

Russian Orthodoxy and Secularism

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By

Kristina Stoeckl



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Russian Orthodoxy and Secularism

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Abstract

Russian Orthodoxy and Secularism surveys the ways in which the Russian Orthodox Church has negotiated its relationship with the secular state, with other religions, and with Western modernity from its beginnings until the present. It applies multiple theoretical perspectives and draws on different disciplinary approaches to explain the varied and at times contradictory facets of Russian Orthodoxy as a state church or as a critic of the state, as a lived religion or as a civil religion controlled by the state, as a source of dissidence during Communism or as a reservoir of anti-Western, anti-modernist ideas that celebrate the uniqueness and superiority of the Russian nation. Kristina Stoeckl argues that, three decades after the fall of Communism, the period of post-Soviet transition is over for Russian Orthodoxy and that the Moscow Patriarchate has settled on its role as national church and provider of a new civil religion of traditional values.

Keywords

Russia – Russian Orthodox Church – secularization – desecularization – religious market – postsecular – civil religion – Communism – Soviet Union – culture wars

1 Introduction

Over the last thirty years, sociological and political research on Orthodoxy in post-Soviet Russia has followed two basic story lines. The first is an uplifting, almost triumphalist narrative that tells the history of Russian Orthodoxy since the end of the Soviet Union as one of revival and resurgence. Its proponents have described a *Religious Revival in Russia* (Greeley 1994), *Russian Orthodoxy resurgent* (Garrard and Garrard 2008), the failed *Plot to Kill God* (Froese 2008),

the *Rebirth of Orthodoxy* (Burgess 2017) or the *Suppression, Survival and Revival* of religion in Russia (Marsh 2011). The other story line is gloomy, somewhat alarmed, and it narrates the story of religion in Russia after Communism as one full of setbacks. These latter studies have emphasized the dynamics of *deseccularization* (Karpov 2013), observed signs of closure and anti-modernist obscurantism in Orthodox churches across Eastern Europe and Russia (Ramet 2006), and detected nostalgia for a past *symphonic ideal* (Knox 2003). While the first group emphasize the chances for religious freedom in the post-Soviet situation, the second focus on the risks connected with the renewed salience of religion in Russian society and politics. What both of these story lines share, however, is the assumption that the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism is one of discontinuity and conflict. Whether affirmative or critical, both approaches thus lead to the question of the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism. It is precisely this relationship and the question how it has been shaped, imagined and played out institutionally, theologically and politically—over time and in the present—that this article seeks to analyze in the light of and beyond the dominant storylines of revival or deseccularization.

The relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism is relevant beyond the Russian and post-Soviet context. The end of the Cold War has led to a widespread conviction in political science and international relations that religion has again become a factor to be reckoned with in world politics. After Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1993), the appearance of more studies in a similar vein, like *Deseccularization of the World* (Berger 1999), *The Global Resurgence of Religion* (Thomas 2005), or *God's Century* (Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011) signaled a growing emphasis on religion in the discipline. This interest in religion was, prima facie, connected to the need to understand developments in the Muslim world and the role of Islam. But in recent years Russian Orthodoxy and Russia under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin have also attracted the attention of scholars of global politics and international relations—and of the media—as salient factors in the global resurgence of religion. Russia has positioned itself as the defender of traditional religious values against secularism, liberalism and individual human rights in international institutions like the United Nations or the Council of Europe, and the Russian Orthodox Church has established ties with moral conservative civil society actors in other countries and from other confessions. The analysis of the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism, therefore, not only allows us to put into perspective the dominant narratives about post-Soviet religion; it also opens up to the wider topic of religion and conflict in world politics.

In this article, I survey five centuries of Russian history, with a more detailed focus on the twentieth and twenty-first century. The ways in which Russian Orthodox religion has negotiated its relationship with secular state power, with other religious traditions, and with Western modernity over the centuries is as diverse as it is fascinating. It takes different lenses—or theoretical approaches—to examine the many sides of Russian Orthodoxy. In this article, I use three such lenses: a religious market perspective, a desecularization perspective, and a postsecular perspective. All three are needed to comprehend the varied and at times contradictory facets of Russian Orthodoxy as a state church or as a critic of the state, as a lived religion practiced by believers or as a civil religion controlled by the state, as a source of dissidence and freedom during Communist repression or as a reservoir of anti-Western, anti-modernist ideas that celebrate the uniqueness and superiority of the Russian nation. The fact that Russian Orthodoxy *is* such a multifaceted phenomenon, is the first argument of this article. It guides the overall structure of the text and requires the adoption of multiple theoretical perspectives.

The second argument of this article is more specifically about Russian Orthodoxy in the twenty-first century. I argue that, three decades after the fall of Communism, the period of post-Soviet religion is over. This means that we cannot understand the situation of the Russian Orthodox Church today solely against the backdrop of the repression experienced during Communism, as the revival narrative suggests. It also means that we move beyond the idea, implicit in desecularization theory, that religion and secularization come in waves, and that Russian Orthodoxy is riding the religious wave after decades of Soviet secularization. Instead, the decisive historical, political and social frame of reference for the analysis of Russian Orthodoxy today are the last three decades, which started with the first Constitution of the Russian Federation of 1993 and end with the amended Constitution of 2020. Many roles for the Church inside society as well as *vis-à-vis* the Russian state, global Orthodoxy and international politics were thinkable in these last thirty years, but by 2020, the course of action appears decided and the Moscow Patriarchate has effectively turned Russian Orthodoxy into a national church and prime defender of Russia's new civil religion: traditional values.

1.1 *Definitions*

In this article, I use the terms secularization, secularity, and secularism to denote three distinct phenomena.¹ *Secularization* describes the historical process

1 The following definition of secularization, secularity and secularism draws on Casanova 2011 and uses citations and text from Stoeckl 2010a.

of separation of political and social institutions, science and the arts from religion that took place with the onset of modernity. This “thin” definition of secularization, limited to the process of differentiation in modern societies, refrains from stronger claims such as seeing secularization as the privatization of religion, or as the decline of religious belief (Bruce and Wallis 1992, Martin 1978, Wilson 1966). Since as early as the 1960s, sociologists have increasingly called into question the historical and sociological appropriateness of strong claims of secularization and the status of secularization as a “paradigm” (Casanova 2001, Martin 1969). Peter L. Berger, who foresaw an irrevocable decline of religion in the 1960s (Berger 1967), later admitted that the secularization thesis had been falsified (Berger 2008). Much of contemporary sociological and political research about religion calls into question the historical narrative of progressive secularization. The debate points towards understanding secularization no longer as “paradigm” or “thesis”, but in a narrower sense as a *historical process* (Gorski 2003). Similarly, in this paper, the term secularization will be used with reference to a historical process of separation of church and state and differentiation of social spheres, which affected and shaped Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian state from the fifteenth century onwards, just as it did any other religion and state in Europe in the modern period.

The ambivalent consequences of the process of secularization are more accurately captured with two other terms, namely secularity and secularism. *Secularity* describes a state or condition—the state of affairs of modern institutions and practices. Drawing on Peter Wagner (Wagner 2008), I define modern institutions as the result of the autonomous collective self-determination of individuals on questions such as how to govern life in common, how to satisfy economic needs, and how to determine valid knowledge. In all three realms—the political, the economic, and the epistemic—modern institutions operate in a way that is detached from religion. “Detached” does not mean “independent”: religion may still play a role in the way in which a state or an economy is organized, and it may still serve to legitimize knowledge claims. But under conditions of modernity, religion does not have a monopolistic claim over any of these three realms, and does not provide the overall frame of reference. For the modern individual, conditions of belief have been altered by modern experience. Religion, as poignantly pointed out by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*, is no longer the “default condition” of the modern person, it is one option among many (Taylor 2007). From the perspective of political science, secularity denotes first and foremost the separation of religion and politics, and the crafting of institutional relations between religious institutions and communities and the state (Stepan 2001). The secularity of the modern state system frequently has limits, and politics and religion are not as completely separated

as the secularization thesis would suggest (Madeley and Enyedi 2003, Jelen and Wilcox 2002, Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos 2005). If we consider secularity as condition, then, the goal is to explain not only the separation of religion from politics in the history of Russia and Russian Orthodoxy, but also the permanence of religion in politics, and the ambivalent effects of religion on politics and society under conditions of modernity.

Secularism, in turn, describes both a statecraft doctrine and a worldview. As a statecraft doctrine, secularism denotes a set of ethical–political principles at the center of which lies the separation of the political from religion. Secularism is, in the words of José Casanova, “an epistemic knowledge regime”. Knowledge regimes give shape to institutions, and the modern secular knowledge regime has given shape to different arrangements for the separation of religion from politics, from morality, from science, and from law. As a statecraft doctrine, therefore, secularism means the separation of church and state. What turns a knowledge regime into an -ism, into a worldview or ideology, is the fact that it “may be held unreflexively or be assumed phenomenologically as the taken-for-granted normal structure of modern reality, as a modern *doxa*” (Casanova 2011, 55). When secularism is seen as a *doxa* (“belief”) by those who hold it and by those who criticize it, it becomes a rival to religion. The title of this article is *Russian Orthodoxy and secularism*, because the focus of the analysis lies on the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism as a rival knowledge regime and principle of modern institutions.

Russian Orthodoxy, the other term in the title of this article, also requires a brief definition. Russian Orthodoxy refers to one branch of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the religious traditions, practices, and believers identified with it. The term can comprise different articulations of the Russian Orthodox tradition over time and different levels of analysis, from forms of lived religion to theology. Within Russian Orthodoxy, different and also rival definitions of various aspects of Orthodoxy and of its place in the world are the norm; it is therefore a pluralistic and fluid concept.

The *Russian Orthodox Church*, by contrast, refers to the concrete historical, organizational and ecclesiastical institutionalization of this branch of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. When I refer to the Russian Orthodox Church, I mean the institution, with its organizational hierarchy (patriarch, bishops, priests, lay believers), governance structures (patriarchate, eparchies [dioceses], parishes, monasteries) and procedures of decision making (synods, councils). The institutional set-up of the Russian Orthodox Church has changed profoundly several times in the course of its history, from its foundation at the time of the Kievan Rus’ in 988, to the transfer of the Patriarchate to Moscow in 1352, to the replacement of the Patriarchate by a “Holy Governing Synod” through

the church-reforms by Peter I in 1721, to the re-installment of the Patriarchate in 1917, as well as waves of severe repression during the Soviet period, and its restoration after Communism. I use the term *Moscow Patriarchate* not as synonymous to Russian Orthodox Church, but in a more narrow sense denoting its leadership and governing center. This governing center is made up of the Patriarch, currently Patriarch Kirill, who was elected in 2009, and a series of different departments and commissions. In this article, some of those organizational units, such as the Department of External Church Relations directed by Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), the Department for Relations between the Church and Society, directed until 2016 by Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin (1968–2020), and the Patriarchal Commission for Family, Defense of Motherhood and Childhood directed by Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov, will be mentioned.²

1.2 *Theoretical Perspectives: Religious Economy, Desecularization, Postsecularity*

This survey article develops and contrasts three theoretical perspectives on Russian Orthodoxy and secularism: religious economy, desecularization, and postsecularity. The two mainstream views, which I briefly portrayed in the beginning of this introduction, constitute the first and second theoretical perspectives. According to the first, the theory of religious economy (Stark and Bainbridge 1985), religion is a social response to a universal human need. Religious market theory predicts that levels of religiosity will be high when people can choose between different religious teachings with different forms of prayer and spirituality that suit individual tastes, and that they will decline when a state restricts religious pluralism and creates conditions of monopoly for one religion. Religious vitality depends on a free religious market and religious pluralism. Post-Soviet Russia is both a confirmation and an outlier for religious market theory, because it manifests, on the one hand, the persistence and revival of religion despite adverse conditions and, on the other, the closure of the religious market due to the predominance of the Russian Orthodox Church (Froese 2008).

The second theoretical perspective is that of desecularization (Karpov 2010). It interprets religious revival as a form of counter-secularization. Russian Orthodoxy's revival after Communism is, from this perspective, the sign of a larger civilizational process unfolding in modern societies, which entails a profound shift in the role of religion. Religion is moving back center-stage after

2 This article follows the usual academic convention of referring to clerics at the level of bishops by ecclesiastical title, name and, for disambiguation, the surname added in brackets. Other clerics are referred to by title, name and surname.

centuries of secularization, and secularism as *the* modern statecraft doctrine and predominant modern worldview is challenged. Following Karpov, I show that the theoretical perspective of desecularization is useful for understanding the post-communist recreation of the Moscow Patriarchate as a quasi-state church and anti-modernist tendencies inside Russian Orthodoxy.

The third theoretical perspective I develop in this article is that of postsecularity (Stoeckl and Uzlaner 2019a). Unlike the religious economy model, which presumes the persistence and coexistence of the modern secular state and religion, with the two remaining essentially separate, and unlike the desecularization perspective, which theorizes the dominance of religion over the modern secular order, the postsecular perspective refrains from sketching a “big picture” and focuses on the transformative interactions of the secular and the religious sphere. The postsecular perspective helps to zoom in on the paradoxes of Russian Orthodoxy as civil religion, which smoothly combines practices and ideas from the Communist era, from Orthodoxy theology, and from Western Christian social conservatism. These interactions leave neither side intact, but lead—as encapsulated in the use of the term by Jürgen Habermas—to “a situation in which secular reason and a religious consciousness that has become reflexive engage in a relationship” (Habermas and Mendieta 2010, 5).

Calling this third perspective “postsecular” aligns with a growing body of scholarship that seeks to move beyond long-held assumptions about the connection between modernity, religion and secularism, such as the notion that religion is best defined as a set of personal beliefs, or that secularism as differentiation of state and religion is an essential feature of modernity (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and Van Antwerpen 2011, Asad 1993, Connolly 1999, Beaumont 2019). In the sociology of religion, we can by now speak of the emergence of a postsecular research paradigm, whose features are renewed attention to religion and secularity beyond the West (Casanova 2013, Rosati 2015, Rosati and Stoeckl 2012, Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr, and Middell 2015), and an empirical focus on religious-secular entanglements (Molendijk, Beaumont, and Jedan 2010, Beaumont and Baker 2011). What the Russian case-study adds to this literature is the theoretically important observation that the transformative interaction between the religious and the secular sphere may amount to a “modernization” of religious consciousness, but not with the progressive and pro-democratic outcome that was assumed by Habermas and most scholars who draw on him (Stoeckl and Uzlaner 2019b).

In this article, I show that all three theoretical perspectives are warranted in the study of Russian Orthodoxy, and each translates into a different research perspective: on lived religion, on religion-state relations, and on religious-secular entanglements. The research perspectives developed in this survey

article draw on a non-partisan reading across different disciplines: these include sociology of religion, both in its quantitative as well as qualitative methodological articulation, social and cultural anthropology and history of ideas, historical institutionalism, political sociology, comparative politics, and international relations. Eventually, every particular research project in the wide field of Orthodoxy and Russian society and politics has to settle on a narrower disciplinary approach and methodological tool-kit: whether it is the study of ordinary believers' lives in the post-Soviet period from the perspective of social and cultural anthropology, the relationship between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Kremlin from the angle of historical institutionalism, or a political sociological study of the actors and institutions that determine the Russian Orthodox Church's discourse on secularism, democracy and human rights. The beauty of subject-driven research like the study of Russian Orthodoxy lies in the fact that each approach is worthwhile and relevant for the other, and each can add a piece to the puzzle and offer insights that help advance new research perspectives.³

1.3 *Overview*

This survey article is divided into four parts, each covering one historical period: Russian Orthodoxy and secularism before the twentieth century, during Communism, in the post-Soviet period, and in the twenty-first century.

In section 2, I analyze the history of Russian Orthodoxy leading up to the twentieth century. Tensions between the model of symphonic power-sharing and the reality of state control over religion existed as cracks in the edifice of the Russian Orthodox Church from its foundation until the Bolshevik takeover. These cracks became even wider during the Communist period.

In section 3, I describe Russian Orthodoxy during Communism as a phenomenon with many facets. Repression, collaboration, dissidence and emigration are the four main keys to interpret Russian Orthodoxy in this period. From each of these empirical vantage points, the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism appears in a different light. This multiple experience of secularism translated into a variety of strategies and ways of interpreting the place of Russian Orthodoxy in post-Soviet Russian society.

After Communism, the Russian Orthodox Church experienced a revival and a process of internal differentiation into liberal, fundamentalist, and

3 In this survey article, I refer to English language sources of Russian texts whenever possible. With few exceptions, I limit references to secondary literature in English. However, it should be stressed that, even though more and more scholarly literature is available in English, knowledge of Russian is indispensable for doing original research on Russian Orthodoxy.

traditionalist camps, which I describe in section 4. Each of these camps had a different vision of the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and the secular state. The one that prevailed on the official and institutional plane was the traditionalist perspective, built around the defense of “traditional values” and a close and privileged cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state.

In section 5, finally, I analyze how two decades into the twenty-first century, the constitutional reform of 2020 sets the end-point to the previous, volatile period of “post-Soviet religion”, characterized by internal church-struggles. The constitutional reform establishes Russian Orthodoxy as a civil religion that is complicit in the creation of undemocratic, autocratic structures in Russia. I offer two research perspectives for analyzing this latest development, one focused on the conditions of the “pro-Orthodox consensus” inside Russian society, and one looking at Russian Orthodoxy in the context of the global culture wars.

Applying the multiple theoretical toolkit outlined above, the article follows a systematic approach of first presenting the dominant narrative in the scholarly literature on Russian Orthodoxy and secularism for each of the three different periods of history, then adding research perspectives that qualify, challenge or add to this dominant view. In this way, the article seeks to underscore the ambivalent and at times contradictory history of Russian Orthodoxy as an institution and as lived religion, the multiple character of the Russian Orthodox Church as a legitimizer and as a potential critic of state power, and the openness of Russian Orthodoxy to interpretations that see it as the opposite or as the entangled “other” of Western modernity.

2 Russian Orthodoxy and Secularism Up to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Russia has frequently been seen as Europe’s “other”, as different from the West, both by Western observers as well as by Russians themselves. The source of this otherness is usually considered to be religion, i.e. the difference between Western Latin Christendom and Eastern Orthodox Christendom. In the course of the first millennium and throughout the Middle Ages, the two directions inside Christianity developed divergent doctrines of church-state relations. In early medieval Western Europe, political culture was characterized by an antagonistic relationship between worldly rulers and the papacy, who were in constant conflict over who held power over whom (the Investitures Controversy). In Western Europe, the conflict eventually resulted in a separation and

differentiation of the religious institutional sphere (churches, ecclesiastical institutions) and the secular sphere of the state, economy, science, and arts (the Latin word *saeculum* means “worldly”). The system of differentiation liberated creative and critical energies inside both institutional spheres. Western Christianity was transformed theologically and institutionally by scholasticism and the Reformation; political power and society in Western Europe were transformed through the Renaissance, the end of feudalism, the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, and, eventually, the democratic revolutions.

The Byzantine and Russian Orthodox world, by contrast, is said not to have embarked on a comparable pathway to institutional separation and differentiation. Furthermore, the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans in the mid-fifteenth century and the conquest of the medieval Russian lands by the Mongols until the fifteenth century have led historians to suggest that Eastern Christian societies do not share the Western European trajectory of secularization and modernization. This standard interpretation informs classic works on Russian history, like James Billington's *The Icon and the Axe* (Billington 1966) or Richard Pipes' *Russia under the Old Regime* (Pipes 1974). Likewise in the Soviet Union the school of cultural semiotics of Yuriy Lotman and Boris Uspenskij put heavy emphasis on the religious difference between Western and Eastern Christianity in explaining the specificity of Russia (in their classical article on dualism in Russian culture originally published in Russian in 1977 and published in English as Lotman and Uspenskii 1985). Orthodox scholars have also interpreted the modern history of Russia and of Orthodox countries in Central and Eastern Europe as premised on a fundamentally different religious, philosophical and cultural trajectory from the West (Meyendorff 1996a, Ware 1963).

Secularism, in this dominant view, is a doctrine that originated in the Western Christian experience of power-struggle between the papacy and the world rulers amidst the ruins of the Roman Empire. In the Eastern Christian experience, by contrast, spiritual and worldly rulers are said to have cooperated harmoniously, a vision summarized as the doctrine and teaching of *symphonia*. The concept is usually traced back to the very foundation of the Byzantine Empire by the first christened Emperor Constantine in 330 AD. In the *Eisagoge* (also referred to as *Epanagoge*), a law codex promulgated by the Byzantine Emperor Basil the Great in the second half of the ninth century, the doctrine is described as follows: “The temporal power and the priesthood relate to each other as body and soul; they are necessary for state order just as body and soul are necessary in a living man. It is in their linkage and harmony that the well-being of a state lies” (quoted in: Vassiliadis 2003, 99). *Symphonia* is the outward sign of a regulated state order based on two sources of authority: the worldly order embodied in the Emperor on the one hand, and the

Church, or spiritual order, represented by the Patriarch on the other. Both institutions depend on the cooperation of the other for the system to work, since both serve one and the same Christian community. In practical terms, in the condition of *symphonia*, the Byzantine Church did not see itself as rivalling or opposing the Emperor, but as half of a relationship in which both sides worked together to serve state interests. At the same time, however, the Emperor as head of state was subordinated to the true spiritual ruler—Christ *pantocrator*. The patriarchs were assigned the task of constantly reminding worldly rulers of this fact and of their obligations towards God and to the people (Papaderos 2006, 113–115). The concept of *symphonia* was, in essence, not much different from Western Christian models of the time—Augustine’s doctrine of “two cities” or the Gelasian theory of “two swords”—but unlike in the West, where these models were challenged in the course of the Middle Ages and eventually replaced by secularism as a statecraft doctrine, the Orthodox world underwent a very different social, cultural and political development.

After the fall of the Byzantine Empire to Ottoman rule, Muscovite Rus’ saw itself as direct successor to the Empire that had ceased to exist and, following the Byzantine state-church model, *symphonia* became the determining statecraft doctrine in the development of relationships between the Tsars and the Orthodox Church in Russia (Meyendorff 1996b, 177). The doctrine reached its symbolic heights in the nineteenth century, when Russian Orthodoxy came to be seen as leading factor in preserving Russian and pan-Orthodox unity. Under the slogan *Narodnost’-Samodershavie-Pravoslavie* (“Nationality-Autocracy-Orthodoxy”), Tsar Nicholas I in the nineteenth century cemented the alliance between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church, making it one pillar of the empire (Engelstein 2003, 23). A significant architectural landmark expressing this unity between church and state was the Cathedral of Christ the Redeemer commissioned by Tsar Alexander I to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon in 1812 in the centre of Moscow. The fate of this Cathedral symbolizes the twists and turns of the Russian Orthodox Church’s history as state church, and I will come back to it several times in this article.

At this point, however, it is important to point out that the standard cultural history of division between Western and Eastern Christianity since the time of the schism in 1054 and the related idea of a special (by Western standards of secularization) state-church cooperation in the Russian Empire requires some qualification (Kivelson and Greene 2003a, Freeze 2000). *Symphonia* (cooperation between church and state) as an alternative statecraft doctrine to secularism (separation of church and state) continues to exercise fascination and influence in Russian Orthodoxy; in section 4, I will show that even in the twenty-first century, the Russian Orthodox Church harks back to this

doctrine in its social teaching. Yet the historical, cultural and political ties between Russia and the Latin West from the early modern times onwards were constant; Russia partook in the developments of Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment that were unfolding in Western Europe; Russian intellectual and religious life developed a critical public vis-à-vis the alliance of church and state. It would therefore be an oversimplification to see the experience of secularization and the condition of secularity as something alien or belated in the Russian Orthodox context. Two research perspectives from the history of Russian Orthodoxy before the twentieth century make this point.

2.1 *The Limits and Indirect Effects of Symphonia*

The power and status of the Russian Orthodox Church inside the Russian Empire was never as unitary and complete as the official state doctrine, premised on the Byzantine ideal of *symphonia*, suggested. In the context of the emerging Russian Empire, the equilibrium between worldly and spiritual power gradually shifted in favour of the Tsars, and led to the Russian Orthodox Church no longer having an equal share of power, but being assigned a subordinate role. The church reform of the eighteenth century officially marked the subordination of the Church to the Tsarist state regime and its role as state church within the Russian Empire. “Leaving the post unfilled after the death of the last patriarch, in 1721 Peter the Great entrusted control of the church to a newly created administrative institution, the Holy Synod, which remained in charge of church affairs until the end of the imperial era. The abolition of the patriarchate signified a radical change in the relationship between church and state in Russia. The Holy Synod operated as a branch of the bureaucratic, secular government and was headed by a layperson appointed by the tsar.” (Kivelson and Greene 2003a, 6)

The reforms of Peter the Great paralleled dynamics of secularization and confessionalization across Europe, where, starting in the sixteenth century, national churches came under the control of the state in Protestant as well as in Catholic countries, leading to the establishment of modern confessional territorial absolutist states (Casanova 2019, 18–24). In Russia, Peter’s reforms are generally considered to have led to a complete subordination of the Russian Orthodox Church to the state, but as historian Gregory Freeze has pointed out, they also put some groups and individuals inside Russian Orthodoxy in a position of critical distance from their own church hierarchy and the state, leading to the emergence of critical views inside the Church that eventually came to question the very legitimacy of the alliance between church and state by the end of the nineteenth century (Freeze 1985, 1996). A second aspect that set limits to the power and status of the Russian Orthodox Church in the imperial

period was the fact of religious pluralism. The Russian Orthodox Church was the dominant, established religion in a multi-confessional Russian Empire (Werth 2016), but religious toleration and (restricted) forms of freedom of religion created the conditions for challenging the official state doctrine (Poole and Werth 2018).

2.2 *Entanglements of Russian and European Trajectories of Reform and Secularization*

The view that religion, politics and society in Western Europe were transformed by scholasticism, the Reformation, and the Renaissance, whereas the Byzantine and Russian Orthodox world were somehow left out from these developments, is inaccurate. Historical and philological research has shown that Russian Orthodoxy was early on affected by debates about the status of the church in the world that echoed the Renaissance, Reformation and processes of secularization in Europe. As early as 1525, the Greek-born monk Maksim Grek,⁴ who had spent part of his life as a young man in Renaissance Florence, introduced a radical critique of close church-state relations and of church hierarchy into the Russian context. He referred to the teachings of Girolamo Savonarola, the Dominican friar who had preached against clerical corruption and despotic rule in the Florentine Republic and had been excommunicated and condemned to death by the Pope in 1498 (Hamburg 2018, 50–51). Maksim Grek also paid a high price for his teachings, as he was put on trial and imprisoned, but his ideas had an impact on a controversy that erupted within the Russian Orthodox Church in the sixteenth century between the so-called Non-Possessors and Possessors (Garzaniti 2015). In this conflict, the former voiced protests against ecclesiastical wealth and monastic landholding, believing that monks and priests should attend entirely to their vows and be poor. “They also held that the Church should be independent of the authority of the state, which, since it belonged to a lower order of reality, was seen to have no right to interfere in religious matters. The Possessors by contrast spoke for the virtue of a close union between the autocracy and a powerful Church, with the former acting as the natural protector of the latter.” (Madeley 2018, 270) In 1503, a Church Council finally settled the controversy in favour of the Possessors, but John Madeley interprets the controversy as a form of resistance to the power and culture of the official Church and the worldly authorities, in

4 Maksim Grek, also known as Maximus the Greek or Maximus the Philosopher (1475–1556) and canonized as a saint of the Russian Orthodox Church, was a Greek monk and scholar. Born in Greece, Maximus fled Ottoman occupation to Italy and lived in Florence and Venice under the name Michele Trivolis, before returning to Mount Athos in Greece. From there he moved to Russia, where he acted as a translator and theologian.

line with comparable developments of religious reform across Europe in the same historical period.

There are many more examples of entanglements between developments of religious reform and the Enlightenment in Western Europe and Russia, for example the Old Believers (De Simone 2018) or the Decembrist-Movement (Trigos 2009). They all point to the fact that, as Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Greene write in their introduction to *Orthodox Russia. Belief and Practice under the Tsars*, “Orthodoxy faced continual challenges. It had to struggle to establish secure roots among the sparse, dispersed pagan population, then to create and enforce unity of belief and practice within the Orthodox flock, and ultimately, to maintain its primacy in a diverse, multi-ethnic empire, in which a wide variety of religions coexisted and interacted” (Kivelson and Greene 2003a, 7–8). Recent scholarship has highlighted the contested and pluralistic nature of Russian Orthodoxy in the imperial period on the level of “lived religion” (Kivelson and Greene 2003b), and it has demonstrated that the efforts on the part of the state and the Moscow Patriarchate to enforce a unitary doctrine often had counterproductive results, leading to more criticism of the church (Scarborough 2018).

“Although the Orthodox Church was historically tied to the Russian lands and the Russian princes,” Laura Engelstein writes, “what it stood for in spiritual and cultural terms was, by the nineteenth century, no longer taken for granted” (Engelstein 2003, 23). The Russian Orthodox Church found itself challenged by thinkers who developed their religious philosophy in dialogue with German Idealism and romanticism largely outside of the official canons of Orthodox theological teaching. During the “Silver Age”—the name given to the period from roughly 1890 until the Bolshevik Revolution, characterized by prolific literary and artistic activity—Russian writers, poets, painters and composers formulated a Russian variant of the cultural and literary modernism that flourished in European capital cities like Berlin, London, Paris or Vienna. Religious and socialist themes aimed at a renewal of the Russian Church and the Tsarist state, and some of the thinkers, like Nikolai Berdyaev⁵ and Sergei Bulgakov,⁶ sought to combine socialism and Orthodoxy. However, the Christian socialism advocated by these representatives of the Russian *intelligentsia* could not

5 Nikolai A. Berdyaev (1874–1948) was a Russian philosopher. He emigrated to Western Europe in 1923 and died in France. His works has influenced Christian philosophers in the Eastern and in the Western Christian traditions.

6 Sergei N. Bulgakov (1871–1944) was a Russian Orthodox theologian, philosopher and priest. Besides Berdyaev, he is one of the most important figures of the Russian emigration. His theological ideas caused controversy in the 1930s and 40s, when he was accused of modernism and heresy by his main antagonist, the Russian emigré theologian Georges Florovsky (Bird 2003, Valliere 2000).

develop into a full-fledged reformative agenda for Russia during their lifetime nor could it change the hierarchical structure of the church, yet its potential remained a reference-point for individual theologians and priests during the Soviet Union and after (Copleston 1988).

Research perspectives on the cultural history of Russian Orthodoxy, on religious pluralism in the Russian Empire, the history of lived religion and on the religious intelligentsia of the turn of the nineteenth century are important for a better understanding of the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism, since they underscore the sociological claim that Russian Orthodoxy has undergone *sui generis* processes of secularization notwithstanding the fact that on the level of church-state relations secularism (the separation of church and state) as a statecraft doctrine was not applied. Secularity as a condition, to recall the definition from the introduction, means that religion continues to play a role in the way in which a state is organized: it may still serve to legitimize claims to power and knowledge, and it may still inform the worldview of citizens, but it no longer provides the overall and unquestioned frame of reference for state and society. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Russian Orthodoxy found itself in a situation where a plurality of worldviews and of potential religion-state arrangements were an option. With regard to secularization as a process and secularity as a condition, pre-revolutionary Russia was therefore much less “the other” to the countries of Western Europe than suggested by much of the scholarship with a focus on the difference between Latin and Orthodox Christianity and their different trajectories of reform and secularization.

3 Russian Orthodoxy and Secularism during the Communist Period

The October Revolution of 1917 marked the end of the Russian Tsarist Empire and the beginning of Soviet Communism. From the perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church, 1917 did not only mean the onset of long decades of persecution of men and women in the Soviet Union on grounds of their religious faith, it also brought about the re-establishment of the canonical institutional structure of the Moscow Patriarchate, which had been displaced two hundred years earlier by Peter the Great. In an ironic twist of history, the year 1917 saw the Russian Orthodox Church restored to institutional independence and yet doomed to peril at one and the same time. The newly elected Patriarch Tikhon⁷

7 Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow (1865–1925) was born in Russia and became Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church in North America. He returned to Russia in 1907 and was elected Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia in 1918. He was repeatedly placed under arrest by the Bolsheviks and forced to issue statements of loyalty.

boldly anathematized the Bolsheviks as “the enemies of Christ” before he was placed under arrest; subsequently thousands of churches and monasteries were shut down or destroyed, and many priests, monks, nuns, and believers were killed throughout the 1920s and 1930s (for an overview: Ellis 1986, Lupinin 2010, Walters 1986, Ware 1963).

Ware summarizes the Bolsheviks’ attitude as follows: “Religious belief, in all its manifestations, was an error to be repressed and extirpated” (Ware 1963, 145). All church lands and property were confiscated by the Communists, religious organizations were ordered to hand over control of their educational institutions, the display of religious images in any state institution was banned, and a requirement for civil marriage was introduced. On January 1918 the revolutionary government issued a Decree on the Separation of the State from the Church and the Church from the School, which deprived the Russian Church of legal personality, thereby rendering it incapable of holding property in its own right (Ware 1963, 145–150).

The Bolsheviks aimed at the eradication of religious sentiments from Russian society and the replacement of religion with a belief in the future of Communism. Religion was seen as backward, reactionary, and oppressive; Communism, in turn, stood for future, modernity and education. A propaganda poster from the period shows a girl trying to escape the grip of her grandmother, who wants to drag her to church instead of sending her to school; another propaganda poster shows a Russian cosmonaut in space and his message from the skies that “There is no god”. “Propaganda”, Madeley writes, “was to become an important tool in the campaign against the Church and religion generally” (Madeley 2018, 278). The League of Militant Atheists was put in charge of an ambitious five-year plan aimed at achieving the total eradication of religion by 1937: “In 1932–3 all external signs of religion were to be destroyed; during 1933–4 all religious pictures in books or people’s homes were to disappear; during 1934–5 the whole country and particularly its youth were to be subjected to intensive atheistic propaganda; during 1935–6, any places of worship still standing would be destroyed; and, finally, during 1936–7, religion were to be rooted out from its most secret hiding places.” (Knox 2004, 46) The 1929 Law on Religious Associations stepped up the pressure on religious organizations by restricting lawful religious activity to the performance of religious services in registered buildings, and thereby making “almost every other kind of religious witness or activity illegal: conducting evangelistic activity or religious education, producing and distributing religious literature, organizing communal activities for believers, raising money for social or charitable purposes” (Madeley 2018, 276). With this law in place, Madeley concludes, the religious freedom ostensibly guaranteed by the 1936 Constitution meant little or nothing.

The Bolsheviks did not attempt, however, to formally ban or abolish the church or other religious organizations completely. Article 52 of the Soviet Constitution of 1977 guaranteed freedom of conscience, extending this freedom to religious worship and its opposite, atheist propaganda: "Citizens of the USSR are guaranteed freedom of conscience, that is, the right to profess or not to profess any religion, and to conduct religious worship or atheistic propaganda. Incitement of hostility or hatred on religious grounds is prohibited" (Pankhurst 1988, 188). Legally the Soviet system was one of complete disestablishment and separation of church and state, not unlikely the constitutional laicism found in France or religious disestablishment in the United States. Practically, however, it meant anti-religious persecution, at least for most of the seventy years of communist rule. It should also be added that the duality of formal legal disestablishment and practical persecution afflicted all other religious communities in the Soviet Union, i.e. Muslims in Central Asia, Buddhists, Jews, and Protestants (Keller 2001, Fletcher 1973).

It is against this background of persecution that the narratives of a revival and rebirth of the Russian Orthodox Church after Communism from the 1990s onwards, cited in the introduction, must be read and interpreted. The history of injustice, suppression and violence that afflicted the Russian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century explains the negative stance of the Church towards what its representatives usually call "militant secularism" (Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev) 2004), by which they mean secularism as an ideology and program of forced secularization.

Summarizing the argument on the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism so far, one could thus argue that the Russian Orthodox Church prior to the twentieth century rejected the principle of secularism (opposing it with *symphonia*) and then became the victim of a hardened, ideological version of it during the twentieth century. Secularism as a statecraft doctrine, as a mode of institutionalizing the relationship between the state and religion in a way that guarantees institutional autonomy for the church and freedom of conscience and religious freedom for all citizens, was not on the horizon of Russian Orthodoxy until the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the same time, however, forms of state-church collaboration did develop under Communism and Orthodox religious life did continue during the Soviet Union (and in emigration, a point I will come back to below), thus creating a condition of precarious secularity and religiosity for the church and for believers. Research perspectives that focus on the permanence of church-state relations in the Soviet Union, on the continuity of religious life under Communism and on impulses coming from Russian Orthodox emigration complicate the narrative of repression and survival, but they also give important clues

to understanding the situation of Russian Orthodoxy after the fall of the Soviet Union.

3.1 *The Russian Orthodox Church's Collaboration with the Soviet State*

Firstly, it is important to recognize that the Soviet history of the Russian Orthodox Church is not only one of repression, but also of collaboration and cooptation. What remained of the Russian Orthodox Church after the anti-religious purges of the 1920s and 1930s was eventually rehabilitated in 1941 by Stalin in his effort to mobilize church support during the Second World War. Stalin not only gave the green light for the election of a new Patriarch of Moscow, he also created a tight administrative structure for controlling the Church. Throughout the Soviet Union, the Soviet secret services controlled the activities of clergy through a Council for Religious Affairs. It is well-documented that numerous clergy members from the 1950s until the fall of the USSR worked as informants for the KGB (Armes 1991). Archival materials give a glimpse of how priests were approached by agents who had been instructed to show “no veneration”, to address the priests not with their clerical titles but “with name and father’s name”, to be just polite enough to “not put the feet on the table”, but sufficiently bold “to smoke in their presence” (Roccucci 2011, Corley 1996).

A particularly poignant example for the strict collaboration and Soviet control over the church’s “message” is the way in which the Russian Orthodox Church represented Soviet foreign policy interests in its external church relations.⁸ From 1942, the wartime effort and concerns over the post-war geopolitical order had led Stalin to loosen his destructive grip on the Church, and Patriarch Sergius⁹ was determined to lead his Church into collaboration with the state in order to assure its institutional survival (Dickinson 2000, Miner 2003, Roccucci 2011). The historian William Fletcher speaks about an “unwritten concordat” between the Soviet state and the Russian Orthodox Church during the Cold War, the terms of which he defines as follows: “From the Church’s point of view, the advantage of continued institutional existence in Soviet society were deemed sufficient to outweigh the religious—and sometimes ethical—incongruity of subservience to an anti-religious State in political matters,” and, “from the State’s point of view, the advantage which may accrue from the political co-operation of the Church

8 This section draws on chapter 1 of my book *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (Stoeckl 2014, 19–26).

9 Patriarch Sergius (1867–1944) was Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus’ following Patriarch Tikhon. After the death of Patriarch Tikhon, the Soviets prevented the re-election of a new head of the Church and Sergius became Patriarchal *locum tenens*, before being formally elected as Patriarch in 1943 in the context of Stalin’s relaxation of state repression of the Church.

were deemed sufficient to outweigh the ideological annoyance of a delay in the eventual disappearance of organized religion from Soviet society.” (Fletcher 1973, 5–6)

The collaboration of the Soviet government with the Russian Orthodox Church and other religious communities after 1945 was concentrated in the field of external relations, where the Soviet religious communities were expected to create a positive image of the Soviet Union in the international arena. The main topic for engagement of the religious communities—not only the Russian Orthodox Church, but also the Soviet Muslim and Buddhist communities (on Islam and Buddhism in Soviet foreign politics, see Fletcher 1973, 69–91)—was peace and disarmament propaganda. In the name of the campaign for peace, the Russian Orthodox Church initiated a series of ecumenical activities. These activities targeted, on the one hand, the other Orthodox Churches among which the Russian Orthodox Church sought to confirm its role as leader, and, on the other hand, Christian Churches worldwide, with whom the Russian Orthodox Church entered into dialogue. The Prague Christian Peace Conference, founded in 1961, constituted one such undertaking. It is described by the historian Fletcher as an institution whose primary function was propaganda for peace as an adjunct to the implementation of Soviet interests (Fletcher 1973, 40). Besides the Christian Peace Conference, the Russian Orthodox Church also became a member of the World Council of Churches in 1961. In these institutions, it became, as Webster points out, a “prime mover of moral statements”, which frequently included harsh criticism of US military aggression, but kept silent on the military actions of the Soviet Union or its client states (Webster 1993, 216). The Russian Orthodox Church also conducted a regular dialogue with the West and the East German Evangelical Churches (Overmeyer 2005).

The deal between Stalin and the Church consisted of an agreement that the Church would be spared repression in exchange for unconditional loyalty to the Soviet state. This pledge of loyalty included the Church’s silence on human rights violations by the government, in particular on religious persecution. As an illustration of this, it is worth recalling how, already during the 1930s, at a time when churches in the West were openly concerned about the violation of religious freedom in the Soviet Union, the patriarchal *locum tenens* Sergius denied Western charges that the Russian Orthodox Church was the victim of religious persecution. Fletcher reproduces an interview that Sergius was allowed to give to foreign journalists in Moscow in February 1930, which reveals clearly his determination to barter loyalty for survival. When the interviewer asked “Does persecution of religion really exist in the USSR and what forms does it take?” Sergius answered “Persecution of religion never did and does not exist in the USSR” (Fletcher 1973, 13).

But there was also an internal, ecclesiastical aspect to the denial that religious freedom was being violated in the Soviet Union. Before and during the Second World War, different parts of the Russian Orthodox Church had declared themselves independent from the Moscow Patriarchate, in particular the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (Miner 2003, 101). Patriarch Sergius accused “schismatic” forces of trying to weaken the Church, and his successor after 1945, Patriarch Alexej, made every effort, supported by the Soviet government, to bring these groups back under the jurisdiction of Moscow. The Russian Orthodox Church at the time welcomed the Soviet repression of the newly founded Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church¹⁰ or of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church¹¹ and relied on state support to achieve its own ecclesiastical goals. This historical background is crucial for understanding the conflict surrounding the declaration of autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2018 (Denysenko 2018).

During the 1980s, the years of perestroika, the Russian Orthodox Church was gradually restored to a public role (for a good overview of this period, see Garrard and Garrard 2008, and most recent Kotzer 2020). In 1988, the thousand year anniversary of the Christianization of medieval Rus’ was celebrated as a state event attended by the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, and broadcast on state television. The celebration—complete with a minted commemorative gold coin, state honors for the Patriarch and bishops, and a musical performance for hierarchs, members of the Politburo, and foreign diplomats at the Bolshoi Theatre—reinstated the Russian Orthodox Church as a national hallmark everyone could relate to and identify with in some way (Bell 1988). It was only logical that a few years later, during the 1990s, the Cathedral of Christ the Redeemer, erected by Tsar Alexander I and destroyed by the Soviets in 1931, was also painstakingly rebuilt in every gilded detail, vividly symbolising the process of restoration.

10 The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church was founded during the short-lived Ukrainian independence of the 1920s. It was repressed by the Soviet government, which favored the re-establishment of church structures under the Moscow Patriarchate. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church lived on in the diaspora and was re-established in 1990, before merging with the newly founded Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019.

11 The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, founded in 1596, is a church that follows the Byzantine rite of the Eastern Christian Churches while recognizing the Pope and being in communion with the Catholic Church. During the Soviet period, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was repressed and all church property was officially transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate. The Church lived on in the diaspora and was re-established in Ukraine in 1989, which led to conflicts with the Moscow Patriarchate over church property.

What is important to point out in summing up this research perspective on church-state collaboration during the Soviet period, is that it is not the break in the Orthodox “symphonic ideal” caused by the Communists’ rule that stands out, but its continuity. In this way, the narrative of suppression and survival of Russian Orthodoxy during Communism is not denied, but it is qualified. As a result of its collaboration with the Soviet regime, the Russian Orthodox Church fell apart into a handful of hierarchs pampered by the state, representing the Russian Orthodox Church in international meetings and ecumenical initiatives, on the one side; and an oppressed flock of parish priests and believers, on the other side, many of whom were persecuted for their faith and sent to the gulags. This paradoxical situation continued throughout the Cold War, and opens up to a second research perspective on Russian Orthodoxy in the Soviet period: lived religion and religious dissident.

3.2 *Lived Religion and Religious Dissent in the Soviet Union*

The second research perspective on the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism addresses the situation of believers in the Soviet Union. The Church’s collaboration at the time did not go unchallenged. The most famous example of open clash between the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church, and those Russian Orthodox believers who demanded more freedom, is the case of the priest Gleb Yakunin.¹² In 1975, Yakunin and his fellow priest Lev Regelson wrote a letter to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, gathered in Nairobi that year. In their letter, the two priests denounced the persecution of religious believers in the Soviet Union and accused their Church of collaboration with the state (Kelly 1976). The official delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church tried to silence the protest and condemned the behaviour of the two priests. But Yakunin and Regelson were not the only religious protesters who challenged their Church and the Soviet Union; other figures in later years included Vladimir Rusak, Zoya Krakhmal’nikova, Felix Svetov, and Gleb Eshliman (Webster 1993, 57, Valliere 1997).

The plight of these individuals points to a much wider reality taking place below the radar of reports on “religious dissidence” diffused in the West;¹³

12 Gleb Yakunin (1934–2014) was well-known as an outspoken critic of the Patriarchate of Moscow. He became a member of parliament in the post-Soviet period for some time, and was eventually defrocked.

13 The plight of Orthodox believers under Communism attracted the attention of several institutions in the West, such as the UK’s Keston Institute, the Swiss organization G2W and the Italian Catholic foundation Russia Cristiana, which monitored human rights violations in Eastern Europe and maintained contacts with dissidents and religious human rights activists (Stoeckl 2014, 10).

namely lived religion in the Soviet Union. In recent years, research on religious practices under Communism has shown that “religious practice in the USSR and efforts to secularize Soviet society were mutually constituting and shaped the ongoing possibilities for individual and collective self-definition throughout the Soviet period” (Wanner 2012, 2). The volume *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine* edited by Catherine Wanner pioneers this approach, showing how confessional groups inside the Soviet Union were able to adapt their practices and beliefs to the social, political, and ideological constraints of Soviet society so as to continue to pursue their beliefs. Peripheral realities of religious practice resisted centralized anti-religious campaigns. Forms of “unsanctioned religiosity” also persisted during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, including pagan rituals in natural groves, pilgrimages to sacred sites, or ad-hoc religious gatherings in cemeteries (Luehrmann 2012, Rock 2012). Whereas traditional analyses of religion in the Soviet Union tended to focus on what the state “did to” religion and believers, these studies, John Anderson points out in his review, offer a more dynamic approach, stressing state secularism and lived religion as a two-way process (Anderson 2014).

Most of the research on lived religion is historical, sociological and anthropological (Luehrmann 2015, Wanner 2011, Hann 2002), and offers a corrective or at least a useful qualification to those political sociology and political science approaches that have tended to interpret the shift from the Soviet to the post-Soviet epoch exclusively from the perspective of institutional power relations between church and state. Focusing only on notions of change derived from the Cold-War era and encapsulated in terms like “revival”, “resurgence” or “rebirth”, mainstream interpretations risk affirming the narrative according to which Soviet secularization and atheism successfully suppressed religion, which could “re-live” only after the fall of Communism. Such a perspective runs the risk of overlooking the rich and multifaceted realities of religious practices during the Soviet period.¹⁴ This is true both for Russian Orthodoxy as well as other religions in the Soviet Union, in particular Islam in Central Asia (Sartori and Babajanov 2019). Such a research perspective shifts the focus from the study of the Russian Orthodox Church and state secularism to religious pluralism in the country and practices at the intersection of lived religion and state secularism.

To illustrate the precariousness of religious life at the intersection of Soviet state secularism and religion, it is worth looking briefly at the fate of the Russian Orthodox intellectuals associated with the ideas developed by pre-revolutionary philosophers of the Silver Age (see 2.2.). Since religious

14 I am grateful to Paolo Sartori for this insight.

philosophy and theological writings were rejected on ideological grounds by the communist regime and any activity in this field could be sanctioned by the authorities, most of this religious philosophical debate happened underground, and literature circulated only in closed circles of individuals, the so-called *samizdat*. In these circles, philologists like Aleksej Losev¹⁵ or Sergej Averintsev¹⁶ enjoyed the reputation of preservers of the memory of pre-revolutionary Russian religious thought, and a priest like Alexander Men'¹⁷ could become a teacher and spiritual leader for many believers among Moscow's educated circles. Until perestroika, all of these religious experts lived under precarious circumstances, always at risk of either being co-opted (through the secret services) or persecuted by the Soviet state.

One of these was Vladimir Bibikhin,¹⁸ who in an essay entitled "For administrative use", reveals a government-sponsored project for the preparation of

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- 15 Aleksej Losev (1893–1988) was the living "link" between the pre-revolutionary religious philosophers, some of whom he had met personally, and the religious dissidents during the post-Stalin Soviet years. He had spent parts of his life as a prisoner in Soviet labor camps. Upon his return to Moscow he worked as a teacher at the Moscow Pedagogical Institute and received students for private philosophy lessons. At the time of perestroika he was already advanced in age, but his testimony continued to be of importance for students of religious philosophy. His house, *Dom Loseva*, is now a museum and center for the study of Russian religious philosophy.
- 16 Sergej Averintsev (1937–2004) was a teacher of philology at the Moscow State University. His courses on "Early Byzantine Literature" were famous, the improbable title hiding what was in fact the teaching of patristic theology and ancient Greek philosophy, ideologically inconvenient subjects during the Soviet period. Averintsev was a central figure among the religious intelligentsia throughout the 1970s and 80s and his lectures at Moscow State University drew large audiences. He was criticized in conservative church circles for his ecumenism and his advancements in Orthodox theology, for example his proposal to translate the liturgy from Church Slavonic into modern Russian. For a detailed analysis and further reading on the circle around Losev and Averintsev, see (Stoeckl 2007, 2009, Horujy, Mikhailovsky, and Stoeckl 2016).
- 17 Alexander Men' (1935–1991) was a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church with a reputation as a critic of the Soviet regime. He was very active in religious education and became a popular voice of Orthodox Christianity in the late *perestroika* period. He ran a radio program and attracted large audiences to his sermons and speeches. His parish outside Moscow was a meeting point for religious dissidents from the capital. Conservative Orthodox church circles were critical of Men' for his ecumenism and his openness towards the laity inside the Church, and Russian nationalists resented his Jewish origins. He was assassinated under circumstances that were never clarified in 1991 (for more background on Men' and his legacy, see Agadjanian 2013).
- 18 Vladimir Bibikhin (1938–2004) worked as translator and taught philology and philosophy at Moscow State University. A student of Losev and a close friend of Averintsev, his writings offer a chronicle of the Moscow circle of religious intellectuals. In Russia, he is remembered as the translator of Martin Heidegger and many other contemporary Western

philosophical digests on Russian and Western philosophy. Bibikhin recalls critically that the Soviet government was interested in Russian religious thinkers inasmuch as it could shape their ideas into an official canon that could be read in support of Russian nationalism and, as an anti-individualist philosophy, of Communism. “The ones in power started to look for ideological alternatives to Marxism early,” Bibikhin wrote. As early as 1973, political strategists started to consider Orthodox patriotism as an easy way out of an ideological dead-end. Especially with regard to an ideological underpinning for the Soviet army, the state organs busied themselves with the elaboration of ideological alternatives, to this end employing even the “innate dissidents”, as Bibikhin called himself and his fellows. These scholars translated and reviewed prohibited literature, their texts being published in a series with the signature *DSP* (*dlya sluzhebnogo pol'zovaniya*, transl. for administrative use), numbered and limited editions that would be carefully distributed among state-officials. Since the authorities imagined that Orthodoxy could provide a particularly useful ideological background for patriotism, research in this field was intensified. Bibikhin recalls that in the end of the 1970s, religion was a particularly well-financed part of the *DSP*-series. Making *DSP*-literature available outside of the controlled circulation was a criminal offence and even as late as 2001, Bibikhin was tormented by the secrecy of these years: “There were cases, quite frequently, when dissidents were found to have such numbered editions, and an entire investigation set in. [...] That I might be charged for the possession of numbered volumes is a constant fear of mine, even today, in spring 2001” (quoted in: Stoeckl 2015, 396). Towards the end of his life, Bibikhin looked back critically on this government-sponsored work on religious literature: “Today, as the former body of the Moscow milieu has dissolved, one could rightfully think and say that the air in the country would be lighter, but cleaner, if the social science ‘for administrative use’ had never existed” (quoted in: Stoeckl 2015, 395).

Summing up this research perspective on lived religion and religious dissent during Communism, it is important to point out that this perspective qualifies the dominant view that Soviet secularization and atheism successfully suppressed religious sensibilities, which could “re-live” only after the fall of Communism. Religious life in the USSR and efforts to secularize Soviet society were, as Wanner stresses, mutually constituting. Not only did they shape the ongoing possibilities for individual and collective self-definition throughout the Soviet period, they also had a deep impact on the ways in which the

philosophers and as productive philosopher in the tradition of phenomenology and deconstruction. See Stoeckl 2015 and the entire special issue on him in the journal *Stasis* (2015).

relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism was interpreted and handled by various actors after the end of Communism. In particular, it is important to recognize that the revival of Russian Orthodoxy in a nationalist and anti-Western vein was actively prepared by late-Soviet ideology. The ideological legacy of this type of revival of Russian Orthodoxy came to full fruition only after the end of Communism, as I will show in section 4. The believers and intellectuals that come into focus from the lived-religion perspective outlined in this section were well aware of this dynamic, and of the existence of different factions and instrumentalizations inside Russian Orthodoxy. Their—critical—perspective therefore remains important for understanding the development of Russian Orthodoxy after the end of Communism (see: Horujy, Mikhailovsky, and Stoeckl 2016).

3.3 *Russian Orthodoxy in the Western Emigration*

A third research perspective for a better understanding of the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism during the communist period, is the development of Russian Orthodoxy outside the Soviet Union, in emigration. The fate and vicissitudes of the Russian Orthodox Church in emigration constitute important background knowledge for understanding developments in Russian Orthodoxy to the present day. The Russian Orthodox Church in emigration, to a certain extent, faced the same challenges as the Russian Orthodox Church under Soviet rule: it had to come to terms with the loss of special relations with the state (it no longer had a state to refer to) and it had to establish religious life in the secular context of Western societies, where Orthodoxy was only a minority religion. In addition, it had to come to terms with democracy. In studying the way in which the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism has been shaped, imagined and played out institutionally, theologically and politically, the fate of the Russian Orthodox Church in emigration is therefore worthy of closer examination.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, during the civil war, many Russians, including many clerics of the Russian Orthodox Church, fled to the West and eventually established three alternative Russian Orthodox Churches in confrontation with the Moscow Patriarchate (for a complete overview, see Kalkandjieva 2017). The first, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (initially called Karlovackij Synod Church) assumed responsibility for the religious life of the Russian Orthodox emigrants in 1921, but soon political disagreements led to further subdivisions within the Orthodox diaspora. In 1922, the Patriarch of Moscow, probably under pressure from the Soviet authorities, denied canonical status to the Karlovackij Synod Church, which supported the White Army's position in the Russian civil war and the idea of a return to monarchy.

In response, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia declared itself the true heir of Russian Orthodoxy and developed parallel canonical structures in Western Europe and the United States. The Patriarch of Moscow recognized Metropolitan Evlogij in Paris as the head of the canonical Russian Orthodox Church in Western Europe. When, in 1930, the Moscow Patriarchate demanded a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet Union from the Paris clergy, however, Metropolitan Evlogij broke bonds with Moscow and entered into the canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, thus provoking a further split in the Russian Orthodox diaspora. Consequently, three church-entities rivalled each other for the canonical jurisdiction over the Orthodox diaspora.

Nicolas Zernov, in an article from 1976, described their positions in the following way: the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia was decidedly conservative, remaining faithful to the idea of Orthodox Tsardom and hoping for the restoration of the monarchy in Russia; the Russian Orthodox Church of Western Europe, under the jurisdiction of Moscow, advocated cooperation of church and state and understood its adherence to the Moscow Patriarchate as an act of solidarity with the suppressed Russian Church; and finally, the Russian Orthodox Church of Western Europe under the jurisdiction of Constantinople stood for the separation of church and state, and was strongly ecumenically minded (Zernov 1976).

In their book *The Ways of Orthodox Theology in the West*, Noble et al. (2014) describe the situation of emigration as an instance of “historical self-reflection of Orthodoxy encountering the West”. Russian Orthodox theologians and religious philosophers brought impulses to theology in the West, especially to patristics (the study of the writings of the Church Fathers of the first millennium AD) and Christian personalism. They also developed Orthodox theology in a new form that included a critical reflection on the past and the encounter with Western theological traditions through the ecumenical movement. Orthodoxy in the West during the Cold War was in a position to re-evaluate its relationship with secularism and democracy independently from historical models of symphonia, and from the grim reality of state-oppression that Russian Orthodoxy faced in the Soviet Union. “Orthodox Christians in the diaspora seemed to thrive within the European, American, and Australian democracies within which they found themselves,” Aristotle Papanikolaou and George Demacopoulos write in their introduction to *Christianity, Democracy and the Shadow of Constantine*. “Even if ambivalent, there seemed to be an emerging Christian consensus around democracy”—and, one should add, around secularism as a statecraft doctrine—and “it appeared as if Constantine’s shadow had finally receded.” (Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou 2017, 6)

After the fall of Communism, the Russian Orthodox parishes in the West became a source of conflict for the Moscow Patriarchate. The Russian Orthodox

Church Outside Russia eventually reunited, at least for the most part, with the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007. As for the Russian Orthodox Church in Western Europe, the old conflict of loyalty to the jurisdictions of the Moscow Patriarchate or the Patriarchate of Constantinople erupted once again and the Russian Orthodox community in the West experienced new divisions as the Moscow Patriarchate tried to gain stricter control over them (Hämmerli and Mucha 2014, Rimestad 2015b). Ecclesiology and controversies over jurisdictions in the diaspora are a complicated matter and potentially endless subject of investigation; yet they open new research perspectives on the question how Russian Orthodoxy relates to secularism under conditions of democracy and of minority-status in non-Orthodox host societies.

To conclude on Russian Orthodoxy and secularism under Communism, it is important to stress once again the severe and traumatic nature of the repression of religion in the Soviet Union that dismembered the Russian Orthodox Church. Metaphorically speaking, the cracks in the edifice of the Church that already existed prior to the Bolshevik takeover—between the church hierarchy and lay believers, between an idea of symphonic power-sharing and the reality of state control over religion—became even wider during the communist period and almost led to the collapse of Russian Orthodoxy. In short, then, Russian Orthodoxy during Communism was a many-faceted phenomenon. Repression, collaboration, dissidence and emigration are the four main keys to its interpretation in this period. From each of these perspectives, the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism appears in a different light. From the perspective of the repressed church, secularism was a hardened, inimical ideology; from the perspective of the collaborative church, it was a deficient form of twin toleration; from the perspective of dissidence, the secularism on paper of the Soviet Constitution was something to aspire to, as it promised to guarantee freedom of religion and separation of church and state; from the perspective of the emigrant church, secularism was the natural environment in which Orthodoxy found itself abroad. This multiple experience of secularism translated into a variety of strategies and ways of interpreting the place of Russian Orthodoxy in post-Soviet Russian society.

4 Russian Orthodoxy and Secularism after Communism

After the end of Communism, Russian Orthodoxy experienced an undisputed revival. Thousands of church buildings and religious artifacts were restituted to the Church by the state, a huge number of Russians discovered the Orthodox faith, and the Church restored its role as public religion in the eyes of Russian

citizens. The visible sign of this revival was the rebuilding of the Cathedral of Christ Redeemer in the heart of Moscow, on the exact same site where the Communists had demolished the previous cathedral in order to make space for a colossal Palace of the Soviets, which was never built. Survey data showed a clear rise in religious affiliation in Russia. The most striking survey data were produced by the International Social Survey Program and included in a widely cited Pew Research Center Report in 2014: according to this survey, in 1991, 31 per cent of Russians identified as Orthodox, while 61 per cent declared themselves unaffiliated. By 2008, these numbers had reversed, with 18 per cent declaring themselves unaffiliated, and 72 per cent identifying as Orthodox (Pew Research Center 2014b).

These numbers appeared to confirm what the theoretical perspective of religious economy predicted: ultimately, religion resists forced secularization. With the end of Communism, religion as a social need would be able to resurface and flourish. Russia in the early 1990s was, as Paul Froese has argued in his book *The Plot to Kill God*, a free market of religions: “When religious restrictions were lifted after the Soviet era, a flood of religious suppliers found themselves in the midst of one of the most religiously fertile areas of the world. And in the course of active missionizing came a renewed religious appetite” (Froese 2008, 142). One year before the collapse of the Soviet Union, on 1 October 1990, the Supreme Soviet approved a new law on religious freedom, which provided for complete freedom of worship, permitted proselytizing, and gave religious organizations the status of legal persons.¹⁹ The Russian Orthodox Church was granted institutional autonomy, the Council for Religious Affairs that had controlled religions since the times of Stalin ceased to exist and the constitution of the Russian Federation, promulgated in 1993, declared the Russian state to be secular and guaranteed freedom of conscience and belief.

Subsequently, the Russian Orthodox Church underwent a rapid institutional growth. This growth was visible across all Russian cities: church buildings and sacred artifacts were restituted to the Church and restored, monasteries reopened, and symbols of Orthodoxy proliferated in the public space. However, the end of ideological control over religion led to the revival not only of Orthodoxy, but also of other religions in the country and to the influx of foreign missionaries from the West (Glanzer 2002). This situation of religious pluralism was of deep concern for the Moscow Patriarchate, which saw the proselytizing activities of Catholic and Protestant Churches as unfair and unwanted competition. Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church did not frame the

19 Among the authors of the new law was Sergej Averintsev, who had been elected to the Supreme Soviet the year before.

question of Russian citizens adhering to one or another religion as an issue of individual religious freedom, but instead focused on the threat of the influx of “totalitarian sects” and the risk of watering down “Russian Orthodox identity” (Papkova 2011, 74–93, Shterin and Richardson 1998). In 1997, the Russian State Duma revised religious freedom legislation under pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church. The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience, which introduced restrictive measures like a 15-year waiting period for the legal registration of religious organizations, was aimed at keeping Christian missionary churches, many of which came from the United States, out of the country.²⁰ The law responded to the desire of the Moscow Patriarchate for a “managed” religious pluralism (Gvosdev 2002). It had a conspicuous preamble which accorded the Russian Orthodox Church a special place in the panorama of Russia’s “traditional religions”, with “traditional” implying those faiths that had been present on Russian territory since the times of the Tsarist Empire.²¹

In the new situation of freedom, different religions and spiritual trends flourished. And yet, the closure of the religious market due to the predominance of the Russian Orthodox Church and other traditional religions after 1997 has not, or at least not immediately, led to a decline of religion in the country. On the contrary, the role of Russian Orthodoxy in state and society has become stronger. This is a development for which religious market theory cannot really provide an explanation, and which Karpov addresses through the concept of desecularization in his seminal article “The Social Dynamics of Russia’s Desecularization” (Karpov 2013).

Karpov acknowledges that religion in Russia has indeed experienced a resurgence, but the reasons for this resurgence, he writes, are still not completely understood: “Why, for instance, side by side with spectacular public displays of the political role of religion does one also find relatively low levels of mass religious piety and participation? Why are ordinary Russians so eager to proclaim themselves Orthodox and so uneager to go to church? Why has religious resurgence become so closely associated with the spread of nationalistic, undemocratic and intolerant ideologies?” (Karpov 2013, 255). Indeed, the nominal religious affiliation of Russians to Orthodoxy remains high. According to the European Social Survey, the Orthodox share of the population was 41 per cent in 2005, peaked at 50 per cent around 2010 and fell to 45 per cent by 2012

20 For an account of the long term (and unintended) consequences of this law, J. Clay 2018.

21 “Traditional religions” is not the term used in the text of the preamble, but it is commonly used in public debate and in the literature about the topic.

(Pew Research Center 2017).²² Even though the numbers of active church attendance remain low (6 per cent), popular faith appears widespread.²³ In the summer of 2017, the display of the relics of Saint Nicholas, on loan from the Italian city of Bari, drew large crowds of believers to Moscow's main cathedral, just as the relics of the Belt of Virgin Mary had attracted large crowds in 2011.

Geraldine Fagan's book *Believing in Russia* adds detail to this picture of discontinuity between nominal and practiced religion. Russians do follow rituals that clearly have a spiritual value for them, but often these rituals are more of Soviet than Orthodox origin: Even though only the ninth day after Easter Day is the traditional Orthodox day to commemorate the dead, many more Russians visit cemeteries on Easter Day than attend church services—as became commonplace during the Soviet era. “In Moscow, the police figure for those visiting cemeteries on Easter 2003 was fourfold that for church attendance; a 2009 national poll on how respondents intended to mark Easter revealed a similar discrepancy” (Fagan 2013, 25). What these empirical data show is, firstly, that for respondents, self-identifying as Orthodox and declaring oneself a member of the Russian Orthodox Church are not the same thing and, secondly, that self-identifying as Orthodox and as Russian by nationality are linked. Pew Research survey data reveal that 57 per cent of respondents said that “being Orthodox” is important for being a “true” Russian (Pew Research Center 2017, 12), and even a quarter of the religiously unaffiliated people in Russia said it was important to be Russian Orthodox in order to be “truly Russian” (Lipka and Sahgal 2017).

Karpov describes the religious dynamic in post-Soviet Russia as “desecularization from above”, in the sense that it is a departure from the principle of separation of church and state and from secularism as a statecraft doctrine. It leads to the gradual establishment of Russian Orthodoxy as a quasi-state

22 According to Pew Research Center, the difference between survey data can be explained by the different wordings used in surveys. The European Social Survey uses a two-step question: Respondents first are asked if they have a religion, and then, if they say “yes,” they are asked a follow-up question about which religious tradition they follow. This question wording typically yields a smaller share of religiously affiliated adults. Surveys by the Pew Research Center and International Social Survey Programme use a one-step question: Respondents are asked what religion they have, if any, and are immediately presented a list of options. Typically, this wording yields a higher share of people who identify with some religion. (Pew Research Center 2017, 21, footnote 9).

23 The independent Russian research group Sreda published an atlas of religious affiliation in Russia in 2012, which offered again different data. The Sreda survey distinguished “Orthodox inside the church” (41 per cent) from “Believers without religion” (25 per cent), “Christians” (4,1 per cent) (not including Catholics and Protestants, who are listed separately with less than 0,5 per cent each), “Orthodox outside the church” (1,5 per cent), and “Old Believers” (less than 0,5 per cent) (Sreda 2012).

church. This process started in the 1990s and reached its culmination around 2020 with the new Russian constitutional project, which I will discuss in detail in section 5. Desecularization theory suggests that these thirty years of post-Soviet transition were one straightforward pathway from state atheism to state church, a process driven by powerful elites inside the church and the state. The church was interested in maintaining unity and obtaining a position of power, and the secular elites were looking for a strong ideology after the collapse of Communism.

4.1 *Desecularization from Above*

Karpov describes the desecularization of post-Soviet Russian society as a process driven by powerful elites inside the church and the state, each of which pursued their own goals. The goal of the church was to maintain unity and obtain power and influence inside the secular state; the goal of secular elites was to create a strong national ideology after the collapse of Communism.

As regards the quest for unity, the Russian Orthodox Church was faced with several challenges. The breakup of the Soviet Union brought the Russian Orthodox Church in competition not only with other religions, but also with other Orthodox Churches. The Patriarchate of Moscow continued to claim jurisdiction over Orthodox believers in the independent states of the former Soviet Union. The Russian Orthodox Church began to cultivate an imperial identity that harked back to the times of the Russian Empire and, paradoxically, even to the Soviet Empire (Richters 2013), trying to prevent the establishment of national ecclesiastical structures, for example in Estonia or Ukraine. The schism inside Estonian Orthodoxy and the creation of an independent Orthodox Church of Estonia in 1993²⁴ was a blow to the transnational vision of Russian Orthodoxy promoted by the Moscow Patriarchate. A much bigger setback was the breakaway of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from the Moscow Patriarchate as a reaction to the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine in 2019.²⁵ The crisis of Orthodoxy in

24 The Orthodox Church of Estonia had been founded in 1923, breaking away from the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. After the Soviet occupation of Estonia, the Orthodox Church of Estonia was re-incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church, but continued to exist underground and in emigration. It was reactivated after the break-up of the Soviet Union and Estonian national independence in 1993. (Rimestad 2012, 2014).

25 The Orthodox Church of Ukraine was recognized as an autocephalous (independent) Orthodox Church by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in 2019. It is the result of a unification of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, founded in 1992, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, founded in 1921, but repressed by the Soviet government and only re-established in 1990, and a part of the Ukrainian

Ukraine has deeply affected the Russian Orthodox Church both in size and influence as well as reputation, and it has shattered the narrative of the Moscow Patriarchate, according to which the Russian Orthodox Church was the unique factor of continuity across the politically discontinuous Russian history and of unity of all Russian Orthodox believers inside and outside Russia.

Apart from competition with other religions and tensions over ecclesiastical jurisdiction outside the Russian Federation, the Church also faced internal tensions between those priests and members of the Church who came from a dissident experience and demanded clarifications as to the role of their Church's leadership during Communism, and the hierarchy, who did not want to dig too deep into the subject of collaboration. "Post-Soviet Orthodox leaders," Karpov writes, "were creatures of the system that thoroughly selected politically loyal appointees for any position of power and influence. [...] Given their Soviet origins, official hierarchs must have justifiably been afraid to encourage a religious rebuilding from below" out of the fear that "had faith communities been allowed to rebuild from below, a new, rising generation [...] would have been likely to remove the old leadership compromised by its collaboration" (Karpov 2013, 266). The post-Soviet religious elites, in other words, had an interest in desecularization from above in order to prevent and control desecularization from below. In 1991, Patriarch Aleksy II extended a general apology for the misdeeds of the Church: "Before those people, however, to whom the compromises, silence, forced passivity or expression of loyalty permitted by leaders of the church in those years caused pain, before those people, and not only before God, I ask forgiveness, understanding and prayers" (cited in Fagan 2013, 44). But in the years that followed he put in place restrictive measures against parishes in Moscow that were considered "liberal" and threatened critical priests with excommunication (Knox 2004, 75–104). Up until today the Patriarchate of Moscow prevents access to its archives for research into the extent of church-state collaboration during the Soviet period (Fagan 2013, 42–44). Instead, the Church has actively promoted the memory of Russian Orthodoxy as repressed church, for example through the canonization of hundreds of Soviet-era New Martyrs, including the royal family murdered by the Bolsheviks, in 2000 (Christensen 2019).

The ruling elites of the Russian state also had and still have an interest in desecularization from above, according to Karpov. It is important to remember throughout the 1980s, during Perestroika, the Soviet Union had seen

Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. On Orthodox Churches in Ukraine and the reasons for the break with the Moscow Patriarchate, see Denysenko 2018, Hovorun 2014.

a liberalization in religious matters and a religious revival that included increased visibility of religion in the public sphere and the circulation of theological literature that had hitherto been prohibited. The 1988 celebration of the Thousand-Year-Anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church was not the only sign of this new direction. In 1988, the Politburo, the governing organ of the Communist Party of the USSR, took the decision to publish, as an appendix to the journal *Voprosy Filosofii*, a series of volumes containing works “from the history of Russian philosophical thought”. This library of “forgotten” Russian thinkers signaled the official recovery of the Russian religious philosophical tradition, which had hitherto—as pointed out above—been confined to the underground. The 1980s also saw an increase in publications of testimonies about the persecution of religion in the Soviet Union (Papkova 2011, 7).²⁶ Most of this early religious revival during Perestroika was state-driven and happened top-down. The dying Soviet regime had a precise vision of what kind of religion it wanted to promote, namely an anti-Western Orthodox political theology as a unifying force for the crumbling Soviet empire. The government had, as Catherine Wanner argues “a vested interest in limiting, administering, or harnessing for itself the power of religious institutions” (Wanner 2012, 8). With the end of Communism, the ruling elite’s instrumental attitude vis-à-vis the church did not change. Russian leaders, from Yeltsin to Putin, expressed interest in filling in the ideological void created by the collapse of Communism with Orthodoxy. “Traditional religion”, which mostly meant Orthodoxy, with the other “traditional” religions as decorative and supportive bystanders, should play the role of a new cohesive ideology.

The visible expression of the desecularization of the Russian state is the monumental statue of Saint Vladimir, the medieval prince under whose rule Kievan Rus’ was Christianized in 988, which was unveiled on Moscow’s Borovitskaya Square in November 2016, a few meters away from the Kremlin gates. Political commentators did not fail to notice the highly political message of this commemoration. Vladimir’s act of conversion to Christianity and the subsequent baptism of the Russians historically took place on the Crimean peninsula. Laying a claim to the memory of Saint Vladimir and erecting a monument in the Russia of 2016 was an easy-to-decipher strategy by the Russian

26 The organization “Memorial” was founded in those years and started to gather large numbers of personal testimonies, documents, and life stories of victims of the Stalinist terror and Soviet repression, which were made available in local foundations and archives across the Soviet Union. Religion was not in the center of Memorial’s work, but victims of religious persecution were also able to tell their stories through Memorial. This work of giving a voice to the victims of repression increased the recognition among Soviet citizens of the repressive nature of the regime.

government to underscore Russia's claim to the Crimean territory, which it had unlawfully annexed in 2014 (Bodin 2019). There was also another detail in this celebration, however, which merits attention. The inauguration of the monument was attended by a number of selected Russian religious leaders. The selection and the hierarchy of their appearance was a showcase of Russia's model of religion-state relations: The religious leaders present were the Patriarch of Moscow Kirill, the chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, the Chief Mufti and Head of the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Russia, the Chief Rabbi of Russia, the Head of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church, the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Moscow, and the leader of traditional Buddhist Sangha of Russia. The group picture showed the Patriarch standing up front next to President Vladimir Putin with the other religious leaders lined up in the first row of the audience. As they stood there, each of them in colorful garb or a conspicuous hat that made it easy even for the lay observer to decipher which religion they were actually representing, their presence epitomized the visual expression of the Russian informal model of church-state relations: the state is Orthodox, with the President and the Patriarch at the top, and other religions are bystanders and minor partners.

Desecularization from above also means that the Russian Orthodox Church and the state mutually benefit from each other. The Church relies on the support and financial resources of the state, and the government can count on the church leadership's approval of its policies. Even after the 1997 law on religious freedom, the Russian legislator has continued to meet the demands of the Russian Orthodox Church for rights and privileges: in 2012, the elective and non-confessional course on "The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture" opened a pathway for Orthodoxy into schools (Papkova 2011, 93–117, Willems 2018);²⁷ military chaplaincy was introduced in 2008 (Herspring and McDermott 2010); the Church was allowed to have a say in health reforms in 2013 regarding the regulation of abortion (Mancini and Stoeckl 2018); and in 2017, theology was accredited as a subject at state universities. What all of these examples have in common is that the legislation introduced often constituted a formalization of practices of church-activism in the public sector that had taken shape in a largely unregulated fashion, leading to a monopoly of the Russian Orthodox

27 The school subject "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture" was introduced in 2012, after a long and unsuccessful battle of the Russian Orthodox Church to introduce a confessional Orthodox religion course into state schools. The new subject is one among six options (Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture, of Islamic Culture, of Jewish Culture, of Buddhist Culture, of Secular Ethics and of World Religions) and can be chosen by the pupils' parents during 4th and 5th grade (Köllner 2016).

Church. Other religious groups in Russia, in particular the Islamic faith groups, ended up following the lead of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The key event that seems to have sealed the pact between the church leadership and the Russian ruling elites was the controversy over the performance of the punk-band “Pussy Riot” in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Readers will remember that this controversy involved a group of young women who, in spring 2012, entered the off-public altar space inside the Cathedral to stage what they called a “punk prayer” in which they shouted “Mother of God, banish Putin”. They were forcefully removed by security guards, and later published a video of the performance on the internet. Three of them were arrested and put on trial for hooliganism. The trial became a crystallization point for different interpretations of the role of the Church in Russian society: one group of believers demanded heavy punishment for blasphemy, another group of believers wanted them acquitted, the church leadership saw it all in the hands of the state legislator, and the accused women themselves claimed that “the language of protest must also have a legitimate place inside the Church.” The judges took a hard line and sentenced the women to prison. The Russian Parliament also reacted and quickly passed a law that criminalized “the offence of religious feelings” in the future. Since 2012, the Russian Parliament has passed a series of legislative proposals which reflect the social conservative vision of the Church, such as the ban of public display of “non-traditional relationships”, which renders gay pride parades or any other public manifestation of homosexuality illegal, or the criminalization of offensive language in literature, film and theatre. The Pussy Riot case and its aftermath illustrate clearly the strategy of desecularization from above described by Karpov, according to which the state steps into the role of the protector of the Church and the Church becomes the provider of an ever narrower social conservative norm that allows for the persecution of all kinds of protest and expression of opinion.

Zoe Knox’ (2003) analysis of the document, *Osnovy sotsial’noi kontseptsii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* (Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church), adopted at the Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000 is relevant for understanding the background to this development. The document expounds the official position of the Patriarchate on the Church’s relations with the state and with secular society (for a concurring interpretation of the document, see also: Agadjanian 2003). The section on “Church and State” provides a thorough description of the Patriarchate’s normative vision of church–state relations in Russia: even though the document makes clear that the church leadership wishes to remain formally separate from the state and sees the symphonic ideal as incompatible with the modern secular state, the Russian Orthodox Church nonetheless defends its privileged

position inside the Russian state. The document also expresses the idea that the separation of church and state should not prevent the church from influencing Russian social and political life. Knox quotes Patriarch Kirill, at the time Metropolitan, as saying: “So the Russian Orthodox Church stands at the same time for separation of church and state, but against the separation of church from life or from society. On the political level, this entails the necessity of dialogue and cooperation between the church and the powers that be, in the interest of the people.” (quoted in: Knox 2003, 581). Knox concludes that the “Patriarchate’s conception of church–state relations is not one of separation, but instead the bridging of the two entities. The claim to extensive areas of cooperation, coupled with the political leadership’s complicity with this privileged status, allows the Orthodox Church a prominent political role, as envisaged in the symphonic ideal” (Knox 2003, 582). Twenty years after the Social Doctrine, this vision of the Church’s place in the Russian state and society has found its way into the country’s constitution.

In sum, there is overwhelming evidence that in the period after the collapse of Communism the Russian Orthodox Church has defined its public role as a close partnership with the Russian state and has used the resources and the power of state institutions to strengthen its own position and to put limits to moral and religious pluralism in the country. In the remainder of this section, I add to this analysis with a research perspective that complements and, to some extent, qualifies the overall argument of desecularization. Extending the analysis to the internal divisions and power struggles between the liberal, fundamentalist and traditionalist factions inside the church, I add an additional layer of complexity to the dynamics of Russian desecularization.

4.2 *Liberals, Fundamentalists and Traditionalists—the Multivocality of the Russian Orthodox Church*

In his seminal article “The World’s Religious Systems and Democracy: Crafting the “Twin Tolerations”, Alfred Stepan (2001) argued that in a democracy, minimal boundaries of freedom of action must be crafted between political institutions, religious institutions and individuals. The “twin tolerations” formula requires that the religious and political domains tolerate each other as independent spheres, though they can still have certain levels of interaction. But who are the actors that define these two domains? Are they heads of states or heads of churches? Parliaments or Bishops’ councils? Voters or parishioners? For Stepan, all of the world’s great religions are “multivocal”. They all harbor some diversity of belief and practices, some of which are at odds with democracy, others being compatible with democratic rule. The same can be said about Russian Orthodoxy. Patriarchs, Bishops’ Councils and parishioners, as

this section will show, did not and still do not necessarily have the same idea about how the twin toleration between church and state should be crafted.

The multivocality of Russian Orthodoxy became a central argument in Irina Papkova's *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (2011), which introduced a new direction in the study of post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy. This new direction consisted, from an empirical perspective, of a focus on multivocality, fragmentation and issue politics inside the Church, and from a theoretical perspective, of an emphasis on contingency rather than path-dependency. The aim of such an approach, which also informed my book *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (Stoeckl 2014), was to look at the Russian Orthodox Church as one actor among others in Russian politics and civil society, and interpret it as a public religion that is struggling internally towards a proper definition of its vocation and agenda, and externally for a place in Russian society and the world. Studying the multivocality of Russian Orthodoxy meant, in practice, diving into the fine details of church-discourses and identifying different ideological positions, factions, power-struggles and strategies at play inside the Russian Orthodox Church with the aim of disentangling at times contradictory and competing visions on secular society, democracy and the state inside Russian Orthodoxy.

Papkova and others commonly identify three ideological factions inside the Russian Orthodox Church: liberals, fundamentalists, and traditionalists. This three-fold distinction differs from prevalent approaches in sociology of religion, which usually distinguish only two groups: liberal religious actors, who accept secularism as a statecraft doctrine and secularity as the normal condition of plurality in contemporary society; and fundamentalist religious actors, who reject secular society and the secular state as pagan and sinful. In the Russian context, however, there is a third, in-between group, which can be called "traditionalists." This group does not reject secular society and the secular state, but nor does it accept that the church can only occupy a limited space in an overall regime of separation; instead, traditionalists seek to give shape to the system as such, and to actively influence politics and society (Stoeckl 2017b). The distinction between these three groups is important for two reasons: firstly, it highlights the existence of a liberal branch of Russian Orthodoxy, one that tends to be overlooked by mainstream research; and secondly, it brings into focus a division of Russian Orthodoxy "on the right", with the existence of a conservative wing and a fundamentalist wing, which are in constant battle for power and influence inside the Church. The research perspective on multivocality points to the fact that Russian desecularization, as described above, is a contingent process and the result of a dynamic empirical reality.

4.2.1 Liberal Orthodoxy

“Liberal” Orthodoxy was initially so called because its representatives were generally associated with the liberal religious dissident movement of the 1970s and 80s. Towards the end of the Soviet period, individuals priests like Alexander Men’ and Georgij Kochetkov²⁸ or the philosopher Sergej Averintsev stood for a Russian Orthodoxy that cherished the reformist ideas of the Russian religious philosophers of the pre-revolutionary period, that was open to the advancements made in Orthodox theology in emigration, and that wanted to build a Russian Orthodox Church independent from the state (Agadjanian 2013). To be liberal meant, in short, to be pro-democratic and somewhat theologically reformist; it did not mean socially liberal or progressive, as is usually understood in the context of Western debates between religious liberals and conservatives. For the Moscow Patriarchate, these liberal parishes, composed mostly of intellectual elites in the urban centers, especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg, were an unwelcome disruption to its project of recovery as a quasi state-church, and therefore during the 1990s the church hierarchy took active measures to curb these groups.

In his article “A Church of Empire”—a text that cost him his position as editor of the theological journal of the Moscow Patriarchate in 2015, and whose introductory paragraphs are worth quoting full length—the Russian journalist Sergej Chapnin told the story of frustration felt by a generation of young Russians, who had joined the Church as a beacon of change and democracy, over the path it had taken since the 1990s:

I joined the Russian Church late in 1989, becoming actively involved in its life soon thereafter. This was two years before the fall of the Soviet Union, and times were hard—inflation, recession, and empty shelves. Our parish community in Klin, some fifty miles outside Moscow, was given the ruins of an old church at the town center. We raked rubble from this deserted building, the first in the Moscow Region to be returned to the Church. It seemed to us a symbol of the new era. This was the time of the so-called ‘Church Revival’ in Russia—part of the broader cultural transition that was epitomized by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian state underwent an identity crisis in the 1990s, with a choice either to democratize or to become a new empire. Its initial decision, in the early Yeltsin years, was in favor of democracy. A similar trend characterized

28 Georgij Kochetkov, born 1950, is a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow, who became the focal point of heated controversy over church-reforms in the 1990s, when he started to read mass in the vernacular (instead of Church Slavonic).

reforms in the Russian Church. Once a Soviet-controlled system, now church life became open to new movements and lay involvement. By the decade's close, however, these changes in Church and state were proving ephemeral. Today, the Russian Church Revival is complete—and the Church that has been revived is not the one we intended when we rebuilt the ruined church in Klin. (Chapnin 2015)

One priest who dared to openly criticize the Moscow Patriarchate was Pavel Adelheim (1938–2013). With his past as a dissident, having served prison sentences for his religious belief during Communism, Adelheim was exemplary for the liberal camp inside the Russian Orthodox Church. He criticized the clerical bureaucracy, spoke out in defense of the political opposition and even petitioned the Patriarch for the release of the Pussy Riot activists. When he was murdered by an allegedly mentally ill man in 2013, his death was interpreted by many observers as one more sign of the increasing pressure on liberals inside the Church.

Liberal voices inside the Russian Orthodox Church still exist today, but they are relatively few and seek to keep a low public profile. One recent exception, which may signal the onset of a return of liberal Orthodoxy in the Russian public sphere, was the unexpected public protest by Orthodox priests against the treatment of people arrested during demonstrations against the Moscow city government in summer 2019 (Chapnin 2019). During the demonstrations, protesters had sought and obtained shelter inside churches, fleeing from the riot police. More than 200 clerics signed a petition in protest against the harsh prison sentences imposed on the peaceful demonstrators. Their letter started with a quotation from Alexander Men': "Mercy is what we call for", a clear sign that they identified with the intellectual and theological tradition of the religious dissident movement during the Soviet period, and not with the legacy of collaboration of the Moscow Patriarchate. Liberal Orthodoxy, in short, identifies with the experience of dissidence and emigration during Communism. The lesson it draws from this experience is the quest for a church independent from the Russian state.

4.2.2 Russian Orthodox Fundamentalists

During the 1990s, the distinction between fundamentalists and conservatives was not always clear to outside observers, because the main focus of attention was on the rift between conservatives and liberals. Papkova writes: "The heated polemics around [liberal Orthodoxy] led to the perception among Western scholars of an ideological struggle within Russian Orthodoxy between traditionalists (or alternatively, conservatives) and liberals. Once the liberal

movement receded into the quiet obscurity in which it exists today, however, it became apparent that what were thought to be uniformly conservative forces in the ROC consisted of two very different ideological planes: while a traditionalist model could fairly be said to dominate, it was under sustained pressure from what has been called within ROC circles the ‘temptation from the right.’ (Papkova 2011, 60) By this “temptation from the right” she means a sizeable camp inside the Church that resents the loss of the empire, whether Tsarist Russian or Soviet, and is deeply suspicious of secularism and democracy. Russian nationalism and antiwesternism are part of the worldview of this group, which Alexander Verkhovsky calls “Russian Orthodox Fundamentalists” (Verkhovsky 2000, 2002, 2003, see also Kostjuk 2000).

It is important to remember what was already mentioned above, namely that during the last years of the Soviet Union, Orthodox religious and cultural identity as a source of Russian nationalism were ideologically promoted by the regime. After the end of the Soviet Union, these ideas found a continuation in the right wing of the Russian Orthodox Church. A sizeable constituency of this right wing can be found among members of the military (Knorre and Zygmunt 2019), which is maybe not surprising: the military was an important site of ideological training in the Soviet Union; anti-Westernism, defense of territory against enemies, an imperial consciousness and a strong sense of collectivity were central features military identity, and these could easily be shaped in an Orthodox key (Herspring and McDermott 2010). This militant Orthodox identity found an expression in the concept of the “Russian World”, *Russkij Mir*, a concept used by church and state officials alike from roughly 2000 onwards.²⁹ It carried, on the one hand, a geopolitical message of claims to a Russian sphere of influence, both religious and political, and, on the other hand, an ideological message of continuity and unity of “Russia” as a national, cultural and religious entity. The Russian world was meant to include ethnic Russians or, more correctly, native Soviet citizens and their descendants, in the countries of the former Soviet Union and also in Western Europe (Laruelle 2015, Suslov 2018).

It is in the battlegrounds of Eastern Ukraine since 2014 that the concept of *Russkij Mir* has revealed its terrible effectiveness. As an ideological container it brought together Eastern Ukrainian separatists, Russian right-wing militias, Orthodox fundamentalist priests, nationalist intellectuals, and all other sorts of people that identified with the cause. At least from the Russian side, the

29 *Russki Mir* is also the name of an organization founded by the Russian railway oligarch Vladimir Yakunin. Its aim is the promotion of Russian language and cultural activities abroad.

conflict in Eastern Ukraine initially expressed itself with symbols and keywords of Orthodox Christianity. Cyril Hovorun has described the content of a video clip on YouTube from the early phases of the conflict, in which a priest teaches the newly recruited soldiers of the “Russian Orthodox Army” why and how to use their weapons. We hear him say: “The Antichrist is coming to Holy Rus. What we’re seeing now—it’s primarily a spiritual war, because the Antichrist is coming to Holy Russia, against Orthodoxy.” Then the priest moves to the practical lesson of how to win the war against the Antichrist, whom he apparently associates both with the West and with Ukrainians seeking to maintain their country’s territorial integrity: “I will teach you how you should properly load cartridges—to make bullets flowing into the goal, to destroy the enemy.” He continues, “So the Holy Fathers teach us that when you take the cartridge and load your weapon you should utter the following words of prayer: Blessed Mother of God, save us. Holy Father Nicholas, pray for us. Holy Tsar Nicholas, pray for us.” Hovorun writes that this perverse use of prayer illustrates how the ideology of the Russian World adopted the powerful traditions of Orthodox Christianity, but in a way essentially antithetical to Christianity (Hovorun 2014).

Nationalist and religious fundamentalist groups are a sizeable factor in Russian Orthodoxy, where they have created their own subcultures (Shnirelman 2019, Mitrofanova 2005, Stoeckl 2010b). Their real influence on the Moscow Patriarchate, however, is less clear. Rather than a source of support for the Church, they appear to constitute a threat to the authority of the Patriarch. One episode that exemplifies the tension between the official Church and its right-extremist fringe was the controversy that erupted over the meeting between Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis in 2016. On February 12, 2016, the two church leaders met at the airport of Havana in Cuba; it was the first meeting of a Russian Patriarch and the Catholic Pontifex in history. Their dialogue was mainly devoted to global problems in modern society, in particular, to the persecutions of Christians in the Middle East, the crisis of the family in modern society, military-political conflict and religious situation in Ukraine. The event caused a storm of protests from anti-ecumenical fundamentalists in Russia.

The Patriarch was criticized by a group of religious fundamentalists called “People’s Council”, a movement with close links to military and paramilitary forces and branches in almost all Russian regions. According to Boris Knorre (2018), the backbone of this movement in spring of 2016 was made up of military volunteers from the two separatist regions in Eastern Ukraine, the People’s Republic of Donetsk and the People’s Republic of Lugansk. The People’s Council organized several events dedicated to the question of the Havana meeting, where some participants debated whether to still commemorate Patriarch

Kirill during the liturgy or whether to stop commemorating him because he was a “heretic”, and others raised the issue of convening a Local Council to reform the Church. Another organization analyzed by Knorre, the “Council of Orthodox Citizens”, actually decided to no longer commemorate Patriarch Kirill at Divine Services and to consider the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate a “heretic community”. The leader of the Council of Orthodox Citizens stopped calling Patriarch Kirill by his clerical title and name and referred to him merely by his civil surname (Gundyaev). Knorre identifies at least three more fundamentalist groups who temporarily broke with the Patriarch over his meeting with the Pope in Havana. All of these fundamentalist movements share a distinctly nationalistic ideology. One critic, for example, called the meeting of the Patriarch with the Vatican “a threat to the sovereignty of the country”. He saw the “national security” of Russia at risk and called for the FSB (the Russian intelligence service) to interfere and “defend Orthodoxy” (Knorre 2018).

Another episode that exemplifies the tension between the Moscow Patriarchate and its right-extremist fringe was the controversy that erupted over the movie “Matilda” in 2017.³⁰ “Matilda” was a historical movie about the love affair of the future Tsar Nicholas II with the ballet dancer Matilda Kschessinska. The film covers the time span from 1890 until 1896 and does not touch on Nicholas II’s rule and his death, when, along with his family, he was killed by Bolsheviks in 1918. The whole family was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1981 and by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000. Even before reaching Russian cinemas, the film about the last Tsar’s pre-marital affair stirred heated controversies. Fundamentalist Orthodox believers called the film “blasphemous,” because the pre-release trailer showed the Russian ruler and future saint in sex scenes and emotional turmoil over his romantic love for the ballet dancer. With my co-author Dmitry Uzlaner, I have argued that the “Matilda”-case must be read in continuity with the case of Pussy Riot’s “Punk Prayer”. The trial of the Pussy Riot members led to an overall closure of the religious and political debate: it narrowed down the category of the “truly Orthodox” believer to the most conservative groups, and it entrusted the protection of their religious feelings to the state. In the case of the “Matilda” protest, the offended believers did not huddle under the protective wing of the Russian State prosecutor, but started to act on their own—to the point of an open confrontation with State and Church authorities. Natalia Pklonskaia, Duma deputy from Crimea and by no means entitled to make

30 I have first made this argument in (Stoeckl 2017a) and then in more detail in (Uzlaner and Stoeckl 2019).

theological statements, threatened that those who watched the film would be banned from taking Holy Communion. An obscure extremist group called “Christian State—Holy Rus” sent letters to film distributors threatening to set fire to movie theatres that showed *Matilda*. Shortly afterwards, a man actually tried to set a large movie theatre in Ekaterinburg on fire by ramming the entrance with a car full of gas balloons and exploding his vehicle. In the *Matilda* case, we argued, the offended believers stopped being the “silent majority” under the supervision and protection of the State. They became a “shouting minority” which became a headache for both secular and Church authorities. In fact, church authorities started to distance themselves from the “too-much-offended believers”, insisting that they were not true believers but “pseudo-religious radicals”. Secular authorities also reacted, arresting the violent protesters under terrorism charges and guaranteeing safe viewing of the film in Russian cinemas. Only five years had passed since Pussy Riot, but the power-conforming configuration of the protection of the feelings of the Orthodox believer had already revealed its power-disturbing potential (Uzlaner and Stoeckl 2019).

Orthodox fundamentalists are critical of the current Patriarch because they consider him too much of a modernizer in his external church relations and not forceful enough in his defense of the “Russian world”. The same Orthodox fundamentalists support President Putin, but only to the degree that he acts as a strongman in defense of Russian interests. The annexation of Crimea was a point in his favor, but the fact that Russia did not also proceed to conquer the separatist Ukrainian regions Luhansk and Donbass appears to have frustrated expectations of the radicals again. In the light of such developments, the judgment that religious fundamentalism is Russian Orthodoxy’s “temptation from the right” (Papkova 2011, 60) should probably be enlarged to include the assessment that fundamentalism is a “threat from the right” for those in power in the Russian Orthodox Church and in the Russian state today.

4.2.3 The Traditionalist Camp

From the liberal clerical call for mercy for protesters on one side, to the fundamentalist battle-cry for excommunication of the Patriarch in Havana or for anyone who watches a romanticized bio-pic about the last Tsar on the other, the range of worldviews and political judgments inside Russian Orthodoxy is breathtakingly wide. In all this, the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church appears intent on keeping a centrist position. Following Papkova (2011), I call this position “traditionalist”. In fact, it was today’s Patriarch of Moscow who first formulated the strategy of a middle ground in an article published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in February 2000:

A fundamental contradiction of our time and also a major challenge to the human community in the 21st century is the confrontation of liberal civilization standards, on the one hand, and the values of national cultural and religious identity. The study of the genesis of the contradiction between these two crucial factors of modern development and the search for ways to overcome it should take, as it seems, an important place in Orthodox theological studies. Since this is a problem whose solution will largely determine the future shape of the human civilization, it is clear that the very formulation of the problem and attempts to settle its primary definition is not only the fruit of a sincere interest, but no less of sincere anger. Anger about those who out of ideological convictions reject the very idea of raising these issues for fear of a possible correction or revision of the liberal ideas which today underpin the attempts to shape the human community into a “melting pot” of cultures and civilizations. Anger also about those zealots and religious and cultural fundamentalism who have made up their mind on these problems long ago and are deeply convinced that the only way to move further is to tightly close the door of their house. (Metropolitan Kirill 2000)

Kirill concluded that the critical and creative engagement with liberal values was among the most important tasks of Orthodox theology.

It was quite symbolic that *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* printed this article alongside a reproduction of two nineteenth-century woodcuts by the romantic artist Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld entitled “The healing of the two blind men” and “Jesus and the apostles in the storm”. The two images and their symbolism underlined the argument of the article, namely that there is a conflict between two sides that are “blind” in their ideological fervour, and that the Church is in a crisis. What Kirill did in his article was to distance himself from both forms of “blindness”: he did not think that Russia should unconditionally adhere to the Western modern and secular trajectory, as he believed liberals would argue, nor did he want to find himself on the side of the religious zealots, who would not even consider the question of engagement with secular society. Rather, Kirill argued for the need to find a third way to confront secularism.

It was because of statements like these that Patriarch Kirill entered office in 2009 with the reputation of a modernizer: for many years he had acted as the head of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, and under his leadership this department had established offices in Brussels and Strasbourg. The Department of External Church Relations—whose first website in the 1990s (now discontinued, but still available online) had the almost programmatic sounding internet address “orthodoxeurope.

org”—was founded already in 1946 and had coordinated church diplomacy during Soviet times. It is important to recognize that Patriarch Kirill had spent a large part of his Soviet career in this department and was therefore well versed in negotiating the needs of the Church and the interests of the state. His position and program of reform inside the Russian Orthodox Church are representative of the traditionalist position.

The traditionalist camp was the focus of my book *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (2014), where I looked at the ways in which the Russian Orthodox Church has defined its approach to human rights from 1948, the year when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations was signed, up until the publication of the Human Rights Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2008. This study brought to the fore three key characteristics of the traditionalist camp: a modern style of communication, theological conservatism, and political pragmatism.

By the modern style of communication of the Moscow Patriarchate I do not only mean the professional use of new communication technologies (which in itself is already quite striking), but also the topics on which the traditionalist camp communicates with the public. The topics for the Church during the first ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union were basically all about the Church itself—its place in society, religious education in schools and the military, church entitlements and privileges, restitution of property and religious artefacts taken away from the Church during Communism. With the publication of the document *The Bases of the Social Teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church*, the list of topics changed and started increasingly to address issues of social ethics and public morality: family, abortion, and demographic change. The novelty was not so much the topics per se but the Church's use of the language of human rights to discuss them. This shift in communicative strategy was, as I show in my book, entirely the work of a relatively small circle of clerics around Kirill, working inside the Moscow Patriarchate's External Relations Department (Stoeckl 2014, 43–52).

Under the leadership of Kirill, the Moscow Patriarchate started to discuss publicly issues that seemed outside its immediate sphere of interest, for example the *Lautsi*-case, a case in front of the European Court of Human Rights between 2009 and 2011, regarding the legitimacy of displaying crucifixes in Italian public schools. The *Lautsi* case triggered a strong reaction on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church. Archbishop Hilarion (Alfeyev) sent a letter to the Vatican Secretary of State in which he said that the Moscow Patriarchate considered the verdict “an attempt to impose radical secularism everywhere despite the national experience of church-state relations” (ROC 2009a). He added that religious communities in Europe should work together to discuss

the fact that “the Court has turned into an instrument of promoting an ultra-liberal ideology”. Patriarch Kirill sent a letter to the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in which he stated his “full and unconditional support for the intention of the Italian Government to appeal this decision ... in cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church” (ROC 2009b). Church officials repeatedly mentioned the Lautsi case in public interventions as evidence that “aggressive secularism” and “Christianophobia” were on the rise in Europe (Doerry, Neef, and Schepp 2009, Metropolitan Hilarion 2010). It is apparent that the choice of the Moscow Patriarchate to pursue topics like these was motivated by the desire to establish itself as a moral conservative “norm entrepreneur” both inside and outside Russia (Stoeckl 2016).

The progressive style of communication and the ambition to tackle new topics did not, however, come along with theological innovation. The traditionalist camp inside the Russian Orthodox Church is theologically conservative—or, as critics may argue, it is hardly theological at all (Hovorun 2018). In fact, under Patriarch Kirill, the relationship between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Kremlin appears dictated more by political and pragmatic goals than by theological arguments. The traditionalist wing maintains a conservative theological, political and social position, which distinguishes itself from the anti-modernism and anti-Westernism of the Orthodox fundamentalists through the active inclusion of modern topics (for example bioethics) and popular concepts (for example the language of human rights). The traditionalist camp cooperates both with state institutions and traditionalist civil society groups, creating professional positions and departments dedicated to this interaction: the department for External Church Relations, the Department for Relations between Church and Civil Society, the Department for the Church and Mass Media etc. While it is critical of the work of the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights, the Moscow Patriarchate maintains a permanent representation in Strasbourg in order to follow closely and react to decisions regarding interest of the Russian Orthodox Church in these institutions (Rimestad 2015a). The traditionalist position, announced as a “third way” twenty years ago, has, by 2020, become a powerful institutional apparatus, whose ideological and political program is the “defence of traditional values”.

Summarizing this research perspective on the multivocality inside the Russian Orthodox Church, it is important to stress that Russian Orthodoxy harbors a great diversity of beliefs and practices, some of which are at odds with modern secular society, others that are compatible with it. Patriarchs, Bishops’ Councils, priest and parishioners do not necessarily hold the same ideas about how their church should relate to the state, evaluate secularism, or define traditional values. This is not at all surprising and a reality of all religious

traditions worldwide. Taking the multivocality inside Russian Orthodoxy seriously, however, has an effect on how we do research on Russian Orthodoxy. If one looks at the Russian Orthodox Church with the multivocality of liberal, fundamentalist and traditionalist factions inside the church in mind, then the analysis of a desecularization from above by the will of religious and political elites appears in a slightly different light.

The desecularization from above, emblematically expressed in the picture of President Putin and Patriarch Kirill at the foot of the statue of St. Vladimir, is contingent upon the traditionalist faction inside the Moscow Patriarchate keeping the upper hand or—as is the more likely scenario for the future—moving further to the right and meeting more demands of the fundamentalists. However, if the Moscow Patriarchate gives up on the middle ground and moves to the right, the polarization inside the Russian Orthodox Church will grow and it is likely that liberal voices will become more vocal—if not inside, then outside Russia. Signs of greater polarization inside the Russian Orthodox Church are already visible in Ukraine, where the Russian Orthodox Church of Ukraine has been split into those who remain faithful to the Moscow Patriarchate and those who joined the newly founded autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine. This increasing polarization inside the Church could further a dynamic of public disenchantment with Russian Orthodoxy, which Uzlaner has captured with the term “the end of the pro-Orthodox consensus” (see below). In short, the research perspective on the multivocality of Russian Orthodoxy opens up a dynamic empirical reality, whose determinants are not always easily identified and this makes the predictions of long-term trends exceedingly difficult.

5 Russian Orthodoxy and Secularism in the Twenty-First Century

Since around 2010, the Russian state and the traditionalist camp inside the Church have actively promoted Orthodox religious and cultural heritage and traditional values as the basis for a civic identity centred on the value of community and the nation. This process has culminated in Russia’s most recent constitutional reform, which—if approved in the course of 2020—will put “God” in the preamble of the Constitution³¹ and define marriage “in the context of the traditional and confessional composition of Russian society”

31 The full text of the preamble was reported as: “The Russian Federation, united by a thousand-year history, preserving the memory of the ancestors who transmitted to us the ideals and faith in God, as well as the continuity of the development of the Russian state, recognizes ...” (PRAVMIR 2020).

(Meduza 2020). This constitutional reform is a political move, and its primary goal is to provide continuity in office for Putin. However, if approved, it will conclude the process of transformation which both the Russian state and the church have undergone in the last ten years, beginning with the election to office of Patriarch Kirill in 2009 and the re-election of Putin as president of the Russian Federation for a third time in 2012, respectively.

From a sociological perspective, the 2020 constitutional reform marks the end-point of the period of “post-Soviet religion”. In section 4, I have described the post-Soviet phase as characterized by religious revival, desecularization from above, and internal church-struggles over the future role of the Church inside Russian society. Different visions of the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism as a statecraft doctrine—all of which relating back to the multiple experiences of secularism during the Soviet period and earlier—were in competition with each other. There was the liberal vision of a church independent from the state, of religion as a motor of democratic reform and—why not?—a critic of the state. There was also the fundamentalist vision of a radical and militant church, antagonistic to the secular Russian Federation in the borders of 1991 that did not live up to the fundamentalists’ expectations of monarchy and empire. And there was the traditionalist vision of a church that collaborates with the state and pragmatically provides the social teaching most suitable for the policies of the Kremlin. By 2020, the competition between these visions has been settled in favor of the last camp: the new Russian Constitution turns the traditionalism promoted by the Moscow Patriarchate into a civil religion.

I use the term “civil religion” in line with the definition by Jocelyne Cesari, who draws on Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s original take on *religion civile* and describes it “as a state-centered project aimed at securing the loyalties of citizens through rituals and symbols” (Cesari 2018, 9). This understanding differs from the definition of Robert Bellah, who—building on Émile Durkheim—described civil religion as the nonsectarian religious beliefs shared by all citizens regarding the symbols and history of their nation (Cesari 2018, 109–110). When I call the traditional values discourse promoted by the Moscow Patriarchate a civil religion, I do so in the first sense, as a state-centered religion, and not in the second sense, as a system of shared beliefs. The implication of civil religion as a state-centered religion is that the religious tradition in question and the state are mutually constitutive, that they depend on each other and are transformed by their relationship.

So far in this article I have looked at the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism from two theoretical perspectives: desecularization and religious economy. What both of these story lines share, is the assumption

that the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism is one of discontinuity and conflict. The desecularization perspective theorizes the triumph of religion over secularism, while the religious economy model presumes the persistence and coexistence of secularism and religion over time, with the two remaining essentially separate and in competition. Russian Orthodoxy as civil religion displays a different dynamic: one of secular-religious entanglement. When Russian Orthodoxy takes on the role of a civil religion inside the Russian state, both the church and the state are transformed, and these changes are most insightfully interpreted from a postsecular theoretical perspective.

As civil religion, Russian Orthodoxy becomes a resource for the state to shape and control the citizenry (Cesari 2018, 193). The central instrument of this control is the discourse on “traditional values”, carefully crafted by the traditionalist camp inside the Church over the course of the last decade. This discourse has had a transformative impact on the church. It has defined the traditionalist theological mainstream and sidelined other approaches, and it has also effectively combined new practices and ideas deriving from sources that were originally quite alien to Orthodox teaching: social mores from the Soviet era and teachings from Western Christian social conservatism. Russian Orthodoxy as civil religion has a transformative impact also on the Russian state, which makes itself dependent on Russian Orthodoxy by embracing the church’s traditional values discourse as public norm and in its foreign policy. Below, I develop two aspects—on the discourse of traditional values, and on Russia in the global culture wars—that substantiate this claim.

5.1 *“Traditional Values” as Civil Religion*

The notion of “traditional values” is a relatively recent concept in both religious and political discourse in Russia. When the Russian Orthodox Church spoke of values in the 1990s or earlier, the usual adjective was “spiritual” or “moral” (Rousselet 2020). “Traditional” was, instead, used in connection with “traditional religions”, meaning those religions that constitute, as stated in the preamble of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Religion, “an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia” (Chapnin 2020). Chapnin has traced the provenance of the concept “traditional values” to the article by (at the time) Metropolitan Kirill mentioned above, and to the analysis that inside Russian Orthodoxy there is a conflict between liberals and fundamentalists. In that article, Kirill used the term “traditional values” for the first time, explicitly contrasting it with liberal values and calling on the Church and the Russian state to actively defend these traditional values. The task of the Church, he wrote, was “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” and that of the state was to counter the spread of liberal mores and values “with a policy of introducing a system of values that are traditional for Russia into the youth upbringing, education, and interpersonal relationship formation [...] shaping the legislation, education, culture, social relations, and public morals.” (quoted in: Chapnin 2020) This program, he added, was “a matter of finding our place in the global community of nations and of survival as an Orthodox nation” (quoted in: Chapnin 2020).

Once he was elected Patriarch, Kirill made the promotion of traditional values the key theme of his term. Since then, it has occupied “the place of honor” in public discourse of the church, according to Elena Stepanova (2015), becoming the new “signature discourse” for the Moscow Patriarchate. In his article “Tradition, morality and community: elaborating Orthodox identity in Putin’s Russia” (2017), Agadjanian analyses the discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church on “traditional values” in several official documents. The item at the top of the traditionalist agenda is conservative family values. These include traditional gender roles, which see the man as husband and breadwinner and the woman as wife and mother. The positive evaluation of patriarchal family structures extends to the rejection of special rights for children, since these are thought to weaken parental authority, and the refutation of state policies that regulate family life, for example policies against domestic violence or special children’s rights. Conservative family values include the rejection of abortion and of homosexuality, transsexuality, and same-sex marriage.

The constitutional reform of 2020 proposes to turn conservative family values into the letter of the law, according to spokesperson of the Russian Duma, in order to prevent international human rights bodies like the European Court of Human Rights or the Council of Europe from imposing the implementation of LGBT-rights in Russia (Interfax Religion 2020b). This inclusion of conservative family values into the constitutional reform might appear, on the surface, to be a clear sign of religious influence on the state and as one further step towards desecularization. But such a perspective leaves aside at least two important points.

First, for the Russian state, the conservative family values discourse is a welcome argument in its prioritization of national legal sovereignty over international human rights commitments (Laruelle 2020). It is a topic that enjoys wide support among the Russian population and does therefore not risk attracting excessive criticism. Surveys and opinion polls regularly collect data on the religious and moral views of populations. These surveys, like the World Value Survey or Pew Research Center, proceed from the assumption that people who are more religious generally have more conservative views on issues

such as homosexuality and abortion. This pattern is not fully confirmed in the Russian context, where a high degree of social conservatism does not necessarily correlate with a high degree of religiosity, as the following findings from the Pew Research Center show: “Although levels of church attendance and prayer are relatively low, 85 per cent of Russians overall say homosexual behavior is morally wrong. Even among religiously unaffiliated Russians, three-quarters say homosexuality is morally wrong and 79 per cent say society should not accept it.” (Pew Research Center 2017, 27) The Pew Research Center adds that, “by contrast, in Catholic-majority Poland, where the population as a whole is more religiously observant, only about half of adults (48 per cent) say homosexuality is morally wrong” (Pew Research Center 2017, 27). The opposite picture emerges on the issue of abortion. Basing their argument on survey data from 2002, Karpov and Kääriäinen spoke of an “abortion culture” in Russia, according to which abortion was generally seen as a routine and a morally “neutral” solution to medical, personal or family difficulties. According to that survey, in 2002, 80 per cent of Russians saw nothing wrong in abortion for medical reasons, and 72 per cent said it was not wrong at all for socioeconomic reasons. Orthodox affiliation, according to the authors, made very little difference in people’s beliefs about abortion (Karpov and Kääriäinen 2005). Pew Research Center data indicate that the view on abortion in Russia may have changed since, with 44 per cent of respondents saying that abortion was “morally unacceptable” in 2014 (Pew Research Center 2014a). What these survey data suggest is that in Russia social conservative views on homosexuality and abortion do not correlate with religiosity; that is, even though it is likely that Orthodox believers hold social conservative views, many more Russians who hold social conservative views are not actually believers.

For the Russian sociologist Alexander Agadjanian, the reason for this discrepancy between actual levels of religiosity and social conservative moral attitudes is to be found in the Soviet experience. In 1961, the Communist Party started to promulgate the “Moral Code of the Builders of Communism”, a list of twelve moral commandments every Soviet citizen should observe. Some of the values promoted by the Moral Code were clearly compatible with a conservative religious worldview, such as the emphasis on strong family values, collectivism and mutual help. Anthropological studies have confirmed that such a transmission of moral ideas from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period has indeed taken place, for example by Soviet cultural workers and educators who refashioned themselves as Orthodox activists (Luehrmann 2011) and by teachers of “Orthodox culture” (Ładykowska 2011). The civil religion of traditional values is, in short, more accurately described as a hybrid of secular (Soviet) and religious sources than as a sign of desecularization.

The second point that the desecularization perspective overlooks, is the legal and political context for Russia's new civil religion of traditional values. The Russian Federation became a member of the Council of Europe in 1996. Since then it has signed and ratified a large number of treaties and conventions under the Council of Europe, also the European Social Charter in 2009. Under this Charter, which contains basic social rights, Russia is obliged to reform its family law. This reform was developed under President Medvedev and the reform bill was submitted to the State Duma in autumn 2011. At this stage of the legislative process, this seemingly uncontroversial topic turned into a major political issue, which saw the Church up in arms, together with other nationalist forces, against the "imposition of foreign rights standards" (quoted in: Stoeckl 2016, 140). Clerics and parents' associations were particularly upset about the idea that under the new legislation it could become easier for authorities to remove children from parental custody. At a protest rally against this reform, priest Vsevolod Chaplin, at the time responsible for the relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and civil society, declaimed that the reform was imposed by "international organizations". The Church, he said, was against the idea that the state should interfere with the educational rights of parents in any way. In February 2013, the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a declaration in the same vein, stating that "any system of children's rights should be adapted to national culture and traditions" (quoted in: Stoeckl 2016, 141). Religious media fanned fears that the reform would lead to children from low-income families being taken away from their parents, thus undermining parental authority and fostering corruption. A seemingly uncontentious reform was thus transformed into a major controversy and the Russian Orthodox Church had identified a new frontier in its fight for traditional values: *yvenal'naya yustitsiya*³² (Höjdestrand 2016, 2014). The protest was successful, the reform was stalled and eventually withdrawn by Putin, who had followed Medvedev into office in 2012.

In 2017, a new, but in its dynamics very similar, debate erupted over the question of domestic violence. In that year, the Russian State Duma passed legal changes that decriminalized some forms of domestic violence by making it an administrative, rather than a criminal, offence. The step was welcomed by the head of the Patriarchal Commission for Family, Motherhood and Childhood of the Russian Orthodox Church, Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov, who said on a television program that "the idea the state should be able to poke its nose into family

32 The term not only sounds foreign in Russian, it is also a completely misleading translation of the English term "juvenile justice", which means criminal law vis-à-vis minors and not, as it was used in the Russian debate, family law.

affairs was a western imposition on Russia” (Walker 2017). In 2019, the debate came up for a second time, when a group of parliamentarians attempted to stiffen penalties for domestic violence again. The Russian Orthodox Church opposed the draft legislation, called it a “violation of the rights of individuals and families” and accused the group of inciting family conflict and divorce (Meduza 2019). The overall significance of these debates is clear: traditional values, as promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state, need to be defended against foreign rights standards, because the latter threaten the unity and cohesion of Russian families and Russian society.

These two points show that the inclusion of social conservative norms into the constitution of the Russian state by 2020 are not a sign of the triumph of religion over the secular Russian state, but rather the effect of the combination of secular attitudes and religious arguments in support of a pragmatic policy goal: national legal sovereignty. The conservative values discourse has a transformative effect both on the Russian Orthodox Church as well as on the state. The Russian Orthodox Church is led to prioritize some aspects of social ethics—like homosexuality or traditional family roles—over others, following a logic of priority that lies outside the religious realm. Social ills like poverty, environmental damage, or poor health care are rarely addressed officially by the Patriarchate. The Patriarchate does not seem to be interested in a potentially conflictive pursuit of the promotion of traditionalist ends. If achieving social conservative ends—for example the complete abolition of abortion in Russia—was the main goal, then the Moscow Patriarchate would need to act critically towards the Russian state, because the government has no intention of pursuing an unpopular policy like bringing to an end abortion in the country. It was the conservative fringe to the right of the Moscow Patriarchate, which organized a (failed) referendum on the abolition of abortion, not the Patriarchate itself (see: Mancini and Stoeckl 2018). In short, instead of desecularization of the Russian state, we could also talk of a secularization of Russian Orthodoxy or, more accurately, of a religious-secular entanglement, which leaves neither side unchanged.

5.2 *The Russian Orthodox Church as a National Church*

In the lead-up to the Russian constitutional reform of 2020, the Russian Orthodox Church has not only promoted the idea of putting God in the preamble. It also suggested attributing a special role to the “Russian people (*russkij narod*)”. Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov, the head of the Patriarchal Commission for Family, Defense of Motherhood and Childhood suggested that the new constitution should make explicit “the special role which the Russian people has played in Russian state formation”. He did not want to deny that the many

different ethnic groups living inside Russia has also played an important role in Russian history, but only the Russian people, he said, was “a state-forming people” (Interfax Religion 2020a).

This proposal—whether it will eventually be included in the new constitution or not—is quite remarkable. It shows that the Russian Orthodox Church, deeply implicated in daily politics and dependent on the Russian state, may, for the first time in its history, be turning into a national (but not necessarily nationalist) church. In section 4.2., I discussed that nationalist and religious fundamentalist groups are a sizeable factor inside Russian Orthodoxy. There have been instances where these groups have constituted a threat to the authority of the Patriarch. However, in the light of the criticism waged against the transnational and ecumenical undertakings (and failures) of the Patriarch, the church leadership now seems to be moving to the right.

The Russian Orthodox Church may effectively be about to abandon the imperial and transnational self-understanding it has hitherto cultivated. For a large part of the post-Soviet period, the Moscow Patriarchate promoted the concept of the “Russian World” and projected to the outside the image of Russian Orthodoxy as a transnational church with a wide reach of canonical jurisdictions and cultural ties to people outside the Russian Federation, including in Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Moldova and other parts of the world (Richters 2013). The “Russian World” was a civilizational concept, and as such the exact opposite to the idea of a nation state. However, with the conflict in Ukraine since 2014 and the breaking away of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine from the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate in 2018, the transnational project of the Russian Orthodox Church has largely failed. As a result, the Patriarchate seems to be moving away from the civilizational discourse of the post-Soviet years, replacing it with a nation-state discourse, which—if confirmed—would open a new chapter in the history of the Church.

I see some evidence in this direction: When the Patriarch suggested the inclusion of God in the preamble of the new Russian constitution, he presented his idea as a mere repetition of the national anthem of the Russian Federation. This anthem uses the melody of the old Soviet anthem, with lyrics from 2000 that include the line “Russia—our holy nation [...] Native land protected by God!”, echoing the Russian Orthodox liturgy’s “Let us pray to the Lord for our country protected by God” (Fagan 2013, 24). The idea of Russian Orthodoxy as a national church is also behind the project of the monumental “Victory Church” on the outskirts of Moscow, which was inaugurated in June 2020, commemorating the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany, a central element of Russian civic consciousness (Briskina-Müller 2015). It is reflected in the architecture of the church building, which incorporates melted spoils

of war and frescos commemorating scenes from the Second World War. The initial plan for the church interior included a fresco of Putin and other leading politicians to commemorate the annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014, but controversial reporting led to its removal (BBC 2020). The two examples support the idea that the Russian Orthodox Church is re-defining itself as a national church.

The problem with the national narrative inside Russian Orthodoxy is that it ties the Church to the state. It weaves the present role of the Russian Orthodox Church deeply into the fabric of Russian statehood, precluding other possible places for the Church in society, for example that of a critic vis-à-vis the state. Ironically, the monumental Victory Church is located in Klin, a city on the outskirts of Moscow. We already encountered the place in the long quote from Sergej Chapnin in section 4.1., who remembers raking rubble from the ruined church building there, the first in the Moscow Region to be returned to the Church. A place that seemed at the time the herald of the new era, the symbol of the church's revival, has turned out to become home to the symbol of Russia's new national civil religion.

Thus far, I have stressed the need to alternate between analysing what is on the surface of the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism and what remains below, between church-state relations and lived religion, between the public image of the Church "triumphant" and the picture of a torn religion full of contradictions. The following example also serves to call into question the pervasiveness of Russia's new Orthodox civil religion. Levels of nominal adherence to Orthodoxy are high, despite the variations in survey data described in section 4. This high level of nominal adherence to Russian Orthodoxy has prompted the sociologists Furman and Kääriäinen to speak about a "pro-Orthodox consensus" in Russia (Furman and Kääriäinen 2007). The two scholars consider the pro-Orthodox consensus to be one of the most vivid manifestations of religious revival in post-Soviet Russia.

The validity of the analysis of a pro-Orthodox consensus has recently been disputed by another Russian sociologist, Dmitry Uzlaner, who points out that incidents where Russian citizens criticize or resist the pervasive public role of the Russian Orthodox Church are increasing. In the city of Yekaterinburg, for example, citizens successfully protested against the erection of a new cathedral in a public park (The Moscow Times 2019); and in Moscow, citizens opposed the construction of new churches in their neighborhoods, which led to violent clashes between church supporters and opponents (Weir 2019). Opinion-polls show that the attitude towards the idea that the Church should influence state decisions is changing. Uzlaner cites a 2016 survey by the Levada Center (Levada Center 2016) and argues: "The number of people who disapprove of

this idea [that the Church should influence state decisions] is increasing—from 27 per cent in 2005 to 36 per cent in 2017, whereas the number of those who approve is decreasing—from 16 per cent in 2005 to just 6 per cent in 2017. The same trend is evident in the way these individuals evaluate the influence the Church has on state politics in Russia. The number of those who think that this influence is excessive is increasing, whereas the number of people holding the opposite view is decreasing” (Uzlaner 2018, 188). In Russia in the twenty-first century, he concludes, Russian Orthodoxy may no longer be a factor of national consensus, but rather a factor of national conflict, and religion may end up as just another indicator of cleavage in Russian society (see also: Stepanova 2019).

It is definitely too early to draw conclusions on the role of Russian Orthodoxy as Russia’s new national civil religion. Time will show whether Orthodoxy will be a factor of national consensus or cleavage. Almost certainly the debate on the constitutional reform in 2020, brought to a standstill by the global Covid-19 pandemic, will eventually give us more insights into the attitude of Russian citizens vis-à-vis the public role of church. In any case, the national context is only one arena where the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state is being defined and negotiated. The other—and at least as important arena—is international relations and Russian foreign politics, my final section in this long exploration of Russian Orthodoxy and secularism.

5.3 *Russian Orthodoxy and the Global Culture Wars*

In this last section I argue that the international arena is just as central for understanding the dynamics of religion-state relations in Russia today as is the domestic context. The traditional values discourse described above is not an entirely, let alone a uniquely Russian phenomenon. It must also be interpreted in a global perspective, taking into account global religious dynamics.³³ Likewise, the close cooperation between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church cannot only be explained by the domestic need for a civil religion. It is also the result of a conscious political strategy of external church relations and Russian foreign policy, in the course of which the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state have co-defined their roles and image vis-à-vis international partners and international institutions.

33 This research perspective is the program of a five-year research project entitled “Postsecular Conflicts (POSEC)” at Innsbruck University, Austria (2016–2021). This section draws on findings and publications from this project. All POSEC publications are available at: <https://zenodo.org/communities/postsecularconflicts/>.

The international context in which we have to read this process of co-definition of the Russian Orthodox Church and the state, is that of the global culture wars. The term “culture wars” was introduced by James D. Hunter in his book *Culture Wars. Struggles to Define America* (1991) and describes confrontations in American society related to topics such as family, abortion, education, art, and law. Hunter identified two alternative positions that characterize each of these conflicts: traditionalist and progressive. In his analysis of the American cultural wars, Hunter drew attention to a number of processes. First, these conflicts lead to a radical reformatting of the religious space: instead of divisions along denominational lines between Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mormons and others, inter-confessional and even inter-religious alliances are formed. The culture wars forge a common traditionalist front of Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, united by a shared rejection of the progressive agenda. Second, Hunter’s analysis showed that culture wars are not battles between religious traditionalists and secular progressives. The divisions over moral controversy run down the middle of religious communities. Traditionalist Protestants feel less and less connected to progressive Protestants; conversely, the proximity between traditionalist Protestants and traditionalist Catholics, Jews or Mormons grows. These groups unite in a movement which Andrey Shishkov has called “conservative ecumenism” (Shishkov 2017).

Since the mid-1990s, the culture wars have acquired a transnational, global dimension, a process that Clifford Bob (2012) has called the “globalization of the cultural wars”. Bob and others (Buss and Herman 2003, McCrudden 2015, Berger 2014, Kaoma 2014, Irvine 2012, Gathii 2006) have shown that through the globalization of the culture wars, patterns of polarization, topics of controversy and strategies of confrontation stemming from the American context are transposed into local political and societal contexts, which may initially harbor different approaches to moral controversy. Russia is a confirmation of this trend and a newcomer to the global culture wars.

In the thirty years since the end of the Cold War, the Russian Orthodox Church has itself is being shaped by the culture war dynamics, with the result that today the Russian Orthodox discourse on traditional values mirrors the topics, patterns and strategies of Christian Right groups in the West. American Christian Right groups actively promoted conservative family values and traditional gender roles in the early years after Perestroika (Glanzer 2002) and helped create the first anti-abortion groups (Mancini and Stoeckl 2018). Their Cold War anti-leftism and anti-liberalism resonated with the disillusionment felt by many Russians with regard to the Soviet past and to the chaotic transition to market liberalism of the nineties. Scholars and observers have, for the most part, been interested in the question how post-communist societies

“learned” about democracy, liberalism, and the advantages of an open society. What such a perspective overlooked (or downplayed out of an intrinsic bias) were the existing tensions inside the Western social order described by Hunter as “culture wars”. Illiberal, traditionalist and social conservative ideas were also part of the Western import of ideas to post-Soviet Russia, and they became an important source for contemporary Russian conservatism (this connection is explored in more detail in Stoeckl and Uzlaner 2020, see also Suslov and Uzlaner 2019).

The Russian Orthodox pro-family positions, which have become today the central tenets of Russia's new civil religion, were deeply influenced by cooperation with American pro-family and pro-life activists starting in the mid-1990s. The case study of the World Congress of Families, a transnational pro-family NGO, reveals that Russian family-conservatism originated in the context of an international exchange on family sociology and demography before moving into the orbit of the Russian Orthodox Church and becoming central to the agenda of the Patriarchal Commission for the Family, Protection of Motherhood and Childhood (Stoeckl and Medvedeva 2018, Uzlaner and Stoeckl 2017, Stoeckl forthcoming).

Through foreign influence, organizations like the Russian World Congress of Families have been created, which entertain equal ties to business, politics and the Russian Orthodox Church. The strategies, from fund-raising and lobbying to the organization of international congresses, differ considerably from the more traditional workings of the Russian Orthodox Church and regular church diplomacy. Through the World Congress of Families, ideas and practices more commonly associated with their American counterparts have been imported into the Russian Orthodox milieu; homeschooling for religious reasons is one of them (Mourão Permoser and Stoeckl forthcoming). I have called this new development inside the Russian Orthodox Church “the birth of the Russian Christian Right”, modelled on the strategies and manners of the American Christian Right.

The engagement of Russian Orthodoxy on the frontlines of the global culture wars can, therefore, rather than as a sign of desecularization, also be interpreted as an indicator of its increasing “marketization”. Olivier Roy, in his book *Holy Ignorance* (2009) has made the argument that present-day conservative religious tendencies are not the fruit of a (re-)rooting of religions in traditional societies, but instead the result of a global diffusion of “markers” of religious conservatism that owe little to traditional concerns and practices and more to modern political dynamics. “No to abortion” and “no to same-sex marriage” are the global markers of religious conservatism for Protestant Evangelicals in the

United States and in Brazil, for conservative Catholics in France and Honduras, and for Orthodox traditionalists alike.

Russian anti-liberalism is attractive to conservative Christians in the West, who resent the liberal and secular character of their own societies. This is particularly true in some of the new member states of the European Union, who have recently experienced a political right-turn. Frequently, the conservative resentment over rapidly changing societies is wedded with a general opposition to the European Union and Brussels's control over national politics. This explains why some right-wing parties in the Europe have not only adopted the anti-liberal rhetoric of traditional values, but have also looked to Putin's Russia for a model of authoritarian government (Stoeckl 2019, Shekhovtsov 2018, Laruelle 2019, 2018, Umland 2014). But also in the United States, conservative Christians have been attracted to Russian Orthodoxy as a stronghold of traditional values, as demonstrated in the ethnographic work on conversions to Russian Orthodoxy by Sarah Riccardi-Swartz (Riccardi-Swartz 2019).

In short, the discourse on traditional values, predominant in Russia for almost a decade already, is not entirely homegrown, nor is its use solely domestic. Traditionalist actors intentionally promote Russia as a player in the global culture wars. "Russia the great defender of traditional values" is created as a kind of "trademark", which is presented to potential partners and clients on the global culture wars market. For conservatives in the West and in the Global South, Russia under Vladimir Putin has become an attractive partner against liberal values and against an international human rights regime that is frequently perceived as "too liberal" (McCrudden 2014). Scholars have usually interpreted the Russian Orthodox Church's international value-based agenda as an instrument of Russian soft power and foreign policy (Curanović 2015, Laruelle 2015). I argue, instead, that we need to focus on the Russian Orthodox Church as a moral norm entrepreneur in its own right. The Moscow Patriarchate has consistently acted as a moral conservative agent at the international level in different institutional fora since 2008: at the United Nations Human Rights Council (Stoeckl and Medvedeva 2018, Stoeckl 2016, McCrudden 2014) and at the European Court of Human Rights (Annicchino 2011, Rimestad 2015a). The Moscow Patriarchate and Russian state have co-created and co-defined a Russian leadership role in the promotion of traditional values against the liberal international human rights regime. This has arguably led to a change in the dynamics of the global culture wars: in debates at the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Russian traditionalist agenda has successfully presented itself as equally 'universal'

as the liberal position promoted by Western states or, indeed, the UN bureaucracy itself.

What is important to take away from this brief discussion of Russian Orthodoxy and the global culture wars is that the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism is being reshaped through the prism of the culture wars. This relationship was traditionally, as I have shown in the first sections, interpreted in a theological and cultural key. Secularism was seen a “Western idea” and was understood as rooted in the theology of Latin Christendom, Renaissance and Reformation and the entire trajectory of Western European modernization, which Orthodox Russia—allegedly—did not share. This view is still predominant in Orthodox fundamentalist circles. The active role of the Russian Orthodox Church as a player in the global culture wars challenges this age-old Orthodox prejudice vis-à-vis the West. Not only have Russian Orthodox actors identified likeminded conservative actors in the West, they have also started to advocate conservative positions that have more in common with morality politics in the United States or Western Europe than with the social reality inside Russia. In this context, the planned constitutional amendment of 2020, which defines marriage as between a man and a woman, and mentions God in the preamble, is not only a sign of Russia’s new civil religion, but also an indicator of Russia’s global strategy to present itself as a stronghold of conservatism in the global culture wars.

6 Conclusion

In this article I have sketched the development of the Russian Orthodox Church from the period of the Tsarist Empire through Communism and post-Soviet transition to the present situation. In all periods of its historical existence, Russian Orthodoxy has been implicated in processes of secularization, in the condition of secularity, and in negotiations over its relationship with secularism as a statecraft doctrine and as an ideology. In order to capture the complex and diverse relations between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism, I have drawn on three distinct theoretical perspectives: religious market theory, desecularization, and postsecularity. The first is relevant for understanding the vitality and plurality of Russian Orthodoxy as lived religion; the second for analyzing the nature of church-state relations in Russia and explaining the re-creation from above of the Russian Orthodox Church as a quasi-state church after Communism. The third theoretical position highlights the transformative effect secular-religious entanglements have on Russian Orthodoxy, society and the state.

This article has made two arguments. The first is that Russian Orthodoxy today is not a monolithic body, nor has it ever been throughout its history. It has many different and at times contradictory facets, which can make us see a state church or a critic of the state, a lived religion or a civil religion, a pro-democratic or an anti-democratic force—depending on which theoretical perspective we take and which empirical material we draw on. In this article, I have tried to add as much empirical detail as possible—to the point of risking distracting the reader from the overall argument—in order to render tangible this multifacetedness of Russian Orthodoxy.

The second argument is that, three decades after the fall of Communism, the period of post-Soviet religion is over, and that this has implications for the way in which we study the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism. It is not the historical experience of repression and secularization under Communism that is the main backdrop for understanding Russian Orthodoxy today, but the volatile situation of the post-Soviet years of transition. During this period, many roles for the church inside the Russian state and society were thinkable, but by 2020, the die has been cast and the Moscow Patriarchate has effectively turned Russian Orthodoxy into a national church and prime defender of Russia's new civil religion of traditional values.

However, the historical overview has made clear that the decisions of the church leadership have always been contested from inside the Church and that efforts on the part of the state and the Moscow Patriarchate to enforce a unitary doctrine often had counterproductive results, leading to more criticism of the Church. This was the case in the imperial period, and it may well again be the case in the twenty-first century. Russian Orthodoxy as national church and bearer of Russia's new civil religion is one possible outcome of the present situation, but also other outcomes, such as the end of the “pro-Orthodox consensus” or new cleavages inside Orthodoxy and Russian society, are thinkable.

In any event, what distinguishes the present period from any previous time in the history of Russian Orthodoxy is the reality of globalization (see Roudometof 2014). Russian Orthodoxy today is defining its relationship vis-à-vis secularism as a state craft doctrine not exclusively in the Russian context, but in a world of international human rights norms and the global culture wars. It is finding its place inside a secular, pluralistic society which—given transnational mobilization and communication—extends beyond the Russian borders and the Russian language. For this reason, the future of the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and secularism is open. The research perspectives developed here are not the only ones imaginable to explore this complex reality further, and I hope that this survey article will encourage new and original paths for doing research on Russian Orthodoxy and secularism.

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