

2022

## Religious Leadership and Critical Junctures in the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine: 104 War Days of Metropolitan Hilarion

Alar Kilp

*University of Tartu, Estonia*

Jerry G. Pankhurst

*Wittenberg University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Eastern European Studies Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Kilp, Alar and Pankhurst, Jerry G. (2022) "Religious Leadership and Critical Junctures in the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine: 104 War Days of Metropolitan Hilarion," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 7 , Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2148.2376>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol42/iss7/3>

This Article, Exploration, or Report is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

# RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP AND CRITICAL JUNCTURES IN THE 2022 RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: 104 WAR DAYS OF METROPOLITAN HILARION

By Alar Kilp, Jerry G. Pankhurst

**Alar Kilp** (PhD, 2012 in political science) is a lecturer in Comparative Politics at the University of Tartu (Estonia) since 2004. His research specializes in religion and politics, comparative politics, contested and controversial issues. He has published articles in *Religion, State and Society*, *Society Register*, *Studies in Church History*, *Proceedings of Estonian National Defence College*, and *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*. His recent papers on religious nationalism, European normative power, religion and soft power, religious authority, Euro-secularism and legal regulation of same-sex relations have appeared in volumes published by Brill and Routledge.

E-mail: [alar.kilp@ut.ee](mailto:alar.kilp@ut.ee) ORCID: 0000-0002-4471-1432.

**Jerry G. Pankhurst** (Ph.D. University of Michigan) is professor emeritus of sociology and of Russian and Central Eurasian studies at Wittenberg University (USA) with specialties in sociology of religion, politics, and family. He was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Tartu in 2012 and a visiting professor there in 2015. His current research and writing focus primarily on questions of religion and politics, and sociology of family in Russia and Eurasian societies, with recent publications assessing migration issues and the implications of the leadership and ecclesiology of the Russian Orthodox Church and Ukraine.

E-mail: [jpankhurst@wittenberg.edu](mailto:jpankhurst@wittenberg.edu) ORCID: 0000-0002-4953-9010.

## Abstract

The chairman of the Department for External Church Relations (DECR) of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) was dismissed from his office on the 104<sup>th</sup> day (June 7, 2022) of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Was Hilarion dismissed because of his ‘silence’ on the Russian invasion?

We study the 104 ‘war days’ of Metropolitan Hilarion from four dimensions: leadership as *position*; leadership as *process*; leadership as *result*; and leadership as *person*. Our findings are multivocal: the Russian invasion of Ukraine did become a leadership challenge for Hilarion the way that previous military interventions (in Ukraine and Syria) and thorough broadening of the collaboration between the Church and the military in Russia during his 13 years as the Chairman of the DECR did not; Hilarion refrained from the rhetoric (religious demonization of the adversaries) and narratives (e.g. ‘spiritual brothers cannot be in conflict,’ labelling the conflict ‘an internecine strife’) used by Patriarch Kirill, but Hilarion still opted to leave his position of professor in Fribourg University instead of condemning (delegitimizing) the Russian invasion of Ukraine; Hilarion had contributed to Patriarch Kirill’s doctrine of the ‘Russian world’ since 2009 and did not revoke any of his related positions during the 104 days of war. As the ‘religious’ concept of the “Russian world” is the key narrative whereby religious leaders of the ROC have legitimated Russian imperialism over the territory and population of Ukraine, the key indicator for Hilarion’s assumed ‘silence’ should be the rejection of the Russian world doctrine, not his commitment to the principle “war is not a conflict solution method.” Finally, we observe his successor

(Metropolitan Anthony) to be even less vocal than Hilarion on religious and geopolitical issues related to Ukraine.

This period studied started with a secular critical juncture (start of invasion) and ended with a critical juncture in religious relations on Ukrainian territories occupied by the Russian Federation, when with the June 7, 2022, decision of the Holy Synod of the ROC to relocate dioceses of the Orthodox Church in Crimea into direct subordination to the Moscow Patriarchate, the latter initiated *cuius regio, eius religio* paradigm in its relations with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (of Moscow Patriarchate).

**Keywords:** religious leadership; leader personality; conflict escalation; critical junctures; Russian-Ukrainian conflict, 2014-; Russian invasion of Ukraine, 2022; religion and international relations; war; Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev); Russian Orthodox Church.

## Prologue

The turbulence of war sets out challenges before leaders that they may not meet fully or adequately.<sup>1</sup> Chaos threatens everywhere, and there are a multitude of questions arising rapidly and in crosscurrents that make it difficult to understand clearly events happening in the moment. Circumstances are fluid and the need to adapt quickly eludes many leaders. Action is often required that do not seem to fall under the purview of prior plans. Furthermore, adaptations by some leaders that are most creative may be seen by other leaders as circumventing their roles or falling outside the acceptable range of options. And differences of worldview or opinion that were irrelevant during peacetime may take on an importance during wartime that now rises to a critical level in decision making.

If one is an autocrat possessing reliable collaborators in administrative roles, perhaps the problem of leadership is not as acute as it is for those in the second tier who are beholden to the autocrat.<sup>2</sup> What the autocrat says goes, even if it leads to calamity or error. What the next level collaborators do is always under the eyes and judgments of the highest level, and missteps may lead to severe consequences, even when such “missteps” may be saner or more effective for reaching the goals of the organization than the tack taken by the autocrat or his party.

When one goes against the wishes of the autocrat, the consequences can be dramatic. In this paper, we examine a major leadership shake-up in the Russian Orthodox Church and its

---

<sup>1</sup> David Keen, “War and peace: What’s the difference?” *International Peacekeeping* 7, no. 4 (2000), 1–22.

<sup>2</sup> P. D. Harms, Dustin Wood, Karen Landay, Paul B. Lester, and Gretchen Vogelgesang Lester, “Autocratic leaders and authoritarian followers revisited: A review and agenda for the future,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2018), 106.

uppermost leadership in the Moscow Patriarchate. Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev) heads the patriarchate as an autocrat would. He is the unchallenged leader occupying the patriarchal throne.<sup>3</sup> We search for the reasons for the demotion of Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), a hierarch seen by most as the “second in command” of the ROC, just a step away from the throne. Our goal is not simply an attempt to describe the leadership change. We seek to understand more fully the dynamics of leadership in the Church and, most importantly, the relationship the Church leaders have with the Russian state leaders in a time of war; that is, with Vladimir Putin in the time of the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military. The war involves the collaboration of two large human organizations each headed by an autocrat who, in turn, is managing relations among a group of significant second-level leaders. The potential for leadership clashes and conflict as war unfolds is obvious.

## Introduction

On June 7, 2022, the 104th day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Hilarion (Alfeyev) was dismissed from his duties as Metropolitan of Volokolamsk, member of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), and head of the Department of External Church Relations (DECR) of the Moscow Patriarchate. On that day, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church also heard the report of Hilarion’s visit to Hungary (from June 1 until June 5); expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, for refusing to include Patriarch Kirill in the EU sanctions list; responded to the recent declaration of change of the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate); and transferred Hilarion to the position of primate of the Russian Orthodox Dioceses of Budapest and Hungary.<sup>4</sup>

The transfer of Hilarion to Hungary is a strategic step forward for the ROC. Hilarion may be of instrumental use in Hungary for the ROC in several ways. Viktor Orbán’s Hungary is a strategic partner for the Russian Federation—Orbán’s attitude towards Russia is more positive than that of any other head of government in the EU;<sup>5</sup> Orbán’s government is committed to traditional

---

<sup>3</sup> We use the term “throne” intentionally. The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia is indeed enthroned when he takes on his office. Per-Arne Bodin, “The Enthronement of Patriarch Kirill: A Liturgical Event,” in *Orthodox Paradoxes: Heterogeneities and Complexities in Contemporary Russian Orthodoxy*, ed. Katya Tolstaya (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 56–70.

<sup>4</sup> *Journals of the Holy Synod* from June 7 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/5934527.html>.

<sup>5</sup> In the first months of 2022, President of Russia Vladimir Putin had probably more meetings and phone conversations with the President of France Emmanuel Macron than with Viktor Orbán, but the atmosphere and style of conversation have been more open and mutually understanding during his meetings with Orbán. For example, in a joint news

values strategically promoted also by the Russian Federation;<sup>6</sup> the exclusion of Patriarch Kirill from the package of EU sanctions against Russia thanks to Hungary's objection just a couple of days before the dismissal and transfer of Hilarion is significant for both the ROC and the Russian Federation.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, for Hilarion personally the transfer to Hungary was a leap downwards in church hierarchy and in his church career. First, in Budapest he administers a very small number of priests and parishes. Previous heads of the Hungarian branch of the ROC administered also some other diocese. Before 2009, Hilarion himself administered both the Vienna-Austrian and Hungarian dioceses. In June 2022 he received the position from Metropolitan Mark of Ryazan who was the head of the Ryazan Metropolia and the Budapest-Hungarian dioceses. Metropolitan Hilarion received only the Budapest-Hungarian diocese, which in June 2022 had only ten churches, 11 active priests and 4 deacons.<sup>8</sup>

Second, he was dismissed from positions which, inside the ROC, are lower only in regard to the Patriarch. Before dismissal he was considered the highly likely successor to Patriarch Kirill, "the church's *de facto* crown prince."<sup>9</sup> The position of administrator of the Budapest-Hungarian dioceses enables Hilarion to abstain from commenting on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukraine-related geopolitics, and global inter-Orthodox politics. In the new office Hilarion has an opportunity to devote himself first and foremost to parishes, theology, and church music. He may 'save face' among the audiences that have included him in the list of high-ranking leaders of the ROC to be sanctioned for their ideological legitimization of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as long

---

conference with Putin on February 1, 2022, Orbán said: "We can offer the Hungarian model. The Hungarian model exists in politics: we are members of NATO and the European Union. Nevertheless, we can maintain excellent relations with Russia. This is possible. What do we need for this? We need mutual respect. Hungary has always been respected by President Putin, and we also show such respect for the Russian Federation." "News conference following Russian-Hungarian talks," February 1, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67690>.

<sup>6</sup> On May 16, 2022, Patriarch Kirill congratulated Viktor Orbán for victory in Hungarian national elections with the words: "You are one of the few European politicians who in his activities pays great attention to the issues of supporting Christian values, strengthening the institution of the traditional family and the norms of public morality. I know you as an active defender of persecuted Christians in the Middle East and Africa." "Congratulations of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to Viktor Orbán on his re-election as Prime Minister of Hungary," May 16, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5925864.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Jorge Liboreiro, Efi Koutsokosta and Shona Murray (2022) "Patriarch Kirill excluded from EU sanctions after Hungary's objection," *Euronews*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/06/02/patriarch-kirill-excluded-from-eu-sanctions-after-hungary-s-objection>.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Anderson, "'Current socio-political situation' dictated Hilarion's demotion," *Orthodox Christian Laity*, June 12, 2022, <https://ocl.org/current-socio-political-situation-dictated-hilarions-demotion/>.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Braw, "Putin Sacks Top Priest over Ukraine War," *The Center for European Policy Analysis*, July 5, 2022, <https://cepa.org/putin-sacks-top-priest-over-ukraine-war/>.

as he ceases to promote the doctrine of the “Russian world.” But transfer to Budapest did not improve his status in the church hierarchy.

In June 2022, Hilarion explained his dismissal:

I myself do not know many details. They have been told me (*sic*) that the decision [of the dismissal] is not linked to any shortcomings or weaknesses in the chairmanship of the DECR, nor in relation to any ecclesiastical institution that I headed. It has only been said that this is what the current socio-political situation requires. That the road made a very steep turn, I couldn’t fit and I ended up on the side of the road. But it’s better than tipping the car over and exploding.<sup>10</sup>

Hilarion’s comment is quite vague. However, because the ROC has not delivered any explanation, most commentators still rely on Hilarion’s arguments and take at face value the frames and metaphors given by him: his dismissal was not caused by any fault in his performance as the Chairman of the DECR; “they” who took the decision did it because of “the current socio-political situation”; finally, the ‘road-side’ metaphor should wrap up all loose ends—Hilarion ended up on the road-side, but luckily did not suffer from a car crash.

Hilarion’s brief comment has too many ambiguous loose ends. If nothing was wrong with his performance, then “those” who decided to dismiss him, still had to have some reason. The hint is that the reason is about “the current socio-political situation”; this has been assumed to refer to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We do not know who “they” were who decided. It could be the members of the Holy Synod of the ROC, but it could also be somebody from the Kremlin.

Finally, the use of the ‘road-side’ metaphor is a deliberate tactic to increase ambiguity at the expense of the imaginary clarity offered by the metaphor. In the efficient use of metaphor, the audience will focus on the ‘ordinary meaning’ of the metaphor used (which here is the statement that “a car crash is worse than being left on the road-side”). There is no ambiguity in the idea that it is better to be on the roadside than to suffer a car-crash. However, the trick is that we still have no certain knowledge of what this metaphor means regarding the dismissal of Hilarion.

There is “no manual for determining what a metaphor ‘means’ or ‘says’,”<sup>11</sup> but when we do not hesitate over the meaning of the metaphor in ordinary contexts (we know what a car accident is) *and* we stick to the latter, then we are manipulated to feel and believe certainty without having

---

<sup>10</sup> “What Hilarion said about his dismissal from the DECR and as a Metropolitan of Volokolamsk,” *Orthodox Times*, June 13, 2022, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/what-hilarion-said-about-his-dismissal-from-the-decr-and-as-a-metropolitan-of-volokolamsk/>.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean”, *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978), 31, 35.

it. We do not know, what was the car accident that Hilarion avoided thanks to (sic!) being dismissed from the office of chairman of the DECR. Additionally, if we consider that saying “nothing was wrong with his performance” is his subjective evaluation (and not necessarily fact supported by evidence), and that terms such as “they” and “the requirements of the current socio-political situation” are without fixed meanings, then from Hilarion’s comments we do not know much with certainty at all.

On July 26, 2022, Hilarion gave additional comments from Budapest in a short video-clip published on his webpage. He said that his transfer to Hungary is “not an exile” (*ссылка*). He was not punished in any way, because “there was nothing to punish him for.” He had no guilt before the Church, before the Patriarch, and before the Motherland. However, he admitted that he himself “would never have left Russia” by his own will, but when he was offered to serve abroad, then Hungary was his own choice.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, if he would not have been forced to relocate abroad, he would never have left Russia. This looks like something still had gone wrong. But what exactly? In order to increase comprehension on this question, we study 104 war days of Metropolitan Hilarion from four dimensions of leadership suggested by Keith Grint, Owain Smolović Jones, and Clare Holt: leadership as *position*; leadership as *process*; leadership as *result*; leadership as *person*.<sup>13</sup>

### **Leadership as *Position***

The position of the Chairman of the DECR is very important in the ROC. The person filling that office is automatically assumed to be the ‘foreign minister of the Church’ and often the ‘number 2’ in the church hierarchy (as if this position lifts the office-holder higher than all other ministers in the Church, except the Patriarch).

Since 1990 and up to the Summer of 2022, four persons have been chairmen of the DECR – the present Patriarch, at that time Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev) from November 13, 1989, until February 1, 2009; Archbishop Mark (Golovkov) temporarily from February 11 until March 31, 2009; Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) from March 31, 2009, until June 7, 2022; and Metropolitan

---

<sup>12</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion spoke about his life in Budapest,” July 26, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/template/mitropolit-ilarion-rasskazal-o-svoey-zhizni-v-budapeshte.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Keith Grint, Owain Smolović Jones, and Clare Holt, “What Is Leadership: Person, Result, Position or Process, or All or None of These?” in *The Routledge Companion to Leadership*, eds. John Storey, Jean Hartley, Jean-Louis Denis, Paul ‘t Hart and Dave Ulrich (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 4.

Anthony (Sevryuk) since June 7, 2022. Thus, for most of the period since the fall of the Soviet Union, two persons (Kirill and Hilarion) have been the chairmen of the DECR.

The position itself, however, does not determine the degree of involvement and influence of the chairman in relations with the government, with foreign states, with other religions and other Orthodox Churches. For example, Metropolitan Kirill was highly politically ambitious and in 2001 he was assessed to be “the main Church figure in dialogue with the Kremlin.”<sup>14</sup> Metropolitan Kirill was also the key messenger of the ROC during Georgia-Russia conflict (and related disputes over South Ossetia’s and Abkhazia’s religious independence) in 2008.<sup>15</sup> Despite being “only the chairman of the DECR,” in specific instances and issues, he acted as ‘number 1.’

The opposite is also possible. The Chairman of the DECR may hold himself back from full commitment to the duties expected of him by the Church Synod or state government. Particularly, when ‘times get tough’.

As pointedly observed by Niccolo Machiavelli, when circumstances and affairs change, a leader is ruined if he does not adapt and “does not change his mode of proceeding.”<sup>16</sup> According to Marchiavelli, human beings keep certain ‘constancy of conduct’ and act in an invariant fashion because of deeply rooted psychological traits (the style of leadership that is characteristic to their person).<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the coming of ‘days’ and ‘times’ of war may be a challenge for them, because without adapting to the expectations that characterize the situation (or “the requirements of the socio-political situation,” to use the expression of Hilarion), they will lose their job.

Both Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Chairman of DECR have reflected over the ways to adapt to changing circumstances and how to balance the expectations of the official position with their own character, personality, and habitual dispositions that characterize them as leaders.

In May 2022 Sergey Lavrov answered questions at the Yevgeny Primakov School. One of the questions was: “How often does a politician have to make tough decisions that go against

---

<sup>14</sup> Geraldine Fagan, *Believing in Russia: Religious Policy After Communism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 40, 42.

<sup>15</sup> Kimitaka Matsuzato, “South Ossetia and the Orthodox World: Official Churches, the Greek Old Calendarist Movement, and the So-called Alan Diocese,” *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 2 (2010), 292, 293.

<sup>16</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli. *The Prince*. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 100.

<sup>17</sup> Megan K. Dyer and Cary J. Nederman, “Machiavelli against Method: Paul Feyerabend’s Anti-Rationalism and Machiavellian Political ‘Science’,” *History of European Ideas* 42, no. 3 (2016), 441.



personal convictions in a situation where those decisions must be made? How hard is it to make them?” Sergey Lavrov answered:

If the decisions that need to be made are at odds with personal convictions, it is better not to make them. If making them is unavoidable, but they are in conflict with personal convictions, then one needs to choose between remaining in office or stepping down. There is no way around it. At least for me.<sup>18</sup>

Before the invasion, in the beginning of February 2022, Metropolitan Hilarion was quite enthusiastic both about his job and about close collaboration between the DECR and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He did not seem to be facing a stark choice between office and conscience. With ease he identified DECR figuratively with the defence department:

Our institution is sometimes called the Church Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is not entirely fair, since we are engaged not only in foreign affairs, but also in interfaith relations in our Fatherland. And in recent years, we increasingly feel like a kind of defence department, because we have to defend the sacred borders of our Church.<sup>19</sup>

After the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Hilarion’s reflective attitude became multivocal. In March 2022 he emphasized that diplomatic activities of the state are also *different* from the foreign church activities, because “the Russian Orthodox Church is not only the Church of Russia, but the Church of Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the republics of Central Asia, the Baltic States, as well as Japan, Mongolia and China.”<sup>20</sup> At the end of May, 2022, he seemed to distance himself and the Church (as he understood its mission) from the state and MFA even more. He said:

You and I are not responsible for military actions or political decisions. But we are responsible for our Holy Church. /.../ At the Last Judgment, no one will ask us whether or not we have participated in any political decisions...<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to questions as part of the 100 Questions for the Leader project at the Yevgeny Primakov School,” May 23, 2022. [https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/1814502/](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1814502/).

<sup>19</sup> “The President of Russia presented Metropolitan Hilarion with the Order of Alexander Nevsky,” February 2, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/prezident-rossii-vruchil-mitropolitu-ilarionu-orden-aleksandra-nevskogo.html>.

<sup>20</sup> “At the meeting of the scientific lecture hall “Krapivensky 4” the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the international arena was discussed,” March 9, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/na-zasedanii-nauchnogo-lektoriya-krapivenskiy-4-obsudili-rol-russkoy-pravoslavnoy-tserkvi-na-mezhdun.html>.

<sup>21</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion: We have supported and will continue to support the unity of our Church,” May 28, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-my-podderzhivali-i-budem-dalshe-podderzhivat-edinstvo-nashey-tserkvi.html>.

In the same message Hilarion *added* that the hands of the DECR are tied and ultimately everyone has a personal responsibility for the way they perform in any office:

... in this century, and in the future, we will be asked for our responsibilities, for which each of us is responsible in his post. /.../ The Department for External Church Relations is a church institution that does not make its own decisions but helps the Hierarchy to implement their decisions. We report directly to His Holiness the Patriarch and the Holy Synod, and have a mandate from them for our activities, receiving assignments relating to the entire sphere of external church relations.<sup>22</sup>

However, increasing collaboration between the ROC and the Russian military since 2009 did not come as a surprise to Hilarion. Kirill started his Patriarchy with Hilarion at the head of the DECR and with a commitment to develop church-state co-operation first of all in the areas of military and education.<sup>23</sup> Over the years, “the intertwining of the ROC and the Russian strategic community” became more visible in the armed forces than in any other sphere.<sup>24</sup> The ROC provided the Russian military with “the sense of mission” and “higher levels of motivation” in the Russian military campaign in Syria (starting in 2015) and assisted the Russian government in legitimizing the intervention domestically.<sup>25</sup> In 2020, the opening of the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces was a sign of growing cooperation between the Russian military and the ROC. The Cathedral was officially “dedicated to the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War, as well as the military feats of the Russian people in all wars.”<sup>26</sup>

Hence, the collaboration between the ROC and the military increased and broadened during the 13 years when Hilarion was the chairman of the DECR. Before February 2022, Hilarion seemed neither to question this development nor to reflect over the issue with the dilemma, where one has to choose between personal responsibility before God and what it is that is being expected from the religious leadership.

In April 2022 Hilarion refrained from delivering public comments on Ukraine-related political and inter-religious (and inter-Orthodox) issues. For him, this could have been a month of personal reflection. In May 2022 he re-emerged to public debates with a voice that, next to official

---

<sup>22</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion: We have supported and will continue to support”.

<sup>23</sup> Fagan, *Believing in Russia*, 140.

<sup>24</sup> Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, “Russian Orthodox Church and Nuclear Command and Control: A Hypothesis,” *Security Studies* 28, no. 5 (2019), 1010.

<sup>25</sup> Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, “Christ-Loving Warriors: Ecclesiastical Dimension of the Russian Military Campaign in Syria,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 67, no. 6 (2020), 433–445.

<sup>26</sup> Bojidar Kolov, “Main Cathedral of Mutual Legitimation: The Church of the Russian Armed Forces as a Site of Making Power Meaningful,” *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 925. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110925>.

positions of the church, involved also personal comments not always and fully overlapping with the former.

For example, Hilarion seemed to have changed his attitude regarding the Archbishop of Cyprus. In 2020 he was highly critical of the Archbishop Chrysostomos, because the latter had commemorated Metropolitan Epifaniy of Kyiv and All Ukraine.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the ROC terminated Eucharistic communion with the Archbishop of Cyprus.

In the May 22, 2022, program “Church and Peace” on the channel “Russia 24” Hilarion commented on his recent meeting with the Archbishop of Cyprus with a tone that was more accepting of the latter than was the official position of the ROC at that time:

First of all, I would like to say that Archbishop Chrysostomos, having learned about my stay in Cyprus, invited me to have lunch with him. I must say that it was a very cordial conversation. Archbishop Chrysostomos during this conversation spoke in great detail about the efforts he made to reconcile the Orthodox Churches. When it became known about the decision of the Patriarch of Constantinople to legalize the Ukrainian schism, then Archbishop Chrysostomos took on a mediation mission and toured several Local Churches. /.../ I would like to say that, of course, such sad events in the history of relations between the Churches occur from time to time. /.../ It seems to me that all these Local Churches understand the importance of the Russian Orthodox Church and the need to maintain dialogue, despite what has happened.<sup>28</sup>

One day before the dismissal of Hilarion, the Archbishop of Cyprus claimed to have much better mutual understanding with Hilarion than with Patriarch Kirill:

I told Hilarion to tell Patriarch Kirill that he should give up his mistakes and start commemorating us. We are commemorating him; I send him letters and he replies. /.../ Kirill has pressed all the Metropolitans down. He is very selfish, and the Metropolitans are afraid to be close to him. I had many fights with him because he was wrong. I realized that in the past the Church of Russia was under communism and the Russian Metropolitans couldn't talk because they did what the Secretary-General of the Party told them to do.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> “Sadness” and threats to strike Church of Cyprus off diptychs by Russian Orthodox Church. *Orthodox Times*. 24 October 2020. <https://orthodoxtimes.com/sadness-and-threats-to-strike-church-of-cyprus-off-diptychs-by-russian-orthodox-church/>

<sup>28</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion: in the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, we must go through this difficult period,” May 22, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-vo-vzaimootnosheniyakh-mezhdu-russkoy-pravoslavnoy-tserkovyu-i-rimsko-katolichesk.html>.

<sup>29</sup> “Archbishop of Cyprus: Kirill is in a frenzy, his Metropolitans are afraid to approach him,” *Orthodox Times*, June 6, 2022, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/archbishop-of-cyprus-kirill-is-in-a-frenzy-his-metropolitans-are-afraid-to-approach-him/>.

Hilarion's 104 days of war ended with the decision of the Holy Synod of the ROC on June 7 to relocate three dioceses of Crimea "into direct canonical and administrative subordination to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia."<sup>30</sup> The decision was a reaction to the changes adopted to the charter of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)--which is formally an exarchate of the Russian Church under the Moscow Patriarch--whereby it claimed total self-reliance and independence from the Patriarchate of Moscow.<sup>31</sup>

The situation of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine was a direct responsibility of the DECR, wherefore the question emerges whether the quest for independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church could be seen as a failure of performance of the Chairman of the DECR (discussed below in the subsection "leadership as *result*"). Here we highlight the fact that Hilarion's public comments did not overlap with the official position of the ROC. Hilarion said that this statement did not yield any new status to the UOC, ".../ on the contrary, it has once again confirmed that it has the status of independence and independence that was given to it back in 1990."<sup>32</sup> In principle, the Holy Synod of the ROC agreed, but added that any "additions and amendments to the Statute on the Governance of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church /.../ are to be submitted for approval to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia."<sup>33</sup> Consequently, while the Holy Synod said that the UOC had no right to make such decisions at all, according to Hilarion the related decisions *did not change* the status of UOC, a position that seemed not to question the decision adopted by the UOC.

The decision of the Holy Synod of the ROC to 'take over' the dioceses in Crimea from the UOC is a religious critical juncture in the Russia-Ukraine conflict escalation. Critical junctures are steps in conflict escalation, where each step relies on the previous one and leaves an enduring legacy.<sup>34</sup> Each step requires its own justification (or, legitimating narrative). Thus, when the agenda of the actors becomes more radical (e.g., they chose military action instead of negotiations),

---

<sup>30</sup> *Journals of the Holy Synod* from June 7, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> "Ukrainian Orthodox Church Council declares full independence," *Interfax*, May 27, 2022, <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/79642/>.

<sup>32</sup> "What is Happening in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Should be Understood in the Context of the Unprecedented Pressure Exerted on it," May 29, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-proiskhodyashchee-v-ukrainskoy-pravoslavnoy-tserkvi-sleduet-ponimat-v-kontekste-o.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the Holy Synod of 29th May 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/en/db/text/5931476.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Jakob Hauter, "How the War Began: Conceptualizing Conflict Escalation in Ukraine's Donbas", *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 48, no. 2 (2021), 153, 155.

then this change of policy goes together with a change (radicalization) in strategic narratives.<sup>35</sup> In December 2021 and January 2022 Russian secular leaders (President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov) played the game of negotiations; their demands to NATO and the United States involved arguments that dealt only with security and military concerns. The strategic narrative that attributes Neo-Nazism to Ukrainian nationalism was adopted together with the intent to invade.<sup>36</sup> The February 24, 2022, Russian invasion of Ukraine was a (*secular*) critical juncture.

In this perspective, the annexation of Crimea and the intervention of Russia in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Spring 2014 was an earlier secular critical juncture for the European Neighborhood Policy.<sup>37</sup> It changed the context, the relationships, and patterns of interaction. It had a lasting impact (critical junctures of conflict escalation have lasting impacts until the process of de-escalation takes over).

In the sphere of religious relations, one critical juncture has been the emergence of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in 2018-2019. We argue that another religious critical juncture took place on June 7, 2022, when the Holy Synod of the ROC virtually abolished its own UOC from Crimea.

Before this event, the common knowledge, along with the assessment of experts, was that in Ukrainian territories occupied or annexed by Russia, the non-Orthodox religious groups were either banned, persecuted, or required re-registration (according to strict requirements) and the only (virtually established) representative of the Orthodox was the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. This was the expert knowledge and common perception regarding the occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk as well as for Crimea.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Elias Götz and Jørgen Staun, "Why Russia attacked Ukraine: Strategic culture and radicalized narratives," *Contemporary Security Policy* 43, no. 3 (2022), 482–497; John Hogan and David Doyle, "The Importance of Ideas: An A Priori Critical Juncture Framework," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 4 (2007), 884.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Sergey Lavrov used the term 'neo-Nazis' first two weeks before the start of the invasion, when he said: „This [Budapest] Memorandum did not oblige Russia, Britain or the US to recognise the anti-constitutional coup d'état that neo-Nazis and ultra-radicals staged in February 2014.“ „Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with UK Foreign Secretary Elizabeth Truss, Moscow“, February 10, 2022, [https://mid.ru/en/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/1797897/](https://mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/1797897/).

<sup>37</sup> Nikki Ikani, "Change and Continuity in the European Neighbourhood Policy: The Ukraine Crisis as a Critical Juncture," *Geopolitics* 24, no. 1 (2019), 20–50.

<sup>38</sup> Oksana Vysoven, Yuriy Figurnyi, Valentyna Molotkina, and Nina Brehunets, "Repressive Policy of the Occupiers During the Declared Russian-Ukrainian Hybrid War Against Religious Communities of Ukraine 2014–2022," *Occasional Papers of Religion in Eastern Europe* 42, no. 6 (2022), article 3, 17-18; Felix Corley and John Kinahan, "DONBAS: Luhansk: religious freedom survey," *Forum* 18, February 23, 2022. [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2721](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2721); Felix Corley, "DONBAS: Donetsk: three Protestant churches banned," *Forum* 18, October 4, 2021, [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2689](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2689).

After June 7, 2022, a new paradigm of *cuius regio, eius religio* (who owns the territory, also owns the religion) is implemented fully in Crimea and not in all religious relations, but particularly in the relations between UOC and ROC.

The Russian Federation has been dreaming and planning to unite other occupied territories of Ukraine (e.g., Kherson) with Russia. If Russia succeeds and replicates the same strategy of having no Ukrainian Orthodox Church in territories they (falsely) claim to be the territory of Russian Federation, then this change of policy transforms the religious situation, which used to be “in eastern Ukraine and Crimea radically in favor of the UOC.”<sup>39</sup> It would lead to a situation where there would be no more UOC in the territories conquered or annexed by the Russian Federation.

UOC is under pressure also from the parliament and government of Ukraine. In sum, Engjellushe Morina and Andrew Wilson predict that:

[T]he 2018 solution of having two canonical Orthodox churches in Ukraine seems unlikely to survive the current war. It may not even survive the current phase of the war, as Ukraine presses ahead with derussification on other fronts, including restrictions on Russian books and music...”<sup>40</sup>

The religious critical juncture of June 7, 2022, changed the nature of the relations in the field of religion drastically for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

### **Leadership as *Process***

As mentioned above, the *secular* critical junctures in the conflict escalation between Russia and Ukraine have been the annexation of Crimea and military intervention by Russia in Eastern regions of Ukraine in 2014 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

The transition from indirect intervention, diplomacy, and negotiations to an open war is a change in the *process* of leadership (‘process’ referring to the “way we do it”). Both before and after February 24, 2022, Hilarion made publicly known his attitude regarding war as a means of international relations and method of conflict solution. Hilarion did not express the endorsement of the Russian effort to the extent that Patriarch Kirill did, but his attitude regarding war and the Church was ambiguous both before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

---

<sup>39</sup> Vysoven *et al.*, “Repressive Policy of the Occupiers”, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Engjellushe Morina and Andrew Wilson, “Russia, Ukraine, and the Orthodox Church: Where Religion Meets Geopolitics and War,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, June 23, 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/article/russia-ukraine-and-the-orthodox-church-where-religion-meets-geopolitics-and-war/>.



In January 2022, Hilarion hoped that the conflict would be solved by diplomacy and negotiations, but he agreed with the concerns of the Russian government that led to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He endorsed the security concerns of the Russian Federation that were submitted to NATO and the United States on December 21, 2021, calling for formal guarantees that Ukraine and other ex-Soviet republics would not be NATO members and US forces and weapons would be withdrawn from Europe. He commented: “It is quite natural that Russia insists on certain security guarantees so that NATO weapons are not placed directly at its borders and are not directed at Russian cities.”<sup>41</sup>

We need to emphasize here that the narratives of security (including NATO expansion and/or the possibility of Ukraine becoming a member of NATO) and the geopolitical status of Russia as a great power in the global world are part of the *secular* strategic narratives in Russia and not the key narratives whereby the ROC and its leaders endorse and legitimate the Russian war efforts. Metropolitan Hilarion mentioned NATO no more during 104 days following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Patriarch Kirill mentioned NATO just once in March, when he attributed the cause of conflict to the NATO enlargement:

Over time, however, forces that openly view Russia as an enemy have come close to its borders. NATO countries are building up their military power year after year, month after month, oblivious to Russia's fears that these weapons will one day turn against it.<sup>42</sup>

Patriarch Kirill did not endorse the Russian invasion of Ukraine swiftly. Particularly the ministers of UOC expected Patriarch Kirill to take a stance on the war, but Kirill did not do it for weeks. Hence, Kirill became criticized in the international community “first for his silence and then for his apparent support of the conflict.”<sup>43</sup>

Patriarch Kirill presented many narratives and used several rhetorical strategies that were not articulated by Hilarion or were overwhelmingly more often delivered and used by the Patriarch during the 104 days of this study:

1. The ongoing war is “an **internecine**/internal **strife**”:

---

<sup>41</sup> “The Russian Orthodox Church is also against Ukraine's accession to NATO,” *RISU*, January 17, 2022, [https://risu.ua/en/the-russian-orthodox-church-is-also-against-ukraines-accession-to-nato\\_n125146](https://risu.ua/en/the-russian-orthodox-church-is-also-against-ukraines-accession-to-nato_n125146).

<sup>42</sup> “His Holiness Patriarch Kirill sent a message to the Acting Secretary General of the WCC in connection with the events in Ukraine,” March 10, 2022, <https://mospat.ru/ru/news/89069/>.

<sup>43</sup> Elise Ann Allen, “Pope, Kirill may meet at religious congress in Kazakhstan in September”, *Crux*, June 2, 2022. <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2022/06/pope-kirill-may-meet-at-religious-congress-in-kazakhstan-in-september>.

“May the Lord protect the peoples who are part of the common space of the Russian Orthodox Church from internecine strife [*междоусобной брани*].”<sup>44</sup>

“...may the Lord protect the Russian land from internecine warfare and from the invasion of foreigners...”<sup>45</sup>

2. **Peace is conditioned/dependent on the unity of Russian and Ukrainian peoples:**

“... today it is necessary to work for the restoration of peaceful life in Ukraine and the Donbas. ... I have no doubt that Russia will make the necessary efforts to create this peaceful life, in which the prevailing principle will be the preservation of unity between peoples based on mutual understanding.”<sup>46</sup>

3. **‘Spiritual brothers’ cannot be in conflict:**

“... I have said before that the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, who came out of the single Kiev baptismal font, are united by the Orthodox faith and are bound by a common historical destiny, cannot be considered the culprits of this situation. They have no and cannot have an interest in the conflict.”<sup>47</sup>

Messages and statements of Hilarion not delivered by Patriarch Kirill focused on the humanitarian mission of the Church,<sup>48</sup> war ‘not a conflict solution method,’<sup>49</sup> and ‘war may have disastrous consequences for Russia.’<sup>50</sup> Hilarion seemed to have the kind of second thoughts about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which he did not have regarding the 2014 Russian operations in the territory of Ukraine. In 2014, Hilarion was the official spokesperson for the Moscow Patriarchate and was the one who crafted official statements on the crisis in Ukraine.<sup>51</sup> He

---

<sup>44</sup> “Patriarch Kirill urged believers to pray for peace and unity of the Church,” February 27, 2022, <https://mospat.ru/ru/news/89032/>.

<sup>45</sup> “Patriarchal sermon on the day of Radonitsa after the Liturgy in the Archangel Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin,” May 3, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5922848.html>.

<sup>46</sup> “Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the X Parliamentary Meetings in the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” May 17, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5926129.html>.

<sup>47</sup> “Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the X Parliamentary Meetings.”

<sup>48</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion: We have supported and will continue to support the unity of our Church,” May 28, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-my-podderzhivali-i-budem-dalshe-podderzhivat-edinstvo-nashey-tserkvi.html>.

<sup>49</sup> “The Church prays that the conflict between Russia and the West will be resolved peacefully,” February 20, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-tserkov-molitsya-chtoby-konflikt-rossii-i-zapada-reshilsya-mirnym-putem.html>.

<sup>50</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion: the figure of Rasputin was extremely controversial,” March 21, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-figura-rasputina-by-la-chrezvychayno-protivorechivoy.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Nicholas E. Denysenko, *The Orthodox Church in Ukraine: A Century of Separation* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018), 191.



attributed the blame on Greek Catholics, who according to him were unlike the canonical UOC and had taken sides.<sup>52</sup>

After February 24, 2022, Hilarion did not question the support the ROC gave to the Soviet Union during the Second World War. In the program “Church and Peace” on the channel “Russia 24,” he said on May 8, 2022:

From the very first day of the Great Patriotic War, the Church was with its people. The first person to address the people on the radio was Metropolitan Sergius of Moscow and Kolomna. He did it even before Stalin addressed the people. ... Then, throughout the Great Patriotic War, the Church was very active in helping the front. With the money collected by the Church, a tank column named after Dmitry Donskoy was created. Many clergymen visited the front line, helped refugees. Wherever the Church was allowed, it was present. Of course, together with all the people, the Church celebrated Victory Day and continues to celebrate it for 77 years.<sup>53</sup>

Was 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine qualitatively different for Hilarion? Did he not identify it with the patriotic fight against Nazism the way it was presented by Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov? Andrey Shishkov commented that Hilarion had informed Patriarch Kirill about the red lines regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict he was unwilling to cross, and, according to Shishkov, among the reasons why he was dismissed from his office was the fact that he did not deliver statements in support of the military operations.<sup>54</sup>

Andrey Shishkov’s comment has a point, but Hilarion’s ‘silence’ on the Russian invasion has more layers. Until 2022, Metropolitan Hilarion had a position of professor at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. On March 8, 2022, the faculty of theology of Fribourg University asked Hilarion to condemn the Russian invasion and to call on the Russian President to withdraw his troops. Hilarion chose not to. He thanked the faculty for years of fruitful collaboration and suspended his position as a full professor.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion: Actions of the Uniates Have Caused Great Damage Not Only to the Ukraine and Her Citizens, but Also to the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue,” June 3, 2014, <https://mospat.ru/en/2014/06/03/news103524/>.

<sup>53</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion: The Church is doing a great job to help the victims of the confrontation in Ukraine,” May 8, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-tserkov-provodit-ogromnuyu-rabotu-po-pomoshchi-postradavshim-ot-protivostoyaniya-.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Yulia Akhmedova, “Patriarch Kirill was offended: “How the ministers of the Russian Orthodox Church were divided into three opposing camps and what happens to priests who oppose the war,” *Бѣсѣда*, August 2, 2022, <https://verstka.media/cerkov-i-voina/>.

<sup>55</sup> “Ukraine war: Metropolitan Hilarion suspended from post at Swiss university”, *Catholic News Agency*, March 10, 2022, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250632/ukraine-war-metropolitan-hilarion-suspended-from-post-at-swiss-university>.

The international communities outside Russia and Ukraine, have focused most on what Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion have said regarding the invasion and expected them to call the invasion an aggression and point the finger toward Putin. This aspect is important because religious leaders would thus *delegitimize* the invasion. However, this is only one side of the coin. The religious leaders *legitimize* the invasion primarily not by blaming NATO or calling authorities in Kiev Neo-Nazi sympathizers, but by spreading the religious doctrine of the Russian world.

The secular themes of the Russian strategic culture—e.g. security concerns such as the expansion of NATO and alleged militarization of Ukraine; Russia’s status as a ‘great power’ in the global world order, Russia representing ‘true sovereignty’ vis-à-vis Western powers – are promoted by actors other than the ROC (e.g. “sovereign democracy” was developed by Vladislav Surkov).<sup>56</sup> The religious narrative of the Russian world focuses on the historic and cultural special relationship with the Ukraine (as a historical cradle of Russian civilization)<sup>57</sup> and on the spiritual, cultural, and historical unity of Russian and Ukrainian peoples.

As mentioned above, radicalization of policy requires radicalization of legitimating strategic narratives. Scholars of strategic narratives of Russia have identified that Putin’s decision to start a war on February 24, 2022, was “made possible and thinkable” due to “radicalized narratives in Russia’s strategic culture.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the annexation of Crimea and military intervention in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 were made possible by shifts in predominant discourses of Russian national identity.<sup>59</sup>

The messages of the “Russian world” by religious leaders have “played an important role in Russia’s neo-imperial plans, as it was an active embodiment of the “Russian World” in the spiritual, political, cultural, and humanitarian spaces of Ukraine.”<sup>60</sup> The narrative of (spiritual) unity of Ukrainians and Russians with the aim of integrating Ukrainians into the Russian state, culture, and civilization, has been used in Russian imperialism since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Zenon E. Kohut has called

---

<sup>56</sup> Mikhail Suslov, “‘Russian World’ Concept: Post-Soviet Geopolitical Ideology and the Logic of ‘Spheres of Influence’,” *Geopolitics* 23, no. 2 (2018), 337, 338.

<sup>57</sup> Staun Götz, “Why Russia attacked Ukraine,” 486.

<sup>58</sup> Staun Götz, “Why Russia attacked Ukraine,” 492.

<sup>59</sup> According to Ted Hopf, the following ideational changes led to the 2014 events in Ukraine: starting from 2006 Russia “delinked from identification with the West,” identified increasingly with Imperial Russia, rejected most of its Soviet past and conservative discourses became more mainstream in Russian discourses of identity. Ted Hopf, “‘Crimea is ours’: A discursive history,” *International Relations* 30, no. 2 (2016), 227.

<sup>60</sup> Vysoven *et al.* “Repressive Policy of the Occupiers.”

it a ‘unity paradigm.’<sup>61</sup> This paradigm connects Russian identity and values into a set that is simultaneously imperial and Orthodox.<sup>62</sup> It legitimates Russian imperial rule of Ukrainian territories and peoples. This paradigm was even utilized by Soviet authorities in order to attain the loyalty of Ukrainian to the Soviet order.<sup>63</sup> The ‘unity paradigm’ was a ‘master-frame’ whereby Putin legitimated the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In a March 18, 2014, speech he said:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>64</sup>

If so, then the key indicator of Hilarion’s attitude toward the Russian invasion is not so much about war as a method, but whether he re-thought his positions regarding the religious conception of the “Russian world.” However, there is no evidence of Hilarion having revised or having had second thoughts about the concept of the “Russian world” during the “104 days of war.” His position is identical to Patriarch Kirill’s. Although Kirill devoted more energy to emphasizing the common history, land, destiny of Russians and Ukrainians, and Hilarion expressed quantitatively more criticism of the Ukrainian “schismatics,” they both were the messengers who upheld the narrative of One (common) Church and spiritual unity of Russians and Ukrainians.

It is the cases that Patriarch Kirill’s contribution to the Russian war effort exceeds Metropolitan Hilarion’s in significant ways. Hilarion does not rhetorically demonize the adversaries (what can be called “religious demonization”). Patriarch Kirill, however, claims that the enemies of Russia work in the service of the devil:

... Our prayer today is to preserve the spiritual unity of the Russian land. And why did external forces rise up so much on the Russian land? Why do they seek to destroy it, to divide it, to pit brother against brother? There is a mention in Scripture of a certain force that keeps the coming of the antichrist into the world.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Zenon E. Kohut, “Origins of the Unity Paradigm: Ukraine and the Construction of Russian National History (1620-1860),” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 1 (2001), 70–76.

<sup>62</sup> Eugene Alexander Vertlieb, “The Ideology of “Strategic Conservatism” from Russia’s Imperial Perspective,” *Global Security and Intelligence Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022), p. 153.

<sup>63</sup> Denysenko, *The Orthodox Church in Ukraine*, 159.

<sup>64</sup> “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” March 18, 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

<sup>65</sup> “Patriarchal sermon on the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary after the Liturgy in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior,” April 7, 2022, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/print/5915151.html>.

The ‘unity paradigm’ has existed and been used strategically in Russian politics for centuries. However, the present application of the concept (the religious version of the Russian World) is articulated, represented, and promoted mostly by Patriarch Kirill. It has been called “Kirill’s doctrine of Russian nationalism”<sup>66</sup> and Kirill’s “Russian world” strategy.<sup>67</sup> When addressing secular audiences, Kirill uses the concept “Russian world,” but when speaking to Church internal circles, he uses the term “Holy Russia.”<sup>68</sup>

Thus, several of those who have called for the application of sanctions on Patriarch Kirill—e.g., MPs of the Ukrainian Parliament in April 2022,<sup>69</sup> the Archbishop of Chernihiv<sup>70</sup>--have perceived religious leaders of the ROC to be involved in the Russian invasion of Ukraine by the promotion of the ideology of the Russian World *and* have listed Hilarion among those who ought to be sanctioned together with Patriarch Kirill.<sup>71</sup>

Hilarion had promoted the “Russian world” ideology together with Patriarch Kirill in 2010,<sup>72</sup> in 2014<sup>73</sup> and kept doing it during “104 days” of 2022.

## Leadership as *Result*

Metropolitan Hilarion claimed that his dismissal was not caused by any fault in his performance at the head of DECR. However, there is a list of developments that do not look like successes of DECR (for the ROC and from the perspective of the ROC) during the first half of 2022.

---

<sup>66</sup> Alexander Verkhovsky, “‘Kirill’s Doctrine’ and the Potential Transformation of Russian Orthodox Christianity,” in *Orthodox Paradoxes: Heterogeneities and Complexities in Contemporary Russian Orthodoxy*, ed. Katya Tolstaya (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 72.

<sup>67</sup> Denysenko, *The Orthodox Church in Ukraine*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Suslov, “‘Russian World’ Concept,” 345.

<sup>69</sup> “MPs propose to impose sanctions against Kirill and three other figures of the Russian Orthodox Church.” *RISU*, May 01, 2022, [https://risu.ua/en/mps-propose-to-impose-sanctions-against-kirill-and-three-other-figures-of-the-russian-orthodox-church\\_n128876](https://risu.ua/en/mps-propose-to-impose-sanctions-against-kirill-and-three-other-figures-of-the-russian-orthodox-church_n128876).

<sup>70</sup> “Archbishop of Chernihiv: Sanctions should be imposed on Kirill and Hilarion over the war in Ukraine,” *Orthodox Times*, March 17, 2022, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/archbishop-of-cherniyiv-sanctions-should-be-imposed-on-kirill-and-hilarion-over-the-war-in-ukraine/>.

<sup>71</sup> Among those listed to be sanctioned together with Patriarch Kirill was also Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, who on 25 August 2022 was dismissed from the office of Deputy Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations by the Holy Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate. *Journals of the Holy Synod* from August 25, 2022, <https://mospat.ru/ru/news/89562/>.

<sup>72</sup> “Head of Department of External Relations of UOC-Moscow Patriarchate: Holy Rus Is Not Only Common History but also Present and Future,” *RISU*, November 18, 2010, [https://risu.ua/en/head-of-department-of-external-relations-of-uoc-moscow-patriarchate-holy-rus-is-not-only-common-history-but-also-present-and-future\\_n42439](https://risu.ua/en/head-of-department-of-external-relations-of-uoc-moscow-patriarchate-holy-rus-is-not-only-common-history-but-also-present-and-future_n42439).

<sup>73</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk: Spiritual unity will be preserved forever between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples,” September 16, 2014, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3744471.html>.

In May 2022, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople recognized the autocephaly of Archbishopric of Ohrid (North Macedonia).<sup>74</sup> The ROC had argued that exclusive canonical rights in North Macedonia belong to the Serbian Church.<sup>75</sup> It endorsed the outcome (by claiming to support the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church), but the fact that it was the Patriarchate of Constantinople who acted as a sole mediator of the status of the Orthodox Church of North Macedonia was a hard pill for the ROC to swallow.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, Metropolitan Hilarion had to explain the outcome to the Russian public.<sup>77</sup>

The relations between the ROC and the UOC had deteriorated while the Department for External Church Relations under Hilarion's leadership was responsible for Ukraine. Hilarion's own explanation of the independence declaration of the UOC may have been seen as a mere "excuse" by the ROC synod, not a substantive reason for what the UOC leaders did. Just two days before his departure from his DECR duties in Moscow, on June 5, Hilarion stated in a television program<sup>78</sup> that the UOC's reason for its declarations of independence from the Moscow Patriarchate was the UOC's need to thwart the threat of re-registration brought on by the Ukrainian government's 2018 law requiring a re-naming of the church that would directly show its connection to the Moscow Patriarchate. Hilarion argued that, because local Ukrainian authorities and unruly community groups were threatening to use force against UOC churches to change jurisdictions to the "schismatics," the UOC needed to protect its property by this public declaration of independence from Moscow. Such an argument now appears to have been too sympathetic to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church position in the view of Patriarch Kirill and/or the members of the Synod that made the decision to move Hilarion to Budapest.

---

<sup>74</sup> For detailed analysis, see Gjoko Gjorgjevski, Ruzhica Cacanaska, Ivan Blazhevski, and Aneta Jovkovska, "Macedonian Orthodox Church-Archbishopric of Ohrid and Its Arduous Road to Autocephaly," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 42, no. 6 (2022), article 2.

<sup>75</sup> "Moscow's reaction to the Archdiocese of Ohrid: The Serbian Church has the exclusive canonical rights in N. Macedonia," *Orthodox Times*, May 10, 2022, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/moscows-reaction-to-the-archdiocese-of-ohrid-the-serbian-church-has-the-exclusive-canonical-rights-in-north-macedonia/>

<sup>76</sup> "Patriarchate of Moscow: The recognition by the Serbian Orthodox Church of the Autocephaly of the Church in North Macedonia is a joyful event," *Orthodox Times*, May 25, 2022, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/patriarchate-of-moscow-the-recognition-by-the-serbian-orthodox-church-of-the-autocephaly-of-the-church-in-north-macedonia-is-a-joyful-event/>.

<sup>77</sup> "Metropolitan Hilarion: The Macedonian Orthodox Church cannot be put on the same level with the Ukrainian schismatics," May 29, 2022, <https://hilarion.ru/social/mitropolit-ilarion-makedonskuyu-pravoslavnuyu-tserkov-nelzya-stavit-na-odnu-dosku-s-ukrainskimi-rask.html>.

<sup>78</sup> "Attempts to forcibly rename the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are due to the desire to seize its churches, believes Metropolitan Hilarion," June 6, 2022, <https://mospat.ru/ru/news/89352/>.

On June 6, 2022, Hilarion had to also explain the situation in Lithuania, where several clergymen had appealed for help to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>79</sup> In one way or another, the crises in the Ukrainian and Lithuanian Orthodox Churches were repercussions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Additionally, the meeting between the Patriarch of Moscow and Pope Francis (the organization of which is also one of the main tasks of the Chairman of the DECR) was postponed.

This list of “failures of the leadership performance” is not exhaustive and is based on indirect evidence. However, it highlights that the “lack of faults” argument by Hilarion should not be taken at face value.

### **Leadership as *Person***

Finally, it cannot be excluded that among the reasons for the dismissal of Hilarion was his highly popular personality. Katherine Kelaidis has argued that his dismissal can be interpreted “as an attempt on the part of the Russian Patriarch to exile a powerful and ambitious rival.”<sup>80</sup>

Did Hilarion then err regarding the First Law of Power of Robert Greene, “Never outshine your master”? Robert Greene explains this law of power as follows:

Always make those above you feel comfortably superior. In your desire to please and impress them, do not go too far in displaying your talents or you might accomplish the opposite--inspire fear and insecurity. Make your masters appear more brilliant than they are and you will attain the heights of power.<sup>81</sup>

When he joined Patriarch Kirill’s team in 2009, Hilarion was the sole Russian hierarch to defend a thesis at Oxford.<sup>82</sup> Over the years he has built a thorough personal presence in the web and public sphere through regular appearances in media programs, transcripts of sermons and statements published on his web-site, and even in July 2022, he continued to address his followers in Russia via video-clips published on his web-site. Hilarion has a well-developed public profile, image, personality, and popularity of his own.

---

<sup>79</sup> “Metropolitan Hilarion: Attempts to split the Orthodox community of Lithuania are doomed to failure,” June 6, 2022, <https://mospat.ru/ru/news/89354/>.

<sup>80</sup> Katherine Kelaidis, “With this Largely Overlooked Shakeup is the Russian Orthodox Church Looking to Westernize? Yes and No,” *Religion Dispatches*, June 14, 2022, <https://religiondispatches.org/with-this-largely-overlooked-shakeup-is-the-russian-orthodox-church-looking-to-westernize-yes-and-no/>.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2000), 1.

<sup>82</sup> Aleksei Makarkin, “The Russian Orthodox Church: Competing Choices,” *Russian Politics & Law* 49, no. 1 (2011), 16–17.

Sure, Metropolitan Hilarion did refrain from direct support of ‘war as a conflict solution method’ and probably was expected by the Kremlin to be more vocal on this issue. However, when we look at his successor Metropolitan Anthony, we see that he almost never delivers messages and statements of his own, not to mention not having a personal webpage, not publishing transcripts of public appearances, and eschewing regular appearances in media programs. Paradoxically, Metropolitan Anthony does not speak about war either. Based on this evidence we could conclude that the ‘number 2’ in the ROC is expected to be *more silent* on themes related to war and conflict in Ukraine than Metropolitan Hilarion used to be.

## Conclusions

This study focused on the reasons why Metropolitan Hilarion was dismissed from the office of the Chairman of the DECR on the 104<sup>th</sup> day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The results of the study indicate, that Hilarion was both unwilling to delegitimize the Russian invasion and unwilling to endorse it the way Patriarch Kirill did. However, during 13 years at the office of the Chairman of the DECR, Hilarion was committed to advance the “Russian world” concept legitimating Russian imperialist policies over the territory and population of Ukraine together with Patriarch Kirill. Hilarion did not revoke any of his positions regarding the “Russian world.”

Time will tell whether promotion of the “Russian world,” which is the key narrative whereby religious leaders of the ROC legitimize Russian war efforts in the territory of Ukraine, was for Hilarion merely a duty related to the office of Chairman of the DECR or will he be one of the main proponents of this concept also in his new position as primate of the Russian Orthodox Dioceses of Budapest and Hungary. If the latter is true, then this will compromise his ‘silence’ on the Russian invasion of Ukraine even further.

We noted earlier that Hilarion’s advanced education at Oxford set him apart from the other hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church. His erudition about church history, the Church Fathers, and theology may also have made him appear in a different category than most of the ROC hierarchs. His mentor at Oxford University was the renowned scholar of Orthodoxy, Kallistos Ware, who, like Hilarion, was a monk and a Metropolitan in the Orthodox Church.<sup>83</sup> One major lesson of Ware to his students, according to his eulogist Brandon Gallaher, was that “to go against

---

<sup>83</sup> Sadly, Metropolitan Kallistos died recently, on August 24, 2022.

our conscience would be to lose one's soul.”<sup>84</sup> Whatever ambiguities and ambivalences Hilarion had been facing in regard to the attack on Ukraine, when faced with the concrete situation of war involving the Russian state supported by the Church's legitimation, this critical juncture for the Church, he seems to have had a problem of conscience that further separated him from the hierarchs of the Holy Synod.

---

<sup>84</sup> Brandon Gallaher, “True Man: Kallistos of Oxford as Orthodoxy's First Universal Teacher of the Global Age,” *Public Orthodoxy*, Orthodox Christian Studies Center, Fordham University, September 6, 2022, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/09/06/true-man-kallistos-of-oxford-as-orthodoxys-first-universal-teacher-of-the-global-age/> .