THE DEVIL IN TECHNOLOGIES: RUSSIAN ORTHODOX NEOCONSERVATISM VERSUS SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS

by Marcin Skladanowski

Abstract. One of the interesting aspects of Russian self-definition in opposition to the West is its attitude toward Western science. Russian distrust of scientific and technological progress in the West is an important force shaping contemporary Russian identity. This article touches on these issues in four parts. The first section characterizes two main conservative circles that are active in today's disputes over the significance of scientific development for Russian identity. The second demonstrates certain Russian contemporary concerns related to scientific and technological progress, which will enable us to explain the position of the Russian Orthodox Church. The third section presents the political, religious, and identity context for the suspicion toward science expressed by Russian conservatives. The final section, on the other hand, discusses the way in which Russian Orthodox neoconservatism uses Orthodox anthropology to raise suspicion toward scientific and technological achievements.

Keywords: anti-Occidentalism; Christianity; Russia and the West; Russian neoconservatism; Russian Orthodoxy; theology and science

---

The unabated conflict between Russia and the West is a multidimensional reality. The scale of anti-Western sentiment in contemporary Russian public discourse—in political, church, intellectual, and artistic circles—cannot be explained merely by reference to political, military, and economic interests. The intensification of such sentiments and the increasing isolation of Russia from the Western world are influenced by other factors as well. One of the factors worth noticing is a distrust of the West, which is deeply rooted in the Orthodox socioreligious tradition (Papanikolaou 2003, 77). But Russian anti-Occidentalism has its foundations in the Rus' Orthodox historiosophy of medieval times. It has repeatedly been used, at different

Marcin Skladanowski is Professor of Russian Religion and Society at the Faculty of Theology of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland; e-mail: skladanowski@kul.pl.

 ISSN 0591-2385

times of the Rus' and Russian history for political purposes in order to justify the rejection of Western paradigms of social and religious development (Cherepanova 2010). This phenomenon can also be observed in Russian public discourse, particularly when it evokes the Orthodox socioreligious tradition so that Russian cultural difference and uniqueness can be justified.

One of the interesting aspects of Russian self-definition in opposition to the West is its attitude toward Western science as well as the social and ethical implications of scientific achievements (Papkova 2011, 190). This issue seems not to have attracted sufficient reflection among Western academics so far. It is usually omitted in favor of a focus on political and economic problems that seem to be easier to grasp and describe. Meanwhile, Russian distrustful, or even openly hostile, self-definition concerning scientific and technological progress in the West is not only rooted in Russian history, but is an important force shaping contemporary Russian identity (Katz 2014, 135–36).

The Russian Orthodox Church itself holds a relatively moderate position on this issue (Mospat 2018). On the one hand, it notices positive aspects of scientific and technological progress; on the other hand, it opposes such aspects of this progress that could come in conflict with the Orthodox tradition (Katasonov 2015). A far more radical position, however, is presented by Russian neoconservative circles that appeal to Orthodox tradition.

The Russian debate over the societal consequences of embracing the achievements of Western science and technology can be, for an outside observer, difficult to understand and, especially, can be considered of merely local and marginal significance. Such a conclusion would be, however, mistaken. In reality, this debate is part of a more significant phenomenon: the attempt to increase Russia's cultural isolation and, especially, to cut it off from Western influences. The intensification of these actions is related to the political change resulting from the Ukrainian conflict. The conflict with the West has made the Russian Federation authorities reach for the anti-Western rhetoric more willingly and more frequently. In this way opinions regarding the destructive influence of the West, also as far as science and technology are concerned—which used to be marginal and politically insignificant—have entered Russian public discourse with the help of the state-controlled mass media. Anti-Occidental views of Russian conservative circles become, in this context, a tool used to permanently divide Russian society from the West. They are supposed to strengthen the Russians' conviction that they form one unique civilization. Moreover, these opinions, in certain cases, form the justification for war rhetoric, which can be observable both in the statements of Russian political elites as well as among some church groups.

The Starting Point: The Conservative Actors in the Russian Ideological Dispute over Religion and Progress

While analyzing the current dispute in Russia regarding the significance of scientific development for Russian identity and uniqueness, especially in the religious and axiological dimension, one can point to two main circles that manifest conservative, isolationist, and anti-Western views. These circles, although in many aspects different and having varied objectives, share their connection with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Russian Anti-Modernization Circles

The first of the above-mentioned circles comprises extreme conservative Orthodox groups, both these related to the Russian Orthodox Church as well as more radical ones, connected to the schismatic, ultraconservative, and isolationist current of the Old Believers. With the exception of the Old Believers movement that openly opposes the Moscow Patriarchate, these groups enjoy the support of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy. In fact, their political significance is very limited. Nonetheless, such movements as the Social Committee "For the Moral Renaissance of the Fatherland" (*Obshchestvennyy Komitet "Za Nravstvennoye Vozrozhdeniye Otechestva"*) or All Russia Social Movement "People's Council" (*Obshcherossiyskoye obshchestvennoye dvizheniye "Narodnyy sobor"*) are present in public space (Papkova 2011, 134–49; Ruskline 2018). They radically express the necessity to separate Russia from Western influences and to defend traditional Russian values. They also promote historiosophic, messianic, and Gnostic ideas rooted in the Rus' religious traditions, according to which the evil that aims to destroy the Holy Rus' comes from the West. Meanwhile, the Rus' (Russia), as a state chosen by God and preserving uncontaminated faith, is called to survive the eschatological end of the world. This survival, however, requires strong protection against Western influences.

The second circle consists of the representatives of Russian neoconservatism. Neoconservatism should be understood here as the return to Russian conservative thought that was formed in the nineteenth century, especially at the time of Tsar Nicholas's I rule. This was the period when, despite the preservation of the synodal structure of the Church introduced by Peter the Great, the modernization reforms of the Church and society implemented in Russia in the eighteenth century were, to a great extent, reversed. Additionally, Russian state ideology regained its old anti-Western and isolationist character (Strickland 2013). These are the reasons why the intellectuals appealing to the Soviet Union as a paradigm of scientific, technological, and social development (e.g., Sergey Kara-Murza) cannot be included in the group of Russian neoconservatives without some reservations, even though their views agree in many aspects with neoconservative

positions. The fundamental obstacle lies in their attitude toward the role religion plays in social and political life.

For Russian neoconservatism, religion is crucial for Russian identity or Russia's self-definition with respect to the Western world (Knox 2005, 141–44). Threats to religion—which is often treated merely as an ideological instrument—can be observed in the lifestyles, norms, and patterns of family life that come from the West. This is the reason Russian conservatism is heavily based on Orthodoxy (especially on Orthodox anthropology that promotes the society at the expense of the individual) and opposes all Western influences on Russian social life (Dugin 2009). The most influential representative of this movement is Aleksandr Dugin, who advances the concept of Russia being separate from the West. This separate character is manifested in the fact that Russia has created its own independent "Eurasian civilization," in which even Orthodoxy was transformed and, in the axiological dimension, adjusted its norms to the social values characteristic of traditional Asian societies (Dugin 2015c, 155). In this case, the question could also be raised as to the actual political significance of the given group. On the one hand, the idea that Dugin has become the "Kremlin ideologist" seems exaggerated (Shekhovtsov 2008, 492). On the other hand, however, the changing character of the statements issued by the representatives of the government, especially almost complete cessation of using the language of modernization typical of the presidency of Dmitriy A. Medvedev, allows us to notice the significance of this circle and perceive it as a strongly influential group. This significance is even more serious because the politicians associated with the said circle occupy prominent positions in the president's administration and in parliamentary and governmental structures (Secrieru 2014).

Between the two above-mentioned circles, there are potential areas of collaboration. The evidence for such cooperation can be the Izborsk Club, established in 2012. It gathers both the most influential representatives of the conservative wing of the Orthodox Church (e.g., bishops Avgustin Anisimov and Tikhon Shevkunov) as well as activists from Russian anti-Occidental right-wing groups (Izborsk 2018). At the same time, its members reject that part of the president's administration that advocates the modernization of Russia and its equal competition—in terms of technology and science as well as culture and ideology—with the West (Dugin 2015d, 352; Dugin 2015f, 63–64).

What is interesting is that both mentioned circles do not abandon technological achievements while spreading their positions and beliefs. The representatives of the described conservative groups are extremely active in Russian media space, including the Internet, including such radical Orthodox information centers as the Russian National Line (*Russkaya narodnaya liniya*), Orthodox Rus' (*Rus' Pravoslavnaya*), and Russian far-right websites related to Dugin's intellectual milieu. Neither of the circles demands giving

up modern techniques of information and communication, but they require severe control by the authorities. One can hear the postulates to create Russia's own closed Internet network and other alternative information resources that would present, in particular, a Russian interpretation of history and contemporary international relations (Aver'yanov et al. 2016, 250–75).

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Concept of Progress

The political activism of both above-mentioned circles, both appealing to the Rus' and Russian Orthodox tradition, creates a challenge for the Russian Orthodox Church. The Moscow Patriarchate under the rule of Patriarch Kirill aims to maintain a moderate position on political and ideological issues, following the stand of President Putin. Meanwhile, the existence and significant role that is played by conservative circles in Russian public life make the Orthodox Church declare their position on certain issues that are considered sensitive in contemporary Russian political reality.

The history of the Orthodox Church shows that it cannot be systematically and unquestionably considered an enemy of education or scientific and technological progress. The evidence for that should be the revival of the Russian theology as a reaction to Western influences in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the promotion of education the Church in the synodal period (which was the time of state domination over the Church realized through the institution of the Sacred Synod, which supervised the Church on behalf of State) (Belenchuk 2015). It can also be seen in current activities of the Orthodox Church, especially with respect to theology being given the status of a scientific discipline and the development of Christianity-inspired scientific thought, mainly in the humanities (e.g., at the most prominent Orthodox academic institution, St. Tikhon's Orthodox University in Moscow), as well as numerous examples of collaboration in the areas of education with local and regional authorities (Fagan 2013, 141–51; Eremin and Osmachko 2017, 1479–80). Besides, Patriarch Kirill himself has repeatedly declared the lack of conflict between science and religion and supported scientific research as long as it does not negate human dignity (Patriarchia 2016).

At the same time, however, one cannot consider the position of the Church as indisputably open to progress. This is due to the fact that modernization tendencies, which were present in the Orthodox Church in the area of education especially in the synodal period, are assessed critically nowadays by those in modern conservative circles. Already at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the forerunners of the so-called patristic renewal of Russian Orthodoxy such as Alexey Khomiakov rejected the idea that Russian Orthodox theology could copy Western patterns, including Western manners of scientific reflection, as they considered them incompatible with the special historic role of Russia. The Slavophile movement

that was developing in the nineteenth century objected to the turn toward the West which characterized Peter the Great's reforms, and the questioning of the Rus' social and religious traditions (Papanikolaou 2014, 34; Dugin 2014c, 58).

Contemporary neoconservatism, developing nineteenth-century conservative concepts, perceives mostly negative consequences of Peter the Great's reforms, which opened Russia to Western influences, both in terms of socioreligious issues as well as in the area of science and technology. The result of these reforms was supposed to be the destruction of traditional Russian society, questioning and depreciating the values that distinguished the Orthodox Rus' from the "heterodox" West and gave the Rus' the status of a unique and God-chosen land. The modernization of the eighteenth century turned out to be superficial. It did not make Russia a Western state, nor the leading country in the areas of science and technology. In the social aspect, however, it turned out to be destructive. It led to the formation of Occidentalized social elites that did not use the Russian language to communicate even in day-to-day relations; they did that in order to distance themselves from the customs and traditions of the Russian people (Dugin 2014a, 694; Dugin 2014b, 313–19; Mitrofanova 2016, 114). The subordination of the Orthodox Church to the state, typical of the synodal period, significantly diminished its social influence. All these factors, in the longer perspective, led both to the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 as well as to the inconceivable persecutions of the Orthodox Church in the Soviet period. Modernization, which was contrary to the "Russian spirit," had, therefore, tragic consequences.

These types of observations, which, despite being radical, have to be considered valid, make it impossible for the Russian Orthodox Church, quickly regaining strength after the fall of the Soviet Union, to support unconditionally the implementation in Russian social life importing Western scientific and technological achievements. Moreover, they intensify the anxiety present among the most conservative religious, as well as anti-Western, intellectual circles.

Scientific and Technological Progress: Contemporary Concerns of Russian Orthodoxy

Since the 1990s, when the fall of the Soviet Union opened Russia to Western cultural influences, the simultaneous revival of the Russian Orthodox Church has been observed. One can notice two phenomena in Russian society that, on some social levels, remain incompatible and provoke controversy. On the one hand, mostly due to developing mass media, primarily the Internet, the lifestyle predominant in the West has become known and accepted by younger generations of Russians. On the other hand, the level of identification with Orthodoxy among both older and younger Russians

has increased. This identification has, at times, a decidedly cultural character; it is not accompanied by an increase in religious practices, but is a form of identification with the Church as a disseminator of specific values and attitudes. The values presented in Russia as Western (Matsaberidze 2015, 84) are, however, distinctly different from the ones proclaimed by the Russian Orthodox Church that for many are an indicator of genuine Russian identity. This discrepancy in Russian society has become more pronounced since the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the authorities of the Russian Federation began to change the direction of their cultural policy by emphasizing Russian tradition and increasingly distancing themselves from Western civilization (Evans and Northmore-Ball 2012, 805).

The modernization of Russia and the simultaneous revival of the Russian Orthodox Church followed by its increasing significance in Russian public life have revealed conflicts related to the opportunities and restrictions in adopting Western scientific and technological achievements. These achievements could significantly impact Russian society. They also engendered radical tendencies among Orthodox Russians, who found the Moscow Patriarchate's moderate position not radical enough and inadequate to the requirements of both the Orthodox faith and Russian social tradition (Stöckl 2006, 257–59). These radical sentiments are used by modern Russian neoconservative circles who aim at isolating Russia from all Western cultural influences (Engelstein 2001; Shekhovtsov 2008).

The Human Being as a Slave to Technology

The specific nature of the Russian Orthodox attitude toward scientific and technological progress can be illustrated by two significant controversies. One of these regards the introduction of the "taxpayer identification number" (*Identifikatsionnyy nomer nalogoplatelshchika* [INN]), assigned to institutions, organizations, and individuals, and the "basic national registration number" (*Osnovnoy gosudarstvennyy registratsionnyy nomer* [OGRN]), assigned to legal entities. Barcodes, which were introduced according to the EAN-13 standard for goods identification, have also proved problematic. In these cases Orthodox conservative circles perceived attempts to create electronic population records, necessary for tax and statistical purposes, as a "seal of the Antichrist" that was supposed to mark the individual (Papkova 2011, 120–34; Krest'yankin 2018). The barcode issue became particularly serious when some people managed to identify Satan's symbols in codes containing the number 666 (Dobrosotskikh 2001; Zherdev 2001).

The official position of the Patriarchate of Moscow aims to subdue the existing tensions. The Patriarchate does not assign these introduced identification numbers any religious or theological significance, let alone any connection with demonic forces (Chaplin 2010). It states that the decision whether to use them should be left to individuals and organizations,

and it should also depend on legal regulations of the Russian Federation (Patriarchia 2011, 45; Patriarchia 2013). The fact is, however, that the authorities have absolved Church institutions and organizations from the requirement to employ these numbers (Patriarchia 2008, 42).

The controversies about the electronic population and institutional records have not been resolved in Russian Orthodoxy, however. In 2018, a new area for discussion was entered by Patriarch Kirill, who warned the people against using electronic methods of payment instead of cash. He stated that the spread of electronic methods of payment has been a cause for concern for the Church. Although Patriarch Kirill acknowledges the benefits of cashless payment (such as the transparency of financial operations and the ability to reveal cases of fraud), he also perceives such payment as a means for anonymous financial institutions or political structures to control people's lives (RIA Novosti 2018).

In both of the problematic cases indicated above that are connected to new technologies, the Moscow Patriarchate occupies a moderate position. On the one hand, it does not demonize these technologies. On the other hand, however, it acknowledges the dangers they might pose and does not distance itself decisively from radical tendencies in Russian Orthodoxy. These movements perceive Western technologies as Satan's "area of operation" or as Western activities aimed against Russia (Zherdev 2001). The reasons for such a discrepancy in the Patriarchate's position are rooted in Orthodox anthropology itself as well as in the close relation the Orthodox Church has had with the Russian sociopolitical tradition.

When it comes to theological aspects, the concerns of the Russian Orthodox Church regard the dependence of an individual on technologies managed by anonymous institutions. Orthodox anthropology does not, however, have a personalistic character in the Western meaning of the word. There is no space in Orthodox doctrine for the appreciation of an individual with no relation to the community. On the contrary, an individual can only fully reveal his or her own personal dignity in a community of people, which can assume the shape of a religious or national community as well as that of a fixed structure such as a state (Dugin 2015e, 338). Orthodox anthropology, which has more of a collectivist than personalistic character (Zizioulas 2004), especially in its Russian form, finds it dangerous when an individual relies on other elements than those of the religious or national community or state (Zinkovskiy 2014, 170–71).

Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church emphasizes the "spirituality" (*dukhovnost'*) of Russia and Russian culture, which corresponds to the "spiritual" nature of an individual and which is best manifested in Orthodox teaching. The fact that various aspects of human life depend on other factors, in particular those in which mysterious and demonic symbolism can be noticed, or which can be used as a tool in the hands of foreign economic and political centers, is considered dangerous for this

"spiritual" dimension of an individual (Davydenkov 2015, 284–87; Knox and Mitrofanova 2017, 53–56).

Progress as the Risk of Negating the Truth about the Human Being

From the Orthodox anthropological perspective, an uncritical attitude toward scientific and technological progress, which marginalizes the spiritual dimension of an individual and concentrates mainly on their earthly existence, might, in consequence, distort the very truth about individuals and the way they perceive themselves. This, in turn, might lead to the situation in which even baptized people lose sight of the destiny that makes their lives meaningful and gives them purpose (Mumrikov 2011; Osipov 2015). This approach reveals a serious discrepancy between the ethics of Western Christianity and the Orthodox ethics prevalent in Russia. While Western, Catholic and Protestant, Christianity aims to sanctify earthly life, Russian Orthodoxy follows the Byzantine concept that refuses to assign any greater meaning to earthly life and appreciates all that has a mystical, divine, and supernatural dimension (Dinello 1998, 46).

Such a position leads those in Russian Orthodox conservative circles to raise doubts regarding numerous medical techniques, which aim to improve people's comfort or prolong their lives. This criticism refers to, among others, organ transplantation as a therapeutic method that leads to prolonging a person's life. The Russian Orthodox Church has not determined any clear position in this respect, and numerous moderate Russian theologians emphasize the necessity to use medical advances to improve the care of people's lives, especially the most vulnerable, that is, the sick and suffering. The attitude of Jesus Christ, who healed the sick and even brought people back from the dead, thus prolonging their earthly life, could serve as an argument to justify the use of these advanced therapies, including organ transplantation. Nonetheless, the reference to the truth about individual's spiritual dimension and their final destiny leads to a negative assessment of organ transplantation (Orthoview 2014). The arguments are anthropological in nature and are composed of two issues.

First, a radical intervention in the human body such as an organ transplant undermines the sacred character of the body and contradicts its spiritual dimension. Such an intervention expresses the reduction of the body merely to its physical and material aspects which is, from the perspective of conservative Orthodox circles, a manifestation of the desacralization of Western science, especially in the field of medicine (Siluyanova 2007). The Orthodox ascetic tradition refers to Old Testament symbolism that connects certain human organs and tissues (heart, blood, liver, and kidneys) with a person's individual spiritual life. In this tradition, a human body in its specificity and wholeness is a personal gift from God to each human person. Such an opinion leads to the conclusion that

people cannot freely manage their bodies; what is more, they cannot pass this personal gift or its parts on to other people (Orthoview 2014).

Second, from the perspective of Orthodox anthropology, excessive concentration on earthly life, including its prosperity and length, can be seen as opposing God's will toward an individual and can make people ignorant of their destiny. Practices such as organ transplantation or other serious interventions in the human body can be perceived, from this perspective, as attempts to surrender to the temptation known in the Bible "to be like God" (Genesis 3:5). This temptation is to be realized one day by reaching the state of actual immortality. Its consequence, however, would be the conscious rejection of the purpose of human life—that is, living among the saved in Heaven—as well as avoiding responsibility before God for actions done in this life that are going to be judged after one's death (Orthoview 2014).

These indicated issues are in Russian Orthodoxy widely discussed and, ultimately, unresolved. Nonetheless, one of the implications of these ongoing discussions is of particular importance for the present article. In the achievements of Western science, in particular in the field of medicine, the spiritual image of the West can be recognized as concentrated on earthly life, a materialistic view that reduces an individual to his or her earthly dimension, resulting in excessive care for worldly prosperity and longevity. Russian philosophical debates raise doubts about uncritically following the Western cult of scientific and technological progress because it might alter the Russians' hierarchy of values (Evans and Northmore-Ball 2012, 804). In this hierarchy, worldly values such as economic success or general prosperity should be preceded by "spiritual" values (Dugin 2014b, 498–99).

The Suspicion of Science in the Context of Political and Religious Identity

The suspicion of scientific achievements and their application in everyday life has a long history in the Russian national and religious traditions. Moreover, one can also claim that occasionally it becomes an essential element of building Russian Orthodox identity in opposition to the West as a cultural and axiological community.

Russian Antireligious Scientism and Its Contemporary Manifestations

Paradoxically, the era of the Soviet Union, when science was given an absolute and "sacred" status (albeit only in selected fields that agreed with Marxist-Leninist ideology), played a significant role in undermining the trust of Russian society in scientific and technological progress. Soviet doctrine heavily emphasized the radical opposition of religion and science, and the complete incompatibility of these two realities. Scientific worldview was eventually supposed to supplant religion as a useless and harmful

illusion, which hinders the progress of humanity to be accomplished in the Communist Bloc.

Certain aspects of the Soviet sacralization of science and its employment to fight religion are still alive in the thought of contemporary participants of Russian public life. Some of them, such as Aleksandr Nevzorov, oppose religion as such and perceive the Russian Orthodox Church as a hindrance in the development of Russia according to the Western paradigms (Nevzorov 2015). These paradigms, however, are very selectively interpreted, which leaves the impression in media coverage that Western-style modernization of Russia is bound to create the cult of science, which will replace religion and in particular will remove the Church from Russian public life (Gayda 2011).

The social effect of such actions in contemporary Russia, which is engaged in conflict with the West and experiencing a significant increase in anti-Western, nationalist, and isolationist sentiments, is, however, opposite and unexpected. Because the Russian Orthodox Church, even given Russia's multiethnic and multireligious character, should still be considered a constitutive element for Russian national and cultural identity (Cherepanova 2010, 316–17), and is closely linked to the Russian state tradition (Wortman 2013), the demand to remove it from public life in the name of the science cult raises suspicion. This forms the foundation of the conviction rising in conservative intellectual circles that the introduction of Western technologies into Russian public life is an element in the cultural war of the West against Russia (Dugin 2015c, 155). The technologies in question can be employed to control society and gather sensitive data or even to change the culture and national tradition by promoting new lifestyles and values.

The Religious Image of the West

From the perspective of those in Russian neoconservative circles, it is the numerous negative features of the modern West that distinguish it from Russia. On the religious and ideological level, one can talk, first of all, about the "unspirituality" (*bezdukhovnost'*) of Western societies. This "unspirituality" goes much deeper than the secularization of public life and social relations, or the reduction of the social impact that religious groups possess. It is characterized by the separation of the spiritual element from the very foundations of Western civilization (Dinello 1998, 52). Religion, its values, and rules of conduct are not the only and unquestioned factors shaping the entirety of individual and social life (Eremin and Osmachko 2017, 1476–77). They do not limit the horizon of people's aspirations in life, which can encompass various areas of personal development. The Russian approach sees this openness and lack of limits as leading to the degradation of religion and religious values. Instead, progress, science, and technology

are promoted as aspects of human existence whose individual and social value is much more easily measured and, consequently, perceivable and unquestionable.

This separation of spirituality from the directions in which Western civilization is developing is already present in the very beginnings of the independent political and cultural path of the West, by which the political and religious severance of links with Constantinople in the tenth and eleventh centuries is understood. Aleksandr Dugin interprets this severance of links in terms of the clash of two fundamental civilizational models: conservative Land, symbolized by ancient Rome, and progressive Sea, whose archetype was ancient Carthage. The authentic values of ancient Rome, such as being faithful to tradition, moral conservatism, and the sacralization of public life, were only preserved in the Eastern Empire so that they could be further developed in the Orthodox Rus' and Russia. Meanwhile, the Western Empire and Western Christianity followed the path of Carthage and began to value economic and technological expansion more than spiritual values (Dugin 2014b, 47–54).

A certain element of Soviet ideology and anti-Western propaganda which remains fresh in modern Russian conservative circles, particularly of the Orthodox denomination, is worth noting in this context. Whereas, as mentioned above, the Soviet Union promoted the cult of science and sacralized its achievements, it also rejected—importantly—those scientific findings that went against Marxist-Leninist ideology, and against collectivism that was the foundation of the Soviet social organization. This is the reason why Western economic knowledge and the economic organization based on it was rejected in the Soviet Union. The economy developed in the West was perceived as representing the cult of money, egoism, and personal "enslavement," that is, a person being reduced to a thing whose value can be expressed in money (Dinello 1998, 47). For Orthodox anthropology, this argument remained valid despite its different ideological background. Russian rejection of Western scientific and technological advancement is also motivated by Russia's opposition to Western egoism. Egoism and materialism are seen as pervading the entirety of the religious and spiritual life of the West, which means that Western "spirituality" cannot be considered authentic (Dinello 1998, 52; Rutland 2016, 354–55).

Western civilization, which is expansion-oriented, made Christianity follow its aims, which resulted in Western Christianity losing the Eastern depth of thought, at least in the eyes of Russian observers. Protestantism meets with particular hostility in this respect because Russian neoconservatives accuse it of subjugating religion to worldly matters. In certain aspects, this opinion agrees with the known analyses of Max Weber, who notes the connection between the level of scientific, technological and economic development of European countries and the dominant confessional tradition. This connection explains the reasons that

Protestant countries achieved the dominant economic position (Weber [1905]2001). The Russian neoconservative standpoint is not limited, however, to Weber's scientific perspective but clearly assigns a different value to individual religious traditions and negatively judges entire Western Christianity (Kara-Murza 2013, 40; Dugin 2015b, 159–60). Western Christianity is accused of contributing to the "unspirituality" of the West.

Western scientism, uncritical faith in science, and the belief in scientific and technological progress that is supposed to solve all the problems of humanity, form, in the opinion of Russian neoconservatives, such a pseudoreligious cult. It is both a natural and unavoidable direction of the development of Western civilization. People are supposed to be subjugated to the requirements of scientific and technological progress. Moreover, none of the areas of human existence can be spared from the impact of this progress. At the same time, however, it also gives the opportunity to control the people who make use of new technologies (Dugin 2015a, 242–43).

These observations are interesting because they show that in the contemporary sociopolitical reality of the Russian Federation the war against specific technologies of communication and information exchange, which crosses state borders, has become the official national priority, which is also supported by the Orthodox Church.

Spiritual and Moral Uniqueness of Russia

Against such an image of the West, Russian Orthodox neoconservatism presents Russia as a country of "spiritual foundations" (*dukhovnye skrepy*). This motif is significant in the statements of Patriarch Kirill (Pravoslavie 2016). President Putin also sees "spirituality" as an aspect distinguishing Russia from the entire Western world (Tsargrad 2017). Such an approach, however, makes the employment of Western scientific and technological advances ambiguous.

On the one hand, Russian political elites, including V. V. Putin and D. A. Medvedev, speak about the necessity to modernize Russia, to develop Russian science and technology not only to catch up with the West but to defeat it in scientific and technological competition. On the other hand, however, Russian conservative thinkers warn the Russians against uncritically following Western patterns of development, including the unlimited use of Western technologies. Technological advances cannot be entirely separated from cultural changes. Under Russian conditions, where the access to "free from state control" mass media is still possible, the separation of technological progress from cultural changes, especially when it comes to new—mostly informational—technologies, is impossible. This is the reason why thinkers such as Dugin realistically point out that uncritical acceptance of Western science and technology necessarily would lead to the development of civil society in Russia. According to the

concept of "civil society," institutions such as state and church perform an auxiliary function toward citizens. This concept goes against traditional Russian values, rules, and patterns of conduct. This is also the reason why trust in Western science and technology, especially those fields that are crucial for social life, has to be severely limited (Dugin 2014a, 73).

Although for modern Orthodox-related Russian conservatism these scientific and technological advances that can directly impact social life (mostly from the area of media and communication) raise some doubts, it is interesting to note that one can also find more radical voices in the Russian public domain. In 2018, as a reply to new sanctions of the United States administration against Russian oligarchs connected to the Kremlin, the project of countersanctions was prepared in the State Duma. Among these advised countersanctions one can find, for example, the ban on the import of medicines produced in countries "hostile" to Russia—against the opinion of the Moscow Patriarchate (NTV 2018). Although this project will not be accepted in such a radical shape, there have been voices in some of the conservative circles regarding the necessity to replace medical supplies produced in the West with the products of traditional Russian medicine (Medportal 2018).

Both in the most common accusations made against Western science and technology as well as in radical calls to reject Western medicines one can notice, aside from their political and propaganda elements, the religious and ideological aspects that are of great significance in the contemporary conflict between Russia and the West. Orthodox Russian conservatism, in some aspects openly supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, considers the separation from elements of Western influence that could impact the philosophy, value system, and predominant patterns of Russian social life as the primary condition for Russia to survive as a separate political, religious, and cultural entity. The influence of the West in these areas could, in the opinion of Russian conservatives, deprive Russia of its declared "spirituality." If these influencing factors are scientific advances or new technologies, these should also be considered morally wrong and harmful, and should be rejected, or at least should have access to them limited (Dugin 2014b, 479).

Orthodox Tradition and the Dilemmas of Russian Modernization

Religious and ethical doubts related to the advances of science and technology in individual and social life have a decidedly political and historiosophic context in Russian conservative thought. In the conservative approach to various signs of progress, a fundamental difference between "Russian spirit" and "Western spirit," which is defined through rationalism, laicism, and materialism, can be perceived.

Modernization as the Destruction of Russian Orthodox Society

Suspicion of scientific and technological achievements, new thinking trends, or cultural changes that arrive in Russia from the West has a long tradition in Russian intellectual thought that appeals to Orthodoxy. Already the Rus' religious and political thought of the late Middle Ages, which aimed to assign the Moscow Rus' a very particular, religiously sanctified role, saw the cause of the fall of Constantinople in its relations with the West (Hunter 2017, 102). Such arguments were behind the long isolation of the Moscow Rus' from Europe, which was supposed to ensure the purity of Rus' Orthodoxy and the stability of the political and social structure. The fact is that rapid modernization, which began in Russia in the time of Peter the Great, had severe consequences for the Orthodox Church as it became dependent on the state and marginalized. In further stages of modernization, conducted mostly during the reign of Catherine II, the war against the Russian Orthodox tradition, especially monasticism, was justified by the necessity to develop socially and scientifically (Engelstein 2001, 135). This model of the modernization of the state, which employed force to accomplish its goals and mercilessly destroyed these national and religious traditions that were considered backward, was decidedly weaker in the nineteenth century but came back much stronger after the Bolshevik Revolution (White and McAllister 2000, 361).

These historical experiences of the Rus' and Russia are the reasons why, for contemporary intellectual circles which appeal to Orthodoxy, modernization understood as uncritical support for social, cultural, scientific, and technological progress cannot be positive in itself. There have been many periods in Russian history when the requirements of progress and the necessity to conform to the currents of thought that were predominant in Europe were used to justify brutal war against the Rus' and the Russian religious and spiritual tradition.

Western Progress and Russian Spirit

The concerns regarding Western scientific and technological achievements which some Russian groups are trying to raise, reveal a fear that such modernization of their society would eventually lead to the destruction of Russia's identity, uniqueness, and internal integrity. This fear is expressed by the Orthodox-inspired representatives of neoconservative thought, who reject the possibility of building a civil society in Russia based on Western patterns. They also perceive Western scientific and technological achievements as weakening those religious and cultural bonds that unite Russia and make it unique among other civilizations (Dugin 2015c, 155).

In recent years, the Russian Orthodox Church has increasingly proven its willingness to actively participate in the actions of Russian authorities directed at strengthening Russian identity by separating it radically

from Western influences, which are perceived solely in a negative light (Cherepanova 2010, 316). The position of the Church can be assumed based on numerous statements of Orthodox officials or the engagement of significant representatives of the clergy, including bishops, in conservative and anti-Western intellectual circles (e.g., the Izborsk Club). It is interesting to observe in this context that the elites of the Russian Federation administration, starting with President Putin, do not see the contradiction between scientific-technological progress and the Russian spirit. Official national ideology speaks both about Russia's "spirituality" based on Orthodoxy as well as the necessity to develop (Turner 2011, 37). This development should not, however, require the acceptance of Western attitudes and lifestyles (which is often expressed as modernization without Westernization). In such a way, Russian political and intellectual elites aim to demonstrate that it is possible to scientifically and technologically develop without abandoning one's ethical, axiological, and spiritual dimension (Shlapentokh 2007, 223; Matsaberidze 2015, 84). The question is, however, whether this task is feasible under current political and religious circumstances.

Conclusion

This article has aimed to demonstrate the significance of the religious factor in shaping Russian identity and the perception of foreign influences, including the field of science and technology. From a Christian perspective, the direction of scientific and technological development cannot be devoid of criticism regarding religion and ethics. Otherwise, this development can lead to the depersonalization of the individual and the perception of another individual only as a means to achieve one's scientific ends. On the other hand, other elements must be added to the general Christian theological and anthropological perspective given the conditions of Russian culture shaped by Orthodoxy. These concerns may be incomprehensible in the West, even in Christian circles. Orthodox anthropological and ethical assessment of scientific and technological achievements do not stop at asking about the way these achievements impact human life, or to what extent they improve the quality of human life, or whether they pose any threat or modify the way an individual perceives the purpose and aim of earthly life. These are religiously significant questions, both for Eastern as well as Western Christianity. Russian Orthodoxy, however, raises additional questions that express a close relationship with the Russian sociopolitical tradition and its predominant anti-Occidental and idealistic concepts. The concern of those in certain Orthodox circles questions whether the acceptance of Western scientific and technological achievements would require the recognition of values, patterns of conduct, and lifestyles that are foreign to Russia. Science, mainly when it directly affects individual and social life,

does not remain philosophically neutral; conducted research and proposed solutions are often used as proofs of the Western concepts of the individual, human existence, and destiny.

The position of the Russian Orthodox Church in conflicts related to scientific and technological progress is moderate, which opens it to the criticism of radical circles. The statements of the Moscow Patriarchate do not question the value of scientific achievements and technological progress, nor do they object to their use by Orthodox believers. At the same time, however, in some areas, which can influence people's individual and social life significantly, this position is cautious and concerned. The anti-Western statements of those in neoconservative circles who appeal to Orthodoxy and with whom various representatives of the Church cooperate are far more radical. One can assume that, at the time of current strained relations between Russia and the West, and the new policy of the Russian administration aiming to separate Russia from Western influences, it is the voice of these circles that will gain importance in Russian public life, not only among Orthodox Christians.

Given the above considerations, one can, in conclusion, raise a question whether Russian disputes regarding scientific and technological progress and its relation to religious tradition bear any significance for a broader reflection over the relations between religion and science. The Russian dispute shows that religion, even in Europe, can still be considered an important part of identity. As such, it not only pervades the religious life of believers, but also reflects on all aspects of social life. What seems to be a phenomenon that Western countries have dealt with, namely the confrontation between science and religion and their influence on social life, is still an open issue in other societies. The Russian example shows that an attempt to build a national identity under conditions of cultural isolation, and particularly the aim to demonstrate one's own social, religious, and political tradition as unique and better than others, strengthens the isolationist function of religion. Religion, in such an approach, remains a useful tool to isolate significant groups from foreign influences and to build one's identity in opposition to others.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank the National Science Centre, Poland (grant number 2016/21/B/HS1/00815) for funding this study.

References

Aver'yanov, Vitaliy, Aleksandr Anisimov, Il'ya Brazhnikov, Yaroslav Butakov, Petr Kalitin, Andrey Kobyakov, Vladimir Kucherenko, Yegor Kholmogorov, and Konstantin Cheremnykh. 2016. *Russkaya doktrina: Gosudarstvennaya ideologiya epokhi Putina*. Moskva, Russia: Institut russkoy tsivilizatsii.

Belenchuk, Larisa. 2015. *Prosveshcheniye Rossii: Vzglyad zapadnikov i slavyanofilov*. Moskva, Russia: Izdatel'stvo PSTGU.
Chaplin, Vsevolod. 2010. "Raz"yasneniye predsedatelya Sinodalnogo otdela po vzaimootnoscheniyam Tserkvi i obshchestva otnositel'no pozitsii Tserkvi po voprosu ispolzovaniya novykh dokumentov i tekhnologiy identifikatsii grazhdan." Available at http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/1212769.html
Cherepanova, Rozaliya. 2010. "Discourse on a Russian 'Sonderweg': European Models in Russian Disguise." *Studies in East European Thought* 62:315–29.
Davydenkov, Oleg. 2015. *Dogmaticheskoe bogosloviye*. Moskva, Russia: Pravoslavnyy Svyato-Tikhonovskiy gumanitarnyy universitet.
Dinello, Natalia. 1998. "Russian Religious Rejections of Money and Homo Economicus: The Self-Identifications of the 'Pioneers of a Money Economy' in Post-Soviet Russia." *Sociology of Religion* 59:45–64.
Dobrosotskikh, Alla. 2001. "Razduvaniye isteriki vokrug INN – put' k raskolu." Available at http://www.pravoslavie.ru/sobytia/sbk-inn/dobrosotskih.htm
Dugin, Aleksandr. 2009. "After Tskhinvali: Interests and Values." *Russian Politics and Law* 47:61–70. https://doi.org/10.2753/RUP1061-1940470305
———. 2014a. *Etnosotsiologiya*. Moskva, Russia: Akademicheskiy proyekt.
———. 2014b. *Geopolitika Rossii*. Moskva, Russia: Akademicheskiy proyekt.
———. 2014c. *Noomakhiya: voyny uma. Tsivilizatsii granits*. Moskva, Russia: Akademicheskiy proyekt.
———. 2015a. *Russkaya voyna*. Moskva, Russia: Algoritm.
———. 2015b. *Russkiy logos – russkiy khaos. Sotsiologiya russkogo obshchestva*. Moskva, Russia: Akademicheskiy proyekt.
———. 2015c. *Teoriya mnogopolyarnogo mira. Plyuriversum*. Moskva, Russia: Akademicheskiy proyekt.
———. 2015d. *Ukraina—moya voyna: Geopoliticheskiy dnevnik*. Moskva, Russia: Tsentropoligraf.
———. 2015e. *Voobrazheniye: Filosofiya, sotsiologiya, struktury*. Moskva, Russia: Akademicheskiy proyekt.
———. 2015f. *Voyna kontinentov: Sovremennyy mir v geopoliticheskoy sisteme koordinat*. Moskva, Russia: Akademicheskiy proyekt.
Engelstein, Laura. 2001. "Holy Russia in Modern Times: An Essay on Orthodoxy and Cultural Change." *Past and Present* 173:129–56.
Eremin, Aleksandr, and Sergei Osmachko. 2017. "The Education Activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Contemporary Transcultural Space of Russia." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 237:1475–81.
Evans, Geoffrey, and Ksenia Northmore-Ball. 2012. "The Limits of Secularization? The Resurgence of Orthodoxy in Post-Soviet Russia." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51:795–808.
Fagan, Geraldine. 2013. *Believing in Russia: Religious Policy after Communism*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
Gayda, Fedor. 2011. "Progress: rozhdeniye novoy religii." Available at http://www.pravoslavie.ru/49628.html
Hunter, Shireen T. 2017. *God on Our Side. Religion in International Affairs*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
Izborsk. 2018. "O klube." Available at https://izborsk-club.ru/about
Kara-Murza, Sergey. 2013. *Rossiya i Zapad. Paradigmy tsivilizatsiy*. Moskva, Russia: Akademicheskiy proyekt.
Katasonov, Vladimir. 2015. "Nauka i religiya (vozmozhnosti novoy metodologii issledovaniya)." *Gosudarstvo, Religiya, Tserkov' v Rossii i za Rubezhom* 33:30–50.
Katz, Mark N. 2014. "Can Russian-US Relations Improve?" *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 8:129–41.
Knox, Zoe. 2005. *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
Knox, Zoe, and Anastasia Mitrofanova. 2017. "The Russian Orthodox Church." In *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Lucian N. Leustean, 53–56. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Krest'yankin, Ioann. 2018. "Yavlyayutsya li INN i novyye dokumenty pechat'yu antikhrista?" Available at http://www.ioann.ru/parts/cerkov/yavlyayutsya-li-inn-i-novye-dokumenty-pechatyu-antixrista

Matsaberidze, David. 2015. "Russia vs. EU/US through Georgia and Ukraine." *Connections* 14:77–86.

Medportal. 2018. "Zapret na vvoz etikh preparatov lichit nachikh patsientov shansov na zhizn'." Available at https://medportal.ru/mednovosti/news/2018/05/04/413sanctions/

Mitrofanova, Anastasia. 2016. "Russian Ethnic Nationalism and Religion Today." In *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, edited by Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, 104–31. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Mospat. 2018. "Round Table on Theology in Modern World: Russian and Foreign Experience Held as Part of Christmas Readings at Ss. Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies." Available at https://mospat.ru/en/2018/01/29/news156108/

Mumrikov, Oleg. 2011. "Bibleyskiy vzglyad na nauchno-tekhnicheskiy progress: Noyev kovcheg ili Vavilonskaya bachnya?" Available at http://www.pravmir.ru/biblejskij-vzglyad-na-nauchno-texnicheskij-progress-noev-kovcheg-ili-vavilonskaya-bashnya/

Nevzorov, Aleksandr. 2015. *Otstavka Gospoda Boga. Zachem Rossii pravoslaviye*? Moskva, Russia: Eksmo.

NTV. 2018. "RPTs vystupila protiv zapreta na vvoz zapadnykh lekarstv." Available at http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/2014208/

Orthoview. 2014. "Pravoslavnyy vzglyad na transplantatsiyu organov." Available at http://orthoview.ru/pravoslavnyj-vzglyad-na-transplantaciyu-organov/

Osipov, Aleksey. 2015. "Khristos i progress." Available at http://www.pravmir.ru/hristos-i-progress-lektsiya-professora-alekseya-osipova/

Papanikolaou, Aristotle. 2003. "Byzantium, Orthodoxy, and Democracy." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71:75–98.

———. 2014. *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Papkova, Irina. 2011. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center.

Patriarchia. 2008. "Opredeleniye Yubileynogo Arkhiyereyskogo Sobora Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi o voprosakh vnutrenney zhizni i vneshney deyatelnosti Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi." Available at http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/419789.html

———. 2011. "Opredeleniye Osvyashchennogo Arkhiyereyskogo Sobora Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi o voprosakh vnutrenney zhizni i vneshney deyatelnosti Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi." Available at http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/1402551.html

———. 2013. "Pozitsiya Tserkvi v svyazi s razvitiyem tekhnologiy ucheta i obrabotki personal'nykh dannykh." Available at http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2775107.html

———. 2016. "Slovo Svyateyshego Patriarkha Kirilla na vstreche s uchenymi v Sarove." Available at http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4579909.html

Pravoslavie. 2016. "Patriarkh Kirill: vpervyye v istorii zakony na Zapade poshli protiv nravstvennoy prirody cheloveka." Available at http://www.pravoslavie.ru/98785.html

RIA Novosti. 2018. "Patriarkh Kirill otmetil opasnost' otkaza ot nalichnosti." Available at https://ria.ru/economy/20180107/1512218695.html

Ruskline. 2018. "Redaktsiya RNL." Available at http://ruskline.ru/about/redakciya_rnl/

Rutland, Peter. 2016. "The Place of Economics in Russian National Identity Debates." In *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, edited by Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, 336–61. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Secrieru, Stanislav. 2014. "Russian Conservative Reawakening." *Strategic File* 18:1–10. Available at https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=18046

Shekhovtsov, Anton. 2008. "The Palingenetic Thrust of Russian Neo-Eurasianism: Ideas of Rebirth in Aleksandr Dugin's Worldview." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9:491–506. https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760802436142

Shlapentokh, Dmitry. 2007. "Dugin Eurasianism: A Window on the Minds of the Russian Elite or an Intellectual Ploy?" *Studies in East European Thought* 59:215–36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-007-9030-y

Siluyanova, Irina V. 2007. *Antropologiya bolezni*. Moskva, Russia: Izdatel'stvo Sretenskogo monastyrya.
Stöckl, Kristina. 2006. "Modernity and Its Critique in 20th Century Russian Orthodox Thought." *Studies in East European Thought* 58:243–69.
Strickland, John. 2013. *The Making of Holy Russia: The Orthodox Church and Russian Nationalism before the Revolution*. Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity.
Tsargrad. 2017. "Putin: Sokhranyaya dukhovnost' i vpityvaya novoye, Rossiya ostanetsya soboy." Available at https://tsargrad.tv/news/putin-sohranjaja-duhovnost-i-vpityvaja-novoe-rossija-ostanetsja-soboj_98481
Turner, Bryan S. 2011. "Religion in Liberal and Authoritarian States." In *Religion and State: A Comparative Sociology*, edited by Jack Barbalet, Adam Possamai, and Bryan S. Turner, 25–41. London, UK: Anthem Press.
Weber, Max. [1905]2001. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by T. Parsons. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
White, Stephen, and Ian McAllister. 2000. "Orthodoxy and Political Behavior in Postcommunist Russia." *Review of Religious Research* 41:359–72.
Wortman, Richard S. 2013. *Russian Monarchy: Representation and Rule*. Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press.
Zherdev, Pankratiy. 2001. "Problema INN i golos khristianskoy sovesti." Available at http://www.pravoslavie.ru/sobytia/sbk-inn/pankratij.htm
Zinkovskiy, Mefodiy. 2014. *Bogosloviye lichnosti v XIX–XX vv*. Sankt-Peterburg, Russia: Izdatel'stvo Olega Abychko.
Zizioulas, John D. 2004. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd.