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Russia and Ukraine: Two Models of Religious Liberty and Two Models for Orthodoxy*

MYROSLAW TATARYN

A report on the press conference at the conclusion of the Plenary Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church on 22 February 1997 quoted Patriarch Aleksii II: '[in Russia] without seeking to become the church of the state, ... our church remains open to the idea of cooperation with the structures of power at all levels ... [in Ukraine] the authorities, certain circles, and the press are openly supporting the dissident Orthodox entities ...'.¹ The Russian patriarch thus distinguished two approaches towards the relationship between church and state, two paths for the development of Orthodox churches in postsoviet society. Although Orthodoxy in both Ukraine and Russia is often presented as a 'traditional' religion and both states have promulgated laws on religion which establish criteria and expectations for the registration of all religious bodies, we have in fact two different approaches to the question of religious liberty and two models for how Orthodox church life is to develop in the postsoviet era. In this paper I shall first describe the religious liberty situation in each of the two states; I shall then discuss the position of the Orthodox Church in both Russia and Ukraine; and finally I shall seek the roots of the present-day differences in the clearly different experiences of the two cultures in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. My underlying thesis is that although Russia and Ukraine have shared much common historical, political and religious experience over the past 300 years, the religious situation as it has evolved over the past decade demonstrates a deep underlying difference: Ukraine has had an experience of religious pluralism and tolerance which is now making demands upon its body politic, whereas such has not been the case in Russia.

Religious Policy in Russia

In the waning days of the Soviet state, on 1 October 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev promulgated a new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations which introduced Russian society to widespread religious liberties. With the collapse of the Soviet Union this law was supplanted by an even more liberal Russian law on freedom of conscience. Subsequent actions by the Yel'tsin government continued

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this retooling of the church–state relationship: in December 1991 President Yel'tsin declared his intention to return 'all shrines, churches, monasteries, and sacred objects' to the churches and in April 1993 the legal basis for such action was implemented.² This initial phase of liberalisation was welcomed by the Russian Orthodox Church in the person of Patriarch Aleksii II who judiciously sought to avoid involvement in political affairs and 'declared on several occasions that it would be wrong for the Russian Orthodox Church to acquire an official status and proclaimed its neutrality toward the state'.³ Russia seemed well on the way to the establishment of a western-style state where religious liberty and tolerance were to be seen as the cornerstones of civil society. So clear were the directions in the early years of post-soviet Russia that one commentator confidently declared: 'The prospects for Orthodox Christianity to become the official religion in Russia are virtually non-existent.'⁴

A direct linear movement from communism's ideology of militant atheism to a western-style pluralistic democracy was not however to be realised. Although signs of a resurgent marriage of Russian nationalism and Orthodoxy could be divined in the early 1990s⁵ it was in the middle of this decade that this relationship came to the political foreground. I agree with Vladimir Wozniuk: 'As Russia's great power credibility continued to slip, the problem of deteriorating spiritual and moral values also became increasingly prominent in public discourse, and the lack of a national ideology was associated with the decline of both.'⁶ In the political atmosphere in the wake of the violent dispersal of the Congress of People's Deputies in 1993 the search for a national ideology was intensified and in the 1995 Duma elections and 1996 presidential elections the Orthodox Church assumed a higher profile. The Duma's fundamental conservatism and lack of sympathy for religious liberalisation was demonstrated in 1993 when it attempted to enact a reform of the 1990 law. This attempted step backwards would have clearly targeted foreign religious organisations for a second-class status in Russia.⁷ This attack on 'foreigners' was a sign of things to come and a rallying-cry for many previously disparate groups. The Russian Orthodox Church was being courted not only by nationalists and by Yel'tsin supporters but also, surprisingly, by the revamped Communist Party.⁸ Another interesting development was Patriarch Aleksii's outspokenness during the 1995 election in support of a strong conscription law calling on young men 'to serve the Motherland ... to protect and defend it from external and internal enemies as true Orthodox warriors'.⁹ Conservative attitudes were coming to dominate within the Russian Orthodox Church. In the previous year the church's synodal theological commission had overwhelmingly voted that the church should withdraw from all ecumenical contacts (although the Synod did not in fact take this step).¹⁰ This incipient xenophobia became increasingly evident in the public pronouncements of the patriarch. In a May 1995 interview with *Vek* Aleksii condemned foreign 'sects and preachers' as 'desiring to add to the division of the Russians'.¹¹ Russian Orthodoxy's condemnation of 'foreign interlopers' became a common refrain of the presidential candidates in 1996. During a visit to the Holy Trinity St Sergius Monastery Communist Party leader Gennadi Zyuganov expressed his support for opposition to foreign preachers coming to Russia and his openness to declaring the Orthodox Church the state church. He also reiterated his position that religion was 'the foundation of all Russian civilization and culture'.¹² President Yel'tsin took a more cautious approach, simply stating that this issue must be dealt with 'very delicately', although at the same time reminding the public that he was a baptised Orthodox.¹³ Anxiety over foreign-based religions was heightened with the events associated with the White Brotherhood sect in Ukraine in

1993 and the Japanese doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo in 1995.¹⁴ This remarriage of church and state was symbolised in the common effort to rebuild the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour at an estimated cost of \$US 300 million.¹⁵ In response to the increasingly convivial relationship of politicians and Orthodox churchmen, especially on issues relating to foreign influences in Russia, in early 1997 Svetlana Filonova in *Novoye vremya* painted a rather ominous picture:

The fact that Orthodoxy as a religious teaching has become hostage to politicians and that xenophobia and nationalism are gathering strength under the cover of Orthodoxy is only half the trouble. The real problem is that an imperial ideology cloaked in priestly vestments has acquired the status of inviolability and become an ideology without an opposition or opponents.¹⁶

The stage was now set for a startling reversal of liberalising policies in the new Russia and for an albeit brief confrontation between president and Duma on the issue of religious freedom.

A few days before Christmas (7 January) 1997 Patriarch Aleksii gave an interview to *Rossiiskiy vestnik* in which he probably unwittingly defined the politico-religious agenda for the coming year. In the interview he declared:

One can only take a positive view of the legislatively enshrined principle of equality of religions before the law. Our Church does not call for any kind of persecution of non-Orthodox Russian citizens At the same time, the principle of equality of religions and denominations before the law should not be construed as a declaration of their equal importance or equal greatness. If we are told that there is no difference between the Orthodox Church that shaped Russia's historical face, the Church to which the majority of the country's believing citizens belong, and some little group made up of 10 people, that is absurd. If it is asserted that our Church and this group should have an approximately equal number of churches, equal representation in discussions of the vital issues that confront us, and equal time on state television, that would constitute discrimination against the many millions of Orthodox believers¹⁷

Recognition of the Orthodox Church's unique contribution to Russia came once more from an unexpected source when Communist Party member Viktor Zorkal'tsev presented a draft Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations to the Russian Duma on 18 June 1997.¹⁸ It quickly passed three readings in the lower house by overwhelming majorities and on 4 July passed the upper house by a majority of 112 to 4.¹⁹ This draft law named four religions in its preamble (Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism) and identified Orthodoxy as 'an inseparable part of the all-Russian historical, spiritual and cultural heritage'.²⁰ The rights of other religions were significantly restricted and the law's provisions meant that foreign religious organisations could not in fact act legally in Russia. Some commentators observed that the law was poorly written: 'The law contains numerous passages that appear dubious from the standpoint of common sense. A poorly thought-out text meant to defend the Russian population from totalitarian sects could, under certain circumstances, wind up "defending" it from any religion whatsoever....'²¹ On 22 July 1997 President Yel'tsin vetoed the law. In his public explanation of his action he stated that 'many provisions of the law infringe on human and civil rights and freedoms as spelled out in the Constitution, establish inequality among different faiths, and are at odds with inter-

national commitments that Russia has assumed'.²² In an alarming response to the presidential action Viktor Ilyukhin, chairman of the Duma's Committee on Security, assailed Yel'tsin's appeal to religious liberty as supporting foreign religious faiths which 'pose[s] a threat to the country's national security'.²³

All this anxiety over 'nontraditional' religions in Russia had already been described as 'overdramatized and blown out of proportion' in a survey in 1996 which showed less than one per cent of the population as following one of the 'new' religious movements, whereas Orthodox believers comprised 75 per cent of those who claimed to be believers.²⁴ One might have thought that the Orthodox hierarchy would be more interested in attacking the ancient problem of so-called *dvoyeveriye*: a June 1996 survey showed that 66.2 per cent of surveyed Muscovites classified themselves as Orthodox and yet 47 per cent of those surveyed also claimed a belief in witchcraft, hexes and the evil eye. In fact, fewer people believed in traditional Christian tenets such as the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of Jesus than in witchcraft; since a similar survey in 1993, the greatest increase had been in belief in witchcraft (5 per cent).²⁵ These results seem to suggest that although most believers do claim allegiance to Orthodoxy they may do so more out of a sense of culturo-religious tradition rather than as a result of conscious adherence to an ecclesiastical entity. A survey conducted in August 1997 by the All-Russia Centre for the Study of Public Opinion seems to confirm this conclusion: it revealed that only 27 per cent of those surveyed supported some form of special status for the Russian Orthodox Church, whereas 49 per cent opposed any legal advantage being given to that church over any others.²⁶ It would seem that the marriage between politicians and ecclesiastics of the Russian Orthodox Church had more in common with the practices of Soviet oligarchy than with new-style democracy and liberalisation.

The period from July to September 1997 demonstrated the stresses and strains involved in Russia's new struggle with its identity. Some saw the new law as demonstrative of the bankruptcy of the reformers' attempts to graft western notions onto the Russian soul. In a major article in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* Andranik Migranyan and Aleksandr Tsytko heralded the collaboration of church and state. An at least partial restoration of the Orthodox Church's former influence on the Russian way of life, they argued, offered a chance to shape a new Russian national consciousness and to revive a sense of Russian identity.

Liberal democratic values, individualism and the cultivation of self-interest, which have shaped the ideological orientation of the regime since the start of the Gaidar reforms, have proved incapable of serving as spiritual foundations uniting the people who inhabit the geographic space known as the Russian Federation.²⁷

Others, meanwhile, decried the new turn of events. Mikhail Buyanov, the president of the Moscow Psychotherapy Academy, wrote in rebuttal of Migranyan and Tsytko:

The Church is being glorified and imposed upon our people by certain seeming intellectuals who, for the most part, by the way, are former fanatical Communists. ... Frozen in its smug self-satisfaction, the Orthodox Church stands aside from Russia's main problems, yet for some reason it has declared itself the sole guardian of morality.... Priests shamelessly consecrate gambling houses and bordellos and perform burial services for gangsters. Not once (outside the church) have they spoken out

against drunkenness, smoking and prostitution. They didn't utter a word against Russia's attack on Chechnya, against the inhumane blockade of Abkhazia, and so on. Orthodoxy is invariably on the side of those in power, however loathsome they may be....²⁸

Deacon Andrei Kurayev, a member of the State Duma's Advisory Council on Religious Affairs, dramatically declared: 'It has become clear that the main issue here is not cults or even the law. The main issue is the future of Russia.'²⁹ A few days later he called upon the state to work with the church to guarantee that 'our children are just that – our children. That they speak our language and value what has given meaning to the lives of our forefathers and ourselves.'³⁰ Clearly trying to find a stabilising element among the massive social and political upheavals of the day, the deacon further stated: 'The Church doesn't want any upheavals. Therefore, I am worried about the President's action, which cannot be called either well thought-out legally or carefully considered politically. ...'³¹ The church was clearly coming to be perceived as a guarantor of a mythical *status quo*: Russia as truly Russia, undamaged by western/foreign influences. Amidst this discussion *Nezavisimaya gazeta* also carried an extensive report on sharply rising antisemitism, which raised questions about the fact that church and state were concerned with the less than one per cent of the population who belonged to nontraditional religions, but seemed to be paying no attention to the 5–7 per cent of the population who were overtly antisemitic,³² witnesses to the darker side of Russia's religious culture.

The mercurial Boris Yel'tsin ostensibly reversed his position on the issue of the draft law. On 1 September 1997 his Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations announced that after extensive consultations the reworked document could proceed to the Duma with the expectation of the president's support. The Duma passed the law on 19 September 1997 and a week later the president signed the law and thus implemented a slightly amended version of the legislation which months earlier he had declared unconstitutional. The final version broadens the 'special role' of Orthodoxy to include Christianity in general,³³ but the 15-year period of registered activity required prior to receiving full legal status ostensibly limits equality before the law only to those religious groups which had gained standing in the old USSR.³⁴ 'Painful as it is to admit', declared commentator Zoya Krakhmal'nikova, 'the new version of the draft, known as the "President's version", shows just how strong the inertia of suppressing freedom still is in Russia and how very dangerous it remains.'³⁵ Although such prestigious figures as Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk opposed this view, declaring that the new law 'is so liberal it will prove to be ineffective',³⁶ subsequent events seemed to support the prediction of Krakhmal'nikova. On 29 September 1997 police in Noginsk, near Moscow, confiscated the property of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate and reportedly some 100 worshippers and clergy were beaten. Apparently the chief of police stated that a Moscow regional arbitration court had ordered the confiscation since the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was a foreign religious body.³⁷ Perhaps encouraged by the law's passage, the conservative arm of the Moscow Patriarchate seemed to demonstrate its strength further when on 7 October 1997 the liberal cleric Fr Georgi Kochetkov of the Church of the Dormition in Moscow and rector of the St Filaret Theological School was suspended by Patriarch Aleksii from communion along with twelve of his parishioners.³⁸ In spite of widespread support from young intellectuals for his progressive pastoral approach, the conservatives who condemned his 'modernist and reformist' policies gained the day.³⁹ On 6 October 1997 the

Ministry of Justice of Khakassia cancelled the registration of the Evangelical Lutheran mission in that province, citing violation of the previous and current laws on religion. Public pressure caused the authorities to suspend their action against the mission, but they reopened the case in December.⁴⁰ The new law's *de facto* support of the Moscow Patriarchate was in evidence in November when local authorities in Ryazan' began proceedings to evict the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad from the seventeenth-century Church of the Epiphany.⁴¹ In December local authorities in the Russian republic of Mari El attempted to prevent a Baptist congregation from conducting an evangelisation meeting. Aleksandr Abdullov, an adviser to the province's president, described the event as 'dangerous to young people'.⁴² Encouraged by their apparent ascendancy, conservative elements in the Russian Orthodox Church were behind the burning of theological texts in Yekaterinburg on 5 May 1998, even though many of the texts were the work of Russian Orthodox theologians in the United States like Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff.⁴³ Bishop Nikon of Yekaterinburg received only a 'gentle reprimand' from Patriarch Aleksii over the event.⁴⁴ In spite of the promise of Yel'tsin's spokesman that the government would closely scrutinise the law's implementation,⁴⁵ local authorities were clearly applying the law as they saw fit.

Events soon began to demonstrate, however, that it was politicians, not clerics, who were in control of the political agenda. In November 1997 Patriarch Aleksii launched a major public campaign to ban the public broadcast of Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ*. His failure to do so provoked ironic comment:

Even before the Bolsheviks, the Church didn't have the spiritual influence that is ascribed to it today. And the reason for this is (and was) that the Church never tried particularly hard to intervene in serious matters.⁴⁶

Other observers saw this exercise as a failed attempt by the church to test its own strength.⁴⁷ Even the patriarch's proclamation that the television station was a 'spiritual alien entity'⁴⁸ and his appeal for President Yel'tsin to attend more to the moral health of society received no public reply from the president.⁴⁹ The relative power of clerics and politicians was also demonstrated in the episode of the remains of Tsar Nicholas II and his family. In spite of the authoritative conclusion of a state commission of experts that the remains found in Sverdlovsk *oblast'* were the imperial remains⁵⁰ and the president's decision to bury them on 17 July 1998 in St Petersburg⁵¹ the Orthodox Church maintained its distance and announced an effective boycott of the event. The reasons for the church's reluctance to accept the commission's findings were outlined in the name of the Holy Synod by Fr Vsevolod Chaplin of the church's Department of External Relations:

Large numbers of believers regard these remains with suspicion, and these people's concerns should be put to rest. The Church cannot act in a way that ignores part of its own body, those churchgoers who are concerned over the possibility that these remains might prove to be the wrong ones.⁵²

Rather than enhance the church's credibility, this stance simply served to evoke more ironical comment. *Izvestiya* responded to Fr Chaplin's statement:

Yes, there has to be a burial, but not of the Tsar. Of whom, then? Or what? Of the 'Yekaterinburg remains, in a symbolic tomb'. The Church has doubts about the identification of the remains, and in order not to confuse its flock or mislead believers into worshipping false relics, it believes the

bones must be placed in a sepulchre 'above the ground', as Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad explained, so that they will be accessible for additional studies in the future (which, unlike the ones already performed, the Church is going to believe?).⁵³

At its April 1998 meetings the Holy Synod decided that the July burial would go ahead without the patriarch in attendance and that only local clergy would attend.⁵⁴ In the end the incoherence of the church's position led to the service of burial in St Petersburg being performed for 'innocent victims of Soviet terror', while at the Holy Trinity Monastery near Moscow the patriarch prayed for the tsar and his family.⁵⁵

Rather than inaugurating a new era of dominance on the national stage for the Russian Orthodox Church, the promulgation of the new Law on Freedom of Conscience brought some support for the church at the level of local government, but with this somewhat higher profile a certain peripheralisation of the church on the national stage. In fact, it would seem that whatever its own aims might be, the Russian Orthodox Church is increasingly beholden to the conservative political forces and an instrument of their national agenda. 'The episcopate of the Russian Orthodox Church fears not the wrath of God, but rather the wrath of the church's Black Hundreds.'⁵⁶ Clearly this agenda was a more conservative one at the end of the 1990s than at the start of the decade. Political pressure had caused the Yel'tsin government to adopt some of the presoviet symbols, among which a major one was of course the Orthodox Church. The restrictions on religions identified as non-traditional are also reminiscent of policies implemented in tsarist Russia in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁷ However, the preeminent role given the Russian Orthodox Church cannot be seen as recognition of the importance of its voice in society.

Religious Policy in Ukraine

From the time of the first intimations of reform and religious liberty the situation in Ukraine has developed very differently from that in Russia. In the late 1980s Russian Orthodoxy had to deal with a *de facto*, if not yet *de jure*, state of religious pluralism in the Ukrainian Republic. Gorbachev's reforms allowed the overt revival of the underground Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and forced Orthodox churchmen to address the issue of how to relate to this competitor in the religious arena.⁵⁸ On 22 October 1989 a number of Russian Orthodox priests defected and proclaimed themselves members of the dormant Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. This latter group immediately demonstrated its attachment to historic Ukrainian nationalist aspirations. In its first public statement the church appealed to 'all the Christian sons and daughters' of the Ukrainian people and asked 'How long will you be a slave in your own home? How far are you going to submit to foreign spiritual overlords – gaolers?' and later 'We, Ukrainians, also want OUR own church as other peoples have'.⁵⁹ When the new liberal Soviet law on religion was passed in 1990 the religious landscape of Ukraine was transformed; some would say it was thrown into chaos. Until 1990 Ukraine had one major Christian church, the Russian Orthodox Church, which was officially the home for the overwhelming majority of believers. After liberalisation, defections from that church and the emergence of those who had been practising their faith clandestinely now created a number of alternatives for the adherence of Christian believers. The Ukrainian situation, unlike that of Russia, was from its outset characterised by pluralism.⁶⁰ A marriage of nationalist rhetoric and church politics meant that on the eve of

Ukraine's referendum on independence in December 1991 there were three large church organisations competing on the political and religious stage in Ukraine. The largest was the former Russian Orthodox Church, now an autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church (still under the jurisdiction of Moscow, however); the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church; and the fledgling Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, now led by Patriarch Mstyslav Skrypnyk, an émigré bishop elected to head the church in 1990.⁶¹

In the midst of this near-anarchy the government of Leonid Kravchuk, a long-time communist apparatchik, did attempt to introduce some order. Serhii Plokhly has ably outlined how the Kravchuk government attempted to establish a state religion, significantly not by banning others but by strongly favouring one.⁶² Initially the Kravchuk government attempted with the assistance of another long-time apparatchik, Metropolitan Filaret Denisenko,⁶³ to gain autocephaly for the now autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church. When the Moscow Patriarchate rebuffed this appeal and defrocked Filaret in 1992, the government had to adjust its tactics. Plokhly observes that:

Official Kyiv had acted on the autocephaly issue according to the old Soviet way of administering matters involving church-state relations. In keeping with principles developed then, the bishops were supposed to support unconditionally the policy of the government for which Filaret was the spokesman. Old ideas and old policies did not work this time, however. *Perestroika* had loosened the state's control over the church.⁶⁴

Filaret's personal reputation and history of autocratic behaviour had not endeared him to his episcopal brethren and so for a short time his career seemed at an end.⁶⁵ Undeterred, however, Filaret and his friend Kravchuk created another opportunity. Under pressure from the government, and without the knowledge of Patriarch Mstyslav, the Autocephalous Church convoked a synod and renamed the church the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kiev Patriarchate (UOC–KP). Filaret was elected deputy patriarch and since Mstyslav was resident in the United States this former metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church became the effective head of a national church, created in an ecclesiastical *coup d'état*. This new entity embodied a startling coalition: the former senior bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine (Filaret), a former communist and now president of an independent Ukraine (Kravchuk), and ultranationalists, specifically the paramilitary Ukrainian National Self-Defence Organisation (*Ukrains'ka natsional'na samooborona*) (UNSO)).⁶⁶ On 26 June 1992 Filaret's wing and Patriarch Mstyslav's wing of the church formally united. In an attempt to enhance the new church's claim to be the national church, Kravchuk ousted the long-time head of the Council for Religious Affairs Mykola Kolisnyk and put in his place Arsen Zinchenko, an ardent supporter of Ukrainian autocephaly.⁶⁷ Two events in the latter part of the year militated against the quick success of the government's policy: first Patriarch Mstyslav withdrew his support of Filaret and in October reasserted his claim to head the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; and second, President Kravchuk's personal appeal to the ecumenical patriarch for recognition of Ukrainian ecclesiastical autocephaly was rebuffed.⁶⁸ The death of Mstyslav on 11 June 1993 created another opportunity for the Kravchuk government to force a union of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, but once more the attempt failed and the two new Orthodox churches each elected different patriarchs: the Filaret group elected a former political prisoner, 67-year old Fr Vasyli'

Romaniuk, who took the name Volodymyr, while Mstyslav's faction elected Dmytrii Yarema. After the election of Romaniuk Filaret chaired a press conference and issued one of his oft-repeated appeals that all Orthodox in Ukraine unite to establish a truly national church. Although by this point even Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan), primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate (UOC–MP), had adopted a policy calling for the canonical establishment of an autocephalous Orthodox Church the enmity of the past three years was such that no moves were made towards union. In fact, claiming deep disillusionment with Filaret's leadership, five bishops left the Kiev patriarchate and rejoined the autonomous, Moscow-associated church led by Metropolitan Volodymyr.⁶⁹ The campaign in the run-up to the July 1994 presidential elections saw the former communist Leonid Kravchuk, now favourite of the nationalists, under attack from Leonid Kuchma; one of the latter's criticisms was that under Kravchuk there had been overt state interference in religious matters. Kravchuk's religious policy had failed, and so did his bid for reelection.

The complex and sometimes chaotic developments I have described, and government ineptitude in effecting its own religious policy, had one positive outcome, however. By 1994 Ukraine was host to real religious pluralism. In that year there were 17,600 officially registered religious communities belonging to 65 different groups.⁷⁰ In a 1993 survey⁷¹ 44 per cent of respondents stated that they were religious, 33 per cent were undecided, 18 per cent said they were not religious, and only 5 per cent said they were atheists. Although the majority (64 per cent) of those who said they were religious classified themselves as Orthodox, this total was more than 10 per cent fewer than in Russia, and in any case was divided amongst the three Orthodox churches. There is, moreover, a startling feature of the findings of this and similar surveys. The majority of Orthodox communities registered belong to the UOC–MP (in 1995 the ratio was around 2 to 1).⁷² However, in the 1993 survey 48 per cent of respondents said that they supported the UOC–KP, 10 per cent said they supported the Russian Orthodox Church, and only 6 per cent said they supported the UOC–MP.

Leonid Kuchma, elected president in July 1994, seemed to understand this pluralistic environment and after condemning Kravchuk's efforts to create a national church he swiftly moved to a more neutral religious policy. As part of this policy, Kuchma abolished the Council for Religious Affairs, which the Soviet authorities had used to control religious organisations, and placed responsibility for religious matters in the hands of the Ministry for Nationalities, Migration and Religious Denominations.⁷³ Kuchma's policy hit a major stumbling-block in July 1995 with the death of Patriarch Volodymyr (Romaniuk). Clearly at the instigation of former president Kravchuk and Metropolitan Filaret, and with the paramilitary backing of UNSO, the leaders of the UOC–KP ignored the government's refusal to permit the patriarch's burial on the grounds of the historic St Sophia Cathedral in Kiev. The government had issued the ban in line with its policy of neutrality in matters of religion. The promoters of a national church would have none of this, however. The result, a bloody conflict and the *ad hoc* burial of Patriarch Volodymyr in the pavement outside the cathedral walls, has gone down in Ukrainian history as 'Black Tuesday' (18 July 1995). These events were swiftly condemned by politicians and ecclesiastics alike.⁷⁴ On 22 August 1995, forty days after the patriarch's death, Kuchma's government issued a statement outlining its position on the events at the funeral. Significantly, this statement also amounts to a summary of the Kuchma government's understanding of the religious situation in Ukraine.

The government understands the important role which the church has to play in the building of an independent, democratic Ukraine and it makes every attempt to create the necessary conditions for the realisation by religious institutions of their charitable mission and their higher vocation. Ukraine today is a multiconfessional state in which there are almost 17,000 active communities of almost 70 different religious faiths and denominations. The state is concerned to guarantee the full legal status of all religious organisations; it recognises and sustains their full equality before the law. ... The government of Ukraine regards it as absolutely unacceptable to establish special relationships with the leadership of particular churches or to grant them special privileges over and against other religious organisations, nor does it agree with or support the calls for the artificial creation of some particular state church. In our state there should not exist a distinction between domestic and foreign churches, regardless of the location of their headquarters.⁷⁵

Kuchma now saw that in order to maintain its neutrality his government would have to become much more active in attempting to ease interconfessional tensions and to engage the various religious leaders in constructive dialogue. On 11 October 1995 he announced the reestablishment of the Council for Religious Affairs (*Rada u spravakh relihii*); this time, however, it had the express purpose of encouraging dialogue among religious denominations.⁷⁶ Although Metropolitan (from 20 October 1995 Patriarch) Filaret regarded (and continues to regard) Kuchma's policies as favouring the Moscow Patriarchate,⁷⁷ it seems rather that the president has succeeded in approaching that elusive balance achieved in western civil societies.

In 1996 the Kuchma government's transition to a policy of encouraging inter-religious dialogue gained more momentum. On 23 February 1996 Anatol Koval' outlined his role as head of the Council for Religious Affairs. He identified three specific tasks: to guarantee the constitutional separation of church and state; to support all religious organisations in the exercise of their legal mandates; and to avoid all forms of religious intolerance or special status. He responded to continued calls for the government to encourage the establishment of a state church:

The creation of any religious organisation is the affair of believers. As regards the unification of churches, the creation of a new religious institution by way of state interference, well, we already have a sad and tragic precedent, the so-called 'self-liquidation' in 1946 of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and its 'unification' with Orthodoxy. Is there any sense in repeating these mistakes?⁷⁸

Subsequently, on 15 March 1996, President Kuchma had a meeting with representatives of twelve religious confessions and announced his intention of creating an All-Ukrainian Council of Churches (*Vse-ukrains'ka rada tserkov*) which would advise him on religious matters.

Appeals are again being heard for the government to set down a policy on religion. Behind this are attempts to press for a state church, to create divisions between one church that is ours and another that is alien. Our policy is to create equal conditions for all churches and ensure peace between all confessions.⁷⁹

These attempts at harmonising previously contentious relationships seemed to bear

fruit in the run-up to the promulgation of the new constitution on 28 June 1996. Religious groups of all kinds overwhelmingly supported this initiative and specifically the guarantees therein for religious freedom (Article 35), the one notable exception being Patriarch Filaret who supported the new constitution but noted that it would be better if it foresaw the creation of a state-supported national Orthodox Church.⁸⁰ On 20 June 1996 the vicepremier Ivan Kuras announced the establishment of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches. This council now meets quite regularly and seems to be building strong collaboration on important issues. On 21 July 1997 a three-point memorandum was signed by church leaders on the unacceptability of using force in interconfessional relations.⁸¹ Although in 1996 turmoil was the order of the day for the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church even this situation seemed to improve in 1997, as many parishes and some hierarchs left that church and joined the UOC–KP.⁸² In fact one can easily agree with Joseph Gregory who observes that although tension remains high among the Orthodox leaders ‘the split may ultimately benefit Ukraine. After all, it has undercut efforts to establish a state religion that would play into the hands of the country’s hard-line nationalists.’⁸³

The religious atmosphere in Ukraine today is quite healthy, then, and this situation benefits more than just Christians. For some years now the Jewish population has been affirming the fact that it is possible to lead a religious Jewish life in independent Ukraine.⁸⁴ Recently the chief rabbi of Ukraine, Yaakov Bleich, even declared that the situation for Jews in Ukraine was better than in any other CIS country.

I think that this is in no small part thanks to the atmosphere that was created by the Ukrainian government since its independence – since 1991, when the Ukrainian government made it known that [it] will seek a European type of democracy, where national minorities will all be free and welcome to build their own communities within the framework of Ukraine.⁸⁵

It appears that the apparent chaos of the first years of the 1990s served not to divide Ukrainian society further, but rather to strengthen it through the development of a healthy religious pluralism and increasing religious tolerance. Notwithstanding significant efforts to limit this pluralism and to establish a national church with all that that entails, the centrifugal forces at work in Ukrainian society prevailed. Today, from the perspective of religious liberty at least, Ukraine is much closer to achieving the reality of a civil society than is Russia. The reasons for this are complex and manifold; however, I will now turn to what I regard as one of the most important factors underlying this difference: history.

Russia in the Sixteenth Century

Recent historical scholarship has convincingly demonstrated that the typical nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations of Russian history and the history of the Orthodox Church as a struggle between Westernisers and Slavophiles are not only much exaggerated, but perhaps even inaccurate.⁸⁶ Nancy Shields Kollmann suggests that we would be better served by seeing Russian society in the sixteenth century as premodern and therefore ‘localistic, loosely tied together by assertions of political unity or by a common religion and language, but notable more for their regional autonomies and social divisions than for integration’.⁸⁷ This assessment has a bearing on Russia’s policies on religion during the 1990s. It is remarkable that although in local instances the Russian Orthodox Church has found supporters, it has not

achieved an authoritative role at the national level. The church has been regarded as serving an integrative purpose in postsoviet Russia, but surveys demonstrate that although many believers regard themselves as Orthodox, this does not mean that they follow church teachings and practices. As a result the church (from which citizens apparently do not receive their common set of beliefs) does not possess an organic integrative role today; its role is rather the result of the proclamations of ecclesiastics and many politicians.

In the sixteenth century the provincialism of Muscovy meant that it was ignorant of the world beyond its borders, even of 'the realities of life on the western boundaries of Orthodox Christendom'.⁸⁸ Similarly today many of the promoters of Russian Orthodoxy as a state religion and supporters of the new law on freedom of conscience are remarkable in their simplistic understanding of the world beyond Russia's borders. It is very common to hear them speak of the infamous Zionist-Masonic conspiracy, of ecumenism as another manifestation of the move to a world government, and of foreign money as lying behind all Russia's problems.⁸⁹ The more open-minded churchmen in Russia recognise the fundamentally isolationist and obscurantist character of contemporary Russian Orthodoxy.⁹⁰

Paul Bushkovitch demonstrates the diversity of Russian religious and cultural life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the fact that for most people religion was a domestic or familial matter rather than a matter for the public sphere.⁹¹ But he also clearly points to the dominance in the sixteenth century of monasticism, which was seldom criticised and supplied the majority of candidates for canonisation.⁹² Remarkably we again see parallels with the current situation in Russia: many commentators remark upon the popular 'indifference' to questions of theology and faith and at the same time the public dominance of a ritual 'monastic' religiosity.⁹³

Meanwhile recent research by Borys Gudziak into the 1588–89 visit of Patriarch Jeremiah II to Moscow and the erection of the Muscovite Patriarchate is also informative on the historical roots of current Russian attitudes towards religion. It was very clear during this visit that the Muscovite Church was subject to the political interests and agenda of the boyars and tsar. It appears that the metropolitan of the Muscovite Church, who was soon to be patriarch, played only a minor role in the 'negotiations' with Patriarch Jeremiah and met him only on the eve of the erection of the Patriarchate even though Jeremiah had been in Moscow for several months. The ceremony erecting the Patriarchate was uniquely designed for the occasion and, while solemnly confirming the significance of the church, to a more important extent it served to prove the rising power of the Muscovite state.⁹⁴

The struggle over religion in the Russian state today thus reveals similarities with previous historical patterns. I would agree with those who see culture (religious or other) as something *ad hoc*, contingent, constructed by the interplay of various social groups and structures.⁹⁵ Although many in Russia appeal to an ideal image of the relationship between church and state, the so-called Byzantine *symphonia*,⁹⁶ I question the very reality of that image and would suggest that the relationship is one which is always being defined and redefined. Appeals to history in support for a national church, a traditional religion, are based more on romanticised ideological constructs than on actual historical reality. In the end, religious policy in postsoviet Russia is reflective more of Russia's continuing struggle to define itself as a modern state in an increasingly pluralistic world than of some intangible characteristic of the Russian soul.

Ukraine in the Sixteenth Century

Political and religious developments in the past decade in Russia and Ukraine have clearly been remarkably different. In spite of the efforts of politicians and ecclesiastics in Ukraine, notably former President Kravchuk and Metropolitan (now Patriarch) Filaret, the movement for a dominant and favoured national church has not progressed and increasingly has to be regarded as a footnote to this chapter in Ukraine's history. The undeniable centrality of Orthodoxy in the religious life of Ukrainians and the shared 300 years of history with Russia do beg the question, however, as to how these two nations could today be moving in such different directions. My answer is unequivocally to point to the developments in Ukraine in the sixteenth century, fundamentally different from those in Muscovy, which manifest not only an alternative political culture, but also a different model of Orthodoxy.

In the sixteenth century the Ukrainian and Belorussian lands were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This multilingual and multiconfessional state was noteworthy for its practice of religious tolerance and the involvement of the nobility in all major political and religious issues.⁹⁷ Prominent sixteenth-century citizens of the Commonwealth were Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Calvinist or Lutheran. Humanist and Reformation ideals had become part of the very fabric of the society. The nobility of Ukraine was wholly integrated into this pluralistic environment in spite of remaining in the main Orthodox.⁹⁸ It was in this environment that the Orthodox hierarchs of the Kievan Metropolitanate were able to struggle with and finally realise the idea of an ecclesiastical union with the Church of Rome, the so-called Union of Brest of 1596. The latter part of the century practically demonstrated the ability of the Kievan Church to struggle with a new social and political environment and respond to it in a unique fashion.⁹⁹ The majority of the hierarchy entered into this Union; however, many of the nobility, monastics and laypeople refused. As a result the Kievan Church was split in two; but initially this did not mean open hostility between the two camps or the view that the other camp was 'not Orthodox'. Historians Frank Sysyn,¹⁰⁰ Sophia Senyk¹⁰¹ and Serhii Plokhii¹⁰² all note the tolerance and search for compromise which dominated the Kievan Church for most of the seventeenth century. Plokhii juxtaposes Ukraine and Russia in this period:

It seems to me that when one speaks about a change of 'faith' for Ukrainians, it simply meant a change of jurisdiction. When one speaks of the same for Russians, one could foresee even rebaptism.¹⁰³

The sixteenth century created a situation within the Ukrainian nation whereby one did not have to adhere to one specific church in order to define oneself as Ukrainian. Cultural uniformity could include religious diversity. In addition, Orthodoxy in Ukraine was not untouched by the religious tolerance of the society within which it lived. Late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Orthodoxy in Ukraine was an organic blend of the early Kievan traditions and Western European Renaissance and Baroque culture.¹⁰⁴ Church leaders such as Ipatii Potii, Veniamin Ruts'kyi and Petro Mohyla, all Orthodox for much if not all of their lives, were not uncultured obscurantists, but products and representatives of European culture and education.¹⁰⁵ The move in Ukraine away from favouring one church or religion over another and the adoption by the Kuchma government of a policy of impartial arbiter in order to facilitate the development of religious pluralism within a civil society should not be surprising in a society with an almost 400-year-old tradition of religious diversity,

albeit muted and strained by years of imperialist subjugation by Russia. From the early days of *perestroika*, when the relaxation of religious repression led to the rebirth of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, it should have been obvious that Ukraine's future could not involve the dominance of one religion or church over another. The period 1989–91, the eve of independence, quickly produced a diversity which was at times anarchic. Nonetheless, this diversity was clearly the product of forces which had been latent within Ukrainian society for hundreds of years. The Ukrainian government had to accept the diverse religious environment as a simple fact. Clearly in the postsoviet period the nationalist forces encouraged the development of an Orthodox alternative to the Russian Orthodox Church; but even nationalist sentiment did not coalesce around one agent. The diversity of Orthodox ecclesiastical jurisdictions also represented the diversity of life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The three major Orthodox jurisdictions in Ukraine, albeit to some degree a product of the animosities of their leaders, are also reflective of Ukraine's historical tradition of openness to new forms and innovative strategies. Ukraine's past reflects a constant struggle with issues of identity, of relatedness to Russia, Poland and Europe. These same issues are still in play today. Although some do rhetorically appeal to a Ukrainian soul and a romanticised past when the people and Orthodoxy were one (usually identified with the Cossack period), nonetheless this myth is even harder to justify than the Russian myth outlined above. Orthodoxy in Ukraine – the borderland – is not surprisingly constantly in a process of self-definition. It is not comfortable within the historical myths of canonical Orthodoxy, and able, although at times not overtly, to accept and deal with the pluralism of contemporary society. Religious developments and attitudes towards religion in Ukraine and Russia demonstrate the contemporary and historical cultural differences between the two countries. One must recognise that the Orthodox Church functions in a number of forms in the world today: Ukraine and Russia demonstrate two of them.

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- ¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 19.
- ¹⁰⁴ It is this culture which in the seventeenth century was imported into Muscovy. See Bushkovitch, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
- ¹⁰⁵ For the first two see Senyk, 'Dva mytropolity', and for Mohyla's historical contribution see Alexander Sydorenko, *The Kievan Academy in the Seventeenth Century* (University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 1977), p. 19. Mohyla's cultural breadth is also demonstrated by his library: see Liudmila V. Charipova, 'The library of Petro Mohyla', *The Ukrainian Review*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1997, pp. 55–76.