ABSTRACT


by Lara McCoy Roslof

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as a cultural force in the formation of post-Soviet Russian national identity. In order to demonstrate the depth of Russian Orthodoxy’s involvement with Russian life, Russian Orthodox political and social programs in the post-Soviet era are examined. A brief summary of Orthodox involvement historically in political and social life is presented as a framework for understanding Orthodoxy’s role in the post-Soviet period, followed by an examination of contemporary church-state relations, both political and economic, and a discussion of the evolution of post-Soviet Orthodox social ministry.

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INTRODUCTION

The unexpected demise of the Soviet system in 1991 brought overwhelming changes to Russian society and the Russian Orthodox Church. The collapse of the Soviet Union meant not only the end of Soviet policies and indoctrination, but also the end of an empire that had encompassed not only Russia itself, but also nations located from the Baltic Sea to Central Asia. As Russia struggled with its new democratic political system, the country also grappled with its social and cultural identity. Post-Soviet Russia’s national consciousness required a connection to the Russian past, but also a recognition of the legacies, both positive and negative, of the Soviet era. As the only national institution that remained intact throughout the entirety of Russian history, the Russian Orthodox Church emerged after 1991 as a cultural force in Russian life and an important element in Russian national identity.

Despite the realities of a post-modern society distanced from religion, Russian Orthodoxy hoped to reclaim its historic role as a driving force in Russian culture. Just as Russia endeavored to reclaim its former title of superpower, the Russian Orthodox Church longed for its former glory as the faith of an empire. Years of communist policies, however, had changed both Russia and the Russian Church. In 1991, the church found itself with a dwindling financial base and an aging clergy, as well as a population uneducated in the ways of the church and skeptical about its relevance. The loss of the Soviet welfare net and the devaluation of the ruble left many people impoverished, and the end of “godless communism” brought an influx of Western missionaries. For the first time, the Russian Church found itself competing for souls in a free marketplace of religion. Initially the church expected support from the state, as had been the case throughout much of Russian history. Gradually, however, the Russian Orthodox Church accepted a new role as an important part of Russian national consciousness connecting cultural and political forces from the past and the present.
Post-Soviet life caused the Russian Orthodox Church to modify its traditional framework of symphony and liturgy. Historically, the relationship of the church to the state was governed by the Orthodox concept of symphony in which all Christian power should be dedicated to God's work. The ruler supported the Orthodox Church because it offered eternal salvation for all. The church, led by the patriarch, supported the political aspirations of the ruler because he was God’s chosen. The realities of post-Soviet Russia, a multi-confessional country operating under a secular political system, forced the Russian Orthodox Church to reevaluate this relationship. The church’s historical prominence in Russian political and social life gave Orthodoxy a privileged position within the new order that resulted in legal and economic protection, though officials from both church and state declared that post-Soviet Russia was a secular nation without an official religion.

Without state support to encourage the presence of Orthodoxy in Russian life and culture, Russian Orthodox priests stepped outside the bounds of traditional Orthodox practice to create social ministries ranging from programs on alcoholism to work in orphanages. Because social ministry is not emphasized in Orthodox theology and suffering was often exalted in Russian history as a path to heaven, these developments indicated the influence of a more powerful force than simply the needs of their congregations. Challenges from western Protestants forced Orthodox priests to think about the role of the church in Russian life and enact new programs to preserve the cultural heritage of the Orthodoxy in Russia. Individual priests viewed their involvement in society as a way to reacquaint Russians with the faith of their ancestors and thereby preserve Orthodoxy’s influence in post-Soviet life. This thesis will explore the Russian Orthodox Church as a social and political institution between 1991 and 2003, highlighting the role of the church in Russian political and cultural life historically, examining postmodern political and economic relations between church and state, and discussing the development of social ministry as a cultural phenomenon, with the goal of emphasizing Orthodoxy’s role in Russian culture and thereby in Russian national identity.

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This work drew from several sources. Comments from priests, the presentation of church actions in print media, and statements by the Moscow Patriarchate on social work demonstrated the importance of social ministry as a cultural reaction. The evangelical
publications *East-West Church Ministry Report, Religion in Eastern Europe* and *Religion, State and Society* offered the most recent information on religion in Russia.¹ Historical works on religion and politics in Russia created the framework within which I examined post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy. These works included *Mythmaking in the New Russia* by Kathleen Smith,² media accounts of Putin’s relationship with Russian Orthodoxy, and the collaboration by Nikolai Mitrokhin and Lev Timofeev, *The Economic Activities of the Russian Orthodox Church and Its Secret Elements.*³ In order to present the position of Orthodoxy in Russian culture as one approximating national identity, I applied theories from the collection *Becoming National.*⁴ Although this thesis recognizes that the role of the Russian Church in post-Soviet Russian life also has implications for developing Russian nationalism it does not fully explore these ideas, but summarizes them briefly utilizing works on nationalism theory that emphasize the role of religion.

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National identity depends upon a relationship between culture, politics and society. Unlike nationalism, which is thought of primarily as a politicizing force imposed by those in power, national identity represents the juncture at which “citizens identify with the nation-state.”⁵ National identity draws from the cultural elements that are present in society. Russian Orthodoxy, as one of Russia’s most historically pervasive institutions, has a strong position from which to influence Russian national consciousness. A deep and often manipulative relationship existed between the state and Russian Orthodoxy in times of nation-building, war, and transformational political programs. The Orthodox faith also represented a powerful force for the Russian people, regardless of social class, and regardless of political developments. Even during the most secular periods of imperial

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history, church rituals took place in everyday life and religious holidays provided mass gatherings of people from all levels of society. Contemporary scholars, religious leaders, and journalists have reflected on Russian history in order to assess the church’s potential as a relevant part of post-Soviet society, and their opinions will also be taken into consideration when examining what role the church has played in democratic Russia.

National identity is a relational concept, depending upon interaction between the political establishment and social reality. Despite declarations of separation of church and state, religion continued to influence Russian politics even in the post-Soviet era. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian political parties from across the spectrum attempted to boost their poll numbers through their association with the Russian Orthodox Church. Post-Soviet presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin maintained a relationship with the hierarchy, turning to the church for support of their legitimacy and their programs, although they often moderated this relationship in speeches, recognizing that the realities of a multiethnic nation and the predisposition of the international community against religion in politics made the use of Orthodoxy in government a questionable enterprise. For its part, the Russian Church lobbied the government for legal protection and economic help with the understanding that if the church as a non-governmental entity is expected to provide aid to society, it must find funds to pay for social programs and defend itself against western interlopers. After 1991, the church’s relationship with the state resulted in a restrictive law on freedom of religion as well as partnerships with major corporations and the development of church-related industries.

As the Russian Orthodox Church learned to adapt to a new political system, it also developed new ways of being involved in Russian society and culture. Though the importance of the Orthodox Church for Russian culture is based in history, the revival of the church at the grass-roots level, the level where national identity is formed, has been strengthened by the development of social ministry. The evolution of social ministry has had several implications for the relationship between church, state and society in post-Soviet Russia. Initially, it raises the question of responsibility for social welfare. During the communist era, the government took care of its population. After 1991, funding and developing social programs was left mainly to private sector initiatives, including those of

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6 Ibid., 152.
the Orthodox Church. The creation of social ministry is also relevant to the position of the Russian Orthodox Church in regard to the Russian state. The expansion of foreign missionary work and its role in evoking Russian Orthodox social ministry raises the question of religious pluralism in post-Soviet Russia. Despite the formal separation of church and state, laws passed under pressure from the Orthodox hierarchy limited the work of other religious groups, particularly in the area of social activities. While such official action seemed to ensure the church a position in Russian life and reinvigorated the debate over the role of Orthodoxy in Russian national identity, the preservation of social ministry for the Orthodox church at the expense of non-indigenous Christian groups allowed the church to use this work to assert its ties to Russian history, culture, and ultimately, Russian-ness.

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Few scholars study post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy. Those who track religious developments in contemporary Russia, Mark Elliott and Walter Sawatsky for example, are interested primarily in questions of religious freedom. Jennifer Hedda and Simon Dixon, the only scholars who study Orthodox social ministry, have focused on the development of social ministry in nineteenth century St. Petersburg, but have not carried that research into the post-Soviet period. Jane Ellis wrote about the modern church but did not address the issue of social work. While a few journalists have highlighted Russian Orthodox economic programs, no English-language scholarly work has been written on the subject.

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A study of the changing position of Russian Orthodoxy in post-Soviet politics and society addresses the question of whether the church, like the state, has used the fall of communism to reinvent itself. Given prevailing Orthodox views on the duties of priests as well as statements by the Church hierarchy on social programs, social ministry seems unlikely to continue over time if the state develops new programs of social aid. If, however, social work gives the church meaning for post-Soviet Russian life, it may become a crucial element of Orthodox ministry. Looking at how Russian Orthodoxy has faced economic problems during the first years of Russian capitalism should help gauge the way it will seek funds in the future, just as looking at the way the church has worked with the government gives insight into church–state relations. Examining Russian Orthodoxy’s
immediate reactions to post-Soviet life and the break with Orthodox tradition that they represent gives insight into the durability of Orthodoxy as an important factor in the post-modern Russian nation.
CHAPTER 1: THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF ORTHODOXY IN RUSSIAN HISTORY

Traditionally, Russian Orthodoxy has played a two-fold role in Russian culture as both the religion of the state and the religion of the people, thus the histories of the church and the state are inseparable. Brought to Kievan Rus’ in the tenth century, the Russian form of Orthodoxy grew along with the Russian nation. Despite being an important presence in Russian politics, the Russian Orthodox Church’s avowed avoidance of things of this world prohibited the church from seeing itself as a political actor; it sought to work with the state for the greater good. Orthodoxy’s effectiveness for societal reform and nationalist sentiment lies in this complex relationship between faith and politics. Tracing Russian Orthodoxy’s involvement with the Russian government and people creates a framework for the development of social ministry and the involvement of the church in post-Soviet political and social life.

The Russian Orthodox Church in Russian Political History

The Orthodox idea of symphony, which historically governed relations with the state, relies to some extent on the principle of separate but equal. Under this philosophy, the church and the state are Christian partners, without one imposing itself on the other. Because Orthodox spirituality intends for the church not to concern itself with earthly things but instead to demonstrate the glory of the world to come, theologically the church exists solely to guide people in spiritual matters and prepare them for the kingdom of heaven. Responsibility for earthly needs falls to a secular government, though one that is in accordance with the principles of faith and is led by Orthodox believers. Traditionally the state supported the church because it promised eternal salvation; the church backed the government because it was headed by God’s representative and kept order in the sinful world. Throughout Russian history, symphony has been practiced with varying degrees of success. More often than not, both political and religious leaders worked through the church to foster increasingly secular aims. Nevertheless, the relationship between church and state entrenched the Orthodox faith in Russian life, and the involvement of both
religious and secular authorities in battles against foreigners bringing alien faiths to Russia further identified Russia with Orthodoxy.

From the time of Kievan Rus’, Russian Orthodoxy acted as a unifier. In 988, during the consolidation of his power over the eastern Slavs, Prince Vladimir of Kiev adopted Orthodox Christianity from Byzantium and forcibly baptized his people. Throughout the medieval period, Orthodox priests accompanied government representatives and soldiers as Vladimir’s heirs progressively took over more of the eastern Slavic lands. “The spiritual guidance, the promise of salvation, and the social norms and cultural forms of the Church provided a common identity for the diverse tribes comprising Kievan Rus’ society.”

Dmitri Donskoi’s victory at the Battle of Kulikovo resulted not only in the ascendency of Moscow but also an increase in the political power of the Russian Orthodox Church. By moving his see to Moscow in 1310, Metropolitan Peter indicated the rising power of the city by establishing there the only national institution of the Russian people; the Muscovite prince’s later victory over the Mongols seemed to prove Peter right. The church threw its support behind the attempts by Donskoi’s successors to unify the Slavic peoples under one ruler and eventually the church’s support replaced that of the Mongol khanate in determining a leader’s legitimacy. Orthodox Christianity was used as an excluding factor as well, since as early as the fifteenth century the “frontier” referred to the area that separated Orthodox peoples from the non-Orthodox. In the sixteenth century, while serving as regent for Tsar Feodor, Boris Godunov heightened the church’s prestige and went a step further in creating a national church by persuading the patriarch of Constantinople to elevate the Metropolitan of Moscow to the rank of patriarch. In return, the church later supported his election as tsar.

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9 Martin, “From Kiev to Muscovy,” 22.


The church also demonstrated its political power during the reign of the first Romanov tsar, Mikhail. Young and pious, Mikhail was dominated through most of his reign by his father, Patriarch Filaret. Though Filaret’s control over his son effectively united church to state, the reign of Mikhail’s son Alexei saw the most invasive use of church power in state affairs during the Muscovite period. Alexei supported the reforms of Patriarch Nikon, which split the Russian Church and threw the country into turmoil. The compromise that ended the controversy returned church-state relations to their traditional form of symphony, forcing the church to refocus its energy on spiritual matters.

Although the state grew increasingly secular, Orthodoxy did not vanish from politics. Even during the Imperial period, when the founding of the Holy Synod restricted the church’s political power, Orthodoxy remained an essential part of Russian culture. Although Peter the Great abolished the office of the Patriarch with the establishment of the Holy Synod, he did not seek to eliminate the church altogether. Peter simply wanted to establish a more secular, western-style form of government and avoid the religious controversies that plagued the reign of his father, Alexei. Peter included chaplains in his beloved navy and made sure that appropriate religious services accompanied state functions. Despite his love of all things western, Peter believed that “Orthodoxy was the proper faith of the Russian people and it was the Russian tsar’s duty not only to defend and preserve Orthodoxy but to reform and improve it, without touching its essential doctrine or basic rituals.”

Later emperors incorporated some of Peter’s ideas of church reform, though they were more interested in using religion to bolster the regime. The famous dictum “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality” propagated during the reign of Nicholas I preserved the church’s position within the state. Nationality for Nicholas “stressed the unique character of the Russians as a people and the inappropriateness of foreign political and social institutions for Russia,” including foreign religions. During the reigns of Alexander III and Nicholas II, Orthodox dioceses were founded in the far reaches of the empire including in Finland and Vladivostok “for specific political ends,” namely, to

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combat the heretical sects found in those parts of the world and strengthen the position of the Russian government. \(^\text{14}\) Once again, the line between Russia and the outside world was drawn on the basis of faith.

Closer to the center of the empire, the church continued to support the tsarist government even during the tumultuous years leading to the revolution. Although individual priests worked for reform in both the church and society, the Holy Synod rejected these initiatives and defrocked many of the priests involved in the labor reform movement after the 1905 revolution, choosing instead to put its trust in the tsar. \(^\text{15}\) Even after Nicholas II abdicated, some priests encouraged their flocks to defend him, declaring that the faithful must reject the provisional government and fight “for faith, tsar, and fatherland.” \(^\text{16}\) The volatile years of the Civil War complicated church-state affairs. While many of the church hierarchs were monarchists, many parish priests particularly in rural areas supported the revolution. For their part, the Bolsheviks were willing to make allowances to parish churches during the conflict in order to strengthen their appeal among the peasantry. \(^\text{17}\) These concessions, which included continued teaching of religion to children in schools and state recognition of church marriages, disappeared gradually as the Bolsheviks consolidated their power and by the early 1920s were abolished altogether.

The victory of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War and the establishment of the Soviet Union effectively ended the promotion of symphony in church-state relations. While much remains unknown about the relationship between the church and the Soviets, the Bolsheviks certainly intended to remove the church from both government and everyday life. This policy of strict separation of church and state, however, was practiced like the idea of symphony with varying degrees of success. During the early years of communism the priests of the Renovationist movement attempted to be both Christian and Soviet. Although their actions eventually alienated both the church and the state, initially the


\(^{15}\) Ibid., 315.


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 71-72.
government used the movement in an effort to weaken the church from within. With the creation of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs in 1943, the Soviets developed an official body to monitor church-state relations. Despite its status as a part of the Communist government that reported to the Central Committee, the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs “played a significant role in the cause of defending the rights of religious organizations, clergy and believers.” While the Council gave believers a forum for their complaints, it also issued “guidelines” that heavily influenced church policies, effectively allowing the state to control the church. The Council became a more active instrument of repression under Nikita Khrushchev, but the church endured and emerged again in 1988 as a useful political ally for Mikhail Gorbachev. Despite the stated objectives of Marxism-Leninism, the realities of twentieth-century government and the importance of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian life forced the Soviet state to interact with the church as a matter of political expediency.

**Church and State During Times of War**

With the notable exception of the Civil War, during which the Russian Orthodox Church officially supported neither side, historically church and state worked together effectively during wartime. War encouraged an “us against them” mentality, strengthening ideas of nationalism and national identity. For Russia, wartime historically meant a surge of patriotism founded on Orthodoxy. The military victories of the medieval Russian princes Alexander Nevskii and Dmitri Donskoi were both connected to the Orthodox faith, setting the stage for the foundation of the Russian nation on Orthodox principles and the identification of the Russian people with the Orthodox faith. Faced with threats by the Catholic Swedes and Teutonic Knights to the west and the Mongol horde to the east, Alexander, the Prince of Novgorod, is traditionally said to have chosen to fight the western invaders because they sought to impose their religion on the Orthodox Rus’, whereas the Mongols had no such aims. Dmitri Donskoi’s battle with the Mongols benefited from the

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church in the form of the hesychast monk Sergei of Radonezh. Sergei openly supported the Muscovite state and Dmitri personally. Medieval Russian accounts of the life of Dmitri attribute his victory at the Battle of Kulikovo to the blessing Sergei administered to the troops, endowing them with the protection of the Virgin Mary. Though later Russian warriors did not profit from hagiographical history, documents still attest to the church’s influence during wartime. Patriarch Germogen’s insistence on an Orthodox tsar encouraged all of Russia to rise up and push back the Poles during the Time of Troubles, while the victory over Napoleon in the War of 1812 was commemorated by building churches in many cities, including Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

Even Joseph Stalin recognized the potential of religion, working with the hierarchy to elicit the church’s open support for the war effort during the Great Patriotic War. Through a series of agreements with Stalin in 1943, a new patriarch was elected, 46 bishops were released from prison, and more than 1,000 churches were reopened. Stalin recognized that his soldiers were fighting for Russia, not communism, and that Orthodoxy remained a significant part of Russian life. The church’s support of the nation’s defense was important for the continuation of the campaign, particularly during fighting in the non-Orthodox western regions and during the Battle of Stalingrad.

Russian Orthodoxy in the Life of the Russian People

Of course, Orthodoxy did not affect ordinary people only through official state channels or in times of conflict. From the time of Prince Vladimir, Orthodoxy was simply a condition of the Russian people. The Domostroi, the most prevalent manual for domestic life in medieval Russia, was written by a priest and incorporates “Christian Laws” in all its mandates, including the use of religious rituals in trade, interactions with strangers and servants, as well as the relationship between a husband and wife. In Muscovy, the Orthodox Church used ecclesiastical courts to create laws against drunkenness and rape in

21 Ibid., 231.
22 Tatiana Chumachenko, Church and State in Soviet Russia, 57-9.
24 Ibid., 68.

The whole of Russian life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was permeated with religious rituals. At birth the Russian child would be baptized and given a saint’s name. The annual celebration of a person’s saint’s day was even more important than that of their birthday. Every major event in a Russian’s life – entry into school and university, joining the army or civil service, purchasing an estate or house, marriage and death – received some form of blessing from a priest.\footnote{Orlando Figes, \textit{Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia} (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002): 301.}

Although the Russian aristocracy of the Age of Enlightenment perceived Orthodoxy as a peasant faith, they participated in its rituals, particularly the festivals surrounding Easter and Christmas. Maintaining the practices of Orthodoxy was not necessarily a statement of belief, but a reflection of the importance of the church in culture and society – both high and low. The Slavophiles and artists of the nineteenth century presented Orthodoxy to the educated public as a part of traditional Russian culture. Themes in the writings of Chekhov, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky reflect the influence of Orthodoxy; Rachmaninov wrote liturgical music for the church and Stravinsky used traditional Russian chants in his Symphony of Psalms.

The importance of Orthodoxy in Russian life and culture at both the official and grassroots levels reflects the traditional identification of Orthodoxy with Russian culture and national identity. The close interaction between church and state allowed pre-Revolutionary Russian governments to reinforce official nationalism with the Orthodox faith while the pervasive nature of Orthodox rituals in everyday life linked the church and the Russian people. War solidified the connection between the Russian nation and Orthodox Christianity by portraying invaders of different faiths as the other. National identity is formed by “a fluid complex of cultural signifiers – symbols, practices, and narratives.”\footnote{Duara, “Historicizing National Identity,” 165.} In tsarist Russia, national identity was joined to Orthodoxy by all three.
Symbolism was projected on the tsar through the Orthodox ideal of symphony, ritual practices permeated both everyday and official life ranging from a baptism or marriage to a coronation, and the narrative of Russian history promoted by the Primary Chronicle gave Orthodoxy a primary role in Russia’s formation. Through political maneuvering, wartime solidarity and ritual observance in everyday life, the Russian Orthodox Church dominated the culture and identity of Pre-Revolutionary Russia.

Contemporary Opinions on the Church and Russian Nationalism

Scholars are divided over the Russian Orthodox Church’s ability to become an important element of Russian culture and national identity in the post-modern world. Simon Dixon, whose work explores Orthodoxy’s relationship with the west in the nineteenth century, compares the Russian Church to the Catholic Church after the French Revolution and in post-Fascist Italy. In both instances, Dixon finds the Orthodox Church in a worse position. The Catholic Church, Dixon points out, benefited from a supranational structure and a mechanism for coping with internal debate. More importantly, perhaps, the Jacobin and fascist dictatorships did not last long enough to make the church irrelevant in society. In addition, no other church has had to cope with such a massive transformation in society as the Soviet process of “urbanization and industrialization.” Though Dixon’s article was written before the Russian Federation reestablished itself as an independent state, his arguments point out crucial weaknesses the Russian Orthodox Church continued to face in the immediate post-Soviet period, such as the lack of parish communities and pastoral ministry. Dixon’s one hope for the rebirth of the Russian Church lies in its position in Russian history and Russian national identity.

James Billington holds out more hope than Dixon, emphasizing the very existence of the Russian Orthodox Church as indicative of its ability to survive. Billington, too, sees challenges for the church, particularly in its domination by conservative reactionary

30 Ibid., 86.
31 Ibid., 92.
nationalists. By the time Billington made his case, a movement had begun within the Russian Church to establish Russian Orthodoxy as an official state church. The churchmen advocating this position appeal to the nationalist character of the faith and its position in Russian national identity. They seek to maintain its traditional emphasis on the liturgy, prayer, and veneration of saints. Though he believes in the importance of liturgy and tradition for Orthodox reestablishment, Billington instead encourages the model of parish priests working at the grass-roots level represented by Alexander Men’, a martyred priest of the Soviet era renowned for his teaching. Like Dixon, Billington views the development of a parochial system and social ministry as necessary steps in the renewal of the Orthodox faith. The church must step out of its traditional bounds in order to grow. Finally, Billington believes that the Russian Church will revive because it has the support of the people and it represents a positive aspect of the past Russia can draw upon to establish its post-Soviet identity. In a survey that reinforces Billington’s point, a survey done in 1996 by the Institute of Social Research noted that 88% of Russians had a positive opinion of the Orthodox Church and 65% believed the Russian Orthodox Church was a necessary element of Russian society. 

Unlike Dixon and Billington, Dmitry Pospielovsky takes a particularly Russian view on the reestablishment of the church in Russian national consciousness. Pospielovsky believes that the church can play a role in post-Soviet Russia, but only if it confronts its past. The Russian Church remains divided from its émigré branch over issues such as the canonization of Nicholas II and the church’s relationship with the state under communism. Pospielovsky proposes that the church release all archival materials relating to its relationship with the KGB, a promise made in 1992 that has not yet been fulfilled. He also advocates dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, headquartered in New York City, in hopes of reconciliation, at least with the more moderate members.

33 Ibid., 62.
34 Ibid., 58.
Pospielovsky believes in the importance of the Russian Church as a national institution and while he does not support the recreation of an official national church, he supports Patriarch Alexii II’s statement that Western Christians cannot understand the situation of the Russian people and can only cause turmoil through their evangelical activity.\textsuperscript{37} In the assessment of both Pospielovsky and the Moscow Patriarchate, a foreign or western faith is one alien to Russian national consciousness.

Journalists who study post-modern Russia also see the challenges brought about by post-Soviet life and the potential for Orthodoxy to fill the moral gap left by the collapse of communist ideology. Their work is particularly valuable for assessing the role of the church because they base their research on interviews with a wide variety of people. David Satter, a former Moscow correspondent for the \textit{Wall Street Journal} and \textit{The New York Times}, notes that western observers monitor Russia’s development in primarily economic terms.\textsuperscript{38} The health of the society, however, is not reflected solely in the price of oil, but in the way people behave. Although Satter tends to exaggerate the activities of the criminal element in Russia and engage in some conspiracy theory, the evidence he presents of widespread criminal activity indicates the lack of values present in post-Soviet Russia. Satter acknowledges the role Orthodoxy played in the Russian conscience historically, as well as the connection between church and state in determining values.\textsuperscript{39} In Satter’s opinion, morality can only return to Russia through “transcendent, universal values…assured only by establishing the rule of law.”\textsuperscript{40} In other words, only the alliance of the Russian Orthodox Church and the government can counter the effects of criminal culture.

David Remnick, a long-time Moscow correspondent for the \textit{Washington Post}, takes a more measured view of the church’s ability to resolve Russia’s moral crisis, but he does recognize its place in Russian history and politics. He believes that for Orthodoxy to play a defining role in Russia’s future, however, it has to distance itself from the historical pattern

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 201.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 3.
of absolutism. In democratic Russia, politicians as diverse as Boris Yeltsin and Gennady Zyuganov, the head of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, used Orthodoxy to bolster their political message. Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov spearheaded the drive to rebuild the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, which had originally been constructed as both a monument to the glory of God and the power of the Russian state. Those who backed the construction argued that rebuilding the cathedral was a way to engage the nationalism embodied by the Russian Orthodox Church in the past and to reject the influence of Western capitalism. Remnick writes that post-Soviet Russian politics have replaced Communist propaganda with nostalgia for the pre-Revolutionary past – represented in part by projects like the reconstruction of Christ the Savior. Although “the old system will never regain its shape,” possibilities exist for using its elements, including the Orthodox faith, in the future.

Naturally church officials are more universally positive in their assessment of the church’s position in post-Soviet life, though they see challenges, primarily in the influence of the West. Orthodox priests in the Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations view the exclusion of other religious groups from Russia as necessary for the reestablishment of the church. When he was the Department’s director of the secretariat for Inter-Christian Affairs, Hilaron Alfeev wrote articles actively supporting the use of Orthodoxy as a “unifying ideology” for Russia. Alfeev wants the church to be free from the control of the state, but still have its support. He resents the Western influence so pervasive in post-Soviet Russia in both the political and economic realm and believes Orthodoxy can guide Russia toward an identity mindful of its past. This national identity should emerge from the people, guided by faith. Alfeev does not believe the church is flawless. He advocates a revision of theological education to take into account the challenges of modernity, including such subjects as foreign languages and western

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theology. Fundamentally, however, Alfeev believes the church should reemphasize the church fathers and the liturgy in Church Slavonic.\textsuperscript{46}

Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, the head of Department of External Church Relations, views the church as the only force that can heal society from what he views as the evils of modernity. When the communist state fell, he writes, the world expected peace but instead war broke out within the Russian state. The gap between rich and poor continued to grow, and consumptive consumerism devastated the environment.\textsuperscript{47} Like Alfeev, Kirill blames many of society’s woes on the imposition of unfamiliar western culture on Russian society. “Russian culture,” says Kirill, “was shaped under the influence of Christianity.”\textsuperscript{48} He cites the examples of Prince Vladimir and Dostoevsky to indicate the importance of Orthodoxy in Russian identity. Kirill’s words for Protestant missionaries are vitriolic. For Kirill, Western proselytism in Russia is enough to destroy the ecumenical movement: “For many of Russia today, non-Orthodoxy means those who have come to destroy the spiritual unity of the people and the Orthodox faith.”\textsuperscript{49} Kirill sees Orthodoxy as a unifying force for Russian society.

While Patriarch Alexii has been more balanced in his assessment of Orthodoxy’s relationship with other religious groups, he views Russia as a particularly and uniquely Orthodox country. In his address on the 300\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg, Alexii spoke of the need for Russia to return to the faith of its fathers and for Orthodoxy to receive a place in Russian society held by churches in other European countries. Only after Orthodoxy has been reestablished in Russia can the Russian people work with other nations in promoting peace and tolerance.\textsuperscript{50}

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Historically, Russian Orthodoxy enjoyed an intimate relationship with the Russian state and its people. Though both church and state stretched the limits of the traditional

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 246.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{50} Alexii II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, “Poslanie sviateishego patriarkha Moskovskogo u vseia Rusi Aleksia II presidentu Rossiskoi Federatsii V.V. Putinu, glavam gosudarstv pribivishim na prazdnovanie 300-letiia Sankt-Peterburga,” Russian Orthodox Church News, 30 May, 2003 < http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/nr305272.htm>
Orthodox concept of symphony, their affiliation remained influenced by the idea that faith and politics could maintain a supportive, non-competitive alliance. Despite the secularization of the government and society, Orthodoxy remained a determining factor in assessing Russian-ness, and the observance of Orthodox rituals by those who were not particularly religious indicated the essential role Orthodoxy played in Russian cultural life and the way Russians viewed themselves. Contemporary scholars and churchmen, citing the moral vacuum in post-Soviet Russia, viewed the Russian Orthodox Church as the one institution capable of energizing and unifying the Russian people, demonstrated by the church’s position as the sole surviving Russian national institution throughout Russia’s thousand-year history, though they recognize that the association between the Russian Church and the Russian political establishment must change. Developments between 1991 and 2003 show how the relationship has adapted.
Throughout history, the Russian Orthodox Church relied on the state for political and financial support. After the fall of communism, it seemed only logical that the church would once again turn to the state for aid. Though unwilling to reinstate the Russian Orthodox Church as the official religion of Russia, the government found other ways to alleviate the church’s plight, indicating that even in a secular democratic system, the church had relevance for Russian life. In the post-Soviet era, the government protected the Russian Orthodox Church from its competitors with restrictive laws on religion as well as favorable import and export terms. The church has augmented this assistance by entering into relationships with Episcopal parishes in the United States, working with multinational Russian corporations and developing its own economic pursuits.

The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and its Predecessors

Mikhail Gorbachev began the post-Soviet process of church–state cooperation when he realized that by throwing government support behind the Orthodox millennium festivities, he would increase the legitimacy of his new political agenda, which promoted openness in the form of glasnost’ and perestroika. In 1987, as Orthodox officials were making plans for a celebration of the millennium of Christianity in Russia, Gorbachev called a meeting with church leaders at the Kremlin during which he effectively made a deal with the patriarch and other members of the hierarchy. If the Orthodox Church would support his reforms, Gorbachev would see to the passing of a new law on freedom of conscience that would “reflect the interest of religious organizations.” In March of 1990, three influential Orthodox churchmen along with other religious representatives and government bureaucrats began to write a new law to govern the practice of religion. When the law was passed in October of that year, it provided equal treatment and protection for both atheists and believers of all faiths.

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Though Patriarch Alexei II, who was elevated to the patriarchate in 1990, presided at Boris Yeltsin’s inauguration, Yeltsin in 1993 guaranteed that Russia would have no state religion and “no party or church may be under the . . . control of the state.”\textsuperscript{53} Later in 1993, in response to the influx of western missionaries, Patriarch Alexei began to seek legal restrictions on foreign groups as a recognition of the Orthodox Church’s long history as the church of the Russian people as well as the suffering it had undergone during the communist period. The Russian Orthodox Church collaborated with the government on the writing of a new policy, resulting in the 1997 law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations. Unlike the 1990 Law on Freedom of Worship, which guaranteed equality under the law for all religious bodies, the 1997 Freedom of Conscience Law severely restricted several forms of religious activity. While the 1997 law does not declare any specific religion above any other, it does give certain religious establishments legal privileges and openly states in the introduction that the law was passed to “recognize the special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia’s spirituality and culture.”\textsuperscript{54} According to the 1997 law, religious organizations – defined as those that have been active in Russia for at least fifteen years and during that time were known to government officials – are allowed to own property, conduct religious schools, and publish religious literature.\textsuperscript{55} Religious groups – those that entered Russia after the fall of communism – are allowed only to conduct worship services. Another important distinction is that only religious organizations are allowed to conduct charitable missions in hospitals, prisons, and orphanages.\textsuperscript{56} Only religious organizations can “establish international links including those for the goals of pilgrimages, participation in meetings . . . and they have the exclusive right to invite foreign citizens for professional

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 164.


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 60.
(religious) purposes.” In addition, only religious organizations have the right to use the words “Russia” or “Russian” in their names.

While the Russian Orthodox Church is not the only beneficiary of this law, it is the largest and most prominent. Consequently, its active support of the law resulted in criticism of the church from outside or disenfranchised groups. Those who sent official protestations to President Yeltsin regarding the Law on Freedom of Conscience before it was passed included the United States, Canada, the Vatican, the European Union, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-Day Adventists. During the many debates that followed the law, both supporters and detractors of it declared it an instrument of nationalism, linking Russian Orthodoxy to the Russian state and tying “religious faith to a person’s ethnic roots.”

Though Yeltsin’s successor, Vladimir Putin, openly admitted to being an Orthodox believer and recounted his conversion story to the public, his politics reflected his position as head of a multinational, secular state, rather than his personal opinions as an Orthodox believer. At a visit to the Solovetskii Monastery in 2001, Putin said “the idea of equality of all peoples before God should become the foundation of Russia's domestic and foreign policies.” He echoed those sentiments at the 2003 Asia-Pacific Summit, when he stated, “Russia is a multidenominational country…with traditions of interactions between nations and regions,” and emphasized that in order to become a power in the Pacific Rim, Russia must strengthen its ties with Muslim countries. Andrei Zolotov, who followed religious issues for The Moscow Times, has noted that Putin defied expectations by not openly supporting Orthodoxy. His policies on particularly Orthodox issues, such as the return of church property or restitution for it, were more restrictive than Yeltsin’s. Putin, however,

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57 Ibid., 62.
58 Russian Federation State Duma, On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations, 8.5.
continued to present himself as a believer and supported Orthodoxy’s place in Russian history, declaring on his visit to Solovetskii that “without Christianity, Russia would not have become an accomplished state” and that Russia must think about Orthodoxy as a source of strength “now, at a time when we are finding ourselves again and seeking foundations to life.” The majority of Duma deputies elected in 2003 reflected both Putin’s politics and religious belief. Although none of the major Russian political parties identified themselves as exclusively Orthodox, many of the deputies were open about their faith during the campaign and discussed the need for spirituality and morality in post-Soviet Russia. These examples demonstrated that Orthodoxy’s relationship with the state has changed during the postmodern era from one of direct influence, as in the pre-Revolutionary period, to one of moral guidance.

*Fundraising Opportunities at the National Level*

Democracy changed the character of church-state relations, and the arrival of free-market capitalism brought a new dimension to interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian government. While the post-Soviet government did not always help the church politically, it made provisions to help the faith economically by allowing the Orthodox Church certain fund-raising privileges. One of the most controversial benefits the government bestowed upon the church was the right to import cigarettes and alcohol for sale tax-free. The cigarettes were imported through a company called Nika, which was organized in 1992 by a group of Russian businessmen who met at a fundraiser for the Orthodox Church and developed the idea to work with the church in an import/export business. As part of a church enterprise, Nika could import goods duty-free. The businessmen collected 10 million rubles for the church at the fundraiser and used the money as Nika’s seed capital. In the beginning, Nika imported consumer goods such as soap, candy, clothes, and shoes. In 1993, Nika transferred $2,000-$3000 a month to the External Relations Department of the Russian Orthodox Church. Later Nika began to trade in olive oil sent to the Russian Church by Greek Orthodox communities. Finally, Nika received permission from the government to take humanitarian aid and sell it for profit, and

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64 Kathleen Knox, “Putin’s Religious Belief in Spotlight Following Monastery Visits.”
the deal was made to import cigarettes. The Dutch cigarette producer sold 50,000 tons of duty-free tobacco to the church in 1996 with the approval of the Russian Commission on International Humanitarian and Technological Aid. From 1996-1998, the Russian Orthodox Church was Russia’s largest tobacco importer, bringing into the country one out of every 10 imported cigarettes. Though the profits are unknown, they are estimated between $15-24 million with a tax benefit equal to $40 million. The Russian Orthodox Committee for External Church Relations used some of the profits to construct a hotel for pilgrims in the Holy Land at Nazareth.

Cigarettes provided only a fraction of the funds the Orthodox Church received from importing and exporting oil. The church was a partner in International Economic Partnership, a major oil import/export firm established to earn money for renovation of the Kremlin churches. Restoring these properties allowed the church to become more visible to the many visitors, both Russian and foreign, who tour the Kremlin each year. International Economic Partnership had a deal with the government that allowed the Partnership to buy Russian oil wholesale and sell it on the international market with tax breaks. In 1994, International Economic Partnership exported 7.7 million tons of oil – 8.5% of total Russian oil exports. Two years later, the partnership exported 4.5 million tons of oil and did $2 billion worth of business. In 1997, the Partnership claimed almost $2.7 million in profit. Also in 1996, the church was able to export 650 tons of oil to Germany tax-free in order to purchase a collection of Orthodox art for the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. In 1997, International Economic Partnership engaged in a barter deal with Cuba to trade oil for

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71 Feller, “Unorthodox.”
sugar. Oil was also traded with India, China, and Turkey for manufactured goods. By 1999, the International Economic Partnership maintained an average account balance of $30 million at Vneshtorgbank, the Russian bank for international trade. The Partnership used its profit to fund construction of apartment buildings around Moscow. It also worked with Arthur Andersen to engage in stock transactions on both Russian and European exchanges.

Though the International Economic Partnership was the only oil firm in which the Russian Orthodox Church owned a stake, the church worked with other Russian oil companies. Lukoil, Russia’s giant oil producing firm, made a deal with the church in 2001 that allowed Patriarch Alexei II to appear in Lukoil commercials, providing the church with a post-modern way to visibly associate itself with Russia. Lukoil, which produces two-thirds of Russia’s oil, also donated money for church building restoration. The commercials featured the patriarch thanking Lukoil officials for their donations to the restoration of the church. The Russian Orthodox Church and Lukoil also signed a deal to create joint ventures in craft shops and gas stations. In the Siberian diocese of Sytyvka and Vorkutinsk, Noble Oil gave the local bishop, Pitirim, a new 1998 Lincoln Towncar. The Lincoln was not the first vehicle Noble contributed to the church in this oil-rich region. Previously, the company had bestowed a Toyota Land Cruiser on the diocesan hierarchy. Though the church was not known to have a business relationship with Gazprom, Russia’s state gas company, the chairman of Gazprom’s board openly announced support for the Russian Orthodox Church and Gazprom funded the construction of a church building in Nedelnoye in the Kaluga oblast’.

Perhaps the most visible of the Church’s business endeavors was the Saint Springs bottled water company. In 1992, the Kostroma diocese, located northeast of Moscow on the Volga River, entered into a deal with international partners to establish a bottled water plant, pumping mineral water from an aquifer in the diocese. The diocese itself became

72 Mitrokhin, “A.O ‘MES,’” 156.
73 Ibid., 156.
75 Mitrokhin, “Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov’ kak sub “ ekt Ekonomicheskoi Deiatel’nosti,” 94.
one of the partners in the venture along with the Epiphany Women’s Monastery, and California businessman John King. The partners incorporated the venture as Saint Springs, Ltd. and formed a privately held joint-stock company called Rodnikii. The new corporation quickly became Russia’s largest producer of bottled drinking water, again modernizing the church’s interaction with post-modern society. Saint Springs water profited from its name and its open affiliation with the Church. In addition, the Archbishop of Kostroma blessed the spring, and his signature and seal appeared on every bottle of Saint Springs water. In 1995, Saint Springs produced 7 million liters of water, did $2.9 million in business, and made a $140,000 profit; by 1997, those numbers rose to 48 million liters for production, $6.5 million in business, and $515,000 of profit.

Saint Springs proved extremely successful, even weathering the 1998 financial crisis with a profit. Because of its connection to the church, the venture received tax breaks from the government and Saint Springs funded church construction and charity projects. The company donated $1.5 million over six years to the Kostroma diocese for the restoration of churches and monasteries as well as the funding of a seminary. In 1996, Saint Springs gave the diocese $300,000, but in that same year, the company’s profit was $515,000. The $215,000 not given to the diocese is unaccounted for. Similar comparisons can be made for 1997-1999. In 1998, the Russian government liquidated the joint-stock company Rodnikii due to tax fraud. A new limited liability partnership was created to bottle and sell the water, still working with the Kostroma diocese and in 2002, Saint Springs was sold to Nestle Foods for a reported $50 million.

The church does not concern itself only with secular fundraising. While oil and gas deals may be far more lucrative, the Russian Orthodox Church still carried on traditional commercial activities, particularly the manufacture and sell of candles, icons and vestments.

78 Ibid., 163.
79 Ibid., 166.
80 Ibid., 168.
81 Ibid., 170.
82 Ibid., 165.
for use in church services. The Russian Orthodox Church manufactured its own icons, candles, and other religious supplies at a factory in the tiny village of Sofrino located between Moscow and the St. Sergius-Holy Trinity Monastery at Sergiev Posad. Sofrino, established in 1980, was an expansion of the church supply business from a workshop in Moscow that had been established by the Soviet government in 1949. Sofrino employed 2700 people in seven different manufacturing sections: icons, church supplies (candle stands, icon holders, censors), candles, printing, smelting, jewelry, and sewing (vestments). In 1997, Sofrino averaged $2 million a month in sales and made a 15% profit, bringing in $3.5 million a year. The income breakdown for Sofrino that year was $700,000 in church supplies, $640,000 a month in icons, $240,000 a month in candles, and $140,000 a month for sewing. In 1999, the government gave Sofrino permission to import $30 million of wine tax-free. While some was used for religious services, much of the wine was sold and the profit used to expand Sofrino’s business. For many years Sofrino had operated shops to sell its goods in several major cities and in 1997, branched out to kiosks in the Moscow rail stations. 1999 did not prove to be a good year for Sofrino, however, despite the profitable wine deal. The government raided the factory that year because Sofrino had not paid the appropriate taxes. The kiosks were closed down and the entire enterprise was slammed with a higher tax rate.

There are smaller, varied sources of income within the Russian Orthodox Church at the national level. Personal donations from influential ‘new Russians’ and politicians sponsored many large building projects. The Russian Church also received grants and donations from Western churches, particularly the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches, as well as the World Council of Churches. Western churches contributed $1 million to the establishment of a publishing facility at the St. Sergius-Holy Trinity

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87 Ibid., 154.

Monastery.⁸⁹ The church operated about 50 publishing enterprises,⁹⁰ the largest of which is the Srentensky Monastery.⁹¹ These publishing houses printed religious material, but also reproduced pre-Revolutionary and samizdat materials that require no payment of royalties.⁹² Book sales brought the Russian Church $9 million a year.⁹³ Another source of funding for the church was traveling exhibits of famous icons and relics. The Orthodox traditionally revere icons and saintly relics and pay to see important ones. In 1998, the miracle-working Chimeev Icon of the Mother of God was brought to Ekaterinburg. Over a month, the diocese there raised $100,000 from viewing of the icon.

*Fundraising at the Parish Level*

Most of the proceeds from the Russian Orthodox Church’s international business activities went into national funds for humanitarian aid or the renovation of major national cathedrals. Individual parishes had to find their own sources of funding. There were four main funding sources at the parish level. Parishes sold icons, books, crosses, and other personal religious items. These sales provided about 20% of parish income. The performance of rites such as baptisms, funerals, and weddings, brought in another 10-15%. 60-70% of parish income came from the sale of candles and prayers. The candles were bought mostly from Sofrino and resold at a 50% profit margin.⁹⁴ Believers also donated money in return for prayers to be read during services or silently over the altar.⁹⁵ While these funds allowed churches to pay salaries and bills, they did not allow for the renovation, expansion, and construction of buildings or the development of social work. For some parishes, funding for these items came in the form of alliances with American churches. Others sought funding from ‘new Russian’ capitalists. Local businessmen founded a soup kitchen at the Church of the Holy Unmercenaries Kosma and Damian

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⁸⁹ Ibid.
⁹⁰ Nikolai Mitrokhin, “Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov’ kak sub ‘ekt Ekonomicheskoi Deiatel’nosti,” 111.
⁹¹ Sergei Chapnin, “The Money of the Church.”
⁹³ Ibid., 114.
⁹⁴ Ibid., 82.
⁹⁵ Chapnin, “The Money of the Church.”
Four churches in the St. Petersburg area developed partnerships with American Episcopal churches. The American partners funded most of the parish’s social ministry and some construction. In Sablino outside St. Petersburg, St. Nicholas parish constructed a prison chapel and a storefront church and planned to build a preschool with the aid of 12 Episcopal churches in Dayton, Ohio. A new church near St. Nicholas parish was built with financing from a local capitalist. In Pushkin, the flag of a local construction company that funded church construction and renovation flew outside St. Sophia’s Church. Orthodox parishes often relied on contributions from New Russians to fund their construction projects because Russian churches known to have access to American money often were charged inflated prices for construction work. Projects developed from this and other forms of funding allow both parish priests and national church leaders to build a new Russian consciousness on the ground. From large building projects to small icon kiosks, the Russian church worked within the new economic system to reestablish the link between Orthodoxy and Russian-ness.

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The post-communist transition changed Russian church-state relations. Rather than relying on each other as institutions working to uphold a Christian nation, both the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church developed new ways to interact in a democratic, capitalist system. Orthodox hierarchs learned to work within the political process to encourage positive legal developments and garner economic benefits. National politicians demonstrated that their position required some expression of religious freedom, though they reconciled this expectation with the historical relevance of Orthodoxy for the Russian state. While some of the programs developed by the church with the aid of the state seemed questionable, they were grounded in Russian history, necessitated by post-Soviet realities, and helped to reinvolve the church in Russian life and culture.

CHAPTER 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOX SOCIAL MINISTRY

The changes in church-state relations indicated the willingness of the Russian Orthodox Church to adapt in its interaction with society. Troubled by the inability of the state to care for the needs of the people and the willingness of foreign missionaries to fill that void, the Orthodox Church reconsidered its role in the world. Traditionally Russian Orthodox priests interacted with the faithful through corporate prayer in the form of the liturgy, widely celebrated holidays and the performance of individual rites, but the fall of communism forced Orthodox clergy to reexamine their duties. Because the Russian Orthodox Church held a unique position in Russian culture and the church viewed being Orthodox as an essential part of being Russian, parish priests could not let these issues go unresolved, despite Orthodoxy’s inclination to avoid earthly things. In deciding to begin social ministry, priests in St. Petersburg gained insight from a short-lived movement of Orthodox charitable works begun there in the late nineteenth century. In Moscow, the legacy of Fr. Alexander Men’ influenced social work among his followers while other priests increased the church’s presence in society through legislation aimed at the return of church property and the teaching of Orthodoxy in state schools. The actions of Russian Orthodox priests, encouraged by economic deprivation, successful missionary work, and a need to reclaim Russia for Orthodoxy, resulted in an increase in the church’s involvement in everyday life, expanded the church beyond its traditional practice and gave it new meaning for nation-building.

The Protestant Challenge and the Beginning of Orthodox Social Ministry

The realities of life in post-Soviet society brought both challenges and possibilities to the Russian Orthodox Church. Difficulties between the Russian Orthodox Church and their Protestant counterparts raised questions of nationalism in post-Soviet Russia because Orthodox priests felt that growth within the Orthodox Church would mirror the revitalization of the Russian nation. Church, government, past, and future were all intertwined for the Orthodox; in contrast, evangelicals saw their mission as concerned more
with souls of individuals than the soul of a nation. Although Western evangelicals smuggled religious literature into the Soviet Union during the communist period, large numbers of missionaries did not begin arriving in Russia until the 1980s. The Institute for East-West Christian Studies notes that in 1979, 80 groups operated in the Russian Federation of Soviet Republics; in 1997, the *East-West Christian Organizations Directory* catalogued 561 missionary associations. The Institute also placed a figure of 4,390 nonindigenous missionaries working in Russia by 1995.\(^7\) The ways western Protestants reached out to the Russian people were vast and varied, encompassing such well-known organizations as Campus Crusade for Christ in addition to individual efforts. Protestants gave Christian libraries to orphanages, developed summer camps for children, and built medical clinics in addition to the mass media they projected into Russia. At least ten different evangelical Christian organizations ran television or radio stations in the former Soviet Union.\(^8\) These efforts cannot be criticized so much for what they do, but the lack of cultural understanding inherent in how they try to accomplish their mission.

Evangelicals and Orthodox have fundamentally different ways of interpreting Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples of all the nations.” The Orthodox faith is one based in Christian nurture. Orthodox theology teaches that when one is baptized Orthodox as a child, one will learn about God and grow in the faith through regular attendance at the liturgy and interaction with other believers. Orthodoxy does not require any sort of conversion experience or adult proclamation of belief after baptism in order to consider someone “saved.” In contrast, evangelical traditions center their faith on a personal commitment to Christ, made and attested to after infancy. This emotional experience determines the condition of one’s soul. Because the Russian Orthodox Church considers Orthodoxy a distinct part of Russian culture, the church assumes that most if not all Russians are truly Orthodox, whether or not they actively participate in religious life; therefore, Orthodox priests and officials consider any sort of evangelical outreach in Russia that intends conversion to be proselytism. Evangelicals attempting to work around Orthodox criticisms have said, “we avoid proselytizing Russian Orthodox Christians,


\(^8\) Ibid., 372.
directing our ministries instead toward the vast majority of practical atheists.” These Evangelicals do not understand the Orthodox Church’s perception of its role in Russian culture, which is that those who do not actively practice religion but are Russian are still inherently Orthodox.

Partially to engage these non-practicing Orthodox, individual priests with little encouragement from the hierarchy and no structured plans began prison ministries, soup kitchens, Sunday schools, and other projects in response to these challenges. While these ministries were often modeled on programs set up by western missionaries, they embodied a particularly Orthodox mindset, drew from a uniquely Orthodox heritage, and, as a result, gave the Orthodox Church a more visible role in Russian society, reconnecting the Russian people with their traditional faith.

Social Ministry in St. Petersburg Past and Present

Though the kind of social ministry practiced by Protestant missionaries is not emphasized in Orthodox theology, it was not unknown in St. Petersburg before 1917. As the most westernized of Russia’s cities and Peter the Great’s window on Europe, St. Petersburg experienced more western styles of ministry throughout its history. In the early years of Alexander II’s rule, Lutherans in the Baltic republics and Finland as well as Polish Catholics were allowed to practice their faiths freely. Alexander’s government decided, “repression of the non-Orthodox [in these regions] stirred discontentment and was counterproductive.”99 Lutherans had long been established in Latvia and Estonia as a result of historic German and Scandinavian influences. Estonians who emigrated to St. Petersburg in the late nineteenth century used the Lutheran church as a way to retain their identity and sense of community.100 In St. Petersburg, which was geographically close to non-Orthodox lands, Orthodox clergy were both inspired and intimidated by the work of their Christian brothers.101 As a result of these influences as well as a boom in secular

charity groups in the mid to late nineteenth century, the parish clergy of the Petersburg region began a new program of social ministry.\textsuperscript{102}

After realizing that individual almsgiving – a traditional form of social ministry for the Orthodox – was not profitable, the parish priests in St. Petersburg began an organized social effort, focusing their work on charitable organizations and temperance societies. Mainstream Orthodoxy saw the effectiveness of the Old Believers, who supported hospitals and nursing homes, as well as the vibrancy of the Protestants, who conducted Sunday schools and Bible studies. Orthodox priests wanted to explore these options, but in a uniquely Orthodox way. Protestants used charity as a means of reaching out to non-churchgoers and bringing them into the fold. The Orthodox felt that “charity begins at home.” The Russian priests would not accept charity from, or give charity to, those who were not already believers. They cared about the material and spiritual well-being of both the recipient and donor of charity, so often the wealthy members of a parish would give money to aid the poor within the same parish.\textsuperscript{103}

Orthodoxy had traditionally focused on the liturgy as a means of demonstrating God’s love, but the nineteenth century priests seemed to take advice from Martensen, a Danish bishop, who sought to “construct a framework of charitable activity in the spirit of God’s love, in which both donor and recipient took part in a moral act.”\textsuperscript{104} A St. Petersburg priest, Fr. Alexander Gumilevsky formed the first citywide charity in the mid-1860s. Though charitable works were sometimes thought of as the responsibility of monastic groups, by 1900, almost every parish in St. Petersburg was engaged in some sort of charity, including soup kitchens, tea rooms, and Sunday schools. Most of these charities focused on the homeless or poor women with children. Churches tried to individualize recipients of charity and to know them personally, hopefully by making the recipients active members of their parish. It was very important for those who received charity to be

\begin{footnotes}
\item[102] see Adele Lindenmeyer, \textit{Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Late Imperial Russia}, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996.
\item[104] Ibid., 177.
\end{footnotes}
actively involved in trying to help themselves – often demonstrated by a willingness to attend church.¹⁰⁵

Creating a sense of morality in an increasingly secular state was important to Orthodox charity, and the development of temperance societies was an expression of this focus. Abuse of alcohol, always a problem in Russia, increased in prominence during the nineteenth century. While the Orthodox Church never actively supported drunkenness, it never encouraged temperance either. To abstain from drink was sometimes considered un-Russian. The government first began addressing the issue of alcoholism in 1888-9 due to a report presented to the tsar by K.P. Pobodontsev, the Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod, in which he called drunkenness a “vice with a pernicious influence on the religiosity and morality of the population.”¹⁰⁶ Because temperance groups were unknown in Russia, they were based on Western models, primarily from the example of German Lutherans who were active in St. Petersburg. Russians, however, never completely accepted the idea that alcohol itself was inherently evil; therefore organizations that promoted complete abstinence were difficult to maintain.

The Orthodox Church’s involvement in the fight against alcohol was somewhat self-serving. “From the start, the church saw in the temperance movement a means of drawing men back into its own fold.”¹⁰⁷ Temperance organizations were, therefore, structured to give men a support group – based in Orthodoxy – that would involve them in activities not related to alcohol. Like charitable groups, temperance movements were begun by individual priests and then grew into citywide organizations. Parishes developed individual anti-alcohol groups, and the first public temperance group was organized by Ioann, bishop of Narva, with the aid of students from the theological school.¹⁰⁸ The many temperance groups based in St. Petersburg took trips to famous religious sites, sponsored religious talks, and held icon processions in order to increase the involvement of their members. While Orthodox efforts at both charity and temperance in St. Petersburg proved

¹⁰⁵ Lindenmeyer, Poverty is Not a Vice
¹⁰⁶ Dixon, “The Church’s Social Role in St. Petersburg,” 181.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 182.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 181.
temporarily successful, any potential for large-scale reform was stunted first by the 1905 revolution and the troubled times that followed.

For seven St. Petersburg area Orthodox priests who began social ministry in their parishes after 1991, the creation of social programs was not a conscious return to their historical roots, but simply a response to need. In the St. Petersburg suburb of Pushkin, the cathedral of St. Sophia provided meals for 260 people a day through its soup kitchen. Fr. Gennady Zverev described these people as “homeless, vagrant…they have no residence, no food, no work.” Some of the homeless vagrants were beneficiaries of post-Soviet prison amnesties. The release of thousands of prisoners put a strain on society that Fr. Gennady tried to alleviate. St. Sophia’s opened a rehabilitation center and halfway house near two correctional facilities, one a prison in St. Petersburg and the other a camp near Pushkin. “We have no idea what conditions [prisoners] will be in when they are released,” said Fr. Gennady, “It is absolutely clear that society will not be able to reabsorb them easily.”

Fr. Nikolai Aksyanov, rector of St. Nicholas’s Church, Sablino, hoped to reach prisoners before they arrived at the halfway house. He assumed the chaplaincy of one of the largest women’s prisons in Europe. Fr. Nikolai said he did not decide to begin a prison ministry,

It just happened so. Our parish in Sablino is geographically located next to this prison. The believers in the prison, they were abandoned. They felt they had no guidance, so they turned to me and they asked the bishop to bless me so that I could do that ministry in the prison. It was about seven years ago and I went there once, then I just had to keep coming back because they were waiting for me and I saw that they were in need.

With the help of his parish Fr. Nikolai built a chapel inside the prison. He also helped prisoners find work when they are released. Many of the women became Orthodox believers and one established a flourishing trade as an icon painter. Fr. Nikolai’s prison ministry exposed ideas of Orthodoxy and Orthodox culture to members of the most downtrodden level of society.

109 Gennady Zverev, interview with the author, translated by Igor Tolochin, Pushkin, Russia, June 11, 1999.
110 Ibid.
111 Nikolai Aksyanov, interview with the author, translated by Igor Tolochin, St. Petersburg, Russia, 11 June, 1999.
One of the many concerns of women in prison was the fate of their children and Fr. Nikolai also worked with social orphans who have incarcerated parents. Many priests believed that children should be the focus of social ministry. Soviet laws forbade children from participating in church services, so after the fall of communism, the first act of many revitalized parishes was to open Sunday schools. Orthodox Sunday Schools often were much more involved than the Protestant version, teaching children about culture and the structures of the faith rather than simply teaching children stories about God and familiarizing them with the Bible. Every year children miss out on religious classes is a year they are “denied oxygen,” commented Fr. Boris Mikhailov, a Moscow priest involved in developing programs for Orthodox education. “We have to get children acquainted with the fact that the Orthodox Church exists. Not to teach them religion, but to get them acquainted with it, as with some alternative to the secular stream which is present…. we want children to know the history, to know about the faith of their fathers.”

Fr. Boris has also been involved in developing a curriculum for Orthodox culture classes in the public schools. Though such an initiative raised questions about the separation of church and state, at the beginning of the 2003 school year Deputy Prime Minister Galina Karelova presented an Orthodox culture textbook to students at a Moscow school declaring that its purpose was to teach children about their family. “If you know the history of your family, you will know the history of your country, the history of Russia.”

Both Fr. Nikolai and Fr. Gennady expanded their Sunday School programs into larger education projects. Fr. Gennady’s community built a private school that teaches children Orthodox faith and culture in addition to state-required subjects. Fr. Nikolai’s parish used the Sunday school building during the week to teach after school classes in traditional Russian arts and crafts for all children, not just members of the parish. “We accept everyone who comes,” said Fr. Nikolai, “but we hope that these people will become members of our congregation.” The handiwork taught in the afterschool program helped connect children to the Russian past, a role Fr. Nikolai believed the Orthodox Church

112 Boris Mikhailov, interview with the author, translated by Ekaterina Lukyanova, Moscow, Russia, 8 September, 2003.

113 “Galina Karelova zaiavila, chto prepodavanie osnov pravoslavnoi kulturi v rossiskikh shkolakh dolzhno provodit’cia fakul’tativno,” Sedmitsa, 1 September, 2003.
should embrace.\textsuperscript{114} “The Orthodox church promotes love for country and love between people in the Orthodox culture. Where else can it be found?”

Orthodox programs for children in parishes were not limited to formal education. Fr. Alexei Shchulkin in Pushkin and Fr. Konstantin Gupoteev in St. Petersburg both established support groups for disabled children and teenagers. A former emergency physician, Fr. Konstantin worked with the disabled society of the Leningrad Oblast providing spiritual counseling and performing services for believers as well as organizing special pilgrimages for group members. Fr. Konstantin noted that church aid to the disabled became particularly important after the collapse of communism.

Originally the state put forward a very good program. They were trying to make those owners of the factories employ these people. They gave subsidies to these manufacturers and so it was actually profitable for them to hire the disabled. But now it is all being abolished and the disabled are in a very sad state. Some of them are really very needy, on the brink of disaster…the church is trying to help them, but we have very limited resources. The main way to approve the situation for us is to help those who have become our parishioners, to attract their attention\textsuperscript{115}

One of the ways Fr. Konstantin dealt with the problems of disabled and abandoned children was to connect them with elderly members of his parish. This program provided both groups with at least a form of emotional support, even if it brought no financial benefit.

Fr. Alexei’s work with disabled young people represented only part of his ambitious program to help the sick in his parish, St. Panteleimon, located within the grounds of a large hospital. Although the church was reopened only in 2001 and Fr. Alexei became the priest in the fall of 2003, he believed that “the church must become the main spiritual center for the hospital…There must be permanent prayer for the patients of the hospital, the church must be provided with information about the patients who need urgent surgical help, and God should hear our prayers so that the hand of the surgeon is firm and correct and so necessary help is provided to patients who need it urgently.” While Fr. Alexei’s first concern was that patients are prayed for, he also worked on “more practical means of help.” He tried to establish a community of Orthodox nurses to act as a liaison

\textsuperscript{114} Nikolai Askyanov, interview with the author, translated by Ekaterina Lukyanova, Sablino, Russia, 12 October, 2003.

\textsuperscript{115} Konstantin Gupoteev, interview with the author, translated by Ekaterina Lukyanova, St. Petersburg, Russia, 10 October, 2003.

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between the church and the hospital. By Fall 2003, connections had been established with hospital administrators so the church was informed if a patient needed a particular type of liturgical service performed.\textsuperscript{116}

Fr. Mikhail Mokropolov, Fr. Konstantin’s colleague at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in St. Petersburg, encouraged social ministry among his parishioners, many of whom are medical professionals, but he resisted organized ministry of this kind through the church. “I think that a lot of our parishioners can do social ministry where they work, at their working place, not necessarily here at the church. We have a parishioner who works on an ambulance and he can do his ministry there. We have a psychiatrist and a neuropathologist and we think that they can minister at their working place.”\textsuperscript{117} Fr. Mikhail believed that “the most important thing for an Orthodox priest is to provide spiritual guidance for his flock” and this opinion reflected the reluctance of priests to commit totally to social ministry.

For Fr. Mikhail, there are two national organizations in Russia, the state and the Orthodox Church. If the state couldn’t take care of the people, the church had to step forward. After 1991, the church played a role that belonged to the state, but one that was so crucial that the church felt obligated to venture outside of its traditions in order to accomplish it. In 1996, the church signed an agreement with the Ministry of Social Defense of the Population of the Russian Federation that would “[merge] the efforts of the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox church for restoring moral norms of social life and establishing social protection for the population in keeping with the high historical mission which the Russian Orthodox church has fulfilled in the course of centuries.” The agreement constructed a legal framework for the church and state to work together to provide charitable aid. Though no programs have been established using this agreement as a guide, its existence validates Fr. Mikhail’s feeling that if the church is to do the work of the state, it requires aid from the state.\textsuperscript{118}

Although he was one of the priests most active in social work, Fr. Nikolai also felt ambivalence in his ministry between helping people and spreading the gospel. The mission

\textsuperscript{116} Alexei Shchulkin, interview with the author, translated by Ekaterina Lukyanova, Pushkin, Russia, 11 October, 2003.
\textsuperscript{117} Mikhail Mokropolov, interview with the author, translated by Igor Tolochin, St. Petersburg, Russia, 10 June, 1999.
of the church, said Fr. Nikolai, “is to preach the word of God and teach all the nations the word of God and bring all the people to Christ and to the church so that people can be saved.” Yet his work in the prison, like his after school classes, was not restricted to Orthodox believers and he did not cut himself off from those who reject the faith.

Many women start coming to church in the prison and they hear good things and the word of God touches upon their hearts and they receive a blessing. I can’t say that all of them become true believers and they stay in the church…Of course I would like to have more of them come to the church, but the world is such that on the one hand, we have the blessing of our Lord and on the other hand, there is a lot of dirt in the world and you can’t just ignore it and hide from it.

Likewise, for Fr. Gennady, “the task of the church is first of all to save the souls.” Nevertheless, “The church is a community…we do not consider the church an institution that should be remote from all the social problems which our society has.”

While tension between outreach and making disciples is unfamiliar to Western traditions that see social ministry as part of the church’s mission, the distinction is crucial for the liturgically focused Orthodox. “In the Orthodox Church, the most important element is praying to God,” commented Fr. Mikhail. Fr. Alexei’s focus on praying for the patients as well as helping them physically reflected this sentiment. All the priests subordinated social ministry to conducting services when asked how the church should fulfill its mission. Some priests even implied that social work was a distraction from their real tasks of performing the liturgy and writing sermons. “Now in Russia, the priest has to be a contractor and an administrator…everything. It is too much,” said Fr. Nikolai, “I’m out to buy building materials and I have negotiated with construction workers and spend my time on things that I shouldn’t really be thinking about. So instead of being Mary, sometimes I function like Martha.” In the gospel story of the sisters Mary and Martha, Martha prepared materially for Jesus’ visit to their home, while Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to him teach. “Today in Russia,” Fr. Gennady sighed, “our priests can’t be just

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119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Zverev, interview.
122 Mokropolov, interview, 1999.
123 Askyanov, interview, 1999.
Social Ministry in Moscow and the Legacy of Alexander Men’

The experiences of priests in Moscow echoed Fr. Gennady’s sentiments, but their involvement in society tended to be political rather than cultural. As in so many aspects of Russian life, clergy in Moscow and St. Petersburg responded differently to the demands placed on the church. Unlike the northern capital, nineteenth century Muscovite clergy did not benefit from the western-modeled charitable work popularized by Petersburg priests. Instead, being in the seat of power for both the church and state caused some Muscovite priests to work for change through political channels, often encouraging pertinent legislation through Orthodox Duma deputies or working with the ministry of education to develop a course on Orthodox culture for schoolchildren. Although parishes sponsored Sunday schools and many had smaller ministries in hospitals, the organization of major social projects seemed to fall to a few parishes that have a connection to Fr. Alexander Men’. Fr. Men’, an activist Orthodox priest murdered by unknown assailants in 1990, was an extremely influential figure whose commitment to charity and Orthodox education survived his death. Alexander Men’s teachings influenced three priests in Moscow who actively pursued social ministry as a way to reform the church and bring it into society.

Many of Alexander Men’s parishioners divided themselves between the Church of the Holy Unmercenaries Kosma and Damian and the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin – two churches well known for their activism and located less than two blocks apart in central Moscow. Kosma and Damian sponsored several active ministries including a soup kitchen for the homeless, a secondhand clothing collection for refugees, and an art school for terminally ill children. “Twice a week we feed the homeless. We have about 300-400 people who come for free lunches and sometimes we give them food to take away. They come in all shapes and sizes, poorly dressed, sometimes they are drunk and they smell. We don’t ask them why they are where they are, we just try to help them,”

124 Zverev, interview.
described Fr. Alexander Borisov.¹²⁵ Kosma and Damian also provided space for what Fr. Alexander called “passive ministries,” such as meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous.

It is not important to Fr. Alexander if those who received help at the church are believers. Although those who came to the soup kitchen lived in the area and occasionally attended church services, being Orthodox is not a requirement for aid. Likewise, Fr. Alexander allowed the alcoholic groups their space.

They have their own topics to discuss...we don’t charge them anything for that, nor do we try to involve them in the life of the church very much. We don’t insist on that. I was pleased a couple of years ago when their leader came up to me with words of thanks, not just for providing the space, but also for not imposing such church life on them. They are free to, some of them do come to the church, but providing the space is important. Normally these are people who are not in a very socially advantageous position and I believe this is one of the more effective ways of helping people like that.¹²⁶

Providing space and services without proselytism was one of the aspects of social ministry these Orthodox priests universally upheld and part of what distinguishes them from Protestants. In Fr. Alexander’s view, this characteristic of Orthodox social ministry derived from Alexander Men’. “His influence was all-pervasive,” said Fr. Alexander, “he shaped the way the church is today.”¹²⁷ Fr. Men taught his followers to be community-oriented, both within their parishes and towards their non-Orthodox neighbors. It was a lesson Fr. Alexander Borisov took to heart.

On the days that lunch is not served at Kosma and Damian, the poor and homeless could find a warm meal at the Dormition of the Virgin. Fr. Vladimir Lapshin, the head priest there, learned about the importance of social ministry not only from Alexander Men’, but also from the priests at Kosma and Damian where he previously served. “When we were just starting to have services and ministry here, we actually had no beggars. This place was a shambles. There was no ceiling, no nothing. It was just a pigeon hole really, and the beggars saw it and they realized there was nothing to be had here.”¹²⁸ Later, when the church was renovated and the homeless did start coming around the building, Fr.

¹²⁵ Alexander Borisov, interview with the author, translated by Nataliya Koltsova, Moscow, Russia, 31 October, 2003.
¹²⁶ Ibid.
¹²⁷ Ibid.
Vladimir initiated the soup kitchen using the church’s kitchen facilities. In 2003, it served 200-300 people twice a week.

The parishioners at the Dormition of the Virgin were also active in two other important ministries – caring for invalid orphans and sending packages to prisoners. The ministry in the orphanage began when Fr. Vladimir served as an assistant priest at Kosma and Damian and it transferred with him when he received his own parish. In this project, the church worked with the state to provide for the children’s needs. The government covered the children’s basic necessities, and Fr. Vladimir’s parishioners provided “human warmth. What you would get in a family.” Fr. Vladimir received a series of letters from prisoners at a camp in Kirovskaia Oblast, in the Russian north. These prisoners had heard of the activism in his church and requested that the parish send clothes or medicine. Fr. Vladimir began reading the letters in church and groups of parishioners took the letters and fulfilled the prisoners’ requests. Although Fr. Vladimir always supported this ministry, it is an indication that social ministry needs to be more widespread in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Of course the country is in a difficult position economically and there is great need. But even the fact that we here in Moscow send parcels to Kirovskaia Oblast, way up in the north…They have dozens of churches there, they have a whole diocese there, but they write here. Why? Because there is no one doing this work there. So you need to develop this ministry, but how? It’s not as if we sat down here in our community and said, well, we’re going to develop this ministry. We didn’t have a meeting and say, how can we please God. It just happened the way it did.

After establishing the relationship with the prison camp in Kirovskaia, Fr. Vladimir received letters from prisoners in other regions. To each letter, Fr. Vladimir sent a reply

128 Vladimir Lapshin, interview with the author, translated by Nataliya Koltsova, Moscow, Russia, 5 November, 2003.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
informing the prisoners of the address of the nearest diocese and advising them to write there.

Fr. Vladimir was open to developing social ministry in his parish because of what he had seen when he attended Alexander Men’s church at Novoderevia.

Fr. Alexander always called people to be open to the world and to the needs of the world. That kind of openness was something that he preached. I heard him say many times that the nature of Christianity is not believing in God but it is demonstrated, it is revealed God. This actually is sort of what’s happening here. At the time when Fr. Alexander was alive, social ministry wasn’t an option. It was so difficult to do anything, but when we got this option we started doing it. There is a saying in Russia that what the priest is, the church is.\textsuperscript{131}

Fr. Vladimir tried to be the kind of priest that Alexander Men’ was, the kind of person open to bringing the church beyond the traditional limits of liturgy and prayer.

Fr. Georgii Kochetkov, another of Alexander Men’s followers, took an extremely broad view of social work and Fr. Alexander’s legacy. Although after 1997 Fr. Georgii served at Novodevichy convent and did not have a parish in which to encourage social work, he taught his principles to the students at the Orthodox higher-education program he directed, involving his students in prison ministry, orphanages and soup kitchens. Fr. Georgii believed that there is a lot of potential for increased social activity in the Russian Orthodox Church, and that its importance is often overlooked. “A lot of Orthodox Christians at this stage don’t even have that [the idea of helping others] inherited in their Christian life. The paradigm of their life just doesn’t have that component to it and a lot of people are busy with themselves and they keep thinking that Christianity is only for saving their own souls.”\textsuperscript{132} In Fr. Georgii’s conception, Christianity has to expand beyond a limited conception of personal salvation.

The church has experience working with children and young people, working with the sick, with the socially deprived, people in prison, rehabilitation centers, including drug addicts and alcoholics. I personally think the church should offer help to women who have been raped. We realize that the church cannot cover all the needy people in Russia…but

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{132} Georgii Kochetkov, interview with the author, translated by Nataliya Koltsova, Moscow, Russia, 12 September, 2003
there has always been that principle in the church, from the very first
centuries. You have to help your own brothers and sisters.133

The Church Leadership on Social Ministry

In 2000, the Jubilee Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a
statement declaring the church’s position on many issues facing the faith in the secular
world, including church-state relations and social ministry. The official position of the
bishops was that the church, while being universal, could not deny Christians the right to a
national identity. “The church unites in herself the universal and the national…the cultural
distinctions of particular nations are expressed in the liturgical and other church art…all
this creates national Christian cultures.”134 In addition, the bishops called upon the church
to reinforce its role in national identity by supporting patriotism.135 This patriotism
included caring for fellow citizens, as well as “participation in the affairs of
government.”136 More indicative of the Russian Church’s relationship with the government
at that time was the statement that the church “has the right to expect that the state, in
building its relations with religious bodies, will take into account the number of their
followers and the place they occupy in forming the historical, cultural, and spiritual image
of the people.”137 With this declaration, the bishops justified their advocacy of the 1997
law.

The bishops encouraged all believers to demonstrate their Christian values to
society by using their individual gifts. Far from giving a true mandate for social ministry,
the bishops make the nebulous statement in the introduction to their proclamation that “the
variety of gifts in the Church is manifested in a special way in her social ministry. The
undivided Church organism participates in the life of the world around it in its fullness, but
the clergy, monastics, and laity can realize this participation in different ways and
degrees.”138 Fundamentally, the bishops believed that charity is the responsibility of the

133 Ibid.
134 Jubilee Bishop’s Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox
Church, Moscow, 2000, sec. II.2
135 Ibid., sec. II.3.
136 Ibid., sec. III.1.
137 Ibid., sec. III.6.
state. The church would work with the state to improve society, but the state must take the initiative

*Other Problems with Social Ministry*

The lack of economic freedom and the ability of the church to own property are among the biggest complaints priests had with the quality of church life in post-Soviet Russia, and these qualms are seconded within the official church establishment. Fr. Boris Mikhailov, who helped draft legislation on the return of church property complained that the government let him know under what circumstances he could conduct services in the Church of the Virgin’s Cover in Fili [Khrama pokrova presviatoi Bogoroditsi v Filiakh], which is also the state Andrei Rublev museum. “The state has said ‘you will conduct only the Sunday liturgy here if the temperature and the humidity rate will not exceed certain perimeters.’ If the humidity rate, say, is too high, the workers of the museum can forbid us entrance into the cathedral.” Fr. Boris, who is a specialist in church property issues, saw the lack of church ownership of property as the biggest detriment to social ministry. In pre-revolutionary Russia, churches often used the sale or rental of property to earn money for social projects, and the low-rent apartments many churches built helped those who did not need outright charity.

[The church in Fili] used to have 33 units of land. 21 of these units they rented out, so they received rent. They had an opportunity to pay their clergy, carry out repairs, and have a school there. 13 or 12 of these units were sold with the permission of the emperor to a businessman who built a factory on this land. The money was put into a bank, the sum was not accessible, they could not take it out, and the percentage of income was again used in order to subsist the parish. The parish allowance in 1904 provided for erecting a four story building there for the purpose of renting out apartments, and so they could have permanent income. But they didn’t build it because the war started, then the revolution. But in Moscow there are such churches that did build such buildings for rent and of course they didn’t have these houses returned to them or compensation either.

Fr. Alexander Borisov at Kosma and Damian also cited a lack of property control as a major barrier to social ministry.

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139 Mikhailov, interview.
Before 1917, this church owned another building, a small house just down the road from here. It was a two-story building, about 600 sq m. In 1917 it was demolished. To restore, rebuild that building for our parish and social ministry is too expensive. We have to wait until there is a new generation of people who will give more to the church. To date, the government has not been very active in that, unfortunately. Moreover, there is a bill in the Duma being discussed that the church will be taxed for any property not used in worship, so whatever small amount of property that the church has been able to receive or get back recently would then be taxed, which is basically going to take away the money that could have been used for social work.\textsuperscript{141}

Though the control of church property by the state was a problem in itself, especially as the restoration of church buildings continued to be a major drain on church finances, the lack of real ownership indicated larger limitations on the ability of the church to be involved in society.

For Fr. Alexei and Fr. Georgii, the lack of education about the faith, particularly among younger adults was even more important than the lack of property. Experience taught them that even lack of finances could be overcome more easily. “Money always comes if you want something, need something, if you are committed. While social work is indeed an expensive thing, I would still put money second, not first. Often enough, with a bit of enthusiasm you can do a lot with a tiny amount of money. But will is not enough for education. I think this is the most important problem at the moment, spiritual education and instruction,”\textsuperscript{142} commented Fr. Georgii. “People must be properly educated,” agrees Fr. Alexei, “this moving away from God, which took place during the 80 years of Soviet rule has created such a situation that people don’t know where is God or who he is. In this respect, people have more superstitions than true faith or real knowledge about who God is or what prayer or other services mean.” In order to combat this lack of knowledge, churches began Sunday school classes for adults as well as children. Fr. Nikolai opened a church near the railroad station in the center of Sablino that also serves as an educational center; catechism classes formed the center of Fr. Georgii’s ministry. Unlike so many of the church’s problems, education was one that could be solved if there were people to be taught. Although by 2003 going to church ceased to be trendy, people now attend “because

\textsuperscript{141} Borisov, interview.

\textsuperscript{142} Kochetkov, interview.
they feel an inner call to come. People are coming penitent and this is the beginning of true spiritual life,” said Fr. Boris. For him, it was a sign that Russians had truly reconnected with their historical faith.

For many priests, those who were not penitent would not receive the benefits of social ministry. Fr. Boris Glebov, rector of the Church of the Transfiguration in St. Petersburg, encouraged aid to the poor, but only those who deserved it. “When the needy come,” he said, “we try to help them. Not those alcoholics that you saw outside, but people whom we know.” Fr. Boris was willing to help unfamiliar people, but only “when you see that it is really a poor person, a person who has no alcohol or drug problems.” Fr. Vasily, priest at St. Petersburg’s Church of St. Seraphim, took a similar view. “If there are donations coming to our parish, we redistribute them among the poor and the needy. We are ready to help anybody, but we do not help alcoholics or drug addicts. These are people of weak will power and we can’t really help them. If people come to me [for help], I really demand that they come to church and not spend time loitering around town.” Fr. Georgii was willing to expand social ministry to those outside the church, but “within the church, there can be no people who need help.” Throughout the post-Soviet period, however, the numbers within the church kept growing. In Fr. Nikolai’s opinion, “if people come to the church, it indicates that they do find help here.” The continuing expansion of social programs from 1991-2003 shows that more and more Russians find answers for everyday life and a means to connect with their history within the walls of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Church and State at the Parish Level

Regardless of personal feelings about the involvement of the church in politics and social issues, priests in both Moscow and St. Petersburg believed Russian Orthodoxy has a distinct place in Russian culture and that the faith had been a source of aid during the

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143 Mikhailov, interview.
144 Boris Glebov, interview with the author, translated by Igor Tolochin, St. Petersburg, Russia, 8 June, 1999.
145 Ibid.
146 Vasily Ermakov, interview with the author, translated by Igor Tolochin, St. Petersburg, Russia, 7 June, 1999.
147 Kochetkov, interview.
difficult adjustment to life after communism. “There is no Russian culture without Russian Orthodoxy,” said Fr. Alexei. “The history of Russia, the history of Russian culture is the history of Orthodoxy. All the events of great historical significance, particularly events of clashes between nations, like the invasions of the Tatars, the wars with Poland or the wars with Turkey are all connected with external attempts to damage the Orthodox faith.”  

Fr. Boris Mikhailov agreed that Orthodoxy has a special and irreplaceable place….The Russian Orthodox Church is the only public institution that has been preserved from the pre-revolutionary times. The monarchy has failed, the army has collapsed, all Russian estates have gone – the merchants, the nobility, and the peasants…it was only the church, which came to this land in the 10th century, that managed to stand with the same orders and with the same goals – to bring the New Testament to the people, to be their salvation and be the source of the culture. It’s not just the source, but an enzyme that makes the culture ferment. It is something that, working from inside out, gives pause to human beings.  

This pause, for many post-modern Russians, is something more aligned with skepticism than faith, but parish priests are working to educate people about Orthodoxy, its role in society, and its meaning for Russia’s future.

**Russian Orthodox Involvement in Society and Developing Russian Nationalism**

As Orthodoxy once again became a presence in Russian life at all levels of society, it influenced post-Soviet Russian nationalism and national identity. The latest debate over Russian national identity began after Boris Yeltsin’s 1996 presidential campaign when he declared a search for an “idea for Russia.”  

For Yeltsin, determining what made a Russian provided a way to encourage solidarity, engage the public, and prevent future challenges to the democratic government. To other Russian thinkers, politicians, and ordinary people who became involved with the issue, determining Russian-ness meant looking into history to find what could be drawn from the past to positively shape the future. Few nations had to reinvent themselves under the circumstances Russia faced. Because of its longevity in Russian society and culture and its relationship with both the

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148 Shchulkin, interview.
149 Mikhailov, interview.
150 Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia*, 158.
government and the people, the Russian Orthodox Church was a valuable tool for the
collection of Russian national identity.

Most scholars of nationalism often discredit the value of religion, however,
declaring it a barrier to the creation of modern nations rather than an aid in the process.
Benedict Anderson relegates the significance of religious loyalties to the distant past. For
Anderson, true national identity can only begin to be established after “the ebbing of
religious belief.”151 Anderson focuses on the use of language in nationalism, particularly
after national languages could be spread through print-capitalism. In his discussion of
embryonic nationalism in nineteenth-century Russia, Anderson cites the Russification of
the Western borderlands, emphasizing the imposition of the Russian language on
Ukrainians, Finns, and Baltic Germans in order to inhibit their national tendencies and
unite them to the Russian Empire.152 Anderson fails to mention that Orthodoxy was often
imposed as well with the same aims. Despite scholar Eric Hobsbawm’s Marxist
worldview, he contemplates religion’s potential for creating nationalism. Hobsbawm
makes the valid point that religions strive for universality and therefore make bad national
unifiers,153 though the Russian Orthodox bishops seemed to have no difficulty reconciling
universality with nationalism in their jubilee statement. Hobsbawm prefers, however, to
focus on more definitive elements such as ethnicity, language, or common territory. He
does allow that ethnic groups that share a religion among other elements can use their faith
as a powerful force after the nationalist movement becomes a “mass force” rather than a
“minority ideology.”154

Unlike many of their contemporaries, Anthony Marx and Anthony Smith appreciate
religion as a source for national identification with its own unifying power. According to
Marx, religious exclusion constitutes the basis for nationalism in a diverse society since
religion provides a more powerful unifying factor than ideas based purely in ethnicity.155
Marx also believed that national identity is created at the juncture of “mass allegiance and

152 Ibid., 87.
154 Ibid., 68.
institutional power,” a juncture provided by religious belief and created irrespective of class divisions.\textsuperscript{156} Marx expounds his theory through an examination of the ill-defined, agrarian nation-states of early modern Europe, but it also applies somewhat to post-Soviet Russia. Russia’s boundaries, both politically and religiously, are clearly defined whereas the leaders of nebulous early modern France, England, and Spain had to be concerned with determining national territory as well as national identity. In addition, while the religious traditions of early modern Europe claimed adherents throughout the Western world, Russian Orthodoxy, with the exception of a small émigré community, exists only in Russia. Like Marx, Anthony Smith dates the appearance of national identity earlier than Anderson and Hobsbawm, which allows him to use religion as a unifier in much the same way. Smith writes that “Among Orthodox Russians…myths and symbols of descent and election and the ritual and sacred texts in which they were embodied helped to perpetuate the traditions and social bonds of the community."\textsuperscript{157} Smith notes that one of the problems of identifying nationality with religion is that often the faith is dominated by a political leader who can be deposed, as happened in Russia with the fall of the tsarist empire. As the nationhood of Israel has shown, however, religion can create national identity in a democratic world.\textsuperscript{158}

Though enthusiasm for Yeltsin’s 1996 search faded away without an outcome, the discussion of Russian national identity continues among politicians and scholars. Vera Tolz, who has examined questions of Russian national identity in the pre-revolutionary and post-Soviet periods does not encourage the use of Russian Orthodoxy as a factor in nationalism because it excludes those who fit ethnic and linguistic definitions of Russian-ness. Elements of culture, however, like religion, are much more important when assessing national identity. In a survey taken in 1995, 84% of Russians declared that knowledge and love of Russian culture was crucial for someone to be considered a Russian.\textsuperscript{159} Throughout history, Russian Orthodoxy was an essential part of Russian culture and as the church

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 356.
became more involved in post-Soviet life, it demonstrated the importance for faith in culture, even in a secular nation.

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By breaking with traditional Orthodox views on the role of the church and its clergy, Russian Orthodox priests made religion more relevant to postmodern society. Though social programs evolved in response to evangelical challenges and were enacted in order to preserve Orthodoxy’s traditional position in Russian life, they represent a new course for Russian Orthodoxy. Using social work to reintegrate the church into society engaged Orthodoxy’s connection to Russian history and culture and increased the importance of religion for the Russian nation while demonstrating that religion did not have to be state-sanctioned to be a representative of national goals. Instead, social ministry demonstrates a way to build national consciousness on the ground. Though nationalism is created from many elements and Orthodoxy cannot be an official element of nationalism in the multiconfessional Russian state, it does represent a powerful, historic cultural force and is still used to separate Russians from ethnic minorities and foreigners and give Russians their own sense of national identity.
CONCLUSION

The unforeseen changes that swept Russia after 1991 affected every aspect of Russian life. Faced with creating a democratic government out of the world’s first communist society, national political leaders did not at first focus on a new definition of Russian-ness. For many people, being Russian in 1991 was not significantly different from being Soviet. The Russian Orthodox Church, however, saw the end of the Soviet Union as an opportunity for transformation. It meant the ability to worship freely, hope for the return of church property, and the possibility of restoring the church’s influence in Russian life and national identity. While church officials worked within the political establishment, parish priests reacted to the changes in society by reaching out to those around them in both a reaction to and imitation of Protestant missionaries. From 1991-2003 the Russian Orthodox Church worked to reintegrate itself into Russian culture by altering its traditional concept of church-state relations to allow for the actualities of a secular society and expanding its vision of ministry to include an emphasis on social work.

Although traditionally relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state were based on an idea of symphony, the historical reality of interaction between Orthodoxy and the government set a precedent for post-Soviet church-state posturing. The political and religious leaders of early Russian history worked openly together to maintain their Orthodox nation in the face of challenges from foreign countries and foreign faiths. Russians were defined by their belief system and “Orthodox” came to be equivalent with “Russian.” Although the church lost political influence in the secular society of Imperial Russia, the emperors still maintained church presence at official functions, and Russians from all walks of life participated in baptisms, weddings and funerals even if they never attended regular church services. The visibility of the church demonstrated its importance as a social and political institution.

Despite 70 years of official atheism, post-Soviet Russians resurrected the Orthodox Church’s function in social and political rites. In 1990, Patriarch Alexei declared that in the
past year, 40% of all weddings were religious marriages – up from 4% in 1985. 160 He gave similar numbers for baptisms and funerals. In 1991, Alexei attended Boris Yeltsin’s presidential inauguration. Yeltsin’s successor Vladimir Putin made policy statements at Orthodox monasteries while maintaining Russia’s official secularism. These occurrences, both public and private, indicated the Orthodoxy Church’s fundamental role as a cultural force in Russian life and an inextricable part of what makes Russia unique, separate from Orthodoxy as a faith.

The relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state rejuvenated the church through more than just political visibility. The church arrived at the end of the communist period in a free marketplace of religion without funding or understanding of how to compete. Although Orthodox priests rejoiced at the ability to use former church buildings, the facilities desperately needed renovation. In addition, many Russians were impoverished after the devaluation of the ruble both in 1992 and 1998, and they turned to the church for material as well as spiritual aid. The government respected Orthodoxy’s traditional place in Russian culture and protected the Russian Orthodox Church from its competitors by enacting restrictive laws on religion as well as granting the church favorable import and export terms and tax benefits; over time, the church hierarchy augmented this assistance by entering into relationships with multinational Russian corporations and developing its own economic pursuits.

At the parish level, priests in Moscow and St. Petersburg brought Orthodoxy into society through programs of social ministry. This grass-roots activism was a response both to western threats and a changing perspective of parishioners’ needs. Priests in St. Petersburg, Russia’s window on Europe, were open to adapting western styles of ministry to Orthodoxy because of the long-standing presence of western religious groups in the city. Taken as a group, Petersburg clergy proved willing to work with other Christian groups to help the needy in their community and expand the mission of the church beyond the liturgy. In Moscow, priests with a connection to Fr. Alexander Men’ also felt compelled to work with those less fortunate as well as to educate children about the church in Sunday schools and traditional Russian handicraft classes. Other Muscovite priests chose instead to take on the political process, working to pass laws that would give the church control of

property and enact educational reform to allow teaching of Orthodox culture in public schools. Overall, priests believed in the need for Russians to embrace Orthodoxy as part of their heritage and as the element that connects Russians to one another. In the words of Fr. Nikolai Aksyanov, “The Orthodox church promotes love for country and love between people in the Orthodox culture. Where else can it be found?”

The realities of life after the fall of the Soviet Union required the Orthodox Church to reach out to the postmodern world rather than wait for believers to come flooding back. By reestablishing a relationship with the Russian government in its secular, democratic form the Russian Orthodox Church gained visibility and economic benefit. Orthodoxy, a faith grounded in tradition and following a theology basically unchanged since the ninth century, chose to work with modernity through television commercials, a stake in Russia’s lucrative bottled water industry, and a dial-a-prayer service available for cellular phone subscribers. In commenting on the cell phone service, which also allows callers to ask about theological doctrine and directions to the nearest monastery, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, deputy head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of External Church relations, said, “We welcome anything that helps people get to know Orthodox culture better.” For Orthodox clergy, the Russian Orthodox Church formed the bedrock of Russian national identity. Reaching out to Russians who grew up with no understanding of the role of the church became the focus of the church after 1991, and this mission was fulfilled by increasing the church’s visibility in any way possible.

In the immediate post-Soviet period, the Russian Orthodox Church turned to the Russian state for help with the challenges of life in secular society. The government proved willing to provide assistance both because it was politically expedient and because the Orthodox Church represented something uniquely Russian in a time when Russians were trying to distinguish being Russian from being Soviet. Although the church maintained close ties with the state, individual parish priests began working within their own communities to revitalize the church and reintegrate it into society. Social ministry programs in both Moscow and St. Petersburg expanded from 1991-2003. Scholars,

161 Aksyanov, interview.

journalists, politicians, and clergy all agree that the Russian Orthodox Church has an important role to play in post-Soviet Russian national identity. Throughout the 12 years after the collapse of communism, the Orthodox Church explored ways to satisfy that assessment. Whether through interaction with the state, multinational corporations, or individual parish projects at the very lowest levels of society, the Russian Orthodox Church after 1991 worked to reintegrate itself into Russian life and national identity by reviving its position as a crucial aspect of Russian culture.


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