

The new Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia to continue the alliance of church and state

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On February 1, metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kirill was officially enthroned as the 16th patriarch of Moscow and all Russia in the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. Prior to the election, Kirill had received unofficial backing from the Russian government and unprecedented support from the Russian media; his activity as 'Guardian of the Throne' (the church's interim leader following the death of the former patriarch, Alexy II) received widespread media coverage. The election of the new Patriarch illustrates the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state. As of 1990, when the previous synod took place, the Russian Orthodox Church has managed to obtain a privileged status compared to other religions. However, it owes its position almost exclusively to the support of the authorities. For the government, the role of Orthodoxy is largely symbolic – it is treated as an ideological pillar of statehood and Russian national identity. After decades of rigorous atheism, the state now supports the Orthodox Church in the reconstruction of its infrastructure and spiritual potential and in its struggle against competition from other denominations. The election of the new Patriarch is not going to alter the relations between the state and the church. Kirill I is likely to maintain the existing model of cooperation with the state, as it has been bringing the Orthodox Church considerable benefits in recent years.

The new Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church

The new Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church is 63-year-old Kirill, the metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, the church diplomat, former head of the External Church Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate, and Alexy II's long-standing associate. He was elected Patriarch on January 27, during the Local Synod, and was backed by 508 out of 701 delegates – hierarchs, monks and representatives of the laity. It was the first time that there were so many representatives of the laity among the delegates, including businessmen (local sponsors of the church) and regional officials.

The election procedure was rather hasty; the church statute provides that the patriarch should be elected within 6 months following his predecessor's death (Alexy II died on December 5). Metropolitan Kirill, the church's interim leader following the death of Alexy II, quickly beca-

me one of the most recognisable Orthodox hierarchs in Russia, leaving other contenders for the patriarch's throne far behind. The new patriarch owes his popularity to the media coverage provided by the authorities who thus pointed to him as their unofficial candidate. Therefore, the election of the 16th patriarch of Moscow and all Russia has once again proved how close the relations between the Orthodox Church and the Russian state are.

The material and spiritual potential of the Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church has undergone major changes since the last Local Synod (when the former patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexy II was elected) which took place in 1990, still in Soviet conditions. What has changed most are the issues of ownership and administration. Within the last 20 years the church has restored most of its infrastructure destroyed or taken over by the Soviet authorities. As stated by Kirill on the day of his election, from 1988 to 2008 the number of parishes has quadrupled (from 6,893 to 29,263), the number of dioceses has doubled (from 76 to 157), the number of monasteries is 36 times higher (from 22 to 804), while the number of priests has quadrupled (from 7,397 to 30,670).

The spectacular development of the church's infrastructure was not followed by comparably deep changes within the church itself. The core of its hierarchy has remained unchanged for years: most of the bishops began working in Soviet times and are rather elderly¹. Most of them hold extremely conservative views about faith and the contemporary world – they

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object to any reforms of the church, are critical of the Western democracy model (first of all, of a liberal attitude to moral values) and oppose ecumenism. The conservatism of the Russian Orthodox Church and the clergy's poor intellectual capacity (most of them have no higher education

in theology) do not attract Russians to the church. Even though most of Russian society (71 per cent in 2008) declare themselves Orthodox, they treat religion purely symbolically: it has more to do with tradition and cultural heritage than with a genuine faith in God. It is confirmed by the statistics concerning religious practices: only 8 per cent of Russians who consider themselves Orthodox attend church regularly², while as little as 1 per cent regularly take communion³. The majority of Russians only meet a priest when they get married, baptise a child or bury the deceased, while the sacraments are perceived as part of the tradition or a magic trick that is supposed to provide health, safety and well-being.

The cooperation of the church and the federal government

Throughout the 18 years of patriarch Alexy II's service, the Russian Orthodox Church managed to obtain a privileged position in Russian public life. Even though the Russian constitution of 1993 and the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations of 1997 guarantee the separation of church and state and ensure equal rights to all confessions, the Orthodox Church in practice enjoys much broader privileges compared to other denominations existing in Russia.

The Orthodox Church actively cooperates with state institutions. It has signed official cooperation agreements with numerous ministries, e.g. the Education Ministry, Health Care Ministry, Defence Ministry and the Ministry of Interior. Paradoxically, the Orthodox Church gets the most solid support from the power institutions. Former persecutors of Orthodoxy have now become its most ardent advocates. A symbolic illustration of this cooperation was

¹ The Church, as with the whole Russian state administration, has never undergone a process of vetting, therefore many current bishops are very likely to have collaborated with the KGB in the past.

² No less than once a month. Data provided by Levada Tsentr, <http://www.levada.ru/press/2008031104.html>.

³ Data provided by Fond Obshchestvennoye Mneniye, http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/cult/rel_rel/_d081623

the opening of an Orthodox chapel in the Federal Security Service headquarters in Moscow in 2002⁴. Orthodox priests often participate in military ceremonies while chapels are continually springing up in successive military units. The Orthodox Church is also supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in building chapels in Russian diplomatic agencies abroad and in regaining the pre-Revolution property of the church.

Unlike priests of other denominations, Orthodox clergy have easy access to prisons⁵, hospitals and schools. The Russian Orthodox Church also has more delegates in the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations at the Presidential Administration (4 representatives of the Orthodox Church compared to 1 representative of any other denomination).

Another privilege of the Orthodox Church's is the top Russian officials' involvement in religious issues. Politicians starting with President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin frequently and ostentatiously participate in major Orthodox holidays; this is accompanied by widespread media coverage. On their part, Orthodox hierarchs take part in important state ceremonies.

Cooperation on the regional level

The Russian Orthodox Church gets the greatest support from the regional authorities and local business. The officials in the regions often offer the Church direct financial support, e.g. the Moscow city budget yearly allots funds for the reconstruction of Orthodox churches, monasteries and chapels in the city.

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Local businessmen, officials and politicians eagerly become founders of new churches. Besides this, representatives of Orthodox parishes are usually very favourably received in government agencies when they come to complete legal formalities.

Regional authorities also help the Russian Orthodox Church fight their 'contenders for the peoples' souls'. Apart from the Orthodox, other religious movements (especially new Protestant denominations such as Pentecostals and Adventists) face a number of problems, especially of an administrative nature. Quite often officials classify them as dangerous sects⁶ and refuse to grant the permission necessary for these communities to function. The problems usually concern the issues of ownership (land and temple buildings), e.g. officials refuse to give their consent for the construction of a temple, or take away land or premises they have previously granted.

Orthodoxy as a symbolic pillar of Russian statehood

The Russian Orthodox Church has great symbolic importance for the Russian authorities. Orthodoxy acts as an ideological pillar of Russian statehood and an important element of the national identity. Both the authorities and the church emphasise the latter's role in filling the ideological void following the collapse of the USSR. The majority of the Orthodox clergy hold conservative, anti-Western views and incline towards imperial 'Great Russian' nationalism. This mindset is in keeping with the authorities' ambitions to restore Russia's global superpower status. Orthodoxy, present in Russia for over ten centuries, acts as a consolidating symbol for the new state ideology that is combined of elements of tsarist, soviet and present-day traditions and is designed to prove that Russia has sustained its empire status.

⁴ Nikolay Mitrokhin, *Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov*, p. 245.

⁵ Some Orthodox dioceses have signed agreements concerning pastoral service in penitentiaries.

⁶ In fact, the activity of sects poses a great threat in Russia. Local officials, anxious of the activity of numerous more or less dangerous cults, often tend to classify small religious communities as sects.

The Russian authorities use this symbolic potential of the church, e.g. by participating in the ceremony of signing the Act of Canonical Communion of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia in May 2006, which ended the 80-year split between the emigration orthodoxy and the Russian Orthodox Church⁷.

The then President Putin who took part in the ceremony along the patriarch Alexy II, thus presented himself as the co-author of the symbolic reunion of the Orthodox Church and the Russian nation. Similarly, the solemn atmosphere of the Local Synod and grand-style ceremony of the new patriarch enthronement

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were supposed to convince the Russian public that historical continuity has been sustained both within the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state.

For the Russian authorities, there is another important symbolic dimension of Orthodoxy: it is supposed to unite the nations of the divided post-soviet states, especially those of historic Ruthenia (Ukraine and Belarus). Therefore, the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church, set by the new patriarch as one of the priorities, is in keeping with the Russian authorities' ambitions to regain (or maintain) its considerable influence in these states. The church that remains loyal to the state, may thus become an instrument for promoting the Russian authorities' standpoint outside the Russian Federation⁸.

On the state's terms

Despite Orthodoxy's privileged position and the priests' active cooperation with the state institutions, the church is far from being influential when it comes to state policy. It is the secular authorities who define the terms of mutual relations, as they have much more to offer to the church, e.g. significant support in the reconstruction of the church's infrastructure.

In the current model of church-state cooperation, orthodoxy plays a merely symbolic role. So far, the Russian Orthodox Church has failed to strengthen its position by sanctioning its unofficial privileges. As of 2002, the church has been ineffectively seeking to introduce the 'Basics of the Orthodox culture' (which would in fact be the Orthodox catechisation) to schools as a curricular subject. In September 2007, President Vladimir Putin basically ruled out the possibility of introducing religion-oriented subjects to schools, for fear that religious conflicts might become escalated. At the moment, it is up to the regional authorities and even to the schools' administration whether the Orthodox culture is taught⁹. The church has also failed to implement other projects they have been promoting, such as making the status of theology equal to other university disciplines, providing state accreditation for college diplomas in theology, or creating a corps of chaplains in the Russian army.

On a legislative level, Orthodoxy's privileged position is only reflected in the preamble of the Law on Freedom of Conscience which emphasises its special role in Russia's history, its spirituality and culture¹⁰. However, this statement is not followed by any regulations that would give the Orthodox Church a legal guarantee of privileges and benefits.

One of the main reasons for the authorities' objection to strengthening the privileges and rights of the church is the specific ethnic and religious structure of the Russian Federation. Even though the government considers Orthodoxy a pillar of Russian statehood, it simultaneously tries to promote ideas of multi-religiousness. To avoid religious conflicts, the authorities have adopted a strategy of emphasising in official rhetoric the separation of church and state and stressing the multi-religious character of the Russian Federation. When patriarch Alexy II died, President Medvedev did not announce official national mourning but only recommended that the media should refrain from broadcasting entertainment shows

⁷ In 1927, the Moscow Patriarch Sergiy declared loyalty to the Communist authorities, which was condemned by the emigration hierarchs and resulted in a schism in the Russian Orthodox Church.

⁸ On February 2, President Dmitry Medvedev received the new patriarch at the Kremlin and declared that the state was going to support the Orthodox Church in its efforts to 'strengthen the fraternal bond with the states of the near abroad'.

⁹ As of September 2006, the 'Basics of the Orthodox culture' have been a curricular subject at schools in four Russian regions: Belgorod oblast, Kaluga oblast, Smolensk oblast and Bryansk oblast. In other regions, the decision is left to individual schools.

¹⁰ The preamble of the Law on Freedom of Conscience also states that three other religions – Islam, Buddhism and Judaism – constitute 'an inseparable part of the historical heritage of Russia's peoples'. As a result of over-interpretation of this rather vague statement, the notion of the

on the day of his funeral. This may be seen as a gesture of regard toward other religions in Russia, especially Muslims who were celebrating Qurban Bayram at the time.

By making the Russian Orthodox Church privileged unofficially, without solid legal grounds for its special status, the authorities have plenty of room for manoeuvre whenever they want to either use it for political purposes or to keep balance in a multi-religious Russia.

Another reason for the church's weaker position vis-à-vis the state is the former's limited ability to influence Russian society. The authorities do not consider the church to be an institution that could seriously influence people's political views and therefore do not regard the church as an efficient tool for their policy. This seems to be one of the main factors that weakens the church's position vis-à-vis the state.

New patriarch – unchanged relations

The election of the new patriarch is not likely to alter the existing relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state. The church is likely to remain subordinate vis-à-vis the state on the one hand, and to continue deriving benefits from the cooperation with the state on the other. Another reason for continuity is the new patriarch Kirill's long record of cooperation with the state as the head of the 'church's diplomacy'.

1. The Russian Orthodox Church is likely to remain heavily dependent on the authorities. It is the government who is going to dictate the terms of mutual cooperation and define the limits of the church's public presence in the state. The benefits and support the church gets from the state are so significant that it is hard to imagine the new patriarch revising these relations or confronting the authorities. Close cooperation with the state, even at the expense of partial autonomy, is deeply rooted in the Orthodox culture and is in keeping with the church's attempts to preserve the tradition and historical continuity.

2. Despite the church's weaker position vis-à-vis the state, Kirill is likely to seek new benefits for the church. In his speech at the synod, he mentioned the introduction of the Orthodox religion as a curricular subject in Russian schools. The new patriarch can also be expected to try and strengthen the church's role in the state and society. After the inauguration, Kirill voiced his determination to continue the close cooperation of the Russian Orthodox Church and the authorities who should 'harmoniously combine their interests'. He also announced that he was going to continue to host his weekly TV show 'The Shepherd's Word'.

3. After the election, Kirill feels obliged to remain loyal to the Russian government, who provided him with widespread media coverage, strong albeit unofficial backing prior to the Local Synod, and official support and congratulations after the election.

4. Kirill enjoys the authorities' support due to his image of a liberal (despite his actual conservative views) and the extensive political and diplomatic experience he gained as the long-standing head of the External Church Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate. With an experienced diplomat and politician heading the Russian Orthodox Church, the church is basically doomed to support the authorities' policy both in Russia and outside its borders.

so-called 'traditional religions' appeared in Russia, widely used to refer to Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. The position of other confessions, not considered 'traditional' in Russia, is much weaker and less privileged. Opinions of Catholics, Protestants and representatives of other denominations are usually disregarded in different discussions. On the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Church has lobbied for endorsing the special status of the 'traditional religions' as of 2001, but none of these initiatives has so far been successful.

APPENDIX

The Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Kirill (Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev)

He was born on November 20, 1946 in Leningrad in the family of an Orthodox priest. He entered the Leningrad Seminary and in 1970 completed a degree from the Leningrad Theological Academy (where he was awarded for excellent performance). He was ordained on April 3, 1969 by Nikodim, Metropolitan of Leningrad and Novgorod and adopted his new name, Kirill (Cyril). In 1971-1974 he served as a representative of the Moscow Patriarchate to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and in 1974-1984 – as Rector of the Leningrad Academy and Seminary.

On November 13, 1989 he was appointed Chairman of External Church Relations Department of the Moscow Patriarchate. For many years he supervised the Russian Orthodox Church's foreign policy. Kirill's spectacular career as the Church's representative to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and later as the Chairman of External Church Relations Department (in the times when the church was severely persecuted) may lead to the assumption that Kirill must have been in some way affiliated to the Soviet secret services.

In the 1990s, thanks to President Boris Yeltsin and Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin's support, the External Church Relations Department under Kirill's leadership acquired the privilege of duty-free import of alcohol and cigarettes. The Russian Orthodox Church thus became the leading cigarette importer in Russia. It still remains unknown what profits this yielded and what this money was spent on.

On February 25, 1991, Kirill became Metropolitan bishop of Smolensk and Kaliningrad. On December 6, 2009, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church proclaimed him the church's interim leader ('Guardian of the Patriarch's throne'). He was elected the 16th Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia on January 27, 2009, at the Local Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Kirill has been a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations at the Presidential Administration, and of presidiums of the Inter-religious Council of Russia and Inter-religious Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States. As the head of the church's diplomacy, Kirill has extensive contacts with politicians and officials in Russia and abroad.

He repeatedly visited Rome as a hierarch and diplomat of the Russian Orthodox Church and established many contacts with Catholic priests. At the same time he criticised the Catholic Church for 'proselytism' and the establishment of 4 Catholic dioceses in Russia in 2002. He was also critical of Western democracy for its 'excessive tolerance' towards homosexual relationships, drug abuse, prostitution and euthanasia. Kirill opts for the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church and strongly opposes the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

In comparison to the conservative Orthodox hierarchy, Kirill is regarded a more open and progressive priest. However, his public speeches (especially prior to the Synod) were conservative and state-oriented: he expressed his support for President Medvedev in the days of crisis, and assured that the church does not need deep reforms – what it actually needs, is its unity and tradition.



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