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Orthodoxy and the Search for Identity in Contemporary Russia

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Abstract

This paper examines important issues associated with the search for national identity in contemporary Russia following the disappearance of the Soviet Union, particularly the contribution of Orthodoxy to that discussion. It considers the historical context in which the debate about identity has taken place and the reasons for the re-emergence of Orthodoxy as a significant marker of identity. The analysis adopts a philological approach in recognition of the need for an accurate understanding of matters of language to elucidate the debate and to clarify the role of Orthodoxy.

Introduction

[1] This paper represents an attempt to explain certain aspects of the complex and significant connection between Orthodoxy and identity in post-Soviet Russia. It is not intended to be a contribution to the study of the vexed question of the relationship between the Eastern and Western Churches, and offers no explicit insights into the long history of East-West ecclesiastical relations. Nor is it intended to pass judgment on the Churches. Rather it provides some understanding of the role of Orthodoxy in the cultural development of Russia and the construction of a post-Soviet national identity. It is hoped that it will promote mutual respect between East and West.

[2] The approach taken here to the question of Orthodoxy and identity in Russia is intentionally philological. This reflects the view that the question must be considered within its cultural and linguistic context and that a failure to observe the specific semantic distinctions that relate to the discussion of these matters in Russian (as opposed to those

drawn by other languages) may lead to serious misunderstandings. As the famous American linguist Sapir has noted: “The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not the same world with different labels attached” (quoted in Lyons: 432). Doubtless this statement requires qualification, since clearly these worlds are not discrete. But it must be emphasized that language holds the key to an understanding of culture and offers an important pathway to the realm of ideas.

Orthodoxy and Russian Culture

[3] The collapse and disappearance of the Soviet Union was one of the cataclysmic events of the late twentieth century. Hardly predicted even a few years before it occurred, it marked the start of a new chapter in the long and turbulent history of Russia. (The same can be said *mutatis mutandis* of the other independent states that appeared on the territory of the former Soviet Union after the collapse of the USSR. There is no suggestion that Russia and the Soviet Union should be considered coterminous.) But the new sovereign state that emerged as the Russian Federation (*Rossiiskaia federatsiia*) remains an enigma for many observers: it appears to share significant political and social characteristics with Western countries, while displaying unexpected and prominent features that set it apart. The Constitution of the Russian Federation, for example, is avowedly democratic in every respect, yet the implementation of the Constitution seems to fall far short of its stated provisions. Everyday life does not reflect its high ideals. At the same time, contemporary Russia shows a strong popular identification with religion. There is widespread and deeply felt religious devotion that finds its expression in the Orthodox Church. In the discussion that follows we shall examine the phenomenon of contemporary Orthodoxy and attempt to elucidate some of the reasons for its re-establishment as a critical component of Russian life and an important marker of identity in the post-Soviet period. We shall also discuss the vigorous public debate that has accompanied these developments in Russia.

[4] The current prominence of the Orthodox Church is not without precedent. It recalls the Church’s long-standing and pivotal role in the religious and cultural life of Russia. Even during the Soviet era, under conditions of repression and persecution, it continued to be a significant institution. The Church has served as a rich source of spirituality and has had a deep influence on creativity of all kinds: literature, music, art, architecture, philosophy, and political thought. At various times the leading role of the Church in Russia has been contested. This was so during the reign of Peter the Great and especially during the period before the Revolution of 1917. Once more the place of the Church has become the subject of public argument. But whether the reaction to Orthodoxy is positive or negative, it remains a powerful cultural determinant.

[5] Evidence of the lasting influence of Orthodoxy on Russian culture is easy to find. If we consider, for example, the Russian language and alphabet, its history refers us immediately to the missionary activity of the Eastern Church and to the pioneering work of the Thessalonian Apostles to the Slavs, SS. Cyril and Methodius, in the ninth century. Their mission to the Western Slavs of Moravia in 863 resulted directly in the creation of a distinct Slavic alphabet and the development of the first Slavic literary language, Old Church Slavonic, intended for the translation of the Greek Scriptures. Along with Greek and Latin, this language was accepted officially by the Church, both Western and Eastern, as one of the

languages of the Christian liturgy (long before the use of the vernacular). At the same time, in contrast to Greek and Latin, Old Church Slavonic did not offer direct access to the literature of classical antiquity and so did not provide a sense of cultural continuity with the classical world. Rather, it encouraged the notion of the separateness of Slavic Orthodox culture. In turn, it contributed strongly to what may be termed the specificity of the Russian world-view with its many profound and far-reaching consequences. It is this specificity that is sometimes ignored or misunderstood by Western commentators, but must be taken into account, however difficult that may be, if Russian culture is to be interpreted in its own terms. Even today the Russian alphabet is referred to as Cyrillic, *kirilitsa*, and the liturgical language of the Orthodox Church remains Church Slavonic, a somewhat modified version of the earliest Slavic literary language, though not fundamentally different.

[6] In the centuries that followed the mission of SS. Cyril and Methodius to Moravia (now part of the modern Czech Republic), Church Slavonic exerted enormous influence on the cultural development of the Orthodox Slavs. Russia shared this inheritance and the modern Russian literary language, while secularized for use in a civil society, cannot be described properly without reference to the vital role of Church Slavonic in its formation. Until the end of the seventeenth century a kind of diglossia existed in Russia where Church Slavonic, fundamentally of South Slavic origin, represented the normative model of the written literary language and Russian, of East Slavic origin, was predominantly used as the spoken language and in some chancellery texts of a non-literary character. Modern literary Russian as such emerged only in the eighteenth century after the reforms of Peter the Great and the introduction of a new so-called civil script based on the Church Slavonic alphabet and designed to approximate the letters more closely to those of the Roman alphabet used in the West.

[7] From these observations it is clear that Orthodoxy has left a concrete legacy in the Russian language: the Cyrillic alphabet and much of the abstract vocabulary, even certain grammatical forms, can be traced back to Church Slavonic. The very idea of literacy is associated directly with the missionary activity of the Church. Such a close historical connection between literacy and Orthodoxy has important implications for the way in which national identity may be constructed. And it differs radically from the history of literacy in the West where the Roman alphabet predated the conversion to Christianity.

[8] Russian literature also carries a strong Orthodox imprint. There are many Russian writers who have treated matters of spirituality in their works, some explicitly Orthodox. Dostoevsky is an obvious example. Others include Bulgakov, Chekhov, Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn, Solov'ev, Tolstoy, Gogol', Khomyakov, Leskov. So numerous are such writers that it is hard to suggest another national literature in Europe that can be compared with Russian literature in this respect. The explanation for this phenomenon may lie in the relatively late secularization of Russia when compared with the West and in the prolonged influence of the Orthodox Church as the major cultural institution in society. (Even after the secularizing reforms of Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century the Church maintained this role.) At a more subtle level it may be possible to discern a propensity in Russia to prefer the literary work as a vehicle for philosophical and religious discourse in contrast to the academic text in keeping with the Orthodox view that the higher truths are to be perceived intuitively rather than purely rationally. The importance of intuition as opposed

to rationality is stressed in Orthodox thought (for a contemporary discussion by a Russian philosopher, see Kuznetsov 2001).

[9] In general one can argue that there can be no comprehension of Russian literature without an appreciation of the profound influence of Orthodoxy on Russian writers and thinkers. Whether these writers have embraced Orthodoxy or rejected it in some way, it represents the conceptual foundation of their culture. This is not to say that all Russian writers can be described as Orthodox or anti-Orthodox in a simple sectarian sense, but rather that their cultural milieu has been so imbued with Orthodoxy that it cannot be understood apart from it.

Orthodoxy, the State and the Concept of the Nation

[10] In the period before the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 the dominance of the Orthodox Church as the major cultural institution in Russia was reinforced by its position in the political structure. Under the Empire Orthodoxy was the established religion in Russia and the Church enjoyed a privileged status. Its history was closely intertwined with the history of the Russian State. Indeed, the very concept of Russia was often formulated in religious terms derived from the notion of Moscow as the centre of Orthodox Christendom. This idea, linked to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, found expression in the famous phrase *Moskva – tretii Rim* (“Moscow is the third Rome”). Even so, as the Empire expanded and the power of the State increased, the independence of the Church was curtailed, most obviously during the reign of Peter the Great, when the Tsar asserted his authority by abolishing the Patriarchate and establishing the Holy Synod.

[11] During the Soviet period the Orthodox Church, like other forms of organized religion in Russia, was suppressed by the State, often with murderous cruelty. At certain times the Church was allowed a very limited degree of freedom, but not until the last years of *perestroika* and *glasnost* was the policy of official suppression lifted. Despite the extreme deprivations inflicted by the State, the Church continued to exert a strong spiritual and cultural influence throughout the era of Soviet rule.

[12] Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Russian Federation the official government view of religion in Russia has been strictly secular. Not even a passing reference to God is made in the Constitution or in the Preamble, and there is certainly no provision for an established church. The Constitution demands the absolute separation of church and state. Yet despite these constraints the Orthodox Church has become a vital component of Russian life and its prominent position has been much discussed.

[13] During the Soviet period a single ideology determined a particular concept of the nation, at that time constituted as the USSR. By contrast, in the post-Soviet period various sets of ideas about the nation and its place in the world have competed for dominance. These ideas have a striking presence, as is obvious from the numerous articles that have appeared in the Russian press, which debate the notion of Russia with fierce intensity and intellectual virtuosity. The debate itself represents a cultural phenomenon of profound significance. In both style and content it shows little resemblance to current political discourse in the West. It is a highly charged debate in which language plays a central role and many of the

arguments are presented as expressions of faith. Take the following contribution to the debate by the radical publicist Aleksandr Dugin. Published in 2001, its tone is not unusual.

If we are even to shape an image of Russia's future, then it is only and exclusively on the basis of a total "Yes!" said to *all* the periods of our history, on the basis of an affirmation of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of our Eurasian civilization, of the particular and unique path through time and space. Russia can be either great or nothing. . .

Our patriotism – like our state and our people – has never been small. We are *Great* Russians, we are a *great*-power people. If we have grown weary and cannot continue thus any more, then the voice of our forebears will not let us rest on what's small. Either great or nothing! (4; author's translation).

[14] There are many parties to this discussion in Russia and many well-articulated points of view. They reflect a deep crisis of identity triggered by the demise of the Soviet Union and intensified by the economic collapse that followed. They form part of a wider discussion about the collective identity of the nation and its place in the post-Soviet world order. When the Soviet Union disappeared, it was replaced by newly independent sovereign states on the territories of the former Soviet republics. But this was not a uniform process: the effect was very different in Russia. Whereas most states experienced a sense of liberation from the Soviet yoke, Russia experienced an enormous sense of loss – a loss of prestige, power, and influence abroad. For the Russian republic, the RSFSR, had been by far the largest and most populous of the Soviet republics and had been so dominant economically and politically that Russia and the Soviet Union were synonymous, certainly in the thinking of many Russians. Moscow had served as the Soviet capital and the Russian language as the Soviet lingua franca. So the disappearance of the Soviet Union deprived Russia of its status as a world power and contributed greatly to anxiety about the nation's identity and place in the world. (Here it should be noted the conflation of Russia with the Soviet Union was reflected at the lexical level by the use of the term *Rossia* to denote the USSR. Such conflation was also common in the West. This tendency towards simplification through identification of the Soviet Union with Russia has potentially serious consequences, since it can lead easily to an inadequate representation of the repression and suffering inflicted on millions of Russians during the Soviet period.)

Language and Identity

[15] The current debate about identity in Russia is therefore driven by the pressing need to reinvent the nation. It is a debate that is characterized by a complex set of ideas and a subtle use of language. Often the terms involved are difficult to translate: they draw semantic distinctions that cannot be conveyed succinctly outside Russian. What is the significance when Medvedev is styled *rossiiskii prezident*, the language he speaks is called *russkii iazyk*, and Kiev is referred to as *mat' russkikh gorodov*? In each case the adjective "Russian" would tend to appear in the English translation, though the original adjective expresses three distinct notions. Even the ideas discussed in the debate rarely correspond to the concepts that dominate contemporary Western discourse. This is a different conceptual field. Prominent Russian cultural historians, Iu. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskii, have noted the specificity of Russian culture and the problem in conveying the meaning of the Russian worldview in the

terms of Western thought. In discussing the cultural background of early nineteenth-century Russia, they refer to “this paradoxical untranslatability of certain basic features of Russian culture into the language of common European political terminology of the beginning of the nineteenth century” (171; author’s translation). An analogous comment applies to the cultural background of post-Soviet Russia.

[16] What is the linguistic context of the debate about identity in Russia? In contemporary standard Russian the set of key terms that are most relevant to the debate consists of two adjectives and two nouns very loosely considered pairs of synonyms, but more precisely to be regarded as pairs of contrasting paronyms. It is the complex use of these terms that permits a subtle construction of national and ethnic identity, but it is a use that can hardly be gauged from dictionary definitions. The two adjectives in the set are normally translated into English as “Russian,” into German as “russisch.” One is the adjective *rossiiskii*, the other is *russkii*. The first adjective, *rossiiskii*, is derived from the noun *Rossiiia* (“Russia”), while the second, *russkii*, is formed from the noun *Rus’*, denoting the medieval lands of the Eastern Slavs. In turn these two adjectives correspond to two distinct nouns, *rossiianin* and *russkii*. (The second, *russkii*, functions grammatically as a noun, but is inflected according to the adjectival paradigm.) What is the difference in meaning between the two adjectives, *rossiiskii* and *russkii*? The first, *rossiiskii*, describes national identity in the sense of citizenship; the second, *russkii*, denotes ethnic identity. The first term covers all citizens of the Russian Federation without regard to ethnic origins. The second term is applied to those whose ethnic origins are deemed to be Russian. In this way the language permits differentiation between national and ethnic identity, since the two groups denoted by the two terms overlap but do not coincide.

[17] At the same time it should be noted that the adjective *russkii* is polysemous: it can have a secondary meaning, though this is rare. It may occur occasionally in certain fixed phrases and refer directly to *Rus’*. It has this connotation in the well-known saying *Kiev – mat’ russkikh gorodov*. This must be translated as “Kiev is the mother of the cities of Rus’” (as the Ukrainian translation of the saying proves beyond doubt).

[18] The semantic distinctions drawn by the adjectives *rossiiskii* and *russkii*, often blurred in English translation, have a deep resonance in Russian. The first adjective sounds a note that is formal and official; the second has a more intimate and emotive tone. And so certain nouns regularly combine with one or the other to form standard phrases: *Rossiiskoe gosudarstvo* and *Rossiiskaia Imperiia* signify the State and the Empire, *Russkii Tsar’* and *Russkaia Pravoslannaia Tserkov’* denote the Tsar and the Church.

[19] The native language of those considered to have Russian ethnicity is described as *russkii iazyk*, though not all those who speak Russian as their first or even sole language are deemed to be ethnically Russian. Language is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for membership of the ethnic group, since the criteria for Russian ethnicity relates to more than just language. Religion may also serve as a criterion. Even a person’s surname can be taken as an indicator of ethnicity. This is encouraged by the fact that surnames in Russian carry distinct morphological markers relating to their linguistic provenance, so that it is relatively easy to determine a surname’s ethnic origin. Surnames with the suffixes *-in* and *-ov* are generally Russian in origin (*Pushkin*, *Grishin*, *Chekhov*, *Petrov*), those with *-enko* and *-chuk* are

Ukrainian (*Bondarenko, Kravchuk*), those with *-shvili* and *-dze* are Georgian (*Abramashvili, Dumbadze*), and so on. Similarly, surnames with no suffix (that is, with a zero marker) are usually foreign in origin, even if well known (*Blok, Unbegaun*). These surnames are only partially assimilated into the grammatical patterns of Russian, since they lack corresponding feminine forms (for a detailed and definitive study of surnames in Russian, see Unbegaun). Those people who are held to have Russian ethnicity are designated by the noun *russkii*, while those who are considered citizens of Russia are designated by the noun *rossiianin*. The term *russkii* thus functions as an ethnonym, and as such may be applied to some living outside the borders of Russia.

[20] According to the Russian Constitution Russia has two official names: *Rossia* and *Rossiiskaia federatsiia*. Significantly, the second name makes use of the non-ethnic term *rossiiskii*, stressing the multiethnic composition of the population. While conventionally translated into English as the Russian Federation, it would be rendered more precisely as the Federation of Russia. In this paper the translation “Russian Federation” is used in deference to the official name in English adopted by the United Nations. Note that *Rossiiskaia federatsiia* recalls the official name of the Russian Republic during the Soviet period: *Rossiiskaia Sovetskaia Federativnaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika*, though at that time the adjective *rossiiskii* was not used to express nationality. This was conveyed by the term *sovetskii*.

[21] It follows then that the semantic distinctions drawn by the adjectives *rossiiskii* and *russkii* in Russian permit a careful differentiation at the lexical level between national and ethnic identity. This contrasts sharply with many European languages where one term refers to both, so that context alone must be relied on to avoid ambiguity. Even a language closely related to Russian such as Ukrainian uses one term to denote both nationality and ethnicity.

[22] How can one define what may be termed the official contemporary view of the nation? Such a view is expressed formally and unequivocally in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. This is a model secular Constitution that was drafted with the assistance of constitutional experts from the Netherlands, and shares the political values of the West. It eschews the rhetoric of nationalism and defines the nation strictly as a democratic state governed by the rule of law. Under the Constitution all citizens have equal rights irrespective of ethnicity. Even the Preamble avoids reference to the glories of the past. It acknowledges explicitly the multiethnic character of the population.

We, the multiethnic people of the Russian Federation, united on our land through a common fate, affirming the rights and freedoms of man, civil peace and concord, preserving the historically established unity of the state, proceeding from the commonly accepted principles of equality of rights and self-determination of peoples, honoring the memory of our forebears who have passed on to us love and respect for the Fatherland, faith in goodness and justice, reviving the sovereign statehood of Russia and asserting the firmness of her democratic foundation, striving to ensure the welfare and prosperity of Russia, on the basis of responsibility for our Homeland to present and future generations, acknowledging ourselves as part of the world community, accept THE CONSTITUTION OF THE RUSSIAN

FEDERATION (Government of the Russian Federation; author's translation).

[23] This is a significant statement. But the Constitution and the polity it defines lack popular appeal and hardly serve as markers of national identity. The status of the Constitution has been seriously undermined by the realities of political life. If the previous Constitution of the USSR was seen to fail to ensure the proper conduct of the State, then in post-Soviet Russia there is also a strong perception of a discrepancy between the functioning of the political system and the requirements of the Constitution. As in any constitutional democracy the experience of the citizens as they interact with the political process has a profound effect on the degree to which they identify with the Constitution and its polity.

Orthodoxy as a Marker of Identity

[24] Given the weak status of the Constitution as a marker of national identity in Russia, it is to be expected that the quest for identity will encourage other markers to take its place. And traditional markers tend to emerge, since they are already well established as powerful labels of self-definition, and have an emotional appeal and weight of tradition that the recently written Constitution does not. Prominent among these markers is the Orthodox Church.

[25] If one seeks an explanation for the special position of Orthodoxy in this construction of national identity, then it should be remembered that Orthodoxy has provided the conceptual and moral framework of Russian culture and been the major influence in the history of Russian creativity. Even literacy and the alphabet can be related directly to the missionary work of the Church. Furthermore, the Church represents one of the very few public institutions from pre-revolutionary Russia that has survived the cataclysm of the Soviet period and continues to exist in the post-Soviet state that emerged after the disappearance of the USSR. In a country where the political structures have been subjected to two radical revolutions in less than eighty years, and where the polity has been fundamentally altered as a result, the Church offers continuity with the past and a powerful means of self-definition.

[26] But the relationship of Orthodoxy to the question of identity is complex and many-sided. So while the Church functions as an important identity marker in this construction, it does not mean that it is confined to this role or that this role adequately represents it. There are significant doctrines of Orthodoxy that make claims to universality and that transcend notions of national and ethnic identity. Some within the Church prefer to stress these doctrines, while others are more inclined to emphasize its national importance.

[27] The official view of the Church proclaims its universal and supranational character. The Church is seen as the community of the children of God without respect to nationality, ethnicity, and class. Theirs is a heavenly kingdom and their capital is the new Jerusalem, not on this earth, but in heaven. In the words of the official website of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate:

By its very nature the Church has a universal and, consequently, supranational character. In the Church "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" [Rom 10:12] . . . While being universal by nature, the Church is simultaneously a single organism, a body [1 Cor 12:12]. It is the community of the children of God, . . . The new people of God "do not have a

permanent city here, but seek the future one” [Heb 13:14]. The spiritual homeland of all Christians is not the earthly, but the “heavenly” Jerusalem [Gal 4:26] . . . (2000a; author’s translation).

[28] At the same time the Church encourages national loyalty and devotion to an earthly homeland, however constituted. It warns of the dangers of excessive nationalism, while affirming the equality of all peoples and demanding the subordination of the state to God.

However, the universal character of the Church does not mean that Christians should not have the right to national independence, to national self-expression. On the contrary, the Church combines a universal origin with a national one. Thus, the Orthodox Church, while universal, consists of a multitude of Autocephalous Local Churches. Orthodox Christians, acknowledging that they are citizens of a heavenly country, ought not to forget about their earthly homeland. . .

At the same time national feelings can become the cause of sinful phenomena, such as aggressive nationalism, xenophobia, national exclusivity, interethnic enmity. In their extreme expression these phenomena often lead to a restriction of the rights of individuals and peoples, to wars and other manifestations of violence.

Contrary to Orthodox ethics is the division of peoples into superior and inferior, the belittling of any ethnic or civil nation. All the more incompatible with Orthodoxy are doctrines that put the nation in the place of God or reduce faith to one of the aspects of national consciousness (Moscow Patriarchate 2000a; author’s translation).

[29] The idea of the universality of the Orthodox Church is strengthened at the lexical level by the association of the Church with the adjective *kafolicheskii*, derived from the Greek. It contrasts with the related adjective *katolicheskii*, which refers to the Western Church. Since *kafolicheskii* (rather than *katolicheskii*) occurs in the Creed, it relates the Orthodox Church to the notion of universality by the same means of lexical identification as the term “catholic” in the case of the Western Church, but at the same time clearly distinguishes the Orthodox Church from the Catholic Church. The existence of the two adjectives, *kafolicheskii* and *katolicheskii*, plays an important role of differentiation.

[30] While proclaiming its universality, the Orthodox Church also strongly defends the special relationship of each Autocephalous Church to the nation each represents, where that nation can be considered predominantly Orthodox. In the case of Russia, the central role of the Church in creating and maintaining the identity of the nation, particularly during the dark period of Soviet rule, is seen to give weight to the claims of a special relationship. And the nation is regarded as a single community of faith.

When the nation, civil, or ethnic, is fully or mainly a uniconfessional Orthodox community, it can be taken in a certain sense as a single community of faith, an Orthodox people (Moscow Patriarchate 2000a; author’s translation).

[31] Yet, significantly, the Church represents more than just Russia. It also represents Rus', where Rus' was originally the medieval domain of all the Eastern Slavs. This idea is clearly expressed in the terminology of the Church: the Patriarch carries the title *Patriarkeb Moskovskii i vseia Rusi* (Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'). Although in the West, through unfamiliarity and without apparent difficulty, Rus' may be loosely equated with Russia, the distinction in Russian between the terms *Rus'* and *Rossiiia* (Russia) has profound importance and strong resonance. For the historical domain of Rus' included a population whose descendants eventually formed three separate, but closely related nations: Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. So the Church of Rus' (as opposed to Russia) is already seen to extend naturally beyond the boundaries of Russia. It is both multinational and multiethnic, in the modern sense. This is confirmed by the official description of the Church as *mnogonatsional'naia*, given in the General Statutes of the Church's Charter, as presented on the website of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Russian Orthodox Church is a multiethnic Autocephalous Local Church, which is in dogmatic unity and prayerful canonical communion with other Local Orthodox Churches (Moscow Patriarchate 2000b; author's translation).

[32] At the same time Rus' has great symbolic significance. And this extends to both politics and religion. Although it has disappeared from the map of Europe, it remains a symbol of statehood and spirituality. It is a sacred place: *Sviataia Rus'* (Holy Rus'), associated with the formal adoption of Christianity by Vladimir in 988.

[33] The importance of Rus' as a symbol, both political and religious, can hardly be overstated. But it remains contentious. How is Rus' to be interpreted in terms of the history of the nations whose forebears once inhabited its territory? Even the right to the symbol is contested by those who seek to claim the legacy of Rus' as the inheritance of their own nation to the exclusion of other national groups. Some Russian and Ukrainian nationalists wish to make the symbol uniquely theirs, thereby creating an ideological conflict that is difficult to resolve.

[34] As a sacred place, *Sviataia Rus'* contrasts sharply with the secular world. This can be seen clearly from the following passage, taken from an autobiographical piece by the well-known Russian poet, Nikolai Kliuev, who was murdered by the Soviet authorities in 1937. Kliuev refers directly to Holy Rus'.

I came to know that the invisible Jerusalem of the people is not a fairy tale, but a near and most dear reality. I came to know that, besides the visible structure of the life of the Russian people in the form of the state or an altogether human society, there exists, concealed from proud gazes, a secret hierarchy, an invisible church – Holy Rus'; that everywhere, whether in a coastal hut, in the drifting Olonets snow or in a village beyond the Caspian, there are souls that are bound together by an oath to save the world, an oath to take part in God's plan. And this plan is the completion, the revelation of the beauty of the face of God (author's translation).

[35] Note the directness of the language. In imagery and ideas the passage recalls the writing of the English poet and visionary, William Blake. While Kliuev is discovering Jerusalem in Russia, Blake is building Jerusalem in England.

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills? . . .

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land (514).

[36] Rus' serves as a major rhetorical topos in Russian historical and literary discourse and occupies a central place in the conceptual framework of Russian political and religious thought. It also brings to mind the discourse of the Jews, for, as a symbol of national and spiritual awakening, it has a function that is similar to that of Israel in Jewish thinking, even if there are clear differences. In terms of typology, Rus' and Israel show a striking similarity. And in its symbolic role the figure of Vladimir bears a close resemblance to that of Moses.

[37] The matter of the distinction between *Rus'* and *Rossia* is far from trivial. To ignore the difference between the terms is to distort the picture of the Orthodox Church, since it allows the Church to be portrayed as narrowly nationalist in contrast to its far more complex character. As in the case of the Catholic Church in Poland (and in certain other countries), the Orthodox Church is simultaneously national and multinational, however contradictory that may seem. It affirms the identity of the nation, but within the context of the community of nations, just as it affirms the identity of the individual within the context of society. Even the official name of the Church, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov'*, is not entirely unambiguous. For, as we have seen, the adjective *ruskii* is polysemous. It may refer to *Rus'* and have a historical significance that goes beyond the meaning of the name Russia.

Conclusion

[38] In summing up, what conclusions can be drawn from this investigation of Orthodoxy and identity in post-Soviet Russia? There are several.

1. Language plays a critical role in the debate about identity.
2. The conceptual and linguistic framework of the debate does not correspond closely to ideas and terminology current in Western discourse. The semantic distinctions drawn by the Russian terms used in the debate are not easily conveyed in another language.
3. At a time of deep searching for identity, Orthodoxy has enormous intellectual and emotional appeal. It provides a coherent view of the world and of man's destiny that offers a sense of meaning not given by the current political and economic system. It imparts value to the nation through its long association with Russian culture and history, while reminding the nation of its moral obligations.

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