RUSSIAN NATIONALISM AND THE NATIONAL REASSERTION OF RUSSIA

Edited by Marlène Laruelle

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11 A religion for the nation or a nation for the religion?

Putin's *third way* for Russia

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Vladimir Putin, plucked from the security services by Boris Yeltsin to become Prime Minister Putin in 1999, acting president upon Yeltsin's resignation on 31 December 1999 and duly elected president in March 2000, had little time to market himself. Undoubtedly, Putin felt considerable pressure to prove to Russia that he respected his patron, Yeltsin, but would not be his protégé. Putin went to work. With the Duma emasculated by low party identification, Putin tightened federal control over the regions through changes to the electoral law governing the election of governors and through the institution of supra-regional structures. These changes gave the center – and so Putin – more oversight of regional political processes. With the blessing of the IMF, Putin reformed many economic structures to encourage greater accountability of corporations, businesses, and individuals. This also served to enhance the legitimacy of Russian businesses in the international market. Backed by the judicial system, he confronted members of the oligarchy who appeared to threaten his power. Yeltsin never attempted such brazen challenges to the elite; Putin preferred an elite that would be firmly under his control. And in moves that provoked the ire of the United States and Europe alike, Putin seemingly snickered at the idea of an independent media, preferring to exercise significant control over industry and its output. Although Putin's terms as president ended in 2008, he transitioned – seamlessly, it appears – to the position of Russian prime minister.

Putin's unyielding efforts to centralize power have led many scholars to suggest that he represents a third way in Russia. The labels applied to this third way are plentiful: the popular ones include competitive authoritarianism, managed democracy, illiberal democracy, and electoral democracy.[1] Richard Sakwa, in a 2004 book sketching Putin's presidency, fleshes out the direction and meaning of the third way in Russia, arguing that it is built on a revival of centrism that he dubs "radical centrism."[2] In this version of centrism the autonomy of the state in the socioeconomic and bureaucratic arenas trumps other concerns. This autonomy gives the state sufficient opportunity to maneuver the difficult task of bringing order that is based on legitimate authority and not authoritarian stability, while keeping democratic tendencies toward chaos in check. Sakwa finds Russian journalist Victor Sheinis's portrayal of this centrism in Russia to be instructive: The basis of Putin's middle way is opportunistic merging of neo-conservative

economics with statist politics from the left.[3] Ultimately, the state seeks to manipulate democracy to achieve its desired ends.

Yet coming from the same mold of a Soviet-born, Russian-inspired, democratically versed politician and eager to rally Yeltsin's few remaining benefactors, Putin had a strong incentive to suggest that there is continuity between Yeltsin's administration and his own. This became apparent early on in matters of religious freedom and Church–state relations, where Putin adopted his predecessor's rhetoric and agenda. According to most accounts, Putin has essentially aligned himself with Yeltsin's program for administering religious organizations and for interpreting religious freedom: the national church of Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), dominates the scene; yet homage is still paid to religious freedom. On the basis of a number of interviews with the foremost observers and promoters of religious freedom, Edwin Bacon notes: "To many who follow religion and politics in Russia, the policy adopted by Vladimir Putin … is not markedly different from that adopted by Boris Yeltsin from the summer of 1997 onwards."[4] At first blush, this is an uncontroversial statement. Putin, like Yeltsin, is congenial with the hierarchy of the ROC, especially during high-profile photo sessions. Putin, like Yeltsin, invokes and promotes the basic principles of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations; looking the other way when court rulings undermine or eliminate the activity of foreign religious organizations.

If there is continuity to be found from Yeltsin's religious agenda to Putin's religious agenda, more backpedaling might be necessary to understand where the Russian government stands today on religious matters. Did Yeltsin and Putin inherit anything from the communist regimes that preceded them? Zoe Knox, author of *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church*, noted in a 2006 lecture series *Christianity and Colonialism* that there are remarkable similarities between the religious policy of the Soviet Union and the religious policy that began under Yeltsin and continues through today. She points to three essential areas of continuity: a Soviet and post-Soviet habit of passing legislation that offers religious freedom while in practice clamping down on that freedom; privileging of the Russian Orthodox Church prior to and subsequent to 1991; and continued discrimination against unfavored faiths.[5] The Russian nation has always incorporated the Russian Orthodox faith at its epicenter; Russian politicians (and Soviet politicians before them) have always sought to capture the nation for their political programs. The Russian state and the ROC have jousted for centuries in a battle over which side should lead the nation. The state, with its swords made of metal, has generally had an edge over the Church, with its swords made of prayers. Nevertheless, neither can agree on what would constitute a win and so, still today, the state and the Church continue to play the game. This does suggest a great deal of continuity between Putin, Yeltsin, and the preceding Soviet regime.

Yet I will argue in this chapter that to speak only of continuity does not capture the underlying mood of Putin's religious program. The *third way* forged by Putin – opportunistic manipulation of democracy – may also have some relevance when one looks at his religious policy during his two terms in office as

president. Bacon hints at a break in continuity when he points to the "securitization" of religious policy under Putin. The securitization of policy is a conceptual framework for understanding Putin's efforts to move normal politics into the realm of security. As Bacon states, "The Putin regime seeks first of all a manageable state," a trend that Yeltsin began late in his career but is moving at a greater pace under Putin,[6] and this is achieved by identifying an existential threat that in turn justifies policy changes outside the formal political processes.[7] When the state is threatened, who will scruple to abide by standard procedure? During the early years of Putin's tenure, Bacon comments, two policy shifts marked the continued securitization of religion: the Constitutional Court's decision concerning the Salvation Army, and the Law on Extremism, which amended Article 14 of the 1997 law on religion. The first shift effectively solidified the current balance of religious groups and the second extended the list of violations for which a religious group could be prosecuted, giving the state the potential for more control over the structure of religious groups. To this list one might add Putin's first foreign policy foray, the National Security Concept, signed in January 2000, in which he claimed, "Threats to the national security and interests of the Russian federation … are created by the economic, demographic, and cultural-religious expansion of neighboring states into Russian territory." The preservation of national security calls for "counteracting the negative influence of foreign religious organizations and missions" and "resistance to economic, demographic, and cultural and religious expansion on the part of other states onto the territory of Russia."[8] Whereas Yeltsin hesitated to undermine religious freedom, Putin initially showed strong signs that he feared foreign religious groups would threaten Russian identity. The securitization of religion applies to Putin's first and second terms, I will argue later in the chapter.

Let me submit that Putin's religious program while in office deviated from Yeltsin's program in a related and equally disquieting way. In this chapter I will elaborate and expand on the hypothesis that Putin's religious policy shows significant deviation from Yeltsin's religious program and I will argue that it goes beyond securitizing religion. In Putin's first term and at key points in his second, Putin has used Orthodoxy as a platform for unifying the Russian *state* – as opposed to the nation – and for solidifying the Russian state's position in the near abroad. This inclination is often delicately conveyed and is not the dominant message of Putin and his administration; yet Putin's willingness to use Orthodoxy for this purpose is a decided shift from Yeltsin. In fact, it suggests that Putin's natural predecessors might be Joseph Stalin in the World War II era for his decision to embrace Orthodoxy to ensure popular support for the state's wartime efforts, or Tsar Peter the Great for his frequent use of the ROC in empire building even while criticizing its backwardness. Putin's religious agenda, however, still nods toward the twin pillars of the democratic ideal for religious life: separation of church and State, and religious freedom. Putin's *third way* in religious matters is a recognition that individuals deserve the freedom to choose their own religious beliefs and that the ROC ought to carve out its own path. However, these freedoms come at a cost: the state effectively

punishes individuals and the Church for deviating from the norms of nationhood, norms that are dictated by the state. In this *third way* the state declares to the individual: you may be a Roman Catholic in Russia, but be warned that the Russian state will defend and favor the Russian Orthodox Church (so perhaps you might think about being a less obvious Catholic and find more favor?). Or the state declares to its neighbors: your Orthodox history and culture place you squarely on "our" side (so perhaps you should consider yourselves allies?).

Furthermore, I conclude that Putin's desire to protect and unify Russia, while also promoting the dominance of Russia in the near abroad, has had a profound effect on his administration even though it has been an inconsistent policy on Putin's part. The bureaucrats who work for Putin interpret religious policy in accordance with *his* views. Thus, even while Putin has emphasized the multiconfessional status of Russia and distanced himself from the Russian Orthodox hierarchy in his second term, the effects of his earlier message still resound in Russia. In sum, Putin's *third way* in religious matters has no ideological basis. Proclaiming both religious freedom and a multiconfessional state while simultaneously offering the ROC the role of religion of the state – with the job of unifying Russia and promoting the state's interests abroad – quickly degenerates into a chaotic mishmash of policy at the regional and local levels.

Unpacking Orthodoxy's claim on Russia

I contend that the unifying and imperialist religious program of Putin and his administration is easily missed because of a conceptual mistake that finds its way into common parlance, daily papers, and academic studies. There is a tendency to lump together two different notions of "Russianness": (1) a Russian is Russian Orthodox; and (2) a Russian Orthodox is Russian. For example, an article in *Religion, State and Society* by Julia Sudo, which examines Russian nationalist Orthodox theology, includes this statement: "Because 'Russian is Orthodox, and Orthodox is Russian,' Catholics, Baptists, Buddhists and other *inovertsy* … may be attacked [by Russian nationalists] as well."[9] The initial statement on "Russian" and "Orthodox" is given an explanation by Sudo that implies that Russians are Orthodox (and therefore foreign religious groups do not belong in Russia). The second element in the clause – Orthodox is Russian – is *not* given a separate interpretation but is taken to mean the same as the first element. However, a closer examination of the second part of the phrase "Orthodox is Russian" leads to a different view of Russianness: membership in the religion is prior to membership in the nation, so that those who are Russian Orthodox are automatically given the status of "Russian."

In the former proposition (Proposition A), *Orthodoxy* is necessary to *Russian*. A Russian must be Orthodox in order to be truly Russian in the ethnic sense. This idea of Orthodoxy is no doubt behind the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations (see below) and countless attempts, both under this law but also in other contexts, to inhibit the work of foreign religious groups. The securitization attempts that Bacon notes are part and parcel of this

notion of Orthodoxy. To claim that a Russian must be Orthodox protects Russia from the loss of an integral part of its identity.

In the latter proposition (Proposition B), however, being Orthodox is treated as a sufficient condition for the Russian nation. All one needs is to be Orthodox and one can be considered Russian. An Orthodox adherent is – regardless of other characteristics – truly Russian. Whereas for Proposition A there is a test one must pass to be a good Russian – one must commit to the ROC – in Proposition B there is a conferral of identity that passes to someone who commits to Orthodoxy – a Russian identity – or, from another viewpoint, a loss of a non-Russian identity associated with becoming a member of the ROC.

The claim that a true ethnic Russian must be Russian Orthodox has been a recurrent topic of discussion in the literature on Orthodoxy and religious life in Russia for centuries. The connection between religion and nation is clearly at the heart of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy's efforts to maintain a strong connection with Russian identity. Furthermore, the Yeltsin and Putin administrations have spoken and acted on this claim on numerous occasions. A few examples should suffice.

In 1997, as Yeltsin felt his support in the Duma and among the public slipping, he signed into law a bill that implicitly argues that Russians belong in the Russian Orthodox Church. The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations operates as a tool to demoralize non-traditional religions, many of which were actively evangelizing to ethnic Russians.[10] The discrimination against non-traditional religions is built into a registration system that divides religious associations into two categories: organizations and groups. Organizations are entitled to a full plate of religious freedoms, but to become organizations they must prove they have existed in Russia for fifteen years (no easy task to date one's existence to the Brezhnev era![11]) and prove their affiliation with a centralized organization (again, not an easy assignment for many new, independent religious associations). Those who failed to pass these tests were relegated to "group" status, meaning that their religious activities were restricted, particularly in public.[12] In the 1997 law the Duma and Yeltsin acted to protect the ROC's status as the religious protector of the Russian identity by voting in favor of the law.[13]

The handling of Church property following the dissolution of the Soviet Union has also indicated a strong commitment to the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as guardian of the nation. The ROC has been the clear winner in the return of Church property following nearly complete state control over property in the Soviet era. Forum 18 News Service, an organization that documents religious freedom violations in Russia and elsewhere in the post-Soviet bloc, notes that the ROC has also maintained a distinct advantage in holding services of worship free of charge in historical places of worship. Even after a land legislation bill was signed in 2004, which would have required the ROC to pay for usage of these services, the hierarchy of the ROC registered a complaint with the authorities that led to a 2005 supplementary bill, signed by Putin, nullifying the requirement that the ROC pay rental fees.[14]

Finally, the initiatives of numerous departments in the federal administrative structure indicate a strong desire on the part of federal bureaucrats and significant pressure by the ROC to increase the visibility of the ROC in schools, the military, and in the provision of social services (to name a few). The Education Ministry has been attempting to introduce lessons on Russian Orthodoxy into the public school system, although ultimately a proposal for a federal provision did not pass muster with Putin. In fact, in late 2002 the Minister of Education, Vladimir Filippov, sent a report with a recommended syllabus for teaching Russian Orthodox lessons to all schools. Although this move was not sanctioned by Putin, it was not condemned either, and many localities have acted on this implicit authorization.

Then the minister for nationalities, Vladimir Zorin, released a draft in 2002 of the proposed Law on Extremism in which the designation "extremism" included "propaganda of the superiority of a religion over another."

The draft suggested that "extremist" organizations include Protestant denominations and even the Roman Catholic Church. The final version, passed in July 2002, though less virulent than Zorin's suggestions, punishes individuals or groups who incite racial, ethnic, or religious hatred. In other provisions, the law prohibits propaganda against citizens for their religious affiliation and "propaganda of exclusivity … of citizens according to their relation to religion."[15] A subsequent set of amendments, passed by the Lower House of the Duma in September 2006, adds to the list of offenses that are deemed extremist, including a candidate or party who engages in "seditious libel" by slandering someone holding public office. Forum 18 has documented cases in which this law has been used against Russia's traditional and non-traditional religious groups, some of them for maintaining the superiority of their faith over other religions, others for evangelizing in regions where the ROC dominates the local political system.[16] At many levels of government – federal, regional and local – we can find overwhelming evidence that religious and political leaders believe that the Russian people belong in the ROC.

But consider that, by all accounts, to be Orthodox in Russia means simply to be *nothing other than* Orthodox. John Dunlop notes in a 1995 chapter that "the Orthodox Church today consists largely of an 'unchurched' flock, people well-disposed toward their national religion and respectful of it, but who have little understanding of Orthodoxy's teachings and customs."[17] Thus, it is assumed, unless shown otherwise, that a Russian is Orthodox by virtue of being nothing besides Orthodox. The empirical evidence strongly supports this claim. A 1999 survey by Kimmon Kaariainen and Dmitry Furman, funded by the Finland Academy of Sciences survey, found that self-identified Orthodox believers ranged from 7 percent who attend church at least once a month up to 45 percent who never attend church services.[18] In the same year, B. Dubin published some of the results from the Russian Center for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM), which showed that 13.8 percent of those who identified themselves as Orthodox attended services at least monthly, while 36.8 percent from this category never attended church services.[19] In a study completed in 2002 by Vladimir Karpov, the numbers remained

surprisingly low. Karpov notes, "With 7% attending at least once a month, Russians are among the least frequent churchgoers in Europe. Given Orthodoxy's strong emphasis on church participation, this is especially striking."[20]

Thus, the phrase "a true Russian must be Russian Orthodox" can, as a practical matter, mean something closer to "a true Russian must be nothing besides Russian Orthodox." The hierarchy in the Moscow patriarchate, the main branch of the ROC, appears to use this logic in denouncing the evangelistic efforts of a wide range of religious groups, including Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Baptists: insofar as these groups are seeking converts among ethnic Russians, including those without religious beliefs of any kind, the Moscow patriarchate believes that they are poaching from the ROC.

There is a second claim about religion and nation in Russia that also works its way into the discourse and practice of religious and political leaders. I believe that this proposition must be separated from Proposition A; it follows a different logic and the motives behind these propositions can be markedly different. In fact, I argue that insofar as Putin and his administration are willing to use Proposition B as a basis for their discourse and actions, we can argue that Putin has forged a *third way* in the area of religion and nation. This *third way* allows Putin to contain forces that are working against unity in Russia and justify Russian domination in and around the Russian state while, at the same time, preserving some semblance of the democratic ideal of religious freedom. It smacks of a managed religion.

The upper echelons of the Russian Orthodox Church have good reason, in terms of political power, to support the claim that "Orthodox is Russian." After all, this justifies their control over the Ukrainian and Belarusian churches, both of which are part of the canonical structure of the Moscow patriarchate. At the 1993 All-World Russian Assembly a group of nationalists opened up Church membership to non-ethnically Russian members, but it did so by declaring any alien baptized into the Russian Orthodox Church *ipso facto* a Russian.[21] At this same conference it was determined that the term "Russian" would include Ukrainians and Belarusians, who are brother and sister Slavs.

For the Putin administration the motive for promoting this claim is less obvious. However, we can attribute two possible objectives. First, when this notion is supported by the Russian administration, it may well be acting with imperialist hopes. In its imperialist version, closely identifying "Orthodoxy" and "Russian" can justify control over the regions around Russia, particularly Ukraine and Belarus, but also non-Russian Orthodox states such as Serbia, and states in which Russian Orthodoxy is a visible presence, such as Estonia. By virtue of their Orthodox status, they become natural adoptees of the Russian state. As long as Russia is viewed as the mother hen, it can use Orthodoxy to its advantage.

Another possible motive of the Putin administration is unification within the Russian state. In this version the notion that "to be Orthodox is to be Russian" is advanced by significantly undermining or denying the religious belief and devotion of those outside of the Russian Orthodox Church. Those individuals may not become members or believers in Orthodoxy, but such membership or belief does not appear to be necessary for one to call oneself Russian Orthodox. Simply by

citizens being insulated from other belief systems, they can be more easily adopted into the Russian nation. Alternatively, referring to Orthodoxy in a territorial sense (that is, Russian Orthodoxy as vital to the Russian *state*) means that minority groups are denied their beliefs, and unity is founded on the notion of Orthodoxy. In both cases the costs of professing a religion other than Orthodoxy are higher and so discouraged. Nominal Orthodoxy is tolerated, but commitment to other religious groups is not: you pay for it by being denied full membership in the Russian nation. In unity, strength; therefore make disunity cost!

Dmitri Glinsky-Vassiliev wrote in a policy memo in 2001 that while

> making Russian ethnicity the basis for state-building was politically and often personally unacceptable for members of the new ruling class, using Christian Orthodoxy for these purposes was seen as perfectly appropriate (since its profession could be as ritualistic and divorced from daily practice and way of life as Marxist-Leninist rhetoric was before it).[22]

One of the troubling aspects of ethnic nationalism is its exclusionary tendencies. An ethnic idea of "nation" and its true membership entails that some do not belong. Guarding national unity will exclude. However, some might argue that religious unity is less exclusionary so long as the religion providing unity does not require much. It is much less expensive for Putin to argue that Orthodoxy is the state's organizing principle than to declare that Russian ethnicity is the central element of the state. Even so, religious unity does exclude; members of other religious groups are treated at best as second-class citizens.

In sum, Proposition B means either conferring nation status on all members of the Orthodox Church or undercutting the beliefs and practices of the non-Orthodox to make them more easily fit within the nation. Non-Russians in the ethnic sense are given nation status simply because they are "close enough" to Orthodoxy either by being non-religious or by keeping their religion a private matter.

Putin's *third way*: looking at the evidence

Putin's efforts to use the Russian Orthodox Church for his broader political agenda of achieving unity and gaining a platform in the near abroad can be observed in a series of statements and visits during his first years in office. While these statements did not necessarily translate into religious policy, their potential for setting a religious tone that favors Orthodoxy as glue for the state is evident.

An early attempt to define Orthodoxy's unifying role for the Russian state came during Putin's first Christmas season as acting president. Putin issued Christmas greetings at an Orthodox service on the Orthodox Christmas on 7 January 2000. His address incorporated two different notions of the Russian nation: in the opening, Putin proclaimed that "Orthodoxy has traditionally played a special role in Russian history" but later noted that "[Orthodoxy is] an unbending spiritual core of the entire people and state."[23] His latter comment is

remarkably controversial, even if we acknowledge the tendency of speakers to use poetic language that resonates with the audience: labeling the entire Russian territory as Orthodox territory, at the core of what it means to be Russian, undermines not only foreign[24] but also minority religious groups. The latter statement, with its strong language, was taken to be the crux of Putin's holiday message to the Orthodox community and was roundly criticized by human rights organizations. If the state in all its elements is Russian Orthodox, a unified nation follows; the state is defined by its Orthodoxy.

The following week marked the tenth anniversary of Patriarch Aleksii's enthronement, celebrated with a variety of personal and public events. Putin sent a message to Aleksii, routed through the press, congratulating him for leading the Church through a "difficult and confusing period." Putin took the occasion to promote the ROC's role in Russia: "The Russian Orthodox Church plays an enormous role in the spiritual unification of the Russian land after many years of life without faith, moral degradation and atheism."[25] His use of the Russian *rossiiskii* – denoting the territory of Russia – instead of *russkii* – referring to the Russian nation – is significant: the Church is marked as a unifying force for those on Russian territory. The ROC is conceptualized as the church of the state and not only the church of the nation. In January 2004, Putin stated during a visit to an orphanage in the monastery of St. Savva of Mt. Storozha, "Of course, in our country the church is separated from the state..... But in the people's souls everything is together."[26] Such remarks indicate a willingness on the part of Putin and his administration to use Russian Orthodoxy for the purposes of state building.

Yet unifying the state using Russian Orthodoxy is not Putin's only goal for the ROC. Putin has also shown a penchant for using Orthodoxy as a basis for dominance in the near abroad. The examples come largely from his first term in office. In March 2000, Putin met with Aleksii and the catholicos of Armenia. In a public statement at this meeting, Putin acknowledged the importance of the spiritual development of society on the basis of the eternal values of Christianity, which, he claimed, would lead to the moral health of the peoples living on the territory of both the Russian and the Armenian states.[27] Although Putin uses the broader term "Christianity" to incorporate Armenian religious identity in his proclamation, his audience of Orthodox hierarchs registered a more restricted understanding of "Christianity" for Russia.

This same use of Orthodoxy for imperialist purposes was emphasized at a World War II memorial service in early May 2000. The leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus met at a key World War II battleground in Prokhorovka, a village in western Russia near the Ukrainian border, to underline their shared heritage, launching celebrations marking fifty-five years of peace. Putin, Ukraine's Leonid Kuchma, and Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko paid tribute to Soviet troops mowed down by the Germans. With much of the former Soviet Union gearing up to mark Victory Day on 9 May, the three leaders unveiled a modest memorial in a field near the center of the world's biggest tank battle, generally known as the Battle of Kursk. Patriarch Aleksii conducted a memorial service underscoring the unity of the Slavic peoples: "In the years of severe trial, we were

not divided into Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians – we defended one country, one motherland. Although we now live in different states, we have one faith, one history, one culture." The presidents echoed the patriarch on the theme of unity, with Putin concluding: "We are one family. We vanquished when we stood together. We have common historic roots, a common fate, history, culture."[28] The memorial blessing of a church leader is stock fare for many countries, likely to perturb only devout separationists, but the inference drawn from this cohort of three leaders and one patriarchate is subtler and more momentous.

In November 2000, Vojislav Koštunica, the newly elected president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, made an official visit to Russia, an initiation into the international political scene. The visit incorporated a substantial religious component to showcase the good relations between the two states. Koštunica, accompanied by the Serbian patriarch Pavle and two metropolitans from the Serbian Orthodox hierarchy, met with Patriarch Aleksii to express their thanks for the support of the ROC for the Koštunica government as it ousted the former Serbian president, Slobodan Miloševic. Putin portrayed the religious substance of his talks with Koštunica as "an essential element of the affirmation of the special relations between our states … that needs no explanation; it can only be welcomed."[29] The liberal media still felt compelled to offer an explanation, and not a particularly positive one. Editors of the popular daily *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* decried the overlapping political and religious elements in the meeting;[30] thus, the highly religious component to a political meeting of two heads of state did, in the end, find Putin on the defensive for construing Orthodoxy as integral to the state. In these remarks and others, Putin's discourse underscores the claim that Russian Orthodoxy can lead the way in building a stronghold for Russia throughout the region.

In 2003, Putin ventured into a dispute between the ROC and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) that has been ongoing since 1920 when Tikhon, the patriarch of the ROC, ordered that all Orthodox believers under the authority of the Moscow patriarchate find a new home to escape Soviet domination. Over the course of the next eighty-plus years the ROCOR found new reasons for separating from the ROC's Moscow patriarchate: it was disenchanted with the ROC for its capitulation to the Soviet authorities and it strongly disagreed with the ROC's engagement in the ecumenical movement (such as the World Council of Churches). A thaw in relations began in the 1980s but did not seem to be heading toward unification. In 2003, Putin held a meeting with the hierarchs of the ROCOR to begin a process of reconciliation; he clearly attaches great importance to the unification of these churches. The ROCOR has parishes all over the world (including within Russia) and represents an opportunity for Russia to extend its influence beyond its borders. Putin accomplished his goal in 2007 with the official reunification – largely symbolic, since they remain autonomous from each other on most matters – of the ROC and the ROCOR.

While on a working trip to Greece in 2005, Putin took the opportunity to travel to the holy Mount Athos, a secluded set of monasteries that caters to Orthodox communities from around the world. According to some press reports and the

Moscow patriarchate's press releases, Putin took the opportunity to underscore the spiritual connection between Russia and Greece. Putin purportedly remarked that

> Russia is a state with a rather large Orthodox population, as the historical seeds of Christianity entered Russia from Byzantium and Greece. Thus, the relationship between Russia and Greece, which have a long and rich history, provides the necessary prerequisites for growth in a spirit of complete trust.

Later in the visit Putin stated that "the strength of Russia is spirituality before everything else … the revival of Faith is one of the foundations of Russia's present revival."[31] This religious language is not altogether foreign to those who study American politics, where presidents often use Christian imagery or terminology in their speeches. However, the motivation appears quite different: Putin uses the ROC to court allies; Bush uses Christianity (particularly evangelical Protestant language) to court votes. For Putin the ROC provides an opportunity for expanding Russia's influence abroad.

Putin's *third way* for religion and nation takes a more peculiar route in his interactions with traditional religions in Russia apart from the ROC, namely Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. These three religions are considered traditional to Russia, yet they do not attract the same status as the ROC. While Putin cannot be accused of discriminating overtly against these religions, their adherents are subject to Putin's efforts to unite the Russian state on the basis of Orthodoxy. Again, some examples offer a sketch of Putin's efforts to unify through Russian Orthodoxy.

Parliamentary elections were held in December 1999. Much of the debate centered on economic and foreign policy matters, leaving cultural and ethnic issues largely aside in the wider media. For the most part, the election centered on the strategies of the two most popular parties and their prospects for winning the most seats. Although religious issues played virtually no role in the campaigning, Putin did support the creation of an Islamic party, Refah, which won about a dozen seats in the State Duma (five of them through Refah itself, which was in the umbrella of the Unity party, and five to seven other deputies who called themselves supporters). His support for a party warrants attention, given his (and Yeltsin's) general distaste for party politics. The Islamic party is significant for its relatively vacuous religious convictions, which distinguish it sharply from the various radical forms of Islam in society. Putin's support for this party can easily be seen as support for an Islamic party that might easily be assimilated into the Russian nation. This benignly religious group could be construed as Russian – if not through being Orthodox, at least through being only weakly Islamic. Though not Orthodox, it is not much of a threat to Orthodoxy.

Zoe Knox remarked in the conference on *Christianity and Colonialism* that Putin prefers to deal with a "single representative" within a religious association and that this has led to persistent rivalries within the Islamic community. Knox attributes Putin's preference to his centralizing impulses.[32] One might also note that Putin's favoritism can lead religious denominations in a direction that makes them blend into the Russian state and nation more easily. There is evidence that

Putin is intruding into the affairs of the Jewish community: Lawrence Uzzell writes that Putin has anointed Berl Lazar as the "sole, legitimate leader of [Jews in] Russia"[33] after Putin spoke favorably about the position of a second chief rabbi for Russia. One can conclude that Putin continues to toy with the notion of greater cultural homogenization.

The Russian Buddhist community has not played an active role in lobbying the Putin administration for favors, with the exception of the pressure it exerted to allow the Dalai Lama to visit. His previous visit was in 1994, but in 2004 he was given permission to make another visit; however, the Buddhist community was given very little advance notice and the Putin administration largely ignored the visit, significantly undermining its significance for the Russian state.

Sakwa claims that Putin is pushing a pragmatic patriotism that is supra-ethnic and statist as one of the key elements to his nation-building plan.[34] As part of this plan, it is critical that Putin finds values that can bring together diverse ethnic groups and give them a sense of belonging. Russian Orthodoxy works well, particularly if Russian Orthodoxy requires much less than actual religious belief or participation in religious activities. On several occasions Putin has proposed the formation of a Russian national idea, a proposal that was developed by the State Duma and released in September 2006 to the public for discussion. The proposal has been met with hostility from the Muslim community in Russia, which claims that it tries to find unity in a multicultural society by promoting the role of ethnic Russians. This may leave the Putin administration with little choice but to continue its unifying efforts using Russian Orthodoxy as a centerpiece and demoralizing other traditional religious groups. Proposition B, *Russian Orthodox therefore Russian*, can be rather clumsily restated as *Nominal Russian Orthodoxy as the state religion therefore all within the state and many outside the state can be considered Russian or Russian-oriented*.

Putin's religious policy during his tenure has been less consistent than these examples may imply. One could point to numerous occasions on which he painstakingly conveyed his support for full religious freedom and distanced himself from the ROC. His administration has overseen the establishment of military chaplains from traditional religions; it has not forced religious instruction in the school system; and Putin himself met with the late Pope John Paul II in Rome in 2003. Statements made by Putin also reflect consideration for religious freedom and even, at times, a distancing from the ROC. At a 2003 appearance in Sarov for the one-hundredth anniversary of the canonization of St. Serafim of Sarov, Putin appeared to stun the patriarchate with his emphatically ecumenical language. His short message included such lines as "we value highly the contribution of all confessions of our country" and the "harmony among the peoples of multinational Russia." In this way we see Putin wandering through many different understandings of the nation and religion for the Russian state and society: on one hand, he maintains a commitment to the liberal democratic notion of religious freedom; on the other hand, his frequent promotion of Russian Orthodoxy as a harbinger of the Russian national idea and as a crucial element for unity in the state underscore his quest for a managed and manageable state.

Some implications for Putin's *third way*

It is easy to conclude that Putin's gestures at an Orthodox state or a greater Orthodox region are, if not meaningless, then sufficiently atypical and thus not warranting great concern. However, I would argue that there is more to consider. Some of the attacks against foreign religious personnel and groups, and the undermining of the separation between the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church by members of Putin's inner administration, nomenklatura, and the judicial system, may be connected to Putin's willingness to use language that suggests either "a Russian is Russian Orthodox" or "a Russian Orthodox is Russian."

The undermining of religious freedom has come in many different forms. In 2002, many Roman Catholic clergy were thrown out of Russia with no legal right of return. The Salvation Army and Jehovah's Witnesses are just two groups that face increasingly difficult times in obtaining the necessary registration to exist as legal religious entities. Jehovah's Witnesses were outlawed in Moscow. Russian officials, some of them with close connections to Putin, have made bold statements denouncing non-Orthodox religious organizations. In the past few years the Eurasian Department of the International Religious Freedom Association, a non-governmental organization that promotes religious freedom globally, has noted increasing intolerance against Protestants on the part of local administrations and individual representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in a number of provinces of the Central District of Russia. The Muslim community has also been subject to questionable searches, arbitrary arrests, and difficulty finding places to worship at the local and regional levels, according to Forum 18 and the United States Committee on International Religious Freedom.

The sporadic nature of these crackdowns on religious freedom – across time and space – suggests that there is no institutionalized effort to undermine religious freedom but that the signals of the Putin administration to those on the ground are conflicting and confusing. At a minimum, Putin's willingness to use language suggesting the importance of Orthodoxy internally and externally signals a level of toleration for the promotion of Orthodoxy as a unifier of the state and a carrier of the Russian flag abroad. For Putin, Russian is Orthodox and Orthodox is Russia, depending on his audience. The first proposition provides cover from external domination; the second proposition coaxes unity and, when necessary, motivates imperialism. Religion, it turns out, can be managed as well as democracy in the *third way*.

Notes

1 See S. Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, 12, 2, April 2002, 51–65; F. Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, 76, November–December 1997, 22–41; L. Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

2 R. Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 79.

3 V. Sheinis, "Posle bitvy: itogi parlamentskikh vyborov i novaia Gosudarstvennaia Duma," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 29 December 1999, 8. Quoted in Sakwa, *Putin*, p. 80.

4 E. Bacon, "Putin's Religious Policy," paper presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, November 2002, Pittsburgh, PA, 1. Used with permission from the author.
5 Z. Knox, "Continuity in Church–State Relations in Russia: The Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras," lecture given at Arizona State University, 21 March 2006. Used with permission from the author.
6 Bacon, "Putin's Religious Policy," 9.
7 Ibid., 7.
8 See J.M. Godzimirski, "Russian National Security Concepts 1997 and 2000: A Comparative Analysis," *European Security*, 9, 4, Winter 2000, 73–91.
9 J. Sudo, "Russian Nationalist Orthodox Theology: A New Trend in the Political Life of Russia," *Religion, State and Society*, 6, 1, 2005, 78.
10 Other non-Russian Orthodox religions that are traditional in Russia, including Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam, were largely unaffected by this law. Of course, this was the intent of the signatories, as these traditional religions posed no real conversion threat to ethnic Russians.
11 During Brezhnev's tenure, religious groups (including the Russian Orthodox Church) continued to suffer repression, a practice introduced by Lenin and fully adopted by Stalin. Religious groups were forced to disband or go underground, leaving the latter with little to no documentation of their existence during the Brezhnev era.
12 For more detail about the 1997 law, see Rossiiskaia Federatsiia Federal'nyi zakon, "O sovobode sovesti i o religioznykh ob"edineniiakh," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 1 October 1997, 2–3.
13 For an in-depth discussion on the intentions behind the MPs' designing of the law, see Z. Knox, "Postsoviet Challenges to the Moscow Patriarchate, 1991–2001," *Religion, State and Society*, 32, 2, June 2004, 87–113.
14 G. Fagan, Moscow Correspondent, "Russia: Religious Freedom Survey," Forum 18 News Service, 14 February 2005.
15 Ibid.
16 Fagan points out a number of cases in which Muslims, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Old Believers have been harassed under the guise of the 2002 extremism law. In many of the cases the charges of extremism are clearly overstated, with local authorities judging activity such as rallies at local stadiums to be extremist activity.
17 J. Dunlop, "Orthodoxy and National Identity in Russia," in V. Bonnell (ed.), *Identities in Transition: Eastern Europe and Russia after the Collapse of Communism*, Berkeley: University of California Press/University of California International and Area Studies Digital Collection, 93, 1996, p. 121.
18 K. Kaariainen and D. Furman (eds.), *Starye tserkvi, novye veruiushchie. Religiia v massovom soznanii postsovetskoi Rossii*, Moscow and St. Petersburg: Letnii Sad, 2000, p. 38.
19 B. Dubin, "Religioznaia vera v Rossii 90-kh godov," *Russian Public Opinion Monitor* (Moscow: Russian Center for Public Opinion Research), 1, 39, 1999, 31–39.
20 V. Karpov, "Orthodoxy, Religious Ethnocentrism and Intolerance in Russia," paper presented at the ASN annual meeting, New York, 16 April 2005. Used with permission from the author.
21 N. Babasian, "Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' budet otstaivat' traditsionnye tsennosti v otkrytoi zapadu Rossii, zaiavliaet Mitropolit Smolenskii i Kaliningradskii Kirill," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 5 June 1993. Also see *Krasnoiarskaia gazeta*, 11 June 1993, 2–3.
22 D. Glinsky-Vassiliev, "Islam in Russian Society and Politics: Survival and Expansion," *PONARS Policy Memo*, 198, May 2001, 2.
23 Interfax, "Putin nadeetsia chto Pravoslavie ukrepit Rossiiu," Moscow, 7 January 2000.
24 The use of "foreign" in this sentence indicates those religious groups that did not have a presence in Russia prior to 1991.

25 Reuters, "Putin Lauds Church Role as Patriarch Marks 10 Years," *Reuters*, online posting, Johnson's Russia List (no. 4359), 9 June 2000, 40.
26 Portal-Credo.Ru, 7 January 2004.
27 ITAR-TASS, "Vladimir Putin neofitsial'no vstretilsiia s Patriarkhom Alexeem II i Catolicos Gargein II," 1 March 2000.
28 Reuters, "Russia, Ukraine, Belarus Leaders Recall WWII Unity," 3 May 2000.
29 A. Krymin and G. Engelgardt, "Novyi president Yugoslavii podderzhivaet traditsiiu otnoshenii mezhdu russkim i serbskim narodami," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 1 November 2000, 2.
30 Ibid.
31 J. D. Huneycutt, "Putin Visits the Holy Mountain," *Orthodoxie*, 10 September 2005.
32 Z. Knox, "Continuity in Church–State Relations in Russia."
33 L. Uzzell, "Eroding Religious Freedom," *Moscow Times*, 24 January 2003.
34 Sakwa, *Putin*, p. 163.