Post-Cold War National Security: The Role of Russian Orthodoxy

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Literature Review

"The Orthodox Church, though commonly referred to as Eastern, considers herself none the less the universal Church; and this is true in the sense that she is not limited by any particular type of culture." -*Vladimir Lossky, 1944*

1.1 - Introduction

This thesis uses historical analysis and theological frameworks to bridge the gap between the religious, ideological elements of Russian society and the political decision-making of the Russian government. By giving a historical overview of the relationship between the church and the state in Russia in the Communist period as well as the post-Soviet period, the thesis addresses the precedents of political Orthodoxy in Russian history to explain the interconnected relationship between the modern Russian Orthodox Church and the Putin Administration. After the literature review included below, Chapters Two and Three answer the question of how Russian historical context combines with the significance of the Russian Orthodox Church in order to explain how church-state relations have developed to the level of influence wielded by the government today. The Russian Orthodox Church and the state experienced a tumultuous relationship over the 20th century and this thesis proposes that the fall of the Soviet Union marked a massive change in church-state relations. In Chapter Four, this thesis places the historical analysis of Chapters Two and Three into Orthodox theological frameworks to offer an interpretation of why the Russian Orthodox Church resonated with Russians and restored its status after the drastic shift from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Since the

ideology of the Communist Party did not live up to its promises, the thesis puts forward that the Russian Orthodox Church provided an alternate belief system in the post-Soviet period, which has been used by the Putin Administration to justify policy domestically and abroad.

This literature review will provide summaries of prominent existing research regarding the Russian Orthodox Church and its connection with the Russian state from scholars in history, political science, and religious studies. Their work establishes the background required to look at the changes in the influence of religious national identity from the early 20th century in the Soviet Union to modern-day. Russia, with its complex history, requires observation of the past to support this thesis' interpretation of the Kremlin's interactions with religion and the Russian Orthodox Church's role in policy-making. Previous work done on Russian church-state relations focuses primarily on the separate actions and policies of the Church and state and shows their overlap as existent only for mutual survival. This study takes historical evidence and interprets it through theological frameworks to not only understand how the Church survived the Communist period, but also how it began to thrive after the fall of the Soviet Union.

1.2 - Historical Overview: The Communist Period

Modern church-state relations in Russia remain inseparable from Communist precedent in narrative and attitudes toward Orthodoxy. The Soviet Union focused on secularizing the population as prominent Soviet leaders sought to replace religious sentiments with a civic identity. Scholars such as John Anderson in *Religion, State, and*

Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States, Dimitry Pospielovsky in *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia,* and Stephen Merrit Miner in *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945* have traced the changes in the relationship between the Communist government and the Russian Orthodox Church to show the reasons for Orthodoxy's survival under anti-religious policy. Fluctuating relations with the Orthodox Church required church leaders to adapt to the domestic and foreign agendas of each Soviet administration in order to perpetuate the Church through this period. This overview looks at the relationships that Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, and Leonid Brezhnev had with the Russian Orthodox Church to provide the background required to understand President Putin's combined church-state rhetoric.

1.2.1 - Church-State Relations: The Stalinist Era (1922-1953)

John Anderson and Dimitry Pospielovsky suggest that the state's negative policies towards religious institutions and ideas within the Soviet Union oscillated between continued assault and extended liberalization of the church.[1] Russian Orthodoxy remained on the cultural sidelines of the Communist era, as the atheistic regime often repressed, if not persecuted, the church in the 20th century. Yet, Stalin's own restrictions against the Church lessened during World War II, when many of the Russian troops held onto Orthodoxy alongside state rhetoric in

[1] Dimitry Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russi*a (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press), 291; John Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

combat.[2] Religious leaders combined patriotism with the defense of Christian civilization to try and provide an alternative propaganda line for Stalin; however, Stalin did not adopt such a policy.[3] Restrictions resumed after the war ended and the Church's numbers dwindled under Stalin.[4] Stephen Merrit Miner proposes the idea that the state's relationship with the Church in this period aimed to manage the religious population, until religion's eventual demise predicted in Communist theory.[5] In the 1950s, Stalin and his other Soviet leaders at the time, including Georgii Malenkov, settled into confidence in the Communist system to maintain economic, political, and military stability.[6] Rather than drawing from religious tradition, Soviet standards and practices depended on governmental programs for social welfare in education, healthcare, literature, and art.[7] Loyalty to the Soviet Union would surpass all other affiliations, including religion.

Stalin established a cult of personality which aimed to replace the religious sentiments traditionally associated with Russian identity, rooted in both tsarist and mythological history. Stephen Kotkin, in his research on Stalinist civilization, linked state-sponsored political language and activity with previous

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[2] Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006), 132.
[3] The Moscow Patriarchate, *The Truth about Religion in Russia* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1942), 5-8; Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russi*a, 270; Christopher Stroop, "'A Christian Solution to International Tension': Nikolai Berdyaev, the American YMCA, and Russian Orthodox Influence on Western Christian Anti-Communism, C.1905-60." *Journal of Global History* 13, no. 2 (2018): 188-208.
[4] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 308.
[5] Steven Merrit Miner. *Stalin's Holy War Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945 (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 320-321.
[6] "STALIN'S ORTHODOXY," *New Statesman and Nation* 44, no. 1127 (1952): 407-408.
[7] Georgiĭ Maksimilianovich Malenkov, *Report to the Nineteenth Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the C. P. S. U. (B.) October 5, 1952. (*Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1952), 92-99.

traditions of peasant life as a distinct social identity under Stalin.[8] This study will go further to link such political identity to Orthodox heritage and practices. As much as Stalin tried to outweigh religion with Bolshevism in the Soviet Union, his relationship with the Soviet people maintained a similar logic to Orthodox theology. The idea of a political religion and its implications gained traction among scholars after the Stalinist era, since his ideology uniquely used liturgical and philosophical elements of the Orthodox religion to create a collective worldview for the Soviet Union.[9] Yet, Stalin held a distinct deviation from religion by keeping the church and the state separated politically and culturally.

1.2.2 - Church-State Relations: The Khrushchev Era (1953-1964)

Anderson in *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* identifies the later policy transitions between Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev as important to finding patterns of the role of religion in Russian society. Each Soviet leader after Stalin addressed religion with reactionary measures to perceived threats to the structure of Soviet society. Pragmatism by these three leaders led to both conflict and cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church. According to Anderson, Khrushchev initiated an attack on organized religion as a part of his plan to accelerate the development of

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[8] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 221.

[9] Graeme Gill, "The Stalin Cult as Political Religion," *Religions* 12, no. 12 (2021): 1112.

Communism, despite his denunciation of many oppressive Stalinist policies.[10] Young people in the 1950s started to be drawn toward religion, which stirred anti-religious sentiments and policies from the Party.[11] This persecution, outlined by both Anderson and Pospielovsky, denied the possibility of positive church-state relations and formed the "autumn of Holy Russia" which Patriarch Kirill would allude to in his address to the World Council of Churches in 2000.[12]

1.2.3 - Church-State Relations: The Brezhnev Era (1962-1982)

In the Brezhnev period, the public attitude toward religion began to shift away from open hostility and many started to practice openly.[13] Persecution of Christianity remained common in the Soviet Union; however, the Party took on a utilitarian view of the Russian Orthodox Church.[14] The Russian Orthodox Church emphasized its historical status as a part of Russian identity, which caused the Soviet state to pay attention to the Church as they tried to prevent dissident sentiments from religious groups. The Church offered their support to the Soviet government with the expectation that the state would allow for its continuation and expansion.[15] Though Brezhnev still desired for religious influence to

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[10] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 37; Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 313.
[11] Pospielovksy, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 313.
[12] Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, "The Russian Orthodox Church and the Third Millennium," *The Ecumenical Review* 52, no. 3 (2000): 301.
[13] "Orthodox Believers Petition to Build a New Church in Gor'ky," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* (New York: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1977), 371.
[14] "Baptists in the USSR Demonstrate Against the Closing of a New Church," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* (New York: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1977), 435.
[15] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 87.

decrease, bargaining with the Church provided the means to extend Soviet propaganda to an all-encompassing ideology of nationality.[16] Yet, Brezhnev did not try to harness the full potential of a state-influenced church as Mikhail Gorbachev later did when he established open cooperation with the Patriarchate.[17] This study will take Anderson and Pospielovsky's findings regarding the cooperation between the Soviet Union and the Russian Orthodox Church to provide a preface to the post-Soviet resurgence of Orthodoxy during the Putin Administration.

1.3 - Historical Overview: The Post-Soviet Period

By observing literature regarding post-Soviet history, this study shows the narrative of the Russian Orthodox Church's evolving relationship with the Kremlin**.** Security-focused examinations of post-USSR church-state relations, resurgent Orthodoxy, and Russian politics from authors such as Dmitry Adamsky, John Garrard and Carol Garrard, and Wallace L. Daniel were consulted to establish the necessary context. Dmitry Adamsky, in his book *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy: Religion, Politics,*

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[16] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 88-89; "A. Ross Johnson and Arnold L. Horelick, 'Communist Political Succession'," Wilson Center Digital Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RAND Report R-1958-DOS, 1972, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208715.

[17] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 137; "Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with President of Afghanistan, General Secretary of the CC PDPA Najibullah, Tashkent," Wilson Center Digital Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Gorbachev Foundation*,* 1988, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117250; "Western Ukraine: Drive for Independence," Wilson Center Digital Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*,* Approved for Release by the Central Intelligence Agency*,* 1989, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/209489.

and Strategy, outlines the timeline of the relationship between the Russian church and state within three decades, starting in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union. Throughout his work, Adamsky reiterates how the narrative of the Russian Orthodox Church intertwined with Russian identity, which is key to the development of this paper.

1.3.1 - Church-State Relations: The Gorbachev Era (1985-1991)

Pospielovsky, drawing from Anderson's work, outlines the publicized meetings between Gorbachev and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church as an example of how the Church and the state synthesized as the country emerged out of Communism. Gorbachev's liberalization and reform extended into religious policy with the 1990 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, which began to drop the Soviet direct oppression of religion. These abrupt changes in ideological framework led to re-appropriation of rituals, some of which were drawn from Russian Orthodoxy.[18] Russians raised under the Soviet flag were used to a civic identity, which had its own kind of rituals, liturgies, and patron saints. To fill the void left by the Communist Party's dissolution, the Russian Orthodox Church emerged as a viable alternative to Soviet identity for Russians going into the 1990s.[19] Without this period of liberalization under

[18] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 14-16; Sophie Kotzer, *Russian Orthodoxy, Nationalism and the Soviet State During the Gorbachev Years, 1985-1991 (*London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 64.
[19] James H. Billington, "The Case for Orthodoxy," *The New Republic* (New York: New Republic, 1994), 27; Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, "Called to One Hope – The Gospel in Diverse Cultures," *World Conference of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism* (Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1996), 67; "National Intelligence Daily for Thursday, 19 July 1990," Wilson Center Digital,

Gorbachev, the contemporary relationship between the Church and the state could not have been possible.

1.3.2 - Church-State Relations: The Yeltsin Era (1991-1999)

Wallace J. Daniel developed research in his book *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia* on the rediscovery of Orthodoxy before Adamsky, which showed the stability that the Russian Orthodox Church provided during the turbulent end of the Soviet era.[20] Although Daniel notes that religious revival in Russia did not encompass all Russian society, he points to the potential political force within Orthodoxy's cultural heritage.[21] The Russian Orthodox Church shaped post-Soviet civil society indirectly through its reform rhetoric in this period leading to its revival as a cultural powerhouse.[22] Legally and culturally, the Russian Orthodox Church began to regain legitimacy as a Russian institution. The 1990s increased fusions between religious associations and the secular state through communication structures created by Boris Yeltsin and the Moscow Patriarchate for partnership policies between the two entities.[23]

History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Approved for Release by the Central Intelligence Agency, 1990, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/209629.

[20] Wallace J. Daniel, *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 42.

[21] Daniel, 185.

[22] James H. Billington, "Orthodox Christianity and the Russian Transformation," *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 56-57; Zoe Katrina Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism (*London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 115.

[23] Anatoly Krasikov, "Russia: A Country of Religious Freedom?" *The European Legacy, Toward New Paradigms* 3, no. 2 (1998): 39-43.

The Russian Orthodox Church realized its potential for power and influence in 1991, which Adamsky defines as the "genesis" of church-state relations. John Garrard and Carol Garrard in *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent* note that the Russian Orthodox Church filled the void of Soviet patriotism existent over the past century.[24] The Russian people needed an identity after the fall of the Soviet Union and the Russian Orthodox Church provided it. From this starting point of social influence, the Russian Orthodox Church began to extend this influence on larger Russian society by linking the idea of a "Holy Rus," one of the theological frameworks exercised in this paper, to the rising Kremlin narrative of Russian civilization in the early 2000s.

1.3.3 - Church-State Relations: The Putin Era (2000-Present)

Adamsky suggests that church-state relations grew closer during the early 2000s, which he calls the "the conversion decade," due to the growing sentiment of a return to Russian greatness. Russian politics allowed for an internal extension of the Russian Orthodox Church, which resulted in the construction of many new churches, religious schools, and institutions as alternatives to secular education. Although the "conversion" Adamsky refers to developed from the bottom up, the Kremlin under the pragmatic Putin sought to make Russia relevant on the global

[24] John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 242.

scale at the same time.[25] Under Communism, the Party presented itself as unique and superior within the global arena. When Russia moved away from the Communist ideology, a space was left to create a new reason to extend Russian culture and heritage to the world. The past Russian idea of a "Holy Rus'," a unified global Orthodox Church, allowed for a different set of values that Russian identity could rest on. The reunification of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia with the Russian Orthodox Church in 2007 introduced the possibility of this globally unified Church.[26]

Adamsky's research shows the hybrid identity of Orthodoxy, nationalism, and autocracy found in Putin's public image, which holds historical significance in Russian ideology.[27] Adamsky argues throughout *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy* that the post-Soviet space was filled with the ideology and identity of the Orthodox faith. These findings suggest that the dissipation of the Soviet Union has allowed the Russian Orthodox Church to evolve across the cultural landscape and develop its political relationship with the Kremlin. Putin provided a narrative of religious restoration out of the "godless regime" he claimed to replace.[28] Orthodoxy, through bottom-up institutions and mobilization of mass popularity,

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[25] Dmitry Adamsky, *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy: Religion, Politics, and Strategy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 177; Daniel P. Payne*, "Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?" A Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 4 (2010): 712; Nick Paton and Walsh Moscow, "Orthodoxy Revisited: Hand of John the Baptist in Russia," *The Guardian [London, England],* (2006): 1.
[26] "Almost There: Two Russian Orthodox Churches Approaching Reunification," *Russian Life* 49, no. 6 (2006): 8.
[27] Adamsky, 87.
[28] Sophia Kishkovsky, "2 Russian Churches, Split by War, Reuniting," *The New York Times* (New York: The New York Times Company, 2007).

developed its influence over the Russian population and offered an alternative to the Soviet heritage. This study will expand on Putin's pragmatic assimilation of Orthodox narratives to show how he will continue to operationalize the Church to justify political movements at home and abroad.

1.4 - Theological Frameworks: Russian Orthodox Thought

With these historical precedents in mind, the theological frameworks used by Orthodox leaders fill the gap in academic research in this area by intertwining religion into reason-based policy research. Eastern Orthodox theological tradition, specifically Russian Orthodoxy, viewed itself as the alternative to Western thought.[29] Seeing itself as the one true path toward unity with God, Orthodoxy provides an identity of unique, set-apartness in the world.[30] Looking at a collection of Orthodox texts organized by Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, writings from Orthodox theologians such as Vladimir Lossky, and direct statements from the Russian Orthodox Church leadership, this study uses the theological concepts of the moral perseverance in persecution, eschatological identity in relation to geographical space, and the alignment of church and state through symphonia to show the social influence of the Church in the post-Soviet period.

[29] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, 1944* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 17.
[30] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 136-137.

1.4.1 - Theological Narrative: Salvation through Morality

Common narratives emerge between the Putin Administration and the Russian Orthodox Church such as superiority of ideology, security of identity, and the importance of education. A key theme of a strong Russia exists in many official Russian Orthodox Church statements from Patriarch Kirill and other documents found on the Russian Orthodox Church's official website. *The Basis of the Social Concept*, a document presented by the Sacred Bishop's Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000 and widely available online, outlines the Patriarchate's official stances on social issues including the role of the Church in state affairs. [31] The ideal for a perfect state includes an Orthodox government in which the state and Church work together in power as a counter to Western streams of Christianity.[32] Patriarch Kirill took this role of the Church further by claiming that Russian Orthodoxy stood as the defense against "the secular, humanistic approach to the organization of society and the State, derived from Western philosophy and political thought" following the collapse of Communism.[33] By establishing the Church as the medium through which Russia

[31] "The Basis of the Social Concept," *Sacred Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church* (Moscow: *The Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations*, 2000).
[32] "The Basis of the Social Concept," III.4.
[33] His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, "Religious Faith as the Source of Social Norms: 2000," *Freedom and Responsibility: A Search for Harmony – Human Rights and Personal Dignity* (London: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarchate, 2011), 1; His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, "Liberal Ideology: A Threat to Peace and Freedom: 2004," *Freedom and Responsibility: A Search for Harmony – Human Rights and Personal Dignity* (London: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarchate, 2011), 33.

will be saved from Western influence and power, these narratives provide a structure for understanding the political rhetoric of the post-Soviet period.

1.4.2 - Theological Narrative: Russian Identity through Holy Rus'

Orthodox eschatology, the belief system for the climatic end of the world, reveals the overarching narrative of history which permeates Russian Orthodox thought and correlates to Russian nationalistic principles. Following the Great Schism of 1054 between the Western and Eastern Churches, the Orthodox Church cemented its position as distinct from the West and viewed itself as the true manifestation of Christianity in the world. For the Russian Orthodox Church, the land of Russia will be the place from which the return of Christ will begin. According to Russian Orthodox belief, the holy land, "Holy Rus'," would be the next natural step for Christianity, which first found its center in Rome and then later in the Byzantine Constantinople.[34] Seen by the Russian Orthodox Church as the fulfillment of Byzantine aspirations for the universal Church, Moscow, a "Third Rome," is the bastion of future hope in the second coming of Christ.[35] First proposed in 1510, the concept of a "Third Rome" in Holy Rus', distinct from the West, still exists in Russian Orthodox thought today.[36] Ideas like a Western "Other" and the ultimate future victory of Russian Orthodox identity are common

[34] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Filofei Argues That Moscow Is the Third Rome (ca. 1510)," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 341; Lossky, "The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church," 17.
[35] Dimitri Strémooukhoff, "Moscow the Third Rome: Sources of the Doctrine," *Speculum* 28, no. 1 (1953), 84-101.
[36] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Filofei Argues That Moscow Is the Third Rome (ca. 1510)," 341.

in Patriarch Kirill's addresses, but the unity of the church and the state for the purpose of creating a holy land stands as an important theme which will be further developed in this paper as a connection to the narrative tools from the Russian government.[37]

1.4.3 - Theological Narrative: Church-State Relations through Symphonia

Stretching back to Byzantine Orthodox theology, a common Orthodox theological principle presented in 21st century Russian rhetoric is "symphonia," which argues that the church and the state ought to work in tandem to mutually support each other.[38] Irina Papkova discusses this in her research on contemporary Russian politics, but Patriarch Kirill justifies the equilibrium between state power and church authority through the concept of symphonia.[39] Without the state presenting itself as Orthodox, symphonia is almost impossible. The post-Soviet government, however, slowly grew in cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church to the point of symphonia as outlined above and in future chapters. This paper will take the concept of symphonia to show the model of church-state relations under the Putin Administration, where the Church exists to cultivate morality within an apparent decadent world through the support of state policy.[40]

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[37] His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, "God's Plan for Man and Free Will: 2005," *Freedom and Responsibility: A Search for Harmony – Human Rights and Personal Dignity* (London: Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarchate, 2011), 39.

[38] Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23.

[39] His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, "God's Plan for Man and Free Will: 2005," 46-47.

[40] Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights (*New York: Routledge, 2014), 127-128; Jarrett Zigon, "*HIV Is God's Blessing": Rehabilitating Morality in Neoliberal Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 17.

1.5 - Conclusion

Based on these studies, this research argues that Russian Orthodoxy in the post-Soviet era of Russia stands as a potential substitute ideology for a historical civic identity from Communism during the 20th century. Restoration of the past stands as the primary narrative tool used by Putin domestically and this study will show how he uses Orthodox theological structures to present his aggressive policies. Understanding the religious and ideological justifications for expansion of Russian territory and influence will be critical for policymakers interacting with both Russia and the post-Soviet states in the coming years. Although the overall goal of this paper attempts to explain the narrative shift of the Putin Administration around 2010 and through the present day, these events do not occur in a vacuum. Without taking the USSR and Russian theological history into consideration, Putin's motives for supporting Orthodox values do not make sense to the Western reader. When President Putin mixed faith with state loyalty, this paper theorizes that he used the resurgent Russian Orthodox Church to shape Russian identity into a paradigm that had already existed in the theological space of Orthodoxy.

CHAPTER TWO

The Communist Period

"The Russian Orthodox Church is one with its people: their sorrows are its sorrows; their joys, its joys." -*The Moscow Patriarchate, 1942*

2.1 - Introduction

Religion stood as a pillar of the imperialist legacy of the tsars and the church struggled to maintain relevance in the new Soviet lifestyle. Under Soviet authority, every aspect of everyday life became influenced by state power, including organized religion. A Soviet personality arose out of the revolution which wanted to depart from cultural ties to the tsarist autocratic period that had dominated Russian history for hundreds of years prior to 1917.[41] The Bolsheviks overturned the ideology "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" extending back to Nicholas I and offered a new vision which promised "Peace, Land, and Bread."[42] Instead of maintaining power alongside the state, as was the case under the tsars, Orthodoxy now worked within state regulations to survive.

The purpose of this chapter is to walk through the historical precedents set by each Soviet leader starting with Stalin to observe the changes in the relationship between the Soviet head-of-state and the Russian Orthodox Church. Secularization, that is, the societal separation from religion, marked the Soviet project; however, the Church did not dissolve entirely. Each leader of the Soviet Union brought their own unique interpretation

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[41] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 200-201, 228.

[42] Charles F. Horne, Walter F. Austin, and Leonard Porter Ayres. "Lenin's Proclamation of 7 November 1917," *Source Records of the Great* War, vol 5, (New York: National Alumni, 1923), 342-343.

of what it meant to be a Communist state, distinct from the rest of the world and superior to capitalist powers. The two-fold framework of distinctiveness and superiority influenced senior Soviet officials' decision-making to address the Church as either a threat, burden, or tool for expansion toward "socialism."

2.2 - Joseph Stalin: Anti-Religious Identity and War

After the October Revolution in 1917, the Bolshevik party, later named the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), stood as an establishment of order and direction to the revolutionary spirit common among the Russian people. Through the course of the Civil War over the following three years, the Bolsheviks created a platform which claimed to embody and protect the revolution from those who conspired against it.[43] The Bolsheviks portrayed the Provisional Government and the White Army as betrayers of the working class, who deviated from the revolution and its goal to create an egalitarian society in Russia.[44] Religion and specifically the Orthodox Church represented a similar existential threat to the Bolshevik government, since Orthodoxy remained a symbol of the fallen tsarist regime and the perceived backwardness of Russian society. In 1944, Stalin pointed to the struggle of the October Revolution as the starting point of tensions between the Church and the Soviet government. In a conversation with St. Orlemanski, a Roman Catholic Priest in Poland, about religious freedom in the Soviet Union, Stalin stated

[43] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 14.
[44] *October: Ten Days That Shook the World*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, and Grigori Aleksandrov (1928; Soviet Union: Sovkino), film.

> [Stories about the Soviet people] originate from the fact that during the initial period of the existence of the Soviet government we experienced a cruel struggle between the representatives of the Orthodox church and the representatives of the Soviet government in Russia. When the new government, which was led by Lenin, emerged in Russia after the revolution in October 1917, the leaders of the Orthodox church and of other religious groups declared that the Soviet government was anathema, and called for the population to disobey its orders.[45]

Seen as the opposition to the anti-religious Communist project, the Russian Orthodox Church experienced persecution from the beginnings of the Soviet experience, as the Bolsheviks did not want to share ideological space post-revolution.[46]

Some Russian historians such as Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii have drawn parallels between the leadership myths that came out of the revolution and the legacy of the Russian Orthodox Church, since both emphasize the need for a national savior. However, the line between intense, charismatic leadership and religion remains blurry.[47] Some aspects of the early Soviet lifestyle find counterparts in Russian Orthodoxy, such as the celebration of Soviet leaders in a way similar to the veneration of the saints.[48] The Soviet ideology created a belief system focused on the ultimate perfect future, like the Church's eschatological message of salvation, to establish a purpose for the development of a Communist society. At the head of this utopia stood Stalin as a leader of the believers in a better future through collective achievement. A kind of liturgy, the repeated

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[45] "Record of a Conversation between I. V. Stalin and the Roman Catholic Priest Stanislaus Orlemanski about the Feelings of the Polish Nationals in the United States toward the USSR." Wilson Center Digital Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Vostochnaia Evropa 1, 1944, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123130.

[46] The Moscow Patriarchate, *The Truth about Religion in Russia,* 21.

[47] Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 103.

[48] Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper, *The Leader's Many Bodies: Leader Cults and Mass Festivals in Voronezh, Novosibirsk, and Kemerovo in the 1930s* (Gottingen: V&R Unipress, 2004), 198.

script for public worship, existed in the secular Soviet lifestyle for participatory events of revolutionary remembrance.[49] Yet, Professor Graeme Gill from the University of Sydney's Department of Government and International Relations notes in his recent piece "The Stalin Cult as Political Religion" that even though Stalin's leadership cult and the Orthodox religion find similarities in liturgy and ritual, the analogy should not be viewed as Stalin attempting to create his own religion.[50] Rather, Stalin pulled from cultural precedents to give meaning and rhythm to people's lives.

Growing up in the Orthodox tradition and even attending seminary in his early life, Stalin chose to shape Soviet ideology around collective rituals and liturgical language. Mass festivals of achievement were common in pre-revolutionary Russia and celebrations of the revolution developed into annual events, complete with images of figures like Lenin and Stalin to correlate to the religious icons present in the celebrations from the tsarist era.[51] During non-celebratory occasions, the community could reference "the sacred texts" of Marx or Lenin, which were widely available, to remind them of the belief system they followed. The publications of Stalin's own writings shaped the language used in the Soviet Union, as the populace integrated his words into demonstrating their commitment to the state. Social identity, sponsored by the state, overpowered every other area of personal identity, including religious identity, with

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[49] Jennifer McDowell, "Soviet Civil Ceremonies," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13, no. 3 (1974): 267-68.
[50] Gill, 8.
[51] David K. Shipler, *Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 98; Gill, 5.

Bolshevist narrative.[52] Although organized religion withered under Soviet authority, the ritualization of culture found in Orthodox tradition remained.

Stalin, in his cult of personality, provided an incarnation of the Soviet ideology rooted in the Bolshevik Revolution and continued its anti-religious policies at the beginning of his regime. Stalin's goal was to completely rebuild Russia into an industrialized, secular power through socialism.[53] Any religious institutions, including those of the Russian Orthodox Church, stood in the way of achieving this goal. In Soviet ideology, religion hindered the growth of socialism by being an enemy to the working class, who should be modern and atheistic. Stalin viewed religion as a threat to the Soviet system, especially those in the western Republics, where anti-Soviet nationalism often coincided with thriving church structures.[54] Stalin's purges of the 1930s included many religious scholars and theologians, since, as Pospielovsky states, they "refused to accept Marxist dialectical materialism as the absolute truth and foundation of all learning."[55] By 1940, the Bolsheviks had killed at least 40,000 members of the clergy with some estimates reaching up to 200,000.[56] Coming out of a decade of political repression and religious persecution, the Russian Orthodox Church struggled to function in Soviet territories under Stalin.

The Antireligious Commission, later the League of the Militant Godless, had set the goal for the annihilation of all religion; however, with the German attack in 1941,

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[52] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain,* 221.
[53] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 17-18.
[54] Miner, 44.
[55] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 258.
[56] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 258.

Stalin had to re-adjust his religious policy for the sake of the war, even though the League had aided the Soviet government in anti-religious campaigns for years.[57] The Russian Orthodox Church had survived these years of persecution, but with the introduction of World War II into Soviet life, the state's priorities shifted toward winning the war and away from eliminating religious sentiment from society. Partially independent organizations like the League, supported by the state, declined under the need for the government to refocus its resources toward war efforts. Additionally, the Church had not withered away within the Bolshevist framework, as some Soviet leaders had anticipated, and the war forced Stalin to find new political motivations which would stir people to fight. Instead of being portrayed as enemies of the state, some religious leaders were publicized as good Soviet workers, if they remained patriotic to the Soviet Union during the war.[58] To match the narrative of a moral fight against Nazism, remaining religious leaders framed the Russian Orthodox Church as an institution of patriotism. For example, in 1941 Metropolitan Sergii tried to link Orthodoxy with the Soviet progressive agenda and wrote

> Progressive humanity has declared a holy war against Hitler, in defense of Christian civilization, in defense of the freedom of conscience and religion.[59]

In wartime, the Church had a common goal with the Stalinist state. Although the Church wanted the profession of Christ to stand as the point of their patriotism in World War II, Stalin cared about their loyalty to the Soviet Union far more than their religious beliefs.

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[57] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 264-265.
[58] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 266.
[59] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 270.

The Moscow Patriarchate authored a book in 1942, *The Truth About Religion in Russia*, to show that the Church remained dedicated to Communism and that the Church rejected all aspects of Nazi fascism, which also claimed to be aligned with Christianity. The book rarely gave legitimate descriptions of the status of religion in Russia, but its publication marked the survival of the Church in public life. Regarding religious freedom, the book stated that

> The Soviet Government's decree on freedom of conscience and of religious profession lifted the weight which had been lying upon the Church for so many years. It freed the Church from external tutelage. This liberation has been of enormous benefit to the inner life of the Church. The decree grants freedom and guarantees to all religious communities the inviolability of this freedom" and completely avoided the history of state-sponsored persecution.[60]

During the war, Stalin's official line remained that the Church had the freedom to function and worship however it desired, if the people stayed true to their dedication to Soviet authority. In his conversation with St. Orlemanski, Stalin stated

> The war eliminated the contradictions between the church and state. The believers abandoned their positions of rebellion, and the Soviet government abandoned its own militant position toward the religion.[61]

Anti-religious ideology still lingered in the Communist Party, but defense against fascism outweighed the ideological need to persecute the Church.[62]

After victory in World War II, Stalin regained a tight hold onto Soviet identity as the war was held up as an example of the successes of the Communist ideology over

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[60] The Moscow Patriarchate, *The Truth about Religion in Russia,* 20.
[61] "Record of a Conversation between I. V. Stalin and the Roman Catholic Priest Stanislaus Orlemanski about the Feelings of the Polish Nationals in the United States toward the USSR."
[62] Overy, Richard. *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort: 1941-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 162.

fascism. Overt persecution, as found in the 1930s, did not return in the Soviet Union post-war; however, aggression towards individual Orthodox believers was revitalized as CPSU re-instated anti-religious policies created to stir the domestic popularity of atheism.[63] Stalin and the CPSU aimed to suppress religion but found the Church to be useful in reaching the Russian diaspora spread out through Europe after the war.[64] Stalin wanted to minimize nationalist movements in the Soviet republics and called on the Russian Orthodox Church to unify with the Ukrainian Catholic Church to prevent the solidification of ethno-religious divisions in Ukraine.[65] Defending Soviet foreign policy gave the Russian Orthodox Church a place in the Soviet system, as many clergy and bishops had to portray the government as peace-seeking and supportive of Russians abroad. With prayers and sermons intertwining Divine Providence and Stalin's leadership in the war, clergy and even the Patriarch, Alexii, had to continue paying political homage to the state so that they maintained the ability to open and re-open churches in the Soviet Union.[66] Stalin kept the parts of organized religion that served his political interests but struck down any signs of the Church becoming a lasting, legitimate institution that could threaten the Soviet system, which only intensified under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev.

[63] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 291.
[64] Miner, 11-12.
[65] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 300.
[66] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 304.

2.3 - Nikita Khrushchev: Persecution within Reform

Khrushchev, although known for his reformative "thaw" after the Stalinist period, revitalized religious persecution in an attempt to synthesize Communist ideology in the Soviet Union post-destalinization. Entirely opposed to Stalin and his "cult of the individual," Khrushchev aimed to purify the Soviet system from Stalinist influence.[67] In Khrushchev's mind, Stalin had directed the Soviet Union away from its original values for his own political goals and personal glorification. To redirect society back to these values, Khrushchev pushed for ideological work in various areas of Soviet thinking, including history, philosophy, economy, science, and the arts. In his "Secret Speech" in 1956, which laid out these goals, Khrushchev declared that the Soviet Union must look

> To return to and actually practice in all our ideological work, the most important theses of Marxist-Leninist science about the people as the creator of history and as the creator of all material and spiritual good of humanity, about the decisive role of the Marxist party in the revolutionary fight for the transformation of society, about the victory of communism...
>
> …It is especially necessary that in the immediate future we compile a serious textbook of the history of our party which will be edited in accordance with scientific Marxist objectivism, a textbook of the history of Soviet society, a book pertaining to the events of the civil war and the great patriotic war.[68]

Khrushchev's ideological return to all-encompassing scientific Marxist objectivism stood in direct opposition to the Church and its practices, as Khrushchev desired to provide "all [the] material and spiritual good[s] of humanity" through such an ideology. During the

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[67] "Khrushchev's Secret Speech, 'On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,' Delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," Wilson Center Digital Archive, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, From the Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 84th Congress, 2nd Session, C11, Part 7, 1956, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115995.

[68] "Khrushchev's Secret Speech, 'On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,' Delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."

war, the Soviet government had lost some of its control over societal practices and Khrushchev sought to re-establish state power over society, especially over religious institutions.

In order to launch such a rebuilding, Khrushchev renewed the religious persecution which had dwindled under Stalin. The Orthodox Church, as well as some other religious groups such as Baptist Christianity, had begun to appeal to some young people in the 1950s and Khrushchev fulfilled his promise to increase education in "scientific atheism" at both the school and the university levels to counter this appeal.[69] Khrushchev's policies toward the Church stemmed from his commitment to a fully realized Communist society by the end of the century, which required an assault on the Church so that religion would diminish over time.[70] In his logic, if other ideologies were kept away from societal institutions, Communism could thrive in their places. Rather than looking to a religious identity for purpose and meaning, the Soviet population would look to the Communist Party to lead them in "building communism" as their new identity.[71] Starting in 1958, resolutions from the Party started to call for the expansion of atheist propaganda as well as the limitation of religious activities and pilgrimages.[72] Furthermore, in 1961, Khrushchev signed legislation restoring the early Stalinist anti-religious policy, which would ban material support for churches, parishes, and monasteries.[73] Such assault caused the closure of many impoverished religious

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[69] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 314.
[70] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 17.
[71] "Khrushchev's Secret Speech, 'On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,' Delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."
[72] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 31.
[73] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 319.

institutions, particularly those in rural areas, which depended on the charity of larger parishes to survive. If not suffocated by these means, many places of worship were liquidated by force.[74]

Not only did the Communist Party push for softer persecutions like increased anti-religious propaganda materials and limited funding, but also allowed for open attacks on places of worship. The Orthodox Church, like in the early Stalinist period, refused to collapse, which led to escalating forms of overt persecution. On top of the churches that were already closing from the increased push for atheism, religious institutions were restricted with state-sponsored financial and legal penalties, and many Russian Orthodox Church monasteries and seminaries were forced by the Soviet government to close.[75] Seen as the opposition to "scientific Marxist objectivism," the Communist Party saw no issue with treating these communities with contempt. Brutality towards the monks and other religious people was common in attacks on places of worship.[76] By the mid-1960s, the number of Orthodox churches had decreased from approximately 13,000 places of worship in the 1950s, down to approximately 7,500, and the number of monasteries decreased from 90 to only 17 functioning institutions. One clergy member lamented

> In the whole of the area around Moscow you can see that there were churches at one time, for their walls are still standing...There is no record of how many churches have been converted into various store-rooms, repositories and offices, where until very recently the Holy Spirit of the Living God had his dwelling...

[74] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 324-327.
[75] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 59; Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 322-323.
[76] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 59; Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 139-141; Michael Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets* (London: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1970), 127.

> …When our common fascist enemy attacked us, we were not set aside from the communists, but they trusted us and we went to fight for our homeland...
>
> …But if they could see us, they would be horrified that now we are considered enemies of the people, mocked at our work and our labour is not respected.[77]

Many Orthodox believers grieved for the Stalinist period, where they had more religious freedom by the end of the war.[78] Yet, the Church lost much of the influence or power gained from the war as Khrushchev aimed for an entirely atheistic society.

Within the Church hierarchy, the relationship between the Church and the state fluctuated between submission and resistance. Because of the state's clear anti-religious stance, many religious leaders kept their heads down and complied with the state. The Soviet government required existing Church structures to show support for the state not only at home, but also abroad. Meetings with the World Council of Churches forced the Russian Orthodox Church to cover up the state persecutions and claim that the Soviet Union allowed for their religious freedom.[79] Patriarch Alexii kept the Church's policies under the legislation given by the Party; however, even he was willing to occasionally undermine the scientific Marxist objectivist interpretation of history in his speeches. He proclaimed that the Church was the source of peace in the world and would not balk under persecution as he declared in 1960

> Here I stand before you as the mouthpiece of the Russian Orthodox Church, which represents millions of citizens of this state...As witnessed by history, this is the very same Church which at the dawn of Russian statehood helped to instill civic order in Russia...

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[77] Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and* Prophets, 124-125.
[78] Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 65.
[79] Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union: A Sociological Study* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), 35.

> ...Christ's Church, whose very aim is human well-being, is suffering insults and attacks from humans. Nevertheless, she does not shirk her duty, appealing to humans to live in peace and to love one another. Moreover, the Church finds consolation in this situation for her faithful: what danger is there in the efforts of human reason against the Church?
>
> Jesus Christ himself predicted the indestructibility of the Church when he said: "The gates of hell will not overcome the Church."[80]

At the onset of hostile state responses to this statement, Metropolitan Nikolai took the false blame for Patriarch Alexii's speech so that the Patriarch would be spared and claimed that he had been writing Patriarch Alexii's speeches. Metropolitan Nikolai had previously written pieces against the Khrushchev government's propaganda and the persecution of the Church during destalinization, which added to the state's case against him. The Soviet government launched a pogrom against the Church in 1960-1961, leading to the disappearance of Metropolitan Nikolai.[81] Regardless of persecution, resistance during trials remained a principle of the Orthodox faith. Not every believer submitted entirely to the state and continued to practice, since Orthodox theology, defined and explained in a later chapter, maintains a sense of holiness in suffering. Within the suffering of the Church during this period, Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist, anti-terror policies still allowed for the quiet continuation of Orthodoxy in the Soviet Union, since he could not stamp out religion without resorting to the Stalinist methods he condemned. Resistance to an atheist state, although minimal, did not disappear, and the desire for a state which would work alongside the Church remained.

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[80] Dmitry Pospielovsky, *The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 335.
[81] Pospielovksy, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 316.

2.4 - Leonid Brezhnev: The Emergence of Religious Dissent

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Party under Leonid Brezhnev continued its hostility towards religion; however, Brezhnev understood that religion could not be completely liquidated by force.[82] Khrushchev's domestic policies regarding religion drew debate in the Brezhnev era, since the persecution showed little results of lessened religious belief, only lessened numbers of religious institutions. Those who condemned the state's persecution of the Church began to get louder under Brezhnev, when human rights organizations emerged as a response to Khrushchev's attempts to centralize Soviet ideology.[83] Fearful of religious dissidence, the Soviet government had to take the Church's influence seriously, while also making sure sympathy for the resisters did not arise out of the state's overt persecution. Rather than attempting to uproot all religion out of society, Brezhnev allowed the Church's presence, as he believed that keeping the Church in the public eye resulted in more state control. The Church going into hiding posed a more dangerous potential for resistance, since its members and leaders would be further out of state control. If the state could keep a hand on the Church's activities while they functioned, then religious influence could be monitored. Rather than overtly persecuting the Church, scientific atheists like A. F. Okulov, the director of the Central Committee's Institute for Scientific Atheism, believed that the state should focus on

[82] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 69.
[83] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 82.

constructing the socio-economic and cultural aspects of Communism, which in turn would produce the environment for religion to naturally deteriorate.[84]

To still weaken the possibility of religious dissidence, the state projected its influence over Russian Orthodox Church leadership. Patriarch Alexii, worn down by the regulations and persecutions from the Khrushchev era, did not push much further against the Soviet government as he served as Patriarch through the late 1960s. The dualism of trying to stir spiritual life under persecution, while also denying the persecution's existence, destabilized the Church as an institution. After Patriarch Alexii passed away in 1970, his replacement, Patriarch Pimen, was chosen and placed through the help of the KGB to secure weak leadership in the Church which would not oppose the state going into the 1970s.[85] As a Metropolitan before elected to Patriarch, Pimen spoke against those who brought attention to religious persecution and stated

> …believers in the USSR have no need of...defense. Their rights are protected by the relevant articles of the Constitution of the USSR. The assertions about the closure of churches are baseless. Thus, in the city of Minsk not a single parish church has closed since the war. On the contrary, two churches damaged during the Nazi invasion, one of which is the large cathedral, have been restored and are now open for worship.[86]

Not only did Patriarch Pimen deny persecution from the Soviet government, but also denied any injustice or financial need.[87] If churches shut down, then they closed due to the number of people disassociating from religion, according to the Patriarch.[88] Obedient

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[84] A. F. Okulov, *Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma*, "Za glubokuyu nauchnuyu sovremenykh problem ateizma," Vyp. 1, (1966), 13.
[85] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 332; Special to The New York Times. "Metropolitan Pimen Elected Patriarch of Russian Orthodox Church," *New York Times (*1971): 2.
[86] Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 61.
[87] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 348.
[88] Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets*, 143.

to the state, Patriarch Pimen did not give clear spiritual and moral direction to the rest of the hierarchy and the Church.[89]

Despite vague spiritual leadership, the alternative of religion for historical and cultural significance appealed to more Soviet people as many grew disillusioned with Khrushchev's promises.[90] The stagnation of economic growth throughout the Brezhnev era diminished the allure of the Party's ideological claims for superiority and infallibility. At the everyday level, Russian Orthodoxy provided a traditionalist heritage for Russians in the Soviet Union, and some chose to collect icons or religious figurines to display in their homes. Reporter Hedrick Smith in his book *The Russians* (1976) wrote of a Communist Party member who observed the Easter Orthodox services from a distance and proclaimed

> Look at that! I am a Communist, not a believer. But it is good to see these old Russian customs preserved and coming back.[91]

Even though older women made up the majority of the Orthodox worshippers, the Church was not prepared to take in the number of young and middle-aged people interested in Orthodoxy, nor was it able to use its growing popularity to its advantage due to its tense relationship with the state.[92] Smith's report shows that the remembrance of distinct Russian culture in every generational level was symbolized in Orthodox Christianity. He wrote

[89] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 334.
[90] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 86.
[91] Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1976), 575.
[92] "Orthodox Believers Petition to Build a New Church in Gor'ky," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* (New York: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1977), 371; Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 335; Smith, 580.

> For centuries the Church has been a special guardian of Russian culture. To a foreigner accustomed to picturing the Soviet Union as a land of militant atheists, the magnetism of Orthodox services on such high feast days as Easter is hard to believe. It astonished me to see that it was primarily young people, in their late teens and twenties, who congregated outside the old cathedrals for a glimpse of the rich pageantry within. But anyone who knows Russia understands that churches are her artistic glory.[93]

Intrigued by something new from inside the Soviet system, many Russians held onto aspects of faith, even if the Church held a precarious relationship with the authorities. One of Smith's interviews was a middle-aged, educated Russian woman, who wore a cross. When asked if she was a believer, she replied with hesitancy

> Yes, in the sense of believing in Something and not going to a church, I am a believer, but I have no Bible. Some time ago, I got little books of four of the gospels...I read them quite a bit and I find they help me...out of frustration with the emptiness of life here, the emptiness in our contemporary life. Religion gives me something to hold on to. That is how I feel it.[94]

At its most influential, religion filled the eschatological promises of Communism for a better future.

Outside of Russia, the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 erased the hope of a peaceful, humanized Communist society through the Party. This harsh treatment under the Brezhnev doctrine stirred nationalist sentiments throughout the Soviet Union, which found reinforcement in ethno-religious movements in many of the Republics.[95] Christianity in Armenia, Georgia, and Lithuania provided a tangible symbol of their distinct minority cultures within the Soviet Union.[96] In a 1972 RAND Report for the U.S. Department of State, even American policy recommenders considered the role of

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[93] Smith, 577-578.
[94] Smith, 581-582.
[95] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 90.
[96] Shipler, 266-267.

religion, specifically Orthodoxy, as a factor in establishing a nationalist, post-Communist society not only in the Soviet Union, but also outside of it. This report tried to forecast potential outcomes in Yugoslavia, rather than describe the political realities of the country; however, it shows that the recognition of religion as a tool for power dynamics existed beyond Soviet planning. The report suggested that

> The Church (say, the Serbian Orthodox and the Slovene Catholic) assumes considerable importance as spokesman for the nationalist cause. Cultural associations [could] turn into National Radical-like parties with autonomous representation in the Socialist Alliance; they [could] seek to elect assembly delegates.[97]

The threat of religious nationalism, dangerous to the integrity of the Soviet Union, motivated Brezhnev to place the Russian Orthodox Church under state supervision to prevent such political influence from developing in Russia.

Considering the growth of religious nationalism, Brezhnev and the Party toyed with the idea of intertwining some Russian nationalist sentiments into their ideology so that the Russians who were drawn to traditionalism and nationalism would find historical significance in their civic identity instead. Such motivations led to a church-state relationship of bargaining, reminiscent of the late Stalinist era. The Russian Orthodox Church, already emphasizing its cultural and historical significance to the Russian people, tried to present itself as a convenient avenue to mitigate the divisive aspects of nationalism, while also connecting its historical legitimacy to a civic nationalism. Protestant churches were considered far more dangerous, due to their western influences,

[97] "A. Ross Johnson and Arnold L. Horelick, 'Communist Political Succession'," 38.

and remained persecuted under Brezhnev.[98] Under Patriarch Pimen's authority, the Russian Orthodox Church continued to present the Soviet government as progressive and denied religious persecution, which served as a useful foreign policy tool for the state.[99] Bargaining with the Russian Orthodox Church allowed the state to promote its values through the frame of Russian heritage as an attempt to counter outside ideological forces. The Russian Orthodox Church simultaneously gained traction in their influence with the state as well as lost some potential dissident power with the people by staying in line with Party interests. Links between religion and nationalism continued to plague the Soviet Union as it approached its dissolution, but the beginnings of a Russian Orthodox Church used to develop a state-centric Russian nationalism, as seen under President Putin, find their root in the Communist period.

[98] "Baptists in the USSR Demonstrate Against the Closing of a New Church," 435.
[99] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 88.

CHAPTER THREE

The Post-Soviet Period

"Our mission, dear brothers and sisters, is a mission of 'one hope,' a mission for salvation, for a spiritual transformation of humanity...Only in this way will we be able to enter a new millennium as a spiritually strong civilization knowing the meaning of its existence." *-Patriarch Kirill, then Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, 1996*

3.1 - Introduction

The transition out of Communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to a period of crisis in Russia, both economically and ideologically. Without the state infrastructure of the Soviet Union, many Russians found themselves required to adapt to a new system of thinking and living. Russia's identity had to expand beyond the Soviet Union and find a distinct set of Russian norms to depend on. Based in Russian historical and nationalistic tradition, the Russian Orthodox Church provided the moral structure left void by the fall of the Soviet Union. Instead of something new and radical, which everyday Russians had already experienced enough of under the fast-paced political reforms and economic crises of the 1990s, Orthodoxy gave the appeal of stability and purpose in uncertain times.

The role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia today stems from the transitory period of expanding power and influence through the new state. This chapter goes through the steps that were taken by both the Church and the state which moved the Russian Orthodox Church from an oppressed group of believers to a major cultural power in Russia. Although the process of restoration and resurgence was arduous after the divisive nature of church-state relations explained in the previous chapter, the Russian

Orthodox Church pragmatically engaged with the new system to ensure its survival and growth within it. During the transition and turbulence of the post-Soviet period, the Church had the opportunity to connect with everyday Russians, while also developing an established, supportive relationship with the state, which extends into today.

3.2 - The Transition out of Communism: Glasnost and Liberalization

Idealism regarding the promises of a Communist future had all but vanished within the Soviet Union by the 1980s. Even if the Soviet state and Mikhail Gorbachev aimed to develop socialism through political and economic reform, the disaster of Chernobyl discredited the moral validity of Communism. As some of the lies from the Communist Party began to be revealed by Gorbachev's commitment to openness, many educated Russians looked to the possibility of religion as a moral guidance system in the 1980s.[100] A kind of spiritual revival stirred within Russia; however, the revival had more to do with heritage than faith.[101] David K. Shipler, a journalist for *The New York Times,* lived in the Soviet Union for a few years before authoring his book *Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams* on his experience. He observed in 1983

> The longer I lived in the Soviet Union, the less amazed I was by the drawing power of the Russian Orthodox Church. It began to seem natural for Russians to search for belief, to look beyond the barren ritual of the state, to seek a connection with their own history, to find beauty.[102]

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[100] Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67-68; Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 354.
[101] James H. Billington, *Russia Transformed: Breakthrough to Hope Moscow, August 1991* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 123-124.
[102] Shipler, 267.

The pull of the Russian Orthodox Church reflected the general zeitgeist of the Russian people going into the 1990s. With a desire to know and experience what had been restricted for so long, many were intrigued by the history and ornateness of the Orthodox religion which contrasted against the backdrop of mundanity within the socialist environment in Russia. Shipler tells the story of a Moscow woman and her children, who he spoke to during his time living in the Soviet Union, and recalled

> "Because of false politics," said a Moscow woman... "So much in our newspapers is false, and everyone knows it. In church there is something mystical, spiritual." Her teenage daughter "goes sometimes to watch and listen and be quiet a little." Her son does watercolors of onion domes and crosses...More and more I saw tiny gold crosses on thin chains around the necks of young Russian women.[103]

Gorbachev, along with the softening of other Soviet policies through perestroika and glasnost, liberalized his religious policy during this societal shift. Religion, no longer viewed as the enemy to building socialism within the Soviet Union, could be used by the government to support the reform of the system.

Gorbachev's glasnost policies of openness provided the Church with extended religious freedom, which was done through cooperation with the Church, rather than persecution. With a platform built on humane reform within the Soviet system, Gorbachev had a similar goal to the Russian Orthodox Church for the moral restoration of the people. Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev implemented religious liberty into his many reforms within the Soviet system. Although Gorbachev, like his predecessors, did not approve of religion, he saw the Russian Orthodox Church as

[103] Shipler, 267.

a supportive tool to his domestic policies.[104] In 1988, Gorbachev met with the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, like Stalin did in 1943 and 1945, to re-evaluate the state legislation toward the Russian Orthodox Church.[105] Drafts of a new religious law circulated over the following two years and culminated in the 1990 law "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations," which dropped the Communist Party's open hostility towards religion, including the Russian Orthodox Church.[106] The first article of this law stated

> This law guarantees the rights of citizens to decide and express their attitude towards religion, to convictions corresponding to this and to the unhindered confession of a religion and the performance of religious rites, and also to equality and protection of the rights of citizens regardless of their attitude towards religion, and it regulates the relations connected with the activists of religious organizations.[107]

The Soviet media reflected these changes in their works as well. Under Gorbachev, Easter services for the Russian Orthodox Church were allowed to be shown on Soviet television and various newspapers were allowed to cover the Church's millennium celebrations.[108] Combining reform with a historical institution like the Russian Orthodox Church laid the groundwork for a rapidly expanding church-state relationship.

Patriarch Alexii II, who was elected in 1990 in the first real election since 1917, believed that the Russian Orthodox Church had a moral obligation to guide the people of Russia and thus had to engage with the state, even as public support for the Soviet state

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[104] Garrard and Garrard, 2.
[105] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 356.
[106] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 159-161, 170-171.
[107] Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, 177-178.
[108] William and Jane Taubman, *Moscow Spring* (New York: Summit Books, 1989), 105.

was rapidly decreasing.[109] Dissidents called religious leaders, especially those of the Russian Orthodox Church, to acknowledge their affiliations with the Communist Party and their denial of state persecution.[110] The Orthodox religious leaders within the Soviet Union had built their platforms of faith on their adaptation to the state, which led many sermons to sound remarkably like the rhetoric found in the Communist Party.[111] By showing support for perestroika, glasnost, and Gorbachev's other reform policies, the Church had been permitted to develop infrastructure as an attempt to renew influence among the people. According to a declassified CIA intelligence report, however, Gorbachev's reforms did not help the Party's popularity as he thought it would. The report stated

> Recent opinion polls suggest that the party is at an all-time low. In a survey of public opinion shortly before the congress opened, only 18 percent believed the party could ease the current crisis; 46 percent supported the immediate resignation of the administration. Other polls show the party is held in lower regard than the Supreme Soviet, the armed forces, the KGB, *or the Russian Orthodox Church.*[112]

As the Soviet Union approached its dissolution and Russia moved into a presidency under Boris Yeltsin, the Church's relationship to the state during the transition was unstable at best. During the 1991 putsch, many Russian Orthodox leaders did not support Gorbachev and Yeltsin when hard-liner Communists tried to overthrow the reforming government.[113] Yet, on the morning of the coup, Patriarch Alexii addressed with boldness the troops who threatened the government, condemning the attack as an

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[109] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 366.
[110] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 362.
[111] Taubman, 106.
[112] "National Intelligence Daily for Thursday, 19 July 1990," (emphasis added).
[113] Billington, *Russia Transformed: Breakthrough to Hope Moscow, August 1991*, 126.

> ...outrage against all that is holy in our Fatherland on the day when the Church celebrates the great feast of the Lord's Transfiguration.[114]

Going back and forth between loyalty to the Soviet government and to the Russian "Fatherland" defined the Church's role in the chaotic transition into the post-Soviet period when the identification of civic authority remained vague.

Not only did the Russian Orthodox Church struggle to unify on issues of civic authority, but also to unify within itself. After decades of fragmentation due to persecution, the Church found it difficult to solidify its hierarchy as well as its role in Russian society with its newfound religious freedom. With no official commitments in anti-religious activity for any church or religious group, the Russian Orthodox Church felt threatened by the expansion of other religions under glasnost and the 1990 religious liberty law.[115] The Church sought to hold a strong place within Russian culture and the search for a new Russian identity after the fall of the Soviet Union presented the Church with the opportunity to gain greater influence than the other growing religious groups, who did not hold a historically "Russian" tradition.[116] In 1991, Michael Bourdeaux, founder of the Keston College for religion in Communist states, wrote in an article in *The Guardian* voicing his concern for the next stage in church-state relations.

> Perhaps the greatest danger and challenge, especially in the period of Yeltsin's ascendancy, is that the Russian Orthodox Church will be tempted, once again after 74 years, to claim the position of the state religion, along with all the

[114] Billington, *Russia Transformed: Breakthrough to Hope Moscow, August 1991,* 128; Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad. "The Russian Orthodox Church and the Third Millennium," 305.
[115] Garrard and Garrard, 68-69.
[116] John Witte Jr., *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 7.

> triumphalism and intolerance which that implies. Alexi II is a young enough man (62) to have the physical vigour to face these challenges.[117]

Described in-depth in the next chapter, the Russian Orthodox Church had a distinct theological tradition of symphonia, a deeply intertwined Church and state for the expansion of Orthodox Christianity, which prompted the Church structure to grow in its relationship to the new Russian state. Although Patriarch Alexii denied a symphonious relationship with the secular government, the new legal framework which did not oppress the Church granted an opportunity to gain policy leverage with the state.[118]

3.3 - Turbulence after Communism: The Birth of Church-State Cooperation

The Russian Orthodox Church provided a societal structure within chaotic everyday life as one of the respected institutions besides the military left in Russia after the deconstruction of the Soviet state.[119] Within the crumbling state infrastructure and economy, the Church seemed stable and dependable. The failing promises of reform made the Church stand out as a moral foundation for Russian solidarity. While everyone had to focus on keeping themselves and their families economically secure, the Church continued to develop for itself a new distinctly Russian identity, particularly through times of intense political turbulence. Yeltsin's confrontation and siege of the parliament in 1993 provided the optimal setting for the Russian Orthodox Church to step in as a

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[117] Michael Bourdeaux, "The Monday Profile: Between Hammer and Anvil - Alexi II, Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Has Always Seemed a Loyal Soviet Citizen Unwilling to Disturb the Status Quo Between Church and State. With Both in Turmoil, Will He Prove the Great Spiritual Leader Russia Needs?" *The Guardian [London, England],* (1991): 3.
[118] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia*, 368.
[119] Billington, "The Case for Orthodoxy," 25.

mediator of a perceived neutral moral high ground, rather than as a symbol of dissidence that the Church remained under the Communist Party.[120] During the crisis, Yelstin appealed to Patriarch Alexii for aid and wrote

> At this moment of tragedy for our Fatherland I turn to you, calling on your authority among all religious confessions and believers. The influence of the Church in our society is too great for the Church to stand aside during these events. This duty is directly related to the Church's mission, to which you have dedicated your life: serving people, caring for their hearts and souls. The Church, which has suffered through the times of totalitarianism, may once again experience disorder and lawlessness.
>
> All believers, the Russian nation, and all Russia await your word![121]

In response, Patriarch Alexii condemned the violence between Russians, like he did in the coup of 1991, and proclaimed

> Russia is on the brink of a precipice. In these days we have an option: either stop the madness or bury the hope for a peaceful future of Russia. If events continue along the present path, the Russian state will disintegrate and the results will be felt for decades, perhaps for as much as a century.[122]

To stay true to the value of peace in Russia, Patriarch Alexii oversaw the negotiations for the parliament and the executive, who both accepted the Church's mediatory role as legitimate.[123] Neither side of the conflict had more moral authority than the Church did at this time. Declaring anyone who first fired a weapon during the confrontation excommunicated from the Church, Patriarch Alexii confronted the violence which threatened to undermine the unity of the country. As the government reconciled, the Patriarch called the whole Russian people to unify under the Church and its truth

[120] Daniel, 41, 66.
[121] "Yeltsin's Appeal (To Patriarch Aleksy II)," translated in Garrard and Garrard, 255.
[122] Daniel, 63.
[123] Daniel, 65.

superseding the chaotic nature of everyday life. With the goal of developing tightly interwoven church-state relations, given the opportunity, the Church inserted itself into the political realm without hesitation.

Unique among the religious groups in Russia because of their distinct "Russian-ness" coupled with the historical significance of a longstanding institution, the Russian Orthodox Church sought to surpass the other religious groups who were also gaining traction among Russians. In 1997, a new law was passed by Yeltsin with the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate to replace the 1990 law "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations," which would place limitations on foreign religious groups evangelizing in Russia.[124] The Patriarchate had pushed for such a revision of the law since 1993, but Yeltsin had been hesitant to sign it and originally vetoed the law due to concerns of violating the Russian Constitution and international human rights conventions.[125] Still, after much urging from the Russian Orthodox Church, Yeltsin signed the updated law, which in effect, placed the Russian Orthodox Church at a higher legal level than other religions. The law outlined criteria for the difference between religious organizations and religious groups and stated

> No fewer than ten citizens of the Russian Federation may be founders of a local religious *organization*, joining together as a religious *group* which must have confirmation from the organs of the local government that it has existed on the given territory for no less than fifteen years, or confirmation from a centralized religious *organization* of the same creed that it forms a part of its structure.[126]

[124] T. Jeremy Gunn, "The Law of the Russian Federation on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations from a Human Rights Perspective," *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 261.
[125] Harold J. Berman, "Freedom of Religion in Russia: An Amicus Brief for the Defendant," *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 277; Anatoly Krasikov, "Russia: A Country of Religious Freedom?" 39–43; Papkova, 74-76.
[126] 1997 Law, art. 9.1, quoted in Gunn, 241 (emphasis added).

Not only did foreign religious groups have to go through a state-legitimized religious organization, most likely the Russian Orthodox Church, to become an organization themselves, but they also could not operate openly without such a designation. According to the law

> Religious *organizations* [but not religious groups] can own buildings, plots of land, objects for the purpose of production and for social, charitable, educational, and other purposes, articles of religious significance, financial means, and other property which is essential for their activity, including that necessary for historical and cultural monuments.

Furthermore, through this law, the Russian Orthodox Church could receive funding from the Russian government for the purpose of preserving historically Orthodox sites and for running religious education in Russia.

> [The state may provide] financial...material and other aid...[for] the restoration, maintenance, and protection of buildings and objects which are monuments of history and culture...[and for] the instruction in general educational subjects in educational institutions.[127]

This legal framework fused the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state's efforts to prevent the expansion of Western thought and influence through foreign religious groups, which was a benefit for both the Church and the Russian government.

The Russian Orthodox Church, according to Dmitry Adamsky, sought to influence Russian identity also through the military.[128] As Russia began to rebuild, "Russian-ness" became a common social identity in place of the Soviet state and the Russian Orthodox Church organized events, councils and conferences to further develop church-state relations. In the case of the military, the Moscow Patriarchate pushed for the

[127] 1997 Law, art. 4.3, quoted in Gunn, 246-247.
[128] Adamsky, 21.

pre-Communist historical connection between the Church and the armed forces in conferences with titles like the "Spiritual-Ethical and Orthodox Tradition of the Military" and "Orthodoxy and the Russian Army." Additionally, the Communist Party had forced a sense of larger mission and ideological spirit within the Russian Army, which left a cultural gap after the Soviet collapse. By offering a substitute "meaning for the service, motivation for the sacrifice, and moral psychological support to overcome combat difficulties," the Russian Orthodox Church began connecting spirituality to patriotism, with the goal of establishing the institution of a military clergy.[129] The Russian military leadership allowed the Church to have this spiritual and education influence on their recruits in the hope that the strengthening of morality within their conscripts would prevent high rates of desertion.[130] Orthodoxy gave the military the same feeling of grander purpose for their sacrifice and dedication to the Fatherland as Communism did during the Soviet era. Yeltsin himself even praised the Russian Orthodox Church for its connections to the Russian people in his 1998 Christmas Eve speech.

> For more than 1000 years the Russian Orthodox Church has fulfilled its sacred mission, affirming spiritual and moral values on Russia soil...The Church is an inalienable part of the history of our country and our people. Its selfless activities have deservedly earned [the state's] gratitude and respect.[131]

Through the implementation of increased influence within Russian civil society, the Russian Orthodox Church was no longer oppressed, but beginning to be favored among central Russian institutions.

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[129] Adamsky, 24.
[130] Garrard and Garrard, 220.
[131] Witte Jr., 24-25.

3.4 - Trajectory toward Nationalism: Orthodoxy within the State

Foreign nationalism remained a concern for the post-Soviet Russian government; however, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian nationalism became a tool to solidify civic and ethnic identity among the people. In the early 2000s, the narrative of the Russian Orthodox Church began connecting itself to nationalistic ideas of Russia-specific civilizational values.[132] Metropolitan Kirill, the Russian Orthodox Church's External Relations Department head, had begun in the 1990s to gain theological and political traction in Russia when he lobbied for a Russia-centric geopolitical system for the purpose of spreading Christianity to other nations. In 1996, he gave a speech to the World Conference of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism titled "Called to One Hope - The Gospel in Diverse Cultures," where he laid out what he believed the mission of the Orthodox Church to be in the world, especially for Russia coming out of crisis.

> The military and political crisis has been accompanied by economic collapse as whole regions have found themselves below the poverty line...Nowadays many are starving...Many feel powerless and defenseless in the face of the evil that has fallen upon them so suddenly and forcefully.
>
> Moreover, severe political and economic problems have affected many regions in the world...Human survival depends today not so much on military-political changes, economic forces, efforts to overthrow totalitarian regimes, or improvements of the existing social system, as on the spiritual and moral state of the human person.
>
> ...Therefore, mission as a witness to the spiritual and ethical heritage of Christianity becomes the number one task for the churches...Who will raise a voice against this moral decay if not the church?[133]

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[132] See "4.3 - Russian Identity: Eschatological Uniqueness in Holy Rus'" in this work.

[133] Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, "Called to One Hope - The Gospel in Diverse Cultures."

Metropolitan Kirill believed that church-state relations held the key to a moral revival of the people and worked with the Sacred Bishops' Council and Patriarch Alexii to develop a formal statement on the Church's vision for social and political influence, later called "Foundations of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church" or "The Basis of the Social Concept."[134] Although the theological implications of the document are explored in the next chapter, this formal declaration of religious and secular cooperation marked the new era of church-state relations.

The national identity found in the Church appealed to many Russian elites looking to use such nationalism to their benefit and President Putin, Yeltsin's chosen successor in 2000, was one of these elites. [135] Where the Church had gained social leverage from the state under Yeltsin, President Putin allowed the growth of Orthodox influence to expand into widespread power and create narratives and symbols for the whole nation. Building his platform on the revival of Russian greatness after a period of economic and political chaos, President Putin found compelling the Church's idea of a Holy Rus', what John Burgess in *Holy Rus': The Rebirth of Orthodoxy in New Russia* calls "that mythical yet historical homeland of the eastern Slavic peoples...that foretaste of the perfect justice, peace, harmony, and beauty for which Christians and other spiritual traditions long."[136] For President Putin, the Russian Orthodox Church and the state both exist to preserve the long-term physical and spiritual security of the Russian people in a kind of Holy Rus'. In

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[134] Daniel, 173-174; "The Basis of the Social Concept."
[135] Adamsky, 87.
[136] John P. Burgess, *Holy Rus': The Rebirth of Orthodoxy in the New Russia* (New York: Yale University Press, 2017), 21.

one press conference in 2007, President Putin even linked the Church to the state's role in nuclear weapons development and stated

> Traditional confessions and the nuclear shield are those components that strengthen Russian statehood and create the necessary preconditions for providing the state's internal and external security. Therefore, a clear conclusion can be drawn, about how the state should relate, today and in the future, to the one and to the other.[137]

Protecting Russia from the outside world, according to Putin, is a task accomplished through a unified Church and state. With Yeltsin's death in 2007, the Orthodox Church, already holding political credibility with the state under the Putin Administration, hosted Yeltsin's funeral in Moscow's Church of Christ the Savior, a symbol of modern Russian faith.[138] Traditional Orthodox prayers and rituals led thousands in mourning the first leader over the new Russian state, which would have been unheard of in the Soviet Union. When Metropolitan Kirill, with his passion for a Church which influences the rest of the world, became Patriarch after Alexii's death in 2008, President Putin developed a close-knit relationship with the Church, which offered a cultural legitimization of his policies.

Going in the 2010s, President Putin continually made a geopolitical distinction between Russia and the West in his domestic and foreign policy narratives and identified the Russian Orthodox Church as an institution entirely unique to Russia.[139] Having gained its influence in Russia by means of the state, the Church in return promoted the Kremlin's policy interests. The "Fatherland" became a common term used by both Putin

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[137] "Bol'shaia press-konferentsiia Vladimira Putina," quoted in Adamsky, 87-88.
[138] Papkova, 1-2.
[139] Adamsky, 180.

and the Church to justify the security of the land of Russia by any means necessary. In a significant precursor to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Putin Administration attempted to employ the Church in justifying the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Both Patriarch Kirill and President Putin emphasized the perceived Russian cultural heritage in Ukraine throughout the process of integrating Crimea. In his 2015 address Putin proposed

> The peninsula is of importance as the spiritual source of the development of a multifaceted but solid Russian nation and a centralized Russian state. It was in Crimea, in the ancient city of Chersoneses...that Grand Prince Vladimir was baptized before bringing Christianity to Rus. [Thus, Crimea has] invaluable civilizational and sacral importance for Russia, like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism.[140]

Putin's argument which depends on Russian faith for the geopolitical "rebirth" of Russian political greatness reveals the inextricable intertwining of religion with the state. After a prolonged period of state antagonism, the Church found itself desired by the Putin Administration to establish domestic policy credibility, which opened the possibility for a symphonious relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state. The trajectory of the relationship between the Church and the Russian government finds tradition going back into Orthodox theological arguments, which can explain the Church's justifications for such an alignment with the state.

[140] Adamsky, 186.

CHAPTER FOUR

Theological Frameworks

"Perceive, pious tsar, how all the Christian realms have converged into yours alone. Two Romes have fallen, and the third stands, and a fourth there shall not be. Your Christian realm shall not pass under the rule of another." -*Filofei, hegumen of the Yelizarov Monastery, 1510*

4.1 - Introduction

As the Church continued to develop its relationship with the state, the social construction of the Church filled the vacuum of ideological power left by the Communist Party. Full of ultimate hope and direction for the future of Russia, Soviet Communism constructed an all-encompassing worldview, which required devotion, ritualization, and iconography.[141] The Soviet legacy did not disappear overnight, but post-Soviet Russians looked to their far past to understand and interpret their new situation abandoned by the promises of Communism. After decades of suffering under the Soviet system, many Russian people, especially those who had seen the horrors of the gulag, searched for meaning within their suffering.[142] Searching for depth and meaning within their everyday experiences, many sought history and religion for an explanation, as shown in the previous chapter. Due to hundreds of years of Russian heritage, not only are the theological claims of the Church guiding principles for Orthodox believers, but also for the nation. When many Russians over the last few years have defined themselves as

[141] Refer to "Joseph Stalin: Anti-Religious Identity and War" in this work.
[142] Billington, *Russia Transformed: Breakthrough to Hope*, *August 1991,* 130.

religious, the need to pay attention to the narrative choices of the Church increases.[143] Even if Russian religiosity does not always affect ordinary life in Russia, the cultural significance of the Russian Orthodox Church still resonates with many people. President Putin, known for his use of Orthodox symbolism, crossing himself or attending Orthodox services, parallels the theology of Orthodoxy in his own narratives and goals of Russian greatness and strength.

The close relationship between the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church, decades in the making, complicates how the statements given by the Church and the Patriarch should be read. This study will look at three theological concepts to observe the pieces which fit into President Putin's platform and political rhetoric. First, the system of traditional morality promoted by the Church aligns with President Putin's conservative platform, as both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Kremlin aim to shape the Russian people as distinctly set-apart from the rest of the world. Second, a potential for Holy Rus', both ideologically and geospatially, affects the domestic perception of Russian political movements abroad. Finally, the idea of symphonia shapes Russian Orthodox decision-making towards the ruling government, whether tsarist, Soviet, or post-Soviet. The model has appealed to Orthodox leadership for generations going back to the Byzantine Empire, where the Church shared equal power and authority with the state.[144] Although the effectiveness of such narratives on achieving domestic policy change is

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[143] "Attitudes to Religion," Levada-Center, 2020, https://www.levada.ru/en/2020/03/19/attitudes-to-religion/; "Church and State: How Religious Are You?" *Levada-Center,* Jan. 27, 2022, https://www.levada.ru/en/2022/01/27/church-and-state/.

[144] Papkova, 7.

difficult to gauge, the usage of moral influence of the Church by the Russian state prompts study into the theology of the Russian Orthodox Church.

4.2 - Orthodox Morality: Redemption through Suffering

In Orthodox theology, the final goal for all believers is an ultimate deification and perfection of humanity in the Kingdom of God at the end of time.[145] The deification process, theosis, consists of the daily actions which push the believer toward the Divine to become more like God.[146] The Orthodox Church embodies in the present the spiritual vision of the future both in its architecture and its hierarchy and facilitates theosis in the hope of a globally unified group of believers, who are all becoming more deified.[147] Archpriest Lev Lebedev encapsulated this role of the Church in the deification process and wrote

> A Russian Orthodox Church is not merely a place for prayer, it above all is the image of the Kingdom of Heaven in everything from the symbols of the architectural forms and its inner tripartite division, to the decoration of the icons, especially the iconostasis.
>
> In Russian Orthodoxy the personal spiritual life of the faithful, domestic life, family relations, economic and all other activity consciously aspire to the 'embodiment,' the reflection of the Heavenly in the earthly, which is the chief means of transforming the earthly, of spiritualizing and bringing it closer to the Heavenly.[148]

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[145] Lossky, "The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church," 111.
[146] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Eastern Trends in Christian Theology," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts*, 178; Lossky, "The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church," 65.
[147] Garrard and Garrard, 7.
[148] Archpriest Lev Lebedev, "Veneration of St. Nicholas in Russia, Conclusion," *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, no 6. (1987): 71.

In this framework, when the Church exists to be the embodiment of "the Heavenly" on earth, it must influence every aspect of a believer's life, including national identity and political activity. Coming from the Soviet period, where religiosity was inextricably linked to the Russian Orthodox Church, many Russian people seeking spirituality looked toward the Church as a combination of "Russian-ness" with Christianity.[149] The Church strives to provide the moral structure to advance the deification process by integrating Russian national culture with the Orthodox value of spiritual salvation. In recent years, the Orthodox Church has focused on developing the traditional morality required for a saving deification, which, in the eyes of many Russian religious leaders, should manifest itself through the Church and its believers working towards the good of the Russian Fatherland.[150]

Foreign religious groups, especially Western denominations of Christianity, were seen as a threat to the moral growth of the Fatherland and deification of the Russian people. The perceived decadence of Western secular culture stood in direct contrast to the standard that the Russian Orthodox Church claimed to uphold, which led Orthodox religious leaders to label to foreign missionaries as "proselytes" who aimed to take Russians away from the true faith. Patriarch Kirill criticized these groups and claimed that Western missionaries "...dashed in, believing the former Soviet Union to be a vast missionary territory," and "...behaved as though no local churches existed, no Gospel was

[149] Julia Sudo, "Russian Nationalist Orthodox Theology: A New Trend in the Political Life of Russia," *Political Theology* 6:1, 71.
[150] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Moscow Bishops on the Church, the Nation, and Globalization (2000)," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts,* 505.

being proclaimed."[151] Globalization symbolized a weakened Russian Orthodox Church, who believed itself to be the bearer of true Christianity. The St. Petersburg Theological Academy, one of the most influential seminaries in Russia, held a conference on the promotion of globalization abroad and condemned the new set of values held by the West.

> The ideology of globalization stands in opposition to the Christian world outlook; it is incompatible…through efforts of the world elite, it takes root and is propagandized in secular society and in the church, and it expresses [the world elites'] interests. Globalization becomes an embodiment of the utopian idea...about the creation of a unitary, supranational and rigidly controlled community on Earth...
>
> …[Globalists] reject and do not recognize the historical calling of Russia as a country preserving the Orthodox faith, culture, and traditions. Yet such values are important for the whole world.
>
> Changes in the traditional system of values; the destruction of national culture, Christian morals, and senses; the primitivization of people's thinking...such are the current and primary manifestations of the globalization process in the Russian Federation...[152]

In the eyes of the Russian Orthodox Church, the West lost its moral foundations, and its promotion of globalization represented an increasingly Westernized, secular world. The growth of foreign religious groups in Russia created pressure for the Russian Orthodox Church to show the moral distinctiveness of their Church throughout history.

Evidence given for this "set-apartedness" from the West stems from the perseverance of the Russian Orthodox Church through the intense waves of persecution of the Soviet period. If the Church could sustain itself and stir a revival after the anti-

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[151] Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, "Called to One Hope – The Gospel in Diverse Cultures."
[152] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Spiritual and Social Problems of Globalism (2001)," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts,* 506-507.

religious policies executed by the Soviet government, then the Church's long-standing nature only proved the indestructibility of the Orthodox faith. Extending back to 1944 under the Stalinist regime, Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky looked ahead to the future of the Church evolving through the Soviet era.

> From this, too, comes the unconquerable energy which enables Orthodoxy to go through all trials, all cataclysms and upheavals, adapting itself continually to the new historical reality and showing itself stronger than outward circumstances. The persecutions of the faithful in Russia, the systematic fury of which has not been able to destroy the Church, are the best witness to a power which is not of this world.[153]

Perseverance of Orthodox holiness through suffering demonstrates, in the view of the Church, their legitimacy as an institution of morality for the Russian people and their superiority to other sects of Christianity.[154] Pushed to the outskirts of societal influence and power in the Soviet Union, the Church sought to regain a hegemonic role in shaping Russian culture.[155] In the new era of Russia in the post-Soviet space, where persecution has dissipated, the Russian Orthodox Church believes that society can be restructured into a Russian nation, holy and becoming deified in the likeness of God.[156] The official statement of the Russian Orthodox Church written in 2000, "The Basis of the Social Concept," provides justification for the Church to assist in the moral shaping of post-Soviet Russia.

> Recognising every man's right to give a moral assessment to cultural developments, the Church reserves the same right to herself too. Moreover, she sees in it her direct obligation...the Church is convinced of the ultimate truth and

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[153] Lossky, "The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church," 16.
[154] Garrard and Garrard, 13; Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Archbishop Serafim Condemns the Ecumenical Movement (1948)," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts,* 487.
[155] Papkova, 69.
[156] Zigon, 6-7.

> salvific nature of the way revealed to her in the Gospel. If a creative work contributes to the moral and spiritual transformation of the personality, the Church gives her blessing upon it. But if culture puts itself in opposition to God, becoming anti-religious and anti-humane and turning into anti-culture, the Church opposes it.
>
> The eschatological aspiration of the Christian does not allow him to identify his life fully with the world of culture, «for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come» (Heb. 13:14). The Christian can live and work in this world, but he should not be fully absorbed in the earthly activity. The Church reminds the people of culture that their calling is to cultivate people's souls, including their own, seeking to restore in them the image of God distorted by sin.[157]

Through the process of deification, the suffering which the Russian Orthodox Church faced under the Soviet Union can be redeemed into a reborn Russia that looks at the world and seeks the "one to come."

The framework of a resurrected, resurgent Russia through the medium of traditional morality correlates with President Putin's conservative platform which aims to counter the spreading of liberalism in the global order. Liberalism is considered an ideological threat to both the Russian Orthodox Church and the modern Russian government because liberalism focuses on the freedom of the individual instead of the traditional conservative value of preserving collective traditions.[158] In the eyes of these two entities, Russia stands alone, superior in the world by maintaining the moral responsibility perceived to be abandoned by the liberal West.[159] Patriarch Kirill warns against the Russian people leaving Christian principles behind, as he considers the West to have done, by losing "their chastity, purity, their righteousness and inner integrity."[160]

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[157] "The Basis of the Social Concept," XIV.2.
[158] "The Basis of the Social Concept," IV.7.
[159] His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, *Freedom and Responsibility*, 64.
[160] Burgess, 183.

In response, Russia and its designated Church structure, the Russian Orthodox Church, must "give a soul to Europe."[161] To contrast the broad Western culture which promotes sexual freedom and secularism, Putin uses the Russian Orthodox Church as a social tool to shape the national identity of the Russian people.[162] Church-run programs for Russian society, existent prior to state support, attempt to soften the ideological blow of liberalism and solve the problems of sin which affect a person's morality and personhood.[163] First through education, Putin reinforces the Church in the dissemination of Orthodox virtues, which he calls "spiritual staples," to provide an alternative to the liberalizing West.[164] The Russian Orthodox Church considers education as the means through which morality, the root of deification, grows in a nation.

> The Church believes it beneficial and necessary to conduct optional classes on Christian faith in secular schools, at the request of children or parents, and in higher educational institutions. The church authorities should conduct dialogue with the government aimed to seal in the legislation and practice the internationally accepted right of believing families to the religious education and upbringing of their children. To this end, the Church has also established Orthodox institutions of general education and expects that they will be supported by the state...
>
> ...The Church is called and seeks to help school in its educational mission, for it is the spirituality and morality of a person that determines his eternal salvation, as well as the future of individual nations and the entire human race.[165]

With the resources of the state under Putin, the Church intends to construct the character of the Russian people to model Orthodox Christian values in their personal and public

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[161] His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, *Freedom and Responsibility*, 85.
[162] Adamsky, 180.
[163] Zigon, 85, 92.
[164] "Obraschenie prezidenta k Federal'nomu sobraniiu Rossii," *Kremlin.ru*, 2012; Burgess, 90-91.
[165] "The Basis of the Social Concept," XIV.3.

lives. Religion, according to the Church, ought to organize the family unit, the institution of marriage, and sexual relations.[166] Looking towards the eschatological future of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Russian Orthodox Church aims to interact with every aspect of an individual's life to transform the person through deification and to separate them from the decadent West.

4.3 - Russian Identity: Eschatological Uniqueness in Holy Rus'

In the eyes of the Russian Church, Holy Rus' and the "Third Rome" provide historical significance for the entire world and Russia with a basis for existing in a separate category from any other geopolitical actor.[167] With an eschatology which requires a geographical space for the second coming of Christ, Russian Orthodox thought emphasizes the well-being of the land as a symbol and sign for the spiritual status of the Russian people. The Soviet period, seen as a moment of darkness for the Russian Orthodox Church, passed and the Church views the present as the beginnings of religious revival towards Holy Rus'.[168] While still a Metropolitan, Patriarch Kirill summarized this trajectory by stating

> In the course of the long decades of persecution of the faith it was difficult to talk of such a development. "Hold fast to what you have" (Rev. 3:11); "Guard what has been entrusted to you" (1 Tim. 6-20) - we felt that the Lord addressed these and similar scriptural verses directly to us during the persecution of the church. This period, called by some "the autumn of Holy Russia" (I prefer to call it

[166] "The Basis of the Social Concept," X.3, 6.
[167] See "1.4.2 - Theological Narrative: Russian Identity Through Holy Rus'" in this work.
[168] Michael Binyon, *Life in Russia* (Great Britain: Billing & Sons Ltd., 1983), 248.

> "Golgotha")… But now, under circumstances of freedom, the possibilities are greater, and likewise the expectations held for us are greater.[169]

Kirill's invocation of "Golgotha," the location of Jesus' crucifixion and the ultimate Christian symbol of holy suffering, symbolized the depth of persecution for the Russian Orthodox Church as well as the rebirth or resurrection into the Holy Rus', as Christ rose after Golgotha. With the non-persecutory relationship to the state now enjoyed by the Russian Orthodox Church, the Holy Rus' seems more attainable, as the birthplace of the ultimate future of deified humanity.[170]

Not only does the eschatological hope of Orthodoxy resonate with hundreds of years of Russian culture, but also with the recent Russian experience under the ideology of the Communist Party. Both systems view their motivation to live in the present as the key to accomplishing the perfect future. Shipler, during his time living in the Soviet Union, observed

> As an answer to all questions, Christianity can exert a special hold on Russians yearning for enveloping truth, on those once inclined in earlier, fervent years, to give themselves to communism as a full system of explanation and belief.[171]

In the ideal Communist system, the working class looks to the Party for their source of truth and hope as their leadership takes them closer with logical procession to the scientific atheistic "paradise" of a fully Communist society. The truth of the Communist Party supersedes that of the rest of the world, since its ultimate mission to enact a global

[169] Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, "The Russian Orthodox Church and the Third Millennium," 301.
[170] Burgess, 24.
[171] Shipler, 268.

Communist system must be reached through the transformation of society.[172] On the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Church gives its followers a similar structure for truth, hope, and mission, but replaces dialectical materialism towards a Communist society with deification towards a perfected humanity in the Kingdom of God. Maximus Confessor, a Byzantine theologian in early Eastern Orthodoxy, portrayed this overcoming of evil and ascension into deification as first enacted by God, but completed through believers.

> ...In order to bring about the union of everything with God as its cause, the human person begins first of all with its own division, and then, ascending through the intermediate steps by order and rank, it reaches the end of its high ascent, which passes through all things in search of unity, to God, in whom there is no division.[173]

In this mystical theology, believers draw closer to God and find truth by linearly interacting with the earthly world as well as the Divine. Communism and Orthodoxy both value participation in building a better, more moral society, even if they disagree on what that society should look like. Despite the Communist anti-religious persecutions, the Church persevered and offered truth from God as a replacement to the truth of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, which failed to fulfill its promises in Russia.[174] The desire for a unique, saving mission in the world, whether political, ideological, or spiritual, runs deep within Russian culture.

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[172] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Soviet Line on Religion Under Khrushchev (1959)," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts*, 470.
[173] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Maximus Confessor on the Incarnation and Unity with God (early 640s)," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts*, 188.
[174] Shipler, 275-276; Burgess, 25; Smith, 415.

The idea of “Russian-ness” often combines the physical Russian land with the spiritual hope of Russian Orthodoxy and tries to justify its superiority to the West through these two elements. To many Russians throughout the Soviet period, stability could only be found either in their own personal spaces or in the Church, which laid the groundwork for religious nationalism.[175] Carrying over into the post-Soviet period, this nationalism reflects an almost spiritual connection to the Russian soil, which establishes a Holy Rus’ on a much more mundane level. Regardless of the individual Russian’s view of deification, the symbol of the land and its history commemorates the development of the nation’s greatness. One artist in Russian popular music, Zhanna Bichevskaya, who was an Orthodox believer herself, wrote a song “We Are Russians,” interconnecting religious nationalism and Russian military strength. With a sharp distinction from the rest of the world, especially the West, Bichevskaya portrays Russia as ever growing toward the ultimate Holy Rus’.

> We were formed for the glory of Christ / The monstrous enemy cannot devour us / They struck with a crescent and attacked with stars / But our banner is and will be the cross.
>
> The narrow paths lead us to Christ. / We know death, persecution, and captivity. / We are Russians, we are Russians, we are Russians / We nevertheless rise up from our knees.
>
> ...Lacerating wounds scar the body of Russia / But the light of Christ shines clearly ahead. And if the foul ones attack us / We go forth into battle with a cross on our chests.
>
> Discussions with our enemy have ended / We again summon ourselves to heroic deeds of sorrow / Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus—Three tribes of Slavic heroes.
>
> A crimson peal fills the world / A Russian dawn portends victory / And we, having risen with crosses and icons / Proceed to crown the Russian tsar.

[175] Shipler, 340.

> Indeed, angels sound the assembly for the last battle / For the faith, for the tsar, but not for cowardice / Through soborny, penitence, and prayer / God will revive Holy Rus'.[176]

Bichevskaya alludes to the undefeatable nature of both the Church and Russia in her song and, like the Russian Orthodox Church, presents Holy Rus' as the perfect manifestation of Russia's values as a civilization and a nation. Pushing through trials of "death, persecution, and captivity," the Church and the Russian people rise into Holy Rus' with military strength, Slavic uniqueness, and Orthodox piety. This image of the holy land, in which Bichevskaya includes Ukraine and Belarus, aligns with the objectives of the Putin Administration.

Not only is the West considered a threat to the moral integrity of the Russian people, but also to the geopolitical strength of the nation. To both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Putin Administration, Russia holds superiority to the rest of the world, whether by moral or nationalist "set-apartedness." Putin, viewing Russia as the successor to the Soviet Union which in turn was the successor of the Russian Empire, speaks of the unique power of the nation. To Putin, the growth of Western power and the emergence of independent states after the fall of the Soviet Union led to "a major humanitarian crisis."[177] Putin's rhetoric portrays tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union as Great Powers and aims to regain a Great Power status for Russia through the revival of Orthodoxy and patriotism. To build this strong, imperialist state, Putin claims that "spiritual unity" must

[176] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Zhanna Bichevskaya, 'We Are Russians' (2006)," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts*, 508.
[177] "Putin rues Soviet collapse as demise of 'historical Russia'," *Reuters*, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-rues-soviet-collapse-demise-historical-russia-2021-12-12/.

be accomplished between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.[178] Rather than recognizing Ukraine and Belarus as independent countries with their own sovereignty, Putin groups them together with Russians in the ancient tradition of Holy Rus'. In his 2021 article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," Putin used Orthodoxy to validate his foreign policy views.

> Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are all descendants of Ancient Rus, which was the largest state in Europe. Slavic and other tribes across the vast territory – from Ladoga, Novgorod, and Pskov to Kiev and Chernigov – were bound together by one language (which we now refer to as Old Russian), economic ties, the rule of the princes of the Rurik dynasty, and – after the baptism of Rus – the Orthodox faith. The spiritual choice made by St. Vladimir, who was both Prince of Novgorod and Grand Prince of Kiev, still largely determines our affinity today.[179]

Although this article preceded Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the rhetoric of Ukraine "denying its past" by establishing independence from Russia and its Church remained leading up to the war.[180] Differentiating from the Soviet leaders, Putin aligned himself with the Church to accomplish his goals for Russia.

4.4 - Long-term Symphonia: The Ultimate Goal of Church-State Relations

Like the idea of Holy Rus', the symphonic ideal for church-state relations extends back to the Byzantine empire, where the emperor was expected to support Orthodox leadership in the construction of the universal Church through "a system of co-

[178] "Article by Vladimir Putin 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians'," *Kremlin.ru*, 2021.
[179] "Article by Vladimir Putin 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians'."
[180] "Article by Vladimir Putin 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians'"; "Russia's Orthodox Church paints the conflict in Ukraine as a holy war," *The Economist*, 2022; "Analysis: Ukraine invasion splits Orthodox Church, isolates Russian patriarch," *Reuters*, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-invasion-splits-orthodox-church-isolates-russian-patriarch-2022-03-14/.

reciprocity."[181] Emperor Justinian in Byzantium defined symphonia for the Orthodox Church in 535 A.D. as the interactive relationship between the Church and the state.[182]

> The greatest blessings of mankind are the gifts of God that have been granted us by the mercy on high: the priesthood and the imperial authority. The priesthood ministers to things divine; the imperial authority is set over, and shows diligence in, things human; but both proceed from one and the same source and both adorn the life of man…
>
> ...For if the priesthood be in all respects without blame, and full of faith before God, and if the imperial authority rightly and duly adorn the commonwealth committed to its charge, there will ensue a happy concord that will bring forth all good things for mankind.[183]

This cooperation would grant equal power to the state and the Church for the purpose of upholding the well-being of the citizens of the empire both physically and spiritually. For the Russian Orthodox Church, symphonia is the tool in which Holy Rus' can be created. Not only can the Church use state resources to proliferate Christian principles, but also the state can use the Church as an extension of itself to bring about a strong Russian nation. Although the Byzantine framework for symphonia also gives power to the state to dictate the Church's spiritual activities, the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods desired a cooperative relationship with the state that would allow the two entities to work together, while not overstepping into their designated spheres of influence. The Russian ideal of symphonia, drawn from the original Byzantine concept, establishes a spiritual domain and a political domain, which interact with each other,

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[181] Lucian N. Leuştean, "The Concept of Symphonia in Contemporary European Orthodoxy," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2-3 (2011): 189.
[182] Knox, 576.
[183] Bryn Geffert and Theofancis G. Stavrou, "Justinian on Imperial Authority over the Church (ca. 535)" *Eastern Orthodox Theology: The Essential Texts*, 155-157.

without either actor controlling their counterpart. The current Russian Constitution keeps the Church and state separated in this way; however, the symphonic ideal would establish a partnership to simultaneously extend the Orthodox faith and better the social, economic, and foreign affairs of the nation.[184]

Throughout the Soviet period, many of the Russian Orthodox leaders lost hope of symphonia under a secular, anti-religious state, which would not aid in the spread of Christianity. Yet, under each Soviet leader, the Church found ways to work with the state to ensure their survival. In the Stalinist period, the symphonic ideal appeared during World War II, when the Church supported the state in its patriotic rhetoric for wartime domestic mobilization.[185] Stalin, still staunchly anti-religious, did not directly support the Russian Orthodox Church, but realized their usefulness in reaching the Russian people and ceased overt persecution after the war. When Khrushchev succeeded Stalin and overturned the mild symphonic relationship with the Church, many people missed the Stalinist period of the state and Church almost working together for the good of the people, even if only rhetorically. Looking towards the end of religion through the development of Communism, Khrushchev opposed any kind of symphonic relationship with the Church, which settled the Orthodox narrative of perseverance through Soviet state-sanctioned suffering cited today.[186] With Brezhnev, the Russian Orthodox Church

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[184] Adamsky, 175.

[185] See "1.2.1 - Joseph Stalin: Anti-Religious Identity and War" in this work.

[186] See "1.2.2 - Nikita Khrushchev: Persecution within Reform" in this work.

still lacked the symphonic ideal, but the Soviet government began to sympathize with Russian nationalism, which bore fruit for symphonia in the post-Soviet period.[187]

Many post-Soviet Orthodox leaders denied a relationship of symphonia with the state, such as Patriarch Alexii II in the 1990s, who stated that such an arrangement would result in "sooner or later the Church [becoming] a department of the State," yet the Church openly sought an aligned, symphonic relationship with the state at the turn of the century.[188] The Patriarchate's "The Basis of the Social Concept," referenced still today, outlines the capabilities and boundaries of this relationship as dependent on the common goals of the Church and the state to improve the well-being of the people.

> The state, including the secular state, is normally aware if its calling to build the life of the people on the principles of good and justice, taking care of both the material and spiritual welfare of society...
>
> ...For the Church this co-operation [with the state] should be part of her salvific mission, which embraces comprehensively the concern for man. The Church is called to take part in building human life in all spheres where it is possible and, in doing so, to join efforts with representatives of the secular authority.
>
> Church-state co-operation should be realized on the following conditions: the Church's participation in the work of the state is correspondent to her nature and calling; the state does exercise dictate in the Church's social work; and the Church is not involved in the spheres of public activity where her work is impossible for canonical and other reasons.[189]

In order to create the local manifestation of Holy Rus', the Russian Orthodox Church cooperates with the secular state in the mission to build a better, stronger Russia. The definition of a better, stronger Russia remains vague and open to interpretation for both

[187] See "1.2.3 - Leonid Brezhnev: The Emergence of Religious Dissent" in this work.
[188] Krasikov, 39.
[189] "The Basis of the Social Concept," III.8.

parties, but "The Basis of the Social Concept" attempts to cover all social issues which concern both the Church and the Russian government.[190] Citing Justinian's symphonic ideal, the document explains

> However, the state is aware as a rule that earthly well-being is unthinkable without respect for certain moral norms — the norms which are also essential for the eternal salvation of man. Therefore, the tasks and work of the Church and the state may coincide not only in seeking purely earthly welfare, but also in the fulfilment of the salvific mission of the Church.[191]

The resurgence of Orthodox "moral norms" in the post-Soviet period encouraged the state to participate in their end of the relationship, where the previous executive leaders in Russia had been indifferent toward symphonia.[192]

The modern Russian Orthodox Church portrays their involvement in developing Holy Rus' as coordinated with President Putin's domestic and foreign policy goals as Patriarch Kirill views Putin's presidency as "a miracle of God."[193] After a prolonged period of state antagonism against the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union, President Putin appeared to the Church as the person through which symphonia could be achieved. Putin, wanting to engage with the Church and provide rhetorical and financial support, showed the signs of working with the Russian Orthodox Church to develop the "spiritual, cultural, moral, and patriotic education and formation" of Russia.[194] In his culture war against liberal reforms in the West and in his own country, Putin enjoyed the mouthpiece of the Church as a counter to Westernization and globalization but does not

[190] Daniel, 174.
[191] "The Basis of the Social Concept," III.3.
[192] Garrard and Garrard, 243.
[193] Adamsky, 86; Burgess, 223.
[194] Garrard and Garrard, 243.

allow the Church to hold enough power to influence the political sphere to exceed his own power.[195] Desiring for Russia to hold an image of strength and stability for the rest of the world order, Putin holds the Church and its moral infrastructure up as providing legitimacy for his own rule.[196] Through the modern symphonic relationship between the Church and the state, the ideology of Russian superiority prospers domestically and extends into foreign policy as the concept of Russia as the truly good land which contrasts to the morally declining West.

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[195] John Anderson, "PUTIN AND THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH: ASYMMETRIC SYMPHONIA?" *Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 1 (2007): 189.

[196] Mikhail Antonov, "Russian Symphonia vs. Rule of Law," *BYU Law Review 46, no.* 5 (2021): 1199-1200.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

"The extensive renaissance in the life of the Russian church which we have witnessed is, for us, a miracle of God…The fate of Russia in the 20th century has become the clearest historical confirmation of the invincibility of faith, the indestructibility of the church of Christ, against which the gates of hell are powerless..." *-Patriarch Kirill, then Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, 2000*

5.1 - Looking Ahead by Looking Back

The factors which changed the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state from an antagonistic divide to a symphonic cooperation include both specific historical circumstances and theological lenses interacting with each other. Without the political decisions of governmental and religious authorities, the Orthodox identity found in the theological frameworks might not have been re-established in Russian culture. From the Church's perspective, their decisions to work with the state in the Soviet and the post-Soviet periods stemmed first from the necessity for survival and second from the desire to redeem Russia through Christianity after a long period of anti-religious influence. However, in every era, the state leaders instituted varying levels of relationship with the Church out of pragmatism for their own national security goals, which ultimately resulted in the tight-knit rhetorical and political relationship between the modern Russian Orthodox Church and the Putin Administration.

Each Communist leader interpreted the role of the Church in Soviet society differently, but the eventual disappearance of religion remained the common ideological thread between them. Stalin based his original intense persecution of the Church on

Soviet anti-religious principles; however, his foreign policy needs within World War II trumped his ideological goals for Communist society. With the assumption that the new Soviet people would naturally grow disinterested in religion over time, this break in persecution may have seemed tolerable to Stalin. On the other hand, Khrushchev viewed Stalin's lightening of persecution as antagonistic to Communist ideology. His domestic policy goals of destalinization and "building communism" required a return to religious persecution.[197] Still under the same dialectical assumption as Stalin, Khrushchev attempted to accelerate the process of eliminating religion from Soviet society. The Brezhnev era revealed the primary weakness in this assumption: persecution does not necessarily lead to lessened religious belief and in some cases, persecution even increases religious belief, especially for the Orthodox faith, which considers suffering as a virtue.[198] The nationalist, ethno-religious movements within the Republics concerned Brezhnev, but he chose to bargain with the Russian Orthodox Church to keep any form of religious dissent under his control.

The relationship of bargaining to achieve national security and domestic policy interests extended under Gorbachev's liberalization practices and through the chaotic transition out of Soviet infrastructure and ideology. The ideological void left by the loss of Soviet identity provided an opening for the Russian Orthodox Church to re-establish its cultural significance in Russian society during Yeltsin's time in office. While previous forms of moral structure faded away into the Soviet past, the Russian Orthodox Church

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[197] Khrushchev's Secret Speech, 'On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,' Delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."
[198] See "4.2 - Orthodox Morality: Redemption through Suffering" in this work.

stepped into the role of establishing the principles of the nation. Even if the practice of Russian Orthodoxy set up more cultural norms rather than a revival of religiosity, the organization of national symbols and narratives supplied legitimacy for other Russian institutions. Russia, coming out of the former Soviet Union, dealt with challenges of power and identity coming out of the Cold War. This led to rhetoric of a return to Russian greatness, which resonated with many ordinary people. The government and church unified under a mission to restore Russia to geopolitical and eschatological glory, which fit into Putin's platform of creating Russian stability in economic, social, and foreign policy. Putin's appropriation of moral tradition and tsarist history produced an opportunity for the Church to build symphonia in hope of recreating Holy Rus'. Based in theological tradition, the ethno-nationalist components of Russian Orthodoxy replaced the Communist Party ideology by establishing a historical uniqueness for Russia after the nation was no longer a part of the vastly multi-ethnic Soviet Union.

Cultural myths from Soviet society persisted into the post-Soviet period through a Russian nationalist ideology that tried to employ these myths to justify its positions. With the resurgence of Russian Orthodox theology, the mysticism of the faith permitted broadness of interpretation, which allowed cultural mythmaking to appeal to Russian norms. The common myths of the importance of "The Fatherland," restoration of Russian greatness, and a Western enemy carried on in Russian collective memory from the Communist period and constructed social frameworks for modern Russia. Armed with an innate sense of Russian superiority, this new ideology proposed, like Soviet ideology, that all internal problems in the great "Fatherland" must come from foreign interference

and influence.[199] Creation of an enemy who is an “Other,” far away from Russian society, outsourced blame during the Soviet period, which carried on after its dissolution. According to this ideology, the Russian people have been persecuted by the rest of the world and in every era, there exists a mythical “Other” who aims to leave the Russian people in destitution.[200] Both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Putin Administration group Western nations, liberalism, and secularism together into an amorphous modern day “Other,” regardless of the spectrum of differences in political and social norms seen in the West today. This combined church-state rhetoric takes a blend of history, geography, and eschatology which claims to transcend all other national systems.[201]

Exploitation of Orthodox narratives by the Putin Administration contributed to a disconnect between the Christian morals presented by Putin and the hypocrisy evident in church-state relations both at the local and federal levels. Both the Putin Administration and the Russian Orthodox Church insist that truth can only be accessed through their frameworks and institutions, which emphasize Russian uniqueness throughout time and in geographical space. Justified through religious narratives of redemption and morality, the Putin Administration has severed political opposition and foreign influence through increasingly aggressive actions at home and abroad. Geopolitics, often on the mind of post-Soviet Russian leadership rolling off the Cold War, combined with the resurgence of religious principles in Orthodoxy to generate a cohesive Russian identity against the

[199] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of* Russia, 363.
[200] Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of* Russia, 372-373.
[201] Adamsky, 69-70.

West. Exploited by the Putin Administration to justify a conservative, Russia-focused platform, the nationalist framework both complemented and integrated with Orthodox theology. With the idea of Holy Rus' in mind, Russia must preserve its geographical integrity from being lost to the rest of the world and must promote its nationality to a place of leadership and power.

In the post-Cold War world, Russian identity has searched for a new place after stepping down as a geopolitical powerhouse during its time as the Soviet Union. Debates on whether Russian identity aligns more with Europe or with Asia stretch back into the tsarist period and continue still today.[202] As an attempt to make sense of the new world around them, many Russians looked to the Church as a long-standing institution of consistency. The idea of Holy Rus' uses the past to dictate the future of Russia with an end goal of preserving geographical and moral integrity against the backdrop of Western liberal and secular culture, which runs parallel to the political goals of strengthening Russia militarily and employing its power to exercise control over the previous Soviet Republics. Seen most prominently in the current 2022 crisis in Ukraine, the revival of a great Russian imperial legacy has been used by both the Church and the state to legitimize the invasion. As the war develops and reaches its conclusion as a new inflection point of history, the results of a united church-state front in Russia will remain a subject of study for political theologians over the 21st century.

[202] Mark Bassin and Suny Ronald Grigor, The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2016,) ix.

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