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CHRONOLOGY OF CHURCH-RELATED PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON THE RUSSIAN WAR AGAINST-UKRAINE WAR, (February 25-March 16, 2022)

Mark R. Elliott, Compiler

Commentary is in italics. Church-related appeals, open letters, and petitions since the February 24, 2022, launch of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been pouring forth in a flood. Because of a desire to publish findings expeditiously enumerated and excerpted documents are critiqued only very briefly.

February 24 Metropolitan Onufry, primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate, publicly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine (See above in the article: Elliott, “Putin’s Invasion.”)¹

February 25 Statement by Bishop Sergei Ryakhovsky on Behalf of the Spiritual Council of the Russian United Union of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals) on the Situation in Ukraine

According to Bishop Ryakhovsky’s Spiritual Council:

A terrible thing [has] happened.... The fratricidal conflict that has been smoldering in the Donbas for more than eight years has [now] covered a much larger area: explosions are heard, shots are fired, people are dying.... The Spiritual Council...calls on all brothers and sisters of the Evangelical churches to unite in fasting and prayer until the Divine resolution of the fratricidal conflict and the onset of peace.²

This statement does not reference the Russian invasion of Ukraine nor Russian responsibility for Ukrainian casualties.

February 26 Pope Francis called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy expressing “his deep sorrow for the tragic events” unfolding in Ukraine, this following an unannounced doorstep visit of the Pontiff to the Russian Embassy in Rome where he voiced his “concern over the war.”³

February 28 Metropolitan Evlogy of the Sumy Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church published a Facebook post signed by 28 Ukrainian priests and deacons critical of Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill who “did not condemn the aggressive actions of the Russian authorities.... In this difficult situation...we have decided to stop commemorating the Moscow

¹ Mark R. Elliott, “Putin’s Invasion of Ukraine: What’s Religion Got to Do with It?” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 42 (No. 2, 2022).

² “Zayavlenie episkopa Sergeya Ryakhovskogo (ot imeni Dukhovnogo Soveta ROSKhVE) po situatsii na Ukraine;” <https://www.cef.ru/documents/docitem/article/1640677>.

³ Jack Jenkins, “Ukraine Orthodox Leader Likens Putin to the Antichrist,” Religion News Service, February 28, 2022.

Patriarchate at divine services...dictated by the demands of our flock, which, alas, no longer wants to hear the name of Patriarch Kirill in our churches.”⁴

*To date at least 15 Orthodox dioceses in Ukraine, including Lviv, Cherkasy, Rivne, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Mukachevo, have protested the Russian invasion, and have called for non-commemoration of Patriarch Kirill. As for Moscow Patriarchate parishes in Ukraine, there have been increasing calls for a severing of ecclesial ties with Moscow.*⁵

March 1-11 Appeal of the Priests of the Russian Orthodox Church with a Call for Reconciliation and Ending the War

We...appeal to everyone on whom the cessation of the fratricidal war in Ukraine depends, with a call for reconciliation and an immediate cease fire.... We mourn the trial that our brothers and sisters in Ukraine were undeservedly subjected to.... We respect the God-given freedom of man, and we believe that the people of Ukraine should make their own choice on their own, not at gunpoint, without pressure from the West or the East.... “ ‘The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground; and now you are cursed from the earth,’ God said to Cain [Genesis 4] Woe to every person who realizes that these words are addressed to him personally.”⁶

This petition, open for signatories from March 1, includes 280 priests and deacons—but no bishops or metropolitans—as of March 11.

March 2 Russian Evangelicals began circulating an Appeal to Compatriots ultimately containing 380 signatures.⁷

March 2 Letter of Acting General Secretary of the World Council of Churches Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Sauca [of the Romanian Orthodox Church] to Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill

It is with great pain and with a breaking heart that I am writing to Your Holiness. The tragic situation of the war in Ukraine has brought tremendous suffering and loss of life.... I write to Your Holiness to intervene and mediate with the authorities to stop this war.⁸

The letter does not condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

⁴ Jack Jenkins, “Among Russian Orthodox, Glimmers of Dissent against the Invasion of Ukraine,” Religion News Service, March 4, 2022.

⁵ “Primate of U.P.Ts.M.P.: ‘There Is No Justification for Those Who Start Wars,’” Religion Information Service of Ukraine, March 11, 2022; Elise Ann Allen, “Russian Orthodox Priest Arrested for Anti-War Stance,” *Crux*, March 10, 2022.

⁶ Allen, “Russian Orthodox Priest;” Claire Giangravé, “With War in Ukraine, Pope Francis’ Years Long Outreach to Kirill Appears to be in Ruins,” Religion News Service, March 10, 2022; Phyllis Zagano, “Keep Your Eyes on Kirill,” Religion News Service,” March 14, 2022.

⁷ Elliott, “Putin’s Invasion.”

⁸ Oikoumene.org/news.wcc-acting-general-secretary-to-patriarch-kirill-of-Moscow-raise-up-your-voice-so-that-the-war-can-be-stopped.

March 4 Call for End to Violence in Ukraine Issued by Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland

In the face of the shocking loss of life, bloodshed, displacement of people and destruction of property in Ukraine.... We ask our fellow Christians everywhere, including Patriarch Kirill and all in the Russian Orthodox Church, to join in solidarity with us in daily spiritual and practical efforts for a ceasefire, for humanitarian outreach and the silencing and laying down of weapons.⁹

The appeal makes no reference to Russia as the instigator of the loss of life and bloodshed.

March 4 Russian legislation went into effect providing for fines and prison terms up to 15 years for the dissemination of statements in conflict with state pronouncements and/or "discrediting" the armed forces.¹⁰

March 5 Brussels-based Human Rights Without Frontiers called for the EU, the UK, and the US to sanction Russian religious figures supporting Putin's war against Ukraine.¹¹

March 6 Father Ioann Burdin of the Church of the Resurrection, Karabanovo, Kostroma Diocese, opposed the war in Ukraine in his Sunday homily. Earlier, on February 25, Fr. Ioann and his predecessor, Fr. Georgi Edelstein, posted on the church website that Russian troops had invaded Ukraine. Furthermore, "We Christians do not dare to stand aside when a brother kills a brother, a Christian kills a Christian.... We cannot shamefacedly close our eyes and call black white [or] say that Abel was probably wrong in provoking his older brother" [Genesis 4: 8-10].

March 7 Fr. Ioann appeared in court. On March 8 under the new Administrative Code Article 20.3.3 he was fined the equivalent of a local average month's salary. By March 8 prosecutors had brought charges against 144 persons under the new law.¹²

March 7 Appeal: Expel the Russian Orthodox Church from the World Council of Churches by Church of the Brethren Pastor Pavel Černý, Former President of the Czech Ecumenical Council of Churches

In keeping with:

the plague of caesaropapism... Kirill, the current patriarch of Moscow, likes to take pictures with his supporter Putin, who has been unstinting in showing him his favour in return. Both seem to believe in the value of reuniting the throne and the altar, the church and the state. Putin will make a great show of kissing an icon in the church, and in return receives loud approval of his regime by the Church leadership. In the current Russian-Ukrainian war, this horrible bond has been fully revealed. Unfortunately, the current war also has a

⁹"Catholic Bishops in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland Call for End to Violence in Ukraine," *The Polar Connection*, March 7, 2022.

¹⁰ Victoria Arnold, "Russia: Patriarch Priest Fined for Condemning War in Ukraine," *Forum 18*, March 11, 2022.

¹¹ Elliott, "Putin's Invasion."

¹²"Arnold, "Russia: Patriarch Priest;" Jack Jenkins, "Orthodox Priest Reportedly Arrested in Russia for Sermon Decrying Invasion of Ukraine," Religion News Service, March 10, 2022; Allen, "Russian Orthodox Priest;" "Kostroma Priest Fined for Discrediting Russian Military," RIA Novosti, March 11, 2022.

religious dimension. The Russian Orthodox Church would again like to absorb the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which in 2019 achieved recognition of its independence from the ecumenical Patriarch of Istanbul....

It is not possible for the Russian Orthodox Church to continue as a member of the World Council of Churches. Expel it from your structures! The Orthodox Church in Russia needs to be awakened from this false dream before its desire for power turns it into a permanent accomplice in the greatest war and humanitarian catastrophe since World War II.¹³

March 9 Statements of Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kyrill following the Divine Liturgy at the Church of Christ the Savior

As regards “Russian-Ukrainian relations” a goal of the West “is the weakening of Russia, which has become a strong and really mighty country. But it is so rotten and vile to use...a fraternal people [Ukrainians], and so horrible to stir up this people against their brothers [Russians], and so horrible to arm it to join a struggle with brothers of the same blood and the same faith.... Russians and Ukrainians, [are] essentially one people [yet...Western] neighbors began doing everything they could to divide this people. [This is] against God’s will.”¹⁴

March 9 Open Letter to Patriarch Kirill from Metropolitan John of Dubna, Russian Orthodox Archbishop of Moscow Patriarchate Orthodox Churches of Russian Tradition in Western Europe

I appeal to you to raise your voice... against this monstrous and senseless war and to intercede with the authorities of the Russian Federation so that this murderous conflict will cease as soon as possible.¹⁵

March 9 George Weigel, Catholic scholar and Distinguished Senior Fellow of Washington’s Ethics and Public Policy Center, called for the suspension of ecumenical relations between the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Church “until Kirill condemns the invasion of Ukraine, thereby proving himself something other than Putin’s puppet.”¹⁶

March 10 Appeal to the Presidents by Rev. Dr. Elijah M. Brown, Baptist World Alliance General Secretary; Rev. Alan Donaldson, European Baptist Federation General Secretary; and Rev. Petr V. Mitskevich, President of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists; to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, French President Emmanuel Macron, and U.S. President Joseph Biden, Jr.

We lament the violent conflict currently taking place across Ukraine and appeal to you to immediately organize a joint meeting that works for a just and peaceful resolution.¹⁷

¹³ Copy in author’s possession; provided by Gregory Nichols, Prague.

¹⁴ “Patriarch Kirill Calls Attempts to Divide Peoples of Ukraine and Russia Rotten and Vile,” Interfax-Religiia, March 9, 2022. See also Zagano, “Keep Your Eyes.”

¹⁵ Jenkins, “Orthodox Priest;” Inés San Martín, “Catholic, Orthodox European Bishops Call on Patriarch Kirill to Work for Peace in Ukraine,” *Crux*, March 10 2022.

¹⁶ George Weigel, “Needed: An Ecumenical Reset,” *First Things*, March 9, 2022.

¹⁷ <https://baptist.org.ru/en/news/view/articles/1642733>.

Rev. Petr Mitskevich, M.D., is president of the Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, which has been under repressive state assault for years, as well as general secretary of his denomination. This embattled evangelical church leader may have felt safer issuing an appeal for peace in company with leading European and global Baptist executives.

March 2022 Appeal of Baptist minister, the Rev. Dr. Keith Clements, Former General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, 1997-2005, to Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kyrill

It has to be said in plain truth and in sorrow, the military operations are being carried out not by NATO but by Russian forces under the orders of President Putin.... It is a situation which cannot be justified by any Christian spirit of conscience, and for the sake of the people of Ukraine and of Russia must be ended without delay.

Thus far, we in the world outside have heard words [from you] about the desire for peace, but not about the things that make for peace: first of all, an acknowledgment of the wrong that is being committed against the people of Ukraine, without which no genuine movement towards peace can begin. It is known that there are voices in your Church and in other Christian communities in Russia, which are already expressing these aspirations toward repentance.

Many of us are well aware...of the constraints which Your Holiness experiences, as leader of a Church with such close ties to the Russian state. But...Christians are called to place above all claims of earthly powers their loyalty to Jesus Christ to whom alone “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given” (Matthew 28:18).¹⁸

March 11 Appeal of U.S. Christian Leaders to Patriarch Kyrill

With broken hearts, we are making an earnest plea that you use your voice and profound influence to call for an end to the hostilities and war in Ukraine and intervene with authorities in your nation to do so.... We ask you to prayerfully reconsider the support you have given to this war because of the horrendous human suffering it has unleashed.

Included among the over 100 signatories are Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton, board chair of the National Council of Churches; Rev. Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals; the Most Rev. Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church; Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, general minister and president, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada; Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus, Reformed Church in America; Sister Carol Zinn, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious; and Sister Donna Markham, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA.¹⁹

¹⁸ *The Baptist Times*, March 2022; https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/631495/An_open_letter.aspx?fbclid=1wARI17bXrBCoCJaxYXgFsBpWa0PGpRPjH_hDfWkuw-gQXqJzWTd-mw0nCFES0.

¹⁹ Jack Jenkins, “US Christian Leaders Ask Kirill to Speak Out, ‘Reconsider’ Comments on Ukraine,” Religion News Service, March 11, 2022.

March 11 Response of Patriarch Kyrill to Acting World Council of Churches Secretary Archpriest Ioan Sauca

The Patriarch asserts that Western nations are responsible for the present conflict; that they sought to “mentally remake Ukrainians and Russians living in Ukraine into enemies of Russia;” and that they also were behind Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew’s granting autocephaly to the new Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which the Moscow Patriarch regards as non-canonical and schismatic.²⁰

March 13 A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii Mir) Teaching

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is a historic threat to a people of Orthodox Christian tradition. More troubling still for Orthodox believers, the senior hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church has refused to acknowledge this invasion, issuing instead vague statements about the necessity for peace in light of “events” and “hostilities” in Ukraine, while emphasizing the fraternal nature of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples as part of “Holy Rus’,” blaming the hostilities on the evil “West”.... The support of many of the hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate for President Vladimir Putin’s war against Ukraine is rooted in a form of Orthodox ethno-phyletist religious fundamentalism, totalitarian in character, called *Russkii mir* or the Russian world, a false teaching which is attracting many in the Orthodox Church and has even been taken up by the Far Right and Catholic and Protestant fundamentalists.²¹

The Declaration, signed by 342 Orthodox clerics, scholars, and laity primarily from Europe and North America was initiated by the Orthodox Christian Studies Center, Fordham University, and Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Volos, Greece.

February 24 to the present: Metropolitan Hilarion: Missing in Action

To this writer’s knowledge Metropolitan Hilarion, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department of External Church Relations, has to date made no public statement regarding the Russian war against Ukraine. On March 5 during a visit to Orthodox churches in Syria being restored with Russian Orthodox help, he referenced the wartime destruction of Damascus: “When we...saw terrible skeletons of houses all around, we were reminded of the horrors that Syria went through.”²² Might the Metropolitan also reference the wartime destruction Russia is inflicting on Ukraine? Statements on Hilarion’s External Church Relations website in reference to Russia’s “special military operation” against fellow coreligionists are conspicuous in their absence.

By way of contrast, Father Igumen Arseny, who traveled to Syria with Metropolitan Hilarion, was the first to sign the petition of Russian Orthodox priests opposed to the war in

²⁰ Jenkins, “US Christian Leaders;” “Patriarch Kirill Accuses Western Politicians of Trying to Make Ukrainians Enemies of Russia,” Interfax-Religiia, March 11, 2022.

²¹ *Public Orthodoxy*, March 13, 2022; https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/?fbclid=IwAR2K3OAucEvLc844LmtwO_RTZReAkiMOZfYgtkUA0xbKpGZ-Ud_Bbmy8jc.

²² <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=c0a2570f&view=pt&search=all&permthid=thread-a%3Ar-2839175442923462740&simpl=msg-a%3Ar-2837522>.

*Ukraine.*²³ *Upon Hilarion's return to Moscow from Syria he received word that the University of Freiburg in Germany had cancelled his teaching position "due to his silence on the Russian invasion."*²⁴

²³ Allen, "Russian Orthodox Priest."

²⁴ Jenkins, "US Christian Leaders;" Giangravé, "With War in Ukraine."