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Russian Orthodox Geopolitics: The "Russian World" and the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine

Tetiana Oleksiivna Panina
RUSSIAN ORTHODOX GEOPOLITICS: THE “RUSSIAN WORLD”
AND THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN UKRAINE

By

TETIANA PANINA

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The members of the Defense Committee approve the thesis of Tetiana Panina defended on April 6, 2021.

______________________________
Dr. Robert Romanchuk
Thesis Director

______________________________
Dr. Jonathan Grant
Outside Committee Member

______________________________
Dr. Lisa Ryoko Wakamiya
Committee Member

Signatures are on file with the Honors Program office.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is a significant actor in the foreign policy of the
Russian Federation. The Church has a long history of involvement in the diplomacy of Kyivan Rus’,
the Grand Duchy of Muscovy and the Russian Empire. At the fall of the Soviet Union, it was the only
organization whose reach extended over the entirety of the post-Soviet space. As a result of this, the
ROC was a natural partner in the Kremlin’s pursuit of a post-Soviet sphere of influence in its “Near
Abroad.” In the late 20th and 21st century, the ROC became one of the primary pillars of the russkiy
mir ideology that justified Russia’s violation of Ukrainian sovereignty.
This paper is divided into three parts. The first addresses the content and evolution of the *russkyi mir* ideology. It discusses the organizations that emerged to fulfill the values and objectives expressed in *russkyi mir*, as well as the involvement of the ROC. The spiritual dimension of the *russkyi mir* eventually rose to the forefront and enjoyed increasingly active support from the Moscow Patriarch. The second establishes the history of the Orthodox Church in Rus’, specifically in contemporary Russia and Ukraine. Both the Kremlin and the ROC have repeatedly used a Russophile interpretation of this history to justify the need for unity, whether spiritual, cultural, or territorial, of Russia and Ukraine. Furthermore, it shows that the involvement of the Orthodox Church in secular diplomacy has a long tradition. The involvement of the ROC under Patriarch Kirill in the *russkyi mir* project and in Ukraine are neither a freak occurrence nor a new development. Rather, they are consistent with the history of the Church and the Russian state. The history also highlights the development of the independent churches of Ukraine, Orthodox and (to a lesser extent within the scope of this paper) Greek Catholic. This background is important to understanding the complex relationship between the Ukrainian and Russian Churches, as well as the latter’s interests in the region. Part three explores how the ideology was put into practice in Ukraine, at first as a tool of soft power often associated with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate, and later to justify the use of hard power in the annexation of Crimea and the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Although the rhetoric of *russkyi mir* has since faded in the context of Russia’s policy in the “Near Abroad,” the circumstances that surround it and the ROC have much to teach us. As history has clearly shown, both the Russian secular and spiritual authorities have a vested interest in maintaining dominance—if not hegemony—within the Eastern European region. This is only doubled when faced with the perceived threat of globalization and a united Western civilization.

The ambition and maneuvering of Russia’s secular institutions are thoroughly documented and widely discussed. However, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, and of the influence of Orthodoxy in the former Soviet space, is often overlooked or minimized in the West’s understanding of Russian diplomacy. This issue is raised by James Sherr and Kaarel Kullamaa in their 2019 report on the Russian Orthodox Church: “Beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union, an insufficient number of people understand…[that] ‘the Russian Orthodox Church, as an organization, less and less
2. THE "RUSSIAN WORLD" IN THEORY

2.1. Ideological Foundations of the "Russian World"

2.1.1. The Origins of the "Russian World"

The concept of the "Russian World", or russkyi mir, traces its lineage back to the 19th—some would argue 11th—century.² It was mentioned in the writings of Panteleimon Kulish, a member of the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius in the mid-nineteenth century³ and by Sergei Uvarov, architect of the infamous Imperial Russian slogan “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality.”⁴ It served as a framework for Russian exceptionalism, a messianic ideal that juxtaposed the Russian civilizational and cultural path to that of the West.⁵

The spin doctors of the newly formed Russian Federation echoed much the same sentiments when they revived the concept in the 1990s. Its revival is credited to Petr Shchedrovitsky, who set out to formulate a policy for Russia’s so-called “Near Abroad” following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.⁶ In the decades that followed the concept “passed a convoluted intellectual trajectory”, repeatedly morphing in meaning and focus.⁷ According to Michael Gorham, it was precisely this “protean symbolic potential” that made it so attractive to the Putin regime.⁸ The scope and content of russkyi mir are both broad. At any given time, it may refer to Russia’s policy for its “Near Abroad”, its interactions with the global Russian diaspora, or Russia’s self-representation to the rest of the

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² Hurzhi, “"Russkiy Mir,"” 92.
⁵ Hurzhi, “"Russkiy Mir,"” 95.
⁶ Plokhy, Lost Kingdom, 392.
world in the context of globalization. The content of *russkyi mir* can be best summarized as “Russianness”—the alleged unifying elements of shared language, culture, religion (specifically Orthodoxy), and history. The “Russian World” is a collective civilizational entity consisting of the East Slavic peoples (or people in the singular, according to some Russian ideologues) in which “Russia acts as a guarantor of rights and defender of the Russian people.” At its core is the myth of the religious exclusivity of the Russian people and the Orthodox faith.

More concretely, *russkyi mir* serves as the ideological justification for Russia’s claim to its “Near Abroad.” The “Near Abroad” is a Russian invention formulated as part of a study into Russia’s policy towards the Commonwealth of Independent States shortly after their creation. It is a Russo-centric concept that encapsulates the former Soviet space and implies a Russian sphere of influence—a tendency inherited by the concept of *russkyi mir*. The “Near Abroad” was fixed as the focus of Russia’s foreign policy at the turn of the 21st century as a path to regaining the country’s Soviet-era international status. It was reaffirmed in 2000 by Vladimir Putin, who acknowledged the Russian Federation’s limited geopolitical capacity and placed priority on strengthening the sphere of influence in the “Near Abroad.” It was under Putin that *russkyi mir* was elevated to an official state ideology and became synonymous with the Russian sphere of influence.

Initially, the concept of the “Russian World” was proliferated in terms of the global Russophone community. According to Putin, the “Russian World” extended to all the people “who speak, think, and—what is perhaps most important—feel in Russian.” The Russian state categorized these people as “compatriots abroad” or *sootechestvenniki za rubezhom*. Through them, the Russian language could be used as a tool for maintaining Russian influence abroad, and as a *lingua franca*. 

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11 Ibid.
13 Suslov, “Russian World,” 333.
14 Ibid.
16 Suslov, 337.
the former Soviet space, a “uniting factor” in the “Near Abroad.” In a 2007 speech, Putin claimed that the Russian language was “the guardian for an entire layer of truly global accomplishments”, and the “living space for the millions making up the Russian World.” Due to this, it “can never become a language of hatred or enmity, xenophobia or nationalism.”

2.1.2. The “Russian World” in Peril

The year 2004 marked a significant step towards the consolidation of russkyi mir as official state ideology. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine was considered a failure of Russian policy in the “Near Abroad.” The Orange Revolution yielded a valuable lesson for Russian authorities— concordance with the ruling regime was not enough. Success required engagement with “the people on the street.” Soon, the Russian authorities developed a newfound interest in the use of “soft power.” Coined by Joseph Nye in the 1980s, the concept of soft power involves the use of co-option rather than coercion—that is, power through diplomacy or cultural attraction. The concept of russkyi mir and its implicit mechanisms—advocacy for Russian language, culture, diaspora, and transnational unity abroad—presented the perfect toolset for conducting foreign policy and participating in the competition of global nations. A. Cherupin, the Head of the Department of the Compatriots Abroad said in 2004: “The Russian diaspora offers a social and humanitarian basis for the implementation of the interests of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space” and that “as a geopolitical concept, the russkyi mir is useful in the countries of Eastern Europe, which Russia intends to keep in its orbit.”

This line of thinking was taken up by Vladimir Putin. In 2006 during a conversation with a journalist, Putin alluded to a quotation from Anton Denikin’s writings: “No Russia, reactionary or

19 Gorham, 192.
21 Plokhy, Lost Kingdom, 329.
25 Plokhy, 329.
democratic, republican or authoritarian, will ever allow Ukraine to be torn away. The foolish, baseless, and externally aggravated quarrel between Muscovite Rus' and Kyivan Rus’ is our internal quarrel, of no concern to anyone else, and it will be decided by ourselves.”

The threat of Ukraine breaking from Russian influence—and the possibility of other members of the former Soviet space following suit—catalysed Putin’s decision to embrace *russkiy mir* as a pillar of the state’s foreign policy.

In 2006, in a speech to the creative intelligentsia Putin declared that “*russkiy mir* can and must unite everyone, who cherishes the Russian word and the Russian culture, wherever they live – in Russia or abroad” and directed his audience to “use this phrase more often.” The year 2007 saw a number of academic initiatives evaluating the status of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space. The labors of Russian ethnographers and sociologists revealed that the Russian language was losing its privileged status in the “Near Abroad” and that the Russian state had to act to halt and reverse the trend.

2.1.3. The Systemization of the “Russian World”

Putin established *Fond Russkyi Mir* with the aid of the federal ministries of foreign affairs and education in 2007. The reigns of the organization were handed to Viacheslav Nikonov, Kremlin aligned historian and political consultant, an early signal that the foundation’s objectives extended beyond its proclaimed scope of the promotion of language and culture abroad. In the following year, the government equivalent of *Fond Russkyi Mir*, the federal agency *Rossotrudnichestvo* was created to minister to the compatriots in the “Near Abroad.” As per Gorham, “[w]hile Russkiy Mir sought to win over hearts and souls through language and culture, Rossotrudnichestvo focused more on protecting the rights of Russians in the near abroad.” These organizations would allow Russia to

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27 Naydenova, “Holy Rus,” 42.
28 Hurzhi, “«Russkiy Mir»,” 96.
29 Ibid., 331.
30 Ibid., 329.
31 Suslov, “‘Russian World’ Concept,” 339.
utilize its diasporas as “tentacles” to influence neighbouring states by providing a framework for organization and control.\footnote{Suslov, 338.}

\textit{Fond Russkiy Mir} enjoyed the generous support of the state, private sector, and the Russian Orthodox Church. With these resources it rapidly spread its influence, establishing centers across both the “near” and “distant” abroad. Through these, it distributed instructional materials, hosted conferences and festivals, and generally promoted the use and celebration of Russian language and culture.\footnote{Gorham, 186.} By 2013, there were 90 such centers in 41 countries. Additionally, the foundation issued grants to organizations like the Natalia Narochenitskaia’s Fund for Historical Perspective, which “promotes a Russian nationalist vision of History Abroad.” Counted among its partners was the International Council of Russian Compatriots, whose leader—Vadim Kolesnichenko, a member of the Sevastopol Duma—was a prolific advocate for the preeminence of “the Russian language in Ukrainian economic, social, and cultural spheres.”\footnote{Plokhy, \textit{Lost Kingdom}, 331.}

The foundation defined its intended audience—that is the “citizens” of the “Russian World”—as “millions of ethnic Russians, native Russian speakers, their families and descendants scattered across the globe” and “the millions of people worldwide who have chosen the Russian language as their subject of study, those who have developed an appreciation for Russia and its rich cultural heritage.”\footnote{“About Russkiy Mir Foundation,” Russkiy Mir. Accessed March 26, 2021. https://russkiymir.ru/en/fund/} It portrayed itself as an organization acting in good faith, concerned with modernizing the Russian identity and paving the way for global cooperation: “In forming the Russian World as a global project, Russia is creating for itself a new identity, new possibilities for effective cooperation with the rest of the world, and new incentives for its own development.”\footnote{Laruelle, \textit{The “Russian World},“ 13.} It represented an attempt at a “delicate dance between past and present, tradition and transformation, civilizational conservation and transnational consolidation.”\footnote{Gorham, 189.}

All pretensions at being an apolitical, purely cultural organization—if ever there were any—fell away within the first year of the foundation’s operation. By 2008 figures like Kolesnichenko were
arguing that “cultural events were insufficient,” due to the “cultural genocide of the Russian people” in Ukraine.39 That same year, the concept of russkyi mir (which had been streamlined in this period as a tool of soft power) was entered into the Concept of the Russian Foreign Policy as one of the state’s leading priorities. The future head of Rossotrudnichestvo, politician Konstantin Kosachev, openly stated that “the soft power of Russia is first and foremost the Russian World in the broadest sense of the word.”40 Soon, narratives of russkyi mir as “union, harmony, bridges, and borderlessness” gave way to consolidation41—that is, the gathering of the lands of the historic Rus’. Although the conceptual russkyi mir included all those who spoke Russian and took an interest in the future of Russia, it was always geographically understood as “Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldavia…sometimes other countries…as for example, Kazakhstan.”42 Ukraine and Belarus feature most prominently in this imperialist scheme, which “Russian public diplomacy tends to depict…as timelessly united on a profound level by their shared history, closely related languages, and common cultural and spiritual heritage.”43

A new dimension of russkyi mir rose to the surface as part of this narrative shift. The celebration of Russian culture among the diaspora and the facilitation of international cooperation fell by the wayside. In their place emerged sobornost, translated approximately as “conciliarity” or “catholicity.”44 It was time for the Russian Orthodox Church to reprise its role as the source of Russia’s moral right to unify the scattered territories of historic Rus’.

41 Gorham, 193.
2.2. The Russian Orthodox Church Takes Up the Banner

2.2.1. Russia, Ukraine, Belarus – There You Have It, “Holy Rus”

In the chaos that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Russian Orthodox Church represented the continuation of Russia’s perceived geopolitical legacy. Russian identity and self-awareness as a political state had formed in the context of the Orthodox faith and in 1991, the ROC was the only institution still standing that could claim “jurisdiction over the entire post-Soviet territory.” Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus comprised the core of this territory.

The Church’s rapid development as a leading force (and instrument) in Russia’s foreign policy is unsurprising. It quickly became a “powerful presence…[in] issues of morality, economics, international relations, and…the Russian elections” and increasingly wielded this power to generate ideas and lobby in favour of certain directions in Russian foreign policy. The ROC’s ability to legitimize the Kremlin’s policy from a moral and social perspective made it an attractive partner to the Russian state. It is precisely in this capacity that the ROC developed its symbiotic relationship with the state’s foreign policy objectives.

The ROC supplies the religio-mystical foundations for the borders of russkyi mir through the broader, religious concept of “Holy Rus.” According to an ROC cleric, there are “three Russias: ‘Russia’ as the contemporary Russian Federation; Rus, which refers to the four Eastern Slav peoples; and ‘Holy Rus’, which is much greater than both previously mentioned concepts.” It is in order to restore the “Holy Rus” that Russia and the ROC must “gather what has been scattered over the last thousand years” and “preserve the national culture based on the spiritual and moral values of the Orthodox faith for future generations in the environment of globalization and secularization of public conscience.”

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45 Hurzhi, “‘Russkiy Mir,’” 92.
47 Plokhy, 331.
49 Ibid., 7.
51 Ibid., 41.
Unlike elements of the Russian secular political landscape, the ROC (under the leadership of Patriarch Aleksii II, who worked for the KGB under the poetic alias “Drozdov” [“Blackbird”]) never accepted the dissolution of the Orthodox world in the “civilized divorce” of the Soviet Union. As early as 1992, the Holy Synod of the ROC issued a statement in the newspaper Moskovskii tserkovnii vestnik (Moscow Church Herald):

Our Church is historically tied with Kievan Rus (sic) that gave life to the Belorussian, Russian and Ukrainian peoples. That is why historical unity and brotherhood of Slavic peoples baptised together, should not be broken. Being separate on the level of states, we should be united spiritually.

And the greatest threat to this spiritual unity could be found right across the border in Ukraine. During the Gorbachev era, Ukrainian parishes constituted “close to 60 percent of the Moscow Patriarchate’s parishes.” The ROC lost thousands of these parishes in 1989-1990 to the reinstated Ukrainian Catholic Church, halted only by the deliberate intervention of then-Metropolitan Kirill (Gundiaev, KGB alias “Mikhailov”). Ukraine issued a second challenge to Russian Orthodox hegemony in the early 1990s, when Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko) of Kyiv (another mainstay of the KGB, alias “Antonov”) attempted to create an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church—an endeavour again thwarted by the direct intervention of Kirill.

The ROC continued its war on Ukraine’s spiritual—and national—inde pendence into the 21st century under the leadership of Kirill, who succeeded Aleksii II as patriarch of the ROC. In an address to the Third Assembly of the Russian World, Kirill “stresse[d] the important role played by the Church in ensuring at least the spiritual unity among Orthodox Christians of Slavic background, reminding Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians of their common heritage.” He claimed that “spiritually we [Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova] remain one nation” and explained that the
term *Rus* “refers to the community of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians during the entire time ‘in which we had a unified country, regardless of the prevailing political system.’”

It is on this alleged historical fact that the ROC’s oft-repeated concept of “Holy Rus” is built, representing “a transnational cultural collective of people united by a common Russian Orthodox faith regardless of native language and ethnicity” that “is destined to synthesize everything most valuable from different periods of the country’s history using the…ideological formula: faith – autocracy – justice – solidarity – dignity.” For this reason the ROC undertakes the “pastoral mission” in the “nations taking Russian spiritual and cultural traditions as the basis of their national identity.” On these grounds (rather than ethnic ones) the Church takes the name “Russian.”

Conveniently, the ROC’s conceptualization of the “Russian World” “tacitly undergirds Kremlin attempts to rebuild an ideational backbone.” The union of church and state on matters of foreign policy is a natural development. The ROC’s goals abroad align with the government’s foreign policy. Support for the *russkiy mir* ideology harmonizes well with its primary objective of unifying the Orthodox Churches of the “Near Abroad” under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. In the words of the patriarch, “the Church acts on equal footing as a subject of relations with different states and with international public and political organizations. We defend our values and promote the rights and interests of our congregations.” As voiced by the ROC in its first attempt to unify the disparate churches in 1938:

The Russian Orthodox Church is the only truthful center around which the union of all Russian people is possible. The Russian Orthodox Church is the creator, essence and life of the Russian people … Any other center will need long lasting explanations and preparations.

The unification around the Church does not need explanations.

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58 Bremer, “How the Russian Orthodox Church,” 43.
59 Hudson, “The Ukrainian Orthodox Church,” 1358.
60 Naydenova, 43.
61 Rotaru, 41.
62 Hudson, 1358.
63 Rotaru, 41.
65 “Протокол № 4 торжественного собрания Всезарубежного Собора Русской Православной Церкви за границей [Minutes No. 4 of the Solemn Meeting of the All-Diaspora Council of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia],” Деяння второго Всезарубежного Собора Русской Православной Церкви Заграницей [Statutes of the Second All-Diaspora Council of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia].
2.2.2. Russian Orthodox Diplomacy

Kirill established areas of cooperation between the Church and the Russian state as early as 2001. First, the return of property and art lost during Soviet rule; second, the defence of the rights of compatriots in the “near” and “distant” abroad; third, pursuit of multi-polarity in international relations. The state, too, was cognisant of the diplomatic potential contained in spiritual diplomacy. The National Security Concept (NSC) of 2000 states that “the spiritual renewal of society is impossible without the preservation of the role of the Russian language as a factor of the spiritual unity of the peoples of multinational Russia.” In 2004, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation emphasized the importance of a single Orthodox Church as a unifying force in the former Soviet space. The spiritually based unity of the “Russian World” also found supporters among (at the time) fringe nationalist parties, such as the “Patriots of Russia.”

Over the next years, however, the ROC rapidly strengthened its links with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The NSC called for “the formation of government policy in the field of the spiritual and moral education of the population, and...counteraction against the negative influence of foreign religious organizations and missionaries,” opening the way for the ROC’s direct involvement in policymaking. These sentiments are echoed in the National Security Strategy and Foreign Policy Concept. According to the latter, the “increase in cultural and civilizational diversity necessitates creating a larger role for religion in shaping international relations.” As a result, the ROC’s...
involvement quickly expanded beyond domestic policy, allowing it to play a key role in formulating and advancing Russian interests abroad.\textsuperscript{73}

This was first (formally) realized in 2003, when the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia (MOFA) established a permanent Working Group on Interactions. The working group (which is still active) focused its efforts on the activities of the Church and state in the “Near Abroad.”\textsuperscript{74} According to the minister of the MOFA, “the maintenance of partner relations with the Russian Orthodox Church had been an age-old tradition of Russian domestic diplomacy.”\textsuperscript{75} Minister of Culture Alexander Avdeev further elaborated on the relationship, stating that “Russian culture will flourish and remain the center of the national idea only if it will be in very close dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church.”\textsuperscript{76}

The partnership proved mutually beneficial. The ROC coordinated its activities with Russia’s secular foreign policy,\textsuperscript{77} strengthening its “spiritual security” and boosting the channels available to project its (soft) power abroad.\textsuperscript{78} It helped re-establish Russia as “the Other to the West” and support “the re-integration of the post-Soviet space.”\textsuperscript{79} The Church, meanwhile, could pursue the preservation and reunification of its canonical territory with the backing of the state. This relationship effectively revives the Byzantine model of \textit{symphonia} (the harmony between church and state)\textsuperscript{80}, positioning the ROC as a “state church” playing a prominent role in domestic and foreign policy. Nationalism and

\textsuperscript{73} Blitt, 365.
\textsuperscript{74} Roman Nikolayevich Lunkin, “Европейский Вектор Политики Русской Православной Церкви: Особенности Становления в Постсоветский Период [European Vector of the Policy of Russian Orthodox Church: The Features of the Formation in the Post-Soviet Period].” \textit{RUDN Journal of Political Science} 20, no. 2 (December 1, 2018): 280.
\textsuperscript{76} “Ⱥɥɟɤɫɚɧɞɪ Ⱥɜɞɟɟɜ: Ɋɨɫɫɢɣɫɤɚɹ ɤɭɥɶɬɭɪɚ ɛɭɞɟɬ ɭɫɩɟɲɧɨ ɪɚɡ ɜɢɜɚɬɶɫɹ ɬɨɥɶɤɨ ɜ ɫɨɬɪɭɞɧɢɱɟɫɬɜɟ ɫ Ɋɭɫɫɤɨɣ ɩɪɚɜɨɫɥɚɜɧɨɣ ɰɟɪɤɨɜɶɸ [Alexandr Avdeev: Russian culture will only flourish in cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church],” Russkiy Mir, 06 April 2009. https://russkiymir.ru/news/13932/
\textsuperscript{77} Blitt, 382.
\textsuperscript{78} Blitt, 379.
patriotism are evident throughout the social doctrine of the ROC, which energetically advocates for
the patriotic education of parishioners in keeping with the contents of the ruskyi mir concept.\footnote{Mel’nyk, “‘Russian World,’” 243.}

2.2.3. ROC: Protagonist of the ‘Russian World’

The year 2009 witnessed a significant development in the ROC’s presence in the diplomatic
arena. Metropolitan Kirill, head of the Department of External Church relations and architect of the
Church’s symbiosis with the state, was elected Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. His former
position was filled by one of his closest associates, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev).\footnote{Lunkin, “European Vector,” 280-281.} Kirill’s rise to
power came at a time when “Moscow had exhausted all possible ideological platforms for the latest
‘gathering of Russian lands’ and needed an alternative, clear, ideologically and spiritually sound plan
of action.”\footnote{Mel’nyk, 243.}

In July 2009, Kirill travelled to Ukraine. There, he emphasized the spiritual unity of the East
Slavic peoples and informed the people of Ukraine that “[t]here is no imperialism here, no domination
over others.” Additionally, he condemned Ukraine’s attempts to “falsify” history by seeking
recognition for the Holodomor, the Stalin-era engineered famine, as a crime of genocide. These
messages happened to coincide with the renewed efforts of the UOC Kyiv Patriarchate to gain
autocephaly, supported by the wave of nationalism and pro-Western sentiment generated by the 2004
Orange Revolution. Patriarch Filaret of the UOC-KP expressed concerns that Kirill’s presence was
calculated to advance Russian political interests. A plausible concern in light of Kirill’s
communication with the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, to whom he expressed apprehension over
Ukraine’s aspirations towards NATO membership.\footnote{Blitt, 437.}

The Russian patriarch’s program in Ukraine was echoed by then-president Medvedev. He
condemned Ukraine’s “harmful practices of intervention…in the affairs of the Orthodox Church” and
argued that the conditions created on the eve of the patriarch’s visit were artificially unfavorable. As a
result, Russia would refuse to dispatch a new ambassador to Ukraine until it installed new political

\footnotesize{\footnote{Mel’nyk, “‘Russian World,’” 243.} \footnote{Lunkin, “European Vector,” 280-281.} \footnote{Mel’nyk, 243.} \footnote{Blitt, 437.}}
leadership more accommodating towards Russia and its spiritual representatives. Deliberately or otherwise, this statement established a clear and direct parallel between the leadership of the ROC and Russia’s secular government.\textsuperscript{85}

Already a champion of the \textit{russkyi mir} concept, Kirill took readily to doing the same for \textit{Fond Russkyi Mir}. In 2009, the ROC and \textit{Fond Russkyi Mir} entered into a formal cooperation agreement for the “strengthening of the spiritual unity of the Russian World” and preserving the “spiritual, linguistic and cultural identity” of the Russians abroad.\textsuperscript{86} Kirill was the main speaker at the Third Congress of the Russian World Foundation.\textsuperscript{87} In his speech to the assembly, the patriarch sacralized the ideology \textit{russkyi mir} and the \textit{raison d’etre} of \textit{Fond Russkyi Mir}.\textsuperscript{88}

The new partnership strengthened the ROC position on the concept of \textit{russkyi mir} and Russia’s sphere of influence in the “Near Abroad.” This position was enumerated in the patriarch’s 2009 address. He explained that the work of \textit{Fond Russkyi Mir} was “a bulwark against the threat of globalization and loss of culture” and that “the ROC represents ‘the backbone of the Russian World.’” He reiterated that the ROC was not an ethnic but a cultural church, ministering to all the “countries of the Russian World.”\textsuperscript{89} Notably, the patriarch invokes the words of a 20\textsuperscript{th} century Chernihiv cleric to describe the idea of “Holy Rus”/“Russian World”: “Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus – there you have it: ‘Holy Rus.’”\textsuperscript{90} In this context, Russia’s contemporary mission is nothing less than the continuation of the legacy of “Holy Rus”.\textsuperscript{91}

Kirill insists that the people of “Holy Rus” share “a strong awareness of the uninterrupted and continuous nature of the Russian state and social tradition.”\textsuperscript{92} He also appeals to quasi-mythical

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{86} “Подписано соглашение о сотрудничестве между Русской Православной Церковью и фондом «Русский мир» [An agreement on the cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian World Foundation],” The Russian Orthodox Church Department of External Church Relations. Accessed 28 March 2021. https://www.mospat.ru/ru/news/58290/
\item \textsuperscript{87} Plokhy, \textit{Lost Kingdom}, 331.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Mel’nyk, 243.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Gennadii Druzenko, “Geopolitics from the Patriarch: The Heavenly Kingdom versus the ‘Russian World.’” \textit{Russian Politics & Law} 49, no. 1 (2011): 65.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Kirill, “Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на торжественном открытии III Ассамблеи Русского мира [Address of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the opening ceremony of the III Russian World Assembly],” (Speech, Moscow, 03 November, 2009), Russian Orthodox Church, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/928446.html
\item \textsuperscript{91} Curanović, “Russia’s Mission in the World,” 257.
\item \textsuperscript{92} Kirill, “Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла [Address of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill].”
\end{itemize}
concepts such as Kyiv as the cradle of Russian civilization, “Russianness as Russianness,” the fear of the Other, and salvation via the Russian World/peace (*mir* takes an ambiguous meaning). Kirill warns that “alone, even the largest countries of the ‘Russian World’ will not be able to defend their spiritual, cultural and civilizational interests in a globalizing world.” Russia’s mission is to integrate the “nations of the Russian World” to “preserve their civilizational identity.” Accordingly, it acts not in its own interests, but in theirs. This is, however, in conflict with the realities of Ukrainian and Belarusian politics and culture.

This conflict did nothing to weaken the convictions of the ROC or *Fond Russkyi Mir*. The latter’s activities increasingly departed from its original mission of promoting Russian language, wandering instead to the promotion of Russian Orthodox exclusivity. Medvedev, speaking on behalf of the secular government in 2009, praised the Church’s reunification efforts in concert with the foundation.

Nowhere has the ROC’s involvement in the thrust of Russia’s foreign policy vis-à-vis *russkyi mir* been felt more acutely than in Ukraine. According to the ROC, the Ukrainian territory belongs canonically to the Russian Church. Any outside interference in the ecclesial affairs of this territory—whether by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate, or others—is illegal. In conjunction with the concepts of *russkyi mir* and “Holy Rus”, this canonical spiritual dependence provides the Kremlin with impetus for the violation of Ukraine’s national sovereignty. Kirill expressed this view in 2010, when he said that “historical conditions are right for Kyiv to again become one of the most important political and social centers of the Russian World” and that he was sure “that Ukraine can continue the ancient Kievan (sic) tradition, the hallmark of

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93 Mel’nyk, 244.
94 Kirill, “Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла [Address of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill].”
95 Curanović, 259.
96 Mel’nyk, 244.
97 Blitt, 386-387.
98 Blitt, 414.
100 Mel’nyk, 243.
which has always been support for a strong Russia capable of defending Holy Orthodoxy.” Soon after, Kirill met with the pro-Russian president of Ukraine, Yanukovych, to commend him for his “attention to the needs” of the UOC – Moscow Patriarchate.

The rhetoric of Russia’s mission and Russo-Ukrainian unity intensified in 2013. The ROC narrative legitimized Russia’s “exceptional role” and “special responsibility” to unite the post-Soviet space against the morally and culturally degenerative hegemony of the West. Putin publicly adopted the patriarch’s ethno-cultural line when he accompanied him on his annual pilgrimage to Kyiv in 2013. The Russian president said that they “understood today’s realities” and that the Russians and Ukrainians were one people, united by common spiritual values.

In the years that followed, Russia’s newest awakening to the “unity” of the “peoples of the ‘Holy Rus’” would come at a price familiar to the Ukrainian people. A familiarity the Russian patriarch dismissed as “obsessive fear” that local national culture might be destroyed by support for Russian culture, which allegedly knew nothing of “the spirit of xenophobia and chauvinism” or “the suppression of foreign cultures.”

History, however, tells a different tale.

3. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOX DIPLOMACY

The history of the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe is one of struggle, less for the salvation of the souls who dwell there than for diplomatic and cultural influence. From the Grand Duchy of Muscovy, through Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and into present day, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarch have been an accomplice and a tool of the Muscovite/Russian state to lay claim to Ukrainian lands, subjugate its people, and supress its culture and national consciousness. Within this context, history is an ideological battleground and a tool of nationalism.

101 Kirill, “Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на открытии IV Ассамблеи Русского мира [Address of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the opening of the IV Assembly of the Russian World],” (Speech, Moscow 03 November 2010), Russian Orthodox Church, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1310952.html
102 Blitt, 438.
103 Curanović, 259.
104 Plokhy, 334.
105 Kirill, “Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на открытии IV Ассамблеи Русского мира [Address of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the opening of the IV Assembly of the Russian World],”
and (in the Russian context) colonization. This is painfully apparent in the “Ukrainian-Russian competition over the Kyiv Rus (sic) legacy” which gave birth to two often diametrically opposed historiographical schools—the Ukrainophile and Russophile, respectively. These schools each encapsulate a radically different comprehension of the legacy of Kyivan Rus’ and contain the source of much of the cultural and national conflict between the Russian and Ukrainian nation states. For example, the Russophile school considers the 17th century treaty of Pereyaslav to be an inevitable and auspicious reunion of kindred peoples. The Ukrainophile school, on the other hand, considers it the “lesser of a number of evils” which did not implicitly rob Ukraine of its independence but opened the way for Russian treachery that did.106

These factual interpretations result in a fundamental difference in perspective. The Ukrainophile school portrays Russia as an “Other” which can only indirectly claim descent from the proto-Ukrainian Kyivan Rus’. This is totally incompatible with the Russophile school. According to the Russophiles, it is Russia that has primary claim to the Kyivan Rus’ legacy. Furthermore, it considers Ukraine an uncontested part of Russia and denies the existence of a unique Ukrainian culture, let alone a nation-building impulse.107

The Russophile school has supplied ample ammunition for the supporters of russkyi mir and “Holy Rus.” The ROC and the Russian Federation both tirelessly echo a glorious, messianic history which legitimizes Russia’s flagrant aggression and distortion of reality. To understand and critically evaluate not only the core concepts of these narratives but also the driving force behind the words and actions of Russia’s secular and spiritual leaders, it is imperative to understand the historical background of the relationship between the modern Russian and Ukrainian states and the churches that minister to them.

107 Ibid., 34.
3.1. Kyivan Rus’ and the Grand Duchy of Muscovy

3.1.1. Rus’ and Constantinople

The tendency of the Russian Orthodox Church to participate actively in secular diplomatic affairs can be traced back to its Byzantine heritage. The close, harmonious relationship (called *symphonia* or ‘symphony’) between the church and emperor was a fundamental feature of the Eastern Orthodox Church to which the metropolitanate of Kyiv and all Rus’ (a predecessor of the ROC) belonged.\(^{108}\) First employed by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, the concept of symphony coincides the theoretically universal power of the emperor with the universal expansion of the church. It was the duty of the emperor to protect and shelter the church, which in turn legitimized his rule and authority.\(^ {109}\)

The premise of *symphonia* was especially relevant to the metropolitan of Rus’ whose political role, according to John Meyendorff, “was immensely greater than that of a regular Byzantine provincial primate.”\(^ {110}\) Although politically independent, Rus’ was brought into the fold of the Byzantine Empire through the Eastern Orthodox Church. As a result, the metropolitan of Kyiv and all Rus’ was forced into the position of diplomat, working to advance the interests of Constantinople in Rus’, and of Rus’ in Constantinople.\(^ {111}\) As the primary guardian of Byzantine cultural values and the imperial ideology in Rus’, the Church wielded significant influence which it used not only to maintain the relationship between Rus’ and Constantinople, but also between the Orthodox nations of Eastern Europe and the various powers competing for control of Rus’ itself.\(^ {112}\) The princes of Rus’ quickly recognized the importance of holding the metropolitan’s favor.

In the early 13th century, the Mongol armies brought low the city of Kyiv. This event marked the fall of Kyivan Rus’, which has since taken on a semi-mystical dimension in contemporary thought. Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus (whose modern-day territory fell within the historic borders of Kyivan Rus’) all claim to have inherited the legacy of the fallen nation. Russia and Ukraine have been most


\(^{110}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{112}\) Ibid., 39
enthusiastic about these claims. Over the course of the next several centuries, Russia repeatedly
mobilized this idea to not only claim the cultural and civilizational unity of the Slavic peoples (always
with Russia at the helm) but also to justify its colonialism and irredentist claims.

The fall of Kyiv left the metropolitanate unattended, which provided the scattered powers of
former Kyivian Rus’ with an opportunity to establish a new power dynamic in the region. The first act
of Grand-prince Daniel Romanovich upon his return (after fleeing the Mongol armies) to the
principalities of Volhynia and Galicia was to secure the leadership of the church by establishing his
candidate, Cyril, as Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Rus’.113 Despite the support of the Galician Grand-
prince, Cyril did not remain bound by the prince’s interest. As the head of the only administrative
structure to span all Rus’, “from the Carpathian Mountains to the upper Volga and from Novgorod to
the Golden Horde,”114 he established contact with the Grand-prince Nevsky of Vladimir, and
eventually transferred the seat of the metropolitanate to Novgorod.115 Nor was the Rus’ metropolitan
strictly bound to the will of his canonical masters in Constantinople, who were pursuing a Uniate
course under the patriarch John Beccos and emperor Michael Palaeologus, aiming to strengthen
relations with the western papacy. The leadership of the Rus’ church remained faithful to Grand-
prince Nevsky’s policy of loyalty to the Tatars and resistance against Western involvement, likely
influencing Grand-prince Daniel—his successor and prince of Moscow—to assume a similar course
and break his association with the papacy.116

3.1.2. The Metropolitanate and the Rise of Moscow

Over the course of the 14th century, the metropolitanans of Kyiv and All Rus’ began cultivating
a close relationship with the Grand principalities of Vladimir and Moscow, the seeds of the future
Russian Empire and the modern Russian Federation. Frequently, this relationship was more political
than spiritual in nature. The princes of Vladimir and Moscow supported the metropolitanans’ oft
contested claims to the metropolitanate. The metropolitanans, meanwhile, lent an air of legitimacy to the

113 Ibid., 49-50.
114 Ibid., 52.
115 Ibid., 43
116 Ibid., 45
princes’ claims of primacy among their peers. This relationship laid the foundations of the pervading Russophile narrative of Moscow as the de facto leader and fated unifier of Rus’ lands.

In the year 1300, Metropolitan Maksim, Cyril’s successor, transferred his residence to the city of Vladimir, the capital of the northern Grand-princes. Shortly after, his successor Peter moved his residence to Moscow as part of a calculated political maneuver which dramatically increased the prestige of the new capital. 117 The princes of Moscow were not the only ones seeking strength through an alliance with the Church. Peter’s appointment to the office of metropolitan earned the ire of Michael of Tver, Grand-prince of Vladimir, who had nominated his own candidate to the position. Michael attempted to depose Peter on two separate occasions by issuing formal complaints against him to the patriarch. This, however, only strengthened the ties between Moscow and the metropolitanate. Peter responded by seeking an alliance with the Grand-prince of Muscovy, going so far as to take a stance against Tver in the principality’s military confrontation with the Muscovites in 1311. 118 It is hardly a coincidence that the years that followed witnessed Moscow’s rapid rise to power in the region.

Peter’s pro-Moscow policies would continue under his successor, Theognostos. A Greek, Theognostos was appointed directly by Constantinople due to the ongoing conflict among the Rus’ princes. The fact that the foreign metropolitan continued to pursue Peter’s course suggests that Moscow had earned the favor of Constantinople via its allegiance with the late metropolitan. The construction of several stone churches and canonization of Peter (buried in Moscow) as a saint greatly increased the prestige of Moscow, allowing it to rival the ancient capital of Vladimir. In addition, Theognostos excommunicated Prince Alexander of Tver, who had continued his father’s conflict with Moscow and the Golden Horde. 119

By the 14th century, the Grand Duchy of Muscovy had established the Eastern Orthodox Church (under the Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Rus’) as a de-facto diplomatic arm. As a result, the

117 Ibid., 79.
118 Ibid., 150.
119 Ibid., 156.
Muscovite princes developed a strong interest in keeping the Rus’ lands spiritually unified—a trend that would endure for hundreds of years to come.

Facing a threat against their economic interests in the Black Sea due to the military movements of the Tatars, the Byzantines conceded a new ecclesiastical province in Galicia-Volhynia to assist in the Crusade of the papally-aligned King Casimir of Poland. A new metropolitanate was created in ‘Mikra Rosia’ in spite of Moscow’s protestations. This arrangement lasted for the duration of the conflict—shortly after peace was restored, the Byzantine emperor received an obsequious letter (accompanied by a large monetary gift) from Symeon of Moscow entreating the restoration of a single metropolitanate. The request was granted. In the responding letter, Emperor Cantacuzenos styled Symeon “grand prince of all Rus’” and gifted him with “an imperial encolpion with relics of the True Cross and of four martyrs.”

But Moscow was not the uncontested leader of the Rus’ lands, as Russophile historiography often claims. Its growing primacy amongst the principalities of Eastern Europe faced a challenge from Lithuania. Galicia-Volhynia, only recently brought back under Metropolitan Theognostos, fell in 1349 to Casimir of Poland. He was opposed by Lithuania, which took on the role of the defender of Orthodox Christianity, and in this capacity sought to add the title of unifier of Russia—towards which Moscow was making rapid progress—to its accolades. Lithuania moved quickly to secure the support of Khan Djanibek of the Tatars. From this strengthened position it restored the metropolitanate of Lithuania to legitimize its position as “a rallying point for Russian principalities.”

The rule of the Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Rus’ was similarly challenged. The Lithuanian prince Olgerd sent his candidate, Theodoret, to Constantinople to be consecrated Metropolitan of Rus’, despite Theognostos (whose demise was thought imminent due to illness) continuing to hold the metropolitanate in Moscow. Theodoret’s candidacy was rejected by the ecumenical patriarch. He was instead consecrated by the Bulgarian Patriarchate, which had recently split with Constantinople.
was likely intended as a steppingstone to the creation of an autocephalous Russian Orthodox Church allied to Olgerd, as it would have been unreasonable for the Metropolitan of Russia to be canonically dependent upon Bulgaria. Although Theodoret’s episcopal title is not reliably recorded, he was the acting metropolitan in the territories controlled by Olgerd (including the see of Kyiv) for two years.\(^{123}\)

Facing a threat to Byzantine influence in Eastern Europe, the ecumenical patriarchate excommunicated Theodoret and moved to strengthen the “legitimate” metropolitan in Moscow. Alexis, a Russian abbot and the vicar of Moscow, was named Theognostos’ successor and was consecrated Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Rus’ immediately following his predecessor’s death.\(^{124}\) To further discredit Theodoret, who resided in Kyiv, the seat of the metropolitanate was formally transferred to Vladimir, where the last three metropolitans had already resided.\(^{125}\) These actions placed the Grand-principality of Vladimir and the Muscovite dynasty in an ideal position “to claim the inheritance of Kievan Russia (sic) and of ‘Russian unity.’”\(^{126}\)

3.1.3 *The Struggle for the Unity of All Rus’*

The events of the latter half of the 14\(^{th}\) century represent one of the first major challenges to the primacy of the Moscow aligned metropolitanate in Rus’. Ecclesiastical administrative control was closely associated with the diplomatic sphere of influence, which bred both a secular and ecclesiastic intolerance towards division within the Eastern Orthodox Church in Rus’. This tendency to suppress and delegitimize religious factions that were deemed a threat to Muscovite—and later Russian—aligned Orthodoxy became the *modus operandi* of the Orthodox Church in Muscovy and Russia.

In the same year as the consecration of Alexis, a change of power took place in Constantinople that shifted the winds in favor of Lithuania. Backed by the Genoese, the new Byzantine emperor John V had a vested interested in maintaining a decentralized balance of power in Eastern Europe. To this end, Constantinople reconciled with Lithuania and Bulgaria, and consecrated Roman, a monk from Tver, “Metropolitan of the Lithuanians” to oversee the territory under Olgerd’s

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 165.
\(^{124}\) Ibid., 166
\(^{125}\) Ibid., 167.
\(^{126}\) Ibid., 168.
rule and challenge, once more, Moscow’s claim over the souls of the Rus’ peoples.\textsuperscript{127} The two metropolitans, Roman and Alexis, travelled to Constantinople to settle their dispute by formally defining the limits of “Lithuania” within the context of the metropolitanate. Although Alexis retained the title of Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Rus’, Roman was granted jurisdiction over all territory belonging to the Lithuanian Grand-prince and the dioceses of Galicia and Volhynia, greatly expanding the previously established influence of the Metropolitan of Lithuania. Despite these concessions, Roman returned to claim Kyiv as the seat of his residence and the title of Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Rus’.\textsuperscript{128}

This confused state of affairs did not survive Roman, and the metropolitanates of Rus’ were once again reunited after his death in 1362.\textsuperscript{129} Notably, the patriarchate deliberately acted to discredit Olgerd as the leader of a united Rus’ by canonizing three Lithuanian martyrs, Anthony, John, and Eustathius, who had been killed on Olgerd’s orders.\textsuperscript{130} In 1370, Olgerd wrote to the patriarchate with a list of complaints against Alexis and a request to reestablish the Lithuanian metropolitanate with expanded jurisdiction. The patriarch denied the request and instructed Olgerd to respect Alexis’ claim to the Metropolitanate of Kyiv and All Rus’. He also wrote to Alexis, asking that “there be love between you and [Olgerd], so that you may meet him and his people.”\textsuperscript{131} The patriarchate was simultaneously involved in diffusing a conflict between Prince Michael of Tver and Metropolitan Alexis, who was acting as regent of Moscow at the time. This patriarchal diplomacy resulted in a tentative peace between Lithuania, Tver, and Moscow.\textsuperscript{132}

Anticipating the death of the elderly Metropolitan Alexis, the patriarchate consecrated a Bulgarian monk and patriarchal envoy, Cyprian, Metropolitan of Kyiv, Rus’, and Lithuania while Alexis still lived. This decision was made to ensure that the territories under Olgerd’s control would not be left without ecclesiastic care without dividing them from the rest of Rus’ upon the death of

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 170.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 196.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 197.
Alexis. This appointment, and the return to Kyiv as the seat of the metropolitanate, proved distasteful to Moscow, which was dominated at the time by the boyar party. Driven by a newfound sense of local nationalism, the Muscovites were uninterested in the unity of “all Rus” and sought to use the metropolitanate as a diplomatic tool to pursue diplomacy with the Mongol empire. They were opposed by a coalition favoring an anti-Tatar alliance of Rus’ princes, among whom Cyprian found supporters.

3.1.4. Troubled Times in Muscovy and the Fall of Byzantium

In the 1370s, Constantinople yet again changed hands and Moscow entered talks with the new government. With the aid of the Genoese, they brokered the creation of a new metropolitanate of ‘Megale Rosia’ (the closest to a true historical territorial predecessor of the modern Russian state) to be entrusted to Michael-Mityai. When Cyprian travelled to Moscow in 1378 intending to claim succession after the death of Alexis, the Muscovites refused to receive him. They humiliated his entourage and placed Cyprian under military guard, subjecting him to cruel and inhumane treatment and accusing him of favoring Lithuania. He was released shortly after and returned to Kyiv, bitterly admonishing his treatment at the hands of the Muscovites and the unlawful consecration of Michael-Mityai. He continued to call himself metropolitan of all Rus’ and excommunicated those who supported the legitimacy of Moscow’s candidate.

Cyprian arrived in Constantinople in 1379 to plead his case against Moscow and Michael-Mityai before the very same patriarch who had a hand in his misfortune. That year, the Byzantine emperor was deposed, and John V reclaimed the throne. Meanwhile, a Muscovite delegation headed by Michael-Mityai had embarked for Constantinople, unaware of the changes that would take place in Constantinople during their journey. Michael-Mityai died unexpectedly when the
delegation was within sight of Constantinople, but the delegation continued despite this complication. Relying heavily on bribery, they swayed the newly installed patriarch to decide the fate of Rus’ in their favor. In the final decision of the synod, Cyprian was disparaged as a falsely consecrated agent of Lithuania. One of Michael-Mityai’s archimandrites, Pimen, was consecrated Metropolitan of Kyiv and Megale Rosia\textsuperscript{140} while Cyprian’s metropolitanate was reduced to Lithuania and Mikra Rosia.\textsuperscript{141}

Pimen would not assume this position for some years, however. The diplomatic standoff between Moscow and the Golden Horde ended when the Mongolian Khan Mamai began to assemble an anti-Muscovite coalition of the Genoese, the Prince of Ryazan, and Grand-prince Jagiello of Lithuania, son of Olgerd. With the blessing of St. Sergius (a friend and ally of Cyprian), Dimitri of Moscow hastily arranged an alliance between the Rus’ princes to contest the Horde. The two sides met at the Battle of Kulikovo. Moscow emerged victorious, taking the mantle of the vanguard for national liberation.\textsuperscript{142} Shortly thereafter, Dimitri drastically changed his conduct towards Cyprian, requesting that he assume his metropolitanate in Moscow that winter.\textsuperscript{143} Pimen, upon his return to Rus’, was arrested repeatedly and subjected to the same treatment suffered by Cyprian on his first attempt to enter Moscow.\textsuperscript{144}

Moscow’s independence from the Golden Horde lasted until 1382, when Khan Tokhtamysh invaded Moscow and restored Dimitri’s dependence on the Golden Horde.\textsuperscript{145} This bade ill for Cyprian, who had always opposed Tatar rule and did not enjoy the favor of either the Khan or Genoese-controlled Constantinople. Cyprian fled Moscow for Tver, and Dimitri released Pimen to assume leadership of the metropolitanate of Kyiv and Megale Rosia.\textsuperscript{146} Although Cyprian himself had no objection to this act, members of the monastic party in Moscow staged a campaign against Pimen, travelling to Constantinople with indictments against him.\textsuperscript{147} In that same year (1383) Dimitri himself withdrew his support of Pimen, providing the delegation with letters accusing Pimen of falsely

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 219.
\item Ibid., 220.
\item Ibid., 222.
\item Ibid., 224.
\item Ibid., 225.
\item Ibid., 227.
\item Ibid., 229.
\item Ibid., 230.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
obtaining the metropolitanate.\textsuperscript{148} It may be assumed that the goal of the delegation was to depose both Pimen and Cyprian to restore a united Rus’ metropolitanate, most likely under a new metropolitan in the Archbishop Dionysius.\textsuperscript{149}

Byzantium agreed to send a commission to Moscow to investigate the accusations and install Dionysius in Pimen’s place if necessary. Dionysius was arrested in Kyiv, however, and there died in confinement.\textsuperscript{150} Pimen, meanwhile, was deposed and fled to Constantinople to plead his case. Shortly thereafter, the Byzantine commission returned with Cyprian, who had been summoned to face inquiry. These intrigues lasted until 1389.\textsuperscript{151} That year, Pimen was formally deposed \textit{in absentia} and died after refusing to heed patriarchal summons.\textsuperscript{152} Cyprian was confirmed as Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Rus’, and after Dimitri’s death that same year returned to Moscow without obstacle.\textsuperscript{153}

Growing anti-Muscovite sentiment in Lithuania complicated the political landscape, weakening Cyprian’s hold over the portions of the flock in Lithuanian lands. During this period Lithuania turned westward. Prince Jagiello converted to Catholicism and formed a union with Poland to take the Polish crown. Cyprian was left in the difficult position of mediating to maintain the unity of a metropolitanate split between Orthodox and Latin princes—a complication which would only grow more complex over the next centuries.\textsuperscript{154}

In an effort to navigate the conflicts among the princes of Rusv, Cyprian appealed increasingly to the authority of the Byzantine emperor and patriarch who, within the framework of the Byzantine Commonwealth and the notion of absolutism, held ultimate authority over all Orthodox peoples. Believing that an alliance between Moscow and Lithuania was the only path to preserving the union of the metropolitanate, he worked to forge ties between the two princely houses and broker peace.\textsuperscript{155} This project gained new urgency with the growing Turkish threat against Constantinople,
against whom the Queen of Cities could only be preserved through Christian unity. Cyprian actively promoted the idea that “loyalty to the Byzantine Commonwealth [was] a condition for the maintenance and progress of Orthodox Christianity in the whole of Russia, both in Muscovy and in the Lithuanian-held territories.”

This policy was continued by his successor Photius. He was challenged repeatedly by Vitovt of Lithuania, who had resumed Olgerd’s campaign to unite Rus’ under a Lithuanian metropolitan. Supported by the western-Russian bishops, Vitovt sent an indictment against Constantinople’s corruption and elected Gregory Tsamblak as metropolitan of Kyiv and all Rus’. He was condemned and excommunicated, and Photius was reinstated as the one true Rus’ metropolitan.

The notion of ecclesiastical unity under a Byzantine Commonwealth was rapidly losing popularity in Rus’ lands. It was further weakened by the signing of the Union of Florence, promoted by Metropolitan Isodore on behalf of Byzantium and against the wishes of Muscovy. Grand-prince Basil II expelled the metropolitan on his return and requested leave of Byzantium to elect a new metropolitan. It was not forthcoming, and in 1448 the Muscovites elected Metropolitan Jonas without the patriarchal blessing. Neither the Lithuanians nor the Muscovites enforced the union of the churches brokered by Constantinople, a clear sign of the weakening Byzantine influence. The patriarch attempted to salvage the union of the metropolitanate by appointing a new metropolitan, but Moscow had gone its own way, forsaking allegiance to Turkish Constantinople. Upon the death of Metropolitan Jonas, Theodosius was elected ‘Metropolitan of all Rus’, permanently severing the Muscovite controlled lands from the historic see of Kyiv, Volhynia, Galicia, and the Polish-Lithuanian territories.

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156 Ibid., 252.
157 Ibid., 258.
158 Ibid., 266.
159 Ibid., 267.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid., 268.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid., 269.
3.1.5. The Last Bastion of Orthodoxy

By the end of the 15th century, the Grand Prince of Moscow was the last free Orthodox ruler, and “sole defender of the Orthodox faith.” Constantinople was in the hands of the Turks, Moldavia and Walachia were fighting against the Ottoman advance, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had embraced Catholicism. These events contributed to the idea of the universality of the Moscow Church. Orthodoxy was facing a struggle for survival in Ukrainian lands and many of its clergy, officials, and townspeople turned to Muscovy. The Muscovites were not going to help a church they had long since come to consider a rival, however they did offer refuge to those willing to leave behind their homeland to practice Orthodoxy in the east. Those who believe in Russia’s messianic role in Eastern European civilization frequently refer to this era as evidence of its uniqueness among the other Slavic nations.

The Orthodox faith in Ukraine did not die, however. On the contrary, it developed under a unique set of conditions that would distinguish it from its Russian counterpart in the centuries to come, rendering it an enduring rival to the primacy of the Muscovite faith. The 15th century saw the appearance of organizations called bratstva, or brotherhoods, of Orthodox laypeople throughout Ukraine. Found primarily in cities such as L’viv, brotherhoods were secular organizations associated with a particular local church, which they supported through various social functions. Their role and influence expanded significantly by the end of the 16th century. Their position was strengthened by the recognition of the ecumenical patriarchate. In 1585, the charter L’viv Dormition Church Brotherhood was formally accepted by Patriarch Joachim of Antioch and vested with supervisory powers over the life of the clergy and Orthodox Church. Four years later, the brotherhood’s prestige was further enhanced by Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople through the right of stauropegion, 

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165 Volodymyr Hurzhi “Russian World as a Method of Modernization for the Social Doctrine of the ROC,” Doksa, no. 2(28) (December 1, 2017): 93.
167 Sherr and Kullamaa. The Russian Orthodox Church, 10.
168 Magosci, A History, 156.
which placed the brotherhood directly under the control of Constantinople and granted them a supervisory role over all other brotherhoods in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{169}

This event was followed by the creation of several other brotherhoods which followed the model of the L’viv Stauropegial Brotherhood to establish Greco-Slavonic schools. These brotherhoods played a significant role in ensuring the survival of Orthodox culture in Ukraine. Their supervisory role over Orthodox religious life, however, brought them into conflict with the formal church hierarchy.\textsuperscript{170} Certain church hierarchs, such as the bishop of L’viv, Gedeon Balaban, took issue with what they perceived as heavy-handed interference of Constantinople in the affairs of Ukraine’s Orthodox Church. Balaban and his like-minded peers turned to the Roman Catholic church for leadership.\textsuperscript{171} In the meantime, the Patriarchate of Constantinople was mending its ailing relationship with Muscovy, upon which it was forced to rely for financial support while under the yoke of the Ottomans. In 1589, Patriarch Jeremiah recognized the autocephaly of the Muscovite Orthodox Church, raising it to the status of patriarchate.\textsuperscript{172} This event allowed Moscow to adopt the Byzantine model of church-state relations—\textit{symphonia}, in which the two functioned as halves of a whole.\textsuperscript{173}

A significant blow was dealt the Orthodox Church in Ukraine at the end of the 16th century. With the support of the Polish king, the Uniate faction of the clergy signed the Union of Brest with the Roman Catholics. The treaty was fiercely opposed by a significant portion of Poland-Lithuania’s Orthodox leaders and laypeople, but their protests could not contend with the support of the crown. The Union of Brest resulted in the creation of the Uniate church and the outlawing of the Orthodox Church in Poland-Lithuania. Although the Orthodox Church regained its legal status less than a decade later, it remained significantly weakened in Ukrainian lands.\textsuperscript{174}

In the years which followed, Ukrainian Orthodoxy would find its most staunch defenders among the Cossacks. Hetman Petro Sahaidachnyi, educated in the Orthodox Ostrih Academy,

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 158-159.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Daniela Kalkandjieva. “Orthodoxy and Nationalism in Russian Orthodoxy.” St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 57, no. 3–4 (2013): 284.
\textsuperscript{174} Magosci, \textit{A History}, 169.
demanded of the Polish king the full restoration of the Orthodox hierarchy in exchange for his military aid and loyalty to Poland. During this same period another Galician native, Ielysei Pletenets'kyi, restored the cultural and intellectual prestige of Kyiv by establishing a prolific printing press at the Monastery of the Caves. Not long after, a brotherhood was established in Kyiv, followed by a Greco-Slavonic school based on the L’viv model. During this same period, Hetman Sahaidachnyi transferred his administration to Kyiv, fully restoring its status as the centre of cultural, political, intellectual, and military life in Ukrainian lands.\textsuperscript{175}

The Orthodox faction took the opportunity of Kyiv’s restoration to attempt a restoration of the Orthodox organizational framework. They persuaded the Patriarch of Jerusalem during his visit to Kyiv to ordain an Orthodox metropolitan as well as four bishops, with two more the following year. These ordinations were performed in secret and subsequently outlawed by the Polish government. The Cossacks continued to demand that the Orthodox hierarchy be legalized.\textsuperscript{176} This demand was not met, but in 1632 the Polish king agreed to the compromise of the “Pacification of the Greek Faith.” This compromise regulated Orthodox church life, stipulating that the Orthodox hierarchs would be elected by the Orthodox clergy and nobility, confirmed by the Polish king, and ordained by the patriarch of Constantinople. The first Orthodox metropolitan of Kyiv elected under this new system was Petro Mohyla, formerly archimandrite of the Monastery of the Caves.\textsuperscript{177} Mohyla believed that the survival of the Orthodox Church depended on the clergy’s understanding of their Latin opponents, and as a result mandated that monks be educated according to the Jesuit Latin model. These ‘pro-Western’ views concerned the traditionalist Orthodox milieu, including the secretly ordained hierarchs and the Cossacks who supported them. This faction began to look to Muscovy for support.\textsuperscript{178} It was precisely this attitude that Mohyla sought to challenge. He believed that the future of Ukrainian Orthodoxy was not with Muscovy, but with Poland, whose culture and religion the Orthodox Church could learn to accommodate on equal terms while remaining separate and distinct.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 188.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
3.1.6. Ukraine Under Khmel'nyts'kyi

For the next fifty years, the Orthodox Church would continue to struggle against the Uniate church for control over Ukrainian lands. This period was also marked by a series of rebellions by the Cossacks, the sworn allies of the Orthodoxy. Although Poland had legalized the Orthodox Church, it had not met the demands of Cossack leaders to raise them to the status of a noble estate within Poland’s social structure. The rebellion of 1648, led by Hetman Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi, was successful. Rather than attacking Warsaw, Khmel'nyts'kyi made a number of demands (including the abolition of the Uniate church) and returned to Kyiv to await the king’s answer.\(^{180}\)

In Kyiv, Khmel'nyts'kyi was greeted by the metropolitan and the patriarch of Jerusalem. The Orthodox Church vocally supported the Cossack rebellion, calling Khmel'nyts'kyi a “modern-day Moses” who would free the people of Rus’ of “Polish bondage.”\(^{181}\) The leaders of the Orthodox Church considered the Cossack’s efforts to be the turning point in the religious and cultural survival of Rus’. The patriarch of Jerusalem urged Khmel'nyts'kyi to work with their Orthodox neighbours, Moldavia and Walachia, and to recognize the authority of the Muscovites. It was the patriarch’s hope that a united Orthodox front might some day rally together to free Constantinople from the Ottomans.\(^{182}\)

Khmel'nyts'kyi was deeply affected by the faith placed in him by these Orthodox leaders and solemnly took up the mantle of the champion of Orthodoxy and the Rus’ people. He promptly undertook negotiations with the neighbouring Orthodox lands of Moldavia, Walachia, Muscovy, as well as anti-Catholic Transylvania and the Lithuanian Prince Radziwill. The hostilities with Poland concluded with the signing of the Zboriv agreement. This agreement expanded the number of registered Cossacks and gave them control over Ukrainian lands, granted the Kyiv metropolitan a seat on the Polish Senate, and declared amnesty for the nobles who had participated in the uprising.\(^{183}\) This agreement was overturned after the failure of Khmel'nyts'kyi’s diplomacy and a series of military

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 203.
\(^{181}\) Ibid.
\(^{182}\) Ibid.
\(^{183}\) Ibid., 204.
losses, and then again restored after subsequent victories. Recognizing that a grand anti-Polish coalition was unlikely and that his continued military struggles would at best end in a stalemate, Khmelnytsky instead turned towards Muscovy.

Although Tsar Aleksei of Muscovy had refused to offer the Cossacks aid in 1648, the Cossacks’ victories against the Poles had shown that Polish military might could be bested. Additionally, Patriarch Nikon had come into power in 1652 and was eager to draw on the intellectual talent of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to reform the Russian Orthodox Church. Nikon encouraged the Muscovites to accept the Cossacks’ requests, even acting as mediator when Khmelnytsky’s envoys arrived in 1653 to ask the tsar for his protection. The tsar agreed.

According to Muscovite sources, the day the tsar’s envoys met with Khmelnytsky, the archpriest of Pereiaslav (where they were set to meet) led the people in greeting the envoys and “thank[ing] God for having fulfilled the desire of our Orthodox people to bring together Little and Great Rus’ under the mighty hand of the all-powerful and pious eastern tsar.” The negotiations at Pereiaslav faced resistance from the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Some of its leaders feared that the Ukrainian church—at that time still under the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople—would be subordinated to the Patriarchate of Moscow.

Their fears proved well founded. Among the terms of the agreement reached at Pereiaslav, it was decided that “the Orthodox metropolitan and other clergy throughout Poland-Lithuania were to be ‘under the blessing’ of the patriarch of Moscow.” Shortly thereafter, the Muscovite tsar changed his title from Tsar of All Rus’ to Tsar of All Great and Little Rus’. The Orthodox Church in Ukraine soon felt the effects of the agreement. In the same year as it was signed the eparchies of the Kyivan metropolitanate in Belarus and Russia were placed under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Moscow. The successors of the bishops of these eparchies were thenceforth appointed by the Muscovite patriarch to serve as “guardians” of the Kyiv metropolitanate on Moscow’s behalf. By 1675, the

184 Ibid., 205.
185 Ibid., 206.
186 Ibid., 213.
187 Ibid.
188 Ibid., 255.
189 Ibid., 213.
Kyivan metropolitan himself was one such “guardian”, and in 1685 the Muscovite tsar directed the Cossack hetman to assemble a church council (synod) to elect a metropolitan who would recognize the supremacy of the Moscow patriarch. The ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, pressured by an Ottoman government desirous of maintaining positive relations with the Muscovites, reluctantly approved the appointment.

Beginning with 1686, the Metropolitanate of Kyiv, effectively independent since the times of Kyivan Rus’, fell under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. This was a step forward in Muscovy’s ambitions to unite the Eastern Slavs in a single Orthodox Church, as well as lay definitive claim over the political, religious, and cultural heritage of Kyivan Rus’.

This claim was reinforced by a text that emerged in Kyiv in the late 17th century. Attributed to the archimandrite of the Monastery of the Caves, Inokentii Gizel’, the “Sinopsis ili kratkoe sobranie” (“Synopsis, or A Short Collection”) was an attempt to record the history of the East Slavs and quickly became the most popular textbook in Ukraine and Muscovy. According to the “Sinopsis,” the Muscovite tsars derived their autocracy from the Kyivan grand princes and union of Ukraine and Russia was the natural reunion of historic Rus’. This text laid the foundations of Russia’s imperial conception of Eastern Europe—that is, the direct inheritance of power from Kyiv, to Vladimir-na-Kliazma, to Moscow, and finally to St Peters burg.

3.1.7. Ukraine Under Mazepa

The bilateral influence of the Ukrainian and Muscovite Orthodoxies on one another reached its height under the Hetman Ivan Mazepa. Like the other Zaporizhian hetmans, Mazepa quickly became a staunch ally of the Ukrainian church. He lavished the church with gifts of money and land and supported the Orthodox Ukrainian collegiums and academies, which produced some of the leading figures of the East Slavic Orthodox intelligentsia. Muscovy’s tsars and patriarchs both welcome the many talented graduates of the Ukrainian higher education system. As a result, many

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190 Ibid., 255.
191 Ibid., 256.
192 Ibid., 257.
193 Ibid., 258.
Ukrainian intellectuals sought (and found) their place in Muscovy’s court and church, leading to an increased acceptance of Ukraine’s new relationship with the Muscovites. According to Magosci, “in terms of culture, the Orthodox Church, which included virtually all of Ukraine’s intellectual leaders, was steadily being drawn into the orbit and service of Muscovy.”

3.2. Russification of church and culture in Ukraine

This process continued throughout the 18th century. The Russian Orthodox Church underwent significant changes under Peter I. The seat of the patriarch was abolished, replaced instead by a council of bishops called the Holy Synod. This change was accompanied by a new constitution for the church, which removed the Kyiv Metropolitans’s self-governing status and reduced to an eparchy administered by the Holy Synod. The Kyiv Metropolitans was restored in 1743, but never regained its autonomy. All its eparchies were either lost to the Polish-Lithuanian Uniates or placed under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. Additionally, the metropolitan of Kyiv was directly appointed by the Russian government or the Holy Synod. In 1770, the metropolitan’s title was change to Metropolitan of Kyiv and Galicia to supply the Russian Empire with a claim to Western Ukrainian lands, which were still under Polish rule.

Meanwhile, unrest was growing among the Orthodox population of Polish-controlled Ukraine. Displeased with their socioeconomic and religious status, the peasants staged several rebellions throughout the middle 18th century, culminating in a major revolt in 1768. The revolt was organized by the Zaporizhian Cossack Maksym Zalizniak. Supported by members of the Orthodox clergy and feeling that the Orthodox adherents were under threat of destruction by anti-Russian Polish nobility, Zalizniak led the capture of several towns in the Kyiv palatinate, as well as in Volhynia, Podolia, and Bratslav, ending finally in the conquest of Uman’. Along the way, they massacred any Polish landlords and Roman Catholic or Uniate clergy they encountered. On the back of these victories, Zalizniak intended to demand the return to pre-serfdom conditions and the creation of an

194 Ibid.
195 Ibid., 259.
196 Ibid., 260.
197 Ibid., 284.
198 Ibid., 299.
Orthodox “Cossack-like political entity.” These aspirations to autonomy and the diplomatic instability resulting from the revolt lost Zalizniak the support of Russia, and Catherine II ordered that the Russian forces already in Poland suppress the revolt.

Soon thereafter, the Hetmanate in Ukraine—which had clung to autonomous self-government despite Muscovite pressure—was abolished and the Muscovites continued to erode the rights and freedoms of the Ukrainian church. The Kyivan metropolitan lost the right to appoint monastery archimandrites to the Holy Synod and all monastic property was secularized, rendering the clergy fully dependent on the state. Of the sixty-one convents and monasteries in Russian-controlled Ukraine, forty-two were closed. In 1785, the eparchial boundaries were redrawn to coincide with the Russian administrative boundaries. The Metropolitan of Kyiv and Galicia was reduced to the holder of an honorary title, and after 1799 no native Ukrainian held the title again. By the end of the 18th century, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine had been fully integrated in the Russian Orthodox Church.

The 19th century saw the appearance of a Russian intellectual movement eerily reminiscent of the contemporary russkyi mir concept. It was called “panslavism” and was first articulated by the educated upper class of the Russian Empire. From the very beginning, the movement was tied closely to the Russian Orthodox Church and enjoyed the active support of various ecclesiastical dignitaries. Its content, like that of the russkiy mir elevated Russia to the status of savior by virtue of its alleged historical and spiritual role in the Eastern European space. It was destined by inherent exceptionalism to rescue its “brother Slavs groaning under the yoke of the foreigner.” From whence stemmed this divine right? From the purity of the Russian Orthodox faith, the “essential basis of true civilization” of which the Russian nation was the “only true and effective repository.”

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199 Ibid., 300.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
202 Ibid., 285.
204 Ibid., 31.
It appeared at a time when Russia ached for national recognition, made acute by recent
defeats in the Crimean War and the nation-building success of Germany and Italy. The narrative
supplied by panslavism painted Russia as a “mighty power destined to shape the history of the world.”
It was the alternative to the “one, true civilisation to which all other peoples...should be adapting
themselves” of the West.205

Like russkiy mir, panslavism spawned culturally oriented organizations like the Moscow, St.
Petersburg, Kyiv, and Odesa committees. It also enjoyed the backing of the state through organs like
the Department of Asiatic Affairs in the Foreign Office. Abroad, its activities (particularly in
“Slavonic Ethnography”) were met with suspicion and critiqued as thinly veiled mechanisms of
imperial propaganda.206

The focus of the panslavists soon bled beyond cultural considerations and they began to
advocate for the gathering of Slavic lands under Russian imperial hegemony. This included the
homogenization of culture within these territories to the “superior” and “pure” Russian way. The
result was a series of aggressive russification policies in the so-called “western lands,” consisting of
Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine.207

Whereas before the Orthodox Church in Ukraine had acted as the guardian of Ukrainian
culture and identity under Polish rule208 it now “became an instrument of russification in the former
Hetmanate, Sloboda Ukraine, and Zaporizhia.”209 Throughout the first half of the 19th century, the
Russian Empire aggressively suppressed the Roman and Greek Catholic churches in Ukraine, so that
by the mid-19th century all Ukrainians belonged to Russian Orthodox Church.210

Regardless of their place of birth, the majority of Orthodox clergy in Ukraine identified as
Russian and actively opposed the realization of a distinctive Ukrainian identity. The Orthodox Church
was instrumental in spreading “the official imperial ideology, with its glorification of the tsar,
Orthodoxy, and Russian nationality” throughout Ukraine via ecclesiastical activity and the church-run

205 Ibid., 51-52.
206 Ibid., 30.
207 Ibid., 35.
208 Magosci., 374.
209 Ibid., 321.
210 Ibid., 375.
education system.\textsuperscript{211} It participated actively in the erasure of the Ukrainian language in accordance with the Ems Ukase of 1876, a decree passed to suppress the growing Ukrainian nationalist movement. All schools and publications exclusively used Russian language, and sermons were given in Russian. Even the Church Slavonic of the traditional liturgies was rendered with Russian pronunciation.\textsuperscript{212} These restrictions were only lifted in 1905, when a small number of publications, schools, and churches began using Ukrainian in their regular activities. However, they remained an exception to the rule.\textsuperscript{213} As for pan-slavism, it followed a trajectory similar to that of \textit{russkiy mir}, and took on a more militarist cast, evolving into the panrussianism that would drive the Empire to war with its neighbors.\textsuperscript{214}

\begin{quote}
3.2. The Soviet Era

3.2.1. Early Attempts at Ukrainian Independence and Suppression

The next series of significant changes in the Orthodox Church of both Ukraine and Russia occurred throughout the revolutionary period beginning in 1917. The Russian Orthodox Church abolished the Holy Synod established by Peter I and reinstated the patriarchal seat in Moscow. In Ukraine, meanwhile, the spirit of Ukrainization resurfaced among the clergy. While some desired autonomy from the Moscow patriarchate, others sought full independence, or autocephaly. They formed the autonomists and autocephalists respectively.\textsuperscript{215}

After the dissolution of the Empire, Ukraine fell into the hands of the Central Rada, which confiscated the landholdings of the church. Due to this, the church hierarchy welcomed the abolition of the Rada in April of 1917. It was succeeded by Pavlo Skorpads'kyi, a lieutenant-general of the dissolved tsarist army. He was installed as ruler of Ukraine by the occupying German army, effectively trading Ukrainian freedom for this position. Despite this he quickly received the full support of the Orthodox Church and was appointed Hetman of Ukraine with the blessing of the bishop

\begin{footnotes}
\item[211] Ibid.
\item[212] Ibid.
\item[213] Ibid., 380.
\item[214] Sumner, 40.
\item[215] Magosci., 491.
\end{footnotes}
of Kyiv. The Orthodox clergy were eager to return to a more stable way of life which the revolutionary activity of the abolished Central Rada had deprived them of.  

The autocephalists and autonomists convened twice during the Hetman’s reign. The autocephalists were barred from the second meeting, at which it was decided that the Ukrainian church would become autonomous. On 22 July, the Orthodox exarchate of Ukraine was founded. Henceforth, the Ukrainian metropolitans would be elected by a Ukrainian council of bishops, or sobor, and church appointments would be made by the exarchate. Both, however, would be subject to the final approval of the patriarch of Moscow. Despite this, members of the clergy and laity continued to support autocephaly, though the movement achieved little until Ukraine came under the Bolsevhiks.  

A member of the pro-Russian clergy later depicted the defeat of the autocephalists and their calls for Ukrainization as a victory for the Church.  

The autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church was created by the All-Ukrainian Orthodox Church Rada in May 1920. The authocephalists seized control of church property from the Exarchate. They received the support of the Soviet authorities, who intended to use the autocephalous church leadership to institute reform “from below” in the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1921, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church chose its own metropolitan. Receiving no support from the appointed Orthodox bishops, the autocephalous metropolitan was consecrated by the clergy and laity via ‘laying on hands,’ which isolated the autocephalists from the rest of the Orthodox world and alienated many of its adherents.  

Despite this departure from Orthodox convention, the Autocephalous Church attracted many nationalist minded Ukrainians. For them, it was to serve as the vanguard of an independent, distinct Ukraine within the newly formed Soviet federation. Another faction soon emerged, called the Renovationists. Rallying around their opposition to the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Tikhon, the Renovationists received the support of the Bolsheviks as a tool for undermining the Russian Orthodox Church.  

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216 Ibid., 489.  
217 Ibid., 491.  
219 Magosci, A History, 545.  
220 Ibid., 546.
Church. This left Ukraine’s Orthodox adherents divided into three factions: the Ukrainian exarchate answering to the Moscow patriarchate (the Tikhonites), the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (the Lypkivtsi), and the Orthodox Autocephalous Synodal church (the Renovationists). The three factions often entered into conflict over the control of church property.

The Ukrainian Soviet authorities hoped that the Ukrainian Autocephalous and the Synodal Orthodox Churches would merge into one faction, which would make it easier to manipulate the religious landscape of Ukraine. This did not happen, and soon the Soviet regime began to wary of the direction of Ukrainian nationalism and Ukrainization. The All-Ukrainian Orthodox Church Council was dissolved by the authorities in 1927. This marked the beginning of a recurring trend of the Party’s direct involvement in church affairs.\(^\text{221}\)

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church survived only a couple more years. In 1929, the Soviet secret police ‘uncovered’ the church’s involvement with the fictitious counterrevolutionary Union for the Liberation of Ukraine. By January 1930, the church was forced to dissolve itself as punishment for its alleged participation in the anti-Soviet conspiracy. Any attempts by the clergy to continue the functions of the dissolved church were supressed by Soviet security forces. According to Magocsi, “during the next eight years, 2 metropolitans, 26 bishops, and 1,150 priests were arrested and/or disappeared in labor camps. Even the 300 parishes allowed to reconstitute themselves as a new organization called simply the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were progressively eliminated until the last was supressed in 1936.”\(^\text{222}\)

### 3.2.2. Ukraine Under German Occupation

Ukrainian religious life (and the nationalism that accompanied it) would remain supressed until 1939. During this time, the Rusyn/Ukrainian populations of the Lemko, Chelm, and Podlachia regions of modern Poland were incorporated into Greater Germany as part of the Generalgouvernement. Hoping to escape Soviet oppression, over 20,000 Ukrainians fled to these regions. There, they were permitted to establish several Ukrainian institutions and reinstated the

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\(^{221}\) Ibid.  
\(^{222}\) Ibid., 565.
Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.\textsuperscript{223} It was able to extend to the rest of Ukraine in 1941, when the advancing German armies occupied Soviet Ukraine and incorporated it into the Reichskommissariat. They were soon joined by the revived Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church, which attracted to its ranks the remnants of the Russian Orthodox clergy due to its recognition of the Moscow patriarch’s authority.\textsuperscript{224} Although the clergy initially viewed German rule favourably due to these temporary freedoms, their new rulers soon showed their true colours.\textsuperscript{225} The Ukrainian and significant Ukrainian Jewish populations were considered Untermenschen, or subhumans, and as a result were subjected to forced labor, deportation, and the systematic mass killing of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{226} The Reichskommissariat lasted until 1944, when the Germans were driven out of Ukraine by the Red Army and replaced once more by Soviet rule.\textsuperscript{227}

\subsection*{3.2.3. Return to the Soviet Union and Russification}

With the Soviets came the expectation that all the East Slavs who chose to hold to their faith would do so within the Russian Orthodox Church. As a result of this, 1944 saw the systematic destruction of the Ukrainian Autocephalous and Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Churches, as well as the destruction of the Greek Catholic (Uniate) church, which had survived primarily in Western Ukraine.\textsuperscript{228} Although the Ukrainian Orthodox Church ceased to be in Soviet Ukraine, much of its clergy fled west where it would keep the church alive until the fall of the Soviet Union. The clergy of the Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church also fled west. Some, having always recognized the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate, were integrated into the ranks of the Russian Orthodox Church. This homogenization was performed in concert with the efforts of the Soviet authorities, who by this point had thoroughly subjugated the Russian Orthodox hierarchy.\textsuperscript{229} Thus, much as in imperial times,\textsuperscript{223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[223] Ibid., 620.
\item[224] Ibid., 628.
\item[225] Ibid., 629.
\item[226] Ibid., 631.
\item[227] Ibid., 638.
\item[228] Denysenko, “Explaining Ukrainian Autocephaly,” 429.
\item[229] Magosci, \textit{A History}, 650.
\end{footnotes}
the Russian state used the Orthodox Church as a tool for the subjugation of the Ukrainian—and other Eastern European and Caucasian—peoples. This state of affairs endured for the next 45 years.

Meanwhile, the Soviet authorities subjected Ukraine to a new wave of intense Russification initiatives backed by the Russian Orthodox Church. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the language of instruction in Ukrainian schools was replaced with Russian so that by 1987 16% of schools were Ukrainian, 12% mixed, and 72% Russian. Areas such as Chernihiv, Donetsk, Simferopol, and Luhansk had no Ukrainian-language schools at all. Of the students attending these schools in 1960, only 62.5% were Ukrainians, with 30% being ethnically Russian. Ukrainian literature, both instructional and cultural, was eclipsed by Russian publications. This project of linguicide was further supported by the initiative to systematically Russify Ukrainian grammar and vocabulary through linguistic institutes.230

Russification was also promoted through resettlement. Russians were encouraged to migrate to Ukraine. The Russian population in Ukraine rose from 16.9% in 1926 to 22.1% in 1989. Entire villages were transferred by Soviet authorities, a practice that continued into perestroika. Millions of Ukrainians were forcefully resettled as part of these policies so that by 1989 nearly 6.8 million Ukrainians lived throughout the USSR outside Ukraine. The regions where this policy was most effective were Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Dnipropetrovsk. 231

In 1989, with the advent of glasnost’ and the reawakening of Ukrainian culture and national consciousness, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church returned to Ukraine proper. Over the years that followed, the Autocephalous church (and its Greek Catholic counterpart) rebuilt their authority in Ukraine. They were welcomed by the local bishops, who recognized the church leadership that had been living ‘in exile’ in New Jersey and Rome, respectively.

The Russian Orthodox Church perceived the reconstitution of the Ukrainian churches as a direct threat. Attempting to discredit the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and lay claim to the Ukrainian orthodox laity, the Russian Orthodox Church renamed its Ukrainian exarchate to the

231 Ibid.
Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Soon after, a three-way struggle commenced for Ukraine’s religious infrastructure. For the most part, the Greek Catholics proved most successful in the West, and the Autocephalous Orthodox Church prevailed in central and Right Bank Ukraine.\(^{232}\)

4. THE “RUSSIAN WORLD” IN PRACTICE: THE CASE OF UKRAINE

4.1. Ukrainian Soil, Russian World

4.1.1. The Religious Landscape of Ukraine

One of the factors contributing to the ROC’s preoccupation with Ukraine is its spiritual plurality. The largest of the Ukrainian churches was traditionally the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). Although it is in full communion with the ROC and submits to the Moscow Patriarch, it was granted autonomy in 1990. At its peak in January 2014, it had 12,673 parishes in Ukraine.\(^{233}\)

Its first competitor was the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), established by the Uniates in the sixteenth century. Although it retained the Byzantine (or “Eastern”) rite, it is under the authority of the Pope in Rome. Much of its flock resides in the traditionally more European region of Galicia. Throughout Ukraine, it holds 3,763 parishes.\(^{234}\)

A second competitor emerged in 1992 with the reconstitution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP). The Kyiv Patriarchate was formed by then-Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Rus-Ukraine Filaret (Denysenko) of the UOC-MP. Until 2018, it was considered uncanonical by most of the Orthodox world and the clergy of the UOC-MP and controlled a minority of Ukrainian parishes.\(^{235}\)

The third was the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), which was resurrected in Kyiv in 1987 with the aid of the thriving Ukrainian Orthodox diaspora that had kept the

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\(^{232}\) Ibid.

\(^{233}\) Hudson, “The Ukrainian Orthodox Church,” 1360.

\(^{234}\) Ibid.

\(^{235}\) Ibid.
Church alive abroad since 1920. Although it is based in Kyiv, it ministers primarily to the Ukrainian diasporic community.\textsuperscript{236} Within Ukraine, the UAOC claims only 1.8\% of the population.\textsuperscript{237}

The UOC-MP and their masters in Moscow focused their vitriol on Filaret and the UOC-KP for three primary reasons. Of Ukraine’s population, roughly 75\% is religious, and of that 70\% are Orthodox. Thus, the opinion-forming potential of organized religion in Ukraine is very significant, and the UOC-KP directly challenged Russia’s spiritual hegemony by illegally splitting off to form its own church. In contrast to the \textit{russkyi mir} so favoured by Russian clerics, the Kyiv Patriarchate is associated with Ukrainian patriotism and even nationalism, advancing narratives of Ukrainian history, statehood, and pro-European geopolitical orientation at odds with the \textit{russkyi mir}. Although the UOC-MP appears to retain dominance according to the distribution of parishes, a 2006 survey revealed that 39.8\% of respondents considered themselves part of the Kyiv Patriarchate, as opposed to 29.4\% answering the Moscow Patriarchate. With that said, the UOC-MP remains the best resourced of Ukraine’s churches and enjoyed a significant media presence.\textsuperscript{238}

Many would argue that the UOC-MP is a tool of Russian soft power in Ukraine. It is a dealer of Russian culture in the Ukrainian state and promotes the narrative of a shared spiritual heritage inherited from “Holy Rus” which cleanly incorporates the people of Ukraine into the Russian World. Before 2014, the UOC-MP enjoyed close relations with the Ukrainian authorities resembling its Russian counterpart, with the notable exception of President Yushchenko. Though there is some truth to these statements, to claim that the UOC-MP is a tool under the direct ideological control of the ROC is an oversimplification. The autonomy granted to the UOC-MP has allowed for the formation of factions within its clergy, divided primarily into pro-Kyiv and pro-Moscow. The patriotic pro-Kyiv minority resists attempts at control from Moscow (even going so far as to advocate autocephaly) and consists primarily of the younger, post-Soviet generation. Much of the clergy remains oriented towards Moscow, however, and actively promotes its worldview.\textsuperscript{239} (ibid., 1359)

\textsuperscript{237} Hudson, 1362.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 1359.
While the UOC-MP frequently works with the ROC, it also enjoys autonomy in the broadest sense. The primate of the UOC-MP, the Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine, is a permanent member of the Holy Synod of the ROC and is considered second only to the patriarch, placing the UOC-MP in a position from which it can defend its rights and interests should they decouple from the ROC’s vision. The fact remains, however, that the views of the UOC-MP and ROC are closely aligned. In 2011, the Metropolitan Ahafangel of the UOC-MP made a statement strikingly reminiscent of the Russian patriarch’s 2009 address:

It is not an exaggeration to say that the question of the preservation, protection and development of the Russian language is a part of a wider objective, namely, to defend the Orthodox civilization choice, the spiritual integrity and independence of the peoples inhabiting the vast space of the ‘Holy Rus’, the Church unity.

The struggle for the status of the Russian language is the struggle for real equality of the residents of Ukraine. Therefore, the questions of the state status of the Russian language, its free use in official documents, the legal field, of lifting the criminal yet formally legalized inhuman restrictions regarding the use of the ‘non-state language’ on TV and radio are still on the agenda.

The UOC-MP also supports Moscow’s hostile stance towards Ukraine’s autocephalous churches, referring to them as schismatists who will return inevitably to the only canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Only recently (that is, after the Revolution of Dignity) has the pro-Kyiv faction of the UOC-MP begun to gain ground within the Church. The UOC-MP has enacted a number of Ukrainianization measures, such as publishing its website in Ukrainian and using Ukrainian in services in some areas. It also conducts an annual commemorative event in the National Museum Memorial to Victims of Holodomors in Ukraine to commemorate this tragic event. This comes in stark opposition to

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240 Ibid., 1362.
242 Hudson, 1364.
243 Ibid.
Kirill’s statement from his 2009 visit to Ukraine, in which he condemns Ukraine’s “falsification” of history in seeking acknowledgement of the catastrophic human toll of the Soviet-era engineered famine. In 2016, Metropolitan Oleksandr (Drabynko) of the UOC-MP (who went on to join the newly canonized Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2018) released an article that criticized the ruskyi mir concept and the failure of the UOC-MP to issue a direct condemnation of what he called “a modern imperialist policy of Russian military aggression.”

These circumstances are indicative of an ideological split within the UOC-MP, not a new heading. A significant number of clerics, many of them holding senior positions in the Church, continue to espouse a position that complements both the ROC and the Kremlin in its pursuit of the ruskyi mir. Many individual clerics would make this fact abundantly clear via their words and actions during and after the Revolution of Dignity.

In conclusion, although the UOC-MP is undeniably aligned with the ROC, it cannot be reduced to a mere puppet and distributor of the ruskyi mir ideology. Practically, the fact that it possessed “its own structures of management, finance, training and appointment” freed it from the ROC’s direct influence. Ideologically, its clergy is split between a pro-Kyiv and a pro-Moscow state, the former of which actively resists the influence of Moscow and the Kremlin. The UOC-MP represents a hybrid Russo-Ukrainian identity: it does not identify with or pursue active integration with the Russian Federation, but expresses a Russophone or “Eastern” Ukrainian identity.

4.1.2. The Revolution of Dignity

The Euromaidan Revolution (or, as it became known post factum, the Revolution of Dignity) took place in 2013-2014 in Ukraine. It began as a protest against the Yanukovych regime, which had reneged on its agreement to enter into a trade agreement with the EU. This decision was calculated to “right” Ukraine’s geopolitical course, which had been trending gradually away from Russia and

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244 Blitt, 437.
245 Hudson, 1365.
246 Ibid., 1366.
247 Ibid., 1367.
248 Ibid., 1366.
towards Europe. As part of this endeavour, Putin visited Ukraine in 2013 with Kirill to endorse the 
*ruskyi mir* concept and remind the Ukrainian people that they belonged to “one Russian nation.” His 
words were supplemented by a trade war against some Ukrainian products. The protests rapidly grew 
into a revolution which culminated in the overthrow of the pro-Russian Yanukovych regime.\(^{249}\)

Much of the clergy of the UOC-MP was openly hostile towards the liberal values which 
generated the early protests. As a result, the church was hesitant to give the protestors their support, 
and many clerics—such as the primate—were openly critical.\(^ {250}\) Similar (if more extreme) sentiments 
were echoed by some religious organizations in Ukraine traditionally associated with the UOC-MP. 
Among these were the Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Brotherhood, the Orthodox Choice organization, 
and the People’s *Sobor*, which held an anti-revolutionary procession in Kyiv bearing slogans such as 
“Ukraine, Russia and Belarus are the Holy Rus!” and appealed to St. Alexander Nevsky to defend Rus 
from the “Western Euro-sodomic expansion” they perceived in Ukraine’s pro-European sentiments.\(^ {251}\) 
The views of these groups have become conflated with the views of the UOC-MP in the popular 
consciousness, though the Church generally followed a milder line.\(^ {252}\)

Nonetheless, the UOC-MP’s lack of enthusiasm for the protests and subsequent revolution 
was equally condemning. While the Moscow Patriarchate stood by, the UGCC and UOC-KP were 
quick to lend the Euromaidan protesters their support. According to Hudson, “‘tent churches’ were 
established on the Euromaidan, prayer vigils were held, and choirs sang in the streets. A medical 
station was set up in the grounds of St. Michael’s Monastery to treat those injured during the 
demonstrations.”\(^ {253}\) When the riot police arrived on 11 December to clear out the protesters, St. 
Michael’s Monastery rang its bells as it had historically done to warn of trouble. Priests of the UGCC 
placed themselves between rioters and police and recited prayers until the police withdrew. The pro-
Euromaidan activists killed during the protests were dubbed the “Heavenly Hundred.”\(^ {254}\) The 
Ukrainian people did not miss the distinct lack of UOC-MP involvement in these events.

\(^{249}\) Plokhy, 336.  
\(^{250}\) Hudson, 1367.  
\(^{251}\) Ibid., 1367.  
\(^{252}\) Ibid., 1368.  
\(^{253}\) Ibid.  
\(^{254}\) Ibid.
The Moscow-aligned church was widely criticized for its lack of participation. It defended itself by claiming that its priests did attend, but on an individual basis and “less [visibly] as they were not among the activists and organizers.” One such example came in January of 2014, when “the presence and influence through the medium of prayer on the part of UOC-MP priests helped reduce tensions and prevent bloodshed.”

On 15 December, the UOC-MP joined the rest of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations in issuing a statement calling on the government to listen to the people and condemning violence. But the UOC-MP’s own stance remained ambivalent—frustratingly so, for much of its laity. When it finally proclaimed its support for the protesters at the end of November, it did so by calling on “the clerics and laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, regardless of their political convictions” to “join ranks in a common prayer for peace, love and concord, for elimination of discords and enmities, for prevention of violence, and for the surmounting of contradictions.”

The public received this statement poorly, taking this “depoliticised talk of peace and reconciliation” to be a continuation of the Moscow Patriarchate’s tradition of implicit support for incumbent regimes.

In contrast, the UOC-KP said that it was “supporting these people in their fight for liberty and freedom, which God granted to each man,” while a UGCC priest told protesters to “pray for the enemies, forgive them but you have to fight for your destiny and independence.” Another UGCC priest went even further, explicitly condemning the Yanukovych regime as “evil” and “anti-nation.” Both churches expressed their support for the Euromaidan protests and for Ukraine’s European integration (as per Patriarch Filaret) “to keep our statehood, to keep peace and to improve the life of the people.”

Compare these statements with the words of the Moscow Patriarch, who only reiterated the importance of preserving the unity of “Holy Rus”, which “continues to be a great spiritual and civilised drive of [the] present-day world.” Already tone-deaf, the ROC’s stance on the Revolution of

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255 Ibid., 1372.
256 “Prayer for eliminating discord to be chanted in all Eastern Orthodox churches in Ukraine.” TASS Russian News Agency, 30 November 2013. https://tass.com/world/709667
257 Hudson, 1369.
258 Ibid.
259 Ibid., 1370.
Dignity only soured Ukrainian opinion further when the Holy Synod released a statement implying the manipulation of foreign parties in Ukraine’s newest affirmation of its nationhood:

We realize the people of Ukraine have different outlooks for the future of their country and we respect the right of its people for the choice of their own pathway but still it is important to ensure that the pathway is really chosen by the people and is free and based on the knowledge of all the pros and cons rather than dictated by someone’s external will.  

Although the UOC-MP tacitly avoided propagating this narrative and stuck to the course of political neutrality, many of its clergy felt otherwise. Several priests, especially in the Russophone Donbass region, openly supported the dissolved Berkut units responsible for the deaths of the Euromaidan protesters.  

The Revolution of Dignity triggered a definitive shift in the Russkyi mir ideology. By 2014, the “global Russian diaspora” was all but forgotten within its framework, as was the benevolent promotion of language and culture. In its place was an unwavering focus on the Russian “Near Abroad” and the preservation of its sphere of influence, with the quasi-mythical bonds of common genetic code, heritage, spirituality, Russian messianism and exclusivity in opposition to the West as its foundational elements. The “Russian World” was no longer a multinational partnership, but a protector-state serving as bulwark for aggrieved minorities. This ideological shift was expressed by Putin in 2014 on a televised talk show when he said that “a person of the Russian World…[has] an exceptionally powerful genetic code” through the mixture of ethnicities and nationalities with “a single language in the framework of a single state, living on a common territory” with “common cultural values” and “common history.” Russkyi mir was no longer a scheme for the globalization of Russia and the union of related but implicitly unique peoples. Rather, it was a “monolithic body of the Russian people, Russian state, Russian lands, Russian culture and Russian values” contained in the

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261 Hudson, 1370.  
262 Gorham, 186.  
263 Ibid., 203.  
264 Vladimir Putin, interview by Kirill Kleymenov et al. Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным [Direct Line with Vladimir Putin], President of Russia, 17 April 2014, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796
South and South-East of Ukraine, Eastern Belarus, and Northern Kazakhstan—a divided nation seeking reunification. To simply “speak, think, and…feel in Russian” was no longer enough.

4.1.3. The Annexation of Crimea

Putin repeatedly reiterated the unity of Ukrainians and Russians in the months leading up to the annexation of Crimea. “We are one people” he said in a 2013 television interview. “We have…common historical roots and common fates; we have a common religion, a common faith; we have a very similar culture, languages, traditions, and mentality…” he graciously concedes the “ethnic colouring” that distinguishes the two cultures and concludes with the trite assurance that he “take[s] delight” in Ukraine’s culture.265

As early as 2009, *russkiy mir* began to pave the way for the unlawful annexation of Crimea. The Russian patriarch, during a visit to Simferopol that year, stressed that Crimea “should occupy a very big place in the life of every Orthodox person who belongs to historical Russia” as the site of “the first steps of the Orthodox faith in our land.”266 *Russkiy mir* was again invoked in 2014, when the supposedly benign, culturally minded ideology took on militant overtones. Putin called upon it when justifying his invasion of Crimea, and committed to “defend both ethnic Russians in Ukraine and that part of the Ukrainian population…that feels a direct tie—not only an ethnic, but also a cultural, linguistic tie—with Russia, that feels itself to be part of the broader ‘Russian World.’”267 Doroszczyk identifies Russia’s annexation of Crimea as “an element of the struggle to establish a collectivist, Byzantine-type civilization” in response to the “colonialism of a unified Western civilization.”268 It is telling that when the international community called on the Russian president to explain his unlawful actions, his responses dealt not with legality, but with history and culture.269 He even appealed to

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266 Kirill. “Святейший Патриарх Кирилл: «Первые шаги православной веры по земле исторической Руси, вышедшей из киевской купели Крещения, начались с Крыма» [His Holiness Patriarch Kirill: ‘The first steps of the Orthodox faith in the land of historical Russia, which emerged from the Kiev baptismal font, began in Crimea.’] (Speech, Simferopol, 01 August 2009), Russian Orthodox Church, http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/709491
269 Plokhyy, 339.
Germany, stating that he hoped “as a country formerly divided” it would “understand and support the ‘aspiration of the “Russian World,” of Russian history, to re-establish unity.”

Although the Russian president likely meant to appeal to the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990, in the minds of many it instead conjured the Anschluss of 1938. Indeed, there are many parallels to be drawn between the russkyi mir project and the Heim ins Reich, from the Volksdeutsche/sootechestvenniki to “Greater Germany”/ “Greater Russia,” but that is not within the scope of this essay.

In terms of international law, Russia appealed to the principles of R2P, or Right to Protect, arguing that Ukraine had blatantly violated the rights of the Crimean Russophone population. Curiously, no evidence of such discrimination was forthcoming. Putin went on to say that Russia was also defending its compatriots from “Western expansion.” In the president’s words: “with Ukraine, our Western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally.” Thus, Russian aggression in Ukraine was not directed towards its fellow “citizens” of the “Russian World”, but towards the West who was implicated as the true aggressor. “They were fully aware that there are millions of Russians living in Ukraine and in the Crimea,” Putin continued. “They must really have lacked political instinct and common sense not to foresee all the consequences of their actions. Russia found itself in a position from which it could not retreat.”

Kirill reaffirmed these convictions in 2014 on the program “The Shepherd’s Word,” where he again referenced the collective “Kievan (sic) baptismal font” and the exceptional nature of the “Russian World”, “which includes people who today call themselves by different names – Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians.” He reiterates that russkyi mir is a civilizational, rather than a national concept. The perceived civilizational struggle is echoed by Kirill’s secular contemporaries. A member of the new Crimean parliament said that Crimea was “on the front line in the battle for the

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270 Vladimir Putin, “Обращение Президента Российской Федерации [Speech of the President of the Russian Federation].” (Speech, Moscow, 18 March 2014), President of Russia, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603
271 Plokhy, 339.
272 Suslov, 341.
273 Putin, “Speech of the President.”
‘Russian World,’” and a deputy of the Russian Duma said that “from a civilizational world view… [this is] a war between Western civilization and the ‘Russian World.’”

4.1.4. The Russo-Ukrainian War

The undeclared Russo-Ukrainian war in south-eastern Ukraine began shortly after the annexation of Crimea. Plokhy calls it “the worst crisis in East-West relations since the Cold War.” It violated several international legal norms and treaties, most blatantly the 1994 Budapest memorandum. This agreement, brokered by Russia, the United States, and Britain, involved the surrender of Ukraine’s nuclear arsenal (the third largest in the world, after the U.S. and Russia) in exchange for the guaranteed indivisibility of its territory. Ukraine gave up its primary means of self-defence in a nuclear-capable world because its leaders trusted in the sanctity of formal international agreements. The Kremlin has unequivocally proven that the Russian Federation is unwilling—or unable—to integrate into the norms of Western international relations.

Much like the rest of Russia’s policy towards Ukraine, the war was justified through the russkyi mir. As per a deputy of the Russian Duma, the West had interfered by “fire and sword” in “Novorossia” (the region of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts) to force the people to “abandon their native language and culture.” He concluded that “saving them from genocide is the sacred duty not only of Russia, but of the entire ‘Russian World.’” In the context of Ukraine’s history, the deputy’s turns of phrase are bitterly ironic.

Indeed, sacredness would feature prominently in the pro-Russian narratives of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The conflict per se was not religious in nature, driven instead by the irredentism of the significant pro-Russian populations in Luhansk and Donbass. However, religious rhetoric was
repeatedly employed to mobilize support for the insurgents.\textsuperscript{279} In June 2014, at the height of the conflict, one of the leaders of the pro-Russian forces, Pavel Gubarev, addressed the members of the Donbass militia. He informed them that “the Russian church has blessed us for the war we are waging. It is a war for the ‘Russian World,’ for Novorossia.”\textsuperscript{280} In 2015, Kirill accused Ukrainian authorities of pursuing “militant atheism,” responsible for the destruction of shrines and the human toll of the conflict. The statement alone is inflammatory enough, but it becomes doubly dangerous when paired with the provisions laid out in the “Fundamentals of the Social Doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church.” According to this doctrine, “if the government forces Orthodox believers to deviate from Christ and His Church, as well as to sinful, soul-damaging acts, the Church must deny the state obedience.” When one takes the patriarch’s statement together with this doctrine, it is nothing less than a call for the pro-Moscow church and its faithful to rebel against the “sinful” Ukrainian authorities.\textsuperscript{281}

Such trends were also visible among the clergy of the UOC-MP. Some priests in southeastern Ukraine refused to preside over the funerals of Ukrainian soldiers who died fighting the pro-Russia insurgents. In 2015, during a session of the Vekhovna Rada, representatives of the UOC-MP refused to stand when then-president Petro Poroshenko read out the names of those honored with the title Heroes of Ukraine for their service during the Russo-Ukrainian War. Some priests called on their parishioners to join the fighting against Ukraine, even doing so themselves. A cleric of the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves “boasted that he and four others were placed by the Moscow Patriarchate in the FSB detachment that fought in Slovyansk.” A fact later confirmed by Igor Girkin, a former leader of the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic.”\textsuperscript{282} Several others helped the militants and eagerly

\textsuperscript{279} Hurzhi, “The Current State,” 74.
\textsuperscript{282} Sherr and Kullamaa, The Russian Orthodox Church, 15.
engaged in their “spiritual support.” This ecclesiastical support lends the war—and the forces fighting in it on Russia’s behalf—a sacrosanct air that allows them to “attain moral respectability” and “effectively place [themselves] beyond the reach of any legitimate criticism, scrutiny or control.”

There were, of course, exceptions. Priests, parishes, and dioceses of the UOC-MP in central and southern Ukraine aided Ukrainian military hospitals and quietly organized humanitarian aid. Some even served as chaplains for the Ukrainian military.

The UOC-MP, meanwhile, claimed that its statements reflected a politically neutral position. They framed the Russo-Ukrainian War as a fratricidal conflict and called for the cessation of hostilities to mourn all victims, pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian. But by the end of 2014 parts of Ukraine’s population had grown wary of the inconsistencies in the UOC-MP’s public statements and conduct, and its attempts at neutrality were criticized for implicitly conferring legitimacy to the separatist military actions in the Donbass. The involvement of the ROC in the Russo-Ukrainian War and the liberal use of the russkyi mir ideology quickly became problematic for Russia’s international standing and the future of the ‘Russian World’ project and its hegemonic ambitions for the “Near Abroad.” The use of Orthodox Churches as “protagonists” in the project of the russkyi mir cast suspicion on the presence of the Moscow Patriarchate throughout the former Soviet space. Recognizing this precarious position, the ROC and the UOC-MP have grown more cautious in their support for Russia’s increasingly aggressive policies.

On 15 May 2015, Metropolitan Onufriy (primate of the UOC-MP as of 2014) publicly declared support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. He denounced any calls for military aggression and hostility made by members of the UOC-MP clergy, as was as the use of religious slogans to justify the war. Acting on these convictions, the UOC-MP has refused to accept the transfer of churches seized by pro-Russian forces in south-eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

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284 Blitt, 379.
286 Hudson, 1371.
287 Plokhy, 344.
288 Sherr and Kullamaa, 27.
website of the UOC-MP has also been updated to honor the memory of Ukrainian soldiers who fought in “anti-terrorist operations.”

Although Onufriy refused to support the nationalist rhetoric of Poroshenko, neither did he express any sympathy for the ruskyi mir that had fuelled much of the Church’s language over the past years.

The ROC has similarly sought safety in (alleged) neutrality. As an institution, it publicly distanced itself from complicity in Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine. Kirill did not attend the official ceremony marking the “reunification” of Crimea with Russia and refrained from commenting on its territorial status. The ROC fired two clerics who bragged about pastoral visits to the pro-Russian militants in the Donbass, forbidding others to do so. However, individual clerics (including the patriarch himself) continued to be complicit in Russia’s aggression. It is likely that this caution arises from pragmatism rather than morality or spirituality. The leadership of the ROC recognizes that much of its flock in Ukraine “supports the Ukrainian political option, the country’s territorial integrity, and the political changes connected to…the Revolution.” Alienating this demographic could cost the ROC its parishes in Ukraine, which constitute roughly a third of the approximately 38,000 parishes under its jurisdiction. If Ukraine were to unite under one church, it would replace the ROC as the largest Orthodox Church in the world, not only according to the number of parishes, but also the number of active worshippers. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center between 2015 and 2016, 16% of Ukrainians attend church weekly, while 50% attend monthly/yearly. In Russia, the figures were 7% and 30% respectively. By driving the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to unity, the ROC could significantly harm its prestige in the international Orthodox community.

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289 Hudson, 1372.
290 Mitrokhin, 6-7.
291 Ibid., 6.
293 Mitrokhin, 6.
4.2. “Russian World”: Failure and Future

4.2.1. Disillusionment in the “Near Abroad”

The Russian Orthodox Church has harmed its standing in the “Near Abroad” by becoming the “protagonist” of the russkyi mir project and lending the state’s aggressive foreign policy its support. As early as 2009, a Latvian report argued that “the ‘humanitarian dimension’ in Russia is not a natural by-product of the activity of society and the state, but rather a conscious and deliberate policy of power aimed at neighbouring states.” Among its tools were “manipulation, propaganda, … attempts to control the media, non-governmental organizations, cultural and educational institutions, and churches.” The conflict in Ukraine supplied tangible proof of this theory.296 Even those who supported Russia’s endeavours implicitly acknowledged the new, irredentist dimension of the russkyi mir. As per the Kazakh paper, Time, writing in 2014: “The past weekend offered a glaring example of the information war now being waged against Russia by enemies of the gathering of the ‘Russian World’ and the reintegration of post-Soviet space.”297

Kirill’s appeals to the unity and shared identity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples waned between 2014 and 2019. Since the Revolution of Dignity, such statements received growing backlash and triggered accusations against the UOC-MP.298 The ROC had to tread carefully to avoid antagonizing members of the UOC-MP who supported the Ukrainian government.299 By 2019, the people of Ukraine were referred to only as “brothers in faith” rather than a “brotherly people.”300

4.2.2. A Ukrainian Church for a Ukrainian State

In 2014, 32% of Ukrainian Orthodox Christians belonged to the UOC-KP, 25% to the UOC-MP, and 1% to the UAOC. 40% considered themselves Orthodox with no affiliation, with 2% stating they did not know their affiliation.301 By 2018, 45.2% belonged to the UOC-KP, 16.9% to the UOC-

296 Gorham, 199.
298 Mitrokhin, 7.
299 Curanović, 259.
300 Mitrokhin, 8.
301 Rotaru, 42.
Panina 57

MP, and 33.9% were unaffiliated.302 The UOC-MP struggled to maintain credibility in the wake of the Russo-Ukrainian War. By failing to condemn the actions of Russia, the homeland of its patriarch, it has established itself as a “foreign church.” One that is “incommensurate with Ukraine’s nation building aspirations.”303

Outrage over Russia’s actions and a rise in Ukrainian nationalism have amplified the voices labelling the Moscow Patriarchate an “illegitimate imperial outpost” whose continued existence is inappropriate in an independent Ukraine.304 This shift in public opinion has renewed calls for a canonical autocephalous Ukrainian church, which has met with vehement opposition from supporters of the fading russkiy mir ideology and the ROC. To allow Ukrainian autocephaly would mean undermining the “spiritual unity” that legitimizes Russia’s ambitions to impose its influence on the “Near Abroad” and restore the territorial integrity of “Holy Rus.”305

By 2015 Ukraine’s Orthodox Churches were moving in the direction of autocephaly. A joint commission convened in that year announced that the UOC-KP and UAOC were willing and ready to merge into the Local Orthodox Church of Ukraine and pursue canonical autocephaly.306 That same year, 70 parishes in Ukraine changed their affiliation from the Moscow Patriarchate to the Kyiv Patriarchate, 50% doing it with the unanimous support of their community. The Moscow Patriarch claimed that these parishes had been “usurped” or “seized by raiding,” but the Kyiv Patriarchate refuted these claims. Even some UOC-MP clerics began to express doubts about the role of the Church in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. One priest called the UOC-MP a “very concrete political force” which “is working against Ukrainians... [and] to be part of the Moscow Patriarchate right now is to take part in the killing.”307 Another cleric acknowledged that “in the eyes of a significant part (if not the most part) of modern Ukrainian society we have become a ‘church of the aggressor state.’”308

302 Sherr, 15.
303 Hudson, 1373.
304 Ibid., 1360.
305 Ibid., 1374.
306 Rotaru, 42.
Indeed, this was supported by Ukrainian law, which proposed “a special status for religious organizations with governing centers based in an aggressor state” in Bill 4511, presented to the Verkhovna Rada in 2017. In 2018, it passed legislation to change the name of the UOC-MP to the “Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine,” but the decision was overturned by the Supreme Court of Ukraine in 2019.\textsuperscript{309}

The UOC-MP has also claimed that its churches have been subjected to arson and vandalism, and that “a number of its clerics have been murdered.” To avoid further provoking the public, Onufriy permitted UOC-MP clerics to omit the name of the Russian Patriarch in the intercessional prayers of their church. Kirill, meanwhile, has ceased his annual visits to Ukraine.\textsuperscript{310}

The events that surround the tomos of autocephaly issued to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2018 are complex and likely to seriously impact the Orthodox world. However, it is a topic which would require significant explanation and analysis, and therefore falls outside the scope of this paper.

4.2.3. The Future of the “Russian World”

The decline of the UOC-MP coincided with the decline of russkyi mir in Ukraine. Even in the pro-Russian Luhansk and Donbass regions, the initiative to “unite Rus lands” has been all but abandoned. The Kremlin even went as far as removing passionate separatist leaders like Gubarev, who would have continued to antagonize Ukraine and the Western world. This deprived the separatist movements of their ideological cohesion, leaving them loyal to Moscow but generally ideologically uncoordinated.\textsuperscript{311} Attitudes towards the russkyi mir and the use of force to support it suffered in Russia as well. Although Putin continued to espouse the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian people well after the start of the Russo-Ukrainian War, the percentage of Russians who accepted this argument dropped from 81% to 52% between 2005 and 2015. Support for the use of force to protect Russian minorities abroad fell from 58% in March 2014 to 34% in 2015. Between 1998 and 2015, the


\textsuperscript{310} Hudson, 1376.

\textsuperscript{311} Plokhy, 344.
percentage of Russians who wanted to change the borders through territorial expansion fell from 75% to only 18%. The situation of the *russkiy mir* ideology in Russia was no less dire. According to a survey taken in Russia in 2014, when asked if they had ever heard of the “Russian World” 71% of Russians answered “no.” Of the 16% who answered affirmatively, associations ranged from vague notions of nationalism, Russia’s geographic territory, and the names of branded stores and products.

The events in Ukraine left the developers and ideologues of *russkiy mir* with numerous challenges and questions, ones that would need an answer if the ideology was to survive. One member of the Federal Agency for Nationality Affairs put it thusly:

> The concept of the “Russian World”, on the one hand, is in deep crisis, and on the other has gained momentum and is ingrained in the public consciousness. In 2014, the situation changed dramatically, then did so again. In 2014, many believed that Crimea was the beginning of a great journey, a “Russian spring,” but over time it became clear that this was not the case and that it was necessary to creatively rethink, to reformulate the concept of the “Russian World”. We need to understand what worked and what didn’t.

Russia began to lose supporters within the “Near Abroad” as well. For much of *russkiy mir*’s lifespan it enjoyed the support of the traditionally pro-Russian Belarus. But by 2015 its president, Aliaksandr Lukashenko, expressed a different sentiment: “If there are any here who consider that the Belarusian land is part of, well, as they say nowadays, ‘the Russian World,’ and almost of Russia itself, forget it…there was no [independent Belarus] previously but now there is…and we will not give our land away to anyone.” Speaking further, he dismisses the relevance of *russkiy mir* to the people of Belarus: “It’s not true – ‘We are for the Russian World!’ I don’t understand what the ‘Russian World’ is. Our people, moreover, do not know what the ‘Russian World’ is.”

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312 Ibid., 346.
316 “Интервью Лукашенко негосударственным СМИ, в том числе Еврорадио (обновлено) [Lukashenko Interview with non-state media, including Euroradia (updated)],” euroradio.fm, 04 August 2018. https://euroradio.fm/ru/intervyu-lukashenko-negosudarstvennym-smi-v-tom-chisle-evroradio-onlayn
uniting the “multinational peoples of historic Russia,” in the end ruskyi mir only drove them further apart.

4. CONCLUSION

The concept of the “Russian World” followed a convoluted, often contradictory trajectory since its construction in the 1990s. It mutated repeatedly to suit the needs of Russian foreign policy. At first an initiative to celebrate Russian culture among its diaspora and foreigners abroad, it was vaunted as Russia’s modern attempt at globalization, a step towards international cooperation rather than contention. However, as the focus of the Russian Federation shifted to its “Near Abroad” so did the “Russian World.”

Ruskyi mir became a means of shutting out the global community rather than engaging with it. Its rhetoric switched from inclusivity, conditional only on interest in the wellbeing of Russia, to a set of predetermined and inalienable conditions that defined Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and on occasion Moldova and Kazakhstan as members of the “Russian World.” Among those conditions were a common history, language, culture, and faith. This ideological shift coincided with Russia’s growing ambitions to create a Eurasian union under its de facto control, a project conveniently in line with ruskyi mir. It also coincided with Ukraine’s continual trend towards European integration.

This phase of ruskyi mir’s development saw the first active participation of the Russian Orthodox Church. The ROC drew on a millennium of diplomatic involvement in the affairs of Kyivian Rus’, Muscovy, the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and Russian Federation. It had spent those years planting roots throughout Eastern Europe and working actively to maintain spiritual hegemony in the region, often in concert with the Muscovite/Russian authorities. Ruskyi mir was a continuation of this long tradition.

As Ukraine strayed further from the Kremlin’s vision for its “Near Abroad” the rhetoric of the ruskyi mir intensified, evolving once more to reduce the “multinational ‘Russian World’” to “one people.” It was no longer a union of equals but a dire civilizational struggle in which only union with Russia could preserve the unique culture and spirit of the “Russian people,” to include Ukrainians and Belarusians. With the aid of the Moscow Patriarch, ruskyi mir took on a spiritual, sacralised
dimension. Among the stakes raised by the rhetoric of the *russkyi mir* was the spiritual unity of the people of “Holy Rus”, which was under threat from Western interventionists and Ukrainian schismatists. Thus, the patriarch’s frequent visits to Ukraine and the pro-Russian sentiments of much of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate’s clergy was not an expression of Russia’s geopolitical interests but a righteous, holy work to preserve the unity of the “Russian World” and “Holy Rus.”

In 2014, *russkyi mir* was called upon to justify the unlawful invasion and annexation of Crimea, and soon after the Russo-Ukrainian War. However, the Kremlin and ROC both overestimated the resonance of this ideology in Ukraine. Appeals to unity and claims that Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty had been infringed upon “for its own good” and out of a need to defend the ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living there were negatively received. The Russian Orthodox Church and its subordinated Ukrainian Orthodox Church rapidly lost credibility and appeal among the Ukrainian population. Russia’s aggression had shown that the future of an independent Ukraine could not be found in its shadow—or in the shadow of its Church. Belarus, the other part of the mythical triad, came to a similar conclusion, causing its president Aliaksandr Lukashenko to reverse his infamously pro-Russian stance in the context of *russkyi mir*. For Ukraine and Belarus, *russkyi mir* has become synonymous with Russian aggression and the denial of their sovereignty.

Where does that leave the “Russian World”? Its terminology has gained a generally negative connotation among its target audience in the former Soviet space, rendering it detrimental to Russia’s foreign policy objectives. Today, it has all but faded from the official statements of the Russian Federation concerning its policy towards its neighbours. Instead, it has again turned its focus to the “compatriots” abroad, this time with the intention of attracting them to return to Russia. At the 6th World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad, Putin condemned the “Russophobia” found throughout the world and invited the compatriots to visit Russia for work, study, cultural immersion, and permanent residence. He informed the audience that the bureaucratic process had been altered to create “more comfortable conditions for resettlement in Russia for permanent residence for
compatriots abroad, as well as [create] clear rules for entry and obtaining the right to live, work, and acquire Russian citizenship."\(^{317}\)

Although *russkyi mir* failed in Ukraine, the ambitions it represented survive. Ukraine’s progress towards European integration—especially membership in NATO—is a direct threat to Russia’s interests, and it is only a matter of time before the Kremlin attempts to interfere once more. But what of the “protagonist” of the later phases of the *russkyi mir*? The position of the Russian Orthodox Church has only grown more complicated—and dire—where its Ukrainian flock is concerned. Losing Ukraine would deal a significant blow to its international prestige as the largest Orthodox Church, and with the new *tomos* of autocephaly granted to the Orthodox Ukrainian Church by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in 2018, there is a very real risk of Ukraine shaking off the authority of the Moscow Patriarch.\(^{318}\)

The Russian Orthodox Church has challenged the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch over the *tomos*, bringing to light numerous issues in the laws and procedures of the Orthodox Church and leading to conflict within the community. The ROC has proven its commitment to opposing Ukraine’s spiritual independence and seems poised for a campaign to deny Ukrainian autocephaly.\(^{319}\) As Kirill told the Ecumenical Patriarch: "Your All-Holiness, if you give autocephaly to Ukraine, blood will be poured out." \(^{320}\) This has opened a new chapter both for Ukrainian Orthodoxy and for the global Orthodox community.

What, then, is the West to do about all this? For the moment, nothing. Neither the Russian Federation nor the ROC has abandoned its ambitions in Ukraine, and it is only a matter of time before they act upon them, either independently of each other or in tandem. Until they do, it is crucial that the international community remains vigilant and remains wary. In 2014, Russia had the advantage of


\(^{318}\) Sherr, 16.

\(^{319}\) Ibid.

surprise. The Western world naively believed that a “modern” Russia could successfully integrate into the Western model of international relations and was too slow and hesitant to act when this delusion was shattered. Next time, the international community must not hesitate to condemn Russia’s unlawful actions and respond in an appropriate and deliberate manner. Not only for the sake of the freedom and dignity of the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian state, but for the dignity of Western international institutions and the credibility of their commitment to peace and democracy.
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