

## Introduction

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of the new Russian Federation, the people of Russia found themselves at an existential crossroads. Alongside the creation of their new nation, they had to construct a new identity for themselves. Would they be like other nations in Europe and follow the path of Westernized modern democracy? Or, would they look down the path that had been taken by their Slavic ancestors more than a century before and return to the ideals of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality?” The journey to forge a Post-Soviet identity within the Russian Federation has been a tumultuous. Different factions have risen up to suggest different paths. Some members of the intelligentsia and liberal politicians have declared the new path to be one towards a democratic and civil society that can “unleash the people’s initiative and to protect them from the egotism of those in power.”<sup>1</sup> Others, however, have expressed an affinity for the past and a return to the “unification of all Russian land around a single spiritual (religious) and political (great power) center, that, after the victory at Kulikovo, by all rights became Moscow.”<sup>2</sup> It is within this existential dichotomy that the Russian people search for an identity.

Russia’s search for identity has resulted in several ideological movements within its society. In my thesis, I will discuss two movements that have been made into one and have had a profound effect not only on Russia’s existential question, but also on its pragmatic reality. These movements have not only affected the search for identity, but they have also affected areas such as Russian foreign policy. The first of these

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<sup>1</sup> Billington, 100

<sup>2</sup> Allensworth, 132

movements has been a resurgence of interest in Orthodox Christianity, and, in particular, the Russian Orthodox Church. The second is a growing tide of nationalism that has strongly asserted itself in Russian society and politics. The intermixing of these two movements has been a form of religious nationalism that has greatly affected the modern Russian state..

In the post-Soviet sphere, the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Federation conduct what I refer to as “parallel conflicts,” or conflicts involving states and ecclesial bodies that exist in the same area and over similar issues. In parallel conflicts, the ROC and Russian Federation exhibit significant diplomatic. The conflicts that exist between churches and the conflicts that exist between Russia and other states share similar characteristics, and it seems as if the ROC and Russian state follow closely to each other’s lead. This symbiotic relationship results in a form of religious nationalism that powerfully asserts itself in the post-Soviet sphere, an area marked for its high Orthodox population and extensive ethnically Russian diaspora.

Russia’s place in the global order is of significant concern to policy makers and political analysts. It is the largest nation in the world, is one of the top ten economies in the world, and has the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons. For these reasons, it is important to understand the effect religious nationalism has on the Russian state and people. The study of religious nationalism in Russia is, in my opinion, a matter that deserves attention.

This thesis explores the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) to determine the extent of influence that religious nationalist ideals have over foreign policy. During the 2008 Russia-

Georgia conflict, the ROC and GOC displayed a relationship that was different from that seen in other parallel conflicts such as those in Ukraine and Estonia. The Russian Federation engaged in an armed conflict with Georgia while the ROC decried the conflict and respected the GOC's canonical integrity, whereas the Russian state and ROC showed similar concerns over political and ecclesial conflicts in Ukraine and Estonia. This thesis asks the question: what was the relationship of the ROC and the GOC during the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, and what does this relationship say about religious nationalism in Russia?

The first chapter of this thesis discusses theoretical understandings of religious nationalism and how they apply to the socio-political context of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, this chapter uses the theoretical understandings to explore the facets of the Russian society and political structure that allowed for the emergence of religious nationalist sentiments.

The second chapter looks at the ROC as a transnational political actor and examines the impact of the ROC on decisions of policy that are made by the Russian Federation. This section uses Brian Hocking and Michael Smith's three requisites to be called a transnational entity, and discusses how the ROC fulfills these requisites. The second chapter also introduces the three priorities of the ROC in the post-Soviet sphere and shows how these play out in international affairs through looking at conflicts in Ukraine and Estonia that involve both the ROC and the Russian state.

The final chapter consists of the ROC-GOC case study. It outlines the 2008 conflict and focuses on the relationship of the ROC and GOC while comparing and contrasting it to the relationship of the Russian Federation and Georgian government

during the time of the Five-Day War, a brief armed conflict in 2008 in which Russia invaded South Ossetia, a frozen conflict region on the Georgia-Russian border.

This thesis is a critical look at the religious dimension of interstate relations in the former Soviet Union. Through the example of the ROC and the Russian state, I hope to show that the development of religious nationalism in East Europe is an ideological movement that seeks to provide an answer to questions of identity in transitional states, but whose influence also penetrates matters of state such as foreign policy. For this reason, it should be studied, and this is an attempt at just that.

## Religious Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union

“The tendency to turn human judgments into divine commands makes religion one of the most dangerous forces in the world.” – Georgia Harkness, Methodist minister

Throughout the world, there has been an increasing amount of attention paid to the role of religion in society. The “Global War on Terror” has brought to the forefront of Western consciousness the idea of the Islamic terrorist. In Northern Ireland, the conflict between Protestant and Catholic Christians is still carried out in both government buildings and on the street. A similar story occurs in India between the nationalist Hindu population and the minority Islamic population. When it is considered that many social theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim believed that the influence of religion would diminish as the world modernized, it is startling to see that the opposite seems to be true.

Religious nationalism has gained traction in many different locales. One of these locales are the second-world states that were affected directly by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the third-world states that experienced failed socialist and Communist movements.<sup>3</sup> Willfried Spohn writes, “Since the breakdown of Communism, we have been witnessing a world-wide and often parallel revival of nationalism and religion.”<sup>4</sup> He then lists several phenomena accompanying this revival, such as the growth of ethnic

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Spohn, 265

nationalism, strengthening of fundamentalist religious movements, and an overlapping of religious and nationalist interests, all of which have occurred in the post-Soviet sphere.<sup>5</sup>

In the study of the transitional societies and governments of Eastern Europe, there has been extensive research that has paid attention to the political and economic changes in the area. While those are certainly important, the power of religion as a mobilizing national force is one that demands attention. Conflicts such as the Kosovo War and Russia's war in Chechnya, with their overt religious overtones, underscore the importance of understanding the area's religious context. The developing globalized post-Soviet States of East-Europe are an important puzzle piece in the challenging landscape of modern international affairs. Religious nationalism's presence in these states should likewise be considered a part of this landscape. A study of the developing post-Soviet states, many of which have histories of strong religious conviction, warrants a close examination of their religious elements.

For the most prominent post-Soviet nation, Russia, the bells of religious nationalism have rung loudly, and many Russians have followed their call into the embrace of the ROC. Why is this? What has caused the upsurge of religious nationalism in recent Russian history? That question is what this chapter tries to answer. However, to answer that question, a theoretical understanding of religious nationalism is needed which can then be applied to the context of Russia.

### **What is Religious Nationalism?**

Nationalism is easily observed all over the globe. When registering for anything, a person is most likely asked what their "nationality" is. The events discussed in the

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<sup>5</sup> Spohn, Willfried 265

introduction to this chapter, conflicts divided upon the lines of religious borders, provide clear examples of religious nationalism's effects. Despite it's the reality of its existence, it is hard for scholars to fully agree on a definition for it. Most of this problem lies in describing the concept of "nationalism." Many have commented on various facets of nationalism but end up agreeing with Imanuel Geiss, who remarked, "nation and nationalism belong to those 1001 themes on which not even two scholars are at one with each other."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Hugh Seton-Watson wrote, "Thus I am driven to the conclusion that no "scientific definition" of the nation can be devised, yet the phenomenon has existed and exists."<sup>7</sup>

Despite the slippery nature of a definition for the term "nationalism," it is important for the overall scope of this thesis to have a working definition. I do this by discussing two different viewpoints on the growth of religious nationalism. The first view is that of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner that posits nationalism as an outgrowth of modernity. The second, popularized by scholars such as Mark Juergensmeyer and Peter Van Der Veer, believe religious nationalism to be a reaction to globalization and the perceived failure of secular nationalism.

Ernest Gellner, in his seminal work Nations and Nationalism, proposed that nationalism was an inherently modern construction that emerged because of the effects of the Industrial Revolution. In a later book, he wrote, "'In simpler words, agrarian civilizations do not engender nationalism, but industrial and industrial societies do."<sup>8</sup>

This idea is rooted in the French and American Revolutions being the first examples of a

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<sup>6</sup> Merdjanova, Ina 233

<sup>7</sup> Seton-Watson, Hugh 5

<sup>8</sup> Gellner, Ernest, *Culture, Identity, and Politics*, 18

modern concept of nationhood, and, as the effects of the Industrial Revolution spread across Europe, nationalist ideologies followed. Some examples of this are the Serbian revolution (1804-1817) and the Greek revolution (1821-1829) from the Ottoman Empire. Gellner believed that "nationalism is about entry to, participation in, identification with, a literate high culture which is co-extensive with an entire political unit and its total populations, and which must be of this kind if it is to be compatible with the kind of division of labor, the type or mode of production, on which this society is based."<sup>9</sup> He argues that literate, codified culture could only have risen out of the "cluster of economic and scientific changes which have transformed the world since the seventeenth century."<sup>10</sup> Gellner's nationalism is one that relies on an advanced economic system that can produce high culture, one that can create a literate society and engendered forces to rally disparate groups across a nation.

Benedict Anderson makes a similar argument to that of Gellner, one that puts prerequisites on nationalism that are characteristic of modern societies, such as secularization projects and democracy. Moreover, he believed the important quality of these prerequisites was the ability to have universal appeal. He writes, "the creation of these artifacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became 'modular,' capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations."<sup>11</sup> Anderson pinpoints the end of the

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<sup>9</sup> Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism*, 95

<sup>10</sup> Gellner, <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, 4

eighteenth century because it “marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought.”<sup>12</sup> For him, religion and dynastic rule relied on the ability to create an “other” around which to rally, whether it was a rival religion or political party, which is divisive and works against the unifying aspect of nationalist movements. He argues that the cultural roots of nationalism lie against the backdrop of a fading religious community and dynastic realm, not to say that nationalism supersedes either of these, but that nationalism must be contextualized with, or rather “against,” those two cultural systems.<sup>13</sup> In Anderson’s appraisal, the fall of the Latin language as the universal language of the intelligentsia in Europe “exemplified a large process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized.”<sup>14</sup>

In both Gellner’s and Anderson’s accounts of the rise of nationalism, there were specific circumstances that brought about the emergence of national consciousness during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. For Gellner, it was the advent of the Industrial Revolution and its creation of a literate, codified “high culture” that led to nationalism. Anderson placed its beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the advancement of scientific pursuit and philosophy during the Enlightenment alongside the waning of a deeply religious culture living under dynastic realms. These accounts, however influential, have not been without their critiques.

One of these detractors would be Peter Van Deer Veer, author of “Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India.” Van Deer Veer acknowledges the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, 12

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 19

importance of Gellner's argument and its impact on the study of nationalism, but he writes that Gellner theorized in a "characteristically sweeping manner."<sup>15</sup> He believes that Gellner simplified the nature of the universal homogenization of culture as brought on by modernization. "Nationalism creates other nationalism," he writes, and comments that it should be lucid that there exist internal processes that make what is at one moment an anti-national movement a nationalist movement in the next moment.<sup>16</sup> Van Deer Veer's chronicling of religious nationalism in India also takes objection to Gellner's presumption that nationalism is inherently a product of the modern age. The dichotomy that is made between the traditional and the modern is rejected in Van Deer Veer's account. In India the various forms of nationalism that are present are largely derived from older religious identifications. Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu nationalists all find their identities in something that predates "modernization." Van Deer Veer writes that the main problem with these arguments is the delineation that is "based upon an ahistorical and essentializing treatment of culture as either "traditional" or "modern."<sup>17</sup> Instead, Van Deer Veer posits, based on his observation that nationalism is preceded by diffusion, that the "modern is not a result of a historical transition; rather, the "modern" invades the "traditional."<sup>18</sup>

Another theory is that of Mark Juergensmeyer's, author of "The New Cold War: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State." He writes that theorists such as Francis Fukuyama, with his "end of history" thesis must deal with the fact that instead of seeing an increasing global embrace of Western liberal democracy like Fukuyama

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<sup>15</sup> Van Deer Veer, 13

<sup>16</sup> Van Deer Veer, 14

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 16

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 17

predicted, there has been an increase instead of religious and ethnic nationalism.<sup>19</sup>

Juergensmeyer, like Van Deer Veer, sees religious nationalism not as a product of modernity, but rather as a reaction to modernity; a resurrection of the old in the face of the new. Secular nationalism like the kind exhibited in nations such as France and other western European is a product of modernity, whereas religious nationalism is a reaction against modernity and secularization. Gellner and Anderson's modern nationalism would be one that responded to needs such as collective identity, ultimate loyalty, and moral authority without making reference to the authority that previously addressed them: religion.<sup>20</sup> Juergensmeyer writes that secular nationalism is particular to the West and its spread was taken up as a project by Western states promoting the ideals of modernity, democracy, and secularism. Because of this, nations that feel threatened by globalization and the influence of Western democracy rally around two previous identifiers: ethnicity, religion, or, in many cases, a combination of the two.

The effects of globalization on transitional societies such as those in the post-Soviet sphere are subject to increasing amounts of study. Some scholars such as Catarina Kinnvall, associate professor of political science at Lund University, sees globalization as one of the reasons for the rise in religious nationalism. Kinnvall believes that the process of globalization has made many individual and groups "more ontologically insecure and existentially uncertain."<sup>21</sup> She argues that religious nationalism should be viewed as a response to the destabilizing effects of globalization in the "global-local nexus." She references Anthony Giddens, who wrote that globalization tends to break down "the

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<sup>19</sup> Juergensmeyer, 2

<sup>20</sup> Juergensmeyer, 18

<sup>21</sup> Kinnvall, 741

protective framework of the small community and of tradition replacing these with many larger, impersonal organizations.” He continues, “The individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the psychological support and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings.”<sup>22</sup> Kinnvall writes that this leads to a sense of ontological insecurity and existential anxiety that forces individuals and groups to refer back to stories and cultural practices in which they gain a “feeling of biographical continuity where the individual is able to sustain a narrative about the self and answer the questions doing, acting, and being.”<sup>23</sup> In the face of the uncertainty that comes with globalization, religious nationalism offers a narrative that provides security. These narratives are many times rooted deep in the history of a nation (as is the case with the ROC). Therefore, people adopt these narratives as ontological security blankets. Some nations and regions in the post-Soviet sphere have exhibited this by emphasizing their Orthodox (Russia, Ukraine, etc.), Catholic (Poland), or Muslim (Chechnya) identity as a means of unifying the population.

Gellner and Anderson offer great lucidity to the development of nationalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but their frameworks fall short when analyzing Russia. While West Europe and parts of Central Europe experienced nationalism in the patterns of Gellner and Anderson’s analysis, Russia was still operating as a relatively economically backward and insular nation. Enlightenment ideas had considerably less influence in Russia (primarily limited to the upper echelons of society) as opposed to France, so religion provided a largely accepted narrative that lasted until the fall of the monarchy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the Soviet period, religion was replaced with Communist

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<sup>22</sup> Giddens, 33

<sup>23</sup> Kinnvall, 746

ideology as a unifier. Finally, Russia, like many East European nations, hit an ideological “reset” button after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. So, for Russia, the nation-building project per Gellner and Anderson’s assessment would not have occurred until after the fall of the Russian Empire (which subjugated people) and the USSR (which used Communism as a pan-national unifier). The emergence of the Russian “nation,” therefore, emerged in the early 1990s, well after the time periods that Gellner and Anderson focus on.

In the case of Russia, the theories set out by Van Der Veer, Juergensmeyer, and Kinnvall are the most applicable. They encompass the insecurity that Russia feels as a transitional society in a globalized world and deal with the reaction to this insecurity as an adoption of a previous identity. Their views on religious nationalism are in step with the reality of the post-Soviet state as an insecure and changing atmosphere that engenders a desire for stability. Furthermore, they show the phenomenon of the rise in religious nationalist sentiments as a thoroughly modern product.

### **Religious Nationalism and Orthodoxy in Russia**

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has experienced a revival of interest in Orthodoxy. Surveys have shown that the Russian people trust the ROC more than any other public institution in the nation, testifying to its significance in the building of public opinion.<sup>24</sup> According to the US State Department, 100 million Russians identify themselves as Russian Orthodox Christians, though very few of these practice on a

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<sup>24</sup> Knox, 533

regular basis.<sup>25</sup> Out of a population of almost 143 million people, for 100 million to claim allegiance to a specific religious group constitutes a large majority. These numbers act as a testimony to the influence the ROC has with the Russian people.

Similarly, nationalist sentiments have had strong influence after the fall of the Soviet Union. It isn't uncommon for the streets of St. Petersburg or Moscow to play host to marches infused with nationalist rhetoric such as "Russia for Russians" or "Our Russia;" reactions against the perceived encroachment of Western powers and the influx of foreign immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Scholars such as Zoe Knox and James Billington have devoted much academic concern to this phenomenon. Billington noted that during the tumultuous political climate of the late 1990s and early 2000s, "nationalist views of Russian identity offered ideological cement should Russia's fragile democratic institutions break down or social violence break out."<sup>26</sup> With the rise of these two movements, it is understandable that Russia would spawn a religious nationalist movement. However, it is crucial to understand why this happened, and how the ROC fit into these two movements. This section applies the previously discussed theories specifically to the Russian context to better understand religious nationalism in Russia.

#### The Four Needs of the Post-Soviet State: Why Russia Chose Orthodoxy.

In Alexander Agadjanian's study of religious nationalism in East-Europe, he writes that religious identity filled four needs of the new post-Soviet states.<sup>27</sup> The first

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90196.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Knox, 533

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 476-477

was the basic need for protection and security. As I previously wrote about, the loss of the ideological identity of being a “socialist” society based on class consciousness and the challenge of new identities brought on by globalization left people, as Kinnvall termed it, “ontological insecure and existentially anxious.” An important characteristic of feeling secure is the promise of permanence and continuity. To lose that sense of permanence and continuity thrusts societies into a state of insecurity that is then exacerbated by the influx of outside influences that vie for the acceptance of the populace. In Russia, the reason that people revert back to an Orthodox identity was because it represents permanence and continuity. It is a link to the past, to an identity that had been with the Russian people since the Baptism of Rus in 988, the historical foundations of the ROC. Jurgensmeyer wrote:

“In the present period of social turbulence and political confusion-which the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of American economic power have created around the world- it was inevitable that new panaceas would emerge involving religion, sometimes perceived as the only stable rudder in a swirl of economic and political indirection. Moreover, as nations rejected the Soviet and American models of nationhood, they turned to their own past, and to their own cultural resources.”<sup>28</sup>

For many in Russia, Orthodoxy was the cultural resource that could calm their social turbulence and political confusion.

The next need that post-Soviet states have is a need for a venue of socialization that would provide “new webs of communications, patterns of solidarities...”<sup>29</sup> In Russia, the previous web of communication and solidarity had been through the Communist Party. It was the resource through which you were given a job, food, shelter, etc. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, that resource was no more. For a society that had

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<sup>28</sup> Jurgensmeyer, *The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism*, 19

<sup>29</sup> Agadjanian, 476

operated in the Party framework for generations, how would they transition to a framework that didn't include the Party? Once again, Orthodoxy, with its focus on the local church and tight-knit community, offered a new framework. The local church offered a new forum through which the community could socialize and create new networks that would help provide a basis for the new society they were building. Politicians and businessmen began to recognize the power of the Orthodox community and began to view it as a place to meet other influential members of Russia's new social landscape. The opportunity to socialize was offered by Orthodoxy in a way that the liberal democratic agenda pushed by the globalizers could not. To be a part of the globalizer's society, one had to connect to social networks outside of Russia and East Europe, for which the Russian people, after years of isolation within the Soviet Union, were not yet adept. The local Orthodox church offered a social network of familiar peers, not the "others" of Western Europe, America, and elsewhere. Orthodoxy filled the need of the new Russian state for a venue to socialize and did so in a safe, familiar manner.

Another need that religion responded to was that of a cultural argument among the public discourse. Within the new society of the Russian Federation, what would be its culture? As Marxist ideology faded from the public arena, religion filled the void and believers and priests argued for a return to traditional moral values as espoused by the Orthodox faith. Because of this, the ROC has taken credit for the development of culture within Russia. As the Bishop's Council in 2000 stated, "the Church has assimilated much from what has been created by humanity in art and culture, re-melting the fruits of creative work in the furnace of religious experience in the desire to cleanse them of

spiritually pernicious elements and then to offer them to people. She sanctifies various aspects of culture and gives much for its development.”<sup>30</sup> As this quotation elucidates, it is the opinion of the ROC that at the heart of the Russian culture is the idea of Orthodoxy. Nothing better adds to the evidence of this than the proposed class for Russian school children titled “Foundations of Orthodox Culture.” Proponents of this course want it added as an elective outside of the normal school curriculum for preparatory school aged children and argue that it would not be a confessional class, but would instead be one that taught *about* the ROC and its significance within Russian history and culture. In one book on Russian religious education, it says:

“In Russia the destructive consequences of life without God- the social experiment of the twentieth century- and of the liberal-democratic changes of the past decade are particularly obvious. The spiritual and moral crisis has produced political, economic and social crises in our country...The only way Russia is going to find resources to overcome the crisis is by reasserting and propagating its traditional spiritual and moral culture...Only our traditional way of life is capable of offering resistance to the influence of modern culture and to the model of civilization being exported from the West.”<sup>31</sup>

Joachim Willems argues that the support of the Foundations of Orthodox Culture by its constituents is one way in which the ROC is attempting to influence the political dialogue of the nation, by appealing to the idea of a “traditional” culture for the Russian state. Present in this dialogue is the rhetoric of positioning the Orthodox culture against that of the “liberal-democratic changes of the past decade,” underscoring the tension that Kinnvall discussed that is brought on by the ideological imposition of globalization. Instead of the globalizers’ ideology or the humiliated Marxist ideology, it was the

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<sup>30</sup> Willems, 292

<sup>31</sup> Willems, 290

continuation of a perceived and traditional Orthodox identity that began to gain sway as one of the main influencers of culture in the new Russian state.

The final need that Adgadjanian writes about is that of an auxiliary source of ethnic and national consolidation. He writes, “Ethnic identity was combined with state sovereignty (independent or autonomous polities) to produce a new national identity. Religion was one of the latent (or active) components that first supported revived ethnicity and then moved up to the level of nation building as one of the major cultural boundary markers.”<sup>32</sup> Orthodoxy offered Russia a solidifying force for its geographically and ethnically diverse population.

These four needs show why the ROC became such an influential force in the Russian Federation. It was one of the few movements that could fulfill all four needs in a way that historically predictable. As Van Der Veer discussed, religious nationalism allowed the people to continue a previous identity instead of sacrificing it for a new one. Orthodox identity offered a balm to the ontological insecurity and existential anxiety that was caused by the loss of identity and the challenge of globalization. It offered a solution to the needs of the new Russian state and the Russian people that was not foreign and insecure, but, instead, was familiar and had offered “safety” in the past.

After the dissolution of the USSR, the new Russian Federation faced the challenge to build a nation on top of what had been an empire and then a part of the Soviet Union. Presented before it were three options: 1. Initiate a restoration of the Soviet Union 2. The joining of the three Eastern Slavic states (Ukraine, Belarus, Russia) 3. The Russian Federation, excluding some areas where non-Russian ethnic groups

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<sup>32</sup> Agadjanian, 477

constituted a majority.<sup>33</sup> With these three options there were significant problems, the most prevalent of which were the growing demands for national sovereignty in areas that made up the former USSR such as Ukraine, the Baltic States, and Georgia. Because of this, the third option was chosen, which presented little basis for national unity. People were geographically distant, stretching from the borders of Europe to the borders of China and the borders of the Middle East. Though ethnic Russians comprised a majority of the population of the Russian Federation, there were very prominent non-Russian groups (Ingush, Chechens, Tartars, etc.) that made the idea of national unity on the basis of ethnicity and idea that only appealed to radical nationalist groups. Orthodoxy filled the ideological void by offering a national cement that crossed geographic and ethnic boundaries. During the time of the Russian empire, missionaries had spread it throughout all of Russia's holdings to the various ethnic groups that lived in it, spreading Russian Orthodoxy throughout the areas that now comprise the Russian Federation. Orthodoxy had a history of uniting disparate peoples under a common banner, so, when the same problem faced the new Russian Federation that had once faced the Russian Empire, it was once again the ROC that became a unifying force for the nation.

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<sup>33</sup> Tolz, *Post-Soviet Nation State Building*, 268

## **The Russian Orthodox Church and Transnational Politics**

Why is studying religion in the post-Soviet sphere important when there are so many other areas to be studied, like transitional economies and domestic policy making? What is it that makes the rise of religious nationalism a demanding issue of analysis for scholars of international affairs?

This chapter attempts to answer those questions by exploring the relationship between the ROC and the Russian government and looking at cases in which both parties have cooperated on issues of foreign policy. These cases give evidence that religious nationalism has affected not only the existential state of Russia, but it has had a profound effect on the way Russia relates with other post-Soviet nations.

The Moscow Patriarchate is a transnational body that conducts political relations within and outside of Russia with the goals of maintaining the solidarity of its canonical territory and promoting itself within the Universal Orthodox Church.<sup>34</sup> In its dealings with other international organizations, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has closely mirrored the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Political conflicts between the Russian Federation and other nations usually exist alongside ecclesial conflicts between the ROC and the other nations' religious bodies.

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<sup>34</sup>Curanovic, Alicja. "The Attitude of the Moscow Patriarch towards other Orthodox Churches." *Religion, State, and Societ* 35, no. 4 (2007): 301

These parallel conflicts, political and ecclesial, are most lucidly seen in the nations comprising the former Soviet Union, because it is in those areas that the Russian state and ROC has the most influence. During the time of the Russian Empire, the ROC spread throughout large swaths of Eastern and Southern Europe, the Near East, and Central Asia. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, those areas became republics of the Soviet Union, and, though religion was banned and adherents were persecuted under the atheistic Soviet state, the legacy of the ROC remained. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the majority of these republics declared independence, and the pattern in many cases was such that national independence precipitated schismatic ecclesial conflict.

This chapter focuses on the ROC as a transnational political organization and builds a contextual foundation from which the larger discussion of the religious nationalism of the ROC proceeds. First, I discuss the theoretical and historical basis for interrelations between the ROC and the Russian State and how it impacts both actors' international affairs. Secondly, I examine the ROC as a subject of transnational political relations and look at its goals and priorities. Finally, I provide two examples of parallel political-ecclesial conflicts in the former Soviet Union while paying special attention to the religious-nationalist overtones of these conflicts.

### **The Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Federation**

The harmony that exists between the Russian State and the ROC is not a new concept. In fact, there is an ages old theological precedent for it. Within Eastern Orthodoxy there is a concept referred to as *symphonia* that calls for the close relationship between the church and state. The concept is believed to have originated around the time

of the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine. Later, the Emperor Justinian I expressed his understanding of the concept when he said: “A distinction is drawn between the imperial authority and the priesthood, the former being concerned with human affairs and the latter with things divine; the two are regarded as closely interdependent, but, at least in theory, neither is subordinated to the other.”<sup>35</sup>

*Symphonia* began to influence the spirit of church-state relations in Russia upon its statewide conversion to Orthodoxy at the Baptism of Rus in 988 under the reign of Grand Prince Vladimir. That same spirit continues today. In February 2009, at a reception given at the Kremlin upon the election of Patriarch Kirill, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev reaffirmed the ROC’s preeminent status in Russia, saying: “At the heart of all our achievements and victories, notions of steady development of the State in the future of Russia lies the moral power of the nation, the belief in the ideals of goodness, love and justice. The source of this power for many centuries is the Russian Orthodox Church. Without a doubt, this will continue.”<sup>36</sup> Patriarch Kirill responded: “One can not imagine heaven without the earth and the earth without the sky. Earth and sky form a harmony of God's creation. God grant that the combination of heavenly and earthly, the efforts of church and state were directed at the spiritual and material prosperity of the people.”<sup>37</sup> These comments cast light on the interdependent relationship that the ROC and Russian state. While the state goes about the pragmatic business of running a nation, the Church is the protectors of “ideals of goodness, love and justice,”

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<sup>35</sup> Cross, , and Livingston. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. New York: Oxford University Press (USA), 2005. 771. Print.

<sup>36</sup> “Архипастыри — участники Поместного Собора присутствовали на приеме в Георгиевском зале Большого кремлевского дворца”

<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/548365.html>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

and the “spiritual and material prosperity of the people.” Because of this relationship, a popular phrase can be heard that states, “To be Russian is to be Orthodox; to be Orthodox is to be Russian.”<sup>38</sup>

The government of the Russian Federation has taken notice of the resurgent ROC. One reason, as previously stated, is because of the long tradition of harmony between the two entities. In other words, their coming together was partly an organic fusion born out of historical precedent. Another, more practical reason is because the ROC retained influence in the former Soviet Union through its parish system in areas where the Russian Federation wished to regain the influence it had lost after the fall of the Soviet Union. Shared interests such as these motivated the two to cooperate and brought the concept of *symphonia* into present-day church-state relations.

Cooperation between the two operates symbiotically, with both helping support the other. The Russian government provides the ROC with legal legitimacy and protection from other religions proselytizing its flock in return for the ROC’s endorsement among the people. One example of the state protecting the church is the 1997 law entitled “*O Svobode Sovesti i O Religioznykh Ob’yedineniyakh*” (Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations). “*O Svobode*” made it mandatory for religious organizations to register yearly with the Ministry of Justice and provide extensive information on church doctrine, leadership, and numerical strength. A panel would then review the applications and confirm or deny the groups the legal right to practice within

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<sup>38</sup> Marsh, Christopher. "Religion and Nationalism." Nations and Nationalisms in Global Perspective: An Encyclopedia of Origins, Development, and Contemporary Transitions. 'Ed'. Guntram H. Herb and David H. Kaplan. ABC-CLIO, 2007. Print., 5

Russia.<sup>39</sup> “*O Svobode*” also recognized Orthodoxy among the “traditional religions”<sup>40</sup> of the state and praised the ROC for its spiritual and cultural contributions to the nation.<sup>41</sup> The law provided the ROC legal status as the premier religion of the Russian state and protected it by giving the ability to deny legal legitimacy to rival religious groups.

In return for its political protection, the ROC has helped to legitimize the government in the eyes of the people by praising politicians many times over for their commitment to church and state. After Vladimir Putin’s presidential inauguration in 2000, then-Patriarch Aleksii II praised Putin’s “thoughtful and responsible style of leadership,” and then pleaded for him to “help us to disclose the soul of the nation.”<sup>42</sup> Recently, the Unity of Orthodox Nations International Foundation, with the blessing of Patriarch Kirill, awarded its 2009 award to President Dmitry Medvedev for his “outstanding work to strengthen the unity of Orthodox nations and to promote Christian values in the life of society.”<sup>43</sup> These are important affirmations and have had their intended effect. Surveys have found that the ROC is the most trusted institution in Russia, with approximately 60% of all Russians expressing a level of confidence in the Church.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Basil, John D. "Orthodoxy and Federation Laws." *Religion, State, and Society*. 33.2 (2005): 154. Print.

<sup>40</sup> Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism are considered to be the four “traditional religions” or Russia.

<sup>41</sup> Walters, Phillip. "Turning Outwards or Turning Inwards? The Russian Orthodox Church Challenged by Fundamentalism." *Nationalities Papers*. 35.5 (2007): 853-855. Print.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, John. "Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church: Asymmetric Symphonia?." *Journal of International Affairs* 61(2007): 185-201.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.mospat.ru/en/2009/11/29/news9359/>

<sup>44</sup> Marsh, Christopher. "Orthodox Christianity, Civil Society, and Russian Democracy." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* . 13.3 (2005): 454. Print.

The Church exploits this confidence for the advancement of the State through its public affirmation of Russia's leaders and participation in state ceremonies.

### **The Russian Orthodox Church as a Transnational Actor**

Symbiosis between the ROC and Russian state exists in international affairs as well as domestic affairs. As in the domestic sphere, the State provides the Church with legal legitimacy and the Church provides the State with societal legitimacy in the international scene as well. Close ties present both actors the opportunity to cooperate and work together towards each other's specific goals. The goals of the Russian state are not the focus of this chapter, but it is important to recognize that one of these goals is the desire to regain influence within its perceived sphere of influence, the area constituting the former Soviet Union. To that end, the ROC is a useful partner. The ROC's canonical territory stretches far beyond the boundaries of the Russian state, and therefore functions as a parastate institution that wields considerable soft power, which has become an asset to Russian leaders.<sup>45</sup>

The ROC's goals, as previously mentioned, are to maintain the integrity of its canonical territory and to promote itself within the Universal Orthodox Church. States of the former Soviet Union that are a part of the Orthodox community view having a national autocephalous church as an important factor in the sovereignty of the nation. The ROC is viewed by many states as an organ of the Russian Federation, meaning that its existence in a state also invites the influence of the Russian state. Because of this, there have been many efforts to nationalize the churches of the ROC that exist in other

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<sup>45</sup> Curanovic, 302

nations, as was the case in Ukraine and Estonia. The ROC fights nationalization and retains its canonical territory in those nations by being supported by the Russian state. Russia would not go to war with another nation of the issue of autocephaly, but it helps for the ROC to have the backing of a regional hegemon to support its retention of territory. This relationship, however, has exacerbated the issue and proven to some states that the ROC really is an extension of Russia's long arm of influence. Despite that, the Russian state recognizes the ROC as an international actor and, in the spirit of *symphonia*, conducts international affairs alongside it.

### **Hocking and Smith's International Actor Criteria**

It is important to understand the nature of the ROC as a transnational actor before moving on to specific examples of parallel conflicts. Brian Hocking and Michael Smith's international actor criteria are used in this section as a framework for understanding this. According to Hocking and Smith, an actor must represent a certain social group, enjoy freedom of action, and influence the international environment.<sup>4647</sup> The ROC fulfills all three criteria.

The designation of being an international actor is not exclusive to the ROC. Other autocephalous churches within the Orthodox community fulfill these criteria as well. However, the ROC, along with the Patriarchate of Constantinople (representing the Greek Orthodox tradition), wield the most influence and largest congregations, meaning they are the most influential of the Orthodox churches over the broad area of the former

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<sup>46</sup> Hocking, B., and M Smith. World Politics. New York: Prentice Hall, 1990. Print. 71

<sup>47</sup> Curanovic, 302

Soviet Union. Therefore, the ROC is not alone in its transnational influence, but vies against other churches for primacy. This is an important reality, and it accounts for a large part of the ecclesial conflicts the ROC finds itself in.

Per Hocking and Smith's criteria, the first requirement is for an international actor is that it must constitute a distinct social group. Though the ROC keeps no official membership records, it is widely held that it is the largest strain of Eastern Orthodoxy, and accounts for approximately 164,000,000 adherents with approximately 113,500,000 being located in Russia.<sup>48</sup> One way to track its growing membership is through the upward surge in the number of parishes that has steadily risen since the fall of the Soviet Union. In 1988, the number of parishes in Russia was 6,893.<sup>49</sup> As of 2008, the number had sharply increased to 29,263.<sup>50</sup> More than half of those parishes are located outside of Russia, with the majority in former Soviet states such as Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the social group that the ROC represents is not contained within the confines of Russia, but is spread over the whole world, with a majority clustered in the former Soviet Union. Its presence throughout many nations is one of the largest contributing factors to the designation of the ROC as an international actor. For it to fulfill its goal of retaining its ecclesiastical territory and promoting itself within the Orthodox community, the Church is forced to deal with a number of foreign religious organizations and governments.

The second criterion deals with freedom of action, meaning that the actor can not have significant restraints placed on its dealing in the international scene. One factor that

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/europe/russian-federation/russian-orthodox-church.html>

<sup>49</sup> Knox, Zoe. "Russian Orthodoxy, Russian Nationalism, and Patriarch Aleksii II." *Nationalities Papers* 33(2005): 533-545. Print., 539

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/508396.html>

<sup>51</sup> Knox, 545

greatly contributes to the freedom of action enjoyed by the ROC is the structure of the government of the Universal Orthodox Church. Unlike Catholicism and some Protestant sects, Orthodoxy employs a loose system of government with no one ruler or ruling body. The Universal Orthodox Church is comprised of 13 autocephalous church that all have the right to govern themselves and choose their own clergy. The historical head of Orthodoxy is the patriarch of Constantinople, but he carries no right to intervene in other churches' affairs and is relegated to matters sacramental and canonical.<sup>52</sup> The ecclesiastical freedom that is given under the Orthodox form of government allows autocephalous churches to enjoy great freedom of action. This, however, leaves room for divergent opinions. As a transnational autocephalous church, the ROC is able to pursue its own interests in matters that may be divergent to the larger Orthodox community instead of conforming to one standard. This freedom of action also allows the Church to draw near to the Russian state in its foreign interactions instead of conforming to a universal ecumenical stance set by a governing church body. Orthodoxy's loose government allows individual churches to tie themselves more closely to ideas of ethnicity, national myths, and patriotism, resulting in an *internalization* of the religion.<sup>53</sup> (In Russia, the internalization of the ROC resulted in its being tied with nationalism. The rhetoric of radical leaders such as Vladimir Zhirinovskii of the Liberal Democratic Party and Gennadii Ziuganov of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation is peppered with calls for the defense of the Orthodox faith against the perceived enemies of "non-traditional" religions and the West.<sup>54</sup>)

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<sup>52</sup> Curanovic, 302

<sup>53</sup> Curanovic, 302

<sup>54</sup> Knox, 551

The last criterion is the ability for a transnational actor to influence the international environment. As previously stated, the transnational constituency of the ROC allows for it to have considerable affect on the other nations. Alicja Curanovic reports that the ROC had three priorities for its international activity.<sup>55</sup> The first is for the ROC to maintain a privileged position within Russia and limit the activities of other religious groups. To do this, the ROC has to act both domestically and internationally. Within Russia it secures its position through its ties with the Russian state through favorable legislation. Internationally, it has to carry out relations with organizations such as the Catholic Church and evangelical Christian groups from other nations that wish to form churches in Russia.

The second priority for the ROC is to retain its jurisdiction of its canonical territory outside of Russia, reconcile with schismatic churches, and take care of the Russian diaspora in other nations. This priority oftentimes is the factor that places the most strain on inter-Orthodox relations. ROC jurisdiction in newly sovereign states in the former Soviet Union presents a hindrance to positive ecclesial and political relations because it can be seen as a remnant of the Soviet era when Moscow exercised jurisdiction. Such is the case in Ukraine and many other former Soviet republics, where having an autocephalous church has been tied into nationalist movements that seek separation from Russia and the legacy of the Soviet Union.

The third and final priority is for the ROC to be a religious hegemon within the Universal Orthodox Church. To do this, the ROC has to play a complicated political game that distinguishes between perceived “allies” and “enemies” towards its goal of

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<sup>55</sup> Curanovic, 303

increasing its influence. Curanovic identifies three “alliances” that the ROC has engaged in relationships with.<sup>56</sup> The first is an anti-Constantinople alliance with the autocephalous Greek Orthodox Church over the Constantinople Patriarchate’s increasing interference with individual church decisions. The second alliance is with Slavic churches that oppose the Greek dominations of the Universal Orthodox Church and is based on historical ethnic and societal ties, bringing the churches of Belarus, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Serbia closer to the Moscow Patriarchate. The final alliance is anti-schismatic and encourages churches in Montenegro and Macedonia to not break away from the Serbian Patriarchate, bringing the Serbian and Russian churches closer together.

This complex set of alliances is a testament to the role of the ROC as an international actor that carries on relations with both religious and political bodies. As discussed, the ROC fulfills three criterion needed to distinguish itself as a transnational actor: it represents a particular social group, enjoys freedom of action, and affects the international environment. In its international affairs, the ROC also has priorities to maintain a privileged position in Russia, retain its canonical jurisdiction in areas outside of Russia, and to increase its influence within the Universal Orthodox Church. The elements discussed that make up the transnational agenda of the ROC all play out in its relations with other churches and, consequently, nations, and proves that the ROC is an important international actor.

### **The Russian Orthodox Church, Estonia, and Ukraine**

Because the ROC is a transnational actor and is closely linked to the Russian state, the Church often finds itself in ecclesial conflicts that are congruent with political

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<sup>56</sup> Curanovic, 310

conflicts of the Russian state. Two examples of these parallel conflicts are the ROC and Russian state's relations with Estonia and Ukraine. The previous sections of this chapter established the connection between the Russian state and the ROC and then gave a theoretical basis for understanding the ROC as a transnational actor. This section adds on to those by providing real-world scenarios through which to view parallel political-ecclesial conflicts that exist as a result of the connection between the ROC and Russian state. These two cases also lend context to this thesis' later analysis of relations between the ROC and Georgian Orthodox Church. This section's analysis primarily focuses on the relationship between the ROC and autocephalous churches in Ukraine and Estonia; however, some attention is also given to the relationship between those nations and the Russian Federation for issues of contextual clarity.

The ROC has a complicated history of relations with other churches in the states of the former Soviet Union. As discussed earlier, the ROC's imperative of retaining its canonical jurisdiction in its parishes outside of Russia often puts the Church into conflicts with the interests of nationalists that see the ROC's presence as a slight to their nation's sovereignty. Two examples of this are its relationships with the Orthodox churches of Estonia and Ukraine. I dub these "parallel conflicts" because these nations are also zones of political conflict for the Russian Federation as it deals with its loss of influence in these areas after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In these situations, the relationship between the ROC and those nations' autocephalous churches and the relations between the Russian Federation and the governments of those nations mimic one another and are often rooted in the same issues.

In Estonia, the ROC and Russian state both conduct relations with the priority of protecting the Russian diaspora. Geographically, the two nations are immediate in proximity, with Estonia sharing Russia's northwestern border along the Baltic Sea. Ethnic Russians presently make up a quarter of Estonia's population and represent the nation's largest minority group. Along these same lines, the Russian language is spoken by approximately 30% of the populations.<sup>57</sup> This high percentage of Russians living in Estonia is largely due to its long history with Russia. After the Great Northern War in 1721, the Peter the Great incorporated Estonia into the Russian Empire. After the First World War, Estonia temporarily enjoyed independence, but was quickly incorporated into the Soviet Union after the 1917 civil war in Russia. Independence was not gained again until 1991 when the reestablished Estonian parliament issued a declaration of independence from the Soviet Union. Russia and Estonia's shared history and close proximity to one another resulted in an open migration of Russians to Estonia, particularly during the time of the Soviet Union, when ethnic Russians were encouraged to move outside of Russia in an attempt to tie those areas closer to Russia.

The Russian Federation has made many efforts to protect the ethnic Russians living in Estonia from what they see as an ethnically based oppression by the Estonian government. James Hughes, a Reader in Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science and editor of the newsletter "Development and Transition," confirmed Russia's assertion, and wrote that Estonia has a "sophisticated and extensive policy regime of discrimination" against Russian speakers.<sup>58</sup> Others, however,

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

<sup>58</sup> Hughes, James. "Russophone Minorities in Estonia and Latvia." *Development and Transition*. 2. (2005): 22-24. Print.

have refuted that claim and believe that Russia is using it as a reason to meddle in Estonia's affairs. In 1997, Dr. Kara Brown of the University of South Carolina wrote: "the Russian government, disregarding the fact that Estonia's Russian speakers willingly have chosen to stay [in Estonia], has used the excuse of alleged minority-right infringements as justification for a possible armed invasion."<sup>59</sup> These tensions have also been aggravated over issues such as Estonia's joining the European Union in 2004. This created a tense political environment that led to 60% of the polled Russians to believe that Estonia is hostile towards Russia, topping all other nations, including Georgia and the United States.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, the ROC views the Russian diaspora in Estonia as being under its wing of protection. Estonia is widely regarded as one of the most non-religious nations of the European Union, with 34.1% of its populations being affiliated with no religion, 32% unspecified, and 6.1% having no religious convictions.<sup>61</sup> However, 12.8% of the population identifies themselves with Orthodoxy, coming directly behind the 13.6% of the population that claim to be Lutheran. The Moscow Patriarchate currently has 31 parishes located in Estonia, accounting for 43 priests and 14 deacons and 150,000 of the 1,400,000 ROC adherents in the Baltic states.<sup>62</sup>

From 1923 to World War II, when Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union, Constantinople had exercised jurisdiction of its churches after the Estonian Orthodox priests made a decision to leave what was then a Moscow patriarchate ailing

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<sup>59</sup> Brown, Kara (1997). "The Russian-Speaking Minority and Estonian Society". *KHRONIKA / The Chronicle of Education in Russia and Eurasia*, Volume 6, Number 2, Fall 1997. Indiana University.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.levada.ru/press/2007053003.html>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.orthodox.ee/indexeng.php?d=history/today>

under Soviet rule. After World War II, however, the Soviet government forcibly brought the Estonian churches back under the umbrella of Moscow's jurisdiction.<sup>63</sup> This continued until 1996, when Batholomeos I, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, announced that Constantinople would resume authority over the Estonian churches. This decision gave canonical legitimacy to the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church that had begun in 1993 as the legal successor to the Autonomous Estonian Orthodox Church that was established in 1923. Estonian-born Patriarch Aleksii II of the ROC sharply objected to this and nearly put the church on the edge of another schism when he broke a thousand year tradition by omitting prayers for the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople during a liturgy held in 1996 in Moscow's Cathedral of the Epiphany.<sup>64</sup> The Russian diaspora was a prominent factor in Aleksii's contempt for the situation. The churches that wanted to fold into the Constantinople Patriarchate represented the rural, ethnically Estonian minority of Orthodox believers, while those wishing to remain a part of the ROC were largely of Russian ethnicity and located in the large urban parishes.<sup>65</sup> For the Estonian minority, the decision to join Constantinople was one with a nationalist basis. The ecumenical patriarch represented to them a time when Estonia enjoyed a range of freedom that had resulted in the establishment of the Autonomous Estonian Orthodox Church. The Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church was the successor to that, and represented a distinctly Estonian approach to Orthodoxy that was set apart from the influence of Moscow, who was still seen in the light of Soviet occupation.

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<sup>63</sup> Radu, Michael. "The Burden of Eastern Orthodoxy." *Orbis*. 42.2 (1998): 283. Print.

<sup>64</sup> Davis, Nathaniel. "The Russian Orthodox Church: Opportunity and Trouble." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. 29.3 (1996): 279. Print

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

After the initial chill in relations between the ROC and Constantinople, matters seemed to improve when in 1996 the two agreed to allowing each church in Estonia choose their allegiance, whether it is to Constantinople or Moscow. This cooperation was largely at the behest of government officials who temporarily wanted to improve relations to make Russia appear to have completely left behind its tyrannical Soviet image (this would not last long and the two governments would soon thereafter continue hostilities). As theorized, the ethnically Russian majority agreed to stay under Moscow's jurisdiction with the Estonian minority choosing Constantinople.<sup>66</sup> This, however, did not prevent Russia and Estonia from continuing to level accusations at one another, with the ROC petitioning the head of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) mission to examine cases of Estonia's policy's towards the Russian minority as discrimination.<sup>67</sup> The Estonian case makes visible the ROC's commitment to guaranteeing both spiritual and physical protection (evidenced by the OSCE petition) to Russians living in the former Soviet Union. The tensions between the ROC and Constantinople also represent the ROC's imperatives of retaining its canonical jurisdiction and trying to promote itself within the Universal Orthodox Church.

Another parallel conflict that highlights the goals and priorities of the ROC and Russian Federation is with Ukraine. Ukraine and Russia have a shared history that dates back to the time of the Kievan-Rus state under the leadership of the Varangian Rurik around 860. From that time forward, Russia and Ukraine shared an interconnected history with Ukraine subjugated to Russia for the majority of it. Similarly, the ROC traces its history to 988 when Grand Prince Vladimir converted the whole state to

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid*

<sup>67</sup> Curanovic, 305

Orthodoxy. The Kiev church was originally a Metropolitanate under the authority of the patriarch in Constantinople. It then moved to Vladimir, and finally Moscow in 1325, after the Mongols had reduced Kiev's power and had left the burgeoning Muscovite state in a position of prominence. In 1488, as Constantinople's power was waning and the Muscovites on the rise, the church in Moscow declared its autonomy and began what can be seen as the founding of the Moscow Patriarchate. That also marked the beginning of Russia's Third Rome ideology, which fantasized about Moscow being the center of the Christian world, replacing Rome and Constantinople. After that point, the center of Slavic Orthodoxy moved from Kiev to Moscow, an event that continues to define the relationship between autocephalous churches in Ukraine and the ROC.

The parallel conflict in Ukraine is defined by similar characteristics that are evident in the Estonian case, such as increasing state nationalism and issues concerning the nations' large ethnically Russian populations. The difference between Ukraine and Estonia, however, lies with history. Russia being seen as an unwelcome foreign occupier defined the Estonian-Russian relationship, Ukraine and Russia share a common history of close relations and intermingling. Russia has long held that it shares with Ukraine a Slavic brotherhood with a common ancestry and narrative. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine's nationalist voices came to the forefront of the population and called for the nation to distance itself from Russia. The relationship between the Russian Federation and Ukraine has been defined by Russia trying to gain influence and Ukraine pushing it away in favor of nationalist and pro-Western sympathies. In the book, "Ukraine: The Search for a National Identity," contributor Paul A. Globe writes that Ukraine and Russia are both "central to the other, but in radically different way and with radically

different resources. As a result, the two countries are truly caught in a dangerous and asymmetrical embrace.”<sup>68</sup> Globe lays out is that both Ukraine and Russia exist in relative weakness, though they are extremely different. Ukraine is a new state that is in the middle of two relatively stronger nations: Germany and Russia. Its weakness, when compared to these nations, is obvious militarily, politically, and economically. However, it differs from Russia in the respect that Ukraine’s weakness is due to its young statehood and undeveloped potential. Russia’s weakness is unlike Ukraine in the respect that it is still a very large nation that commands some sense of respect in foreign affairs (largely because of its nuclear arsenal), but, where Ukraine gained from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia lost out.<sup>69</sup> As Alexander Tsipko, a deputy director in the Soviet Academy of Sciences, put it, the dissolution and Ukraine’s separation from Russia was seen as “Russia’s flight from Russia.”<sup>70</sup>

Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution” in 2004 can be seen as the most pivotal landmark of Ukraine’s desire to separate from Russia. The massive protests and political events that called for the election of the progressive Viktor Yushchenko as president to replace Leonid Kuchma, who had greatly improved Ukrainian ties with Russia. With this, Ukraine joined a trend of “color revolutions” in which formerly Soviet nations elected pro-Western Democracy officials, such as the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. Yushchenko had

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<sup>68</sup> Zviglyanich, Volodymyr, and Sharon L. Wolchik. *Ukraine: The Search for a National Identity*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 200. Print 183

<sup>69</sup> Zviglyanich, 110

<sup>70</sup> Solchanyk, Roman. *Ukraine and Russia: The Post-Soviet Transition*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001. Print.

made his contempt for Russian influence widely known, and his main goal was for Ukraine to increase ties with Western Europe. Russia viewed this as problematic, as it would invite the influence of organizations it saw as anti-Russia such as the EU and NATO to its borders. The political fallout of this resulted in a chill in relations between Ukraine and Russia. The various “Gas Wars” during the 2000s have been emblematic of this chill, with Russia accusing Ukraine of stealing gas and cutting off their supply of Russian gas for periods of time, which also affected other areas of Europe that relied on the gas supply that runs through Ukraine. The back and forth political bickering between the two nations has underscored a deeper issue, that of Russia’s “near abroad” sphere of influence that Ukraine wants to keep its distance from and Russia wants to extend.

Ukraine’s separation from Russia is equally problematic for the ROC. The bonds of a perceived fraternal Slavic unity are compounded when considering the similar religious heritage of both states. Roughly 17.3% of Ukraine’s population is ethnically Russian, or about 7,906,000 of Ukraine’s 45,700,395 inhabitants.<sup>71</sup> There has been a push to return to using the Ukrainian language, but the nation still largely speaks Russian in day-to-day life. The ethnic complexity of Ukraine correlates with its religious situation. Approximately 84 percent of the nation identifies as being Orthodox, with another 7 percent belonging to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic church, a group that worships with an Orthodox liturgy but chose to accept the authority of the pope in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The nation’s Orthodox population is split between three churches. Accounting for about half of Orthodox believers in Ukraine are affiliated

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<sup>71</sup> <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>

with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church- Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP), followed by the 26 percent that follow the Ukrainian Orthodox Church- Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), and distantly followed by the 7 percent that belong to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). This disunity among Orthodoxy is “deeply enmeshed in the ambiguities of Ukrainian nationalism, border disputes, statehood, and secular politics, which are dominated by Ukraine’s idiosyncratic and ecumenical distrust of all its neighbors...”<sup>72</sup> The legacy of the UOC-KP is one that is steeped in all of these. In 1989, the parish of Church of the Saints Peter and Paul in Lviv announced that they would be breaking apart from the Patriarch of Moscow. Since then, the UOC-KP has installed three patriarchs, with it presently being Filaret, the excommunicated former UOC-MP Metropolitan of Kiev.<sup>73</sup> The UOC-KC is steeped in nationalist fervor, and conducts their liturgy in the Ukrainian language instead of the traditional Old Church Slavonic.<sup>74</sup> The UOC-KP has been very politically involved, lending its voice to the 2004 Orange Revolution and the resulting presidential election of the Victor Yushchenko, an adherent to the UOC-KP and devoted Ukrainian nationalist that has promoted ties with the West as opposed to Russia. Some have come to consider the UOC-KP a “quasi-state Church” because of the sponsorship it receives from the current administration.<sup>75</sup>

The UOC-KP has presented a very real problem for the ROC that involves many of the same issues discussed in the Estonian situation. Ukraine has the second

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<sup>72</sup> Radu, 293

<sup>73</sup> Curanovic, 304

<sup>74</sup> Krawchuk, Andrii. "Religious Life in Ukraine: Continuity and Change." Religion in Eastern Europe. 16.3 (1996): Print.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*

highest concentration of ROC communicants, second only to Russia. The ROC presently has 10,377 parishes in Ukraine, a number that far out shadow third place Belarus (1,319 parishes).<sup>76</sup> The schismatic nature of Orthodoxy in Ukraine is both an affront to the ROC's protection of its diaspora and its canonical territorial integrity. A present fear is that the nationalist Ukrainian government would make attempts to further wrestle parishes away from the ROC to place under jurisdiction of the UOC-KP. Also, schism among the ROC's largest diaspora sets a dangerous precedent for its congregations in other former-Soviet nations with smaller groups of ethnic Russians. At the present time, the Universal Orthodox Church does not canonically recognize the UOC-KP, which puts the ROC in a place of ecclesiastical prominence. If that were to change, and the UOC-KP were to be recognized by Constantinople, the success would be a bolster to other states that see ROC hegemony as a mirror of Russian hegemony in the former Soviet Union.

### **The Russian Orthodox Church and Transnational Politics**

As set out in this chapter, the ROC is a transnational actor that greatly influences the political relationships of the former Soviet Union. Parallel conflicts in areas such as Ukraine and Estonia show that the conflict revolving around the Orthodox community is usually not theological in nature, but is instead a complex mixture of ethnic conflict, state building, and nationalism.

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/europe/russian-federation/russian-orthodox-church.html>

In the cases of Estonia and Ukraine, the ROC's priority of retaining its influence among its congregations outside of Russia was clear. What was also clear was the way that the conflicts of the ROC and Russian Federation mirrored one another. Both had to deal with issues of nationalism and ethnic politics in areas where both were losing influence. Moreover, the actors involved in Estonia and Ukraine had to deal with conflicting ideologies of nationalism and ethnicity. Ukraine and Estonia have both taken steps to distance themselves from Russia, though both have large Russian minorities and long histories. Russian political elites, however, still hold to a nationalist ideology that sees Russia as the political and ideological leader of Eurasia, separate from both the West and the East. Former Russian General Alexander Rutskoi echoed this sentiment concerning Ukraine when he wrote:

“ If we want peace, prosperity, and happiness for today's living and for future generations, if we want to save the Fatherland from being divided up and from the dividers, if we want to survive on the holy land of our forefathers as a great and free people- The Russian State must be restored within its natural boundaries: historical, geopolitical, ethnic. The basis for this process must be the reunification of the three fraternal peoples- Great Russians, Little Russians, and Belorussians- within the framework of a single Russian state.”<sup>77</sup>

In parallel conflicts, both the ROC and Russian Federation have to deal with these post-Soviet tensions, pitting a resurgent Russia against growing independent nations, both of which are cloaked in nationalist rhetoric. These conflicts are mostly political and ecclesial in nature, not incorporating the threat of military strength. In the following chapters, these tensions will be applied to a different situation that has similar tensions but is steeped in military conflict. In the wake of the Georgia-Russia conflict of 2008, set against the background of longstanding military conflict in

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<sup>77</sup> Solchanyk, 18

Chechnya, the relationship between the ROC and the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Russian Federation and Georgian state offers a counterpoint to the previously discussed conflicts, giving a unique perspective to the subject of the ROC and religious nationalism.

### **The Russian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church Unity Amidst War**

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II, entered Moscow to pay his respects to the recently deceased Patriarch Alexy II of the Russian Orthodox Church. This well-mannered display of fraternal affection was especially poignant when considered alongside the tumultuous months that preceded it.

In August 2008, Georgian military forces attacked the separatist region of South Ossetia. Russia quickly launched a counter attack from its southern border, beginning what would be known as the Five Day War.

The previous chapter of this thesis showed the ways in which religious nationalism has affected the ROC in its dealings with other nations in the post-Soviet sphere. In both the Estonian and Ukrainian cases, the ROC acted alongside the Russian state in hostile relations. The Five-Day War, however, represented an instance in which the ROC and Russian state did not pursue a “parallel conflict.” While the Russian Federation decided to invade Georgia, the ROC and GOC called for peaceful resolution of the conflict and reaffirmed what was considered a historic spiritual bond. After having learned of the conflict, then Patriarch Alexy II issued a statement calling on Georgia and Ossetia to cease their aggressions. He wrote:

“Having learned about the hostilities in Tshkinvali and its outskirts, I call upon the warring parties to cease fire and return to the path of dialogue. Blood is being shed in South Ossetia and people are being killed and this

makes my heart to grieve profoundly. Among those who have lifted their hand against each other are Orthodox Christians. What is more, those who have come into conflict are Orthodox nations who are called by the Lord to live in brotherhood and love. I am aware of the appeal to peace made by His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Iliya of All Georgia. I also make my ardent appeal to those who have gone blind with hatred: stop! Do not let more blood be shed, do not let today's conflict be expanded many times over! Show common sense and virtue: sit at the negotiation table for talks with respect for the traditions, views and aspirations of both the Georgian and Ossetian peoples. The Russian Church is ready to unite efforts with the Georgian Church and help in achieving peace. May our God, Who 'is not a God of disorder but of peace' (1 Cor. 14:33), be our Helper in this endeavor.<sup>78</sup>

Why is it that Alexy responded this way? When considering the Estonian and Ukrainian case, it would seem that the ROC would have followed the same pattern in Georgia and tried to further increase its influence in post-Soviet Georgia. This chapter will examine the possible reasons that the ROC did not follow the parallel conflict model with Georgia during the Five-Day War. There is little account of the reason the ROC chose to respond the way it did. In this chapter I will cover two aspects of the relationship between Georgia and Russia that will help elucidate the reasoning behind the ROC's support: the history of Georgia-Russia relations and the geopolitical importance of a friendly GOC.

### **The Conflict**

Against the international backdrop of the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympic Games on August 8, 2008, Russian military forces crossed over the Georgian border into the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, beginning a five-day war that would become the Russian Federation's largest show of military strength since

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<sup>78</sup> <http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/19/2/549.aspx>

the fall of the Soviet Union. The contested regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are both of negligible strategic importance to Russia. Together they have a population of 200,000 and represent an area about as large as Rhode Island. Why then, did this conflict happen?

The engagement can be divided into five phases: the battle for Tskhinvali that lasted from August 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>, the Russian counterattack and bombing of Georgian “targets of opportunity,” the Russian invasion into Georgian mainland and the shelling of the Gori Georgian Army base, the cease-fire brokered by President Sarkozy of France, and the final establishment of “buffer zones” by the Russian military and their slow withdrawal from central Georgian territory.<sup>79</sup> Notable features of this conflict were the contingency plans that both nations had for this type of engagement and the disproportionate response of the Russian military force that included a mass mobilization of air, naval, and ground units that they had amassed on the South Russian border.

Many potential causes have been given, from Russian interest in securing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and other Caspian energy interests to cracking down on militant Islamic factions on its southern border.<sup>80</sup> Jim Nichols, a specialist in Russian and Central Asian affairs wrote for the Congressional Research Service that the conflict stemmed from concerns such as Russian hopes of controlling future oil production in the Caspian Sea and alleged harboring of Chechen terrorists in Georgia’s Muslim enclave in the Pankisi Gorge.<sup>81</sup> Writing from a critical geopolitics perspective Gerard Toal placed the blame on Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili’s aggressive style of leadership,

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<sup>79</sup> Toal, 686-688

<sup>80</sup> Nichols, 5-6

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 7-8

“great power” aspirations in Russia, and the “fantasy that Georgia could create geopolitical proximity to the Euro-Atlantic world through force of technology, money, and personal politics.”<sup>82</sup>

The debate about who was responsible for the conflict continues to be discussed, with little overwhelming proof of either side’s guilt. What is important for this chapter’s discussion is the fact that Russia responded very aggressively towards the Georgia in what was to be considered a “peace keeping mission.” The contingency plan that had been set in place for just such a conflict pointed to a larger issue at hand. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was educated at Columbia University in the United State, received a fellowship with the United States State Department, and interned with an American law firm. The allure of bringing Georgia into the modern world he had experienced led him to pursue a reform agenda that placed high priority on his nation’s modernization and alignment with Western powers. Under his leadership, Georgia received substantial aid from international development agencies and Western governments in hopes of securing NATO membership. Saakashvili in particular poised himself close to the United States by securing a presidential visit to Georgia and then awarding President George Bush the dignity of being the first American to win the Order of Saint George. Saakashvili went a step further and also pledged 2,000 Georgian troops to the war effort in Iraq.<sup>83</sup> This close association won over the US administration and led Vice-President Dick Cheney, in a visit to Georgia in September 2008, to declare that the “democratically elected government (of Georgia) can count on the continued support and assistance of the United States...to overcome the invasion of your sovereign territory,

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<sup>82</sup> Toal, 699

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 681-682

and an illegitimate, unilateral attempt to change your country's borders by force... We will help you to heal this nation's wound, to rebuild this economy, and to ensure Georgia's democracy, independence, and further integration with the West."<sup>84</sup> Important to Saakashvili was Georgia's integration into NATO, which was taken into account when in 2006 NATO approved of an "Intensified Dialogue" with Georgia about reforms that were needed for eventual membership.<sup>85</sup> One issue of contention that stalled its membership was the frozen conflict areas of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. To not have territorial sovereignty over the whole of Georgia and the ambiguous status of those breakaway regions weren't acceptable to Saakashvili's reform agenda.

Russia was not warm to the idea of Western governments and NATO having jurisdiction on its borders. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of many of the former republics, Russia acutely felt the loss of its sphere of influence when Western-governments shipped economic and humanitarian aid to the newly independent states. This chill between in relations between Russia and the West has continued to the present, particularly when dealing with issues concerning former-Soviet republics. On the wave of a resurgent economy and the regaining of its superpower status, Russia felt emboldened to pursue its own form of unipolar foreign policy.<sup>86</sup> Upon hearing that NATO was considering extending membership to Ukraine and Georgia, Putin remarked that the extension of the alliance was a "direct threat to the security of our country".<sup>87</sup> Similarly, he said that "NATO should not ensure its (Georgia's) security at the expense of the security of other countries, Russia included...If

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<sup>84</sup> Nichols, 5

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>86</sup> Toal, 683-684

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 683

NATO continues approaching the Russian borders, Moscow will take ‘necessary measures.’<sup>88</sup>

The invasion of South Ossetia and the resulting military conflict offered Russia a window of opportunity to put a check to NATO’s expansion into the region. Open conflict with Russia over disputed territorial areas such as South Ossetia hindered Georgia’s desired image as a stable, modern democracy. Instead, it would make it seem in the eyes of some as a conflict area that had yet to resolve issues of its own statehood. The militarization of these frozen conflicts could have polarized NATO’s views on offering Georgia a defense guarantee as laid out in article 5 of the NATO charter.<sup>89</sup> For NATO and Western powers to be involved in an issue such as border disputes between an upstart democracy such as Georgia and a resurgent superpower such as Russia could lead to a freeze in already tense relations or to a possible system-wide conflict, neither of which NATO wants.

The situation in South Ossetia offered Russia the chance to reassert itself within what was perceived as an unfavorable balance of power in its former Soviet sphere of influence that was favoring the West. For NATO to include Georgia or Ukraine would chip away at the buffer zone that was placed between the Russian Federation and the West. Russia’s increasing hostility towards Western powers mixed with its resurgent economy and military to lead it to believe that it could unilaterally deal with nations instead of going through the channels of alerting the United Nations or other major powers. The swiftness and power with which the engagement against Georgia was carried out alluded to a deeper meaning. It was not simply a mission to coerce Georgia to

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<sup>88</sup> Toal, 684

<sup>89</sup> Allison, 1165

peace with South Ossetia or a mission to protect its peacekeeping forces. The attack against Georgia was a premeditated situation that Russia exploited to reassert itself as a regional hegemon. This is what makes the reaction of the ROC to the conflict so startling. If Russia pursued a hegemonic policy towards Georgia, why did the ROC not promote that as they had in the cases of Ukraine and Estonia?

### The ROC's Reaction to the Conflict

The ROC issued a quick reprisal of its own after learning of the conflict. The Patriarch issued the previously quoted statement that condemned the actions of the states involved and called for each side to seek peaceful resolution. That statement would be the beginning of the ROC positioning itself alongside the GOC as the main channels of communication between Russia and Georgia.

On August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree that recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.<sup>90</sup> Georgia quickly responded by severing its diplomatic ties with Russia.<sup>91</sup> From that point on, the ROC and GOC took up the mission of keeping dialogue open between the nations. The first official contact between the two nations occurred between an envoy of representatives of the GOC and Russian deputy foreign minister Grigory Karasin in a meeting that was organized by the ROC.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the first contact from Georgia to the President of Russia was when the Georgian Patriarchy Ilia was in Moscow for Patriarch Alexy's funeral service. Ilia's secretary, Deacon Mikael, was quoted as saying, "This was a

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<sup>90</sup> <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080826/116286788.html>

<sup>91</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7588428.stm>

<sup>92</sup> Kishkovsky, Sophia. "Georgian Church Envoys Meet With Russian Official." *New York Times* 08 Nov. 2008, late ed.: A11.

public diplomacy effort meant to coax politicians to the negotiations table... The patriarch's position is that we should be able to have neighborly relations with Russia, but not at the expense of giving up Georgian territories.”<sup>93</sup>

In December, Patriarch Alexy died, leaving a question mark around the issue of continued relations with Georgia. The new Patriarch, Kirill, however, took up the mantle and committed himself to further improving the dialogue between the two. In February 2009, Kirill received a Georgian delegation and sent them back with the message, “Orthodox unity- these are not simple words. I would like you to pass this along to His Holiness and Beatitude, the Patriarch of all-Georgia, and expression of my fraternal gratitude, my fraternal love. I wish him strength and fortitude, God's help in his service as Patriarch.”<sup>94</sup> During his first meeting with Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia in Azerbaijan, Kirill announced that the two Churches would “pull out the inter-state relations from the impasse,” to which Ilia responded that the Russian and Georgian churches were “fraternal, and nothing will ever shake them.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite their warm relations, both actors have come to the negotiation table with firm positions. Patriarch Kirill and the ROC continually stress good relations between the two nations and churches, but he has been quick to place the initial blame for the conflict on Georgia, calling it a “result of aggression that was started by evil political will...”<sup>96</sup> Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia also placed a fair share of blame on the Georgian government, but refuses to concede that South Ossetia or Abkhazia should be

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<sup>93</sup> [http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav021609\\_pr.shtml](http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav021609_pr.shtml)

<sup>94</sup> Rustavi-2 TV, Tbilisi, in Georgian 1100 gmt 3 Feb 09, as reported by BBC Monitoring Trans-Caucasus Unit

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.mospat.ru/en/2009/11/07/news8001/>

<sup>96</sup> [http://rt.com/Top\\_News/2009-08-08/russian-orthodox-church-mourns.html](http://rt.com/Top_News/2009-08-08/russian-orthodox-church-mourns.html)

independent or be absorbed into the Russian Federation. Both of the churches' stances are to be expected, though. The two both have strong church-state ties, so to stray too far from some of the fundamental stances of their governments would be unlikely. What is remarkable are the close ties that the churches have maintained despite their governments' political ill will towards the other. The reasons for that is the subject of the rest of this chapter.

### **Being a Neighbor During a War: Why?**

It would seem unlikely that two warring states would have two prominent social institutions that would keep such close bonds as the ROC and GOC have since the Five-Day War. It can be argued that without the work of both churches diplomacy would have stood still and the likelihood of a similar conflict would have greatly increased due to the conflict's still unresolved status.

The reasons behind the kinship of the ROC and GOC have not been made very clear. Neither side has offered an official reasoning aside from preserving "historical and fraternal" spiritual ties, nor has academia elucidated the situation beyond anything but a glancing mention. In my opinion, the relationship between the ROC and GOC is important to understand when looking at the overall scope of the ROC's influence. As previously discussed, the ROC has conducted relations in the post-Soviet sphere in an aggressive manner when trying to reclaim its influence in states such as Ukraine and Estonia. However, with the GOC, a church that isn't aligned with the Constantinople Patriarchate and shares a close geographical and ideological proximity to the Moscow Patriarchate, the ROC has been very accommodating. I attribute this to two reasons. The

first is the close historical relationship that the ROC and GOC have shared. The final reason for the tight relation between the two is because of the geopolitical importance to the ROC for a stable Georgia. Though I make no illusions that these two reasons are all-encompassing of the situation, I do believe that they offer a deeper look into the strategy of the ROC in former Soviet Union and help to understand where the ROC's foreign affairs are heading in the coming years. This knowledge is particularly valuable when considering the influence the ROC holds over areas such as South Ossetia, an area that is of great value to the Russian government.

#### The History of the Relationship between the ROC and GOC: Fraternal Brothers?

Most of the recent contact between the ROC and GOC has resulted in both sides stating that they are “Orthodox countries that have had good fraternal relations for very many centuries.”<sup>97</sup> Because of this, it is important to understand the relationship between these two. While both Patriarch's like to stress the commonalities between the two and to talk about their “good fraternal relations,” many others view this relationship as asymmetric; a relationship between weak Georgia and strong Russia.<sup>98</sup> Looking at the history of Georgia, it would seem so. They have enjoyed only very brief periods of independence in modern history and spent much of their time under the rule of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. The history of the relationship between Georgia and Russia can be seen as the history of Georgia's intertwining with Russia and the loss of its ancient identity, only to be found again after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>97</sup> Kishkovsky, 2008

<sup>98</sup> Curanovich, 311

In the long run, Christianity first arrived in Georgia well before it was adopted by Russia in 988. The first Christian communities established in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, and Christianity was subsequently made the official state religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It is even believed that there was a Georgian bishop present at the first Ecumenical Council at Nicea.<sup>99</sup> Georgia was home to one of the first Christian states and had a defining presence amongst the early Christian body. Georgia continued on that path, with Christianity becoming less of a religion and more of a defining philosophy of life for the Georgians.<sup>100</sup> Georgian writer Ilia Chavchavadze wrote “For us, Christianity is more than living according to Christ: it means our Motherland, Georgia; it means that we are Georgians. Today, the whole of the Transcaucasus makes no distinction between Georgians and Christianity- they are one and the same thing. Instead of saying that someone became a Christian, they say, he became a Georgian.”<sup>101</sup>

Originally, the Georgian Church was under the administration of the Antioch Patriarchate, but was granted autocephaly in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, though staying under the influence of Eastern Orthodoxy centered in Constantinople. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Georgia became surrounded by Muslim nations and entered into a period of great tribulation. This culminated in 1783 when the Treaty of Georgievsk was signed, which gave Russia protectorate status over Georgia. In 1801, the Russian Tsar annexed Georgia and by 1814 the Holy Synod and emperor annulled the autocephaly of the Georgian Apostolic Church and Western Georgian Church.<sup>102</sup> Following that, the Russians began the process of bringing Georgia in line with the ROC by changing the

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<sup>99</sup> Alasani, 117

<sup>100</sup> Panjikidze, 1

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>102</sup> Alasani, 126

language of instruction in ecclesiastical schools from Georgian to Russian, the ROC appointed its own exarches, and Orthodox services ceased to be conducted in Georgian.<sup>103</sup> High levels of Russification were characteristic of Georgia's time in Russia, a process that left its impact on Georgian clergy and believers.

The overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II in 1917 marked a new period for the Georgian Church. During the ensuing tumult in Russia, a gathering of bishops in Georgia proclaimed the Church's autocephaly. The state did the same, and held elections and formed the Democratic Republic of Georgia. This lasted from 1918 to 1921, when the Bolshevik Red Army invaded and annexed Georgia for the Soviet Union and the ROC denounced the Church's autocephaly and reincorporated it. The leader of the Georgian church responded by issuing a memorandum to the other patriarchates and stated that "the Georgian nation was deprived of the mother tongue and its ancestral national culture and religious belief were profaned," and he demanded "the Russian military occupation be withdrawn from Georgia immediately."<sup>104</sup> This, however, was met with coolness by the patriarchates, which rejected the memorandum and declared the Georgian Church to be an essential part of the ROC. Thus, once again, the Church came under the influence of Russia. This time, however, it was met with the aggression of the atheistic Communist regime and went into another dark period.

Just as the Russian Revolution marked a time of hardship for the Georgian Church, the period after World War II marked an upswing in fortune. Because of Georgia's participation in the war and the diplomatic expertise of the Georgian Church leader Kalistrate Tsintsadze, the ROC recognized the territorial autocephaly of the

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<sup>103</sup> Panjikidze, 5

<sup>104</sup> Alasania, 127

Georgian Church and the GOC was reformed under the Catholicos-Patriarch in Tblisi. In 1977, the present Catholicos-Patriarch, Ilia II, was elected, and in 1990, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the World Patriarchate in Constantinople issued the GOC's autocephaly and published a document recognizing the title of the Catholicos-Patriarch.<sup>105</sup>

The post-Soviet period marked the first time for centuries that Georgia had experienced sustained sovereignty. During this time, nationalist rhetoric tinged the ideology of most politicians, and the distancing of them from Russia became a high priority. One of the most prominent identities that the Georgian people reverted back to was that of Orthodoxy. The state's first leader, Zviad Gamsaxurdia (an ardent dissident and revolutionary during the Soviet period), addressed this concern during his inaugural speech in 1991. He said: "The rebirth of the Georgian state, the resurrection of its independence, cannot succeed apart from the rebirth of a significant living faith, outside of a moral rebirth. Both Georgia's past and present support this."<sup>106</sup> In his address, Gamsaxurdia set the tone for the new Georgian state. It was a continuation of a historic independent entity, one that was separate from Russia and was based on a historic Orthodox identity. He concluded his speech saying:

"Our history, the foundation of our life, is a struggle for faith, for national independence. This is a martyr's and Christ-given way of goodness, compassion, and love. History has given us the possibility to return to our ancestral path, to confess in faith a free Georgia. The time has come when the life of all without exception belongs to the fatherland; the people are, without a doubt, prepared for the decisive battle. National government is a duty, it is a worthy and great mission; may the task before us be fulfilled. May Georgia be accomplished with divine love. May the will of God be

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<sup>105</sup> Alasania, 127

<sup>106</sup> Crego, 6

fulfilled! The will of the people! Long live free Georgia! May God protect us all!”<sup>107</sup>

Gamsaxurdia was eventually deposed by a bloody coup that resulted in a civil war lasting up until 1995. However, he was instrumental in beginning the intimate connection between the GOC and the Georgian state after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Under the new president Shevardnadze (elected in 1995), tensions between separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia came to a head and resulted in the beginning of an intense period of inter-ethnic violence, with Russia supporting the separatists. Under his leadership, the role of the GOC became more prominent and gained legal status, with the 1995 constitution stating “The state recognizes the special importance of the Georgian Orthodox Church in Georgian history but simultaneously declares complete freedom in religious belief and the independence of the Church from the state.”<sup>108</sup> In 2002, the GOC further solidified its status by the signing of the “Concordant” with the Georgian government that confirmed the GOC’s ownership of all churches and monasteries in Georgia, recognized the GOC’s special role in Georgian history, and offered many other preferential treatments such as the exemption of GOC clergymen from military service.

Shevardnadze was overthrown in 2003’s Rose Revolution, which saw the election of the current president, Mikheil Saakashvili. Influenced by a Western education, Saakashvili began reforms of the economy and military with the goal of acceptance into NATO and the EU. Saakashvili’s time in office has come to define the present cool in relations between Georgia and Russia. His Western leanings have increased the tensions

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<sup>107</sup> Crego, 7

<sup>108</sup> Chedia, 1

between the two states and led to conflicts such as the Five-Day War. However, it is under his regime that the relationship between the ROC and GOC has flourished.

The relationship between the ROC and GOC has been a microcosm of the greater relationship between Russian and Georgia itself. It is characterized by a long period of the ROC and Russia imposing itself on the GOC and Georgia, from the beginnings of their relations in the 1700s until the fall of the Soviet Union. However, it is interesting that since modernization projects of Saakashvili have gone into effect, that the GOC has warmed the dialogue between itself and the ROC. Why is it, then, that the GOC has revised their history of ROC imposition?

The ROC's relationship with the GOC is similar to its relationship to the churches in Estonia and Ukraine in that they all have long histories of interaction. However, where the relationship differs is in its origins. The ROC's presence in Ukraine and Estonia largely precipitated the presence of any other autonomous Orthodox body. In both cases, the ROC was the main channel of Orthodox thought. In Georgia, however, the ROC was chronologically secondary to the GOC, whose involvement in Georgia dates back centuries before the founding of the ROC. The ecclesial conflicts in Ukraine and Estonia were over churches that had historically been part of the ROC. Because this was different in Georgia, it engendered a stance of non-conflictive relations. For the ROC, it would be far more advantageous to keep the GOC as an ally by respecting canonical territory than to try and enfold the churches of South Ossetia and Abkhazia into the ROC and cause a substantial ecclesial rift.

### The ROC, GOC, and Geopolitics: The Benefits of Cooperation

One reason for the closeness of the ROC and GOC lies in the mutual benefits that both parties receive from such a relationship. The ROC benefits from amiable relations by securing that the GOC will keep their autonomy from Constantinople's influence and that the GOC will remain a supporter of the ROC's policies towards Ukraine and Estonia. The GOC, a decidedly anti-Western institution, found in the ROC an ally against the encroachment of institutions such as the EU and NATO. These geopolitical aspects allow the GOC and ROC to continue to grow closer to one another despite their respective governments growing apart.

The GOC and ROC both share a similar distaste for the increasing influence of Western institutions in Georgia and Russia.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, one of the important aspects of the ROC's foreign policy agenda is to prevent the influence of the Constantinople Patriarchate from growing in the post-Soviet sphere. Because of the abundance of its churches in these nations, the ROC views them as under its sphere of influence. However, as it has tried to do this, newly autocephalous churches have looked to Constantinople instead of the ROC, an institution they associate with years of Soviet rule. Unlike other newly independent churches in East Europe, the GOC has rejected the influence of Constantinople and the ecumenical movement. In 1997, Georgia withdrew themselves from the World Council of Churches despite Ilia II having served as President in 1980. Georgian religious scholar Beka Mindiashvili believes this is representative of a larger

issue in which the GOC has closed itself off towards other religious institution except for the ROC, who is made out to be a fellow conservative institution.<sup>109</sup>

Another benefit of this relationship is the GOC's ardent support of the ROC's policies towards autocephalous churches in Ukraine and Estonia.<sup>110</sup> According to Mindiashvili, this is particularly important to the ROC, because if Georgia were to endorse the autocephaly movement in Ukraine, it would be the only Eastern Orthodox Church to do so.<sup>111</sup> Georgia and Ukraine share situational similarities as being post-Soviet nations trying to separate themselves from the influence of Russia. However, the Georgian patriarchate has rejected this and endorsed Moscow's policies.

In response, the ROC has repeatedly denied the separatist South Ossetian and Abkhaz churches acceptance under the Moscow Patriarchate. Archbishop Hilarion made this clear by stating, "The Russian Orthodox Church considers changes of political borders do not mean changes of church canonical borders."<sup>112</sup> Russia's support of the GOC's canonical integrity is also important because absorbing the Ossetian and Abkhaz churches would negate the legitimacy of their argument that the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Constantinople Patriarchate in Estonia were violating canonical law.<sup>113</sup>

The GOC and ROC both share a similar distaste for the increasing influence of Western organizations such as the EU and NATO in Georgia. The ROC is a fierce critic of the Westernization and globalization projects pushed by the liberal democracies. In

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<sup>109</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079456.html>

<sup>110</sup> Curanovic, 311

<sup>111</sup> [http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav021609\\_pr.shtml](http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav021609_pr.shtml)

<sup>112</sup> <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090916/156147781.html>

<sup>113</sup> Matsuzato, 1

reaction to these, it was suggested that the position of the ROC is “by focusing upon its own story in and through the liturgical life of the community, the Church is able to offer an alternative culture to that of Western secularism.”<sup>114</sup> The GOC is in a similar situation, and it has looked towards the ROC as a peer in the fight against what is perceived to be Western secularism. However, unlike the ROC, the GOC is in a nation where the government is avowedly pro-West. Saakashvilli’s attempts at courting Western nations have only increased the paranoia of the GOC and caused them to draw even closer to the ROC. Mindiasvili stated that “While Russia is struggling against growing Western influence throughout its sphere, the church in Georgia is against Western-style liberal democracy’s taking hold, as it would inevitably lead to an erosion of the church’s powers...this is one areas where the two can cooperate, and the Russian’s view the [Georgian Orthodox] church as a potential foothold in Georgia.”<sup>115</sup>

Mindiasvili’s comment resonates a theme that has run throughout the history of the relationship of the ROC and GOC. It seems that while the ROC and GOC have participated in cordial relations with one another, there is a mutual benefit that the other gains from it. Though both claim that the basis for their affinity is simply Christian brotherhood, an examination of their troubled history and mutually beneficial relationship shows that there is a deeper layer, one, I would argue, that kept the ROC and GOC united during the Five-Day War. This layer is characterized by a shared history and geography that opened the door to a mutually beneficial relationship. It is those benefits that kept the ROC from following the examples of its actions in Ukraine and Estonia and instead pursue peace.

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<sup>114</sup> Payne, 869

<sup>115</sup> [http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav021609\\_pr.shtml](http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav021609_pr.shtml)

Despite Russia and Georgia going to war with one another over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the ROC and GOC maintained a tight relationship. After both nations cut diplomatic relations with the other, the two churches became the main conduit for diplomacy. Both claimed that they were encouraged to keep near one another because of a fraternal respect for one another. However, after peeling back the layers of their relationship, there appear to be many factors that have brought them close to one another. Shared interests kept the two churches open to one another and promoted peaceful dialogue between the two.

### **Conclusion**

The case of the ROC and GOC offers an interesting perspective on religious nationalism in the post-Soviet sphere. Two churches growing closer set against the backdrop of two states pulling apart goes against the trend of parallel conflicts in the post-Soviet sphere that exhibit high amounts of church-state cooperation. Of course, there are similarities between the Georgian case and previously discussed cases in Ukraine in Estonia. All three exhibit long histories with one another and factors such as the Russian diaspora come into play. However, there are a number of differences that make the Georgian case unique and shed light upon the state of religious nationalism in the post-Soviet sphere.

One difference is that the GOC significantly outdates the ROC in the region. This is important when considered that the ROC then has no real claim over the parishes of the GOC as it does with those in Ukraine or Estonia, which were historically under the leadership of the ROC. To try and incorporate the North Ossetian churches into the ROC would be a direct affront to canonical integrity that would likely push the GOC to find another ally within the Orthodox community.

Another difference is the conservative outlooks of both the ROC and GOC. Unlike the autocephalous churches in Ukraine and Estonia, which support their pro-Western governments, the ROC and GOC are both anti-Western in orientation. The GOC sees the ROC as an ideologically conservative ally. This caused the Georgian church to cooperate diplomatically with the ROC when its pro-Western government wouldn't. In

my opinion, this brings up the concern that one of the reasons the ROC and GOC were able to draw close to one another is because the Georgian government couldn't control the operations of the GOC. The Georgian government, which has been tumultuous throughout the short history of the nation, has had to try to build itself political capital since the Rose Revolution, but the GOC had been around much longer and had political capital and legitimacy within Georgian society. Therefore, it could be said that the relatively weak Georgian government possibly could not control the actions of the more influential GOC.

These two aspects of the Georgian case show how the positive relationship between the ROC and GOC was more inevitable than those in Ukraine or Estonia. The Georgian case is important to the understanding of religious nationalism in the region because it marks a landmark departure from cooperation between the ROC and Russian state. However, I believe that this case is going to be considered the exception rather than the rule. As I pointed out in my last chapter, the Georgian case was a convergence of mutual benefits between the ROC and GOC that allowed for this departure, primarily geopolitical interests that preserved a conservative Orthodox bloc for the GOC and promoted the influence and interests of the ROC in the universal Orthodox community by way of the GOC.

In my opinion, this convergence of mutual interests does not likely precipitate a shift in church-state relations in Russia, but it does offer vital insight into the nature of religious nationalism's influence on international affairs in the post-Soviet sphere and on the relationship between the ROC and the Russian government. What this thesis has presented is an ideological movement that brings together modern nationalist movements

with old religious identities in order to satiate the existential questioning that is a result of globalization on transitional societies. Religious nationalism is thought to offer a rallying point for the nation; an ideology that can represent a unified group of people to the global community. However, I have found that religious nationalism does the exact opposite. Instead of unifying a group of people, it acts a divisive political tool. On the domestic front, despite their fear of globalization, global forces are acting upon post-Soviet nations and more diverse people groups are entering into their nations. This is especially true in Russia, who is experiencing a demographic crisis with diminishing numbers of ethnic Russians and an influx of multi-ethnic immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia, many of whom are Muslim. On the international front, religious nationalism promotes difference rather than commonalities and engenders conflict, whether it is between different religions (Muslim/Christian in Chechnya) or the same religion (the conflicts discussed in this thesis).

Though the Georgian case may be the exception to the trend of religious nationalism in East Europe, it is one that offers the great hope of religion actually promoting peace rather than division. During the Five-Day War, it was religious institutions that prayed for peace rather than their secular counterparts in the government. It would be advantageous for the long-term stability of East Europe if religious institutions could realize their mutual benefits rather than divisive differences.

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