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THE STANCE OF ORTHODOX GREEK-SPEAKING CHURCHES REGARDING THE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE WITH REFERENCE TO ROMANS 13:1-7 AND JOHN'S REVELATION

This paper examines the positions of the Greek-speaking Orthodox Churches concerning Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine. Apart from being informative, the paper raises the theological question about whether the Churches' various stances follow Christ's commandment to spread his teaching to the world and to what degree they are compatible with relevant New Testament texts. After navigating through and commenting on the relevant statements of the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, the Autocephalous Churches of Cyprus and Greece, and the Holy Community of Mount Athos, two New Testament texts that represent different approaches to political power, namely Rom 13:1-7 and John's Revelation, are briefly examined. The paper establishes that the positions of the Greek-speaking Churches vary between general anti-war statements and concrete condemnations of the Russian invasion and its direct or indirect support by the Russian Orthodox hierarchy. However, nationalism, as well as church-political opportunism, seem to be more or less inherent phenomena in all contemporary national Orthodox Churches. Hence, finally, it is up to the faithful, not just to Church hierarchies, to discern evil and speak out against injustice.

Keywords: Greek-speaking Churches, Ukraine, Russia, war, nationalism, Orthodoxy, Romans 13:1-7, John's Revelation.

A Brief Introduction

Russia's raging war against Ukraine is a matter of grave concern to the civilized world. However, condemning voices against it were not raised by everyone, and even when such voices were indeed heard, their intensity differed considerably. Clearly, the war is religiously motivated and justified by the Russian aggressors to defend the so-called "Russian world", an "ethno-phyletist religious

fundamentalism, totalitarian in character”¹ that represents the uniqueness of the Russian nation and its Russian Orthodox faith and life. Therefore, one would think that the way of the rest of the Orthodox Churches should be clear: They should irrefutably condemn the war against Ukraine as inhuman and contrary to the teachings of Orthodoxy while at the same time also condemning the stance of the Russian Patriarch and the Russian Orthodox hierarchs, who by their words, actions, or even silence place the weight of their authority in favor of this war. However, many Orthodox Churches refrained from taking a stance on this matter for various reasons. This phenomenon is profoundly disconcerting but, at the same time, also worth a critical examination. For one, ambiguity or silence of the Orthodox Churches in this matter could indicate that the heresy of ethno-phyletism,² as well as political cynicism or even just plain fear, are not restricted to the current Russian hierarchy.

In this paper, I will have to limit myself to examining and commenting on the positions on the war against Ukraine of the Greek-speaking Orthodox Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches. In a second step, I will attempt to evaluate these positions in the light of Rom 13:1–7 and the book of Revelation. I will start my presentation with the positions of the most neutral Churches and finish with the ones that adopted a clear stance against the Russian invasion.

First of all, this paper aims to be informative. Secondly, it raises the question of whether the Orthodox Churches nowadays fulfill Christ’s commandment to give his witness to the world (Matt 28:19–20) or whether they principally act and speak based on church-political and financial interests and motivations. The references to Rom 13:1–7 and Revelation intend to discuss two crucial questions: a) Should the Church submit itself indiscriminately to state power as given by God? b) Are there cases that could justify the use of violence?

I will begin my navigation through the positions of the Orthodox Greek-speaking Churches, including a reference to the Holy Community of Mount Athos, which enjoys full administrative autonomy, although it is not an independent Church per se.

¹ B. Gallaher, P. Kalaitzidis (coordinators of the drafting committee). A Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ (Ruskii Mir) Teaching // *Mission Studies* 39 (2022) 269–276.

² See V. N. Makrides. Why Are Orthodox Churches Particularly Prone to Nationalization and Even to Nationalism? // *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57 (2013) 325–352.

The Greek-speaking Orthodox Churches on the War

a. *Holy Community of the Mount Athos*

The announcement of the Holy Community of Mount Athos came with a long delay on 24 May³. In this announcement, the Holy Community speaks of war among “brethren, who have been united for centuries in the common faith and history in Christ”. It expresses deep sorrow for the loss of “many of our brethren”, as well as support for the conflict’s victims. Finally, it emphasizes the need for prayers and intercessions for ceasefire and peace, which God will provide under the presupposition of the genuine repentance of all.

The delay of the above announcement is not typical. The Holy Community has been repeatedly issuing timely statements on various religious and social issues that, in principle, should not be the object of its interest. Such examples are statements about the new “citizen’s card”, religious education in the Greek school system, changes in the criminal code, the pandemic, and even the song of Cyprus in the Eurovision song contest!⁴ Furthermore, in the Holy Community’s announcement, the aggressor is not named, and no responsibility is attributed to the Russian side. Rather, it is a text that tries to keep the balance between aggressors and victims by speaking of war among brethren in faith and asking all sides to repent. While repentance is, of course, a fundamental Christian virtue that should be practiced by all, in this case, both the aggressor and the victim are brought onto the same level of responsibility, which could not be farther from the truth.

Leaving aside the numerous Russian monks of Mount Athos, the main reason for this provocatively neutral stance could be that many more monks of Greek or other ethnic origin consider the Russian invasion as a just war against the “evil West”, which targets Orthodoxy and has misled many Ukrainians to a path of spiritual error and destruction. Also, financial dependence on Russian donors cannot be excluded as a reason for the Holy Community’s neutrality.

b. *Patriarchate of Jerusalem*

The Patriarch of Jerusalem issued only one brief statement at the beginning of the war in Ukraine⁵. His text speaks of a painful crisis in Ukraine and expresses

³ See: Η Ιερά Κοινότητα του Αγίου Όρους για τον πόλεμο στην Ουκρανία // *Ορθοδοξία News Agency*, <https://www.orthodoxianewsagency.gr/agioreitika/i-iera-koinotita-tou-agiou-orous-gia-ton-polemo-stin-oukrania/>.

⁴ See Panagiotis Anagnostis. Παρεμβάσεις του Αγίου Όρους που σχετίζονται με την καθημερινότητα // *Πεμπτουσία: Ορθοδοξία, Πολιτισμός, Επιστήμες*, <https://www.pemptousia.gr/2022/08/paremvasis-tou-agiou-orous-pou-schetizonte-me-tin-kathimerinotita/>.

⁵ See: Δήλωση τοῦ Μακ. Πατριάρχου Ἱεροσολύμων κ.κ. Θεοφίλου τοῦ Γ΄ διά τήν κατάστασιν εἰς τήν Οὐκρανίαν // *Πατριαρχεῖον Ἱεροσολύμων*, <https://jerusalem-patriarchate.info/δηλωσις-του-μακ-πατριάρχου-ιεροσολυμ/>.

profound concern for the human pain “of all our Christian brethren”. According to it, the most potent power of a Christian is prayer. Therefore, the statement calls on all Christians to pray for our world and the Ukrainian people so that God may give wisdom and courage to all leaders and involved parties, as well as enlighten their minds to strive for dialogue and unity.

Characteristically, the word “war” is here avoided altogether. Instead, the term “crisis” is used. Also, while the Ukrainian people and Ukraine are mentioned, it is all involved parties that should strive for peace. However, it is unclear how a party that defends itself may strive for peace while being attacked. Also, the statement does not explain how unity with the aggressor may be achieved. Is prayer enough? When, for instance, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem itself feels under attack by Israeli fundamentalists, it issues very harsh announcements⁶. As is well known, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem rigorously defends its hereditary rights in the Holy Land. It does not limit itself to prayer, “the (supposedly) greatest power of the Christians”.

Clearly, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem takes into consideration its partly Russian flock, as well as the Russian capital that directly or indirectly flows into the Patriarchal treasury. Therefore, after this careful announcement, there has been no further reference to the war in Ukraine. For the last months, silence seems to have been in the best interest of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; therefore, it has remained silent on the war ever since.

c. Church of Cyprus

The Church of Cyprus has abstained from publicly taking any position on the war against Ukraine. In a TV interview, however, the Archbishop of the Church of Cyprus expressed his sorrow about the situation in Ukraine and criticized Putin on a personal level claiming that the Russian President made a massive mistake by flattening a big country such as Ukraine⁷. According to the Archbishop, the Russian President is not bothered by the number of people killed. He can go to church and make the sign of the cross and, at the same time, also kill people. Is this his Orthodoxy? asks the Archbishop rhetorically.

The Church of Cyprus is one of the very few Orthodox Churches that have recognized the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. However, there has been much resistance against this decision by bishops of the Holy Synod, as well as Cypriot clerics and lay people. Thus, the Church of Cyprus probably

⁶ See, for instance: Ο χώρος του Πατριαρχείου εις τήν άγιάν Σιών στόχος άκραιών καταληπιών // *Πατριαρχείον Ιεροσολύμων*, <https://jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ο-χωρος-του-πατριαρχείου-εις-την-αγιαν/>.

⁷ See: Κύπρου Χρυσόστομος: Αυτή είναι η Ορθοδοξία του Πούτιν // *Ορθοδοξία News Agency*, https://www.orthodoxianewsagency.gr/aytokefales_ekklisies/ekklisia_kiprou/kyprou-xrysostomos-ayti-einai-i-orthodoksia-tou-poutin/.

wanted to avoid further tensions. Moreover, it is well known that many Russians have transferred their money to Cyprus and even spend time in Cyprus as a tax paradise. These factors probably led the Church of Cyprus to keep silent about the Russian invasion.

d. Patriarchate of Alexandria

The Patriarch of Alexandria made a statement against the war in Ukraine⁸. In it, the head of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria compares the “insane war” in Ukraine with the second world war. He is saddened that such a war occurs between two brotherly countries that share the same faith. He also refers to the parallel “ecclesiastical attack” that the Patriarchate of Alexandria has suffered by the Russian Church on its own territory. He utters prayers for sanity and the end of the bloodshed, and he cites the Russian Saint Sophrony the Athonite, according to whom “war is the greatest sin”. Finally, the Patriarch commiserates with the victims of the unjust war, sympathizes with those who have lost their own people, and feels with the refugees who had to abandon their homes.

Furthermore, in a radio interview, the Patriarch of Alexandria himself criticized Putin by saying that the absolutist power blinds human beings⁹. He claimed that it is impossible to make the sign of the cross and pray to God and simultaneously kill children and generally human beings. According to the Patriarch, Putin thinks of himself as a contemporary emperor and superhuman. Therefore, God’s grace has abandoned him. Theodore underlined that he knows Putin personally and that he has been a god-fearing person. However, now this side of him has vanished. In conclusion, one cannot say that one loves God and kill people at the same time.

The Patriarchate of Alexandria is not on friendly terms with the Patriarchate of Moscow¹⁰. There have been harsh pronouncements on both sides because of the recognition by the Alexandrian Church of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine¹¹. Afterward, a Russian exarchate was founded in Africa, and many local parishes

⁸ Patriarch of Alexandria Theodore 2nd. Μήνυμα συμπαράστασης της Α.Θ.Μ. του Πάπα και Πατριάρχου Αλεξανδρείας κ.κ. Θεοδώρου Β΄ προς τον Ουκρανικό λαό // *Πατριαρχείον Αλεξανδρείας*, <https://www.patriarchateofalexandria.com/el/mhnyma-symparastashs-ths-aom-toy-papa-kai-patriarxoy-alexandreas-kk-oeodwroy-b-pros-ton-oykraniko-lao> .

⁹ Πατριάρχης Αλεξανδρείας στο Πρώτο: Σύγχρονος αυτοκράτορας ο Πούτιν – Δεν είναι δυνατόν να κάνεις τον σταυρό σου και να σκοτώνεις ανθρώπους // *EPT News*, <https://www.ertnews.gr/eidiseis/diethni/patriarchis-alexandreas-sto-proto-sygchronos-aytokratoras-o-poytin-den-einai-dynaton-na-kaneis-ton-stayro-soy-kai-na-skotoneis-anthropoys-audio/>.

¹⁰ Cf. Στώμεν καλῶς, στώμεν θαρσαλέως // *Πατριαρχείον Αλεξανδρείας*, <https://www.patriarchateofalexandria.com/el/stwmen-kalws-stwmen-oarsalews>.

¹¹ See: Patriarch of Alexandria: Moscow tries to steal priests and Christians – Close your ears to the promises // *Orthodox Times*, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/patriarch-of-alexandria-moscow-tries-to-steal-priests-and-christians-close-your-ears-to-the-promises/>; Statement of the Holy Synod of

and priests went over to the Russian jurisdiction, which the Patriarchate of Alexandria deemed illegal. In the rhetoric of the Alexandrian Patriarchate, its situation is compared with the one of Ukraine, as both are allegedly under Russian attack. In its case, it is an ecclesiastical attack, while in the case of Ukraine a military one. While the official statement of the Patriarch names the victims of this war, namely Ukrainian civilians, it also keeps a balance between the two fighting parties. It implies Russian responsibility by the example of the ecclesiastical schism caused by the Russian Church intervention in Africa but does not say so clearly. Is it because there are pro-Russian hierarchy members in the Synod of the Patriarchate? Is it because the Patriarch does not want to seem to be exacerbating its conflict with the Russian side? Or is it just the tendency of Church circles not to take a clear stance in secular conflicts? I do not have enough information to formulate a well-founded answer to these questions.

e. Church of Greece

About twenty days after the war's beginning, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece issued a declaration to be read in all parishes of its jurisdiction¹². This declaration clearly condemns the "violent invasion of the Russian troops and the war in Ukraine". Here, both the aggressor and the victim are clearly named.

The declaration refers next to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who refuses and condemns violence in all its forms. At the same time, he never used violence against human beings, even when he suffered violence in all possible ways. "No event, challenge, intent, or pretext can ever be an excuse for the atrocity of war. The so-called right of the powerful does not have anything to do with the concept of justice, love, and freedom, which Christ preaches. Furthermore, war makes things worse, as it feeds the circle of violence, hatred, pain, uprooting, hunger, and loss of human life, which we as Christians should respect, protect, and honor".

After a very vivid description of the situation in Ukraine (aberration and harshness of war, bombardment of civilians, loss of countless victims, even children, destruction of churches and monasteries, vital infrastructure and monuments of enormous importance, crowds of refugees, danger of nuclear devastation and a global climax of the war), concrete actions of service and humanitarian aid to the refugees are announced. At the same time, the circular address refers to the appeals of the Archbishop of Athens to the "ecclesiastical leaders responsible, aiming at their intervention to the secular rulers of their jurisdiction for the war's

the Russian Orthodox Church of 28 January 2022 // *Russian Orthodox Church: Official Website of the Moscow Patriarchate*, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5891378.html>.

¹² Περί τοῦ πολέμου στὴν Οὐκράνια // *Official Website of the Church of Greece*, https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/egyklloi.asp?id=3226&what_sub=egyklloi.

cease". It is noteworthy that Patriarch Cyril, the addressee of the Archbishop's letter, and President Putin, the secular ruler implied, are not expressly mentioned.

The encyclical also refers to the comparable examples of the violent invasions of Serbia, Kosovo, and, of course, Cyprus, reminding its audience of the Greek Church's similar positions and actions in those cases. Furthermore, war is seen as a failure of all of us, even of ecclesiastical leaders, to live in the peace that Christ has bequeathed to us. Finally, the encyclical concludes with an appeal for prayer to the Lord of peace, namely Jesus Christ, so that those who have secular power and take decisions may cease all further war threats, human beings may be saved, and global peace may prevail.

Without a doubt, this is a clear statement compared to the previously mentioned ones, but not as clear about the role and the responsibility of Putin and Cyril. In Greece, a small but not insignificant part of the population traditionally feels very close to Russia. On the other hand, it is also alienated from and suspicious of anything coming from the West, in this case, NATO, Western cultural influence, and their alleged impact on Ukraine and its people. Here, the Church of Greece also tries to keep a certain balance. First, it took some time for it to issue its encyclical. This might have had something to do with the initial expectation of many that the war would be brief and that they could just wait it out and take a position after its conclusion. Secondly, while the encyclical mentions the Russian troops and indeed distinguishes between the aggressor and the victim, on the other hand, it does not expressly mention the Patriarch of Moscow and the President of Russia. It prefers to allude to them so that part of its flock is not scandalized. Finally, the comparison with the NATO raid on Serbia, the Serbian invasion of Kosovo, and of course, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (a historical event that all Greeks unanimously condemn) intends to demonstrate the Greek Church's impartiality and, at the same time urge its flock to identify themselves with the suffering Ukrainians just as they can identify themselves with the suffering Cypriots and, of course, last but not least, to justify the Church's support of the Ukrainian side against Russia.

Furthermore, the Archbishop of Athens and Greece also wrote two letters, which he made public, one to the Patriarch of Moscow Cyril¹³ and one to the Archbishop of the newly established autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine Epi-phanios¹⁴.

¹³ Ο Ιερώνυμος έστειλε επιστολή στον Πατριάρχη Κύριλλο: Αντισταθείτε στα πολεμικά σχέδια // *LiFO*, <https://www.lifo.gr/now/world/o-ieronymos-esteile-epistoli-ston-rosio-patriarhi-kyrillo-antistatheite-sta-polemika> .

¹⁴ Archbishop of Athens Hieronymus 2nd. Επιστολή συμπαράστασης στον Λαό της Ουκρανίας // *Official Website of the Church of Greece*, https://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/archbishop/default.asp?cat_id=&id=1073&what_main=1&what_sub=24&lang=gr&archbishop_who=2&archbishop_heading=Επιστολές.

In the first letter, the Greek hierarch speaks of his great concern and sorrowful heart due to the war in Ukraine. He attributes the attacks to the decision and command of the Russian leadership, attacks that transform the Ukrainian land into a place of unspeakable sorrow and torment. According to the letter, the Church of Greece must raise its voice of protest in favor of all the war victims. She wails for the dead and those persecuted due to the evil, intolerance, and barbarity which originate from Christians sharing the same faith.

The Archbishop proceeds then to remind his addressee of the long and indestructible bonds between the Greek and the Russian Churches. On this basis, he appeals to the Russian Patriarch to resist the war plans of the secular rulers while expressing his certainty that such an intervention will be effective. The aim would be the ceasefire and the withdrawal of all Russian troops from Ukraine.

Furthermore, the Greek Archbishop opines that such an intervention would be a witness to the truth of the Orthodox faith, as Orthodox people should not only preach but also practice peace. On the other hand, any deviation from the practice of peace would harm the authority and the overall presence of the Orthodox Church on an inter-Christian and global level.

In the last paragraph of the letter, the Archbishop refers to Matt 7:21 and 1 Cor 12:27 to demonstrate the importance of not only praying to God and invoking his name but also doing his will while realizing that the Church of Christ is his indivisible body. This should be the basis for peace between the Russian and the Ukrainian people who have been partaking in common traditions for centuries and especially in the Orthodox faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. The letter ends with the traditional holy kiss.

Again, in this letter, president Putin is not mentioned by name but only alluded to. However, it is a clear letter of condemnation of the Russian invasion asking Cyril to intervene for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of the Russian troops, thus holding him responsible for not doing it. On the other hand, one can discern the diplomatic language and the fact that there is no criticism against Cyril's anti-Christian rhetoric. On a different note, it is apparent in the Archbishop's letter that he accepts Ukrainians as a distinct nation from the Russian one. Notwithstanding the ecclesiastic and diplomatic language used in the letter, it is an unambiguous critique of Cyril's and the Russian Church's stance on the war against Ukraine. The proof that the letter made its point is that the Russian side never responded.

In his shorter letter to the Ukrainian Archbishop, Hieronymus also refers to the military attack and the violent invasion of the Russian troops. He expresses his sympathy and shared understanding of the situation, as well as his Church's admiration for the courage of the Ukrainian people. He reports that he prays for the enlightenment of those who started this military raid so that they may choose the way of a peaceful solution to the existing differences between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples since their majority share the Orthodox faith. Finally, he men-

tions the humanitarian aid the Church of Greece is gathering and the hospitality she is willing to provide to refugees. He concludes the letter with a prayer and a warm greeting, much more generous than the one in his letter to Cyril, referring to the beloved country of Ukraine and speaking of deep brotherly love.

This warm letter again names both the aggressor and the victim while taking a clear stance in the latter's favor. The letter does not mention Putin as the main responsible for the massacre. Still, it makes all necessary points, even referring to the need for reconciliation, which, however, he makes dependent upon the decisions of the Russian leadership that has to cease its attack.

The Church of Greece is a national Church. As such, it co-celebrates national festivals of important events in Greek national history, such as the Greek revolution against the Ottomans in 1821. Its statements do not justify or condemn the Ukrainian defense while clearly condemning the Russian invasion. Also, there is no reference to the so-called "just war", which we find already in Church Fathers such as notably Augustine¹⁵. The Greek Archbishop speaks against every kind of war, but it is not clear what he would advise or what position he would hold, in case, for instance, an attack against Greece by Turkey were to take place.

The Greek Church has inherited the combined Byzantine ecclesiastical and secular tradition, including the notion of "holy war". Although the Greek Church fathers never used such expressions and unambiguously condemned every kind of violence, even defensive violence, which they tolerated only as a necessary evil¹⁶, from a theological point of view the contemporary Greek Church, as the official religion of the Greek state according to the Greek constitution, is not clear enough on such matters¹⁷. This is, of course, a problem inherent to all national Orthodox Churches in various forms and degrees and a topic for a different paper. However, it should be mentioned here as well that stringent theological arguments in favor of peace and against war could work in ways that could be unpleasant, even to those whom the Greek Church, in this case, supports. To be clear, I am speaking here of a certain lack of theological clarity and a language that does not reflect the Greek Church's own ethnic orientation¹⁸.

¹⁵ See among others J. M. Mattox. *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*. London – New York 2006.

¹⁶ Cf. Basilus of Caesarea, *Epistulae*, 188, 8 // Saint Basile: *Lettres* / ed. Y. Courtonne, vol. 1. Paris 1957, retrieved from <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?2040:004:557011>.

¹⁷ Cf. P. Kalaitzidis, N. Asproulis. Greek Religious Nationalism and the Challenges of Evangelization, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation // *Just Peace: Orthodox Perspective* / ed. S. Asfaw, A. Chehadeh, and M. Gh. Simion. Geneva 2012, 68–89.

¹⁸ On the problem of the Greek Church's nationalist orientation in contrast to the theological message of the New Testament, see Christos Karakolis. Nonviolence in the New Testament: An Orthodox-Hermeneutical Perspective // *Sacra Scripta* 19/1–2 (2022) 76–91. See also the compre-

f. Ecumenical Patriarchate

On the side of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, there is a significant number of statements concerning the war in Ukraine. In these statements, the aggressor and the victims are named clearly. In a TV interview¹⁹, not only did the Ecumenical Patriarch name Russia as the aggressor but also President Putin as the person to blame for the invasion, as well as the Patriarch of Moscow Cyril for not resisting the decisions of his country's President. In his opinion, the Church of Russia is a tragic exception by being the only Orthodox Church not to condemn the war (as we have seen, this is not entirely accurate, even with regard only to the Greek-speaking Orthodox churches). He asked how Cyril could justify himself to his conscience and opined that he should have protested against the invasion of Ukraine and condemned the war just like all other Orthodox primates. That he did not do so speaks against him. He also mentioned other differences between the Churches of Constantinople and Moscow, such as the issue of the autocephaly of the Church of Ukraine. Still, the war is beyond any discrepancies of the past. Therefore, Bartholomew had hoped for a different reaction from Cyril, who, in his view, should have been willing to sacrifice his throne by telling Putin: "Mr. President, I cannot agree with you, and I resign".

Compared to the previous statements, this is the clearest of all concerning the stance of the Russian Church. While the Archbishop of Greece asked the Patriarch of Moscow to take a stance, the Ecumenical Patriarch criticized him for not taking a stance, which should have been a given.

In his paschal sermon, the Patriarch of Constantinople spoke of "innocent victims of military aggression and the plight of refugees, among whom there are numerous innocent children"²⁰. Furthermore, he affirmed that the Church of Constantinople stands and suffers alongside the pious and courageous people of Ukraine who bear a heavy cross. He also condemned silence about this tragedy. In his words, "it is unimaginable for us Christians to remain silent before the obliteration of human dignity, as the greatest casualty of war is humanity"²¹. Finally, apart from praying for peace, he underlined the importance of every human effort to establish peace, as the principal characteristic of a Christian is peacemaking.

hensive article on the relationship between Orthodoxy and Hellenism in modern-day Greece by Pantelis Kalaitzidis. *Idem.*: Orthodoxy and Hellenism in Contemporary Greece // *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 54 (2010) 365–420.

¹⁹ Οικουμενικός Πατριάρχης Βαρθολομαίος: 'Ο Κύριλλος θα έπρεπε να ορθώσει το ανάστημά του στον Πούτιν' // *iEfimerida*, <https://www.iefimerida.gr/kosmos/oikoumenikos-patriarhis-bartholomaios-kyrillos-poytin> .

²⁰ Patriarchal Encyclical for Holy Pascha 2022 // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/patriarchal-encyclical-for-holy-pascha-2022/>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

In another sermon of his²², the Patriarch referred, among other things, to Mariupol and all other Ukrainian territories, where an indescribable tragedy occurred. He appealed for an immediate end to the fratricidal war and stated his certainty that the powers of evil, violence, and injustice would not prevail. The Russian aggression is considered to represent such powers.

In another sermon²³, the Patriarch spoke of the invaders of Ukraine, who share the same faith and intend the absolute humiliation of the proud, faithful, and brotherly Ukrainian nation, which fights heroically and self-sacrificially for its freedom. This text justifies the military actions on the side of the Ukrainians. On the other hand, the Patriarch also considered the tragedy of the families of the fallen Russian soldiers. He said that military actions are evil and destroy peace and unity between human beings, particularly between brotherly people who share the same faith. Furthermore, in his opinion, it is sad and hypocritical that Church leaders do not condemn concretely and unequivocally the fratricidal war in Ukraine, which does not discern between Ukrainians and Russian-speaking Orthodox people.

In another statement²⁴, the Patriarch, again, expressed both his admiration for the strong resistance of the Ukrainian people against the insolent invader and his satisfaction with the brave protest of Russian citizens against the bloodshed. The Patriarch insisted that the invasion be terminated immediately and dialogue be initiated based on the charter of the United Nations.

It is a tragic humanitarian catastrophe, claimed the Patriarch in his first official statement about the war in Ukraine²⁵. This war is, in his words, a horrible and condemnable situation. It is the prevalence of insanity over sanity, hatred over love, darkness over light, and death over life. Thus, he appealed for a ceasefire. He also expressed his sympathy toward his brother Metropolitan of Kyiv Epiphanius and his compassion for the beloved Ukrainian people, which has deep faith in God and chose to live free and determine its own life, as every nation deserves.

²² Greeting of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew following the Service of the Resurrection [Pascha (Easter) 2022] // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/greeting-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-following-the-service-of-the-resurrection-pascha-easter-2022/>.

²³ Οικουμενικός Πατριάρχης: Τα όπλα σκορπούν τον θάνατο και, ασφαλώς, δεν κάνουν διακρίσεις. Σκοτώνουν τους πάντες // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/οικουμενικός-πατριάρχης-τα-όπλα-σκορπ/>.

²⁴ Οικουμενικός Πατριάρχης: Πρέπει να τερματισθεί αμέσως, τώρα, η εισβολή και ο πόλεμος στην Ουκρανία και να δοθεί νέα ευκαιρία εις τον διάλογον // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/οικουμενικός-πατριάρχης-πρέπει-να-τε/>.

²⁵ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: End the war now! // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/ecumenical-patriarch-end-the-war-now/>.

On the first day of the Russian attack, in a phone call of the Patriarch to Epiphanius²⁶, he expressed “his deep sorrow at the blatant violation of any notion of international law and legality, as well as his support for the Ukrainian people struggling for God and country and for the families of innocent victims”. Apart from the condemnation of the unprovoked attack by Russia against Ukraine, the Patriarch said that he prays to God to enlighten the leadership of the Russian Federation to perceive the tragic consequences of its decisions and actions, which could even be the trigger for a global military conflict. Finally, he calls all local Orthodox Churches and all Christians to unceasing prayer for the Ukrainian people and the prevalence of peace and justice in Ukraine²⁷.

Some important points should be underlined here: The Ecumenical Patriarchate is the only Greek-speaking Orthodox Church, and the Ecumenical Patriarch is the only Greek-speaking primate to name Putin as being responsible for the tragedy in Ukraine. Furthermore, he is the only Greek-speaking primate to clearly criticize and condemn the stance of the Orthodox Church of Russia and personally of the Patriarch of Moscow. Moreover, he expresses his support for the Ukrainian people, the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and those who fight for their country’s independence. This is a clear justification of defensive violence that we have not seen elsewhere. References to Russians who resist the war and to the pain that Russian mothers, alongside Ukrainian ones, have to suffer through the loss of their sons are also noteworthy. Even the eschatological dimension is present: In the end, evil will not prevail. However, instead of praying for peace, one should try to bring peace, while silence in front of such crimes is inexcusable for all Christians.

The Ecumenical Patriarch also refers to the differences between his and the Russian Church. According to him, these differences are mainly due to the overall effort of the Russian Church to undermine the Church of Constantinople and take its position as the third Rome. Although the Patriarch claims that his stance has nothing to do with such crises, it is clear that they are in the back-

²⁶ The Ecumenical Patriarch condemns the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine and expresses His solidarity to the suffering Ukrainian people // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/the-ecumenical-patriarch-condemns-the-unprovoked-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-and-expresses-his-solidarity-to-the-suffering-ukrainian-people/>.

²⁷ Cf. also the following statements of the Ecumenical Patriarch, among others: Message of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for the Feast of the Indiction, 1 September 2022 // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/message-of-his-all-holiness-the-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-for-the-feast-of-the-indiction-september-1st-2022/>; Greeting of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for Ukrainian Independence Day (24 August 2022) // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/greeting-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-for-ukrainian-independence-day-24-august-2022/>; *Catechetical Homily at the opening of Holy and Great Lent (2022)* // *Ecumenical Patriarchate*, <https://ec-patr.org/catechetical-homily-at-the-opening-of-holy-and-great-lent-2022/>.

ground of his positions and influence his rhetoric. Because of the conflict between the Churches of Constantinople and Moscow, including a break of communion on the latter's side, the Ecumenical Patriarch is not trying to keep any balance whatsoever. He speaks his mind clearly and openly, although, of course, usually using diplomatic language. Finally, he and the Archbishop of Athens are the only two Orthodox primates to refer to Epiphanius by name, contact him, and offer him their support and sympathy.

Reference to Rom 13:1-7 and John's Revelation

At this point, I will briefly refer to the witness of two important New Testament texts, Rom 13:1–7 and John's Revelation.

In the first text, Paul urges all Christ-followers to be "subject to the governing authorities". All such authorities are from God and have been instituted by God. Anyone who resists authority resists God's command practically and will incur justice. If isolated from their context, these words could justify the Russian Orthodox Church's stance regarding the war in Ukraine and the neutral position of such Churches as the Patriarchate of Jerusalem or the Church of Cyprus. Indeed, the Patriarch and the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia have been faithfully supporting Kremlin's plans, or at the very least, they have been keeping silent about the unfolding of such plans in Ukraine.

However, in the following verses, Paul says that the rulers are not a terror to good conduct but only to bad. In order not to fear the state's authority, one has to do what is good and, thus, one will have its approval. The state is God's servant for the welfare of its people. On the other hand, it also bears the sword to execute wrath on every evildoer. Therefore, one must be submissive to state power not only because of fear but also because of one's conscience. In the above sense, the authorities are God's servants.

Here, we can see the difference from the contemporary situation. Paul deals with the Roman authorities, that are generally still not hostile to Christ-followers. At this time, Paul does not face war or generalized persecution of Christ-followers. He seems convinced that the Roman order is according to God's will. Despite the sporadic problems in his contact with Roman authorities and the indirect criticism in his letters towards the Roman establishment, Paul has no overwhelming reason to turn against the Roman state. On the contrary, he has every reason to accept Roman rule as the framework for his unhindered missionary activity and the flourishing of his newly founded communities (up to the point of writing the epistle to the Romans)²⁸.

²⁸ See for instance J. Albert Harrill. Paul and Empire: Studying Roman Identity after the Cultural Turn // *Early Christianity* 2 (2011) 281–311. See also a differentiated approach by Neil Elliott. *Idem*. Romans 13:1–7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda // *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power*

Furthermore, Paul is convinced that Christ's second coming will occur in the imminent future (1 Thess 4:13–18). Therefore, he does not aim at any radical social changes. His advice is for everyone and everything to remain as it is, given the coming Parousia of the Lord (1 Cor 7). He is also convinced that doing what is good is the way to go for all Christ-believers, who, by doing so, will shine like stars in the world (Phil 2:15). As good examples, Christ-believers will also attract others to Christ's faith. What Christ-followers have to do, among other things, is to be obedient to Roman law and order. They have, for the time being, no reason not to.

However, how would Paul react, and what would he have said had the Roman state asked its subjects to act in a way that would be contrary to the will of God and to the gospel's way of life? Would Paul have submitted himself to the power of a state that would oppose what is universally understood as good (Phil 4:8) and promote intolerance and violence?

John's Revelation gives some kind of an answer to this question in a different era and from a different perspective. The seer has a totally different experience of the Roman state compared to Paul. In his view, the Roman state is evil, does the will of Satan, attempts to replace God, and forces Christ-followers to deny God. It is clear that the book's author is already witnessing or is about to witness a situation of persecution against Christians who insist on believing in Jesus Christ²⁹.

However, the author of Revelation never justifies violence as a defensive option on the part of Christians. In Revelation, justified violence only comes from God and his angels, while evil violence comes from Satan and his servants. In Revelation, the Christians are comforted by knowing that God will avenge them, so they do not have to do anything themselves but just endure, persevere, and remain in faith (Rev 6:10; 19:2). The only blood they will have on them is the blood of the Lamb, which will cleanse and whiten their clothes (Rev 7:14)³⁰. Is there any ground for the justification of active violence on the part of Christians in Revelation? In my opinion, there is not. Violence is accepted, just as in Rom 13, but only if it comes from God.

The above conclusion is also valid for the New Testament as a whole. For instance, according to Jesus' words in the Gospel of John (8:44), anyone who com-

in Roman Imperial Society / ed. R. A. Horsley. Harrisburg, PA 1997, 184–204. Cf. also the overall discussion on the matter in D. J. Moo. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI 1996, 822–826; B. Lategan. Romans 13:1–7: A Review of Post-1989 Readings // *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 110 (2012) 259–272.

²⁹ See the relevant discussion in G. K. Beale. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI – Carlisle, 1999, 12–16.

³⁰ See the relevant analysis in James A. Kelhoffer. *Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament*. Tübingen 2010, 143–182.

mits murder is a child of the devil, who has been a murderer of human beings (ἀνθρωποκτόνος) since the very beginning. Taking anyone's life for any reason whatsoever is evil. Furthermore, according to 1 John 3:15–16, anyone who hates his brother is a murderer of human beings. Any murderer of human beings will not have eternal life within him. On the contrary, because Jesus Christ sacrificed his life for us, we have to offer our lives for the sake of our brethren. This is why killing, even in defense, is considered a grave sin in the Christian tradition. On the other hand, it is regarded as a much lighter sin than all other kinds of murder.

Conclusions

Everything that is happening at the present time in Ukraine, murder, destruction, and devastation, is a clear violation of the Christian gospel, God's will, and Christ's teaching. To keep silent or to justify such actions means to bear responsibility for them, according to the New Testament witness and the ethos of the ancient Church as a whole. Silence means tolerating and potentially justifying evil. Most regrettably, some Greek-speaking Churches have not lived up to their duty to speak up against the ongoing crime in Ukraine and to do everything in their power to mitigate it.

Greek-speaking Churches are currently not under imminent threat. This is all the more reason for them to give witness to the gospel's teaching. However, their silence allows this teaching to be forged into something completely different, such as a justification for war and killing other human beings. Unfortunately, their stance seems to depend significantly on their relations with the Russian Church. Thus, their credibility and, therefore, their impact on the contemporary world more or less suffer.

On a different note, does any Church have the right to order people to fight in a defensive war or to praise them for their resistance? Does bravery in a defensive war belong to Christ's commandments? We have seen differentiated responses to this question from the various Greek-speaking Churches. Everything is debatable, and these are, of course, highly complex issues. However, at this point, an important question would be: would the Greek Churches adopt the same stance in case of a military attack against Greeks or Greek territory? I fear that the reaction from all Greek-speaking Churches would be quite different.

For instance, would the Autocephalous Church of Greece be reluctant to name the aggressor and encourage its members to defend God and the country? On the other hand, would the Ecumenical Patriarchate dare to praise the defenders if the attack came from the side of Turkey, the sovereign state in which the Ecumenical Patriarchate is located? Would the Patriarchate of Jerusalem finally speak up, and what would it say?

If we can learn anything from this brief review of the opinions of the Greek-speaking Churches on the war against Ukraine, it is that there is probably no church politics that is free from expediency. Therefore, it is not up to the church leaders but every church member to become spiritually mature and adopt the proper stance, to discern evil from good, sometimes even against its own country, even against its own church community or jurisdiction. This is the responsibility that all Christians bear, namely, to give witness to Christ's commandment to love even their enemies (Matt 5:44) and to refuse to act violently against them under any circumstances whatsoever (Matt 5:39). On the other hand, it is also their duty to speak up and criticize fellow Christians who mislead others into thinking that hatred and murder could be according to God's will.

There are certainly no easy answers to complex ethical issues such as the above mentioned. However, Christians should be able to discern evil when they see it and name it as such. This is the least all of us can and should do.

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ПОЗИЦІЯ ПРАВОСЛАВНИХ ГРЕКОМОВНИХ ЦЕРКОВ ЩОДО ВІЙНИ ПРОТИ УКРАЇНИ: КРИТИЧНИЙ ПОГЛЯД ІЗ ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ РИМ 13:1-7 ТА ОБ'ЯВЛЕННЯ ЙОАНА БОГОСЛОВА

У статті розглянуто позиції грекомовних православних Церков щодо сучасної війни Росії проти України. Окрім того, що праця інформативна, вона порушує богословське питання про те, чи відповідають різні позиції Церков заповіді Христа поширювати Його вчення у світі та наскільки вони сумісні з відповідними новозавітними текстами. Після аналізу й коментування відповідних заяв Константинопольського, Александрійського та Єрусалимського патріархів, Автокефальних Церков Кіпру та Еллади, а також Святої спільноти Афону, коротко розглянуто два новозавітні тексти, які представляють різні підходи до політичної влади, а саме: Рим 13:1-7 та Об'явлення Йоана Богослова. Встановлено, що позиції грекомовних Церков варіюються від загальних антивоєнних заяв до конкретних засуджень російського вторгнення та прямої чи опосередкованої підтримки його з російською православною ієрархією. Однак націоналізм і церковно-політичний опортунізм є, схоже, явищами, що притаманні більше чи менше для всіх сучасних національних православних ієрархій. Тож розпізнавати зло і виступати проти несправедливості – справа кожного віруючого, а не лише церковних ієрархів.

Ключові слова: грекомовні Церкви, Україна, Росія, війна, націоналізм, православ'я, Послання до Римлян 13:1–7, Об'явлення Йоана Богослова.