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"Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism" as a navigational aid to religious affairs in post-communist Russia
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Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism as a navigational aid to religious affairs in post-communist Russia

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I hereby declare that this submission is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.

I also confirm that I am submitting this work with the agreement of my supervisor, Professor Lucy Huskinson.

Abstract

The author conceived her monograph *Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism* (Routledge, 2013) as a comprehensive navigational aid to the ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding post-Soviet religious policy, particularly its nexus with notions of Russian national identity. Its research is grounded in her years based in Moscow as a journalist specializing in religious issues (1999-2011), encompassing hundreds of interviews with local representatives of religious organizations, government officials, and religious-affairs scholars. Many of these were conducted during extended field trips to more than 30 regional units of the Russian Federation.

The author's findings dispute an array of assumptions and approaches formed in the salient scholarly field prior to her monograph's publication. Four are most prominent: i) allocation of exclusive importance to the Kremlin's relations with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC); ii) myopic attention to analysis of formal legal text and public pronouncements by seniormost state and/or religious personnel; iii) credence of the mutual sincerity of relations between state policymakers and the ROC, as well as the self-identification of a majority of the populace with Orthodox Christianity; and iv) acceptance that the key policy term "traditional religions" represents a government-led and law-based restoration of authentic pre-Soviet precedent. In response, the author contests that these misconceptions combine to generate simplified and skewed perceptions of the role of religion which obscure Russia's true nature as a multifaith polity with a correspondingly multidirectional religious policy. This in turn results in a failure to recognize the potential viability as a policy model of a persistent yet understudied historical tradition characteristic of indigenous Russian religious dissent: the pursuit of an egalitarian religious policy paradigm in place of ROC hegemony.

In seeking to demonstrate her scholarship's impact upon its field as requested by Prifysgol Bangor University, the author has additionally examined more than 100 extant post-publication citations of *Believing in Russia* in Google Scholar, as well as eight reviews of the monograph in academic journals. Her assessment of these texts identifies multiple shifts in scholarly appreciation of the four principal problematic areas listed above which track the innovative arguments advanced by her monograph. The author further establishes her work as a valuable contribution to the salient scholarly field by illustrating the prescience of its arguments in the light of the qualitative shift in Russian religious policy that occurred following completion of *Believing in Russia*.

Note on References

In order to ensure that different categories of source material remain clear to the reader, the author has followed multiple methods of referencing:

1) References to content of the author's monograph appear as page numbers in parenthesis in the main text, in all cases with stipulation that *Believing in Russia* is being cited, e.g. "The author posits… (p. 1)".

2) References to Google Scholar citations are given in parenthesis in the main text. In all cases, the relevant Google Scholar author and publication date are stipulated along with the page number(s) where the work cites *Believing in Russia*, e.g. "According to Agadjanian 2015 (p. 250)… ". Full details of Google Scholar titles are provided in Appendix 1.

3) Full details of scholarly reviews of the author's monograph are listed both alphabetically and numerically in Appendix 2. In the main text, reviews are referenced in parenthesis by number. In all cases, the relevant page where the review cites *Believing in Russia* on a particular point is given, and the author of the review is adjacently stipulated, e.g. "Akhmetkarimov notes…(Review 1, p. 95)".

4) References to all other works are given as footnotes.

Critical Analysis

Introduction

The present critical analysis accompanies the author's 2013 monograph, *Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism*.[1] It seeks to position this study within the salient field of scholarly research: the Russian state's domestic treatment of religious believers in the context of Russian national identity. The author hereby intends to demonstrate her work's original contribution to learning in this field.[2]

The monograph considers developments spanning a quarter century, from the incipient reversal of Soviet anti-religious policy in 1987 to a significant inflection point in the presidency of Vladimir Putin: mass opposition demonstrations during the winter of 2011-12. Particularly close analysis is devoted to the years in which the author was a journalist specializing in religious issues and based in Moscow, 1999-2011. During this period she conducted hundreds of interviews with local representatives of religious organizations, government officials, and religious-affairs scholars, including on extended field trips to more than 30 regional units of the Russian Federation. The same timespan witnessed rapid improvements in telecommunications within Russia and – in most cases – government tolerance for foreign researchers. These working conditions facilitated unprecedented range and thus nuance in scholarly perspectives.

The analysis that follows consists of four parts. The first provides a brief overview of the wider research field prior to the monograph's publication. The second describes deficiencies in this field diagnosed by the author and posits her proposed corrections. The third demonstrates how her findings have impacted the field by considering extant Google Scholar citations for *Believing in Russia* as of mid-2021,[3] as well as reviews of the monograph in academic journals from 2013-16.[4] The final part outlines additional arguments by the author not engaged with substantially by

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[1] Geraldine Fagan, *Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013. This is submitted separately in hard copy.
[2] Prifysgol Bangor University, *Regulations for Postgraduate Research Programmes*, 3.1, p. 9.
[3] See Appendix 1. The original list is at: https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=5162382105581214150&as_sdt=2005&sciodt=0,5&hl=en.
[4] These are listed in Appendix 2. Full texts of the reviews appear in Appendix 3. A notable non-scholarly review appeared in *The Economist* magazine: "A question of faith: A new look at religion in post-1991 Russia," *The Economist*, vol. 406, no. 8821, 2 February 2013, p.73.

Google Scholar citations or scholarly reviews, but which nevertheless proved prescient in the light of post-publication developments.

PART I

Field evaluation

Prior to publication of *Believing in Russia*, the pertinent field of study was defined and dominated by earlier scrutiny of Soviet domestic religious policy.[5] In the wake of the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, the new Soviet state – in which the present-day territory of the Russian Federation comprised the principal constituent component – was the first in history to inculcate atheism among its citizens. Its revolutionary ideology viewed eradication of religious belief from Soviet society as indicative of a successful transition to full communism.[6] Such an unprecedented social experiment naturally engendered keen scholarly interest in its impact. However, the very severity of the regime's attitude towards religion – particularly during 1917-43 and 1958-64 – meant that access to reliable empirical data was heavily restricted for researchers outside the Soviet Union, while independent domestic scholarship was prohibitively hazardous.[7]

In the Russian Empire immediately prior to 1917, the historically dominant Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) was legally enshrined as the "primary and prevailing faith".[8] This privileged status was informed by the ROC's cultural prominence as a key pillar of national identity, a notion revived by Russian religious philosophers during the first half of the twentieth century.[9] Prominent late nineteenth-century Russian writers similarly expounded a mystical fusion between the Orthodox Christian faith and Russian nationhood, epitomized by the claim of one Dostoyevsky

[5] References in Part I are largely to other monographs due to the breadth of the field and considerations of space.
[6] A point prominent Bolsheviks made in block capitals: "THE TRANSITION FROM THE SOCIETY WHICH MAKES AN END OF CAPITALISM TO THE SOCIETY WHICH IS COMPLETELY FREED FROM ALL TRACES OF CLASS DIVISION AND CLASS STRUGGLE, WILL BRING ABOUT THE NATURAL DEATH OF ALL RELIGION AND ALL SUPERSTITION." Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, Pattern Books, 2021, p.254.
[7] For a recent overview, see Dominic Erdozain (ed.), *The Dangerous God: Christianity and the Soviet Experiment*, DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017.
[8] 'O vere', *Osnovnye Gosudarstvennye Zakony*, Chapter 7, 62, 23 April 1906.
[9] See, for example, Vladimir Solov'ev, *Russkaia Ideia*, Moscow: Put', 1911, p. 26; Nikolai Berdiaev, 'Dusha Rossii', in *Filosofiia Svobody*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AST, 2007, p. 246; Ivan Il'in, *O russkom natsionalizme. Sbornik statei*, Moscow: Rossiiskii Fond Kul'tury, 2007, pp. 14–16.

protagonist that, "He who is not Orthodox cannot be Russian," and the poet Tyutchev's assertion that, "Russia can only be believed in."[10] Assessment of the post-1917 antireligious policy's implications for the ROC specifically thus dominated the Soviet-era scholarly literature.[11] A small minority of studies interrogated the atheist state's treatment of other Christian churches or non-Christian faiths, but also in isolation and hampered by the aforementioned paucity of access.[12]

For scholars inside Soviet Russia, the advantage of improved proximity to policy developments was counteracted by the state's suppression of amateur clandestine publications inside the country (*samizdat*) or abroad (*tamizdat*).[13] Given concomitant attempts by the Soviet regime to repudiate reports of its maltreatment of religious believers,[14] the overall scholarly focus thus shifted away from conceptualization of faith as intrinsic to Russian national identity. It instead sought to evaluate the available material substantiating religious persecution and the degree of complicity with the state authorities offered by officially tolerated religious personnel during the Soviet era.[15] No authentic evaluation of the role of religion in public life or the nature of popular piety was therefore possible. A rare, integrated assessment of Soviet policy towards all major faith communities was Kolarz's 1961 monograph, *Religion in the Soviet Union*.[16]

Given this background, scholarly scrutiny during the post-communist presidency of Boris Yeltsin – the period in living memory with the least restriction on academic research in Russia – was drawn to assembling a fuller picture of the

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[10] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Demons*, New York: Vintage, 1995, p. 249; Fedor Tiutchev, 'Umom Rossiiu ne poniat'', translated by Alex Cigale: https://www.albany.edu/offcourse/issue41/cigale_translations1.html#tyutchev.

[11] William C. Fletcher, *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972; Dimitry Pospielovsky, *The Russian Church under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, vols. I and II, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984; Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History*, London: Routledge, 1986.

[12] Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981; Marita Sapiets, *True Witness: The Story of Seventh-Day Adventists in the Soviet Union*, Keston, UK: Keston College, 1990.

[13] For example, early Soviet-era research on the contemporary ROC by Mikhail Gubonin could be published only following the Soviet collapse: M. E. Gubonin (ed.), *Akty Sviateishego Tikhona, Patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseia Rossii, pozdneishie dokumenty i perepiska o kanonicheskom preemstve vysshei tserkovnoi vlasti 1917-43*, Moscow: Pravoslavnyi Sviato-Tikhonovskii Bogoslovskii Institut, 1994. It had been cited anonymously in a *tamizdat* work by Lev Regel'son, *Tragediia Russkoi Tserkvi 1917-45*, Paris: YMCA-Press, 1977.

[14] For example, Nicholas (Yarushevich), Gregory Petrovich Georgievsky and Alexandr Pavlovich Smirnov (eds), *The Truth About Religion in Russia, Issued by the Moscow Patriarchate (1942)*, London, New York, Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1944.

[15] Ellis, ibid.; Pospielovsky, ibid. Ellis briefly notes an exceptional Orthodox nationalist *samizdat* publication, 449-50.

[16] Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, London: Macmillan, 1961.

preceding Soviet as well as late imperial developments. The ROC remained the focus,[17] particularly for scholars within Russia.[18] Despite copious efforts over the past three decades, this area of enquiry is still far from exhausted, with groundbreaking studies covering Soviet as well as late imperial religious policy appearing in very recent years.[19] A key factor has been new access – albeit still substantially restricted – to declassified Soviet state records.[20]

The post-communist era was heralded by a sea change in the official stance towards religion: multilevel Soviet legislation on freedom of conscience adopted in 1990 and the 1993 Constitution of the independent Russian Federation, both of which guaranteed equality before the law for all faiths and none.[21] Informed by the prior focus of the scholarly field upon Soviet hostility towards religion, Yeltsin-era studies – particularly those originating in the United States – prioritized textual analysis of this new legislation and its implications for an apparent resurgence of religion in

[17] John Anderson, *Religion, State, and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995; Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996.

Studies focusing on other faiths include: John Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia: The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's Emissary to the Tsar*, Shaftesbury: Element, 1993; Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev*, London: Hurst, 2000; Dennis J. Dunn, *The Catholic Church and Russia: Popes, Patriarchs, Tsars and Commissars*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004; Tat'iana Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast' v 1905-1991 godakh*, St Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2009; Emily B. Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

[18] Sergei Firsov, *Russkaia Tserkov' nakanune peremen (konets 1890-kh – 1918 gg.)*, Moscow: Dukhovnaia Biblioteka, 2002; Ierei Aleksandr Mazyrin, *Vyshie ierarkhi o preemstve vlasti v Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi v 1920-x-1930-x godakh*, Pravoslavnyi Sviato-Tikhonovskii Gumanitarnyi Universitet, Moscow, 2006; Aleksei Beglov, *V poiskakh "bezgreshnykh katakomb". Tserkovnoe podpol'e v SSSR*, Moscow: Izdatel'skii Sovet Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi/Arefa, 2008; Protoierei Aleksii Marchenko, *Religioznoe politika sovetskogo gosudarstva v gody pravleniia N.S. Khrushcheva i ee vliianie na tserkovnuiu zhizn' v SSSR*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Krutitskogo Podvor'ia/Obshchestvo liubitelei tserkovnoi istorii, 2010; M.V. Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov v XX veke*, Moscow: Veche/Lepta, 2010.

[19] Paul Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018.

[20] Felix Corley, *Religion in the Soviet Union: An Archival Reader*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996; Ia. N. Shchapov (ed.), *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' i kommunisticheskoe gosudarstvo. 1917-41. Dokumenty i fotomaterialy*, Moscow: Bibleisko-Bogoslovskii institut sv. apostola Andreia, 1996; Sonja Luehrmann, *Religion in Secular Archives: Soviet Atheism and Historical Knowledge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

[21] "O svobode sovesti i religioznykh organizatsiiakh," USSR law no. 1689-1, 1 October 1990; "O svobode veroispovedanii," RSFSR law no. 267-1, 25 October 1990; Constitution of the Russian Federation, 12 December 1993, Article 14.2: http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000 -01.htm.

public life.[22] Other Western – and particularly Russian – scholarly approaches preferred a granular ethnographic mapping of religious believers.[23]

By 2013, state relations with the ROC alone still dominated academic discourse on post-Soviet religious policy developments,[24] including notable studies compiled contemporaneously with the author's.[25] Alternative approaches – for the most part within Russia – addressed state policy towards other individual faiths, typically Islam.[26] This burgeoning subfield most often centred upon violent Islamism, due to increased interest in the phenomenon generated by an ongoing Islamist insurgency in Russia's North Caucasus as well as the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.[27] More rarely, Islam was examined in conjunction with Orthodox Christianity,[28] or else government policy towards Orthodoxy and another Christian denomination (or denominations) was considered, usually in anthologies.[29] Single-author endeavours considering government treatment of major faiths in Russia

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[22] For example, the extensive *Emory International Law Review*, Winter 1998, vol. 12, no. 1.

[23] David C. Lewis, *After Atheism: Religion and Ethnicity in Russia and Central Asia*, Richmond: Curzon, 2000. For a multivolume encyclopaedic overview of religious life, see M. Burdo [Bourdeaux] and S.B. Filatov (eds), *Sovremennaia religioznaia zhizn' Rossii. Opyt sistematicheskogo opisaniia*, Moscow: Logos, 2004-06; M. Burdo [Bourdeaux] and S.B. Filatov (eds), *Atlas sovremennoi religioznoi zhizni Rossii*, Moscow: Letnii sad, 2005-09.

More recent microlevel examples of the many post-Soviet ethnographic studies of religiosity in Russia include Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *Shamans, Spirituality, and Cultural Revitalization: Explorations in Siberia and Beyond,* New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012; Iwona Kaliszewska and Maciej Falkowski, *Veiled and Unveiled in Chechnya and Daghestan*, London: Hurst and Company, 2016.

[24] *Otechestvennye zapiski*, no. 1 2001; Zoe Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia After Communism*, London: Routledge, 2005; Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov': sovremennoe sostoianie i aktual'nye problemy*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006; John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008; Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press and Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011.

[25] Katja Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: Politics, Culture and Greater Russia*, London: Routledge, 2013; Kristina Stoeckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, London: Routledge, 2014.

[26] M.V. Mongush, *Istoriia buddizma v Tuve (vtoraia polovina VI – konets XX v.)*, Novosibirsk: Nauka, 2001; Mark James Nash, *The 'Exceptional' Church: Religious Freedom and the Catholic Church in Russia*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2008; Constantin Prokhorov, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990*, Carlisle, UK: Langham Monographs, 2013.

On Islam, see *Otechestvennye zapiski*, no. 5, September-October 2003; Roman Silant'ev, *Noveishaia istoriia islamskogo soobshchestva Rossii*, Moscow: IKhTIOS, 2005; Aleksei Malashenko, *Islam dlia Rossii*, Moscow: Moskovskii Tsentr Karnegi, 2007.

[27] Shireen T. Hunter with Jeffrey L. Thomas and Alexander Melikishvili, *Islam in Russia: the Politics of Identity and Security*, Armonk: M.E.Sharpe, 2004; Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007; Roland Dannreuther and Luke March (eds), *Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010; Galina Yemelianova (ed.), *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010.

[28] Juliet Johnson, Marietta Stepaniants and Benjamin Forest, *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

[29] Wallace L. Daniel, Peter L. Berger and Christopher Marsh (eds), *Perspectives on Church-State Relations in Russia*, Waco: J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, 2008.

in an integrated manner – as undertaken by Kolarz in the more challenging conditions of the Khrushchev era – were curiously absent. The closest efforts consisted of compartmentalized anthologies by multiple authors,[30] journal articles rather than monographs,[31] and studies of a single aspect, such as the sociological statistics of popular piety.[32] The author thus asserts that her work's primary contribution to the field is as "the first book in English by a single author to examine post-communist government policy towards all of Russia's major faiths" (p. xviii).[33]

PART II

Deficiencies in the field and proposed corrections

The second part of this critical analysis describes two fundamental methodological flaws in the field of relevant scholarship prior to *Believing in Russia* (i and ii) and their combined production of two skewed assumptions (iii and iv). In considering these deficiencies, the author offers her proposed corrections.

i) Myopic focus upon the Russian Orthodox Church

The first flaw in the scholarship is the lack of an integrated overview that addresses government relations with all major faith communities in the Russian polity. Informed by the practical constraints of Soviet-era scholarship outlined above, either one faith is considered alone, or commentary on multiple faiths is typically compartmentalized in anthologies. Such strictly vertical analysis is prone to distortions, as its conclusions have not been measured against the horizontal plane of the religious policy sphere.

Thus, studies focusing exclusively upon the Russian Orthodox Church are prone to exaggerate the degree to which it has regained prerevolutionary privilege and

[30] Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.), *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; Michael Bourdeaux (ed.), *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.
[31] Alexander Agadjanian, "Religious Pluralism and National Identity in Russia," *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2000, pp. 97-124.
[32] D.E. Furman and K. Kääriainen, *Religioznost' v Rossii v 90-ye gody XX – nachale XXI veka*, Moscow: OGNI TD, 2006.
[33] A monograph published after the author's manuscript was submitted for publication considered the role of Russia's major religions in foreign rather than domestic policy. See Alicja Curanović, *The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy*, London: Routledge, 2012.

so become, allegedly, "in essence… the *de facto* state religion."[34] Here, conspicuous support for the ROC as expressed by President Putin and other senior state representatives (including public attendance at major worship services, return of church property confiscated by the Soviet regime, public endorsement of increased ROC influence within state institutions) is seen in terms of single-track advancement along this trajectory. The existence of competing religio-national narratives of Russian Catholic (*Believing in Russia*, p. 121), Russian Protestant (p. 179), and Russian Islamic (p. 187) identity is not factored in as a potential counterweight in the government's calculations.

If the same evidence of ROC support is considered in conjunction with analogous instances involving other faiths, however, (including high-profile mosque and synagogue visits, public greetings on non-Christian religious holidays, Russia's observer membership of the international Organization of Islamic Cooperation) a parallel government effort to present Russia as a multifaith polity emerges. On still closer examination, the specificity of expressions of high-level state support – such as the spurning of one long-standing chief rabbi for another (p. 21) or tolerance of Islamist rule by the Kadyrov clan in Chechnya (pp. 191-3) – indicates that it is particular factions *within* faiths, not particular faiths *per se*, which are favoured, and that this is contingent upon their demonstrated loyalty to the regime rather than the theological content of the faiths concerned.

The post-Soviet Russian state's patronage of select religious organizations thus emerges less as a return to the imperial era's exclusive sanction of Orthodox Christianity as its spiritual ideology than as a resurgence of the late Soviet policy paradigm in which an array of pliant faith leaders – in some cases, the same individuals – enjoyed a limited public role contingent upon their continued commitment to the regime (pp. 20-3). Indeed, the readiness of currently favoured religious representatives to express at times comical support for the alien faiths of one another echoes the late Soviet requirement that tolerated faith leaders place considerations of political expediency above religious dogma (p. 128). Furthermore, when the various religious leaders currently enjoying state patronage are considered together, their uncannily similar rhetoric against rivals within the same faith (whose

[34] Lee Trepanier, "Nationalism and Religion in Russian Civil Society: An Inquiry into the 1997 Law 'On Freedom of Conscience'", in Christopher Marsh and Nikolas K. Gvosdev (eds), *Civil Society and the Search for Justice in Russia*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002, pp. 58.

corresponding commonality is hostility or at least aloofness towards the Putin regime) is also exposed (pp. 131, 163, 189).

Once the ROC's position is considered in conjunction with that of other key favoured entities within the faith categories of Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, another significant cleavage emerges that further underscores the multidirectional character of Russian religious policy rather than its unilateral orientation upon the ROC. Whereas the ROC leadership indeed seeks privileged status reminiscent of the imperial era – as when Patriarch Kirill asserts that for Russia, "multiconfessional country" is an oxymoron to be forgotten – other faith leaders (even loyal Muslim sheikhs) vehemently reject the notion that Russia is "an Orthodox country with ethnic and religious minorities" (p. 123). Russia's rulers are thus seen to be faced with two competing notions of spiritual national identity: Orthodox Christian versus multiconfessional egalitarian. Their pursuit of a multipronged religious policy balancing the interests of multiple faith organizations thereby emerges as an alternative approach to exclusive relations with the ROC.

ii) Myopic focus upon formal legal text and senior public pronouncements

The second major flaw in the relevant post-Soviet scholarship prior to *Believing in Russia* is a tendency to analyse the text of formal legislative initiatives as well as public declarations made by seniormost state (and religious) representatives, with scarce reference to their *de facto* interpretation and/or implementation by junior government personnel. Like the first deficiency, this is informed by the practical constraints of Soviet-era scholarship outlined in Part I. A stark illustration is Trepanier's claim that legislation adopted in 1990 "was successful in fostering religious diversity," as if the very letter of the law had automatic and sweeping agency across Russia. His assumption ignores Daniel's alternative suggestion that a powerful grassroots religious renaissance already underway by 1990 sooner "brought many formerly suppressed themes to the surface,"[35] as the author also details (p.57).

The persistence of this tendency in discourse surrounding Russia's landmark 1997 law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations illustrates the need for assessment spanning broader interpretation and implementation of proclaimed

[35] Ibid., pp. 62; Wallace L. Daniel, *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006, p. 4.

policy in addition to textual analysis of its theoretical core (p. 68). Here, the author concurs with prior scholarship in characterizing the 1997 legislation as the culmination of sustained ROC lobbying to restrict rivals using the rule of law.[36] However, she departs from it by introducing crucial context: The provisions finally adopted in 1997 were considerably more lenient towards religious minorities than those initially sought by the ROC, while subsequent federal implementation guidelines softened them still further (pp. 63, 69-70). Once again, a significant paradox within Russia's religious policy paradigm emerges when such context is included: Contrary to their high-profile public pronouncements, senior state personnel are shown to harbour scant appetite for the objectives pursued by the ROC (p. 82).

A shift in analytical focus towards the *de facto* repercussions of the 1997 legislation was therefore undertaken in *Believing in Russia*. Beyond lacklustre support for restrictions among uppermost government echelons, this ascertained that the repression against minority faith groups that occurred with reference to the 1997 law was heavily dependent upon the predilections of individual state representatives at lower levels (p. 85) and/or the degree of influence wielded by local ROC leaders (p. 31). Yet here the author was frequently able to identify only a tenuous link between the letter of the 1997 law and repressive measures. Moreover, she noted pervasive use of the Soviet practice of so-called "telephone law" (*telefonnoe pravo*), in whose original iteration judges ruled at the arbitrary and clandestine direction of Communist Party personnel rather than according to their own methodological implementation of Soviet jurisprudence.[37] Indeed, certain disfavoured Protestant congregations sometimes experienced restrictions solely in line with this practice, without reference to the 1997 law (pp. 91-2).

The widening of the author's analytical lens thus revealed the dynamic of Russia's religious policy to be considerably more fluid and situational than the coherent and systematic rule-of-law approach sooner assumed by the mostly Western scholars focusing on declared intent at senior executive and legislative levels (p. 30). With Blitt, she found this dynamic to lie closer to the sense of the Russian proverb, "The law is like a tow bar – it goes in the direction it's pulled."[38]

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[36] For example, Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press and Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011, p. 93.
[37] Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2008, p. 76.
[38] In Russian, "*Zakon chto dyshlo – kuda povernul, tuda i vyshlo*." While still relying substantially on textual analysis, this is noted by Robert C. Blitt in "'Babushka Said Two Things – It Will Either Rain

This diagnosis of an alternative approach towards religious policy implementation in Russia proved significant, as it was further found to connect with a similar quasi-legal mechanism at play in efforts to repress and/or elevate particular faith communities, which had also been overlooked by pertinent scholarship. Thus, utilizing the Integrum database of term frequency in Russian media (p. 95), the author measured exponential growth in the use of certain discursive terminology in the wake of the 1997 law, all of which aimed to legitimize ROC and certain other faith groups' preferential status while delegitimizing others. As with "telephone law", the more aggressive aspects of this terminology ("totalitarian sect" in conjunction with demonizing imagery) drew upon later Soviet practice: state-crafted propaganda encouraging hostility towards Protestant churches (p. 99) and the Catholic Church (p.111). Most notably, the Integrum searches found this terminology to be entirely absent from general media discourse during the immediate post-Soviet years of 1990-95, despite the ostensibly entrenched nature in Russia of particular faiths alleged by the commonest term: "traditional religion". The terminology's ascendance in the wake of the 1997 law thus appeared indicative of a tactical switch by proponents of greater religious discrimination to a more subtle strategy than legislative restriction: the shifting of popular discursive boundaries towards support for a model of Russian national identity centred upon the ROC (pp. 120, 122).

Ultimately, this mechanism intimidated disfavoured faiths into self-censorship (pp. 88, 119) and was endorsed by both Presidents Putin and Medvedev (pp. 136- 40), underscoring the superior efficacy of paralegal methods in the given context. The author therefore posited that, while significant, the passage of the 1997 federal law was not the primary driver behind subsequent restrictions upon minority faiths in Russia.

Besides legalism, the earlier scholarly focus upon policy as a top-down process emanating from the central authorities in Moscow also obscured the long-term ability of persistent low-level and typically informal initiatives to gain traction over the formal power centre and thus precipitate discriminatory federal religious policy measures. Having noted this as a feature of the quasi-legal terminology propagated in media discourse, the author observed the same diffuse pressure

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or Snow; It Either Will or Will Not': An Analysis of the Provisions and Human Rights Implications of Russia's New Law on Nongovernmental Organizations as Told Through Eleven Russian Proverbs", *George Washington International Law Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1–86.

dynamic at work in multiple other instances, including initial groundwork for the adoption of federal legislation. The nationwide introduction into state schools of tuition on Orthodox Christianity (and certain other "traditional" faiths), for example, was achieved – after the failure of initial federal-level lobbying and even strong pushback by President Putin – via a series of co-operation agreements between regional educational authorities and local ROC institutions (pp. 141-51).

The adoption of the 2002 law On Combating Extremist Activity formed part of a broader federal agenda to securitize domestic policy and so exert greater control over civil society.[39] However, the escalating use of its provisions against disfavoured religious believers from 2007 onwards occurred largely due to the law's conferral to low-level courts of the power to rule religious literature and/or organizations "extremist". This burgeoning practice also borrowed from the popularization of some of the quasi-legal terminology outlined above ("totalitarian sect" and "spiritual security"), as well as the precedent set by local counterextremism legislation in the North Caucasus from 1999-2001, part of which sought to outlaw all but "traditional rites" (p. 161). It thus constitutes a further locally driven process of policy production.

There now follows an examination of how these two key deficiencies in the relevant scholarship have combined to produce two distorted assumptions about the architecture of Russia's religious policy paradigm.

iii) Skewed assumption of deep-seated mutual support between the Kremlin and the ROC

The focus of relevant scholarship prior to *Believing in Russia* upon i) the Russian Orthodox Church in conjunction with ii) senior policy declarations and legislative text encourages credence of iii) the notion that the Russian state leadership (Putin above all) identifies closely with the ROC, and that this deep-seated support is reciprocated.

Accompanying this notion is a tendency to theorize that modern Russia exhibits characteristics of the historical Byzantine political philosophy of *symphonia*, in which imperial authority and the Orthodox Church sought to strive in tandem

[39] Edwin Bacon and Bettina Renz, with Julian Cooper, *Securitising Russia: The domestic politics of Putin*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006, pp. 105-9.

towards shared spiritual ideals.[40] Thus, Mitrokhin views the introduction of classes on Orthodox Christianity into state schools as an example of partial *symphonia*, or "meshing with state institutions in those spheres beneficial to the Church."[41] Once supplemented with the high levels of allegiance to Orthodoxy expressed in public polling, this partnership assumes the form of a closely bonded triad of mutual support between state, Church, and society. This further invites the conclusion that Russia is advancing along a trajectory towards becoming an Orthodox state akin to late Imperial Russia (p. 42).

Characteristically here, Knox sees strong significance in Putin's "habitual acknowledgment of the centrality of Orthodoxy to Russia's historical and future development,"[42] while Blitt unquestioningly accepts that Putin (and Medvedev) are practising members of the ROC. He also deduces that "Putin's regime and the ROC shared virtually uniform policy views and objectives on a host of issues."[43]

The superficiality of this picture is revealed once a broader examination of available data is undertaken, however. To view Putin uncritically as Orthodox is to filter out numerous public statements in which he has expressed an array of personal spiritual attitudes – including some roundly denounced by the ROC leadership (pp. 27-9) – and rejected the possibility of the ROC being afforded privilege within the state apparatus (pp. 39-40, 102, 148). Behaviour characteristically exhibited by the wider Russian political elite suggests pursuit of materialism, not spirituality, to be the determining factor in their decision-making (pp. 31-32). Instances of official support for ROC objectives are also erratic, being the arbitrary outcomes of duelling preferences held by individual officials (and/or their spouses) at varying levels of the state apparatus (p.143). For example, President Putin's 2002 public call for a papal visit to Russia (opposed by the ROC) when speaking to Polish media in 2002 was expunged from a translation of the interview issued by the (pro-ROC) Russian Foreign Ministry (p. 118). President Medvedev's greater attention to non-Orthodox

[40] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, London: Penguin, 1993, pp. 40-41. For a recent explication of the notion of *symphonia*, see Timothy G. Patitsas, *The Ethics of Beauty*, Maysville, MO: St. Nicholas Press, 2019, pp. 518-19, 555-66, 607-8.
[41] Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Klerikalizatsiia obrazovaniia v Rossii: k obshchestvennoi diskussii o vvedenii predmeta 'Osnovy pravoslavnoi kul'tury' v programmu srednikh shkol", Institute for the Study of Religion in the CIS and Baltic States, 2005: http://religion.gif.ru/clerik/clerik.html.
[42] Zoe Knox, "Religious Freedom in Russia: The Putin Years", in Mark D. Steinberg and Catherine Wanner (eds), *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008, pp. 286-7.
[43] Robert C. Blitt, "How to Entrench a De Facto State Church in Russia: A Guide in Progress", *Brigham Young University Law Review*, vol. 2008 (2008), no.3, pp. 743, 775.

faiths was similarly counteracted by his devout Orthodox wife's efforts to facilitate the introduction of tuition on Orthodoxy into state schools (p. 47-8).

To view the ROC as sincerely and unerringly loyal, on the other hand, is to filter out rare but significant occasions when its hierarchs have vocally defied Kremlin positions, such as on the monetization of pensioners' state benefits in 2005, and Russia's war with Georgia in 2008 (pp. 39-42). Here too, individual personality is a crucial complicating factor that has been overlooked: Prominent churchmen are not necessarily those enjoying popular authority, and their views are in any case too idiosyncratic to group into neat ideological factions (p. 38-9).

The views of the Russian population as expressed through polling – where some 70 per cent routinely profess adherence to the ROC – should similarly not be taken at face value. More granular questioning reveals that only a slim minority accepts core Christian doctrine, while focused studies have suggested that pro-Orthodox messaging in political campaign material has a negligible impact upon the electorate.[44] While visually impressive, attendance at even major church worship services – such as at Christmas and Easter – is routinely assessed by police (for crowd control purposes) as being a low single-digit percentage of population (pp. 24-5).

The author thus joins previous scholars in recognising the Russian state's increased support for ROC policy objectives over the first two post-Soviet decades. However, she maintains that this progression appears modest and piecemeal when measured against the ambitions of the ROC and its long-standing prerevolutionary status as the established church of the Russian state. Rather than the strident and coherent Orthodox ideology professed by the tsarist regime, the contrary elements on display in the post-Soviet Russian state's relationship with the ROC in the years prior to *Believing in Russia* point to the government's pragmatic appreciation of two countervailing factors: The *de facto* largely nominal beliefs of elite and populace alike (p. 35) and the need to acknowledge the interests of non-ROC faith groups (and non-believers) in order not to alienate the significant parts of Russia where these are in the majority (pp. 124-5). Prior to the author's monograph, scholars such as Papkova and Verkhovsky had identified uneasiness in the Russian government's dealings with the ROC, as well as a plurality of positions within the ROC hierarchy. However, their

[44] Edwin Bacon, "The Church and Politics in Russia: A Case Study of the 1996 Presidential Election", *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 25, no. 3, September 1997, p. 263; Stephen White and Ian McAllister, "The Politics of Religion in Postcommunist Russia", *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 25, no. 3, September 1997, p. 247.

focus upon the senior-level aspects of the relationship stopped short of recognizing this more variegated picture.[45]

iv) Skewed understanding of the term "traditional religions"

The combined shortcomings of the relevant scholarship as examined above have also culminated in iv) the misreading of a key element in the architecture of Russia's religious policy paradigm following the 1997 law: the innocuous-sounding concept of "traditional religions". Characteristically, this term is erroneously deemed to occur in the 1997 law itself: Mandelstam Balzer, for example, states that Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism are the four religions "designated as 'traditional' in the preface [preamble] to the Russian Federation 1997 'Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations'."[46] In fact, a broader category of "Christianity" is also named in this preamble, and the term "traditional" is nowhere present.

Ascribing the term "traditional religion" in this manner encourages the false assumption that such a legal status indeed exists for Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, rather than the reality of the designation's informal, malleable, and regionally differentiated application to particular religious organizations within a narrower category of faiths than is actually accorded significance in the 1997 law. It also tacitly lends credibility to the propaganda of the term's proponents that the "traditional religions" arrangement (visible, for instance, in the selection of clerical guests at presidential inaugurations) is rooted in long-established historical "tradition" rather than the relatively recent constellation of religious entities whose positions were consolidated during the latter Soviet period (pp. 20-3).

Here, the present-day traction of Russia's pre-1917 status as an Orthodox nation is exaggerated, and the multiple inconsistencies in the use of the "traditional"

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[45] Aleksandr Verkhovskii, "Bespokoinoe sosedstvo: Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' i putinskoe gosudarstvo", in Aleksandr Verkhovskii, Ekaterina Mikhailovskaia and Vladimir Pribylovskii, *Rossiia Putina: Pristrastnyi vzgliad*, Moscow: Tsentr "Panorama", 2003; Papkova, ibid., pp. 22-45; 167-91; Irina Papkova, "The Freezing of Historical Memory? The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church and the Council of 1917", in Mark D. Steinberg and Catherine Wanner (eds), *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008, pp. 69–71.
[46] Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, 'Introduction', in Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Russia: A Reader*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2010, p. x.

category are glossed over (pp. 122-31). In particular, attention is diverted from centuries-old spiritual traditions characteristic of less prominent faith groups such as Old Believers and Molokans, who – while originating in Russia – are not privileged as "traditional" by government policy (pp. 1-20).

Culminating in this misconception of the term "traditional religion", the tendency of prior scholarship to limit its focus to the ROC as well as top-level official texts and proclamations has ultimately conspired to cast the post-Soviet restoration of government control over religious life as natural and inevitable in the Russian polity. By contrast, alternative advocacy of a more egalitarian policy reflecting the principle of freedom of conscience is consigned to alien "Enlightenment notions imported from the West," as Kazemzadeh avers, and is therefore seen as doomed.[47] This is to overlook sustained historical support in Russia for freedom of conscience by indigenous faith groups such as Old Believers and Molokans,[48] as well as tenacious adherence to this principle in parts of the post-Soviet government apparatus.[49]

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In compiling *Believing in Russia*, the author took care to cite all valuable known sources. However, she reasoned that direct and close engagement with scholarly argument influenced by the flaws outlined above would compound its distortion by continuing to privilege phenomena thereby wrongly presumed to be salient. The unprecedented nature of the body of empirical sources available to her suggested further that a focus directly engaging with previous scholarship – and thus remaining within its parameters – would inevitably omit vital nuance. She also judged the mercurial nature of developments in the post-Soviet religious policy sphere to

[47] Firuz Kazemzadeh, "Reflections on Church and State in Russian History," in John Witte, Jr. and Michael Bourdeaux (eds), *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999, p. 227.
[48] *Protokoly Piatago Vserossiiskago S''ezda Staroobriadtsev'' v'' 1904 g.*, pp. 22-38, 67-70, 73-4; Sergei Firsov, *Russkaia Tserkov' nakanune peremen (konets 1890-kh – 1918 gg.)*, Moscow: Dukhovnaia Biblioteka, 2002; Gleb Chistiakov, "Sobornost' v Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Staroobriadcheskoi Tserkvi: Real'nost' i perspektivy", in *Staroobriadchestvo v Tverskom krae: Proshloe i nastoiashchee*, Tver'-Rzhev: Nauchno-issledovatel'skii tsentr tserkovnoi istorii i pravoslavnoi kul'tury im. V.V. Bolotova, 2007.
[49] Sergei Gradirovskii and Evgeniia Malakhova, "Protivorechiia statusnosti religioznykh organizatsii i ob''edinenii", in Sergei Gradirovskii (ed.), *Preodelevaia gosudarstvenno-konfessional'nye otnosheniia*, Nizhny Novgorod: Izdatel'stvo Volgo-Viatskoi akademii gosudarstvennoi sluzhby, 2003, pp. 117-9; A.E. Sebentsov, "Svoboda sovesti v Rossiiskoi Federatsii", in *Aktual'nye problemy realizatsii printsipov svobody sovesti v sovremennoi Rossii*, Zaokskii: Istochnik zhizni, 2009, pp. 6-32.

mean that a theoretical framework would prove of limited utility as a starting point, since it would similarly predetermine the relevance of particular phenomena and so generate artificial patterns and skewed conclusions.

In large part, the author therefore envisaged her task as addressing previous scholarship indirectly by reconfiguring known and new data as a coherent narrative that preserved the multifaceted and complex nature of the post-Soviet religious policy sphere as far as possible. By mapping the sphere's topography in this way, she hoped to situate both the state's relations with the ROC and the senior-level policy pronouncements decontextualised by earlier studies in their proper relief. To this end, she supplemented elements of thorough prior scholarship with her extensive body of material sourced in Russia from participant and close-observer interviews; government, religious, and scholarly conferences and meetings; and local religious affairs media, always controlling for whether this granular data proved salient to overall policy trajectory.

In noting that *Believing in Russia* cites "a significant amount of current scholarship on virtually all aspects of religion-oriented policy and practice in post-Soviet Russia… with pertinence and accuracy… [but] does not present a systematic review of pertinent scholarly literature nor does it necessarily incorporate it into the narrative in any comprehensive or systematic way," Warhola recognizes this technique as non-standard. Yet he also affirms the work's approach to be "understandable… and in no way detracts from its quality or value" (Review 8, p. 777).

PART III

Centred upon then-recent religious policy developments in the early Putin era, the author's manuscript of *Believing in Russia* was submitted for publication in early 2012. There now follows an assessment of the impact upon subsequent scholarship of its key arguments outlined in Part II. This is undertaken through the prism of Google Scholar references to the monograph dating from its publication in 2013 until mid-

2021.[50] Eight scholarly reviews of the work from the same period – including Warhola's cited above – are also evaluated.[51]

Here, the reader is requested to bear in mind that – while now appearing uncontroversial – many of the author's premises accepted and referenced by scholars years later were still contested in early 2012. Among these is the now standard argument that the religious freedom climate in Russia was deteriorating markedly by that point. As late as 2009, for example, it was still possible for a Moscow publisher to credibly release a celebratory anthology entitled *Twenty Years of Religious Freedom in Russia*.[52]

Google Scholar references to Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism

As of mid-2021, there were 106 Google Scholar citations of *Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism*.[53] Underscoring the work's international reputation, these include titles in Czech, Finnish, German, Polish, Russian, and Turkish, in addition to English-language studies. While choosing to reference the author's monograph, approximately a third – or 38 – of these citations engage with its specific arguments only unsubstantially, if at all.[54]

Several in this subgroup of 38 state overtly that *Believing in Russia* is the sole or a rare authority in its field. Gerlach 2015 (pp. 108-9), for example, affirms the work to be one of "only a few international monographs [that] have been devoted to this field so far," while Koesel 2017 (p. 676) lists it as a "notable exception" for

[50] See Appendix 1. The original list is at: https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=5162382105581214150&as_sdt=2005&sciodt=0,5&hl=en.
[51] These are listed in Appendix 2. Full texts of the reviews appear in Appendix 3.
[52] A. Malashenko and S. Filatov (eds), *Dvadtsat' let religioznoi svobody v Rossii*, Moscow: Moskovskii Tsentr Karnegi, 2009.
[53] Additional citations appearing in the original search list were disregarded as either duplicate or otherwise erroneous entries.
[54] Those of the 38 not cited in the following few paragraphs are: Agadjanian 2015, p. 257; Antonov 2018, p.7; Avanesova 2015, p. 34; Avanesova and Naxera 2016, p. 11; Avanesova and Naxera 2018, p. 24; Carobene 2021, pp. 91-2; Dunn 2016, p. 11; Gamza 2019, p.12; Ionutite 2020, p. 114; Koesel 2015, pp. 216, 220, 231; Koesel and Dunajeva 2015, p. 199; McAllister and White 2017, p. 82; Michalak 2019, p. 25; Mikhaleva 2019, pp. 133-34; Murašov 2017, p. 296; Searle 2020, p. 269; Shimotomai 2014, p. 23; Shterin and Dubrovsky 2019, pp. 212, 215, 217-18; Sibgatullina, 2019, p. 30; Skladanowski 2019, p. 50; Staehle 2018, p.385, Stepanova 2014, p. 71; Tsyplakov 2015, p. 171; Uzlaner 2018, p. 189; Zachhuber 2021, p.11. The author was unable to locate a further three items whose titles suggest they are of marginal relevance to her monograph: Aitamurto 2018, Annicchino and Mancini 2016, Skladanowski and Borzecki 2020.

considering religion in post-Soviet society. *Believing in Russia*'s status as an interdisciplinary study is also supported by the broad spectrum of themes to which this subgroup is devoted, some of which are only tangential to the monograph itself. These include the use of classical imagery in Russian media (Malykhina 2014, p. 65) and foster parenting in Russian villages (Hyppölä and Hyppölä 2018, pp. 46-7).

Believing in Russia is similarly referenced as authoritative on topics with which it deals only episodically, such as the religious situation in Ukraine (Krykunov 2021, p. 220; Leustean and Samokhvalov 2019, pp. 203-204; Löfstedt 2020, p. 297) and the Soviet-era martyrs of the Russian Orthodox Church (Agadjanian and Kenworthy 2021, p. 253; Denysenko 2017, p. 109). The monograph is also referenced in microstudies within its general subject area, such as depictions of modern Russian Muslim women in corresponding Islamic media (Aitamurto 2016c, p. 59) and the role of priests in the formation of contemporary Orthodox practice (Emel'ianov 2017, pp. 43-44). In line with the author's intent, her work thus serves as a significant contextual reference volume for otherwise dislocated studies.

For the most part, citations in the subgroup of 38 merely reiterate the monograph's arguments and/or data, with any commentary being endorsement. Shterin 2016 (p. 29), for example, praises *Believing in Russia* for being among a few works demonstrating "a much more complex history of state-religion relations in Russia." Alongside a lengthy enumeration of its themes, Perry Anderson 2016 (pp. 27-8) refers to it as a "penetrating study".

The bulk of the remaining 68 Google Scholar citations is comprised of instances in which *Believing in Russia* is referenced as a source in the four key areas of argumentation outlined in Part II of this critical analysis. These will now be surveyed in turn.

i) Myopic focus upon the Russian Orthodox Church

The author's starting point was to initiate integrated analysis of state policy towards all major faiths in post-Soviet Russia in place of the previously established approach of examining policy through the lens of exclusive government relations with the Russian Orthodox Church. Here, a host of Google Scholar citations reference the monograph's premise that Russia is more accurately perceived as a multiconfessional rather than Orthodox nation, as well as the concomitant awkwardness of government

efforts to incorporate the ROC as a pillar in nationbuilding (Chocholoušová 2019, p. 32; Laine 2019, p. 201; Madeley 2018, pp. 266-67; McFaul 2018, p. 131; Pankhurst and Kilp 2013, p. 239; Zajda 2017, p. 17).

There is enthusiasm for this argument in addition to acknowledgement. Daniel 2016 (p.759), for example, agrees that the author's monograph "challenges the view that Russia upholds a narrow interpretation of religiosity and that this narrowness is an inherent part of Russia's heritage".[55]

Further affirming the author's multifaceted approach, *Believing in Russia* is recognized as an authoritative source in a host of works newly devoted to faiths other than Orthodox Christianity. These include studies of Islam, particularly in Russia's North Caucasus region (Aitamurto and Gaidukov 2018, pp. 224, 227; Akhmetkarimov 2015, pp. 1, 43-4; Akhmetkarimov 2019, p. 180; Akhmetkarimov 2020, pp. 184-6; Bacon 2014, p. 238; Braginskaia 2015, p. 180; Bustanov and Kemper 2017, p. 129; Ruokolainen 2020, pp. 4, 42, 45-6). Also encompassed are studies of Buddhism, particularly in the internal Russian republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia (Badmatsyrenov 2018, p. 10; Holland 2014b, pp. 389, 395-6; Holland 2015 pp. 948, 950, 955; Polat 2020, p. 603; Sablin 2018, pp. 212, 214-5, 226; Sablin 2019, p. 57; Ulanov, Badmaev and Holland 2017, p. 310).

As in the subgroup of 38, scholars of Islam in Russia typically cite the author's argumentation and/or data. When venturing beyond mere citation – like Akhmetkarimov 2020 (p. 186) – they continue her suggestion that Russia's policy cleavage within Islam parallels that within Christianity. Thus, Bustanov and Kemper 2017 (p. 129) reference the author's specific comparison of ROC attempts to restrict non-Orthodox Christians with state-sanctioned muftiates' attempts to restrict alternative Islamic movements, and develop this argument by suggesting that the state's support "for the construction of 'traditional' Islam as a supposedly 'unpolitical' and loyal bulwark against radicalism in fact contributes massively to the politicization of Islam in its entirety" (p. 131). Scholars of Buddhism in Russia similarly accept the analogous cleavage within Buddhism identified by the author. Sablin 2018 (pp. 214-5), for example, references her material repeatedly when highlighting the "anti-foreign (particularly anti-Tibetan)" bent of Russia's Kremlin-loyal Buddhist leader.

[55] For the most part, substantial engagement with this theme occurs when conceptualizing the term "traditional religions", which is considered separately in section iv) of Part III.

Occasionally, however, a cleavage continues to be erroneously delineated as solely lying between the ROC and other faith groups, even as the author's monograph is referenced. Koesel 2017 (p. 686), for example, claims that an extensive partnership between Putin and the ROC "does not extend to other religious groups."

Among the monograph's reviewers, Richters touches upon this theme, praising the author for addressing the false assumption that the ROC is a state church "and that all other communities suffer from this" (Review 4, p. 724-5).

ii) Myopic focus upon formal legal text and senior public pronouncements

Numerous Google Scholar citations accept the author's allied fundamental premise: The dynamic of post-Soviet Russian religious policy is markedly more diffuse and fluid than suggested by earlier scholarship rooted in legislative analysis and public pronouncements made by senior government (and religious) representatives.

Once again, numerous scholars simply refer to *Believing in Russia* as a key authority, in this case on the impact of Russia's 1990 legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations (Agadjanian and Kenworthy, 2021, p. 70; Holland and Derrick 2016, p. 78; Potts 2016, p. 31; Uzlaner 2019, p. 34) and that of the analogous 1997 law in particular (Akhmetkarimov 2015, p. 24; Akhmetkarimov 2020, p. 184; John Anderson 2016, pp. 254-5, 264; Borenstein 2019, p. 248; Finke 2017, p. 723; Karimova 2019, p. 267; Marsh and Koesel, 2016, pp. 41-2; Potts 2016, pp. 38, 40; Todd 2017b, p. 644). More specifically, Kovalskaya 2020 (p.758) reiterates the author's observation that the text of the 1997 law represents an uneasy compromise and is therefore malleable. Clay 2019 (p. 145) and Stoeckl 2020a (p. 244) further reference the author when noting that the 1997 law was mitigated by its softened implementation.

Citing *Believing in Russia*'s finding that local-level initiatives frequently form the driving impetus behind significant national religious policy developments, a number of scholars also pay attention to this dynamic (including Akhmetkarimov 2015, p. 141; Clay 2019, p. 146; Papkova 2013, p. 251; Purzycki and Holland 2018, p. 21). Turoma and Aitamurto 2016 (p. 10), for example, note that, "Geraldine Fagan argues that the oppressive religious politics is not necessarily coherently planned and managed from the top." *Believing in Russia*'s analysis of the highly arbitrary

implementation of the 2002 counterextremism law receives special attention (including from Aitamurto 2016b, p. 187; Aitamurto 2021, pp. 283-4; John Anderson 2016, p. 255; Karimova 2019, p. 268; Upadhyay 2016, p. 202). Aitamurto 2019 (p. 201), for example, references the ambiguity of this legislation as giving officials "much more room for manoeuvre" and – with Shizhenskii 2017 (p. 114) – reiterates *Believing in Russia*'s argument that it has been "used on very light grounds".

A few scholars cite the author's ancillary finding that quasi-legal terminology plays a crucial role in this centrifugal dynamic. Koosa 2017 (pp. 35-6), for example, states:

> The anti-sectarian movement specifically and traditionalist/anti-pluralist discourse in general have succeeded in popularising the use of particular terms such as "sect", "totalitarian sect" or "destructive cult" to the point that they are now part of the vocabulary of ordinary people. Moreover, while these terms are not part of any law, they are broadly used by state representatives and present in numerous official documents produced by regional authorities.

Paert 2020 (p. 149) similarly references the author regarding informal ROC activists' (rather than federal policymakers') eager adoption of the quasi-legal term "spiritual security". Kozhuharov 2015 (p. 378) praises the author's methodology for calculating how such quasi-legal concepts were popularized in the wake of the 1997 law with a view to shifting discursive boundaries and ultimately legal norms.

Here again, however, a few scholars repeat arguments countered by *Believing in Russia* while erroneously citing the monograph as their source. Potts 2016 (p. 31), for example, maintains it was Gorbachev's 1990 legislation on freedom of conscience that "opened the door for religious activism," and that Western Protestants such as Lutherans and Baptists "attempted to gain a foothold in Russia amidst the religious revival of the first years after communism's collapse." This is while Chapter 3 of the author's monograph – which he references for this situation – refutes these arguments. Finke and Fox 2017 (p. 723) and Todd 2017b (p. 644) similarly assume literal implementation of the 1997 law, contrary to the author's argumentation outlined in Part II of this critical analysis.

One reviewer of *Believing in Russia* takes issue with the author's description of Russia's religious policy dynamic: Akhmetkarimov maintains that Russia cannot be returning to repressive Soviet norms with respect to minority faiths such as the Jehovah's Witnesses if federal officials are also absenting themselves from the

religious policy sphere (Review 1, p. 97). Yet these tendencies are not mutually exclusive; they merely indicate that retrograde policy action is propelled by actors beyond the Kremlin. Two other reviewers recognize this circumstance: Robson notes that the author "wisely differentiates among Kremlin decisions, regional situations, and the unruly application of laws (be they restrictive or liberating)" (Review 5, p. 148). Udy summarizes that "the Kremlin's fundamental indifference to religious freedom 'allows junior officials to pursue an Orthodox-centred religious policy in defiance of the federal standard'" (Review 6, p. 713).

iii) Skewed assumption of deep-seated mutual support between the Kremlin and the ROC

As detailed in Part II, the two preceding areas of observation in *Believing in Russia* led the author to dispute the ostensibly cosy relationship between the Kremlin and the ROC, as well as the keen public engagement with Orthodox Christianity assumed to underpin it. Several Google Scholar citations consequently incorporate greater nuance into their analysis of the motivation behind government gestures of support for the ROC. Rogatchevski and Steinholt 2016 (p. 459), along with Chocholoušová 2019 (pp. 32-3), cite the disparity identified by the author between the high proportion of Russian citizens self-identifying as Orthodox and the low number engaging in core Orthodox practice. Here, Stoeckl 2020b (p.30) affirms that, "Geraldine Fagan's book *Believing in Russia* adds detail to this picture of discontinuity between nominal and practiced religion." Also citing the author, Wickström 2018 (pp. 127) summarizes, "the stance of the government and church does not necessarily reflect the belief of its citizens (or even each other)."

Despite strong substantiation in *Believing in Russia* – similarly outlined in Part II – few scholars adopt the author's contention that Putin's personal engagement with the Orthodox faith is superficial, however. Summarizing the monograph, Perry Anderson 2016 (pp. 27-8) implies agreement due to his sceptical tone: "Putin, fond of displaying an aluminium crucifix on his chest, professes himself a devout Christian." Zachhuber 2020 (p. 174) similarly suggests a degree of political posturing: "Vladimir Putin has skilfully played up Russian Orthodoxy as an important element of the country's historical identity." Citing *Believing in Russia* in his 2015 biography of

Putin, *New York Times* correspondent Myers (p. 279) casts the Russian president's religiosity as rooted more in deference to national tradition than personal conviction.

Several scholars nevertheless cite the monograph's finding that the ROC does not have a deep ideological influence upon the Putin regime. Laine 2019 (p. 210) notes that, while the ROC aims at close partnership – or *symphonia* – with the state, in practice "the political establishment has been assiduous in keeping most of that coordination to itself." While alluding to the relationship as "symphonic", Dunajeva and Koesel 2017 (p. 57) also suggest it to be largely transactional. Wickström 2018 (p. 135) agrees that, while some may dream of close *symphonia*, "despite the public displays of faith, there is, as Fagan demonstrates, no overarching common agenda between the church leadership and state. The church is symbolically instrumental in politics but the church strives (officially) to stay outside of party politics." Here, Kenworthy 2020 (p. 181) seconds the author's conclusion that precise definition of the ROC's position is impossible as its representatives defy easy categorization. Tolstaya 2020 (p. 81) also notes *Believing in Russia*'s sensitivity to diversity within the ROC.

In addition to this more complex architecture of ROC-government relations, several scholars – including Akhmetkarimov and Parrott 2017 (p. 58), Sablin 2018 (p. 226), and Wickström 2018 (p. 135) – acknowledge the author's finding of a creeping shift towards greater state support for the ROC (as well as certain other religious organizations) during the 2008-12 presidency of Dmitry Medvedev.

Once again, however, several Google Scholar citations prove problematic, as they continue to assert deep-seated positive mutual relations between the Kremlin and the ROC while referencing the author. Engström 2015 (p. 73), for example, cites *Believing in Russia* as an authority on "Orthodox expansion into the political and cultural sphere" while not acknowledging the major caveats outlined above. Referencing the monograph as a whole, Petro 2018 (p. 217) claims it argues the ROC to be "a reliable tool of the state" whereas – as outlined in Part II – the work offers weighty examples to the contrary. Describing the author as a "Kremlin ideologist", Malykhina 2014 (p. 65) attributes to *Believing in Russia* – without a page reference – the quotation that the ROC is "the only major social institution to have survived their nation's turbulent history". This, she argues, "glosses over" the ROC's role. This phrase in fact derives from an interview given by the author to the *Financial Times*, where the full quotation indicates that the ROC's rare longevity among social

institutions is a purely pragmatic reason for its support from Putin.[56] That Malykhina's interpretation is a misreading is affirmed by Wickström 2018's (p. 125) precise rendering of the author's same point in *Believing in Russia*:

> The church is, as Fagan notes, the only pre-1917 national social institution to have survived the Soviet era. Due to this legitimacy and centrality in pre-Soviet Russia, she argues that "the Church is thus able to perform an essential sacralizing function for the ruling elite, and one which the Kremlin dare not let opponents usurp."

Among reviewers, Richters concurs that the author moves beyond stereotypes in earlier scholarship (Review 4, p. 725). Specifically, she suggests that *Believing in Russia* is "particularly valuable in providing a thorough analysis of some of the most commonly held assumptions about church-state relations (e.g. that the ROC is seeking to regain the privileged status it had before 1917 and that the Kremlin is sympathetic to this)."

iv) Skewed understanding of the term "traditional religions"

Scholars citing *Believing in Russia* exhibit varied degrees of engagement with – and understanding of – the key concept of "traditional religions". For the most part, they endorse the author's analysis: Agadjanian 2015 (p. 257) and Köllner (2016, p. 370; 2021, p. 63), for example, reference the monograph as the lone authority on this topic. Several point to the author's emphasis on the term "traditional religions" as not originating in the 1997 law (Aitamurto 2016b, p. 185; John Anderson 2016, p. 254; Karimova 2019, p. 267; Kozhuharov 2015, p. 376). In her article devoted to the concept of "traditional religions", Osipova 2018 (p. 136) repeats multiple data points from *Believing in Russia* while only once referencing the monograph on a different theme; two of these demonstrate the absence of the term "traditional religions" from Russian law.

Advancing the author's argumentation, Holland (2014b, p. 389) acknowledges the "problematic nature of the 'traditional' label". He consequently

[56] Charles Clover, "Putin and the monk," *Financial Times*, 25 January 2013, https://www.ft.com/content/f2fcba3e-65be-11e2-a3db-00144feab49a.
The full quotation is: "Russians identify with the Orthodox church as the only major social institution to have survived their nation's turbulent history, so Putin wants to capitalise on Orthodoxy's image of permanence, even as his own legitimacy crumbles."

chooses to "place 'traditional' in quotes throughout'" a later article (2015, p. 950), as well as in co-authorship with Todd (2015, p. 1515). Aitamurto (2016a, p. 101; 2016b, p. 185) repeats the author in specifying that the term in practice demarcates "traditional" and "non-traditional" religious organizations, rather than faiths *per se*.

Sablin 2018 (p. 212) agrees with the author that this demarcation harks back to the latter Soviet era, summarizing that "traditional religions" are actually "[religious] organizations (or their successors) that were patronized by the Soviet government." Braginskaia 2015 (p. 180) notes the same with respect to Islam. Akhmetkarimov 2015 (p. 15), however, protests that the specific term "traditional religion" was "not a salient part of official Soviet rhetoric". Yet this is not in fact suggested by *Believing in Russia*, rather that – as he also states – "the 'traditional religions' configuration is largely a Soviet construct."

Here again, confusion persists regarding the term. Akhmetkarimov and Parrott 2017 (p. 58) are among a number of scholars who mistakenly cite *Believing in Russia* as claiming that the term "traditional religions" originates in the 1997 law. This reading generates several further pitfalls. Todd (2017b, p. 644) merges the 1997 law's lesser legal category of "religious groups" with "foreign" religious communities, including the Jehovah's Witnesses. This in turn leads her (2017a, p. 21) to fuse the mistaken notion that repressive practice is symptomatic of the 1997 law's literal implementation with the mistaken notion that the law privileges four "traditional religions":

> This law served to legitimize Russia's four historical religious traditions and separate them from religious proselytizing movements entering the more liberalized Russian religious sphere, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishnas, and Mormons. It required these nontraditional religions to have an established legal presence of 15 years in Russia to gain legal status from the government, making it more difficult for them to gain adherents and status.

While logically consistent, this analysis is contradicted by the empirical evidence: The Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas were present in Russia well before its religious sphere was liberalized. With the Mormons, they did not need to establish a specifically *legal* presence of 15 years (due to the mitigation of the 1997 law discussed in Part II) and gained the same legal status as religious entities with a longer history in Russia (including the ROC).

Holland 2014a (p. 173) similarly conflates the 1997 law's tiered distinction between "religious organizations" and "religious groups" with the distinction between "traditional religions" (again mistakenly ascribed to the law) and other faiths. This overlooks the *de facto* discriminatory distinction made *within* faiths named by the law, such as between the (favoured) ROC and (disfavoured) alternative Orthodox communities. Laine 2019 (p. 201) also overlooks this distinction, instead maintaining that Russia, "has always been home to several other confessions and religious groups, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, all having equal status."

Failure to appreciate that "traditional religions" arose as a quasi-legal term in response to the 1997 law's failure to codify the notion is problematic because it perpetuates the skewed notion that the "traditional religions" paradigm is based upon the longevity of particular religious observance rather than the pro-regime loyalties of particular religious entities. Interpreting the "traditional religions" paradigm in this way thus obscures the concordance between the attitude of Putin's regime and that of the late Soviet era. Luehrmann 2017 (p. 241), for example, concludes that post-Soviet government has switched from

> a stance that sees all religion as harmful and destructive to social life to one that differentiates between "good" religions that are useful partners in cooperation and help to promote particular moral visions and "bad" religions (often glossed as "fanatical") that create social strife, promote violence, and endanger public health.

The latter scenario in fact also serves as a fair description of late Soviet religious policy, albeit with a more restricted role for the "good" (or patriotic) religions co-opted to promote the Soviet moral vision.

Uncritically accepting that the longevity of a religious tradition equates with its privileged status in this way also leads scholars to neglect the role of long-standing alternative religious traditions in Russia that have not enjoyed such privilege, as well as an indigenous historical tradition of pursuing religious toleration for Russia. A rare exception citing the author at length on this topic is Burgess 2018 (pp. 143-44).

Among reviewers, there is little specific assessment of the "traditional religions" term. Udy (Review 6, p. 713) notes that associated concepts introduced by *Believing in Russia* have

> resonances in Soviet disinformation techniques – the creation of certain concepts and phrases… and their continued use until they are wrongly assumed to have legal weight, whereupon they are adopted by journalists, officials and police to demonise and persecute non-establishment faiths and religious groups.

Uzlaner (Review 7, pp. 306-7) implicitly affirms the same dynamic when stating that the author's monograph "reads like a riveting crime novel about how Russia rejected religious freedom and embarked upon a path of progressive restriction using legal and quasilegal measures." However, he does not see a conscious revival of any previous religious policy model so much as

> a quite clumsy attempt by the state to devise a fitting model of relations with religious organizations that takes into account all the past and present nuances of Russian reality… The state is trying to balance influential religious organisations (taking into account their political/economic/moral influence) and legal norms.

While appreciating that the influence of both imperial and Soviet Russian history is asserted in *Believing in Russia*, Robson strikes a further critical note, regretting that its "emphasis on religious policy leaves the author little space to analyze the historical processes and personal narratives at play" (Review 5, p. 148). As mentioned in Part I, however, the pertinent field of research is far from exhausted. Moreover, as Robson himself admits: "It may be decades before we can answer the most significant question hanging over this book: how might Russia – first steeped in religion and then baptized into belligerent secularism – create an appropriate and workable form of religious pluralism?"

PART IV

Much of *Believing in Russia* has proved prescient in the light of developments following the monograph's submission for publication in early 2012. This is recognized by several scholars: Noting what the author agrees was an important pivot in Russia's religious policy beginning later in 2012, for example, Uzlaner 2018 (p. 189) credits the author for providing "a detailed analysis of how, preceding this qualitative shift, Russia had already begun moving from total religious freedom." Similarly, Levitskiy (Review 3, p. 86) observes that one of the monograph's "main arguments about the ill-fitted Orthodox-centric model of national identity which produces a dangerous social and religious imbalance (p. 197), proved to be right in

the light of the 'Pussy Riot' case and other recent events that are not covered in the book."

Such acknowledgements are rare among the extant Google Scholar citations and academic reviews of *Believing in Russia*, however. In the final part of this critical analysis, the author therefore demonstrates how her scholarship represents a valuable contribution to the relevant field due to the prescience of its arguments.

Legislative developments

Since publication of *Believing in Russia* in 2013, multiple developments pertaining to religion in the legislative sphere have followed patterns identified by the author. Ongoing prosecutions of politically disfavoured communities of Orthodox Christians (a monastic community in conflict with the ROC) and Muslims (readers of the modernist Turkish–born theologian Said Nursi), for example, affirm that the quasi-legal paradigm of "traditional religions" in practice refers to particular religious entities within faith categories rather than faiths *per se*.[57] The application of Russia's 2002 counterextremism legislation in such cases, most prominently against the Jehovah's Witnesses, affirms it to be the state's preferred repressive instrument against disfavoured religious communities rather than the 1997 law. The choice of such a mechanism was anticipated in *Believing in Russia* by sourcing ROC representatives' justification of opposition to "non-traditional" faith communities as "counterextremism" as early as 2002 (p. 167). As further evidenced in the monograph (pp.168-70), its deployment does not hinge upon a literal reading of the text of the counterextremism law, but arbitrary interpretation of theological works by low-level court personnel, with federal-level bans following this local precedent. The centrifugal thrust of Russia's religious policy dynamic identified in *Believing in Russia* thus continues to assert itself.

Citing a Jehovah's Witness representative repeating a Russian proverb in early 2010 – "A Russian harnesses slowly but rides fast" – the author accurately predicted that their situation "could deteriorate rapidly" (p. 194) and was "a chilling reminder that no safeguard prevents the Russian authorities from drifting towards Soviet anti-

[57] "Pomoshchnik eks-skhiigumena Sergiia (Romanova) zaderzhan po podozreniiu v vozbuzhdenii nenavisti," *Sova*, 1 September 2021, https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2021/09/d44832/; "Gabdrakhman Naumov prigovoren k shesti s polovinoi godam kolonii," *Sova*, 2 November 2021, https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2021/11/d45229/.

religious policy" (p. 170). More than a decade later, this is now internationally acknowledged as the latest of 70 Jehovah's Witnesses jailed as extremists are sentenced to eight-year prison camp terms in October 2021.[58]

Following the post-2012 qualitative shift in Russia's religious policy trajectory noted by Uzlaner 2018 above, the 1997 law was amended in 2016 to regulate the public sharing of religious ideas ("missionary activity"). *Believing in Russia* anticipated this development – including for *de facto* "missionary licences" – by tracing its origins to little-noticed 2005-6 federal-level proposals (p. 109), as well as to 1990s regional laws restricting "missionary activity" (pp. 81-2).

Also in line with the author's observations on the mechanism of policy implementation, the 2016 amendments took the form of provisions that did not specify particular faiths, but which were nevertheless conducive to malleable application against religious entities informally shunned as "non-traditional". Attracting more lenient (administrative) penalties than those for "extremism", "unlawful missionary activity" is thus typically prosecuted if committed by Protestants such as Baptists or Pentecostals.[59] Similarly broadly worded, the criminal offence of "public actions… aimed at offending the religious sensitivities of believers" introduced in 2013 is also selectively applied to prosecute antireligious expressions against the ROC specifically.[60] As noted in *Believing in Russia*, the law thus continues to be "pulled in particular directions" (p. 85).

Developments in ROC-state relations

Completing her manuscript in early 2012, the author concluded *inter alia* that (p. 195):

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[58] "V Astrakhani sud naznachil Svideteliam Iegovy dlitel'nye sroki lisheniia svobody," *Sova*, 25 October 2021, https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/news/persecution/2021/10/d45176/; Editorial Board, "Opinion: The absurd 'crime' of religious worship in Putin's Russia, *The Washington Post*, 28 October 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/28/absurd-crime-religious-worship-putins-russia/.

[59] Recent examples include: "V Brianske za 'nezakonnoe' missionerstvo oshtrafovan grazhdanin Belorussii," *Sova*, 29 June 2021, https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/intervention/2021/06/d44475/; "V Kabardino-Balkarii pastora-baptista oshtrafovala za 'nezakonnoe' missionerstvo," *Sova*, 4 October 2021, https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/harassment/intervention/2021/10/d45025/.

[60] A recent example is "Zhitel' Cherepovtsa prigovoren k uslovnomu sroku za oskorblenie chuvstv veruiushchikh i prizyvy k ekstremizmu," *Sova*, 13 October 2021, https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/extremism/counter-extremism/2021/10/d45104/.

> As popular resentment over the gulf between the lifestyles of the rich and powerful and ordinary citizens rises, the Kremlin is growing ever more reliant upon cynical identification with national values in order to protect the elite. While so far substantially untapped, alliance with the ROC against perceived spiritual enemies is one of the few remaining mechanisms for bolstering popularity to which it has recourse.

In the light of the emergence of mass public opposition to the Putin regime in late 2011, the author further noted that, seeking the ROC "as an ally in its drive to preserve credibility amidst rising popular resentment, the regime is increasingly drawn to the old notion that Russia is definitively Orthodox." Here, she pointed to a then lone indicator: Putin's 8 February 2012 public declaration that the ROC is Russia's "state-forming" confession and his attendant promise to grant its wishlist for privileged access to state institutions, reciprocated by Patriarch Kirill's effusive comments regarding Putin's forthcoming 4 March 2012 presidential candidacy (p. 199).

This prediction has been amply confirmed by the sharp pivot towards defence of "traditional values" – including Orthodox Christianity – taken by the regime since, as noted by Uzlaner 2018 above. Moreover, the nature of this shift further reinforces the author's characterization of Putin's attitude towards the ROC as pragmatic rather than rooted in sincere spiritual allegiance (pp. 27-36), as well as the ROC's reciprocally positive stance towards the Putin regime as situationally dependent upon the latter's continued support by the public (p. 39-44). At the height of the mass protests in mid-December 2011, Putin retained an equivocal stance towards the ROC, speaking in favour of both a more secular state and religious activity in schools, prisons, and the military during his annual televised call-in show (p. 151). Rather than the complete loyalty to the Kremlin expected of faith organizations in the "traditional religions" paradigm, the ROC at that time emphasized its neutrality,[61] going so far as to engage in dialogue with opposition leader Aleksei Navalny as late as mid-January 2012.[62]

[61] "V Tserkvi schitaiut vazhnym ustanovit' istinu v voprose ob itogakh vyborov pravovymi metodami i prizyvaiut vozderzhat'sia ot provokatsii," *Interfax*, 9 December 2011, http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=43419.

[62] "Navalny Meets With Orthodox Church Rep to Discuss Protests," *The Moscow Times*, 18 January 2012, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/01/18/navalny-meets-with-orthodox-church-rep-to-discuss-protests-a11955. The subsequent (alleged) poisoning and jailing of Navalny by the regime indicates how daring this step was on the part of the ROC.

For both Putin and the ROC therefore, the 8 February 2012 show of unity after mass demonstrations began to wane was a volte-face belying their previously publicly strained relations. Yet this is overlooked in the rare Google Scholar citations to the author in this regard, meaning that the skewed notion of the ROC and regime moving in lockstep is once again perpetuated. Koesel 2017 (p. 700), for example, sees the ROC's support for the Kremlin as immediate and unequivocal: "In response to large-scale protests following the 2011 parliamentary elections, the ROC stood firm as a defender of the Kremlin… the Church has been handsomely rewarded for its loyalty."

The newly demonstrative alliance between the ROC and the Kremlin triggered the notorious Pussy Riot protest inside Moscow's main Orthodox cathedral in the summer of 2012. Popular aversion to this stunt further cemented the Kremlin's commitment to "traditional values", terminology which *Believing in Russia* traces to ROC lobbying as early as 2004 (p. 133). This commitment encompasses the aforementioned 2013 criminalization of "offence to religious sensitivities" and the insertion into the Russian Constitution of the proclamation that the nation "keeps the memory of ancestors who conveyed to us ideals and faith in God."[63] That it took half a generation for the ROC to secure this and other relatively modest concessions under Putin (p. 178) further underscores *Believing in Russia*'s key premise that his support for "traditional values" is a reluctantly pragmatic rather than personal priority.

Secularist backlash

The author's monograph further described an incipient widespread mood of resentment towards the ROC among a portion of the population, expressed particularly in medium-sized public demonstrations against the construction of new Orthodox churches in urban settings (p. 178). As this was prior to – and so did not reference – the Pussy Riot incident, its early identification by the author appears to have passed unnoticed among later scholars. Wickström 2018 (pp. 126-7), for example, notes that "the population is becoming more disillusioned with the church" immediately before referencing the author on a separate point.

Here the author may have anticipated a related trend in noting that the introduction of tuition on Orthodox Christianity into some state schools as early as

[63] Article 67.1, approved by popular referendum on 1 July 2020.

2001 repelled rather than attracted some pupils (p. 180). A 2019 survey of religious affiliation finds that the 18-24 age group – which would include some of the first cohort receiving tuition on Orthodoxy as 10- and 11-year-olds from 2010 onwards – includes only 23 per cent self-identifying as Orthodox. This compares with 62 per cent in the 25-34 age group, rising to 74 per cent for the over 60s.[64]

Recurring aspects of historical religious policy

Believing in Russia acknowledges that post-Soviet Russian religious policy's variegated approach towards different faith groups patently differs from the early Soviet practice of blanket persecution. It further observes that the later Soviet paradigm (state support for certain religious entities, circumscribed legal existence for others, and repression of the remainder) – albeit determined by loyalty to the regime rather than religious ideology – echoes the late imperial three-tiered approach of a "primary and prevailing" faith (the ROC), "tolerated," and "persecuted" confessions (p. 176). The author additionally notes the persistence of pre-1917 ethnically based confessional divisions despite enforced Soviet atheism, as well as continued mistrust of religious pluralism, particularly the presence of faiths considered "foreign" (p. 54).

Criticizing the author with other scholars for what he views as "a path dependence approach that explains current issues of religious diversity through reference to Russia's historical legacies," Shterin 2016 (p. 29) counters that the history of state-religious relations in Russia is "much more complex" (here conversely crediting the author). A rare commentator on this point, he further argues that the dynamics of the post-Soviet situation are "managed opportunistically by the fledgling post-Soviet state on account of its institutional weakness rather than, as is often assumed, overbearing strength."

More recent developments, however, reinforce the validity of *Believing in Russia*'s original, then-tentative suggestion of a shift in favour of the differentiation characteristic of imperial religious policy. While the type of repression used against the Jehovah's Witnesses since Shterin's observation aligns with Soviet practice, its highly surgical application against this and several other religious entities is ever more reminiscent of the state's highly selective approach prior to 1917. Russia's

[64] "Pravoslavnaia vera i tainstvo kreshcheniia," VTsIOM, 14 August 2019, https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/pravoslavnaya-vera-i-tainstvo-kreshheniya.

religious policy model may thus now be seen as a hybrid of Soviet and imperial. The ROC and – with lesser prominence – certain other religious organizations occupy the position of "primary and prevailing" faiths ("traditional religions" in this iteration), now grounded mostly in the loyalty of their personnel to the regime. Organizations closely following government regulations and not seeking to criticize or compete with those in political and/or spiritual authority (such as Catholics, Lutherans and other establishment Protestants) occupy the position of "tolerated" faiths. Finally, groups seeking to function independently of state requirements (including certain other Protestants, Orthodox, and Muslims, along with the Jehovah's Witnesses) are "persecuted". Reward of status for loyalty keeps the Islamic, Jewish, and Buddhist entities in the top tier; fear of prosecution for "unlawful missionary activity" or even "extremism" ensures compliance from those in the middle tier. In all cases, the state has established the necessary means of control, indicating that there is no institutional weakness as Shterin believes.

On this point, only Aitamurto and Gaidukov 2018 (p. 224) second the author, noting that "authoritarian hierarchism has a long history in Russian religious politics" and citing the example of the first Russian Muslim organization set up by Catherine the Great as a means of efficient control over her empire's *ummah*. Werth's groundbreaking 2014 study of "foreign faiths" in tsarist Russia likewise concludes that – despite notable differences (also acknowledged by the author) – the policy shift presaged by the 1997 law's appeals to "special" roles and "historical heritage" has established a hierarchy "familiar to both servitors and non-Orthodox subjects of the empire".[65]

While scholars have yet to engage substantially with these elements of *Believing in Russia*, the author maintains with Levitskiy (Review 3, p.86) that – given their subsequently demonstrated accuracy, her work "certainly makes an invaluable contribution to the research field."

Concluding Remarks

All eight scholarly reviews are explicit concerning the monograph's exceptional position within its field. Akhmetkarimov affirms post-Soviet religious

[65] Werth, ibid., p. 266.

policy to be a "neglected area" in which most analysis has been devoted to "Orthodoxy under the Soviet and Tsarist regimes," whereas *Believing in Russia* "fills a major void in the literature" and "will undoubtedly take its exclusive place on reference shelves" (Review 1, pp. 94-5). Dewhirst notes that the author is "immersed in her subject and doesn't pull any punches" (Review 2, p. 391). Warhola concurs that he "is not aware of any other book currently available, in any language, that explores in such depth and breadth the religion-related policies of Russian authorities at national and regional levels, and their ramifications" (Review 8, p. 777).

Both characterizing the monograph as "must-read material", Akhmetkarimov and Warhola also stress its interdisciplinary appeal, whether for students of Russian politics in particular (Review 1, p. 98) or "for those interested in any aspect of Russian affairs" (Review 8, p. 778). Uzlaner further suggests that the work "can be fairly viewed as a textbook for anyone who wishes to make sense of all the twists and turns of post-Soviet religious policy" (Review 7, p. 307).

Other reviewers emphasize the detailed and comprehensive nature of *Believing in Russia*. Levitskiy characterizes it as "well-informed, thorough and coherent" (Review 3, p. 82), while Udy similarly describes it as "thorough and comprehensive" (Review 6, p. 712). Some reviewers are critical on this point. Richters claims the amount of detail in the monograph obscures its main argument (Review 4, p. 725), while Robson notes: "At times, the text seems to meander from place to place, and from one sacred tradition to another… [which] makes Fagan's argument a little difficult to follow" (Review 5, p. 148).

Udy (Review 6, p. 713) takes the opposite view, however:

> It is no easy task to produce a readable account of a highly complex situation which is continually changing and incorporate extensive source material (over 1,600 footnotes) without obscuring the main themes in a mass of detail. The author manages to do this with great competence."

In his Russian-language review, Uzlaner (Review 7, p. 298) further counters that the monograph's comprehensive detail does not come at the expense of a robust overview:

> Works about Russia written by foreigners often have a characteristic deficiency: Despite the authors' command of their material, they are let down by not understanding the general context, which at times leads to quite

questionable conclusions. Fortunately, this cannot be said about Geraldine Fagan's work.

Furthermore, he concurs with Warhola (Review 8, p. 777) that *Believing in Russia* largely succeeds as the first systematic history of religious policy in Russia since the USSR, this being the author's fundamental aim.

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APPENDIX 1

Works in Google Scholar Citing
Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism

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APPENDIX 2

Academic Reviews of *Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism*

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