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Civil religion in Russia

A choice for Russian modernization?

by **Elina Kahla**

This essay addresses aspects of the cultural traditions and practices of Russian Orthodox believers and bearers of that church's legacy in contemporary society, especially in the gray area between the secular and religious spheres of life. The theoretical basis of the present study is rooted in Jürgen Habermas's understanding of the "post-secular", by which is meant the regaining of religion by individuals and societies. Habermas proposes a new "third way" for a social contract, one that requires an equal dialog between religious and secular citizens.¹ My aim here is to elaborate on the improvement of the relationship among the church, the state, and society in the contemporary Russian situation by comparing it with the West, where secularization has been seen as a key component of modernization. I call for a dialog between the Western social theory of *civil religion* and Russian statements on its own cultural tradition. The guiding research question is: to what extent are cultural traditions – such as the shared value of symphony,² or practicing forms of *theosis* and collective, circular control (as discussed by Oleg Kharkhordin³) – still at the core of self-identification and ingroup communication in Russian cultural Orthodoxy? My hypothesis is that such cultural traditions and practices are crucial, and therefore they should be openly integrated into societal dialog and form the key components of Russia's unique model of civil religion. I also posit that, due to Russia's Orthodox legacy, its potential for civil religion is fundamentally different from the Western (here: American) model, and therefore should be analyzed in its own, non-Western context. What is vital is that Russian political tradition emphasizes symphony between secular and sacred authority, and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC),

by virtue of its history and as the religion of the ethnic majority, has dominated other confessions. As a result, cultural and political Orthodoxy formed the *modus vivendi* that in the public sphere of symbols, legislation, and practices, ruled not just over its own adherents but over non-Orthodox, non-Russians, and non-believers as well. By inertia, the ROC and the Kremlin today aspire to revive the prerevolutionary tradition of symphony, while simultaneously admitting the multiconfessional and secular status of the state. Given this controversy, it is safe to posit that a better analysis of the Russian model of civil religion is urgently needed – even more so today, when the conflict in Ukraine is drawing two Orthodox nations into fratricide.

TODAY, A SELF-IDENTIFICATION with the spiritual and historical legacy of Russian Orthodoxy unites the majority of ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers.⁴ Adherence to "cultural Orthodoxy" is to some extent also shared by non-Orthodox citizens, due to its ubiquity and intangibility, which helped it to transform and survive 70 years of communism. Because of this combination of shared tradition, ubiquity, and intangibility, it seems that practices of symphony, theosis, and circular control apply to both the Orthodox Christian (*pravoslavnye*) and the non-Orthodox (*inovernnye, inoslavnye*) citizens, and even those *rossiiane* living abroad in "Greater Russia"⁵. My point is that the ubiquity of cultural Orthodoxy lies in the fact that it relates deeply to the public sphere and therefore creates a potential realm for agency and choices, and ultimately for an updated contract between church and state and between church and civil society. Due to its ubiquity, it forms an organic part of political culture as well. Accord-



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ing to White⁶, the USSR incorporated eight features of Russian tradition that characterize political culture: low public participation in politics, and hence the weak articulation of representative institutions; authoritarianism and an unusually broad scope of government; personalization of the population's political attachments; centralization; bureaucracy; a strong sense of community; suspicion towards outsiders; and a reliance on face-to-face relations rather than anonymous procedures.⁷ I would agree with White and Richters and stress that these features are still prevalent today.

It is generally held that, even though personal attendance at worship is low and even though the ROC is widely criticized for its corruption, authoritarianism, and conspicuous compromises with secular authority and nationalist groupings, Orthodox identity and the ROC as its promoter have made a permanent comeback in modernizing society, for both good and ill.⁸ The public duumvirate of secular and ecclesiastical authority, referred to as “symphony”, *simfoniia*, has taken a stronger hold on daily life (Channel 1 broadcasts on Russian TV offer sufficient evidence). The ROC has regained much of its property and privilege; it acts as a supra-national body in “Greater Russia” (including Ukraine, Belarus, and Estonia) and is a viable soft power player once more. The church enjoys trust. It is seen as the upholder of national values. Whether it is because of a post-Soviet backlash, or inertia, or the authorities' efforts to maintain social cohesion inside Russia and in “Greater Russia” or to resist anti-Western tendencies, the fact is that the presence of cultural and political Orthodoxy, with all of its practices, has strengthened. Yet cultural Orthodoxy as a set of beliefs and practices is still insufficiently studied in

its contemporary forms, and its potential as a positive force in modernizing Russian society and in the global environment is understated.

IN THIS ESSAY I revisit Robert N. Bellah's classic work “Civil Religion in America” (1967) and his subsequent “Religion and the Legitimation of the American Republic” (1980). In these works, Bellah discusses the contract between secular and religious authority. My aim is to point out the similarities and differences between the American contract, as analyzed by Bellah, and the emerging Russian one, although I also argue that there exists just now a momentum towards formulating a new kind of contract of civil religion in Russia. Specific traits of this situation should be examined, since together they may represent threats or opportunities, inertia or open choices for a *modus vivendi*. “Russian cultural Orthodoxy” denotes here not only the ROC as a formal hierarchical organization, but also lay networks, brotherhoods, monasteries and foundations, and even informal and untraditional civil agencies such as the pro-Putin musical group Buranovo Babushkas and the anti-Putin group Pussy Riot.

The Russian Orthodox Church and the challenge of modernization

In light of the ROC's incapacity to deal with any civil protest, it seems that there is an evident need for a revised contract between the secular and religious authorities over their societal roles. Renegotiating a new civil religion contract would allow Russia to avoid antagonistic situations in which accusations of “blasphemy” are treated in secular courtrooms as “hooliganism”



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PHOTO: IGOR MUKHIN

Left: Russian Orthodox believers attend an Easter service in the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow on April 24, 2011. Above: Members of the anti-Putin band Pussy Riot.

or as a “crime against the state”, as in the scandalous Pussy Riot trial.⁹ That trial exposed, more than any other example, the unpreparedness of the ROC or the state to deal with the antagonistic sphere between the Orthodox authority and the modern, *a priori* secular civil agency whose openness and globalism are evident in social media.¹⁰ It is worth noting that without social media, especially YouTube, no scandal would ever have taken place. However, social media are not only a threat but also an opportunity: the Pussy Riot case also pointed to potential affirmative agency by revealing taboos that cannot be dealt with in formal institutions.¹¹

Given the huge challenges, self-reflection is a must. It is crucial that the ROC, within the frame of its specific traditions and historic trajectory, takes up the challenge of self-reflection posed by post-secularity, and accepts the existence of competing denominations, the autonomy of secular knowledge from sacred knowledge, and the institutionalized monopoly of modern scientific expertise. Meanwhile, the ROC needs to develop an epistemic stance regarding the secular reasoning predominant in political arena.¹²

AS FOR DEMOCRATIC values held among Orthodox adherents, Christopher Marsh has claimed that “religious belief and practice have virtually no impact on democratic values, suggesting that Orthodoxy may not be the obstacle to democracy that some have made it out to be.”¹³ More recently, Irina Papkova’s analysis of the mass campaign against electronic identification pointed out that within the formal ROC structures there are fractions of liberals, traditionalists, and fundamentalists.¹⁴ And finally, Kristina Stoeckl’s¹⁵ analysis of the Social Doctrine and the Human Rights

Doctrine debate has shown that modernization of the ROC is truly in progress:

The ROC recognizes that modern society has become the natural living environment for the majority of Orthodox believers, and while the ROC criticizes the excesses of modern society it also responds to the legitimate desire of the Orthodox believer to be part of that society. ... I would argue that the changes in the human rights debate actually stand for an ideological renewal, and not only for strategic-political adaptation¹⁶.

With this in mind, one would conclude that Orthodox faith and practice in Russia are not *per se* obstacles to the country’s democratic development. If peace prevails, openness will grow and human rights debates will gradually contribute to an ideological renewal. On a closer look, the ROC is neither a monolith nor a remnant of an idealized past, but consists of a wide range of clerical-formal and lay actors whose choices will contribute to the content of the contract between secular and religious authority, even if the dogma of symphony remains untouched.¹⁷

American ‘civil religion’ and Russian Orthodox tradition

As was argued earlier, modern Western social theory has so far failed to take Russian traditions of the sociology of religion into serious consideration when discussing Russian social development. What we need is better and more egalitarian integration of Western and Russian academics’ work. To attempt a step forward

along this path, let us next compare the concept of civil religion proposed by the American sociologist Robert N. Bellah with some remarks on the situation in Russia. In his original essay “Civil Religion in America” (1967) – written during the crisis of the Vietnam War – Bellah was inspired by Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (1762). Rousseau outlined four simple dogmas of civil religion: “the existence of God, the life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance. All other religious opinions are outside the cognizance of the state and may be freely held by citizens.”¹⁸ Rousseau’s dogma is still valid. In addition, the Durkheimian emphasis that civil religion is an “objective social fact”, a *sine qua non*, is important here.¹⁹ Comparing Bellah’s theory with the historical trajectory and recent developments of post-secular Russia leads us to focus on the following points:

Civil religion deals with ultimate questions of faith and power. Sovereignty rests with the people, but ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God. Civil religion deals with tensions between secular and religious authorities and the legitimacy of political authority. This definition is universal, but manifests itself differently in different historical and national civil religions.²⁰

In Russia, the historical trajectory, the question of faith and power is exhibited in the narrative of statehood. The birth of the state is associated with Vladimir I’s baptism and the Christianization of Kievan Rus in 988. The ROC backed the political authority until 1917 in the name of symphony; Russian ethnicity meant adherence to Orthodoxy. In the officially atheistic USSR, the ROC was involved when its help was needed, as during WWII. In post-Soviet Russia, symphony has been revitalized, especially during Putin’s second term. The ROC plays a dominant role in an unusually broad range of government functions (the soft power agenda, military and penalty institutions), while the other traditional religions Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism are far less privileged; and some confessions such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses are considered outgroups.

CIVIL RELIGION PROVIDES different solutions to the religious–political problem that seem to correlate with phases of religious evolution. In archaic societies, the focus of both political and religious attention was on a single figure, often identified as a divine king. Although in the first millennium B.C. this fusion between political and religious power was broken by the emergence of the historic religions, “it remains a permanent possibility in human history”. Once the historic religions arise, there can be a direct relation to the divine, unmediated by political authority. This means a radical reorientation in the divine-kingdom symbolism. “The symbolisms of Confucius or Jesus suggest (Jesus’ throne is a cross and his crown is thorns) that the relations between political authority and ultimate meaning turn out more problematic than ever thought before”.²¹

In Russia, sovereign Orthodox Tsars anointed by God purportedly mediate between God and the faithful. Today, due to the memory of regicide in 1918, the aspect of national redemption is felt and strongly propagated, and is a part of political technology. It is key that Tsar Nicholas II (along with his family) was canon-

ized as a passion-bearer in 2000. Recently, the 400th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty has been widely celebrated in both secular and religious terms. Allusions to President Putin acting as a contemporary *suverennyi* come to mind. In festivities, films, ceremonial exhibitions, and the reconstruction of memorial places related to the Romanov dynasty (such as the village of Feodorov at Tsarskoe Selo), Orthodox Russia is seen as having God’s blessing from past to present and future, whereas negative aspects of the Romanovs’ reign (or of Stalin’s) are taboo and not discussed in public.

CIVIL RELIGION EXISTS alongside, and is clearly differentiated from, churches. Adherents of different religious views are equally qualified participants of political processes. The religious authorities recognize the legitimacy of the state in return for political recognition of their own dominant position in the realm of religion.²²

In Russia, another historical path was taken: centralism and the idea of symphony persist, implying that the ruler of the state is Orthodox and the Moscow Patriarchate’s position is dominant; a national redemption process focuses on the sin of regicide; legitimacy and power struggles continue. However, due to the low numbers of people joining the church (*votserkovlenie*) and strong propaganda and catechization via cultural Orthodoxy, the distinction between Orthodox and non-Orthodox adherents is blurred and gradual, especially in “Greater Russia”, where Eastern Orthodox civilization is the focus. Non-Orthodox citizens have formal access to political processes.

Civil religion shifts over time through “trials”. In America, the Declaration of Independence and the abolition of slavery are examples of such trials, whereas the Vietnam War, an acute crisis in 1967 when Bellah’s essay was written, is regarded as a Manichean confrontation between East and West, where “honor is at stake”.²³

In Russia, emancipation from the Mongol yoke, World War II, the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya, and even the battle for hegemony over Crimea may represent analogous “trials”. Today, the ROC pointedly propagates the restrengthening of lost links between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, “in order to make peace flourish in the minds and hearts of brothers and sisters in blood and faith”.²⁴ Richters has pointed out that in Ukraine, hard-line MP clerics speak positively about the division of Ukraine and the integration of its eastern parts into Russia.²⁵ In military training, Russian soldiers are taught to sacrifice their lives as a way of imitating Christ’s ultimate sacrifice, hence a form of theosis.²⁶

Civil religion is messianic: one’s own nation is regarded as chosen by God and a light unto all nations, one’s own country as the New Jerusalem; it is eschatological and ultimately transnational. “A world civil religion could be accepted as a fulfillment and not a denial of American civil religion”.²⁷

In Russia, the manifestation of messianism is analogical, most famously elaborated by Slavophiles and Fyodor Dostoevsky, and today by neo-Eurasianists such as A. Dugin, an influential advisor to President Putin. Patriarch Kirill constantly stresses the heritage of Holy Rus and the unity of the great Eastern-Slavic civilization into which brethren in blood and faith are called. In

the Patriarch's policies, Ukraine is important for its size and history, Kiev being the "mother of all Russian cities" and symbol of national baptism. Today, clerics' support for the integration of Eastern Ukraine into Russia (*vozhraschenie v Rossiyu/v Rodinu* – return to Russia or to the homeland) bears some messianic features.

Civil religion can be researched through its Biblical archetypes: Exodus, the Chosen People, the Promised Land, the New Jerusalem, sacrificial death, and rebirth.²⁸ Consequently, an examination of a nation's model of civil religion addresses its own prophets and martyrs, its solemn rituals and symbols, as well as cultural patterns and practices.

In Russia the model is fairly similar. The distinction between ingroup and outgroup is important. Today, memorial dates related to national sacrifices, secular and religious martyrs, and redemption show the momentum of civil religion in the public sphere. The Piskaryovka, Levashovo, and Solovetsk memorials, for example, stress the universal, multiconfessional and multi-ethnic character of mourning.

WE CAN CONCLUDE that there are both fundamental differences (a different history, the dominant position of the ROC, and the ubiquity of cultural Orthodoxy in Russia versus American pluralism and modernism), but also similarities (strong momentum for resurgence through sacrifice; messianism) between Bellah's model and the Russian model of civil religion. Next, let us examine in more detail the Orthodox model's key concept symphony and the practices related with it.

Symphony in the service of secular power?

In today's Russia, the division between religious and secular power remains unresolved due to the adaptation of the Byzantine ideal of symphonic power, which the Byzantologist H. G. Beck referred to as "political Orthodoxy".²⁹ By this coinage, Beck meant the Church's dual role of temporal *and* ecclesiastical leadership. He also related it to the late nineteenth-century rediscovery of the Third Rome doctrine (i.e., the mythology of Moscow as a capital of Christendom after the Turks had invaded Constantinople in 1453³⁰), to a hostile attitude towards Western Catholicism and later Protestantism that is still present today, to confusion regarding succession to the throne, and to wars and devastation. Throughout its history, in spite of cataclysms and corruption, Russian Orthodoxy has cherished and maintained the ideal of symphony. Symphony and *sobornost* as closely linked concepts involve, according to the religious philosopher Nikolai Lossky (1870-1965), "combination of freedom and unity of many persons on the basis of their common love for the same absolute values".³¹ According to A. Verkhovskii, the Moscow Patriarchate today can be considered a political party although it is not formally registered as such.³²



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church. Yelizarovo, Orekhovo-Zuyevsky District, Moscow Oblast.

In political and secular rhetoric, loyalty to the values of Orthodox symphony (especially cherished by Slavophiles) has often been presented as an antithesis to Western individualism, pluralism, and democracy. In aggravating circumstances of war or power struggle, periods of disorder (*smuta*) and purges (*chistka*) of the ingroup, the Orthodox have tended to support the legitimacy of the secular regime. The ROC hierarchy backed the state with little reward in return, even during the worst years of Stalinist terror. Today, I see no other explanation for the immense popularity of the cult of the Blessed Matrona of Moscow except that she is seen as the paragon of loyalty to Stalin, and by extension to the nation, when the Nazis were in the suburbs and attacking Moscow in late autumn of 1941.

Extremely useful for understanding the Russian version of civil religion and cultural patterns is the famous propagandistic book *The truth about Religion in Russia (Pravda o religii v Rossii)*, published in 1942 by the Moscow Patriarchate to win the support of the allied powers by reassuring them that the Soviet government does not persecute the faithful. The book bears witness to the patriotism of the ROC hierarchs led by *locum tenens* Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodskii). Although obviously propagandistic and denying many facts, the pastoral speeches reveal an unquestioned bond between the Russian nation and its Church and a willingness to sacrifice, and the authors declare that the only hope of defeating the enemy is by turning once more to God and His help. Importantly, as Pospelovsky points out, notwithstanding the apocalypse of 1942, *Pravda o religii* also contains wording condemning war in a true Christian spirit.³³

TO EMPHASIZE THE UNBREAKABLE bond between secular and religious authority, the sermons quoted in *Pravda o religii* draw an explicit parallel between the German invasion and the Teutonic knights' attack of 1242, which Prince Alexander Nevskii repelled. Hitler's attack is presented as analogous to the medieval one: again, seven hundred years later, the faithful are requested to collect money to save the homeland by supporting the Red Army. The manifestation of symphony and unquestioned loyalty to

the state authority is strongly implied in a photograph in which Metropolitan Sergii is sitting by his typewriter in a posture similar to Stalin with no visible pastoral or religious markers except a humble clerical black cap, the *skufia*, on his head.³⁴ This example testifies to situations of extreme external danger which compels religious and secular leaders to unite, bring the contract between state and church under reconsideration, and invite the persecuted ingroup back into the collective. The epigraph of *Pravda o religii* is from the Old Testament Book of Ezra: “Truth is great and will prevail”³⁵. The reference to Ezra as a model – negotiating with the king, leading a group of exiles from Babylon back to their native Jerusalem, but also enforcing observance of the Torah and cleansing the community of inter-ethnic marriages – may perhaps be seen as a vignette of Sergius and his behavior at that time. A similar but secular version of the motto is on the Red Army’s 1945 victory medal: “Our cause is just – victory is ours”, and was preceded in the future tense by Molotov’s radio speech of June 22, 1941: “Our cause is just, the enemy will be defeated, the victory will be ours”. The analogy between the religious and secular leaders’ mottos consolidates the idea of symphony: side by side they use, if needed, repressive means within their ingroup as a model of collective penance and redemption. Up until 1948, Stalin used the church as his ally in international politics; in periods of *détente*, the ROC actively and systematically supported Soviet proposals in international peace organizations.

WHEN THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY and ideology eroded and lost their legitimacy, Orthodox institutions gradually replaced them as definers of the soft power agenda. Important milestones included the millennial celebration of Russia’s baptism in 1988 and the canonization of thousands of new martyrs, most notably that of Tsar Nicholas in 2000.³⁶ These events attest to a return of symphony between state and church. Although the Social Doctrine³⁷ claimed a commitment to a separation of church and state, seen from today’s perspective, the Doctrine has not uprooted the symphonic tradition and the informal practices related to it.

Consequently, a closer analysis of symphony and the related practices is needed for a better understanding of religion in contemporary Russia. However, the Russian sociologist Oleg Kharkhordin has recently contributed to the analysis of cultural practices in several of his works.³⁸ In the next section, I will address some of his remarks on concepts such as *deification (theosis)*, *collective*, *circular control*, *self-exposure*, and *friendship* – all of which are relevant in understanding Russian tradition and practices.

Civil society and congregational traditions

The idea of civil religion was popularized in the Russian context by Oleg Kharkhordin. In “Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity”, Kharkhordin applies theories of civil society to diverging visions of Christian ethical life. He suggests that there exists a specific Russian conception of civil society in which the relations between civil life and religious traditions are negotiated in a manner different to those of Protestant and Catholic communities and their perceptions of the ethical role of a congregation.³⁹

Kharkhordin refers to Dostoevsky’s Slavophile concept of the theocratic mission of the Orthodox Church. It is best manifested in the famous episode in which Ivan Karamazov suggests that ecclesiastical courts should regulate all aspects of secular life too, so that the Christian church would finally fulfill its mission in this world. Ivan stresses that the Church should not try to take on the state functions of suppressing crime and sustaining political life – as Catholicism allegedly yearns to do. The church should not punish; it should not become the state, but all social relations should be recast in accordance with the New Testament.⁴⁰

From the point of view of the characters in the Dostoevsky novel, this Orthodox vision still reflects the true, “right” (the meaning of “orthos” in Greek) project of the Christian church: not to coexist with the violent state as a necessary evil (a point on which both Catholics and Protestants seem to agree) but to strive with the radical denial of this evil through the deification of man (a famous Orthodox theosis) and through the reconstruction of the world on church principles.⁴¹

Indeed, deification, *theosis*, originally equivalent to *imitatio Dei*, is of major importance in Orthodox dogma and the practice of working on oneself (*podvizat’sia*). Kharkhordin convincingly adopts *theosis* as his starting point in translating cultural traditions from one regime to another. The radical denial of evil is related to the ideal of utmost humility, which stems from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-17:

[I]f thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

The three-step pattern of ingroup control is crucial: it stands as a model for religious and secular congregations and collectives. As suggested by Nikolai Berdiaev⁴² and Elizaveta Skobtsova,⁴³ the Russian Revolutionary radicals indeed tried to translate Dostoevsky’s project into reality. Berdiaev famously called it “religious asceticism turned inside out”. Kharkhordin goes even further: in his discussion, *all* Soviet groups and collectives, from workers on a given factory shop floor to group of inmates in a given cell or tourists in a given hotel, “were all supposed to be transformed to become a ‘collective’”.⁴⁴

The concept of “collective” turned out to be very stable. According to Kharkhordin, the secret of this stability and of the limited use of physical violence in normal Soviet life consisted in the fact that each Soviet collective functioned as a quasi-religious congregation, employing the principles of the New Testament to maintain the powerful system of circular social control within the collective.⁴⁵

Circular social interdependence and control, or *krugovaia poruka*, is another specifically deep-rooted tradition, stemming from the pre-modern peasant community in which the collective was supposed to bear responsibility for each member's obligations and vice versa. Thus, both circular control in accordance with the Gospel and congregational norms underlay the surveillance and the punitive system of the Soviet collectives. They also constituted the basis of Anton Makarenko's pedagogical system targeted at educating the new soviet man, *Homo Sovieticus*.⁴⁶

IN THE FIRST STAGE of the formation of the collective, the group was picked from more or less randomly assembled individuals who then were introduced to a goal and collective responsibility in attaining it. The second stage was to create a core (*aktiv*) within the group or collective who were responsible for ingroup surveillance and the regulation of behavior in accordance with set norms. In the third stage, the *aktiv* was subjected to the same norms as the rest so that the group became self-regulating. When circular control works, it is in a sense equivalent to a pseudo-religious congregation, and in its essence, the secret of its success consisted in its stability and its limited use of violence. Kharkhordin's conclusion is plausible that the structures of circular control in the Christian congregation and in the secular Soviet collective, two seemingly opposed phenomena, indeed coincided.⁴⁷ Perhaps these coincidences are not sporadic, but rather paradigmatically related to the holistic Orthodox understanding of Christian individual efforts at deification and Christianity's long teaching on communal (cenobitic) forms. Indeed, this unbroken chain does come to mind, given the popularity of reprints (and web versions) of old patristic, hagiographic, and pseudohagiographic literature devoted to ascetic and cenobitic life today. In short, *krugovaia poruka* and reliance on face-to-face relations help to explain how people cope with hardships. When salaries or pensions were suspended for several months, as was often the case in the 1990s, it did not lead to massive unrest or violence. Today, circular responsibility might entail hosting refugees in private homes or Orthodox monasteries instead of state-run asylums.

Another focal component of congregational and pseudocongregational practice is self-exposure, or *oblichenie*. In premodern times, the mystery of confession used to be public: the penitent confessed his or her sins in front of the priest-confessor and the congregation. Even later, when the mystery of confession took place in private, penance could not always be kept private. For example, if the penitent had committed grievous sins, he or she might not be allowed to enter the church, but have to stand outside.

In the Soviet Union, self-exposure became a part of purge procedures. During the 1933 purge, 76% of all Communist Party members went through a ritual in which their party cards were taken away from them, but returned again after a session of "criticism and self-criticism" – that is, pseudo-congregational confession – and their approval as good party members.⁴⁸

In his anthology of essays on theory of practices, Kharkhordin once again emphasizes the role of voluntary self-exposure.⁴⁹ Contemplating the meaning of the practice, common among

Russians, of sometimes disclosing themselves in front of people important to them, he claims that Soviet citizens had voluntarily (that is, as an exercise of deification) translated that practice from the official sphere of party purges into their private sphere, into the sphere of friendship (*druzhba*).⁵⁰ Kharkhordin analyzes grades of closeness, from *hetairos* to *philos* (from partner to friend), from private friends to friends of God, from the Tsar's adviser to trading partners and drinking buddies. He does so using research materials such as medieval sources, classical and Christian Orthodox compilations, and excerpts from contemporary spoken and written language.

Kharkhordin argues that, in Russian cultural practice, friendship between two individuals is only a recent and rare phenomenon. The *network of friends* is what rules: "The network functions, not the friend"; "my friend is your friend"; "friends share everything" ("*u druz'ei vse obshchee*"). Likewise "I am successful to that extent I am included in a network of friends",⁵¹ or "Better a hundred friends than a hundred rubles". Today too, it is crucial to have the right mediators and the right space: once one has them, everything else will follow. The exchange of friendly favors and the "informal economy" have had an enormous impact on the daily lives of Russians and on the process of change of society as a whole.⁵² True Judeo-Christian, Russian Orthodox values lie in being included in the "involvement of the individual in collective life".⁵³

IN THE SECTION ABOVE, based on Kharkhordin's analysis, I aimed to point out analogies between religious and secular communalities based on informal practices of circular responsibility. Awareness of Orthodoxy-based tradition also helps us understand Russian intellectuals' attraction to revolution, including thinkers from Sergei Bulgakov to Nikolai Berdyaev and Pavel Florensky. In the search for freedom and the rejection of corruption, they stressed the radical denial of evil. Perhaps ideas of symphony also highlight why the communality of Russian Orthodox intellectuals and political elites today has little to do with their formal attendance at worship, but explains messianic expansionism.

Concepts like *deification (theosis)*, *circular control (krugovaia poruka)*, *self-exposure (oblichenie)*, and *friendship (druzhba)* denote a holistic universe of distinct cultural practices and individual participation in communal life which have had a long and unique history on Russian soil. By way of conclusion, I would suggest that these core concepts should be given greater consideration in addressing the positive potential of civil religion, and especially in defining the traits that constitute its unique substance in the negotiation of relations of agency between church and state and between church and civil society in the contemporary Russian situation, as well as in examining the ROC's contributions to interconfessional dialog.

To conceptualize the potential of civil religion, a detailed analysis of the relevant agencies – formal and informal, productive and counterproductive, including taboos – is required. In the Russian context, in which the whole project of modernization is often viewed with suspicion, no successful social concept and accompanying action program will be attained without taking



Cossacks for Christ.

that context's premises and its specific religious-cum-political-cum-cultural practices in earnest. When Bellah reminds us of the American founding fathers' vision, he emphasizes it was based on rejection of particularism; instead, it relied on a vision of the common good and an artist-people's creative idea: "The civil religion proposal is to strive once again to incarnate that artist-people's creative idea".⁵⁴ Recalling the artist-people's creative idea is, to some extent, parallel and compatible with the ideas of Russian fin-de-siècle philosophers', such as Vladimir Solovyov. The creative idea is at the core of the civil religion proposal: it offers a solution to national (and nationalist) lethargy by involving an acknowledgment of mystery, but it also rejects the legitimization of state repression. ✕

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- On *symphony* in this sense, see below and, e.g., Zoe Katrina Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005).
- Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Oleg Kharkhordin, *Oblichat' i litsemerit': genealogiia rossiiskoi lichnosti* (St. Petersburg and Moscow: EUSPb, Letnii sad, 2002).
- I refer to 'Orthodoxy' as the religious faith, but also as a cultural tradition and cultural practices by self-identified adherents of Russian Orthodoxy, that is, 60-80% of Russians. According to a VTsiom survey of 2008, 73% of Russians reported adherence to Orthodoxy. <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=11099>, accessed August 7, 2012.
- C.f. Katja Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: Politics, Culture and Greater Russia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).
- S. White, *Political Culture and Soviet Politics* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979).
- White, *Political Culture*, cited in Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church*, 158.
- "Nebo stanovitsia blizhe" [Heaven gets closer], *Bolshoi gorod* 6 no. (April 10-24, 2013): 4. On criticism of economic practices see <http://www.religionnews.com/2013/02/27/al-jazeera-video-orthodox-corruption/>, accessed April 16, 2013.
- Young Muscovite artists performed 'punk moleben' with openly political, anticlerical, and allegedly blasphemous lyrics directed simultaneously at the President and the Patriarch. "Punk moleben lyrics", accessed June 20, 2012, <http://andmand.livejournal.com/63504.html>. In December 2013, the performers Maria Aliokhina and Nadia Tolokonnikova were released from prison and announced that they would continue to protest.
- The harsh response from Russian authorities, both secular and religious, is discussed by, e.g., Dmitry Uzlaner, "The Pussy Riot Case and the Peculiarities of Russian Post-Secularism", *State, Religion and Church* 1 no. 1 (2014): 23-58.
- See Markku Kivinen, *Progress and Chaos: Russia as a Challenge for Sociological Imagination* (Helsinki: Kikumora Publications, 2002); Markku Kivinen, "Russian Societal Development: Challenges Open", in *Russia Lost or Found?*, ed. Hiski Haukkala and Sinikukka Saari, 112-144 (Helsinki: Edita, 2009).
- Cf. Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere", 14.
- C. Marsh, "Orthodox Christianity, Civil Society, and Russian Democracy", *Demokratizatsiya* 13 no. 3 (Summer 2005): 449-462.
- I. Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D.C., 2011): 118-120. Papkova defines Orthodox fundamentalism in terms of four factors: "On the political side, they are anti-Western, anti-democratic, and anti-market; on the theological, they justify their political stance based on an apocalyptic interpretation of temporal reality." *Ibid.*, 118-119.
- K. Stoeckl, "The Human Rights Debate and the ROC", *Religion, State and Society* 40 no. 2 (2012): 221, emphasis added.
- For a similar assessment, see A. Agadjanian, "Liberal Individual and Christian Culture: Russian Orthodox Teaching on Human Rights in Social Theory Perspective", *Religion, State, and Society* 38 no. 2 (2010): 98.
- Thus far, the ROC hierarchy's stance toward values in modern society has mostly been defensive, both outside and inside, posing a double confrontation. See S. Ramet, "The Way We Were – And Should Be Again? European Orthodox Churches and the 'Idyllic Past'", in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, ed. P.J. Katzenstein and T.A. Byrnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and K. Stoeckl, "European Integration and Russian Orthodoxy: Two Multiple Modernities Perspectives", *European Journal of Social Theory* 14 no. 2 (2011): 219. Outside, vis-à-vis Western countries, the main threats are secularist and pluralist values, and competition among different religions. All this is often referred to as "multiculturalism". Inside, in societies of prevailing Orthodox tradition there also are processes of modernization and secularization which threaten the authority of religion. Patriarch Kirill has made notable efforts to meet these challenges. Perhaps the confrontation of Orthodox religion with modernity will even appear as a central theme of his patriarchy. In both his Social Doctrine (2000) and his Human Rights Doctrine (2008), Kirill defends the ROC's conservative stance on questions ranging from sexual ethics to environmental protection. Responding to these

- questions, Kirill also recognizes that they are legitimate for the Orthodox citizens of today, regardless of their residence or citizenship. Patriarch Kirill has so far fairly systematically kept a balance between Orthodox fundamentalists' pressures on the one hand and the threat of Western hegemony and its 'militant secularism' on the other. Understandably, Kirill, or the Western-schooled Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev) and others in today's the ROC top hierarchy, are far better equipped to participate in scholarly, interconfessional and interfaith dialog with the 'world society' as defined by Habermas in his "Religion in the Public Sphere", than the more domestic-market-oriented Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, let alone the grassroots clergy and laity across Russian dioceses. Given the situation in which the post-totalitarian ROC is for the first time confronted on so many levels and fronts (theological, intellectual, and institutional), the challenge it faces is huge.
- 18 Rousseau in Chapter 8, Book 4, of the *Social Contract*, cited in R. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", *Daedalus* 96 no. 1 (Winter 1967): 5.
 - 19 Ronald C. Wimberley and William H. Swatos, Jr., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, "civil religion", web version, accessed August 11, 2012.
 - 20 Cf. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America".
 - 21 R. Bellah and P. E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980): viii-ix.
 - 22 Cf. Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, x.
 - 23 Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", 16.
 - 24 Patriarch Kirill's Easter greeting, *ZhMP*, 5/14, n.p.
 - 25 Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church*, 117.
 - 26 Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church*, 60.
 - 27 Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", 18.
 - 28 Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", 18, 1-21.
 - 29 H.G. Beck, *Das byzantinische Jahrtausend* (Munich, 1978).
 - 30 The meaning of the "Third Rome" ideology (*translatio imperii*) has been much debated. Recent research on primary documents shows that the modern version of the myth resulted mostly from late nineteenth and early twentieth-century philosophical-cum-political thinking, such as the writings of Vladimir Solovyov, and became most popular in Sergei Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible I-II, 1944-58*, as noted by D. Ostrowski, "Moscow the Third Rome" as Historical Ghost", in *Byzantium, faith, and power (1261-1557): Perspectives on late Byzantine art and culture*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009): 170-179. "Little notice was taken of the 'Third Rome' until 1861, when [the monk] Filofei's Letter against Astrologers was first published". Ostrowski, "Moscow the Third Rome", 176.
 - 31 In Chris M. Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* (University Park, PA: PennState University Press, 1995): 28; Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church*, 105-108.
 - 32 A. Verkhovskii, "Moskovskaia Patriarkhiia kak politicheskaia Partiiia" [The Moscow Patriarchate as a political party], *Russkaia Mysl'*, 4278 (1999): 21.
 - 33 *Pravda o religii v Rossii* [The truth about religion in Russia] (Moskovskaia patriarkhiia, 1942): 42-56; D. Pospelovskiy, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime 1917-1982*, vol. 1 (St. Crestwood, New York: Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984): 198-199.
 - 34 *Pravda o religii*, 56.
 - 35 "Velika est istina i premogaet." 2 Ezd 4:41 in the Slavonic Bible.
 - 36 Bremer notes that throughout history canonization politics is an important indicator of church-state relations. See his analysis of political canonizations in Muscovite Russia and later in Thomas Bremer, *Kreuz und Kremlin: Kleine Geschichte der Orthodoxen Kirche in Russland* (Herder, 2006): 113-142.
 - 37 "The Basis of the Social Concept", ROC, last modified 2000, accessed June 27, 2012. <http://www.mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>.
 - 38 Oleg Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity", *Europe-Asia Studies* 50 no. 6 (1998); Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*; Kharkhordin, *Oblichat' i litsemerit'*; Oleg Kharkhordin, ed., *Druzhba: Ocherki po teorii praktik* (St. Petersburg: EUSPb, 2009).
 - 39 Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity", 955.
 - 40 Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity", 955-956.
 - 41 Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity", 956, emphasis added.
 - 42 N.A. Berdiaev, "Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma" (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1937), accessed June 28, 2012, <http://www.vehi.net/berdyayev/istoki/index.html>.
 - 43 E. Skobtsova, *Dostoevsky i sovremennost'* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1929).
 - 44 Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity", 957.
 - 45 Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity", 958.
 - 46 Makarenko (1888-1939), the prominent psychologist and pedagogue, "created the concept of formation of personality in the collective, where he regarded mutual relations of members as relations of 'responsible dependency'". "Anton Makarenko", accessed February 11, 2014, <http://psychology.academic.ru/AntonMakarenko>.
 - 47 Kharkhordin, "Civil Society and Orthodox Christianity", 958.
 - 48 Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*, 215.
 - 49 Kharkhordin, *Druzhba*.
 - 50 Kharkhordin refers to late Brezhnev-era empirical surveys, according to which Russians valued spending leisure time with friends substantially more than Americans. The respondents mentioned various reasons ranging from mutual help to the exchange of information not accessible via official media. Importantly, meetings with friends did not devalue when repressions stopped: the high value Russians attach to friendship is not related to the regime but rather to 'subjectifying practice'. Kharkhordin, *Druzhba*, 12-14.
 - 51 Kharkhordin, *Druzhba*, 429-430.
 - 52 A. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); A. Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works? The Informal Practices that Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); V. Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
 - 53 "Prichastnost' individua k kollektivnoi zhizni." A. O. Boronoev, and P. I. Smirnov, *Rossia i russkie: Kharakter naroda i sud'by strany* (St. Petersburg: Lenizdat, 1992): 88.
 - 54 Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*, 204.