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## The Religio-Political Strategies of the Russian Orthodox Church as a 'Politics of Discourse'\*

JOACHIM WILLEMS

We frequently hear misgivings expressed in the West, and in Russia itself, about the fact that Orthodox Christianity might become a new state religion or state ideology for Russia, if indeed it has not already done so. Liberal circles in Russia talk about the far-reaching influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) over public life, and in the western press this is pretty well the universal view. Cited as evidence, for example, is the recent court case against the art exhibition 'Ostorozhno, religiya' in Moscow which resulted in the organisers being fined (Sapper *et al.*, 2004, pp. 48–51; Schumatzky, 2005; Voswinckel, 2004). Some even see the 1997 law on religion as showing the influence of the ROC, in that it succeeded in having its own special status written into the law. At the same time, however, other researchers argue just the opposite: the ROC does not exercise influence over political life, but Russian politicians have been instrumentalising the ROC when they have found it useful to do so, while generally paying no attention to it. In the view of Kathrin Behrens (2002, p. 370), for example, 'the real influence of the ROC on political processes and political actors depends on how far its own interests coincide with those of the political classes and in particular with those of the decision-makers in the state'.

The greater this convergence, the greater the evidence of the ROC's potential power, as for example in Patriarch Aleksii's visit to Belgrade during the war in Kosovo, which almost amounted to a state visit. In cases where the interests of the ROC have not impinged on the political players, however, as in the controversy over the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, or where they have been in direct conflict with the politicians' plans, as in the patriarch's appeal for a peaceful solution to the first Chechen war, the ROC has not been able to influence events. (Behrens, 2002, p. 379)

Both points of view, however, agree in maintaining that a new 'symphony' between church and state has developed. The only question is which one – church or state – is calling the tune. Is the ROC using state structures to advance its own interests? Or are the state organs guiding the ROC? In my opinion both points of view underestimate the complexities of the relationship (or, more accurately, relationships) between state and church. As the debate on the school subject 'Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture' shows, the ROC is faced with the necessity of demonstrating its indispensability to both state and society. It is by no means certain that the voice of

the ROC will be generally listened to; rather the ROC has to find ways of putting its case so as to convince people who do not share the church's faith-based position but who work according to the logic of politics. At the same time it is clear that the ROC has the potential to influence state and society if it can give its attitudes a social plausibility and move beyond a purely internal church debate.

The ROC is in fact involved in a power struggle with other political and social actors. All the players have their own strengths and weaknesses, consequences of their positions in the social and historical context. The ROC's main strength is the significant role it has played in Russian history and the general tendency for Russians today to identify themselves as Orthodox as a sign of their nationality (Kääriäinen, 2000, p. 359; Kääriäinen and Furman, 2000, p. 5). The weakest point is arguably the atheist tradition of the twentieth century, which is still having its effects: it no longer manifests itself as militant atheism, but it has helped to shape the private life of many Russians (poor knowledge of religion, alienation from church doctrines and practices) as well as the laicised vocabulary of legislation. Article 14 of the Russian Constitution and the preamble to the current law on religion both define Russia as a 'secular' (*'svetsky'*) state, and Article 2 Section 4 of the law on education establishes 'the secular character of education in educational institutions at national and regional level'.

In this article I propose to analyse the strategies of the ROC against the background described above. I shall be using the example of ROC discourse on the question of the introduction of subjects dealing with religion into the school timetable.

### **Debate on Religious Education in Russia**

The question of how and in what form religion should be dealt with in school has been on the agenda in Russia since the time of perestroika under Gorbachev. Recently a broad consensus has been taking shape that school pupils need knowledge of religion in order to understand Russian and foreign literature, art and history. The hope is also expressed that dealing with religion might have a positive moral effect in school and society (Willems, 2006; Glanzer, 2002, 2005). Some in the ROC even hope that schools will contribute to a 'religious renaissance' or a 'spiritual and moral rebirth' in Russia. The latter hope, in turn, arouses the mistrust of Russians who are inclined towards laicism. They point to the abovementioned legal separation of church and state and of church and school and demand a religious education of an exclusively informational character which does not involve any kind of introduction to the faith of the ROC or indeed any other denomination. To this extent the debate in Russia follows the pattern of debate in other European countries where the question arises as to how 'learning religion', 'learning from religion' and 'learning about religion' should relate to each other. Some countries take increasing religious pluralism into account and have replaced former confessional religious instruction with the study of religion or even of 'religious phenomenology' (for example Norway and some parts of Great Britain); other countries have introduced completely new disciplines (for example The Netherlands).<sup>1</sup>

The situation in Russia is somewhat different. Here only a very small minority are demanding confessional religious instruction. At the same time, there is a very wide range of ideas about what 'religious knowledge' might consist of. Some, coming from a secular perspective, are calling for subjects called 'the History of Religion' or 'the Religions of the World' which would aim to provide neutral and objective information about religions of all kinds. This kind of instruction has been tried out in some schools in Moscow, for example, and has also been introduced in some Islamic republics

(Tatarstan, Ingushetia) (see Willems, 2006, pp. 162–63). Advocates of this kind of instruction include the Russian education minister, Andrei Fursenko.<sup>2</sup> A textbook for school years 10 and 11 on ‘The Religions of the World’ talks about the neutrality it is trying to achieve:

You need to know that there are two different things: ‘religious studies’ (*izucheniye religii*) and ‘religious instruction’ (*obucheniye religii*). In the ‘Religions of the World’ course we are studying religions; you can get religious instruction in Sunday schools, in churches, from priests and preachers. It’s your own free choice and a matter for your own conscience whether you do or not. (Kulakov, 2003, p. 20)

At all events the discussion on religious education shows that those involved have very different views on what constitutes a ‘neutral’ presentation. For the compilers of the textbook quoted above neutrality means describing religions ‘without bringing in the question of the existence or non-existence of God’; for others neutrality necessarily means atheism.<sup>3</sup>

On the other side we have those in favour of introducing the subject ‘Foundations of Orthodox Culture’. They say that they do not want to return to the kind of confessional instruction found in schools before 1917 when pupils were catechised in Orthodox doctrine under the rubric ‘God’s law’ (*Zakon bozhi*). Instead they want to see instruction *about* Orthodoxy; but they want this to be given within a course which takes account of the special significance of Orthodoxy for Russia rather than placing all religions on an equal footing. This subject should be offered on a voluntary basis outside the normal school syllabus. The current Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations (Article 5, Section 4) even allows religious organisations themselves to provide voluntary extracurricular instruction of this kind. There does not seem to be much demand for it, however; as noted above, people seem to want a ‘culturological’, non-church-based subject. Findings by the ROC in July 2004 showed that 20 per cent of school pupils in Russia were attending lessons of this kind (V Moskve, 2004).

The demands of the ROC, which wants to see the introduction of ‘Foundations of Orthodox Culture’ on a nationwide basis, seem quite modest in European terms: the church is after all not insisting on a confessional subject ‘in accordance with the tenets of the religious community concerned’, as in the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (Article 7, Section 3), for example. Why is public debate so heated, then? To answer this question we need to look more closely at the arguments and thus reveal the basic features of the ROC’s strategy of influencing public discourses.

### **The Thesis that Religion and Morality are Interconnected**

It is striking how frequently the proponents of ‘Foundations of Orthodox Culture’ refer to current debate on concepts such as ‘morality’, ‘patriotism’, ‘identity’ and ‘crisis’ when making their case. Virtually all contributions on the subject in books, periodicals and newspapers paint a picture of a contemporary (postsoviet) society with the following deplorable features: widespread use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs; high levels of crime; media concentration on sex, violence and criminality; prostitution, pornography and high abortion rates; the increasing acceptability of premarital and extramarital sex; and the proliferation of religious sects. Young people particularly are said to have lost positive values such as diligence and patriotism and

to see no purpose in life, which leads to increasing suicide rates. The whole crisis is usually ascribed to just one cause: a collapse of moral values. Some see this as starting with perestroika and the increasing acceptance of western liberal values. Others see the rot setting in with the October Revolution which opened the way to life 'without God'. The only solution is for Russia to rediscover its own traditional spiritual values.<sup>4</sup>

In a book on religious education we read the following:

In Russia the destructive consequences of life without God – the social experiment of the twentieth century – and of the liberal-democratic changes of the past decade are particularly obvious. The spiritual and moral crisis has produced political, economic and social crises in our country... The only way that Russia is going to find resources to overcome the crisis is by reasserting and propagating its traditional spiritual and moral culture... Only our traditional way of life is capable of offering resistance to the influence of modern culture and to the model of civilisation being exported from the West. (Levchuk and Potapovskaya, 2003, pp. 5f.)

The 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course is designed to reinforce just this 'traditional way of life', and it is no surprise that those who are in favour of the course are convinced that Orthodoxy can and should make a significant contribution to the moral education of young people in the light of the perceived crisis. Every evil will be contrasted with an Orthodox value: today's 'sex culture' with Christian sexual ethics and the sacrament of marriage, for example (see Vladimir, 2003). In the same way a young person brought up the Orthodox way 'will not become involved with, or a victim of, drugs or pornography, destructive sects or satanic cults'; when the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course is introduced prostitution, lawbreaking and other forms of antisocial behaviour among young people will visibly diminish, children will be defended from moral depravity and sects and they will receive education in patriotism, which will include motivation to defend the fatherland. In short, Orthodoxy 'leads people to a fulfilled and harmonious existence, intellectually and spiritually, and frequently also to physical health' (Galimova and Yelepova, 2003). Or, to quote a particularly clear example of the link between Orthodoxy and patriotism, according to Metropolitan Vladimir of Tashkent and Central Asia the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course is capable of rendering large numbers of children worthy of 'their earthly and heavenly fatherland' (Vladimir, 2003).

Yevgeni Shestun, a priest and teacher of Orthodox pedagogics at the Samara Theological Seminary, holds that a state whose citizens are unbelievers is not destined to survive, because citizens are guaranteed to observe the law only if they recognise that they are subject to God.

If the head of the family, the husband, does not obey God and does not live by his laws, and if the wife does not honour and obey her husband, two disobedient people are not capable of bringing up an obedient child. This is the reason why families are destroyed and children are disobedient. And when they grow up, these disobedient children become disobedient citizens. They are incapable of honouring the authority of power or the wisdom of the law. Disobedient citizens, who break the law and come into conflict with the power of the state, turn into criminals; and a growth in criminality weakens the state. (Shestun, n.d.).

In his view the military defence of the land also requires a religious citizenry.

All too often people think that patriotism is just love for the homeland; but in the Orthodox understanding love for the homeland includes being ready to defend it against villains to the last drop of one's blood, determined if necessary to give one's life for it... Genuine patriotic education becomes impossible if the western concept that life is in itself the highest value lodges itself in the consciousness of modern man. Unfortunately this kind of concept is becoming ever more widespread, nurturing potential future traitors to the fatherland, who will save their own lives at any price. (Shestun, n.d.)

These quotations from proponents of the course 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' carry weight because they offer answers to burning issues in Russian society today. The social crisis they identify is being experienced by most non-Orthodox citizens and politicians in Russia too, and people are generally at a loss about how to react to it. In this situation church representatives and their allies bring morality and religion together. In order to obey the law and act in a moral fashion, they argue, people need to know good from evil, and this is what Orthodoxy offers, in the shape of 'traditional values'. What is more, Orthodoxy enables people not only to understand the essence of moral behaviour but also to act in a moral way. Shestun makes this clear: obedience has to be rooted in the transcendent, and ultimately only the person who fears God will be obedient and hence moral. As far as education in patriotism is concerned, the argument about fearing God is joined with the argument about heavenly rewards: it is the hope of eternal life that motivates one to risk one's life in war.

One could give many more examples of this type of argumentation on moral issues by the proponents of the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course. One of its features is that they paint the crisis in particularly vivid colours in order to make it clear that moral education based on religion is essential. 'It is high time our government decided what is more important: the abstract principle of separation of school from church or the fate of Russia's young people and the future of the fatherland' (Vladimir, 2003). One can interpret this as an attempt to lend credibility to a church agenda within the realm of secular discourse and thereby to press for the adoption of the church's point of view. Things need not necessarily, of course, come to the critical point envisaged in this last quotation, when 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' would be introduced in some sort of state of emergency, overriding the 'abstract' legal principle of separation of school from church.

### **The Thesis that Orthodoxy and Culture are Interconnected**

Another discourse strategy, similar to that which connects religion with morality, could be described as the Orthodox appropriation of culture. This strategy too is being effected in the context of current extra-ecclesiastical discourse. Here we need to look particularly at the 'Culturology' course which has been a compulsory subject during their first term for all high school pupils in Russia since 1992 (Scherrer, 2003, p. 8). In a similar way to the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course, the 'Culturology' course has set itself the task of filling the 'ideological vacuum' left after the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the communist ideology. '*Kul'turologiya*' in Russia is thus quite different from what we understand by 'cultural studies' in the West. Rather than looking at Russian and foreign culture past and present,

'Culturology' in Russia is primarily concerned with helping Russia in its 'search for a civilisational identity' (as in the subtitle to Scherrer, 2003). 'Set up as a new way of studying society and citizenship', 'Culturology' in Russia sees its task as 'the culturologising of education' and its aim as 'contributing to a postsoviet and postcommunist identity by reflecting on national cultural values and on how to provide or even create meaning after the dissolution of the Soviet empire and the abandonment of communism, and looking for models and solutions first of all in Russian culture and civilisation itself' (Scherrer, 2003, pp. 14f.). Culturology wants to help to 'model a culture' (Scherrer, 2003, p. 91) which is not influenced by the 'products of mass western culture' but which sets up alternative values and concepts 'which are orientated towards "Russia's historical experience"' (Scherrer, 2003, p. 66). The aim of describing Russia's distinctive cultural heritage thus goes along with the aim of creating a specific Russian (*Rossiiskaya* or *Russkaya*) culture.<sup>5</sup> 'Culturology' has thus become the ideological successor to subjects like 'Marxism-Leninism' or 'Scientific Atheism'.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that representatives of the ROC are now hoping that the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course will become a kind of 'Culturology' for children and young people and that they will thereby be able to work along with the avowed aims of the Culturology programme. Every state, they argue, has the right and the duty to instil a knowledge of the country's culture into the younger generation. Orthodoxy is not just a significant element of Russian culture but lies at its very basis; we frequently read that Orthodoxy is the 'faith that has formed the culture' of Russia (see for example Borodina, 2003, p. 13). Indeed, Orthodoxy is often even credited with forming the state itself.<sup>7</sup> In this perspective instruction in the fundamentals of Orthodoxy is essential if people are going to learn about Russian culture and identify themselves with it and with the Russian state.

Behind this argument lies the conviction that culture is impossible without religion. According to the Social Concept of the ROC, promulgated by the Bishops' Council in 2000 (Osnovy, 2000), the Latin word *cultura* is etymologically derived from the word *cultus* (Osnovy, 2000, p. 239). The church therefore has a positive attitude towards culture.

The Church has assimilated much from what has been created by humanity in art and culture, re-melting the fruits of creative work in the furnace of religious experience in the desire to cleanse them of spiritually pernicious elements and then to offer them to people. She sanctifies various aspects of culture and gives much for its development.

This quotation, however, makes it clear that the ROC does not see art, literature and other cultural manifestations as autonomous areas of social activity *alongside* institutional religion. Indeed, the document goes on to say that human creativity 'in its churching returns to its original religious roots', and that the church 'helps culture to cross the boundaries of a purely earthly pursuit. Offering it a way to cleanse the heart and unite with the Creator she makes it open for co-work with God' (Osnovy, 2000, p. 240; all in bold type in the original). On its own – that is, outside the church community – the culturally creative individual is not in a position to distinguish genuinely divine inspiration from the ecstatic 'inspiration' which frequently conceals dark and destructive forces. In line with the close identification of 'culture' and 'cult', any form of culture which puts itself up 'in opposition to God, becoming anti-religious and anti-humane' is identified as 'anti-culture' and opposed by the church (Osnovy, 2000, p. 241; all in bold type in the original).

From these premises it necessarily follows that any cultivated human being needs a religious education and religious ties, and conversely that without religion no human being can be cultivated. This conviction is spelt out in the debate about religious education in schools, in specifically theological terms:

The essence of the matter is that everything that man creates in cooperation with God and that strives to awaken the likeness of God in man is *kul'turnym* [meaning both 'cultural' and 'civilised'], but that everything that awakens man's animal desires, deadens the conscience and furthers evil vices is *beskul'turno* ['uncultured', 'uncivilised'] and godless. (Kiprian, date unknown)<sup>8</sup>

On the basis of this kind of definition a course on Orthodox culture thus has the task of 'awakening righteousness and exterminating vice'. The pedagogical goals are:

First, the formation of the moral citizen and patriot of the fatherland. Second, the formation of the virtuous and industrious family man. Third, the formation of the cultivated creative personality who strives for the salvation of his soul, who is protected from spiritual surrogates and substitutes and who has a respectful attitude towards the world and nature created by God. (Kiprian, date unknown)

Orthodox moral education and the study of the history of religion and culture are thus bound together. When applied to the 'secular' subject of Culturology they move the latter in an Orthodox direction. And indeed Culturology is open to this kind of influence, given that its own aim is to provide an ideological orientation in the national interest. The question at issue now in Russia is not so much whether this linking of an ideological function with the 'objective' scientific ideal is legitimate, but rather what the constituent elements in the culture to be studied in fact are – and, specifically, what the role of Orthodoxy in it is. Even outside the church there is a widespread conviction that Russianness and Orthodoxy are inextricably bound up together, and there is a growing feeling that the ROC ought to be given an important say in cultural matters.

To a westerner it looks as if references to the 'culturological' nature of the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course are primarily tactical in nature. If one examines the content of the course, however, it is clear that it is chosen and presented from an Orthodox perspective and that its aim is to lead the student to an acceptance of this perspective (Willems, 2006). The use of the concepts 'culturological', 'confessional' and 'scientific' is arguably an indicator of cultural differences in the public discussions of educational policy issues in various European societies. Russian proponents of the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course have no problem with arguing that this confessional course should be a course for all Russians.<sup>9</sup> It is this very argument that critics of the course are wary of. The fact that these critics are mostly coming from the 'laicising' position, however, gives the proponents of the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course the opportunity to discredit their point of view as essentially western or Soviet and alien to traditional Russian culture – despite the fact that the 'laicisers' can point to the Russian Constitution and associated legislation (see above). Meanwhile the proponents of the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course argue that this is not a matter of church influence on schools, but simply of introducing pupils to their own culture; and that hardly anyone is denying

that this culture is Orthodox or that the ROC is the institution which defines what Orthodoxy is (see for example Patriarkh, 2005). Many Russians who are not practising believers are persuaded by this argument, as shown by the relatively widespread use of this course in schools.

### **Further Examples of Church Adoption of Key Concepts**

We have seen how representatives of the ROC and proponents of the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course imbue the concepts 'morality' and 'culture' with religious content and thereby add weight to their interventions in definition and discourse. In the same way the ROC aims to take over various other concepts and to show that they are of positive significance not only for religious believers.

One example is the concept '*dukhovny*' and its related forms. The word is derived from '*dukh*', meaning 'spirit', 'intellect' or 'mind' (compare the Greek '*nous*'). The abstract noun, '*dukhovnost*', is an ideal of education, like that of being a 'cultivated' ('*kul'turny*') person, which Russians, including non-Orthodox and 'laicising' Russians, are certainly committed to. At the same time, the concept is open to an ecclesiastical and theological interpretation. According to the archbishop of Tobol'sk and Tyumen', for example:

The word 'spirituality' ('*dukhovnost*') comes from the word 'spirit' ('*dukh*'). In the Bible this word defines the world beyond nature. The Spirit is God, and God is the Spirit, and his antithesis is the Devil, the Demon, or the fallen evil spirit. When one uses the word 'spirituality', then, one must be careful to distinguish genuine spirituality, which bears witness to God, from un-spiritual, demonic or sinful pseudo-spirituality. (Doklad, 1999)

The antithesis 'spirituality'/'pseudo-spirituality' corresponds to the above mentioned antithesis 'culture'/'anti-culture'. The passage immediately following this quotation shows how in this context morality can also be defined as Christian, so that Christianity as previously described turns out to be indispensable for moral education.

The word 'morality' ('*nравственность*') comes from the word '*nрав*' ('character', 'disposition'). 'Character' is a permanent feature of the human spirit which manifests itself in everyday life, reflecting the inner state of the individual's soul. A good spirituality which is from God will produce a good character and a good morality, but godlessness or spirit-lessness will produce a bad character or lack of morality. (Doklad, 1999)

Another example of an attempt to appropriate a word with many meanings in public discussion and to fill it with specifically Christian content is provided by the word '*мировоззрение*' ('world-view'). A school subject called 'Foundations of the Orthodox World-view' ('*Osnovy pravoslavnogo mirovozzreniya*') (see for example Silant'yeva and Shitkin, 2003) is easier to introduce than one with words like 'the Orthodox Faith' in its title. As mentioned above, an Orthodox world-view is communicated in Orthodox-culturological courses by introducing students to a specifically Orthodox understanding of reality. Such courses can in fact be considered as consisting of instruction in the faith.

## Conclusion

Let us now look at all the above from the perspective of the theory of religio-political discourses. We see that to a significant extent the political activity of the ROC is characterised by redefining politically relevant concepts. Further investigation would be needed in order to clarify the significance of the ROC's strategy of influencing public discourses in relation to other forms of lobbying activity. Its relative importance would however seem to be high. Very pertinent observations by Behrens to the effect that the ROC exercises very little *direct* political influence (see above) would seem to confirm this view. But we should not underestimate the significance and effect of this discourse policy, especially in view of the fact that the political actors who are pressing for the introduction of the 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture' course, and who have already had so much success at regional level, often employ terminology used by the ROC in order to justify their decisions. (This is of course regardless of the actual reasons which may have determined their political choice.) The fact that discourse policy strategies can be particularly effective and resonant is also a consequence of the fact that the ROC uses them to provide categories of meaning for state (and for society) in the very arena where social problems have been debated since the time of perestroika, namely in the arenas of morality and identity (and also culture). On questions of identity creation and the raising of moral standards the interests of church and state coincide, and synergy can produce results welcome to both parties.

There is also the consideration that a discourse policy suits the ROC very well, for the ROC represents the ideal of an Orthodox society. This is an ideal which is to be realised not only through preferential political treatment of the ROC as an institution; a more important requirement is that culture and mentality should be permeated with Orthodox content. For this to happen a privileged position for the ROC may be an advantage, but it is not a sufficient condition. If the ROC were to succeed, however, in shaping language to its own meaning, it would come much closer to its goal. It should come as no surprise, then, that we find discourse policy strategies similar to those in the field of school and education operating in other areas of religio-political relevance, for example in the ROC's attitude to military chaplaincy, media policy and demographic developments.

From the perspective of the theory of democracy, all this leaves an ambivalent impression. One naturally welcomes the fact that after 70 years of antireligious policies the ROC has been able to start campaigning for its own point of view, but I am exercised about the fact that the ROC is chiefly concerned for the good of the state in order that the latter should emerge as a state shaped by Orthodoxy. There is no question here of a *critical* role for religion, church or theology vis-à-vis culture or the state. We need only look at the above-quoted stance of the ROC on patriotic education or the numerous church statements on the wars in Chechnya. For the development of a democratic society it is necessary that civil society institutions should emerge which will keep themselves at a certain distance from the state in order to monitor it and suggest reforms. The definition of Russian culture, morality and 'spirituality' as essentially Orthodox is problematic in view of the fact that Russia is in many respects a pluralist state as far as religion and belief are concerned. Anyone who is not Orthodox (or a member of one of the other religions recognised as 'traditional' by the ROC and in the preamble to the 1997 law on religion – Islam, Judaism or Buddhism) is thus potentially excluded from Russian culture, and implicitly denied the right or possibility of being a reliable and morally sound citizen.

Arguably, then, the ROC is not doing itself any favours by continuing to pursue its religio-political strategy. Standing close to the state and assuming responsibility for it means that the ROC runs the risk of (self-)instrumentalisation for political purposes. The higher the profile the ROC gives itself as offering a new ideology to the state, in ways outlined above, the more this will be perceived as its role by the general public – and perhaps its only role (Behrens, 2002, pp. 369–85).

The last 15 years have seen a process of pluralisation and individualisation in Russia as far as the religious adherence of its population is concerned (see for example Willems, 2005, pp. 105–30). If this process continues the ROC may continue to try to persuade state institutions of the correctness of its own position; but it remains to be seen how it will cope in competition with other religious organisations.

## Notes

- 1 In Germany, where confessional religious instruction is guaranteed by the Constitution (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, Article 7 Section 3), the question has recently given rise to controversy in Brandenburg where the government invoked a clause in the Constitution allowing for exceptions (Article 141) and replaced the subject 'Religion' with a religious knowledge subject 'Lebensgestaltung – Ethik – Religionskunde'. At the moment there is a similar controversy going on in Berlin.
- 2 Fursenko has often spoken in favour of a subject called 'History of the World's Religions', as for example in a radio interview with 'Ekho Moskv' on 30 May 2004 (Larina, 2004). He said that a textbook for this subject would be produced by the end of 2004 (see Privalov, 2004). In June 2005 he was able to announce that the textbook was ready (Zavershena, 2005).
- 3 Yuri Zavel'sky, rector of Moscow Gymnasium No. 1543, holds that only convinced atheists should be allowed to teach the subject 'The History of Religions' because only atheists will be sure not to bring their own religious convictions into the discussion (see Lemutkina, 2004).
- 4 For specific references for all the perspectives described in this paragraph see Willems, 2006, pp. 100–14.
- 5 This Russian (*Rossiiskaya* or *Russkaya*) culture will not necessarily turn out to be different from other cultures. It may be that it will involve an interpretation of 'Russian history as part of universal culture or universal civilisation and/or an autonomous culture/civilisation' (Scherrer, 2003, p. 103).
- 6 It is in fact frequently the case that Culturology is now being taught by people who were formerly instructors in Marxism-Leninism or Scientific Atheism (Scherrer, 2003, p. 8).
- 7 The education minister, Andrei Fursenko, who is in favour of a 'History of Religions' course rather than 'Foundations of Orthodox Culture', has nevertheless said: 'Let me repeat, in Russia, or at least in most of Russia, Orthodoxy has naturally played, well, let us say, a very large role, perhaps even the decisive role, in shaping our statehood and culture' (Larina, 2004).
- 8 See Kiprian. Valentina Yekimenkova, who trains teachers of Orthodox ethics under the aegis of the ROC, also explains '*kul'turno*' in theological terms. She defines 'piety' (*blagochestiye*) as 'habits of human behaviour which are founded in an Orthodox education'. 'Civilised (*kul'turny*) behaviour' is thus an aspect of piety (Yekimenkova, 2001, p. 10, n. 1).
- 9 The question of how under these circumstances the school system can do justice to the plurality of world-views (and ethnic plurality) in Russia, and indeed the question of how the various claims and standpoints of the religious organisations can be distinguished from the logic of the political process itself, are questions that need to be asked, but they fall outside the frame of reference of this article.

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