
Religious Issues in The Russian Invasion of Ukraine

Chaplain (Col-R) Charlie Reynolds

Agenda

Historical Events that impact Putin's Actions

Brief Overview of Putin's rise to power

Putin's Relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church

The Saint Putin Myth

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Putin and the Orthodox Church (ROC)

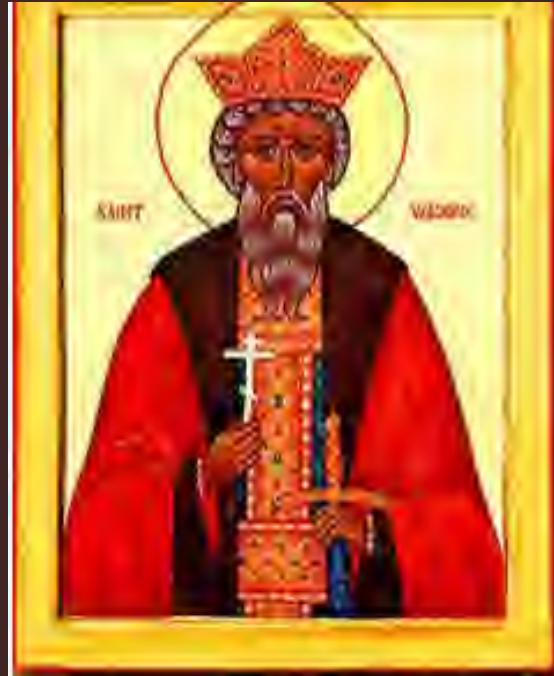
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“Nowhere has Religion played a more prominent role - and perhaps nowhere has its importance been more unrecognized - than in its role in supporting the Russian state and Russia's current place in world affairs. ... Putin's move in close coordination with the Russian Orthodox Church to sacralize the Russian national identity has been a key factor shaping the increasingly authoritarian bent of the Russian government”²⁶

Paul Coyer - Contributor World Affairs - Forbes Magazine

St Vladimir Patron Saint of the Russian Orthodox Church



- Russia Vladimir who was notorious for his barbarism and immorality having five wives and some 800 concubines. 24 Until 989 he approached Eastern Emperor Basil II about marrying his sister Anna.
- He married Princess Anna, and thereafter put away his pagan wives. He ordered the statues of pagan gods to be thrown down. Vladimir urged all his subjects to become Christians, established churches and monasteries throughout Russia.

The Baptism of the Rus

Chaplain Col-R Charlie Reynolds

The baptism of 'Kyivian Rus' (a heritage/event claimed by Ukrainians and Russians alike) in 988, the history of Western aggression against the Christian East in the Fourth Crusade in 1202-1204 is experienced as a current event.

The 'past' is 'present' in the Christian East in a way we Americans may find difficult to understand.

LCDR Sean J. LaBat

The Baptism of Rus is the founding event of the formation of the Russian religious psyche, the Russian Orthodox church traces its origins back here. 11



The Baptism of Rus' refers to the seminal event of the mass baptism of the residents of Kiev in 988 as Grand Prince Vladimir accepted Orthodox Christianity as the religion of his lands.

Religious Issues in the Ukraine

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- 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.

Putin using religious language to justify his actions in Crimea

Baptism of the Rus

- From that point the two diverge deeply. Russia, viscerally, claims ownership of this Kyivvian inheritance (analogous to Serbia's claim to Kosovo in the 1990s). Ukraine has its own language, culture, and traditions distinct from that of Muscovite Russia.



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Putin's Early Life



- Putin was born on 07 October 1952, in St. Petersburg. 19
- Vladimir Putin's father was an atheist, and his mother was a devout Orthodox who named her son after St Vladimir. 21
- Putin's father was a foreman in a metal factory. He learned to become a wily street fighter and scrappy underdog. 20 By the age of sixteen he was a top-ranked expert at sambo, a Russian combination of judo and wrestling. 23
- He attended a respected high school, School 281, which only accepted students with near-perfect grades. 23

Early Career

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- At Leningrad State University, Putin graduated from the law department in 1975 but instead of entering the law field right out of school, Putin landed a job with the KGB, the only one in his class of one hundred to be chosen. ²³
- Putin served 15 years as a foreign intelligence officer for the KGB including six years in Dresden, East Germany. ²⁵
- Returned to Russia to become prorector of Leningrad State University, became an adviser to Sobchak the mayor of St. Petersburg. He became known for his ability to get things done; by 1994 he had risen to the post of first deputy mayor. ²⁵
- In 1996 Putin moved to Moscow. Boris Yeltsin made Putin director of the Federal Security Service, and shortly thereafter he became secretary of the influential Security Council. Yeltsin, who was searching for an heir to assume his mantle, appointed Putin prime minister in 1999. ²⁵
- Putin's public-approval ratings soared when he launched a well-organized military operation against secessionist rebels in Chechnya. ²⁵

Leader of Russia

- On December 31, 1999, Yeltsin unexpectedly announced his resignation and named Putin acting president. 25
- Promising to rebuild a weakened Russia, he easily won the March 2000 elections with about 53 % of the vote. 25
- Putin quickly reasserted control over Russia's 89 regions and republics, each headed by a representative appointed by the president. He also removed the right of regional governors to sit in the Federation Council. 25
- With a constitutional provision forcing Putin to step down in 2008, he chose Dmitry Medvedev as his successor. Medvedev nominated Putin as the country's prime minister. Putin was still regarded as the main power within the Kremlin. 25
- On March 4, 2012, Putin was elected to a third term as Russia's president. Putin's first year back in office as president was characterized by a largely successful effort to stifle protest movements. Opposition leaders were jailed. 25



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Putin and the Orthodox Church - Background ⁸

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- During the days of the Czar, the Russian ruler was seen as God's chosen ruler. Today, a not dissimilar vision is once again encouraged both by Putin and by the Church, each of which sees the other as a valuable political ally and sees their respective missions as being interrelated.
- Foreign missionaries found fertile and receptive ground, causing the ROC to fear that its opportunity to rebuild its social influence. In response, the ROC successfully pushed the government to pass a law in 1997 that restricted the freedom of religious practice of faiths considered “foreign”.
- This marked the beginning of a trend of increasing restrictions on citizenship rights and the beginning of the slow death of Russia's fledgling democracy.



Putin and the Orthodox Church - Benefits

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- This privileged status marked the beginning of a political alliance between the ROC and the Russian state that has grown increasingly close and formalized under Putin and which has been beneficial to both parties.
- Putin came to power he shrewdly noted the ROC's useful role in boosting nationalism and shared worldview.
- The Russian Duma passed a law returning all church property seized during the Soviet era (which act alone made the ROC one of the largest landholders in Russia).
- Putin has ordered state-owned energy firms to contribute billions to the rebuilding of thousands of churches.
- ROC has been given rights that have vastly increased its role in public life, including the right to teach religion in Russia's public schools and the right to review any legislation before the Russian Duma.



“If there's Putin - there's Russia, if there's no Putin - there's no Russia.”

Senior Govt Official

Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' Kirill

→ .

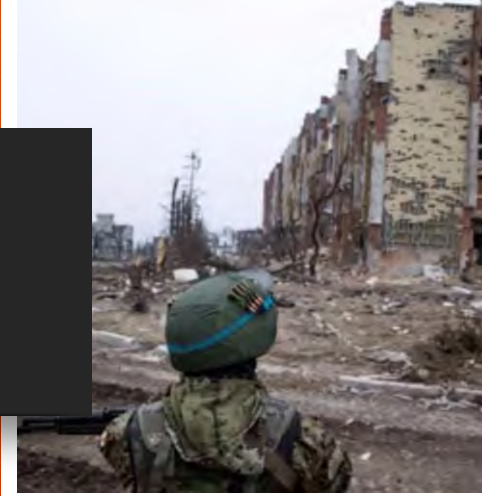
Led by Patriarch Kirill (Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev) is Russia's most populous and influential religious group. Patriarch Kirill is a close ally of President Vladimir Putin.

KGB material in the Estonian archives leaves no doubt about the patriarch's connections with the KGB. It even gives a specific date for his recruitment: February 28, 1958. 17 18

The 70 plus years of Soviet rule wreaked havoc on the Church. The Church was severely oppressed, with many of its clergy imprisoned, tortured and/or executed, however It has long been rumored that Patriarch Kirill (Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev) had KGB connections. As soon as the Soviet Union fell in 1991, the ROC began working to rebuild its formerly dominant role in Russian society.



- Kirill has given Putin his full spiritual and political backing, labelling him “a mericle of God.”
- In a sermon in early March, Kirill railed against the influences of the Western world - its "excess consumption" and "gay pride parades." He said of the Ukraine war: "We're talking about human salvation."



Putin and the Orthodox Church - Worldview ⁸

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- Putin and the ROC, hold a sacralized vision of Russian national identity and exceptionalism. Russia, according to this vision, is neither Western nor Asian, but rather a unique society representing a unique set of values which are believed to be divine.
- This has provided the ideological justification for Putin's crackdown on dissent, and the rationale behind the Church's cooperation with the Kremlin in the repression of civil society groups or other religious groups which have dissenting political views.
- Russia's mission is to expand its influence and authority until it dominates the Eurasian landmass, by means of a strong central Russian state controlling this vast territory and aligned with the ROC as the arm of the Russian nation exercising its cultural influence.
- This vision of Russian exceptionalism has met with broad resonance within Russia. Putin has successfully been able to transfer to himself the social trust placed in the ROC and to posture himself as a patron saint of Russia. The “messianic” sense of national identity is deeply rooted.
- Putin has cast himself as the true defender of Christians throughout the world, the leader of the Third Rome.



A replica of a bust of Julius Caesar in a toga with Putin's head replacing Caesar's

A man bows during the inauguration of a sculpture of Russia's President Vladimir Putin in the... [+]

“A man whom fate and the Lord sent to Russia.”

Putin's Deputy Prime Minister

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The Myth of Saint Vladimir Putin

- This widely understood theological concept has paved the way for Russians to accept and defend Putin's as the country's spiritual father.
- This gives Putin Divine sanction to continue the war.
- In service to this mythology, in 2020 Putin oversaw the construction of a new Orthodox cathedral dedicated to Russia's military and celebrating the annexation of Crimea, and initially intended to include frescoes of both Josef Stalin and Putin himself. the mosaic was removed after controversy, with Putin himself reportedly giving orders to take it down.
- Vladimir Putin's rise to power came accompanied by a new version of patriotism relying on "heroic" and "bright" aspects of the Soviet past. An image of Stalin as a strong leader who had ensured victory in the second world war and led a Soviet superpower re-emerged.

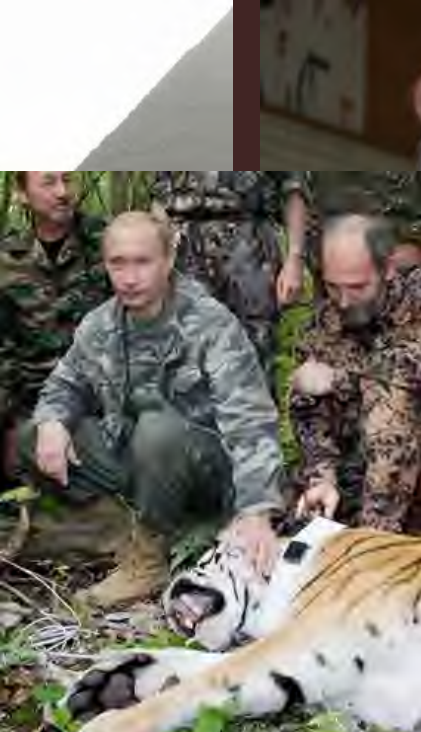


Russia's Military Cathedral

Cathedral of guns and glory symbolizes Putin's Russia

- Opened on May 9, 2020 — the 75th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, Once completed, the building will become one of the tallest Orthodox churches in the world. The cathedral's mosaics shows Putin and Shoigu flanked by prominent politicians and a bleeding Mary.





Macho
Putin





Putin's Motorcycle Gang

Putin has his own motorcycle gang. They run around eastern Europe, to project intimidation in areas where Putin feels it would be to Russia's advantage to do so. Putin is close friends with the leader of the gang, and sometimes rides with them, mostly for photo ops to project his macho image, which most Russians love.



View of the West

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- For church and state, the idea of “Russian World” encompasses a mission of making Russia a spiritual, cultural and political center of civilization to counter the liberal, secular ideology of the West. This vision has been used to justify policies at home and abroad.²²
- According to Patriarch Kirill, Russia invaded Ukraine because of gay parades.²⁷
- It has been useful for Putin to portray himself as the champion of a Russian nation beset by a hostile West. The West's goal, says the Kremlin, is to spread liberal Western values within Russia and so dilute the Russian national character ²⁶
- Putin has set himself up as a defender of traditional morality—for instance, by opposing homosexuality, penalizing divorce, and supporting the “traditional family.” ²⁶
- Pew Research notes that in the nine former Soviet nations that are majority-Orthodox—except for Ukraine—more than half of those surveyed agree that “a strong Russia is necessary to balance the influence of the West.” ²⁷

Values War



- **"Putin's use of traditional Christianity is calculated for political effect. American and European observers would do well to see through the charade." Alexis Mrachek 27**
- **Some of the orthodox curriculum created for Russian Public Schools has been adapted for Christian home schooling in the US.**
- **Many conservative figures in America, including Pat Buchanan and Franklin Graham, have been attracted to Putin's rhetoric. 27**
- **Franklin Graham had declared that Russia's notorious "gay propaganda" law, showed that Russia's moral standards were higher than America's. 22**
- **Pat Buchanan argued: "In the culture war for the future of mankind, Putin is planting Russia's flag firmly on the side of traditional Christianity." 22**

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Religious Issues in the Ukraine

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- October of 2018 the Ukrainian church announced that after 332 years, it was splitting with the Patriarchate of Moscow in an attempt to gain independence from Russia. This split was approved by the head of the Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, based in Turkey.
- Putin blamed Ukrainian politicians for the church split. He then positioned Russia as the defender of religious freedom, saying, “We reserve the right to react and do everything to protect human rights, including the freedom of worship.”
- Putin responded by cutting ties with Constantinople, Making Moscow a rival to the traditional center of the Orthodox Church and stealing Orthodox Churches away from Constantinople. ¹⁰
- Orthodox Churches tied to Moscow Built Russian Cultural Centers all over Eastern Europe.
- Putin is seeking to tighten his grip on Ukraine and Belarus, as well as expand Russian influence further into Eastern and Central Europe. He will undoubtedly continue to promote Orthodoxy in the process. This is simply an attempt to seduce former Soviet republics back under the sway of Russia.

Patriarch Filaret



- He obtained his theological education at the Odessa Seminary and the Moscow Theological Academy. He took monastic vows in 1950 assuming the monastic name Filaret and was ordained a priest in June 1951. After his graduation he stayed at the Moscow Theological Academy as a professor.
- Filaret served in the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to the Patriarch of Alexandria. served as ROC Bishop of Vienna. 1964 he returned to Moscow as the Bishop of Dmitrov and rector of the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary. In 1966, he became archbishop of Kyiv and Halych, thus becoming one of the most influential hierarchs in the Russian Orthodox Church, and a permanent member of the Holy Synod, the highest collegiate body of the Russian Orthodox Church.
- On May 3, 1990, Patriarch Pimen of Moscow died and, the same day, Filaret became the interim leader of the Russian Orthodox Church. Alexey II was elected Patriarch of Moscow, instead he was made the "Metropolitan of Kyiv and All-Ukraine"
- **August 1991, a national sobor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church unanimously passed a resolution stating that henceforth the UOC would operate as an autocephalous church.** In 1992, the Russian Orthodox priest and Soviet dissident Fr. Gleb Yakunin accused Exarch Filaret of having been an informer for the KGB. **Filaret was defrocked by the Russian Orthodox Church on 11 July 1992. The UOC-KP was not recognized by other Orthodox churches and was considered schismatic. ROC officials stated that the anathematization of Filaret was "recognized by all the Local Orthodox Churches including the Church of Constantinople"**
- **On 11 October 2018**, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople announced that Filaret Denisenko, along with the Primate of UAOC, had been "restored to communion with the Church." [46] The decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate also abolished the Moscow Patriarchate's jurisdiction over the diocese of Kyiv

Patriarch Filaret

- In September 2018, Senator Joe Biden met with Filaret and expressed his support for the schismatic movement's plans to receive autocephaly from Constantinople, and gratitude to Philaret for his work "in spreading spirituality in Ukrainian society, helping the Ukrainian army, fighting against corruption, and so on." ⁵
- Some Russian Orthodox believe that the CIA influenced Bartholomew to recognize the Ukrainian Church.
- On the October 12, 2018, self-proclaimed "Patriarch" Filaret visited "Holy Transfiguration Cathedral" in the Ternopil region of western Ukraine, to "bless" a massive "icon" of Saint George. However, the the "icon" in question is not a true icon, but a sacrilegious monument to the sin of ethnophyletism and Nazism. ⁶
- The Orthodox view of these peoples, if you dig deeply, reveals that their unity is sacred, blessed by God, and indivisible. This is why this mural desecrates the two-headed eagle—because deep down, its creators despise Holy Rus'. We must realize that not only does it glorify Nazism, but it is blasphemous, and an insult to all Orthodox peoples from Constantine the Great to our current days. ⁶



The Orthodox Church in Ukraine (OCU)

- Led by Metropolitan Epiphanius (Dumenko). This body was recently formed in 2018 in a council convened by Patriarch Bartholomew (Archontonis) of Constantinople (Istanbul).
- His authority, however, is not absolute and has been increasingly challenged by the more populous Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church, regard the OCU as illegitimate and uncanonical.



Metropolitan Onufriy is the Metropolitan of Kyiv primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)



- **Metropolitan Onufriy appealed directly to the president of Russia to ask for an immediate end to the “fratricidal war”. “The war between these peoples is a repetition of the sin of Cain, who killed his own brother out of envy,” he stated. “Such a war has no excuse, neither from God nor from people.”**
- **Agencies have raided numerous holy sites of the church and then posted photos of rubles, Russian passports, and leaflets with messages from the Moscow patriarch as proof that some church officials have been loyal to Russia.**

UOC formally separated itself from Moscow

- **On 27 May, 2022 The UOC formally separated itself from Moscow a "huge blow to Putin."** ³⁰
- **Kirill appeared to downplay the move in comments Sunday. "We fully understand how the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is suffering today," He warned that "spirits of malice" wanted to divide the Orthodox people of Russia and Ukraine but declared that they would not succeed.** ³⁰



*Metropolitan Pavel
Pavel is the abbot of the Kyiv-
Pechersk Lavra monastery,
Ukraine's most revered
Orthodox site.*



- On April 1, 2023, Ukraine's SBU security service charged Pavel (Peter Lebed) with incitement of religious enmity and justification and denial of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. 31
- Earlier in tOn July 13, 2023 the SBU charged Pavel over an interview in which he allegedly denied Ukraine's status as a sovereign state and referred to Russia's war against Ukraine as a "civil war." 31
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, threatening him with damnation.
- Held in detention by law enforcement until Aug. 14, with a UAH 33 million (\$900,000) bail. District Court placed Pavel under a 60-day house arrest, which included the requirement to wear an electronic bracelet. He responded "I am accepting this," he said shortly before the bracelet was attached. "Christ was crucified on the cross, so why shouldn't I accept this?" 32
- July 15 (Reuters) - Russia on Saturday demanded the immediate release of a senior Orthodox cleric detained in Kyiv on suspicion of inflaming religious hatred and justifying Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Rabbi Shlomo Dov Pinchas Lazar

- Known for his friendship with Vladimir Putin.
- In 2004, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an edict to honor him with the Order of Friendship. This award was presented for the contribution made by Lazar to developing culture and strengthening friendship between nations within Russia.
- Lazar is an advocate of interfaith dialogue and sits on the Board of World Religious Leaders for The Elijah Interfaith Institute.



Ukrainian Catholic Church



- Let by Patriarch Sviatoslav (Shevchuk) is an Eastern Christian Church, sharing common liturgy, spirituality, theology, and traditions with the Orthodox, but in communion with the Roman Catholic Pope. This church emerged in 1596 in effort to resolve the civil status of Eastern Christians living under the authority of a Roman Catholic state – as of 1596 the instance of Eastern Christians living within the Polish and Austrian Empires. The Ukrainian Catholic Church has been closely aligned with Ukrainian national identity, living as an illegal underground church in the Soviet era. The Ukrainian Catholic Church is closely aligned with President Zelensky and enjoys a warm relationship with the OCU.

2021 Religious Demographics

US State Department Religious



- **60.0 % Christian Orthodox**
- **8.8 % Greek Catholic (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, UGCC)**
- **1.5 % Protestant**
- **0.8 % Roman Catholic compared with 1.8 percent in 2020**
- **0.1 % Jewish**
- **0.2 % Muslim**
- **18.8 % state they do not belong to any religious group**
- **Small numbers of Buddhists, pagans (following traditional pre-Christian polytheistic beliefs, including animism),**

Impact on Religious Freedom

- **Ukraine has long been a hub for Evangelical Christianity in Eastern Europe, but Ukraine's Evangelicals, especially its Baptists, are now under threat of increased persecution from Russian invaders.**
- **The Russian government uses its anti-evangelism law, signed by Putin in 2016, to do the pushing. Passed under the guise of "anti-terrorism," the law prevents believers from sharing their faith outside of church. It has been used most often against Russian Evangelicals. Passing out New Testaments or meeting in small groups at home to talk about the Bible is punishable with fines.**
- **Baptists in the parts of Ukraine under Kyiv's control enjoy religious liberty. They were preaching sermons about peace the Sunday before the invasion. They live alongside Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Pentecostals, Jews, and Muslims. Putin can't stand that. Religious liberty is antithetical to his regime's view of "spiritual security."**

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Questions ?

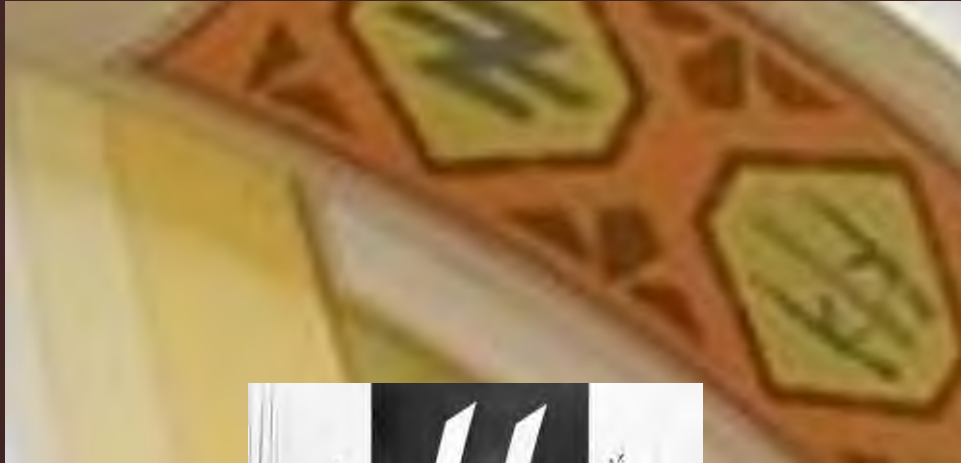
Pope Francis Involvement

- Pope Francis said only God can eliminate the evil of “the vicious war” against Ukraine during a ceremony where he consecrated Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
- The Vatican has widely acknowledged that Christ’s mother appeared to three young shepherds in 1917 at a small city in Portugal. the Mother of God made mysterious references to Russia. Sister Lúcia dos Santos, one of the three visionaries, publicly stated that the consecration of Russia as a nation would lead to a period of world peace.



“If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace. If not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, and several nations will be annihilated.”

Patriarch Filaret



→ The Kyiv Patriarchate and its allies are indeed nationalist Churches. Furthermore, the official site says that next to Saint George the painter portrayed “The Revolution of Dignity” (the Maidan coup) and Ukrainian soldiers, and that the idea of the “icon” is: “God is with Us—Ukraine is behind us.”⁶

→ In modern Ukraine, this symbol has been associated with a variety of far-right organizations, such as the Social-National Party of Ukraine, as well as Azov Battalion, a national guard regiment directly connected by many organizations including the UN to war crimes in Ukraine—war crimes including targeting civilians in mass lootings, torture, killings, and rape.⁶

What do commanders' need to know

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- Putin has framed his expansion of territory as a divine mission. Where Russia is the arm of God protector of Christian Orthodoxy against liberal Western values.
- Putin is strongly allied with the Russian Orthodox Church and has reached saintly status in the eyes of many Russians.
- In 2018 the Ukrainian Orthodox Church split from the Moscow Orthodox Church and allied with Constantinople. Putin responded by pressuring churches allied with Constantinople to ally with Moscow creating a competitive rift within the Orthodox world.
- Orthodox Churches allied with Moscow set up cultural centers all over Eastern Europe that promote Putin's political agenda. Putin is actively pressuring Orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe to switch alliance from Constantinople to Moscow.