Isa [Jesus].”¹⁹ This is an excellent example of the translation of ideological matrices across epochs and cultures: the Nilus matrix has traveled from the Christian to the Islamic context, from the conservative to the revolutionary discourse, while preserving intact its readily recognizable apocalyptic nucleus.

Today’s Russian Byzantinism faithfully follows the Nilus matrix in reviving the idea of an Orthodox empire. Only two or three undesirable details have been dropped such as overt anti-Semitism and lurid pictures of the Serpent creeping over the map of Europe and “eating away and devouring all non-Jewish forces.” On the whole, “the idea of the gracious katechon became a commonplace in the milieu of Russian monarchists in the 20th century.”²⁰ A century after the publication of Nilus’s book new links have been added to the chain of Russian katechons and – take note – this includes even the theomachist Bolshevik regime. V. I. Karpets notes that

“the Soviet Union was heir to the Russian Empire, the Russian Empire was heir to the Kingdom of Muscovy and the Kingdom of Muscovy to three political-historical entities – the Kievan-Novgorodian Rus of the Rurikovichs, the Byzantine Orthodox Empire and the Eurasian Golden Horde”;²¹

the author stresses that inheritance of the katechonic mission “came with the territory.” Some Byzantinist texts openly claim that Stalin was also a katechon. Stalin’s empire turns out to be even closer to Byzantium than the Petersburg one because the Bolshevik “social experiment brought into politics and public life” masses of new people who “carried a powerful charge of traditional Moscow Byzantinism.”²² There the idea of katechon merges with the current strong nationalistic apologia of Stalinism

19 M. Efimova, “Konturnaia karta,” *Kommersant Vlast*, 29 June 2015, no. 25, p. 9, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2753304>.

20 V. Tsimbursky, “Apokalipsis na segodnia,” in *Eskhatologicheskii sbornik* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2006), 515.

21 V. I. Karpets, “Imperiia neizbezna,” in *Eskhatologicheskii sbornik* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2006), 491.

22 A. V. Efremov, “Dukh surovyy vizantiistva,” *Razvitie i ekonomika* 4 (2012): 50.

and the “Red Orthodox project,” which, among other things, is part of the motley ideological baggage of today’s Donbass separatists.

The geopolitical configuration is also changing. Needless to say, the servants and workers of the Antichrist still come from the West, but while for Nilus their center was “France, the Jewish-dominated nest of the Freemason Conspiracy,” today the main spawning ground is America. It has already occupied Russia:

“Russia is directly ruled from America. [...] We are an occupied territory. [...] The system of occupation includes the government directed from outside, the agents of influence, grant recipients, traitors on various levels and the propaganda machine.”²³

Its link with the “son of perdition” is obvious:

“The sinister country on the other side of the ocean [...] is asserting its planetary dominance [...] over all the Earth’s peoples. Over us. [...] This is strikingly reminiscent of the prophecies of the advent of the Antichrist.”²⁴

Furthermore, today’s version of the Nilus matrix aspires to a much higher theoretical level. While Nilus wrote religious essays for the public, the authors of modern Byzantinism for the most part belong to the scientific community and their articles (monographs are few and far between) often promote far-reaching conceptual constructions in history, the philosophy of history, and political philosophy. The main subjects are Russian and Byzantine history; the link between Byzantium and Russia; modern geopolitics; apologia of imperial principles, monarchy, and autocracy; and criticism of Western liberalism. In particular, the case for autocracy is made by positing a link between the tsar-autocrat and the katechon, “the one who withholds.”

23 E.A. Fedorov “Esli Rossiia osvoboditsia ot vneshnego upravleniia, to ona avtomaticheskii stanet derzhavoi nomer odin,” *Razvitie i ekonomika* 9 (2014): 94, 93, 91.

24 A.G. Dugin, *Absolutnaia rodina* (Moscow: Arktogetia, 1999), 657–58.

As for the theme of empire, its treatment is usually based on a leit-motif that is often expressed in Tyutchev's words: "Empires do not die." This is the underlying intuition of Byzantinist imperial thinking that is best expressed and justified exactly through the idea of the katechon, and today, of the Russian katechon. This line of thinking represents a continuous logical chain: the world is threatened by the Antichrist who is already at work, ergo to preserve the world and the course of history "that which withholds" is needed, the one who withholds can be only an empire that is supported by faith in Christ (and also the Roman Empire because, according to Luke 2:1–3, it included Christ in its population census. "Our Lord was written into Roman power" is the argument of Kosma Indikoplov (6th century), which was taken up by Philotheus), therefore, the existence of the Russian Orthodox Empire in our day guarantees the existence of the world and history. If history is to continue this empire has to be. This is the innermost nerve of Russian Byzantinism.

Alas, this does not rule out the fact that the nerve is but a phantom or sick nerve, a disease of social consciousness. Quite obviously, the above logical chain consists of patently unprovable propositions in all its links and all its implications. The majority of them hark back to long-familiar stereotypes that form part of the peculiar discourse of end-of-the-world prophecies, a prophetic and eschatological discourse of an utterly cryptic, illogical, and obscure nature. This discourse stands apart even in the circle of sacral discourses as a direct opposite not only of scientific discourse, but of any discourse that is epistemologically clear and transparent. Meanwhile traditionalists try to make it the basis of their concepts of the philosophy of history and political philosophy and develop an ambitious project to determine Russia's geopolitical strategies. In the process, of course, they mix together absolutely incompatible discourses and end up with a no-holds-barred free-for-all discourse that provides them with the coveted "vacant space."

The Antichrist takes on a new role, that of a broad discursive opportunity. What embodies his threat, from where it may strike, who and what contribute to it – all this is totally unknown and unknowable, but traditionalists discuss it all in a scientific guise and in great detail. In determining the salutary katechon and pointing a finger at the servants of the Antichrist, in executing and pardoning, they comfortably deploy under

the screen of Orthodox eschatology their own likes and dislikes, complexes and idiosyncrasies. It is hard to disagree with a critic's judgment: "Modern Byzantine fantasies [...] are the narrative of a medical case."²⁵

Just one more thing can be added. Without any eschatology, which should not be mentioned needlessly, the Antichrist is a fixture of modern Russian discourse. Traditionalists trumpet his successes, ascribing to him a great role and power in the modern world. In this way they undoubtedly inflate his significance and advertise him. But does it not mean that they are the servants of the Antichrist in the sphere of public relations?

Conclusions

As we have seen, anatomizing traditionalism supports our preliminary assessments. No version of today's Russian traditionalism and Byzantinism is conducive to genuine insight into tradition and immersion in its living experience. They all speculate on tradition in various ways, mainly in the field of history and politics, with history leaning toward historiography and politics leaning toward geopolitics, i. e., areas long favored by the authors of way-out para-scientific theories. These speculations have certain basic elements. The main method of traditionalism is creating a "vacant space" in which it is free to develop its unprovable theories. As a rule, the "vacant space" is created by clearing up chunks of historical time, past and/or future. A model example is the concept of "primordial tradition" that underpins all of "traditionalism in the narrow sense." It adds to the real historical past an imaginary prehistoric stretch its authors fill *ad libitum*, however they like, and using this filling, in light of their imagined tradition, the whole picture of the real past is cardinally changed and reformatted. In other words, proto-tradition is used to supplant or even to *steal the past*. Thus, in traditionalism-Byzantinism apocalyptic and eschatological schemes create a "vacant space" that defies critical reason, while interpretations of the Apocalypse are a special genre in

25 A. Lyusy, "Vizantiiskii narrative," *Razvitie i ekonomika* 4 (2012): 235.

which fantasies and speculations have always thrived. Modern Byzantinism translates these speculations into a quasi-scientific discourse spawning futurological concepts and strategies and creating an image or model of the future in accordance with a certain apocalyptic scheme. In other words, apocalyptic schemes are used to *hijack the future*. One can argue that *stealing the past and hijacking the future are the two main operational techniques of traditionalism*.

Bearing in mind the assessments given above we can conclude that modern traditionalism is a profoundly false form of ideological life. It is similar to faking antiquities – faking paintings by old masters, and pieces of furniture and artifacts of ancient cultures has long been practiced in the world of art and antiquities. One cannot but see that consciousness engaged in faking tradition or stylizing as tradition is diametrically opposite to consciousness that has a tradition and is based on tradition. Therefore traditionalism poses a threat to tradition and tradition needs to be protected against traditionalists.

Lack of intellectual scruple, faking, stylization, mystification, and often obscure roots and total fantasy – all this likens traditionalism typologically and epistemologically to such phenomena as occultism, theosophy, anthroposophy, and the New Age subculture. They all share a common quality – lack of disciplined thought and cognition, lack of elementary methodological culture and, as a consequence, intellectual second-ratism. Mikhail Bakhtin in his time noted that such phenomena cannot be first-rate in principle. One might have thought that one variation of traditionalism stands apart from all others and has nothing to do with the criticized features. Moderate Byzantinism focused on political-state aspects shies away from fantastic theories, be it proto-tradition or the symbolic Serpent with its heads devouring Russia. But on closer inspection that version is not much different from the others. As has been said, it is best represented by the film *The Lesson of Byzantium*. This is the comment it has drawn from Viktor Zhivov, a world authority on links between Russia and Byzantium:

“People who are ignorant of history should refrain from making comments on it [history – *S.H.*] being aware of their igno-

rance. These words fully apply to [...] the film about Byzantium. The paradigm its authors construct does not exist in reality.”²⁶

So, that too is a fake, the only difference being that this time around it is a politically commissioned piece of work without a shadow of mystique. The effect is the same: traditionalism invariably brings ignorance and inferiority to Russian culture.

Yet, in spite of all this, traditionalism, and especially Byzantinism, is growing stronger and stronger. Its champions are full of confidence: “The ideological and socio-political practices of today’s Russia [...] will forever fall back on Great Russian Byzantinism.”²⁷ “Byzantinism is emerging as a kind of unofficial ideology, an inner metaphysical dimension of the church and state life of Russia.”²⁸ Current Russian reality provides ample grounds for such confidence. Pompous celebrations have just been held of the millennium of the Russian monastic presence on Mount Athos, and this event sent a wave of enthusiastic wishes of “*Many Years to Basileos Vladimir!*”²⁹ over the Internet. This gives cause for concern. Marginal shoddy thinking that spawns pseudo-scientific and pseudo-mystical theories and sees enemies everywhere is coming to the surface and claims to occupy the high ground in the country’s ideological life. This is certainly a symptom of an unhealthy atmosphere and unhealthy processes in society, a sign of a dangerous downgrading of intellectual culture.

The issue of how to counter this trend is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it has to be stressed that modern Orthodox thought is fully equipped to answer the challenge of traditionalism. A correct understanding of tradition and the art of living inside tradition has been handed down from century to century. Today it can be found in the theology of culture of Father Georgy Florovsky and in the synergic anthropology that develops it today. It consolidates again the old Orthodox paradigm of the

26 V. M. Zhivov, “Issledovanie togo, kak Rossiia sviazana s Vizantiei, dolzhno byt’ tonkim i niuansirovannym”: Interv’iu V. M. Zhivova,” *Razvitie i ekonomika* 4 (2012): 170.

27 A. V. Efremov, “Dukh surovoyi vizantiistva,” *Razvitie i ekonomika* 4 (2012): 51.

28 I. L. Brazhnikov, “Vizantizm: stilizatsiia ili faktor identichnosti?” *Razvitie i ekonomika* 4 (2012): 85.

29 This is a clear reference to Vladimir Putin’s rule.

Living Tradition: the spiritual tradition is the preservation and passing on of the living experience of the Christian's communion with Christ. It is a school of personal spiritual experience, and not an ideology, be it imperial, apocalyptic, or any other. It draws on the spiritual practice of Orthodox hesychasm, and preserving this invigorating and directing link is a reliable counterweight to all the manipulations and speculations about tradition, all attempts to create ideological fakes, of which modern traditionalism is one example. Adequate treatment of tradition contrasts with traditionalism on yet another important point. Traditionalism is fully in the framework of the old philosophical and political thinking based on binary oppositions, above all the opposition of tradition and modernity. But seeing tradition as a school of living experience that does not make an absolute of any entities and institutions prompts an interpretation of tradition as creativity, thus paving the way to resolving these oppositions. As leading authorities on philosophy and sociology admit, resolving the tradition-modernity opposition is a prerequisite for the development of society today. Alain Badiou writes: "A situation has to be created that escapes this alternative... [the tradition-modernity alternative. – *S.H.*] you must not let yourself be structured by this opposition."³⁰ This means that unlike the strategies of traditionalism, strategies based on true loyalty to the spiritual tradition do not structure new situations of conflict and do not increase global threats and risks.

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30 A. Badiou (with F. Tarby), *Philosophy and the Event* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 94.

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Translated by Yevgeny Filippov

Andrey Shishkov

Two Understandings of Tradition in Russian Orthodox Theology

In order to understand the issue of traditional values in Christian communities such as Russian Orthodoxy, one should first consider the theological understanding of the concept of “Tradition.” I will examine this question primarily from the perspective of Russian Orthodox theology.

In Russian Orthodoxy, ecclesiastical Tradition (*Traditsiia*) is also called *Predanie*. Etymologically, the word *predanie* indicates the transmission (*peredacha*) of a thing or idea. There is no substantive difference in Orthodoxy between the meanings of *traditsiia* and *predanie*. The Russian Orthodox Church employs these terms synonymously.

When discussing the ecclesiastical understanding of Tradition, one should distinguish what could be called “Living Tradition” from various conceptions of tradition that are constructs of theological thought. “Living Tradition” is a non-reflexive narrative of an uninterrupted transmission of church experience and practices. The religious consciousness absorbed in “Living Tradition” does not give a second thought to the origins of this tradition. One could imagine “Living Tradition” in the form of a chain. As a rule, the bearer of “Living Tradition” does not see the beginning of this chain or even the places where its links are joined, but has a sense of communion in the chain. From this perspective, people generally consider as traditional the experience of the immediately preceding historical period and not the earlier periods of church history, because the comprehension of the earlier periods requires reflection and the con-

structed work of the imagination. Thus, in modern Russian Orthodoxy, people consider many practices traditional that only relate to the recent past (say, the 1970s to 1990s) and that were considered new and occasionally even avant-garde when they first appeared (for example, frequently partaking of the Eucharist at a church service¹). This “Living Tradition” could also be called “Fluid Tradition,” since it is constantly changing, but its bearers, being immersed within the flow, do not sense the changes or discontinuities.

In Orthodoxy, the conceptualization of Tradition is a reaction to the emergence of historical criticism and historicism. In antiquity and in the medieval period, theologians worked with all available sources without distinguishing any historical stages of development. Of course, Holy Scripture has always had a special status, but the works of the Church Fathers were considered as if they were all “contemporaries.” The well-known formula of St. Vincent of Lérins, who defines the catholicity of the church, comes to mind: *Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est* (that faith that has been believed everywhere, always, and by all). That formula contains no historical time. The Fathers of various periods of church history seem to be on equal footing.

With the emergence of a historical consciousness in the modern era, historical criticism, which subjected the medieval conception of Tradition to deconstruction, gained momentum. Placing creedal and theological sources into their historical context allowed for the exposure of discontinuities and contradictions in the course of the historical development of ecclesiastical thought, which brought into question the very notion of catholicity. Under the weight of historical criticism, “that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all” was stripped of integrity, which until then had been an essential attribute of catholicity.

It was in the context of modernism that various conceptions of tradition, which represented various methods for unifying the historical with the universal (catholic), began to emerge. A search for the “living and mysterious thread binding the whole historical fullness of Church

1 Today in the Russian Church, it has become the norm to partake of the Eucharist once or twice a month, while in the imperial period the usual practice was to have communion several times per year (usually at the end of each of the four fasts).

life into one catholic whole”² became the task of theologians. According to Florovsky, Holy Tradition is “a concrete expression of the Church’s catholic self-consciousness,” and in a similar vein, he wrote, “The Christian Faith is essentially historical and historically concrete.”³

Jaroslav Pelikan, an American theologian and church historian who converted late in life from Protestantism to Orthodoxy, wrote,

“Tradition without history has homogenized all the stages of development into one statically defined truth; history without tradition has produced a historicism that relativized the development of Christian doctrine in such a way as to make the distinction between authentic growth and cancerous aberration seem completely arbitrary.”⁴

Attempts to conceptualize Tradition can be divided into two basic approaches that I will call liberal and conservative. The liberalism and conservatism of the two approaches should be understood relatively; they are liberal or conservative only in relation to each other. Similar designations are in no way connected with political liberalism or political conservatism. Many authors who have worked within the liberal paradigm of Tradition have been rather conservative politically and culturally. Proponents of both approaches agree with one another in their view that one can only discuss Holy Tradition in the context of the life of the Church. Tradition is maintained in the Church by the Holy Spirit and is actualized by each member while experiencing the life of Christ. The two approaches differ in their definition of authentic Tradition, their method for working with Tradition, and their stated criteria for belonging to that Tradition.

The liberal conception of Tradition distinguishes the unchanging substantive core that expresses the true essence of the Christian faith

2 George Florovsky, “The Catholicity of the Church,” in *The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, Vol. 1, ed. Richard S. Haugh (Vaduz: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 45.

3 Georgii Florovskii, “Bogoslovskie otryvki,” *Put’* 31 (1931): 23; Florovskii, “Dom Otchii,” *Put’* 7 (1927): 65.

4 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 9.

from the temporary strata that are determined by historical context and that frequently overshadow or obscure this core. Proponents of the liberal paradigm consider this unchanging core to be the true Church Tradition to which it is imperative to return. The liberal approach proposes a free, critical rethinking of Church Tradition by (1) separating out and describing the core of the Christian faith, (2) purifying it from elements that obscure it, and (3) returning to the authentic foundation of the faith through the actualization of the unchanging core in modern times. Here, the instrument for the construction of Tradition is theological reason, which distinguishes the unchanging core of the faith, compares it to various elements of Church Tradition, and from this perspective considers the current state of the church. Significantly, the liberal approach to Tradition requires the freedom to theologize while taking into account the results of historical criticism.

As Russian theologian and social thinker George Fedotov writes:

“The Church’s Holy Tradition is included within the common stream of historical tradition, which is ever complex, ever nebulous, and humanly interwoven in verity and falsity. Just as sin resides within human righteousness (holiness), so falsity resides within human tradition – and even in ecclesiastical tradition. The task of moral *askesis* consists in the pruning of sin and in the process of a person’s sanctification. The task of theology consists in the release of the pure first principles of Holy Tradition from under the historical dross that has built up in time alongside religious gains.”⁵

Examples of the liberal approach to Tradition are theological projects like the Eucharistic ecclesiology of Fr. Nicholas Afanasiev and the liturgical theology of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. In each case, the aforementioned theologians make an attempt to ascertain the core of the Christian faith and to separate it from the historically conditioned strata, which they characterize as a distortion of Tradition. For example, Schmemmann examines

5 Georgii Fedotov, “Pravoslavie i istoricheskaia Kritika,” *Put’* 33 (1932): 4.

the Divine Service as the source of theological thought. Yet, with this in mind, he states that it is necessary to return to the authentic (traditional) understanding of the Liturgy as an eschatological event. He writes,

“The Divine Liturgy should once more be interpreted as the *leitourgia* of the Church, and this is the theologian’s task. But in order to resolve this task, we need to discover the true Liturgical Tradition again, and this is the liturgist’s task. If the work of the theologian is to purify the Divine Liturgy, the work of the Divine Liturgy is to return to theology that eschatological fullness, which only the Divine Liturgy can ‘actualize.’”⁶

Here, we see the merging of the work of the theologian and the historian (the liturgist).

The conservative approach to Tradition consists of the adoption of the accumulated church heritage. From this point of view, Tradition itself can be depicted as a cloud (or “cloud storage”), in which private theological opinions, practices, and traditions (with a little “t”) are located alongside the foundational truths of the faith. The conservative conception of Tradition does not assume the existence of “an external criterion” that defines affiliation with Holy Tradition. This criterion is a personal mystical-religious experience in which one meditates upon the aspects of Tradition “through the feat of prayer, through the spiritual development of the believing personality, [and] through living communion with the eternal experience of the Church.”⁷ Florovsky further writes, “The identity of experience is loyalty to Tradition.”⁸ In other words, the comprehension of ecclesiastical Tradition occurs not on the basis of an analysis of Tradition and the subsequent synthesis of a theological position, but through the reinforcement of an experience that is considered similar to that of the Holy Fathers.

6 Aleksandr Schmemmann, “Bogoslovie i liturgicheskoe predanie,” in *Sobranie statei, 1947–1983* (Moscow: Russkii Put’, 2009), 230.

7 Florovskii, “Dom Otchii,” 82.

8 Florovsky, “The Catholicity of the Church,” 49.

If in the liberal approach, the basic instrument of work with Tradition is theological reason, in the conservative approach it is mystical-religious intuition. This intuition allows one to understand whether any particular theological opinion relates to Tradition or not. In such an approach, theology's task is preservation. Theology goes beyond the cloud's boundaries and works to excise heterodox elements if they suddenly float to the surface. In light of such an orientation, "preservation theology" is preoccupied more with the search for and exposure of heresy than with free theologizing and the synthesizing of theological conceptions.

Florovsky writes,

"Theologizing in its roots should be intuitive, defined as the *experience of faith [and] vision*, and not as a self-satisfying dialectic movement of inert abstract concepts. For in general, dogmas of faith are the truths of experience, the truths of life, and they can and should be revealed not through logical synthesis or analysis, but only through spiritual life, through the presence of testified dogmatic definitions of experience. At the basis of Orthodox 'theological opinions' and judgments there should lie not a [logical] conclusion but direct vision, contemplation."⁹

Florovsky directly attacks the approach I called "liberal" above:

Mistaken and untrue is that theological minimalism, which wants to choose and set apart the "most important, most certain, and most binding" of all the experience and teachings of the Church. This is a false path, and a false statement of the question. Of course, not everything in the historical institutions of the Church is equally important and venerable; not everything in the empirical actions of the Church has even been sanctioned. There is much that is only historical. However, we have no outward criterion to discriminate between the two. The methods of outward historical criticism are inadequate and insufficient.

9 Florovskii, "Dom Otchii," 82.

Only from within the Church can we discern the *sacred* from the *historical*. From within we see what is catholic and belongs to all time, and what is only “theological opinion,” or even a simple casual historical accident.¹⁰

An example of the conservative approach to Tradition is the theological project of the neo-patristic synthesis proposed by Georges Florovsky and developed further by Vladimir Lossky, Fr. John Meyendorff, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, and today by Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, Fr. John Behr, and others. At present, this project has become dominant in Orthodox theology.

I have to note one apparent peculiarity in Florovsky’s position. In his work *The Ways of Russian Theology*, he subjects all Russian theological thought that emerged outside the influence of Byzantine theology to a devastating criticism. To him, the theological tradition that took shape from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries proved to be irrelevant. He calls this “Western captivity” and “pseudomorphosis” – a distortion and perversion. According to Nikolai Berdyaev, “Florovsky [in *The Ways of Russian Theology*] essentially denies everyone, all Russian theology and philosophical thought, everywhere condemns Western influence.”¹¹ How does such a position correspond with the conservative approach to Tradition? Since one’s affiliation with Tradition is determined by a religious feeling, Florovsky feels that Russian theology of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries does not reflect the Tradition of the Church:

“The crisis of Russian Byzantinism in the sixteenth century was also a departure of Russian thought from the patristic tradition. [...] In theology, the patristic style and method were lost. [...] It is not enough to be acquainted with the texts and to know how to draw quotes and arguments from them. One should possess the theology of the Fathers from within. Intuition is perhaps more

10 Florovsky, “The Catholicity of the Church,” 50.

11 Nikolai Berdyaev, “Ortodoksiia i chelovechnost’,” *Put’* 53 (1937): 61–62.

important for this than erudition, for intuition alone revives their writings and makes them a *witness*.”¹²

Florovsky excludes Russian theological thought from ecclesiastical Tradition like an editor cuts a film. Pseudomorphosis cannot be part of the Holy Tradition, which means that it should be deleted, as should other heresies and distortions. “Preservation theology” ensures that such elements are excised. For this reason, Florovsky’s position fits well within the conservative approach to Tradition. Florovsky says:

“The retrieval of patristic style is the first and main postulate of the Russian theological renaissance. I do not mean a mere ‘restoration,’ repetition, or going back. At any rate, ‘to the Fathers’ always means forward, not backward. I am talking of being faithful to the patristic spirit, not the letter.”¹³

Other proponents of the conservative approach to Tradition are not as radical as Florovsky. They consider both Russian imperial and Soviet works within “Tradition.” The works of all theologians and ecclesiastical writers ever glorified into the Communion of Saints automatically fall within the confines of Holy Tradition. Those who hold a conservative approach to Tradition create various notions of the *consensus patrum*, which are called upon to remove contradictions of opinion between the Holy Fathers. In its extreme expression, the conservative approach to Tradition is returning to a medieval understanding in which history is absent.

In modern Russian Orthodoxy, the conservative paradigm of relating to Tradition dominates. The Russian Orthodox Church formulates its attitude toward the modern world within this paradigm. Yet, in my view, the problem with such an approach and the “preservation theology” associated with it consists in the way its theo-analytical toolkit is subordinate to the task of unmasking heresies. “Preservation theology” does not offer a positive program of a theological apprehension of the day-to-

12 Georgii Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogosloviiia* (Minsk: Izdatel'stvo Belorusskogo Ekzarkhata, 2006), 495–96.

13 *Ibid.*, 496.

day realities of the modern world and their correlation to Church Tradition. Such a position is inherently reactionary.

And although Florovsky claimed that we should create a new theology that would apprehend the day-to-day realities of the modern world “in the spirit of the Fathers,” neither he nor his successors could offer a convincing social and political theology. Today’s proponents of the neo-patristic synthesis see their task entirely as the retrieval and compilation of the Fathers’ opinions from the entire mass of the sacred patristic legacy in order to explain modern processes. Such an approach to theology makes it completely irrelevant to the very realities of life in which the Church exists.

For example, today’s Russian Orthodoxy believes that monarchic polity better corresponds to Orthodoxy than does democracy (and this is on record, including in the church’s official documents). This has taken place because the vast majority of the Church Fathers lived under monarchy, and some of them justified it from theological positions; but one can only count on one hand the number of saints who would have written in defense of democracy. Yet, the restoration of monarchy in its medieval understanding is already impossible, since it has long been impossible to deny the modernist idea of the sovereignty of the people as a source of power in the state.

The irrelevance of the conclusions of “preservation theology” leads believers to some form of alienation from ecclesiastical doctrinal authority. Believers thus search for answers to their questions “on the side,” turning to secular notions and explanatory strategies. They do not understand why monarchy is good, but democracy, human rights, and capitalism are bad. Is it merely because the latter did not exist in the times of the Church Fathers? At the recent Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete, participants seriously discussed the question of whether it was permissible to utilize the term “human person” (*prosopon*) in church documents dedicated to social issues.¹⁴ One of the obvious proponents of the neo-patristic synthesis, Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, explained the

14 “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World,” Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, accessed 30 August 2017, https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world?_101_INSTANCE_VA0WE2pZ4Y01_languageId=en_US.

problem by stating that the Holy Fathers never used the term *person* in their writings.¹⁵

A second problem facing “preservation theology” is that one cannot even call it “theology” in the strictest sense of the word. The most essential thing – the theological element – is missing from this stance. This theology does not correspond to God, but to a sacralized historical tradition that exists “in this age” – the *saeculum*. In one sense, it represents a secularized form of religious thought. The example of the debates around the human person wonderfully illustrates this point. In the case of Metropolitan Hierotheos, a commitment to historical tradition has won out over a theological approach. He rejected the term “human person” not because there can be no theological content within it, but because the Greek Holy Fathers did not ever use it. As a result, the Church continues to speak with believers in a little-understood, archaic language.

The absence of a relevant contemporaneity of theology does not allow believers to occupy any kind of theological position in relation to the problems and conclusions of the modern world. Moreover, this void in the place of theology actually *becomes* a position. And this is a common problem for today’s Orthodox socio-religious thought, from representatives of the church leadership to popular publicists.

The liberal conception of Tradition looks more optimistic in this respect. It allows one to freely theologize with a reliance upon the unchanging core of the Christian faith and offers theological solutions in the language of its time, under the condition of maintaining the crucial meanings of the Christian religion. Certainly, one should separate one’s own religious thoughts here from that which could be called the cultural identity of Christianity. The latter could be deeply rooted within Tradition, but that said, it does not relate to the basic principle of the Christian faith – human salvation – and may even contradict it. In the final analysis, it is the salvation of the human person for eternity, and not the defense of a cultural identity of Christianity, that should be the priority for the Christians.

15 See more about this discussion: Paul Ladouceur, “Human Beings or Human Persons?” *Public Orthodoxy*, accessed 30 August 2017, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2017/06/06/human-beings-or-persons/>.

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Translated by April L. French

Aristotle Papanikolaou
**I Am a Traditionalist,
Therefore I Am***

Amidst the culture wars, the word “traditionalist” has gained currency and has been co-opted in a variety of ways. Broadly, it is a self-naming mostly by those who identify as religious and are seemingly faithful to their religious tradition in the face of attacks either against religion in general or by others within their religious tradition who challenge various givens of that tradition. For the Orthodox Christian crowd, a very simple example would suffice: a self-named traditionalist would typically oppose the ordination of women to the diaconate, while a non-traditionalist – usually called, pejoratively, a liberal – might challenge the givenness of the non-ordination of women.¹

An extension of “traditionalist” is “traditional values,” which has come to mean a very select set of “values” related to gender and sexuality. “Traditional values” has very recently become a transnational slogan that cuts across the East-West divide, since there are Westerners (American Evangelicals) making alliances with Easterners (Russian Orthodox actors)

* This text was first published on Public Orthodoxy, 19 February 2019: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2019/02/19/i-am-a-traditionalist-therefore-i-am/>.

1 AnnMarie Mecera et al., “Toward a Reasoned and Respectful Conversation about Deaconesses,” *Public Orthodoxy*, 17 April 2018, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2018/04/17/conversation-about-deaconesses/>.

in order to advance “traditional values” through established national and international legal structures.

The meaning of “traditional values” has been further amplified with the neologism “Orthodox morality.”² I say neologism, because never in the history of Christianity – at least Orthodox Christianity – has the word “Orthodox” functioned as an adjective for “morality.” Never. This neologism has a very non-traditionalist – dare I say, modern – ring to it.³ It may appeal to those attracted to a version of the so-called “Benedict Option,” but this Donatist logic of purity was condemned a long time ago.

My thesis is very simple: the use of the word “traditionalist” and its derivative forms (“Orthodox morality,” “traditional values”) is philosophically untenable, i. e., it’s wrong. Why? Because we are all traditionalists. How? Because it is impossible to exist as a human being without tradition. Put another way, traditionless existence is impossible. Put yet another way, humans exist not simply in and through, but as tradition.

If this thesis is unexpected, what may be more shocking is the fact that it’s actually been around for a long time; I’m definitely not the first to articulate it. I’m simply repeating an axiom that has gained a fairly wide philosophical consensus and was probably most famously articulated by the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, whose work many of the so-called traditionalists appropriate.⁴ They do so selectively, because they fail to mention that for MacIntyre, everything is tradition, even the liberalism against which the “traditionalists” self-define. The fact that liberal democracy itself is a tradition sustained by particular civic practices was definitively shown by the Princeton philosopher, Jeffrey Stout.⁵

At this point, a “traditionalist” might accept that all is tradition and that we are all traditionalists but would probably argue that the use of

2 Rod Dreher, “Male and Female He Did Not Create Them,” *The American Conservative*, 3 February 2016, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/male-female-god-transgender/>.

3 George Demacopoulos, “‘Traditional Orthodoxy’ as a Postcolonial Movement,” *The Journal of Religion* 97, no. 4 (2017): 475–99.

4 Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Tradition as Reason and Practice: Amplifying Contemporary Orthodox Theology in Conversation with Alasdair MacIntyre,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2015): 91–104.

5 Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, in association with Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 2004).

the word “traditionalist” is meant specifically against those who identify with the shared religious tradition but are trying to change it in order to adapt to the current culture and to be more relevant. They might conclude that those who argue, for example, that women should be ordained to the diaconate contaminate the Orthodox tradition with godless liberal tradition. This approach would actually be more philosophically and theologically tenable, but if that is what’s being claimed, then the word “traditionalist” needs an adjective, like “pure,” in order to indicate what kind of traditionalism is being evoked.

This argument, however, is still not quite reflective of the reality. How would one describe someone who practices Orthodox Christianity faithfully, accepts the authority of the dogmatic proclamations of the Ecumenical Councils, believes that Jesus is fully divine and fully human, that God became human so that humans can become gods (theosis), and on the basis of these particular “traditional” beliefs argues that discussion and change are possible within the tradition on issues of, say, gender and sexuality? If there is no such thing as traditionless thinking, and if these arguments are being made based on thinking in and through the beliefs of the Orthodox tradition, is this not “Orthodox traditionalism”?

One could argue that simply making claims about gender and sexuality is an infiltration of a mutually exclusive tradition. But how is that the case if the arguments made are actually based on theological principles and beliefs constitutive of Orthodoxy? And if one claims that the very fact that we are discussing these issues is only because of liberalism, then the counterargument is the historical fact that there were Pagan philosophers challenging Christian thinkers with questions. If, in fact, the source of the questions disqualifies those very questions, then on that basis, the entire history of Christian thought should be rejected.

What these “traditionalists” often forget or choose to ignore is that Alasdair MacIntyre explicitly stated that while traditions themselves are often differentiated by distinct epistemic presuppositions, a tradition must open itself to all questions and challenges if it is to survive as a tradition. The viability of a tradition will depend on how well it can answer the challenges and questions of a particular era while incorporating the best insights of a rival tradition in a way that does not threaten the internal coherency of the tradition. This does not mean a tradition must change

its givens; but, if those givens fail to be credible responses on the basis of the tradition's own non-negotiable presuppositions, then that tradition will, in fact, not survive.

What the word "traditionalist" muddles is the real debate, which is not whether one is a traditionalist or non-traditionalist, faithful or non-faithful. The fault line exists at the disagreement over the implications of presuppositions or beliefs held in common by those who adhere to the tradition. To return to our example, when I argue that the Orthodox Church should allow women deacons, it's not to make Orthodoxy more relevant, but it's because there does not exist a good theological argument consistent with the belief in God's Incarnation (which includes the Cross and Resurrection) that would preclude women serving the Church in this way. That would also serve as my guiding light when thinking about issues of sexuality.

One thing is for certain: the non-religious would, at least, consider me a traditionalist; but their use of the term is simply the flip side of the bad religious use of the term. Again, it's not about being a traditionalist versus a non-traditionalist; it's about identifying what kind of traditionalist we are. For the record, I am an Incarnational traditionalist. I suspect those with whom I disagree on what is discussable in the Orthodox tradition share this epistemic presupposition. Our real debate is over the acceptable amount of diversity that can exist among those who share a common dogmatic tradition.

We should, thus, recognize our common presuppositions and affirm those common presuppositions, especially the dogmas, as ground rules for debate. We need to stop using words like "traditionalist," "traditional values," and "Orthodox morality," which only obfuscate what we share in common or, at worst, become rhetorical tools for demonization. These words are conversation stoppers, which, for anyone who knows the history of Christianity, is actually antithetical to the living Tradition.

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Sergey Chapnin

The Rhetoric of Traditional Values in Contemporary Russia

Although the notion of “traditional values” has recently become popular in Russia, it is actually a new phenomenon in both religious and political discourse. In the 1990s, the most common and established use of the word “values” was with adjectives such as “spiritual” and “moral,” while the word “traditional” was mostly attributed to religions.

In a certain sense, the very concept of “spiritual and moral values” was used as a transitory one. Having emerged between the 1980s and the 1990s as an antithesis to Communist values, this concept was nevertheless based on an understanding of spirituality that was exceptionally wide and could not be limited exclusively to the Orthodox framework.

As a result, the new social and political situation required a clarification of notions and definitions.

One can trace the use of the concept of “traditional values” in the Orthodox context with a high level of certainty. For several years (2000–2012), it was used only by Metropolitan Kirill and a circle of publicists around the WRPC¹. Yet, even in this milieu, it took a while for the notion to take root. In an extended collection of articles and speeches published

1 The World Russian People's Council (WRPC) – a public forum founded in 1993 and patronized by Kirill (Gundyaev), then the metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who has been the patriarch of Moscow and all Russia since 2009; the WRPC plays the role of the main Orthodox think tank.

in 2008, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, the closest assistant to Metropolitan Kirill, uses the expression “traditional values” only three times, with one of those being a hybrid: “traditional, spiritual and moral values.”² In the wider church context outside of Metropolitan Kirill’s circle, the concept of traditional values was not in use and went largely undetected. Only much later, somewhere around 2010, did politicians begin to use this expression, following Vladimir Putin.

Such a remarkable gap indicates that at that time the Metropolitan Kirill’s ideas did not have much influence even within the Russian Orthodox Church. His statements did not influence the public and political sphere and rarely caused a serious reaction in Russian society until they became an element of state ideology and, by extension, state propaganda.

Kirill (Gundyaev): Traditional Values 1.0

It is relatively easy to trace when the rhetoric of traditional values made its grand entrance into the agenda of the Russian Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev) wrote the crucial text for understanding the church’s approach to this subject, an article titled “Norms of Faith as Norms of Life,” published in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* in February 2000.³ In the article, Metropolitan Kirill used the term “traditional values” for the first time, explicitly contrasting it with liberal values. In fact, he reintroduced the ideological model of a clash between two “global systems” that are engaged in a “cold war” of sorts, if not in an open conflict: “The fundamental antagonism of our age and at the same time the key challenge for the humanity of the 21st century is the opposition between liberal civilizational standards and the values of cultural and religious iden-

2 Vsevolod Chaplin, *Tserkov’ v Rossii: Obstoiatel’stva mesta i vremeni* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii Sovet Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, Arefa, 2008), 137.

3 Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, “Norma very kak norma zhizni,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 February 2000, http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2000-02-16/8_norma.html.

tity.”⁴ Metropolitan Kirill claimed that it is not enough to discuss these conflicts on an inter-state level with the aim of establishing a just world order. The conflict between liberals and traditionalists is based on how the different actors interpret individual human rights and on how they view modern society as a whole. Metropolitan Kirill has no doubt that the liberal doctrine leads to “the liberation of the potential of sin in a person” and that “it would not be an exaggeration to characterize that doctrine as anti-Christian.”⁵

Hence, he draws two main conclusions. He addresses the first conclusion to society, framing it as a rather mild proposal to form a model of behavior and social fabric “that would allow interaction between liberal and traditional ideas and values.” Acknowledging that this is an extraordinarily difficult task, Metropolitan Kirill goes on to call for cooperation between “other traditional religions, all sound forces in our society that love Russia and wish it well, and the Russian Orthodox Church, first of all with its theologians.” The main goal of this cooperation is “to help the modern man in grasping the meaning of tradition as the norm-forming factor that defines the values system including the cultural, spiritual, and moral orientation of a person and of society.”⁶ Metropolitan Kirill addresses his second, much bolder, conclusion to the Russian state:

If currently liberal thought is used as a basis for the country’s public and social development model, then, in full compliance with the liberal principle of checks and balances, it *must be countered* with a policy of introducing a system of values that are traditional for Russia into the upbringing of youth, education, and interpersonal relationship formation. Thus, the issue of shaping legislation, education, culture, social relations, and public morals is, in fact, a matter of preservation of our national civilization in the coming century. It is a matter of finding our place

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

in the global community of nations and of survival as an Orthodox nation.⁷

At the time, Metropolitan Kirill was relatively alone in his criticism of liberalism. His efforts saw no support from Patriarch Alexy, the Synod, or any other hierarchs. Yet, he did not seem bothered by this lack of backing. Metropolitan Kirill had to wait another twelve years for the state's clear and positive reaction to his call.

Paradoxes of Tradition

In light of Kirill's premise that "today, in the context of globalization, the main danger comes from the destruction of tradition as the mechanism of passing on values from generation to generation,"⁸ the Orthodox Church has expended tremendous effort to endorse and reinforce these mechanisms.

However, the result turned out to be paradoxical. In Russian society today, it is not an interest in the Christian tradition that is growing, but rather an interest in the heritage of the Soviet past. And this is understandable, since Russian society is highly secular and detached from the Christian tradition as it is understood by the Orthodox Church. The only living tradition in Russia is, in fact, *the Soviet tradition*. Bussing themselves with fortifying the mechanisms of passing on "traditional values," Patriarch Kirill and the Orthodox Church hierarchy seem to have failed to notice or consider this fact.

This long-term endeavor to impose traditional values has led to a surge in an interest in the Soviet past:

- Soviet-era repressions are being justified by an overemphasis on the achievements of the Soviet period;

7 Ibid.

8 Patriarch Kirill, "Khristsianskoe ponimanie svobody v sovremennoy obshchestve," *Tserkov' i vremia* 2, no. 51 (2010), cited from: <https://mospat.ru/church-and-time/410>.

- Persecutors of the church, most notably Stalin himself, have received positive attention and “icons” of them have even been painted though officially these “icons” were not recognized by the church;
- Church spokespeople admit that the church has always collaborated with the state, even with the Communist and atheistic one;⁹
- Secular and church traditions comingle: wherever possible, clergy at all levels, from the patriarch to regular priests, lay wreaths at eternal flames (in the Russian context this is not just a secular, but clearly a Soviet tradition), and in 2015, some even attempted to bring eternal flames into churches and light candles from this fire;

Orthodox ideology is being framed to replace the collapsed Communist ideology. Any attempts to question this peculiar fusion of traditions incite a defensive reaction from the church.

Vladimir Putin: Traditional Values 2.0

Only a year after the UN Human Rights Council had to admit that there was no common definition of traditional values,¹⁰ Vladimir Putin made the decision to include those values in his political agenda. In his official address to the Federal Assembly after his third inauguration in 2012, he outlined a new approach:

Today, many nations are revising their moral values and ethical norms, eroding ethnic traditions and differences between peoples and cultures. Society is now required not only to recognize everyone’s right to the freedom of conscience political views,

9 “Vakhtang Kipshidze on Conflict Zone,” *Deutsche Welle*, 26 April 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/vakhtang-kipshidze-on-conflict-zone/av-38593214>.

10 “Why the Fuss? Understanding the Human Rights Councils Resolution on Traditional Values,” *International Justice Resource Center*, 8 October 2012, <https://ijrcenter.org/2012/10/08/why-the-fuss-understanding-the-human-rights-councils-resolution-on-traditional-values/>.

and privacy, but also to accept without question the equality of good and evil, strange as it seems, concepts that are opposite in meaning. This *destruction of traditional values* from above not only leads to negative consequences for society, but is also essentially anti-democratic, since it is carried out on the basis of abstract, speculative ideas, contrary to the will of the majority, which does not accept the changes occurring or the proposed revision of values.¹¹

The terminology used in that speech became a key formula for his future political rhetoric. It is chock-full of path-breaking elements:

1. It shifts the accent from cultural issues to moral and ethical issues;
2. It directly discusses the topic of good versus evil;
3. It criticizes other countries without mentioning any country in particular;
4. It uses military rhetoric (the key word used alongside “traditional values” is “destruction”);
5. It claims to express “the popular will of the majority.”

A week after that speech, Vladimir Putin, while answering questions from CNN’s Jill Dougherty, effectively acknowledged that this was a new emphasis for him (and for Russia):

As for our traditional values, I seriously believe we should devote more attention to them. In the Soviet Union there was just one ideology dominating. And no matter what our attitude to it is, there were rather simple, comprehensible, or even quasi-religious values. If you read the code of the builders of Communism, it is a pale copy of the Bible: do not kill, do not steal, do not covet your neighbor’s wife. In the Communism builder’s code there’s everything but poorly articulated and extremely short-

11 Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniyu,” *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial'nyi sait*, 12 December 2013, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19825>.

ened. [...] The new generation of Russian citizens, our young people do not know what it is. Yet, it can only be replaced with these traditional values. Without such values societies degrade. We must return to them, understand their worth and on their basis move forward.¹²

Putin's reply contains an important addition to the words from Scripture, marking the outline of a new internal policy based on traditional values:

1. Attention to traditional values is directly linked to the ongoing crisis of Russian identity (the Communist builder's code has passed away, but it has never been replaced with anything new);
2. One must "return" to traditional values, and only then would one be able to "move forward";
3. Despite his pronouncement of a conservative program, the task of the program is development.

A few months earlier, Putin had framed this even more clearly: "Conservatism relies on traditional values but with an obligatory element being aimed at development."¹³

However, a claim to support traditional values means not only active efforts toward the growth of such values, but also a battle against those who are perceived to stand against those values. The president of Russia has no doubt that the modern world is at war against traditional values, which are being diluted,¹⁴ depreciated,¹⁵ humiliated, and mocked.¹⁶

12 "Press-konferentsiia Vladimira Putina," *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial'nyi sait*, 19 December 2013, <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859>.

13 Vladimir Putin, "Interv'iu Pervomu kanalu i agentstvu Assoshieited Press," *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial'nyi sait*, 4 September 2013, <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19143>.

14 Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie na Zasedanii Soveta po mezhnatsional'nym otnosheniam," *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial'nyi sait*, 31 October 2016, <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/councils/53173>.

15 Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie na zasedanii prezidiuma Gossoveta, posviashchenogo politike v oblasti sem'i, materinstva i detstva," *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial'nyi sait*, 17 February 2014, <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/state-council/20265>.

16 Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie v Evreiskom muzee i tsentre tolerantnosti," *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial'nyi sait*, 27 January 2015, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47529>.

Traditional values, according to Putin, should therefore be supported,¹⁷ defended,¹⁸ promoted,¹⁹ strengthened,²⁰ and protected. In other words, in the modern world, traditional values are under threat of elimination, and those who claim to defend them must fight against their “erosion” and put forth an effort to “support” them.

As in any war, the war for traditional values has both enemies and allies. The nations of the West are among the adversaries, while the Muslim world is among the allies.

And this presents a distinctly new line of argumentation that Russia in its fight against the global West has never used before in the post-Soviet period: one of moral arguments. Russia sees Western countries as enemies not for any political or economic reasons, but because of their perceived moral decay.

Traditional Values and Conservatives’ Radicalization

Notwithstanding the moral line of argumentation, the rhetoric of traditional values actually spurred the momentum of some rather dangerous tendencies of radicalization in Russian society in 2017. As it turned out, the numerous calls for the protection of traditional values without any real content or specific definitions for those values have become an explosive mix. While state propaganda is very clear that traditional values must be protected, the understanding of what precisely should be defended is

17 Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie Prezidenta Federal’nomu Sobraniuu,” *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial’nyi sait*, 1 December 2016, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>.

18 Vladimir Putin, “Vystuplenie na tseremonii vrucheniiia veritel’nykh gramot posلامي inostrannykh gosudarstv,” *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial’nyi sait*, 16 January 2014, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20070>.

19 Putin, “Vystuplenie na zasedanii prezidiuma Gossoveta.”

20 Vladimir Putin, “Vystuplenie na vstreche s chlenami fraktsii politicheskikh partii v Gosudarstvennoi Dume,” *Prezident Rossii: Ofitsial’nyi sait*, 14 August 2014, <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46451>.

much less obvious. Thus, Russian patriots are left with a simple task: to determine what needs protection themselves.

This is precisely how Russian state propaganda provoked a conflict around the release of the film *Matilda*, an unremarkable pseudohistorical movie about an affair between Tsar Nicholas II and ballerina Matilda Kshesinskaia. Numerous groups protested the film's release, including some of a radical or even a terroristic nature. The image of Emperor Nicholas II, whom the Russian Orthodox Church has canonized as a saint, has become a new traditional value that must be protected. The film's director, Alexei Uchitel, in his turn, has emerged as an enemy who is attempting to destroy this particular value by giving it a false interpretation, thus offending the late tsar's memory and outraging all Orthodox believers and "the whole of Russia." The conflict would seem to be unworthy of such epic proportions, yet a confluence of circumstances has turned up the heat in Russian society, reaching an all-time high.

On the one hand, the Russian Orthodox Church has attempted to refrain from formulating an official position regarding the film. On the other hand, a number of bishops and priests have made an open stand against it.

The state funded the film's production, and despite all the protests, it issued a distribution certificate for the movie. Meanwhile, State Duma member and former attorney from Crimea, Natalia Poklonskaya, became one of the main anti-Matilda crusaders. Her tactics included searching for grounds to withdraw the distribution certificate and accusing Uchitel of financial fraud.

Against such a backdrop, an arson attack on a cinema in Ekaterinburg²¹ and the burning of several cars parked near the office of Uchitel's attorney looked especially dire.²² In the former case, the arsonist admitted that he had hoped to stop the screening of *Matilda*. In the latter case, the arsonists left a note near the parked cars that stated, "Burn for Mat-

21 "Protivnik 'Matil'dy' popytalsia v zovrat' ekaterinburgskii kinoteatr," *RIA56.ru*, 4 September 2017, accessed 13 April 2018, <http://ria56.ru/posts/5424584582458245.htm>.

22 "Liudi v maskakh podozhgli dve mashiny u ofisa advokata Uchitel'ia," *Novaia Gazeta*, 11 September 2017, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/09/11/135168-troe-v-maskah-podozhgli-dve-mashiny-u-ofisa-advokata-uchitelya>.

ilda.”²³ Thus, the actions of traditional-values campaigners have demonstrated that the risk of the traditional-values movement’s radicalization throughout the entire nation of Russia is exceptionally high.

* * *

The “traditional values” discourse has failed to become an essential part of a new *Russian ideology* – for the simple reason that this ideology, despite all efforts, was not properly thought out. For years it remained as a set of isolated elements. Moreover, traditional values have not become the basis of a new *system of values*. In the post-Soviet space, the values discourse should be perceived not within the context of axiology, but merely as a pragmatic, ideological instrument. Values are brought up only when a person in power wants to distance him- or herself from the previous ideological constructs, to destroy the image of an old enemy, or to create a new enemy. It is, therefore, advisable to brand this phenomenon the “rhetoric of values.”

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Dmitry Uzlaner
Epilogue:
Reflections on Globalizing
Culture Wars

Culture war is a concept that was used by James Davison Hunter in order to describe the bitter conflict in the US between “orthodox” and “progressive” over which moral vision is correct and should become the foundation of human society.¹ “Orthodox” actors – one can also call them conservatives or traditionalists – adhere to the idea that key human institutions are rooted in transcendent principles and cannot be changed by circumstances or human will, while “progressives” – one can also call them liberals – believe that all institutions develop historically and in new contexts can be conscientiously changed.² The mobilization of religious conservatives (the Christian Right) – who are the focus of this volume and the *Postsecular Conflicts* research project project behind it – was a reaction to the advancement of the progressive agenda, which, in the opinion of traditionalists, undermined the moral foundations of society, for example, by questioning traditional notions of gender and authority. Culture wars have been embodied in a series of highly emotional confrontations over such issues as abortion,

1 See James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

2 *Ibid.*, 44.

religion at school, homosexuality, pornography, contemporary art, etc.³

Hunter's work was devoted to the processes in American society, but in general, similar conflicts have affected any society that was influenced by the "cultural revolution" of the 1960s and the social dislocations that followed. As Kristina Stoeckl rightly put it in the introduction, culture war is not the only form that these kinds of postsecular conflicts take. Culture war seems to be pretty much an American phenomenon, while the European context, for example, is better described through the concepts of postsecular society and the postsecular search for consensus (along the lines of Jürgen Habermas's thought).⁴

To a certain extent, it can be argued that these kinds of conflicts have replaced the ideological confrontation of the Cold War and the "end of history" phase, which, as some believed, started as soon as the great battle between Communists and capitalists was over. It can hardly be argued that the confrontation between traditionalists and progressives over abortion or LGBTQ+ rights is comparable in scope and intensity to the confrontation of the Cold War. However, it is undoubtedly one of several key contemporary conflicts along with, for example, the confrontation with global terrorism.

In recent decades we have observed a very peculiar transformation: the culture war between conservatives and liberals, which was initially limited to American borders, began to take on a transnational and global dimension.⁵ This process started as early as the late 1980s and its visible manifestations are the emergence of transnational alliances of conservatives and the export of the traditionalist worldview to regions and continents that have not yet been fully seized by the dynamics of the American culture wars.⁶ Culture wars are globalizing – not only in the sense

3 Ibid. 3

4 Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 17–29.

5 For more, see Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

6 James T. Gathii, "Exporting Culture Wars," *U. C. Davis Journal of International Law & Policy* 13, no. 1 (2006): 67–93; Peter Berger, "Exporting the American Culture War," *The American Interest*, 20 August 2014, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/08/20/exporting-the-american-culture-war/>. The same, of course, could be said about the opposite – "progressive" or liberal – camp. However, the focus of this volume is on the conservative position.

that conflicts over values are becoming visible all over the world and even in international institutions like the UN⁷ (this is just one aspect of this globalization), but also in the sense that these conflicts more often than not take the form of a culture war, a fierce polarization where any consensus is almost impossible.

There are several key actors representing the traditionalist position in this new globalized context – these actors are joining their efforts in a kind of ecumenism 2.0.⁸ One of these, of course, is the Vatican, which was one of the first to engage in this type of confrontation during the pontificates of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II.⁹ Some Muslim actors, particularly the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which has tried to be active in the UN and to interact with like-minded partners from other religions, also subscribe to the traditionalist position.¹⁰ However, the key actor for our research is the American Christian Right, a movement forged during the American culture wars of the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹ The Christian Right became the key drivers of this globalization of culture wars and the formation of transnational alliances of conservatives.¹² Another important actor is Russia, which is a latecomer, becoming a significant player on the conservative side only in the second decade of the 21st century: in 2012 the Russian regime, backed by the Russian Orthodox Church, started – quite successfully I should say – to position itself

7 Katherine Marshall, “Engaging on Global Issues in a UN Setting: Religious Actors,” in *Religion, State and the United Nations: Value Politics*, ed. Anna Stensvold (New York: Routledge, 2017), 17–26.

8 On this concept, see Andrey Shishkov, “Two Ecumenisms: Conservative Christian Alliances as a New Form of Ecumenical Cooperation,” *State, Religion and Church* 4, no. 2 (2017): 58–87.

9 A good treatment of this is the recent book by Frederick Martel, which not only describes the chronology of this struggle, but also shows its consequences for the Catholic Church (Frederic Martel, *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy* [London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019]).

10 See, in particular: Marie Juul Petersen and Heini Skorini, “Hate Speech and Holy Prophets: Tracing the OIC’s Strategies to Protect Religion,” in *Religion, State and the United Nations: Value Politics*, ed. Anna Stensvold (New York: Routledge, 2017), 44–61.

11 See Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

12 Jennifer Butler, *Born Again: The Christian Right Globalized* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2006).

as the last bastion of traditional values and the leader of the global conservative front.¹³

This volume brought together conversations with some of the key representatives of contemporary “culture war conservatism” both from the US and Russia. These conversations were balanced by voices that offered a critical look at this ideology. These materials show how contemporary traditionalists evaluate the dynamics of culture wars, whether they agree with the widespread thesis that conservatives have lost the culture war, how US conservatives perceive Russian conservatives and vice versa, and whether these alliances against transnational liberalism are stable and enduring. Finally, the materials show the conservative attitude toward Europe, which – against the backdrop of the rise of populist movements – has become a zone of special interest for the strategists and commanders of the culture wars. This last issue is especially relevant in the context of the question posed by Kristina Stoeckl in the introduction: if the culture wars are brought to Europe and if Europe is seen as a mission field by culture warriors, then the European model of a postsecular society oriented toward consensus is under threat and in danger of being replaced by the globalizing model of the American culture war.

In what follows I will share my reflections and observations concerning the current state of global culture wars on the basis of the materials published in this volume.

Increasing polarization and disappearance of the center. The theme that cuts across the volume is the disappearance not only of some kind of consensus, but also of a dimension where meaningful rational exchange of arguments is possible.¹⁴ These conditions are already implied in the very concept of culture war, but, as our interlocutors see it, the situation is becoming much worse. R. R. Reno points out that the general background of the Cold War pushed both conservatives and progressives not only toward a centrist position, but also toward the formation of a certain consensual positions: yes, changes are necessary, but – conservatives asserted – these changes should not be too fast and too rapid. How-

13 See Kristina Stoeckl, “Postsecular Conflicts and the Global Struggle for Traditional Values” (lecture), *State, Religion and Church* 3, no. 2 (2016): 102–16.

14 This was emphasized by Clifford Bob in *The Global Right Wing*.

ever, the end of the Cold War “made the cultural consensus of the Cold War era, built around [...] ‘diversity over unity’ and ‘openness over closure’ both more powerful and more dysfunctional” (p. 55). The checks and balances that allowed centrist positions to exist and prevented excessive polarization with the inevitable radicalization of the parties have disappeared. The image that is often mentioned in descriptions of the current stage of culture war is that of a “civil war,” the most extreme phase of civil confrontation. As Rod Dreher, for example, puts it: “when I look at the US now, I think about Spain in 1931, when the trouble started there that eventually led to a civil war. I don’t think that we will pull guns against each other in the US, but the polarization is so great now and there’s no center left” (p. 28).¹⁵

The image of violent confrontation over values and identities, which in the American context sounds like a warning, like a kind of exaggerated description of the intensity of ongoing polarization, in the Russian Orthodox context takes a much more sinister turn. Alexander Filonenko, philosopher, theologian, and member of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate, reflects on the conservatism of traditional values and evaluates it against the background of the ongoing military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This conflict has a clear value dimension – at least from the Russian side it is often portrayed as a reaction to the attempt of the liberal West to subvert the “Russian world,” which is based on adherence to traditional values and a traditional way of life. Filonenko points to the growing cleavage between adherents of traditional values and those members of the Eastern Orthodox Church who don’t share this ideological vision. This cleavage is visible all over the Eastern Orthodox world. What is really troubling is the fact that these two groups – at least, in Ukraine – can no longer talk to each other and stop perceiving each other as parts of a single Orthodox community. These value conflicts are the context “from which demons are born” (p. 76) – demons of war and demons that divide the Church, members of which live both in Rus-

15 In the early 1990s James Davison Hunter paid attention to this sinister dimension of evolving value conflicts. In *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America’s Culture War* (New York: Free Press, 1994), he described how discussion degenerates into a caricaturish battle dangerously charged with intense emotions.

sia and Ukraine. Ideological confrontation, the struggle over values and identities exacerbated by the uneasy territorial relations between Russia and Ukraine, has split the common space of Russian Orthodoxy. The Russian-Ukrainian context that Filonenko is talking about is, of course, very specific and cannot be reduced solely to confrontation around different understandings of moral vision. However, it shows how easily confrontation over values and identities develops into a military struggle that threatens to destroy community. The tensions around the “Russian World”¹⁶ reveal in a much more dramatic and violent form the polarization and loss of any consensus that American participants and observers of culture wars are talking about.

The eclipse of the mind and the rise of emotions. Positions on the opposing sides in these conflicts appear to be embedded in large emotionally charged narratives that nearly bring the work of reason to a standstill. Certain issues in these struggles, for example, confrontations about the definition of family or non-discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, are not technical issues waiting to be resolved pragmatically. These are symbols that, like any other symbols, point to something beyond – to comprehensive narratives about the war between good and evil, light and darkness. This vision of something like a “cosmic war” makes it impossible for each side to hear the other’s positions and turns the very debate into a small part of a bigger story. Progressive, liberal actors adhere to the narrative of gradual progress and the emancipation of the human person from various limiting forces and prejudices, while the conservative side sees the culture war as the history of a transcendently founded order that is about to collapse under the pressure of human sin and immorality. Conservatives are not fighting same-sex marriages or abortions as such, these are just symbols of the moral order, of the hierarchies that might collapse at any moment, plunging society into the chaos of non-differentiation, where everything becomes mixed – high and low, bad and good, old and young, male and female, parents and children.¹⁷ Or alternatively

16 On the concept of the “Russian world” and its controversies, see Mikhail Suslov, “‘Russian World’ Concept: Post-Soviet Geopolitical Ideology and the Logic of ‘Spheres of Influence,’” *Geopolitics* 23, no. 2 (2018): 330–53.

17 For more on this, see Dmitry Uzlaner, “The Logic of Scapegoating in Contemporary

they envision a world gripped by a new totalitarianism, where everything would be turned upside down – evil would take the place of good, low in the place of high, etc. The US Supreme Court has legalized same-sex marriages and the world has not collapsed. But this is not a reason to give up the fight, because it is not a fight for or against same-sex marriage, it is a fight against chaos, against immersion in disorder, or the inverted order of the new 1984. Such narratives, imbued with emotions – fear, anxiety, righteous indignation – lead to a black-and-white perception of the world, to the demonization of the opponent and to the impossibility of achieving even some minimal consensus.¹⁸

Russia and the United States as screens for each other's projections. Russia and the US are once again becoming screens for each other, on which corresponding actors project some of their own images arising from the internal logic of corresponding societies.¹⁹ The transformation, the inversion of each other's images that has taken place since the Cold War, is remarkable. During the Cold War, the USSR (Russia is the successor to the USSR) was perceived by American conservatives as an “evil empire,” as a source of destructive cultural influences (let's remember the fake “Communist Rules for Revolution”²⁰), while the US was perceived as a force that was preventing the world from the final triumph of godless Communism and anarchy. The USSR, by contrast, positioned

Russian Moral Conservatism,” in *Contemporary Russian Conservatism: Problems, Paradoxes, and Perspectives*, ed. Mikhail Suslov and Dmitry Uzmaner (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 103–27.

- 18 Clifford Bob calls the outcome of such an emotional struggle “‘zombie’ policy” (Bob, *The Global Right Wing*, 6). The materials presented in our publication demonstrate that this trend shows no signs of abating.
- 19 Ivan Kurila, *Zakliatye druz'ia: Istoriia mnenii, fantazii, kontaktov, vzaimo(ne)ponimaniia Rossii i SShA* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2018).
- 20 A fake document supposedly discovered by Allied forces in Germany in 1919 and then widely spread in the US by anti-Communists. The first rule is: “Corrupt the young, get them away from religion. Get them interested in sex. Make them superficial. Destroy their ruggedness.” A very similar fake document is spreading in post-Soviet Russia under the name of the “Dulles' Plan” (see Vesna Smirnova and Serghei Golunov, “Proliferation of Conspiracy Narratives in Post-Soviet Russia: The ‘Dulles' Plan’ in Social and Political Discourses,” *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 37 [2016]: 21–45). This plan, supposedly authored by Allen Welsh Dulles, the head of the CIA, includes among other things the following: “Poison the soul of the youth with unbelief in the meaning of life, stimulate interest in sexual issues, attract them with such lures of the free world as discs, poems, songs...”

itself as a vanguard of emancipation, as a fighter for the progressive transformation of humanity (away from religion and toward atheism²¹) and against the reactionary forces of the West, led by obscurantists from the United States. Today positions have changed dramatically – it is the US or the ruling liberal establishment that – in the conservative narrative – has become the new or neo-USSR, spreading subversive ideas about family or the nature of authority around the world, while Russia has become almost a beacon of hope, “the last bastion of Christian values” that helps keep the world from sliding into a new left-liberal dystopia. Russia’s self-identity has changed accordingly – now it is Russia who actively resists destructive, revolutionary experiments with fundamental human institutions, experiments inspired by new revolutionary neo-Communists from the United States. Hence the cautious hopes that the US Christian Right have for contemporary Russia: they are literally projecting on Russia as if on a screen their fantasies about another West that has not been infected by the virus of cultural liberalism.²²

However this vision of Russia finds little support among the Russian voices presented in this volume – with Dugin as a very big exception. These are the voices of Russian intellectuals who are trying to show the deeply problematic nature of the Russian ideology of traditional values and its image as the defender of Christian values. Sergey Chapnin in his contribution shows how new and unusual is this turn to “traditional values” for post-Soviet Russia: as late as the early 2000s traditionalism was still a rather marginal and not particularly elaborated ideology, the basic foundations of which were gradually developed by the future Patriarch Kirill and his circle. Other contributions emphasize how complex and ambiguous the concept of tradition in the Orthodox context is and how crudely this tradition is being instrumentalized for the sake of ideological and geopolitical considerations.

21 On Soviet atheism, see Victoria Smolkina, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

22 Peter Montgomery, “The Religious Right Has an Unholy Crush on Vladimir Putin,” *Salon*, 23 December 2016, https://www.salon.com/2016/12/23/the-religious-right-has-an-unholy-crush-on-vladimir-putin_partner/.

The difference between Russian and American contexts. In interviews, American traditionalists often say that they experience themselves as a kind of new dissident²³ (hence their interest in the experience of Soviet dissidents), as losers in culture wars, who at any moment could be, if not outlawed, then at least seriously limited in their rights – for example, if discrimination against sexual identity becomes equal to racial or gender discrimination. This understanding of their own desperate situation pushes them to look for hope somewhere else – either in the future, in the hope of some new demographic trend, when conservative religious families have more children than liberal ones, or in exotic cultures and regions – for example, in Russia, which, as I mentioned above, turns into a very convenient screen for all sorts of fantasies about an “alternative West” with an authentic Christian tradition.

The Russian context is strikingly different from the American one. In Russia it is liberals who are nearly dissidents in a society almost totally dominated by conservative actors and institutions. These liberals are in the very vulnerable position of people who could be declared enemies of the people at any time and whose full membership in the national community could easily be questioned. From this experience a completely different attitude to “traditional values” and traditionalism arises, and this attitude is expressed by Russian contributors to this volume: conservatism as a dead ideology, which threatens to turn Russia into a museum of archaic outdated forms, doomed to slowly fading in the face of rapidly developing neighbors both in the West and in the East.

We are “driving on fumes,” says Rod Dreher in his interview (p. 33), referring to the decline of American society corrupted by left-liberal ideology. We are “driving on fumes,” say Russian liberals, meaning the fading of Russia, which is prevented from any development by the suffocating new ideology of traditionalism.

Focus on Europe. Europe is becoming increasingly important for culture war activists. Against the backdrop of a crisis of mainstream political parties and the rise of right-wing populist movements, in which religion

23 See also: Gertrude Himmelfarb, “Comment: The Other Culture War,” in *Is There a Culture War? A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life*, ed. James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 81.

and traditional values play an important role,²⁴ both Russian and American conservatives look at Europe with hope. The current European situation is perceived as a very good opportunity to open some kind of “second front” in the culture wars. Moreover, some European societies are seen to provide the possibility of a kind of “third way” – compared to overly liberal America and overly authoritarian Russia – and even to redefine the very configuration of culture wars, as Alexander Dugin describes in discussing his “fourth political theory” (p. 67). As he puts it, the traditional way of structuring the culture wars was to oppose the union of conservative economic views and conservative social views to the union of progressive economic views and progressive social views.²⁵ However, Europe, with its traditions of a social state, can offer a different and more attractive configuration: progressive economic views together with conservative social views versus conservative economic views together with progressive social views. That is, traditional values conservatism could be finally separated from its usual link with the neoliberal economy, which many conservatives reject, and attached to a more progressive economic program.

The fragility of transnational value alliances. Do alliances between Russian and American conservatives have a future? On the one hand, the motivation to build such alliances is strong – both American and Russian actors face the same powerful and insidious enemy. As Rod Dreher says in this regard, referring to one of the key representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Hilarion: “the things that divided us in the past, they’re important, we can’t ignore them completely. But the challenge from post-Christianity and a hostile post-Christian culture is so great that we need to try to help each other” (p. 30). On the other hand, the history of previous conservative alliances show how short-lived these alliances are and how easily circumstances ruin ecumenism 2.0 in its different manifestations. For example, the Vatican, which was one of the first international leaders of the conservative camp, quickly became a great dis-

24 See Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell, and Olivier Roy, eds., *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

25 See Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2019).

appointment for the Christian Right: against the backdrop of sexual scandals, the new Pope Francis in 2013 replaced socially conservative rhetoric with a much more moderate stance, open to new progressive social and cultural trends. Another conservative alliance – that between American Evangelicals and Muslim actors (Clifford Bob called it the “Baptist-burqa” network²⁶) – turned out to be no less fragile: Allan Carlson describes in detail the collapse of this alliance at the moment of the terrorist attack on New York City on 11 September 2001 (p. 38–39).

Actually, disappointment in former allies – Catholic and Muslim – was one of the crucial factors that pushed the American Christian Right to seek new allies in Russia. However, given the deterioration of relations between the two countries against the backdrop of the ongoing scandal over possible Russian interference in the US elections in 2016, as well as the instability of the conservative platform in Russia itself, one can assume with some certainty that collaboration between conservatives of the two countries might soon be put to a severe test.

Though some American conservatives are more or less sure that the national culture war is over and that they have lost their battle for the soul of American society, global value conflicts are far from over. And the outcome of this struggle seems open-ended. Global culture wars in the transnational and global dimension have their own logic and their own line of development that may lead to unexpected consequences in different national contexts – including, probably, the American one. So, as one of our interlocutors put it in his interview, “the great battles lie ahead. We’ll see how it turns out” (p. 52).

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26 Bob, *The Global Right Wing*, 36.

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