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The Orthodox Church in the Mirror of Public Opinion: An Analysis of Recent Polls and Surveys

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This essay has two objectives: to show the theoretical challenge of and practical necessity for a broad socio-cultural study of the Orthodox Church in Russia and Eastern Europe, emphasizing the Church's public role; and to analyze the results of the most recent public polls and surveys of popular attitudes toward religion and the Church. The absence in academic literature of a systematic and cross-cultural sociological study of contemporary Orthodoxy has contributed to sharp disagreements among scholars on how to explain the Church's presence in modern society and how to interpret its influence on the values and world-views of modern man. Some opinions have appeared which doubt the very fact of the post-Soviet religious revival. Did the revival indeed take place and, if so, what exactly was revived? There is no consensus among scholars on how to view the rise in public interest in religion in Russia and Eastern Europe. Is religion simply a fashion resulting from the previous ban on religion, and, as such, bound to disappear from the public arena? Is it a temporal substitute for the lost state ideology and therefore nothing more than a symbolic remnant of the past? Or, per-

haps religious institutions are still able to appeal to the basic needs of human beings – the need for order, tradition, and identity – and may play an important role in modern public life. In this case, how to adjust these institutions to the modern system of ideals and values? Based on recent public polls and surveys, the present essay attempts to clarify these questions and shed light on recent changes and developments in the religious situation in Eastern Europe and particularly in Russia.

Toward a Socio-Cultural Analysis of Beliefs and Values.

There is a wide range of opinions on how to define the present “transitional” condition of the post-Soviet countries. Today, it is far from clear in which direction these countries are moving and what types of society are being created. In order to identify success or failure of transformation, one has to look at the changes that have occurred in public consciousness. The role of traditional religion in this process is important to investigate, and the extent to which religious beliefs influence institutional changes and define people’s national and cultural identities is important to analyze. The role of the Orthodox Church in this context is one of the most challenging and practically valuable questions still open for research. How does the Orthodox Church contribute to modern social life, and is there any significant difference between the social impact of Orthodox beliefs and those of Catholics and Protestants?

Among the most recent studies of religion and modernity, a monograph by American sociologist José Casanova should be mentioned, for it presents an important insight into the nature of the relations between traditional religions and modernity. The central claim of Casanova’s study is that there is a phenomenon of global de-privatization of religion taking place in the modern world.¹ Traditional religions, according to Casanova, refuse to accept the marginal and privatized role that theories of modernity and secularization have ascribed to them. They refuse to be confined to the private sphere, and hence they “go public,” penetrating state and market affairs, connecting private and public morality, re-defining the modern boundaries between legality and morality, individual and society, between family, civil society and state, and between nations and the

¹ Casanova, José. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 40-74.

world system. Casanova shows different ways in which the Catholic and Protestant churches shape the public life of the countries of Western Europe and America. The case of Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe and Russia is still waiting for its researcher.²

The Eastern European countries of the former Soviet block with the largest Orthodox populations – Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia – represent particularly challenging cases. The role of religion in these countries cannot be viewed simply by analogy with the role of religion in the Western world. The long separation of these countries from the West, the impact of Soviet atheism, the strength of historical memory and cultural traditions as well as rapid modernization and democratization make this part of the world unique for sociological research on religion and modernity. The Orthodox churches, deeply rooted in the heritage of the Byzantine Empire, entered into the public lives of these countries immediately after the end of Soviet oppression, “skipping” the experience of the Reformation and Post-Reformation. How do they influence social processes in these countries and the life-style and world-outlook of people? Does revived Orthodoxy lead to greater tolerance and social involvement, strengthening family and community ties and encouraging modern individualism and self-development? Is the social contribution of Orthodoxy (if there is any) to be attributed to the impact of religious beliefs *per se*, or to the influence of various other historical, political, and cultural factors?

A serious challenge for such research comes from Max Weber’s classic thesis on the Protestant ethic. Weber reveals an affinity between ascetic Protestantism and the modern (rational and individualistic) capitalist ethic.³ However, it would not be easy to conclude, paralleling Weber’s thought, that there is an affinity between Orthodox beliefs and the Communist (authoritarian and collectivist) form of social organization. The Orthodox system of beliefs and Communist theory and practice do not necessary correlate with each other. Nicholas Berdyaev’s view that Orthodoxy prepared the ground for acceptance of Com-

² In agreement with Casanova’s analysis, Mitropolit Kirill of the Moscow Patriarchate pointed to the modern tendency to view religious belief as a deeply private matter, and to the necessity for the Orthodox Church to enter the public sphere. See “Standards of Faith as a Norm of Life” *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* 16-17, February, 2000.

³ Weber, Max, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1930, pp. 47-78.

munism in Russia must be re-examined in the modern context.⁴ The difficulties that Orthodox-oriented countries experience in adapting to the modern economic system must be examined in the context of their historical, cultural, and religious settings. Does Orthodoxy play the role of a “stoppage” (to use Peter Berger’s term) for spreading the “spirit of modern capitalism?” Is it able to motivate people’s economic initiative and support individuals’ willingness to bear financial responsibility? In short, does the Orthodox faith contribute to the development of the ethics of rational capitalism and is it significant for success (or lack of it) in business?

The need for a broad socio-cultural study of Orthodoxy in the post-communist countries is also occasioned by the process of unification in Europe which may bring millions of Orthodox into the common European development in the near future.⁵ What will the East-West separation then mean? The conflicts in the Balkans sharpened this question. Samuel Huntington, in his well-known thesis in *Clash of Civilizations*, pointed to the defensive war that Eastern Orthodox Europe is preparing against the West.⁶ If, indeed, the Christian East and the Christian West are different in culture and mentality, can their differences be harmonized and Western liberal standards reconciled with Eastern national, cultural, and religious values? To answer these questions, it would not be enough to engage only in historical or theological studies. The extent to which religious institutions influence society must also be examined through analysis of public opinion. One needs to have reliable socio-cultural data, includ-

⁴ Berdyaev, Nicolas, *The Origin of Russian Communism*. Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964.

⁵ The Orthodox populations in Eastern Europe are: Russia, between 50 and 70 million, almost half of the nation; Ukraine, 20 million, 22 percent of the population; Romania, 19.8 million, 71 percent of the population; Greece, 9 million; Serbia, 8 million; Bulgaria, 6 million; Belarus, 6 million; Moldova, 3 million. The data are for 1999-2000. See the report of Alexander Panshin, “Skolko v mire pravoslavnich?” in the Internet Journal “Sobornost” (www.sobornost.ru). The data are collected from *Service Orthodoxe de Presse* (Paris) and *Vostochnie Christianskie Tserkvi. Spravochnik* (Vatican). For statistical data on religious adherents in the world see www.adherents.com; also the recent sociological study of Miklós Tomla and Paul M. Zulehner, *Religion in den Reformländern Ost(Mittel) Europas*. Wien: Pastorales Forum, v.1, p.27.

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations: The Remaking of the World Order*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

ing the data of available public interviews and surveys, which would reflect on the life of religious communities and on people's beliefs and world-views.

A study taking beliefs and values of religious communities into consideration is also necessary because Orthodox churches themselves (with the exception of Orthodox in America) do not sponsor sociological studies. Even the question of the number of believers is answered by the Moscow Patriarchate only approximately. The question of religious affiliation will not be included in the 2002 official survey of the Russian population.⁷ However, there are reports of the growing social significance of the Church and the increase in religiosity among Russian youth.⁸ Where will this development lead? What are its social consequences? Is the Russian Church's "social profile" similar to that of the Church in Serbia, Bulgaria, and other post-Soviet countries? Is there an Orthodox block in world politics?⁹

Thought-provoking in this context is the sharp criticism of modernity expressed by the hierarchs of the Russian Church, who point to the growing conflict between modernity and religious tradition. Mitropolit Kirill, for example, speaks of the "resistance of the traditionalist world-outlook to the forcible establishment of neo-liberal values."¹⁰ He views this resistance as a "civilizational challenge for our time"¹¹ which is implicit yet acutely felt everywhere. The present ideological drama, according to Kirill, consists in the conflict between the standards of Western liberalism and the need for nations to preserve their cultural and religious identities. The expansion of liberalism cannot take place without conflict, especially in those spheres of human life which tenaciously retain the

⁷ See M. Tomka and P. Zulehner, *op. cit.*

⁸ "Religiousness of the Russian Youth," 14 December 14, <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews>.

⁹ For further reflection on this subject see "When Cultures Don't Collide," a review of Viktoria Clark's study of Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe, *The Economist*, 10 August 2000; Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *Emperors and Elections: Reconciling Orthodox Tradition with Modern Politics*. Huntington, NY: Troitsa, 2000. Gvosdev attempts to show the theoretical possibility of reconciling the Orthodox tradition with modern politics. The work of Oleg Kharkhordin, a scholar from St. Petersburg, can be seen as an attempt to investigate the possibilities for building a civil society on the Orthodox value system.

¹⁰ Mitropolit Kirill, "The Circumstances of Modern Life," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, May 26, 1999.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

values nurtured by national spiritual and cultural traditions.¹² The task of Orthodox Christianity, he concludes, is to preserve its own vision of life and protect tradition from the imperatives of neo-liberalism.

Selected data from recent public polls will be outlined below, with the focus on the religious situation in Russia. These data are collected with the purpose not only of describing what people think about the Church, but also finding out how important the Church is for modern man, how strong its social voice is, and whether there is, indeed, the value conflict indicated by Mitropolit Kirill. In a broader perspective, it will be important to see whether the self-image of the Orthodox Church corresponds to the image that society has of it, or whether there is a split between the Church's internal self-understanding presented in its official documents and statements, and the external image of the Church as exhibited in public polls and interviews.

Orthodoxy in the Russian Context.

There are several reasons for focusing on Russia. First, because the Russian Church is the largest national Orthodox Church in the world. Second, because the Moscow Patriarchate takes the leading role in world Orthodoxy. It attempts to influence the social, and to some extent political, orientations of the Orthodox churches in Eastern Europe. Third, because the Orthodox Church is the only institution in all the countries of the former Soviet block that has survived the post-Communist transformation, and the Russian Church still views itself as the institution that maintains their spiritual unity. The recently accepted "Social Concept" of the Russian Orthodox Church, for example, was written as a guide for Orthodox believers not only in Russia but for believers throughout the world. The Russian Law on Religious Freedom (1997) became a model for religious legislation for several countries of the former Soviet block. The impact of Soviet atheism and the post-Soviet religious revival were both strongest in Russia. The religious situation in Russia provides a model for a comparative study of religious life in other post-Soviet countries with majority Orthodox populations.

¹² Ibid.

Russian Religiosity in East-European Context.

According to the all-Russian surveys for the year 2001, 60.1 percent of Russians said that they are believers.¹³ 65 percent confirmed that they devote time to meditation, contemplation and prayer.¹⁴

The table below shows percentages of religious believers in the populations of Russia and the Eastern-European countries.¹⁵

Country	% Believers
Croatia	77
Poland	74
Lithuania	67
Rumania	63
<i>Russia</i>	<i>60.1</i>
Ukraine	57
Slovakia	55
Hungary	54
Slovenia	49
Czech Republic	27
East Germany	25

Russian religiosity, as the table shows, is located closer to that of the Eastern European countries which traditionally had strong churches, such as Croatia and Poland, than to the countries with a lower degree of religiosity, such as East Germany and the Czech Republic. The difference between the level of religiosity in Russia on one hand and East Germany and the Czech Republic on the other is significant. These data show that, in addition to the division between so-called Catholic- and Orthodox-oriented countries, there is also a division between “more secularized” and “less secularized” countries in the Eastern-Europe.¹⁶ It is

¹³ “Attitude of Russians toward Religion,” *Russian Public Opinion and Market Research*, posted 31 January 2000 at “Religious News,” Stetson University.

¹⁴ Igor Tcigel'nik, “Religia rossian” ROMIR research group, www.romir.ru.

¹⁵ M. Tomka and P. Zulehner, p. 33. For the data on Russia, see footnote 13.

¹⁶ Secularization here is understood to be reflected by number of believers. The research of M. Tomka and P. Zulehner also shows a correlation between high degree of religiosity and high level of technological development, media influence, and low level of sexual morality.

important that all the Orthodox-oriented countries belong to the “less secularized” group. The data below provide additional support for this view:

According to public polls, 29.9 percent of Russians identify themselves as non-believers. 4.4 percent say that they are atheists. East Germany and the Czech Republic have, respectively, 60 and 58 percent non-believers. Poland has only 2 percent, Romania 3 percent.¹⁷

Based on these data, one can conclude that Russia occupies a middle ground between two poles of religiosity in Eastern Europe. It is interesting that despite Russia’s atheistic past, the present level of atheism in Russia is lower than in some of the Eastern European countries in which, during the Soviet years, atheism was not so strongly imposed as it was in Russia. From that, one can take a further step and say that the post-Soviet religious revival was not caused exclusively by the Soviet ban on religion. If this were the case, the distribution of religiosity in Eastern Europe and Russia would look different. If religion is only a fashion, then it would be stronger in Russia, where any expression of religious beliefs was previously strongly prohibited. Although one cannot build a theory of religious revival based on only one factor (Russia’s past official atheism) without taking into consideration other historical, political, and geographic factors, the table above supports the argument that the revival of religion in the post-Communist countries is a very complex phenomenon and cannot be seen as a matter of temporary interest insignificant for the societies’ present and future. Perhaps the shock of transition from one social system to another – a state of “liminality,” as sociologists would say – is the factor that better explains the return to religion as well as the different degrees of religiosity in these countries.¹⁸ Certainly, atheist propaganda had an impact on the religious revival. Yet, as the data suggest, it was not the only significant factor.

¹⁷ Ibid. See notes 14 and 15.

¹⁸ Andrew Greeley, in his “A Religious Revival in Russia?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33.3 (1994), pp. 253-272, demonstrated a certain “religious turning point,” an event in individuals’ lives which they view as the point of their religious conversion. Greeley’s study can be taken as an example of a sensitive approach to religion in post-Soviet societies that reveals important features of psychology of religious belief after atheism.

Proportion of Orthodox Among Believers.

The Orthodox in Russia constitute 91.1 percent of all who identify themselves as believers.¹⁹

The number of people who declare themselves Orthodox is growing every year, according to the Russia-wide poll of The Public Opinion Foundation:²⁰

	1991	1992	1997	1998	1999	2000
Atheists	40	28	36	36	31	29
<i>Orthodox</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>59</i>
Other faith	10	10	8	7	6	5
No answer	16	15	6	5	5	7

The table above contains a hidden problem: the problem of defining religious identity. When a respondent identifies himself as Orthodox, it may not be enough to take this answer for granted. Whether there is need to examine the respondent's religious beliefs in greater detail is a question that has caused extensive debates in sociological circles in Russia and abroad.

Several public interviews have been conducted in the last decade in order to clarify the issue of the religious conviction of Russian believers. How often do the "believers" attend church services, how often do they pray at home, how deeply do they know the basic religious texts? These and other questions have been included in various surveys in order to identify the "real" number of Orthodox as opposed to the number of the "nominal" Orthodox. It appeared striking to many observers that a very small percentage of Russian believers regularly attend church services, and most of those identifying themselves as Orthodox had difficulties answering the most basic questions about their faith. The Orthodox identity, it was concluded, is highly "nominal" and is not based on "a real piety."²¹

The heavy impact of cultural and ethnic (or national) components in the Orthodox identity is not surprising. This fact was identified by Max Weber in his

¹⁹ See Elena Bashkirova on "Value Change..." ROMIR research group gives a smaller number – 71.1 percent. See "Religia Rossian" 2000, <http://www.romir.ru>

²⁰ See "The Role of the Orthodox Church in Society Has Been Strengthened," 22 June, 2000, <http://english.fom.ru/reports/frames/short/eof002504.html>.

²¹ See the aforementioned article of Elena Bashkirova. See also "How Many Orthodox in Russia?" and "O chlenach Tzerkvi i kollichestve pravoslavnych," in the Internet journal "Sobornost," www.sobor.ru.

definition of world-religions and religious sects. The Orthodox Church, as Weber would see it, is not a religious sect, and therefore one cannot expect from its adherence the same level of religious consciousness as, for example, from the members of a small group of Puritans. However, for a sociologist the interesting question would not be the correctness of individuals' faith, but the impact of religious beliefs on their life, world-view and social behavior. The sociologist is not in a position to evaluate matters of faith as such. As a science, sociology does not have appropriate instruments for dealing with this issue. Yet, sociological studies of public trust and public values may be helpful to find out the role and importance of religious beliefs in the public sphere and to identify the directions in which religious beliefs may lead people and, possibly, prevent the conflicts that may develop.²²

The Church and Public Trust.

The following data were collected by the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion in Russia.²³ They "measure" the degree of trust which Russian respondents have in various public institutions. The study was done in January 2001 (the data for July 2000 are given in parentheses).

	Significant trust (%)	Insignificant trust (%)
President	58	11 (16)
Bankers, financial oligarchs	55 (60)	15 (10)
Government	46	18 (29)
Army	39 (46)	23 (20)
<i>Church, religious organizations</i>	<i>31 (24)</i>	<i>34 (41)</i>
Duma	26 (19)	38 (46)
Political parties	21 (16)	39 (49)
Intelligentsia	21 (18)	46 (54)
Professional Unions	20 (10)	65 (69)

²² A thoughtful article on this issue is Alexandr Morosov, "Skol'ko Pravoslavnych v Rossii?" *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 20.10.1997.

²³ "Obshestvennoe mnenie v Ianvare 2001," POLIT:RU Public Opinion, <http://www.polit.ru/documents>.

The table above shows that a significant number of Russians have a positive view of the role of religion in society. Trust in religious organizations is higher than in professional organizations, the intelligentsia, political parties, and even the Duma. There is a visible increase in the positive attitude toward religion in the last year. A decrease in the negative attitude can also be seen. Based on these data, one can conclude that, ten years after *perestroika*, religion is affirming its position in the social structure of modern Russia and is becoming more influential. This fact is striking given that it occurs in a society that had seventy years of atheist ideology and two generations of people who grow up with no knowledge of their religious heritage. If the increasing respect for religion were only a fashion resulting from the previous ban on religion, then after a few years of religious revival, one would expect to observe a decline in public religiosity and a decrease in respect for the Church. But there is no evidence for such a decline.

The following table also reflects the role of the Orthodox Church in Russian society, but from a different angle.²⁴ It gives insight into how strong and important the Church appears to people and how they view its social role. The respondents were asked what they think about the influence of the Orthodox Church on Russia's political life: whether the Church's leadership has increased, remained unchanged, or decreased in the past decade. In contrast to the previous table, the data do not reflect the actual trust of Russian population in the Church and do not tell us how strong the Church's actual position in society is, but how the latter is reflected in people's minds – how the Church appears to people and how people view its development:

Increased	50 %
Remained the same	23 %
Decreased	4 %
Uncertain	23 %

These data provide an additional reason for asserting that the Church, indeed, continues to affirm its position in society. More than half of the population views its role as increasing or remaining stable and only four percent thinks that its social influence has declined. Perhaps, realistically thinking, one will look at the democratic processes in Russia and will see that the Church experiences

²⁴ The data are taken from the Public Opinion Foundation. See full report on <http://english.fom.ru/reports/frames/short/ed000910.html>.

many difficulties in affirming itself in the new social structure and that it is not easy for it to influence modern social developments. Yet, on the popular level, it is viewed as one of the strongest institutions. People believe that the Church is becoming stronger even though its actual situation may not be so advantageous, and this is a sociologically important fact. The data allow us to predict that in the near future, the Church's role in Russia's social life will either continue to increase or remain unchanged.

Another fact supporting the thesis of the growing social strength of Orthodoxy is provided by reports on the public views of the role of Patriarch Alexis II. The Patriarch's role was positively evaluated by 70 percent of Russian respondents. Only 8 percent gave a negative answer. It is interesting that among the positive characteristics of the Patriarch were mentioned such qualities as peace-making and personal honesty, diplomatic abilities and great style of language, as well as his effort to consolidate the nation and spiritually support the Russian soldiers in Chechnya.²⁵ Both the personal piety and public (or political) influence of the Patriarch were equally important for the Russian respondents.

Some additional information on the rise of public interest and trust in the Church is contained in the table below.²⁶

<i>Question: How important is the social contribution of the following institutions?</i>	December, 2000	January, 2001
Army	14	14
State security bodies	12	9
Police	6	8
Judicial system	3	3
Housing and communal services	9	10
Public education system	17	13
Public health system, medical services	19	18
Shopping and public catering establishment	20	22
Show business	20	22
Mass-media	26	30
<i>Orthodox Church</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>44</i>
Non-Orthodox religions	3	3

²⁵ *The Public Opinion Foundation*,
<http://english.fom.ru/reports/frames/short/ed000933.html>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Perhaps the increase in public interest in the Church in Winter 2001 can be explained by the Church's activity before Christmas, the holiday which only recently was recognized as an official national holiday in Russia.

Another fact that needs to be mentioned is the increase of religiosity among Russian youth. More young people in Russia tend to declare themselves believers.²⁷ Before 1988, no more than 12 percent of youth counted among the believers. In 1994, the percentage was already 46.²⁸ Ten years ago, only elderly people were seen at Church's services; today, more and more young people attend. According to some Russian sources, the younger generation is inclined to be more conservative in matters of faith and more nationalistic than the previous generation.²⁹ The great appreciation that young people expressed for Mitropolit Kirill's presentation before the Meeting of the Russian Orthodox Youth in Moscow in 2000 is impressive. Mitropolit Kirill can hardly be called a liberal religious leader, and the fact that Russian youth were inspired by his presentation is significant in itself, indicating a traditionalist tendency in Russian religious life.³⁰

The rise of religious conservatism also coincides with an affirmation of democratic views of the Church's involvement in the public life. Many Russians support the Church's separation from the state. About 61 percent of Russians think that religious institutions should not influence the decisions of political leaders and 75 percent believe that religious leaders should not influence people's political views and should not interfere in election processes. This view corresponds to the position of the Orthodox Church itself, which was articulated as one of "critical neutrality" towards the state and accepted as the Church's official position in its "Social Concept" at the Bishops' Council in August 2000.

Although 20 percent of Russian respondents think that religious beliefs are insignificant for political office, more people state that belief in God is an important personal characteristic for political activists.³¹ This shows that the separation of the Church from the state in Russia did not diminish the Church's public

²⁷ Andrew Greeley, "A Religious Revival in Russia?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33:3 (1994), pp. 253-272.

²⁸ By "youth" is understood a group of people between approximately the ages of 18 and 25.

²⁹ See note 8.

³⁰ See the Internet Journal "Sobornost," news: www.sobor.ru.

³¹ See Elena Bashkirova's report on "Value Change and Survival of Democracy in Russia, 1995-2000," ROMIR research group.

voice. The Church, as Patriarch Alexis said, can be separated from the state but it cannot be separated from the people, and public opinion has shown that this view corresponds to the real state of affairs.³²

Religion in the Hierarchy of Values.

The following hierarchy of traditional values for Russia was produced by the ROMIR research group (the data on 1999)³³:

	1995	1999
Family	97	95
<i>Work</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>83</i>
Friends and acquaintance	79	81
Leisure time	71	68
<i>Religion</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Politics</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>38</i>

The table demonstrates important features of the modern Russian mentality and indicates directions in which it might develop in the future. The increase in the value of religion develops simultaneously with the increase of the level of people's political involvement. The higher value of work in modern Russia is also important and a new factor in Russia's social life. The survey also indicated that the value of work in Russia is higher than in developed countries. These data present us with an interesting phenomenon, namely, the Orthodox Church finding itself in a dynamic social situation and being challenged to respond to this situation. Based only on these data, it would be too early to conclude that Orthodoxy positively influences popular attitudes toward work and encourages their political involvement. It is possible, however, to assume that religious beliefs do not withdraw people from active participation in social life, and that the two developments, the rise in traditional religiosity and the increase in social participation, coincide. These data also challenge the received view of the Orthodox Church as monastically oriented, state dependent, and socially passive. If

³² Vsevolod Chaplin, "Active Neutrality," in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, November 10, 1999.

³³ ROMIR is a member of Gallup International.

the latter were true, the Church would hardly acquire such a degree of trust and belief in its strength and social importance.

More informative may be the results of the study of public values conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation presented below.

Religious Devotion and Tolerance.

The data below show that the rise in the importance of religion does not lead to the rise of intolerance.

Although the recent relations between the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church are far from friendly, 41 percent of Russians feel positively about Pope John Paul II visiting Russia, 46 percent positively evaluate the contacts between Orthodox and Catholics, and 25 percent think positively about the Pope's role in the world. Only 4 percent expressed negative feeling toward the Pope's visit to Russia and 5 percent expressed antipathy toward Roman Catholicism. The interview also showed a significant level of popular indifference toward these issues. More than half of the Russian population had no definite opinion on the role of the Pope in the world and was indifferent to his Russian visit. 40 percent of Russians were also indifferent toward the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue.³⁴

Concerning other non-Christian religions, attitudes toward them are rather negative (10 percent of respondents expressed negative feelings toward other religions and only 3 percent positive ones). It is worth noting, however, that during the Christmas holidays, attitudes toward non-Christian religions remained unchanged while the interest in the Church increased.³⁵ This fact allows us to suggest that the existing negativity toward non-Christian religions does not originate in the Orthodox Church itself, as is sometimes claimed by external observers, but rather it is rooted in the cultural and political situation.³⁶ Religious

³⁴ <http://english.fom.ru/reports/frames/short/ed000910.html>.

³⁵ See Public Opinion Foundation, <http://english.fom.ru/reports/frames/short/ed010303.html>.

³⁶ See the 2000 report on Russia by the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom, particularly the section on "Orthodoxy and Nationalism," www.uscirf.com.

beliefs, as was concluded in other research, make people more tolerant, and Orthodoxy has a significant moderating power in Russia.³⁷

The facts that almost half of Russians (41 percent) believe that truth is contained in all religions, and that 21 percent are convinced that there is only one true religion are thought-provoking.³⁸ Devotion to one religion, one may conclude, coincides with indifference to inter-religious issues and creates a situation in which both increase and decrease in religious peace and tolerance are possible.

Concerning the issue of the separation of church and state, 40 percent of Russians hold the view that all religions should be equal before the law.³⁹ Yet 23 percent of Russian youth and 38 percent of older people state that Orthodoxy should be the state religion and that activities of non-traditional religions should be restricted. Although it is not clear from these data what the respondents mean by “state religion” and “restriction” of non-traditional religions, the existence of two groups with opposite views is evident. This opposition was noticed by Metropolitan Kirill when he referred to the conflict between liberalism and traditionalism as the “civilizational problem of our time.” One can also point to the various cases of inter-religious disputes related to property issues, registration difficulties, and to the existing negative societal attitudes toward non-Christians and non-Orthodox religions in Russia.⁴⁰ At the present time, these conflicts indicate the nation’s search for a cultural and religious identity, and they may be seen as leading toward both affirmation of Russian national tradition and adjustment to the requirements of the modern democratic social order.

³⁷ See A. Greeley, note 27.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The data of the Russian Independent Institute for Social and National Problems, “Religiosity of Russian Youth,” posted December 14, 1998, <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/0004a.html>.

⁴⁰ See the 2000 report on Russia of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, <http://www.uscirf.gov>.

Religion and Freedom.

Issues of religious freedom are perhaps the most complicated and tense issues in Russia's present religious life.

What is it that is MOST important?

Good health	44.2
Good job	39.2
Happy family life	33.2
Living in a country without war	28.2
Living in a country without violence and corruption	22.3
High living standards	17.4
<i>Freedom</i>	<i>6.0</i>
Education	5.7
<i>Religious freedom</i>	<i>1.9</i>

What is the LEAST important?

<i>Religious freedom</i>	<i>50.2</i>
Education	38.2
<i>Freedom</i>	<i>19.9</i>
Good job	12.4
Living in a country without violence and corruption	8.3
Living in a country without war	4.5
Good health	4.4
Happy family life	3.4

Religious freedom is clearly not the highest priority for Russians: this was the conclusion of Paul Globe, an observer from Washington.⁴¹ The tables above show the priority of social and economic values to the issues of individual freedom. The results of this study from Washington lend support to the research of the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, which also ranked freedom of speech and freedom of worship among the least important issues for the

⁴¹ ROMIR, September 1999. Available at <http://www.romir.ru/eng/research/imp.html>.

Russian population.⁴² Reflecting on these results, it is important to find out the impact of religion on people's attitudes toward issues of religious freedom, human rights, individualism, and the rule of law. Unfortunately, there is not enough data available on these issues, and there has not been extensive research done on these topics. One can assume, however, that Orthodox beliefs may restrict the development of individualism and encourage collective values. Indeed, Orthodox concern for sacramental and collective salvation rather than with individuals' personal relations to God may create an obstacle for development of respect for the rule of law, human rights, and individual freedoms, including freedom of speech, of the press, and of worship. How deeply Orthodox beliefs penetrate into social life and how important Orthodox spirituality is for the development of modern liberal society are open questions for future theoretical and practical studies.

Conclusion.

The data of public surveys leaves no doubt that the Orthodox Church plays an important role in Russia's public life and occupies a prominent place in the system of traditional Russian public values. The data also indicate a shift in the public mentality from viewing the Church as a state-oriented institution to a society-oriented institution. Orthodoxy, as it is seen by the majority of Russians, is not private religiosity but a public religion. The Church plays and is expected to play a significant role in the affairs of the society. However, there are still problems and tensions in public views on church-state separation, freedom of belief, and religious tolerance. The development of public views on these issues is important to observe in order to evaluate the Church's role and to make prognoses for its future developments.

There are many questions, however, that cannot be answered by the available data. Very little is known about the role of Orthodox beliefs in business ethics, in the development of legal consciousness, and in international connections between the countries of the former Soviet block. The impact of Orthodoxy on family, morality, political life, and education has not been sufficiently analyzed.

⁴² Paul Globe, "Russia: Analysis from Washington. Entitlements, Rights and Democracy," RFE/RL, October 1, 1999, <http://www.erferl.org/nca/features/1999/10/f.ru991001121734.html>.

Although in recent years Orthodox Christianity has continued to attract the interest of scholars in different fields, a broad, systematic, cross-cultural study of Orthodoxy and its relations to modernity has yet to be done.

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