
Part IV: **Brazilian Views**

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Ecumenical Lessons from the War against Ukraine: Passionate Protest and Loving Patience

1 Introduction

By origin, I come from the country of Switzerland, where I was born into a cold war with hot discussions.* “Go to Russia” was the saying if you were critical of the stout anti-communism and, especially, of the Swiss army and preparation for war against the supposed or real Eastern enemy. Many Christians insisted you had to defend the country, the faith and the “free world” – including, of course, the free market – against the “ungodly” socialists. Emotionally and in my faith convictions, I felt much closer to the peace movement and wondered why such a small country like Switzerland should have an army at all rather than invest heavily in development co-operation. The blatantly asymmetric terms of trade worldwide also upset me deeply. An eyeopener was the 1989 Basel Assembly, six months before the Berlin wall came down, on “Peace, Justice, and the Integrity of Creation” (Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen und des Rates der Europäischen Bischofskonferenzen 1989). There were delegates from all over Europe, including Eastern Europe, discussing such crucial issues relatively freely. Both Russia and Ukraine were states of the Soviet Union then. In the midst of many important debates and encounters, of sharing prayer, knowledge, wisdom, and food, I never forgot that restless and impatient Irish priest. In the midst of a sophisticated, but for him too unengaged discussion on how to best protect and preserve the environment, he said: “I have fire in my belly – but love in my heart”. This became an ecumenical motto for me: passion and patience, struggle and love, prophetic denouncing and Gospel announcing have to go together. Peace is not a harmonious still life: it is active non-violent engagement with creative means. It implies dialogue as much as honesty and speaking up to power. The same is true for what I understand by ecumenism. It is staying together despite sometimes deep differences, without leaving out necessary questioning and criticism – of oneself first, and then of the other.

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I today live in the city of Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, within a diversity of cultures of a variety of origins, churches, and religions, coming from Germany, Italy, Poland, Japan, Lebanon, Syria, as well as from the territory that today is Ukraine. Brazil has a Ukrainian diaspora of about half a million persons, mainly in Paraná state, and over 10 percent in Curitiba, the capital. In the municipality of Prudentópolis, at 200 kilometers from Curitiba, 75 percent of the population are of Ukrainian descent.¹ In terms of religion, they are Catholics of oriental rite, Orthodox, and Jews who have come since the last decade of the 19th century. In a first migratory phase, workers came from Western Ukraine (Galicia), which at the time belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A second wave came after World War I, during a short phase of independence combined with great political instability. The largest migration happened after World War II, of workers, prisoners of war, political refugees, and soldiers (Boruszenko 1969; Guérios 2008; Alves 2018). A recent wave of migration happened after the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, mainly of well qualified professionals. Refugees from the current war have come in small numbers only.² Yet, the Ukrainian memorial has become one of the most visited places in Curitiba. The community and their neighbors are scared and appalled.

What I would like to explore in this contribution are three things: 1) Political and academic positions in Brazil on Russia's invasion of Ukraine – or, as some say, into “NATOistan”; 2) the role of churches and theology; and 3) strengthening agency and voices in, from and with Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, within the ecumenical movement, broadly speaking.

2 Political and Academic Positions in Brazil

Brazil as a country, as you may know, has officially adopted a “neutral” stance. When the war broke out, then president Bolsonaro had just returned from a visit to Moscow. It is no secret that he has great admiration for Putin. In difference to other leaders in the Southern Cone, Bolsonaro avoided any critique in his first tweets, he did not even mention Russia at all, but only showed concern about Brazilians potentially trapped in Ukraine (Pitta 2022). The Foreign Ministry, on its part, issued the following statement:

¹ According to data compiled on the website of the Eastern-rite Ukrainian Catholic Metropolis (Czaikowski n.d.).

² Until February 2023, 422 humanitarian visa for Ukrainian refugees had been issued according to “G1” (2023). The deadline for applications for such visa was extended until December 31, 2024.

The Brazilian government follows with great sorrow the initiation of military operations by the Russian Federation against targets in Ukrainian territory.

Brazil calls for the immediate suspension of hostilities and the beginning of negotiations that can lead to a diplomatic solution to the issue, based on the Minsk Agreements, and that takes into account the legitimate interests of security by all involved parties, and the protection of the civilian population.

As a member of the United Nations' Security Council, Brazil remains engaged in multilateral discussions in view of a peaceful solution, aligned with the Brazilian diplomatic tradition and the defense of solutions oriented by the UN Charter and by international law, especially as to the principles of non-intervention, sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and the pacific solution of controversies. (Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2022; my translation)

Then Foreign Minister Carlos França declared to be well aligned with India and Turkey on the matter, in a “balanced position in which we would analyze national interest” (Casado 2022). This position of not taking sides but vindicating a peaceful solution within an international framework indeed has a tradition in Brazilian diplomacy and has been maintained in principle by the Brazilian Foreign Ministry throughout 2023. Brazil supported a number of UN resolutions in favor of Ukraine, including the one adopted on February 23, 2023, which demanded that Russia withdraw from Ukrainian territory (United Nations 2023).³ In this, it acted differently from the other BRICS countries that voted against (Russia) or abstained (China, India, and South Africa). In other issues, Brazil sided with Russia. And it did not support sanctions nor send weapons or ammunition to Ukraine. Jorge Heine and Thiago Rodrigues (2023) called this “active nonalignment”, a “foreign-policy doctrine” that is “not about neutrality or equidistance”, but “dynamic”, i.e., never unequivocally on one particular side.

Such position was generally seen as acceptable by many sides, including Russia; however, President Lula, stepping out of his country's rigorous foreign policy doctrine, created some unrest when he said, during a visit to China, that the United States and the European Union were “encouraging war” by sending arms to Ukraine (Schreiber 2023). Celso Amorim, President Lula's special advisor on foreign policy and former minister, was sent out to settle the unrest. He also went to Russia and was, against all protocol, received by President Putin himself (Machado and Paixão 2023). On his part, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov traveled to Brazil in February, 2023, and again in 2024 (Presidência da República 2024a).⁴ The Ukrainian government, obviously, was not pleased with this and has

3 The voting board appears on the website showing that Brazil voted in favor.

4 The “conflict in Ukraine” is mentioned only at the end of the note, as a side issue. Much more emphasis is given to Russia's intention to support Brazil's plea for permanent membership in the UN's Security Council and to the invitation for the October BRICS summit in Russia, which President Lula accepted.

shown discomfort with the Brazilian stance in various moments, but it seems to want to keep the door open given Brazil's not decisive, but important third-party weight. This might be wise. Brazil, then, might be seen as sufficiently neutral to be a partner in peace negotiations and can make some difference on the international scene. After all, Brazil was an elected member of the UN Security Council in its 11th tenure in 2022 and 2023 and held the presidency in October 2023. During Brazil's presidency, the main concern of course came to be the terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israel and Israel's devastating response to it, which has in the meantime been taken to the International Court of Justice in The Hague by South Africa, a case supported by Brazil, which has led to a considerable and clear court decision on immediate measures (International Court of Justice 2024). However, discussions on negotiations for an end to the war in Eastern Europe continued. Brazil admits they did not bring any progress. On the whole, the official evaluation is that "Brazil's diplomatic tradition of prioritizing political and diplomatic solutions to conflicts, especially in times of great geopolitical tensions" was valued (Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2023). Surely, Brazil is sufficiently far away from the war not to be urged into immediate action, and it remains to be seen whether it can really offer and get approval for a good solution. Still, it represents a voice from the Global South that begs to differ from the traditional blocks, especially the United States with its miserable record on South America in the 1970s and 1980s when it strongly supported military dictatorships, including their practices of torture. Since later the United States looked to other places and became forgetful of the continent, it is understandable that its countries looked around for other partners. In any case, Brazil might surprise at some point, together with South Africa and other BRICS states and further partners. And, together with South Africa, it is a country with notable democratic and mediatic checks and balances, which cannot be claimed in the same way of Russia, India, China and the new BRICS members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudia Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.⁵ As says Manuella Libardi on *Open Democracy* (2023), "Brazil is not a world power, but the countries of the Global South know that, collectively, they have power." Brazil certainly wants to be a Global player, as has been evident since Lula first became president in 2003. Notably, the country is presiding the G20 for the first time during 2024, and its summit will meet in Rio de Janeiro in November. Recently, Brazil and China presented a joint proposal for peace negotiations with the participation of Russia and Ukraine, focusing on deescalation,

⁵ According to the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, the BRICS group includes 46 percent of the world's population, 36 percent of Global GDP and 25 percent of world trade; 30 countries have expressed an interest in joining. Brazil's former president Dilma Rousseff heads the BRICS' New Development Bank based in Shanghai (Holtzmann et al. 2024).

the avoidance of any use of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and the protection of civilians (Presidência da República 2024b). Brazil has been insisting that Russia should be present in any initiative that seeks to end the war. As a consequence, it attended the June 2024 Bürgenstock conference organized by the Swiss Government, to which Russia had not been invited, only as an observer.

Of course, not only moral and political principles stand behind such position. Brazil is highly dependent on Russian fertilizers. In 2021, the country imported goods from Russia over 5,58 bn USD worth, 64% of them were fertilizers. The Russian company Gazprom announced in February 2023 to invest in the Brazilian energy sector, seeking to expand relations and cooperation. Brazil also imports considerable quantities of Diesel from Russia.⁶ Furthermore, Brazil exports large quantities of agricultural products to China, a semi-ally of Russia. Some earlier fascination for the Soviet Union when the US was dominant in Latin America might also be an ingredient. After all, however, all countries have their more or less evident or vested interests involved. Accordingly, such aspects should neither be over-, nor understated. Brazil is a powerful voice that deserves to be heard.

In difference to Western Europe, churches and theology in Brazil were by and large silent on the war in Ukraine. Even before that, there was no deeper reflection on peace ethics when it comes to wars between nations. There had been reflection and positioning on peaceful resistance, as represented by Archbishop Helder Câmara (1909–1999) in his time, inspired, beyond Jesus, by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. The military regime was able to prevent him three times from getting the Nobel Prize for Peace he was nominated for. And his famous phrase acquired new relevancy in the past years in Brazil: “When I give out bread to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a Communist” (Piletti and Praxedes 2008). Today, there is war in Brazil, in fact of quite high intensity and violence – in 2017 alone, there were over 65'000 homicides, mostly between drug traffickers and their overlords – but it is internal (von Sinner and Westphal 2018). And there is sometimes quite violent polarization, shamefully with very few initiatives of pacification, dialogue and truth-seeking (von Sinner 2023b). Mainly those related to the ecumenical movement, like Magali Cunha, are among those who truly seek alternatives.⁷ The traditional ecumenical winter course of the São Paulo based CESEEP was dedicated, in July 2022, to “Ecumenism in Times of War: Welcoming and Struggle for Peace with Social Justice” (Conselho Nacional de Igrejas Cristãs do Brasil 2022). In

⁶ These data are according to an article by senior economist José Caballero of the World Competitiveness Center of the International Institute for Management Development (Caballero 2023).

⁷ See, for instance, her monthly contributions to *Carta Capital* (www.cartacapital.com.br) and her splendid work in checking fake news in the *evangélico* world: www.coletivoboreia.com.br.

the academy, I see very little theological reflection on peace, with the noble exception of Érico Hammes (2024), a Catholic who is ecumenical and peace seeking in all possible senses, but not under all circumstances.

In the journalistic and academic realm, one can find voices that tell a different story of the conflict than one would find in Western Europe and the United States. Left wing exponents like journalist Pepe Escobar see it as a “conflict of NATO against Russia” and use the term “NATOistan” (*Otanistan*, in Portuguese).⁸ José Luiz Fiori, professor emeritus of political economics at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, also emphasized the advance of NATO into Eastern Europe as a – apparently plausible, even if not necessarily sufficient – reason given by Russia for its invasion. He himself and colleagues have published recently, albeit before the war in Ukraine, two books “On War” (Fiori 2018) and “On Peace” (Fiori 2021), in which they trace its geopolitical implications throughout history. It is a sign of an attempt to widen perspectives in what may also could be called “active non-alignment”.

3 The Role of – Namely Orthodox – Churches and Theology

The Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe have, all through their history, maintained great proximity to the political authorities. Between the patriarch and the emperor existed a “symphony”, that is, two types of action cooperating toward a single goal. Along these lines, it was named by Emperor Justinian the Great (482–565) in the preface to his 535 novel (n° 6) to the *Codex Iustinianus*:

The greatest gifts that God, in his celestial benevolence, has bestowed on mankind are priesthood [*hierosýne*] and sovereignty [*basiléia*], the one serving on matters divine, and the other ruling over human affairs, and caring for them. Each proceeds from one and the same authority, and regulates human life. Thus, nothing could have as great a claim on the attention of sovereigns as the honor of priests, seeing that they are the very ones who constantly offer prayer to God on the sovereigns’ behalf. Hence, should the one be above reproach in every respect, and enjoy access to God, while the other keeps in correct and proper order the realm that has been entrusted to it, there will be a satisfactory harmony [*sympsonia*], conferring every conceivable benefit on the human race.⁹

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NRxmZGwzxl>. Accessed February 14, 2024.

⁹ Translation from Miller and Sarris 2018, 97–98. I thank Archpriest Prof. Dr Cyril Hovorun for providing me with the quotation from this book (Ponomariov 2021).

The church, in general, constituted the weaker part of the partnership, subject to the Emperor's decisions, although there were moments when the Patriarch interfered more directly in political issues – which in research triggered the concept of “political orthodoxy” (Bischof et al. 2014, 320). Patriarch Anthony IV of Constantinople (d. 1397), in a letter to the grand duke of Moscow, Basil I, famously wrote: “It is not possible for Christians to have a church and not to have an Emperor.”¹⁰ However, this understanding of a very close connection between church and state had to suffer a number of serious setbacks, namely the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The Empire was now no longer Christian, but Muslim. Even so, according to the Ukrainian theologian Cyril Hovorun, “symphonic mentality continued to be an important part of this experience” in an “Ottoman symphonia”, whose Sultans called themselves “Cesar of the Romans” (*Qayser-i Rûm*; Hovorun 2024 [forthcoming]).

During the Ottoman Empire, the Patriarch of Constantinople was also the political leader of his non-Muslim religious group, the *millet*, more specifically the *Rum millet* (the Rome/the Romans' *millet*), which had, among other things, to collect taxes for the empire. Only in the 19th century nation-states emerged that had a national Orthodox church responsible, not least, for the preservation of national identity. In Russia, which had not been under the Ottoman Empire, the relationship between church and state followed the symphony model, a relation that benefitted both parts.

With Peter the Great (1672–1825), there was a reform inspired by Protestant and Catholic Reformations, which subjugated the church to the Czar's power while it abolished the office of Patriarch and created a collective church government instead. With the Russian Revolution of 1917, the church got back its patriarch but was severely persecuted, namely by former seminarian Joseph Stalin. Had it not been for the German invasion of Russia in 1941, when the church aligned with the state, it might have become extinct (Bischof et al. 2014, 324). The church survived, but under strict state control. After the end of the Soviet Union, in Russia as in her neighboring countries, the Orthodox church gained prestige and configured itself as marker of national identity.

Religious, ethnic and political issues have always been intertwined. The origin of it all is the “Rus’ of Kyiv”, the baptism of Prince Vladimir in the year 988, when Kyiv was his capital and the emperor of Byzantium's daughter his wife.

¹⁰ As quoted in Hovorun 2024 [forthcoming] in his lecture to the VI Consultation of the Global Network of Public Theology in Curitiba, Brazil, on October 6, 2022, then under the title of “Ukrainian Public Theology versus the Political Theology of the ‘Russian World’”; he in turn refers to F. Miklošič and I. Müller, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi II* (Vienna, 1862), 191.

Later, the capital was transferred to Moscow. While Russia understands that Moscow and its patriarchate would be the legitimate successors of this political and religious tradition, she intends to bring together “all Russians” from the “Rus”, whether they live in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, or Moldova, the countries of today. Many Ukrainian Orthodox, however, today see Russians linked to Moscow as foreign intruders. In turn, Roman Catholics in Ukraine are often understood as Poles, Lutherans as Germans, Reformed as Hungarians, etc., all of which are tolerated but not necessarily seen as part of the national tradition and conscience.

From this historical understanding came the idea of the “*sviataia Rus*”, the ‘Holy Rus’, propagated by Patriarch Kirill. The expression was first used in Prince Kurbskii’s letter to Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584), although, at the time, rather with dissident subtleties than being aligned with the installed power. In the 19th century, it reappears with a purely religious designation. Among Russian Orthodox intellectuals in the 20th century, however, the term emerged with a strong geopolitical connotation. From there, it was welcomed by Patriarch Kirill, who ascended to the ecclesiastical throne in 2009 after having headed the church’s department of foreign affairs for many years. As then President Medvedev greeted him on his enthronement, he recalled the “spirit of symphony” which, in his view,

opens up wonderful prospects for the development of church-state relations in such a way that neither the state or the church would interfere in each other’s affairs, [yet] respect each other’s position on these internal affairs and, at the same time, build a wide-range interaction, dialogue, and cooperation. (As translated in Ponomariov 2021, 238)

As prime minister in 2018, Medvedev reinforced this as a relationship established specifically with Patriarch Kirill, hoping such “symphony” would continue to exist. The most secular correlate of ‘Holy Rus’ is the *russkii mir*, the Russian world in the ethnic sense, including all “Russians” in any territory – similar to the idea of pan-Germanity that emerged with the unification of the German Reich in 1871 and extended strongly also to Brazil. Hovorun indeed draws an analogy to the “German world” with its idea of a strong state anchored in the respective *Volk* with its morality and rationality, similar to the diction of Helmuth Graf von Moltke (1800–1891) and Ferdinand Kattenbusch (1851–1935). It entails the idea of a messianic state whose “mission would be to bring culture and authentic Christianity to its neighbors” (Hovorun 2016, 199). If, at the time, for Germany the issue of republicanism namely of French making was considered the “mortal sin”, for today’s Russia it would be liberal Western legislation on human sexuality (Hovorun 2016, 201).

On his first visit to Ukraine as patriarch, Kirill designed ‘Holy Rus’ as “an essentially decentered entity, whose focal points and strongest geopolitical metaphors (the metonym of Russia, Russia’s cradle, Russia’s sacred capital, fortress of the Orthodox faith, etc.) are located on the geographical periphery – in Ukraine” (Suslov 2016, 169). This initial indication of the centrality of a non-center – Kyiv and Ukraine – came with the idea of Patriarch Kirill taking up a patriarchal residence in Kyiv and even obtaining Ukrainian citizenship. However, Russian politicization and expansionism meant that Ukraine ended up once again being relegated to the periphery to be managed by the center in Moscow.

The rhetoric only increased with the growing confluence of the ‘Russian world’ (*russkii mir*) and ‘Holy Rus’. The new idea that was propagated was that “today’s ‘Russian world’, led by the ROC [Russian Orthodox Church], is waging a war of liberation with a de-Christianized, hegemonic West” (Suslov 2016, 172–173). A similar moralistic agenda can be found in Brazil, in many parts of Africa and beyond. The tone was also raised against the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church united to Rome, alleging that it had collaborated with Nazi Germany and was nationalist and anti-Russian. The “schismatics”, that is, the orthodox churches considered noncanonical, were condemned. According to researcher Mikhail Suslov (2016, 162), the Russian Orthodox Church was now defining its borders no longer in temporal but in spatial and therefore geopolitical terms, and Ukraine became the battleground between the West and Russian and Orthodox civilization.

There has been, both political and, with the variety of Orthodox churches claiming canonical status in Ukraine and autonomy from Moscow, also religious dispute between Russia and Ukraine. Some argue the longstanding conflict between Ukrainization and Russification also in church terms is an important ingredient to the current invasion by Russia. In any case, if the idea behind the invasion was a quick success to bind Ukraine to Russia, the contrary has occurred. Even the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate (UOC–MP) has been estranged from the ROC and has given signals (albeit somewhat generic and little concrete) for a rupture.¹¹ Right on the day when Russia’s invasion began, Metropolitan Onufry called it a “fratricidal war”. The Russian Patriarch, in a sermon on March 6, 2022, attributed to the war a “not physical, but metaphysical” dimension. For Cyril Hovorun, once the head of the External Relations Department of the UOC–MP, the religious dimension is more important as a motivation for war

¹¹ It is also politically being pushed that way, most recently through a law which bans religious organizations with links to Russia (Skorkin 2024). It is to be seen how this law will work in practice.

to President Putin than imperialism. He draws an analogy to Iwan Schatow in Dostojewski's *Demons* of 1872 who develops a strong faith in Russia, but only timidly in God. "He [Putin] managed to transform the ROC into such [an instrument of mass manipulation] – with the latter's full consent" (Hovorun 2022, 34). Indeed, says Hovorun, the war has a metaphysical, albeit paranoid dimension.

4 Strengthening Agency and Voices in, from and with Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus

There is growing resistance by theologians, monks and priests, Ukrainian or not, including some Russians, against the war and the conception of the "Russian World" that underlies it. A number of underground websites voice such resistance, as mentioned by Natalia Vassilievich from Minsk, Belarus, currently finishing her doctorate at Bonn University, during a Theological Study Day at Halle University in January 2024. She mentioned a number of persons and websites; however – for the Western reader – they are not available in English or German.¹²

"A Declaration on the 'Russian World' Teaching" was published on March 13, 2022, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, and has since been translated into more than 14 languages and signed by 1,545 personalities (Public Orthodoxy 2022). It rejects the "ethno-phyletist religious fundamentalism, totalitarian in character, called *Russkii mir*" and calls it a heresy. It further affirms that "just as Russia has invaded Ukraine, so too the Moscow Patriarchate of Patriarch Kirill has invaded the Orthodox Church, for example in Africa, causing division and strife, with untold casualties not just to the body but to the soul, endangering the salvation of the faithful". In six theses and antitheses, subscribers "affirm" and "reject" what is Orthodox and what is not. It is clearly inspired in style and content by the Confessing Church's Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934. Such implicit, but very evident reference to Barmen seems significant and pertinent in a moment of *status confessionis* at a time of immense peril for the identity of the church, as well as for the nation and its citizens. As is the nature of *status confessionis*, it is the moment

¹² <https://www.ethos.org.ua/>; <https://christians4peace.com/>; <https://shaltnotkill.info>. Among other examples, she mentioned that Russian priest Fr. Alexey Uminski refused to read the prayer for 'Holy Rus' and the "victory" of the Russian army and was defrocked on January 13, 2024, for "breaking his oath" of obedience to the church. She also mentioned the testimony of Sr. Vassa Larin in *Coffee with Sister Vassa*, a Russian theologian/liturgist born in the USA: www.youtube.com/@VassaLarin.

of using a clear and unmistakable language. Thus, the first “truth” affirmed states:

There is no separate source of revelation, no basis for community, society, state, law, personal identity and teaching, for Orthodoxy as the Body of the Living Christ than that which is revealed in, by, and through our Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.

We therefore condemn as non-Orthodox and reject any teaching that seeks to replace the Kingdom of God seen by the prophets, proclaimed and inaugurated by Christ, taught by the apostles, received as wisdom by the Church, set forth as dogma by the Fathers, and experienced in every Holy Liturgy, with a kingdom of this world, be that Holy Rus', Sacred Byzantium, or any other earthly kingdom, thereby usurping Christ's own authority to deliver the Kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24), and denying God's power to wipe away every tear from every eye (Revelation 21:4). (Public Orthodoxy 2022)

There are, between Barmen and the above Declaration, of course, differences in language and theology. In the case of Protestant Barmen, the reference is exclusively to Scripture and God's Word, while the Orthodox document includes references to the Church Fathers as well. On the other hand, the latter is more explicit and concrete as to the current context, which is understandable by the fact it was written by Orthodox that do not live in Russia and, thus, did not have to fear immediate retaliations. This was different in 1934, when Hitler had already taken power and the leaders of the Confessing Church were under great risk as they were situated, so to speak, in the eye of the hurricane. In both cases, however, the addressee is the church, which is to remind herself of her fundament in Jesus Christ and of her evangelical tasks, not permitting a blind adhesion to an authoritarian state. The first loyalty of Christians, according to both declarations, has to lie with God who revealed Godself in Jesus Christ and acts through the Holy Spirit. Following this logic, expressed more clearly in the recent declaration on (and against) the “Russian world”, any discrimination and stigmatization of other peoples and/or minorities is rejected. The Manichean vision of a Christian, morally correct and orthodox “East” against a secular, immoral and heterodox “West”, as implied in the positions of Patriarch Kirill and the “Russian world” doctrine, is not accepted, either.

More generally speaking, Orthodox theologians have not spoken out as their counterparts in the West have throughout history, not having developed a just war theory of their own. They have not had controversies like those in the West between state-related Protestantism and the radical Reformation, for instance (Hamalis and Karras 2017).

Rather than being silent or adopting one of the four Western stances, i.e., (1) just war theory, (2) pacifism, (3) holy war and (4) political realism, Hamalis (2017) proposes to “partner” with some less predominant Western options, i.e., (1) just peacemaking, based on the Sermon on the Mount and an incarnational Christology,

and (2) Christian realism inspired by Reinhold Niebuhr in the line of Augustine, considering the fallenness and redemption of human beings. This was written before the Ukraine war but shows Orthodox voices trying to grapple with war and finding a distinctive position, neither copying the West nor simply aligning with state power.

The ecumenical movement, on its part, is a privileged space to learn, as long as it is able to provide “safe and brave” spaces in which it is possible to be honest with one another but also solidary in crying and laughing, in sharing a meal and in praying for one another. Personally, I have been enormously enriched by such and other meetings within the ecumenical movement, especially within the World Council of Churches (WCC), ever since I served as a steward at the 7th Assembly in Canberra, Australia, in 1991. One of my colleagues in that group was a young Russian, today a priest and professor, whom I was privileged to reencounter at the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, 31 years later. Ecumenical space is a space where many experience more freedom and equality than in their domestic contexts, be it in the church or in society, or both. Much of what is said and heard there can and, in fact, must not be made public. It is not possible nor wise to expose to the public how persons present themselves when they make themselves vulnerable to others. However, it is necessary to turn public the nature of the WCC as such a place of encounter, of dialogue and of non-violent conflict.

The WCC’s Central Committee issued a bold declaration against the war at its meeting in Geneva in June, 2022, and again at its Assembly in September that year. Between (and, meanwhile, beyond) these events, there were visits to Ukraine and to Russia. This was necessary, in fact, the minimum of what had to be said. On his part, the former head of the Department of External Relations of the ROC, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), in his allocution before the Orthodox pre-Assembly, facilitated by the WCC, underlined the diaconal task of the church: “day after day, strenuous humanitarian and peace-making activities are being carried out, much of which remain unseen. We invite all interested parties to join efforts in rendering aid to the suffering. I think that time and again, our conflict-torn world will need Christians’ help” (Hilarion of Budapest and Hungary 2022, 59). This is the other bottom line: churches have to help the suffering. Metropolitan Hilarion also thanked the WCC explicitly for what it has done in other cases of conflict. At the same time, however, he did not spare harsh words and affirmed that “we must not be indifferent, seeing certain parts of the Western Christian world sliding into the abyss of absolute rejection of the Gospel and Christ and following the path of moral relativism and degradation” (Hilarion of Budapest and Hungary, 2022, 55). He, thus, reinforced one of the very pillars of the conflict on the Russian side, a construction of “us” against “the West”. An experienced partic-

ipant at ecumenical gatherings for decades, he should know better about the real West.

In Karlsruhe, there were present Christians from both sides of the conflict: all of them suffering and struggling, be it for conviction, coercion or survival. One of the plenaries was dedicated to Ukrainian churches, present as guests as they were not yet members of the WCC. Russian delegates also had their moments of raising their voices. Much was discussed in the corridors. It was evident, at least for the majority, that an exclusion of the ROC from WCC membership, which was claimed by a group especially from Western Europe and echoed, in unusually sharp words, in the German Federal President's address to the Assembly,¹³ is not the solution. It would signify the total failure of ecumenical dialogue, and once that church would be out of the ecumenical fold, it would probably not return for a very long time, if at all. Such exclusion would be water on the mills of very conservative and anti-ecumenical sectors in the ROC that have been vociferous for many years. Furthermore, the church would be out of conversation and co-operation so important for the postwar period when it finally comes. It is also good to remember the WCC has never excluded member churches on the basis of their position in political and religious conflicts, while at the same time it did not spare them from fierce criticism when necessary, as happened with the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa for its theological sustenance of the system of separation of races (apartheid). The church itself withdrew from the WCC as a consequence. The fact that such withdrawal has not (yet?) occurred in the ROC's case can be seen as a positive signal of a search for alternatives, albeit in non-publicized ways. After all, in today's Russia, persons critical of the war – it may not even be named thus in Russia – and of President Putin are confronted with very severe punishment. Sometimes, silence can talk loudly, that is, not defending the war – which, as far as I could perceive, Russian delegates did not, they just tried to minimize criticism especially in relation to the ROC and its patriarch – is a sign of hope, modest and timid as it may be.

13 "There are also representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church here today. The fact that they are here is not something we should take for granted in these times. I expect this Assembly not to spare them the truth about this brutal war and the criticism of the role of their church leaders. Yes, time and again Christians are called to be bridge-builders. That is and remains one of our most important tasks. But building bridges requires willingness on both sides of the river; a bridge cannot be constructed if one side tears down the pillars that support it. [. . .] What sort of dialogue will we engage in here? That is the choice this Assembly has to make, and Germany's stance – I am speaking also on behalf of the Federal Government – is clear" (Steinmeier 2022). Steinmeier is a confessing Protestant Christian and has been an important lay leader for instance in the presidency of the German *Kirchentag*.

As for the documents from the Central Committee and the 11th Assembly, both deplore the war as an “illegal and unjustifiable war inflicted on the people and sovereign state of Ukraine” and declare it “incompatible with God’s very nature and will for humanity and against our fundamental Christian and ecumenical principles”, rejecting “any misuse of religious language and authority to justify armed aggression”. Furthermore, both affirm “the mandate and special role of the World Council of Churches in accompanying its member churches in the region and as a platform and safe space for encounter and dialogue in order to address the many pressing issues for the world and for the ecumenical movement”. The assembly statement did not reaffirm that “a fresh and critical analysis of the Christian faith in its relation to politics, the nation and nationalism is urgently called for”, present in the Central Committee’s declaration, but added that the “churches are called to play a key role in the healing of memories, reconciliation and diaconal care” (Central Committee 2022; Eleventh Assembly 2022).

Accordingly, in my perception, while dialogue was upheld, it was nothing harmonious, but rather honest and clear. Words of rejection of the Russian invasion and – less so, it is true – of its religious support were clear and consistent. They could have, of course, been more incisive. Time will show whether this was the right way to follow. On April 18, 2024, the WCC questioned Patriarch Kirill as to why he called the invasion into Ukraine a “holy war” in a document approved by the XXV World Russian People’s Council on March 27, a large public forum presided over by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. WCC General Secretary Jerry Pillay said “the World Council of Churches cannot reconcile the statement that ‘the special military operation [in Ukraine] is a Holy War’ with what we have heard directly from Patriarch Kirill himself, nor with relevant WCC governing body policy pronouncements, nor indeed with the biblical calling for Christians to be peacemakers in the midst of conflict”, considering it inconsistent with what the Patriarch himself had told a WCC delegation the year before (WCC 2024). The consequence of this – if any – is still to be seen, but it seems to indicate a step-up in tone of the WCC.

5 Concluding

In concluding, I would like to affirm that:

1. Brazil and other states in “active non-alignment” can make a diplomatic difference in the long run, as they are not pre-located in the polarized situation between Russia and the (North-)West.
2. A thorough peace ethical reflection is needed both politically and theologically. The current conversation is an important step towards this end.
3. Within the Orthodox church, both in Russia and Ukraine, voices critical to the war must be mobilized and supported. They exist inside the warzone – at extreme risk – and outside as well. They are thus the primary agents and voices in this situation.

While within the ecumenical movement, broadly speaking, one should not shun away from bold statements and fierce criticism when they are needed, it has to be done in a spirit of humility. Not least as a Lutheran it is very clear to me that good and evil, justice and sin are often intertwined in concrete situations. This should prevent us from being arrogant and feeling well in judging others. At the same time, Christians’ prime loyalty is to the Gospel, especially to Jesus’ ministry and proclamation. As this is their common calling, it is correct to call each other’s attention when we see the message blurred or distorted. As the ecumenical movement intends to stay together, move together and act together, it must not forget the Irish priest’s statement that critical prophecy with ecumenical dialogue is like fire in the belly and love in the heart.

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