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Radzik Ryszard**SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY**

The article is devoted to the Russian Orthodox Church as an institution stimulating values and behavioural patterns in a secular setting, which – although invariably focused on God and making references to the sacred – are often different in Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy. The article also considers how Russian Orthodoxy contributed to the shaping of a distinct vision of the social order, structures, mentality and attitudes.

Key words: *Russian Orthodoxy, sacralisation of the world, the Third Rome, clash of civilisations.*

Радзік Р.**СОЦІАЛЬНІ КОНТЕКСТИ ПРАВОСЛАВ'Я**

У статті розглядається проблема церкви (російського православ'я) як інституту, що здійснює цінності та зразки поведінки у світському контексті їхнього виникнення, які побудовані людьми довкола Бога та, незважаючи на відкликання до священного, часто відрізняються у різних віросповіданнях: католицизмі, протестантизмі та православ'ї. Також тому, наскільки російське православ'я формувало бачення соціального світу, менталітет, структури, соціальні настанови, які відрізняються від двох інших віросповідань.

Ключові слова: *православ'я, сакралізація світу, Третій Рим, зіткнення цивілізацій.*

Радзик Р.**СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ КОНТЕКСТЫ ПРАВОСЛАВИЯ**

В статье рассматривается проблема церкви (русского православия) как института, что несет в себе ценности и поведенческие модели в светском контексте их возникновения, что выстроенные вокруг Бога людьми, несмотря на ссылки на их святость, часто разные в отдельных конфессиях: католицизме, протестантизме и православии. А также потому, насколько русское православие формировало

отличные от двух остальных вероисповеданий представления о социальном мире, менталитет, структуры и подходы.

Ключевые слова: православие, сакрализация мира, Третий Рим, столкновение цивилизаций.

Over a thousand years ago, it was impossible to predict that the decision to adopt Christianity from Rome, as was the case in Bohemia or Poland, or from Byzantium, a choice made by Kievan Rus', would have such tremendous cultural consequences. Nor could it have been foreseen that it would divide Europe in general, and its Slavic regions in particular, into two different cultural circles or even, as viewed by Feliks Koneczny, Samuel Huntington and a number of Russian academics, two civilisations. The paths within the East Slavic community itself also diverged to a great extent, although the process did not always produce lasting results. In the course of time, the area came to display increasingly more distinct and more important cultural, political, mental and religious differences within the Orthodox world: while the Grand Duchy of Moscow became orientalised, the societies of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which, at a later date, were to form Ukraine and Belarus became westernised.

It could therefore be said that the sense of a separate Russian cultural identity, often emphasised by the Russians themselves, was shaped by factors such as a prolonged isolation of Russia from the West, the influence of non-Indo-European value systems, the Tatar rule, and, last but not least, the emergence of the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome. This distinct Russian identity, with its attendant sense of pride in the power of the steadily expanding state, was constructed in constant opposition to the West, treated as a reference group (in the sociological sense). This tendency, already visible in the seventeenth century, became common in the times of Peter I. By contrast, Russia was never a point of reference for Western Europe, and Western Europeans never formed their identity in constant comparison with Russia and Russianness.

1. The sacral dimension of Rus'ness

The concept of Moscow as the Third Rome was proposed in the early sixteenth century by Philotheus, a monk at the Pskov monastery. Whatever his intentions, in the course of time the idea exerted an enormous influence on the shape and form of the Russian state in terms of its culture, religion and politics: the Russian Tsardom came to be perceived as the only and the last Christian state, with the Russian rulers destined to

assume the leadership of the Christian world until the Second Coming of Christ. Following the reforms introduced by Peter I, this messianic dimension of the Russian idea of the Third Rome came to be replaced by a missionist idea of a universal and secular empire serving the common good.

Thus, between the sixteenth and eighteenth century Russia embraced its two fundamental concepts and sets of values, which became the decisive factors shaping the development Russianness in the centuries to come, and are still visible today. Firstly, Orthodoxy, consolidated by the messianic idea of the Third Rome, came to provide a set of constitutive values which defined a Russian (*русский*) in terms of culture and mentality, set the limits of Russianness, created Russian visions of the world and built the social capital. As such, its impact extended also to the political sphere. Secondly, Peter I's secular missionist idea was to build an empire whose subjects would no longer be the ethnic Rus' people, but Russians, regardless of their ethnicity or religion – a concept following, to a certain extent, the example of European political nations.

Although over the course of Russian history the paths of the two concepts have sometimes diverged and sometimes converged, the messianic spirituality stemming from Orthodoxy has always been intertwined with the missionist conviction of Russia's grandeur. Even if contrary to the facts, Russia, as seen by the Russians, has always been great and is indeed predestined for its grandeur, considering its culture, spiritual depth, political power and its sense of a mission going back to the concept of the Third Rome and the great empire of Peter I. In this approach, Russians perceive themselves to be a special nation. Today's Russian elites are trying to convince the West that the great Russian culture brings a universal message to the world. Andrzej Nowak argues that, in the spirit of Philotheus, some Russian intellectual circles are currently attempting to consolidate the imperial dimension of their country in a bid to protect its cultural identity from the Western menace. This can be seen as yet another Russian attempt to bring salvation to the world [12, pp. 136-137].

While The West saw the medieval idea of *Respublica Christiana* secularised in the Renaissance and was ultimately to experience the birth of nation states, in the East the process of transformation of the Tsardom of Muscovy into the Russian Empire took an entirely different course. Indeed, Mykola Riabchuk observes that '[h]ere, the pre-modern Slavia Orthodoxa became a part of the imperial narration and the newly established empire was synectically identified with the mythical «Rus'»,

which came to signify not only a religious, but also an ethnic, territorial and political community. Thus, the empire acquired a sacred dimension while the Slavia Orthodoxa was nationalised. For the empire, this meant a petrification of the pre-modern frame of thought and structure of government; for Orthodoxy, a fatal stagnation in the archaic forms of caesaropapism, which until today involves a peculiar combination of politically inspired megalomania with aggressive messianism disguised in the cloak of a construct referred to as «*ruskii mir*». The replacement of confessional-civilisational «Rus'ness» with ethnopolitical «Russianess», along with utterly unfortunate misunderstandings stemming from the fact, have considerably hindered the formation of modern national identities, not only Ukrainian and Belarusian, but also Russian' [15, p. 363-364].

The Russian-Rus' community, which, as viewed by Russians, includes also Ukrainians and Belarusians, is sometimes compared to Muslim *ummah* (Besançon, Riabczuk): the sacred space of its hard core is surrounded by a borderland zone, with areas outside remaining to be conquered. Thus, there are no limits to expansion, just as there are no limits to the expansion of the Church. The Russian Orthodox Church combines 'the ecclesiastical element, the patriarchate, and the element of force: the state. The Russian state is Orthodox, i.e. the Orthodox Church is fully integrated with its structure' [2, p. 4]. Considering the constitutive mechanism of the state, the nature of its community and common cultural bond, Besançon has often remarked that Russia is not a state, but a Church. It is a Church which has integrated a 'natural', as it were, tendency for expansion, and demands that others should accept its faith (a considerable proportion of Russians, including academics, believe that all Slavs should be Orthodox and Poles are Catholic traitors of the Slavic people). In much the same vein, in the twentieth century, communism acquired a similarly religious dimension in the Russian context, and Russia attempted to save the world by spreading the new communist faith.

Russian vagueness about their country's borders and the borders of Russianness as such stems from three factors: the history of expansion of the Russian state (a phenomenon unparalleled, for reasons of available space, in the western European context), the perception of Russia in terms of a potentially expanding Church (ever since the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome), and the Russian understanding of state and state borders, which was adopted from the Tatars, who had imposed their political categories on Moscow Rus' for over two centuries.

Arguably, Russians, in their own eyes, did not conquer and enslave others, like the British or French, but brought truth to the world, the truth enabling the unification of all Orthodox people into the true and universal Church. A similar religious principle operated also in the case of communism, perceived in terms of the one and only ideology able to unite all those suffering from class oppression. Thus, Russian communists spread good, truth and ideological salvation. In this way, the religious Orthodox messianism of Rus' as the Third Rome was replaced with communist and internationalist missionism of sacralised atheism of the twentieth century.

In other words, Russia has the right to be (whatever the verb 'to be' is taken to mean) in any area which is or at one time was Orthodox, communist, or conquered by the Russian army. In much the same way, the Tatar state, or at least a sense of legitimate possession of a territory, was wherever there was the Tatar army. Like the Chinese, who try to legitimise their claims to Tibet, the Russians also assert their right to return (either directly or by establishing a sphere of their interests) to territories they once controlled. Such imperial-militarist mentality, coupled with messianism and a sense of a mission to spread the only true idea served the Russians to sacralise both themselves and their military conquests.

As Alain Besançon observes '[t]he attribute of holiness, which once belonged to the Orthodox Church and from there was transferred onto the tsar, came to belong also to Russia as such. However, unlike in the case of any other nationalism, this attribution does not involve a privileged ethnic group in an abstract sense. Here, the light of the sacred shines on everything Russian, everything that is in any way connected with the country. Russia has become an object of worship, or even the sole object of worship. The list of things sacred is endless' [4, p. 63]. Here, Besançon lists the language, literature, landscape, objects of everyday use, customs, icons, liturgy, and also 'Christ and the Holy Spirit, who became nationalised, as they are seen to have been properly understood only by the Eastern Church and Russian Orthodoxy, which considers itself their guardian [4, p. 64]. In the world of this practically holy and undoubtedly great Russian nation (*великий русский народ*), the expansion from Alaska to Warsaw is considered to be a natural activity of the state, which sees itself either as the Third Rome or its more secular Soviet incarnation (the USSR and its internationalist ideology). Such expansion, then, is 'not a conquest but unification' [4, p. 50]. It is even more natural in the case of 'collecting the lands of Rus'', treated by the Russians nearly as the right they received from God himself.

2. Features of Russian Orthodoxy

Any discussion of the social dimension of Russian Orthodoxy carried out from the point of view of Western standards involves the risk of adopting a judgmental ('better-worse') attitude. Regrettably, such attitudes can be found on both sides of the eastern EU border. Societies in this part of Europe vary considerably, but their differences should not be subject to judgmental evaluation in academic discourse. Although Orthodoxy brings about different social consequences than Catholicism or Protestantism, the present discussion perceives difference only in descriptive terms and not in terms of evaluative judgment. Below, I offer a brief presentation (inevitably simplified because of our limited space here) of at least some characteristic features of Russian Orthodoxy.

(1) Under the influence of such historical factors as the Tatar rule, the idea of the Third Rome and the reforms of Peter I, Russian Orthodoxy, interpreted as a civilization (a view often shared by the Russians themselves), developed a sense of community which separates itself from others and displays the mentality of a besieged fortress. It is characterised by a strong tradition of sacralisation of its own difference, a conviction of its own cultural and religious superiority, clearly developed imperialist and expansionist attitudes, and, consequently, a messianic-missionary mentality. All these features are combined with a tendency to perceive the world in terms of 'us' and 'them'. This tendency, relatively much stronger than in Western Europe, stems from a prolonged tradition of Russian isolationism (which at some point involved also physical isolation of foreigners in the country) and a distinctly different character of the tsarist state, particularly in the period prior to Peter I and the Age of Enlightenment.¹ Russian isolationism and a dichotomic vision of the world got a new lease of life under the Soviet Union, at that stage the world's only communist country (hence, traditional distrust of foreigners, division into 'us' and 'them', and a peculiar spy mania). To a lesser extent, such attitudes continued after the second World War until the fall of the communist state, and linger on today. This has always

¹ 'Inherited from the Mongols, the concept of the border as a barrier which is forbidden to cross in either direction acquires also a religious meaning; the border becomes a wall protecting purity and is thus consolidated even further. The few foreign traders who managed to get across were placed in a separate district and put under strict surveillance' [4. p. 40]. Similar procedures in the case of foreigners were applied also in communist China (even after Mao's death) and are still in place in North Korea.

been a markedly anti-Western phenomenon, and it still looms over Russian politics and influences attitudes of the Russians today.

(2) Orthodoxy has been characterised by its highly developed spiritual, mystical and contemplative dimension. At the same time, the division between the spiritual, metaphysical sphere of ideas and the sphere of social reality and methodological principles in humanities and social studies is weaker than in Catholicism. As Jerzy Klinger observes '[i]mportantly, most Orthodox theologians today are convinced that the essence of the Church eludes any attempted definitions of any kind' [9, p. 160]. Unlike in the West, the culture of discourse in Orthodox societies is not based on the scholastic tradition, a fact of considerable social consequences. The Orthodox East is not as rational as the West (although it has to be noted that the criteria of rationality were constructed in the West). Irena Borowik argues that 'Orthodox adogmatism does not activate the mechanism of rationalisation, as is the case in Catholicism. The Catholic Church, which has an entire class of priests at its disposal (...), makes a conscious effort to achieve (...) a coherence between its religious doctrine and social reality' [5, p. 19]. The Orthodox world is more emotional, more focused on contacts within primary groups, relies more on oral and rural culture, and tends to concentrate on the here and now (since change is often revolutionary). On the other hand, Catholicism and Protestantism are more open to constant change, innovation and transformation of the social order. Also, Eastern Christianity is given to visionary (mythopoeic) explanations rather than to scientific social theories providing a framework structuring a vision of the world on a macro and micro scale. Such an attitude is reflected not only in essayist and 'academic' literature of this cultural circle, often (particularly in Russia) saturated with visionary historical interpretations (involving historical conspiracy theories far more frequently than in the West), but also in anti-modernist practice of everyday social life, both among the elites and in the entire society.² 'Antidogmatism, an aversion to rationality and speculative thinking, can be identified as one of the reasons for the inability to identify fundamental contradictions between communist ideology and Orthodox doctrine' [5, p. 29]. Thus, the Orthodox

² Alain Besançon writes: 'While it is true that Russian academic achievement in science is impressive, it is certainly mediocre in humanities, as seen from the perspective of the last two hundred years. (...) The adopted «German model» limited and intellectually impoverished the academic study almost as effectively as communism did at a later date' [3, p. P31].

Church succumbed to the new communist power far more easily than its Catholic counterpart. At the same time, as has often been noticed, in the Russian social context communism came to play the role of religion, in which idealist missionism replaced religious messianism.

(3) The extent to which Russian Orthodoxy has been affected by caesaropapism, both in the political and a broader socio-cultural sense, cannot be underestimated. The Orthodox church served to provide religious sanction to the political authority, while remaining strictly subordinated to the monarchy in the theological and dogmatic as well as the institutional sphere. The Church structures, incorporated into the administrative power structure of the Russian state by Peter I, facilitated control of the population. Consequently, unlike in Catholicism, the elites of the Orthodox Church were not in a position to act as a counterbalance or partner to the ruler. This situation was exacerbated by the low level of formation among the Orthodox clergy, particularly its lower echelons, which resulted in low esteem of village priests in the local community. The position of the Orthodox Church within the power system consolidated vertical rather than horizontal social structures and social bonds. Its subordination to the tsarist rule entailed inability to pursue emancipation from the spiritual and political centre of the country: the Orthodox clergy (unlike its Catholic counterpart in a number of European countries) did not initiate autonomous national tendencies among Ukrainians and Belarusians. Quite on the contrary, it was often the case that they were their active opponents. In the last decades of the Russian Empire, Orthodox priests were an extension of political power and supported Russian nationalist tendencies as requested by the authorities. Wherever the Orthodox Church remains independent from the political (particularly Russian) authorities, it has generally been indifferent to the national question and remained focused on its religious service; at the same time, it usually tries to be loyal to the authorities (as can be currently observed in the Białystok region).

(4) Unlike Western Churches, the Orthodox Church generally did not wipe out pre-Christian culture, leaving a rich repository of local folklore at the level of rural communities. Immersed in traditional culture, the peasantry was much longer isolated from external influences, and, consequently, less susceptible to ideological bonds coming from the outside world. [13, pp. 187-188]. As a result, rural communities and their later *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* counterparts in the region remained largely anational, the consequences of which can be seen even today. Also, a gap between urban centres and rural areas and between educated elites and

rural masses has always been greater in the East than in the West. All these factors weakened the process of empowerment of the peasantry. Thus, the Russian nation (*русский народ*) resembles a sacralised community rather than a modern nation of the European type. In addition, as Daniel Beauvois stresses, Orthodox societies of tsarist Russia did not have such access to the school network as Catholic ones [1, pp. 369-370] and their level of literacy was lower [18, p. 172 passim], particularly in rural communities, which formed the overwhelming majority of the population of the region even after the Bolshevik revolution. This hampered their national emancipation and social empowerment, and made them more inclined to become involved in class-oriented activity. As a result, in the Eastern Orthodox area, class ideology won the competition with national ideology, which triumphed in countries west of the Soviet Union after the First World War.

(5) Drawing both on the concept of Holy Rus' and on their sense of imperial mission, the Russians developed an idea of an all-Russian nation, (*общерусская нация*), a community uniting Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, based on – as claimed in Russian historiography – their common origin, religion (Orthodoxy), culture (including the language) and historical past [14, passim]. While in the seventeenth and eighteenth century the concept invoked an alleged political and ethnic community of Kievan Rus', the second half of the nineteenth century saw attempts to create a consolidated Orthodox community of East Slavs by identifying Rus'ness with Orthodoxy. This approach was extended to the territories of the former Commonwealth, where the Greek Catholic Church had been abolished in 1839. As Belarusians did not develop their national elites until the end of the nineteenth century and the Ukrainian ones were still quite weak, the Belarusian and Ukrainian peasantry identified themselves with Rus'ness as promoted by Petersburg and Moscow. In the course of time, particularly after the land ownership reform and the abolition of serfdom, both peasant societies (at least 95% of Belarusians and Ukrainians in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century lived in rural areas) came to identify themselves with the powerful Orthodox state governed from Petersburg, and often took pride in the connection. This bond, existing at the level of the peasantry, which often still remained illiterate, could not be broken within a relatively short period of development of the Ukrainian and Belarusian national movement in the early twentieth century. The prevailing attitude was to identify oneself as 'an Orthodox, a Rus', a member of a great community headed by the great tsar'. This identification continued even when Orthodoxy came to be

replaced by communism and the tsar by communist rulers. For Russians, in turn, Ukraine and Belarus were a regional extension of their state and their sacralised community.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the establishment of three separate and independent East Slavic republics brought the revival of national tendencies. In the 1990s, Andrzej Lazari observed that ‘Russian nationalism is bound together by a peculiar interpretation of history, which involves tracing «proofs» to a claim that the Russian nation-state-religion has had a special mission to save the world or to introduce the «just» Russian order worldwide’ [10, p. 149]. As a result of social processes operating in the Soviet Union (and to a certain extent also in the tsarist Russia), Russianness is not clearly defined in terms of ethnicity or nationality, but rather in terms of language and, most importantly, religion (which is obviously not meant here in the sense of individual religious practice). Its social and territorial extent is rather vague: in general perception, as Rus’ness, it includes also Ukrainians and Belarusians; as Russianness (in the political sense), it tends to be extended to include the non-Slavic peoples of the Russian Federation. Attempts to combine the two options lead to conflicts, such as the one following the Maidan in Ukraine in 2014.

Unlike the burgher ethos of the more urbanised West, the cultural-political, sacralised dimension of Russianness is deeply rooted in peasant culture, and its contents make it a Huntingtonian civilisation rather than an occidental nation. This stems not only from the nature of Russian culture and the course of the country’s history, but also from the backwardness of the tsarist era and the anational character of the Soviet Union. It is hardly surprising that Russian peasantry did not develop a national identity of the western type in the environment dominated by the Orthodox Rus’ness of the tsarist period or its Soviet cultural counterpart. Although the urbanisation of the country in the Soviet era did not bring any major change in this respect, it does not mean that the same pattern is true for today’s Russia. Indeed, the country is going through the national (or even nationalist) process, involving the emergence of a number of organisations which promote views and mechanisms analogical, to a certain extent, to the historical pattern of European evolution.

In today’s Russia, the Orthodox Church is held in high social esteem, as is the case also in Belarus and Ukraine. However, it is particularly Russia and Belarus where the Church is strongly connected with the state in terms of a hierarchical system of power. Andrzej Wierzbicki

observes that ‘[f]or the Orthodox Church, the most acceptable type of nationalism is its cultural variety, defining Russian culture in terms of past or present religious identity (not necessarily connected with actual religious practice), even though the Church does not officially use the term nationalism itself. Cultural nationalism fits the «civilisational approach». (...) As the Russian Orthodox Church does not want to be limited only to a national institution, it proposes a community broader than one based on ethnicity or political nationality: it is a community of civilisation built on the foundation of the Orthodox religion and Orthodox culture. (...) Defined in terms of Orthodox culture, Russian nationalism construes a hierarchy of nations and proposes a national identity based on Orthodox nationalism³ [16, pp. 124-125].

3. Orthodoxy in Belarus and Ukraine

Although the roots of modern Belarusian and Russian Orthodoxy are certainly Russian, the entire cultural heritage involving the conflation of religion and Russianness which had emerged in the course of the evolution in the preceding centuries was not transposed onto Belarusian and Ukrainian society. In the Belarusian and Ukrainian territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Orthodoxy had been pushed out by the Greek Catholic Church. Its modern version spread there relatively late, in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Uniate Church in 1839, becoming rooted only after the fall of the January Uprising (1863–1864) and the subsequent influx of Orthodox clergy from Russia. Previously, the area had been dominated by culturally westernised Uniate priests.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century (after the Third Partition of the Commonwealth), Belarusians did not have Orthodox elites, and the Bolshevik revolution brought an end both to the elites (whether Polish, Russian or, quite limited in terms of their number, Belarusian) and the elitist tradition as such. The period of tsarist rule was not long enough to enable the transfer of the entire wealth of Russian culture associated with Orthodoxy to the Belarusian peasantry, especially con-

³ ‘Some leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church try to promote a hierarchy of religious and ethnic communities, whereby the state-making Orthodox nation is at the top, followed by the so-called traditional religions and their ethnic communities (Islam, Buddhism and Judaism) and the so-called non-traditional ones (Catholicism and Protestantism)’ [16, p. 125, note 471].

sidering that Belarusians had been exposed to the nation making process (generally involving a strong emotional dimension of culture and attributing a sense of obligation to values) only to a very limited extent, even in the Russian understanding of the term. Following mass executions, Belarusian elites of the Soviet period included bureaucrats rather than intellectuals. Consequently, Belarusian (and Ukrainian) culture is not saturated with imperial attitudes and neither does it have a strongly sacral character typical of its Russian counterpart. On the other hand, it does include other elements of Russianness, such as a tendency to build vertical social structures, or submit to political power (both of them stemming, to an extent, from caesaropapism).

Writing about the Donbas, the most Russified (and Sovietised) region of Ukraine (except for the Crimea), Oleksii Chupa observes that '(...) the slogan «For the Holy Rus'» means nothing to an average Donbas person. On the other hand, it is a sacred phrase for a Russian, who was brought up on the chauvinist propaganda' [6, pp. 35–36]. Although for the most part of the twentieth century both Belarus and Ukraine were exposed to Sovietisation and the Russian language was employed as a means in the process of indoctrination, it was not a factor of Russification in terms of nationality, whatever the definition of the term.⁴

Russia, along with Belarus and Ukraine, has been characterised by a considerable extent (much greater than, for example, in Poland) of the phenomenon which Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński refers to as 'social dimorphism' (or 'dimorphism of values'), whereby the individual is oriented 'towards two parallel and distinct sets of values, depending whether he or she functions in the public or private sphere', which means that the same person would have different attitudes and express different opinions in public and in private [17, p. 45]. Thus, on the one hand, there is a clear domination of the political elite, coupled with a theatricalisation and ideologisation of public life, in which public institutions only superficially follow the western models. On the other hand, owing to a low level of empowerment, the overwhelming majority of society does not

⁴ The term sometimes used in this context is 'Russian civilisational nationalism'. Considering a specific (not entirely national) nature of the 'Russian civilisation', I think that in situations involving extreme intensity of attitudes characterised by superiority and aggression (and based on a set of values which, as viewed by the Russians, define the Russian civilisation), a more adequate term would probably be 'civilisational chauvinism' or 'imperial-cultural chauvinism'.

engage in social activity. This situation is conducive to the spreading of rumour, conspiracy theories and to closing within primary groups. Although the source of this phenomenon can be traced back mainly to the Soviet political reality, it was probably fostered also by Russian Orthodoxy with its traditional gap between the sacred, metaphysical, spiritual world of ideals, which defies rational reasoning, and the world of everyday reality of mostly poor society subjected to generally quite ruthless power of the ruler.⁵ In the context of the Donbas conflict, the traditional gap between the authority and society is coupled with a sharp contrast between the propaganda and reality.

It is interesting to observe that the longer the period under the Soviet Union and tsarist Russia, the lower the general level of religious involvement of the Belarusian or Ukrainian Orthodox population. In Belarus, religious involvement is the highest in the western regions of the country, which belonged to Poland before the Second World War. The pattern is the same in Ukraine, both in the case of the Uniate region of Galicia and the Orthodox region of Volhynia, as well as in the Right Bank of the Dnieper, which belonged to the Commonwealth, as opposed to the Left Bank, and particularly to the former so-called New Russia.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Belarusian Orthodox community (just like its Ukrainian counterpart) experienced a phenomenon of religious revival. In atheised urban centres, the process sometimes takes the form of neophytism with all its typical consequences. By contrast, rural areas, not ideologised to a similar extent, were less given to emotional excitement in this sphere, more Orthodox, and Belarusian-speaking. It was the language (and a generally lower level of education than in towns) that functioned, to a certain extent, as a barrier inhibiting the diffusion of high Russian culture (in spite of widespread pro-Soviet and pro-Lukashenka attitudes) among the rural population.

In Ukraine, the elites from the areas dominated by Russian Orthodoxy are less frequent to display their personal religious beliefs or manifest their religious affiliation in public than the Uniate elites from Galicia. Their counterparts from the central-eastern part of the country are traditionally urban, Russian-speaking, have Soviet identity and are characterised by a much weaker contact with rural culture, the source

⁵ In regular surveys, Russia is generally characterised by the highest value of the Gini coefficient of income inequality among the European countries (always above the level of 0.40). This situation can be attributed to a number of factors.

of Ukrainian identity. Western Ukraine is more attached to peasant traditions, has stronger connections between the urban centres and rural areas, and has a more consolidated national identity based on the Ukrainian language.⁶

In Belarus, the Orthodox population belongs to the Russian Orthodox Church. Andrzej Mironowski comments that ‘Belarusian authorities are currently opposing any attempts to make the Orthodox Church truly Belarusian’ [11, p. 309]. From the early days of its presence in Belarus in the nineteenth century, the Russian Orthodox Church (along with Petersburg and, later on, Moscow political authorities) has been the main instrument of assimilating Belarusianness and making it a cultural (or even national) extension of Russianness. By contrast, the founders of the Belarusian national movement were Catholics. They have also been clearly overrepresented in the national part of the political spectrum after 1991, even though a large proportion of Catholics in Belarus consider themselves as Poles. It can therefore be said that the Orthodox Church orients Belarus towards the East, which under the present circumstances hinders Belarusian national aspirations: as national separatism breaks the cultural-national unity with the Russians, it is difficult to accept for the Church. On the other hand, the Catholic Church (whether Belarusian- or Polish-oriented) leads Belarusians towards the West and thus, as it were, naturally consolidates their tendency to separate themselves from Moscow. This is particularly the case of Belarusian orientation within the Catholic Church which increasingly uses Belarusian as the language of liturgy.

In Ukraine, the most pro-national stand is taken by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, culturally oriented towards Europe and dominating in Galicia. It displays the same attitude in Belarus, where, however, its presence is barely noticeable. Volhynia (where the population has a consolidated national identity) and the central regions of the country are dominated by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate, openly separatist from Moscow, supporting the Maidan in 2014 and the pro-European course in Ukraine. Holding opposite views, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate is influential mainly in the most Russified and Sovietised southern and eastern regions, which

⁶For these remarks on Ukraine, I am grateful to Mr Andrzej Jekaterynczuk from the Institute of Sociology at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, currently working on his PhD thesis on Ukrainian collective identities.

distanced themselves from the Second Maidan (2014). While its bishops and clergy are not uniform in their attitudes, the Church in general is in favour of cultural unity of Ukrainians and Russians. It is important to observe that while western Ukraine does not exceed 20% of the total population of the country, the ‘Maidan-camp’ (i.e. prior to the outbreak of violence) drew 42.4% of its participants from this region, and the corresponding figure for the ‘Maidan-Sich’ (i.e. in the period of violence in February 2014) was 54.8%⁷ [7, p. 162].

At the beginning of 2015, in Russia, the return to imperial tradition, a tendency gathering momentum for quite some time, is clearly visible, and the term imperialism itself is increasingly being used in a positive sense. It is a tradition of an Orthodox state, in which the Church is subordinated to political authority and promotes the imperial-nationalist values (which can be seen, for example, in the case of the Ukrainian conflict). Russia sees its aims in terms of consolidating ‘the Russian world’, and perceives itself as a civilisation threatened by the aggressive West. It is beyond doubt that the East Slavic area between Poland and Russia is currently a scene of a clash between the Western and Eastern circle of culture, or, as Russians firmly put it, the clash of civilisations. It is an objective process stemming from such factors as the economic inefficiency of the Russian model of state and society.

Russian Orthodoxy is certainly not the only religion which petrifies a traditional vision of the world, although the extent of this phenomenon in Protestantism is far more limited. As such, in a number of aspects, it can be seen as the opposite of Sovietism. Obviously, Orthodox religious practices and strong parish structures are more conducive to building a community based on non-Soviet values, including, in some circumstances (autocephaly), also national ones. While Orthodoxy as such,

⁷ According to Vakhtang Kipiani (the editor of ‘Istorychna Pravda’ (Historical Truth) website, a former television journalist and the former editor of the Ukrainian edition of Forbes magazine), in 1990, the Ukrainian Helsinki Union had 3,000 members, 2,300 of whom were from Galicia and the rest from other regions [8, s. 120]. Also, Rukh (the Popular Movement of Ukraine for Restructuring, established in 1989, the Ukrainian equivalent of Sajudis in Lithuania and the Popular Fronts in the other two Baltic Republics) was founded mainly by activists from Galicia and Kiev, with communities of the eastern and southern regions underrepresented in the movement at the time.

unlike Protestantism, does not display any prominent pro-modernising features, it can accompany the processes of modernisation, even if it plays no direct part in stimulating them. Thus, in present-day western and central Ukraine, the Orthodox church may become a factor in the process of separation from Moscow-defined Rus'ness, and building a sense of a new, anti-Soviet, national Ukrainian identity.

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