

Special Issue: Just War or Just Peace? The Future of Catholic Thinking on War and Peace

The War in Ukraine: Challenges to Just War Doctrines in Eastern Orthodoxy

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Abstract

The sequence and escalation of Russian–Ukrainian political and military conflicts since 2014, culminating in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, have reopened interest in and debates on just war theory and practice in general and specifically in historic and modern Eastern Orthodox cultures and Orthodox-majority states. These debates have significant repercussions in areas like church–state and church–military relations in these cultures; ecclesial involvement in these conflicts has varied from war-justification rhetoric (in the case of the Russian Orthodox Church) to reiterations of the inherited traditions of ecclesial pacifism/condemnation of all violence (the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, a number of Orthodox Churches, clerical and theological networks, etc.). The Russian ecclesial involvements in the justification of war/military necessity and formulation of just war narratives have triggered divisions and antagonisms in the Eastern Orthodoxy. The development and course of the ecclesial conflicts involving Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox churches and parishes (and other Orthodox ecclesiastic bodies) will show whether Orthodox religious actors may begin to play a more significant role in the articulation and application of newly emerging trends in areas like the theology of just peace, just peace-making and Christian realism, Orthodox social ethics and the dynamic praxis of just peace-making.

Keywords

Just war theory, Eastern Orthodoxy, pacifism, just peace, church-state relations, Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Orthodoxy, ecumenism and inter-church relations

The succession of Russian–Ukrainian political and military collisions since 2014 (Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the subsequent armed conflict in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region and the start of a full-scale war with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022) have renewed discussions of just war theory and practice in general and, specifically, in historic and contemporary Eastern Orthodox cultures. These debates have important implications in related areas such as church–state relations and political theologies in these cultures as well as highlighting the tensions

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between inherited historic patterns of ecclesial pacifism/non-violence and the justification of war/military necessity by earlier or current political and military leaderships.

The roots, evolution and modern transmutations of the attitudes of Eastern Orthodox cultures and ecclesiastical elites to the problems, methods and ethics of warfare demonstrate important similarities and correlations with the respective Western Christian stances but also some significant divergences. These Eastern Orthodox attitudes have not yet been subjected to the close, exhaustive analysis that has been dedicated to their Western Christian counterparts. At the same time, since the 1980s the topics of the Eastern Orthodox churches' and cultures' traditional and current stances on the legitimization and conduct of just, justifiable and 'holy' war (as well as on pacifism and non-resistance to violence) have become the focus of intense disputes among clerics, theologians, Byzantinists, historians of the modern period, political scientists and scholars of current affairs.¹ These debates have been evolving against the background of shifts in Western Christian (especially Catholic) thinking regarding the necessity to redefine the moral framework for war justification and favour non-violence, just peace and peace-building.²

In their formative stages East Roman Christian/Byzantine ideologies display a synthesis and cross-fertilization of diverse notions, normative regulations and rhetoric, drawing extensively on largely secular late Roman just war tradition, with its precepts being recast in the framework of Christian ethics and Christianized Roman imperial political theology. In contrast with Western Christendom, no evidence of a systematic attempt at conceptualizing a just war theory stemming from within the Byzantine church has been brought to light as yet. With very few exceptions the mainstream of Eastern Orthodox Church discourse and practice, particularly from ecclesiastical elites, held out against notions such as Christian military martyrdom for fallen soldiers, despite some occasional pressure from the Byzantine imperial court keen to facilitate the growth of lay military piety among its warrior classes. Outside the clerical sphere the provenance and precepts of the evolving Byzantine imperial just war theory developed by the imperial court and government are discernible in the medieval record, comprising categories of warfare justification such as 'self-defense', 'recovery of lost territory', 'breach of agreement', and so on.³

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1. An entire recent issue of *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (47.1, 2003) was devoted to these disputes.
 2. Robert W. McElroy, 'Our New Moment: Renewing Catholic Teaching on War and Peace', *The Journal of Social Encounters* 7.1 (2023), pp. 266–71.
 3. Angeliki E. Laiou, 'On Just War in Byzantium', in J. Langdon et al. (eds.), *To Hellenikon*, vol. 1: *Hellenic Antiquity and Byzantium. Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis Jr.* (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1993), pp. 153–77; George T. Dennis, 'Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium', in Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottaheden (eds.), *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), pp. 31–41; Yannis Stouraitis, "'Just War" and "Holy War" in the Middle Ages: Rethinking Theory through the Byzantine Case-Study', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 62 (2012), pp. 227–64; Yuri Stoyanov, 'Eastern Orthodoxy and the Ethics of War', in Greg M. Reichberg and Henryk Syse (eds.), *Religion, War and Ethics: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 164–235, at 166–68.

This composite Byzantine synthesis of the pre-Christian legacy of concepts as well as norms of war and Christian ethics and piety, accompanied by some innovations in the discourse and conduct of warfare, seemed also well-suited to the Orthodox monarchies and principalities that sprung into existence, expanded and declined in the medieval 'Byzantine Commonwealth' in Southeastern Europe, Ukraine and Russia. In the case of medieval East Slavonic Orthodox states and principalities (Kievan/Kyivan Rus', Grand Duchy of Moscow/Muscovy, etc.), both lay pacifism, and secular and religious concepts of just war came to be formulated in their early phases. Generally, defensive war was considered justifiable along with military conflicts designed to regain territories unjustly occupied by an aggressor—such campaigns could be regarded as wars of liberation. These concepts of just war were blended with the notion of the inviolability of frontiers and war's outcome as the judgment of God.

In the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453, a newly formulated religio-political ideology in Muscovy ventured to claim the imperial leadership of the Orthodox Christian Commonwealth through the notion of 'Moscow the Third Rome' which underwent gradual, if initially not methodical, amplifications in the Tsardom of Muscovy and the Russian Empire. This Russian new incarnation of imperial Orthodox Christianity was bound to develop some new perspectives on the moral and religious problematic of war and peace but the inherited and newly-emerging notions in this sphere were not subjected to more systematic exposition and elucidation even in the period when Russian military thinking was transformed under emphatic Western European impact during and after the reforms of Peter the Great (1682–1725).

The nineteenth century also witnessed the military enactment of the Russian Empire's self-appointed mandate as a protector of Eastern Orthodox communities in the Ottoman empire. Russian diplomatic and military interventionism in the Balkans and Caucasus coincided with the rise of Russian Slavophile and European Pan-Slav movements and their repercussions in the ideological, political and religious spheres. The articulation of religiously-based legitimacy framing anti-Ottoman warfare in Pan-Slav discourse combined notions such as the providential destiny of Russia as the religio-military guardian or liberator of the Christian Orthodox East (being heir to and resurrecting Byzantine imperial heritage) with pronounced anti-Occidentalism. In the decades leading to WWI and the Russian revolution in 1917, following Lev Tolstoy's (1828–1910) influential re-affirmation of Christian pacifism in the 1880s, the issues and dilemmas of ethics, justifiability and sanctification of warfare, pacifism, just war reappraisal and polemics were of considerable importance for a number of authoritative theologians, intellectual figures and clerics in the late Russian Empire.⁴

In Soviet Russia, where Bolshevik legislation and measures against the Russian Orthodox Church began as early as the Russian civil war of 1917–1923, World War II was to lead eventually to a reinstatement of the Russian Orthodox Church after several cycles of intensifying Soviet anti-Church repression in the 1920s and 1930s. This war-time rapprochement stemmed from Stalin's decision to utilize the Church's support to enhance national unity in the mobilization of the massive war effort against

4. Representative texts and commentaries in Stoyanov, 'Eastern Orthodoxy', pp. 208–21.

Nazi Germany. During the war leading Russian hierarchs blessed, prayed for and praised what they extolled as a heroic and just defensive war of the Soviet army, frequently describing the conflict as possessing universal religious and ethical dimensions.⁵

During the Cold War the restored Patriarchate of Moscow functioned in a new political climate in which Eastern Bloc governments eventually became aware of the potential of making use of the national Orthodox churches as a tool of their foreign policy through the existing ecclesiastical networks of international Orthodoxy as well as the World Council of Churches and similar international bodies and initiatives: World Peace Council, Christian Peace Conference, the Peace and Disarmament Campaign of the 1980s, and so on. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the beginning of a new period for the revival of the Orthodox churches and the reassertion of their traditional roles in the social and religious life of the Orthodox-majority ex-Eastern and Soviet bloc countries. With the rising prominence of the ethics of war problematic, triggered by post-Cold War conflicts such as the Wars of Yugoslav Succession in the 1990s, in a series of statements in the 1990s and 2000s the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, focused on various issues related to the morality of modern warfare, inter-religious conflicts and militaristic religious nationalism.⁶ Meanwhile, following a decade of redefining and cultivating its new models of relations with the post-Soviet Russian federal state and the military, in 2000 the Jubilee Council of Russian Bishops issued a statement of faith, *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Church*,⁷ which comprises an important section on 'War and Peace'. The section attempts to formulate a more systematic and up-to-date Orthodox re-appraisal of the Christian just war tradition and its relevance to modernity. The statement borrows, reproduces and reworks some of the traditional *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* conditions of the Western Christian just war tradition (as modelled on St. Augustine's earlier formulations). The document employs some ambiguous language concerning the 'difficulty' of distinguishing an aggressive war from a defensive war and the identification of the cases in which war might prove necessary: national defence, defence of neighbours and 'restoration of trampled justice' which provide wide-ranging options for war-justification.⁸ The statement emphasizes the special concerns of the

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5. WWII Russian Orthodox clerical sermons and orations assembled in Moscow Patriarchate, *The Truth about Religion in Russia* (London: Hutchinson, 1944).
 6. Statements assembled in Bartholomew I, *Cosmic Grace – Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew*, ed. John Chryssavgis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).
 7. Russian Orthodox Church, *The Orthodox Church and Society: The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* (Belleville, MI: St. Innocent/Firebird Publishers, 2000).
 8. Yuri Stoyanov, 'Norms of War in Eastern Orthodox Christianity', in Vesselin Popovski, Gregory M. Reichberg and Nicholas Turner (eds.), *World Religions and Norms of War* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), pp. 166–219, at pp. 206–207; Viorel Coman, 'Critical Analysis of the Moscow Patriarchate Vision on the Russian–Ukrainian Military Conflict: *Russkiy Mir* and Just War', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 76.4 (2023), pp. 332–44, at pp. 334–36.

Russian Orthodox Church for the Christian education of the military, the tasks of military chaplains and the Church's commitment to international peace-making and counteracting any war propaganda.

The use of religious and quasi-religious discourses by prominent Russian church hierarchs and political figures in relation to the armed conflicts in Ukraine since 2014 displays some continuities and discontinuities (or ruptures) with the earlier authoritative just war discourses. These war-justification discourses have been conditioned by several factors, ranging from the upgrading of new post-Soviet models of church–state relations in the Russian Federation, to the reintegration of Orthodox concepts and vocabulary in revived trends in post-Soviet Russian geopolitical thought and the gradual clerical penetration of the Russian armed forces and military establishment.

The phases of church–state interaction in the Russian Federation have caused various shifts in vital socio-religious and religio-political spheres such as religious freedom legislation, state building and ethno-religious identity politics, foreign policy and religious diplomacy. The models of this interaction have varied from an exclusive church–state partnership (along the traditional symphonic model) and selective cooperation models to an at-odds relationship (due to competing or antagonistic agendas).⁹ The Russian Orthodox Church has not always acted as an ideologically monolithic structure in the socio-religious sphere, given the internal divisions and fault-lines among its rival principal trends which can be roughly categorized as traditional, fundamentalist and liberal (and their various sub-factions). Furthermore, notwithstanding the evolving politicization of Russian Orthodoxy in the first two post-Soviet decades,¹⁰ its use as a tool for political legitimization and a unifying and homogenizing factor in state-building, in the period up until 2008 the influence of the Patriarchate of Moscow on political stances and decision-making or public opinion was inconclusive and restricted.¹¹ Factors such as the official adoption and promotion of the 'Russian World' ('Russkiy Mir') ideology and pro-

9. Zoe Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism* (London: Routledge, 2005); Zoe Knox and Anastasia Mitrofanova, 'The Russian Orthodox Church', in L. Leustean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 38–66; Katarzyna Chawryło, *The Altar and Throne Alliance: The Russian Orthodox Church vs. the Government in Russia* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2015); Kristina Stoeckl, 'Three Models of Church-State Relations in Contemporary Russia', in Susanna Mancini (ed.), *Constitutions and Religion*, Research Handbooks in Comparative Constitutional Law Series (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), pp. 237–51.

10. Anastasia Mitrofanova, *The Politicization of Russian Orthodoxy: Actors and Ideas* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2005); Aleksandr Verkhovskii "'Political Orthodoxy": Religion's Involvement in the Identity Formation Process', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 57.3–4 (2013), pp. 525–40.

11. Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

grammes by the Kremlin administration in 2006–2007,¹² the election of the ex-chairman of Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, Kirill, as a Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus in 2009 and the so-called 'conservative turn' in Russia's internal and foreign policies in 2011–2012 contributed to enhancing the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as a cultural, social and political actor on the Russian and international scene in the 2010s.

These developments intensified the process of the securitization of Russian religious policies already under way since the early 2000s¹³ since the *Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation* of 2000¹⁴ which articulated the link between 'spiritual-moral' legacy/welfare/values and national security for the first time. The interaction and cross-fertilization between some of the traditionalist and fundamentalist wings of the Russian Church with the revitalized and influential Neo-Slavophile and

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12. In his clerical formulation of the protean concept of the 'Russian World' at the opening of the Third Assembly of the 'Russian World' Foundation in 2009, Patriarch Kirill represents a unique common civilizational and multi-national community and sphere, which has a common historical memory arising from the Orthodox heritage of the cradle of East Slavonic Christian civilization of medieval Kievan Rus. Its nucleus is formed by Russia, Belarus and Ukraine (Moldova and Kazakhstan are also added in later versions of the concept) but it can include other countries of the 'historical space of Russia'. The Russian people, being God-bearing people, have a special place in this multi-ethnic space which also possesses shared saints, holy sites and pilgrimage routes. As the religious and spiritual pillar of the 'Russian World', the Russian Orthodox Church and its canonical territory transcend current state borders and hence could and should facilitate processes of integration within this large transnational sphere. As an international association based on common historical memory and values, it could parallel the British Commonwealth of Nations and become a 'powerful subject of global international politics'. 'Vystuplenie Svyateishogo Patriarkha Kirilla na torzhestvennom otkrytii III Asamblei Russkogo mira', *Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 3 November 2009, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/928446.html>. For this religionization of the concept of the 'Russian World' which enhances the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian cultural and religious diplomacy, see Nicolai Petro, 'Russia's Orthodox Soft Power', *Carnegie Council for International Affairs*, March 2015, http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/727/; Daniel P. Payne, 'Spiritual Security, the Russkiy Mir, and the Russian Orthodox Church: The Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on Russia's Foreign Policy Regarding Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia', in Adam Hug (ed.), *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2015), pp. 65–71; Cyril Hovorun, 'Russian Church and Ukrainian War', *The Expository Times* 134.1 (2022), pp. 1–10, at pp. 5–7.
 13. Edwin Bacon, 'Church and State in Contemporary Russia: Conflicting Discourses', in Rick Fawn and Stephen White (eds), *Russia After Communism* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 97–116; Beth Admiraal, 'A Religion for the Nation or a Nation for the Religion? Putin's Third Way for Russia', in Marlene Laruelle (ed.), *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 203–18, at pp. 204–206.
 14. 'O Kontseptsii natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiyskoi Federatsii', <https://www.prlib.ru/item/352298>.

Neo-Eurasianist streams in Russian geopolitical thinking also deepened, being updated with newer concepts like ‘cultural sovereignty’. Orthodox monarchism, moreover, continued to find and utilize clerical channels of influence.¹⁵ Nationalistic, anti-Occidental and religious rhetoric merged in aggressive discourses of ethno-religious chauvinism and militaristic neo-imperialist expansionism, seeking to bring a new sense of purpose and mission to the inherited and emotionally-charged notions of Russian exceptionalism and messianism.¹⁶ In such an ideological climate certain underground apocalyptically-oriented trends of Soviet-era Russian religious messianism¹⁷ began to assume the shape of a belligerent ‘apocalyptic imperialism’¹⁸ and utopianism.

The focus on the posited inextricable link between national security and traditional ‘spiritual-moral values’ was enhanced in a succession of legal documents such as the updated *Concepts/Strategies of National Security of the Russian Federation* (of 2009, 2015 and 2021), the amended Russian Federation Constitution of 2020,¹⁹ the

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15. Maija Turunen, ‘Orthodox Monarchism in Russia: Is Religion Important in the Present-Day Construction of National Identity?’, *Religion, State & Society* 35.4 (2007), pp. 319–34; Marlene Laruelle, ‘Ideological Complementarity or Competition? The Kremlin, the Church, and the Monarchist Idea in Today’s Russia’, *Slavic Review* 79.2 (2020), pp. 345–65.
 16. For a recent survey of the main approaches to and reconstructions of the roots and evolution of the phenomenon of Russian messianism, see Alicja Curanović, ‘Conventional Wisdom and Contemporary Russian Messianism: A Critical Verification’, *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* 64.1 (2019), pp. 28–44. On its latest manifestations in Russian foreign policy, cf. Maria Engström, ‘Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 35.3 (2014), pp. 356–79; Charlie Lewis, ‘Contemporary Russian Messianism under Putin and Russian Foreign Policy in Ukraine and Syria’, *Slavonic and East European Review* 98.3 (2020), pp. 531–59; Alicja Curanović, ‘The Phantomic Nature of Missionary Nationalism in a Former Empire: The Case of Russia’, in Frank Jacob and Carsten Schapkow (eds.), *Nationalism in a Transnational Age: Irrational Fears and the Strategic Abuse of Nationalist Pride* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), pp. 69–91; Alicja Curanović, ‘Mission Narrative in Russian Foreign Policy: The Comparative Perspective’, in Raymond Taras (ed.), *Exploring Russia’s Exceptionalism in International Politics* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2024), pp. 33–53; Mikhail Suslov, ‘Messianic Discourses and the Ideology of Putinism’, in Taras, *Exploring Russia’s Exceptionalism*, pp. 82–99.
 17. Peter J.S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 87–88.
 18. Victor Shnirelman, ‘Russian Neoconservatism and Apocalyptic Imperialism’, in Mikhail Suslov and Dmitry Uzlaner (eds.), *Contemporary Russian Conservatism: Problems, Paradoxes and Dangers* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 347–78. Cf. Jardar Østbø, *The New Third Rome: Readings of a Russian Nationalist Myth* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2016), pp. 181–223; Engström, ‘Contemporary Russian Messianism’, pp. 363–70 (analysis of post-Soviet Russian ‘katechonic’ ideology and messianism); Suslov, ‘Messianic Discourses’, pp. 90–96.
 19. ‘Konstitutsiya Rossijskoj Federatsii’, *The State Duma of the Federal Assembly of The Russian Federation*, 1 July 2020, <http://duma.gov.ru/legislative/documents/constitution/>.

Declaration on the Values of the Union of the States of Russia and Belarus of 2018²⁰ and the *Fundamentals of State Policy for Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values* of 2022.²¹ The Moscow Patriarchate contributed directly to the section on ‘spiritual-moral values’ in the last document and the expanding concept of ‘spiritual security’ started to pervade official Russian political, ecclesiastical and public discourse, though it was not actually legal terminology.²² The notion of ‘spiritual security’ came to be also interpreted and promoted in relation to the ‘Russian World’ ideology and its outreach projects or schemes, both domestically and internationally.²³

The higher echelons of political and clerical power continuously fortified and embellished the public image of the Russian Orthodox Church as central to Russian identity and statehood, the upholder of morality and the principal, indispensable driving force for moral renewal. The nearly complete cultural hegemony and privileged status achieved by the Russian Orthodox Church in the socio-religious sphere in 2010s (in what otherwise Russian foreign policy documents describe as a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state built on the basis of harmonious inter-ethnic and inter-faith co-existence) indicates a process of mutual instrumentalization and legitimization of church and state. At the same time, the emphasis on patriotism, traditional Christian values and illiberal critique of international human rights regimes in the formal and public pronouncements of leading Russian clerics has established the Moscow Patriarchate as a major ecclesiastical force for neo-conservative Christian ideologies in the political, social and cultural spheres both in Russia and abroad. The consequent appeal and symbolic capital of the Russian Orthodox Church to act as a major transnational actor and a kind of ‘moral norm entrepreneur’²⁴ on the neo-Conservative Christian circuits and venture into the global culture wars²⁵ have

20. ‘Deklaratsiya Tsennostey Soyuznogo Gosudarstva Rossii i Belarusi’, 25 January 2018, <https://rosbelclub.ru/archives/3981>.

21. ‘Executive Order Approving Fundamentals of State Policy for Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values’, *President of Russia*, 9 November 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/69810>.

22. Kristina Stoeckl, ‘Russia’s Spiritual Security Doctrine as a Challenge to European Comprehensive Security Approaches’, *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 20.4 (2022), pp. 37–44.

23. Mikhail Suslov, “‘Russian World’ Concept: Post-Soviet Geopolitical Ideology and the Logic of “Spheres of Influence””, *Geopolitics* 23.2 (2018), pp. 330–53; Shnirelman, ‘Russian Neoconservatism’.

24. Kristina Stoeckl, ‘The Russian Orthodox Church as Moral Norm Entrepreneur’, *Religion, State & Society* 44.2 (2016), pp. 132–51.

25. Kristina Stoeckl, ‘The Russian Orthodox Church’s Conservative Crusade’, *Current History* 116.792 (2017), pp. 271–76; Alicja Curanović, *The Guardians of Traditional Values: Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Quest for Status* (Washington, DC: Transatlantic Academy, 2015); Dimitry Uzlaner and Kristina Stoeckl, *The Moralists International: Russia in the Global Culture War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022); Kristina Stoeckl, *Russian Orthodoxy and Secularism* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 47–59.

been integrated into the Russian government's soft power strategies and rather active and wide-ranging religious diplomacy initiatives.²⁶

The start of the rapprochement between the Russian Orthodox Church and the armed forces in the 1990s was initially similarly underpinned by the Moscow Patriarchate's reassertion of the link between traditional patriotic values and faith.²⁷ This rapprochement facilitated the reintroduction of military chaplains, the erection of churches in the military bases, the initiation of catechism courses for military personnel, the establishment of a Synodal Department for Cooperation with the Armed Forces and Security Organs by the Moscow Patriarchate and the revival of the practice of clerical blessing of weaponry. It also came to evolve into a variety of ecclesiastical-military alliances such as the striking establishment of a de facto institutionalized symbiotic relationship between the church and the nuclear weapons corps, labelled accordingly the 'Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy'.²⁸ Ecclesiastic reactions to the combat phases of the First and Second Chechen Wars (resp. 1994–1996 and 1999–2000) varied from discreet criticism of excessive militarism and appeals for a dialogue to a patriotic rhetoric endorsing the Russian military campaigns, the latter leading to early warnings that church support for the war effort is giving priority to military values over religious and spiritual.²⁹ The proactive participation of the Russian Orthodox Church, from its upper echelons to the parish priests, in the creation of a redefined military-religious ideology³⁰ is evident in emblematic projects such as the reconsecration and restoration of the Kazan Cathedral in St Petersburg in 1998 as a monument to historic Russian military valour in 1998³¹ and the opening of the monumental Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces (Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ) on Victory Day in Moscow in 2020.³²

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26. Daniel P. Payne, 'Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?', *Journal of Church and State* 52.4 (2010), pp. 712–27; Alicja Curanović, *The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 2012); Jade McGlynn, *Defender of the Faiths? How the Russian Government Uses Religious Diplomacy* (London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2021).
 27. John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 207–242.
 28. Dmitry Adamsky, *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy: Religion, Politics, and Strategy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).
 29. Knox, *Russian Society*, pp. 124–25.
 30. Various militaristic aspects of this ideology discussed in Boris Knorre, 'The Culture of War and Militarization within Political Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet Region', *Transcultural Studies* 12.1 (2016), pp. 15–38; Boris Knorre and Aleksei Zygmunt, "'Militant Piety" in 21st-Century Orthodox Christianity: Return to Classical Traditions or Formation of a New Theology of War?', *Religions* 11.2 (2020).
 31. Andrey Gusarov, *Pamyatniki voynskoi slavy Peterburga* (St Petersburg: Paritet, 2010), pp. 100–115.
 32. Bojidar Kolov, 'Main Cathedral of Mutual Legitimation: The Church of the Russian Armed Forces as a Site of Making Power Meaningful', *Religions* 12.11 (2021).

Whether the church–military nexus has currently reached the form and stage of ‘military theocratization’³³ may be open to debate, but it is evident that since the ‘conservative turn’ of 2011/2012 the Russian Orthodox Church could provide a convenient and potentially powerful platform for war-justification proclamations, drawing on an array of notions and narrative from the evolving post-Soviet chauvinist, messianic, neo-Slavophile and neo-Eurasianist discourses. Apart from the ideological ‘benefits’ of a clerical war justification, the activities of military chaplains, the introduction of religious rites and calendar, patron saints for military units, and so on, could also have a bearing on the operational behaviour, military effectiveness and morale of nominally or practising Russian Orthodox soldiery.³⁴ Both concepts of ‘spiritual security’ and ‘Russian World’ could be successfully mobilized for a religious legitimization of military campaigns involving additionally the so-called extended ‘canonical territory’ of the Russian Orthodox Church (in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, diaspora communities, etc.), blending thus the potential strategic goals of Russian political, military and ecclesiastic authority.³⁵

Symptomatically, at the beginning of the Russian military intervention in Syria in 2015, Patriarch Kirill declared that the campaign had a defensive and just character for the protection of genocide-threatened Syrian Christians and civilians, echoing the historic Russian self-understanding of the imperial era as a military defender of Christian communities in the Balkans and the Middle East.³⁶ While the Patriarch praised the intervention in the framework of traditional Christian just war theory, the then chairman of the Synodal Department for the Cooperation of Church and Society of the Moscow Patriarchate, Vsevolod Chaplin, while echoing the same theme of Russia’s historic protection of Middle Eastern Christians and other oppressed communities, asserted that the battle against terrorism (of *Daesh*) is ‘a moral and holy fight’.³⁷ As his ‘holy fight’ pronouncement triggered critique and controversies both in Russia and beyond, including the negative reactions of Syrian Christians, Chaplin was soon released from his duties. The episode indicated that the Moscow Patriarchate was not prepared to tolerate ‘holy fight’ terminology coming from within its ranks of prelates regarding the Russian military engagement in Syria and would resort to a simple version of the traditional Christian just war legitimation.

As the armed conflict in Donbas evolved, with phases of offensives, counter-offensives, static trench warfare and stalemates without proper resolution, the Moscow Patriarchate increasingly came to issue statements representing the hostilities as a war

33. Adamsky, *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy*, pp. 6, 234–35.

34. Adamsky, *Russian Nuclear Orthodoxy*, pp. 233–42.

35. Stoeckl, ‘Russia’s Spiritual Security Doctrine’, pp. 39–40.

36. Elena Chinkova, ‘Patriarkh Kirill: Voennoe uchastie Rossii v Sirii dolzhno prinesti dolgozhdannyy mir’, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, 30 September 2015, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26439/3310649/>;

‘Patriarkh Kirill podderzhal voennuyu operatsiyu Rossii v Sirii’, *Interfax*, 7 January 2016, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/488620>.

37. ‘Vsevolod Chaplin ob operatsii VVS RF v Sirii: Bor’ba s terrorizmom – svyashchenna’, *Ren. TV*, 30 September 2015, <https://ren.tv/news/v-mire/50886-vsevolod-chaplin-ob-operatsii-vv-rf-v-sirii-borba-s-terrorizmom-sviashchenna>.

on Orthodoxy, its churches and Orthodox Christians in the contested region.³⁸ In the early stage of the conflict in the summer of 2014, while being considered as a potential negotiator in peace discussions and process, Patriarch Kirill wrote to the primates of the local Orthodox Churches that representatives of the Greek Catholic and ‘schismatic’ communities were planning to take over Orthodox shrines, attack the clergy of the ‘canonical’ Ukrainian Orthodox Church and ‘eradicate Orthodoxy from the territory of Ukraine’.³⁹ In a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, Patriarch Filaret, promptly countered these claims that the conflict in Donbas represented religious war aiming to destroy ‘canonical Orthodoxy’ and accused the Moscow Patriarchate of blatant war propaganda.⁴⁰ However, with the central message of the Moscow Patriarchate’s statements that a war of eradication was being waged against ‘canonical Orthodoxy’ in Ukraine, unsurprisingly reports emerging from the war zone in eastern Ukraine began to describe a holy war mentality arising on the ground among the regional self-styled Russian people’s militias and volunteers from Russia proper.⁴¹

The heightened rhetoric of these ecclesiastic exchanges reflects the evolution of the complex and plural post-Soviet ecclesial situation of Ukrainian Orthodoxy with the completion of the movement towards an autocephalous Orthodox Church in 2018/2019 against the background of the convoluted history of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of its main bodies: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate (alongside smaller Orthodox churches and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church). The build-up to the establishment of an autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019, principally based on the unification of the first two churches under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople,⁴² had already caused

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38. See, for instance, ‘Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov’ prizvala vlasti Ukrainy ostanovit’ gone-niya na veruyushchikh’, *Informatsionniy portal fonda ‘Russkiy mir’*, <https://russkiymir.ru/news/253084/>.
39. ‘His Holiness Patriarch Kirill Calls Primates of Local Orthodox Churches to Raise Their Voice in Defence of Orthodox Christians in the East of Ukraine’, *The Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations*, 18 August 2014, <https://mospat.ru/en/news/51174/>.
40. ‘Patriarch Filaret to Patriarch Bartholomew: Moscow Cynically Lies about the Events in Eastern Ukraine’, *Religious Information Service of Ukraine*, 1 September 2014, https://risu.ua/en/patriarch-filaret-to-patriarch-bartholomew-moscow-cynically-lies-about-the-events-in-eastern-ukraine_n70497.
41. Tim Whewell, ‘The Russians Fighting a “Holy War” in Ukraine’, *BBC News*, 18 December 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30518054>; Knorre, ‘The Culture of War’, pp. 15–38.
42. Ioannis Panagiotopoulos, ‘The Route for the Bestowal of Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine’, *Ökumenisches Forum: Journal for Ecumenical and Patristic Studies* 40/41 (2019), pp. 263–80; Cyril Hovorun, ‘War and Autocephaly in Ukraine’, *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal* 7 (2020), pp. 1–25; José Casanova, ‘The Three Kyivan Churches of Ukraine and the Three Romes’, *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 9.1 (2022), pp. 209–34; Thomas Bremer, Alfons Brüning and Nadieszda Kizenko (eds), *Orthodoxy in Two Manifestations? The Conflict in Ukraine as Expression of a Fault Line in World Orthodoxy* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022).

a schism between the Moscow and Constantinople Patriarchates in 2018 and some strongly-worded official ecclesiastic exchanges among the Orthodox Patriarchates and Churches.

These deepening ecclesial divisions and antagonisms were made plain and escalated in the build up to and the first stages of the Russian invasion in February 2022. On the eve of the invasion, on ‘Defender of the Fatherland Day’, the patriarch addressed the military with standard just war rhetoric (emphasizing the importance of the military vocation to be always prepared to fight the enemy, defend the Russian people and the ‘sacred borders’ of the realm);⁴³ his follow-up statement, on the day the incursion was launched, recommended prayers for the speedy restoration of peace.⁴⁴ However, in a sermon two weeks after the onset of the war, Patriarch Kirill explicitly endeavoured to present the strategic and military goals of the Russian military assault on Ukraine in wider religious and ‘metaphysical’ context.⁴⁵ While the sermon again nominally called for prayers for a quick peace settlement, it also linked the Russian military campaign with themes from the global culture wars, setting in anti-thesis traditional Christian norms and the values of those ‘who claim world power’/‘powers to be’ who ‘justify sin’ such as the Gay Pride marches, and so on. The central message of the sermon was that in embarking on armed conflict Russia has entered a ‘struggle’ that has not a physical, but a metaphysical significance and in the sphere of international relations has not only political importance but pertains to human salvation.

Patriarch Kirill’s ‘metaphysical war’ stance stood in sharp opposition to the reactions and pronouncements of the Ukrainian Orthodox ecclesiastical leadership. On the eve of the Russian invasion the Primate of the newly established autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan Epiphany, called for a united resistance to the Kremlin aggression, to fight for Ukrainian statehood, to struggle with the aggressor until victory and the establishment of just peace.⁴⁶ The head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Onufrii, issued an appeal for the defence of the sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine, pleading with the Kremlin to stop

43. ‘V Den’ zashchitnika Otechestva Svyateishiy Patriarkh Kirill vozlozhil venok k mogile Neizvestnogo soldata u Kremlevskoi steny’, *Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 23 February 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5903402.html>.

44. ‘Obrashchenie Svyateishego Patriarkha Kirilla k arkhipastyryam, pastyryam, monashestvuyushchim i vsem vernym chadam Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi’, *Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 24 February 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5903795.htm>.

45. ‘Patriarshaya propoved’ v Nedelyu syropustnuyu posle Liturgii v Khrame Khrista Spasitelya’, *Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 6 March 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5906442.html>. The use of religious, Orthodox and quasi-Orthodox notions and narratives (or ‘Russian World’/‘Russkiy Mir’ ideology) by Russian political and military leadership to justify the annexation of Crimea in 2014 or invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 remain outside the scope of this article.

46. ‘Metropolitan Epifanii Called for the Protection of Ukraine from Russian Aggression’, *Orthodox Church of Ukraine*, 22 February 2022, <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsi-novyny/mytropolyt-epifanij-zaklykav-do-zahystu-ukrayiny-vid-rosijskoyi-agresiyi/>.

the fratricidal war, which the metropolitan denounces further as a ‘repetition of Cain’s sin’, a war which cannot have ‘justification from either God or man’.⁴⁷

Patriarch Kirill reacted with a reiteration of his aspiration for the restoration of peace but also with an appeal for the preservation and enhancement of the unity of Rus’ (described as the land which now includes ‘Russia and Ukraine and Belarus and other tribes and peoples’) and the Russian Church against the ‘diabolical attacks and provocations’ and evil, dark and hostile external forces and enemies that have always strived to destroy this unity.⁴⁸ In the unfolding ecclesiastical ‘war of words’ Metropolitan Epifanii responded with an address praising the heroic resistance and invincible spirit of the Ukrainian military, denouncing the Russian political leadership (as displaying signs of the ‘spirit of the Antichrist’) and the discredited Patriarch Kirill.⁴⁹ In a sermon on the second Sunday of Lent, Metropolitan Epifanii framed the armed conflict in metaphysical terms as a ‘struggle of darkness against light, death with life, slavery against freedom’, as destruction and murder are wreaked on Ukraine by Russia which has become ‘the personification of darkness, the empire of evil, the tyranny of slavery’.⁵⁰

Vocal and circumspect opposition to and critique of the war of aggression in the Russian Orthodox Church domestic and international ‘canonical territory’ emerged early after the start of the invasion. In early March 2022, 292 Russian Orthodox priests and deacons from around the world signed an open letter calling for an immediate cessation of the fratricidal war and reconciliation, asserting that the people of Ukraine should make their choice on their own, not under military threat and pressure.⁵¹ In early April 2022 more than 400 clergymen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchate signed an appeal and petition to the Council of Primates of Ancient Eastern Churches, accusing Patriarch Kirill of committing moral crimes, blessing Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine (through statements

47. ‘Appeal of His Beatitude Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine Onufriy to the Faithful and the Citizens of Ukraine’, *Ukrainian Orthodox Church*, 25 February 2022, <https://news.church.ua/2022/02/27/appeal-beatitude-metropolitan-kyiv-ukraine-onufriy-faithful-citizens-ukraine/?lang=en#2024-02-04>. On the eve of the Russian invasion Metropolitan Onufrii appealed to ‘state leaders’ to avoid engaging in war, as it is a ‘grave sin before God’.

48. ‘His Holiness Patriarch Kirill Calls on the Faithful to Pray for Peace and Unity of the Church’, 27 February 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5904398.html>.

49. ‘Zvernennia Mitropolita Epifaniia (27 liutogo 2022 r.)’, *Orthodox Church of Ukraine*, 27 February 2022, <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsi-novyny/zvernennya-mytropolitya-epifaniya-27-lyutogo-2022-r/>.

50. ‘Propovid Blazhenniishogo Mitropolita Kiyvskogo i vsieĭ Ukraini Epifaniia u drugu nedili Velikogo postu’, *Orthodox Church of Ukraine*, 20 March 2022, <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsi-novyny/osud-i-proklyattya-nemyloserdna-kara-vid-vsevysnogo-ochikuyut-na-dushogubiv-i-vbyvts-bo-vony-polyubyly-zlo-i-temryavu-mytropolyt-epifanij/>.

51. ‘Obrashchenie svyashchennosluzhitelei russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi s pryzvom k primireniiyu i prekrashcheniyu voiny’, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yOGuXjdfQ1A3BQaEEQr744cwDzmSQ1qePaaBi4z6q3w/viewform?edit_requested=true.

and actions) which does not meet either the norms of Christian morality or even Moscow Patriarchate's own regulatory documents such as *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Church*.⁵² The appeal called for the establishment of an International Ecclesiastical Tribunal to denounce Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and to review the public statements of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow on the war against Ukraine and assess them scripturally and theologically. The appeal also called for a doctrinal assessment of the 'Russian World' ideology (with Patriarch Kirill recognized as one of its main ideologues) at the Pan-Orthodox level. In case the tribunal condemned this ideology, it would consequently need to bring Patriarch Kirill to justice and 'deprive him of the right to hold the patriarchal throne'. The 'Russian World' ideology was similarly condemned and rejected in March 2022 in an international declaration (signed by more than 1,500 Orthodox clerics and theologians) as non-Orthodox and a 'form of Orthodox ethno-phyletist religious fundamentalism, totalitarian in character', being at the root of many of Moscow Patriarchate hierarchy's support for the war against Ukraine.⁵³

The priests behind the appeal for the examination and sanctioning of Patriarch Kirill by an international ecclesiastical tribunal had also affirmed that they could not remain in any form of canonical subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate. In May 2022 a council of this ecclesial branch of Ukrainian Orthodoxy announced its complete independence and autonomy from the Moscow Patriarchate in protest of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and specifically in reaction to Patriarch Kirill's support for the aggression, explicitly expressing its condemnation of the war and disagreement with his pro-war stance in the resolutions of the council.⁵⁴ This self-declared autonomy opened a new stage in the Orthodox ecclesial crisis in Ukraine and the complex and shifting interrelations between ecclesiastical jurisdictions and dioceses, especially in the

52. Text reproduced in https://risu.ua/en/international-ecclesiastical-tribunal-for-cyril—almost-200-priests-of-the-uoc-mp-demand_n128244; <https://hrwf.eu/ukraine-russia-hundreds-of-priests-of-the-moscow-patriarchate-in-ukraine-condemn-the-role-of-russian-patriarch-kirill-in-the-war/>.

53. Co-published by the Orthodox Christian Studies Centre at Fordham University and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies: *Public Orthodoxy*, 13 March 2022, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/>. The declaration provoked a response from Aleksandr Shchipkov (the First Deputy Chairperson of Moscow Patriarchate's Synodal Department for relations with Society and the Media) who argued that it manifested a radical political Russophobia and de-Russification strategies applied to the theological plane to assume the form of a theological war intended to weaken and deconstruct the Russian society and Church. Shchipkov contends that the declaration is intended to deprive the Russian people of the right to defend themselves against 'military genocide' but does not comment on the war-justification statements and sermons of Patriarch Kirill: Aleksandr Shchipkov, 'Derusifikatsiia i teologicheskaia vojna', *Radonezh*, 16 May 2022, <https://radonezh.ru/2022/05/16/aleksandr-shchipkov-derusifikaciya-i-teologicheskaya-voyna>.

54. 'Resolutions of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of May 27, 2022', *Ukrainian Orthodox Church*, 28 May 2022, <https://news.church.ua/2022/05/28/resolutions-council-ukrainian-orthodox-church-may-27-2022/?lang=en#2024-02-04>.

Russian-occupied areas of the country. The continuing ambiguities surrounding the affiliations and loyalties of the clergy of the newly self-announced autonomous church was to lead to a series of enacted and proposed Ukrainian government legislative measures against individual clergymen and the ecclesial body as a whole, triggering further controversies and inter-church polemics.

Patriarch's Kirill's support for the Russian invasion may have been reinforced by the equally strong endorsement of the military campaign by Metropolitan Kornilii, Primate of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church,⁵⁵ but his emphatic pro-war stance was beginning to trigger divisions, opposition and a series of ecclesial crises across Russian Orthodox 'canonical territory', especially among its dioceses abroad. Inside Russia individual clergymen who have actively opposed the military incursion in Ukraine with anti-war statements and sermons have faced intimidation, censoring, prosecution and defrocking.⁵⁶ The dismissal of the experienced and long-serving church diplomat, Metropolitan Hilarion, as the chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church Department of External Church Relations in June 2022 and his 'exile' appointment to the Metropolis of Budapest-Hungary was undoubtedly provoked by his unwillingness to join in the justification of the Russian war effort in Ukraine with clerical militarist statements of the kind issued by Patriarch Kirill and the Moscow Patriarchate.⁵⁷

In the Moscow Patriarchate-aligned dioceses outside Russia, the intra-Russian Orthodox critique of Patriarch's Kirill's war-justification stance included open letters, and actual moves to seek or declare independence from Moscow.⁵⁸ In the wider sphere of Orthodox ecclesiastical leadership, critique and condemnation of the Moscow Patriarchate's war-legitimization stances were also growing, as demonstrated by the public pronouncement issued by the Orthodox Churches of Cyprus and

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55. 'Mitropolit Kornilii nazval spetsoperatsiyu na Ukraine ispytaniem tverdosti dukha i very', 6 March 2022, <https://lenta.ru/news/2022/03/06/kornilii/>.
56. Jack Jenkins, 'Russian Priest Speaks out Against War in Ukraine despite Threats', *Washington Post*, 8 April 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/04/08/russia-ukraine-war-priest-police/>; Maria Katamadze, 'Anti-war Russian Clergy Face Punishment', *Deutsche Welle*, 15 October 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/like-partisans-anti-war-russian-clergy-face-punishment/a-67103511>.
57. 'Tserkovnyy "Lavrov" otpravlen v opalu', *Novaya gazeta*, 8 June 2022, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/06/08/tserkovnyi-lavrov-otpravlen-v-opalu>. Significantly, in the build-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Metropolitan Hilarion declared that war cannot be a method of solving pressing political problems: 31 January 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-voyna-eto-ne-metod-resheniya-nakopivshikhsya-politicheskikh-problem.html> (his other public statements on issues like the 'Russian World' ideology or the Moscow-Constantinople schism largely comply with the Moscow Patriarchate's official positions; see Alar Kilp and Jerry Pankhurst, 'Soft, Sharp, and Evil Power: The Russian Orthodox Church in the Russian Invasion of Ukraine', *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 42.5 (2022).
58. Yuri Stoyanov, 'Eastern Orthodox War Justification and Ecclesial Dilemmas Arising from the War in Ukraine', *Studies in World Christianity*, 30.2 (2024), pp. 230–248.

Finland,⁵⁹ among others. In a series of public statements the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, articulated sustained denunciations of the invasion on theological and ecclesial grounds, while also addressing the ideological and historical notions exploited to justify the Russian military campaigns in Ukraine. In his first reaction to the Russian military incursion he condemned it as an unprovoked military attack which represents a ‘blatant violation of any notion of international law and legality’.⁶⁰ Subsequently, the patriarch asserted that a war between Orthodox Christians is ‘absolutely unacceptable’⁶¹ and that the Russian state and church ‘cooperated in the crime of aggression and shared the responsibility for the resulting crimes’, so inter-religious dialogue needs to focus on ways to ‘neutralize the capacity of the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate to undermine unity and to theologically legitimize criminal behaviour’.⁶² In a speech delivered at the World Policy Conference at the end of 2022 in Abu Dhabi, Patriarch Bartholomew acknowledged the deepening intra-Orthodox divisions over Moscow Patriarchate’s endorsement of the Russian military campaigns in Ukraine and highlighted the role of the ‘Russian World’ ideology, actively promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church, as a vital ‘instrument of legitimization of Russian expansionism’, with the church siding with the Russian state, faith thus being turned into ‘the backbone’ of state ideology.⁶³

59. Stoyanov, ‘Eastern Orthodox War Justification and Ecclesial Dilemmas’.

60. ‘The Ecumenical Patriarch Condemns the Unprovoked Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Expresses His Solidarity to the Suffering Ukrainian People’, *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, 24 February 2022, <https://ec-patr.org/the-ecumenical-patriarch-condemns-the-unprovoked-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-and-expresses-his-solidarity-to-the-suffering-ukrainian-people/>.

61. ‘Patriarch Bartholomew Says Inter-Orthodox War is “Absolutely Unacceptable”’, *La Croix International*, 31 March 2022, <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/patriarch-bartholomew-says-inter-orthodox-war-is-absolutely-unacceptable/15876>.

62. ‘Ecumenical Patriarch: Russian Church Shares Blame for “Crimes” in Ukraine’, *Reuters*, 22 March 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ecumenical-patriarch-russian-church-shares-blame-crimes-ukraine-2023-03-22>.

63. ‘Speech by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Abu Dhabi’, *RISU. Religious Information Service of Ukraine*, 22 December 2022, https://risu.ua/en/speech-by-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-in-abu-dhabi_n134828. The response of the Moscow Patriarchate contests the theological and historical arguments of Patriarch Bartholomew but does not engage with his conclusions regarding the role of the ‘Russian World’ ideology and the Russian Orthodox ecclesiastic leadership in current Russian expansionism: ‘Comments by DECR Communication Service on Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople’s speech at World Policy Conference (Abu Dhabi, 9 December 2022)’, *The Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations*, 3 February 2023, <https://mospat.ru/en/news/90022/>. On the weaponization of the ‘Russian World’ ideology as a legitimizing tool for current wars of conquest, see David G. Goodin, ‘The Rise of the Third Rome: Russkii Mir and the Rebirth of Christendom’, *Journal of the Council for the Research on Religion* 2.2 (2021), pp. 71–88; Andrey Shishkov, “‘Russkii mir’”, *Pravoslavia ta Viina*, *Bogoslovski razdumi* 20.2 (2023), pp. 63–78.

The Moscow Patriarchate's endorsement of the war also came early under scrutiny in the framework of the ecumenical movement, international relations and diplomacy. In its early reactions to the outbreak of the military conflict the World Council of Churches (WCC) issued appeals affirming and supporting Metropolitan Onufrii's call for the halting of the fratricidal war and the restoration of peace⁶⁴ and following appeals to the presidents of Russia and Ukraine the then acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Fr Ioan Sauca, implored Patriarch Kirill to 'raise up' his voice to intervene and mediate with the Russian authorities to stop the war and bloodshed.⁶⁵ In his response Patriarch Kirill stated that the origins of the military confrontation (including the earlier outbreak of hostilities in Donbas) stemmed from NATO's eastward expansion, Western 'large-scale geopolitical strategy' to weaken Russia, spread unprecedented Russophobia and incite animosity between the brotherly Russian and Ukrainian people.⁶⁶ Following calls to suspend the membership of the Russian Orthodox Church in the WCC due to its justification and legitimization of the war on Ukraine,⁶⁷ at the WCC 11th General Assembly in June 2022 its Central Committee issued a formal statement which deplored 'the illegal and unjustifiable war inflicted on the people and sovereign state of Ukraine', rejected 'any misuse of religious language and authority to justify armed aggression' and urged 'dialogue and negotiations to secure a sustainable peace'.⁶⁸ Around the same time the United Kingdom (to be followed by

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64. 'WCC Urges to Stop this War, and to Restore Peace to the People and Nation of Ukraine', *World Council of Churches*, 24 February 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-urges-to-stop-this-war-and-to-restore-peace-to-the-people-and-nation-of-ukraine>.
65. 'WCC Acting General Secretary to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow: "Raise up Your Voice so That the War Can be Stopped"', *World Council of Churches*, 2 March 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-acting-general-secretary-to-patriarch-kirill-of-moscow-raise-up-your-voice-so-that-the-war-can-be-stopped>.
66. 'Response by H.H. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca', *World Council of Churches*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/response-by-hh-patriarch-kirill-of-moscow-to-rev-prof-dr-ioan-sauca>.
67. Patrick Hudson, 'Expel Russian Orthodox from WCC says Rowan Williams', *The Tablet*, 4 April 2022, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/15226/expel-russian-orthodox-from-wcc-says-rowan-williams>; Andrew Louth, 'Should the WCC Expel Patriarch Kirill?', *Public Orthodoxy*, 26 August 2022, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/08/26/should-the-wcc-expel-patriarch-kirill/>.
68. 'WCC Central Committee Statement on the War in Ukraine', *World Council of Churches*, 18 June 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-central-committee-statement-on-the-war-in-ukraine> (at the same time the Russian Orthodox Church membership in the WCC was retained); on the circumstances and implications of these debates and decisions at the WCC General Assembly, see Cyril Hovorun, 'Can "Ecumenism as Usual" Be Possible in the Wake of the War in Ukraine?', *Ecumenical Trends* 52.5 (2023), pp. 25–31.

some other countries) sanctioned Patriarch Kirill because of his public support for the invasion of Ukraine.⁶⁹

The WCC followed on its stated aspiration for ecumenical dialogue with a meeting with Patriarch Kirill and his entourage in October 2022 during which the WCC delegation focused on the topical questions of the theological argumentation and support of the war in Ukraine in terms of the patriarch's sermons and orations.⁷⁰ Patriarch Kirill (and his delegation) responded that certain phrases from his pronouncements had been used selectively and out of context, declaring that war cannot be holy (while self-defence and self-sacrifice for the lives of others represent a different issue) and his invocation of 'metaphysical war' did not refer to the physical conflict in Ukraine but to Ephesians 6:12 (in an allusion hence to the spiritual battle which the faithful face in their lives). The patriarch also asserted that the churches' mission is to act as peacemakers and the clergy ought to aim to bring peace through dialogue, avoiding any conflict and violence. The indistinct peace assertions of Patriarch Kirill in these communications with the WCC meetings echo to some extent the rhetoric employed in some of his early wartime sermons regarding the potential peace-bringing and peace-sustaining role of an unified Orthodox church in Ukraine beset by a fratricidal war⁷¹ or the importance of defending the 'peace-loving' Russia and its long-suffering people who lack any urge to wage war (while calling on the army, navy and all 'defenders of the Fatherland' to realize the historic importance of the present moment).⁷² But these assertions also contradict pronouncements and claims

69. 'Patriarch Kirill has made multiple public statements in support of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He therefore engages in, provides support for, or promotes any policy or action which destabilizes Ukraine or undermines or threatens the territorial integrity, sovereignty or independence of Ukraine.' 'Consolidated List of Financial Sanctions Targets in the UK', *Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation HM Treasury*, 16 June 2022, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65c2535612d5f1000d375136/Russia.pdf>.

70. 'WCC Communique: His Holiness Patriarch Kirill Meets with WCC Acting General Secretary', *World Council of Churches*, 19 October 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-communique-his-holiness-patriarch-kirill-meets-with-wcc-acting-general-secretary>.

71. 'Patriarshaya propoved' v prazdnik Blagoveshcheniya Presvyatoi Bogoroditsy posle Liturgii v Khrame Khrista Spasitelya', *Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 7 April 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5915151.html>.

72. 'Slovo Svyateishego Patriarkha Kirilla v Nedelyu 4-iu Velikogo posta posle Liturgii v glavnom khrame Vooruzhennykh sil RF', 3 April 2022, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5914188.html?fbclid=IwAR37VW41-JKWsxl6MhypsDIU2K0kIRX_18KQNoA9IJRoJ78Ja8PjlkFP8. At the same time the sermon calls on the army, navy and all 'defenders of the Fatherland' to realize the historic importance of the present moment when most countries of the world are under the 'colossal influence of a single force' which has become a negative force opposing the Russian people whose historical fate may depend on this special time in history. Another sermon delivered around the time of the WCC meeting in Moscow adds another nuance to the peace-bringing process, asserting that peace and justice could be achieved through spiritual unification in the 'Russian World', while those who are not striving after such unity in Holy Russia will need to be persuaded by the power of God: 'Patriarshyia propoved' v den' pamiati svyatyateley Moskovskikh posle Liturgii v Uspenskom sobore Moskovskogo Kremlya', 18 October 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5968673.html>.

advanced by the patriarch in other homilies and public statements. In a pre-war oration at the Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces, Patriarch Kirill, as in earlier attempted formulations of Orthodox just war positions, resorted to John 15:13, to characterize the Christian military ethos underpinning the ideal of the ‘holy feat’ of self-sacrifice on the battlefield.⁷³ But in his speech he went further than these earlier traditions, urging the soldiers to boldly fulfil their military duty and remember that if they gave their life for the motherland and their friends (as postulated in the Scriptures), they ‘will be with God in His Kingdom, His glory, His eternal life’. The patriarch elaborated this notion in another sermon in late September 2022, days after the Russian authorities announced the first partial mobilization in Russia since WWII, which (acknowledging that many are dying on the battlefields of inter-necine warfare) declared that when soldiers driven by a sense of duty and the necessity to fulfil their oath, remain faithful to their vocation and die while performing their military duty, sacrificing themselves for the others, they undoubtedly will have achieved an act equivalent to sacrifice which ‘washes away all the sins’ they may have committed beforehand.⁷⁴

These striking statements blend the notions of military battlefield martyrdom (which was by and large rejected by the medieval Byzantine Orthodox Church)⁷⁵ and remission of sins awarded in exchange for military service, a concept and practice not accepted or attested in Eastern Orthodox cultures. Since the time of the last sermon Patriarch Kirill has made a ‘Prayer for Holy Rus’ compulsory at church services; the prayer implores God to grant war victory and a number of priests who have refused to read it or exchanged ‘victory’ with ‘peace’ have been subjected to punishment (including defrocking), court procedures and fines.⁷⁶ In one of his most recent sermons the Patriarch highlighted the

73. ‘Patriarshhee slovo posle Liturgii po sluchayu pervoi godovshchiny osvnyashcheniya glavnogo khrama Vooruzhennykh sil RF’, 13 June 2021, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5819726.html?fbclid=IwAR1dqQR9tMNF_ikcD8_MudGpT8D367ZQ4LcuF4TlrwBF7ISo8oS-n8O30S8. For the texts of earlier Orthodox articulations of just war and military martyrdom stances based on John 15:13, see Stoyanov, ‘Eastern Orthodoxy and the Ethics of War’, pp. 186–87, 214, 221.

74. ‘Patriarshaya propoved’ v Nedelyu 15-iu po Pyatidesiatnitse posle Liturgii v Aleksandro-Nevskom skitu’, *Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 25 September 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5962628.html>.

75. Texts and commentaries in Yuri Stoyanov, ‘Eastern Orthodoxy and the Ethics of War’, in Greg M. Reichberg and Henryk Syse (eds.), *Religion, War and Ethics: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 164–235, at pp. 178–80, 183–87. Further evidence will indicate whether these ‘innovations’ in Moscow Patriarchate’s promises for a heavenly recompense and remission of sins for fallen Russian Orthodox soldiers might have contributed to the series of violations of the *ius in bello* norms by the Russian armed forces during the military conflict.

76. Jonathan Luxmoore, ‘Thousands Back Priest in Ukraine Stand’, *Church Times*, 9 January 2024, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/19-january/news/world/thousands-back-priest-in-ukraine-stand>.

importance of special prayers asking God to save Russia from the invasion of foreigners —only when Russian human, military and political power is united with God’s power, can victory over the enemy be achieved.⁷⁷

Symptomatically, Patriarch Kirill also resorted to the concept of *katechon* (‘restraining force’, 2 Thess. 2:6-7)⁷⁸ in explicitly apocalyptic terms: first, in a reference to the historic Roman Empire and/or the Church⁷⁹ and then (in an oration addressing Russian Orthodox hierarchs in November 2022) to present-day Russia.⁸⁰ Patriarch Kirill entreated the hierarchs to fulfil their role as the core of spiritual resistance against the powers and movement of the Antichrist, inspire the military and mobilize to join the struggle against the global evil, the ‘Antichrist movement’ unleashed on Russia, a struggle which would decide the future of the world. This appeal represents further evidence of the Moscow Patriarchate’s alignment with the fundamentalist, apocalyptic trends in Russian Orthodoxy which earlier Russian clerical elites sought to neutralize and tame,⁸¹ and foster a justification of the war on Ukraine as a self-defence military operation.⁸²

The Moscow Patriarchate’s evolution towards the concept of ‘holy war’ has accelerated with the approval and publication (on the patriarchate’s official website) of the decree (or edict) of the XXV World Russian People’s Council which was held in late March 2024 under the presidency of Patriarch Kirill (himself head of the council). The first section of the decree is devoted to the Russian ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine and defines it as ‘a new stage in the national liberation struggle of the Russian people’ against the criminal Kiyv regime, a struggle which from ‘a spiritual and moral point of view’ represents a ‘Holy War’ in which they are ‘defending the single spiritual space of Holy Russia’ and ‘fulfil the mission’ of the apocalyptic ‘Restraining Force’ (a vital spiritual mission re-emphasized further in the decree) which protects the world from the ‘globalism’s onslaught’ and the ‘victory of the West, which has fallen into

77. ‘Patriarshaya propoved’ posle Liturgii v Znamenskom khrame pri Glavnom upravlenii MVD Rossii po g. Moskve’, *Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 10 December 2023, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6083447.html>.

78. On post-Soviet Russian *katechon* ideologies, see note 18 above.

79. ‘Patriarshaya propoved’ v prazdnik Blagoveshcheniya’.

80. ‘Svyateishii Patriarkh Kirill: Ot budushchego nashego Otechestva i nashei Tserkvi zavisit, v polnom smysle slova, budushchee mira’, *Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 20 November 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5978803.html>.

81. Aleksandr Verkhovskii and Emil Pain, ‘Civilizational Nationalism: The Russian Version of the “Special Path”’, *Russian Politics and Law* 50.5 (2012), pp. 52–86, at pp. 60–61.

82. Maureen Perrie, ‘Apocalypse Delayed: Patriarch Kirill on Restraining the Antichrist in Ukraine’, *Public Orthodoxy*, 23 January 2023, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2023/01/23/apocalypse-delayed-restraining-antichrist/>.

Satanism'.⁸³ The Moscow Patriarchate's multifaceted justification of Russian military campaigns in Ukraine, the dissenting anti-war clerical currents and initiatives across the Russian Orthodox Church canonical territory, as well as articulation of defensive just war rhetoric and appeals by the newly autocephalous Orthodox

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83. Nakaz XXV Vsemirnogo russkogo narodnogo sobora "Nastoiashchee i budushchee Russkogo mira", 27 March, 2024, Official Site of the Moscow Patriarchate, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6116189.html>. The decree was swiftly condemned by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with a formal statement that its 'holy war' declaration contradicts the 'basic principles of Christian morality' and contains an 'apologia for violence' and a 'justification of a military aggression' inconsistent with the Gospel teaching: 'Calls for the destruction of Ukraine and the justification of a military aggression are inconsistent with the Gospel teaching'—statement from the UOC Department for External Church Relations, March 28, 2024, Ukrainian Orthodox Church, <https://news.church.ua/2024/03/28/calls-for-the-destruction-of-ukraine-and-the-justification-of-a-military-aggression-are-inconsistent-with-the-gospel-teaching-statement-from-the-uoc-department-for-external-church-relations/?lang=en#2024-05-24>. The Hierarchical Council of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine castigated the new 'theology of war/holy war' advanced in the decree to sacralize Kremlin's regime state power and its 'neo-imperial geopolitics': 'Letter of the Council of Bishops of the UOC (OCU) to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew', Orthodox Church of Ukraine, May 11, 2024, <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/lyst-arhiyerejskogo-soboru-upts-ptsu-vselsenskomu-patriarhu-varfolomiyu/>. The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO) also strongly denounced the decree's 'holy war' proclamation as representing a 'spiritual crime' and called on the WCC and the Conference of European Churches to condemn the decree: 'Statement of the UCCRO on the Condemnation of the Documents of the "World Russian People's Council" Containing Justification of Russian Aggression against Ukraine', UCCRO, March 29, 2024, <https://vrciro.org.ua/en/news/statement-of-the-ukrainian-council-of-churches-and-religious-organizations>. The latter did so in a joint statement with the UCCRO ('CEC-UCCRO Joint Statement Calls for Just and Lasting Peace in Ukraine', Conference of European Churches, April 15, 2024, <https://ceceurope.org/cec-uccro-joint-statement-calls-just-and-lasting-peace-ukraine>), whereas the WCC has requested an urgent meeting with the Moscow Patriarchate to seek clarification whether the 'holy war' statement represents the Russian Orthodox Church's own position and how such positions can be held by a member church of the WCC: 'WCC Statement on Decree of XXV World Russian People's Council', World Council of Churches, April 12, 2024, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-statement-on-decree-of-xxv-world-russian-peoples-council>. In the secular sphere the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has adopted a resolution which also decries the 'holy war' promulgation as an 'abuse of religion' and 'distortion of the Christian Orthodox tradition' which makes the Russian Orthodox Church 'complicit in war crimes and crimes against humanity conducted in the name of the Russian Federation and the Russkiy Mir ideology': 'Alexei Navalny's Death and the Need to Counter Vladimir Putin's Totalitarian Regime and its War on Democracy', Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, April 17, 2024, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33511/html>.

Church of Ukraine⁸⁴ or the re-emergence of a militarist Mariology with a revamped iconography⁸⁵ inevitably had serious repercussions beyond the Eastern Orthodox world. Debates will continue whether Russia's invasion of Ukraine represents the first religious war of the twenty-first century,⁸⁶ whether it was triggered by Christian nationalism⁸⁷ or whether religion was used as a rhetorical device for the justification of the war and sacralization of the 'Russian imperial project'.⁸⁸ The exact role of the Moscow Patriarchate and Patriarch Kirill in providing the theological and ideological justification for the warfare in Ukraine will continue to be under close scrutiny⁸⁹ in and beyond Russia and Ukraine. The war has intensified the debates in the Catholic and Protestant theological milieux and clerical leaderships on the contemporary challenges to traditional and modern Christian stances on the ethics of war, the current reappraisal of the Christian just war tradition and patterns of peacemaking and reconciliation. The Holy See and Pope Francis have been particularly active in peace-making efforts and sustaining humanitarian initiatives 'that may lead to a just peace'⁹⁰: in an early initiative

84. See, for example, 'Metropolitan Augustine: Church Blesses the Faithful to Defend their Land', *Union of Orthodox Journalists*, 24 January 2023, <https://spzh.live/en/news/72071-metropolitan-augustine-church-blesses-the-faithful-to-defend-their-land>.

85. Matthew Gault, 'Who is St. Javelin and Why is She a Symbol of the War in Ukraine?', 25 February 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/akvyjj/who-is-st-javelin-and-why-is-she-a-symbol-of-the-war-in-ukraine>; Dorian Llywelyn, 'The Patriotic Virgin: How Mary's been Marshaled for Religious Nationalism and Military Campaigns', 7 July 2022, <https://theconversation.com/the-patriotic-virgin-how-marys-been-marshaled-for-religious-nationalism-and-military-campaigns-183200>.

86. Lucian N. Leustean, 'Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: The First Religious War in the 21st Century', *London School of Economics*, 3 March 2022, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2022/03/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-the-first-religious-war-in-the-21st-century/>; Lucian N. Leustean, 'Is Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Still a Religious War?', *London School of Economics*, 8 February 2023, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2023/02/is-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-still-a-religious-war/>.

87. Jason Stanley, 'The Antisemitism Animating Putin's Claim to "Denazify" Ukraine', *The Guardian*, 26 February 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/25/vladimir-putin-ukraine-attack-antisemitism-denazify>; Ishaan Tharoor, 'The Christian Nationalism behind Putin's War', *Washington Post*, 19 April 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/19/patriarch-kirill-orthodox-church-russia-ukraine/>.

88. Dmytro Voyk, 'Religious Arguments and Political Goals Behind the Russian-Ukrainian War', *Canopy Forum*, 23 June 2022, <https://canopyforum.org/2022/06/23/religious-arguments-and-political-goals-behind-the-russian-ukrainian-war/>.

89. Jonathan Luxmoore, 'Prosecutors Set Out Case against Kirill', *Church Times*, 10 November 2023, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/10-november/news/world/prosecutors-set-out-case-against-kirill>.

90. Devin Watkins, 'Cardinal Zuppi to Visit China as Part of Ukraine Peace Mission', *Vatican News*, September 23, 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-09/cardinal-matteo-zuppi-visit-china-ukraine-pope-envoy.html>.


the Pope communicated to Patriarch Kirill his views on modern warfare and the need for a new Christian understanding of current military conflicts and the applicability of inherited just war criteria,⁹¹ while also condemning the invasion as an ‘act of violent aggression and a sacrilege without justification’,⁹² and a ‘crime against God and humanity’.⁹³ Following Patriarch Bartholomew’s Abu Dhabi speech ascribing to Moscow the deliberate use of the ‘heresy of ethnophyletism’ (which he defines as a form of ecclesial racism) for its religio-political purposes and the condemnation of the ‘Russian World’ ideology as a militaristically weaponized ‘heresy’ in the international declaration co-published by the Fordham University/Volos Academy,⁹⁴ Cardinal Kurt Koch (President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity) has stated that Patriarch Kirill’s ‘pseudo-religious justification’ of the ‘brutal and absurd war in Ukraine’ represents a heresy which has fractured the unity of Orthodox communities.⁹⁵

These polemical statements and exchanges as well as the various greater and micro-crises across the ‘canonical territory’ of the Russian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian Orthodoxy add further urgency and relevancy to the ongoing intra-Orthodox, ecumenical and inter-religious disputes, meetings and consultations focused on topical issues such as modern critiques of the premises and current pertinence of the just war tradition, justification of humanitarian intervention and the environmental consequences of military conflicts. The publication of the document, *For the Life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*⁹⁶ (coordinated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate), and especially its chapter on war and violence, provides an important corrective to the ideologies of warfare crystallizing in

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91. ‘Pope to Russian Patriarch: “Church Uses Language of Jesus, Not of Politics”’, *Vatican News*, 16 March 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-03/pope-francis-calls-patriarch-kirill-orthodox-patriarch-ukraine.html>. For arguments that the Holy See reactions to the war in Ukraine may represent ‘a pivotal moment in modern Catholicism’s reconsideration of the principles of nonviolence and just war’, see Pavlo Smytsnyuk, ‘The Holy See Confronts the War in Ukraine: Between Just War Theory and Nonviolence’, *ET-Studies – Journal of the European Society for Catholic Theology* 14.1 (2023), pp. 3–24.
 92. ‘Pope: “War of Aggression against Ukraine is Inhuman and Sacrilegious”’, *Vatican News*, 20 March 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-03/pope-francis-ukraine-war-inhuman-sacrilegious.html>.
 93. ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See’, 9 January 2023, *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/january/documents/20230109-corpo-diplomatico.html>.
 94. See note 53 above.
 95. ‘Top Vatican Prelate Calls Russian Patriarch’s Defense of Ukraine War “Heresy”’, *Crux*, 30 June 2022, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2022/06/top-vatican-prelate-calls-russian-patriarchs-defense-of-ukraine-war-heresy>.
 96. David B. Hart and John Chryssavgis (eds.), *For the Life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020), <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos?fbclid=IwAR2RSPrgYRhPfAgT9p2iIQkd9wqtOYJ74Gtjnpmyq9xYdxshwqr6U1FJFiY>.

post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy. Categorizing all human violence as a ‘rebellion against God and the divinely created order’, the document acknowledges that on occasion self-defence or the defence of the oppressed cannot be achieved without the ‘judicious use of force’, but at the same time reasserts that the Orthodox Church itself has never developed a just war theory and could never refer to war as ‘just’ or ‘holy’. The problematic of the contemporary challenges to Eastern Orthodox traditional and modern stances on war and peace have been explored in the context of the theology of just peace,⁹⁷ critiques of the basic premises of the just war tradition,⁹⁸ just peace-making and Christian realism,⁹⁹ Orthodox social ethics and the dynamic praxis of just peace-making,¹⁰⁰ and so on. These new perspectives on this increasingly topical problematic may indeed contribute significantly to the capacity of modern Orthodox thought to seek ‘to bridge pacifism and just war theory through a re-conception of justice and peace-making’,¹⁰¹ especially relevant in view of the current comparable theological and ethical pursuits of new war and peace frameworks in Catholic thinking. The unfolding and course of the ecclesial conflicts involving Russian and Ukrainian churches and parishes, triggered in the build-up and escalation of the military conflict, will show whether Orthodox religious actors might begin to play a key role in peace negotiations, peace-building and reconciliation, realizing the obvious potential of the Eastern Orthodox plurality of approaches to diverse Christian models of peace-making.¹⁰²

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97. Semegnish Asfaw, Alexios Chehadeh and Marian Gh Simion (eds.), *Just Peace: Orthodox Perspectives* (Geneva: WWC Publications; Ayer, MA: Institute for Peace Studies in Eastern Christianity, 2012).
98. Boris Kashnikov, ‘Teoriya spravedlivoy voyny: kritika osnovnykh nachal’, *Eticheskaya mys’l’* 19.2 (2019), pp. 152–67.
99. Perry T. Hamalis, ‘Just Peacemaking and Christian Realism: Possibilities for Moving Beyond the Impasse in Orthodox Christian War Ethics’, in P.T. Hamalis and V.A. Karras (eds.), *Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), pp. 335–61.
100. Philip LeMasters, ‘A Dynamic Praxis of Peace: Orthodox Social Ethics and Just Peacemaking’, *Revista Teologica* 4.1 (2010), pp. 69–82.
101. David Pratt, ‘Dual Trajectories and Divided Rationales: A Reply to Alexander Webster on Justifiable War’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 47.1 (2003), pp. 83–97, at pp. 86–87.
102. Yuri Stoyanov, ‘Role of Religious Institutions: Peace in Eastern Orthodoxy’, in A. Kulnazarova and V. Popovski (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Approaches to Peace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 461–77; Pavlo Smytsnyuk, ‘The War in Ukraine as a Challenge for Religious Communities: Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Prospects for Peacemaking’, *Studia UBB – Theologia Catholica Latina* 68.1 (2023), pp. 26–70.