Religion as a Weapon of Empire: The Russian Orthodox Church as an Instrument of the Imperial-Orda Geopolitics and Aggression of the Russian Federation

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When the Church Ceases to Be the Church

The contemporary Russian–Ukrainian war, which since 2014 has unfolded as an open armed aggression and since 2022 as a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, has long transcended the boundaries of classical military confrontation. It has gradually evolved into a real, creeping, hybrid Third World War, in which the instruments of destruction are not limited to tanks and missiles alone, but also include ideology, history, culture, information, religion, as well as systematic deceptive propaganda and deliberate manipulation of human consciousness.

One of the key—yet for a long time underestimated—tools of this war has been the use by Moscow of the Russian Orthodox Church as an ideological and religious weapon. In the twenty-first century, this ecclesiastical structure has definitively lost the nature of an independent spiritual institution and has been deeply integrated into the system of imperial-orda state power of the Russian Federation. As a result of this process, the Russian Orthodox Church (hereinafter referred to as the ROC) has effectively ceased to fulfill its Christian vocation and today functions not as the Church of Christ, but as an ideological, propagandistic, manipulative, and special-operations element of the aggressive geopolitical strategy of the Kremlin and the Russian Federation's security services under its control.

The State Capture of the Russian Orthodox Church as a Completed Historical Process

In the Christian tradition, the Church is called to be a moral witness, a bearer of truth, a defender of human dignity, and a source of spiritual life. However, in contemporary Russia, a complete inversion of this model has occurred at the ecclesiastical level. The Russian Orthodox Church has not merely drawn closer to the

state—it has been fully absorbed by the state apparatus of the Russian Federation, thereby losing its independence and the freedom of spiritual witness.

This process manifests itself across several interrelated levels:

institutional — the incorporation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy into the vertical structure of state power and its security and special services, with systematic control over personnel appointments, governance decisions, and the internal life of the Church;

financial and economic — the dependence of church structures on state funding, privileges, property preferences, and opaque financial flows, which creates economic loyalty and de facto subordination of the Church to the state, depriving it of the possibility of an independent position;

ideological — the substitution of the Gospel with quasi-religious concepts such as “state sanctity,” the “historical mission of Russia,” “sacral” or “holy war,” and the ideology of the Russkiy mir, all of which sacralize violence, imperialism, and the denial of the freedom of other nations;

political — unconditional support for the external aggression of the Russian Federation and for internal repressive practices, the public blessing of war, the concealment of crimes, and the justification of state violence;

geopolitical — the use of the Church as an instrument of influence beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, in particular for the dissemination of imperial narratives, the destabilization of other states, and interference in the internal affairs of churches and societies.

Within this model, the Russian Orthodox Church, directed by the Kremlin, ceases to be a subject of faith, evangelical ministry, and Christian witness, and is transformed into a state-run ideological–clerical institution with a pseudo-sacral оболонка, serving the totalitarian, repressive, and militantly aggressive political regime of the Russian Federation.

The FSB and the SVR of the Russian Federation: The Real Architects of «Church Policy»

A key indicator of the degradation of the Russian Orthodox Church as an ecclesiastical institution is its systemic integration with the Russian special services—above all, the Federal Security Service and the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (hereinafter, the FSB and the SVR). This concerns not

isolated contacts or situational cooperation, but rather a stable model of subordination and functional interaction, within which the Church has effectively been incorporated into the architecture of state security and the external expansion of the Russian Federation.

The FSB performs the role of the principal internal curator of the "church track" and ensures:

- internal control over the hierarchy, clergy, monasteries, theological educational institutions, and other structures of the Russian Orthodox Church, both within the territory of the Russian Federation and beyond its borders;
- personnel loyalty of the episcopate and clergy through the selection, promotion, and retention of controlled individuals in key church positions;
- the formation and use of agent networks within the environment of the Russian Orthodox Church and with its participation—both inside ecclesiastical structures and beyond them;
- the use of the Church as an instrument of internal mobilization of the population and state ideological propaganda in the interests of the ruling political regime of the Russian Federation;
- the sacralization and justification of the war against Ukraine and the West through official church statements, sermons, "theological" narratives, and the activities of church structures under state control beyond the borders of the Russian Federation.

The SVR, in turn, is responsible for the external, international dimension of the use of the Russian Orthodox Church and carries out:

- the export of Russian ecclesiastical influence and the ideology of the Russkiy mir as a quasi-religious heresy beyond the borders of the Russian Federation;
- information, psychological, and other operations conducted under "Orthodox" and "canonical" cover in the countries of Europe, North America, and other regions of the world;
- systematic discreditation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of Local Orthodox Churches that do not fall within Moscow's sphere of control;
- coordination and strategic management of networks of politico-religious influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the Baltic states, the Balkans, Western Europe, North America, and other regions of the world, in the interests of the geopolitical and security objectives of the Russian Federation;

- the creation, deployment, and use of networks of agents, intelligence operatives, and special-purpose personnel under the cover of church structures, religious activity, and the so-called “spiritual mission” outside the borders of the Russian Federation, for the implementation of intelligence, subversive, and hybrid operational tasks.

It is therefore not coincidental that, at critical moments in the implementation of the aggressive military-geopolitical strategy of the contemporary political regime of the Russian Federation, those speaking publicly on behalf of the so-called “church position” increasingly include not only hierarchs or clergy, but also direct representatives of the Russian special services. Such a practice is deeply anomalous from the standpoint of Christian tradition, yet at the same time highly revealing of the nature of the totalitarian and repressive political regime in the Russian Federation, which has definitively erased the boundary between the sacral and the coercive.

Accordingly, this leads to a single conclusion: the Russian religious factor, embodied in the Russian Orthodox Church—both within the state and through its structures beyond the borders of the Russian Federation—has been officially incorporated into the system of political state governance and the activities of state security organs of the Russian Federation. It is purposefully employed by the Russian special services as an instrument of total control over the population, ideological-religious influence, the conduct of hybrid warfare (in particular against Ukraine), political pressure, and the facilitation of imperial expansion, both inside the Russian Federation and far beyond its borders.

Attacks on the Ecumenical Patriarch: Demonization as a Special Operation

It is indicative that in recent years—following prolonged and systematic attacks by the Moscow Patriarchate that have been unfolding since 2019—a new stage of open and brutal discreditation of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (Archondonis) has begun to be carried out not only by Russian ecclesiastical structures, but directly in the name of and through the channels of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (SVR). This development has marked a fundamental shift in the nature of the confrontation: what is at stake is not a theological polemic and not a canonical dispute, but a deliberate special-services technology of demonization and discrimination directed against the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The objectives of this demonization and discrimination are clearly defined and multifaceted, namely:

- to undermine the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch as primus inter pares in the Orthodox world and to weaken the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as the historical center of Orthodox unity;
- to shift ecclesiastical discussion from the realm of theological argumentation, dogmatic teaching, and canon law into the realm of crude, unfounded stigmatization, discreditation, and personal accusations;
- to construct a primitive yet effective model of opposition—"friend versus enemy"—within the Orthodox ecclesial space;
- to mobilize radicalized, agent-based, and dependent milieus within the structure of the Russian Orthodox Church and its foreign subdivisions—in particular within the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate—and to exert influence on certain circles of other Local Orthodox Churches worldwide.

In essence, such rhetoric and practice by the special services of the Russian Federation within the ecclesiastical sphere constitute a language of religious extremism and subversive propaganda, employed as part of a purposeful, pre-planned special operation. This practice is incompatible with Christianity, yet entirely characteristic of totalitarian ideologies, above all the destructive, anti-Christian, and heretical ideology of the Russkiy mir, which is being deliberately and systematically promoted by the Moscow Patriarchate under the control and direction of the contemporary totalitarian ruling political regime of the Russian Federation.

Attacks on the Orthodox Church of Ukraine as a Strike against Ukrainian Identity

The hostility of Moscow toward the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (hereinafter, the OCU) is not theological in nature, but distinctly civilizational. For the contemporary totalitarian ruling political regime of the Russian Federation and the Moscow Patriarchate under its control, the OCU is unacceptable not because of dogmatic or canonical disagreements, but because it embodies the spiritual freedom of the Ukrainian people, the restoration of their own ecclesial subjectivity, and the irreversibility of the process of decolonization.

For this very reason, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine represents:

- the spiritual dimension of Ukrainian sovereignty and national identity;

- the affirmation of Ukraine's own nearly two-thousand-year tradition of ecclesial development, which cannot be reduced to the Moscow-centered narrative;
- a symbol of rupture with the imperial and colonial model of ecclesiastical dependence;
- a decisive factor in the dismantling of imperial control over the Ukrainian nation, the State of Ukraine, and the Autocephalous Local Orthodox Church of Ukraine;
- a factor in Moscow's loss—together with the Russian Orthodox Church—of ideological, worldview, and manipulative leverage over Ukrainian society, the Ukrainian diaspora, and the Orthodox environment beyond the borders of the Russian Federation.

The creation, development, and ongoing activity of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine have thus entailed, for the Russian Federation—hostile toward Ukraine—the systematic dismantling of Russian church-based anti-Ukrainian propaganda, which the Moscow Patriarchate had been imposing for centuries, from 1721 to the present day. This propaganda constituted a deliberate policy of spiritual, ideological, and worldview subjugation that accompanied Russia's imperial expansion into Ukrainian lands.

In particular, this refers to the dissemination of the anti-Christian and heretical ideology of the Russkiy mir, which sacralizes Moscow's imperialism, justifies the killing of Ukrainians, denies the freedom of nations, and serves as a pseudo-religious justification for violence and the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

The loss of this ideological foothold in Ukraine has become a serious defeat for the Russian Federation in the sphere of hybrid influence, including the activities of its special services aimed at controlling the consciousness, worldview, and spiritual orientations of citizens—both in Ukraine and within the Ukrainian diaspora. For this reason, Moscow is attempting to compensate for this defeat through subordinate and dependent structures of the Russian Orthodox Church, employing them as instruments of ideological, spiritual, psychological, and political pressure.

Accordingly, Moscow deploys the full arsenal of hybrid warfare against the Orthodox Church of Ukraine: systematic information attacks, the dissemination of disinformation, international campaigns of discreditation, and pressure exerted through structures subordinate to the ruling totalitarian political regime of the Russian Federation—its special services and the Russian Orthodox Church, including

the use of its foreign subdivisions, in particular through the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine as a Structural Element of the Imperial System

A particularly significant role in the implementation of the imperial-orda strategy of the Russian Federation is played by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (hereinafter, the UOC-MP), which for decades has functioned—and continues to function—as:

- a channel of Russian anti-Ukrainian ideological-religious, manipulative, and disinformation influence exerted by Moscow in Ukraine and within the Ukrainian diaspora;
- a politically ecclesiastical instrument managed and controlled by Moscow, aimed at obstructing the attainment—and subsequently the international recognition—of the lawfully restored historical and canonical autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church;
- a bearer of Moscow's imperial and anti-Ukrainian concept of the "one people," which denies Ukrainians the right to their own statehood, culture, and Church;
- an instrument of spiritual disorganization, demoralization, and artificial division of Ukrainian society, as well as a factor of destabilization within the wider Orthodox world;
- a politicized ideological-religious institution for the dissemination and imposition of the anti-Christian and heretical Moscow ideology of the Russkiy mir;
- an element of the hybrid ideological-political infrastructure of the Russian Federation, involved in the conduct of its creeping hybrid Third World War.

At the same time, it is fundamentally important to emphasize that this concerns not individual believers who, for various life circumstances, traditions, or worldview reasons, remain within the jurisdiction of the UOC-MP. Rather, it concerns a systemic, institutionally formalized, and state-captured ecclesiastical model of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is currently directed and controlled by the totalitarian ruling political regime of the Russian Federation, was deliberately implanted, functioned for a prolonged period, and continues to be preserved in Ukraine and within the Ukrainian diaspora.

This model is deeply embedded in Moscow's political imperial-orda system of coordinates, governance, and influence and is purposefully oriented toward the formation of controlled consciousness and subconsciousness. It is employed as an instrument of spiritual, ideological, psychological, worldview, and political control, as well as of mass manipulation at the spiritual level, targeting believers of the Moscow Patriarchate and, accordingly, its structural subdivision—the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine and within the Ukrainian diaspora.

The Baltic Region, Europe, and the World: The Globalization of Church–Geopolitical Influence

Analogous mechanisms of imperial–ecclesiastical influence are systematically employed by the Russian Federation through the Russian Orthodox Church beyond its own state borders, in particular:

- in the Baltic states;
- in the Balkans;
- in Western Europe;
- in North and South America;
- in certain regions of the Global South and Africa.

Through a network of parishes and so-called "canonical structures" of the Russian Orthodox Church, a long-term, purposeful, and centrally managed influence is formed and exercised. This influence undermines democratic institutions, provokes internal conflicts, generates division and confrontation within World Orthodoxy at the level of Local Orthodox Churches, and legitimizes anti-Western and anti-democratic narratives that serve the interests of the contemporary imperial-orda political regime of the Russian Federation.

«Russkiy mir» as an Anti-Christian and Anti-Human Ideology

The Moscow concept of the Russkiy mir is, in its very essence:

- a theological heresy, insofar as it replaces Christ with the state and substitutes the Gospel with political expediency;
- a moral and spiritual degradation, as it justifies killing, violence, and the destruction of human dignity;
- an anti-Christian and anti-human political doctrine of sacralized Moscow imperialism, which legitimizes aggressive war and the colonial subjugation of nations.

Ultimately, this ideology serves not life, but death; not freedom, but enslavement; not Christ, but the godless, repressive, and totalitarian ruling regime of the Russian Federation; not truth, but falsehood.

Forecast: Further Actions of Moscow, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Special Services

1. Intensification of Russian Special-Services Operations and Attacks.

A further intensification of special information-psychological and subversive operations should be expected, in particular:

- new coordinated information attacks on the Ecumenical Patriarchate and on those Local Orthodox Churches that have recognized the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine;
- radicalization of rhetoric, propaganda, and subversive activity directed against the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, employing demonization, discreditation, and pseudo-theological accusations;
- fabrication of “international scandals” alleging supposed “persecution” of the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, aimed at exerting pressure on Ukrainian state institutions and their international partners;
- more active involvement of special-services channels in the creation of fake “expert,” “human-rights,” and “church” platforms designed to legitimize Russian narratives at the international level.

2. Reformatting and Preservation of the UOC-MP.

Moscow will continue to:

- seek to preserve the institutional structure of the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the networks of political, ideological, psychological, and spiritual influence associated with it in Ukraine and within the Ukrainian diaspora;
- employ the rhetoric of “victimhood,” “discrimination,” and “violations of religious freedom” with regard to the UOC-MP in order to shape a negative image of Ukraine in the international arena;
- activate interstate, inter-church, and quasi-international channels of pressure with the aim of restraining the processes of Ukraine’s spiritual decolonization and delegitimizing the Orthodox Church of Ukraine;
- carry out personnel, structural, and organizational maneuvers intended to mask the de facto subordination of the UOC-MP and its affiliated structures to

the Russian Orthodox Church and, accordingly, to the political leadership of the Russian Federation.

3. Export of the Conflict to Europe.

Through the Russian Orthodox Church, the Kremlin will:

- attempt to draw the Baltic states and the Balkans into inter-church, inter-confessional, and socio-political conflict scenarios in order to destabilize the internal situation in these states on religious grounds;
- provoke inter-confessional tensions, public scandals, and artificial conflicts at the European level;
- cloak propaganda and subversive special operations under the theme of the "protection of religious freedoms," using it as an instrument of hybrid pressure against democratic states and European institutions.

4. Further Sacralization of War by the Russian Orthodox Church

A likely and logical continuation of this strategy will be:

- a deepening of the language of "holy war" as a central element of state and church propaganda of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Federation;
- the final transformation of the Russian Orthodox Church into a quasi-religious ideological department of war, serving the imperial-orda, militarized, and aggressive state policy of the Kremlin;
- further erosion of any remaining elements of church autonomy, with pastoral ministry being replaced by ideological and mobilizational functions.

Conclusions

1. The Russian Orthodox Church has become an instrument of the Moscow imperial-orda geopolitics of the Russian Federation, integrated into the system of state governance, security, and external expansion.
2. The FSB and the SVR of the Russian Federation are the real curators of the so-called "church front," as well as of the structural subdivisions of the Russian Orthodox Church both within the Russian Federation and beyond its borders, including the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine.
3. Attacks on the Ecumenical Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and selectively on other Local Orthodox Churches worldwide constitute a component of the Russian political and ideological dimension of the hybrid

Third World War, aimed at destabilizing the international religious and social order.

4. The so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has been and remains an institutional and structural challenge to the national security of Ukraine, as it represents an element of the imperial system of influence and the hybrid infrastructure of the Russian Federation.
5. The ideology of the Russkiy mir is an anti-Christian, anti-human, and heretical doctrine, disguised as religion, which serves to justify imperialism, violence, and aggressive war.
6. Accordingly, an analytical, theological, and state-legal assessment of the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church and its structures beyond the borders of the Russian Federation—particularly through the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine—does not constitute a struggle against religion or persecution of believers. Rather, it represents the defense of faith, the human person, freedom of conscience, national and spiritual sovereignty, and peace against the Moscow imperial-orda abuse of the sacred—against the transformation of the Church into an instrument of totalitarian ideology and war.