

Article

Towards an “Ecumenical” Council Inside of Orthodoxy!

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Abstract: Ecumenism is a recurrent theme in Orthodox theological debates, but the syntagma “Orthodox ecumenism” is rarely used because it seems to be very restrictive and inappropriate. However, in exceptional situations, such as a war between two Orthodox peoples, I think it might be more than necessary. In the first part of this essay, I will discuss how the mirage of a “third” Rome and the partnership with the Kremlin makes the Russian Church an adversary of ecumenism inside of Orthodoxy. Any Church that blesses a war, aggression, and confrontation and shows imperial tendencies is excluded de facto from the communion with other Churches. In the second part of my work, I will analyze the consequences of the “schism” created by Patriarch Kirill in the bosom of Orthodoxy. What were (or what were not!) the positions of other Orthodox Churches when Patriarch Kirill blessed the war and betrayed the principles of the Gospel of Christ? Why is there a need for a so-called “Ecumenical Orthodox Council” and what are the chances of this happening?

Keywords: Orthodox Church; war; pan-Orthodox synaxis; *primus inter pares*; *Russkij mir*; anti-Christian ideology

1. Introduction

The Orthodox world looks with admiration at the existence and survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Istanbul (which the Greeks in theological discussions also call Constantinople!) in increasingly harsh conditions despite the assurances of the political leadership in Turkey that state the rights of Christians are respected according to the constitution. Even if, over time, there were small frictions between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the leadership of other historical or autocephalous patriarchies on various theological or jurisdictional topics, they did not exceed the limits of a pan-synodal understanding. In other words, they were consumed within Orthodoxy, where it is natural to find solutions to any misunderstanding.

The idea of a so-called “Orthodox ecumenism” could have been beneficial for political and social stability in the former republics of Soviet Russia and in the countries located directly or indirectly in the area of its influence. Of course, the fundamental condition for the existence of such a body of mutual consultation, with decision-making power and ability to apply the respective decisions, could only be acceptance of the status of the Ecumenical Patriarch as *primus inter pares* among the Orthodox patriarchs, and in general, this is respected (Meyendorff 1987, p. 133).

Only one Church made an exception, namely, the Russian Orthodox Church (hereinafter: RuOC), which always showed itself with a certain superiority and perhaps even arrogance in its relations with other sister Churches. It never hid its intention to be considered de facto and de jure the first of the Orthodox Churches, considering its historical past and the number of believers and hierarchs from all over the world, to which, the exceptional contribution of Russian theologians to the development of Christian culture and spirituality was probably added over time. This cannot, however, be taken as a true criterion, especially because most of the influential Russian theologians lived in exile. The Russian Church apparently forgets to mention the most important argument in acquiring its status as the *Third Rome*, namely, the political one because, as we will see, everything



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that this Church does and preaches is approved, consented to, and supported by the power from the Kremlin. The imperialist policy of the Russian Federation is found entirely in the pastoral and missionary projects of the Orthodox Church (Curanović 2007, pp. 311–13). If until recently, the latter's desire to dominate the entire Orthodoxy was hidden in a theological–diplomatic pedantry, with the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army on 24 February 2022, it became public. The RuOC lost its identity and turned into a subsidiary institution of the State. Patriarch Kirill became a kind of speaking trumpet for President Putin (Ionescu 2022), the Christian morality of the Church being replaced by a strange ethic that promoted confrontation instead of peace and love of neighbor (Coman 2023, pp. 332–34).

In fact, right from the beginning of the war, the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow made several statements that totally discredited him in the eyes of the clerics and believers everywhere (Brancato 2022). He adopted an aggressive attitude, coarse language, dictatorial behavior, and manipulative and lying rhetoric regarding the so-called “military operation” in Ukraine (Coman 2023, p. 332).

All this excludes him, *de facto*, from the Orthodox communion. It is clear as daylight that he no longer follows the evangelical precepts, he no longer has anything to do with the sacrificial spirit of Christianity, he no longer promotes righteousness and love, and he no longer respects any of the fundamental values of Christ's teaching (Vulcan 2022). Therefore, although he is the head of the largest Orthodox Church in the world (in terms of number of believers), Patriarch Kirill is no longer an authentic hierarch of God but a faithful “soldier” of the Kremlin. Instead of condemning Russia's aggression in Ukraine (where he still has a faithful church structure despite Metropolitan Bishop Onufrie's “divorce” declarations) (Nescott 2022), he became complicit “in the most hideous things that man without God is capable of committing: the war of the conquest, the terror, the torture, and the mass murder of a people whom Christ tenderly commanded us to love as ourselves, not to crush under the heavy and encroaching boot of death” (Bănescu 2022).

And yet, how can we explain this warlike attitude of the RuOC, represented by its patriarch? Why did he introduce Christianity into the war equation? Was this the price of his safety or is it simply found in his mentality and culture? Whatever the truth, how is it that other Orthodox Churches are not considering convening a pan-Orthodox synod in order to discuss the immoral situation of Patriarch Kirill and to decide on the collaboration of the Russian Church with other Orthodox Churches regarding the issue of preserving the Orthodox ecumenical unity and canonical communion? Is not such a decision related to political and economic interests rather than religious ones? These are several questions that I will try to find some answers to in the lines below.

2. A Few Brief Necessary Comments

First of all, I think that we are dealing here, on the one hand, with a perversion of the concept of the Byzantine symphony, with the Church of Russia now being only a propaganda tool for the political power in the Kremlin. It is clear to everyone that the attitude of the RuOC at the beginning of the war was reprehensible. Its leader, Patriarch Kirill, voluntarily supports President Putin because they think alike, have had the same training, and have the same mentality and the same goal (Ionescu 2022). Therefore, I find it hard to believe that anyone could expect any positive signal from him! Not only did he tacitly approve Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, but he became complicit in the war crimes committed by the Red Army. Instead, he should have publicly condemned this aggression ordered by an irresponsible individual who not only destroys a country and its free people who do not love him but threatens peace throughout the world (Oprea 2022; Coman 2023, p. 333).

Patriarch Kirill's holy duty was to tell his president directly that the decision he had made was unjust, unfair, illogical, and reprehensible in every way, which would only bring unhappiness and death. Any good Christian would have expected him to have spoken

out against the war because it is in total contradiction with Christian values and with the teaching of the Gospel of Christ that speaks of love, not of hatred or destruction.

Unfortunately, he did not behave as a Christian leader but rather as an unscrupulous political actor, openly siding with the invading army and praying for the Russian soldiers who perished in the war but not for the Ukrainian ones, although both are Orthodox Christians with the great majority under his canonical jurisdiction, and not even for civilians, children, women, men, young or old, who had no fault, except perhaps for the fact that they lived in the other country. He did not say a word about the sufferings of the Ukrainian people, whom he calls brother (!) and where he has so many millions of believers; he said nothing about the churches destroyed by the bombings. Instead, he tried to find the strangest and most bizarre arguments in favor of the war, starting with the ones invoked by the Kremlin as he talked about a fight that the brave Russian soldiers (many of whom are involved in this fratricidal war without their will) are waging against the “evil forces” led by the West, who want the destruction of Russia by promoting so-called “fascist practices” in Ukraine, by replacing and perverting religious sentiment by new progressive ideologies (RISU 2022; Dancu 2022; Coman 2023, pp. 333–34).

No one doubts that in a dictatorship like the one Russia now finds itself in, anyone who challenges the Kremlin’s policies can end up in prison or disappear under mysterious circumstances, but Kirill’s duty is to serve and worship Christ, his only reason for being a patriarch. But we see that he has abandoned his mission, abandoned his believers, in exchange for the preservation of his privileges and personal safety or, more likely, because of the concordance of his own sentiments with the policy of his president. On the other hand, whether it is a captive Church with no say before the Kremlin regime or whether it is merely miming this captivity in order to put its pan-Slavic imperial plan into action is of little significance, especially if we consider, as we will see, the fact that there is an overlap of the goals and strategies of the two institutions, the State and the Church.

3. The Mirage of the Third “Orthodox Rome”

Russia’s policy has always been an expansionist one, whether we are talking about the tsarist era, the communist one that we know better, or the current one that we could call democratic revolutionary, although it does not differ much from the first two. As in the past, Russia claims to be the guarantor of the freedom, stability, and prosperity of its citizens and wants to export these concepts to the whole world when, in fact, it tramples on all of them in plain sight, promoting a quasi-universal dictatorship. Before and during the war in Ukraine, treacherously called a special military intervention, the Kremlin leadership ideologically trained the Russian and Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, cutting off all means of free communication and print and audiovisual media, banning any form of protest, and adopting laws with sentences of up to 15 years for those who talk about the war. The only sources of information are the Kremlin and the “trumpets” of the televisions and the press enslaved to its politics. No one is allowed to oppose because they are considered the enemy of the country and its interests. In addition, the population has been prepared for decades to face the West, identified with corruption, immorality, and debauchery and as an enemy of Russian statehood and the Orthodox faith, an enemy ready to attack and conquer their country. Therefore, a real gulf has been created between those who do not believe in official statements and the good will of Russia’s leaders and the great silent majority of Russian citizens who fail to distinguish truth from lies and ideological propaganda. Against the background of this permanent misinformation, the attack launched by the Kremlin against Ukraine, justified by so-called “denazification” (Vişniec 2022; Ene 2022) of it and the danger it would represent for Mother Russia, could be considered legitimate by the population in general. Of course, all these arguments (and many others that are equally difficult to accept by a free mind and a righteous conscience) represent simple mystifications of the truth; they are the result of a diabolical plan, conceived by the president of the State (who does not even consider the sufferings of his own people), together with his henchmen, to invade a free and sovereign country just to achieve his expansionist goals and restore the

prestige and the power of Imperial Russia or the former USSR deceased three decades ago. It is a plan carefully prepared for a long time in the Kremlin “laboratories” and executed by a system based on force, fear, and terror, in which there is no room for discussion or protest but only obedience; those who do not obey are removed or even condemned. Unfortunately, it is about a plan that has nothing to do with democracy, freedom, peace, or Christian values; it is a criminal plan that brings no good to anyone, only death, darkness, and suffering in the whole world.

The politics of the RuOC can be read almost in a mirror. Although they perhaps cannot be directly accused of criminal activities, by tacitly or openly supporting the war in Ukraine, they become complicit, in a way, in all the horrors it has brought on both Ukrainians and Russians. Maybe it is not about a direct crime, but it is definitely about favoring one, especially if there is no public condemnation but instead a blessing, both of the actions themselves and of those who are sent to execute them. If in the case of the Kremlin, things are clear and explainable through its policies, overlooked for too long by the Western powers for economic and strategic reasons (although it can be seen today that it was a big mistake), in the case of the RuOC, they are more complicated and, at least from my point of view, more reprehensible considering its essence (being), presence, and mission in the world.

On the other hand, the similar organization of the two institutions and their operation by command and complete obedience are obvious. Both are based on a hierarchical structure that is deeply respected. As in the case of State power, RuOC is also based on an almost militarized structure, where the watchword is obedience and the blind fulfillment of all tasks on a hierarchical line. Having a special legislation, very protective especially for its superiors, the only ones who have a certain power of decision, the Church is organized according to the same principles as the State, in which the order is not discussed but executed.

Also, in the Church, a kind of dictatorship works, even if it is a velvet one, because here too the law is imposed from top to bottom. No one has the courage to comment on the orders from the superior if they do not want to lose their position and privileges. They all obey without comment. Anyone who steps out of the line is marginalized, judged, or even defrocked because they have no defense. Canons of obedience, oaths, and the need for blessing are invoked. But these completely disregard their source, which is the greatest commandment of the Gospel of Christ, the commandment of love, which comes together with freedom and human dignity, the right to think, to act, and to challenge or agree with a particular action or person. Moreover, even if the Holy Synod is the collective governing body of the Church, power is usually concentrated in the hands of the patriarch who, at least in the case of Russia, works in a so called “neo-Byzantine symphony” with the president of the State according to the Russian model: who is not with us, is against us and must be removed. Mutual support is visible because they have the same goals and the same mentality and find themselves in the same practice. There is a parallel and, at the same time, a paradoxical overlapping of arguments brought by both institutions to validate the war in Ukraine (Krawchuck 2022, pp. 175–78).

More concretely, the Kremlin leader justifies his armed presence in the neighboring country (which, paradoxically, he considers a sister!) for “patriotic” reasons, bringing in his support the discriminatory treatment to which the Russian-speaking population of Donbas were subjected or the so-called danger in which the Russian Federation was due to the advancement of NATO in the countries once in his sphere of influence (Kilp 2022, p. 167), as well as some pseudo-historical or strictly political ones (denazification, demilitarization, and change of the political regime!). For his part, the leader of the RuOC, like a faithful soldier, does not dispute anything that President Putin says. Moreover, he even tries to put public opinion to sleep by promoting some ridiculous concepts, which, nevertheless, catch on with a public indoctrinated against the West (Kantyka 2022, p. 6), which they see as being the personification of the devil himself (Didila 2022; Buruiană 2022; Kilp 2022, pp. 157–63; Coman 2023, pp. 331–33).

His comments and actions are puerile and anti-Christian because nothing can justify the action of supporting war and death, especially when it is a war of conquest of another state, without any logic, without any reason, and only out of a desire to flaunt his military force and impose his own expansionist agenda on a West stunned by the audacity and irresponsibility of a man who has been given credit by all the powers of the civilized world.

Consequently, it is quite obvious that the RuOC follows the Kremlin's policy. Just as the president of Russia wants to show how strong he is, threatening the whole world regardless of the consequences and with the risk of becoming a pariah in international politics, the leader of the largest Orthodox Church in the world wants his "armchair" of *primus inter pares*! (Curanović 2007, pp. 306–10). Besides, RuOC has been trying for a long time to replace the Ecumenical Patriarchy. It behaves like a church superpower whose word must be listened to and respected, and in relations with other Christian denominations, it manifests itself with an air of gratuitous superiority and a lack of obvious respect. In other words, RuOC's desire to rule the Orthodox world everywhere is no longer a secret to anyone and is part of Russia's ideological heritage. The participation of its representatives in the ecumenical movement and the so-called openness to dialogue with all the sister Churches is a simple strategy to lull the vigilance of others. For them, the communion between Church and State is beyond doubt. The State needs the Church to legitimize its actions, and the Church needs the State to assert its authority over any other outside Orthodox structure or community. That is why, in the view of the two leaders, the President and the Patriarch, any crack in communication or collaboration between the two institutions would have direct consequences on the unity of the Russians. For them, recreating that *Russkij mir* answers the aspirations of Russians everywhere, both politically and religiously (Kantyka 2022, p. 6; Denysenko 2013, pp. 41–45; Denysenko 2014, pp. 246–49; Wawrzonek 2016, pp. 37–70; Public Orthodoxy 2022; Chryssavgis 2022; Coman 2023, pp. 333–34, 338–40, 343). Therefore, the emergence of a Church independent of Moscow in Ukraine was seen as a direct attack on the latter's authority to undermine its prestige. The RuOC, even if it never officially recognized it, considered itself the rightful leader of the Orthodox world, the Ecumenical Patriarchy being, in their view, only a symbol of the past.

Moreover, undermining the honorary Orthodox primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarch was permanently on the RuOC's agenda. Whether we are talking about the ecumenical council of the Churches, about the bilateral Orthodox meetings with other Churches, or, in broader formats, with the involvement of the leaders or representatives of other Orthodox Churches, RuOC always wanted to have the last word, and if such a situation was not foreseen, then they would find some pretext not to participate, as happened at the synod of Crete (Dumitrașcu 2022, p. 410).

As for Ukraine, RuOC had a much greater interest because its very history began there. Therefore, when the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew granted autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, there was a complete rupture between Moscow and Constantinople (Kilp 2022, pp. 149–50; Codruț 2022), the former being convinced that its canonical rights had been violated (Bordeianu 2020, p. 458).

All eyes are probably on the Ecumenical Patriarch, the rightful leader of the entire Orthodox world and the person most entitled to signal a pan-Orthodox synaxis. His position is clear. He condemned and vehemently condemns any form of war. He celebrates life, not death, for which there is no justification (Cristescu 2023).

On the other hand, even if the expectations are high, I think we should take into account the fact that, as is known, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been in a rather fragile situation for almost six centuries. With a special status, tolerated in a Muslim-majority country whose president is on cordial terms with the president of Russia, Patriarch Bartholomew cannot do much outside of public statements. Of course, some criticize his lack of concrete action, while others praise his balance and diplomacy because, despite the vitreous conditions in which he lives, he has the courage to assume the responsibilities of the leader of the universal Orthodox world and to openly criticize the unqualified slippage of Patriarch Kirill.

The problem is that if they decide to organize a pan-Orthodox synaxis, who will respond to such a convocation and how would they position themselves in the face of a possible conviction of Kirill, the most faithful collaborator of the leader of one of the most important countries in the world? Although there is a lot of talk in today's society about the clear separation between the State and the Church, or between secular and religious power, we will see in the lines below what Orthodox solidarity means in cases of crisis and how important the political factor is in the assumption (or nonassumption) of decisions at the highest church level.

4. Orthodox Solidarity under Political Pressure

The war in Ukraine showed very clearly how the autocephalous Orthodox Churches are positioned towards the imperialist policy of Patriarch Kirill, incompatible with his religious status and openly supporting the invasion of a brother people of the same faith. If in the Western Christian world, his name is associated, either directly or indirectly, with the crimes committed by the Russian army, in the Eastern world, the opinions are more nuanced because the links between political and religious power are different.

In the lines below, I will try to analyze very briefly the opinions of the old patriarchs (to which I will add a simple remark from other Orthodox leaders) regarding the anti-Christian, antiecclasiastical, and antiecumenical behavior of Patriarch Kirill, who betrayed the true mission of Christ, namely, the preaching of love and peace between peoples, going so far as to love one's enemies. Instead, he chose to preach hatred and bless murder. In other words, he decided to join the Luciferian forces of absolute evil and to campaign for destruction and death.

Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine and denounces Patriarch Kirill's implicit and explicit support for it. Such a truly clear position should not be a surprise as relations between the two Churches deteriorated significantly after Alexandria recognized the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Moscow's reaction came immediately. Patriarch Kirill probably felt offended by the attitude of the successor of the great Athanasius and Cyril—what a coincidence of names!—and he decided to make an unfriendly, unqualified, deeply uncanonical gesture, establishing an exarchate of the RuOC on African territory (Bordeianu 2020, p. 457; Kilp 2022, pp. 150–51), which also shows that the Russian Church is governed by the same forceful, imperialist principles as the "tsar" from Kremlin. The natural resentment of the Alexandrians even led to an unprecedented act in the history of inter-Orthodox relations. More specifically, Patriarch Theodore requested the convening of a synod in Fanar of a so-called "new pentarchy" (made up of the old patriarchs of the Orthodox Church, to which the Church of Cyprus could be added), which demands no more, no less the revocation of the "autocephaly" of the Russian Orthodox Church (Patriarch of Alexandria 2022).

It is very clear that just as the organization of a Russian church structure in the jurisdictional territory of the patriarchate of Alexandria is a flagrant violation of the canonical norms in force, so is this unusual request because, on the one hand, placing the Church of Cyprus on an equal footing with the historical patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem cannot be justified in any way and, on the other hand, it has no precedent in universal church history and is devoid of any canonical foundation.

The Patriarch of Antioch, John X, had a different attitude, explained in a way by the completely exceptional situation in which he finds himself, in a country torn by an internal war that has lasted for over a decade and in which the Russian military played and still plays an active role. Practically, Patriarch John takes almost literally the embarrassing rhetoric of his Moscow counterpart, Kirill, issuing a statement that is more political than religious, in which he, after once again showing his support for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church led by Metropolitan Bishop Onufriy (Berezovsky)—and not uttering a word about other Orthodox Christians who belong to the autocephalous Orthodox Church recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate—expresses his hope for a reconciliation between Russians and Ukrainians, two peoples with a common baptismal origin. What is shocking in a way

is the neutral tone of this statement, as if it were a small misunderstanding, not a terrible, illogical, absurd war that brings death, unimaginable destruction, and suffering to Ukraine. In fact, he does not even use terms like “war” or “invasion” for what is happening in Ukraine, preferring to remain hidden in a gray language that does not involve him at all (Efthimiou 2022).

On the other hand, as I anticipated, there is an explanation in this approach most likely related to the fragility of his status in a very fluid geographical area, both politically and religiously, where insecurity has become a way of life. As the Antiochian Orthodox Church resides in Damascus, with the largest communities outside those of the Western diaspora in Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey, and given President Asaad has benefited from major Russian aid to stay in power, I believe that in his statement, the instinct of preservation prevailed and less so the confession of the truth. This is especially likely as he knows very well that all the arguments brought by President Putin, seconded by Patriarch Kirill, in support of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are propaganda lies and that he has before his eyes, the definitive destruction of the most beautiful city of Syria, Aleppo, which, until his disappearance, had been shepherded by his own brother, Metropolitan Bishop Paul. We are not in the Middle Ages, when news from the war front came through horsemen sent by the leaders of belligerent armies. Now, they come through the most sophisticated means of communication, so the horrific images of the dead and wounded and the destroyed homes, schools, churches, theaters, and shopping malls, with whole cities in ruins (as Aleppo is in your own country), are on all television screens and all digital networks. It is an indisputable truth that the leader of an apostolic patriarchy should have confessed without any hesitation.

Moreover, it even seems that there was a kind of “underground diplomacy” between the two Orthodox Churches on this issue, designed to lull the vigilance and conscience of a symbolic Christian leader used to the horrors of an endless war. The information that could complete the above explanation is given by the visit that Metropolitan Hilarion (Chairman of External Relations) made to Patriarch John of Antioch on March 5, almost two weeks after the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army, publicly blessed by his superior, Patriarch Kirill. We do not know for sure what was the content of his message from Kirill, but given the war situation between Russia and Ukraine and the position of the Orthodox Churches on the territory of the latter, we can speculate that he offered guarantees and substantial funds for the protection of Christians from the Middle East in exchange for support against the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchy, with which Moscow is in conflict (Chryssavgis 2022). The question is how credible could these assurances be from leaders who have discredited themselves by embracing President Putin’s war policy, especially as the Kremlin’s expansionist tendencies have been applauded by the leadership of the Russian Church?

Were they not the ones who said that the invasion of Ukraine was an invention of the West? We all know that it was a crude manipulation designed to lull the vigilance of those who led normal lives and did not believe that there could be any more war in Europe in the 21st century. Therefore, the Kremlin’s word is as worthless as a frozen onion. The word of their religious leaders is worth about as much. From now on, it will be exceedingly difficult for anyone with a fair judgment to take seriously any proposal, any guarantee, which would come from the Kremlin or from the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate.

Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem is in roughly the same position as his Antiochian counterpart, avoiding pronouncing very clearly a statement about the unjust war launched by Russia against Ukraine. His wavering attitude also comes from a certain influence that the Patriarchate of Moscow exercises over the leadership of the Church from the holy places. Incidentally, it seems that he was the first to be visited by Metropolitan Bishop Hilarion with the same mission mentioned above, just one day before the outbreak of this fratricidal war, on February 23. The visit achieved its goal because Patriarch Theophilos limited himself to mentioning the war—he still called it a war!—without going into details and without naming Russia as the aggressor, inviting all Christians to pray for the people of Ukraine

(Chryssavgis 2022). This implicit solidarity with Patriarch Kirill, despite his fraternization with the “tsar” of Russia and implicitly with his criminal policy, is all the more embarrassing as other religious leaders of the Holy Land, representing the Jewish, Christian, Muslim or Druze communities, have condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and publicly asked the Russian Patriarch, through a petition placed on the wall of the Orthodox Church in Moscow Square in Jerusalem, to convince President Putin to end the war and make peace (Margit 2022).

On the same reserved/reluctant line are also the Churches of Georgia, Serbia, and Bulgaria. The first, which is still in the political circle of Moscow and cannot manifest itself as it wants, states through its spiritual leader, Patriarch Ilia II, that his country had this bitter experience of defending its territorial integrity with the invasion of Georgia by Russia in 2008 (Gençtürk 2022). The other two are, as is known, in fraternal relations with the Patriarchate of Moscow and prefer to call the war “a painful act” (Serbia) or “military conflict in Ukraine” (Bulgaria) (Gençtürk 2022). A much firmer response came from the Romanian Orthodox Church through the voice of Patriarch Daniel, who condemned in truly clear terms the war launched by Russia on Ukraine, a sovereign and independent state, on the very first day of the Russian invasion (Patriarhul Daniel 2022). Moreover, the spokesman of the Romanian Orthodox Church sent an extremely harsh message regarding the tacit involvement of Patriarch Kirill in Putin’s imperial policy, a fact that turns him into an accomplice to all crimes and horrors that this war will bring and will forever disqualify him morally before all Christian public opinion and God himself (Bănescu 2022).

5. The Uncertainty of a Hope

In universal popular culture, there is a very well-known expression, namely, “hope dies last”. I do not know if it can be applied in the present case as well if we consider the complexity of the political–religious relations we talked about. Therefore, the question naturally arises: What chance would there be of convening a pan-Orthodox synod to discuss the profoundly immoral and anti-Christian attitude of the leader of the largest Orthodox Church in the world? And if, by a miracle, at the invitation of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, it would take place, most likely without the direct participation of Kirill, by whom and how would it achieve the condemnation of the latter, his exclusion from the synaxis of the Orthodox patriarchs, and severance of all ties of communion with any cleric or community that still recognizes his authority?

I think it is more of a rhetorical question because despite the many negative comments regarding the direct involvement of Patriarch Kirill in the criminal policy of the Kremlin, they gradually disappeared, and today, the topic seems to be completely ignored by all Orthodox leaders as if the war in Ukraine has ended. Although his complicity is obvious and from a moral point of view he is totally compromised in front of the whole world, he prefers to continue to imitate faith, patriotism, and Christian love under the umbrella of the most sinister political system of the 21st century, characterized by lying, slander, manipulation, and simply abominable crime against humanity. Why, however, do the Orthodox Churches tolerate such antievangelical behavior, which leads them little by little towards a deep crisis with profound consequences morally but also canonically, liturgically, and dogmatically? The answer is quite complicated because it concerns a complex of factors that point, on the one hand, at clear deficiencies in structure, organization, and communication and, on the other hand, at the perversion of the so-called Byzantine symphony by transforming it into a kind of permanent vassalage to the State.

If we consider the first problem that refers to the form of organization and functioning of the Church, then we must say that we are before an institution based on a blind subordination of its clergy based on the submission of an oath of fidelity not only to the Church but also of unconditional submission to the local hierarch, reinforced by the so-called blessing, which should be a nondiscriminatory act but has transformed over time into a coercive instrument. This unconditional submission to the bishop is, without a doubt, a flagrant violation of the elementary right to free speech, as endorsed by the very words of Christ.

Moreover, when a cleric chooses to criticize any decision of the “Church” (meaning the hierarchy of the place, even if it is an abusive one), he is subject to constant pressure and even direct threats.

Therefore, the official position of an Orthodox Church is not always the opinion of its members because it does not consider the opinion of priests or deacons, and even less so of the laity, and only considers the opinion of the higher leadership, the Synod. And those who lead the Churches are more concerned with preserving their own safety and privileges; they are less willing to take the risks of sharp statements against those who have started a senseless and pointless war as most priests or lay Christians expect from them.

If we consider the second problem, the so-called vassalage of the Orthodox Church towards the State, the government, or the president of the country on whose territory it operates, it should not be confused with the Byzantine symphony but rather regarded as an unfortunate copy of it. Whether we are talking about the old patriarchies, which depend entirely on the policies of those in power; those in predominantly Orthodox countries, who are faced with an avalanche of progressive anti-Christian ideologies that come with empty promises of material well-being; or those with minority regimes in Western Europe or America, whose voice is almost nonexistent in today’s society, the situation is equally serious. The Orthodox Churches act not necessarily as a government agent but are more or less the echo of State policy. Just as political leaders around the world prefer a balanced policy in the relationship with Russia, always leaving a door open for dialogue, this is also happening in the Orthodox Church world, which is increasingly dependent on decisions made in Western or American chancelleries.

That is why it is hard to believe, considering the above, that any Orthodox Church (whatever it may be) through their leader represents the voice of the proper Christian people, who consider that Patriarch Kirill betrayed his mission and that he should be excluded from the canonical Orthodox synaxis. But they will take care, on the one hand, not to spoil their relations with other Churches, which are also in a kind of “spiritual numbness”, and, on the other hand, not to compromise their relations with the authorities of the State. Instead of concrete actions, the Orthodox leaders will prefer to issue an official communique from time to time, which is part of a general policy of waiting for the final results of the war. In other words, it is unlikely that we will witness a solid anti-Russian Orthodox movement to decide on the organization of a Synod with the participation of Orthodox leaders from around the world that would state the forfeiture of the rights and high religious position of Patriarch Kirill, even if, in particular, each of his colleagues believes that this would be a natural gesture, consistent with the actual situation. One perhaps even more important argument can be added to these arguments, namely, the lack of Christian and inter-Christian solidarity in today’s world. The exile or death of Christians from the Middle East or Africa; their deprivation of the most basic rights in countries where they are a minority, especially in Asia or Africa; and the destruction of the most important churches or monuments of universal Eastern spirituality, with the transformation of some into mosques as has happened more recently with Saint Sophia in Constantinople, provoked only a few political statements designed to lull the vigilance of public opinion. Only that, lots of talk, but no concrete action.

That is why, in the context in which today’s world leaders are more concerned with the promotion and development of an anti-Christian ideology in which traditional values, such as the family or the Church, represent for them historical relics incompatible with the so-called “emancipation” of contemporary society, any Church assembly, even one that brings together the most important voices of the Orthodoxy from all over the world, would have no effect on the decisions taken by the political leaderships of the states directly or indirectly involved in the Russian–Ukrainian war.

6. Conclusions

As can be seen, the Orthodox Christian world today is dominated by political rather than religious interests, which makes the idea of a pan-Orthodox synaxis, which would

discuss the current status of Patriarch Kirill, a rather improbable one. The old patriarchates face situations that are difficult to control, being forced to conduct their activity in non-Christian territories, and they therefore have to act with great caution, being primarily concerned with preserving their identity and preserving their own values.

On the other hand, I believe that the decision to convene a pan-Orthodox synod would be a sign of dignity on the part of all Orthodox leaders and of defense of principles without which their word is mere fanfare, sowing confusion and uncertainty. They would have the opportunity to condemn an unprecedented moral, pastoral, and ecumenical slippage. Moreover, the interruption of communication (implicitly, the mention of Kirill in the Holy Liturgy according to tradition) would represent a clear delimitation of the criminal policy of the Kremlin leader that the patriarch of Moscow and all of Russia have supported and blessed on numerous occasions. It would be an act well received by the Orthodox faithful who expect their leaders to be the first to firmly and unequivocally testify the truth and uphold the teachings of the Gospel, anywhere, anytime, and in front of anyone, regardless of the consequences.

Their silence in relation to the abominable crimes in which Patriarch Kirill is involved, as can be seen, puts them in an unfavorable light. Therefore, although I am quite pessimistic about the convening of a so-called “ecumenical” council inside of Orthodoxy, I do not stop hoping that, in the end, all other Orthodox leaders will decide to meet and make the right decision, which is the severance of all connections with the one who incriminated himself before men and God forever, because history is neutral, neither forgetting nor forgiving.

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