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# Re-Imagination of Religion in Post-Soviet Society: Challenges and Responses (Russian and Ukrainian Case Studies)

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This article examines post-Soviet types of religious development and re-imagining of religion based on the case studies of two post-Soviet countries—Russia and Ukraine. The comparative analysis of these two cases has been focused on issues that could expose the current religious situation which is influenced by the common Soviet and pre-Soviet past and new current trends of social development in two independent states. This analysis aims to answer the question to what extent the religious imagination is connected to social context.

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## إعادة تصوّر الدين في مجتمع ما بعد المرحلة السوفيتية: التحديات والاستجابات (دراستان للحالتين الروسية والأوكرانية) أولجا كازمينا وأولجا فيليبوفا

يبحث هذا المقال أنواع التطور الديني وإعادة تصوّر الدين فيما تلى المرحلة السوفيتية وذلك بناءً على دراستين لحالتين في بلدين ظهرا بعد المرحلة السوفيتية: روسيا وأوكرانيا. تمّ تركيز التحليل المقارن لهاتين الحالتين على الأمور التي يمكنها الكشف عن الوضع الديني الحالي المتأثر بالماضي المشترك خلال المرحلة السوفيتية وما قبلها والمتأثر أيضاً بتوجهات التطور الاجتماعي الجديدة الحالية في الدولتين المستقلتين. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الإجابة على السؤال المتعلق بمدى اتصال تصوّر الدين بالسياق الاجتماعي.

## 后苏联社会对宗教的重新构想：挑战与回应 (俄罗斯和乌克兰案例研究)

Olga Kazmina and Olga Filippova

本文基于俄罗斯和乌克兰这两个后苏联国家案例研究，探讨了后苏联式的宗教发展以及对宗教的重新构想。对这两个国家的比较分析着重于研究同样受到苏联时代及前苏联时代历史影响的两个独立国家中，宗教现状和当前社会发展的新方向。本文的目的在于了解宗教构想与社会环境的关联程度。

## Переосмысление религии в постсоветском обществе: проблемы и ответы (на примере конкретных ситуаций в России и Украине) Ольга Казмина и Ольга Филиппова

В статье рассматриваются постсоветские типы религиозного устройства и переосмысления религии на примере двух республик бывшего СССР - России и Украины. Сравнительный анализ сфокусирован на вопросах, способных отразить современную религиозную ситуацию, сложившуюся под влиянием общих исторических советских и досоветских тенденций, а также новых направлений общественного развития в этих двух суверенных государствах. Данное аналитическое исследование пытается ответить на вопрос о том, в какой степени религиозное восприятие обусловлено социальным контекстом.

## Reimaginación de la religión en la sociedad post-soviética: desafíos y respuestas (casos prácticos de Rusia y Ucrania)

Olga Kazmina y Olga Filippova

Este artículo analiza los tipos post-soviéticos de desarrollo religioso y de reimaginación de la religión basándose en casos prácticos de dos países post-soviéticos: Rusia y Ucrania. El análisis comparativo de estos dos casos se centró en cuestiones que podrían exponer la situación religiosa actual que se ve influenciada por las tendencias de desarrollo social soviéticas y pre-soviéticas comunes, pasadas y actuales, en dos estados independientes.

El objetivo de este análisis es dar cuenta de hasta qué punto la imaginación religiosa está vinculada al contexto social.

RETHINKING THE ROLE THAT RELIGIONS play in the modern world within and across societies and cultures occurs within different contextual and analytical perspectives, among them post-colonial, post-Cold War, and “beyond-western-tradition.” Comprehending religious significance in the modern world as well as in a particular society assumes an understanding of how religions shape societies and are shaped by societies. Also important is how a particular society and state create and foster this context for re-imagination of religion through their social, political, and economic realities. In our view, it is also crucial that imagination (re-imagination) is always connected with memory, takes its roots in common memory. It is influenced by traditional culture and historical experience, and very often imagination operates with stereotypes. At the same time, while dependent on stereotypes it can produce something new, depending on social context. Our other point is that whereas religion is a multidimensional phenomenon, historical heritage and contemporary context determine which dimension and which aspect will be the core of re-imagination.

The post-communist countries constitute important cases for verifying scholars’ assumptions regarding examination of these issues, which could be presented as the “post-communist perspective” of analysis. In countries where religious studies had been marginalized or hidden for decades, re-imagination of religion in scholarly discourse still comprises an “unfinished project.” Also, re-imagining of religion in society influences the academic study of religion, which shows great interest in the sociology of religion and in the political and legal dimensions of religious situation.

The main questions that this article brings to discussion are to what extent religious re-imagination is connected to social context (in its past and present terms) and how social context contests religious development in transitional societies, where state-building and nation-building are on the agenda. Specifically, this article examines a post-Soviet type of religious development and re-imagining of religion based on the Russian and Ukrainian case studies. The comparative analysis of these two cases, we believe, can help to reveal where the current religious situation is influenced by common pre-Soviet history (though common pre-Soviet history is not applicable for the western part of Ukraine) and Soviet past, and where it is determined by the current specific conditions of each country; and hence to see the contextualization of religious re-imagination. Among post-communist societies Russia and Ukraine represent countries that experienced in the near past the so-called “Soviet model” of religious development and church–state relations, which is characterized as “tough and antagonistic separation of the Church from the state” (Yelensky 2000a: 66–67). This makes the choice of Russian and Ukrainian case studies even more promising in terms of examination of religion’s re-imagination.

For fruitful examination it is necessary to outline briefly the crucial preconditions of the recent past, without which re-imagination of religion and scholarly and public discourse about it would not be possible at all. These preconditions are tied to the essential changes that have been occasioned by the collapse of the communist regime and confronted these societies with various questions of re-evaluation, re-definition, and re-constitution of many aspects and forms of individual, communal, and social life, which seemed “unshakeable” before. Alongside with the fundamental shift in ideology and political strategy, as well as in economy that became “directed to the market,” post-communist transformation brought about the reshaping of the sense and importance of many components that had been neglected or suppressed by the communist regime. Among them religion is the most visible one that requires rethinking in great degree both in individual life and in public rhetoric.

The main features of considerable changes of the role and image of religion are the increased attention toward religion and the use of religion in advocating economic, political, national, or civilizational choice of a particular country, the appeal to religion in conflicts and peacemaking processes, and the politicization of religion and its involvement in political processes. Both countries proclaimed the importance of religious values, the necessity of religious freedom, and the acknowledgment of the connection between religious freedom and the building of democracy. The “modus” of the re-imagining of religion is shaped by the specific inheritance of each country, legacies of church–state relations, and different conditions under which religions are being contested by similar and different aspects of the social context.

Although religion is acquiring a new role in the private and public domains, it is significant to understand what crucial factors determine this process and how they could be contextualized as common features of post-Soviet societies or, on the other hand, as a ground for distinction.

The analysis, proposed in this article, comprehends several factors that, we believe, constitute dominant and simultaneously contested sources for religious imagination. They are the historical inheritance of religious development, the legacy of two recent decades, splits and schisms, religious diversity and identity issues in the societies, and as an outcome of the interrelation of the mentioned above sources, a tendency to politicization and contestation of religions.

## HISTORICAL INHERITANCE FOR RECONTESTING?

From the very beginning the Orthodox Church was involved in politics and the power claims of the Old Rus state. In particular, it was the

most powerful factor of “land gathering” and strengthening of the state. Church and state were traditionally tightly connected, and religion was incorporated into the state ideology. Though the Byzantine Orthodox doctrine of “symphony” between church and state was accepted and mandated close cooperation between them, church–state competition for the leading position in society was not excluded. In this competition there were supporters of the idea of an organic religious civilization and of the idea of the church as a subordinate institution of a secularized state. This competition actually ended only in the early eighteenth century under Peter the Great who abolished the Patriarchate. In general, Peter’s reforms attempted to integrate religious life with the centralized imperial administration (Meyendorff 1978: 170). Since the mid-sixteenth century when the Kazan Khanate was incorporated into the Russian state, the Islamic factor was added to the religious policy of Russia. Later on, the appearance of other religious minorities also challenged politics in the religious sphere.

For Ukraine the connection of church and state had its own specific nuances. Most of the Ukrainian territory was integrated into the Russian state, and in the absence of statehood the Church occupied a core place in the national unity. But the Orthodox Church in Ukraine did not get independence. After joining the Moscow Patriarchate in 1686 the Kyivan Metropoly lost its autonomy, whereas the Russian Orthodox Church was considered as the implement of the Russian Empire’s policy in the Ukrainian lands.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the Russian Orthodox Church was not only the largest and most influential denomination of the Russian Empire (actually, it was also the world’s largest national church<sup>1</sup>), but as an established church, it enjoyed many privileges that others did not. At the same time, its activities were strongly regulated and controlled by the state. As to Islam, the second largest religion of the Russian Empire, there was an unwritten rule that the Russian Orthodox Church would not try to use its privileged position of an established church in Muslim regions to proselytize there; Muslims, in turn, would not proselytize among the Orthodox population in those regions.

The advent of freedom of religion in Russia is usually connected with “The Act of Toleration,” adopted in 1905. It guaranteed a better position for non-Orthodox denominations and permitted the crossover from the Russian Orthodox Church to other Christian communities. The

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<sup>1</sup> In 1914 it had about hundred million members (Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, as well as some minority peoples who were baptized), fifty thousand priests, some ninety-five thousand monks and nuns in more than 950 monasteries and convents. (Tsypin and Nazarenko 2000: 132).

Russian Orthodox Church also derived some benefits from it, though it still was greatly dependent on the state. The new context stimulated a movement for restoration of the Moscow Patriarchate (abolished in 1721) and independence from the state; church reforms arose within the Russian Orthodox Church. This movement was especially strengthened after the February Revolution of 1917.<sup>2</sup> The Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 ended this short period of the development of religious freedom. Instead, cruel repression was imposed on the Russian Orthodox Church and, a little later, on other religious organizations. The revolution also provoked striving to change the status of the Church in Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

The position of religion in the Soviet Union also brings some common features to the contemporary Russian and Ukrainian situations. Under Soviet authority “freedom of conscience,” while formally proclaimed, in reality resulted in persecution against believers and the elimination of many religious organizations. The Russian Orthodox Church was much distressed when after the death of Patriarch Tikhon the government did not allow the convening of a church council to elect the successor Patriarch. The Church was even more weakened after the 1927 Metropolitan Sergius’s declaration of loyalty to the Soviet state. This declaration provoked schisms in the Church that persist to this day. However, this declaration allowed the Church to retain its status as a legally permitted institution, otherwise it would have had to go underground.

As part of the state policy of atheism, in 1932 a five-year plan was adopted, with the aim to close all places of worship for all denominations and to end all religion by 1937 (Tsyin 1994: 103). Nevertheless, even under these conditions, when people had few possibilities to openly profess their religion, the level of religiosity remained high, as attested by the 1937 census of population: more than half of the adult population called themselves believers, mostly Orthodox (*Vsesoyuznaya Perepis’ Naselenia 1937 g. Kratkiye Itogi* 1991: 106). However, as an institution the Russian Orthodox Church was on the brink of extinction by late 1930s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The first All-Russian Church Council was called in August 1917, and in November 1917 a Patriarch (Tikhon/Belavin) was elected.

<sup>3</sup> In 1917–1918 there was substantial agitation for independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In 1920 the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church was created (though because of the break of the apostolic succession it was not recognized by other Orthodox Churches). In the beginning this church was supported by Soviet authorities who were trying to undermine the Russian Orthodox Church, but in 1930s it was totally suppressed.

<sup>4</sup> Thus, in 1938 it had only four bishops, who were living at liberty and running their dioceses in comparison with 163 bishops in 1917 (Tsyin 1994: 106). While there were 54,000 churches, 25,000 chapels, and 12,000 convents and monasteries, operating in 1917, by 1938 only 400 churches remained; as to convents and monasteries, they were all closed (Zeide 1988: 345–346).

Unexpectedly for the Church, it improved its positions when new territories were incorporated into the Soviet Union (Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia in 1939, and Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Bessarabia in 1940)<sup>5</sup> since many Orthodox believers lived in these territories.

Also, with the forced conversion of 3000 Greek Catholic (uniate) parishes into Russian Orthodox (which mainly happened between 1946 and 1949), the Russian Orthodox Church increased its membership but simultaneously engendered conflict, which is not resolved in Ukraine until now. As Nathaniel Davis correctly states, it was not that Stalin loved the Orthodox, he hated the Vatican more (1995: 215). He feared any outside influence, although he felt able to control the Russian Orthodox Church.

During World War II the Nazis (while hostile to Christianity in their own country) for tactical reasons allowed the reopening of churches and the profession of Christian religion on the occupied territories. The Soviet government reacted to these measures in 1943 by improving the conditions for religious organizations, especially the Russian Orthodox Church and Muslims on the territory under its control. In particular, some churches, monasteries, and convents were reopened; some priests and bishops were released from prisons. The Russian Orthodox Church was finally permitted to elect a Patriarch. In the postwar period atheism was not among major policy objectives, and the state did not create big obstacles for believers, especially those of older age (Tsekhanskaya 2002: 19). But in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Nikita Khrushchev started a new anti-religious campaign, which included mass closure of churches, atheistic propaganda, discrediting of clergy, and official interference in church affairs (Tsekhanskaya 2002: 19–20). The Brezhnev era was a period of slow erosion as to the religious situation: there were no large-scale church closings, but the losses of the Khrushchev attack were not reversed, and new ones were added (Davis 1995: 46).

Relations between state and religion began to change for the better only in late 1980s during Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika campaign. In 1988 the millennium of Christianity in Rus was celebrated as a national festival. In practice, this was the end of the Soviet policy on religion, and the tendencies of the early 1990s development were forming in the late 1980s.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1939 the Church got 1200 Orthodox parishes (Davis 1995: 16) in Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia. In 1940, when Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were included into the Soviet Union, almost three million Orthodox followers and 300 churches passed to the Russian Orthodox Church. When in the same year the Soviet Union got Bessarabian lands, the number of the adherents of the Russian Orthodox Church increased another three million (Davis 1995: 16). In those new territories there were active priests, bishops, seminaries, and so on.

Generalizing the Soviet experience and its effect on further re-imagination of religion, we argue that the contestations which occurred during the Soviet period were obviously in the “state-church-ideology” realm. The state wanted and to a large extent succeeded in putting religion under its control. Persecutions and the strict state regulations made religious organizations passive in social and political terms. On the other hand, they were the only place under Soviet rule where an ideology, other than communism, could exist legally.

Another effect is that the Soviet antireligious policy did not result in eradication of religion but managed to reshape it. Religiosity was often latent or hidden and not grounded in solid knowledge of church doctrines and practices.<sup>6</sup> Latent religiosity stimulated the religious revival in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Simultaneously, the lack of religious knowledge made religious structures very flexible (they became more stable only by mid-1990s). All this complicated religious development in 1990s.

### LEGACY OF THE RECENT PAST

The last two decades brought great changes to Russia and Ukraine. They comprised several important periods that contributed to religious re-imagination.

The turn of the decade from the 1980s to the 1990s was time when new tendencies were forming. In fact, the celebration of the millennium of Christianity opened a new period in the relationship between church and state. Religion was finally recognized by the state. Another turning point in religious politics, as attested by researchers, was Mikhail Gorbachev’s visit to the pope in Rome in 1989. It meant that the state, while having recognized religion in general, did not show any special support or favor to the Russian Orthodox Church but began a policy of neutrality to all denominations (Davis 1995: 215).

In Ukraine these events stimulated actions toward Church independence. Beginning in 1989 hundreds of parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church (mostly in western Ukraine) declared themselves as belonging to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). According to Orest Subtelny’s estimation, by June 1990 approximately 1650 parishes had passed from the Russian Orthodox Church to the UAOC. Since the 1930s the UAOC had been based abroad and had not operated in Ukraine (Subtelny 1994: 717).

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, there are no substantial statistical or sociological survey data, which could help to analyze the real degree of religiosity of Russia’s and Ukraine’s population in the 1970s and 1980s.

The general situation of the early 1990s was very challenging: disillusionment with the past, loss of previous views, spiritual vacuum, and dreams about the future. The crisis of “Soviet identity” after the demise of the Soviet Union led to the search for a new “positive” identity. For many people this identity was tied into “essential roots” such as religion. Interestingly, in sociological surveys of the late 1980s and early 1990s many people identified themselves not as adherents of some particular denomination but simply as Christians (Byzov and Filatov 1993: 37).

Also, for the first time in seventy years people got the possibility to profess their beliefs openly. The first liberal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations was adopted on October 1, 1990, still in the USSR. It was the final period of the USSR, and the tendencies of decentralization were already strong. Hence, on October 25, 1990 the Russian Republic’s Law on Freedom of Beliefs came into force. Six months later, in April 1991, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.

The Law of the Russian Federation lifted all restrictions on the activity of religious organizations, guaranteed equal rights for all denominations, permitted religious instruction in nonstate schools, and forbade the interference of authorities in the affairs of religious organizations. The Russian scholar of religion Alexandr Shchipkov was absolutely right when he noted that there was not such a degree of freedom either in politics or in economics in that period in Russia (1998: 28).

The Ukrainian Law of 1991 indicated that religious organizations were created with the primary aim to satisfy religious needs and express religious feelings. It also guaranteed equal rights for all denominations. Religious organizations were not divided on the basis of traditional and nontraditional ones. The Law permitted both Ukrainian citizens and foreigners to be leaders of religious organizations.

At the same time, these laws not only outlined the new philosophy and conceptual ideas of religious life in both countries but also several years later brought a new issue to debates: legal protection of the historical Church (Churches). It happened because religious imagination was involved in the Russian and Ukrainian state-building and nation-building processes, where historical Church (Churches) were endowed with a special role in the supporting of state interests.

The atmosphere of early 1990s, when religion was very attractive to many people, helped religious revival and provoked a growth of interest in religion and even a kind of fashion to demonstrate religiosity. Both the new laws and the general popular mood favored a dynamic period for religious organizations. Religiously speaking, the first half of 1990s can be titled “All are welcome.” In these years a lot of churches were opened in

both countries. The overwhelming majority of new denominations began their activities exactly in that period (Filatov 2002: 471).

Christian denominations, which during the Soviet period functioned underground (like the Russian True Orthodox Church or Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church) or were exiled and functioned only abroad (like the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad or Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church), got official status. In Ukraine this openness brought not only “spirituality” but also created some competition between Orthodox denominations (Yelensky 2002b: 458). They competed for their special status from the state and for the number of followers. Each of them aspired to be viewed as the only “true” church for Ukrainian culture and nation.

In the early 1990s almost all the denominations functioning in the countries increased their followings. It was a time of euphoria for all: traditional denominations, those that just came from abroad, and those “newly minted” indigenous sects. These years were also marked by unusually high mobility of those professing religious allegiance, as the newly faithful often converted from one denomination to another, experimenting and trying to choose the religious organization that suited them best. In the re-imagination of religion in that period the very possibility to profess was the most crucial.

During several generations the majority of Soviet people did not get any religious education, did not have any grounded knowledge of religious teachings, and had minimal ties with religious organizations. This determined some specific features of the early 1990s and resulted in the growth of an interest in the so-called “alternative beliefs”: astrology, magic, healing, and so on. Another characteristic feature of this period was some kind of “omnibeliefs”—one and the same person might simultaneously profess Christianity and believe in astrology, poltergeists, interplanetary aliens, reincarnation, and occult appearances.

Since Russia was traditionally a country where the overwhelming majority of population professed Orthodox Christianity but during the communist period became religiously inactive and inert, or even belief-empty, one of the major challenges of the early 1990s was re-Christianization of the population. The Russian Orthodox Church was not the only actor in this field. Many western Evangelicals came to Russia. The Roman Catholic Church became active as well and attracted not only those who belonged to traditionally Catholic ethnic groups. The lack of religious training, the neglect of ritual practice, and the self-identification of many people simply as Christians facilitated the appearance in Russia of various Christian denominations.

In Ukraine the same tendencies were obvious in the eastern and southern regions where, as a result of Soviet transformation, the population

was less religious than in Western Ukraine. In these areas during Soviet times the church did not preserve the functions of social communication, self-identification, and moral arbitration. In Eastern and Southern Ukraine the process of re-Christianization of the population led not only to the competition for "Orthodox loyalties" but also to the search for the "true" Christian denomination.

In this atmosphere of huge popular interest toward religion, the religious organizations in both countries found themselves in competition with each other. The Russian Orthodox Church felt frustrated by this competition. The years of the communist regime had done their job: the Church had become in effect "locked" in its church buildings. It had lost its experience in missionary work and had forgotten how to conduct community activities outside the church. By contrast, Protestant Evangelicals from the West were very skilled in these types of activity. This unequal contest created tensions between the Russian Orthodox Church and western Christian denominations.

These tensions were aggravated by differences in viewpoint between the Russian Orthodox Church and Protestant denominations on evangelism, missionary work, and proselytism. According to Evangelicals, anyone who is just a "nominal" Christian, regardless of whether this person was baptized before, is a legitimate object of evangelism. Evangelicals believe that missionary work can be pursued in any region of the world regardless of whether another Christian Church exists in this area (Witte 1999: 21).

According to the Russian Orthodox Church, most of the population of Russia is under its spiritual protection because they, or at least their parents, were baptized in this Church. Therefore, Russia cannot be defined as an open field for the missionary work of Evangelical denominations, as based on the words of Apostle Paul: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not build on someone else's foundation" (Rom. 15:20). Thus, what was legitimate missionary work in the mind of Evangelicals turned to be a nonlegitimate proselytism in the eyes of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The early 1990s were also a period when many organizations of New Religious Movements appeared in Russia and Ukraine. Among those there were both groups of foreign origin ("Moonies," Aum Shinrikyo, Sri Chinmoy, Scientologists, etc.) and indigenous ones (White Brotherhood, Vissarionists, etc.). They all aggressively promoted their activities.

At the same time, in Russia in the early 1990s, though it was a period of religious diversity and openness of the society to all denominations, the Russian Orthodox Church was the institution that the population trusted the most. In sociological surveys, conducted between 1992 and 1994, the Church rated higher than the government, parliament, different political movements, and parties (White and McAllister

1997: 240). In an atmosphere when the majority of the population became disillusioned with former Soviet structures and not satisfied with new structures and organizations, which were connected in the popular mind with the difficulties of this traditional period, with economic crisis, with worsening of living standards, and so on, the Russian Orthodox Church, with its long history and strong cultural tradition in Russia, represented in people's mind aspirations to stability and assurance of the future.

### SPLITS AND SCHISMS

Another characteristic feature of the 1990s is that many religious organizations and churches of the same confession became active in Russia and Ukraine. Thus, in previous times the Russian Orthodox Church was the only Orthodox organization that officially functioned in Russia. At present, the overwhelming majority of Orthodox believers in Russia continue to belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. At the same time, there are now a number of Orthodox denominations that broke away from the Russian Orthodox Church during the twentieth century though they are small in numbers.<sup>7</sup>

In Ukraine the splits within Orthodoxy are much more serious. The religious situation in Ukraine is different from that in most postsocialist countries. In Ukraine there is no dominant Church with which the society or its majority associates itself. Such a situation is the result of the former division of Ukraine's territory between states with different cultural and

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<sup>7</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (formed in 1927 by Russian clergy and laymen in immigration after Metropolitan Sergius issued the declaration that called for loyalty to Soviet power) began to function in Russia in 1989, and some parishes passed to it from the Moscow Patriarchate's jurisdiction. Basically, the reasons for this crossover were the dissatisfaction with the policy of the Moscow Patriarchate or personal conflicts of some priests with their church authorities. Later, in 1991, its parishes in Russia formed Russia's Free Orthodox Church (its present name is Russia's Autonomous Orthodox Church) under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. In 1995 Russia's Free Orthodox Church separated from this church. Russia's Free Orthodox Church accused the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad of too tolerant an attitude toward the Moscow Patriarchate and of contacts with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (whose jurisdiction is illegitimate in view of Russia's Free Orthodox Church). At the same time, in Russia there are still parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad because not all parishes followed this initiative to separate. The number of these two organizations in Russia is rather small. After the end of communist rule another dissident Orthodox Church began to operate legally. It was the "True Orthodox Church" (its other name is Catacombs' Church; it was also created in 1927 and went underground in opposition to the Declaration of 1927). It is not a single church entity now but is divided into several small groups. These groups differ one from another in their attitudes toward the Russian Orthodox Church and in their jurisdictions. In the very beginning of 1990s there was an increase in their activities, but these activities have since diminished; the years of underground existence made them into some sort of secret sects.

religious traditions, and it is determined by mostly cultural and historical factors. The majority of the Ukrainian population affiliate themselves with Orthodoxy. But Orthodoxy in Ukraine happened to be split. Nowadays in Ukraine three Orthodox Churches exist: (1) Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOCMP), which has more than 9500 parishes, 8000 priests, 131 monasteries with 3700 monks and nuns, and fifteen theological institutions with 4100 students; (2) Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kiev Patriarchate (UOCKP), which is headed by Patriarch Filaret and is anathematized by the Russian Orthodox Church and has 3050 parishes, 2400 priests, twenty-eight monasteries, and fifteen theological schools with 1600 students; and (3) UAOC, which is seeking to be under the jurisdiction of the Constantinople Patriarchate, and has more than 1050 parishes, three monasteries, and eight theological schools (Vas'kovsky 2002: 24–25).

There is some correlation between the preference in church jurisdiction and political and ideological orientations. Some part of Orthodox clergy and laity in Ukraine cannot imagine themselves without immediate connection with the Russian Church, whereas another part of clergy and adherents strongly oppose any jurisdictional ties with the Moscow Patriarchate. Both groups base their convictions on their political and cultural preferences rather than on theological grounds. In Ukrainian society there is no real unity on this question among politicians, the national elite, cultural leaders, and among the broader population (unlike Russia where such type of unity exists). According to some Ukrainian researchers, this question cannot be resolved until a broader public consensus concerning strategic directions of future development of Ukraine is found (Yurash 2003).

Here questions arise as Why in Russia the alternative Orthodox organizations remained small and noninfluential in comparison with the Russian Orthodox Church, while in Ukraine different Orthodox churches, though not equal in their weight, can compete with each other? Could the connection between religious imagination and the social context be viewed as problematic for tradition? In our mind, the answer lies in historical, political, and cultural spheres. In Russia exactly the affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church is the component of national and ethnic identity of Russians and other Orthodox groups (including ethnic Ukrainians who live in Russia). Also, only the Russian Orthodox Church has particular state support. In Ukraine the situation is quite different: in the process of nation-building churches compete to be recognized as a core denomination. On the other hand, the church splits and the absence of a dominant Church in Ukraine does not necessarily represent a “dramatic” feature of contemporary Ukrainian society. According to the Ukrainian scholar Andriy Yurash, a pluralistic and poly-jurisdictional made of existence and development can

be one of the most important characteristic of contemporary Ukrainian Orthodoxy, which would effect a difference from others' Orthodox traditions as well as highlight the pluralistic and democratic type of development of spiritual and religious life in Ukraine.

In Russia the splits touched not only Orthodoxy but other confessions as well. Thus, the Muslim community of Russia is even more split. There are dozens of various rival Muslim organizations. Among the reasons for those splits were personal conflicts and ambitions, political problems, and theological controversies. Very meaningful was "ethnization" of Islam in the religious imagination: many Muslim ethnic groups created their separate organizational structures instead of the previously centralized ones. The tendency of separation also exists in the Buddhist and Jewish communities.

### DENOMINATIONAL DIVERSITY AND IDENTITY ISSUES

Both countries represent considerable denominational diversity that influences the re-imagination of religion. Available statistical sources<sup>8</sup> allow us to outline denominational structure as following. In 2002 58 percent of Russia's population were Christian Orthodox (including 1 percent Old Believers), 1 percent Protestants (including 0.3 percent Pentecostals and Charismatics, 0.3 percent Baptists, 0.2 percent Lutherans), 0.6 percent Armenian Apostolic Church, 0.3 percent Marginal Protestants (including 0.2 percent Jehovah's Witnesses); 0.2 Catholics, 8 percent Muslims; 0.3 percent Buddhists; 0.4 percent Traditional Ethnic Cults; 0.1 percent Jewish; 0.1 percent others; 31 percent were non-believers.<sup>9</sup>

So, the overwhelming majority of believers are traditionally Orthodox. The second largest religion of Russia is, as traditionally, Islam. The overwhelming majority of Russia's Muslims are Sunnis of Hanafi and Shafii madhhab, although in the last decade the Wahhabi sect of Hanbali madhhab has also penetrated the Muslim population, mainly in

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<sup>8</sup> Religious statistics are a very complicated and delicate matter because there is no single strong criterion for affiliating a person with a particular denomination. Figures vary greatly depending on whether one counts those who associate themselves with a certain denomination or just those who are practicing believers. Very often the data on ethnic composition is simply extrapolated on religious affiliation, which is not accurate because there is no strict correlation there. Another problem is the lack of reliable data on religious membership in Russia and Ukraine. Most of the available figures are based on partial sociological surveys. The numbers do not necessarily reflect the degree of participation and cultural and political involvement of this or that denomination. Nevertheless, the estimates below provide at least a rough sense of the contours of religious affiliation in both countries.

<sup>9</sup> Estimates were made by Professor Pavel Puchkov, based on the 2002 census of population data on ethnic composition correlated with materials of sociological surveys on religious affiliation.

Dagestan and Chechnya. Historically, there are two Muslim areas in Russia: the Volga region and the northern Caucasus. But because of high migrational activity of many Muslim ethnic groups Muslims are currently also found in many other regions.

As to Protestantism, if we recall the processes of the early 1990s, the number of Protestants in contemporary Russia may look unexpectedly low. There are several explanations for this in addition to the changes in the general mood of the population: from westernism to more national feelings. First, many Protestants in Russia were ethnic Germans or Finns who emigrated to their ethnic homeland. Second, there also was significant emigration among other Protestants (including ethnic Russians): many pastors left, many theology students, who had been sent to study abroad, did not return (Johnstone and Mandryk 2001: 543). Third, foreign Protestant missions lost some of their potential members because they often did not know or did not take into consideration ethnic and cultural traditions of the population, Russian history, language, and literature (Elliott and Deyneka 1999: 203). Moreover, Protestants were more successful in Siberia and the Far East in comparison with the European part of the country. In newer urban regions of Siberia there were no churches and no parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church at all. Hence, the new denominations were met there with greater interest; sometimes they came there before the Russian Orthodox Church reached those areas.

Protestantism was more successful in Ukraine. Probably it was because of major splits within Orthodoxy in Ukraine, perhaps because Orthodoxy did not have strong state support (also because of the splits) and there was more state neutrality.

As to the ratio of believers and nonbelievers, only a third of Russia's population are nonbelievers, which is not very many for a country where atheism had been imposed for seventy years.

When using statistics concerning the religious structure of Russia's population, one must remember that there is a large gap between the number of those who consider themselves to be believers and the number of those who actually practice (attend religious services, pray, observe church prescriptions), which is the result of secularization. According to surveys conducted by Professor Mchedlov, only 5–7 percent of respondents reported that they were actively involved in the church activities (Mchedlov 2002: 45). There are also those who do not call themselves believers but associate with a specific denomination for cultural and historical reasons. Religion is often considered more as a cultural heritage rather than an opportunity to have contact with God. First of all, the cultural dimension is involved in the religious imagination, especially since it is this dimension that is most understandable for many who have

grown in a very secular society. As sociologist Sergei Filatov states, many people on the question "What is religion in your understanding?" answer that "It is culture, following of national traditions" (Filatov 2002: 474). Interestingly, there is a group of nonbelievers (some 5–7 percent of all nonbelievers, according to Professor Mchedlov) who trust the Church on the matters of morality and social problems (Mchedlov 2002: 45). Because of the dominance of the cultural component, the role of religion in society in general and of Russian Orthodoxy in particular should not be measured by the level of religiosity or the number of practicing believers. Rather it should be correlated with the number of people associating themselves with some faith. Even those who do not go to the church are happy with the opening of new churches and convents. People support the return of religious buildings to the churches. In mass consciousness the transfer to religious organizations of the property that historically belonged to them is an important criterion of the state's attitude toward believers (Loguinov 1998: 86). The majority of Russia's population is satisfied with the state's recognition of the major religious holidays. Hence, the gap between those who associate themselves with the Church and those who practice indicate for the church a potential for growth.

There is also a gap between those who practice and those who claim an association in traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in Russia. In different estimates the number of practicing varies from 2 to 4 percent.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the role of Islam in traditionally Muslim regions has considerably increased. In particular, it is evident in the appearance of Muslim parties and widespread religious statements in the programs of secular cultural and political organizations. And again the cultural component is the one most claimed.

As to Ukraine, 120 denominations are currently represented there (Vas'kovsky 2002: 22). Most communities belong to traditional denominations that have existed in the country for generations, whose religious practices are well known to population and which have become elements of the national culture. These are, first of all, Orthodoxy and Greek Rite Catholicism, as well as Latin Rite Catholicism and such Protestant denominations as Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists. The term "traditional" may also be applied to such religions as Judaism and Islam, which have deep roots in Ukraine. At the same time, over the last decade previously unknown, nontraditional denominations appeared in Ukraine.

According to a sociological survey conducted in 2002–2003, among the respondents who considered themselves religious believers, 68.8 percent belonged to Orthodox Churches, 6.9 percent to the Greek Rite Catholic

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<sup>10</sup> See Johnstone and Mandryk 2001: 544; and Filatov 2002: 474–475.

Church, 2.2 percent to different Protestant congregations, 0.8 percent to the Latin Rite Roman Catholic Church, and 0.7 percent to Islam. Approximately 13.5 percent did not associate themselves with any religious group (Bychenko and Dudar 2002: 15–16).

There are also statistics on the number of religious communities of different denominations. In 2002 over half of the religious communities in Ukraine were Orthodox, 12 percent were Greek-Catholic, and 28 percent were Protestants of various types.<sup>11</sup> Of course, statistics of the number of religious communities do not reflect the numbers of their fellows but influence the representation and still reveal some tendencies in the religious situation. Among those is the rapid expansion of the network of Protestant communities (first of all in Eastern Ukraine), though Protestants compose only 2.2 percent of all believers.

Practically all denominations in Ukraine are regionally structured. The center of religious life has clearly shifted to seven western regions: with only 19.8 percent of Ukraine's population, this area houses some 43 percent of all religious communities. New religious groups attempt to cover evenly the entire territory of Ukraine.

Re-imagination of religion is tightly connected with identity issues. In both countries there were big shifts in identity formation and functioning in the 1990s. Religion became a considerable source for other identities than just the religious one.

One of the challenges for contesting religion in Russia is that it is a multiethnic country, ethnic identity is meaningful for people, and there is a correlation (though decreased in comparison with, say, the previous century) between ethnic and religious affiliation.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, some people are sensitive to the appearance of new denominations and re-imagine them as a threat to their ethnic identity. That is why (especially in a situation when religion is politicized and politics are, to some extent, religionized) there are so many debates about traditional and nontraditional denominations. Also, because of this correlation religion is involved in ethnic conflicts, directly or indirectly.

Since for Russia's population religion has first of all a cultural meaning, the religious component (more precisely its cultural dimension) is becoming more significant to ethnic identity. With ethnic Russians, for example, when one asks "What is your religious affiliation?" the response frequently will be "I am Russian, and hence I am Orthodox." Since Orthodoxy has been the historical faith of Russia for more than

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<sup>11</sup> Sources for the analysis regarding regional confessional composition is Vas'kovsky 2002: 22–23.

<sup>12</sup> For more details, see Kazmina 2000: 229–245.

1000 years, it is deeply incorporated into Russia's culture, traditions, and common memory. It is an important segment of identity even for non-believers. That is why one can hear the definition "I am a non-believer from Orthodox."

Russian Orthodoxy is becoming once again (like in previous times) a symbol of the national identity. The term "Orthodox Rus" has re-entered the public discourse. But there is a certain contradiction here. On the one hand, the conjunction "Russian ethnic identity—Christian Orthodox faith" is very strong. On the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Church is not an ethnic church. Its adherents include many peoples settled in Russia. According to sociological surveys, Orthodox believers are quite tolerant both in ethnic and religious terms.

Religious rhetoric has been widely used by political and cultural leaders of the Muslim peoples. Another characteristic detail of recent decades is the "ethnization" of Islam, which is one of the explanations for the splits that have taken place in Russia's Muslim community.

The role of the religious factor in ethnic identity is very obvious for ethnic minorities who differ from the surrounding population in their religious affiliation. This religious "unlikeness" reinforces ethnic self-consciousness and often becomes the main component and marker of ethnic identity. Religious affiliation helps such groups to prevent assimilation and remain a community.

Another characteristic feature of the contemporary situation in Russia is the revival of traditional pre-Christian and pre-Islamic beliefs precisely as the reflection of ethnic ideas. The persistence of such traditional beliefs is typical for the peoples of Siberia and the Volga Region (both Finno-Ugric and Turkic). During the last decade there were attempts to revive traditional pre-Christian beliefs, not only where they had always remained popular, for example, among the Mari (an ethnic group in the Volga Region) but also among strongly Christianized peoples, like the Mordovians. The leaders of the ethnic cultural organizations and of the nationalistic movements of Mari, Chuvashes, Udmurts, and to a lesser extent of Mordovians try to find their ethnic identity in these traditional beliefs. They oppose the Russian Orthodox Church, an institution that they associate with the russification policies of the Russian empire. Another characteristic feature in the Volga Region is missionary work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria among Finno-Ugric peoples. This activity is being strongly supported by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church. This missionary work is even more intensive among the Karelians (another Finno-Ugric people very close to Finns in their language but professing Orthodoxy; they live in the North of the European part of Russia). This activity is based on a weakly based image spread in the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church that the conversion to

Orthodoxy of a number of Finno-Ugric peoples was not natural for them and that they must be Lutheran. Whereas this missionary work brought some results in Karelia, it was not successful in the Volga Region.

The specific characteristic of the Ukrainian situation is its historical regional diversity. Ukraine is also a multiethnic country, but the correlation between ethnic and religious affiliation in Ukraine is not as salient as in Russia. There are two ethnic groups, Jews and Crimean Tatars (considerable minorities in Ukraine: the Jewish community consists of about one-half million, and the community of Crimean Tatars consists of almost 300,000 members), for whom religion is a core base of their ethnic identity. For the rest of the population, the correlation between regional identity and a certain Christian denominational affiliation is more typical than the correlation between ethnicity and religion. Also denominational composition varies from one region to another.<sup>13</sup>

The analysis of indicators of religious organizations' spread in Ukraine's regions demonstrates that (1) clear regional differences in the saturation with religious institutions; (2) the shift of the Church and religious life to the West of the country; (3) the actual absence of monodenominational zones (regions, areas) in Ukraine; (4) the presence of evidently dominant denominations in some regions; and (5) the absence

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<sup>13</sup> Source for the analysis regarding regional confessional composition is Vas'kovsky 2002: 22. The Western Region of Ukraine, the most religious region, is not religiously homogenous. Despite the fact that 96.9 percent of all Ukrainian Greek Rite Catholic communities are concentrated exactly there, only in the Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk Regions is this dominant, at least numerically: Greek Rite Catholic communities make up 55.1 percent of the entire number of religious communities. In the Ternopil Region Greek Rite Catholic communities make up almost half (48.6 percent). In the Volyn, Transcarpathian, and Rivne Regions the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) retains the leading position, with 47.3 percent of communities, 36.5 percent, and 44.8 percent, respectively. Protestant communities make the second largest type in those regions, with 28.3 percent, 35.5 percent, and 30.2 percent, respectively. In the Chernivtsi Region Protestant communities are in a relative majority, with 42 percent; second place belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), with 39.8 percent. In the southern Region the share of Orthodox communities make up 52.8 percent with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the leading position. It is followed by Protestant communities—27.2 percent. Islam occupies the third place with a concentration of Muslim communities in the Crimea. Adherents of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate) constitute 5.8 percent. In Northern Ukraine the share of Orthodox communities is 64.3 percent; almost half of all religious communities belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)—49.8 percent. Protestant communities occupy the second place—26.7 percent. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate) is also noticeable—13.6 percent. In the Central Region the share of the communities of different Orthodox denominations make up 65.8 percent, with 54.7 percent in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Protestantism is the second largest confession—26.4 percent; Roman Catholic (Latin Rite) communities are active, making up 5.6 percent. In the Eastern Region 45.8 percent within the entire religious network belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate); 39.2 percent of communities are Protestant of different denominations.

of a religious organization (Church) holding dominant position in all of Ukraine's regions.

Hence, in Ukraine, there is no denomination prevailing in all of the country's regions. Each of the Churches is of regional character, as to their spheres of influence. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is the closest to the status of the national Church, if judged by the degree and evenness of its presence, but it does not have a dominant position in the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil. In recent years, in some of the country's regions, Protestant communities made up the majority or a weighty share of the total of religious organizations (more than 40 percent of the entire religious infrastructure)—in the Donetsk Region, in Kyiv, in the Zaporizhya, Kirovohrad, and Chernivtsi Regions. The country's coverage by new religious organizations essentially differs from the configuration of traditional denominations, which has clearly shifted westward.

The rise of the religious factor in fostering identities and the politicization of religion created another specific feature of contemporary religious development in both Russia and Ukraine. In identity issues religion is widely considered not as just a private affair but rather as a force of cultural tradition. Moreover, the involvement of religion in politics and identity formation does not correspond to the dominant post-Enlightenment definitions of religion, which emphasize the privatization of religion and its clear separation from politics. In Russia and Ukraine, although major documents (such as Constitutions) proclaim the secular character of the state, religion is used for political mobilization.

## POLITICIZATION OF RELIGIOUS ISSUES

Both in Russia and Ukraine religious re-imagination in the 1990s was challenged and complicated by major politicization of religion. Religion tended to be treated as a political force or a factor of political mobilization.

In Russia already in 1993 proposals arose for a new law on religion. The reasons articulated for it were the lack of control on the observance of the law "On Freedom of Beliefs,"<sup>14</sup> concerns about the so-called "totalitarian sects," the anxiety of the Russian Orthodox Church about the activity of some foreign religious organizations in Russia, and the general politicization of religion. In the mid-1990s significant changes in the

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<sup>14</sup> According to the 1990 Law "On Freedom of Beliefs," the enforcement of this law was placed mainly on the Soviets of People's Deputies (local authorities). Hence, after the Soviets ceased to exist in 1993, there was actually no more enforcement of the law.

mentality of much of the population took place: the euphoria about western values gave way to more nationalistic tendencies (Filatov 2002: 471–472). These changes touched the religious sphere as well, where they meant greater interest in Orthodox Christianity and other traditional religions. The very term “traditional religions” became widespread in that period.

Religion became most politicized by the mid-1990s. It was the period when the state lost the respect of many people, whereas the prestige of the Russian Orthodox Church was rather high. The state aimed to share in the Church’s popularity by demonstrating its favoritism of the Russian Orthodox Church. Various political forces also tried to use religion to suit their own ends. Naturally, they were interested first of all in the support of the largest religious organization—the Russian Orthodox Church. During the election campaigns of 1995–1996 almost all the major political blocs tried to play upon the prestige of the Russian Orthodox Church to gain more votes (Verkhovsky, Pribylovsky, and Mikhailovska 1998: 176). Even communists began to pretend to be defenders of Orthodoxy. Political leaders of different orientations used any opportunity to pronounce in favor of the struggle against foreign missions, “totalitarian sects,” and “destructive cults.” At the same time, the general population was quite tolerant. Thus, the sociological survey conducted by Russian and Finnish scholars in 1996 reported that 70 percent of Russia’s population “completely agree” or “agree to some extent” with the statement that “all religions should have equal rights in Russia” (Kääriäinen 1998: 143).

This was the background for the promulgation of the new law on religion, which was adopted on October 1, 1997. The adoption of the law “On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations” could potentially change the religious situation in the country. According to the 1997 law, religious organizations that had operated since 1982 were put in a more favorable position in comparison with those that were created later. Only the former could obtain the status of a legal entity after re-registration. Those that were created later could have the status of a religious group with lesser rights. In particular, the missionary work was limited for them. Also the law gave an opportunity for state bodies to interfere in the religious life of believers. In comparison with the 1990 law, the new law had a clearly discriminatory component. But the law has never been fully enforced. Moreover, some acts that actually mitigate some provisions of the law (including the provision of the fifteen-year qualification, which met with the most criticism) were adopted afterward. It additionally testifies that the adoption of this law was probably more a political statement than a legal act. In any case, the new law created an opportunity

for the Russian Orthodox Church to strengthen its position, and this coincided with the general atmosphere in society.

It is also notable that during the mid-1990s the Russian Orthodox Church used more political and cultural, rather than theological, arguments in the competition with nontraditional denominations. Among those arguments were that foreign denominations would divide Russian society and destroy Russian culture and traditions (Filatov 2002: 481). Unlike the early 1990s, in the mid- and late 1990s these arguments were met with understanding from the population. They fit the context of re-imagining religion in cultural and political terms.

The contradictions and uncertainty, which Ukrainian society faced, also led to the politicization of many spheres of social life. This process was reflected in Church and religious problems, inter-Church and Church–state relations. Numerous sociological surveys of the last decade showed that the Church was one of the most trusted institutions. Up to 75 percent of the Ukrainian population trusted the church more than any other social institution. Neither the president, the government, the parliament, nor the army could compete in public opinion polls with the Church on matters of trust. At the same time, many people associated themselves “with just Christianity” and did not have a clear idea about their denominational affiliation (Dudar and Shangina 2002: 3). Moreover, in the situation when no clear uniting idea had been formulated in Ukraine, there was no unity regarding either further development of the Ukrainian nation (ethnic or civil model of the nation) or further economic prospects of Ukraine, or Ukrainian priorities in geopolitics. In such a situation of uncertainty Church and religion are being used for supporting one idea or another, public and political orientations and priorities (which often are in opposition). Thus, the affiliation with a certain Church turns into an indicator of a person’s (Church community’s) political identification and perception concerning Ukrainian advancement toward East (Russia) or West (Europe).

With the heritage of state involvement and in the situation of state-building and nation-building one cannot suppose that religion could be completely de-linked from the state power. However, the issue is what form the links between the state and religion might take in countries that carry a great “burden of the past” in the church–state relations. No doubt, it is important to establish constructive dialogue and cooperation. Nevertheless, the social and political reality of the Russian and Ukrainian nation-state construction shows, that such cooperation and dialogue are still rather a desirable *modus* than a real established one.

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## CONCLUSION: RELIGION IN SEARCH OF ITS ROLE AND PLACE IN SOCIETY

In Russia, despite its religious diversity, the overwhelming majority of believers belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, which is incorporated in culture and traditions and has more than a thousand-year history. In this situation it is difficult to avoid all signs of establishment. Moreover, in a situation when many people are not really practicing but rather traditionally associate themselves with the Russian Orthodox Church, this church can to some extent play a role of civil religion. This is possible if the Russian Orthodox Church does not oppose but cooperates with other religious organizations.

It is important to note that religious organizations are trying to take their place and play an active role in post-Soviet society. In July 2000 the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted a very important document—"Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church."<sup>15</sup> For the first time in history the Orthodox Church adopted a document formulating the position of the Church on a large circle of problems facing the society and concerning the relations of the Church with the nation, state, secular law, and so on. The document also covers such issues as labor and its fruits; war and peace; crime, punishment, and rehabilitation; personal, family and public morality; personal and national health; problems of bioethics, the Church and ecological problems; secular science, culture, and education; the Church and mass media; and international relations, problems of globalization, and secularism.<sup>16</sup> The adoption of "Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church" was a stimulus for other denominations to articulate their social positions and formulate their views on the role of religious organizations in society. These are attempts by religious organizations to develop the institutional dimension of religion and not to be only the so-called "religious factor" in the activities of others: state, political parties, and so on.

In Ukraine the Church in general is the most trusted social institution. In post-Soviet society religion acquires the shape of social "legitimization" and is a preferable characteristic for most people. Unlike the situation in Russia, in Ukraine there is no dominant church, which could unite the society. That means that there is "competition for Orthodox

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<sup>15</sup> See *Osnovy Sotsialnoy Kontseptsii Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi* (Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church).

<sup>16</sup> See, *Osnovy Sotsialnoy Kontseptsii Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi* (2000: 5–104, Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church).

loyalty.” On the one hand, this contestation provokes debates around the thesis of “a national church for a national state,” linked with identity issues (in a broad sense); on the other hand, it creates the opportunity for a pluralistic and poly-jurisdictional mode of existence and the development of contemporary Ukrainian Orthodoxy. This context is able to contribute to the forming of a pluralistic and democratic type of diverse spiritual-church life in Ukraine.

In both countries religious organizations can integrate some aspects of social service, like charity, and so on, providing thereby the access of deprived people to basic rights. They can help to solve the problems of surmounting poverty, the strengthening of family, the humanization of inter-personal relations, and so on. Such activities of religious organizations as charity and social services are greatly supported and approved by public opinion in both countries.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, through its norms and traditions, religion can influence social behavior, labor ethics, the making of decisions, and setting of priorities. It is difficult to argue with Alexandr Shchipkov who claims that many troubles of the period of transition (such as corruption, little concern about social problems, etc.) have been connected with the Marxist and atheistic mentality of some functionaries and businessmen (1998: 45). Religion through its norms and history is able to help to treat the moral sickness of post-Soviet society. The social context for religious imagination with its emphasis on historical heritage and culture can favor religion and then bring people to closer relationship with God.

Both Russian and Ukrainian societies have experienced a rethinking of religion that resulted in crucial changes in specific legislation and in the role of religion in the social, political, and cultural life of Russia and Ukraine. Rethinking religious issues is aided by the re-imagination of religion. The most visible attribute of this process is the search for religion’s role as a historical and cultural basis of a nation and also the foundation for the norms of life.

It is obvious that religion is re-occupying its place in society. This process is shaped and contested by the social context of each country with its historical inheritance of religious development, legacy of the two recent decades, and the religious diversity in the societies. The strong tendency toward politicization of religious issues arises in both countries. Hence, there are attempts to re-imagine religion as a political force or a factor of political mobilization both in internal and

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<sup>17</sup> For Russia, see Ovsiienko, Odintsov, and Trofimchuk 1992: 220; and for Ukraine, see Bychenko and Dudar 2002: 21.

external state policy, advocating the economic, political, national, and civilizational choice of a particular country.

Although it is clear that religion is still searching for its place in these two societies, one can underline that the results of this search could serve as a reliable indicator for ascertaining real democratic development in both post-Soviet countries.

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