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https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

‘Civil Society’ and ‘Orthodox Christianity’ in Russia: a Double Test-Case*

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Irrespective of the formal separation of Church and state, and its apparent independence, we should never forget that it is inseparable from our society, and is playing an enormous, perhaps fundamental role in the process of formation of social consciousness.

Mikhail Sitnikov (1997)¹

What, however, is the dogmatic foundation of the rejection of the principle of freedom of conscience? It is the conviction that salvation is possible *only* through obedience with respect to the canonically correct ecclesiastical authorities here on earth.

Sergei Filatov (1996)²

‘Civil society’ has been held responsible, at least partly, for the breakdown of ‘real socialism’ not only in Poland or Hungary, but also in Russia, and it was largely due to the ‘revolution of 1989’ that ‘civil society’ regained its position as a major topic in political philosophy.³ Civil society became a major slogan and a key concept in western aid programmes that aimed at a reinforcement of civil society as an independent factor, capable of checking state power in Central and Eastern Europe and in so-called developing countries.⁴ In Russia, the call for a civil society has gradually given way to broad support for a strong state provided with a new, Russian national idea: ‘After the almost universal “Westernist” euphoria of the late 1980s, there are hardly any unconcealed and consistent “Westernisers” left in our country’.⁵ This decline in ‘Westernism’ has coincided with a revival not only of nationalism, but also of Orthodox Christianity and of the Russian Orthodox Church, regarded by many Russians, including nonbelievers, as a ‘national religion’, often linked to nationalism and, as far as the Church is concerned, seeking a coalition with political power – the new law on freedom of conscience and religious organisations in Russia, ultimately accepted by the Yel’tsin government, is a major result of this process.

This situation raises the fundamental question whether or not ‘civil society’ and ‘national religion/church’ must be seen as pointing out two main alternative and incompatible roads for postsoviet Russia, a question which can be made more precise

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in two ways: one is the general question of the relation(s) between 'civil society' and 'religion'; the other is the specific question about the compatibility of 'civil society' and Russian Orthodox Christianity. These two questions make up the subject-matter of this article and organise it into two main parts. After a concise elaboration of the concept of 'civil society' and a brief assessment of the 'fate' of civil society in post-soviet Russia, the first part attempts to restate the relation between civil society and religion, while the second part addresses the same topic, but with respect to Russia and Orthodoxy.⁶ The aim of this article is to offer a philosophical, rather than sociological or theological, perspective on these questions. A primary task of philosophers is to bring conceptual clarity where confusion reigns; a second task, however, is to stress complexity where apparent simplicity dominates; and a third task is to restore controversiality where self-evident consensus is suggested. All three tasks can be applied to the topic at hand: it often is unclear what exactly is meant by 'civil society'; the opposition of civil society and religion or church is a simplification; but the idea that the two are compatible in a non-problematic manner is one of the illusions of late or post-modernity. In the conclusion, I shall bring these three aspects together.

In what follows, I shall employ a stipulative conception of 'civil society' as the idea of a human society based upon the free associational activity of individuals on the border between private and public, as presupposing a free market from which it is itself distinct and a state which through legislation guarantees the space where free association can take place, but without interfering in it (except, as in the case of the market, in those cases when the very conditions of civil society are endangered); and further presupposing the presence of individuals who are capable of acting, and willing to act, as members of 'civil society'.⁷ I further make a distinction between civil society in this precise, narrow sense, and civil society in the broad sense of a 'social formation' that is 'civil' to the extent to which a civil society in the narrow sense just indicated exists and functions within it, thus opposing it to other types of society. 'Civil society' in this broad sense is often contrasted with traditional communal society and with modern totalitarian society.⁸

'Civil society' is at once a philosophical idea, a scientific concept, a political slogan, and an important ideological element of the contemporary world: it has reappeared in philosophical discourse, plays a role in political and social science, organises part of western foreign policies, and is something which it is extremely difficult to be 'against'. Rather than complaining about the contradictoriness, abstractness or vagueness of 'civil society', one should recognise its complexity as part of contemporary social and political reality, and thus the very notion of 'civil society' as one of the places where, behind apparent self-evidentiality, the controversial nature of the world that we not merely live in, but 'are', comes to the fore.⁹

Presupposing the distinction between public and private as a necessary condition for political freedom, civil society is usually regarded as a sphere of free activity by individual citizens, situated either between the public and private spheres as a third sphere, or at the border and transition between public and private, and hence, in 'critical' theories, as also being the place where the very distinction of public and private, itself not a natural fact but a political decision, can be questioned.¹⁰ Both classical conceptions and contemporary liberalism see civil society as including economic activity (market and private property) and thus as the sphere of particularity, either assisted to serve the common good by an 'invisible hand' or forced by the state to serve 'the general good', a line of thought in which Marx turned Hegel 'upside down' when he treated the state as a mere instrument of the bourgeoisie, thus

discrediting the very concept for a long time.¹¹ Most contemporary conceptions, by contrast, distinguish civil society from the market, and treat it as a second intermediary sphere of 'free association' that is not necessitated by economic interest, and that is not the atomised arena of individual proprietors: the tripartite scheme of state, civil society and family has given way to a quadripartite division, in which the market is distinguished from civil society as another intermediate sphere between the private and the public, either next to it, or with civil society as the mediator between market and state, restraining or balancing both.¹² At the same time it has functioned, especially in Eastern Europe, as 'a vision of the good life' and as 'one of the "magic trio" of developmental panaceas which emerged in the 1980s and now dominate controversial prescriptions for the ills of the 1990s': not accidentally, one of the first things Russian 'westernising' theoreticians did was to (re)introduce the distinction between 'civil' and 'bourgeois' society, absent in the Marxist tradition.¹³

As citizens, we generally distinguish between economic, political and civil activity, and are able to recognise hybrid forms as such, and it is thus a natural thing to distinguish between market, so-called 'political society', and civil society. To the extent to which the first two can be regarded as guided by particular interests or as the articulation of these interests, the third can appear as a sphere of disinterested associational activity, coming close to notions like 'the good life', the 'quality of life', 'community', and even 'solidarity'.¹⁴ If one can identify activities that belong neither to the private nor to the public sphere, and that are not evidently part of political society or of economic life, then one may call these 'civil society', but this easily leads to an idealisation of civil society and a demonisation of both economy and politics, in which the fact is eclipsed that free market economy, political democracy and civil society are based on the same principle of *free individuality*, and for that reason alone easily intermingle.¹⁵ And if one identifies civil society with a sphere of disinterested activity, it is necessary only to the extent to which human beings of necessity transcend their particularity and seek a 'good life', which implies that civil society is the most fragile and vulnerable part of society, a part which has to be reproduced by sustained free associational activity of sufficient numbers of citizens. As John Hall puts it, illustrating the mixture of 'is' and 'ought' typical for much of civil society discourse: 'Civil society is fragile, and it needs to be extended.'¹⁶

'Civil society' in the broad sense is not automatically identical with 'Atlantic society' or with modernity, or with any 'end of history', because there is no pertinent reason why we should limit the idea of civil society to those empirical social formations which have been qualified or qualify themselves as such in human history.¹⁷ This is particularly important with respect to the possible development of civil society within the framework of other than European, Atlantic or Christian cultural, intellectual and religious traditions. A combination of historical privilege and political conservatism turns the civil society discourse into a part of the ideological legitimisation of a globalising capitalist market economy and a manifestation of occidentocentric cultural imperialism, which then leads to a 'prescriptionism' that partly explains negative reactions to the advocacy of 'civil' or 'open' society, especially in countries with a strong 'national susceptibility' like Russia. By contrast, a combination of anti-eurocentrism and an awareness of the possible intermingling of economy, civil society and political society, as well as a critical approach to the ideological function of 'civil society', turn it into a critical theory in which part of the post-Marxist left can find a home.

In the *perestroika* years the idea of civil society played an important role in

intellectual debate in the USSR. The ideal of civil society clearly motivated a considerable part of the population, and it functioned as an important political slogan. Since then, civil society has largely ceased to be a central notion in political and intellectual discourse, while major necessary conditions for civil society such as political democracy, rule of law and private economy have become realities, at least on paper. What seems to be lacking, however, is the single sufficient condition of civil society: a sufficiently large number of citizens who freely associate into a *de facto* unpredictable and *de jure* uncontrollable multitude of associations, organisations and movements. The 'antistatist' pseudo-civil society that 'has grown in the dark years of repression' has resulted in a weakly developed political society, and most citizens have economic rather than civil concerns.¹⁸

'Civil society' is clearly slow in coming in postsoviet Russia, but are there alternatives to it (apart from a turn to some form of authoritarianism)? Do Vorontsova and Filatov rightly claim that 'the democratic future of Russia is, in the final analysis, the coming-to-be of civil society, and the "Russian model" is nothing but those original forms which this civil society will adopt'?¹⁹ Recently, 'civil society' has been discovered in what one might label the 'democratic Orthodox intelligentsia'.²⁰ This raises the interesting question whether these 'original forms' can be related to religion in general, and to Orthodox Christianity in particular: Oleg Kharkhordin, one of the people engaged in the elaboration of a 'national idea' for Russia, launched the idea of a civil society based on Orthodox principles, and Igor' Chubais called for a synthesis of the 'Orthodox' tradition of morality and spirituality with the 'Roman' stress on legal procedure.²¹ With these and other authors, we touch upon contemporary discussions in western philosophy too.²²

Given the important place of the Russian Orthodox Church in postsoviet Russia, the viability of these ideas may become an important factor in the future development of Russia and therefore deserves our serious attention. But such an analysis requires a preliminary discussion of how, in general, civil society is related to church and religion. For this reason, the first part of this article is dedicated to a restatement of these relations, preparing the ground for an analysis, in the second part, of the specifically Russian situation.

1. Civil Society and Religion: Towards a Restatement

In discussions of the idea of civil society, one only occasionally encounters concepts like religion, church or faith. Whether we look at the classical Hegelian tripartite scheme of state, civil society and family, or at the currently dominant quadripartite scheme in which economy and civil society are regarded as distinct intermediate spheres between the public (the State) and the private (Family, *Intimsphäre*), what is lacking in both schemes is an 'ecclesiastical sphere' which would be the sphere of salvation, distinct from the spheres of regulation, production, association and reproduction. Moreover, the absence of an ecclesiastical sphere, of a Church, is not accidental, but in fact typical and even constitutive for 'civil society' as it arose historically. Traditionally, the 'civil' has been opposed to the 'religious' just as the secular state has been opposed to the Church, and historically civil society arose against the absolutist claims of both Church and State.²³ The relativisation of the state and the privatisation of the church thus may seem equally constitutive of western modernity.²⁴ Even if church and religion are no longer perceived as one of its major enemies, civil society does not seem to hold a place for it.

This is only partly true: civil society does hold a place for religion and church, but

not a specific one. Religion, as one of the forms through which human beings make sense of their existence and experience, belongs to the intellectual and spiritual sphere of world-view, conviction (personal or collective), or ideology. As such, religious convictions are among the sources of motivation of citizens, and in the contemporary world they are certainly among the more important sources of motivation of the free associational activity that constitutes civil society. However, there is not, from the perspective of civil society, a difference of principle between religiously, nonreligiously or antireligiously motivated, and mixed forms of free association between citizens: a local branch of the Salvation Army is just as much part of civil society as a humanist terminal care group, an association of collectors of World Football championship paraphernalia, or a discussion group in which believers and nonbelievers engage in debates over the relationship between civil society and religion, and all four can equally be regarded as supportive of economically disinterested civil structures. Because the principles on which civil society rests are of a formal nature, they are indifferent as regards the content of civil activities. As for churches, they are, from the perspective of civil society, free associations of citizens who together form communities – local, national, inter- or transnational – of people who share the same religious view, and for whom this community can mean anything from the place where personal escape or salvation is sought to the basis for all kinds of society-oriented activities.

'Civil society' typically treats all churches alike, presupposing a legal framework of freedom of conscience, property rights, the right to organise religious education and so on. The fact that some states, on historical or other grounds, privilege a certain religion over others by giving it the status of State Church (United Kingdom, Scandinavian countries) or by linking it to the ruling monarchy (the Netherlands), may contain a tension, but not necessarily a contradiction with a civil society in which all religions have equal status, as is shown by the founding of Islamic schools in western counties with large Muslim minorities. From the point of view of civil society – that is, inasmuch as I am a citizen – I do not and indeed should not care what my neighbours think or what they believe in, as long as they (a) stick to the same rules as I do, (b) respect other convictions, including mine, and (c) keep their beliefs to themselves or to the group they belong to. From that perspective, I do not and indeed should not care whether my neighbour is a Muslim, a Mormon, or a Zen Buddhist, as long as I can come to an acceptable deal about who is paying for the new fence separating our gardens, and as long as we can be both enthusiastic members of the same school committee.

The development of civil society has, in the modern western world – or, to put it more in terms of ideas, in western modernity – coincided with a process of secularisation. In his analysis of this process, José Casanova relates the topic of secularisation to the private–public distinction.²⁵ Secularisation, according to Casanova, can mean three things: (i) emancipation of secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, (ii) decline of religious beliefs and practices, (iii) marginalisation of religion to the private sphere.²⁶ In the case of a strict division of the private and the public, the first and the last of these three coincide: a formal separation of state and church reflects the emancipation of secular spheres, and if the state is identical with the public sphere, everything else being private, religion automatically becomes a private affair. As the second is contingent, neither cause nor effect of civil society as such, it seems to be part of modern civil society that different spheres of society begin to act independently of church and religion, and that religious faith becomes, first and foremost, a private affair of the individual citizen.

The privatisation of religion has two important aspects: one is the emancipation of religion itself in the sense both of individual freedom of conscience and liberation of church communities; the other is the annihilation of the Church as an independent political actor. This was expressed in all clarity, and with due stress on both aspects, in the last chapter of *Du Contrat social* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, often misunderstood as an advocate of government control over the citizen's mind. The rights of the sovereign are limited by public interest:

Le droit que le pacte social donne au souverain ... ne passe point ... les bornes de l'utilité publique. Les sujets ne doivent donc compte au souverain de leurs opinions qu'autant que ces opinions importent à la communauté. ... il importe bien à l'État que chaque citoyen ait une religion qui lui fasse aimer ses devoirs; mais les dogmes de cette religion n'intéressent ni l'État ni ses membres qu'autant que ses dogmes se rapportent à la morale et aux devoirs que celui qui la professe est tenu de remplir envers autrui.²⁷

The authority of the state is restricted to what Rousseau indeed labels 'civil religion':

Il y a donc une profession de foi purement civile dont il appartient au souverain de fixer les articles, *non pas précisément comme dogmes de religion*, mais comme sentiments de sociabilité sans lesquels il est impossible d'être bon citoyen ni sujet fidèle. Sans pouvoir obliger personne à les croire, il peut bannir de l'État quiconque ne les croit pas [italics mine, EvdZ]²⁸

This 'civil religion' is established by the state, 'sans explications ni commentaires', and one can perceive here not only the possibility of public hypocrisy and of 'double-think', but also a development which replaces these articles of faith, still Christian in the case of Rousseau, by other, nonreligious ones.

Still, this should not lead us to disregard an important consequence of the division of religion into public civil religion and private personal confession: 'Maintenant qu'il n'y a plus et qu'il ne peut plus y avoir de religion nationale exclusive, on doit tolérer toutes celles qui tolèrent les autres, autant que leurs dogmes n'ont rien de contraire aux devoirs du citoyen'.²⁹ Here, given these two negative criteria – toleration of others, and noncontradiction with the obligations of the citizen – there can be no fundamental objection against nonreligious convictions and worldviews. The privatisation of religion means both a liberation of the state from any possible church intervention, making the state radically secular whether it proscribes a civil religion or not, and a liberation of the private sphere of the individual – his or her conscience – making religion an object of the individual citizen's decision.

Of course, in the eighteenth century, the Church – different Churches in different countries – was still a major political factor, which, in the eyes of republicans and democrats, was as much a barrier on the road to political freedom as was absolute monarchy. With the important exception of the Russian Empire, this privatisation of religion has been quite successful in Europe, not in the sense of an immediate realisation in all European countries, but in the sense of becoming part of the project of modernity. Separation of state and church, tolerance of all religions (and non-religious worldviews) which are themselves tolerant of others, and freedom of conscience have become self-evident elements of the dominant liberal-democratic discourse, and have been recognised, with the Second Vatican Council, by a long-time major oppositional force against modernisation, the Roman Catholic Church.³⁰

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries privatised religion still usually meant one of the major traditional religions: somebody like Rousseau could hardly foresee contemporary phenomena like 'reli-shopping', the unconcerned eclectic composition of a personal conviction out of an available set of religious and nonreligious teachings that populate the market at any given moment, or 'Sheilism', the elaboration of a strictly private and personal belief-set.³¹ Still, whether one despises this or applauds it as the advent of postmodern individual religiosity, it is in line with Rousseau's reasoning. Similarly, the separation of religion and nation advocated – or: found – by Rousseau has found its contemporary form in the fact that, for example, a Dutchman can just as easily accept the Orthodox faith as Afro-Americans can become Muslims. And the point is just as much in their objective individual right, as citizens, to do so, as it is in their subjective freedom as persons, which makes them regard this as a matter of their own choice.

A necessary consequence of the principle of free individuality, basic to democracy, market economy and civil society, is the principle of freedom of conscience. In the context of early modernity this meant in practice a principle of mutual tolerance of a limited number of traditional religions. Traditional religion has by and large given way, in western countries, to communities of believers which are based on the principle of 'free association': if you are into religion, you choose yourself a Church that fits your personal preferences and feelings.

Religious freedom, that is the privatisation of religion and of the Church – of *all* Churches – creates a situation in which the Church – *any* Church – can enter, or reenter in a new manner, civil society, the market and political society, and in fact 'practically the whole public domain'.³² As Casanova elaborates, there are three ways in which a Church can enter the public domain out of the private sphere, three forms of 'deprivatisation':

- (i) 'religious mobilization in defense of the traditional life-world against various forms of market or state penetration', or, put more broadly, 'religious organizations can act as part of a resistance against what Habermas called 'colonization of the life-world',³³
- (ii) entrance of religious institutions into 'the public sphere of modern societies to question and contest the claims of the two major societal systems, states and markets, to function according to their own intrinsic functionalist norms without regard to extrinsic traditional moral norms';³⁴
- (iii) 'finally, there is a third form of deprivatization of religion connected with the more diffuse relationship ... between individual religious commitment and voluntary associationism of all kinds, religious, moral, civil and political'.³⁵

While the first of these three is focused on life-world and community, but can of course take political and associational forms, and the second is critical with respect to the very structure of society, the third points to a form in which religiously motivated private citizens engage in associational activity that constitutes civil society in the proper sense of the term. People who freely join a religious community, or who freely confirm their belonging to the religious community they were 'born into', may be expected to be its more committed and active members, likely to engage in other forms of activity, too: charity work, peace movements and similar.

'Civil society' as such is not simply tolerant, but indifferent with respect to religions and Churches, even in countries with a state religion; but there seems to be

a growing awareness, in western society and academia alike, that a 'civil society' in the broad sense of a socio-political and economic formation, characterised by a strong 'civil society' in the narrow sense of precisely that sphere of free association, is in need of some sort of inner motivation, among a substantial part of its population, to be a 'good citizen' and to associate freely with others for the realisation of material and immaterial objectives. This motivation can be some sort of republicanism or active citizenship, but it can also be a religious conviction, connected or not with a sense of 'nation'. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau put it very clearly: 'Il importe bien à l'État que chaque citoyen ait une religion qui lui fasse aimer ses devoirs'.³⁶ Churches – in the wide sense of any association of believers – have become, in modern society, one of the possible sources of commitment of individuals to the 'civil society' they live in. Consequently 'religion' becomes relevant to 'civil society' again, albeit in a manner that differs radically from that of the seventeenth century.

Today Christians, in the sense of religiously motivated citizens identifying with Christianity in general or with one of its many forms, are relatively strongly committed members of civil society. But they hold no privilege in this respect: others, humanists for instance, can be as strongly committed. Generally speaking, this means that Christians – especially laity, but also clergy, insofar as they act as private citizens, not as representatives of a Church – can, and in many cases do, play an important role in developing, sustaining and recreating civil society, but they do so under the major condition of acceptance of the basic structure of civil society (in the broad sense of the term), that is the fact of secularisation in the senses (i) and (iii) indicated above, and the fact that religiously motivated forms of free associational activity are part of civil society if and only if they arise out of the private life-world, take shape at community level, and form part of civil society, taking on, eventually, a political form and entering the public sphere through political society. This is, in many countries on the European continent, the situation of Christian democracy, as one of three major political formations – the others are democratic liberalism and social democracy – which do not simply accept but also endorse the basic structure of the society they operate in. Broadly speaking, Christian democrats advocate community and brotherhood, while social democrats urge equality and solidarity, and liberals stress equality and liberty. Together, respecting each other and forming coalitions that neutralise political conflict, they create a situation in which the principles of brotherhood, equality and liberty are recognised and balanced.

At this point, a major question presents itself, bearing directly on the relationship between religion and civil society. To the extent to which Christians have a fundamentally different vision of society and of the good life than the one imaginable within the framework of civil society, or to the extent to which they do not believe that civil society is the place in which they, through their associational activity, can bring society close enough to that vision to satisfy them, their activity is to be situated at the second level of Casanova's scheme of possible forms of deprivatisation. They develop a vision of community which is not compatible with civil society, but appears as an alternative to it. This potential conflict is one of the key problems postsoviet Russia is facing.

2. Civil Society and Russian Orthodoxy: New Challenges for Lay Believers

Looking at discussions going on in Russia, and speaking with Russian intellectuals, one is easily led to think that the topos of civil society as the dominant vision of the

good life has given way to that of a Russia consisting of a strong state (democratic or not so democratic), a market economy that is not so free as to allow for 'wild capitalism (*diki kapitalizm*)', and a harmonious community based on a shared, national religion. In Russia, different in this respect from, for example, Ukraine, there is one strong candidate for the role of 'national Church', and it is undeniably the case that this alternative ideal is attractive to the state, the Russian Orthodox Church, and large parts of society.³⁷ The state is urgently in need of ideological legitimisation and a position of Orthodoxy as a 'national religion' would certainly suit it. The Russian Orthodox Church, as Gerd Stricker puts it, 'seems to claim the privileges of the Patriarchate in tsarist times, as it were the Gold without the Cage', and many Russians, whether Orthodox believers or not, seem to have every reason to give up newly acquired liberties for a more egalitarian and less fragmented society, if the only price to pay is lip-service to Orthodoxy.³⁸

It is tempting, but mistaken, to construct an opposition between 'civil society' and 'national religion' here. Not only has Russia already gone along a path from which there is no easy return, but a monolithic perception of the Russian Orthodox Church is inadequate, too: there are many differences within the Church, and there are also numerous initiatives in Orthodox circles which cannot be regarded otherwise than as free associational activity out of the private into the public sphere. Rather than nostalgia for the Golden Cage, we seem to have a situation in which the cage has been opened and the gold freshly painted, and in which some birds do not dare leave the cage, while others sit hesitantly in its opening, and still others fly about freely, every now and then taking a rest on top of the cage. There has taken shape, over the last decade, what one might call a progressive or democratic Orthodox intelligentsia, made up mostly of laity with some clergy, which engages not only in discussion, but also in a variety of activities, such as the founding of journals, the organisation of religious education, and the development of institutes of higher learning in the fields of theology and religion studies.³⁹

The founding of journals, the creation of a network of educational institutions, and the attempts by these institutions to receive formal recognition by the state are clear manifestations of civil society. Institutions within the field of theology and religious studies fall into three categories: state institutions (that is, departments and institutes within state universities), institutions of the Church, and private institutions. Of these three, the private institutions are the most interesting ones from the perspective of the coming-to-being of a civil society, because they can rely neither on the state nor on the Church, but have to establish themselves as actors in a private market economy and as free associations of citizens seeking legal status. As their activities are largely independent of the state, but as a rule seek legal recognition and protection; arise out of the free initiative of private citizens, but take on institutional forms; and operate under free market conditions, but are not themselves 'commercial'; they simply *are* constitutive elements of civil society, irrespective of their content, because the basis of civil society is of a formal nature. Their relationship to the Church is one of autonomy: they seek its approval and blessing, but operate independently, recognising the actual secularisation of Russian society.

Secularisation in the first sense distinguished by Casanova is an accomplished fact in Russia, but some of these secular spheres, in particular the state, are in need of some sort of legitimatisation to fill the 'vacuum': at the state level, the replacement of Orthodoxy – subordinate state religion until the revolution of February 1917 – by Marxism–Leninism was a pseudo-secularisation. Secularisation in the third sense outlined by Casanova indeed was an effect of Soviet reality, and partly explains the

relatively closed character of religious community life in Russia. Secularisation in the second sense, finally, is simply a fact: the vast majority of the Russians are non-believers.⁴⁰ Typically, people who are active in this field will ask what right they have to confess their faith publicly, when only 15 per cent of the population identifies with the Orthodox faith, and a mere 2 per cent regularly attends religious service. From the perspective of civil society, the answer would be: no right to impose your truth on anybody, for example, in an educational setting, but every right to engage in all sorts of associational and organisational activity, and to demonstrate your religious inspiration while doing so; that is, to be a religiously-inspired active member of civil society. Thinking along these lines, one can imagine a situation in which Russian civil society were about as Orthodox as French civil society is Catholic, or Swedish civil society Lutheran.

The question is, of course, whether such a development is compatible with the Russian tradition, with the idea of Orthodox Christianity, and with Russian conceptualisations of society. In fact, the debates among Russian philosophers concerning civil society have turned around the traditional, but fatal, juxtaposition of western and Russian philosophical thought. If you are an advocate of civil society, you are a Westerniser, and you refer to Locke, Montesquieu and Habermas, in a word, western secular philosophy; if, by contrast, you are an advocate of national identity and Russian specificity, you are a Slavophile, and you refer to Khomyakov, Dostoyevsky and Florensky, or 'Russian religious philosophy'. The shift in philosophical debate from a predominantly Westernising to a primarily Neoslavophile discourse is not only fruitless, but also unnecessary, and it might be precisely the 'progressive Orthodox intelligentsia' that finds a way out of this situation.

This problem is related to a general, not specifically Russian, question, namely the question whether the idea of civil society, obviously developed in the West, but with an equally universal pretension at validity as the Christian tradition it emerged from, has global applicability. This question is usually raised in connection with the propagation of 'civil society' as at least part of the solution for developing countries in the Third World, but it is just as pertinent with respect to Eastern Europe and Russia: is 'civil society' a universal idea, applicable to a globalising world, a necessary counterweight to a global capitalist market economy, balancing increasingly influential international governmental organisations (IGOs) such as the International Monetary Fund, just as national civil societies once balanced the national state? Or is it fundamentally 'eurocentric' and a new form of cultural imperialism *cum* economic hegemony?⁴¹ The currently predominant separation of market and civil society evidently suits those who seek to influence the situation in nonwestern countries without being associated with imperialism and global capital.

Probably the best approach to this issue is indeed to 'move away both from those perspectives which reduce civil society to capitalist economic relations and from those which dissociate civil society from its material base', and 'neither to romanticize civil society as an ideal sphere of freedom and association ... nor to dismiss civil society as a theoretically and politically redundant concept ..., but rather to analyze critically the pivotal role which civil society has in the formation of modern social relations'.⁴² As it is based on free individuality, 'real existing civil society' does realise the universal value of individual freedom, but at the same time it is a place where particular (individual or group) interests articulate themselves, and find part of their ideological legitimisation in a discourse about civil society. This legitimisation is possible, first and foremost, because of the indeed universal nature of its *formal* principle: *any* form of free association is legitimate within the space,

created and protected by law, of civil society, with the sole exception of those forms that threaten that very space. At the same time, this universal form can serve as the vehicle for particular contents, similar to the way in which exchange on the market, mediated by the universal forms of 'money' and 'contract', serves as the vehicle for particular profit interests. In order to make transnational civil society the place where the principle of universality can be brought into play against particular interests, civil society discourse has to be followed and analysed critically, and the principle of universality has to be brought in explicitly. One of the sources of this principle is, of course, Christianity, and at this point Orthodoxy becomes relevant for the discussion about civil society in Russia.

Recently Oleg Kharkhordin launched the interesting idea of a civil society based on Orthodox principles, opposing it to what he called the Anglo-American (or 'Atlantic', as we might say with Gellner) tradition of Locke and Ferguson and the 'Mediterranean' tradition of Montesquieu and Gramsci, which were based on the Protestant and the Roman Catholic traditions respectively.⁴³ An Orthodox vision of civil society, his argument runs, would, while being 'functionally equivalent to the Protestant and Catholic visions', be more compatible than imported western models with postsoviet reality, heir of a Soviet reality which he, following Nikolai Berdyayev, diagnoses as 'the first attempt at this worldly realisation of the Orthodox vision of civil life'.⁴⁴ The main contrast of the Orthodox vision with the Protestant and Catholic traditions is that the state, 'minimal' in the Atlantic, and 'strong' in the Mediterranean conception, would in the Orthodox vision be absent, giving way to an 'ecclesiasticalised' lay world made up of communities based on three correctional principles of ecclesiastical justice: 'to denounce sin, to admonish into righteousness, and – if the sinner does not listen to admonitions – to excommunicate', and on the absence of any secular coercion.⁴⁵ According to Kharkhordin, the postsoviet situation offers even better possibilities for the realisation of this project: the individual has been liberated, and the state, rather than becoming the powerful warrant of freedom advocates of the Mediterranean vision like Vladik Nersesians wanted it to be, or the minimal 'night watchman state' Atlanticly-minded thinkers like Vadim Mezhuev preferred, has become 'feeble enough to be considered just one (perhaps, still the most powerful) gang among the many', not commanding, as is presupposed in both western visions, the monopoly of violence.⁴⁶ The present task, Kharkhordin concludes, would then be to foster civil society by leaving the state in its current decaying condition, that is, to let it 'wither away', to use the Soviet phrase so dear to the Bolshevik project, yet not quite turned into practice during 70 years of constructing socialism, and to engage in 'transforming the relations of uncivil violence according to the principles of friendly networks'.⁴⁷

Two objections come to mind. First of all, it may be seriously questioned if a stable 'civil society' is conceivable without a sufficiently strong state. Probably, a society in which there is no violence because all people, of their own free will and following the example of their fellow-citizens, choose non-violent strategies to solve their conflicts, will be generally preferred. But it is hard to see how it can be effectively excluded that some postsoviet Russian citizen reads Thomas Hobbes, realises that 'when all is reckoned together, the difference between man and man is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit, to which another may not pretend as well as he', and experiences the absence of a 'common power to keep them in quiet' as a chance to dispossess his fellow-citizen, and 'deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labor, but also of his life, or liberty'.⁴⁸ If this possibility cannot be eliminated, there is always a chance of violent settlement of

conflict, which calls for law and for at least a relative monopoly of violence.

The second objection has to do with the status of an Orthodox vision of civil society. The fact that the Protestant and the Roman Catholic tradition have fed different visions of civil society and generated different models of it does not imply that the historical phenomenon they were trying to conceptualise is bound up with the same two traditions, nor does it exclude a subsequent historical development in which initially different models and corresponding realities converge into one, more or less homogeneous, 'civil society'. The empirical reality, the academic concept, and the political slogan of civil society are all part of the same social reality, and there is no such thing as a Protestant or Catholic blueprint of civil society which would have subsequently been realised. Therefore, applying this to the case of Russia, it is certainly worth while to take into account the Orthodox tradition, and to seek in it part of the conceptual basis of civil society, but that does not compel one to construct an Orthodox vision of it, leaving out the Protestant and Catholic – and a few other – visions, nor does it necessarily lead to a specifically Russian vision: it may just as well add another shade to a 'universal idea'.

It is worth noting, in this connection, that there have been thinkers who identified with Orthodox Christianity, and who developed the concept of *sobornost'* (conciliarity) – it is hard to think of a concept which is more specifically Orthodox and Russian – in relation to such notions as state power, private property, legal procedure, and indeed civil society. One can think of Vladimir Solov'yev's *Opravdaniye dobra* (*The Justification of the Good*) or Semen Frank's *Dukhovnyye osnovy obshchestva* (*The Spiritual Foundations of Society*), where he develops a social and political philosophy on the basis of the concept of *sobornost'*, defining civil society as 'a kind of molecular social bondedness, inwardly connecting the individual elements into a free, plastically flexible whole', and substantiates the necessity of state, law, private property and civil society in opposition to both the liberal reduction to a minimum of the state, and the conservative 'statist' and socialist reduction to a minimum of 'a *civil society*, based on the free interaction of individuals'.⁴⁹ The notions of *sobornost'* and free association join hands in the Orthodox tradition of *bratstva* (brotherhoods (and sisterhoods)), a pluralist form of lay organisation, reminiscent of the 'friendly networks' highlighted by Kharkhordin.

Lyudmila Vorontsova and Sergei Filatov, attempting to signalise the beginnings of civil society in Russia, pointed to the *trudovoi kollektiv* (labour collective) as, next to the intelligentsia, a leftover of the Soviet period that can be seen as 'pseudo-civil society': 'One can say as much as one likes about the decline and the insufficiency of the "labour collectives" as a form of civil society, and it will all be true. However, it is today one of its most flourishing forms, whether we like it or not.'⁵⁰ Like the other forms highlighted by Vorontsova and Filatov, active Orthodox parish life and the widespread Cossack movement, the *trudovoi kollektiv* cannot, in my opinion, be regarded as an outstanding example of civil society: these certainly are forms of associational activity, and they are among the few public places where Russian citizens can develop a sense of community, but the absence of legal status, the inward orientation towards church life itself, and the focus on tradition and conservation of traditional values make these forms rather untypical.⁵¹ Like the *bratstva* they would, in a developed civil society (in the broad sense), be part of a pluralist civil society (in the narrow sense), but on their own they point rather in the direction of traditional community than in that of (post)modern civil society: their content and orientation contrast with their significance as forms of free associational activity.

It may indeed be asked whether a vision of 'civil society' as consisting of

communities set up on the principles of ecclesiastical justice is not an ideal of community rather than of civil society.⁵² To put it differently: it is an open question whether we should still name societies 'civil' which are not primarily based on the principle of free individuality, and which do not seek legal status. In an article on the development of 'civil society' among American Mormons Elizabeth Dunn states that

although American Mormons are people who participate in a capitalist, individualist society, they have created a form of 'civil society' that looks much more like those described for 'non-western' societies ..., they create a space which is not only apart from the American state, but which rejects state action ..., a civil society which is not based on private individuals, but rather on a moral system of community interactions.⁵³

In fact, we are facing the rather fundamental, but problematic, choice whether we should identify 'civil society' and 'community', distinguish them from each other, or oppose them as mutually exclusive visions of the good life.

One may see this as an academic question, but in fact any such definition is itself an intervention within as much as a statement 'about' the things we are speaking about. I propose the following solution: 'community' is any 'spontaneously' self-organising collective of human beings on the basis of sympathy and common background and/or shared interests, and to the extent to which it takes some institutional form (association, council, union, party, any form with membership, inner decision procedures, contribution fees, and so on) and seeks legal status, it is part of civil society. The move from community to civil society is then a way in which the private becomes 'public as well', retaining its private basis, and to the extent to which civil society is made up of this kind of free association it can be regarded as a 'community', giving orientation and sense to large groups of people (this suits our experience that, for example, our belonging to a community of stamp collectors is not really distinct from our formal membership which implies acceptance of by-laws and of the appropriate procedures of changing them).

In general terms, community is an antidote for the possible fragmentation, individualisation or 'atomisation' of civil society, and it is not only perfectly compatible with the idea of civil society, but in fact part of its 'matter': informal groupings can be the basis of more formal, institutionalised associations and organisations if they come into existence 'spontaneously' and 'naturally', and if they are not forced into institutionalisation. Semen Frank was right, I believe, when he wrote that liberalism and socialism share an 'individualistic or "atomistic" theory of society, according to which society (conceived precisely as civil society) is a simple external aggregate of ontologically separate individuals', which is the ground for their acceptance and rejection of civil society respectively.⁵⁴ He opposed to this theory his own idea that the '*independence* of all the members of society is not their *self-groundedness*, is ontologically grounded not in their intrinsic natures, but is the necessary form of their *interconnectedness*, their social *unity*'.⁵⁵

To this conception, based on the idea of an 'organic primordial inner *unity*' of all members of society, one can oppose the idea that any concrete unity among members of society is the result of their spontaneous association 'from below', which always entails the possibility that they return to their individuality, and also that this possibility is the condition of the salvation of citizens from potential 'totalitarian' pressure of community life. Regardless of whether we see the generality of community and association as the concretisation of the truly universal, as Frank does, or as the tendential universality out of particularity, a 'molecular' bond is clearly what

prevents 'atomisation'. However, the move from individual to community does not imply a move from particularity to universality: a group of individuals is just as particular as a single individual. Universality, present *formally* in the legal basis that creates the space of 'civil society', has to be realised within that form in order to exist, that is, there have to be individuals or groups that refer to it.

'Community', Elizabeth Bounds argues, when it serves as 'a "metaphor for those bonds among individuals that the market is eroding"', is a 'trope for civil society': 'As an ideological discourse, it arises out of the current problems of civil society in the liberal capitalist state, problems that affect understandings of morality, identity, and membership.'⁵⁶ And in another widespread terminological framework, that of Jürgen Habermas, community in this sense would be the antidote against the instrumentalisation of the 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*), understood as 'the realm, connected to but distinct from state and economy, where socially integrated values, norms, and beliefs are generated and transmitted', which is increasingly being 'colonised' by the systems of state and economy.⁵⁷

Bounds, who identifies 'community' with 'civil society' as well as with 'lifeworld', rightly assumes that 'the discourse of community is a reaction against the nature of civil society in a social formation which includes a capitalist economy, a liberal polity, and a modernist culture in crisis', and stresses the necessity of discussing the arguments around civil society and community 'in relation to the overall social formation', as well as the necessity of a 'dialogue between religious and non-religious discussions of community'.⁵⁸ From a classical-liberal point of view, which tends to identify community with premodern, traditional, society, such identification of community and civil society is a confusion, whereas from a traditionalist communitarian view, civil society, in its atomistic and formal, procedural aspect, must appear as an evil *per se*. Between these two extremes, however, a middle way can be constructed, which rejects both the opposition of community and civil society, and the reduction of one to the other: of community to civil society in the case of liberalism, of civil society to community in the case of antiliberal communitarianism. This position can regard community as a major source of civil society, reserving the legal aspect to the latter, presupposing the distinction of private and public sphere constitutive of modern society, and recognising civil society as a sphere of association between the private and the public, similar yet distinct from the market.

At this point, the possibility of a dialogue with Orthodoxy comes within view, and in the postmodern context of a globalising civil society one should even broaden this perspective. There is no pertinent reason why a dialogue between religious and non-religious discussions of community and civil society should be narrowed down to a dialogue with Protestant liberalism in 'Atlantic' society, Catholic communitarianism in the Mediterranean world, or Orthodox *sobornost* in Eastern Europe (and Islam, Confucianism and so on in the rest of the world). In fact, the idea of a national religion, connected to a national state, a national idea, a national economy, and a national civil society or community is attractive only in the context of a nostalgic desire for a closed, traditional society. Bounds is right that the 'intense tone of nostalgia, loss and despair' that is typical of much of communitarian discourse is not pertinent to it.⁵⁹ The Orthodox tradition possesses a considerable potential to engage in this debate, and to play a role not only for Russia or Eastern Europe, but for the world at large.

Chris Hann is right to be sceptical of 'much heady talk of "world civil society" in the context of globalisation', while in fact 'there is as yet no sign of any plausible alternative to the state as the primary institutional framework'.⁶⁰ At the same time,

the globalisation of the market (multinational enterprises, global banking), of political society (IGOs), and of civil society (transnational NGOs, forms of free association in cyberspace) is a fact of the contemporary world which renders the ideas of national economy, national state, and national civil society obsolete, or at least relative. Transposing to a global level the Hegelian argument that the state is needed in order to reconcile the many particular interests within a general framework, one could argue that a global political society and a global polity are urgently needed in order to regulate economic and societal conflicts which transcend national borders; given globalisation, regional political bodies like the European Union are only part of the solution, apart from the fact that they have yet to become democratic, for which a European political and civil society will be necessary. Moreover, as long as an international polity – including an effective legal system – is lacking, a transnational civil society is needed in order to balance the atomising forces of the market, and at this point, as Casanova argues,

transnational religions are in a particularly advantageous position to remind all individuals and all societies that under modern conditions of globalisation 'the common good' can increasingly be defined only in global, universal, human terms, and that consequently the public sphere of modern civil societies cannot have national or state boundaries.⁶¹

The question then presents itself whether Orthodoxy, like Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, or Islam, can conceive of itself as a transnational religion. As part of Christianity it participates in its universal orientation, which would automatically seem to lead to transnationality. On the other hand, Orthodoxy is organised along national lines, forming a rather loose international (not transnational) conglomerate of independent national churches in Serbia, Romania, Russia and other countries, and this makes Orthodoxy particularly liable to embrace nationalistic tendencies, even if these are not initiated by it.⁶² The tendency to regard Russian Orthodoxy as the 'national religion of Russia' seems to be strong, both within and outside the Church: about 2 per cent of the population goes to Orthodox churches on a regular basis, a mere 7 per cent of Moscow's inhabitants visit the Church at Easter, some 15–20 per cent of the population formally belongs to the Church, while about 10 per cent are, according to Stricker, 'genuinely religious', but 40 per cent regard Orthodoxy as the religion of the Russia people, that is, as a 'national religion'.⁶³ Moreover, as Casanova convincingly points out, the idea of transnational religions presupposes what he labels a 'free religious market' on a global scale, that is the kind of situation in which a potentially infinite multitude of denominations, all of them 'privatised' in the sense of being separated from the state, compete for the free choice of private individuals.⁶⁴ This is precisely the kind of situation which in Russia led to the introduction of a new law *Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations*, in order to stop the spread of financially powerful foreign actors on the free religious market.

The paradox of the current situation in Russia, it seems to me, is that while Orthodox Christianity can play an important role in the conceptualisation of civil society by linking the idea of *sobornost'* to the idea of community-building 'from below', the proximity of the Russian Orthodox Church to a state so urgently needing a national idea in order to strengthen itself, as well as its traditionalism, reinforced by its suppressed-yet-privileged sojourn in the 'Golden Cage' forged for it by Stalin, suggests another role, namely that of advocating an antiliberal idea of community 'from above'. The paradox is, in fact, one of historical order: just as the world of 'real existing socialism', in Russia in particular, knew only a quasi-private sphere of

intimacy, a pseudo-civil society, a fake political society, and a shadow-market economy, it underwent a process of *pseudo*-secularisation: the 'privatisation of religion' which is 'constitutive of Western Modernity' and which today turns the Church – or rather: Churches – into 'one of the important components of those voluntary organizations of civil society in the West', was replaced, in the Soviet context, by the intimate bond of an authoritarian state power that did not respect the distinction between public and private with a pseudo-religion, 'Marxism–Leninism', that denied the legitimate existence of 'civil society', identifying it, in the line of Hegel and Marx, with 'bourgeois society', that is, with capitalism.⁶⁵ As a result the Russian Orthodox Church is not in a position to become an actor 'within a pluralist civil society' out of the private sphere and thus of necessity 'from below'.⁶⁶ If Orthodoxy is to play, to use Kharkhordin's expression, a 'functionally equivalent' role to the Protestant and the Catholic visions of civil society, it will have to give up, while adhering to the idea of community, its protest against the formal nature of law and legal procedure, as well as its 'otherworldliness'.⁶⁷

Whether such a 'modernisation' of Orthodoxy is imaginable for the near future, and whether it is compatible with the very idea of Orthodoxy, is a question only the Orthodox Church itself, or more specifically the Russian Orthodox intelligentsia, can answer. At this point another paradox arises: to the extent to which an Orthodox intelligentsia in Russia takes shape as an independently-minded network of associations and institutions, identifying with the Orthodox tradition, but not automatically with the Russian Orthodox Church, it already *is* part of a civil society that is taking shape. The position of members of the intelligentsia as members of civil society does not depend on whether they engage in a discourse about civil society or not (if it did, this would imply that civil society exists only to the extent to which its participants say what they are doing). But in view of the fact that this discourse is not simply 'about' civil society, but also the place where it reflexively realises itself as civil society, becoming *an-und-für-sich*, it does make a difference if they do, especially in the present situation where the liberal, 'westernising' discourse of civil society has given way to a 'cacophony started by the presidential directive to start looking for a national idea'.⁶⁸ The liberal vs. national dichotomy cuts across the Orthodox intelligentsia as it cuts across, for example, the philosophical community, but in both cases the national chord appears to be struck with greater force.

Another important point is that the distinction between laity and clergy, while being crucial from the position of the Church, is relatively irrelevant from the perspective of civil society: when an Orthodox priest teaches at a secular theological institute he may be representing the Church as far as the content of his teaching is concerned, but he is formally acting as a private person who freely associates with others in an activity which is economic and civil at the same time. But this indifference from the perspective of civil society is relative. Churches may enter the public sphere in different ways, and here the involvement of clergy does make a difference: although clergy are private citizens too, they cannot associate with or dissociate from the Church as freely as other private persons, and the Church may also want to determine or limit the spectrum of associations within civil (and political) society with which its members can freely associate.

The present situation thus presents a major challenge to laity and clergy alike, and the development of the discourse on civil society in intellectual circles which identify with Orthodoxy will be a major source of information in this respect. As Nicolai Petro recently wrote in his review of Jonathan Sutton's *Traditions in New Freedom*: 'The implications of religion for civil society are very far reaching indeed, and it is

ferently to be hoped that there will be future studies examining this connection in contemporary Russia.⁶⁹ The present essay is an attempt to prepare part of the conceptual framework for such studies.

A point on which the Orthodox tradition can certainly contribute to the discussion about possible future states of civil society is in its critique of individualism: while the principle of free individuality remains as constitutive to civil society as it is to democracy and free market economy, this does not necessarily imply the absolutisation of individuality into individualism; nor does the opposite, or oppositional, stress on collectivity necessarily imply its absolutisation into collectivism. The notion of *sobornost'*, coined by the early Slavophile Aleksei S. Khomyakov (1804–1860), and transformed into the philosophical concept of *vseyedinstvo* (all-unity) by Vladimir Solov'yev, can be of considerable value here, as it tries to elaborate a new type of unity, critical of both 'Catholic collectivism and Protestant individualism'.⁷⁰ A serious discussion with this 'Russian' tradition, running from Khomyakov, through Solov'yev and Frank, to Kharkhordin, against the background of the 'western' tradition of discussions around civil society, could prove to be highly fruitful, even if it may seem a bit early to claim, as does his translator, that Frank 'elaborates two ideas [the ideas of *sobornost'* and of *sluzheniye* (serving) (EvdZ)] that may serve as the foundation for a social thought of the future.'⁷¹ What is needed in order to create a situation in which these ideas may indeed play their role in social and political philosophy is, on the one hand, an open mind with respect to the Russian tradition along with an attempt to 'derussify' it, and, on the other hand, critical 'dewesternising' self-reflection with respect to civil society discourse in the western world.

In a more general sense, the presence of religion – or, more precisely, of religiously motivated forms of free associational activity – is important for civil society because it embodies the idea of truth in the strong sense of the term, thus acting as a critique of relativism, that is, of the absolutisation of the relativity of every alleged truth or its reduction to mere subjective opinion.⁷² But a positive appreciation of religion within the context of civil society discourse in turn presupposes a recognition, on the part of any Church or other religiously-inspired organisation, of the principle of free individuality as the basis of civil society, and an abandonment of the claim to be the actual incarnation of absolute truth, the idea of which it embodies. Solov'yev rightly drew attention to the 'very simple but amazingly neglected circumstance ... that not one but several religions affirm the unconditional (i.e. absolute, EvdZ) validity of their truth, demanding choice in their favor and thereby (whether they wish to or not) exposing their claims to investigation by free thought ...'.⁷³

Conclusion

In all discussions regarding civil society it is important, first of all, to be very clear about the fact that civil society, like free market economy and liberal democracy, is based on the principle of free individuality, the freedom to associate or not to associate with others in a space defined and protected by law. By the same token, civil society is particularly fragile as well as coming only after democratisation and economic liberalisation, since it is based on free associational activity that is not necessary in the way economic interest and political conflict are inevitable: the 'good life' of civil society is based on a principle that also allows for a less than good life. Conceptions which totally dissociate civil society from the economic sphere or oppose it to the state not only miss this crucial point, but they also fail to understand the actual complexity of civil society, as they fail to see how civil society pre-

supposes a political distinction between the private and public which defines the place where civil society can come into being. Whether it does come into being in Russia and other places or not, is, in the end, not a matter of westernising intellectuals, nor of financially powerful NGOs, but of the decision of individual citizens to associate with others.

If we perceive civil society as primarily an idea, and if we conceptualise it, in line with many contemporary authors, as a sphere of free, voluntary associational activity of individual citizens between the public and the private, then the time has come to rethink this idea and to include in it the role of religiously-inspired forms of free association, fully recognising their legitimacy. The possibility of an articulation of community as a vision of the good life, alternative to civil society, is present in religious traditions to the extent to which they can extrapolate the communal character of their own group to a larger, societal or global scale. This alternative vision is incompatible with civil society in the broad sense of the term, even though it can find a place in civil society in the narrow sense, and a marginal one in political society.

The worst thing that could happen to Russia is a victory of the tendency to construct political and ideological discourse in terms of a simplified dichotomy, with on one side the West, John Locke, civil society, secularisation and Coca-Cola, and on the other side Russia, Konstantin Leont'yev, national identity, Orthodoxy and ecologically pure mineral water, blessed by Patriarch Aleksii II, and sold, like its western competitor, on every street corner. Such dichotomisation does justice neither to the complex and intrinsically controversial idea of civil society, nor to the rich and complex Russian cultural and religious tradition. In fact, there is no reason why in a predominantly Orthodox Christian country like Russia a flourishing civil society should be impossible. First of all, there is no necessary contradiction between civil society and religious belief: religiously-minded and religiously-inspired people and associations can be, and often are, important actors in civil society. Secondly, in postsoviet Russia several important conditions for civil society have already been realised, including a legal system which gives any citizen, whether religious believer or not, whether member of a Church or not, whether layman or clergywoman or not, the right to associate freely with other citizens. And in the third place, even if the bond between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church, now only one out of four privileged traditional religions, becomes stronger, leading in the end to a situation in which Orthodoxy becomes an official religion, this does not necessarily exclude the development of a civil society either, as its flourishing in some Western European countries with a state church demonstrates.

If in postsoviet Russia the discussion that turned around civil society has given way to a discussion that turns around notions like national religion or national idea, this does not necessarily mean a failure of civil society as an option for Russian society. To the extent to which these discussions practise a recognition of freedom of conscience and of opinion, and to the extent to which they take place within a sphere of free associational activity, protected by law but initiated 'from below', they are part of civil society whether they argue for or against it (or simply ignore the subject). Moreover, there is, among what I have labelled the progressive Orthodox intelligentsia, a recognition of civil society as at least part of the conceptualisation of Russian society.

At the same time, a legislation which guarantees freedom of conscience and of religious organisation is not identical with a functioning legal system that makes individual citizens confident that they can indeed freely associate with others: civil

society comes into being only within the framework of a space, created and warranted by law, that is, by the state, but left free with respect to what exactly happens within that space. In the second place, it seems obvious that of the three major currents in the Christian tradition – Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy – the third is the least sympathetic to the fundamental principle on which civil society is based, that is, the principle of free individuality: one does not have to embrace *individualism*, that is, the absolutisation of individuality, in order to recognise *individuality* as the hinge on which political, economic and civil life turn. Which amounts to saying that, if the Orthodox tradition is to be part of the cultural and spiritual basis of civil society in Russia and Eastern Europe, it will have to reform and modernise itself along lines similar to those of, for example, the Second Vatican Council in the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, Kharkhordin may be right that an Orthodox vision of civil society is possible as an analogue to the Catholic and the Protestant visions, but the fact that in large parts of the world civil society has its cultural and spiritual roots in Catholicism and Protestantism respectively does not make that civil society Catholic or Protestant. Rather, one should say that it has been historically possible that different religious traditions have served as the basis of strikingly similar social formations: there can be no such thing as a Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox civil society. And finally, one of the characteristics of religion, to the extent to which it goes public, that is, acts as a visible organisation (whether you call it 'Church' or not is a secondary question), is that it crosses national borders and becomes transnational, and in this respect matches both global market and transnational civil society – it is international *political* society that is lagging behind. If there can be no such thing as a 'national civil society', it is questionable whether a national religion can serve as the basis of civil society at all: historically it has, but essentially it cannot.

To think along these lines, finally, points to a modernisation of Orthodoxy as it exists as a Church today: it means to leave the cage, to fly about, and to communicate with birds of all feathers, including other Christian denominations, so-called 'new religious movements', nonbelievers and 'Sheilaists'. Those who already do this, both laity and clergy, are often under considerable pressure from the church hierarchy, and the actual state of affairs bears the marks of compromise. Whether, in the end, civil society as a vision of the good life and Orthodoxy as a religion can be made compatible, and whether Orthodoxy can play a 'functionally equivalent' role to that which Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have played with respect to civil society, thus remain open questions. They are also a challenge, both for political philosophy and for Orthodox Christianity.

Notes and References

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- ² Sergei Filatov, 'Kein Gewissen ohne Gewissensfreiheit: Rußland vor der Wahl: Glaubensfreiheit oder Staatskirche?', in Mark Smirnov and G. Avvakumov (eds), *Religion und Gesellschaft im postsowjetischen Raum* (Verlag Der Christliche Osten, Würzburg, 1996), p. 54.
- ³ See: Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992), p. ix and p. 2; Vladimir Tismaneanu (ed.), *Political Culture and Civil Society in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1995), p. 5; Charles

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- ⁴ Theo B. F. M. Brinkel (ed.), *Waarheid en waardigheid: civil society en samenwerking in Europa* (Wetenschappelijk Instituut voor het CDA, 's-Gravenhage, 1996); David G. Anderson, 'Bringing civil society to an uncivilised place: citizenship regimes in Russia's Arctic frontier', in Hann and Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–120; Steven Sampson, 'The social life of projects: importing civil society to Albania', in Hann and Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–42; David C. Durst, Maria I. Dimitrova, Alexander L. Gungov and Borislava V. Vassileva (eds), *Resurrecting the Phoenix: Proceedings from the International Conference on Civil Society in South Eastern Europe: Ethical and Philosophical Perspectives* (EOS Publishing House, Sofia, 1998).
- ⁵ Lyudmila Vorontsova, Sergei Filatov, "'Russky Put'" i grazhdanskoye obshchestvo', *Svobodnaya mysl'*, no. 1, 1995, p. 58; see also: Jutta Scherrer, *Requiem für den Roten Oktober: Rußlands Intelligenzija im Umbruch* (Universitätsverlag, Leipzig, 1966); Evert van der Zweerde, 'Civil society among post-Soviet Russian philosophers: a major sideshow', in Durst *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 295–98; and Marina Shishova, *Russian National Ideology and "National Idea" as Reflected in Official Documents and Discussions in Mass Media Publications* (paper presented at an international symposium on nationalism, St Petersburg, Russian Christian Humanitarian Institute, 22–25 April 1998), p. 2f.
- ⁶ My account of the notion of 'civil society' as well as my assessment of the fate of civil society in Russia are based on earlier research. See my 'Die "bürgerliche Gesellschaft" an den Runtischen russischer Philosophen' in Maria Deppermann (ed.), *Russisches Denken im europäischen Dialog* (Passagenverlag, Innsbruck & Wien, 1998), pp. 278–310; 'Civil society among post-Soviet Russian philosophers ...', pp. 291–308; and 'Civil society in post-Soviet Russia – a failure?', forthcoming in *Strategiya*.
- ⁷ For an elaboration see van der Zweerde, 'Civil society among post-Soviet Russian philosophers ...', pp. 291–94.
- ⁸ See: Tat'yana Vorozheikina, Yevgeni Rashkovsky, Aleksandr Umnov, 'Grazhdanskoye obshchestvo i religiya', *Dia-logos Religiya i Obshchestvo*, p. 64f (also in Vladimir G. Khoros *et al.* (eds), *Grazhdanskoye obshchestvo: mirovoi opyt i problemy Rossii* (Editorial URSS, Moscow, 1998), p. 132; and Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (Penguin Books, London, 1994), pp. 8–12.
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- ¹⁵ See Robert Fine, 'Civil society theory, enlightenment and critique', in Robert Fine and

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- ¹⁶ John A. Hall, 'In search of civil society', in Hall (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 27; and Bryant, *op. cit.*, p. 154, who calls civil society 'a never-ending project'.
- ¹⁷ See: Gellner, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Vorozheikina *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 63; Hann and Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- ¹⁸ Brinkel (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 7; Herman Hoen, "'Civil Society" in de voormalig centraal-geleide economieën', in Eelke de Jong (ed.), *Naar gelijkwaardige partners? Aanzetten tot een christelijk geïnspireerde visie op de positie van arme landen* (Van Gorcum, Assen, 1998), pp. 240–54; Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society* (Routledge, London, 1993), pp. 132–78; Ronald Hill, 'Parties and public organizations', in Stephen White, Alex Pravda and Zvi Gitelman (eds), *Developments in Russian Politics 4* (Macmillan, London, 1997), pp. 82–103; William M. Reisinger, Arthur H. Miller and Vicky L. Hesli, 'Public behavior and political change in post-Soviet states', *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 57, no. 4, 1995, pp. 954–58 and 966f; and Vorontsova and Filatov, *op. cit.*, p. 62f.
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- ²⁰ See, among others: Yevgeni B. Rashkovsky, review of Seligman, *op. cit.*, *Put': mezhdunarodny filosofsky zhurnal*, no. 6, 1994, pp. 311–15; Vorontsova and Filatov, *op. cit.*; Filatov, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–59; Vorozheikina *et al.*, *op. cit.*
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- ³² Gerd Stricker, *Russische Orthodoxie zwischen Freiheit und Nationalismus* (Instituut voor Oosters Christendom, Nijmegen, 1996), p. 9.
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- ⁶¹ Casanova, *Religious Individualization ...*, p. 23.
- ⁶² See Stricker, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- ⁶³ See Stricker, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Wil van den Bercken, 'Kroniek "Rusland"', *Het Christelijk Oosten*, no. 3–4, 1997, p. 334; *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 7, 1992, p. 30, and no. 12, 1992, p. 17f; and John B. Dunlop, 'The Russian Orthodox Church as an "empire-saving" institution', in Bourdeaux (ed.), pp. 15–40.
- ⁶⁴ Casanova, *Religious Individualization ...*, p. 7.
- ⁶⁵ Bounds, *op. cit.*, p. 4, Casanova, *Public Relations ...*, p. 40, and Seligman, *op. cit.*, p. 201.
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- ⁷⁰ Aleksandr L. Dobrokhov, 'Die Evolution der russischen Henologie im ersten Viertel des XX. Jahrhunderts', in Tore Frost (ed.), *Henologische Perspektiven II (zu Ehren Egil A. Wyllers)* (Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1998), p. 96; cf. entry 'Khomyakov', in Mikhail A. Maslin *et al.* (eds), *Russkaya filosofiya: slovar'* (Respublika, Moscow, 1995), p. 595.
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- ⁷² Cf. on opinion (*Meinung*) as being essentially subjective (*mein*): G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Theorie-Werksausgabe vol. 18) (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1971), p. 30; I am indebted to Philip Boobbyer who drew my attention to the role of religion as an 'antidote' against relativism.
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