

## Church and the State in the Orthodox Tradition

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Let me bear witness, concerning religious freedom, to the greatest miracle of the past hundred years. Harmonizing church and state is this act of legislation from the mid-1990s: “The Russian Orthodox Church is registered in the Russian Federation as a legal entity and as a centralized religious organization.” A legal and religious entity! To appreciate this post-Soviet Russian marvel remember that the “New Martyrs,” those who suffered death for their faith during the Soviet era, outnumber all the Christian martyrs in the East and West of all previous centuries combined. Nero and Diocletian pale in comparison to what Stalin did to Christians. From 1918 to 1988 in the Soviet Union, the Church had no legal status and the clergy’s religious activities such as education were severely restricted. Consider this bit of official instruction for teachers:

A Soviet teacher must be guided by the principle of the Party spirit of science; he is obliged not only to be an unbeliever himself, but also to be an active propagandist of godlessness among others, to be the bearer of ideas of militant proletarian atheism. Skillfully and calmly, tactfully and persistently, the Soviet teacher must expose and overcome religious prejudices in the course of his activity in school and out of school, day in and day out.<sup>1</sup>

It was not merely that the Communist Party sought to eradicate religion, but that the State sought to become the religion. The Russian Church withered under this dual wet and dry persecution. So, after more than seventy years to be restored as a legal religious institution is a historical irony all the more heightened by the current Church’s active role in advising the Russian Ministry of Education.

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<sup>1</sup> From a 1949 issue of the *Gazette of the League of Militant Atheists*, quoted in Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin, 1997), 147.

To understand and further enjoy this historical reversal, I hope in this essay to explain the conception of religious freedom within the Orthodox tradition in light of its theory of church-state relations. This church-state ideal, moreover, has been embodied, ignored, and contradicted in various eras throughout the Orthodox world. First, I shall distinguish the Orthodox understanding of church and state over against caesaropapism with which it is often conflated. That will enable us to grasp the terms in which contemporary post-Soviet Orthodox states perceive their relation to the Church. Georgia is a salient example. But those examples hold for nations that have an Orthodox majority and that have freed themselves from the yoke of a failed secular ideology. For most of the rest of the Orthodox world—the eastern Mediterranean—the restriction of religious liberty for Orthodox minorities under Muslim hegemony is a longer, more complicated story. A story, alas, that outstrips the scope of this essay. Restricting ourselves to a survey of the histories of church-state relations in the Slavic world, a narrative emerges that contrasts Western Christianity’s experience of mixing religion and politics.

The Orthodox understanding of how the Church should relate to the state must first be contrasted with Caesaropapism. Caesaropapism is the combining of secular government (the Caesar) and religious authority (the Papacy) where usually the state has the upper hand. In such cases it is the inverse of theocracy where religion controls civic government. In situations of true caesaropapism as well as theocracy, there is no separation of church and state. Religious freedom is often limited to only the established religion, but the status of other religions can be highly variable. The first and often defining example of caesaropapism frequently mentioned is that of the Emperor Constantine, who legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire and later

convened the Council of Nicaea in 325.<sup>2</sup> Certainly this moment in the history of Christianity signals the end of any separation of church and state within the Roman Empire.

From the Orthodox perspective, however, even Constantine's initiatives here and the imperial precedent it establishes that will go on to be followed throughout the centuries of Byzantine rule, do not constitute caesaropapism, since the Church never was actually subordinate to the Emperor. Church historian Timothy Ware clarifies: "It is not just to accuse Byzantium of Caesaro-Papism" because the ideal often sustained in practice was a harmony or cooperation in which neither church nor state "exercised absolute control over the other."<sup>3</sup> Their co-authority is established in the Code of Justinian and sustained by the later *Epanagoge* (the Ninth Century revision to the Byzantine legal code). Ware cites the tenth-century Byzantine emperor, John Tzimisce precisely on this point: "I recognize two authorities, priesthood and empire; the Creator of the world entrusted to the first the care of souls and the second, the control of men's bodies. Let neither authority be attacked, that the world may enjoy prosperity."<sup>4</sup> The dual interdependence of clergy and civic government could not be more forcefully articulated.

In fact, the tendency initially under Constantine and the spirit of Christian Empire throughout Byzantine history was to imbue the Church with greater authority and power. The Renaissance Anglican jurist, John Selden, noted: "When Constantine became Christian, he so fell in love with clergy, that he let them be judge in all things; but that continued not above three or four years, by reason they were to be judges of matters they understand not, and then they were allowed to meddle with nothing but religion."<sup>5</sup> For certain reformers, especially within the

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<sup>2</sup> See Wikipedia database, entry "caesaropapism," for instance, though there they continue and explain the Orthodox objection to this generalization by citing Russian theologian John Meyendorff.

<sup>3</sup> Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 41.

<sup>4</sup> N. H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies* (London 1955), 52. Quoted in Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 41.

<sup>5</sup> John Selden, *Table-Talk* (1689), ed. Alexander Young, *The Library of the Old English Prose Writers*, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1831), 2:164. Online, [www.books.google.com](http://www.books.google.com).

Anabaptist tradition, Constantine represents the beginning of the Church's corruption through partnership with Empire. But that is anachronistic and a bit chauvinistic. If we as Christians are to pray for our civil authorities (I Tim. 2:1-4), what are we to do if God answers those prayers? Another way to think of the Byzantine situation would be, what would an empire be like if the Emperor and his court were Christians? So Ware is correct to emphasize the spiritual motivation behind Byzantium: "that Christ, who lived on earth as a man, has redeemed every aspect of human existence" which inspired the great vision "to establish here on earth a living image of God's government in heaven."<sup>6</sup>

As with Byzantium, of course, so Czarist Russia will follow. First, we should recall that in transferring the capital from Rome to his city, Constantinople, the Byzantine Empire that stood for the next thousand years was the Roman Empire. Hence, Byzantium was not only dubbed Constantine's polis but "Nea Roma" or New Rome; and they called themselves not Greeks or Byzantines but "Romanoi" or Romans. With the conversion of the Slavs at the end of the Byzantine period, a third Rome thus emerged as the seat of Christian Empire. Here's how one Russian monk in a letter to Tsar Basil III in 1510 saw this translation of empire: Our present ruler is...

on earth the sole Emperor of the Christians, the leader of the Apostolic Church which stands no longer in Rome or in Constantinople, but in the blessed city of Moscow. She alone shines in the whole world brighter than the sun...All Christian Empires are fallen and in their stead stands alone the Empire of our ruler in accordance with the Prophetical books. Two Romes have fallen, but the third stands and a fourth there will not be.<sup>7</sup>

So, the same vision as Christian Empire that inspired Byzantium motivated Czarist Russia.

Certain Czars, however, wound up usurping ecclesiastical control at times and plunged Russia into actual caesaropapism. Most notably are the reigns of Ivan the Terrible in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>6</sup> Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 103.

and Peter the Great in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose motivations were quite dissimilar but whose policies proved equally enfeebling for the Patriarch of Moscow.

Czar Ivan's reign of terror reached its height in the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the notion of Moscow as the Third Rome crested into a dangerous conflation of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdoms of earth. Specifically for instance, heresy had become a matter for secular enforcement, that is, instead of possible excommunication from the Church, one could also be fined, imprisoned, or executed—an early-modern Christian example of what is somewhat analogous to the principle of Sharia law in Muslim states. The further danger, of course, is the prospect of any political criticism of God's anointed, the Czar, being dubbed a heretic. A sort of spiritualized jingoism emerged that enabled the Czar to exercise unilateral control despite the Church's sometimes blatant objection. Ivan's bloodthirsty tyranny is legendary. When the head of the Russian Church at the time, St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow, rebuked Ivan publicly at church for his atrocities, Ivan had him imprisoned and later strangled. So much for the dual authority of clergy and empire in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Russia.

By the time Peter the Great comes along at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Patriarch of Moscow had been established and with it the traditional moral and practical authority of the Church. As in the Byzantine harmony established in the Code of Justinian and confirmed in the later *Epanagoge*, the Russian Czar's two duties with regard to the Church were to protect its borders and to nominate its Patriarch. In 1700 when Patriarch Adrian died, however, Peter the Great took his first step in abolishing this harmony and innovating the Russian hierarchy in ways the Orthodox Church had never seen. First, he chose not to appoint a successor to the Patriarch; then to make the Church appear less like Rome and more like the Lutheran states of northern Europe, he established a synod or "spiritual college" of his hand-picked clergy to run the Church

in Russia. The combined effect of the two changes was to subordinate the Russian Church to the Czar.<sup>8</sup>

The subordinate status of the Church to the Czar persisted for the next two centuries until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Between the Czar's forced abdication early in the year and the Bolsheviks' seizing of power late in the autumn, Russian bishops convened to reinstate the Patriarchate. They were able to do so, but the Revolution had already carried the day, and wholesale persecution of the Church had already begun. The persecution of the Church by the Communist Party over the next seventy years was unrelenting, only varying in intensity at certain times. The Communist Party was, of course, militantly secular and anti-religious and bent on the eradication of all religions. "Legislation in 1918 excluded the Church from all participation in the education system, and confiscated all Church property. The Church ceased to possess any rights; it was not a legal entity."<sup>9</sup> Officially, a Russian was free to worship. But with no Sunday schools, no seminaries, no church schooling of any kind, as well as the imprisonment and/or execution of clergy, the Church in Russia withered throughout the bulk of the twentieth century.

All this to explain the sweetness of the joy now at a fully restored Church in Russia. Fully restored, of course, in legal status: The restoration of Russia as a Christian society is an ongoing, epic task. But just this kind of restoration has been underway since 1988 and with thoughtful and methodical leadership. The Moscow Patriarchate has put together quite an amazing and unprecedented collection of official statements and texts that engage contemporary society and culture in a number of ways. One document that specifically addresses political and ethical

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<sup>8</sup> Peter's pro-Western innovations to the Church are common knowledge; for a succinct summary see Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 114-16.

<sup>9</sup> Ware, *Orthodox Church*, 146.

issues (such as ecology, abortion, and homosexuality) titled, *The Basis of the Social Concept* (BSC), eagerly explains the renewed status of the Orthodox Church in post-Soviet Russia.

As one can imagine, the document joyously narrates the Church's freedom to exist, to worship, to teach, to shepherd the souls of its nation. There are, however, some key points of contrast between the new-found and hard-won freedoms for Orthodoxy in Russia and American notions of religious freedom and dis-establishmentarianism. Two items of particular interest for our Conference here, one theoretical, one practical: Freedom of religion is not an "unalienable right," and the church's exercise of this freedom does not require a separation of church and state.

First, the Moscow Patriarchate explains that all government is contingent to the Fall. Freedom of religion is not, as our Declaration of Independence puts it, an "unalienable right." It is not unalienable because that was not God's original order of things. Law and government, when it comes to first things, were not how God created the world to work.

The emergence of the temporal state should not be understood as a reality originally established by God. It was rather God's granting human beings an opportunity to order their social life by their own free will, so that this order as a response to the earthly reality distorted by sin, could help avoid a greater sin through opposing it by means of temporal power. At the same time, the Lord says clearly through Samuel's mouth that He expects this power to be faithful to His commandments and to do good works.<sup>10</sup>

This presupposition is actually more Christian and biblical than the Enlightenment conception of natural law and rights that Jefferson and Madison are articulating.

Extending the analysis further into the validity of rights language itself, the *BSC* astutely observes an individual's freedom of conscience is a slippery slope: "The adoption of the freedom of conscience as legal principle points to the fact that society has lost religious goals and values and become massively apostate and actually indifferent to the task of the Church and to the

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<sup>10</sup> *The Basis of the Social Concept*, Russian Orthodox Church: Official Web site, Department for External Church Relations, 1997-2013, <https://mospat.ru/en/>, III.1.paragraph 4.

overcoming of sin.”<sup>11</sup> The frank assertions and politically incorrect language (“apostate” and “sin”) go a long way toward revealing how contemporary Russia can, in fact, stand up for traditional moral values and not flinch under the klieg light of the censure of the Western media.

A relevant recent example would be the controversial arrest and jailing in Moscow of the punk rock protest group known as “Pussy Riot.” They staged their bit of “performance art”/political protest against Putin and the Orthodox Church within the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in the Kremlin. Church officials stopped the “performance.” Was their act a sacrilege to be disciplined by the Church (i.e. removed from the premises, perhaps excommunicated) or was it a crime against the State? Both, in the eyes of current Russian law and two of the leaders are still serving their two-year sentence. Furthermore, the controversy was and is only in the Western media: The Russian people, the government in general, and the Church have no similar expectation that a citizen’s freedom of expression justifies public blasphemy in such a forum.

Secondly, a working relationship with local, state, and federal governments is necessary since the goal of the Church is the “salvation of the human race” which involves the whole person, soul and body.

To this end, she enters into co-operation with the state, even if it is not Christian, as well as with various public associations and individuals, even if they do not identify themselves with the Christian faith. Without setting herself the direct task to have all converted to Orthodoxy as a condition for co-operation, the Church hopes that joint charity will lead its workers and people around them to the knowledge of the Truth, help them to preserve or restore faithfulness to the God-given moral norms and inspire them to seek peace, harmony and well-being—the conditions in which the Church can best fulfil her salvific work.<sup>12</sup>

Some practical areas where this kind of co-operation could be expected to occur would be disaster relief and charity work, but in the case of the Church in Russia, it is also the public

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<sup>11</sup> *Basis of Concept*, III.6.

<sup>12</sup> *Basis of Concept*, I.4.



school system.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, we see here a modernization of the old Byzantine model of the dual authorities, one for the body, one for the soul. But in ministering to the needs of the body, the church and state will necessarily overlap, if not co-operate. Besides these two points of contrast, the *Basis of the Social Concept* offers keen insights on a number of points.

In defining the Church's proper relation to the world, the *BSC* declares, first, the Church has no true home here, and its unity "is secured not by its ethnic, cultural or linguistic community, but by their common faith in Christ and Baptism. The new people of God 'have no continuing city here, but seek one to come' (Heb. 13:14). The spiritual homeland of all Christians is not earthly Jerusalem but Jerusalem 'which is above' (Gal. 4:26)."<sup>14</sup> This presupposition is important to emphasize in light of the fierce nationalistic tendencies that have emerged historically among the Slavonic-speaking Orthodox and their respective Slavic countries. Thus, by first emphasizing the true pilgrim-status of the Church, only then does the *BSC* acknowledge the proper sphere of genuine patriotism: "The patriotism of the Orthodox Christian should be active. It is manifested when he defends his fatherland against an enemy, works for the good of the motherland, cares for the good order of people's lives through, among other things, participation in the affairs of government. The Christian is called to preserve and develop national culture and people's self-awareness."<sup>15</sup> We in America and especially here at Grove City College have our own ways of yoking God and Country. But it is important to understand that the *BSC*, far from advocating any sort of jingoism, is arguing from the reality of the incarnation. We Christians have bodies, and thus, we belong to a place, and such attachments should rightly order our affections. Of course, this can be taken too far.

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<sup>13</sup> As an appendix, I have copied *BSC*'s list of activities for church-state co-operation as well as their list of prescribed actions where cooperation is forbidden.

<sup>14</sup> *Basis of Concept* II.1.

<sup>15</sup> *Basis of Concept*, II.3.

To counterbalance the sort of misplaced nationalistic zeal that equates nation or ethnicity with the Church (e.g. Serbia, Armenia, Georgia, etc.), the *BSC* quickly frames its discussion of patriotism with this injunction.

National sentiments can cause such sinful phenomena as aggressive nationalism, xenophobia, national exclusiveness and inter-ethnic enmity. At their extremes, these phenomena often lead to the restriction of the rights of individuals and nations, wars and other manifestations of violence.

It is contrary to Orthodox ethics to divide nations into the best and the worst and to belittle any ethnic or civic nation. Even more contrary to Orthodoxy are the teachings which put the nation in the place of God or reduce faith to one of the aspects of national self-awareness.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the Moscow Patriarchate carefully delineates the proper balance between the state and a national church. While war cannot be waged under the Church's banner, per se, the Church in the case of just war may extend a reluctant blessing to armed conflict. A similar sort of equipoise is achieved in its discussion of cases of conscience for both the Church as a community of believers and the individual believer.

Byzantine canon law, which the Orthodox Church still follows, forbids clergy from holding public office or performing any official civic duties; this combined with the *de facto* norm in our modern era of a secular state means that harmony between church and state is achieved primarily through "mutual non-interference into each other's affairs" and co-operation in carefully agreed upon areas."<sup>17</sup> Problems arise when either the church or state transgress into one another's affairs. Whereas Holy Scripture enjoins the Church and individual Christian to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" and to submit to civil authorities generally, in cases of conscience both the Church and the Christian are to follow the moral and ethical guidance of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Basis of Concept*, II.4.

<sup>17</sup> *Basis of Concept*, III.3

Church. Understandably the potential for conflict can be ambiguous if merely left up to each person; therefore, the threshold for conscientious objection is placed higher rather than lower:

The Church remains loyal to the state, but God's commandment to fulfil the task of salvation in any situation and under any circumstances is above this loyalty. If the authority forces Orthodox believers to apostatise from Christ and His Church and to commit sinful and spiritually harmful actions, the Church should refuse to obey the state. The Christian, following the will of his conscience, can refuse to fulfil the commands of state forcing him into a grave sin.<sup>18</sup>

Apostasy and "grave sin" would not enable a Mormon, for instance, to object over a public school lunch that includes iced tea. If, however, the State crosses the line, the individual believer must submit to the Church, who then has a range of peace-making options: direct dialogue with government authority, call upon the people to change or review the law or office, lobby for international interference and global public opinion, or encourage her people to engage in peaceful civil disobedience. The sensible orientation toward peace and reciprocity between church and state might seem to echo our own Western ideals, but the Russian perception makes one key distinction.

In the Russian formulation their notion of "mutual non-interference" intentionally differs from what it sees as two untenable kinds of "radical" separation of church and state: the American kind spelled out in our founding documents and the French kind derived from the French Revolution. The American kind stemmed from the colonists' multi-confessional constituency, where no one brand of Christianity could claim the majority. It asserts a church-state separation for amity's sake because there are churches but not one Church. Nevertheless the majority of Americans are and have always been Christian, so from the Russian point of view, inconsistencies emerge, e.g. the presidents swear oaths on Bibles and Sundays are not work days. The French version of church-state separation stems from a radically anti-religious ideology. It

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<sup>18</sup> *Basis of Concept*, III.3.

asserts a separation for the sake of banishing any and all religion from the public square and at best relegating it to a merely private matter. Neither model of separation strikes the Russian Church as analogous to its own situation that is at once multi-ethnic, multi-national, but mono-confessional with respect to its Christianity.

The Russian Church's unique history and relation to its government is also reflected in its position on the religious freedom of non-Orthodox Christians in Russia. Some American evangelicals today have been heard to complain about their lack of freedom in Russia or about the destruction of their church buildings.<sup>19</sup> And to a certain extent this is true. Non-Orthodox missionaries can only minister in Russia under the permission of the Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church restricts the missionary activity of the non-Orthodox; their work "is possible only if it is carried out without proselytism and not at the expense of 'stealing' the faithful, especially with the aid of material benefits."<sup>20</sup> I am not sure how an evangelical missionary can perform her ministry without "proselytizing," but that is their restriction. This restriction, however, is understandable given the recent travails of the Orthodox, who remember all too well how Western evangelicals came to Russia and instead of helping the indigenous church would start their own with their own "pastors." So instead of coming along side and refreshing their hearts in Christ, the non-Orthodox would poach their struggling congregations often times drawing crowds by offering food, clothing, Bibles, building repairs, etc. This is what the document refers to with the phrase "the aid of material benefits." So, on the one hand, the native Orthodox remember sadly the helping hand of their non-Orthodox brethren as sheep-stealers.

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<sup>19</sup> Dave Bohon, "Russian Christians Fear Persecution," *The New American*, September 12 2012, The New American database, [www.thenewamerican.com](http://www.thenewamerican.com) (accessed Sept. 30, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> *Basic Principles of Attitude to the Non-Orthodox*, Russian Orthodox Church: Official Web site Department for External Church Relations, 1997-2013, <https://mospat.ru/en/>, 6.2.

On the other hand, the Orthodox restriction on Protestant activity quite clearly encourages, welcomes, and sustains any genuinely altruistic co-operation. Specifically, the Christian work ideal for such collaboration includes: to co-ordinate social work, to unite their efforts at reconciliation and the moral revival of society, to defend human life and human dignity.<sup>21</sup> In the spiritual wasteland of the former Soviet Union, there is much work to be shared.

On the whole the Patriarchate of Moscow's *Basis of the Social Concept* is a remarkable document that synthesizes the Byzantine and Russian traditions of church-state relations, while demonstrating a firm grasp of the history and philosophy of church-state relations in the West. It unabashedly asserts that there can be such a thing as an "Orthodox nation" and aspires to make Russia so. This aspiration is not unlike American Christians, who maintain that ours is a Christian nation and would that it were more so. Ironically, it is worth noting, the current revival of Christianity in Russia with its burgeoning church attendance, massive church-building program, and engagement as a legitimate voice on key moral issues confronting society helps illustrate that the American separation of church and state has become more like the French. That is, the voice of Christianity has over the last hundred years been increasingly banished from the public square, and there is no clear means in place to counteract this development. Indeed, the Russian Church through its seventy years of brutal persecution has earned this bit of wisdom borne from humility:

Any change in the form of government to that more religiously rooted, introduced without spiritualising society itself, will inevitably degenerate into falsehood and hypocrisy and make this form weak and valueless in the eyes of the people. However, one cannot altogether exclude the possibility of such a spiritual revival of society as to make natural a religiously higher form of government.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Basic Principles*, 6.1-6.2.

<sup>22</sup> *Basis of the Social Concept*, III.7.

The Russian Church sees itself at a crossroads—its renewed official status, if it is merely a politically expedient fiat, will not last unless the Gospel takes root throughout its society. The blood of her recent martyrs has been and continues to water this growth. We in America all across the fruited plain who might pray for our own spiritual revival, where will we get such nourishment?

## Appendix I: Present Areas of Co-operation between the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church<sup>23</sup>

Church-state co-operation should be realised on the following conditions: The Church's participation in the work of the state is correspondent to her nature and calling; the state does exercise dictate in the Church's social work; and the Church is not involved in the spheres of public activity where her work is impossible for canonical and other reasons.

The areas of church-state co-operation in the present historical period are as follows:

- a) peacemaking on international, inter-ethnic and civic levels and promoting mutual understanding and co-operation among people, nations and states;
- b) concern for the preservation of morality in society;
- c) spiritual, cultural, moral and patriotic education and formation;
- d) charity and the development of joint social programs;
- e) preservation, restoration and development of the historical and cultural heritage, including concern for the preservation of historical and cultural monuments;
- f) dialogue with governmental bodies of all branches and levels on issues important for the Church and society, including the development of appropriate laws, by-laws, instructions and decisions;
- g) care of the military and law-enforcement workers and their spiritual and moral education;
- h) efforts to prevent crime and care of prisoners;
- i) science and research;
- j) healthcare;
- k) culture and arts;
- l) work of ecclesiastical and secular mass media;
- m) preservation of the environment;
- n) economic activity for the benefit of the Church, state and society;
- o) support for the institution of family, for motherhood and childhood;
- p) opposition to the work of pseudo-religious structures presenting a threat to the individual and society.

Church-state co-operation is also possible in some other areas if it contributes to the fulfilment of the tasks enumerated above.

At the same time, there are areas in which the clergy and canonical church structures cannot support the state or cooperate with it. They are as follows:

- a) political struggle, election agitation, campaigns in support of particular political parties and public and political leaders;
- b) waging civil war or aggressive external war;
- c) direct participation in intelligence and any other activity that demands secrecy by law even in making one's confession or reporting to the church authorities.

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted from *Basic Concept*, III.8.

Among the traditional areas of the social efforts of the Orthodox Church is intercession with the government for the needs of the people, the rights and concerns of individual citizens or social groups. This intercession is a duty of the Church, realised through verbal or written interventions by appropriate church bodies with the governmental bodies of various branches and levels.