Holism/Tselostnost' and Liberation/Rebellion in Russian and American Civil Religion

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Abstract

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the storming of the U.S. Capitol by right-wing insurrectionists have drawn increased attention to the faith-political nexus in Russia and the United States. Yet the "Christan nationalist" narratives observed in these countries did not emerge suddenly in the twenty-first century and are not a novelty introduced by a candidate or a regime. Rather, political and religious actors draw inspiration from *civil religions* that have their roots in the very formation of these respective states. This study seeks to trace developments in Russian and American civil religion from its inception up to the climactic events of the Ukraine invasion and the January 6 insurrection with the goal of answering the following question: *how have modern Russian and American civil religion evolved in comparison to their historical forms?* A comparison of these two countries will shed light on how civil religion as a unifying idea is constructed in "republics" with great ethnic and religious diversity. I find that both in Russia and the United States, civil religious discourses have adapted to plurality by evolving toward a strategic ecumenism and inclusivity based on shared political values, in accordance with priorities dictated by the national paradigms of holism/tselostnost' (Russia) and liberation/rebellion (United States).

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1. Introduction:

Although these events differed in nature and involved material interests as well as ideological ones, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the storming of the U.S. Capitol by right-wing insurrectionists drew increased attention to how politicians and faith leaders such as Putin, Trump, Patriarch Kirill, and Christian Right pastors fuse politics and religion in their discourse. Yet the "Christan nationalist" narratives observed in Russia and the United States did not emerge suddenly in the twenty-first century and are not a novelty introduced by a candidate or a regime. Rather, political and religious actors draw inspiration from *civil religions* that have their roots in the very formation of these states, and this awareness of historical continuity is integral to our understanding of both the Russian and American cases.

Perhaps even more significant than the modern-day affinities between the Putin regime and the American Christian Right are the historically stable characteristics that their countries share and those in which they differ. Both Russia and the U.S. have in large part succeeded in maintaining control over vast territories home to ethnically, racially, and confessionally diverse populations. On the other hand, they are very distinct in that America has been a democracy from its inception, while Russia has always been under some form of autocracy; and this divergence of political systems is ultimately reflected in political-religious discourse. As observed by Anderson (2015), "[u]nlike the Christian Right, which is fighting a civil war, the Moscow Patriarchate in part sees itself as fighting a foreign invasion" (p. 6). Two diametrically opposite paradigmatic threads appear to be woven throughout Russian and American mythology; the political theology of the White movement now promoted in Russia is preoccupied with the idea of wholeness—unity between Tsar and people, unity of territory, the holistic eclecticism of Orthodox values—and permeated with the trauma of losing it. Meanwhile, the central theme of mainstream

American Christian Right discourse is Liberty. Beginning with the American Revolution and continuing into the Civil War and Westward expansion, the justification for action has been to spread or defend freedom. In contrast to the Russian Third Rome, the image of Old Testament Israel that lies at the foundation of American political rhetoric is one of resistance and liberation. Indeed, some have noted the centrality of tselostnost', or 'integrity' (Wortman, 2011) and holism (Ishutin, 2017) in Russian discourse and intellectual tradition, while The National Endowment for the Humanities (2011) describes America's "religion of dissidence." In addition to a rebellion dimension, the American phenomenon also has a liberation dimension, which in this context refers to the idea of America as tasked with liberating domestic or foreign oppressed peoples. Drawing upon these observations, I identify two discursive paradigms—holism/tselostnost' (Russia) and liberation/rebellion (U.S.)—as historical constants in the civil religions of the countries being studied. This thesis traces developments in the representations of these constant paradigms from the formation of Russian and American statehood through the climactic events of January 6, 2021, and February 24, 2022, with the goal of answering the following question: *how have modern Russian and American civil religion evolved in comparison to their historical forms?*

Why the need to delve into history? I argue that this is because history informs our understanding of the present and speculations about the future. Meanwhile, the focus on Russia and the United States—an autocracy and a democracy—may inspire further research on how other autocratic and democratic countries that control diverse regions (such as Great Britain, China, and India) construct national narratives in the absence of demographic homogeneity. This study will explore representations of holism/tselostnost' and liberation/rebellion during critical time periods in the history of each country, with particular attention to how these

representations address ethnic and religious diversity. Specifically, I will cover the early history of Russian and American civil religion and the formation of core mythologies (section 3), the idealization of the rebellion narrative during the American Revolution and that of tselostnost' in the late Russian Empire (section 4), the prevalence of these paradigms in reactionary mythmaking that arose in response to the American Civil War and the Bolshevik revolution (section 5), and the evolution of holism/tselostnost' and liberation/rebellion during the Russian transition out of communism and the U.S. civil rights movement (section 6). Finally, the last two sections of this thesis (7 & 8) will discuss how the Putin regime, Trump, and their supporters employ the paradigms of holism/tselostnost' and liberation/rebellion to legitimate their agendas and frame their image as leaders, as well as how these paradigms can be observed in the explicit and symbolic discourse associated with the Ukraine invasion and the January 6 insurrection.

2. Background & Significance

As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to determine how the Russian and American civil religions have evolved into what they are at present, with a focus on changes in representation of the fundamental holism/tselostnost' and liberation/rebellion paradigms. My conceptualization of civil religion is informed by, though not entirely based upon, the original definition of this term as provided in Book 4, Chapter 8 of the Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1762) work *The Social Contract*[1]. As described by this thinker, civil religion is an ecumenical belief in the existence of a single divine being who rewards the good and punishes evildoers in the afterlife, as well as recognition of "the sanctity of the social contract and the laws" that make for a functional polity (Rousseau, 1762, p. 115). Rousseau envisions this

[1] All references to Rousseau in this thesis are taken from Book 4, Chapter 8 of this work: Rousseau, J. J. (n.d.) *The Social Contract & Discourses.* Carlton House. https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.203827/page/n5/mode/2up (Original work published 1762)

civil religion as enforcing tolerance for various personal belief systems but notes that it can take on a destructive character when it morphs into something else—"the Religion of the Citizen," whose ultimate product "is to place such a people in a natural state of war with all others, so that its security is deeply endangered" (p. 111). In considering Patriarch Kirill's prayers for victory in Ukraine and the combination of a "a wooden cross and a wooden gallows" seen at the January 6 insurrection (Gorsky, Perry, & Tisby, 2022, p. 1), Rousseau's warnings come to mind.

However, the Religion of the Citizen is characterized by the militant theological particularism seen in "the religions of early peoples" (Rousseau, 1762, p. 110), when those who followed a different deity were seen as inferior and subject to liquidation. In practice, the groups that engaged in this form of religious statism also tended to be ethnically homogenous, and "othering" occurred along both religious and ethnic lines. At first glance, the discursive environment in Russia and the U.S. Christian Right may leave some observers with the impression that the Religion of the Citizen is precisely what is forming. Snyder (2018) has suggested that Russia is embracing Orthodox fascism, and many have commented on the dangers of the Christian Right's racial and religious intolerance. On the other hand, Russia and America are very different from ancient nation-states that could hope to endure on religious ethno-nationalism in that they are far from homogenous; and especially in the United States, a plurality of ideas makes a rhetoric that cannot adapt to modernity easily displaceable. These conflicting implications may justify further parallel analysis of the Russian and American cases.

As it is the right-wing/conservative aspect of Russian and American culture that appears to illustrate the formation of a Religion of the Citizen, the scope of my analysis will be restricted to right-wing political discourse in the U.S. and official (i.e. non-opposition) discourse[2] in

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[2] Anti-Putin Orthodox believers may be developing their own civil religion. The late Navalny revealed at the end of his trial in 2021 that he had become a Christian (Baunov, 2021; Leonova, 2024). Inspired by this speech, some Orthodox believers are now

Russia. What makes the concept of civil religion especially relevant to the present study is that it was originally proposed by Rousseau as a unifying idea for a *republic.* Although its primary denotation is a polity with representative government, the historical understanding of *republic* also extends to religious and ethnic diversity such as that of the Roman Republic. Indeed, a republic can become an empire, and the two are not always mutually exclusive. Therefore, viewing religious-political discourse in countries such as Russia and America through the lens of civil religion may be useful for understanding the religious interpretation of national experience in republics, whether democratic or autocratic.

Admittedly, there are complications associated with applying the idea of civil religion to the analysis of political discourse, not least because there may be no country in the world that exemplifies civil religion in its original conceptualization. Rousseau imagined that civil religion would serve two purposes: that of "binding the hearts of the citizens to the State" (p. 111) and inspiring them to defend their state against internal enemies, and that of fostering a deeper commitment to the republican idea which would inspire citizens to rise up against domestic tyrants. The Christian Right's agenda is not to tie the hearts of the people to the state, as evidenced by the anti-establishment discourse that became especially apparent during the pandemic period. On the other hand, it is dedicated to the second purpose of civil religion—opposing what it perceives as tyranny. In the Russian case, as will be demonstrated, official discourse has the opposite orientation. Another problem is that the civil religion originally envisioned by Rousseau was purely theistic and intended to enforce tolerance toward different personal faiths, yet neither Russia nor America currently possess such a civil religion in its pure

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explicitly referring to him as a martyr (Leonova, 2024; Zezulin, 2024). Baunov (2021) likens Navalny to the Soviet Orthodox dissidents—a suitable comparison considering that his final trial speech (as cited in Leonova, 2024) articulated the idea of finding spiritual liberty in resignation similarly to how it is expressed in Solzhenitsyn's (1973) *Gulag Archipelago.*

form and most certainly did not possess it at the outset. However, such complications do not necessarily cancel the utility of using civil religion as a lens for analyzing these two cases; rather, this thesis will define civil religion primarily in terms of the properties attributed to it by scholars who have studied its real-world manifestation. Civil religion in the context of my research will be conceptualized as per Bellah and Hammond (1980/2013), who mainly focus on American civil religion and diverge somewhat from Rousseau's definition. The latter sees it as something that necessarily involves belief in a divine being, while Bellah & Hammond (1980/2013) suggest that its narratives and symbols are constructed within the semiotic system of a specific religion and even a specific denomination but eventually become so integrated into public life and mentality that these same narratives and symbols carry a spiritual meaning in the absence of any explicit religious context.

It is also necessary to provide a justification for favoring the idea of civil religion over "Christian nationalism," which Phillip Gorski employs in his 2019 book *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present.* Gorski's (2019) rationale for using the term "religious nationalism" is that Robert Bellah does not adequately distinguish between two different phenomena. Indeed, Bellah (1967/2005) refers to the non-sectarian religious appeals of the Founding Fathers and "an American Legion type of ideology" (p. 51) by the same name of civil religion, which appears to pose a conceptual problem. How can the original idea of civil religion as based on tolerance be reconciled with the intolerance that occasionally results from it in practice?

Gorski's (2019) solution is to draw a line between civil religion and religious nationalism that he believes is missing in Bellah's work, presenting the former as a social justice-oriented discourse and the latter as based on a racialized "conquest narrative" (p. 18). Meanwhile, racial

hostility in the right-wing vein of American civil religion was since its inception often tied to anti-establishment paranoia, as will be illustrated by historical examples in subsequent sections. Emphasis on the conquest narrative as a key pillar of "religious nationalism" also obscures the idea of Liberty and the role it has played in controversial American campaigns that some have called out as conquests. The conquest narrative is not the only and perhaps not the main religious justification for American war, which blurs the boundaries between the phenomena Gorski seeks to separate.

Moreover, "civil religion" and "religious nationalism" have several key properties in common: they are constructed using the symbols and narratives of Judeo-Christian texts (Gorski, 2019), they appear again and again throughout the history of American political discourse, and the idea they express presumably has the desired effect on the target audience even when overtly religious language is not used. They also share many key symbols and heroes, such as the Revolution, the Founding Fathers, and the founding documents. Another complication that arises in attempts to separate civil religion from Christian nationalism is that preoccupation with "blood purity" (Gorski, 2018) and racial animosities are a major characteristic of Gorski's (2019) "religious nationalism," but it is difficult to ascertain in a naturalistic context who belongs to this category and who does not. Mainstream Christian Right leaders would not explicitly express racial animus even if they harbor it but prefer to argue that racism is a personal sin that must be addressed through faith rather than through policy. Although American racial dynamics do not easily map onto the Russian scenario, Russia has its own version of ethnic supremacism which is likewise rejected by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in its official capacity. While chauvinist tendencies are always present in both secular and religious society, there are issues beyond the racial/national question which the constructors of right-wing civil religion are so

concerned with that they are obliged to compromise to some degree on chauvinism, as will be revealed in subsequent sections.

Due to the complications that arise in separating true civil religion from Christian nationalism, particularly in a comparative study, I will retain the term “civil religion” with the understanding that it can have two facets—an idea that has also been entertained by other scholars. Among the academics who view American civil religion as two-dimensional, a commonly proposed dichotomy is that of “prophetic” and “priestly” civil religion (Fairbanks, 1981; Williams & Alexander, 1994; Roof, 2009; as cited in Vegter et al., 2023), corresponding closely to Gorski’s (2019) prophetic religion/religious nationalism dichotomy and sharing its shortcomings. This conceptualization of American civil religion disregards the fact that right-wing American narratives (often termed “religious nationalist”) also have a prophetic element; as stated by Mike Muzzerall (2021) of Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, “‘God bless America’ will happen when America blesses God” (p. 43). Similar opinions have also been expressed by ROC leaders, including Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov, who in a January 14, 2022, interview on the Russian government TV channel *Rossija-24* warned listeners against developing a sense of inherent spiritual superiority based on affiliation with Holy Rus and ignoring the fact that immorality has its place in Russia as well (as cited in Birjukova, 2022). In reality, there is hardly a strain of civil religion that is purely exceptionalist and does not call the nation to account, but especially in the U.S. case, two different strains call the nation to account for different offenses due to different understandings of wrong. Crucially, both define “wrong” not in purely dogmatic terms but in terms of how the issues in question support or threaten the ideal of Liberty.

A coherent analysis of civil religion’s evolution in Russia and America calls for identification of “constants” in the civil religious discourse, namely ideas or narratives that can

be traced throughout history to evince how their representations and surrounding contexts have changed. In regard to the U.S., the prophetic/priestly dichotomy, just as the conquest narrative, does not suit this purpose because it does not sufficiently account for the role of Liberty in American discourse (both right-wing and left-wing) and the anti-establishment orientation that is almost central to the civil religion of the Christian Right. Robert Wuthnow (1988) identifies "liberal and conservative wings" (p. 398) in American civil religion and thus touches upon, but does not define, the facet of right-wing or "conservative" civil religion that stresses not only hegemonic entitlement or the infusion of religion into the public sphere but domestic libertarianism. It is a combination of interventionism and this "rebellious" libertarianism that I consider the discursive constant of American civil religion and define as the liberation/rebellion paradigm. As concerned to Russia, Wortman (2011) makes a compelling case for the idea of tselost' or tselostnost' as a fundamental ideal in Russian discourse but does not discuss its representations in twentieth century émigré philosophy despite the relevance of this intellectual tradition to Putin's rhetoric. As will be shown in subsequent sections of this thesis, Silver Age religious philosophy[3] (and particularly the work of the now-notorious Ivan Ilyin) articulated a new dimension of supra-particularism (holism) in the Russian paradigm that is linked with but not equivalent to tselostnost' and has persisted into modern discourse.

For the above reasons, I selected holism/tselostnost' and liberation/rebellion as the "constants" whose changing representations will be analyzed to determine how Russian and American civil religion have evolved from their inception to the present. Tselostnost' in the context of this thesis is understood as an "integrity" based on the inextricable relationship

[3] Generally, the Silver Age of Russian culture is understood as the period from the late 19th century to the Russian civil war. However, Guseinov & Lektorsky (2009) observe that many principal "Silver Age philosophers" remained active after this time.

between autocratic power and territorial integrity that has become an ideal internalized by successions of Russian rulers (Wortman, 2011). Holism is defined by Ishutin (2017) as "a philosophical position issuing from the idea of priority of the whole in relation to parts" (p. 21). For the American case, "rebellion" denotes a libertarian, anti-establishment orientation exemplified by the quote "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."[4] The other dimension of rebellion is liberation, which refers to the idea of America as destined to liberate the oppressed.

The subject of my analysis will be discourse (both symbolic and verbal/written) by Donald Trump and faith leaders who are associated with the Christian Right and have the status of a "megachurch." The majority of examples will be taken from television programs offered by Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, but the network Total Christian Television and Andrew Wommack's Truth & Liberty Coalition, as well as statements by pastors cited in secondary sources, will also be referenced. For Russia, the focus will be on Putin, Patriarch Kirill, and Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Samples will also be taken from articles on Pravoslavie.ru, the official website of the Moscow Patriarchate, and statements by hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR).

3. Inception: Origin of the Paradigms

The Third Rome and Tselostnost'

The period from 1505 to 1584 was marked by the crystallization of a nexus between expansion/unification and autocratization in Russian political history that would become the ideal of tselostnost'. Centralized monarchic rule in medieval Rus was not established until the reign of Ivan III, Grand Prince of Moscow, who first assumed the title of "autocrator" (Bercken

[4] According to the Thomas Jefferson Foundation (n.d.), Jefferson used this motto as his personal seal.

1999; as cited in Laats, 2009). It was to his son, Vasilii III, that the monk Filofei addressed a letter that is now commonly referenced as the origin of the Third Rome myth. The text describes Russia as the heir of the Byzantine Empire, destined to be the last Orthodox stronghold which would eventually absorb all nations into the one true Christianity (as cited in Østbø, 2015).

It is perhaps not surprising that Filofei saw Vasilii III as the ruler of a rising empire. His father was known for his aggressive unification efforts, particularly the subjugation of the autonomous Novgorod (Wortman, 2011), and Vasilii completed his work of consolidating a centralized Muscovite state (Zimin, 1981/2014). Several centuries later, the Russian historian Nicolai Karamzin highlighted Ivan III's violent campaign against Novgorod as a major achievement in the fortification of Russia, remarking that while the freedoms of the republican system are attractive, Ivan was wise to gather a scattered Russia into one whole (*tseloe*) to ensure its sovereignty and success (Karamzin, 1988, as cited in Wortman, 2011). His descendant, Ivan IV the Terrible, would go on to operationalize the myth of the Third Rome in his territorial campaigns against Muslim Kazan and the Catholic forces of Poland/Lithuania and Sweden (Laats, 2009). As such, the civil religion of the time was unambiguously denominational, and Ivan IV sought to raise Russia's status with Constantinople by presenting it as the defender of Eastern Orthodoxy per se (Ibid.).

As was the case under Ivan III's reign, territorial expansion under Ivan the Terrible was accompanied by the affirmation of royal agency, as the Third Rome myth can be considered the first representation of the autocratic-imperial nexus that would subsequently be articulated as tselostnost'. According to Laats (2009), Ivan IV "felt himself to be the ruler appointed and sent by God" (p. 105). He introduced the practice of coronation to Rus (Laats, 2009) and imbued patriotic tradition with notions specific to what Bellah & Hammond (1980/2013) term "archaic societies,"

wherein an autocratic ruler is seen as an agent of God and "political submission to the divine king is often equated with entry into the world of cosmic order" (p. viii). Even centuries later, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow echoed this idea in his 1851 sermon in honor of Nicholas I's birthday (compiled 1885 by V. Nazarevski), presenting autocratic rule on earth as the image of God's sovereign, uninterrupted rule in Heaven (as cited in Kozlov, 2017).

That the sacrality of autocracy was maintained for so long does not mean, however, that Russian civil religion has remained static in all aspects. Bellah and Hammond's (1980/2013) "archaic societies" likely have the same referent as Rousseau's "early peoples," who practiced not civil religion but the Religion of the Citizen. Certainly, Ivan IV's rendition of the Third Rome myth very much resembled the latter, being dogmatically chauvinist and justifying political conflict based on antagonism toward any religious groups that were not Orthodox. However, as the Russian Empire expanded and centuries passed, the idea of sacral autocracy as the bulwark of harmony would grow all the more relevant in the eyes of political traditionalists, but the ethnocentric and strictly Orthodox conception of Russia would become less sustainable.

The New Israel and Rebellion

Time would impose a similar need for reassessment on American civil religion, which also originated in a theocratic and more or less ethnically homogenous society, albeit a structurally democratic one. The Third Rome myth portrays Russia as a beacon of Orthodoxy, the American New Israel myth relates in the same way to Protestantism, and both narratives were occasionally applied to fuel antagonism toward other ethnic and religious groups that prevented the polity from advancing its interests. It is in the Puritan colonial period that Gorski (2019) finds the beginning of "blood rhetoric," citing the representation of Native Americans as "Canaanites" in the discourse of the day. This Old Testament-themed representation was certainly a prominent

one; yet there was also another myth, less directly influenced by Biblical narratives, which claimed that the Native Americans were instruments of Catholic tyranny (Andrews, 1904). This particular conspiracy theory had been influential more than a century before the American Revolution (Ibid.) and demonstrates that the natives were not the only group perceived as a hindrance to the development of the flourishing Protestant colony, as this category also included internal religious dissidents and even the monarchy.

Indeed, the colonial experiment itself had been framed by the Puritans as a Protestant initiative in the struggle with Catholicism—a City on a Hill that would serve as a testimony to the virtues of a society managed in accordance with Christian principles (Winthrop, 1630). The practical realization of this idea inevitably involved incorporating Protestantism into the legal system, and despite being democratic by political structure, many colonies in the New World were substantively Protestant theocracies. In Massachusetts, the local government issued its own dogmatically-based laws, which conflicted with the laws instituted by the Crown (Randolph, 1676 – 1703/1898, as cited in Brooks, 2020). Following the enthronement of Charles II, the monarchy made multiple attempts to press the colonies into compliance on these and other issues but was met with resistance from Massachusetts Bay in particular (Brooks, 2020), which had already proven itself to have an impulse toward independence. The Massachusetts General Court imposed a mandatory oath of fidelity to the Massachusetts government but did not require an oath of allegiance to the king (Randolph, 1676 – 1703/1898, as cited in Brooks, 2020), and the colony established its own mint producing coins that displayed an evergreen and the stamp of New England in lieu of the king's likeness (Barth, 2014). This ultimately resulted in the 1684 revocation of the Massachusetts Bay charter (Ibid.) under the Catholic King James II. Facing the loss of their Protestant legal system and further inspired by the political-religious power struggle

between Catholics and Protestants in England[5], colonists in several jurisdictions (including Boston) revolted against Crown-appointed governors and replaced them with reliably Protestant leaders (Brooks, 2016). It was around the time of these local rebellions that some espoused the notion that Native Americans were involved in a conspiracy between the French and Catholics to exterminate Protestantism (Andrews, 1904), beginning a stable tradition according to which minorities would be posited as the instruments, though not always the perpetrators, of tyranny.

Despite an obviously growing impatience with the monarchy, conflict between the Crown and the colonies was at the time still based largely, though not solely, on religion. It was not so much the idea of monarchy itself, as a Catholic monarchy, that triggered resistance. This is evidenced by the fact that after James II was replaced by the Protestants William and Mary, the colonists ceased to argue for the mint (Barth, 2014), took the oath of allegiance (New England Historical Society, 2023), and faith leaders adopted an increasingly pro-Britain rhetoric that called for loyalty to the monarchy in the advancement of Protestantism (Kidd, 2005).

Approximately 80 years later, however, the survival of Christianity would no longer be the driving force for rebellion as colonists would revolt against a king who posited himself as a protector of the Protestant faith (Ditchfield, 2002). The absence of an apparent nexus between this effort and religion may be what motivated the construction of apologetics that consolidated a new American narrative—that of rebellion.

4. Civil Religion During the Enlightenment

This section, focusing on the development of civil religion during and after the European Enlightenment, will explore "classic" works of the American Revolutionary period such as those

[5] This was the time of the Glorious Revolution, which resulted in the Protestants William and Mary displacing the Catholic James II (Brooks, 2016).

by Thomas Paine, Patrick Henry, and Ezra Stiles, with attention to how these re-articulate America's mission in a context where persecution of Protestants is no longer the main trigger for rebellion and sacralize facially secular values through a combination of Biblical and patriotic themes. The Russian portion surveys the political philosophies of the Romanov rulers and discusses how these aligned or conflicted with the representations of tselostnost' (or tselost')[6] devised by intellectuals such as Mikhail Katkov. In both countries, we observe the elaboration of civil religious narratives so that tselostnost' and rebellion become quasi-religious ideals whose representations are at least partly recast to suit more secular and ethnically/confessionally diverse contexts.

The Sacralization of Tselostnost'

Between 1721 and 1796, the Russian Empire expanded into territories that were home to various ethnic and religious groups—a diversity that drove exploration, science, and ethnography (Wortman, 2011) but also required additional considerations for maintaining control. Peter I was the first to formally articulate the connection between territorial *tselost'* and autocracy[7], as he believed that the integrity of such a vast dominion could only be preserved by drawing all powers, including ecclesiastical power[8], toward an autocratic Emperor (Wortman, 2011). Catherine the Great largely shared his views, considering the state (embodied in the monarch) to be the epicenter of ideological and administrative unity for the empire (Ibid.), and religion as something that could be utile if appropriately regulated. For her as a student of the Enlightenment (Massie, 2011), the type of religion was less important than that it fostered loyalty

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[6] As it was called before the fall of the Russian Empire (Wortman, 2011).
[7] As articulated in Peter's decree from February 5, 1722, the extension of the Tsar's will to the selection of successors was implemented out of "care for the integrity of our state, which with the help of God has now grown in extent, as is obvious to all" (Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii; as cited in Wortman, 2011, p. 21).
[8] Peter I replaced the Moscow Patriarchate with a government-controlled Holy Synod, enabling the state to control church publications and ensure that preaching instilled obedience to the Tsar (Nikiforov, n.d.).

to the state—a notion very much in the spirit of Rousseau. In his review of Robert Crews' 2006 book, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia,* Khalid (2007) mentions that Catherine's edict of toleration required all subjects "to belong to an assigned confessional category" and "obey the clergy of that faith." While restricting proselytization by the Russian Orthodox Church in what appeared to be a measure to preserve Islam (Corwin, 2006), this ruler drew it toward the center much as Peter had done with Orthodoxy, establishing an Islamic spiritual assembly and the office of state-appointed Muftis (Khalid, 2007). Catherine's reign also saw narrative/philosophical developments in the representation of tselost' that emphasized the Empire's diversity (Wortman, 2011). Although the Russian elite undoubtedly viewed many of its indigenous ethnic minorities from a Eurocentric perspective as those in need of edification and civilization, there was nevertheless an interest in conceptualizing the place of these newly acquired and very distinct parts in the Russian whole; and recognition of this diversity gave rise to the holistic conception of Russia as an organism, which later came to be associated with the philosophy of Ivan Ilyin (to be discussed in the following section). As articulated by the 18th-century ethnographer Johann Georgi, the state was "leading our rude Peoples by giant steps toward the common goal of general enlightenment in Russia, of a wonderful fusion of all into a single body and soul, and of creating, as it were, an unshakable Giant that will stand for hundreds of centuries" (as cited in Wortman, 2011, p. 23)

The idea of patriotism and respect for the state, rather than any particular ethnic or religious affiliation, as the basis for integrity was also promoted by the journalist Mikhail Katkov in his publications *Moskovskii Vedomosti* and *Russkii Vestnik* (Wortman, 2011). He represented tselost' not as a mere political description but rather an *idea* that Bellah & Hammond (1980/2013) would likely refer to as "more than secular" (p. 202). According to Wortman (2011),

Katkov had a "virtual obsession" with tselost.' This intellectual considered the Tsar to be "the personification of this unity" (Katkov, 1863, pp. 100-101; as cited in Wortman, 2011, p. 28), the "supreme authority" with which the diverse Russian peoples "feel themselves *as one organism*" [italics mine] (Katkov, 1865, pp. 350-351; as cited in Wortman, 2011, p. 29). Katkov's views did not quite concur with those of Alexander III, who perceived tselost' as a union between an ethnic Russian people and an ethnic Russian Tsar mediated by *Russian* Orthodoxy in an idyllic pre-Petrine context (Wortman, 2011).

A similar conceptual divergence appears to have occurred between the tselost' envisioned by Alexander III's predecessor, Nicholas I, and Count Sergei Uvarov, who is best known as the father of the initiative to inculcate Russian students with appreciation for "orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.*b*) in hopes of salvaging the threatened monarchy during the reign of Nicholas I. The Russian historian Andrei Zubov (n.d.) in the 35th lecture of his online course on nineteenth-century Russian history seeks to challenge what he considers oversimplification of Uvarov's idea as a chauvinist one. According to this scholar, Uvarov saw Orthodoxy not as a ritualistic or ethnically Russian Christianity but a set of historically stable Christian principles that drew heavily upon ancient Greek and Indian philosophy—principles that had been lost in Western Christianity but were being rediscovered in the East. Uvarov's "nationality," according to Zubov, denoted loyalty to the historical traditions of the Russian nation (understood, again, as dating back to ancient Greece) and the then-popular Slavophile concept of sobornost', a kind of Orthodoxy-based collectivism. Nevertheless, Nicholas I himself likely did not grasp the profundity of Uvarov's intentions and interpreted them in a manner more favorable to a ruler seeking to reverse Alexander II's reforms (Zubov, n.d.). Thus, while there may have been attempts by some members of the intelligentsia to diverge

from the uncompromising divine-right rhetoric and Russian chauvinism toward more secular and ecumenical representations of tselost', these ideas were not fully developed or adopted by the Tsars of the time, who held to Alexander III's "archaic" understanding of integrity.

As has been expounded in this and the preceding section, ambitious early rulers such as Ivan III and Ivan the Terrible combined the broadening of the Empire with the strengthening of monarchic power (Laats, 2009), and Peter I relied all the more on this approach to preserving *tselost'* after the expansion of the Russian Empire into demographically diverse territories (Wortman, 2011). In post-Petrine Russia, the notion of tselost' was absorbed into intellectual discourse and evolved from a political agenda into a symbolic and even spiritual ideal that could have different representations. Alexander III's tselost' was based a distinctly Orthodox, blood-and-soil notion dating back to "archaic" civil religion, while his contemporary Katkov promoted an ecumenical and trans-ethnic patriotic tselost' similar to that enjoined by Catherine II in its sensitivity to the great diversity of parts which needed to be incorporated into the imperial body (Ibid.). Both representations allotted a special place to the ruler, only one promoted a Russian Orthodox version of the divine right and another portrayed the Tsar as the incarnation of a sacral but non-denominational tselost' and the head of the Russian "organism." This organic metaphor would be taken up after the fall of the Russian Empire by Ivan Ilyin, who would expand the underdeveloped representation of tselostnost' into one that synthesized the uncompromising Russian-ness and Orthodoxy of Alexander's vision with the ecumenical vision of Catherine II.

The Sacralization of Liberty

While Catherine II in Russia was devising ways to maintain control over a vast empire without provoking revolutions, the American colonists were preparing for revolution against an imperial power. As discussed previously, the revolts that had occurred across the East Coast a

century before were provoked not only by economic restrictions and other attempts at imperial control, but also by a strong fear of Catholic persecution (Andrews, 1904). During the Revolution, however, activists would refashion the representation of the rebellion narrative to a new and more secular political context.

Although he himself did not believe many Judeo-Christian dogmas, the revolutionary Thomas Paine (1776/1994) in his treatise *Common Sense* frames his argument against reconciliation with the British monarchy around the Biblical passage from 1 Samuel wherein the Israelites request for a king to rule over them. The prophet Samuel was troubled by this request and conveyed the matter to God, Who reproachfully permitted the request to be granted, saying: “Listen to the voice of the people, to all that they say to you. For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from reigning over them” (English Standard Version Bible, 1 Samuel 8:7). Paine also supports his position with an Old Testament narrative describing how after the prophet Gideon successfully leads the Israelites in a rebellion against the oppressive Midianites, they ask him to become their king, to which he replies “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you” (King James Version Bible, Judges 8:23; as cited in Paine, 1776/1994). With the days of Catholic hegemony having receded into the past, *Common Sense* offers a new theological framework for resistance by providing evidence for the idea that monarchy as a political system, regardless of its denominational sympathies, is contrary to the will of God. Significantly, however, this work also demonstrates that the suspicion toward racial and ethnic minorities as instruments of a tyrannical government did not vanish together with Catholic persecution but was still quite acute and now turned itself not only against Native Americans but also African Americans. According to Paine (1776/1994):

> There are thousands, and tens of thousands, who would think it glorious to expel from the continent, that barbarous and hellish power, which hath stirred up the Indians and Negroes

> to destroy us, the cruelty hath a double guilt, it is dealing brutally by us, and treacherously by them. (Par. 104).

Another prominent politician who made it his mission to dispel the illusions of a possible reconciliation with Britain was Patrick Henry. Although he did not delve into extensive Biblical proofs, his rhetoric had a religious pathos very similar to Paine's. Several times in his 1775 *Give me liberty or give me death* speech, Henry makes a somewhat dramatic comparison of the Americans to slaves, drawing a connection between the colonists' condition and the Israelites' bondage in Egypt. He insists that this enslavement must not be tolerated even for the sake of harmony, exclaiming "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?" (Henry, 1775, par. 6).

Another noteworthy aspect of Patrick Henry's monologue is the almost intentional use of paradoxes that place religious language in a secular context. For example, he draws upon Christ's reference to those who fail to understand the Word of God in a description of politicians blind to British obstinacy, suggesting that they are unable to perceive realities "which so nearly concern their *temporal* salvation" [italics mine] (Ibid., par. 2). On the same topic, he comments "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience" (Ibid., par 3). For anyone familiar with the Bible, this brings to mind the verse "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (English Standard Version Bible, Ps. 119:105), yet Henry substitutes "word" for "experience."

Overall, this speech is to some extent a model of the historical evolution of civil religion, where secular matters are attired in religious language and eventually become part of a different "religion" separate from theological principles. There was nothing inherently religious about the American revolution, and there is nothing in the New Testament that prescribes the protection of one's liberty as an end in itself; and yet through the narrative of Old Testament rebellions, the

revolutionary "streak" and aspiration toward self-government that had been germinating in New England mentality for some time became "the holy cause of liberty" (Henry, 1775, par. 5).

After the revolution for which these appeals had prepared the nation was successfully effectuated, the minister Ezra Stiles (1783) marked the victory with a celebratory sermon that was almost providentially similar to the one which opened the American story—John Winthrop's (1630) *Model of Christian Charity*. Stiles' address likewise called upon "God's American Israel" not to forget their Protector and laid out a vision of America's role in the global destiny; yet it also introduced a decidedly more political nuance into this vision, emphasizing that the successful revolution had set an example which would precipitate the demise of tyranny throughout Europe. America was now not only a beacon of Protestantism, but a beacon of political independence that would effect "the triumph of LIBERTY on earth" (Stiles, 1783, p. 98).

In summary, it may be considered that during the Revolution, the idea of Protestantism's eventual diffusion throughout the world was eclipsed, if not entirely replaced, by an aspiration toward the diffusion of democracy. Post-revolutionary America was still viewed as a City on a Hill (Winthrop, 1630), but now with an even more ambitious and clearly articulated mission. As exemplified in Patrick Henry's speech, Liberty itself, religious or civil, was sacred and to be prioritized over peace and even life. Preachers exhorted their congregations to not only repent and work for the common good but to repent and take action to depose monarchy (Cherry, 2014), creating not so much a conquest narrative as a rebellion narrative defined by the motto "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God" (Thomas Jefferson Heritage Foundation, n.d.) and depicting democracy as the order approved by God from the beginning. The enemy shifted from a theological one (Papism) to a political one (tyranny), which the American nation was

commissioned with eliminating within itself and in the surrounding world. Nearly a century after the Revolution, the journalist John L. O'Sullivan in his 1839 article *On the Great Nation of Futurity* uses this democratic messianism for pathos in his argument for Westward expansion and the associated annexation of Texas, eloquently recasting the notion that the American democratic system is established on the divine principle of equality and destined to expand for the liberation of nations in bondage to autocrats. O'Sullivan's ideas were echoed in a more secular form by President James Polk in his 1845 inaugural address, wherein he argues that Westward expansion would enable the United States to spread freedom to other peoples by absorbing them into the jurisdiction of its unprecedentedly fair Constitution. As evinced in these rhetorical appeals, the inherent validity of unbridled expansion began to be questioned in later periods of American history, and a narrative of liberation would be called upon to complement that of rebellion and supplant that of conquest. Of course, some were still not convinced by the pro-annexation propaganda, and Abraham Lincoln (1859) denounced this ideology in his sarcastic *Second Lecture on Discovery and Inventions* as the pretextual invocation of Liberty for the conquest of those peoples who possessed land, with complete disregard for enslaved peoples who did not have this asset. Not long afterwards, Lincoln would realize his own understanding of Liberty through the Civil War.

The preceding discussion has shown that the late Romanov period in Russia was marked by the development of two representations of tselost' as proposals for preserving unity in a Russia that was unprecedentedly diverse. One was an "archaic" narrative that presented unity of the people around the state as a bond based on the dominant Russian ethnicity and Orthodox religion, and the other was based on sacred (but not necessarily religious) cross-confessional values and the cohesion of diverse parts within a single "organism" whose head was the Tsar.

During the American Revolution, we observe a shift from the focus on religious freedom in the conflict between Protestants and Catholics to that on freedom as a religious concept in itself, with a corresponding depiction of the City on a Hill as a wellspring of democracy (rather than only Protestantism) destined to diffuse abroad. Still, notwithstanding the developments of the Enlightenment period, American minorities continued to be presented as instruments of the tyrant, while nationalist ideology persevered in Russia. The Religion of the Citizen would remain strong for some time more.

5. Civil Religion and the Eclectic Enemy

While the radical nature of the Russian revolution/civil war (1917-1920) may have no analogue in American domestic history, its closest parallel would likely be the Civil War (1861-1865), as both events upended a longtime status quo. This led to the formation of counter-movements that claimed to be sanctuaries for a pure Russian or American culture but were to some degree self-contained cultures in their own right, producing innovations in literature, religious philosophy, and political thought that would effect changes in the manifestation of national paradigms. This brought about new representations of rebellion and liberation in the American case and the emergence of holism as a complementary paradigmatic dimension to tselostnost' in the Russian case, as well as an increased attachment to national saints or heroes who embodied these paradigms. Perhaps the most telling development in civil religion associated with both civil wars was the reconfiguration of national and religious boundaries which occurred in response to the rise of a political enemy that, much as was the case during the American Revolution, could not quite be assigned to any specific ethnicity or confession.

The Bolshevik Revolution and Aftermath

After coming to power in Russia, the Bolshevik regime sought to stifle traditional religion and replace it with a purely secular veneration of Lenin and Stalin that nonetheless had Christian undertones. Meanwhile, in the unbounded cultural space known as the "Russian abroad" (russkoe zarubezhie), the pre-revolutionary, imperial-autocratic civil religion remained very much alive, acquiring modern nuances as it was pondered over by intellectuals associated with the White movement. Nearly all White emigres saw Bolshevism as evil, but their views on what Russia should become after its downfall diverged. This faction contained people of different political and philosophical orientations, including Westernists who believed that Russia must adopt a Western European style of government. Among those who rejected the Western model for Russia and favored autocracy, there were Slavophiles, Eurasianists, and those whose ideas did not quite fall into either school.[9] The philosophers whose treatises were influential enough to become recognized classics of the Russian intellectual Silver Age generally concurred on the rejection of pan-Slavic nationalism, recognition of autocratic rule and an abstract "Orthodox" religion as a part of Russia's unique character and destiny, a view of imperial integrity as a guarantor of peace, and a belief in spirituality and free thought as the true freedom contrasted with liberalism as false freedom. One thinker who has gained much attention since the Ukraine invasion is Ivan Ilyin[10], whose Eurasianist-leaning philosophy is somewhat more militant than that of his contemporaries but nevertheless representative of the Silver Age religious perspective on imperialism, autocracy, and Russian identity.

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[9] The main difference between the Slavophiles and the two latter groups was that the former held an ethnic nationalist view of Russia as a pan-Slavic state (Plokhy, 2023) and the latter construed Russia more broadly as a Eurasian empire.
[10]All references to Ivan Ilyin in this thesis have been translated from Russian by the author and draw upon the following text: Ilyin, I. (1948-1954). Nashi Zadachi (Vol. 1). Avid Readers. https://avidreaders.ru/read-book/nashi-zadachi-tom-i.html

Ilyin’s imperialism was based on the organic metaphor introduced centuries earlier by Johann Georgi (as cited in Wortman, 2011). Russia, he warns, is as indivisible as a body and cannot survive with only a part of the whole, such as possessing only rivers while being cut off from the seas they flow into, and any nation that attempts to block its access to the sea would be making a grave error and inevitably provoking the country to a severe and merciless battle for the doors of its own house (p. 150).

In accordance with the idea of tselostnost’, Ilyin believed that Russia’s vastness and diversity warranted autocratic power that could hold it together. Every nation, he opined, is an individual with unique needs that cannot be addressed by a one-size-fits-all approach, and for this reason attempting to impose democracy on Russia is akin to imposing monarchy on the United States. He argued that together with its large territory and frequent wars, the willfulness in its people makes Russia governable only by “strong authority” (sil’naja vlast’), but not a totalitarian one that would sustain itself solely on the use of force and suppress creative impulses. In fact, he considered totalitarianism contrary to the Russian national character. Instead, he proposed that the bond of monarch and people must be mediated by love, arising from a quintessentially Russian need for the government to be artistically and religiously incarnated (p. 209) in a single beloved entity. The ideal Russian leader is “religiously persuasive” (p. 205), strong-willed, self-reliant, and, crucially, a holistic thinker. He must be *possessed by the spirit of the whole, and not the private, the personal, the partisan* (p. 19).

While clearly sharing the uncompromising position on tselostnost’ enjoined by the majority of Russian rulers, Ilyin diverged from the obstinate Slavophilia of the later Romanov tsars. He considered the national identity of pre-Petrine Russia to be a naïve, primitive one because it posited Orthodoxy in its formal sense as the object of national pride and discounted

everything that did not originate from dogmatic religion. Meanwhile, he credits Peter I with introducing a secular culture that changed the understanding of nationalism in Russia and set before the nation the yet-incomplete task of infusing *its religious-Orthodox spirit, the Johannine spirit of love and freedom* (p. 184) into a secular national identity. In order to penetrate Ilyin's reasoning on this matter, it is necessary to understand that his Orthodoxy is not a purely theological concept, but the "Russian idea." The Russian idea, in turn, is the idea of the contemplating heart (p. 208), or the tendency to operate on love, inspiration, and understanding of the case at hand rather than the consistent application of methodologies and rules (which Ilyin associates with overly legalistic and cerebral Western Christianity).

Although this Russian idea was reared in the lap of Orthodoxy and historically defined by its spirit (p. 185), it has become a supra-theological spirituality that colors all expressive forms and domains of life—music, law, dance, medicine, and even non-Orthodox religions. According to Ilyin, Islam and Lutheranism in the Russian Empire have a different character than Islam and Lutheranism elsewhere because they are also permeated with this trans-confessional Orthodoxy. It follows that Russian-ness is not based on affiliation with a single Church but what he calls a single *religiosity,* making for an expansive national identity that includes "….the proud grandson of the Slavs, and the Finn, and the currently wild Tungusian, and the Kalmykian—the friend of the steppes" (Pushkin, A., as cited in Ilyin, 1948-1954, p. 185).

As mentioned previously, Ilyin and his contemporaries were not the first to propose a more eclectic understanding of Orthodoxy and nationality; they had been preceded by Catherine II, Katkov (Wortman, 2011), and perhaps Uvarov (Zubov, n.d.), who interpreted Russia's territorial makeup as that of a single body with diverse parts, and the bond between people and leader as based on something more universal than dogmatic Orthodoxy. However, it was only

after the revolution that this new representation of tselostnost' was elaborated, and the timing can be attributed to a variety of factors. For one, the greatest enemy of the White emigres—Bolshevism—came to power partly thanks to its status as a trans-ethnic ideology that incorporated non-ethnic Russians into its narrative in a way that late imperial Slavophilia did not. Indeed, Ilyin attributed the Bolshevik idea of "national liberation" to a Western plan to orchestrate Russia's downfall by sowing division among its ethnic minorities. Secondly, being officially atheist, Bolshevism set itself not only against Christianity but against all the religions of the former Empire, which may have aroused greater awareness of potential allies in the anti-communist emigration.

Drawing on his conception of the Russian idea as a creative, non-partisan one, Ilyin denounced the tendency of his fellow emigres to become indoctrinated Westernists or Slavophiles and called them to become reconciled under the holistic "grand idea" of resurrecting Russia (i.e. carrying out a counter-revolution). Together with other Silver Age philosophers, he can be credited with linking the religious and governmental elements of tselostnost' with the idea of inspiration over method and perspective over particularism, thereby making holism the other dimension of the Russian paradigm. Ilyin articulated a trans-ethnic, cross-confessional civil religion to counter a trans-ethnic and areligious enemy; but the greater inclusivity of this religion made it distinctly more philosophical or political than theological, being identified as a religion by some perceived sacrality rather than by standard definition.

Pan-Eurasianism, imperialism, and "cultural Orthodoxy" (Kahla, 2014) also figured in the works of dissident intellectuals such as Lev Gumilev and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, whose names are potentially more familiar to the general Russian public than that of Ilyin. Although they did not enter the mainstream definitively until the fall of the Soviet Union, Denis Gorelov

(2003; as cited in Karamaev, n.d.) suggests that copies of Gumilev's work began circulating actively in Russia during the 1960s, when decreased stringency of government control over the creative sector provided an avenue for émigré motifs to begin flowing into Soviet popular culture, even if half-illegally. According to Sergei Karamaev, a researcher with the Russian Academy of Sciences' Center for Problems of Development and Modernization, this period was marked by a more fair media representation of White officers, who had previously been portrayed as brutal villains in communist propaganda. Sergei Volkov in his book *The Tragedy of Russian Officerdom* remarks that two new TV shows released in the 1970s contained an unprecedented number of positive portrayals of White officers with relatively few negative portrayals (as cited in Karamaev, n.d.). Of course, television (which could be more easily censored) betrayed this increasing sympathy for the White movement only in part, and Karamaev (n.d.) notes that White nostalgia was also proliferated through urban chanson[11] and became popular with third-wave emigres as well as citizens of Soviet Russia. His online collection of White-themed Soviet music includes the song *Lieutenant Golitsyn* (poruchik golitsyn)[12], which will be recognizable to most Russians who watched television during the 1990s. It had already existed in some form in 1984 and was adapted slightly by different performers over time (Ibid.), but one of the most popular renditions is that by Mikhail Zvesdinsky, which contains most key elements of emigre-style poetry: imperial grandeur, patriotism, and a lyrical lament over a noble but doomed cause, as shown in the following excerpt:[13]

> In vain our brides wait for us in St. Petersburg,
> And nights spent in gatherings, alas, are not for us,
> Now behind us are trenches and blizzards,
> Crimea and the Caucasus are abandoned by us.

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[11] A ballad-like genre of music generally composed by independent singer-songwriters.
[12] The authorship of this song has been disputed, and it was once even presented as being an authentic émigré ballad composed by a nameless White officer, but it is often attributed to the bard Mikhail Zvezdinsky (Karamaev, n.d.)
[13] All samples of Russian poetry included in this thesis has been translated by the author with the use of DeepL.

Red-black birds circle above us,
Three years have passed like a joyless dream.
Abandon your hopes, Lieutenant Golitsyn,
The last cartridge remains in the barrel.

And in the morning, as before, the sun flickers,
The ship "Imperator" freezes like an arrow,
Lieutenant Golitsyn, perhaps we'll return,
For what, Lieutenant, need we a foreign land?

Roots have been sundered, nests have been plundered,
And our loved ones are long gone.
Lieutenant, we won't return to our homeland,
A bloody dawn is rising over Russia. (as cited in Karamaev, n.d.)

Notably, this ballad does not invoke Orthodoxy. The lesser-known *White Song* (belaja pesnya) by Yuri Borisovich, performed around the 1970s (Ibid.), conveys a Soviet author's interpretation of the White Guard's religious and patriotic sentiments:

We haven't slept for a year now, hiding our resentment under our uniforms,
Awaiting a villein's bullet below our buttonholes.
It's been a year since Tobolsk chimed a requiem for the Tsar,
and anathematized the souls of the murderers.

Not God and not Tsar, not pain and not conscience,
To them it's all "Away with prisons!" and "fire to the heavens!"
And it's our fate to read this terrible tale
In the inflamed eyes of our mothers and brides. (as cited in Karamaev, n.d.)

Although stylized, the tone of these and other songs suggests that the authors had acquainted themselves with earlier, genuine White poetry, both the pompous Orthodox imperialism of the *Battle Hymn of Drozdovsky's Host (marsh drozdovskogo polka)*[14] and the lyrical regretfullness of *Russia, You are Buried in Snow (zamelo tebja snegom, rossija*).[15] This

[14] Marsh drozdovskogo polka (1919). (2024, April 30). In *Wikipedia*. https://ru.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%D0%9F%D0%BE_%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BC_%D0%B8_%D0%BF%D0%BE_%D0%B2%D0%B7%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%8C%D1%8F%D0%BC&oldid=137527723

[15] Zamelo tebja snegom, Rossija. (2023, November 12). in *Wikipedia.* https://ru.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=%D0%97%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%BE_%D1%82%D0%B5%D

rising chanson trend was, however, a modest precursor to what would permeate Russian pop culture several decades later.

Together with greater creative liberties and the spread of White-themed literature, the 1960s brought new opportunities for evangelization in the Soviet Union to the émigré-founded Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR),[16] which happened to share many of the intellectual and political views that were attracting interest inside Russia. Even before the "thaw" period, this establishment not only ministered to the spiritual needs of Russians in exile but also sought to preserve pre-revolutionary values and keep them alive in the homeland. A 1938 letter written to Soviet believers by the Second All-Diaspora Council of ROCOR draws upon a philosophy similar to Ilyin's in a call for religious unity that would be achieved when "the fire of Christian zeal, faith, love and patriotic sacrifice, would truly be kindled in our hearts…and would meld us *into one powerful organism* before which no enemies could prevail" [italics mine] (Second All-Diaspora Council, 1938). Likely to counter the Soviet propaganda to which they knew their audience was concurrently being exposed, the elders reminded them that the "rationalist" approach and coercion could not achieve a just society and that only Christianity can transform hard work from a curse into a "free creative effort" (Ibid.) Love, the epistle stressed, was the substance of the bond that transformed society "into one orderly organism" (Ibid.).

Separation from the Russian homeland, which had long been mystically associated with the Orthodox religion, also led to an intentional focus on the "roots" of Russian and Orthodox

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[16] As recounted by Shchukin (n.d.), ROCOR was formed when several high-ranking clerics emigrated from Bolshevik-occupied Russia and established a temporary body of the Russian Orthodox Church outside the Soviet Union on the grounds that it could no longer remain affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate due to its "enslavement by the Godless Soviet State" (Shchukin, n.d.).

culture that symbolically united the peoples scattered abroad with those remaining in the Soviet Union. In the aforementioned 1938 letter, the All-Diaspora Council relates this heritage in a now-familiar narrative,[17] saying,

> We ceaselessly thank God for you, who amidst brutal persecution until this day preserved whole the treasure received from the great illuminator, St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles, 950 years ago…It is to our grief if the last threads snap that bind us to the ancient Russian of St. Vladimir. Who will be able to resurrect it then? A new people will arise, separated from its historical roots...

In addition to the nostalgic vision of Russia as an Orthodox homeland awaiting imminent resurrection, ROCOR absorbed and continues to preserve other elements of a distinct émigré Christian culture characterized by a religious resentment for the anti-Christian Bolshevik powers and a reverence for fellow Orthodox people who suffered under Soviet rule: Tsar Nicholas II and his family first and foremost, as well as clerics, monastics, and lay believers glorified as the New Martyrs and Confessors. In her 2022 article, Lena Zezulin summarizes the values that characterizes ROCOR culture thus:

> Growing up in America in a ROCOR parish at St. Seraphim of Sarov in Sea Cliff, I was steeped in many loving traditions and values of old Russian émigrés. This included a fierce defense of truth and of religious and human rights violated in the USSR. It also included instruction in the Law of God, the values of Christianity, defense of the weaker and of human dignity, as well as Russian history and literature and even Church Slavonic. We were a tiny group, but we were to speak for the voiceless believers of Russia… We studied the dissidents, we read Solzhenitsyn, and we were fervent admirers of the New Martyrs of Russia.

The article itself describes the author's disillusionment with the outcome of the ROCOR-ROC reunification and the ROC's promotion of the war in Ukraine. In a 2022 NPR interview with Odette Yousef, Zezulin also provides insight on the internal dynamics of ROCOR and its other more controversial facets. She recounts that while she and her biracial family were initially

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[17] Putin and Patriarch Kirill often reference the shared religious heritage of Russia and Ukraine as dating back to the Baptism of the Rus under St. Prince Vladimir in the late tenth century, as observed by Adamsky (2019) and as will be elaborated upon in this thesis.

accepted in their America-based ROCOR community, this changed over the years as "the Church expanded into new areas of the U.S." Although Zezulin appears to attribute this turn to the increased participation of White nationalist converts who saw the ROCOR parish as "a place where they would be tolerated" (Yousef, 2022), there was always a faction of the Russian emigration that harbored nationalist inclinations and especially antisemitism. Indeed, antisemitic sentiment was high among the White Guard and stemmed from the myth that the revolution had been the result of a Hasidic-Masonic conspiracy (Borodin, 2017b, Timofeychev, 2017). Gumilev, although a strong proponent of a multi-ethnic Russia, allotted a rather negative role to Jews in the historical development of the Muscovite superethnos[18] because he perceived them as members of an international community detached from their natural habitat (Lev Gumilev, 2022), and Solzhenitsyn's position on the Jewish question is the subject of an apparently unresolved debate (Grenier, 1985; Mahoney, 2004; Young, 2004). Indeed, the broader conception of Russian-ness proposed by Ilyin is not absolute. Although many emigres recognized the diverse makeup of Bolshevism, some still succumbed to the age-old tendency of displacing political troubles on ethnic-religious minorities. It is indisputable that discourses exist on a spectrum between the original diverse conception of civil religion proposed by Rousseau and a chauvinistic Religion of the Citizen, but the statements that the most powerful individuals and institutions issue in public may indicate where on that spectrum civil religion is located at a given time. Given their multifacetedness and ambiguity, White intellectual works can often be selectively interpreted by powerful actors for different and sometimes even opposite ends.

[18] According to Titov's (2005) interpretation of Gumilev's work, a "superethnos" is a grouping of ethnoi that "develop in the same direction and have similar, but not identical, behavioural stereotypes" (p. 70). Behavioral stereotypes are certain patterns of behavior that arise in the obligatory presence of geographic features specific to an ethnic group's habitat (as cited in Titov, 2005).

For example, as the Soviet Union was nearing its demise, the authorities entertained the idea of using Silver Age literature to construct a new apologetical defense for communism, despite the authors' opposition to this political system. According to Bibikhin (2003, as cited in Stoeckl, 2007) and Stoeckl & Uzlaner (2022), in the 1970s, the Russian state engaged quasi-dissident academics to compile and translate Silver Age philosophy and other theological works, seeking to dissect the literature for religious principles that could be framed as general moral foundations for a communist country. Clearly, when the weakness of class solidarity as a unifying ideology became apparent, the government accepted that some recognition of religion and its role in society was inevitable.

Even before the official collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1988, high-ranking Communist Party staff took part in an official celebration of the millennium of the Baptism of Rus' (Smolkin, 2018)—an event that would become one of the main elements of Putin's discourse. However, the Soviets' increasing openness to religion had its boundaries. Several years earlier, in 1985, the ROC Metropolitan Aleksii (Ridiger) had written a proposal to Gorbachev offering the Church's assistance in resolving the moral crisis of the day, which he argued it could help to mitigate if given a greater role in public life (Smolkin, 2018; as cited in Stoeckl & Uzlaner, 2022). At the time, the state rejected the proposal, and Aleksii was demoted (Ibid.). This did not destroy Aleksii's confidence in the Church's potential to gain social influence, and he later became associated with Boris Yeltsin and, at his request, anathemized the participants of the August 1991 coup and spoke against the detention of Gorbachev (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. n.d.*a*). That year, he attended Yeltsin's investiture as a dignitary (Ibid.).

To summarize this section: it has been shown that during the Soviet period, pre-revolutionary conceptions of tselostnost' as "organic" imperial unity secured by autocratic power

and Orthodoxy survived among the emigrated intelligentsia, with philosophers such as Ilyin expanding the understanding of Orthodoxy and nationality into something ecumenical and Eastern/Eurasian rather than ethnically Russian. Ilyin's Orthodoxy was, at its essence, a kind of holism that is operationalized in citizens and leaders who act on heartfelt inspiration rather than a set of rules or a party line. Bolshevism being a very diverse and even international movement, Ilyin saw the collective "West" as its source. This West, accused of harnessing nationalist sentiments in Russian minorities and seducing them into Bolshevism, was construed as more of an enemy than the minorities themselves. Still, the ancient tendency to identify enemies based on ethno-religious characteristics was also exacerbated by the revolution, producing a supernatural interpretation of the royal family's murder that attributed the event to Jews. Antisemitism and nationalism also had its place in ROCOR—a preserver of Orthodoxy as well as authentic "Russian" (specifically, pre-revolutionary) culture whose agendas intersected with the broader émigré philosophical and literary tradition, including the idealization of tselostnost'. In the absence of a ruling Tsar, it turned to the veneration of deceased Tsar-Saints (namely Prince Vladimir and Nicholas II) who could serve as immortal and therefore enduring symbols of Russian unity. In the homeland, as the Communist Party became aware of its own weakness as a unifying force, Soviet authorities turned to Silver Age political theology and other religious literature in search of a new basis for the integrity of the USSR (Stoeckl & Uzlaner, 2022). No alternative to Marxist ideology was introduced, however, before the Soviet Union began to fall apart, opening new opportunities to ROCOR as well as the Moscow Patriarchate and the ambitious Metropolitan Aleksii. The paths of Aleksii and ROCOR would converge and occasionally conflict as the constituents of the Russian Orthodox Church negotiated its public

image after it became a sociopolitical actor in a context that was inevitably more pluralistic than it had been before the revolution.

As seen from the Russian case, civil religious discourses can change toward greater inclusivity in accordance with the principle “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” albeit this change may be imperfect in light of the fact that prejudices tend to be quite stable. A similar gradual shift in boundary-making occurred in America during the Civil War. However, while Russian émigré discourses primarily drew ideological boundaries between the East/Eurasia and the West in accordance with the territorial boundaries of the imperial period, in the American case a line was drawn through the interior of the country.

The American Civil War

From the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay colony to the beginning of Westward expansion, if Americans were at war, it was with “others”—those of other nationalities or races, or the empire across the sea. During the Civil War, however, the narrative representations of the liberation/rebellion paradigm would turn inwards. While the ideology of the Republic had a unifying element, the rhetoric that most imprinted on Western American collective memory was that of the abolitionists, who promoted the idea that the North was fulfilling God’s will through liberation of the oppressed. This time, however, it was not a project of global democratization à la John L. O’Sullivan, or even a revolution, but rather a federally organized effort for the emancipation of African Americans oppressed by Southern White Americans. Perhaps because the new context warranted a new representation of the liberation dimension, the war was the turning point in American civil religion when New Testament themes became more prominent in Northern discourse than the customary Old Testament narratives. In his interpretation of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, Robert Lowell, as cited in Bellah (1967/2005), states “by his

words, he [Abraham Lincoln] gave the field of battle a symbolic significance that it had lacked. For us and our country, he left Jefferson's ideals of freedom and equality joined to the Christian sacrificial act of death and rebirth." It also was during the Civil War period that the formation of religious organizations for political lobbying was established as an American practice, and many of those who advocated for abolition invoked the New Testament to advance general social and labor justice as well. These activists varied in their adherence to Biblical dogma and were often influenced by Transcendentalism and Spiritualism, but much of their discourse drew upon Christian motifs, and this liberation-oriented interpretation of Christianity became known as the Social Gospel.

Yet liberation is only one dimension of the American paradigm, and the liberation narrative of the Union was countered by the rebellion narrative of the Confederacy. For Southern conservatives, the economic and social threat of abolition, together with other Social Gospel elements, posed a challenge that called for an adapted rebellion narrative. As discussed in the preceding section, anti-tyrannical rhetoric eclipsed anti-Catholic rhetoric during the American Revolution. Still, a prejudice against Catholicism lingered in the predominantly Protestant country, which led to discrimination and hostilities against Catholics and especially Irish Catholic immigrants. This group became a particular target for maltreatment in both the North and the South (McGrath, 2017), likely because the reliable co-occurrence of Catholicism with distinct ethnic markers (such as dialect) not only made them more "foreign" and therefore untrustworthy but also simplified profiling. However, the Civil War brought about an improvement in the attitudes toward Irish immigrants on both sides (Ibid.).

Although the Southern narrative was one of rebellion, in a civil war scenario, the tyrant could not be defined along neatly overlaid ethnic and religious categories; in fact, the opposing

side had approximately the same ethnic makeup as did the Confederacy. Neither could the threat be ascribed to a single religious group, as abolitionism was a pan-Christian sociopolitical movement rather than a theology per se. This may have motivated Southern society to turn its attention to groups that shared its primary objective of defeating the Union and everything it represented, even if that meant laying aside ancient theological conflicts. As recounted in Gleeson (2013), the participation of Irish Southerners in the Confederate cause and postbellum Confederate activism led to a considerable, though not total, amelioration in their status and acceptance into the Southern rebellion narrative. In fact, a volume of Confederate poetry compiled near the end of the war includes the lyrical *Irish Emigrant's Lament* (Songs of Love and Liberty, 1864/2000, pp. 34-35), reflecting the change in discourse that came with cross-confessional alliances.

In addition to the strategic incorporation of formerly marginalized groups, the Southern rebellion narrative was surprisingly similar to Russian émigré discourse in other ways. After the Confederate defeat, organizations and individuals loyal to the losing cause assumed the task of preserving antebellum Southern culture, which inevitably involved mythologization and the supernatural juxtaposition of dark and light. Conceived in the Southern Presbyterian Church, the Confederate myth referred to in academia as the "theological war thesis" interprets the Civil War as a struggle between pure Christianity and heresy, and one of its constructors was the Rev. Robert L. Dabney (Sebesta & Hague, 2002). In his work *A Defence of Virginia*, Dabney (1867/2014) counters the abolitionist view of slavery as a sin by projecting sinfulness back onto the North. He contends that unlike the North with "her Mormons, her various sects of Communists, her Free Lovers, her Spiritualists, and a multitude of corrupt visionaries…," the Southern people overall possess superior virtue. This minister reasons that if slaveholding was

inherently sinful, one would expect to see a large concentration of sin in all other aspects of life among Southerners. Because this is not the case, he conjectures, it can be derived that most slaveholders "were not living in a criminal relation, as to the African race." Essentially, he claims that slavery is acceptable and even beneficent so long as certain standards of humanity are followed, while rejecting the slave trade from which it originated as cruel and abhorrent. Dabney's political philosophy is in this way reminiscent of the Silver Age ethics that surface in ROCOR's 1938 letter to believers in Soviet Russia, claiming that the answer to the issue of inequality was not to dismantle it but rather to imbue it with Christianity. Like Ilyin, Dabney also casts the ultimate enemy as a political rather than an ethnic or racial one but considers minorities to be its instruments. In a speech the minister gave when protesting the proposed ordination of an African American candidate, he exclaims that "Southern Christians have seen the negro made the pretext of a malignant and wicked assault upon their fair fame, and their just rights" (Dabney, 1867, p. 7).

The theological war thesis also pervades Confederate poetry of the day, which displays the full diapason of sentiments seen in émigré verse. Like the latter, it contrasts the idyllic old way to that of the rogue and blasphemous invader, although not without the quintessentially American appeal to Revolution-era Old Testament rebellion narratives, as in this excerpt from the *Christian Patriot's Prayer:*

> This beauteous land, to own and have,
> Thy goodness to our fathers gave,
> A vast inheritance and free,
> To be devoted Lord to thee.
>
> And now the wild-boar rushes for the,
> In frantic fury from the North,
> Our vines and olive trees to spoil,
> Our hearths and temples to defile.

> Drive back these murderous hosts that come
> To rob us of our land and home,
> And let us still in safety sit
> Beneath our fig trees, near thy feet. (Keeling, 1862/1999, p. 5).

Although there is no direct analogue for ROCOR's canonization of imperial idols in predominantly Protestant American culture, keepers of Southern heritage have famously honored Confederate heroes such as General Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson through the installation of monuments. These and similar initiatives were mainly carried out by grassroots memorial/educational movements that achieved not inconsiderable visibility, at least in the South. For example, the Confederated Southern Memorial Association, originating as a number of scattered ladies' groups dedicated to the memorialization of the Confederate dead and cemetery maintenance, expanded to become an association that created school textbooks and engaged in other outreach efforts (American Battlefield Trust, 2020). In a 1904 book dedicated to the constituent organizations from which it was formed, the Association says of one such group that "[n]ot the least of the permanent good" it accomplished was cultivating a reverence for the purity of the Confederacy's motives and its "shattered ideals" in Southern youth (p. 140). A similar organization that was founded in the late nineteenth century and operates to this day is the United Daughters of the Confederacy, or UDC (United Daughters of the Confederacy, n.d.). In the 1950s, it contributed funds toward the construction of the Washington National Cathedral (Washington National Cathedral, 2023)—a gothic church building akin to the Russian Cathedral of the Armed Forces[19] whose architecture and design commemorates national heroes and events

[19] Mainly commemorating the Russian victory in WWII, the Cathedral also depicts other military achievements and intentionally amalgamates religious and patriotic themes. For more information, see: *Patriarch Kirill consecrates new cathedral for Russian armed forces (+video). (2020, June 15). Pravoslavie.ru. https://orthochristian.com/131896.html*

such as the moon landing (Reiswig, 2011) and raising of the American flag at Iwo Jima (Evanson, 2012). The UDC's donations gave them greater leverage in facilitating the installation of two stained-glass windows (now removed and replaced) depicting Lee and Jackson in the Cathedral (Washington National Cathedral, 2023).

The UDC and similar heritage organizations promote an interpretation of Southern participation in the Civil War known as the Lost Cause (Sebesta & Hague, 2002), which shares many cultural symbols with the theological war thesis but received wider acceptance and was even recognized in the North (American Battlefield Trust, 2020). Unlike Dabney's rhetoric, this narrative tactfully sidesteps the issue of slavery and provides a more secular and less controversial story, portraying secessionists as desperate idealists committed to protecting traditional values and Constitutional liberties as a matter of principle rather than for material gain. Having its own "Biblical" storyline and its own martyrs, the Lost Cause was characterized by Onishi (2021) as a civil religion. That Confederate culture has civil religious elements is indisputable, but in this thesis it will be understood not as a civil religion in its own right but as one of the streams that entered into right-wing civil religion by virtue of the rebellion orientation it shares with the latter. The Confederates did not alienate themselves from American heritage but rather considered themselves to be its rightful heirs, actively invoking the spirit and legacy of the Revolution. In like manner to how the White emigration turned with increased affection toward Prince Vladimir as the immutable representation of tselostnost', Confederates embraced the Founding Fathers as symbols of the rebellion paradigm. This trend is evinced in the following samples from Jas Pierport's Civil War-era poem *We Conquer or Die*:

> Go forth in the pathway our forefathers trod,
> We, too, fight for freedom--our Captain is God,
> Their blood in our veins, with their honors we vie,

> Theirs, too, was the watchword, "We conquer or die. “We Conquer or Die”
>
> Then, here's to our Confederacy! strong we are and brave,
> Like patriots of old, we'll fight our heritage to save;
> And rather than submit to shame, to die we would prefer;
> So cheer for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single star! (Songs of Love and Liberty, 1864/2000, pp. 3-4).

This example serves to illustrate the two-dimensional nature of the post-bellum American paradigm. If Union discourse presented the North as the liberator and the South as the tyrant through the liberation dimension, the Confederacy presented itself as the revolutionary and the Union as the tyrant through the rebellion dimension.

In summary, both the American Civil War and the civil war/revolution in Russia precipitated the formation of reactionary cultures with their proper religious, literary, and philosophical heritage that retained the cultural features of the pre-war conservative intelligentsia but also underwent innovations, giving rise to new representations of national discursive paradigms. White émigré culture combined Ilyin’s idea of ecumenical Orthodox religiosity with ROCOR’s more dogmatic Orthodoxy and veneration of the Tsar-saints Prince Vladimir and Nicholas II as personifications of tselostnost’ in a scenario when there was no living monarch to serve as its embodiment. Confederate culture revived the revolutionary ideals of righteous rebellion in opposition to the liberation narrative of the Union, invoking the Founding Fathers as its patrons. Both cultures were shaped by the idea of a theological war between Christianity and anti-Christianity (or heresy) and the binary distinctions between barbarism and chivalry, id and principle, brutal egalitarianism and beneficent hierarchy. Naturally, this dualistic perspective implies that whatever displaced the old way must be undone. In the U.S., the displacement was effected through intervention by the federal government, and in Russia through the overthrow of the monarchy and “national liberation.” The antidote, therefore, was the return of autonomy to

the states in one country and the restoration of imperial autocratic power in the other. Finally, both civil religions were prompted by the diversification of politics to begin moving away from constructing “others” along purely ethno-religious lines and toward a more politically conscious and compromising narrative.

6. The Modernization of Civil Religion

Perestroika and especially the 1990s in Russia were likened by Kon (1995) to the 1960s in America (as cited in Stoeckl & Uzlaner, 2022) for the proliferation of liberal ideas relating to various aspects of life. The mid-to-late twentieth century in America and the late twentieth century in Russia are also comparable in terms of their significance for civil religion in both countries. From this time onward, the representations of national paradigms continued to become more secular and inclusive as they entered mainstream culture and were reinvented for modernity, with less tactful discourses gradually retreating.

Russia After the Perestroika

The aforementioned Metropolitan Aleksii became Patriarch Aleksii II of Moscow and all Rus in 1990 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.*a*) and soon began the process of reunification with ROCOR[20], which was one of his principal projects. The process did not always go smoothly, as ROCOR was especially insistent on glorification of the Tsar and other New Martyrs and wished to see the overall de-Bolshevization and re-traditionalization of Russia. In 2000, The ROCOR Synod of Bishops (Metropolitan Vitaly et al.) issued a letter to the Russian Orthodox People that identified various reservations which ROCOR had concerning rapprochement with ROC. The core idea of the epistle is that the position of the ROC and the

[20] In the process, a faction of ROCOR that was categorically opposed to the reunification (known as ROCOR-v) broke away from the main ROCOR (Archbishop Nathaniel, 1995). Hence, the term ROCOR, when applied to the period after 2006 in the context of this thesis, refers to the faction united with the Moscow Patriarchate.

political situation in Russia did not align with ROCOR and the Russian Diaspora's mission, which is articulated thus:

> This stubborn stand for the Truth, despite its apparent "unreality," pressure from the Bolsheviks, from pro-Soviet hierarchs, and the surrounding democratic world, was realized among us as a 'struggle for Russianism in the midst of universal apostasy,' in the hope that for this God would have mercy on Russia and give our people a last chance to restore its historic aspect. (Metropolitan Vitaly et. al, 2000).

The Synod also expressed its grievances concerning the ROC's reluctance to denounce its prior cooperation with Soviet security forces and its friendly relationship with "the present democratically-elected officials in Russia" (Ibid.), who retained communist symbols and street names as well a legal system that was closer to that of Soviet rather than pre-revolutionary Russia. Aside from suspicion toward the Russian government[21], the two other main concerns expressed in the aforementioned epistle were the ROC's "ecumenism" and "the question of the sainthood of the New Martyrs and the Tsar-Martyr, the anointed of God, who were slain by the atheistic authorities" (Ibid.).

One indicator of ecumenism cited in the letter was Patriarch Aleksii's conciliatory visit with New York Rabbis, during which he invoked their shared belief in a sovereign God (Ibid.). The Patriarch's address denounced antisemitism and was intended to counter a rise in such sentiments, which angered Orthodox nationalists (Rock, 2008), and, it appears, ROCOR. Although he was accused of ecumenism, Aleksii's openness to other confessions was in fact bounded by the religious landscape of Eurasia, as he refused to meet with the Catholic Pope and was a proponent of a 1997 law that prioritized Russian Orthodoxy, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism as the 'traditional religions" of Russia, to the disadvantage of others (Ibid.). Thus, he

[21] It could be said that the ROCOR of the early twenty-first century had a somewhat *rebellious* inclination, although it was not within the jurisdiction of the Russian government. The modern ROCOR, however, is quite complacent and in fact was able to foster both reverence for the Russian royal family and respect for Putin among right-wing American converts in a small Appalachian commmunity (Riccardi-Swartz, 2022).

demonstrated an Ilyin-esque acceptance of confessions that had a long history within the Russian space but was more suspicious of Western denominations, and just as Ilyin considered Ukraine an inalienable part of the Russian body, Aleksii was opposed to the autocephaly of Orthodox churches on Ukrainian soil (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.*a*). Unlike Ilyin, however, who may well have maintained some antisemitic prejudices characteristic of the White intelligentsia, Aleksii recognized Judaism as one of Russia's traditional religions. Meanwhile, neither the Patriarch nor the aforementioned law he supported assigned any privileged status to Lutheranism, although Ilyin considered it one of those religions that exuded "Orthodoxy" in the Russian Empire. In this regard, the Russian state and Church (as its main position, even if not that of all its constituents) became more Eurasianist, changing their orientation in favor of Judaism as a historically representative "Eastern" confession of the Russian Empire while assigning lesser legitimacy to all traditionally "Western" faiths.

As concerned to the question of canonization, the glorification of Tsar Nicholas II and the royal family proved more protracted and contested within the ROC than that of the New Martyrs. According to the Moscow Theological Academy professor Alexei Osipov (n.d.), the process was unprecedentedly fraught with conflict in comparison to previous ecclesiastical debates and even gave rise to public campaigning as a new strategy for winning such debates. Pressures to carry through with the canonization came from ROCOR leadership as well as domestic Russian Orthodox believers, some of whom appeared to perceive Nicholas II as even more than a saint. This inclination is revealed in the formal petition for canonization of the Tsar, which refers to Nicholas II as the *Tsar' iskupitel'* (as cited in Osipov, n.d.). Iskupitel' is generally translated as "redeemer" and denotes the sacrificial role of Christ.

While Russian Orthodoxy allows that saints can advocate for the needs of the world before God, the notion that a redeeming sacrifice can or must be made by anyone other than Christ is incompatible with Christian doctrine. Currently, this uncanonical view is expressed overtly only in sources not sponsored by the Russian Orthodox Church and whose authors generally belong to a Russian Orthodox sub-group, or sect, referred to as the Tsarebozhniki ("Tsar-God-ers"). In its extreme form, the doctrine of the Tsarebozhniki asserts the following:

1) The murder of Tsar Nicholas II was a ritual, symbolic act carried out as part of a conspiracy between Hasidic Jews and Masons (Borodin, 2017a; Russkij Monarchist, 2022; Timofeychev, 2017).
2) The Tsar's death was sacrificial and intended to cleanse the Russian people from the sin of breaking its vows of loyalty to the Romanov dynasty (Russkij Monarchist, 2014).
3) The adverse reports surrounding Ivan the Terrible and Rasputin are slander, and these figures are both worthy of canonization (Borodin, 2017b; Russkij Monarchist, n.d.*a*; Russkij Monarchist, n.d.*b*).
4) After the nation repents, a perfect Christian monarchy led by the mystical "White Tsar" will be established (Volgomer, 2024), and Russia will rise above the rest of the world, which will be governed by the antichrist (Russkij Monarchist, 2021).

The sect's apologetical defense against accusations of idolatry is that while they acknowledge Christ's sacrifice as cleansing all humanity from all sin, the Tsar's sacrificial death cleanses a specific nation (Russia) of a specific type of sin, namely betrayal of the Romanov dynasty (Russkij Monarchist, 2014). Yet the weakness of this argument lies in that the first sacrifice cancels the need for any other; if the sacrifice of Christ covered all sins, a separate sacrifice is not needed for any specific sin. For this and other reasons, the ROC officially

separates itself from the Tsarebozhniki (Borodin, 2017b), and the term "Tsar-Redeemer" is also avoided in mainstream Orthodox discourse. However, it is relevant to note that those who entertain some Tsarebozhnik ideas remain affiliated with both the ROC and the government. One such individual is the Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov, who also has a history of involvement in ROC-ROCOR cooperation efforts (Pospelov, 2012). During his participation in the ROC investigation of the royal family's murder, Shevkunov commented that "We are very serious about this version of a ritualistic killing. Many members of the Church commission [for the Romanovs' murder investigation] have no doubts that the killing had a ritualistic character" (as cited in Timofeychev, 2017). Although Shevkunov later denied that his statement had an antisemitic character (Ibid.), this instance demonstrates the complex nature of the relationship between the modernized civil religion and the primitive one, where formal rejection of the latter is motivated by political considerations but not always complete and genuine disengagement.

The prominence that Nicholas II's cult achieved is difficult to understand apart from the sociopolitical context of the time when it arose. In many ways, the history of his glorification is a testimony to the feelings of national humiliation and confusion, combined with a search for new meaning, that afflicted Russian patriots during the 1990s. In 1999, Patriarch Aleksii blessed a highly symbolic religious procession during which a plane carrying the icon of Tsar Nicholas II and several other venerated images flew over the territory of the former Russian Empire, including Kyiv and Crimea (Natykina, 2016), which had been grudgingly surrendered to independent Ukraine. Conducted at a fraught time and over fraught areas, the procession was likely intended to raise Russian morale through the blessing of a saint with ties to the Russian nation and its contemporary historical experience. Indeed, Nicholas II was promoted from the beginning not only as one of the many martyrs and passion-bearers acknowledged in the Russian

Orthodox canon but as the precise panacea needed to cure the nation in a given social, cultural, and political context. In a 2000 article advocating for the canonization, the Archpriest Alexander Shargunov recounts statements that he reportedly heard during a religious procession that year, which reflect the patriotic origin of participants' gravitation toward Nicholas II; one expressed that *the most important thing is that this reveals that we are Russian, and this is our Tsar. This is both repentance and the attainment of hope.*[22] Another shared, *I pray very hard that the Tsar will be glorified... Then I will be able to realize that I am a Russian in my country... By this I will be assured that I live in Russia, and not somewhere else, not in a colony.*

Shargunov (2000) argues that the concept of Russia was originally indivisible from the Tsar, who embodied the Orthodox humility and childlike purity of the pre-revolutionary Russian nation. With the murder of the Tsar, the sacred unifying bond between monarch and people was severed, and the nation descended into chaos. The Archpriest attributes the range of afflictions plaguing Russia—disconnection from one's national identity, the breakdown of moral principles, social division, and instability—to the fact that the murder of the Tsar remained unacknowledged and unrepented of. Yet if the people once again embrace their Tsar, he assures, they will be blessed with the sought-after harmony and wholeness in his persona. Shargunov fantasizes that the canonization will foster *the unification of the Russian people around the Tsar…the gathering of the Russian people into a single family and the return of the prodigal son to his father.* The Archpriest's conception of Nicholas II is also ostensibly Christological, endowing him with a certain unifying omnipotence—even the quality of being "all, and in all" (English Standard

[22] This and all other statements from Shargunov's article were translated by the author.

Version Bible, Col 3:11). In the Tsar's face, he finds *something in common with the face of Christ—a face that is trusting of God and people.*

In 2000, after active campaigning by ROCOR and pro-canonization actors in the ROC as well as some reported miracles (Natykina, 2016), the Council of Bishops reached a decision to canonize the royal family as strastoterpcy, or passion bearers (Gilbert, 2022).[23] Contemporaneously with the canonization debate, the ROC began to restate its commitment to the spiritual concept of monarchy—a trend that continues to this day. As explained by Archpriest Vladislav Tsypin (2018), the *Basis for the Social Concept of the ROC* released in 2000 compares Biblical theocracy, monarchy, and democracy, arriving at the conclusion that while the direct rule of God that existed before the establishment of kingship in ancient Israel was superior to an earthly monarchy, earthly monarchy is still superior to democracy when it is founded upon a national belief in a ruler appointed by God. The document recognizes that although an attempt to prematurely replace democracy with monarchy would not have a positive outcome, the possibility of a righteous monarchy being reinstituted in Russia after a "spiritual renaissance" should not be abandoned.

In a 2003 interview, Hegumen Phillip Ryabykh, representative of the Moscow Patriarchate to the European Union, likewise argues that the most suitable form of government is autocracy, so long as it is just and aligns with Christian principles. In support of his claim, Ryabykh cites the Old Testament passage from 1 Samuel wherein God granted the Israelites' request for an earthly king, concluding that this meant monarchy was divinely approved (an interpretation diametrically opposite to Thomas Paine's). He also appeals to the popularity of

[23] This status of glorification is the lesser in relation to martyrdom, but the last Tsar is still referred to informally in publications on Pravoslavie.ru as the Tsar-martyr (tasr'-muchenik).

Nicholas II, presenting him as one who exemplified the Byzantine ideal of a Christian leader because he "was very attentive to his consecration as tsar, and the biblical verse, 'The heart of the tsar is in the hands of God' (cf. Prov. 21:1) was extremely important to him" (*The Orthodox Church and society,* 2003).

Outside the church, the intellectual and pop-culture dimensions of the White resurgence that emerged during the 1970's were permitted, and perhaps even encouraged, to enter the mainstream, peaking in popularity at the turn of the century. Stoeckl (2007) suggests that the off-limits status that Silver Age religious philosophy had during the Soviet period gave it a charm which even some of its longtime students criticized as overvalued. Many former dissidents who harbored imperialist sentiments rose to the status of cultural heroes, and the romanticization of the White Guard became commonplace. In 1995, the aforementioned bard Mikhail Zvezdinsky performed his rendition of Lieutenant Golitsyn on television (Christine Squizi, 2013), and, after his experimentation with the White officer image was received well by the Russian public, the singer Alexander Malinin began performing lyrical songs in imperial army uniform. In his 2007 concert, approximately 50% of the songs were stylized White ballads, including the famed Lieutenant Golitsyn (Grand Collection, 2023). Similar trends appeared in other creative spheres, with Alexei Bulgakov's work *Belaja Gvardia* (the White Guard) being freely shown in theatres throughout Moscow and adapted into a film series by 2012.[24] In 2008, two dramas with similar themes were produced—*Gospoda Oficery: Spasti Imperatora*[25] and *Admiral*.[26] The former

[24] Tekusa.ru. (2013, September 7). *Belaja gvardija (2012) Trejler* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVmi4ofS8dk

[25] Novyj Video Kanal. (2011, October 31). *Gospoda oficery spasti imperatora 2008 DVDRip* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSL9r8xdHcw

[26] SerbianCossack. (2008, November 6). *Admiral (2008)* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8SKwEBR-uU

recounts the story of several White officers attempting to save the Romanov family and the latter follows a Tsarist admiral and his lady through the fall of the Russian Empire and the civil war. The White nostalgic discourse which these works exemplify links history, literature, philosophy, and pop culture, producing symbols that could be interpreted religiously or secularly. The image of the White officer can have different connotations for people with different levels of religiosity; for some they embody general ideals of chivalry, and a Russia that was better and more "traditional," whatever one may envision under these terms. Meanwhile, Orthodox discourse also weaves in the idea of a "theological war."

In the intellectual domain, formerly repressed thinkers such as Solzhenitsyn and Lev Gumilev, who had already been revered in émigré circles during the Soviet period, gained more widespread renown. Both authors have been cited by scholars and pundits as participants in the construction of the Putin administration's geopolitical philosophy. Gumilev belonged to the Eurasianist school and introduced a biopolitical version of the trans-ethnic and trans-confessional representation of tselostnost' promoted by Ilyin and other philosophers. He viewed the rise and decline of civilizations as fluctuations in "passionarity" and believed that it was the participation of national minorities (especially descendants of the Turkic/Mongolic steppe peoples) together with ethnic Russians in the country's fate that led to the formation of a Muscovite Russian superethnos (as cited in Titov, 2005). Solzhenitsyn's contribution was to offer a conception of Ukraine that reconciled the Slavophile vision of Russia with post-Soviet geopolitics (as cited in Plokhy, 2023). He acknowledged, at least nominally, the existence of a Belarus and a Ukraine. Still, he argued that Eastern and Southern Ukraine were not Ukraine at all, but historically Russian territory into which Ukraine had expanded (Ibid.).

In harmony with the nostalgia for monarchist and imperialist philosophy, the Third Rome theory also gained favor with the post-perestroika conservative intelligentsia. Although the idea currently has slightly different meanings for different thinkers, commonalities can be identified. Based on the case studies presented in Jardar Østbø's (2015) book *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth*, it is possible to conclude that all proponents of this myth concur that a Christian autocracy is the ideal form of government and attribute some sacrality to the Russian monarchy (particularly the Romanov dynasty). Messianism and imperialism appear to be an obligatory element of the Third Rome, with different theorists presenting it either as an abstract wellspring of global salvation or an empire that must be consolidated through conquest in the real world. There is also a consistent presentation of the West in its religious, cultural, and political totality as the decadent counterpart of the virtuous Eastern Orthodox region/culture, against which the latter must continuously struggle in the moral or physical realms.

To recapitulate the preceding discussion: the newfound liberties of the perestroika shaped the course of Russian civil religion in two major ways; the inflow of pluralism in the absence of a "unifying national idea" (Adamsky, 2019, p. 156) gave the Church an impetus to become more active in the public sphere and a good reason for doing so in the eyes of the state (Adamsky, 2019; Anderson, 2015). During this time, the ROC emerged as a politically savvy actor with an awareness of how it is perceived in society at large. Antisemitism may have been rampant after the perestroika, but Aleksii in his official position as the head of the ROC denounced this tendency and affirmed the status of Judaism as one of Russia's historical confessions. At the same time, this period witnessed the emergence of the nationalist Tsarebozhnik sect, whose discourse is very close to and sometimes indistinguishable from the White-tinted theology of the

modern ROC and especially its collaborator—ROCOR. Indeed, the same tide that brought in liberal ideas also ushered elements of émigré culture into Russian society and the Russian Orthodox Church through influence by ROCOR and formerly repressed dissidents. The White resurgence was especially vigorous because it came in both religious and secular forms; one based on the ancient tradition of anointed kingship merged with the twentieth-century cult of the royal martyrs, and another on the romantic allure of the past and a country that was "greater" than at present. Both endorsed imperial integrity of territory secured under autocratic rule, which has long constituted the sacred, if au fond secular, ideal of tselostnost'. This trend suited the inclinations of the state, making it advantageous for the government to nurture it. Furthermore, the "state," being nevertheless composed of individuals who do not live in a vacuum from the surrounding society and culture, cannot be seen as an entirely rational mechanism but one that is subject to influence by long-standing civil religious paradigms. While his view of communism is critical, Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, appears to have been deeply and negatively impressed affected by the crumbling of the quasi-Empire that had existed during the Soviet Period (*Putin nazval raspad SSSR tragediej,"* 2021). The experienced loss of tselostnost', which had haunted many Russian autocrats, would inform his foreign policy.

The American Civil Rights Period and its Legacy

In the U.S., rapid social change and the increasing public visibility of conservative Christian churches produced a more politically conscious civil religious self-presentation, much like in Russia. Even in the presumably bigoted right-wing dimension of civil religion, there were observable shifts in the direction of a more ecumenical, ethnically inclusive, and even secular discourse. As during the Civil War, this was largely motivated by the need to compete with left-wing civil religion, which was too eclectic to be attributed to any one confession or ethnic group

and yet could easily absorb Americans who did not see themselves in the right-wing religious interpretation of national experience.

The primary twentieth-century manifestation of left-wing civil religion, or the civil rights movement, evolved from abolitionism and the Social Gospel. Many leading civil rights activists and ministers, such as Martin Luther King. Jr., John Lewis, Hosea Williams, A. J. Muste, and Howard Thurman espoused a liberation narrative rather than a rebellion narrative, as they maintained the abolitionist tradition of political thought and felt that the federal government may and must assert itself when needed to protect people from oppression. One of the prominent theoreticians of left-wing civil religion was Reinhold Niebuhr. While initially a categorical pacifist as were some other proponents of the Social Gospel, Niebuhr eventually moved away from his pacifist position and adopted a very Lincolnian liberation narrative according to which wars can be fought in the name of democracy (The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute., n.d.). In his 1944 book *Children of Light and Children of Darkness*, the theologian intended to provide a deeper spiritual and practical conception of democracy than one focused solely on individual liberties, which he believes could easily be undermined by human egotism and make way for disillusionment and the rise of tyranny (Niebuhr, 1944). Niebuhr believed that the "correct" interpretation of democracy was based on a Christian understanding of humanity and argued that the freedom of society as a whole is as important as individual freedom, which calls for some legal regulation of social life (Ibid.).

Overall, his holistic political philosophy is reminiscent of Ilyin's ideas on the distinction between freedom and liberalism; yet there is also a fundamental difference in their orientations that is informed by the Russian and American paradigms. While Ilyin imagined that individual aspirations toward freedom and the common good could be reconciled by a just autocracy and a

committed people in the relationship of tselostnost', Niebuhr (1944) believed that only a democratic government could check the unbridled self-interest of leaders. What does relate their philosophies despite political differences is that while both appear to interpret politics from a Christian viewpoint, the reality may be the reverse. The actual religiosity of their discourse is questionable, as their arguments could be compelling even for nonreligious people who share a concern for tselostnost' (Russia) or Liberty (U.S.). As observed by Lovin (1995), Niebuhr's work was often so centered on the philosophy of politics that some of his contemporaries thought the nexus to religion to be superfluous. This property also unites the two wings of American civil religion, whether or not their members choose to acknowledge it; the transformation of civil freedom into a religious concept during the American Revolution persisted throughout history and affected the right-wing civil religion no less than its left-wing counterpart, albeit the latter had a different interpretation of it that would emerge in the political arena during the civil rights period.

Beginning in the 1950s, the desegregation process in the South was often met with anger and violence. Tellingly, this period saw a renewed interest in the theological war thesis, and a number of works pertaining to the topic were republished (Sebesta & Hague, 2002). At the same time, there was a gradual decline in the overall acceptability of explicitly racist discourse, and the same Southern publications that had formerly mongered a desegregation-communism nexus largely abandoned the practice (Durham, 2002; Durham, 2007).

Racial equity was not the only dimension of the civil rights movement that alarmed traditionalists, and there was arguably greater consensus among conservative Christians on the harmfulness of secularization in public schools, the LGBTQ movement, feminism, Roe v Wade, and a general increase in social acceptance for nontraditional sexual behavior than there was

regarding the place of African Americans in society. Some Christians felt that the Social Gospel disregarded the proliferation of sin (Anderson, 2015) and developed their own networks and organizations to address the issue, becoming as active in the political sphere as the advocates of the Social Gospel and eventually eclipsing them. This rising movement would be known as the Christian Right, and the conservative Christian pivot toward politics that brought it into being is best exemplified by the biography of this movement's key constructor, pastor Jerry Falwell. In his 1965 sermon at Thomas Road Baptist Church, he called for believers to "forget politics" and devote their hearts to Christ (as cited in Legg, 2019). Approximately a decade after the aforementioned sermon, he founded Moral Majority—a socially conservative lobbying organization which he admitted was political in nature (Simon, 1999; as cited in Legg, 2019). Although Falwell himself was a Southern Baptist, Moral Majority united Catholic, Jewish, and Mormon moral conservatives (Anderson, 2015), and its makeup reflected the more ecumenical orientation that American Evangelicals had assumed over the preceding decades.

Prior to this reckoning, however, there was a flare in racism and theological particularism reminiscent of the Religion of the Citizen. At a time when the evolution of civil religious discourse toward Rousseau's ideal was still greatly curbed by a Puritan-era rebellion narrative that delineated the "other" based on a combination of racial and religious factors with some form of tyranny, Catholics remained a target for nativist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (McVeigh, 2009; as cited in Williams, 2013) and militant Protestants (Bennett, 1988; as cited in Ibid.). Throughout the 1940s and 1960s, the religious-political antipathy against Catholics remained fairly strong, with some conservative Protestants drawing a nexus between communism and Catholicism (Huntington, 2020). Yet the ensuing secularization of the public space, Roe v Wade, and the imminent ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment formed an

aggregate liberal threat that stimulated conservative Christians (both Protestant and Catholic) to lay aside dogmatic differences and face a greater common enemy. According to Huntington (2020), the Republican Evangelist Billy Graham reported feeling greater solidarity with Roman Catholics than liberal Protestants. Certainly, many Catholic and Evangelical faith leaders would continue to promote their respective doctrines as the only true; but conservative Christians were now operating in two overlapping fields—ministry and activism, and in the latter political agendas took precedence over theological particularities. Anderson (2015) notes that eventually a large portion of the Catholic and Jewish factions separated from the Christian Right, leaving it predominantly (but not entirely) Evangelical. Nonetheless, the time when Catholicism was seen by a representative number of Protestants as a political threat was definitively over, and political proximity became a more important criterion than dogma for membership in the Christian Right.

The practice of religious boundary-making itself, however, was not entirely abandoned but rather reoriented, as Huntington (2020) suggests that the Catholic political enemy was replaced by an Islamic one. This became all the more relevant after 9/11, which was perceived not only as a physical danger but as a danger to the "free world." Islam was associated with nondemocratic countries, much as Catholicism had been in the past, and post-9/11 discourse generated the idea that Muslims sought to institute sharia law in the United States (Anderson, 2015)—a suspicion expressed even in 2019 by John and Josh Rosenstern (n.d.) of Jimmy Swaggart Ministries[27]. Linked with this is the idea that "Muslims work to change the cultures of non-Muslim countries"[28], a notion that is more complex due to being neither purely political, nor purely religious, nor purely racial, but rather an ambiguous fusion of the three. Of no little significance is that while Catholics had over the centuries proven their commitment to the

[27] *Insight* episode from April 23, 2019
[28] *Insight* episode from July 24, 2019

American narratives of liberation and rebellion, immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries were historically fewer than European Catholic immigrants, and "newcomers" are presumably less versed in the values that comprise the host country's civil religion. Anderson (2015) therefore reasonably attributes the suspicions of cultural infiltration from immigrants to a fear of people who supposedly do not share the American civil religious code. This may especially apply to those who are not party to the Judeo-Christian semantic system wherein that code was initially constructed.

In addition to the relative reconciliation of Protestants and Catholics, another key development in the history of the Christian Right—in which Falwell's Moral Majority is believed to have played a role (Anderson, 2015)—was the election victory of Ronald Reagan and the resulting unprecedented alignment of conservative Christians with the Republican party. Although it may seem surprising in the present, some analysts felt that Reagan's appeals to religious voters would eventually prove unfruitful due to the discrepancy between moral and political agendas;[29] but this proved not to be the case. In fact, the theology of the Christian Right only adapted so as to incorporate Republican political and economic views. This was not simply an act of complacency on the part of Evangelicals but rather a change of priorities effected by changing race relations, a continuing fear of communism, and the rise of religious entrepreneurship.

Williams (2010) considers the birthplace of the typical Evangelical "megachurch," with its corporate model and libertarian discourse, to be the American Sunbelt. As many Southern ministers were choosing to abandon explicit racism, Falwell remained a fundamentalist (Ibid.) dedicated to the idea that desegregation constituted destruction of a divinely established status

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[29] Corwin Smidt (as cited in Williams, 2010) expected that because Evangelicals were mainly focused on social issues and Republican politicians on economic ones, the former would soon become impatient with their collaborators.

quo and would open the door to communist tyranny (Legg, 2019). As his ministry prospered, maintaining a racially exclusive stance became disadvantageous. The growth of new corporations and suburbanization in the Sunbelt brought in opportunities for creating business connections and reaching larger audiences, all of which called for a social position targeted more at moderate conservatives than a considerably shrinking base of pro-segregationists (Williams, 2010). However, as the public emergence of the Evangelical church stifled racially exclusive discourse, it also merged capitalist interests with religious ones. Megachurches had much to gain from laissez faire economics and much to lose from income-based taxation, and the same was true for many of their patrons. Accordingly, with the growth of his ministry, Falwell turned to constructing a Biblical foundation for Republican economic agendas rather than racial inequality, one of his arguments being that free enterprise was established in the Book of Proverbs (Ibid.).

Both in Jerry Falwell's case and throughout the Christian Right, the idea of economic liberty soon became a pervasive theme. Another product of Falwell's work was Liberty University, a Virginia-based Christian university whose name and statement of purpose invoke a revolutionary-Christian ethos. One of their stated objectives is to "promote an understanding of the Western tradition and the diverse elements of American cultural history, especially the importance of the individual in maintaining democratic and free market processes" (Liberty University, 2021). The conservative televangelist Jimmy Swaggart, founder of Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, reportedly projected this mentality abroad by supporting RENAMO (*The Conflict with Renamo,* 2020), a controversial Mozambican resistance group that opposed the country's communist leadership (Sapa, 2013).

Undoubtedly, anti-communist sentiment, and not only corporatization, underlay Evangelicals' enthusiasm for Republican policies that bore no direct relationship to Biblical or

even “traditional” Christian principles, from pro-business economics to military funding. Historically, communism had been to some extent a common enemy for both conservatives and left-leaning Christian activists such as Reinhold Niebuhr, whose foreign policy views during the Cold War may have been what earned him the name “Washington’s favorite theologian” (Zubovich, 2017). Still, the right-wing and left-wing approaches to defeating the enemy differed along the two dimensions of the American civil religious paradigm; Niebuhr called for intervention abroad to *liberate* nations from communism while right-wing Christians believed in the need for a strong military but also maintained a *rebellious* attitude toward domestic economic policies that are in any way reminiscent of communism. The rift between liberal and conservative Christians widened all the more during the Vietnam War. At that time, even Niebuhr criticized Washington’s course of action (The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, n.d.), and other mainline Protestant leaders argued that the intervention was unbiblical (Mislin, 2018). Meanwhile, conservative Christians (particularly Evangelicals) continued to support the war as a campaign against communism (Ibid.).

Curiously, but perhaps not unexpectedly, American participation in the Vietnam War was also favorably assessed by ROCOR—a phenomenon which suggests that the shared hatred for communism among conservative Christians in Russia and the U.S. can enable their affinities to outlast both Putin and Trump. In 1966, the East American diocese of ROCOR sent President Johnson a telegram that described the U.S. army as “waging a heroic battle against the further expansion of evil atheistic communism that attempts to use moral decay as a means of subjugating the world” and expressed that the Church was praying for their victory (as cited in Anashkin, 2015/2016).

Yet the paradigmatic difference remains even here; if ROCOR and the Christian Right share views on communism and many social issues, the "rebellious" promotion of states' rights and economic liberalism is specific to the latter. Another telling and historically impactful case of this orientation among American conservatives is the Tea Party movement. Much like the White resurgence in Russia, it arose when a blow to national dignity (namely by a financial crisis and impending failure in the Middle East), the advance of liberalism, and perhaps another assault to the racial hierarchy mobilized both religious and secular conservatives. This movement can be considered a thematic bridge between the Christian Right and pop culture and evinces the process by which ideas that are first given an explicitly religious interpretation can transform into inherently sacred ones.

As determined from the descriptions in Jill Lepore's (2010) book *The Whites of Their Eyes*, the Tea Party advertised anti-establishmentarianism through a Revolution-era nostalgia revived in colonial cosplay and strengthened with the idea that the Founding Fathers were Christians who constructed the founding documents on Biblical principles specifically. In 2010, the Republican political commentator Glenn Beck launched the program *Founders' Fridays*, dedicated to restoring the founders "to the rightful place in our national psyche" (as cited in Lepore, 2010, p. 156). He later seemed satisfied with his program's statistics, stating "It seems like America, for some reason or another, is interested now in our Founding Fathers and meeting who they really, truly are" (as cited in Lepore, 2010, p. 157). This "rehabilitation" of the Founding Fathers is shared among secular Republicans such as Beck and religious ones such as Donnie Swaggart, who created a video series on historical figures that contributed in some way to building the religious foundation of American nationhood (*Preachers, Patriots, Providence*, n.d.). In this way, a network of often unrelated actors throughout the American cultural space

produces a common discourse that alternates between theologically justifying political agendas and presenting the agendas themselves as sacred. When there is a consensus within the in-group on the logic that ties politics to religion, the imagined religious element within politics become self-evident.

Although explicit Biblical arguments for capitalism are still echoed by modern pastors, and Evangelicals remain concerned with social issues such as abortion, it is also not uncommon to observe purely economic or political discussions in religious contexts. Examples of the latter case can be seen in many episodes of *Frances and Friends*, a daily TV program hosted by Frances Swaggart (wife of Jimmy Swaggart) on their SonLife Broadcasting Network (SBN). On August 9, 2022, the Frances and Friends panel denounced the government raid of Donald Trump's mansion (Swaggart, F. et al., 2014-present). On May 26, 2023, they discussed the potential adverse consequences of computerization, including unemployment of the human workforce and virtual monitoring of citizens' financial affairs (Ibid.). Shortly afterwards, on May 30, 2023, panelists clarified the implications of a potential debt limit suspension by Congress and argued for the benefit of an Inflation Reduction Act (Ibid.). SBN's *Insight* program is also dedicated almost exclusively to political and economic current events, and it is not only Jimmy Swaggart Ministries that is politicized. Total Christian Television airs Star Parker's (n.d.) show *CURE America,* which has a strong anti-abortion focus but also addresses the downsides of social security and "Bidenomics." This latter program is essentially the right-wing civil religious counterpart of left-wing civil religion or progressive Christianity, surveying the problem of poverty and attributing it at least in part to government interference.

At present, one can hardly claim that all matters discussed at length by modern megachurches constitute challenges to the traditional Christian worldview. Upon deeper analysis,

this apparent diversion from Scriptural questions can be attributed to the fact that the doctrine the Christian Right has espoused is not merely an attempt to reclaim abandoned Christian values but a *civil religion* in which the welfare of the state (or the Republican perception thereof) and Christianity are inseverable. It is based on the extra-biblical idea that American democracy and the liberties it establishes, from freedom of religion to the freedom to bear arms, are a manifestation of God's will that America has been appointed to fulfill—on earth and at the level of state policy. Just as many in the time of Christ's earthly walk believed that the Messiah was sent to overthrow the yoke of pagan rule on earth, modern Evangelicals, guided by a revolutionary Old Testament narrative of statehood, are driven to engage in continual political opposition ("rebellion") against an overreaching, tyrannical government. In this way, dogmatic religion applied to remote political questions becomes a civil "religion of dissidence" (The National Endowment for the Humanities, 2011). The advantage of such a religion as it concerns in-group solidarity is that it provides other touchpoints besides pure theology that can bring together right-wing Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and even adherents of "secular versions of white Christian nationalism" (Gorski et al., 2022, p. 10) who identify with Christianity only in a cultural sense.

A review of SonLife Broadcasting Network and Jimmy Swaggart Ministries' website also sheds light on the modern Christian Right's position on race and racism. On one hand, John and Josh Rosenstern in a June 22, 2020, episode of *Insight* drew out a very long-standing trope in arguing that the covert motive of the Black Lives Matter movement was the propagation of Marxism. In a similar spirit, the *Frances and Friends* panel in an April 9, 2021, episode of their program argued for gun ownership based on the idea that revocation of private gun and property

rights was historically a precursor to communism and that "minorities are being used to usher it [communism] in" (Swaggart, F. et al., 2014-present).

On the other hand, the Swaggarts also acknowledge that racism exists in America and needs to be addressed, but they maintain that a top-down solution would never be effective because something that arises in the human heart can only be rooted out through Christ. As with many other matters (save the upkeep of the military), they present government intervention as guided by ulterior motives. Still, their spoken and symbolic discourse shows some self-consciousness in regard to how they may be perceived by non-White, and especially African American, believers. For one, they honor one of the American "20th Century Saints" [30]—Martin Luther King Jr. (Swaggart, F., 2019; Swaggart, F., 2024; Swaggart, G., 2023)—despite the fact that he held political views in conflict with their own. The photographs on Jimmy Swaggart Ministries' website suggest an awareness of diversity as do the advertisings on Total Christian Television; and the aforementioned Star Parker, host of *CURE America*, is an African American woman.

A certain conditional inclusion extends even to immigrants. On a *Frances and Friends* episode from September 30, 2021, the panel hosted Claston Bernard, a former Olympian and LSU graduate who immigrated from Jamaica to the United States. As described in the episode summary,

> Brother Bernard says as an immigrant to this country, he was determined to see how he would fit into America despite his skin color. He was encouraged by the Constitution and the opportunities it offered in this nation whose foundation was built on God, family, and education. (Swaggart, F. et al., 2014-present).

It is also relevant to add that Bernard ran for congress as a Republican in 2021, calling together *Americans* of all races to unite under the commitment to advancement through hard

[30] See Cathedral.org ---> 20*th* Century Saints

work while promising to combat “socialism and other forces of division” (as cited in Mitchell, 2021).

Of course, non-Whites are still at a disadvantage due to the undeniable presence of a racist element in right-wing civil religious discourse; unless they advertise their commitment to “American” social and political values, they are more likely to be automatically placed in the category of those who are “being used” to divide society and advance communism. The interplay of racial, religious, and political prejudices is especially obvious in the case of the Tea Party and Obama, where the former President’s race appeared an insufficient basis for vilification and required the artificial attribution of foreign-ness to his persona. Despite Obama’s publicly known association with Christianity, many Tea Partiers continued to insist that he was foreign-born and a Muslim (Williams, 2013). However, if he were an African American Republican who passionately endorsed the sacred economic and social agendas of that faction, would he be marginalized and foreignized? Or would he instead achieve prominence in the right wing as a minority who shares American values, as is the case with Bernard?

The same narrative that minimizes the intellectual-political agency of minority groups also leaves open the possibility that such minorities can become “Americans.” Just as Ivan Ilyin blamed the division of the Empire on Western Bolshevism and its mobilization of ethnic minorities while concurrently acknowledging those minorities as participants in Russian *religiosity*, Christian Right activists such as the Swaggarts consider the Left to be the agents of polarization who co-opt minority groups and lead them astray from the fundamental social and economic values that unify America. Yet at least in the discursive realm, these same minorities—including immigrants—who share right-wing social and political views are insiders. The conceptualization of Christianity and nationality in the American civil religious narrative is

developing into something akin to Ilyin's more eclectic understanding of belonging. It is a trans-racial identity that incorporates anyone who shares the "American dream" mentality, a faith in capitalism, and an idea of fairness according to which people in various starting conditions can and must achieve prosperity through hard work. It is a trans-religious identity that incorporates anyone who acknowledges the cultural impact of Christianity on American nationhood. What matters here is not theological or doctrinal Christianity but rather recognition of a religious interpretation of American destiny that draws on Judeo-Christian themes, and the lack of such themes in Islam may be another factor that has thus far prevented the Christian Right from integrating Muslims into its narratives. Ultimately, neither Whiteness nor Christianity alone are sufficient qualifications, while the absence of one (or perhaps both) can be compensated for by an acceptable political stance. A non-White Republican who recognizes the *sacrality* of the Constitution and conservative-libertarian culture may become symbolically "White," and a non-Christian who pays tribute to the same ideals is symbolically Christian. In effect, it would not be inaccurate to conjecture that the criteria by which protagonists and antagonists are determined in the contemporary civil religious narrative are primarily political.

From the latter half of the twentieth century and into the present, both Russian and American civil religion evolved in response to the challenges and opportunities of the 20th century. A principal challenge was the proliferation of ideas that went contrary to conservative Christian values as well as the "traditional" structure of society and government. The movements that produced these ideas were too complex for any specific ethnic or religious group to be identified as the culprit, but they offered a narrative that could easily attract alienated minorities. If the Russian and American civil religions were to compete with these ideas, they needed to be rebranded into something more modern.

One direction of this modernization was toward secularity. Various factors in both countries motivated conservative Christian leaders to work more closely with politicians, resulting in a greater overlap between the religious and secular spheres. Furthermore, as national identity crises thrust civil religious symbols such as White officers and the Founding Fathers into popular culture, these symbols became a semiotic link between religious and secular discourses that promoted the same political and social agendas. Another direction of modernization was toward greater demographic inclusivity. Although nationalist and racist reactionism had a place during the time periods studied in this section, more moderate and inclusive discourses gained precedence. In Russia, an ecumenical version of Russian religiosity was now being put into practice by the ROC and state in their occasional overtures to the "traditional religions" of the Russian Federation. A similar civil religious trend also developed in the United States, promoting unity of all races under a shared reverence for the legacy of the Revolution and "God-given" rights, capitalism, self-reliance, and a recognition of Christianity as a cultural cornerstone rather than a theology. Interestingly, the American Christian Right, despite being accused of divisiveness, considers its own narrative to be the key to unity and interprets division in an Ilyin-esque manner as the doings of socialists. In this regard, American discourse appears similar to tselostnost'. This is not illogical, as every republic relies on a certain degree of unity in diversity to survive, and the goal of civil religion is to provide a basis for that unity. Yet in Rousseau's vision, that unity would be twofold; it would rally the people around the government to face external threats and foster a commitment to republican values that could rally the people against the government if it turned tyrannical. Tselostnost' exemplifies the former purpose, and rebellion the latter. Hence, in the Russian narrative good and evil are delineated primarily along the

territorial contours of East and West, and in the American narrative evil is identified within the same country and has its principal seat in the government.

In both cases, however, civil religious discourses have approached what Rousseau originally intended—a belief system without doctrinal particulars that could provide a common purpose for the diverse constituents of a republic. Yet they also remain constrained by the fundamental paradigms specific to each country. In Russia, official discourse intentionally acknowledges non-Christian religions and their legitimate place in the Russian spiritual and historical space, but the same honor is generally not bestowed upon traditionally Western religions. In the United States, the rebellion paradigm was adapted to include as insiders formerly marginalized denominations and racial minorities so long as they shared the desire to engage in at least a discursive rebellion against liberal tyranny, but religions strongly associated with foreign cultures (namely Islam) that presumably do not share the American civil religious code remain outside the boundaries of "American-ness."

7. Civil Religion and Modern Politics

Holism/Tselostnost' Under the Putin Regime

Some discourse samples presented in this section will come from Patriarch Kirill, who succeeded Aleksii in 2009 and, especially after extensive popular coverage of his relationship with Putin following the Ukraine invasion, has come to symbolize the ecclesiastical component of the regime.

When Kirill was still a Metropolitan, the Russian Orthodox Church contained within itself a plurality of voices, including both liberally inclined Christians who favored democracy and radical fundamentalists (Stoeckl & Uzlaner, 2022). He associated himself with neither faction and more or less succeeded in sweeping both to the fringes (Ibid.). In this way, early

Kirill was similar to the early Putin, as both claimed a position intermediate between liberalism and fundamentalist nationalism. Like Yeltsin,[31] Putin nurtured the White revival,[32] but he has also gone further than his predecessor to create an Orthodox image for himself and affirm the relevance of Russia's Orthodox-imperial legacy to modern politics, as his administration even gifted the works of three Silver Age philosophers—Ivan Ilyin, Nicolai Berdyaev, and Vladimir Solovyev—to Russian public servants (Eltchaninoff, 2018). Curiously, these philosophers are not always in agreement with each other; for example, Berdyaev found Ilyin's insistence on the righteousness of a violent counter-revolution repugnant, stating "The Cheka in the name of God is more loathsome than the Cheka in the name of the devil" (Berdyaev, 1926, p. 104; as cited in Arjakovsky, p. 443). Evert van der Zweerde's proposed approach to understanding the relatedness of these philosophies is to focus on what they all oppose: ethnic nationalism, communism, liberalism, and Westernism. It may also be appropriate to add that there are commonalities in what they promote, such as autocratic rule and the idea that wars of consolidation can prevent many future wars, both notions being relevant to the Putin regime. Van der Zweerde also provides insight on the political salience of Solovyev and Berdyaev's "Sobornost," which he argues is not irreconcilable with disagreement so long as those disagreements are not stark or strong enough to foster rebellion. This idea of regulated plurality resonates with Marlene Laruelle's (2020) interpretation of the seemingly conflicting discourses that are accepted or backed by the Putin regime.

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[31] According to Yasmann (2016), the renovation of the Kremlin coronation hall and the reburial of the last royal family (with Yeltsin in attendance) took place under his administration.

[32] Putin's contributions include facilitating the reburial of Empress Maria Fyodorovna (*Tsar's mother reburied in Russia*, 2006) as well as the installation (in collaboration with then-Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov) of a memorial complex dedicated to White soldiers (*Memorial belym vojnam v Donskom monastyre,* 2024). He also organized the transfer of Ivan Ilyin's writings from a U.S. university to Russia (Snyder, 2018).

Under Putin's administration (specifically, between 1999 and 2016), the percentage of Russians who consider Nicholas II's reign to have "brought more good than bad" rose from 18% to 30%, while the percentage of those believing that the 1917 revolution was a benefit to Russia decreased from 27% to 19% over this same time period (as cited in Dal Santo, 2016). According to a 2018 VTsIOM survey cited in Laruelle (2020), the late Tsar's popularity had risen to 54%. Ironically, the second most popular leader of three (Nicholas II, Stalin, and Lenin), was Stalin at 51%. Yet the increase in popularity of these seemingly irreconcilable figures is not as paradoxical as it may appear at first glance. Both Nicholas II and Stalin believed in authoritarianism, and both presided over what have been referred to as empires. Scholars may dispute regarding how much the Putin regime has actually promoted each specific historical figure, but the state's autocratic and imperial inclinations are quite apparent. There is a pro-monarchist, neo-White movement in Russia; there are also some who are still enamored with Stalin,[33] and the regime can periodically engage with both to support its overarching agendas.

Laruelle (2020) argues that the current administration's approach to ideology is not to conduct propaganda from the top down only but rather observe trends that arise at the bottom and root out or support certain actors, ultimately co-opting movements that are more or less suitable for its purposes. This in turn creates a quasi-plurality and competition between diverse social groups or institutions "offering the presidential administration new ideological products in the hope of seeing them adopted at the highest level" (Ibid., p. 346). Ilyin was highly critical of totalitarianism and envisioned a government that would nurture the creative instinct in a manner conducive to raising a healthy patriotic society, and this may be Putin's intent.

[33] Curiously, however, not all Stalin supporters are classical Soviet communists. Malofeev, who is a known monarchist, is also fond of Stalin because, according to him, the leader ceased to act as a revolutionary during the WWII period and began to act "as a sovereign, Russian Tsar" (as cited in Laruelle, 2020, p. 355).

As articulated by Putin himself in a 2013 address to the Valdai International Discussion Club, his vision of Russia is not quite Tsarist and not quite Soviet. Perhaps, he seeks to portray himself as the leader Ilyin believed Russia needed—one who would think in terms of a broader "grand idea" rather than along party lines. And the grand idea in question is, as always, tselostnost', hence Putin's focus on its two components—autocracy and imperialism. Even the name of Putin's party ('Edinaja Rossija,' or United Russia) is a phrase that recurs throughout Ilyin's *Our Tasks*. The "unity and indivisibility of Russia" is one of the "foundational ideas" of the White movement, one of the other being "service to Russia, and not the party (even when somebody entered into a party)" (Ilyin, 1948-1954, p. 4). Considering Putin's erudition in regard to Silver Age religious philosophy, the importance that Ilyin assigned to reconciliation most likely did not escape his notice, and the themes of reconciliation or reunification can be easily merged with the imperial-autocratic "foundational idea" in his discourse and that of his ecclesiastical associates.

In 2005, Putin organized the repatriation and reburial of the White General Anton Denikin, together with Ilyin, in the cemetery of the Donskoy monastery (*Memorial belym vojnam v Donskom monastyre,* 2024). The event was not only a state affair but a significant milestone in the ROC's progress toward unity with ROCOR, during which Patriarch Aleksii stressed the theme of achieving conciliatory closure and *unity* in the aftermath of national strife. When asked whether he believes there to be a possibility of a genuine reconciliation between Reds and Whites, he replied:

> I think that we can quite objectively state that there are tendencies toward reconciliation in our society, an expression of which, to a certain extent, is today's ceremony. Time heals the wounds of enmity and irreconcilability, but today we must nurture in ourselves the consciousness that all of us, citizens of Russia, regardless of political orientation, have

> one Fatherland, one history and one future, which we must build together.[34] (as cited in Tserkovno-nauchnyj tsentr "Pravoslavnaja Encyclopedia.")

Several years later, Putin took the opportunity to explicitly highlight the idea underlying the memorial (at least for him). When speaking to journalist Larisa Kaftan during his 2009 visit to the Donskoy monastery, he advised her to read Denikin's diary, remarking that the general referred to Russia and Ukraine as Great and Little Russia, respectively. He emphasized that Denikin was especially opposed to the "dismemberment" of Russia and believed that no one should be permitted to interfere in Russian-Ukrainian relations because this had always been solely Russia's business (as cited in Kaftan, 2009).

For Ilyin and his ideological successors, the idea of reconciliation is linked with territorial "gathering," and this with autocracy. While it is possible that he sees himself neither as a Tsar nor as a General Secretary, the symbol that the current Russian President selected for himself is nevertheless that of a monarch— St. Prince Vladimir. This is evident in the manner that Putin and his supporters liken him to his namesake. In 2015, not long after the annexation of Crimea, Patriarch Kirill arranged for the relics of St. Vladimir to be transported to Kamchatka, where they were visited by personnel at a local nuclear submarine base (Adamsky, 2019). In his speech to the commanders, Patriarch Kirill noted that the Prince assigned great significance to the religious conditioning of his troops, potentially referencing similarities in Prince Vladimir's and Vladimir Putin's approach to military affairs (Ibid.). One year later, the Russian Military-Historical Society and the Moscow City Government erected a monument to St. Vladimir in Moscow's Borovitskaja Square on National Unity Day *(Monument to Vladimir the Great,* 2016). The unveiling of this statue was marked by a special ceremony with Patriarch Kirill, Putin, and other prominent figures in attendance. During the event, statements by the President and

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[34] Translated by the author with the use of DeepL.

Patriarch stressed the idea of binding the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian people into one "family" by way of religious affinity (Ibid.).

Interestingly, the President is known to have paid special honor to the high-handed strategists of the Russian Empire, such as Prince Vladimir, Alexander III[35], and Peter I, but has not given any positive appraisals of Nicholas II. Even the federally funded film *Matilda*, likely intended to evoke nostalgia for the Russian Empire in the secular population (Petkova, 2017), demonstrated a certain ignorance on the part of its sponsors regarding the perception of Nicholas II by the Orthodox faithful.[36] Still, pro-regime and/or imperialist actors within the ROC can use the tragic and mysticized story of Nicholas II as a nucleus around which to construct their political arguments. A telling example of how sympathy for the Russian monarchy and aversion to the revolution can be used to the advantage of Putin's authoritarian, if not necessarily monarchic, inclinations, is the reasoning that Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov provided regarding the amendments to the Russian Constitution made in July 2020. On June 26 of that year, after receiving questions and concerns from monastics and clergy regarding what appears to be encouragement of religious people to vote on the proposed amendments, Shevkunov presented at the Pskovo-Pecherskij monastery and provided clarification on the most important moments[37] of the proposed new Constitution (Pskovskaja eparhija Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Tserkvi, 2020). Tikhon placed significant emphasis on the amendments' implications for Russia's tselostnost', suggesting that the new law would counter attempts to dispute the territorial integrity of Russia in the Far East and Crimea (Ibid.). The second key point was the new

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[35] In November 2017, Putin unveiled a monument to Tsar Alexander III in Livadia, Crimea, highlighting in his address that while contemporaries called Alexander the "Tsar-peacemaker," he provided Russia thirteen years of peace not through concessions but through a just firmness (Smirnov, 2017). According to Smirnov (2017), Putin also mentioned on two occasions that Alexander III was his favorite ruler.

[36] Due to the portrayal of Nicholas II as having an intimate premarital affair, the film was poorly received by Russian Orthodox believers and provoked a strong backlash from the Tsarebozhniki (Borodin, 2017a; Laruelle, 2020).

[37] All quotes from this lecture have been translated by the author.

constitution's faithfulness to patterns of historical succession in the evolution of the Russian state, which apparently referred both to the maintenance of "traditional values" and certain principles of government. The Metropolitan insisted that the historical succession which has continued through millennia must be followed, adding that the Russians now understand what cataclysms can occur when it is violated, and that its preservation was necessary *so that there would not be these endless revolutions* (Ibid.). Clearly, this statement was an appeal to the anti-revolutionary sentiments and preference for harmony promoted by the ROC.

On June 28, 2020, Tikhon and the brethren of the Pskovo-Pecherskij monastery, together with the Minister of Science and Higher Education, voted at a station set up at the monastery itself (Pskovskoe Agentsvo Informacii, 2020). During the filmed event, Tikhon shared what he described as his personal opinion:

> The most important thing from my point of view is that President Vladimir Putin will have the opportunity, if he is elected by the people, to continue this path for Russia, to govern the country for some time more and prepare not just one successor, but a whole Pleiad of successors.[38] (Pskovskoe Agentsvo Informacii, 2020).

In addition to serving as a testimony to the virtue of imperial Russia and the brutality of revolution, Nicholas II's persona has a cross-denominational appeal that suits a civil religion designed for the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional nature of the Russian Federation that Putin so frequently emphasizes. In a 2009 article on Nicholas II's unrealized "Asian Program," Peter Multimatuli highlights that the Tsar was revered by diverse potential subjects of the Russian Empire who shared a respect for Orthodoxy and monarchy that was absent in the West:

> The great Eastern civilization, with its sacral attitude toward the tsar's authority and solid religious foundation, seemed to the Tsesarevich[39] much closer to the reception of Russian values than the calculating, pragmatic, and bourgeois European civilization. In the East, Russia was not seen as an enemy. Her faith was not considered, as it was in Europe, to be something savage and barbarian. The Russian Tsar was perceived in the East not as a

[38] Translated by the author.
[39] Title of Nicholas II before coronation, analogous to "Prince."

> "tyrant and despot," but as Akh-Padishakh for the Muslims and the White Tsar for the Buddhists. The idea of the "White Tsar" was equally relatable for all of the Eastern nations inhabiting the Russian Empire.[40] (Multimatuli, 2009).

Archpriest Andrew Phillips of ROCOR expresses a similar notion:

> The Buddhists called him 'The White Tara' (King'). So he worked with Tibet, where he was called 'Chakravartin' (The King of Peace'), Mongolia, China, Manchuria, Korea and Japan, countries of potential… He was also respected by the Muslims, who called him 'Al-Padishah', 'The Great King'. In general, sacral, Eastern civilisations had far more respect for 'the White Tsar' than the bourgeois West. (Phillips, 2013).

The degree to which other religious groups represented in the Russian Federation actually venerate Nicholas II is unclear, but the authors' claims are not without merit. For example, the Muslim reaction to *Matilda* demonstrates a certain concern for the representation of the last Russian monarch. During her campaign to initiate an investigation against the film's producers for offending the feelings of believers, State Duma Deputy Natalia Poklonskaya purported to have received a letter from Muslims in the Russian Federation stating that they also hold the name of Nicholas II to be sacred (RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service, 2017). Although an expert on Islam told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that this was not the case because the Tsar was only canonized in Orthodoxy, the Mufti's Office of Daghestan informed RFL/RL several days later that it supports Poklonskaya's campaign (Ibid.). Ramzan Kadyrov, the Muslim leader of Chechnya, likewise backed the effort (Petkova, 2017).

In this regard, the cult of the Romanovs has a strategic element, whether by design or by coincidence. Putin is keenly aware that a leader's attitude toward religion influences subjects' attitudes toward them, and with Muslims comprising the second largest religious group in Russia after Orthodox Christians (Office of International Religious Freedom, n.d.), he has made efforts to

[40] Translated by the author.

publicly acknowledge Islam.[41] In his 2012 article dedicated to the national question, Putin perhaps unintentionally synthesizes Rousseau's rationale for civil religion with Ilyin's notion of religiosity:

> Civil peace and interethnic harmony... is painstaking work for the state and society, requiring very delicate decisions and a balanced and wise policy that is capable of ensuring "unity in diversity". It is necessary not only to observe mutual obligations, but also to find common values for all…At the foundation of Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism…lie fundamental, shared moral and spiritual values: mercy, mutual aid, truth, justice, respect for one's elders, and the ideals of family and labor.[42]

Although Patriarch Kirill endorses the idea of Russia as an Orthodox nation per se more than does Putin (Anderson, 2015), he can also adopt an ecumenical tone. In a September 6, 2014, episode of *Slovo Pastyrja* (russianchurch, 2014), Kirill gives a lecture on the meaning of the Russian World that alludes to a consensus between Russian Orthodoxy and other religions:

> …[a]ny war with people of different views and convictions is alien to us, as at the center of the civilization to which we belong are Gospel values, or, for those who do not accept the Gospel, who belong to other religions, the values of their proper religions, which largely, in the way of virtues, intersect with the Gospel message. This religious dimension of the Russian world is the source of the peace-loving nature of our people.[43] (russianchurch, 2014).

Clearly, the current regime's objective is to promote an Orthodox Russia without losing its "religious persuasiveness" for its sizeable non-Christian populations. Putin does not invoke Nicholas II in his own discourse of cross-confessional unity, but the Orthodox Church has woven a web of connotations around this figure that serves the same end—to draw the diverse subjects of the envisioned Empire into a single organism with a reverence for "sacral authority" and Eastern

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[41] On September 23, 2015, he attended the grand opening of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque (MacFarquhar, 2015). On September 22, 2015, a preview of the new mosque was aired on state television with a presentation by Ravil Gainutdin, who emphasized the presence of both Turkish and traditional Russian elements in the mosque's architecture (Ibid.), again bringing to mind Ilyin's notion of an all-permeating Orthodoxy. In June 2023, Putin visited the Juma mosque during an Islamic holiday in Daghestan and condemned the Quran burnings happening in Europe, stating "The Quran is sacred for Muslims and should be sacred for others" (as cited in Maisah, 2023).

[42] Translated by the author with the use of DeepL.

[43] Translated by the author.

Orthodox (or at least Eastern) spirituality while keeping them eternally at odds with the liberal West.

In summary, the Putin administration and its collaborators actively engage with both historical and contemporary representations of tselostnost'. On the one hand, Putin is careful to posit himself as a leader who, by Ilyin's advice, looks beyond partisan squabbles toward a holistic grand idea. On the other hand, he participates in both the secular and religious aspects of the monarchist trend, using the occasion to promote the two pillars of tselostnost': autocracy and imperialism. As it concerns the ROC, involvement in political activity has modernized ecclesiastical discourse, more or less sidelining intolerant fundamentalism and obliging ROC constituents to occasionally pay tribute to the state's narrative of a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional Russia. It has also allowed politics to decisively penetrate the religious sphere; the canonized Nicholas II is discussed not only as a saint but as a savvy politician who tragically failed to bring to completion a promising "Asian Program" (Multimatuli, 2009), monks are educated on constitutional amendments, and a voting station is set up at a monastery. None of these matters are directly related to traditional Christian dogma; their relevance is only derivative, based on a long historical tradition of sacralizing territorial integrity and the authority of a sovereign ruler.

Liberation/Rebellion à la Trump

After the consolidation of the nexus between Christianity and Republicanism during the twentieth century, many Presidential candidates have followed in Reagan's footsteps as it concerns overtures to the Christian Right, and faith leaders have reciprocated. Nonetheless, pundits found it surprising that, out of several Republican candidates who lived a traditional lifestyle, so many pastors would place their hope in Trump—a man surrounded by scandal. Moreover, the direct appeals to religion in Trump's symbolic and spoken discourse have often been unpersuasive; he has awkwardly evaded discussions of doctrinal specifics (Kilgore, 2020;

Walker, 2015), and his photo-op in front of Saint John's church (Barakat, 2020) was very artificial. However, many pastors do not put any great effort into making a case for Trump's piety, instead admitting that he is not perfect but nevertheless an instrument of God (Beaumont, 2023; Gorski, 2018; Lyons, 2016; White, 2019).

The expectations that these Christians do have for their candidate were voiced during the Evangelicals for Trump rally in January 2020, when a coalition of faith leaders laid hands on the President and prayed over him. The first pastor to lead the invocation expressed his gratitude for the new Head of State as follows (italics mine):

> "Lord, I thank you that America didn't need a preacher in the oval office, it did not need a professional politician in the oval office, but it needed *a fighter and a champion for freedom*, and Lord, that's exactly what we have" (NBC News, 2020).

The second pastor continued along the same "revolutionary" trajectory, calling upon God to give Trump the boldness "to defy and challenge giants in the world and defy and challenge the enemies in this nation" (Ibid.).

These statements show that the general strategy is not to present Trump as a Christian leader in the traditional sense but rather a protector of the faith. The pastor Bill Tvedt finds a more or less suitable characterization for him in the quasi-Biblical rebellion narrative—that of a *gentile* ally whom God uses to protect His people (Beaumont, 2023; Gorski, 2018). According to Tvedt, "He [Trump] is more of a Cyrus, a protector" (Beaumont, 2023). Cyrus himself was a pagan king who had been preordained by God to conquer Babylon, thereby liberating the Jews who had been repressed by the Babylonians and financing the rebuilding of their temple. Thus, while Trump may not be sufficiently versed in religion to persuasively project the image of a Christian leader, he and his acolytes instead leverage the sacrality of Liberty for Christian and secular patriots alike to construct the image of a liberator, and perhaps not without basis; while

Trump stumbles in theology, his use of the rebellion narrative is masterful. According to Gorski (2018), Trump's originality lies in the tendency to present what this scholar considers the four "traditional themes" of White Christian nationalism—"blood purity, blood conquest, bloody apocalypses, and golden age nostalgia" (p. 170)—in a facially secular form. This greater secularity comes with greater explicitness in the use of racist tropes, which Gorski (2018) speculates is precisely what appeals to White nationalists.

Many pundits interpret Trump's discourse, and Christian Right discourse overall, through the lens of race relations and racial prejudice; and it is evident from the discussion in the preceding section that racism and xenophobia have never fully subsided in this faction. At the same time, racial and religious "others" tend to be associated with a greater and more abstract Enemy, referred to as "tyranny," "communism," "totalitarianism," and "Marxism." The protagonists of the contemporary civil religious narrative, whether White, African American, Protestant, Catholic, or nonreligious, are those who defy and rebel against this great Enemy. Accordingly, just as Trump is more explicit in his use of Gorski's (2018) four main themes of White Christian nationalism, he also uses particularly colorful language in anti-establishment discourse. His rebellion narrative is to some extent classic in its semblance to the theological war thesis, portraying American politics as a battle between good and evil.

During his Independence Day address at Mount Rushmore in 2020, Trump (as cited in *Donald Trump attacks 'cancel culture'*, 2020) fanned the flames of conservative outrage over the destruction of several US monuments by reinforcing an exaggerated image of a tyrannical government and implying that he would be the one to oppose it:

> In our schools, our newsrooms, even our corporate boardrooms, there is a new far-left fascism that demands absolute allegiance…If you do not speak its language, perform its rituals, recite its mantras, and follow its commandments, then you will be censored, banished, blacklisted, persecuted, and punished. It's not going to happen to us. (Ibid.)

At another time, he directly referenced the American Revolution, stating, “Here tonight before the eyes of our forefathers, Americans declare again, as we did 244 years ago, that we will not be tyrannised, we will not be demeaned, and we will not be intimidated by bad, evil people. It will not happen” (Ibid.).

The same features that make Trump’s rhetoric distinctly “White Christian nationalist” also constitute a contemporary turn on the rebellion narrative where cancel culture is the new tyrant. While his language may not be something a mainstream Evangelical would regularly employ, even his most petty statements align with the idea of rebellion. Some right-wing Evangelicals interpret political correctness as only a veiled attempt at totalitarianism; as articulated by former megachurch pastor and Trump supporter Jim Garlow, political correctness originated as a Marxist tool to demonize all values of “Western civilization.” Garlow insists that there is no possible response to this challenge except resistance, this being a matter of “spiritual warfare” (as cited in Wolfe, 2023).

As with the four themes of White Christian nationalism, however, Trump’s defiance of political correctness is secular rather than religious. Most of his norm breaches are not linked to the affirmation of traditional marriage or other religious traditions but take the form of primitive jokes and insults that “rebelliously” flaunt standards of political correctness, as when he referred to Elaine Chow as his opponent’s “China-loving wife, Coco Chow” (as cited in Nzanga, 2022), or tastelessly dubbed the Coronavirus the “Kung Flu” during the progressing pandemic and hostilities toward Asians in 2020 (*Donald Trump calls Covid-19 'kung flu' at Tulsa rally*, 2020). Similarly, in 2015, Donald J Trump [@realDonaldTrump] reposted an X post saying of his potential opponent Jeb Bush, who is married to a woman from Mexico, that “Jeb Bush is crazy, who cares that he speaks Mexican, this is America, English !!" (as cited in Moreno, 2016). On

multiple occasions, the former President has avenged himself against female adversaries by attacking their physical appearance (The Associated Press, 2016).

Evidently, these rebellions against the tyrant of political correctness may appeal to a more general Republican public consisting of somewhat prejudiced (and presumably male) voters rather than only conservative Christians. Indeed, Gorski et al. (2022) note that the contemporary Christian Right is growing unprecedentedly close to White supremacist groups who, despite recognizing Christianity as a cultural artifact of sorts, are essentially secular. The authors observe that Trump's flirtation with these militias is yet another characteristic that differentiates him from preceding Republican candidates who were endorsed by the Christian Right. If American civil religion has become increasingly civil and less religious, so that secular discussions of politics can take place in religious contexts without any significant apologetical defense, it is only natural that the people would elect a president who presents a purely secular discourse—so long as it corresponds to the fundamental paradigm of liberation/rebellion.

However ironic this may be in light of his various statements, Trump and his supporters collaborate to construct a public image for him that speaks not only to the secularization but also the diversification of right-wing American civil religion. On several occasions, Trump has attempted to advertise that he is popular with minority groups, and especially the Black community. The coalition of pastors praying over Trump at the aforementioned Evangelicals for Trump rally included Hispanic individuals and one African American, and at another time he organized a prayer with exclusively African American ministers, save his spiritual advisor (Ntreh, 2020). In 2017, he also had a meeting and pray-over that included representatives of the minority confessional groups of the Christian Right, namely Catholic and Jewish faith leaders

(Bailey, 2017). Meanwhile, the only confession that Trump has openly villainized is Islam,[44] this being a religion too "foreign" to be accepted into the fold of American right-wing civil religion, as discussed in the previous section.

By and large, Trump's rhetoric, though at first glance a novel phenomenon, is intentionally or unintentionally aligned with the general trajectory of American right-wing civil religion. Trump is by no means devout but is still accepted and even praised by the conservative Evangelical community; yet considering the preeminence that all Republican political agendas, from abortion to tax cuts, have assumed in the Christian Right, it is not unexpected that activist pastors would pray over and otherwise endorse an impious candidate so long as they considered him fit to support these agendas. Trump shows little understanding of Christian dogma and makes overtures to secular White supremacist groups (Gorski, 2018), but this is also not surprising because explicit or doctrinal Christianity is not the sole priority, since the political battle against Marxism in all its forms has become tacitly religious and can unify parties with varying types and degrees of spirituality. His ambiguous message regarding non-White groups, which consists of statements that are generally interpreted as racially charged and those that portray him as having a diverse base of supporters, also reflect the conditional membership that the Christian Right grants to minorities.

[44] For examples, see: Johnson, J. & Hauslohner, A. (2017, May 20). 'I think Islam hates us:' a timeline of Trump's comments about Islam and Muslims. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/

8. Civil Religion in Action

Holism/Tselostnost’ and the Ukraine Invasion

As evidenced in the preceding section, long before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, idealogues affiliated with the state and ROC were actively promoting the idea that Eurasian unity is crucial for the Russian Empire (or now the Russian Federation) to prosper both materially and spiritually. For example, at the time of the Ukrainian political crisis and the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov scripted and participated in the production of the documentary *Gibel’ imperii: Vizantijskij urok* [Death of an Empire: The Byzantine Lesson] as a lesson for posterity. In the film, Shevkunov claims that Byzantium was a true Christian state that embodied the principle outlined in Colossians 3:11 “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” (English Standard Version Bible), because individuals from various ethnic backgrounds who accepted the Orthodox faith had the opportunity to contribute towards the Empire’s government and identified collectively as “Romans” or “Romeans” (Shevkunov, 2008). However, this harmony was disrupted after Western Europeans infected the Greek intelligentsia with the pan-Hellenic ideology that was spreading through Europe during the Renaissance. Shevkunov argues that once the Greeks began to view themselves as a distinct people and other ethnic groups followed suit, the Empire’s unity and strength was shattered.

Since February 2022, the ROC has remained devoted to the concept of tselostnost’, attributing the war itself to aggression coming from outside the borders of historical Rus, as in this excerpt from a prayer that Patriarch Kirill encouraged clergy to recite in the Litany as of March 3, 2022:

> From a single Baptismal font, under the holy Prince Vladimir, we, Your children, have received Your grace; confirm the spirit of brotherly love and peace in our hearts forever;

> forbid the foreign ones seeking strife and assembling against Holy Rus, and overturn their schemes.[45] (as cited in Metropolitan Dionisii of Voskresensk, 2022).

The Patriarch's September 25, 2022, *Molitva o Svjatoj Rusi* [Prayer for Holy Rus] is very similar with the added explicit reference to victory:

> O Lord God of Hosts, God of our salvation, look in mercy upon Thy humble servants, hear and have mercy upon us: behold the strife of those who assemble against Holy Russia, seeking to divide and destroy her single people. Arise, O God, to help Thy people and grant us victory by Thy power. (as cited in Patriarch Kirill, 2022).

As the nations began to openly discuss possibilities of nuclear conflict in connection with the Ukraine invasion, on September 16, 2023, Patriarch Kirill paid a formal visit to the Viliuchinsk nuclear submarine base to provide words of encouragement to the servicemen (Press Service of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus, 2023). During his high priestly address, he informed listeners that he had disclosed his plans for the visit to the President, who wholeheartedly supported it. The Patriarch emphasized the exceptional and crucial strategic role of the nuclear navy, noting that the navy had always been the elite of the armed forces, *including in pre-revolutionary times*. He ended his speech with a call for a civil religious union as a *single spiritual and worldly army* committed to the defense of Russia's *sacred frontiers* (Ibid.).
Given ROCOR's role in the construction of modern Russian civil religion, it may not be out of place to mention this establishment's response to the war. Unlike the Moscow Patriarchate, it does not express any preferences in terms of victory, but its discourse aligns with Kirill's in the emphasis on preserving unity (Archbishop Peter, 2022; Metropolitan Mark et al., 2022). Metropolitan Mark et al.'s (2022) call to unity invoked key themes of ROCOR culture, reminding readers of the contribution made by "Kievan Rus, later Ukraine" to the development of Russian Orthodoxy from the baptism by Prince Vladimir to the days of Metropolitan Vladimir

[45] All excerpts from Patriarch Kirill's addresses and prayers provided in this section were translated by the author with the use of DeepL.

Bogoyavlensky, who by his martyrdom in Soviet Kiev "baptised Rus' anew as Russia entered into a period of atheism, uniting Russia in his heart…."

However, it is important to bear in mind that the Romanov-imperial resurgence in Russia is truly a civil religious phenomenon in that it has spread through ecclesiastical and popular culture, religious and purely political propaganda. Though based on the archaic notion of a link between Tsardom and divine harmony, it can be used in both religious and secular representations of tselostnost'. The former representation stresses the sacrality of the monarchy and Nicholas II's martyrdom, and the latter the more worldly glory of an imperial state and traditionally "strong" leaders such as Peter I and Alexander III. Of course, there is overlap between the two, as when contributors on Pravoslavie.ru seek to make a case not only for Nicholas II's credentials as a saint but also his political savviness. Metropolitan Tikhon Shevkunov, as described in the previous section, is especially prolific in his secular pursuits.

As commonly known, in addition to the rationale based on Russia and Ukraine's shared historical, cultural, and religious heritage, Putin has provided numerous secular justifications for the war in Ukraine, the most prominent being "denazification" and NATO encroachment. He has also appealed to the secular dimension of Russia's Romanov-centered civil religion at a June 2022 exhibit dedicated to Peter I, stating:

> Peter the Great waged the great northern war for 21 years. It would seem that he was at war with Sweden, he took something from them. He did not take anything from them, he returned [what was Russia's] …Apparently, it is also our lot to return [what is Russia's] and strengthen [the country]. And if we proceed from the fact that these basic values form the basis of our existence, we will certainly succeed in solving the tasks that we face. (as cited in Roth & agencies, 2022)

The new history textbook published under the Putin administration, which has attracted no dearth of attention in the media, is yet another example of how tselostnost' can be represented in a secular, or perhaps ecumenical, form. Page 410, in a section dedicated to the Special

Military Operation, recounts the story of 25-year-old Senior Lieutenant Nurmagomed Gadzhimagomedov, who continued to command his subordinates in battle after being severely wounded and finally detonated a grenade that killed him as well as the surrounding Ukrainian soldiers (as cited in *Medinskij i Kravtsov prezentovali novyj uchebnik,* 2023). Accompanying this account was a quote attributed to Gadzhimagomedov's father, who wished for his son's heroic act to unite the Russian [rossijskij] nation and called upon Russians to advance forward in unity without separating people based on national and religious characteristics.[46] (as cited in *Medinskij i Kravtsov prezentovali novyj uchebnik,* 2023). Above Gadzhimagomedov's photograph was a similarly-themed statement from Putin:

> When I see examples of such heroism as the feat of the young man Nurmagomed Gadzhimagomedov, a native of Daghestan, a Laketian by nationality, I want to say, "I am a Laketian, I am a Daghestani, I am a Chechen, Russian, Tatar, Jew, Mordvian, Osettian. (as cited in Ibid.).

The chapter proceeds to discuss that Russian soldiers have always fought shoulder to shoulder for goodness and truth.[47]

On September 28, 2023, Putin signed an act establishing a new federal holiday—"The Day of reunification with the Donetsk national republic, the Lughansk national republic, the Zaporozhie region, and the Kherson region"—that would be observed on September 30, commemorating the date when the said regions entered into the Russian Federation following a reported majority popular vote for integration (*Putin podpisal zakon,* 2023). The 2023 celebrations included a large "meeting-concert" where some of the nation's most popular singers

[46] Quotes from the textbook have been translated by the author with the use of DeepL

[47] Truth being an important concept for Ilyin, who believed that all the endeavors of the Russian people and even its mistakes were motivated by a search for Truth, and ultimately the Truth of God.

performed on a stage with an overhead banner stating *Rossija* on one line and *Donbas-Novorossija*[48] on the second (*V Moskve ustroili miting-koncert,* 2023).

In comparison to Kirill's, Putin's discourse has been predominantly secular. Of course, it is not surprising that even a president who seeks to assume a Christian image would not use explicitly religious-mythological arguments about the Third Rome as an official rationale for a real-life invasion. However, what if he were asked to share his personal opinion on God's involvement in the world?

The answer to this question lies in Putin's 2024 interview with Tucker Carlson and may have come as a surprise to the interviewer himself. When Carlson asked Putin what effect being a "Christian leader…by your own description" had on him, he predicably mentioned Prince Vladimir, under whom the military and the Rus peoples converted to Orthodoxy (kremlin, 2024). Yet he then proceeded into a discussion of Orthodoxy as a religion that welcomes all others, elaborating on how the values of all world confessions, and especially Russia's traditional religions, are "similar if not identical" (Ibid.). The existence of people from different ethnic and religious groups who all regarded Russia as their Motherland, he boasted, was unique to Russia. Concerning religion, he opined that for the Russian people and their "person-focused culture," religion was not a matter of attending church but rather something within the heart (Ibid.). Putin added that Dostoevsky had written about this with reference to "the Russian soul," explaining that while the West was more pragmatic, Russians were more focused "on eternal things, on moral things" (Ibid.). In response to Carlson's question on whether he saw the hand of God in what was taking place in the world, Putin dismissed the idea and instead took on a discourse

[48] A *pre-revolutionary* term for the Southern/Southeastern part of Ukraine conquered by Catherine II (*Direct Line with Vladimir Putin*, 2014).

reminiscent of Lev Gumilev, stating that "the world community is developing following the inherent laws…some countries rose, some got bigger and stronger and then left the international stage…," positing as examples the Golden Horde and the Roman Empire. Only now, he added, "developments are more rapid than in Roman times" (Ibid.).

In the interview, Putin maintained full accordance with the Silver Age religious philosophy that had become a key element of Russian civil religion and its ecumenical aspect. He recalled ideas of a trans-denominational "religion" of heartfelt contemplation, organicity, the East-West dichotomy, and a Eurasian conception of Russia. However, it was what was missing in this response that was telling. Carlson was clearly probing into Putin's personal relationship with religion and leadership, and yet he did not duly address how Orthodoxy informed his political decisions and self-reflection. While Patriarch Kirill frames the Special Military Operation as practically a holy war, Putin speaks abstractly of the rise and fall of civilizations. What then, to make of his pilgrimages, his church visits, his decades-long projects for Christianization of the military, (Adamsky, 2019) and his association with high-ranking ROC clerics who faithfully promote his agendas? Certainly, if Alexander III, whom he admires, had been presented with these questions, he would have at least spoken of how he considered himself to be carrying out a duty entrusted to him by God. However, Putin differs from Alexander in that he seeks to live the paradox envisioned by Ilyin—to maintain religious persuasiveness with the still predominantly Orthodox Russian population while also promoting a more inclusive cultural religion that transcends dogmas and pervades the public sphere. This requires legitimation of one's authority based on "more than secular" (Bellah & Hammond, 1980/2013, p. 202) ideals, or Ilyin's "religiosity" rather than the pre-Petrine understanding of the divine right. To this end he presents himself as following the dominant confession but is careful not to assume an indoctrinated

persona when speaking from himself as head of state, preferring to outsource religious arguments to the ROC for Orthodox relief while personally maintaining an ecumenical discourse that will not alienate other statistically representative populations.

Liberation/Rebellion and the January 6 Insurrection

Arguably, the cathartic moment for some Christian Right activists was the insurrection on January 6, 2021, when years of religious-revolutionary ideology culminated in a rebellion attempt that occurred before the eyes of the entire nation. As Gorski et al. (2022) recount, it began with false claims of election fraud that were upheld by various actors within the Christian Right. These conspiracy theories inspired the mobilization of the Judeo-Christian grassroots organization Jericho March, which was active during the months leading up to the event. According to a November 25, 2020, press release posted on its website, the organization calls upon participants to engage in peaceful protest for free elections and liberty. Founded by an Evangelical Christian and a Catholic, Jericho March uses strategically inclusive language in the release, addressing "patriots and people of faith" in tandem and referring to their adherents broadly as "Judeo-Christian" (Jericho March, 2020). In symphony with the civil religious evocativeness of its stated mission, the Jericho March protest format, though ecumenical,[49] embodied the Old Testament liberation/rebellion narrative; protestors gathered around government buildings and circled them in simulation of Joshua's conquest of Jericho (Ibid.).

The Capitol riot itself had a similar character. Gorski et al. (2022), among others, have commented on the mélange of religious and political symbols on display during the event. Loyd Wolf's photographs from the insurrection as provided in Feder (2021) could even be said to

[49] According to the press release, "Jericho March ™ is a unified celebration of authentic and diverse Judeo-Christian forms of worship including praying, preaching, singing, rosary recitations, Eucharistic processions, and blowing shofars" (Jericho March, 2020).

capture the entire history of representations of the liberation/rebellion paradigm—Shofar trumpets alluding to the Biblical foundation of American civil religion, “Don’t tread on me” signs that bring to mind the politization of religious discourse during the Revolution, Confederate flags reminding of the Civil War, and, finally, Trump signs. In accordance with the rebellion narrative, one insurrectionist impersonated commander Moroni from the Book of Mormon (Walch, 2021), who led the faithful against an aspiring tyrant seeking to “…destroy the church of God, and to destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted unto them…” (*Book of Mormon*, Alma 46:10).

In his article *The insurrectionists’ Senate floor prayer highlights a curious Trumpian ecumenism*, Jenkins (2021) discusses how the riot involved religious groups not generally associated with the Christian Right. In addition to representatives of non-Evangelical but nevertheless traditional Judeo-Christian religions such as Catholics and Orthodox Jews, there was also the notorious “Q’Anon Shaman,” who visually presented himself as a distinctly pagan personage yet led a prayer for the rebirth of America to which more typical Evangelicals reverently listened. The author describes this moment as “a window into the specific forms of religious pluralism and ecumenism that united many of the rioters… to forge a common spiritual cause that fuses ‘conspirituality,’ anger, Christian nationalism and passionate support for Donald Trump” (Jenkins, 2021). Gorski et al. (2022) arrive at a similar conclusion regarding the January 6 insurrection but do not refer to the phenomenon in question as “ecumenism.” Rather, they argue that there are “secular versions of white Christian nationalism” (p. 10).

In the aftermath of the insurrection, analysts began to speculate that it was being transformed into a new Lost Cause (Graham, 2021; Onishi, 2021; Smith, 2021). Certainly, the reluctant recall that Trump issued to rioters on social media has a tragic-epic flavor. He weaves a

narrative according to which his election was indeed stolen and the rioters are noble people with a right to be angry, but they must abandon the siege because its continuation will only serve the advantage of their enemies. In his own words as reported by Breuninger (2021):

> These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long," he wrote. "Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!"

The multiple and extensive judicial processes that Trump was compelled to participate in after the insurrection recently inspired him to make a melodramatic appeal to African Americans as well. In his speech at an event for Black conservatives, Trump claimed that the Black community relates to his experience with the courts because, like them, he was systemically discriminated against (Egwuonwu & Terkel, 2024). He also invoked the rebellion narrative, this time weaving the African American experience into it:

> Some of the greatest evils in our nation's history have come from corrupt systems that try to target and subjugate others to deny them their freedom and to deny them their rights… I think that's why the Black people are so much on my side now because they see what's happening to me happens to them. (as cited in Ibid.).

As explained by a Black pastor who advises the former President, coalition groups are working to bring pro-Trump messages into Black communities in preparation for the 2024 election, and the Black Conservative Federation reportedly finds it plausible to significantly increase the candidate's voter base among Black males (Ibid.). This intentional effort to integrate Black Americans into the MAGA fold points to the reality behind the increasing inclusivity of right-wing civil religion: in a world where minorities have already achieved the same rights of political participation as the White population, the survival of a civil religion depends on its adaptability to change.

While it is not within the scope of this analysis to assess whether Trump's discourse had any significant effect on prospective voters for the 2024 elections, the narrative of rebellion and sacrifice that Trump and his supporters have constructed around his persona has been internalized by faith leaders such as the megachurch pastor Andrew Wommack. In a February 7, 2024, episode of a call-in program offered through his nonprofit, which bears the telling name *Truth and Liberty Coalition*,[50] Wommack addressed a viewer's question on how to replace the Constitution with the Bible. Wommack replied in a *civil religious* manner, affirming that the Constitution was one of the "great things God has done" but it was not being followed. He then proceeded to discuss concerns about another civil war breaking out in response to the election of Trump and suggested that while civil war is not what he wants, it may be worth it to save the nation. Overall, Wommack echoed Patrick Henry (and, it seems, John Adams) in the notion that one must not shy away from preserving Liberty for fear that it will foment disorder, stating "it was John Adams that said 'duty is ours, results is God's.'"

9. Conclusion

In an earlier section of this essay, I cited Stoeckl & Uzlaner's (2022) remarks on how the authorities of the later Soviet period searched through Silver Age philosophy and other theological literature to unearth some religious (and more lasting) values that could be extracted and presented to the public in the form of a secular ideology. It could be said that they sought to create a civil religion in Bellah & Hammond's (1980/2013) understanding: something that originates in ecclesiastical teachings but merges with culture so that its spiritual connotations

[50] According to their mission statement, "In an effort to correct online misinformation and in contrast to dominionist theological views, Truth & Liberty Coalition stands for preserving America's constitutional republic of government from the consent of the governed through democratically elected representatives for the purpose of guaranteeing to each citizen their Creator-given rights" (Truth & Liberty Coalition, n.d.).

remain in the absence of any religious framing. Despite their alienation of East from West and Republicans from Democrats, the civil religious discourses discussed in this thesis, ironically, appear to be evolving in the direction envisioned by Rousseau—toward the construction of a national idea based on a trans-confessional religion and a trans-ethnic, trans-racial nationality. In fact, these belief systems may be so theologically eclectic that they surpass even Rousseau's expectations, being not only non-denominational but sometimes entirely secular.

At the inception of both states, the religious dimension of politics was quite the opposite of what Rousseau envisioned under the idea of civil religion; it was theologically legalistic and fueled political conflict with an ideology of hostility and suspicion based on religious differences, which often corresponded to racial/ethnic ones. As officially condoned religious bigotry attenuated with the Enlightenment period, states still faced internal and external threats, but these were no longer conveniently bounded by a particular religious or ethnic category. The American Revolution occurred when an ambitious colony that had the capacities to exercise greater economic and political agency remained constrained by imperial policy, and the former hostility toward Catholic monarchs was replaced with the idea that monarchy itself was abhorrent and democracy foreordained by God for His people. Liberty, then being interpreted in religious terms, has now become the epitome of a civil religious ideal—sacred but secular. This ideal was wielded by both sides during the Civil War, when Southern conservatives faced revocation of "sacred" State's rights and offenses to all social, religious, and economic aspects of traditional American life (in their interpretation) from abolitionists, Spiritualists, feminists, and even communists. Already a concern in early Postbellum America, communism ultimately triumphed in 20th-century Russia, and White emigres who fled the Bolshevik regime developed a counter-culture comparable to that of the postwar Confederacy in its theological war rhetoric and

mythologization of a noble and unfortunate past. Like any culture, these movements spanned not only the religious and creative domains but also politics, prescribing a political/economic system considered quintessential to that nation—autocracy and unity with the near abroad in Russia, and democracy and capitalism in the United States—as the antidote to communism, tyranny, and chaos. The ensuing civil rights era and its Russian analogue, the 1990s, constituted a second liberal onslaught against "traditional" values. Both prompted strategically minded conservative actors to adopt a rhetoric that prioritized preserving the fundamental ideas of each civil religion, these being imperial structure/autocratic rule in Russia and states' rights/economic liberalism in the U.S. The threats to these quintessential ideals came from various quarters, and the constructors of right-wing civil religion began to promote a more eclectic idea of nationality and religion to counter an eclectic enemy, to whom both Russian and American discourses attribute social division and conflict.

Of course, this is not to say that prejudice has fully evaporated from civil religion in either country. Both have undergone some discursive reconfigurations of in-groups and out-groups, yet the boundaries that were drawn between the Enlightenment period and the Russian and American civil wars have been preserved in some form. Russian civil religion has become more ecumenical, albeit in conformance to the Eurasianist representation of tselostnost'. Patriarch Aleksii, who began constructing the new Russian civil religion even before Putin, was known for his ecumenical projects, and Kirill as well has appealed to the universal values shared among the traditional religions. Meanwhile, traditionally Western belief systems, even those that have had some longevity in the Russian space, do not receive the same recognition. The civil religion of the Christian Right has taken a slightly different trajectory, creating room for Republican Catholics, Jews, and Mormons who acknowledge the cultural importance of Judeo-

Christian principles in America but excluding Muslims, who are presumed to come from a culture alien not only to the religious but also the “traditional” political values of the Christian Right. However, Muslims are not the antagonists in American civil religion to the same degree that the West is in Russian civil religion. Rather, in both, the primary antagonists are communism, totalitarianism, and liberalism, as well as the paradigm-specific threats of polyarchy and imperial disintegration (Russia) and loss of civil liberties and free enterprise (U.S.). While in Russia these troubles are mainly displaced onto the West and former constituents of the Russian Empire (such as Ukraine) as its instruments, in America they are thought to proceed from the liberal federal government and advanced by various minority groups as its instruments. In this way, the liberation/rebellion and holism/tselostnost’ paradigms inform where intolerance is unwelcome, and where it is permissible or even praiseworthy.

Nonetheless, the symbolic discourse constructed collaboratively by American Christians of various denominations and secular Americans in Christian Right organizations, the Tea Party, and the January 6 insurrection, as well as the appeals to ecumenism in official Russian discourse, all point to the formation of a “religion” that is not so much a theological phenomenon as a general consensus on what “sacred” national values are and from whom these must be protected. This consensus also produces its own idols, whether one chooses to revere them as saints or as national heroes. Therefore, it is quite close to what Rousseau referred to as civil religion, being nondenominational and heavily based on the sacrality of certain social and governmental structures.

In conclusion, the present analysis has revealed several key observations about civil religion in an autocratic country and a democratic country, both of which have a high level of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity. The first observation is that in neither case does the

discourse meet Rousseau's definition of a civil religion as characterized by complete religious tolerance, and it is not entirely free from the idea of dominance of a certain race or ethnicity. The second is that, notwithstanding these imperfections, religious-political discourse in both countries is evolving away from the Religion of the Citizen and toward civil religion if its modern form is viewed against the backdrop of history, as affinity with this "religion" is now based primarily on political and social value orientations rather than theological beliefs or ethnicity. This may have been brought about partly by genuine transformation in how people perceive compatriots of different backgrounds, but also by purely strategic prioritization. Rousseau never denied that civil religion, unlike Gospel Christianity, is a strategic phenomenon, and this helps to explain the seeming paradox in its evolution. At first glance, the assertion that Russia and America are moving closer to a more tolerant civil religion may seem counterintuitive considering the polarization of American society and the fact that Russia is physically at war with Ukraine and politically with much of the Western world. However, while Bellah (1967/2005) may muse on the possibility of a "world civil religion" (p. 54), Rousseau's original intention for civil religion was not to promote world peace. Rather, its purpose was to maintain order in society as well as to rally the people of the republic against external threats and aspiring domestic tyrants. These last two points are where we observe the greatest distinction between Russian and American civil religion, as one is preoccupied with the first, and the other with the second. This distinction is not entirely categorical, however; examples of discourse provided earlier show that Christian Right activists are also concerned about social polarization but attribute it to the government and its vassals, and Ilyin lauded freedom of expression but also insisted on the preservation of autocracy. The prioritization of certain ideals over others illustrates the way in which real-world civil religion falls short of Rousseau's vision; some may

focus on its republican (as in democratic) aspect to the detriment of unity, and some may value internal unity against external threats over freedom. These divergences are in themselves logical. Russia was consolidated as a true state under autocratic rulers with great imperial ambitions, and the United States became an independent country through a revolution accompanied by the institutionalization of democracy and classical capitalism. Hence, it is not surprising that the idea ingrained in each of these civil religions is that if its age-old political tradition is taken away, the state itself will cease to exist.

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