ISSN: 2158-7051
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INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF
RUSSIAN STUDIES

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ISSUE NO. 11 (2022/1)

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE CRISIS OF CIVILIZATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Summary

This paper investigates whether a resurgent Russian Orthodox Church is at the nexus of a new cultural conflict between Russia and the West. To accomplish this, there is an analysis of a variety discourses and facts surrounding three major areas of contention in Russia: The Church and state; the Church and the military; and human rights and freedoms. The paper uncovers a cultural conflict that is fuelled, on one side, by a socially conservative Orthodox Church that aims to Christianize Russian society and, on the other side, by a Western civilization that, in general, seeks to contain religion to the private sphere while promoting progressive and secular values. It is predicted that this conflict will intensify if the current trends within Russia and the West continue, and especially if Russia remains involved in the resistance to those progressive and secular values in the West. Yet a clash of civilizations along religious lines is not a certainty, owing to Russia's ambivalent relationship to the West and to its efforts to make common cause with social and religious conservatives in that region of the world.

Key Words: Human rights, Huntington, LGBT, military, secular, symphonia, traditional values.

Introduction

Is the Russian Orthodox Church at the centre of a new conflict between Russia and the West? According to Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996), such a cultural conflict is to be expected. His basic thesis is that, with the end of Cold War, the world has entered a new age of multipolar geo-politics, one marked no longer by a

conflict of ideologies but by a conflict of civilizations.[1] Even after twenty-five years, Huntington's worldview is still influential—even inside the Kremlin it seems. Consider the statement from the 'Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation' (*Kontseptsiia vneshneĭ politiki Rossiĭskoĭ Federatsii)* that was issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the approval of President Putin, on November 30, 2016:

> The structure of international relations is becoming increasingly complex. Globalization has led to the formation of new centres of economic and political power. Global power and development potential is becoming decentralized, and is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region, eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers. Cultural and civilizational diversity of the world and the existence of multiple development models have been clearer than ever (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

The document goes on to describe how 'tensions are rising due to disparities in global development,' and that these tensions have been 'increasingly gaining a civilizational dimension in the form of a rivalry of guiding values (*sopernichestvo tsennostnykh orientirov*).' This is just one illustration of the language that has come into prominence in Russia recently (Naydenova, 2016). President Vladimir Putin himself has even referred to Russia recently as a 'distinct civilization' that must be protected (Moscow Times, 2020)

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Huntington's thesis is the assertion that civilizational clashes will tend follow religious lines, since, in his view, religion is 'a central defining characteristic of civilizations' (Huntington, 1996, pp. 43, 47). The West's ongoing struggle with Islamic movements at home and abroad in the twentieth-first century appears to be confirming his thesis. Huntington did envision a new—albeit less intense—civilizational conflict between Russia and the West, although the chances of this happening looked slim twenty-five years ago, for at the time Russia was transitioning to Western-style capitalism and democracy (Huntington, 1996, p. 245). Twenty-five years hence and the situation has changed dramatically. Russia and the West are frequently at loggerheads, and there is an insinuation of a 'new cold war' between them (Lucas, 2009). Events in this 'war' would include the West's suspension of Russia from the G8 and the imposition of crippling sanctions on Russia in retaliation for its actions in the Crimea and elsewhere. Russia is also accused of aiding right-wing nationalist movements in Europe and America to destabilize the West (Polyakova, 2014; Snyder, 2018). Undeniably, the level of mutual distrust between Russia and the West is quite high (Huang, 2020; Levada-Center, 2020).

It would be myopic to assume that all the conflicts between Russia and the West today are symptomatic of civilizational differences, but one fact is certain: The rise of these conflict have coincided with a revival of the Orthodox Church in Russia and with an increasing number of Russians, young and old, who identity as Orthodox (Krindatch, 2004; Garrard and Garrard, 2008; Pew Research, 2014). Thirty years ago, only thirty-one percent of Russians identified as Orthodox, while today about seventy-two percent do, although only a small fraction of them frequently attend church services (Pew Research, 2014). Yet, oddly, there are Russologists such as Timothy Snyder and Charles Clover who pay scant attention to the role of Russian Orthodoxy as they try to explain Russia's fraught relationship with the West (Snyder, 2018, Clover, 2016).

This paper investigates whether a resurgent Russian Orthodox Church is at the nexus of a new 'clash of civilizations' involving Russia and the West, to ascertain if religion is a factor behind the 'rivalry of guiding values' between these civilizations. It does this by analysing samples of Russian and Western discourses pertaining to three areas of contention within Russia: The Church and state; the Church and the military; and human rights and freedoms. The point is to compare how the Russian Orthodox Church understands its role in Russia and how its role is perceived in the West.

First, we must begin with a survey of the subject of religion and civilization, along with a comparison of the place of religion in Russia and the West today, to see if there are grounds for a civilizational conflict.

Religion and Civilization

The revival of traditional religions outside the West—'La revanche de Dieu'—is not only integral to Huntington's clash of civilization thesis. It helps to validate it:

> [T]he revival of non-Western religions is the most powerful manifestation of anti-Westernism in non-Western societies. That revival is not a rejection of modernity; it is a rejection of the West and of the secular, relativistic, degenerate culture associated with the West (Huntington, 1996, p. 101).

Russian civilization is defined by a non-Western Christian religion, Orthodoxy, which is undergoing a revival there, as we just noted. Westerners often refer to the Russian religion as 'Eastern Orthodoxy' to distinguish it from the Western forms of Christianity—Roman Catholicism and Protestantism—that have helped to define Western civilization. However, Christianity appears to have played a much greater role in the formation of the Russian than the Western civilization, which is as much a child of classical Greek and Roman cultures. Huntington points out that the Russian or Orthodox civilization 'also inherited from Classical civilization,' but he correctly judges that this was 'nowhere near to the same degree the West' has (Huntington, 1996, p. 70). At the same time, Van den Bercken informs us that Christianity for Russians 'meant the beginning of civilization,' so that 'they were given an alphabet, they learned how to read and write, [developed] the art of painting, and architecture' (Bercken, 1999, p. 33).

Yet the role of Christianity in these civilizations has been changing lately. Studies suggest that Christianity's influence is declining in the West while it is increasing in Russia. To say that the West is secular has become a truism. Charles Taylor's *The Secular Age* is the weightiest study, from a philosophical perspective, of the declining impact of religion on the Western worldview. 'Belief in God' is just 'one option among many' for people and it is one, he says, is 'increasingly contested' (Taylor, 2007 p. 3). Loss of faith in God is one measure of secularization. More tangible indicators are declining church attendance, the disestablishment of churches, the diminishing public influence of religion, and the increasing domestication of religion by states (Bruce, 2002, 2011; Bruce, Glendinning, 2011; Bullivant, 2018; Halman and Draulans, 2006; Mazurkiewicz, 2020; Norris and Inglehart, 2011). While many European states, like England and Denmark, still have established churches, these institutions function mainly as public utilities that provide members with rites of passage through life. The Constitution of the European Union, which makes no reference to Christianity, church, or God, reflects better the general religious environment in Europe than the old established churches of Europe (European Constitution, 2020). More precisely, it reflects the religious environment in Western Europe, as the EU includes many countries in Eastern Europe where religion still has a stronger hold on people.

The so-called 'exception' to the secularization of the West is the USA. Certainly, if one looks at the American constitution, which guarantees the separation of church and state, there is no exception. What has been exceptional about America is the comparatively high levels of faith and church attendance among its population. Yet recent studies reveal steadily declining levels of religiosity, so that in terms of religion America is beginning to resemble Western Europe (Bruce, 2011, p.157-177; McCaffree, 2017; Pew Research, 2019; Thissen, Wilkins-LaFlamme, 2017).

In Russia it is a different story. The country is one of the few developed nations that is reversing the secularization tide. After seventy years of suppression under the Communism, Christianity has made a strong comeback in Russia. John Burgess, an American professor who spent years immersed in Russian Orthodox Church life, sums up what has been happening: 'After a century of being scarred first by militant atheistic Communism and then Wild West capitalism, the Orthodox Church has become Russia's largest … nongovernmental organization and, as it has returned to life, it has pursued a vision of "re-Christianizing" Russian society' (Burgess, 2017, p. 9). This vision is being realized on the landscape. While thousands of churches are being shuttered or secularized across the West, thousands are being erected across Russia (Allan, 2019). Between 1991 and 2014, the number of churches rose from 7,000 to 30,000 (Burgess, 2014). As churches in the West lose the trust of citizens, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has become one of the most trusted institutions in the country (Marsh, 2011, p. 121). While many constitutions in the West—like that of the France, the USA, and the EU—make no reference to God, Russia has just enshrined 'belief in God' in its amended constitution (The Russian Constitution, 2020, p. 25).

One might contend that Russia is really no different than the West, since the explosion in the number of churches and the number who identify as Orthodox has not been matched by an explosion in church attendance, although there has been growth in infrequent attendance, even among the young and well-educated (Pew Research, 2014). On the other hand, poor church attendance could be put down to mundane factors: A shortage still of accessible churches, to the great duration of the Orthodox liturgy in an unfamiliar language, and even to the absence of pews in churches.

Granted, the resurgence of Russian Orthodoxy can be read as ingredient in a broad revival of the pre-Soviet Russian identity, but it would be a mistake to claim that it is only about that. There are signs that a genuine renewal of Christianity is underway in Russia. Few in the West are aware that the best-selling book in post-Soviet Russia, with over three million copies sold, is *Everyday Saints and Other Stories* (2011) by Metropolitan Tikhon, a book that focuses on the lives of monks in the Pskov Caves Monastery. While church attendance levels are unimpressive, Stoeckl says that 'popular religiosity is widespread' in Russia, as witnessed, for example, by the great throngs of people that flock to see exhibits of Church relics (Stoeckl, 2017). Burgess writes that a 'religious vision of the future is touching millions of Russian…[and] anyone who wants to understand the new Russia has reason to pay attention' (Burgess, 2017, p. 7).

An article in the peer-reviewed *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* substantiates the claims of a Christian movement in Russia. The authors of it conclude that 'Russia is experiencing a genuine religious revival, making Russia somewhat of an exception to the processes of secularization' (Evans and Northmore-Ball, 2012, p. 805). It is only a 'lukewarm' revival, the authors caution, but it can be seen in 'growth in church attendance (albeit infrequent) accompanying the growth in Russian Orthodox affiliation and …the increasing polarization in moral traditionalism between church attenders and others' (Evans and Northmore-Ball, 2012, p. 805).

Patriarch Kirill, the leading bishop of the ROC, confirms that there is 'the growing values gap between Russia and the countries of Western civilization,' which he claims, 'did not exist even during the Cold War' (Kirill, 2018, p. 153). Part of the problem, Patriarch believes, is the over-dominance of rationalism in the West. 'Much has been achieved by the rationalistic approach to life', P. Kirill is convinced, but 'a culture that excludes God is not viable' (TV channel "Russia 1", 2017). Patriarch Kirill states that there is a vital lesson for the West in Russia's modern history. 'We threw out God,' he explains, and 'we gave up everything that was holy and ideal for us…. hoping for the power of reason, the power of organization, the strength of the party, the strength of the army,' but

'we failed to build a just and prosperous society that we wanted to build, based on this rationalism.' He worries that 'the same thing is happening in the West.' Many people there are disturbed by this trend, 'the establishment, the political elites associated with big business, the media, [and] the education system support this trend' adds the Patriarch (TV channel "Russia 1", 2017).

Yes, there are many in the West who are disturbed by the secularization happening around them. A notable example is the Patriarch's former Catholic counterpart. Emeritus Pope Benedict, Joseph Ratzinger, has expressed his concerns in several books for the future of European culture in particular, which is suffering, he says, from the erosion of its Christian foundation and the deleterious effects of scientific rationalism and moral relativism. (Ratzinger, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). 'In the wake of this form of rationality,' Benedict writes, 'Europe has developed a culture that, in a manner hitherto unknown to mankind, excludes God from public awareness' (Ratzinger, 2006a, p. 32).

Church and State

According to Huntington, one of the distinguishing features of the West is 'the separation of spiritual and temporal authority' or the separation of Church and state:

> Throughout Western history, first the Church and then many churches existed apart from the state. God and Caesar, church and state, spiritual authority and temporal authority, have been a prevailing dualism in Western culture…The separation and recurring clashes between church and state that typify Western civilization have existed in no other civilization. This division of authority contributed immeasurably to the development of freedom in the West (Huntington, 1996, p. 70).

In Russian civilization, by contrast, 'God is Caesar's junior partner,' he says. This is a facile description of the Church-state relationship in Russia and one that is especially misleading today. Yet it helps to shed light on the growing conflict between Russia and the West. John Burgess, the author of a new book on Russian Orthodoxy, tells us that when Western political scientists mention the Russian Orthodox Church 'it is almost always to assert that the Church has made a devil's pack with Putin' (Burgess, 2017, pp. 11-12). If there were such a pack, this would clash of course with the Western principle of separation of Church and state. Public spectacles in Russia suggest that there is some kind of alliance. According to the Keston Institute, 'no major event today is complete without robed Orthodox priests lending their presence, blessing troops on their way to Chechnya, or naming Saint Matthew as the patron saint of tax inspectors' (Davis, 2002). In the view of certain Western observers, the Russian state guarantees the Orthodox Church 'social privilege and material wealth in exchange for political loyalty' (Burgess, 2017, p. 12). For others, it is more than a matter of political loyalty. Papkova charges the Russian state with 'integrating Orthodox symbolism and cultural capital into both the construction of its own legitimacy and the construction of a viable post-Soviet national identity' (Papkova, 2011, p. 189). In the same vein, Lawrence Uzzell is convinced that the state has co-opted the ROC for the purpose of building national unity, which in the past was accomplished through Communist ideology. 'Putin's Russia is reviving the old habit of treating every social institution, whether secular or religious, as if it were an extension of the state' (Uzzell, 2004). The Orthodox Church is even lambasted as 'Putin's weapon of influence' (Christy, 2018).

There's the assumption also that scarcely any changes have occurred in Church-state relations in Russia, that history is simply repeating itself. According to Davis, the ROC 'throughout its history has exhibited not only political passivity but occasionally even active support for authoritarian regimes, especially during the Soviet era' (Davis, 2002, p. 658). Khodarkovsky wants

us to believe the ROC has always been 'subservient to the state and an unshakable supporter of autocracy' (Khodarkovsky, 2019). The inference to be drawn is that the Church's actions will always be in lock step with those of the state. In the words of Zorkaia, 'both the state and the Church act in an extremely authoritarian manner…the leaders of both institutions are oriented primarily toward the complete suppression of dissent… strict control, and the retention of power by any means' (Zorkaia, 2014, p. 10).

According to other observers, this situation has only deteriorated, not improved as some had expected, since the election of Kirill as Patriarch. 'Orthodoxy has become a powerful political force since the Holy Synod… anointed Kirill as Patriarch in 2009 … [and] in the… years since, Kirill has proven himself to be more than a simple man of the cloth' (Cichowlas, 2017). The insinuation is that he is little more than an artful politician who 'has brought the Church closer to the State' (Cichowlas, 2017). The influential Catholic writer G. Weigel contends that the Russian state is guilty of siding with the ROC for its ulterior purposes, and he excoriates the Patriarchate for allowing this to happen. 'Putin has cynically cast himself as the saviour of Christian values and the Russian Church leadership has not only acquiesced in, but promoted, that farce' (Weigel, 2018). Instead of being a 'chaplain to the omnipotent and infallible czar,' the ROC, Weigel demands, should be 'speaking truth to power' (Weigel, 2018).

These criticisms of the church-state relationship in Russia echo the view of Huntington above—that in Russian civilization, 'God is Caesar's junior partner.' But, to reiterate, these words are misleading today. There is of course no Czar or Caesar in Russia anymore, and while Russia may be an 'illiberal democracy,' it is still a functional one (Zakaria, 2004, p. 89-96). Putin's power may also be outsized for his office as president but it is not unlimited. Certainly, in one sense, Putin is a throwback to the Czarist age, in that he is a member of the ROC and recognises the importance of Christianity for his country. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly in 2014, for example, he noted that "Christianity was a powerful spiritual unifying force … in the creation of a Russian nation and Russian state" (Clover, 2013).

Like many Western constitutions, the current Russian one contains the principle of separation of church and state. This principle is actually a legacy of the Soviet era, yet it is one the ROC has been happy to retain. Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, an intimate relationship between Church and state in Russia had existed for centuries. The relationship was ideally to be a *symphonia*, a formal cooperation between Church and state for the common welfare of the nation. *Symphonia* has been called 'the heart of Russian national identity' (Burgess, 2017, p. 39). Yet under the westernizer 'Peter the Great' (reigned 1682-1725), this arrangement was abolished. The historian Billington tells us that the Church that Peter the Great reorganized 'was more than ever before the subordinate instrument of a particular national state' (Billington, 1970, p. 185). It ushered in an era of caesaropapism, where the emperor had supreme authority over the church, that endured until 1917, when the whole system was overthrown. The Church was a natural target of the Bolshevists' violent opposition to Russia's old socio-political system, since it was interwoven with this system, especially after Tsar Nicholas I (reigned 1825-55) had adopted 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality' (*Pravoslavie, Samoderzhavie, Narodnost'*) as the motto of Russian identity.

In the post-Soviet era, the ROC has become again a public institution that is playing an important role in the shaping of Russia's identity and direction. To clarify its relationship to society and the state, the Church in 2000 published 'The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church' (*Osnovy sotsial'noĭ kontseptsii Russkoĭ Pravoslavnoĭ Tserkvi*), which was later adopted by the Sacred Bishops' Council of the ROC. On theological grounds, the document defends the need for a strong centralized state to protect society against anarchy: 'The Son of God, who rules over earth and heaven

(Matthew 28:18), through the incarnation subjugated Himself to the earthly order of things; He obeyed also the holders of state power' (The Basis, 2000, III-3). At the same time, the document calls for a recognition of the different purposes and natures of the Church and the state. The 'goal of the Church is the eternal salvation of people, while the goal of the state is their earthly well-being' (The Basis, III-3). Moreover, 'since the state is part of *this world,* it does not have a part in the kingdom of God, for where Christ is *"all and in all"* (Col. 3. 11), there is no place for coercion, no place for opposing the human and the divine, and therefore there is no state there either' (The Basis, 2000, III-3).

The document acknowledges the secular nature of modern Russia, but believes that the Russian state is 'aware that earthly prosperity is unthinkable without observing certain moral standards—the very ones that are necessary for the eternal salvation of man.' It follows, then, that 'the tasks and activities of the Church and the state can coincide not only in achieving purely earthly benefits, but also in carrying out the saving mission of the Church' (The Basis, 2000, III-3). A secular state need not be one that dislodges 'religion from all spheres of the people's life' or one that bars 'religious associations from participation in solving socially important tasks, depriving them of the right to evaluate the actions of the authorities' (The Basis, 2000, III-3). The document not surprisingly endorses the restoration in Russia of a *symphonia* of Church and state, which is defined as 'mutual cooperation, mutual support and mutual responsibility, without the invasion of one side into the exclusive domain of the other' (The Basis, 2000, III-4).

In public, Patriarch Kirill has reiterated the need to restore *symphonia* and believes that 'only now has the opportunity to build' this model appeared (Ukrainian TV, 28 July 2009). Specifically, Kirill believes that certain 'vital issues' are best tackled by the Church and state working together such as 'the questions of morality—personal and public, questions of culture… including science, culture, and education' (The Basis, 2000, III-4). He takes umbrage at the accusation that there is a secret union of Church and state in Russia (NHK TV, 2012). Nor, he adds, is the Church under control of the state. 'There is nothing like caesaropapism in modern Russia,' he maintains (Bulgarian media, 2018). The Church, he insists, 'should be independent of the state [and]… remain free in making decisions that concern its internal life' (Bulgarian media, 2018). Yet, for Kirill, the constitutional separation of Church and state in Russia does not mean that 'there is a wall between' them. Instead, there should be a continuous cooperation between them. The only influence the Church can have on the state, he maintains, is a moral one, not a political one for 'the ultimate authority [for the Church] is Christ himself' (Kirill, 2016, p. 121). 'By exerting moral influence on social and personal relations,' Kirill explains, 'the Church indirectly influences politics' (NHK TV, 2012).

The foregoing discourses on the subject of the Church- state relationship in Russia are sharply bifurcated, leaving us with contradictory images of the relationship, and point to a brewing conflict between the West and Russia over the role of religion in society. Part of the problem is that Western critics are generally unfamiliar with the ideal of *symphonia,* and so tend to judge the relationship between Church and state in Russia in terms of Western experiences, where society suffered under the domination of the Church (clericalism) or where the church suffered under the domination of the state (Erastianism). In the liberal, secular West today it is of course clericalism that is feared, not Erastianism. Another related problem is that both sides understand the principle of separation of Church and state differently. For Kirill, the constitutional separation of the two does not mean there should be a 'wall between them'; while for his Western critics, there ought to be such a wall. Yet we should note that even within America there are similar divergent interpretations of the meaning of that principle.

The formal restoration of *symphonia* in Russia would require a constitutional amendment,

although a de facto *symphonia* may be possible without one. If Russia does move closer to the ideal of a *symphonia* between Church and state, and if the West continues down the road of secularization, which entails the marginalization of Christianity in public life, Russia and the West will grow farther apart. If the West seeks to export secularization as part of its liberal democracy package, then we should be prepared for more conflict between Russia and the West.

The Church and the Military

Greater cooperation between Church and state implies greater cooperation between the Church and the state's national defence. The Church and military have grown closer in Russia in the last few decades, and this has fostered fears outside the country, fed by literature and media images, of an emerging militant Christian nationalism within Russia.

At 95 metres high, the Resurrection of Christ Cathedral (*Khram Voskreseniia Khristova*) outside of Moscow, which was consecrated in June 2020, is the third largest Orthodox church in the world. However, it is not so much the size of this church that provoked Western media attention (Giordano, 2020; Bennetts, 2020). It was the mural images planned for the inside. 'Putin and Stalin exalted beside angels in Russia's "pagan temple,"' was the headline in *The Times*, Britain's most prestigious daily newspaper. Few papers in the West, though, reported the fact that in the end neither Putin's nor Stalin's image went on the walls of the cathedral. The Cathedral is dedicated to the Russian military, and it was built to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Russia's victory over the Nazis in the Great Patriotic War. It stands also as an awe-inspiring symbol of the new partnership between the ROC and the Russian military. This relationship has been explored in two books in English, beginning with a chapter in *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent* (2008) by American scholars John and Carol Garrard and then a full-book treatment by Israeli professor Dmitry Adamsky in *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy* (2019). It has also been explored lately in an article by two Russian academics, B. Knorre and A. Zygmont (Knorre and Zygmont, 2020).

A picture is worth a thousand words. That can certainly be said of the Garrards' book, which has on the front cover Putin and the Patriarch in a nose-to-nose embrace. The Garrards' thesis is that the resurgence of Orthodoxy is political. A back–cover blurb says that their story will 'frighten some,' and the most frightening part for Westerners will surely be the chapter 'Faith-based Army.' The Garrards contend that none other than the ROC helped to rescue the Russian military from the grave morale and identity crisis that befell it after the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet they would have us believe that the ROC has done more than that. The ROC, they write, 'has successfully embedded its ethos and its symbols in the both the high command and the men' of the armed forces (Garrard, Garrard, 2008, p. 208).

Adamsky paints a far more frightening picture. We read that the Orthodox faith has 'saturated Russian nuclear military industrial complex' and that 'the ROC has positioned itself as one of the main guardians of the state's nuclear potential' (Adamsky, 2019, p. 3). There is the astonishing claim that the ROC sees itself as 'one of the main guarantors of Russian national security' and that it is the 'main patron of the nuclear enterprise' (Adamsky, 2019, pp. 3, 43). Moreover, all this has come about, according to this author, through the vision and leadership of Metropolitan Kirill, when he was the head of the Church's External Relations Department (1989-2009), prior to his elevation to the Patriarch in 2010.

In their article, Knorre and Zygmont corroborate basically the claims made by the Adamsky and the Garrards. These scholars contend that the post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church has

sacralised the Russian military defence system, witnessed by the blessing of not only soldiers but of weapons of mass destruction—although the church has recently proposed to limit blessings to soldiers. They detect in Russia today the construction of a 'theology of war' and, what Karen Armstrong has called, a 'militant piety.'

The ROC official position on war and the military is laid out in 'The Basis of the Social Concept.' It lists 'care for soldiers and … their spiritual and moral education' as one of those areas of cooperation between the Church and the state (The Basis, 2000, III-8). The document also has a whole chapter on the topic of 'War and Peace' (*Voĭna i Mir*). Certainly, its position is not pacifist. While it condemns the hatred of enemies and malice toward them, it justifies armed resistance to evil. It refers to 'our Christ-loving warriors' who 'guard the Holy Church with arms, guard the sovereign, … protect the fatherland, with the destruction of which inevitably fall the national power and evangelical faith ...' (The Basis, 2000, VIII-2). It makes reference to 'the agreement concluded by the Russian Orthodox Church with the Armed Forces' that helps to bread down the artificial barrier between them and facilitates the return of 'the military back to the established Orthodox traditions of service to the fatherland' (The Basis, 2000, VIII-4). But the ROC understands this service not as an expression of chauvinistic nationalism but of a healthy patriotism. In the view of the Patriarch, patriotism should be an essential part of any Orthodox state, and he sees no inherit conflict between patriotism and the universal validity of Christian ethics.

> Therefore, when we talk about patriotism…we mean the patriotism of any member of our Church in relation to that state and to that ethnos with which he identifies himself. This is where Christian … patriotism differs from nationalism Patriotism is always balanced by Christian universalism. Nationalism is not balanced. (Ukrainian media, 2009).

Kirill defends the ROC's involvement with the military in terms of the Church's general mission to the Russian people, which is about restoring in them the faith of their ancestors. He assures us that the Church's work with the army is only part of a broader mission to increase 'the spiritual influence on the life of our people and society,' that it is not about the clericalisation of the army or about cementing the alliance of Church and state (NHK TV, 2012).

Indeed, what is taking place now in contemporary Russia harks back to the pre-Soviet era, when there was an Orthodox priest in every military unit, although it has not returned to that level yet. The close bond between the military and Orthodoxy was integral to old Russia or Holy Rus.' Emblems of this bond are the Russian national heroes Saint Sergius of Radonezh and Alexander Nevsky. Sergius was a saint who became a military hero also, but there have been many Russian military heroes who have been declared saints by the ROC. Probably the most famous of these is Alexander Nevsky, who defended the city of Novgorod from invasions to the East and to the West in the thirteenth century.

Knorre and Zygmont are not mistaken when they maintain that the close alliance between the church and military in Russia is a feature of Christianity in general (Knorre, Zygmont, p. 13). While Western nations have been quite successful at divorcing the state and the church, they have not yet been as successful in divorcing the church and the military. Military chaplains are still a regular feature of Western armies, and Remembrance or Memorial Day events in the West are celebrated within many churches. Yet in the West today, there is a trend toward the separation of churches from war and the military; and the disestablishment of many churches there along with the privatization of Christianity facilitates this trend. Certainly, one would be hard pressed to find in the West a 'faith-based army' or a church that serves as 'patron of the nuclear enterprise.' Indeed, many churches and leading theologians in the West today promote pacifism and advocate for total nuclear disarmament (World Council of Churches; Hauerwas, 1991; Yoder, 1994; Sider, 2015).

The new alliance between the ROC and the Russian military does not by itself indicate a civilizational conflict with the West, but it could potentially become a key factor in one. This alliance has already been a factor in an inter-civilizational conflict[2] involving Russia and the Ukraine, as Knorre and Zygmont have pointed out:

> The Russian-Ukrainian conflict showed that the extrapolation of the idea of spiritual battle and vivid discussions on the spiritual meaning of military actions can reflect in real-life politics when individual volunteers and private military companies who went to fight in the Donbas began to consider their activities as "a war for Holy Russia" and even called themselves a "Russian Orthodox Army." (Knorre and Zygmont, p. 5)

At the very least, the new alliance between church and military in Russia raises the spectre of another form of militant religious nationalism that is the nemesis of a Western-centred globalism (Jurgensmeyer, 2017, 2019, Cherenkov, 2015).

Human Rights and Freedoms

When we come to the subject of human rights and freedoms, a clash between Russia and the West comes more sharply into view. We can start by revisiting the 'Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation' that refers to the 'tensions' in the world that are becoming civilizational ones in the form of 'a rivalry between guiding values' Values is a generic term, and indeed the two subjects we just examined can be understood in terms of a conflict of values. But in this section, we focus on those values that circulate around sexual relations, family, and religion.

On the subject of human rights, the ROC has lately given us plenty to ponder. There is the 'The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church' (2000), the 'Declaration on the Dignity and Rights of Man' of the World Russian People's Council (2006), and 'The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom, and Rights' (2008). In addition, we have the Patriarch's unofficial statements and comments on this subject.

'The Basis of the Social Concept' does not deal precisely with human rights, but it does contain chapters on 'People, family, and public morality.' Not surprisingly, it takes a very conservative position on these issues. It praises marriage, condemns divorce as a sin, and vigorously opposes any deviations from the traditional definition of marriage. 'The Church insists on the lifelong fidelity of the spouses and the indissolubility of the Orthodox marriage' (The Basis, 2000, X-3). The document compares the nuclear family to a 'small church,' and condemns homosexual relations on the basis of tradition, the Bible, and theology. **'**Holy Scriptures and the teaching of the Church unequivocally deplore homosexual relations, seeing in them a vicious distortion of the God-created human nature' (The Basis, 2000, XII-0).

The 'Declaration on the Dignity and Rights of Man' of the World Russian People's Council (*Vsemirnyĭ Russkiĭ Narodnyĭ Sobor*) stands out among the primary documents before us. It is not technically an ROC document, although the council was established under the aegis of the ROC and is chaired by the Patriarch. This Council prides itself as an 'international public organisation' that is composed of academics, military officers, scientists, business and religious leaders, and even deputies from the Russian parliament (State Duma). The declaration is an obvious response to the threat of a clash of civilizations:

> Aware that the world, passing through a crucial point in its history, is facing a threat of conflict between the civilizations with their different understanding of the human being and the human being's calling, – the World Russian People's Council, on behalf of the unique Russian civilization, adopts this declaration (World Russian Council, 2006).

The declaration is an attempt to establish moral boundaries around this Russian civilization by defining the 'dignity and rights of man' on a Christian basis: 'Each person as an image of God has singular unalienable worth, which must be respected by every one of us…' For that reason, Stoeckl calls the Declaration an 'anti-Western and anti-liberal' and also because the document opposes the separation of human rights from 'obligations and responsibilities' to the 'neighbour, family, community, nation and all humanity' (Stoeckl, 2014, p. 56; World Russian Council, 2006). By contrast, the Declarations states that 'faith, morality, the sacred, [and] motherland' are no less important than individual human rights. Moreover, it condemns any definition of human rights that would 'oppress faith and moral tradition, insult religious and national feelings, cause harm to revered holy objects and sites, [or] jeopardize the motherland' (World Russian Council, 2006).

'The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom, and Rights' (*Osnovy ucheniia Russkoĭ Pravoslavnoĭ Tserkvi o dostoinstve, svobode i pravakh cheloveka*) is a much longer and more elaborate statement on human rights. It is also one grounded foursquare in Orthodox theology. It tells us that the 'weakness of the human rights institution lies in the fact that while defending the freedom of choice, it tends to increasingly ignore the moral dimension of life and the freedom from sin' (Basic Teaching, 2000, II-2). It states that 'human rights cannot be superior to the values of the spiritual world… [and that they]'should not come into conflict with the Divine Revelation' (Basic Teaching, 2000, II-2).

Compared to the 'Declaration,' the tone in the ROC statement is less pessimistic and defensive. Instead of beginning with a reference to a 'conflict' of civilizations, we read about the 'profound differences' between certain 'civilizations and cultures' (Basic Teaching, 2000). Still, it disdains the idea of a civilization browbeating another one with its concept of human rights. 'Certain civilizations,' it states, 'ought not to impose their own way of life on other civilizations under the pretext of human rights protection' (Basic Teaching, 2000). As in the 'Declaration', the ROC statement wishes to see the integrity of Russian civilization insulated from threatening external forces: 'Actions aimed at respect for human rights and improvement of social and economic relations and institutions will not be truly successful if the religious and cultural traditions of countries and nations are ignored' (Basic Teaching, 2000).

In the view of liberal human rights advocates, the Orthodox Church statement is certainly 'illiberal' for failing to foreground individual rights and their universality (Stoeckl, 2014, p. 60). From the perspective of the Orthodox Church, though, human rights ought to be understood holistically, that is in relation to God, morality, nation, and the values of the majority in society. Patriarch Kirill is confident that this holistic approach is enjoined by Article 29 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which he cited (when he was Metropolitan) in an address to UNESCO in 2007 (Kirill, 2007, p. 65):

> In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society (UN Universal Declaration, 1948).

Russia has been a target of late of liberal, Western human rights activists. The Human Rights Watch, for example, concluded in its 2020 report that the 'human rights situation in Russia continued to deteriorate in 2019' (Human Rights Watch, 2020). It reprimands Russia for not protecting religious freedom or the rights of LGBT people. Since 2017, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has labelled Russia among the worst offenders of religious freedom, in violation, it says, of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (USCIRF, 2019; United Nations, 1948). In fact, Russia is the only country in the developed world to earn this

unenviable label. The reasoning: 'The government continued to target "non-traditional" religious minorities with fines, detentions, and criminal charges under the pretext of combating extremism' (USCIRF, 2019, p. 28). The Jehovah's Witnesses is one such religious minority. In 2017, the Russian Supreme Court ruled that this sect was 'extremist' (Higgins, 2017). Western human rights activists go behind the Supreme Court, though, and blame the ROC for this incident, and even for incidents outside Russia. For instance, P. Annicchino, from the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, writes that 'in recent years, the Russian Orthodox Church has emerged as a major protagonist in conflicts over the definition of human rights and, among them, of the right to freedom of religion at the international level' (Annicchino, 2019).

Russia does guarantee religious freedom in its constitution, although it officially recognizes only the four 'traditional' religions of Russia: Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. New religions in Russia are permitted, but they are subject to a fifteen-year probationary period. By Western standards, this policy is flagrantly unjust and discriminatory. But it is not by the ROC's holistic definition of human rights and freedoms:

> The freedom of conscience is sometimes treated as requiring religious neutrality or indifference of a state and society. Some ideological interpretations of religious freedom insist on the need to recognize all the faiths as relative or 'equally true'. This is inacceptable for the Church which, while respecting the freedom of choice, is called to bear witness to the Truth she cherishes and to expose its misinterpretations (Basic Teaching, 2000, IV-3).

A holistic view means also that the rights of individuals must be balanced by the rights of society:

> A society has the right to determine freely the content and amount of cooperation the state should maintain with various religious communities depending on their strength, traditional presence in a particular country or region, contribution to the history and culture of the country and on their civil attitude (Basic Teaching, 2000, IV-3).

It sounds draconian today to suggest limitations on religious freedom. Western leaders would defend religious freedom as an inalienable right and as something essential for the maintenance of religious peace in society—although there are many religious people in the West today who complain about state encroachments on religious freedom. On closer inspection, the ROC document tells us that it is opposed to only an aspect of the definition of religious freedom in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—to the 'freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.' For the ROC, the preservation of the 'motherland' and what it considers Christian 'truth' should take precedence over individual rights and religious harmony. The ROC is also more concerned about Christian and pseudo-Christian sects than other world religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, which have state protection and support in Russia. The proliferation and growth of Christian and pseudo-Christian sects could only attenuate the authority of the ROC. It would not wish to become like the Church of England, which is now, as result of religious pluralism as well as secularisation, the church of just 12% of the population of the United Kingdom (British Social Attitudes 36).

The ROC is also suspected of being behind the Russian Federation's opposition to both greater rights for the LGBT community and for an inclusive definition of marriage within the country and outside it. Russia has become a major player in the World Congress of Families (WCF), an American-founded organisation that promotes 'the natural family,' but one that has been vilified as a homophobic organisation by liberal human rights activists (Stoeckl, 2018). These activists are also cynical about Russia's motives here. They suppose that Russia's end-game is not the protection of

the 'natural family' but the expansion of Russian influence in the world and the destabilisation of liberal, Western democracies (Klington, 2019; Barthélemy, 2018).

One of the amendments to the new Russian constitution is a definition of marriage that excludes same-sex unions (Constitution, 2020, p. 29). This itself can be read as a tactical move in Russia's civilizational struggle with the West. According to Pyotr Tolstoy, the deputy speaker of the Russian Parliament, the amendment was necessary so that international organizations would not be able to 'force Russia into giving any special rights to the LGBT community' (Kramer, 2020). In 2013, the Russian parliament passed a 'gay propaganda' law that made it a crime to advertise, teach, or promote the LGBT lifestyle to minors (people under 18 years). This law was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights in 2017 and by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as a hate law that encourages hostility and discrimination against the LGBT community. This law, and Putin's resistance to constitutional reforms that would accommodate same-sex couples, have been blamed on the political influence of the 'socially conservative' Orthodox church (Litvinova, 2017). The ROC does not single out homosexuality or the LGBT community in its Human Rights Statement, but it stands against a 'non-religious understanding of human rights' having any influence on the beliefs and practices of Orthodox Christians. It also expects the state to protect the traditional definition of marriage and family:

> The modern law should view the family as the lawful union of man and woman in which natural conditions for raising children are created. Law is also called to respect the family as an integral organism and to protect it against destruction provoked by moral decay (Basic Teaching, 2000, IV-9).

Patriarch Kirill has also in addresses and interviews underlined the importance of the traditional family for the health of civilization, which he thinks is threatened by the erosion of that institution. 'Christian civilization – the soul of Europe … is threatened' not only by the common challenges of radical secularism and consumerism but by the loss of the 'traditional family' and 'evangelical morality' ("Le Figaro", 2016). Indeed, the Patriarch suggests that fundamental moral differences are fuelling a clash of civilizations:

> [For] the first time in the entire history of human civilization, legislation has entered into conflict with the moral nature of man …laws began to justify that which does not correspond to the moral nature of man ... the Church cannot accept such a path of development … [And] we now see that this godless civilization is really advancing… ("Le Figaro", 2016).

Russia's conservative laws pertaining to marriage and family are certainly in harmony with the human rights statement of the ROC and with Kirill's own views. Further, on the matter of human values we can discern the lineaments of that *symphonia* of Church and state that Patriarch Kirill wishes to revive. At the 15th World Russian People's Council in 2011, an annual council where the Church and the state come together, the subject was a document titled 'Basic Values are the Basis of a National Identity' (*Bazisnye tsennosti – osnova obshchenatsional'noĭ identichnosti*). The sixteen values contained therein are all universal ones except for a few, including the one that headlines the list, 'Faith in God' (*Vera v Boga*), and the one about 'Family' *(Sem'ia)*, which is defined as 'a union between a man and a woman in which children are brought up' (World Russian Council, 2011).

The influence of the World Russian People's Council, and the ROC in general, is blamed for the presence of traditional values in Russia's domestic and foreign policy discourses (Stepanova, 2015, pp. 119-136; Gradskova, 2020, pp. 31-36). Vladimir Putin, no less than Patriarch Kirill, is a champion of these values. In his 2013 inaugural address to the federal assembly, Putin promised to defend the 'values of traditional families, real human life, including religious life….' (Putin, 2013).

He also reiterated this promise in his 2018 Presidential inaugural address (Putin, 2018). While Putin holds that the state has a responsibility to defend these traditional values, he would expect the traditional religions of Russia, especially Orthodoxy, to inculcate those values in citizens, as Elena Stepanova points out:

> The idea of an indissoluble link between [traditional] religion and morality is strongly supported by the Russian political powers, which tend to delegate the responsibility for moral improvement of Russian people to religious institutions. As a result, in recent decades, the religiosity and moral traditionalism alliance has substantially increased (Stepanova, 2015, p. 120).

This discourse on traditional values can be understood, first, as part of the ongoing restoration of Russia's sense of national identity, which suffered a blow after the collapse of Communism. Indeed, for Patriarch Kirill—and probably for V. Putin—Russia is 'a system of values,' wherein the 'idea ofthe spiritual is dominant over the material' (Russia TV channel, 2009). P. Kirill feels that Russian society must not become detached from this system of values; otherwise, Russians will deprive themselves of 'that common thing that unites people of any religion …' (Kirill, 2018, p. 31). Secondly, this discourse can be understood as a response to perceived threats to Russia's national identity from the outside, especially from the 'the West,' which is often portrayed as a civilization that is corrupted by non-traditional, liberal values:

> The picturing of Russia as the world's last bastion of the defence of traditional values is an integral part of the idea of the ongoing conflict between two opposite civilizations: Western (secular) and Orthodox (genuine Christian), where the former stands for liberalism, secularism, and individualism, while the latter represents traditionalism, moralism, religion and community (Stepanova, 2015, p.120; Gradskova, 2020, p. 30).

Certainly, according to Pew Research Center polls, there is a sizable values gap between Eastern Europeans—who are mainly Orthodox—and Western Europeans and Americans (Pew Research, 2018; Silver, 2018). Eastern Europeans are more socially conservative than Westerners, although Americans appear to think more like Eastern than Western Europeans when it comes to the importance of religion—although, as we noted, this is changing.

Yet, if we give pause, there is a third way of reading the discourse on traditional values. It signals Russia's interest in becoming an 'international conservative power' (Robinson, 2020), one in which it sees itself playing a leading role in the preservation of civilization, by championing those values it deems essential to it. In doing so, the country would be reinforcing its unique Orthodox civilizational identity by fulfilling its messianic calling, which historically has been an essential ingredient in this identity (Curanovic, 2019; Siliak, 2016). After all, the traditional values that Kirill and Putin stand for are neither uniquely Russian nor uniquely Orthodox. As Putin said in his 2013 inaugural address to the Federal Assembly, 'we know that there are more and more people in the world who support our position on defending traditional values'—values that, he said, 'have made up the spiritual and moral foundation of civilization in every nation for thousands of years' (Putin, 2013). Likewise, Patriarch Kirill speaks about *Christian* civilization being in jeopardy because of the loss of traditional values and Christian morality (Kirill, 2018, p. 154). We now see that there are many people in the West, in particular evangelical Protestants and conservative Catholics, who share Russia's defence and promotion of traditional values and value Russia's leadership in this area, as illustrated in the World Congress of Families (Burgess, 2018, pp. 10-11; Robinson, 2020, p. 11).

Conclusion

Samuel Huntington identified 'values and culture' as a key source of conflict between civilizations. A conflict will arise, he predicted, 'when a state attempts to promote or to impose its values on the people of another civilization' (Huntington, 1996, p. 208). While our survey of discourses surrounding three subjects of contention above is far from exhausting, it is a sufficient sample size to make inferences from them. There is clearly a conflict of discourses and one that points to a growing conflict between an increasingly religiously-based system of values in Russia and an increasingly liberal, secular system of values in the West. This conflict is especially salient in the discourses on human rights and values, but it is evident also in those discourses about the Church and state, Church and military. If current cultural trends within Russia and the West continue, so that the public influence of religion grows in the former while it declines in the latter, then we can expect this conflict to intensify accordingly.

Nonetheless, one should be reticent about proclaiming a clash of civilizations between Russia and West for a few reasons. First, the cultural conflict is inter-civilizational as much as intra-civilizational. In Patriarch Kirill's words, 'this struggle is taking place not only along the borders dividing states and regions, but also within countries and peoples' (Kirill, 2018, p. 157). America is riven by a 'cultural war' between liberals and conservatives that is spreading across the West. There is similar divide to be found in Russia, where even within the ROC there is reportedly a division between 'fundamentalists, liberals and traditionalists' (Papkova, 2011). The only difference is that liberals have the upper hand in the West, while conservatives/traditionalists, such as Kirill and Putin, have the upper hand in Russia. Second, Russia has always had an ambivalent relationship with the West. The Russian two-headed eagle looks west and east. Russia both identifies with the West while seeking to differentiate itself from it. Although Putin, for example, can refer to Russia as a 'distinct civilization,' he still likes to refer to Russia as a 'European' country (Robinson, 2020, p. 29). Russia's 'traditional values' campaign and the ROC's relationship to the state and military seem to be driving Russia and the West farther apart, but that may not be Russia's intention. The resurgence of Orthodoxy in Russia has sparked a revival also of the 'religious messianic idea' there (Aksyuchits, 2014, p. 45), which means that Russia wants to be a light to the West (and the world) and to play a leading role in the preservation and revival of Christian civilization. Of course, this messianic tendency is bound to provoke resistance from Western proponents of liberal, secular values, thus ratcheting up fears of a clash of civilizations after all.

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[1]Huntington for good reason uses 'Orthodox civilization' interchangeably with 'Russian civilization'; for not only is Russia the 'core state' of this civilisation, its size and importance is such that Orthodox civilization would cease to exist apart from this country. From this point on, then, 'Russian civilisation' will be used.

[2]Or perhaps intra-civilizational, if we agree with Huntington that Ukraine is a 'cleft country' with a civilizational fault line running through it (Huntington, 1996, p. 165).

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