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## The Role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the State's Promotion of the “Traditional” Family as Part of Family Policy

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### Abstract

*Since the 2010s, the Russian government has promoted a family model in its family policy – a heterosexual married couple with three children – explicitly defined as “traditional”. This definition is close to the representation of the family by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which, since the 2000s, has positioned itself as an actor in family policy, in particular through the establishment of “The Committee of Patriarchs on the Family, Child Welfare and Motherhood” serving as an intermediary with the State. I show that the ROC and the State offer comparable family models and that they work closely together in the implementation of family policy. I show how the Russian government and the ROC support religiously motivated actions, including promotional events such as the creation of new holidays and restrictive measures such as limiting the right to abortion. I conclude that the demographic crisis led Russian family policy in the 2000s to combine a natalist dimension with a traditionalist dimension that values a family model based on ROC values. This work is based on official documentation and the results of a field work conducted between 2015 and 2018 in the Ulyanovsk Oblast. I conducted interviews with two categories of the population: officials of different governmental structures directly related to family policy and ROC priests. The choice of this region was motivated by the involvement of local authorities and ROC representatives in the realisation of the objectives of the federal family policy.*

**Keywords:** family policy, pro-natalist policy, Russian Orthodox Church, family, “traditional family values”, Russia

## Introduction

Family policy is generally based on a response to two coexisting problems: the demographic problem and the social problem [Damon 2006]. The demographic problem aims to increase the population by introducing incentives to influence couples' reproductive behaviour [Chernova 2012; Rivkin-Fish 2010], while the social problem aims to correct social inequalities between families [Elizarov 2011]. Each family policy is placed in a space whose extremes are defined by these two issues. In this spirit, I accept in this article that the notion of family policy refers to a set of measures whose objective is to modify the quantitative and/or qualitative parameters of the family.

Since the 2000s, family policy in Russia has adopted a natalist dimension with the aim of solving the demographic crisis [Russkikh 2018, p. 181], encouraging families to follow a reproductive norm defined by the Russian government (two, then three children per family). Alongside the implementation of birth stimulation measures (e.g., the maternity capital programme), the government promotes a model of the family that it calls "traditional". The government defines as "traditional" those families distinguished by heterosexual marriage and the number of children. This definition, explicitly formulated in official documentation, is part of a policy of valorization. This valorization includes the decoration of exemplary families (the "Maternal Glory" order since 2008), the organisation of competitions (e.g., "Family of the Year" since 2016) and the introduction of new celebrations (e.g., "The Day of Love and Fidelity" since 2011).

Nowadays, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)<sup>1</sup> plays an increasingly important role in political life [Rousselet 2000; Rousselet 2009; Rousselet 2018; Semenoff-Tian-Chansky 2001]. The study of the place of ROC in family policy is the subject of analyses by Denisov & Sakevich [Denisov, Sakevich 2012; Denisov, Sakevich 2014], Sakevich, Denisov & Rivkin-Fish [Sakevich et al. 2016], Pecherskaya [Pecherskaya 2013], Kourilsky-Augeven [Kourilsky-Augeven 2018] and Shirokov [Shirokov 2016]. According to Denisov & Sakevich in countries such as Belarus, Russia and Ukraine "the Church is actively fighting against the right to reproductive choice; but The Russian Orthodox Church appears to us to be the one exerting the most pressure on decisions of the Russian state authorities" [Denisov, Sakevich 2012, p. 13]. The ROC actively seeks cooperation with the state in the area of demography, as well as in supporting the pro-natalist orientation of the state family policy and various activities aimed at preserving the family. Consequently, it can be assumed that the ROC has an indirect influence in the state's promotion of the "traditional" family as part of family policy.

In this paper, I show that the definition of the "traditional" family is close to the vision defended by the ROC, which seeks collaboration with the State in the field of health and family. This collaboration and the closeness of the family models targeted by the two institutions suggest the influence of the ROC on the definition of the family norm proposed by the State. Although the State does not explicitly mention religion in the implementation of its policy, I show that the State supports religiously motivated initiatives aimed at valuing the "traditional" family. Therefore, the ROC's discourse on the family and the State's actions in its family policy converge.

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<sup>1</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church is a centralised religious organisation registered as a legal entity in the Russian Federation [The Charter of the Russian Orthodox Church 2017, ch. 1, section 5].

This article is based on three sources of data: 1) official documentation of the State and of the ROC; 2) speeches of the Patriarchs and 3) extracts from interviews with government representatives of family policy and the ROC.

Official state documentation presents the modalities of family policy in Russia. These are federal conceptions, laws and decrees, the analysis of which shows the claimed objectives of this policy. Particular attention is paid to "the Conception of State Family Policy". The latter represents a fundamental document on the orientation of family policy in Russia and serves as a basis for the regions to choose their family policies. Through this Conception, the government seeks to explicitly define its vision of the family and family norms. The official documentation of the ROC makes it possible to identify its position on the government's family policy. The speeches of Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow are used to analyse the political and ideological motivations of the ROC.

Finally, this work is also the result of field work conducted as part of my PhD between 2015 and 2018 in the Ulyanovsk Oblast. The choice of this region was motivated by the involvement of local authorities and ROC representatives in the realisation of the objectives of federal family policy. For example, the regional authorities of the Ulyanovsk Oblast, in collaboration with the ROC, began to encourage the birth rate as early as 2005 by means of official speeches and widely publicised festive events, two years before the State's turn to a pro-natalist policy. I conducted interviews with two categories of the population: officials of different structures directly related to family policy and ROC priests.

## **Definition of the "traditional" family by the State and the Church**

In what follows, I describe the "traditional" model of the family based on its official definition adopted by the Russian government in a 2014 decree. I show that the draft of this definition proposed in 2013 has a religious character that later disappears from the final definition adopted. Although the reference to religion was removed, the ROC and the State propose comparable family models and collaborate closely in the implementation of family policy.

### *The State definition definition of the "traditional" family in 2013*

In 2012, the government established "the National Strategy of Action in the Interest of Children for 2012–2017" [Order no 761 2012] and by decree requests the Ministries of Labour, Education, Health, and Interior to develop an official document for 2014 presenting the main directions of family policy in Russia [Order no 1916-r 2012]. In 2013, a draft was prepared by "the State Duma committee on family, women's and children's issues". This document, entitled "the Public Project for a Conception of State Family Policy" (the Project), was intended by its authors to become the basis for "the Conception of State Family Policy".

The importance of this "Conception" and of the documents used in its preparation lies in the fact that it contains an explicit definition of the notion of "traditional" family.

The main objective announced in the document is to strengthen the family institution and to promote the development of family values described as “traditional” such as marriage, fertility, and intergenerational cohabitation:

*Traditional family values within this Conception include the values of marriage, understood solely as a union between a man and a woman based on registration with the civil state authorities or performed in accordance with the religious traditions that are an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of the Russian Federation, entered into by the spouses with a view to the continuation of their filiation, birth and education of three or more children [...]. In traditional Russian culture, the main type of family was a large multigenerational family, in which several generations of parents lived together, one of whom was the head of the family.<sup>2</sup>*

According to Pecherskaya, the Project proposes a return to “strict state control and patronage over the family” [Pecherskaya 2013, p. 103]. Zdravomyslova shows that the Project is “an attempt to create an elaborate vision of traditional family values by presenting them as the legitimate basis of Russian family and state life” [Zdravomyslova 2015, p. 155]. Thus, it is possible to give a definition of the “traditional” family as a normative model excluding other types of unions described as “incomplete” (e.g., single parent, homosexual) [Kourilsky-Augeven 2018; Pecherskaya 2013, p. 100].<sup>3</sup>

**Definition of the “traditional” family:** The “traditional” family is a large family<sup>4</sup> based on heterosexual marriage (civil or religious) and intergenerational cohabitation.

The choice of this model was supported by historical and sociological postulates. “The State Duma committee on family, women’s and children’s issues” justifies the reproductive norm of three children by arguing that large families are a historical reality that is still part of the ideal representation of the family for one third of the Russian population today:

*For almost a millennium, the traditional family in Russia was a large family based on the marriage of father and mother [...]. According to a sociological survey conducted by the Levada Centre from 23 to 26 July 2010, more than a third of Russians consider a family with three or more children to be an ideal family, which they would like to have if they had all the conditions necessary to achieve it.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> [The Public Project 2013, ch. 1, section 4; ch. 2, section 6].

<sup>3</sup> In the same year, the federal law “On the prohibition of propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations to minors” was passed [Federal Law no 135-FZ 2013].

<sup>4</sup> According to Russian legislation, the status of a large family is granted by the regional authorities. In the majority of regions, it includes a minimum of three children under the age of 18 [Kim 2010, p. 334].

<sup>5</sup> [The Public Project 2013, ch. 1, section 4; ch. 2, section 6].

Perhaps because it falls within the realm of the known, the reproduction of a supposedly historical model was for the authors a way to return to a controlled situation after a period of crisis:

*The constant and close cooperation of three generations in the family is not an anachronism, but a necessary condition for solving the spiritual crisis of the family and society.<sup>6</sup>*

The authors justify the generalisation of marriage by implicitly assuming that it is a causal factor in the number of children. Under these conditions, religious marriage fulfils the same functions as civil marriage:

*Marriage influences a woman's decision to have a second or subsequent child. The total fertility rate of married women is higher than that of their unmarried counterparts, notably by 10% in the 25–29 age group, by 18% in the 30–34 age group, by 17% in the 35–39 age group and by 20% in the 40+ age group.<sup>7</sup>*

The Project proposes that religious marriage may be contracted before civil marriage:

*Strengthening the institution of marriage, reducing the number of divorces, especially divorces of spouses with minor children, and the birth of children out of marriage requires improving the provisions of family law relating to marriage, including the allocation of a religious marriage certificate as a basis for registering the marriage with the civil registry and issuing the civil status marriage certificate.<sup>8</sup>*

Thus, it gives religious marriage a legal value such that it can be validated by the civil state upon presentation of a certificate issued by the ROC. This recognition of religious marriage is linked to the way the authors define religion, and in particular Orthodox Christianity, as the foundation of the Russian family:

*The family serves as a link between generations [...]. Russian Orthodoxy reinforces the spiritual content of the lineage and the family. The family is not only a social community of spouses, parents and children, but also a spiritual community, a small church.<sup>9</sup>*

Released online in 2013, the Project was criticised by many journalists and researchers including, Pecherskaya [Pecherskaya 2013], Gurko [Gurko 2013], Kourilsky-Augeven

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<sup>6</sup> [The Public Project 2013, ch. 1, section 4; ch. 2, section 6].

<sup>7</sup> [The Public Project 2013, ch. 1, section 4; ch. 2, section 6].

<sup>8</sup> [The Public Project 2013, ch. 1, section 4; ch. 2, section 6].

<sup>9</sup> [The Public Project 2013, ch. 1, section 4; ch. 2, section 6].

[*Kourilsky-Augeven* 2015; *Kourilsky-Augeven* 2018]. Pecherskaya argues that the priority given to “traditional” families respecting Orthodox values violates Article 2 of the Russian Constitution regarding the right to live in accordance with one’s own beliefs as well as the principle of secularism enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution [*Pecherskaya* 2013, p. 99]. This principle of secularism, the effective application of which is subject to debate [*Rousselet* 2009, p. 51], stipulates that “no religion may be established as a state religion or as a compulsory religion”. The “prohibition of hurting the feelings of religious people” [Federal Law no 136-FZ 2013] or the “prohibition of propagating non-traditional relationships to minors” [Federal Law no 135-FZ 2013] do not contravene this definition of secularism insofar as they do not empower any particular religion or impose any religious conviction. On the contrary, the Project does violate this principle by explicitly involving religious representatives in state power and by stating that Orthodoxy is the basis of the Russian family.

The Ministry of Labour, in charge of drafting the text, takes into account these criticisms and removes all references to religion in “the Conception of State Family Policy” approved by the Russian government in 2014.

### *The State definition of the “traditional family” in 2014*

Unlike the Project, “the Conception of State Family Policy” (the Conception) approved in 2014 removes any reference to religion [*Kourilsky-Augeven* 2018; *Muravyeva* 2014, p. 631] and recognises all family patterns by renouncing the notion of an “incomplete family”:

*The measures provided for in the Conception are defined in relation to the socially significant functions of the family such as the birth, upbringing, and socialisation of children, as well as the participation of families in the economic activities of the State, the preservation of the physical, psychological and emotional health of its members, as well as the spiritual development of family members and society as a whole, and the preservation of traditional family values. These measures apply to all families, regardless of their composition, socio-economic status and social status.*<sup>10</sup>

Although this new text seems to disregard any religious dimension, the government continues to promote so-called “traditional” values such as heterosexual marriage and procreation (in contrast to the preparatory text presented in 2013, only marriage in civil status is recognised):

*The priorities of the State’s family policy at present are the establishment of traditional family values and a traditional family way of life [...]. The traditional family values proclaimed by the Conception include the values of marriage, understood as the union of a man and a woman, based on civil registration and entered into for the purpose of creating a family [...].*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [The Conception of the State Family Policy 2014, ch. 2].

<sup>11</sup> [The Conception of the State Family Policy 2014, ch. 2].

Although the reproductive norm and intergenerational cohabitation are no longer explicitly defined as "traditional" values in the Conception, it does aim to promote large and extended families:

*The main objectives of the State's family policy are: the introduction of measures to increase public awareness of the family way of life, large families and multi-generational families through the creation of television and radio specials, talk shows, newspaper and magazine columns and other information projects that promote traditional family values and contribute to a positive attitude towards marriage, parenthood and a dignified attitude towards the older generation and the home.<sup>12</sup>*

Thus, the Conception redefines the "traditional" family:

**Definition of the "traditional" family (2014):** The "traditional" family is a large family based on heterosexual marriage (necessarily civil) and intergenerational links.

Unlike the 2013 draft, religious marriage and intergenerational cohabitation are no longer explicitly included in this definition, but the family based on "traditional" values (marriage, reproductive norms around three children and intergenerational ties) is still widely valued.

I now argue that a religious dimension can be seen in the definition of the "traditional" family model defined by the State, although the reference to religion was removed from the Conception. To this end, I show that the ROC and the State propose comparable family models, and that they work closely together in the implementation of family policy.

### *The ROC's definition of the "traditional" family*

In its official documentation and through its actions, the ROC promotes a family model comparable to that of the 2013 and 2014 Conceptions. For example, in its document entitled "Protection and strengthening of the family and traditional family values: duties of the Church, the State and society"<sup>13</sup>, we observe a definition of the "traditional" family based on the same characteristics as the definition carried by the State: the heterosexual couple, marriage and children:

*Traditional family values and elements of family life, such as marriage contracted exclusively between a man and a woman, marital fidelity and mutual respect between spouses, the emphasis in family life on childbirth and upbringing, respect for the*

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<sup>12</sup> [The Conception of the State Family Policy 2014, ch. 2].

<sup>13</sup> This document is prepared by the "Committee of Patriarchs on the Family, Child Welfare and Motherhood" in accordance with the instructions of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.



*authority and power of parents in the family, recognition of their fundamental rights in the upbringing of children, and the protection of family life from arbitrary outside interference, are all fundamental norms for God's investment in human nature itself.*<sup>14</sup>

The definition of the “traditional” family defended by the ROC precedes the definition proposed by the State, since it can be found in the Church’s canonical texts based on Roman law or the Bible:

*The Roman lawyer Modestin (3rd century) gives the following definition of marriage: “Marriage is the union of man and woman, the community of all life, the participation in divine and human rights.” This definition is included in the canonical collections of the Orthodox Church in an almost unchanged form.*<sup>15</sup>

*Being equally bearers of God's image and human dignity, man and woman are created for complete unity with each other in love: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and be united with his wife; and there shall be two fleshs” (Genesis 2:24). Embodying the Lord's original will to create, the marriage blessed by Him becomes a means of continuation and multiplication of the human race: “And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and possess it”” (Genesis 1.28).*<sup>16</sup>

Both excerpts are quoted in “The Foundations of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church”, which reflects the ROC’s position on various issues such as the relationship to the state and public policy. It provides the theoretical basis for the ROC’s intended family policy in Russia [Chirokov 2016, p. 122]. This document was elaborated in 2000 by a working group of twenty-six members (bishops, clerics, professors of theology, collaborators of the Synod offices among others) appointed by the Holy Synod in 1995 [Calvez 2001, p. 512]. This precedence of the ROC’s definition of the “traditional” family implies a possible influence of the ROC on the State’s definition of the “traditional” family.

## **Participation of the ROC in the state’s promotion of the “traditional” family and State support for religious actions**

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the ROC has played an increasingly important role in political life [Roussele, 2018; Semenoff-Tian-Chansky 2001]. While the ROC seeks to influence political decisions concerning the family, the State’s discourse is influencing the ROC’s discourse. The latter includes the demographic problem in its list of priorities. The state itself is moving closer to the ROC by supporting religiously motivated initiatives aimed at valuing the “traditional” family.

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<sup>14</sup> [Protection and Strengthening of the Family 2016, p. 12].

<sup>15</sup> [The Foundations of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church 2008, §X.2].

<sup>16</sup> [The Foundations of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church 2008, §X.1].



### *The commitment to tackle the demographic crisis*

In 2004, the ROC organised a public and ecclesial forum on "the spiritual and moral foundations of Russia's demographic development", which brought together representatives of the ROC, the Federation Council and the State Duma, representatives of civil society and researchers. The forum was organised to discuss the country's demographic problems:

*For more than a decade, the population of Russia has been steadily decreasing, which is a serious concern and worry for all those who care about the future of our homeland. Without exaggeration, it is possible to say that the demographic situation in Russia is already becoming a national problem.*<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the ROC is openly engaged in the fight against the country's demographic crisis and is now seeking to become an actor in family policy. In 2011, the Synod created the "Committee of Patriarchs on the Family, Child Welfare and Motherhood" [Firsov 2013, p. 356]. The latter consists of 15 church representatives and has since served as an official intermediary with the state:

*The main aims and objectives of the Committee are to ensure interaction between the religious organisations of the Russian Orthodox Church and government authorities, public associations, organisations and the media on the issues of family, motherhood and childhood.*<sup>18</sup>

The Patriarchs' Committee develops proposals for the government regarding family legislation and published its official position on family-related bills in 2015.

Following a roundtable discussion on "traditional family values in higher education" in November 2015, the ROC has organised work to promote the "traditional" family among young people [Protection and Strengthening 2016, p. 89]. Since then, it has become increasingly common to see priests speaking at schools and universities about "traditional" values [Russskikh 2020, p. 188].

The ROC representatives were also involved in drafting the Project<sup>19</sup>. Although they were not present when the Conception<sup>20</sup> was drafted, the ROC continues act within the framework of the State's family policy.

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<sup>17</sup> Speech by Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow at the Public and Church Forum (Spiritual and Moral Foundations of Russia's Demographic Development", 18–19 October 2004 (2004). *Demoscope Weekly*, no 175–176. Available at: <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2004/0175/nauka01.php>, accessed 10.08.2021 (in Russian)).

<sup>18</sup> [Decree of the Committee of Patriarchs on the Family 2014, §1.1].

<sup>19</sup> The list of its representatives is cited in the book "Family Policy of Russia: A Collection of Materials" (2014), Moscow: State Duma Committee on Family Affairs, p. 62 (in Russian).

<sup>20</sup> The list of its representatives is defined by the Ministry of Labour of the Russian Federation: Decree no 379, Annex no 2, 2013. Available at: <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/499043422>, accessed 08.04.2021 (in Russian).

The fight against abortion is also justified by demographic arguments. Patriarch Cyril of Moscow stated in 2019 that the ban on abortion helps to increase the country's population:

*It's great that we have maternity capital, it's great that the state is taking measures, but it's only crumbs. If we want to increase the real population of Russia, we must first of all eliminate the subject of abortion on the scale on which it exists. And if every year we have a million children who are not born, in 10 years we will have 156 million children, and in 20 years – 166 million, and we will not offer any financial incentives for such population growth.<sup>21</sup>*

The fight against abortion, like other actions taken by the ROC in the name of family policy, are not explicitly advocated by the Conception.<sup>22</sup> However, I show that the State supports some of these initiatives, thus illustrating the religious dimension of the “traditional” values it wishes to promote.

### *Valorisation of heterosexual marriage*

The first element of the definition of the “traditional” family common to the ROC and the State is heterosexual marriage. Some civil initiatives contribute to the enhancement of such marriage. For example, the “Fund for Social and Cultural Initiatives”, created in 2008 and chaired by Svetlana Medvedeva (wife of former Prime Minister, Dmitri Medvedev), aims to improve the country's demographic situation by implementing communication campaigns in favour of “traditional” values. Since its creation, this Fund has popularized, at the federal level, “the Day of the Family, Love and Fidelity”, celebrated in the 1990s by the inhabitants of Murom and made official by the Mayor of Murom, Valentina Kačevan, in the 2000s.

The main event of “the Day of the Family, Love and Fidelity” is the awarding of the “Love and Fidelity” medal, created in 2011 by an internal regulation of the “Fund for Social and Cultural Initiatives”. To receive this medal, candidate families must meet the following criteria: 1) the couple must have been married for at least 25 years; 2) the family must be known by its fellow citizens “for its family values based on mutual love and fidelity”; 3) the spouses must raise their children “as worthy members of society” [The Regulations for the “Love and Loyalty” Medal].

In its manifesto called “the Conception of the Feast of Love and Fidelity”, the “Fund for Social and Cultural Initiatives” affirms the secular character of this celebration:

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<sup>21</sup> Speech by Patriarch Cyril of Moscow at the presentation of the “Ambassador for the Protection of Life before Birth” award by the Women for Life Foundation in 2019 (Tereshchenko M. (2019). Patriarch Cyril Considers Abortion Ban Necessary to increase Russia's Population. TASS, May 19, 2019. Available at: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6447167>, accessed 08.04.2021 (in Russian)).

<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, they appear in the 2013 “Public Project for a Conception of State Family Policy”. For example, anti-abortion is mentioned in Chapter no 2, section no 6. Available at: <https://zharov.info/guestbook/koncepciya-semejnoj-politiki-imeni-mizulinoj>, accessed 10.08.2021 (in Russian).

*"The Day of Love and Fidelity" is a public holiday (to be formalised). The aims and objectives of this holiday, like the aims and objectives of family policy, should be supported at the state and municipal level, with the support of the general public [...]. "The Day of Love and Fidelity" is celebrated by the whole of Russian society, regardless of nationality or religion.*<sup>23</sup>

However, this feast is scheduled to coincide with the day of "St. Peter and St. Fevronia", an Orthodox Christian feast based on the legend of two saints who lived in Murom and distinguished themselves by their fidelity in marriage. The same document also underlines the religious dimension of this festival and calls for the participation of the ROC:

*The celebration [of "the Day of Love and Fidelity"] may also be of a religious nature, according to the free choice of citizens of Orthodox or other faiths. At the same time, 8 July is the day on which the Russian Orthodox Church honours the memory of St Peter and St Fevronia. In this regard, it is desirable that the Church participate in these festive events, which take place in many cities and neighbourhoods, and which could begin with worship, the reading of acathists and other religious services with a focus on Peter and Fevronia as patrons of the family and marriage.*<sup>24</sup>

The civil organisation "Family Circle", created in 2004 with the blessing of Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and bringing together representatives of the State, the ROC and members of civil society (mainly business leaders),<sup>25</sup> regularly installs monuments representing St. Peter and St. Fevronia in Russian cities (in more than 60 cities to date) [Potapova 2016]. The aim of this action is to encourage newlyweds to go to a statue of St. Peter and St. Fevronie to receive their blessing.

The ROC officially supports "the Day of Family, Love and Fidelity". On this day, Patriarch Cyril of Moscow visits Murom and blesses couples preparing to get married. The government is also involved in its organisation at the regional and federal levels. Regional governors make an opening speech [Makashova 2013, p. 252], and then-Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev visited the celebrations in Murom. This public celebration aims to propagate the image of the ideal family based on heterosexual marriage, fidelity and the presence of several children [Dukhanova 2018, p. 2010]. According to Khasbulatova the creation of such holidays is "aimed at introducing into the consciousness of the masses the values of love, loyalty, strong and numerous families" [Khasbulatova 2011, p. 10].

Pro-marriage measures are particularly visible at the regional level. In 2017, the President of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, declared, for example, that

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<sup>23</sup> [The Conception of the Feast of Love and Fidelity pp. 3–7].

<sup>24</sup> [The Conception of the Feast of Love and Fidelity, pp. 3–7].

<sup>25</sup> The civil organisation "Family Circle" aims to find ways to get Russia out of the demographic crisis and to promote "traditional" values. The promotion of these "traditional" values involves various actions, including the creation of a media space dedicated to the family (TV, radio, cinema, Internet, other media) (official website of the "Family Circle". Available at: [www.vkrugu7i.ru](http://www.vkrugu7i.ru), accessed 10.08.2021 (in Russian)).

it is necessary to combat divorce for the sake of children's well-being.<sup>26</sup> In the same year, the "Department of Public and Religious Relations" of the Chechen government administration created a family reconciliation commission, consisting mainly of representatives of the "Spiritual Administration of Muslims".<sup>27</sup> Kadyrov stated that, as a result of its work, 1,500 families were reconciled between 2017 and 2018.<sup>28</sup>

Although Chechnya is a marginal case in many respects, many regions of Russia have similar policies. For example, divorce prevention in the Ulyanovsk Oblast takes the form of an awareness-raising campaign in schools with the support of religious representatives, as described by Responsible for "the Civil Registration Department of the Ulyanovsk oblast":

*We are trying to cover the whole educational sphere. We have already covered a lot of universities and schools. In addition to our staff, we invite representatives from the prosecutor's office, bailiffs, church representatives to talk about situations in which young adults may find themselves, for example, during divorce or if the marriage is not registered.*<sup>29</sup>

Free sessions are organised with students from technical schools, universities and colleges, with the main objective of preventing divorce in the first years of marriage. These sessions take the form of group discussions between psychologists, ROC representatives and students.

"The Civil Registration Department of the Ulyanovsk oblast" also implements a policy of reconciliation for divorcing couples. To this end, follow-up is initiated when an application for divorce is made. The couple is then strongly encouraged to consult either a psychologist or a priest. Sessions with a psychologist are free of charge and are organised in collaboration with the family centres in the region:

*If a couple comes to the registry office to divorce, they get a letter of recommendation. So, if they want to start a divorce procedure, they need a psychologist, that's the procedure. It's only a recommendation, there's no law at the moment that makes it mandatory. Of course, I would be totally in favour of it, but I'm not sure that our legislators would put such a law in place.*<sup>30</sup>

Each couple receives a special invitation to meet a priest at the registry office or at the church. The interview with priest Oleg illustrates how a session usually goes:

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<sup>26</sup> Kadyrov Called on Clergy to Intensify Work to Strengthen Family Values (2017). *Chechen State TV And Radio Company "Grozny"*, June 30, 2017. Available at: <https://grozny.tv/news.php?id=21222>, accessed 10.08.2021 (in Russian).

<sup>27</sup> The "Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Chechen Republic" is the highest centralised religious organisation of the Muslim community in the Chechen Republic (official website of the "Spiritual Administration of Muslims". Available at: <http://dumrf.ru/common/org/2303>, accessed 10.08.2021 (in Russian)).

<sup>28</sup> 1,500 Families Reunited in Chechnya (2018). *Chechnya Today*, June 20, 2018. Available at: <https://www.chechnyatoday.com/news/316401>, accessed 10.08.2021 (in Russian).

<sup>29</sup> The extract from the interview with a Responsible for the "Civil Registration Department of the Ulyanovsk oblast" in Ulyanovsk.

<sup>30</sup> The extract from the interview with a Psychologist of the "Family" centre in Ulyanovsk.

*People come from the centre "Family". I listen to everyone and try to respond to their words in some way. But it is not productive to listen to one party [...]. That's why I always ask if there is a possibility that both spouses will come to me. I tell them "I will sit between you and not let you go from talking to insulting or fighting", for example. Most of the time, people don't get along, and in a sacred place, in the presence of a priest, such a conversation is more constructive.<sup>31</sup>*

The regional authorities are therefore approaching the ROC not only to promote marriage but also to preserve it.

### *Reproductive measures*

The second element of the definition of the "traditional" family shared by the ROC and the State is procreation. According to the Conception, the Russian government has not introduced any explicit rejection of abortion. However, it supports some proposals made in 2011 by Patriarch Cyril of Moscow<sup>32</sup> which also appear in the Project [The Public Project 2013, ch.3, section 6].

While abortion is considered by the World Health Organization as a safe medical procedure if performed in accordance with the necessary standards [Denisov, Sakevich 2014, p. 204], one of the ROC's proposals is to oblige women to sign a consent form listing all the serious complications that can occur during or after an abortion. This proposal is supported by the Ministry of Health's decree [Order no 216-n 2016], which officially establishes a list of these complications (e.g., infertility, mental disorders and miscarriage).

Another ROC proposal is a mandatory waiting period, called a "week of silence", of 48 hours or one week, after any application for an abortion. This proposal, promoting the "traditional" family as defined in the Conception, was approved by the Duma and introduced in 2011 in the new law "On the basic principles of public health protection in Russia" [Federal Law no 323-FZ 2011]. In 2015, an "Agreement on collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Church" was signed by Patriarch Cyril of Moscow and Minister of Health Veronika Skvortsova. Under this agreement, the doctor must recommend that every woman seeking an abortion meet with a psychologist or a priest [Denisov, Sakevich 2014, p. 205]. According to Sakevich, this meeting aims "to influence her decision and keep her pregnant" [Sakevich 2016, p. 464]. Irina Kazakova, Head of the Dmitrovgrad maternity hospital, stated in 2017 that all gynaecologists in the maternity ward redirect women wishing to have an abortion to a priest whose aim is to dissuade them:

*Today, all women who want to have an abortion are sent by gynaecologists to Father Petr [this is the priest Petr Guryanov who is the Chairman of the Committee on Family Issues of the Malekevskaja diocese. He conducts interviews in maternity*

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<sup>31</sup> The extract from the interview with a priest Oleg in Ulyanovsk.

<sup>32</sup> Proposals for Improving the National Policy in the Field of Family and Childhood Care (2011). *The Russian Orthodox Church*, January 16, 2011. Available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1386377.html>, accessed 08.04.2021 (in Russian).

*wards in Dimitrovgrad. According to the statistics of our city, among 20 girls who have been interviewed by the priest Petr, four or five refuse to have an abortion.*<sup>33</sup>

Finally, in the framework of the above-mentioned agreement, the ROC proposes to set up crisis centres in some maternity wards for pregnant women who wish to have an abortion. These crisis centres are psychological support cells where women receive advice from psychologists, social workers and ROC representatives with the aim of preventing recourse to abortion:

*The Parties [the Ministry of Health and the Church] shall facilitate the cooperation of medical organisations with representatives of the Orthodox Church in the field of prevention of termination of pregnancy through the establishment of crisis centres in maternity wards with the participation of psychologists and representatives of the Orthodox Church [...].*<sup>34</sup>

While the government does not support all of the ROC's proposals regarding abortion (e.g., the removal of abortion from the compulsory health insurance system), it implements restrictive measures on its own initiative. In 2007, the list of medical criteria for abortion after 12 weeks of pregnancy was considerably reduced ([Denisov, Sakevich 2014, p. 204] citing Ministry of Health Decree no 736, 2007). Then, between 1996 and 2012, the list of social factors allowing abortion after 12 weeks of pregnancy is reduced from 13 (e.g., lack of housing; death of husband during pregnancy) to one (pregnancy as a result of rape).

In addition, in 2016 the Ministry of Health changed the procedure for providing medical care in the obstetrics and gynaecology by adding the requirement to show the embryo and its heartbeat during an ultrasound of the pelvic organs of a pregnant woman requesting an abortion. All these measures make abortion in Russia less accessible [Denisov, Sakevich 2014, p. 205].

Although the State does not explicitly mention religion and the rejection of abortion in its definition of the "traditional" family, I have shown that the State supports the proposals of the ROC and the Project. Conversely, the ROC supports the State's policy by placing its initiatives in the spirit of the Conception. The family model promoted by state family policy thus has a religious dimension insofar as it is the result of a convergence of the actions of the ROC and the State.

## Conclusion

I have shown that the state seeks to promote a normative model of the family through its family policy. This model, openly described as "traditional", is based on values promoted

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<sup>33</sup> Speech by the Responsible of the Dimitrovgrad maternity hospital, Irina Kazakova, at the official meeting with priest Petr Gourianov (Together against Abortion (2017). *Melekess Orthodox*, August 17, 2017. Available at: <http://meleparhia.ru/news/vmeste-protiv-abortov-0>, accessed 10.08.2021, accessed 08.04.2021 (in Russian)).

<sup>34</sup> [Collaboration Agreement 2015].



by the ROC such as marriage, heterosexual union and procreation. Although the State's discourse on the family does not refer directly to religion, the ROC's involvement in the development of family policy and the State's support for the ROC's proposals on the family underline the closeness of their views on what a family should be. Therefore, family policy can be described as "traditionalist" not only because it defends values explicitly defined as "traditional", but also because these values are those considered by the ROC as part of its canon. The evolution of family policy can be seen as a gradual expansion from a natalist policy that encourages families to beget, to a traditionalist policy that encourages families to follow a model based in part on qualitative criteria promoted by the ROC.

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## Роль Русской православной церкви в продвижении государством традиционной семьи в рамках семейной политики

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### Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются различные сферы взаимодействия Русской православной церкви (РПЦ) и государства в конструировании и реализации семейной политики Российской Федерации. Анализируется деятельность РПЦ и правительства, направленная

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на защиту института семьи, а именно зарегистрированного брака и многодетности. С 2010-х годов государство в рамках семейной политики определяет нормативную модель благополучной семьи, которая представляет собой союз мужчины и женщины, основанный на государственной регистрации в органах записи актов гражданского состояния, с тремя и более детьми. Модель благополучной семьи, основанной на браке и многодетности, близка точке зрения представителей Русской православной церкви о семье. Правительство и РПЦ официально сотрудничают как на федеральном, так и на региональном уровнях, а также поддерживают различные мероприятия, направленные на сохранение семьи и брака: создание новых семейных праздников (День семьи, любви и верности), пропаганду многодетности, акции против абортотворения и т. д.).

Данная статья основана на официальной документации (составляющей теоретическую основу семейной политики), официальной документации РПЦ, выступлениях Патриарха Московского Алексия II и Патриарха Московского Кирилла, а также на результатах полевого исследования, проведенного в период с 2015 по 2018 год в Ульяновской области. Анализ официальной документации (концепции, законы, указы) позволяет определить видение семьи и семейных норм на государственном уровне. Особое внимание уделяется Концепции государственной семейной политики, которая является основополагающим документом и служит основой для разработки в регионах семейной политики. Официальные документы РПЦ и выступления патриархов позволяют определить позицию Церкви в отношении государственной семейной политики. Особое внимание уделяется Основам социальной концепции Русской православной церкви. Данный документ был утвержден Архиерейским собором в 2000 году и является теоретической основой семейной политики РПЦ. Ряд интервью в Ульяновской области был проведен с двумя категориями населения – чиновниками различных структур, непосредственно связанных с семейной политикой, и священниками. Выбор данного региона был обусловлен вовлеченностью местных властей и представителей РПЦ в реализации федеральной семейной политики.

Автор приходит к следующему заключению: (1) российская семейная политика на сегодняшний день сочетает в себе пронаталистскую и традиционную направленность, формирует в обществе нормативную модель семьи, основанную на традиционных семейных ценностях (официальный брак и многодетность), которые РПЦ считает частью своих канонов; (2) несмотря на то, что в официальной документации нет прямых ссылок на религию, участие представителей РПЦ в разработке семейной политики и официальное сотрудничество правительства и Церкви в ее реализации предполагают косвенное влияние РПЦ на государственную семейную политику.

**Ключевые слова:** семейная политика, пронатализм, Русская православная церковь, семья, традиционные семейные ценности, Россия

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