

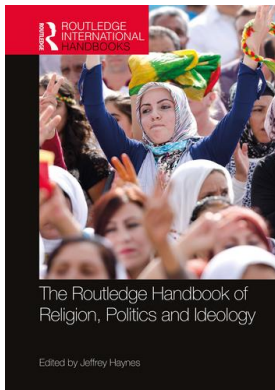
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6

LIFE AFTER COMMUNISM

Contemporary Orthodoxy, politics and society in Eastern Europe

Greg Simons

Introduction

It was not long ago, in the immediate wake of the Cold War and the collapse of communism in the Eastern Bloc, that the perception was that the world was living in a post-ideological age. However, this optimistic line of thinking is being increasingly challenged in an age where in-group culture and identity formation are becoming increasingly relevant and important among states in an era of global transformation. Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, there was a new flowering of religion that was used by a number of countries as a marker of national or cultural identity, a signifier of group values and belonging (to replace the discredited and lost political ideology) or a demonstration of national independence (Koltsö, 2000: 53–80; Staalesen, 2005: 301–325). Today, religion is playing an increasingly prominent role in the social and political life of Eastern Europe in the wake of a period of at least half a century of strict, state-controlled religion (Naletova, 2009; Simons & Westerlund, 2015).

This current situation makes this an appropriate time to study, from a conceptual and theoretical perspective, the significance and motivations for this religious resurgence. Culturally conservative countries, such as Poland, Romania and Russia, have seen closer interaction of religion and politics, which has caused controversy in the global hegemony of liberal democracy (Byrnes & Katzenstein, 2006). Christian Orthodoxy and its political and ideological role in the post-Soviet era have been chosen for closer review and analysis in this chapter. The research question that is posed for this chapter is – *can religion be said to play an ideological role in Eastern Europe? If so, what are its motivations and reasoning?*

The first section details the method and approach taken, followed by reviewing and analysing religion and ideology in the content of the second section. Following this, in the third section, we focus on understanding religion as a centre of cultural production. The fourth section examines the interaction and interplay between religion and identity. The final section seeks to bring all of the previous sections together and, in order to address the stated research question, aims to apply them to the contemporary situation in Eastern Europe.

Method and approach

Approaches to textual analysis in the chapter include content analysis (quantifications of different elements in text), argumentation analysis (the structure of argumentation used) and the

qualitative analysis of ideas in the content (with a focus on persuasion and attraction) (Boréus & Bergström, 2017: 7–9). The combination of these approaches is expected to yield results on the ontology (what exists) and epistemology (knowledge and how we “know” things) of reactions to academic textual depictions of the political and religious groups’ attempts to persuade and influence the symbolic use of religion as both identity marker and ideology among selected majority Orthodox countries of the former Eastern Bloc. The objects of study include power, ideology, policy, culture and purpose, identity and belonging (Boréus & Bergström, 2017: 1–2). The academic texts then contextualise the relationships according to perceived and projected power in the constructed social world order of humanity, where there is, on the one hand, a present perceived or actual social and cultural deficit and, on the other hand, the promise of a sense of belonging, purpose and security.

It is our aim to use a qualitative approach to analysing the data, and given the size of the samples, to create an indicative study. The sample material collected for this chapter was found via a Google Scholar search in 2020. Search terms that were entered are religion and cultural production; religion and ideology; religion and identity; politics + Orthodox Church + Eastern Europe. The first ten pages of Google Scholar search results were manually checked by the author for relevance based upon the stated criterion in the first paragraph of this section.

An approach using similar cases was applied as a means to reduce the size and complexity of the total possible sample. There are various religions present in Eastern European countries, and some countries tend to be more religiously inclined in their active practice than others. Therefore it was decided to limit the cases to countries with a majority Orthodox presence, such as Romania and Russia (being the most examined of relevant countries). Orthodoxy was selected as there are a greater number of countries with an Orthodox presence, and this permits a greater level of cross-country comparisons (in order to draw reliable inferences as to the various uses religion plays in contemporary politics and their ideological role), while it also tends to exhibit over time a fairly high level of consistently strong and stable identity and values (Byrnes & Katzenstein, 2006; Simons & Westerlund, 2015). Time and space simply do not permit for a wider empirical sample, especially given that the focus of this chapter is at the theoretical and conceptual levels and is not intended as generalisable but rather as an indicative result of a theoretical study.

Religion and ideology

Ideology is an emotionally laden and symbolic concept. It potentially has the power to prime and mobilise publics. The presumed end of ideology, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the ideologically framed bipolar world order, caused both jubilation and a declaration of the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1991). This suggests that the potential power of ideology is that it can simultaneously unite and divide people. It is noted that ideologies tend to arise during times of cultural crisis. This occurs when conventional political patterns of meaning fail to interpret the world adequately. As Williams notes, “ideologies emerge as comprehensive systems of meaning at times when current cultural systems seem unable to handle social change” (Williams, 1996: 371). But, what exactly is ideology and what is its conceptual and theoretical significance?

An ideology is thus totalistic: it presents, at least in the fullest form, a broad range of views which cover the central aspects of how society should be organised, answering such questions as what the role of the state should be, what forms of difference or

differentiation between people should be accepted, and which rejected. In the widest possible sense an ideology thus offers answers to the questions of what kind of society is desirable.

(Schwarzmantel, 2008: 25)

However, the political ideological excesses of the 20th century and the association of ideology with Nazism and communism meant that it became a “dirty word” that carried negative connotations. Schwarzmantel (2008: 113) states that “new” ideologies differ from the homogenous and mass ideologies of the past. Instead, they tend to be quite heterogeneous and reasonably diverse, emphasising a particular desired group culture and identity. When ideology is applied to religion, we may note similarities with the above quote from Schwarzmantel.

Pierre Bourdieu details some connections between, and significance of, ideology and religion. He puts it like this: “The objective source of religion’s ideological function is latent in the correspondence that exists between social structures [read power structures] and mental structures” and thus “one may construct the religious fact in a strictly sociological manner, that is, as the legitimate expression of a social position” (Bourdieu, 1991: 5, 16). In other words, religious and political ideology seek to shape and create what they see as a perfect model of a group and/or society by influencing how it is conceived, organised and practised. There needs to be a certain harmony and convergence of theological and political interests to ensure its operational success.

Religion’s involvement and engagement in a country’s political life (i.e., religion as a political resource) are characterised by empirical academic studies along two broad lines of enquiry – religion as culture and religion as ideology. On some occasions, these aspects are kept mutually exclusive, and on others, they are conflated. However, culture and ideology can be interactive and complementary (Williams, 1996). In terms of the voluntary interaction between political ideology and religion, culturally conservative politics is more likely to engage in a relationship in order to benefit from likely forms of religious and social capital (Forbes & Zampelli, 2013: 2488). Furthermore, some studies suggest that religiously active and inclined youth tend to report “greater levels of shared vision or shared worldview, perceptions, values, and goals with their parents, and adults outside their family than less religiously active youth” (King, 2003: 199). Religion can therefore potentially create a more unified vision of identity and culture among a people, which during periods of change and uncertainty are valued by the political governing elite.

Religion as a centre of cultural production

Various institutions of the state (meaning the body politic) are effectively “licensed” to become sites of cultural production through manufacturing and circulating discourse, social and cultural meaning and identity. They “instruct” current and future citizens in the “correct” modes of thought and conduct in relation to the mass media, parliaments, courts of law, educational institutions and expressions of organised religion (Louw, 2001). These are the mechanisms of manufacturing a common ideology to enable it to achieve its goals, as noted by Bourdieu (1991) and Schwarzmantel (2008). Controlling the means of cultural production creates social and political capital, which in turn is used to regulate and manage social and political relations within a given society. As already noted, religion is one of the centres of cultural production, which we need to understand in order to give context to this chapter as a means to illuminate the underlying motivations and reasons for utilising religion in the management of relationships between the elite and the masses.

Pierre Bourdieu provides some interesting insights into the potential power of religion in managing the state’s affairs. Bourdieu (1987: 127) argues that religious power is measured by

its capability “to modify, in a deep and lasting fashion, the practice and world-view of lay people” via “absolutisation of the relative and legitimisation of the arbitrary.” This enables religion, through the normative processes of citizens’ socialisation, to affect individuals’ thoughts and behaviour through a process of integration by instilling conformity (Verter, 2003: 154). Swartz (1996: 7) notes the significance of the potential symbolic capital of religion as “a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others.” Religious capital (a result of religion’s soft power appeal) is used as a means to try and accrue political capital, which is particularly important for politicians in an era and environment of trust deficit.

However, Bourdieu understands and then frames the application of religion’s capital, and symbolic power tends to be viewed in a “sterile” social and political environment of influence and persuasion of the masses. But, as Dillon notes, “although Bourdieu sees religion as a symbolic system, he ignores the diversity of meanings people inject into religious discourses, experiences, and participation” (Dillon, 2001: 426). Meanings can and will be contested at times in the physical and informational environment, especially in a period of profound social, economic and/or political change.

Religion and identity

There are three conceptual levels to identity – ego, social and collective (Beit-Hallahmi, 1991: 86). Identity is a popular topic in the contemporary social science agenda and it is also widely found in mass media. However, the term is often ill-defined and its application is therefore vague and misunderstood (Beit-Hallahmi, 1991). One of the basic goals of every group is to ensure its own survival. Therefore, in matters that are considered to be relevant to the group’s existence and activities, the creation of a common worldview is considered to be key to group integration. Following from this, collective identity is expected to manifest itself in the behaviour and thoughts of individuals (Beit-Hallahmi, 1991: 81–82; Harrison Oppong, 2013: 13). The institutions of cultural production (including religion) can be used as a tangible means (existing in the physical realm) to communicate (via the information realm) and create an intangible ideology (existing in the cognitive realm), where culture and identity constitute vital elements. Identity creates intangible emotional bonds between individuals that enable cohesive and enduring collectives to be created and maintained, with religion as one of the centres of cultural production also potentially playing a significant role in identity formation.

The de-secularisation of society around the world, where religion takes an increasingly active and central role (Byrnes & Katzenstein, 2006), is sometimes conflated with and included in the idea of a growing “clash of civilisations” thesis (Huntington, 1996). However, some argue that an apparently increasing role of religion in politics has little to do with civilisational clash. “The salience of religion in contemporary politics is symptomatic of a fragmentation of the broad movements of politics which the traditional or established ideologies of politics represented, rather than as part of a ‘war of civilisations’” (Schwarzmantel, 2008: 122). It forms an oppositional force to the ideologies of modernity (in particular what come to have been seen as the excesses of the assumed universality of liberalism, see Sanchez, 2010, for example), demanding recognition through the invocation of a symbolic and emotionally constructed group identity that determines the central values and priorities.

Religious identity can be assumed to operate at the level of social identity and is based at the group level. It is a product of social learning that tends to be ascribed rather than adopted through the physical matter of location. This in turn influences individuals’ value systems (Beit-Hallahmi, 1991: 86–87; Markstrom-Adams, Hofstra & Dougher, 1994: 467; Harrison Oppong,

2013: 15). In other words, religious identity is regulated and managed by the ideological system of time and place, together with the institutions of cultural production.

Religion has the ability to navigate and interact on the individual and collective level.

Religion is both personal and social, individual and cultural. The concept of identity seems to provide a bridge between the private and the public realms in religion, as an appropriate locus for that which connects the individual personality and the cultural matrix.

(Beit-Hallahmi, 1991: 91)

Marshall argues, from a more cultural-spiritual interpretation, that

religion addresses the most important questions at the core of human existence – the existential questions of meaning, morality, and the nature of truth. It provides many with a sustaining meaning for life – and an explanation for death. It is a source for community and decency and is an outlet for charity and education.

(Marshall, 1996: 387)

In sum, a significant function of and role for religion as an identity and an ideology is to project and reassure people with a sense of order and meaning in the context of a human experience that may otherwise appear to be chaotic and frightening.

Ideology and meaning: Orthodoxy and the state in Eastern Europe

Radu (1998: 285) observes that “the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe sees itself and is widely perceived as the historic repository of nationhood, national values, and, quite often, as the saviour of a nation’s very existence.” The Orthodox Church is a culturally conservative organisation from the very top of its hierarchy. History plays a very important role in its collective sense of identity and culture. For example, the Orthodox world did not experience either a Renaissance or an Enlightenment, which influenced society’s values and development trajectory differently from that in the West. There are also traumas from the collective historical memory of the Mongol and Ottoman occupations and the decades of communist rule that perceived religion as a threat and repressed it. This historical legacy influences its understanding of what constitutes an ideal constructed present and future that is based on perceived periods of an “idyllic” past. This does create the context for ideological conflict with political ideologies, such as that of liberalism and its assumption of universal standards, values and norms (Roudometof, 1999; Ramet, 2006; Naletova, 2009). But, on the other hand, the Orthodox Church makes a natural ally for culturally conservative political ideologies. There are potentially a number of common (similar/close) concerns and missions in shaping citizens’ world views, behaviour and perception through influencing their identity via the qualitative nature of the institutions of cultural production to counter the named threat and to shape an “ideal” society simultaneously.

The sudden collapse of the Eastern Bloc caused an ideological vacuum that was rapidly populated by various extremist and nationalist ideologies (Yasmann, 1993), following the collapse of the formerly dominant hegemonic system. This contrasts with Western Europe, for example, where “the problems of identity are not as urgent because [it] is not rapidly changing and therefore does not require doctrinal or ideological support” (Borowik, 2006: 275). As the political and ideological centre of the Eastern Bloc, Russia experienced a profound loss of culture and identity, as well as the state institutions that had long built and maintained the system. As a result,

there was a search for an alternative form of ideological guidance as a means to lift the countries and the people from the social, political, economic, ideological and identity crisis¹ that resulted from the collapse of the system. Naletova (2009: 393) notes that there are “a number of cultural, historical and spiritual factors which suggest that the Orthodox Churches are able to strengthen the national identities of their people as strongly or perhaps even more strongly than the traditional churches in neighbouring non-Orthodox countries.” There has been a tendency for Eastern Europe to be prone to and experience a number of crises in the post-Soviet era. This has prompted a search to find a “cure” or “vaccine” for the public against these periodic crises with an aim to instil a new sense of moral and ethical culture and identity so as to develop a desired worldview that produces an “ideal” vision of thoughts and behaviour.

Given the compromised nature of professional politics in many Eastern Bloc countries, religion was a social institution that gained both public trust and authority after the collapse of communist systems (Naletova, 2009: 377). In addition, it is a source of cultural production. In particular, the various local Orthodox Churches, present for many centuries in what is now post-Soviet space, are both culturally conservative and consistent source of values, morals, ethics and periodically partners in state identity building and ideology.² Borowik (2006: 275) notes that “the important difference in Eastern Europe is that religion and Orthodoxy cannot be replaced in the forming of identities, whether individual, national, cultural, or political.” The situation is confirmed by Naletova (2009: 377), who observes that “in spite of the dramatic changes that happened in Eastern Europe after the breakdown of communist regimes, traditional Christian values and practices either remained vital or were revitalised together with the resurgence of patriotism and nationalism.” This was in spite of decades of anti-religious propaganda to limit the Churches’ influence.

In the next section, we examine and analyse in turn the Romanian and Russian Orthodox Churches in order to determine the extent to which they play a contemporary ideological role (based on the theoretical framework elaborated in the preceding sections of this chapter). If they do play such a role, an attempt will be made to clarify if there are any specific sets of social or political or economic circumstances that explain this outcome.

Romania

In 1991, a mere two years after the bloody overthrow of Nikolai Ceausescu, 88 per cent of Romanians declared themselves as being Orthodox (although only 8 per cent attended church services regularly) (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1998: 86). A large part of the population base their identity on Orthodoxy, and this has bestowed on the Church both legitimacy and authority, including the potential to influence public policy debates (Alexandru, 2006: 67). In the immediate aftermath of the communist collapse, some 50 years of propaganda and social engineering had all but erased traces of pre-communist Romania. The successor political authorities required a partnership with the Romanian Orthodox Church as a key source and legitimiser of cultural identity. However, the situation was complicated by the country’s gradual move towards the European Union and, as a result, *de facto* reunification with the West (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1998). This both contradicted and threatened the role and status of the Church as the main source of Romanian culture and identity, as foreign values were said to “threaten” the spiritual welfare of the country.

Nineteen eighty-nine was seen as a watershed year in Romania’s history. The overthrow of Ceausescu’s communist dictatorship enabled a widespread and strong feeling of liberation and a new beginning. It also permitted the resurgence of old ideologies. Yet, many problems remained, such as corruption, a large black market, a massive brain drain and mass emigration (Romocea, 2011: 244). The crises of the 1990s, emanating from various sources, such as political, social and/

or economic instability, uncertainty and lack of clarity in culture and identity formation, periodically revisit Romania today. As a first step to understand the situation, we shall look at the transformation that the Romanian Orthodox Church underwent from 1989 before delving into the issue of church–state relations. Finally, we shall analyse some of the aspects of the Church’s work and its interactions with the public.

Although the Romanian Orthodox Church is a culturally and socially conservative organisation, one of the transformations of the 21st century has been, since 2007, to create and develop a media organisation. It includes both radio and television stations and several newspapers (Damian, 2010: 23). The Church now has a number of different functions among the institutions of cultural production in the information age. Another is education, where the Church is actively involved in developing educational programmes at high school, tertiary and professional (priesthood) levels (Stan & Turcescu, 2000: 1477–1479; Stan & Turcescu, 2005; Andreescu, 2007: 462–464; Damian, 2010). They have been successful in creating a significant educational capability and capacity in a short space of time. Combined educational and media assets enable the Romanian Orthodox Church to communicate its identity, culture and values to a mass public.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Romanian Orthodox Church’s place in the country’s new political order was uncertain and the cause of controversy.

This is because many Orthodox leaders view democratisation as a threat to their Byzantine view of church–state relations and the state is unwilling to relinquish its traditional centralist coordination of every single aspect of Romanian life, including the religious one.

(Stan & Turcescu, 2000: 1485)

Politics viewed the Romanian Orthodox Church as an impediment to the political course of ideological modernisation (such as Euro-Atlantic integration), as the Church was seen as both ideologically conservative and anti-liberal (Romocea, 2011). This was particularly evident in the Romanian Orthodox Church’s opposition to EU accession, based upon the former’s perceived role as the institutional keeper of Romanian values, identity and culture (Radu, 2005; Sincan, 2008) i.e., those aspects that shape worldviews and ideologies. In this regard, the EU was seen as an antithesis to those cherished “native” values and the role of the Church (as the moral and spiritual guardian of Romania and her people) as a key institution of cultural production in Romania. Just before the EU accession in 2007, an opinion poll revealed that 50 per cent of respondents would support the involvement of the Church in political affairs (Sincan, 2008: 211). The period was marked by competition between politics and the Church as to which would be the source of the country’s ideological guidance. By the close of the first decade of the 21st century, significant progress was made in religious education in public sector schools and pre-university. This was justified as a means to counterbalance the moral vacuum created by communist indoctrination (Turcescu & Stan, 2010: 158). At the time, there were also the beginnings of a new mode and quality of interaction and relationship with the state.

The fifth Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Teoctist (1986–2007), embraced “the semi-established and established church model and attempted to obtain a number of legal privileges and recognition by the state as the dominant church in a country” (Turcescu & Stan, 2011: 242).³ In 2007, Patriarch Daniel introduced partnerships⁴ between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the state, which marked a significant departure from the centuries-old Byzantine model of *symphonia* (harmony). This has enabled a more contemporary understanding and practice of church–state relations, where both parties work on an equal footing, a situation better suited to the conditions of the 21st century (Turcescu & Stan, 2010: 158).

An empirical illustration of this new partnership model between the state and the Romanian Orthodox Church occurred in 2008 when the severest economic crisis for decades occurred. In this instance, the Church assumed a number of the social functions normally performed by the state. Four significant results can be noted:

- (1) Increased importance of the religious behaviour understood as socio-cultural transformation;
- (2) Redefinition of the role of church within the socio-political system;
- (3) Rediscovery of the role of religion in the construction of collective identity;
- (4) Instrumentalisation of religiosity with the purpose of consolidating the political legitimacy within a context characterised by instability, crisis of values and political suspicion.

(Cace, Cace & Nicolaescu, 2011: 43)

This social help engagement within the context of an economic crisis, together with associated political, social and economic effects, were likely to increase the political and social capital of the Romanian Orthodox Church. As a result, it is now better placed in terms of its public and political legitimacy to influence and play a more active role in the ideological and worldview development of the country.

Today, the Romanian Orthodox Church seeks to play a more active role in the social and political life of Romania. There has been a move away from the traditional Byzantine understanding of state-church relations to a more contemporary partnership system that was introduced by Patriarch Daniel as a means to break the deadlock caused by value and norm conflicts with politics at the national and EU level. It is difficult for the Romanian Orthodox Church to perform its traditional national ideological role as the holder and definer of the senses and meanings of Romanian culture and identity owing to the clash of the traditional religious ideology with the modern (EU-wide) liberal ideology. However, the Church remains an important social and political actor in Romania, which is influenced by the high level of public trust, recognition and identification with Orthodoxy. The ideological potential of the Romanian Orthodox Church remains as there is a certain degree of need by the state to work with the Church to overcome different crises that are experienced by the Romanian people, who require spiritual and moral comfort in a chaotic worldly environment.

Russia

Sociological surveys in Russia indicate that approximately 80 per cent of Russians identify as being Orthodox; however, only 3–5 per cent are active in practising the religion (Burgess, 2009: 5; Sokolov et al., 2017). As with the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church draws its lineage of historical justification and legitimacy from its Byzantine roots and has a long tradition as the bearer of national identity, culture and values (Ershov & Ashmarov, 2018). It is an institution of cultural production that serves Russia and her people as a spiritual and moral guide that shapes the national self-understanding and worldview. According to Burgess (2009: 8–13), Orthodoxy offers three avenues of identity to Russians – a form of ideological guidance across the spheres of human existence and experience. Firstly, many Russians perceive the connection that to be Russian is to be Orthodox. Secondly, the Orthodox identity regulates social harmony and unity in post-Soviet Russia. Thirdly, Orthodoxy provides Russians with a sense of having a national mission.

The collapse and break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 not only meant the end of an ideology but also the end of an empire. Significant and extreme social, political and economic changes (and crises) followed. Thereafter, Orthodoxy has served a number of public functions. First, it is a stable historical institution that Russians have turned to in times of trouble and upheaval to the

point where it is considered to be the foundation of national culture and the very basis of the national mentality. Second, “on a public level, religion has become an important institution that can contribute much to the solution of the ideological and moral crises” (Titarenko, 2008: 240). Third, there is moral education, intended as a cure for the post-Soviet social and spiritual crisis, to counteract such diverse forms of social ills as high drug and alcohol addiction, diverse sexual orientations and high divorce rates (Köllner, 2016: 382). In short, Russia was experiencing a number of different crises simultaneously, and some wanted to see an active role for the Russian Orthodox Church in helping resolve them.

The return to Orthodoxy is not only about building historical bridges as a means to restore the nation’s historical memory and to develop the spiritual and practical aspects of historical traditional heritage.

For some groups of political elites, religious revival is also a means to incorporate traditional conservative ideology into the state ideology and mentality of the people, to spread conservative moral principles and to find additional support for the idea of strong political power.

(Titarenko, 2008: 252)

The current nature of the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state has been assessed in a different light by Ershov and Ashmarov (2018: 23), “church–state relations in the modern Russian state are based on the principle of relative independence of the Church and the state. The most important is cooperation in the social and cultural sphere.” Other research has shown that there is a simultaneously existing level of independence and interdependence between the state and the Church, depending on the nature of the task at hand. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church and Georgian Orthodox Church acted as intermediaries for their respective states that were not communicating directly after the 2008 Georgian–Russian War (Simons, 2015). Papkova (2011b) summarises the legacy of the 15th Patriarch, Alexei II (1990–2008), as having a relatively weak institution that was not capable of sufficiently strengthening its position in Russia through legislative means. There were informal means of gaining some benefits from the state (at all levels) and governmental or institutional structures. These often functioned on the level of personal relationships with sympathetic politicians and officials. However, many political actors did like the appearance of “legitimacy” and “Russianness” that came from being seen in public at important religious rituals and events (Simons, 2005; Simons, 2009; Papkova, 2011a). There have been attempts to formally articulate an ideal vision of a relationship of the Russian Orthodox Church to different stakeholders, including the state and the public.

One of these attempts occurred in 2000, after Vladimir Putin’s election as President of the Russian Federation, in the form of the *Basis of the Social Concept*.⁵ Positions of the Russian Orthodox Church on political and social questions of relevance and importance at the turn of the 21st century from the Church’s understanding were identified and formulated (Papkova, 2011a: 23–54). The Church was explicit in rejecting a church–state relationship in which the state has any say in the internal affairs of the Church (Papkova, 2011a: 69). Patriarch Kirill (2009–present) has argued for a more active public engagement by the Russian Orthodox Church on a variety of social and political issues.

This engagement has an ideological foundation of a strong claim to establish the church as a powerful actor in society which has been undergoing a post-soviet desecularisation. The claim to be a weighty political entity requires a heavy rhetorical presence.

(Agadjanian, 2017: 40)

This is an attempt to publicly articulate the ethos of the Church, underlining its moral identity and legitimacy and connecting Russia's religious and national identities.

One of the areas that the Russian Orthodox Church is engaged in in contemporary Russia is instilling identity, values and norms. For example, there was the introduction of religious education in state schools in 2012. In addition, the state emphasises the bonds between Orthodox Christianity and Russian history, culture and identity. An underlying reason for this seems to be linked to the instrumentalisation of Orthodoxy as a means of instilling values, thoughts and behaviour in shaping worldviews that contribute to nation- and institution-building and strengthening the sense of patriotism (Köllner, 2016). There has also been a periodic coming together of state and religious interests in the social sphere, for example, in the context of the demographic crisis facing Russia. The Church has articulated a firm stance on the issue (i.e., a problem given the demographic situation) of abortion, which is a key aspect in how family values are defined (Stoeckl, 2016: 132; Agadjanian, 2017: 44). The ideological position of communicating a pro-life worldview and values among the public benefits both the Church and state practically and in terms of social or political capital.

Traditional values are an important part of the Church's communicated identity and culture. This is used as the basis for the social and political role of the Church in the role of guarantor of the traditional ethos of Russia, which is supported by a steady rise in the overall approval of the Russian Orthodox Church's significance among the population (Stepanova, 2015; Stoeckl, 2016; Agadjanian, 2017: 53–54). In its bid to become the voice of traditional values, the Russian Orthodox Church has rhetorically securitised spiritual, moral values as being a matter of national security in Russia. The creation of an example of a dichotomy of desirable versus undesirable fundamental values is intended as a means to construct a stable and resilient national identity that is able to repel cognitive threats, for example, a variant of the Colour Revolutions (Östbö, 2017). The Church's stance on the establishing of traditional values is also supported by the political elite, such as Putin. "the spiritual and moral foundation of civilisation in every nation for thousands of years: the values of traditional families, real human life, including religious life, not just material existence but also spirituality, the values of humanism and global diversity."⁶ Stepanova (2015: 135) argues that the religious (Patriarch Kirill) and political (President Putin) tend to echo each other as defenders of traditional values. However, she rates Patriarch Kirill's interpretation as being more nuanced and conceptually rooted.

The Russian Orthodox Church plays an active role in the conceptualisation and formulation of a national ideology based on traditional values and worldview in a national context. This is in part based on the historical context of the place and role of the Church as being a centre of cultural production since the year 988; together with this is the contribution to being trusted and perceived as the repository of Russian values and culture at the popular and political level. In spite of some differences between the state and Church in the past, there is a convergence of political and religious interests and agenda (even if there are some instances of different motivations and perceptions). This influences the quality and nature of church-state relations that are currently articulated and practised as a form of an independent partnership with interdependent social and political goals in shaping a national ideology that is resilient to internal crises and external threats, such as contamination from "foreign" (liberal) values and neighbouring countries' erstwhile "Colour Revolutions."

Conclusion

The chapter commenced with a question posed in relation to the activities and function of the Orthodox Church: *can religion be said to play an ideological role in Eastern Europe? If so, what are its*

motivations and reasoning? This was specifically applied to the conditions of Romania and Russia. The aim of this chapter was not to highlight the specifics of an empirical case but to draw an implied theoretical result for helping to better understand the environmental circumstances and conditions that facilitate the ideological role and function of religion in contemporary society.

Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe is by nature a deeply traditional and conservative ideological force that has held the national role of defining their respective countries' values, culture and identity for many centuries. There is the common source of historical legitimacy that defined the nature of church-state relations, which was influenced by the Byzantine practice of the *symphonia* concept. The Romanian and Russian Orthodox Churches have had a fundamental impact on forming the national identity and character of Romania and Russia. Both of these Churches also experienced varying forms of repression and suppression during the communist period, and both have emerged from this era with a renewed determination to contribute to the social and political developments of Romania and Russia that have been experiencing various simultaneous and successive political, social, economic and identity crises. Given Orthodoxy is an established centre of cultural production that has outlasted various political regimes, it is well placed to bring a sense of "order" or understanding to the current social, political and economic chaos through instilling a worldview that supports the spiritual and moral welfare of the people.

However, in order for the Church to be able to fulfil this function and role, the nature and quality of relations and responsibilities need to be negotiated and agreed with the state. This proved to be an initial obstacle after decades of state primacy over all aspects of human, economic and political life under communism, although diminished state capacity and capability made the political elite more accommodating. This created state-church relations that are more independent than hierarchical in nature, yet the pragmatic goals and aims are interdependent and require collaboration.

Therefore, it can be tentatively concluded that religion can play an important ideological role in contemporary society. Here, ideology is understood as being a total system including a code for creating and maintaining an idealised understanding of what constitutes an "ideal" society. The role of transmitting and forming a national system of identity, culture and values is a central aspect in determining a desirable society from an undesirable one as it shapes the cohesiveness of a people's worldview. To achieve this, there are necessary environmental factors: (1) a physical and/or psychological presence of a crisis; (2) a high level of historical and contemporary public and political trust in an established religious institution; (3) a weakened state that lacks the capability and capacity to successfully manage and regulate social and political affairs; (4) a system of independent/collaborative church-state relations rather than hierarchical structure where institutional aims and goals converge and create an atmosphere of interdependence in their realisation; and (5) a sufficiently developed concept and vision of an ideology resonates with the public and is appropriate for the current environmental circumstances.

Notes

- 1 For the purposes of this chapter, a crisis is considered to be active when three simultaneously occurring factors are present: 1) a threat to values, 2) unpredictability and 3) a sense of urgency in achieving a resolution.
- 2 For an overview of these aspects of Orthodoxy, please see this link to a Pew poll conducted in the year 2017: <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/>.
- 3 See also Stan & Turcescu, 2006.
- 4 Two of the most significant are the Protocol of Cooperation in the Area of Social Inclusion and the Collaboration Protocol on Social Assistance Partnership with the Romanian government.

- 5 To view this document in English, please see <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>.
 6 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, President of Russia, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6402>, 12 December 2013 (accessed 7 May 2020).

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