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International Theological Conference “Orthodoxy and the ‘Russkii Mir’ (Russian World): The Threat to Orthodox Ecclesiology and the Ideological Basis of Russian Neo-Imperialism

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¹INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE “ORTHODOXY AND THE “RUSSKII MIR” (RUSSIAN WORLD): THE THREAT TO ORTHODOX ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE IDEOLOGICAL BASIS OF RUSSIAN NEO-IMPERIALISM”

By Vladyslav Fulmes

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Abstract

In connection with the full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which was largely based on the ideology of “Russian world,” on June 16, 2022, Volyn Orthodox Theological Academy (Lutsk, Ukraine) together with the educational platform “ETHOS / God Against War” (Kyiv, Ukraine) held an international theological conference “Orthodoxy and the “russkii mir” (Russian world): The Threat to Orthodox Ecclesiology and the Ideological Basis of Russian Neo-Imperialism.” Brief information about this international scientific conference is given.

Keywords: Ukraine, war, ideology of “russkii mir” (Russian world), conference.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, brought with it an encroachment on the territorial integrity of our state, shelling, murder, death, and a threat to the Orthodox Christian tradition. In connection with the full-scale military aggression of the Russian federation against Ukraine, which was largely based on the ideology of “Russian world,” on June 16, 2022, Volyn Orthodox Theological Academy together with the educational platform “ETHOS / God Against War” held an international theological conference “Orthodoxy and the “russkii mir”

¹ Editor’s note: The author of the report uses low case letters when referring to Russia and Russian in line with the recent post-invasion Ukrainian practice to signal disparagement for the aggressor.

(Russian world): The Threat to Orthodox Ecclesiology and the Ideological Basis of Russian Neo-Imperialism.”

Given that the historical, ecclesiological, canonical, and anthropological aspects of the ideology of the “Russian world” are still insufficiently studied by the conciliar mind of the Church, this conference aimed to comprehensively analyze this ideology in terms of its historical duration, modernity, forms of expression, and dangers, which it represents. In addition, the conference aimed to propose ways to solve the problem of “Russian world” in the spirit of Orthodox love and catholicity.

The precondition for the conference was a meeting on April 20, 2022, at the Department of Scripture and Theology of the Volyn Orthodox Theological Academy of the round table on “Understanding the role of the ROC and the ideology of “Russian world” in Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine.”

After hearing a report on the current situation regarding the ideology of the “Russian world” and its impact on Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, the participants of the round table joined an active and fruitful discussion, which ended with the adoption of a joint resolution and initiating the convening of an international theological conference as the next step in a deeper and broader understanding of this doctrine.

After a long preparation, on June 16, 2022, the international theological conference “Orthodoxy and the “russkii mir” (Russian world): The Threat to Orthodox Ecclesiology and the Ideological Basis of Russian Neo-Imperialism” began its work and took place entirely online on the ZOOM platform. Leading theologians from around the world took part in the conference. The conference lasted during the day and consisted of three sessions.

The morning session of the conference was entitled “History: historical and theological basis of the ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) on ‘russkii mir’” lasted from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and was presented by the following participants:

Oleksandr Sagan, Ukrainian theologian, Head of the Department of Religious Studies of Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, Kyiv, Ukraine (The title of the report: “Geopolitical Concept of “russkii mir” in the System of Moscow-Russian Messianism: Purpose, Objectives and Possible Modifications”); Nikolaos Asproulis, Greek theologian, PhD, Deputy Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Volos, Greece (The title of the report: “The Declaration Against

the ‘Russian world’: the Prophetic Voice of the Church in Practice”); Natalia Vasilevich – Belarusian theologian, Political Scientist, PhD Student at Friedrich Wilhelm Rhine University, Bonn, Germany (The title of the report: “The Influence of the Theory of the “Clash of Civilizations” by S. Huntington on the Political Ideology of Kirill (Gundyaev)”; Elena Volkova, Independent scholar in Religion, Literature and Culture, Former professor at Moscow State University, Visiting lecturer at Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, Ukraine (The title of the report: “‘russkii mir’ as Communist Christianity and Post-Soviet Theology of War”); Andrii Dudchenko, Archpriest of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), PhD, Ukrainian theologian, Publicist, lecturer at the Kyiv Orthodox Theological Academy (OCU) (The title of the report: “Reception and Promotion of the Ideology of ‘russkii mir’ by the Moscow Patriarchate at the First Stage”); Bohdan Ohulchansky, Archpriest of the OCU, PhD, Secretary of the Open Orthodox University of St. Sophia the Wisdom (The title of the report: “Trends in the Dominance of Ultraconservatism over Liberalism in Moscow Orthodoxy”); Lyudmyla Fylypovych, Ukrainian philosopher, theologian, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (The title of the report: “Existential-axiological Antagonism of the Anthropological Dimension of the ‘russkii mir’ and the Ukrainian World”). The morning session meeting was moderated by George Kovalenko, Archpriest of the OCU, PhD, Rector of the Open Orthodox University of St. Sophia the Wisdom.

The title of the afternoon session of the conference was “Modern days / the current situation and the influence of ROC ideology of ‘russkii mir’ on the Orthodoxy in the whole world, Russia’s military aggression, the neo-imperial ideology of russcism” which lasted from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and was presented by participants: Petros Vassiliadis, Greek biblical scholar and Professor Emeritus of the Department of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece (The title of the report: “An Attempt to a Historical and Theological Explanation of the Culture of Violence and War of Russian Orthodoxy”); Brandon Gallaher, Doctor of Philosophy, Senior Lecturer of Systematic and Comparative Theology University of Exeter, United Kingdom (The title of the report: “‘His claim upon our whole life’: The Legacy of the Barmen Declaration’s Revelational-Exegetical-Eschatological Political Theology in the ‘Declaration on the Russian World (russkii mir) Teaching’”); Iov (Olshanskyi), Hieromonk of the OCU, Abbot of the Holy Resurrection New Athos Monastery, Lviv, Ukraine (The title of the report: “The Ideology of the ROC on the ‘russkii mir’ as a Distortion of Orthodox Doctrine: the Canonical Aspect”); Yuri

Chornomorets, Ukrainian theologian and philosopher, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, Kyiv, Ukraine (The title of the report: “Theories and Practices of Eradication of Humanness in a Person and Society in Theories and Practices of Russian world (russkii mir).” The afternoon session was moderated by Kostiantyn Sigov, Ukrainian philosopher, PhD, Director of the European Humanities Research Centre of the National University “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy” and “Spirit and Letter” Research and Publishing Association.

The title of the evening session of the conference was “Future/ Consequences and ways to solve the issue of ‘russkii mir’ for ROC and the Orthodoxy in the whole world” which lasted from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. and was presented by participants: Sergei Chapnin, Russian theologian, Senior Fellow at the Orthodox Christians Studies Center at Fordham University, USA (The title of the report: “Between Orthodox Church and Post-Soviet Civil Religion”); Paul Ladouceur, Canadian Orthodox theologian, Doctor of Philosophy, Trinity College, University of Toronto and Universite Laval, Montreal, Canada (The title of the report: “Holy Russia and Holy Romania: Orthodoxy and Nationalism”); Cyril (Hovorun), Archimandrite, Ukrainian theologian, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor at Loyola-Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, USA, Professor at the Stockholm School of Theology, Sweden (The title of the report: “Russian World and Other Ones”); Volodymyr Vakin, Archpriest of the OCU, PhD, Rector of the Volyn Orthodox Theological Academy, Lutsk, Ukraine (The title of the report: “The Sobornost of the One Catholic Church as the Antithesis of the Ideology of the ‘russkii mir’”); Oleksandr Filonenko, Ukrainian philosopher and theologian, Doctor of Philosophy, Associate Professor of the Faculty of Philosophy of Karazin Kharkiv National University, Kharkiv, Ukraine (The title of the report: “Humanity and the Theology of Communion: An Anthropological Dimension of the Path of Orthodoxy”). The evening session meeting was moderated by George Kovalenko, Archpriest of the OCU, PhD, Rector of the Open Orthodox University of St. Sophia the Wisdom.

At the end of the international theological conference, the main final document for discussion was presented to the participants, which will be sent to all Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches. Video recording of the keynote speakers of conference will gradually appear on the official websites of the Volyn Orthodox Theological Academy (<http://vpba.edu.ua>) and educational platform “ETHOS / God Against War” (<https://www.ethos.org.ua>), where everyone will be able to listen to their reports. The second stage of the international theological conference

is scheduled for the end of the year. Based on the results of the second stage of the international theological conference, a collection of conference materials will be published.

More information about the conference you can be found in the online programs at the links:

<https://sites.google.com/view/orthodoxy-and-the-russkiy-mir/%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%96%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%B0?authuser=0>