

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros
Address to the National Intelligence University

April 24, 2023

Bethesda, Maryland

Dr. Cameron, Dr. Sotiriadis,

Dear Faculty, Students and Staff of the National Intelligence University,

I am deeply honored and humbled to address you today, and am grateful to the University for its gracious invitation. So often, the religious dimension of global interactions is seen as superfluous to raw economic and political expediencies. But today is not such a day.

I am eager to speak about the current religious conditions that are aggravating the war of Russian aggression against Ukraine. For I have lived through many of the precursors to this conflict, and could see problematic areas beforehand. Nevertheless, I never imagined that I would witness the Orthodox Christian Church militarized for conquest as it is in Russia today. For convenience, I will divide my remarks into three areas, and commence with a little recent history:

1. The role and evolution of religion in the Ukraine conflict, with special attention to the emergence of the Ukrainian Nation, the simultaneous dissolution of the old Soviet Union and the propagation of the myth of *Russkii Mir*, known as “Russian World.”
2. The weaponization of the Moscow Patriarchate as an arm of the Russian State, including the deployment of Russian Church assets around the world through its diplomatic corps and the anomalous so-called “Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.”
3. The current invasion of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa by the Moscow Patriarchate and prospects for further Russian ecclesiastical imperialism throughout the world.

These three areas will reveal the depths to which the Moscow Patriarchate has sunk. What was always meant to be a spiritual service to humanity has degenerated into a

classic form of Caesaropapism, and we sorrowfully behold the drastic consequences thereof.

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1) The Role and Evolution of Religion in the Ukraine Conflict

I am truly astounded when I consider how far we have come from a more peaceful time. Just a little over one year ago, and barely two years after granting Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine – a hitherto association of non-Moscow related Ukrainian Orthodox entities in need of canonical regularization – His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said the following irenic remarks, when he visited Kyiv for the Thirtieth Anniversary of Ukrainian Independence:

Today, the Mother Church of Constantinople, Which is now also the Sister Church of the newly formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine, brings Her blessings and felicitations to your ancient and ever-renewed Land. A Land watered by the blood of sacrifice, tried in the furnace of great suffering; but a Land that gifted to the Slavic Peoples everywhere the Holy Orthodox Faith in all Her splendor, luminosity and ageless wisdom. Thus, the Mother Church granted a joyous and longed-for autocephaly to Ukraine, so that schism could be healed with the “oil of gladness”¹ and Ukraine – which is truly ancient and new – could benefit from a new and independent Church to realize Her ancient Faith. This was done as a solution – as we said at the Great and Holy Council in Crete in 2016: “The oil should be used to heal the wounds, and not to rekindle the fire.”²

This pastoral and peaceful recognition of ecclesial bodies, both authentic and integral to Ukrainian society, prompted retaliative sorties from the Moscow Patriarchate that afflict the worldwide Orthodox Church to this day.

But we need to back up a bit, and look at some history in order to understand the trajectory that has brought us to the unfortunate conditions of the present day.

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If you were to take a map of the old Soviet Union, and overlay a transparency with the boundaries of the Moscow Patriarchate (as self-understood), you would not be surprised to see that they would match nearly perfectly in every way. These boundaries have continued to this day, even after the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall,

¹ Psalm 44:7 (LXX).

² August 22, 2021, at the Fourth International Veterans Forum celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of Ukrainian Independence.

and the totalitarian infrastructure that supported that old Leviathan came tumbling down like the legendary walls of Jericho. Thereafter, nationalistic and even ethnic priorities of former Soviet Republics scrambled for their own identities.

Whether it was Kazakhstan or Estonia, Georgia or Lithuania – each of these former so-called “Soviet Socialist Republics” found an inner yearning for identity that had been suppressed for generations. Outside of the Russian Federation, there were now fourteen independent states seeking their own sense of history, and none more significant to the Russian Federation than Ukraine.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Moscow Patriarchate sought to retain the sphere of influence that coincided with the Iron Curtain. There have only been two Russian Patriarchs in this period: Alexy II and Kirill, the current occupant of the throne of Moscow. The false notion of *Russkii Mir*, “Russian World,” has been a conceit to justify domination by a dead “imperial” and “Soviet” Russia. Wildly embraced by Putin and Kirill, it is the fundamental Russian logic behind the invasion of sovereign Ukraine.

For centuries, the Russian Church, with the enormous power of Imperial Russia at her back, had asserted itself as the Mother Church – rather than the Daughter that she truly is – over all Slavic Peoples under the Tsardom. And this usurpation of its proper role proved to be the historical engine of relegating all other Orthodox entities – no matter how senior in age and spiritual development – under its own aegis.

This re-writing of history has proven to be one of the chief ideological components of the *Russkii Mir* theory that has been used to justify the invasion of Ukraine. According to a distinguished list of Orthodox Theologians and Academics:

***Russian world* ideology as a principal justification for the invasion ... states that there is a transnational Russian sphere or civilization, called Holy Russia or Holy Rus', which includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (and sometimes Moldova and Kazakhstan), as well as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people throughout the world. It holds that this “Russian world” has a common political centre (Moscow), a common spiritual centre (Kyiv as the “mother of all Rus”), a common language (Russian), a common church (the Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate), and a common**

patriarch (the Patriarch of Moscow), who works in ‘symphony’ with a common president/national leader (Putin) to govern this Russian world, as well as upholding a common distinctive spirituality, morality, and culture. Against this “Russian world” (so the teaching goes) stands the corrupt West, led by the United States and Western European nations, which has capitulated to “liberalism”, “globalization”, “Christianophobia”, “homosexual rights” promoted in gay parades, and “militant secularism”.³

Indeed, Ukraine is the spiritual heart of Rus’ – of the Slavic confederation that adopted Orthodox Christianity from the Mother Church of Constantinople in the Ninth Century. Ages before the fortress on the Moskva River became a center of power, Holy Constantinople put down Her roots in Kyiv, and made her, the Mother of Slavic Christianity. Moscow, much to its own chagrin and much to the surprise of the modern world, is the daughter.

Since the founding of the modern Ukrainian Nation in 1991, the Moscow Patriarchate has attempted to keep the Orthodox People of Ukraine under its power and sway. In Ukraine, a series of impulses toward full and distinct freedom from the Moscow Patriarchate led to divisions and schisms within the Orthodox Population of Ukraine. As long as the Moscow Patriarchate could retain the Ukrainian Orthodox in a semblance of submission or vassalage, it would allow them some degree of autonomy. But the repression of national consciousness, culture, and even native language persisted.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate had maintained historic and deep connections between Kyiv and Constantinople. These continued for centuries, until the exigencies of history – the Fall of Constantinople and the rise of the Ottoman Empire – necessitated granting certain concessions to the new Tsars of the Russian Imperial State and their Moscow-based Patriarchate.

But in the Church, political winds do not determine the course of the Ark of Salvation. Just as many more Roman Catholics live in São Paulo, Brazil than in Vatican City, size means nothing in respect to the history of the See of Rome. The same is true for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the First Throne of Orthodoxy since the Great Schism of the Eleventh Century. Today, there are a mere handful of Orthodox Christians left in the lands that produced the Seven Ecumenical

³ <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/>.

Councils – the constitutional conventions, if you will, of all Christianity. But size, as I said before, is not determinative of history.

Finally, there was inflamed in the hearts of many, as I wrote a few years ago, a genuine yearning for authentic connection to the source of their faith, and freedom from Russia. Let us not forget the atrocities perpetrated on the Ukrainian People during the Communist Era – particularly the Holodomor, the genocide by starvation inflicted on the people by the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Thus, as I have previously written:

The desire to return to the spiritual care of the Mother Church of Constantinople has always remained alive through the centuries in the consciousness of the Ukrainian people. The heavy pressure (often violent) that Moscow has exerted to subordinate the Ukrainian people and their church has caused a corresponding reaction calling for emancipation and liberation from this “Babylonian captivity.” The reaction of the Ukrainian people to their systematic “Russification” has led them, in the course of their history, to join forces with anyone and anything that appeared to fight against Moscow. Given this, the responsibility of Moscow is clear regarding the appearance and spread of the “Unia” in Ukraine; because for many, servitude to Rome appeared to be the only chance for this faithful people, children of Constantinople, to escape Russian spiritual oppression.⁴

The need for an authentic Orthodox Church of Ukraine was obvious. At the invitation of Ukrainian interests – both political and religious – the Ecumenical Patriarchate acted decisively to create a free and independent Orthodox Church in Ukraine with full autocephaly. (Note that we will refer to this as the “OCU,” whereas the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate will be called “UOC.”) When the Most Holy Ecumenical Patriarchate established the OCU with the granting of the Tomos of Autocephaly (or the formal declaration of independence) on January 5, 2019, it brought back into communion with the worldwide Church millions of Christians who had – through no fault of their own – been excluded from the canonical order.

⁴ In *The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Ukraine (27-29 July 2008)*, (Halki Theological School Publications, 2018) page 137.

In the *Design of the Statutory Charter of The Orthodox Church in Ukraine*, the following first principles were stated:

First: The Orthodox Church of Ukraine is a member of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and is inseparably joined with the Great Church of Christ of Constantinople, and through Her, with every other Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

Second: The Orthodox Church of Ukraine is Autocephalous, granted this status by a kenotic act of love of the martyric and sacred canonical Body of the Mother Church of Constantinople, namely the most Holy Apostolic Ecumenical Throne; governed as is reasonable the Holy Tradition, which is the Holy Scripture, the Divine and Holy Canons, and the consecrated process of the Church.

This historic and self-sacrificial act of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was fulfilled on January 5, 2019, and it created an Autocephalous and fully self-governing Church for Ukraine, via the granting of a Tomos of Autocephaly.

The Tomos was met by celebrations in Kyiv, and anger in Moscow. Moscow declared that it would not let Ukraine go under any conditions, and this intransigence became part of the philosophy of aggression and war that had already led to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a preview for all the world to see.

As someone who was privileged to travel with His All Holiness to Ukraine as far back as 2008 – when I was Chief Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod – I witnessed firsthand many of these initial stress-points. But even with those forecasts from fifteen years ago, few could have foreseen the horrific invasion by Russia and the complicity of the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate in this utterly unwarranted and unjustified aggression against the Ukrainian Nation.

As I have stated, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which was granted autocephaly – and presciently so – by the Mother Church of Constantinople in January 2019, is the logical and canonical container for a unified Orthodox Ukrainian *Ekklesia*. The Moscow-backed Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), currently under Metropolitan Ounouphry, had still been subject to the pressures that came from across the border.

However, in May of last year there was a sea change – at least from a canonical point of view – in the UOC's self-understanding. In a canonically confusing step, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, under Metropolitan Ounouphry,

severed all administrative ties with the Moscow Patriarchate (which were minimal), and more importantly, ceased commemorating the Moscow Patriarch, Kirill Gundayev, as their ecclesiastical patron. This half-measure leaves the UOC floating in a canonical fog where no one can really say what the status of such an ecclesial entity is. The UOC should have gone first to the Mother Church of all Ukrainians – the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople – in order to find the solution to their ecclesiastical and indeed, political predicament. And at the same time at home, it has refused to engage in rapprochement with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, under His Beatitude Metropolitan Epiphanius.

There are many exigencies in the current situation – a major one being that Metropolitan Ounouphry has nearly one million parishioners in Russian-occupied Ukraine, many of whom are descended from the infusions of Russian-language speakers into Ukraine by forced migration, similar to what China has been doing with Han Chinese in Tibet for decades.

There is also this predicament, which has been in the news in recent weeks. With the war still raging, and the Ukrainian Government under President Zelensky wishing to further distance Russian propagandistic meddling from the life of the Ukrainian People, the ecclesial body under Metropolitan Ounouphry has been under enormous pressure from the government to cede very sacred sites to the canonically legitimate Orthodox Church of Ukraine. There is also a need to remove any suspicion that any part of the UOC is a fifth column inside Ukraine. As well as a need for the Government of Ukraine to observe a non-coercive stance when it comes to the religious liberty of all its citizens. There are doubtless collaborators with Russia among UOC clergy, but that should not be cause for infringing on the liberties of UOC adherents.

Only weeks ago, Patriarch Kirill had appealed to world religious leaders on behalf of those were being *lawfully* expelled from the Kyiv Caves Monastery. The hypocrisy of his plea is absolutely astounding. Russian mercenaries and soldiers murder, rape, kidnap, and loot with his blessing – even with his jihadist-like promise of Heaven for killing their spiritual brethren.⁵ And incredulously here in America, some are taking the side of the murderous Putin regime against the democratically elected government of Ukraine. A remarkable inversion of falsehood over truth!

The ultimate resolution of the ecclesiastical problem of Ukraine is clearly one, unified, Ukrainian Autocephalous Church, which combines the OCU with the UOC,

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/sep/26/russia-ukraine-war-latest-updates-anti-mobilisation-protests-in-dagestan-us-warns-of-decisive-nuclear-response>.

and stabilizes both within the cultural and political context of Ukraine, a sovereign and independent Nation, which has defeated Russia – hopefully sooner rather than later.

Let us be completely transparent. Putin is the aggressor. Period. Without any justification whatsoever. There is no such thing as *Russkii Mir*, the imperialist model of ethnic affinity that neither comports with the current state of affairs, or with the bloody history that has led to the present situation. Putin and Kirill have forgotten and forsaken the Lord's Prayer which states: for "*Thine* is the Kingdom," not, mine is the kingdom. For Putin, the Russian Church has become a potent arm of the Kremlin. Now, with the war, it has been deployed.

The invasion of Ukraine cannot be justified or excused and is a clear violation of international law and norms. When this invasion is overcome, the need for forgiveness will be as overwhelming as the horrors that have been perpetrated on the populace. The Orthodox Church in Ukraine must be the place where healing occurs, and for that to happen, there must be a unified Church, encompassing all Ukrainian Orthodox Christians. The Mother Church of Constantinople is ready to step in and meet the need, in accordance with Her spiritual and canonical authority. The Russian Church cannot be trusted to do what is right, especially when it blesses violence.

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2) The Weaponization of the Moscow Patriarchate

What we have ultimately seen, from a religious point of view, in the invasion of Ukraine, is the submission of the official Russian Church – in the person of its Patriarch, Kirill Gundyayev— to the political will of a single autocrat. Putin acts like a Tsar and Kirill plays the part of his submissive and cooperative religious justifier. All of this is consistent with weaponization of the Orthodox Faith in Russia by the current religious hierarchy. And it is assisted by the Russian Government.

If you look closely at the Russian Federation's diplomatic network around the world, there is a religious shadow that accompanies its work. And that shadow was established by the current Patriarch Kirill in his last official duty – as Head of the Department of External Church Relations (DECR) of the Moscow Patriarchate under the late Patriarch Alexy II. In New York City, all Russian Church operatives were attached to the Russian Federation's United Nations delegation.

Around the world, chapels have been installed at embassies and consulates and filled with operatives. In some cases, the so-called 'autonomous' Russian

Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, commonly called “ROCOR,” is used to both gather information and feed disinformation. ROCOR is a legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution, a community of Russian Exile Bishops who banded together to keep the Orthodox Faith uncontaminated from the Bolshevik takeover of the Church Institutions and Hierarchy. ROCOR walled themselves off from the Moscow Patriarchate, and like most sectarian minorities, it has gone through many periods of differing stresses, but its founding principle was always constant: should the Moscow Patriarchate become free from the government, ROCOR would reunite. The irony here is unmistakable.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the process of unification commenced almost at once, but was not completed until May 17, 2007. It must be noted that at the official ceremonies in Moscow, it was Vladimir Putin who joined the hands of the two, late primates – Laurus of ROCOR and Alexy of Moscow. Many celebrated this reunion of estranged brethren, but what was missed by most of the world was the role of Vladimir Putin. He had gained very few members to the Russian Orthodox Church; more importantly, he had gained a standing worldwide network that he could exploit. Combine this with the overt religious missions at every Russian Embassy and Consulate around the world, and you have a web worthy of Cardinal Richelieu.

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3) Russian Ecclesiastical Imperialism Throughout the World.

The fragmentation in Orthodox Christianity caused by Patriarch Kirill and his policy of religious thralldom to the Russian State has had deep and, in all likelihood, lasting effects.

Kirill has used the enormous financial resources of the Russian Church to purchase friends in the Hierarchies of Orthodoxy around the world – often in countries which are flashpoints of conflict; Syria being one of the most dangerous.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate is a credible barrier to Russian Religious Imperialism around the world, particularly in the Balkans, the Middle East (as we just mentioned) and in Africa.

I want to call your attention to Africa, which in the Orthodox Christian canonical understanding, is – continent wide – under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, Egypt. Because of the support of Alexandria for the solution in Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in creating and empowering the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Russian Church has taken the unprecedented step

of literal territorial invasion, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Again, Russia's system of embassies and consulates provides perfect cover for its operations.

The absurdity of Kirill's program of aggrandizement beyond the borders of the so-called "Russian World," is that he is feigning some kind of universal jurisdiction – similar to the Papacy. But this is the very thing he accuses the Ecumenical Patriarchate of – because he does not understand, or wish to understand, the *Ecumenical* spiritual role of the Most Holy Church of Constantinople, which is motivated by the power of love, not the love of power.

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In conclusion, in the preceding minutes, I have conveyed much detailed information about the complexities of Ukrainian religious realities, and the ways the Russian Government and Church are attempting to cast an imperial shadow over world Orthodoxy.

I reiterate here that the best counterbalance to this irreligious campaign by Putin and Kirill is support for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its extraordinary leader, His All Holiness Bartholomew.

It is Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who is reaching out in the inter-Christian and interfaith spheres of influence. And it is the Church of Constantinople which upholds the most basic teachings – which are also Christian! – about peace, justice, and equality among all people.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate has been a pioneer in fostering dialogue and cooperation among Christians and people of other faiths. In 1994, it responded positively to an invitation from the President of the European Commission, Jaques Delors, to establish an official representation to the European Union.

Similarly, it would welcome an invitation to open an office for an official representation of the Orthodox Church in Washington, DC. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has enjoyed bipartisan support from consecutive administrations in the United States, over the years. We wish to be good partners in this critical moment and to collaborate for the common good. I believe that our presence in Washington, DC, through the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, would be not only symbolic, but meaningful. We know that religion is a vital factor in geopolitics, as it can help to legitimize, challenge or transform the world order. The Ecumenical Patriarchate is committed to promoting peace, justice and equality among all people, supporting a rules-based international order.

April 24, 2023
Address to NIU

I want to thank you again for this remarkable opportunity to address the National Intelligence University. Your unique mission, to serve as the center of academic life of the American intelligence community, could not be more relevant than it is today. I am happy to take any questions you might have.