

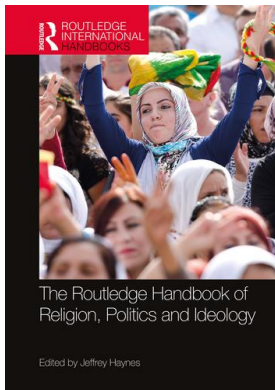
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RUSSIA

Orthodox Christianity

Marko Veković

Introduction

We live in a world where some of the most interesting debates are happening in the virtual realm. For example, in March 2014, Twitter hosted a very lively and interesting debate on the role of Orthodox Christianity in Russian politics. Speakers included Carl Bildt, a member of the European Council on Foreign Relations, and Michael McFaul, a renowned Stanford professor. Bildt claimed that McFaul was possibly underestimating the force of Putin's anti-Western and "anti-decadence" line, saying that such ideas are deeply rooted in conservative Orthodox Christianity (Marty, 2014). In other words, according to Bildt, ideology and religion in contemporary Russia are closely related. In this chapter, I take a close look at this relationship. The goal is to explain how and to what extent Orthodoxy and ideology interact in contemporary Russia. However, my starting assumption is that Orthodox Christianity, as a religious tradition, does not have a clear ideological standpoint (for a more detailed analysis of Orthodox Christianity's political theology, see Papanikolaou, 2012). However, it appears that Orthodox Christian Churches across Eastern Europe are favourably inclined towards monarchy-type political systems. This preference for monarchs, particularly in the Russian case (Turunen, 2007), can be understood as the product of communist rule in these countries. But when it comes to specific ideologies, it would be wrong to try to apply any particular ideology to Orthodox Christianity, including in our particular case: the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). However, the ROC has often been used as a supplement, or an asset, of different political and ideological systems in Russia. Scholars tend to explain this process as the "ideologization of religion" (Rachik, 2009: 347). And in the case of the Orthodox Christian Churches across Eastern Europe, the main explanations for close relationships between different ideologies, state and Orthodoxy, can be found in the specific historical experience, and of course, for doctrinal reasons (Pipes, 1974; Prodromou, 2004).

Growing interest in the study of religion and politics across the world (i.e., Jevtić, 2007; Haynes, 2014; Fox, 2013; Toft, Philpott and Shah, 2011) inevitably led to a focus on how religion and ideology mix and interact (Claval, 2015; Williams, 1996; Ingber, 1989; Martin, 2014; Boccock and Thompson, 1985; Al-Sharif, 2009). Scholars have also looked at how they support or oppose each other (Zaki, 2018) and how religion can be translated into ideology and *vice versa* (Rachik, 2009). In this chapter, I explore how Orthodox Christianity, a dominant religious tradition of Eastern European societies, interacts with dominant ideological systems by using the Russian

Federation, or simply Russia, as a case study. By analyzing this relationship from historical, doctrinal and comparative perspectives, we can see that Russia is a good example of how Orthodox Christianity and different ideologies have interacted and co-existed throughout history.

Since the Christianization of the *Kievan Rus'* in 988, Orthodox Christianity, as represented by the ROC, became a faithful companion of the Russian state. Yet, since 988, a lot of things have changed in Russia. For example, the state's ideology shifted dramatically due to political and social revolutions that the country experienced. The ROC had to adapt to these changes, showing the political potential of one religious actor (Philpott, 2007). There are (at least) two landmark ideologies embraced by Russia in its long-standing history. First was the *imperial ideology* of the Russian empire, characterized by the notion of Moscow as the Third Rome and Russia as the inheritor of the Byzantium empire. Even though the historical roots of the imperial ideology are much deeper, it was the Russian official ideology for 84 years in total (from 1833 to 1917). During this time, Church–state relations were often labelled as symphonic, and the ROC was one of the main pillars of society (Pipes, 1974). The second Russian official ideology was, of course, *communism*. Communist ideology dominated Russian political life from 1917 up until 1991, so 74 years in total. Besides other rather obvious reasons, it is a well-known fact that imperial and communist ideology are different in the way they treated religion, and particularly Orthodox Christianity.

After the February Revolution of 1917 and the imposition of communist ideology, religion was banished from the public sphere, and the state was hostile towards religious communities (i.e., Knox, 2005). After the fall of communism in the late twentieth century, Russia was looking for a new ideology. And it is, again, a well-known fact that the fall of communism triggered a religious resurgence not only in Russia but also across Eastern Europe as well (i.e., Evans and Northmore–Ball, 2012). One of the social, religious and even political consequences of this was the fact that it was religion that actually filled the ideological vacuum once communism was gone (Knox, 2005: 99; Jevtić, 2012: 427). That is why the ROC re-claimed its position as the dominant religious actor and started to deeply penetrate, in different aspects, the public and political arenas. After 2000, Russia started to rise as a political power. Often portrayed as the face of Vladimir V. Putin, the rise of Russia was characterized by the idea of the “New Russia”. This idea relies significantly on a conservative ideology, expressed mainly through anti-Westernism, anti-liberalism and the notion of a specific “Russian civilization”. All these elements of Russia's neo-conservative ideology are both supported and approved by the ROC. However, even though this seems to be an obvious fact, how and to what extent the ROC is ideologized by the state remains unclear. Thus, this chapter has two main goals. The first goal is to offer a rather brief historical perspective on how Orthodox Christianity interacted with different ideologies in Russia until 2000. The second goal is an analysis of the religion and ideology matrix in post-2000 Russia, with a specific focus on the ideologization of the ROC.

Religion and ideology in Russia through the lens of Church–state relations: a historical perspective

Most scholars seem to agree about the relationship between Russian ideology and the ROC in the modern era. However, the same does not apply when turning to the role of the ROC's influence in politics. Papkova (2011) is right, I think, to state that the mechanism, “what the Church wants, the Church gets”, simply does not work. Turning to the Russian religion and ideology matrix, it is clear that there is a vast body of relevant literature. What is interesting to mention is that the literature shares one important, and perhaps rather obvious, pattern: the contemporary religion and ideology matrix in Russia is the product of the historical development

of Church–state relations, supported by the doctrinal teachings of Orthodox Christianity. This is central to understanding how the religion and ideology matrix in Russia has developed and changed over time. We need to take a closer look into Church–state relations. The same goes for understanding the contemporary role of the ROC: it is simply not possible to comprehend it without being aware of the historical trajectory of Church–state relations in Russia. In my book, *Democratization in Christian Orthodox Europe: Comparing Greece, Serbia and Russia* (2020), I suggest that it is easiest to analyse Church–state relations in Russia if we divide this period into three very broad historical phases: from the reforms of Peter the Great to the February Revolution, the communist phase, and the post-communist phase (Veković, 2020). However, such a division will not work for exploration of the relationship between religion and ideology in Russia, due to the fact that Russian imperial ideology, which had strong and direct links with Orthodox Christianity, developed long before Peter the Great (who ruled in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries). In addition, it is important to note that post-communist Russia was significantly different under the regime of Boris Yeltsin compared to that of Vladimir V. Putin. Under the rule of the latter, the ROC became an important pillar of the ideology of the state, which was not the case during Yeltsin’s time (Veković, 2020).

One of the first attempts towards analyzing the religion and ideology matrix in imperial Russia can be found in a well-known and yet often criticized work by Richard Pipes.¹ Pipes’ book, *Russia under the Old Regime* (1974), included a chapter on the ROC, describing it as the “servant of the State”. By drawing his conclusions via both historical and doctrinal analysis, Pipes argues that the ideology of the ROC is inherently conservative, requiring strong support from the state (Pipes, 1974: 225–226). Pipes also states that it was in the first half of the sixteenth century when the ROC placed its entire authority behind the Muscovite² monarchy. Interestingly, according to Pipes, the entire ideology of the Muscovite monarchy was developed by the clergy of the ROC, who believed that “the interest of religion and church were best served by a monarchy with no limits to its power” (Pipes, 1974: 232). But it is important to mention that this was not the officially accepted ideology of the state. Despite this, Pipes refers to this system as “imperial ideology”, comprising four key aspects. These are:

1. *The idea of a Third Rome.* This notion is integral to the Muscovite’s political theory, defined by the monk, Philotheus of Pskov.
2. *The imperial idea.* The rulers of Moscow were heirs to an imperial line that started during the time of Emperor Augustus. This idea was developed by a group of clergymen, supervised by Metropolitan Macarius.
3. *The rulers of Russia were universal Christian sovereigns.* They were claimed to be the emperors of all Orthodox people in the world.
4. *Divine authority of all rulers.* All authority was from God, and the Russian tsar, in the exercise of his office, was God-like (Pipes, 1974: 232–233).

Pipes’s work was integral to most later studies of Church–state relations in Russia, particularly in Western literature, including in relation to how religion and ideology mixed and interacted. When it comes to the doctrinal reasons why the ROC accepted such an ideology, part of the answer lies in the concept of *symphonia*. *Symphonia* represents an ideal type of Church–state relationship in the Orthodox Christian tradition, developed based on the experience of the Byzantium empire. Nikolas Gvosdev, in his influential work, *An Examination of Church-State Relations in the Byzantine and Russian Empires with an Emphasis on Ideology and Models of Interaction* (2001), puts emphasis on the concept of *symphonia*, and how it was incorporated into the political thought and ideology of Eastern Christianity and its relationship with the state. However,

when it comes to doctrinal reasons why Orthodox Christian Churches tend to have closer relations with the state, in my opinion, we should also discuss the organizational pattern of those Churches. Unlike the hierarchical organization of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, Orthodox Christianity is highly decentralized. From both historical and political perspectives, this means that political independence of the Orthodox-majority countries is typically accompanied by an autocephalous, or independent, Orthodox Church. Even though it is believed that all Orthodox Christian Churches are in one sacred and holy communion, the political reality shows that they are quite separated (Veković and Jevtić, 2019). That is why their historical development and even survival is closely related to that of the state. Consequently, it is logical to presume that Orthodox Christian Churches would be very interested in both politics and state ideology.

The nineteenth century was another important historical era of the Church–state relationship in Russia, central to understanding how religion and ideology have interacted over time. In 1833, the state and Tsar Nicholas I declared an official ideology – “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationalism” (*православие, самодержавие, народность*). To be precise, this ideological triad was actually introduced by Sergei Uvarov, Russian Minister of Education under Tsar Nicholas I. Uvarov asserted the importance of Orthodoxy for the Russian state in the following statement: “a people as well as a private person who does not love the faith of its ancestors, must perish” (Anderson, 2012: 209). According to Riasanovsky (1960), the notions of Orthodoxy and autocracy were quite straightforward, unlike nationality (1960: 38). As Laquer says, “Church was the state church, one of the quintessential features of the regime” (2014: 72). Moreover, regarding the position of Orthodoxy within the imperial ideology, Riasanovsky refers to the famous Russian poet saying,

Russia is above all a Christian empire. The Russian people is Christian not only because of the Orthodoxy of its beliefs, but also because of something even more intimate than belief. It is Christian because of that capacity for renunciation and sacrifice which serves as the foundation of its moral nature.

(Riasanovsky, 1960: 39–40)

Coleman also analysed this ideological triad, saying that its basic idea was to

link the Orthodox Church with the state and with evolving notions of Russian nationality. In the eyes of the enemies of autocracy, Official Nationality would further tarnish the Church’s reputation, but it also provided a powerful creative framework for religious patriots who seized on the rather vague slogan and elaborated its significance.

(Coleman, 2014: 17)

But the emphasis on Orthodoxy in the state’s ideology was not only a product of the ROC’s cultural, ideological, historical and/or political importance. It is also important to mention that the focus on Orthodoxy, despite the fact that nineteenth-century Russia was a multi-religious country, was a key instrument of Russian imperial uniqueness. According to Cannady and Kubicek (2014), “underscoring of the importance of religion was partially a rejection of the eighteenth century religious scepticism of the European Enlightenment, the dangerous product of which was strongly on Nicholas’s mind with the revolutionary ethos already infecting Russia” (Cannady and Kubicek, 2014: 4). As a result, the ROC was perceived as both a moral and educational shield for Western ideas. In addition, Cannady and Kubicek argue that the state managed to secure additional control over the ROC by adding it to its ideological matrix (2014: 4). The

official ideology of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationalism” dominated imperial Russia until the February Revolution of 1917.

The 1917 Communist Revolution changed the face of the world. It was a political and ideological earthquake that struck not only Russia but also several other Eastern European countries in the early twentieth century. At this time, however, the ROC, like other autocephalous Churches across Eastern Europe, was not ready to face the communist challenge. Pipes offered an interesting explanation why this was the case: the ROC “identified itself to such an extent with the monarchy that when the latter fell, it went right down with it” (Pipes, 1974: 223).³ When it comes to ideology and religion in communist Russia, the state seemed to have two equally important goals. First, the state used all its powers to impose communist ideology on society. Second, the state did its best to suppress every single notion of the past imperial ideology because it was perceived as a threat to communist rule. Due to the fact that the ROC was an important, and perhaps quintessential part of the imperial ideology puzzle, the state was particularly interested in suppressing its influence.⁴ There is a wide range of sources on the position of the ROC under the communist regime (see, for example, Knox, 2005; Froese, 2004; Powell, 1975; Petro, 1995; Struve, 1967; Veković, 2020: 105–110). From the perspective of religion and ideology, Orthodoxy and communism is a well-studied field. What is interesting to emphasize here is that the time of communist rule (1917–1991) was probably the only historical period when the ROC was not closely connected with the state, and consequently, its ideology. It is well-known that the period of communist rule was very difficult for all religious communities in Russia, yet the ROC suffered most for two main reasons. First, even though Russia is a multi-religious country, the ROC is the dominant religious actor. That is why the hostility of the state was most visible, although it does not mean that other religious communities in Russia were spared hostility; quite the contrary. Second, the state’s specific hostility towards the ROC also derived from the fact that the ROC was a bearer of imperial ideology, the very issue which the communists fought against in the first place.

After the fall of communism, Russian society experienced significant changes and various interconnected processes. Two of the most important were democratization, or liberalization, and religious resurgence (Veković, 2020; Knox, 2005; Papkova, 2011). They were not unique to Russia, with similar processes occurring in other post-communist societies in Eastern Europe. However, the Russian case is of most interest to many scholars. Consequently, there is a vast body of literature on this issue, and once again, there is not much dispute when it comes to the role of the ROC in this period. Scholars tend to agree that a specific ideological vacuum was created after communist ideology was abandoned. As religious resurgence brought the ROC back into the centre of Russia’s religious mosaic (Knox, 2005), it was logical that the Church would fill the existing ideological gap. This was again nothing new in the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, as different Orthodox Christian Churches did the same – for example, in Serbia (Jevtić, 2009). Even though the ROC tried to fill the ideological vacuum, the state was still searching for a new ruling ideology. As Laquer puts it: “After the fall of communism, Russia was in search of a new ideology” (2014: 71). Wozniuk argues that “It is unusual for Russia to remain for a very long time without a national ideology entailing universal claims” (1997: 195). He contends that it was Boris Yeltsin who first called for a “new ideology that would reflect the new state of affairs in Russia – in essence, he was calling for ‘re-imagining’ or reinventing, the foundations upon which Russian national community is based” (1997: 195). Filatov was also on this track, arguing that Orthodoxy was becoming the new national symbol of post-communist Russia (1999: 138–149). And it was clear back then that if Russia was going to re-invent its ideology after the fall of communism, the ROC had to be a part of this project. But the ideological tenets of the Church did not fit Yeltsin’s picture of how Russia should look. There was no room

for the ROC in his idea to gradually liberalize and democratize the country, and eventually get closer to Western democracies. The ROC had slightly different ideas. According to Metropolitan Ioann's open letter sent to the mayor of St Petersburg in 1992, there were three main threats to the ROC in post-communist Russia: atheists and communists, yesterday's sworn enemies; non-Orthodox denominations, and occult heresies and sects (Wozniuk, 1997: 198). Going back to the reinvention of ideology in the post-communist Russia, the specific place of the ROC in this project was practically legalized and institutionalized when the Russian 1997 Law of Freedom of Religion was introduced. Even though Yeltsin was actually hesitant to approve this law (see detailed analysis of this process in Veković, 2020: 110–112), it was introduced in September 1997. This law secured the special position of the ROC and paved the way towards closer integration of the Church and state in post-communist Russia.

In 2001, Agadjanin argued that “in Russia today, religion is considered as a form of ideology, or it is expected to carry out ideological functions” (2001: 363). These ideological functions during Yeltsin's era can also be described via two vivid examples. First, was the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow (built in 1812, devastated during the rule of Joseph Stalin). The reconstruction was done during the 1990s and represented an important symbolic return for the ROC and its resurgence after communist rule. According to some sources, the reconstruction was mainly financed by the state (Knox, 2005: 119–121). Second, the ROC and the Russian army signed a contract in 1995 for the introduction of army priests. When the contract was signed, Patriarch Kirill said that it was one of the primary roles of the ROC to “share and stipulate the spiritual and moral principles” within the army (Knox, 2005: 123–124). That being said, it is obvious that Russia was in pursuit of a new ideology after the fall of communism. In this project, the state looked back into the past and tried to re-invent its ideology. Thus, it was almost impossible to neglect the role of the ROC. However, ideologization of the ROC acquired further encouragement after Vladimir V. Putin took power in March 2000.

Religion and ideology in post-2000 Russia: the re-ideologization of the ROC

When Vladimir V. Putin took power, there was a significant turn in Church–state relations in Russia, including an ideologization of the Church, which happened after the presidential elections of 2000. Putin's rise to power coincided with two important religious events. The first was the final consecration of the Cathedral of the Christ the Saviour, on the very day the Romanov dynasty was canonized. Since then, we can trace the ideologization of the ROC in post-2000 Russia, a process that is definitely not a one-way street. The state started openly using the ROC as an instrument of political support, while at the same time, the Church did its best to impose conservative political and social tenets, or ideology, on society. Both of these areas are well-studied and documented.⁵ However, one should be aware of the fact that post-2000 Russia does not have an official ideology. Yet, there is an obvious tendency of the state to pursue and support conservative politics, both in domestic and foreign policy, to impose and support specific moral principles within society, as well as anti-Westernism and anti-liberalism. All of these could fit under the umbrella of conservative ideology. And if the umbrella is in the hands of Vladimir Putin, the very canopy is definitely made by the ROC.

To my best understanding, the ideological canopy represented by the ROC in post-2000 Russia consists of several aspects, including specific moral principles that the Church tries (quite successfully) to impose on society, as well as a more general anti-Westernism and anti-liberalism. By doing so, the ROC is one of the main pillars of Putin's regime. However, one should be aware of one crucial thing common to all Orthodox Christian Churches: by no means should the ROC be understood as a monolithic block (for detailed analysis on this topic, see Papkova,

2011). The above-mentioned ideological tenets are usually represented by key religious officials and are widespread through Church-controlled media, although not necessarily supported by all Church clergy. Another important fact is that the above-mentioned ideological tenets are supported in the doctrinal teachings of Orthodoxy and further developed in two key documents that define the role of the ROC in Russian society: “The Basis of the Social Concept” (2001) and “The Russian Orthodox Church’s Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights” (2008).

“The Basis of the Social Concept” is a document that defines the political and social role of the ROC and even the ideology of the Church. Hoppe-Kondrikova, van Kessel and van der Zweerde sum up the main principles implemented in this document:

1. *Symphonia*: specific Church–state arrangement;
2. *Pomesnost’*: the need for a balanced nuance between the universalistic mission of the Church and its regional/national organization;
3. *Sabornost’*: the notion of a community based on mutual respect between individual and community; and
4. *Bogoshelovechestvo*: the dual nature of the Church (2013: 203–204).

According to Anderson (2007), this document consists of two elements that led Church–state relations in Russia to become more integrated. He argues that these elements are shared views towards liberalism and the role of the West in Russian society, shared both by the state and the ROC. “Westernism” is understood as a threat to Russian values, and the possible imposition of perceived Western values, such as democracy, is not seen as a good thing. Moreover, as religious pluralism is one of the core values of Western democracies, from the Russian perspective, it is understood as a security threat. The ROC’s anti-Westernism is based, according to Anderson, on three components: the era of living under communism, anti-Westernism in nineteenth-century imperial Russia and the historical division between Eastern and Western Christianity (Anderson, 2007: 189). The main difference between the West and Russia is based on different understandings of society. While Western societies emphasize the virtue of individualism, Eastern Christian societies praise community. According to the ROC, individualism is a bad thing for society. Furthermore, as individualism is closely related to liberalism, the ROC has a very specific way of understanding it. The current Patriarch of the ROC, Kirill, said the following in 2000 (in a very long but important statement):

Today there exist[s] no wall that is able to secure [the] health of the nations and their religious and historical autonomy against the expansion of alien and destructive socio-cultural forces or from a new manner of life that has arisen outside of all traditions and which has been created under the influence of post-industrial reality. At the foundation of this manner of life lie liberal ideas, which have united within themselves pagan anthropocentrism, which centered European culture at the time of Renaissance, Protestant theology and Jewish theological thought. These ideas came to a head in the Enlightenment in a certain complex of liberal principles. The French Revolution was the culminating act of this spiritual and philosophical revolution, at the base of which lay the rejection of [the] normative significance of tradition. It was absolutely no accident that this revolution began with [the] Reformation that rejected the normative significance of tradition in the sphere of Christian doctrine. Within Protestantism, tradition ceased to be the criterion of truth: personal interpretation in the study of Holy Scripture and personal religious experience became the criteria of truth ... The liberal

idea does not call for a liberation from sin because the very concept of sin is absent in liberalism. Sinful manifestation[s] by a person are permitted if they do not violate the law and do not infringe upon the freedom of another person ... Thus for the liberal idea flows the generally accepted concepts of civil liberties, democratic institutions, market economy, free competition, freedom of speech, and freedom of conscience, all of which constitute the understanding of “contemporary civilization”.

(Anderson, 2007: 190)

The ROC’s specific anti-Westernism also has another important dimension. According to a 2017 Pew Research survey, “Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe”, most (66%) Orthodox Christian believers across Eastern Europe agree with the statement that: “A strong Russia is necessary to balance the influence of the West”. Agreement with this statement is even higher (85%) among Russians who are followers of Orthodox Christianity (Pew, 2017).

On the other hand, the document, “The Russian Orthodox Church’s Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights”, is focused on the ROC’s understanding of human rights. As Stoeckel (2017) puts it, besides the fact that the ROC “has emerged as a powerful force for cultural, social, and political conservatism” (2017: 272), the discursive strategy of the ROC regarding human rights changed between 2000 and 2008. She explains this change by arguing that

It evolved from a clear-cut rejection of human rights as a Western invention to endorsing human rights as a concept, but utilising the concept in a way that was opposed to the liberal and egalitarian evolution of the international human rights system. This change was the work of the traditionalist camp inside the ROC, and it sidelined the fundamentalists, who rejected any engagement with the topic, and the liberals, who would have preferred a clearer endorsement of human rights.

(Stoeckel, 2016: 134)

According to Stoeckel, traditional values supported by the Church include

visibility of Christian symbols in the public sphere, opposition to all forms of lesbian–gay–bisexual–transgender rights, restrictions on the breadth of women’s and children’s rights, and opposition to abortion, euthanasia, reproductive and stem cell research, as well as the defence of believers’ rights of religious expression, i.e. battle against any free speech that can amount to blasphemy.

(*Ibidem*, 142)

Agadjanin explores in detail the issue of imposing conservatism and the ROC’s specific moral principles as applied to society. He claims that this specific moral discourse is actually the key to the Church’s agenda (2017: 3). Traditional values, which the ROC tries to impose, comprise different elements, including emphasis on the family, anti-abortion, anti-gestational surrogacy and in vitro fertilization,⁶ and tenets against homosexuality, transsexuality and same-sex marriages, and juvenile courts (Agadjanin, 2017: 7–10).⁷ In order to resist such trends, the ROC tried to gain support from conservative actors across the world (*Ibid.*). This particular aspect of the ROC’s international work has been studied by Stoeckel (2016). The above-mentioned 2017 Pew study also had significant insight into this context. According to the Pew study, conservative social views prevail in Orthodox-majority countries, with a particularly clear hostility towards

homosexuality. The great majority of Orthodox Christians across Eastern Europe, including in Russia, claim that homosexuality is wrong (85%, according to Pew, 2017), while almost as many are against abortion. Most Orthodox Christian respondents stated that abortion should be mostly or entirely illegal while also holding pronounced conservative views on gender norms, agreeing that wives should always obey their husbands (Pew, 2017).

Finally, it is important to mention the issue of religious education in Russia. In terms of the re-ideologization of the ROC, this issue cannot be neglected. As Köllner notes, in Russia, education has always been an instrument through which the state has pushed its political-ideological agenda, particularly during the communist era (2016: 368). Religious education was re-introduced in Russian state schools in 2010. One of the subjects is: “Foundations of Orthodox Culture”. However, Scherrer (2003) states that this subject is not meant to analyse Russian culture. Instead, she asserts that “it has an ‘integrating function’ to compensate for the lack of official state ideology after the demise of state atheism” (2003: 45). Willems’s (2012) study also showed that religious education in Russia has an “ideological construction with an educational purpose”, as students are expected to adopt the uniform Russian tradition as their own and to behave accordingly (2012: 35).

That being said, despite the fact that post-2000 Russia has no official religion, the ROC is widely used by the state in support of its societal re-ideologization. Its role in this process is marked by two important documents accepted by the Church, as well as with the imposition of religious education.

Concluding remarks

During its history, Russia has embraced two major ideological systems: imperial ideology and communism. As a dominant religious actor, it was logical to presume that the ROC had a significant role to play in both. However, its political, as well as ideological, role was quite different during the two periods. While the ROC was one of the main pillars of the imperial ideology, it represented one of the main enemies of the communist ideology. And this was not just the case with the ROC, but also with the other Orthodox Christian Churches across Eastern Europe. However, after the fall of communism and the resurgence of religion and the ROC, we witness the specific re-ideologization of the ROC. This is particularly so in post-2000 Russia, where the ROC is one of the pillars and supporters of the neo-conservative ideology of the state. Why this is the case is derived from both historical and doctrinal reasons.

Despite the fact that Orthodox Christianity does not have an identifiable ideology, it was often used as a supplement or an asset to ideological systems imposed in majority Orthodox Christian countries. From a doctrinal perspective, the political and ideological potential of Orthodox Christianity is based on two equally important and related doctrinal concepts: *symphonia* and *autocephaly*. The first concept is often used to explain the ideal type of Church–state relationship, widely accepted by Orthodox Christian Churches. It is based on the experience of the Byzantine empire and aims for a close relation between Church and state. Second, the concept of autocephaly is related to the organizational pattern of the Orthodox Christian Churches, which are independent and autonomous in their canonical territories. As autocephaly is directly related to political independence, we can see that Orthodox Christian Churches are almost inseparable from the state and its development. Thus, as Orthodox Christian Churches tend to have very close relations with the state, they are often an inseparable part of state ideology. This is precisely the case with the ROC. As one of the most powerful, perhaps *the most powerful*, Orthodox Christian Church, throughout its history, the ROC was closely related to the state and its ideology. This is particularly important in the case of the Russian imperial ideology,

which seems to be the perfect match for these doctrinal concepts. The ROC was praised as one of the cornerstones of the state, so it is reasonable that the ROC considers this period as a golden age.

In this chapter, I showed that the ROC was one of the main pieces in the imperial ideology puzzle. Even though the Russian imperial ideology of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationalism” was officially introduced in 1833, the ideology has much deeper roots. Since the foundations of the Muscovite monarchy, Orthodox Christianity was regarded as one of the key elements of Russian identity. As Pipes (1974) suggests, Orthodoxy and the ROC were also vital parts of the imperial ideology prior to 1833, an ideology based on the idea of Russia as the inheritor of the Byzantium empire, and leader of the Christian world. According to Pipes (1974), this specific ideology was developed by ROC clergy. However, after the February Revolution of 1917, the position of the ROC changed significantly. Almost overnight, the ROC became a key enemy of the state. Obviously, the Church was not ready for this major political change, nor its consequences.

Nevertheless, during communist rule, the Church kept the memory of its role and position in imperial Russia, confident that it would eventually return to prominence. The fall of communism encouraged this idea, particularly after 2000. This is the time when the state and Church merged interests. Both are keen to emphasize the ideas of imperialism and how this “New Russia” project should look much like the old imperial Russia. This project is, of course, heavily dependent on the continuation of cordial Church–state relations, especially the continued support of the ROC.

Notes

- 1 This study is one of the academic cornerstones of the understanding of the Orthodox Christianity as inherently conservative, and thus anti-democratic religious tradition. Alongside Webber’s classic *Economy and Society* (1978), Pipes’ work had a vast influence on Huntington’s “waves of democratization” (1993) and the “clash of civilizations” (1996). Later on, these will become leading sources for describing Orthodox Christianity as an inherently anti-democratic religious tradition.
- 2 Muscovite monarchy is the name of the medieval Russian state, founded in 1340 around the city of Moscow. It was preceded by the Russian Empire in 1547.
- 3 A very similar experience can be found in the case of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Having a strong connection with the Serbian monarchy and its ideology, it also collapsed after communist rule was imposed in 1945.
- 4 It is important to mention that it was the *modus operandi* not only in Russia, but in all communist states across Eastern Europe, including Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, etc.
- 5 One of the very useful projects exploring the political role of the ROC in post-communist Russia, and particularly in post-2000 Russia, is “Postsecular Conflicts” (POSEC), based at the University of Innsbrück (Austria) and directed by Kristina Stoeckel.
- 6 The Holy Synod of the ROC refused the right of baptism to families with children born from surrogate mothers (Agadjanin, 2017: 7–10).
- 7 Set of legal norms that allows state or civil bodies to interfere for the protection of children’s rights against family violence.

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