Roman Catholic, Anglican and Russian Orthodox Views on Civil Society and Recent Church-Related Civil Society Developments in Russia

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Contemporary Perceptions

There is a widespread view that the Russian Orthodox Church is subordinate to the state and that religious authority is complicit with the political authority of the ruling regime - whether the absolutism of the tsars, the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union or the authoritarianism of Putin's postcommunist Russia. Linked to this charge of caesaro-papism is the claim that the Orthodox East as a whole has failed to overcome the legacy of Byzantium - above all, there is no clear, constitutionally enshrined separation of powers or a robust rule of law. Since 1993 it has also been suggested that church and state in Russia have sought to put in place a neo-Byzantine settlement where individuals and society are ruled by the twin forces of president and patriarch - the representatives of earthly and heavenly powers. Closely connected with this is the common assumption that the East has no or only a weak civil society. Or, to be less general, that only Central European Catholic countries such as Poland or Slovakia have a vibrant civic culture, while the Orthodox East is statist and lacks a constitutional tradition, which would favour the emergence of intermediary institutions.

Elements for an Alternative Theological and Historical Narrative

However, both the theology and the history of the Russian Orthodox Church are rather more complex than this contemporary caricature suggests. Theologically, there is a clear distinction between state and church. St John Chrysostom, a fifth-century Greek theologian, was opposed to the sacralisation of power - a critique that underpins the distinction by Pope Gelasius I of the two swords. For Chrysostom, and for St Augustine who followed and developed St Paul's teaching, secular rule is confined to the temporal *saeculum* (destined to pass into God's Kingdom) and falls inside the church insofar as it concerns justice and the orientation of human existence to the Good.

The distinctness of state and church was preserved and enhanced by Pope Gelasius I who emphasised the difference between ecclesial *auctoritas* and secular *dominium*, with the former having absolute priority over the latter (see Gelasius I, 1999) - since eternity enfolds time and the finite realm only is to the extent that it mirrors and reflects God's infinite being and goodness. So configured, politics and the law are secular (in the sense of belonging to the *saeculum*) without being divorced from religion - a unique legacy of Christendom to Europe and the world at large.

The defenders of Christian universality from St Paul via the Church Fathers and medieval scholastics to modern and late modern Christian philosophers like Ralph Cudworth and Vladimir Solovyov all shared a commitment to the idea of government as a divine gift and the subordination of all institutions to natural law under God and according to God's wisdom. In his exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, Chrysostom exhorts Christians not to reject the public political realm as profane but instead to judge secular rule in terms of its divine foundation and finality:
Don't raise objections about one or another abuse of government, but look at the appropriateness of the institution as such, and you will discern the great wisdom of him who ordained it from the beginning. (Chrysostom, 1999)

Historically, Europe is in many ways the most secularised continent in the world (see Rémond, 1999; McLeod and Ustorf, 2003; Greeley, 2003), but it remains a vestigially Christian polity that initially developed from the fusion of biblical revelation with Greco-Roman philosophy (see Belloc, 1924; Dawson, 1932; Brague, 1999; Gouguenheim, 2008). Following the demise of imperial Rome, three forces competed for its legacy and shaped European civilisation: first, pagan tribes from Germanic, Turkic and Slavonic territories; second, Christianity and its network of local parishes and transnational monasteries; third, Islam and the establishment of a caliphate from Arabia to the Iberian peninsula. Of those, as Rowan Williams argues,
the Christian Church is quite simply the most extensive and enduring, whether in the form of the Western Papacy or of the 'Byzantine Commonwealth', the network of cultural and spiritual connections in Eastern Europe linked to the new Roman Empire centred on Constantinople. (Williams, 2005; see also Obolensky, 1984)
Here it is instructive to draw on the work of Dmitri Obolensky, in partiular in his seminal book *The Byzantine Commonwealth*. Indeed, it is hard to overstate the importance of Christendom in European and world history. Christendom was not simply a Roman invention that was confined to the Latin West. Following Obolensky's ground-breaking work, there is amply evidence to suggest that from late antiquity to early modernity large parts of Eastern Europe from the Balkans and Romania via the territories on both sides of the Danube to the Ukraine, Russia and beyond lay within the orbit of Byzantium's religious, political and cultural influence. Taken together, these lands constituted a commonwealth of kingdoms and nations which over time built a shared civic tradition (see Obolensky, 1984). Only the 'Byzantine Commonwealth' and its lasting legacy can explain how the East was Christianised and why it has since then formed an integral part of pan-Europe (see Obolensky, 1971, 1982). Without Eastern Christendom (and the defence of Western Christianity by Charlemagne and King Alfred the Great in the ninth century), Christian Europe would probably have succumbed to invasion by Muslims in the South and the East and by pagan Vikings in the North-West.

Moreover, from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, the periodic religious and monastic revival in Byzantium provided a bulwark against the Mongols and gradually shifted the focus of the Russian Orthodox Church away from national power towards transnational reconciliation of the Northern periphery with its centre in Constantinople. Coupled with a spiritual and artistic renaissance, this realignment favoured political unity among hitherto rival principalities. Thus, Valdenberg is correct to suggest that Muscovy inherited from Byzantium the idea that imperial power is limited and subject to the superior religious (that ought to be) protected by the Orthodox Church. Moreover, this legacy is important for two reasons. First of all,

it provided a transnational embedding of national power, in the sense that the rule of tsars was only really legitimate if it reflected in some way the universal, Orthodox sovereignty of the Emperor in Constantinople. Linked to this was the Romano-Byzantine system of law and shared liturgical and hymnographical practices (and common saints such as Cyril and Methodius). Second, the Byzantine legacy bequeathed notions and practices of civic association that were variously more religious or more secular - either linked to monasticism (St Sergius of Radonezh) or schools, workshops and guilds.

However, it is also true that the unification of Russian lands around Orthodox Byzantine Moscow also introduced a growing split with the Roman Catholic Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania and did not prevent the dissolution of the supranational commonwealth into its constituent parts - empires, monarchies and national churches (see Meyendorff, 1989). The schism was finally consummated in 1453 when the Byzantine Commonwealth centred on Constantinople was destroyed by the invasion of Turkish troops. Subsequently, pan-European Christendom gave way to national kingdoms and churches in the East and the growing tension between the Papacy and the princes in the West.

This event and its aftermath shattered the Œcumene and polity that bound together East and West around a shared - though contested - Christian legacy. The absence of a mediating ecclesial tradition undermined the remnants of Christendom from within and reinforced some of the worst tendencies of Eastern monocracy and Western dualism. Thus, the Great Schism helped destroy the theological and political underpinning of Europe's Christian culture and its common intellectual basis. In this sense, it remains historically much more significant for Europe and the rest of the world than the discovery of the New World or the American, French and Russian Revolutions. Without the disintegration of Christendom, neither modernity nor secularisation would have emerged triumphant in the way they did (see Dawson, 1967).

Indeed, it was the collapse of Byzantium that coincided with the rise of imperial absolutism and periods of caesaropapism in Russia and other Orthodox lands. The tradition of absolutist rule was adopted by numerous Russian tsars and Soviet leaders alike. Indeed, the modern Russian state carries on the tradition of early tsarist days, with their focus on opaque power structures and the idea of the Third Rome, a form of exceptionalism that fuelled both tsarist and Soviet supremacism. In short, the disastrous development of Russia in late tsarist and Soviet times can be traced to the demise of Byzantium rather than the Byzantine Commonwealth itself.

More recently, Russia has been characterised by political authoritarianism and neo-feudalism. Closely connected with these phenomena are the Soviet subordination of independent institutions of civil society to the central state (Lenin called mass labour unions 'transmission belts' from the Party to the people). Since 1991/93, we have seen the de-politicisation of society and the politicisation of the church, both of which can be said to stifle the flourishing civil society and civic culture.

However, the contemporary caricature which I referred to at the beginning fails to capture other important developments - whether the nineteenth-century revival of monastic spirituality, Orthodox theology (especially the Sophiology of Vladimir

Solovyov and Sergei Bulgakov) and religious arts (Rublev for example) or the explosion of civic associations at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. In many ways, these developments would not have been possible with the enduring legacy of Byzantium and the autonomy of church from state.

Russian Orthodox Social Teaching

Like Pope Benedict XVI and the Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams, Patriarch Kirill is determined to strengthen the role of Christianity in the public realm because he believes that only religion can save secular Europe from its growing cultural and economic crisis. In large part, this crisis is the product of moral relativism, especially the loss of shared moral norms that discipline individualism and the absence of a hierarchy of values that subordinates power, pleasure and private profit to the common good in which all can share. During his enthronement service, Kirill spoke about

an era of moral relativism...when the propaganda of violence and debauchery steals the souls of young people..., we must be of service to young people, and help them find faith in God and meaning in life, and together with this an understanding of true human happiness. (Kirill, 2009)

This theme echoes Pope Benedict's denunciation of the 'dictatorship of relativism' and Archbishop Rowan's critique of 'programmatic secularism'.

Before he became Pope, one of Cardinal Ratzinger's primary points was the indictment of a 'value-free' democracy. Speaking of the 'dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires' (Ratzinger, 2005), he cogently argued that a purported respect for all things is in fact a respect for none. On the contrary, a genuine regard for the diversity of difference means that you value some things more than others. For the Pope, a life without a hierarchy of values is a nihilistic endorsement of everything and nothing. Drawing on his own experience of the rise of Nazism, the Pope links contemporary liberal democracy with fascism. He argues that when liberals believe in nothing, fascism is not far behind. Goebbels said as much when he wrote in his diaries that without objective values, there is only power and the sole proof of having power is to break all taboos and transgress all limits in order to better demonstrate supremacy. In part this helps to explain why Roman Catholicism under Ratzinger tries harder than ever to reinforce taboos against killing (abortion, euthanasia) and exploitation (economic, social and cultural) as a radical alternative to the contemporary 'totalitarianisms' of rampant capitalism and secular liberalism.

Likewise, the conspicuous failure of the prevailing ideologies fatally undermines the secular liberal assumption that the good is a matter of taste and conjecture and that human happiness is identical with consumer choice. As Archbishop Rowan Williams has argued, the reduction of human persons to economic agents and objects of sexual desire under the banner of unlimited individual choice has destroyed a common frame of reference in ethics and politics and undermined the possibility of a shared culture framed by an integral vision of human life revolving around mutual bonds of fraternal charity (Williams, 2000). Without theology liberal philosophy and ethics are unable to account for the foundations or finalities of liberal values. Left to themselves, liberal politics and economics lack a universal standard of justice that transcends the 'play of

majorities' and can secure the common good. The liberal scorn for metaphysics and theology has eliminated the notion of a transcendent Good from universal ideas of freedom, prosperity and tolerance and adopted in its stead an impoverished view of the human good that is equated with a 'minimal account of material security and relative social stability' (Williams, 2006).

All three Christian leaders blame moral relativism on rampant secularisation. Once transcendent universal truths are reduced to personal opinion and religion is privatised, there is only human self-assertion and will-to-power. That is why Dostoevsky was right to say that 'without God, everything is permitted'. As such, Christianity opposes secularism because it is absolute and arbitrary. In the name of value-neutrality, secular ideology eliminates all rival worldviews from the public sphere. By denying the existence of objective moral truths, it elevates the subjective into the measure of all things. Morality is thus privatised and evicted from public discourse. Politics is reduced to the arbitration of conflicting self-interest. Ultimately, society is ruled by an unholy alliance of utilitarian ethics and managerial politics. Far from securing a genuine pluralism of belief systems and social practices, secularism impoverishes culture and drains it of all meaning. This is why Pope Benedict, Patriarch Kirill and Archbishop Rowan attribute Europe's inability to articulate a common political project to the growing secularisation of European culture.

As Pope Benedict, Patriarch Kirill and Archbishop Rowan have pointed out over the past year, global finance rests on this secular conception of value. By tying the entire global economy to fake financial wealth that has neither produced real prosperity nor trickled down to the masses, neo-liberalism exemplifies the secular delusion that money - divorced from real things - has any enduring value. That is why last October Pope Benedict was right to say that the global financial system is 'built on sand' and that monetary value alone is an illusion. This view resonates strongly with the Anglican Archbishop of York John Sentamu's description last September of share traders who cashed in on falling prices as 'bank robbers and asset strippers' and his denunciation of Britain's 'idolatrous love of money' at the Church of England's General Synod in London in February 2009.

Nor are such statements isolated. Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and Russian Orthodoxy have a long tradition of social teaching that is perhaps more radical and progressive than many secular minds suspect (see for example Dorr, 1992). This history underpins and informs the contemporary critique of the unbridled free market (and the centralised bureaucratic state it relies on). For example, Russia's fraught economic transition has convinced Patriarch Kirill that Orthodox social teaching is the only genuine alternative to President Yel'tsin's free-market oligarchic capitalism and President Putin's patrimonial fusion of centralised state power and nationalised energy wealth. In a speech to the 11th World Russian People's Council in 2007, Kirill said that

thanks to the export of natural resources, the Stabilization Fund [a state fund of fiscal reserves] is replenished, and so are purses of a handful of people ... Most of our people live in abject poverty.

He also endorsed the Council's conclusion that

staking on the bureaucratic system to replace the oligarchic model has no prospect. Both are unable to solve the problems of corruption, misappropriation of public funds...and the crises in social welfare, science and education.

Likewise, the Orthodox Church - in the document *Basis for a Social Concept* (drawn up Patriarch Kirill when he was Metropolitan) stressed
the need to establish comprehensive control over transnational corporations and the processes taking place in the financial sector of the economy. This control, aimed at subjecting any entrepreneurial and financial activity to the interests of man and people, should be exercised through all the mechanisms available in society and the state.

Thus, already in 2000 the Orthodox Church spoke out forcefully against the power of global finance, condemning the sort of credit-fuelled and debt-leveraged speculative frenzy that only eight years later would plunge the world economy into the worst recession since the Great Depression of 1929. More recently, in his sermon at the Christmas Eve service attended by Medvedev on 6 January 2009, Patriarch Kirill indirectly criticised Vladimir Putin's government response to the current downturn, enjoining the President to take bolder action and inveighing against the authorities for violating the standards of justice and righteousness.

The deepening global economic crisis renders the application of Christian social principles even more pressing, a view shared by the Catholic Pontiff, the Orthodox Patriarch and the Anglican Primate. All three traditions combine a radical critique of the predominant economic logic with the promotion of alternative models governed by the universal principles of mutual solidarity and radical equality for all - not the abstract secular liberal values of individual freedom and equal opportunity for the wealthy few. Concretely, this means strict ethical limits on state and market power in favour of human relations and communal associations.

It is also true that Russian Orthodox social teaching is not as developed or codified as Roman Catholic teaching. There is no separate, specifically Orthodox conception of civil society or a uniquely Russian vision of civic culture. Instead, what we can say is that there are ideas and practices that are nourished by Russian Orthodox traditions, especially notions of freedom from serfdom and exploitation, the dignity of the person and self-determination - all in response to an overbearing, centralistic state. Likewise, the term *'sobornost'* or conciliarity is key, as it accentuates reciprocal and mutualist arrangements that combine hierarchical with egalitarian elements. These ideas translate into practices of social bondedness, interconnection and unity.

Linked to this is a recent tendency to question the view that the Russian state and its central agencies are the sole or predominant mechanisms for civil society development. As the initiatives and projects of parishes and local communities show, values such as autonomy, creativity and local responsiveness are not just professed but also - and perhaps increasingly - practised.

Recent Trends in Russian Civil Society Development

This section outlines some recent trends in relation to civil society development in Russia.

First, in 2001 Russia had approximately 350,000 registered organisations that were neither for private economic-commercial profit nor for any public, state-administrative purpose. According to the same figures, more than 70,000 such organisations conduct charitable work, involving between 1·5 and 2·5 million workers who provide charity to between 20 and 30 millions citizens across the country.

Second, as Richard Sakwa has reported (2008), the Russian Orthodox Church has been instrumental to this process, setting up thousands of Sunday schools and a vast array of religious, philanthropic and charitable organisations (including hospitals, hospices, orphanages). Furthermore,
over 100 Russian Orthodox brotherhoods were established, reviving a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages, concerned with religious and philanthropic work. (Sakwa, 2008, p.354)

Third, in 2011, the total number of officially registered, specifically religious civil society organisations is 28,064, including Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Protestant. At the same time no one really knows the number of religious civil society organisations in Russia that are involved in charity, rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents and drug addicts, educational activities and so on. The main reason is that religious civil society organisations do not have a special judicial status, they are all registered as organisations, foundations or institutions. The Russian Orthodox Church Department for Supporting Charity and Social Ministry tries to collect and update statistics. Its database list is 2133 institutions, projects and initiatives, plus 1091 churches and monastic establishments involved in charity and social ministry, plus 784 government institutions, like hospitals and hospices, with church assistance. So there are approximately 4000 specifically Russian Orthodox civil society organisations.

Fourth, in terms of their legal status, the Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) is the basic and most general type of organisations of the 'third sector'. The relevant Russian law states the following:
Art. 2. Nonprofit organisations may be created for achieving social, charitable, cultural, educational, scientific and managerial goals, for the purposes of protecting the health of citizens, developing physical culture and sports, satisfying the spiritual and other nonmaterial requirements of citizens, protecting the rights and legitimate interests of citizens and organisations, settling disputes and conflicts, rendering legal aid, and also for any other purposes directed towards the achievement of public weal.

Art. 3. Nonprofit organisations may be created in the form of social or religious organisations (combinations), nonprofit partnerships, institutions, autonomous nonprofit organisations, social, charitable and any other funds, associations and unions, and also in any other forms stipulated by the federal laws.

Fifth, within the category of NPO, we can distinguish a variety of organisations: first of all, religious organisations that are regulated by the special federal law 'Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations' (available online at www.legislationline.org/documents/id/4187; second, public associations that are regulated by a special federal law (available online at http://legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/4374); third, charitable

organisations that are regulated by a special federal law (available online at www.legislationline.org/documents/id/4373); finally, other types of NPO that are not regulated by a special federal law.

Sixth, as a rule all NPOs are financed through donations (endowments, contributions, gifts) and fundraising. But recently the state initiated a series of programmes to support Russian NPOs. The Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation has annual grants for NPOs. Moreover, on the website of the Public Chamber devoted to NPOs, there is a list of programmes which offer support for NPOs (available online at http://portal-nko.ru/finance/contest). The Russian Orthodox Church, despite a lack of funding, also tries to support lay social initiatives. There is a Fund of St Serafim of Sarov which among all other activities supports charity initiatives (http://www.bfss.ru/).

Seventh, in the Soviet era any social activity inside or around the church or local parishes was forbidden. So official religious civil society organisations started to appear only in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the beginning there was a tendency to politicisation, and some priests went into politics (like Gleb Yakunin in 1993). But then this politicisation was administratively forbidden by the church and all civil activities concentrated around social and charity issues. Anastasiya Mitrofanova, who wrote a book on the politicisation of Russian Orthodoxy, also stresses that this politicisation trend has decreased. Interestingly, when she published the book in 2004, she had the opposite opinion, arguing that the future would belong to religious ideologues. Now that virtually all former ideologues and ideologies have lost their influence, social activities are concentrated around local parishes, which at least in big cities turn into real communities that are involved in all kinds of civil society activities - sport classes, charity, Sunday schools, food for the homeless. But in the provinces and in the countryside the situation is much worse.

Under Patriarch Kirill, charity and social ministry activities have received stronger administrative support. All these activities are coordinated in some way by the Russian Orthodox Church Department for Charity and Social Ministry Support (http://diaconia.ru/english/). This department, headed by Bishop Panteleimon of Smolensk and Vyaz'ma, tries to coordinate religious civil society activities around the country. Usually such activities appear if there is a charismatic priest in the city or region who is capable of uniting people. Among the best examples are a rehabilitation centre for juvenile delinquents in St Petersburg headed by father Aleksandr Stepanov; the Orthodox hospital of St Aleksi in Moscow; and St Dmitri's sisterhood at the First City Hospital in Moscow.

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