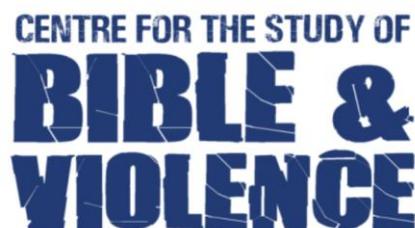


**A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii Mir)
Teaching
Study Guide**
Prepared for the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence
by Revd Peter King



On March 13 2022 the Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University posted online **A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii Mir) Teaching**¹ promoted by certain branches of the Russian Orthodox Church in order to justify the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Drawing on the Bible and the teachings and practise of Orthodoxy, the Declaration is addressed specifically to the context of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, but there would seem to be much in it that has a wider relevance to the church at large and that challenges us in the churches of Western Europe and North America.

This short Study Guide, therefore, is an invitation to join in solidarity with those who journey with us in the Orthodox Churches in reading and reflecting on the Declaration. As we do so we ask ourselves what it might be saying to us in our very different churches and contexts, that together we might grow in our understanding of what it means to be the People of God in a violent and fragmented world.

Study One

Article One

1. "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here." (John 18:36).

We affirm that the divinely-appointed purpose and accomplishment of history, its *telos*, is the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, a Kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, a Kingdom attested by Holy Scripture as authoritatively interpreted by the Fathers. This is the Kingdom we participate in through a foretaste at every Holy Liturgy: "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages!" (Divine Liturgy). This Kingdom is the sole foundation and authority for Orthodox, indeed for all Christians. 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). We firmly condemn every form of theology that denies that Christians are migrants and refugees in this world (Hebrews 13:14), that is, the fact that "our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," (Philippians 3:20) and that Christians "reside in their respective countries, but only as sojourners. They take part in everything as citizens and put up with everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land" (*The Epistle to Diognetus*, 5).

Kingdom or Empire ?

At the centre of the message of Jesus is the Kingdom, or reign, of God. In the words of theologian Jurgen Moltmann:

[Jesus] is nothing other than the Kingdom of God in person. ... If, therefore, one wants to learn what the mysterious "Kingdom of God" actually is, then one must look to Jesus. And if one wants to understand who Jesus actually is, then one must experience the Kingdom of God. ²

However, at times in Christian history, and perhaps in places still today, Christians have confused the Kingdom of God with earthly structures and kingdoms.

It is undeniable that the church was complicit in many ways in the colonial project of the countries of western Europe, and it is no co-incidence that the majority churches in many former colonies are the churches brought to them by the colonising power, hence, for example, the prevalence of Roman Catholicism in much of South America, Anglicanism in many countries of the African continent and Lutheranism in Namibia.

Today many European societies are re-evaluating their colonial legacy, and beginning to acknowledge the suffering caused by empire and its continuing effects in the form of poverty, underdevelopment and dependency. In North America, Australia and New Zealand, too, there is increasing awareness of the many ways in which the after-effects of empire continue to be felt in their contexts too.

- ❖ How do you respond to your country's history of colonialism ? Do you see it as a predominantly good or bad thing ? Why ? How would you respond to someone who holds the opposite view ?
- ❖ Can you see how the colonial project confused the advancing of God's Kingdom with the expansion of national power and influence ?
- ❖ In what ways did they do so ? Do we still do the same ?
- ❖ Read and reflect on the history of colonialism in your context. Has the church colluded with empire in the past ? Does it continue to collude with empire ? Is there anything for which the church should repent ? How might it do this ?

Strangers & Sojourners ?

Most people are familiar with Paul's statement in Philippians 3 that 'our citizenship is in heaven', and it tends to be interpreted in an otherworldly, pietistic sense, not least in the popular spirituality of many Victorian-era hymns. Yet what if it is read as a radical undermining of the nation state's claim to final allegiance ?

Read in that light, and in the context of war and climate-change, the words of the first or second century "Letter to Diognetus", cited by the Declaration, suggesting that *Christians reside in their respective countries, but only as sojourners. They take part in everything as citizens and put up with everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land* take on a new significance.

- ❖ How do you react to the Letter's claims ?
- ❖ Does seeing our life in the world in this light give us a helpful perspective on unfolding world events ? If so, how ?
- ❖ What does it mean to you that "every foreign land" is your home and "every home a foreign land" ? Has this been your experience at any time in your life ?
- ❖ How might the churches work together to educate their members about what it means that "every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land" ?
- ❖ If the church is an trans-national community, how then do we make that a reality on the ground in face of conflicts and rivalry between nations ?

Study Two

Article Two

2. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

We affirm that in anticipation of the final triumph of the Kingdom of God we acknowledge the sole and ultimate authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this age, earthly rulers provide peace, so that God's people might live "calm and ordered lives, in all godliness and sanctity" (Divine Liturgy). Yet, there is no nation, state or order of human life that can make a higher claim on us than Jesus Christ, at whose name "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:10).

We therefore condemn as non-Orthodox and reject any teaching which would subordinate the Kingdom of God, manifested in the One Holy Church of God, to any kingdom of this world seeking other churchly or secular lords who can justify and redeem us. We firmly reject all forms of government that deify the state (theocracy) and absorb the Church, depriving the Church of its freedom to stand prophetically against all injustice. We also rebuke all those who affirm caesaropapism, replacing their ultimate obedience to the crucified and resurrected Lord with that of any leader vested with ruling powers and claiming to be God's anointed, whether known by the title of "Caesar," "Emperor," "Tsar," or "President."

Christ or Caesar ?



Archbishop's Chapel, Ravenna, C6th
© José Luiz Bernardes Ribeiro / [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Who is this figure, dressed in a Roman officer's uniform ?

[T]here's a beautiful mosaic in Ravenna, a city in northern Italy, which I routinely show my classes. It's of a beautiful, very handsome, well muscled, beardless man. He's dressed in a Roman officer's uniform. And he's stepping on the head of a lion, and he's holding a standard. And the standard says in Latin, "I am the way. The truth. And the life." And usually my students can't read Latin and I say, "Who's this a picture of?" And they guess, "The Roman Emperor." But it's not. It's a picture of Jesus. ³

This image of Christ Treading the Beasts is just one visual representation of the transformation which occurs once the Emperor accepts Christianity as the religion of the empire. We see the beginning of what might be called "imperial Christianity".

The 'conversion' of the Emperor Constantine to Christianity and the resultant acceptance of the Christian faith as religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century is variously referred to as the Triumph of the Church, the Peace of the Church or the Constantinian shift. Yet very soon afterwards came the first persecutions of those who were not Christians – initially Jews, but in time those regarded as heretics too.

At the conclusion of his study *Constantine Versus Christ* Alastair Kee concludes that:

Constantine integrated politics and religion in his own life, but his religion was not Christianity. Christianity was enlisted in his own personal crusade to gain control of the Empire and in the process Christianity was transformed. ... From that time the imperial ideology, with all its implications for the accumulation of wealth and the exercise of power over the weak, was given religious legitimation by the church. ⁴

There are many who would agree with Kee, but others would see the Constantinian Shift in a more positive light and claim that it enabled the rise and spread of Christianity in a way that could never have happened otherwise. But, we have to ask, at what cost to the integrity of the church was this accomplished ?

- ❖ How do you view the Constantinian Shift ? Was it a good thing for the church or not ? Why do you think this ?
- ❖ In what ways has the church in your context become accommodated to the “powers that be” ? How might we address this in practise ?

In England, with an established church, the imperial legacy of Constantine continues very obviously to have an effect in the close relationship between state and church, yet even in countries with no established church, Constantine’s legacy continues to cast its shadow. And to those who would lament the church’s increasing marginalisation in society it has to be asked whether the loss of its historic privileges in society really can be described as persecution or whether it is actually something far more positive.

- ❖ Do you think that the establishment of the church, with representation in the upper legislature and the monarch as nominal head, in any way deifies the state or absorbs the church ?
- ❖ Do you think the establishment of the church helps or hinders its mission ?
- ❖ How can the church move from being an “imperial church’ or “state church” to being a church of the people ?

Study Three

Article Three

3. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

We affirm that division of humanity into groups based on race, religion, language, ethnicity or any other secondary feature of human existence is a characteristic of this imperfect and sinful world, which, following the patristic tradition are characterized as "distinctions of the flesh" (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 7, 23). Assertion of superiority of one group over others is a characteristic evil of such divisions, which are entirely contrary to the Gospel, where all are one and equal in Christ, all must answer to him for their actions, and all have access to his love and forgiveness, not as members of particular social or ethnic groups, but as persons created and born equally in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26).

We therefore condemn as non-Orthodox and reject any teaching that attributes divine establishment or authority, special sacredness or purity to any single local, national, or ethnic identity, or characterizes any particular culture as special or divinely ordained, whether Greek, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, or any other.

Reading God's Purposes in the World ?

We reject the false doctrine, that the Church could and should recognise as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, figures, and truths, as God's revelation.

⁵

Over eighty years before the Declaration, a group of German Protestant pastors formed what came to be known as the Confessing Church. Opposed to the Nazis and their ideology their position was set out in the Theological Declaration of Barmen. In the same year, 1934, philosopher and Nazi apologist Ernest Bergmann produced his "Twenty Five Points of the German Religion" where he claimed that:

5. The German religion is not to be regarded as a religion of revelation in the Christian form. It is based rather on a natural "revelation" of the divine will on earth and in the human mentality. ⁶

Reading these two quotes together, the first from Barmen and the second from Bergmann, it is easy to see where Barmen is coming from. The Nazis were not backward in giving divine authority to their ideology, and in ascribing pseudo-messianic status to Hitler. In face of such claims, Barmen firmly rejects the idea that the will and purposes of God can be discerned in people and events in the world. In the context of two thousand years of Christian tradition, this is an extreme position to take, but understandable in the context. However, it raises the question for us as to whether we too wish to go as far as Barmen or whether we are open to the idea that something of God's purposes can be read from the world as it is.

In Roman Catholic theology, Natural Law refers to universal moral norms accessible to all by reason, making up what we might term a "common ground morality". The near-universal prohibition of murder is an obvious example of this, but the problem of actually defining what is and isn't murder is an illustration of the difficulties of actually applying Natural Law thinking to the real world.

In some strands of Protestant theology, certain structures of society or forms of community (such as Marriage / Family; The Economic Order; The State; Culture; Church) are seen as God-given. Commonly referred to as Orders of Creation, the Orders could be said to read God's intentions from the structures and institutions of the world around us.

For Barth, by contrast, claims to discern God's purposes (even in such general terms) from the created order are unduly optimistic, and open to the obvious abuses of the Nazis. The Declaration warns against characterising 'any particular culture as special or divinely ordained', and there is certainly a danger that a theology of the Orders, or indeed Natural Law, will be seen as privileging currently prevailing forms of family, economic or political organisation as divinely ordained.

In conclusion, therefore, it may be that we agree that Barth was correct in his warning against reading what should be out of what is, even if we don't go as far as an absolute rejection of any forms of natural theology. Yet it is only too true that for much of its history, and still in some contexts in our own time, the church has indeed served as upholder of the *status quo* rather than its challenger, as Jesus was.

- ❖ How do you react to the concepts of Orders of Creation and / or Natural Law ?
- ❖ In what ways are they helpful in explaining how certain structures or norms of society relate to God ?
- ❖ To what extent do you agree with Barmen and Barth in rejecting them ?

- ❖ Is there perhaps a middle way between the two positions ?

- ❖ How can the church avoid effectively "sanctifying" the *status quo* ?

- ❖ How do you react to the statement that division of humanity into groups based on race, religion, language, ethnicity or any other secondary feature of human existence is not God-given but rather a characteristic of this imperfect and sinful world ?

- ❖ Does acknowledgement that this is the case help us in our relationships with other nations and peoples ?

- ❖ How might we as churches and individuals speak against attitudes in our societies which promote and encourage feelings of national superiority and the diminishment of minorities and the marginalised such as the poor, refugees and asylum seekers ?

Study Four

Article Four

4. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:43-45)

Following the commandment of our Lord, **we affirm** that as St Silouan the Athonite declares, “The grace of God is not in the man who does not love his enemies”, and that we cannot know peace until we love our enemies. As such, the making of war is the ultimate failure of Christ’s law of love.

We therefore condemn as non-Orthodox and reject any teaching that encourages division, mistrust, hatred, and violence among peoples, religions, confessions, nations, or states. We further condemn as non-Orthodox and reject any teaching that demonizes or encourages the demonization of those that the state or society deems “other,” including foreigners, political and religious dissenters and other stigmatized social minorities. We reject any Manichean and Gnostic division that would elevate a holy Orthodox Eastern culture and its Orthodox peoples above a debased and immoral “West”. It is particularly wicked to condemn other nations through special liturgical petitions of the Church, elevating the members of the Orthodox Church and its cultures as spiritually sanctified in comparison to the fleshly, secular “Heterodox”.

Who is the “Other” ?

Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself. ⁷

French feminist writer and intellectual Simone de Beauvoir is not alone in making the claim that a sense of otherness is actually fundamental to being human. There is common agreement that otherness is in some way essential to identity. I cannot really know, and become, who I am without awareness of who I am not – the other. And it is perhaps ironic in our increasingly globalized world, where in so many ways the barriers between people are falling, that more and more people seem to feel the need to reassert their national identity over against those of other nationalities.

Our need for an “other” is not just a one-off need. Once our group (or indeed personal) identity is formed we continue to need an “other” over against which to maintain our identity. That’s one reason wars (such as the current war against Ukraine) are so “useful” – they serve to reinforce national identity and distract attention away from more immediate threats.

The Declaration is bold in its denunciation of any teaching that serves to demonise the “other”, and we would all do well to heed its words. Jews, “heretics”, women, are just some of the groups of people othered by the church over two thousand years, and the Declaration is a much-needed reminder that the othering continues.

Throughout history, societies (and churches) have fixated upon those they have termed “the other” and have blamed them for their ills. Yet what if the “other” represents not a difference to be feared but diversity to be celebrated ? What if we actually need the other precisely in order that we might acknowledge that our vision of reality is indeed provisional and limited?

- ❖ It might be said that Christianity is inherently “othering” when it refers to “Christians” and “non-Christians” or “believers” and “nonbelievers”. How comfortable are you with this terminology ? Do we need to speak in this way ?

- ❖ Does the church need to repent of its othering in the past ? If so, how might we do this ?

“Catholic Personality”

As Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf puts it, we are on a on a journey toward what he terms "catholic personality". A "catholic personality" is 'a personality enriched by otherness', one which is "what it is only because multiple others have been reflected in it in a particular way."⁸ For Volf therefore, it is clear that without an openness to encounter with the other our lives are impoverished.

- ❖ Reflecting on our own lives, how much can we see ourselves as examples of a “catholic personality” ? Take a moment to identify and give thanks for those whose otherness has enriched our lives.
- ❖ What might a church ‘enriched by otherness’ look like ? How might we begin to bring it to reality ?

A Failure of Love ?

the making of war is the ultimate failure of Christ's law of love

Faced with these words the Declaration calls us to renew our efforts to work for a world at peace. What we might term the “mythic power” of nationhood is manifested in the ways in which the nation becomes an object of almost religious devotion, as seems currently to be the case in Russia. Sometimes, tragically, the church itself is complicit in this, as the Declaration makes clear. The challenge for the church is to stand against this and at the same time embody in its own community that “catholic personality” Volf commends, therefore offering a vision of the world where there is no “other”.

- ❖ Are there ways in which we as churches and as individuals can stand against both “mythic nationalism” and our societies’ demonisation and scapegoating of the “other”

Study Five

Article Five

5. “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:13; cf. Hosea 6:6 and Isaiah 1:11-17).

We affirm that Christ calls us to exercise personal and communal charity to the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the refugees, the migrants, the sick and suffering, and seeking justice for the persecuted, the afflicted, and the needy. If we refuse the call of our neighbor; indeed if instead we beat and rob, and leave our neighbor to suffer and die by the wayside (Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37), then we are not in Christ’s love on the path to the Kingdom of God, but have made ourselves enemies of Christ and his Church. We are called to not merely pray for peace, but to actively and prophetically stand up and condemn injustice, to *make peace* even at the cost of our lives. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9). Offering the sacrifice of liturgy and prayer while refusing to *act* sacrificially constitutes a sacrifice to condemnation at odds with what is offered in Christ (Matthew 5:22-26 and 1 Corinthians 11:27-32).

We therefore condemn as non-Orthodox and reject any promotion of spiritual “quietism” among the faithful and clergy of the Church, from the highest Patriarch down to most humble layperson. We rebuke those who pray for peace while failing to actively make peace, whether out of fear or lack of faith.

Faith & Action

*Now just outside this church our neighbor is waiting for us—waiting for us in his need and lack of protection, disgraced, hungry, haunted, and driven by fear for his very existence. That is the one who is waiting to see if today this Christian congregation has really observed this national day of penance. Jesus Christ himself is waiting to see.*⁹

These are the words of German pastor and theologian Helmut Gollwitzer at the end of his sermon in the aftermath of “Pogromnacht” in November 1938. The occasion was the German church’s annual Day of Prayer & Penitence, and for Gollwitzer *The churches’ failure to protect the Jews ... was destroying the very basis for Christian worship and prayer.*¹⁰

Central to the message of both the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and of Jesus himself is the importance of putting one’s faith into practice. Words and actions go together. However, for much of the Christian tradition, Christian faith has been defined as a set of beliefs to which one has to subscribe. It is notable that neither of the two so-called “Ecumenical Creeds” (Nicene & Apostles’) include any references to ethics or behaviour. According to the Creeds, all that is necessary to enter the Christian community is to subscribe to a set of beliefs about God and humanity, and indeed that is how Christianity continues to be understood even today by many people both within and outside the Christian community. In fact, some would argue that the very word “religion” is itself a Christian invention, effectively defining other faiths in terms of a set of beliefs, rather than as they would more properly understand themselves, a way of life.

The Declaration makes it clear that this is a problem faced by the entire church. For too long Christianity has been defined by reference to a set of beliefs rather than a way of living. The spiritual “quietism” to which the Declaration refers is to be found all around us, and Gollwitzer’s words, originally addressed to a Berlin congregation who had failed to speak out against Nazi persecution of the Jews, speak to us anew in our own world.

- ❖ How do you react to the extract from Helmut Gollwitzer's sermon ?
- ❖ Reflect on your own understanding of Christian faith. How much for you is it about reconciliation with God and how much about action in the world ?
- ❖ As a church, how can we encourage one another beyond quietism into action ? What might it mean for you in your context ?

Called to be Peacemakers

The Declaration makes special mention of the Christian vocation of peacemaking. For many Christians today, writes David Tombs

Reconciliation is typically seen as an appropriate application of Christian love, but is not seen as inherently theological or foundational for Christian faith ... for many Protestants, the doctrine of atonement has come to be seen as an entirely spiritual transaction, with little reference to social and political concerns.¹¹

What this means in practise is that many of us separate peace with God and peace with our neighbour, and prioritise the first to the neglect of the second. In this way the call to be peacemakers becomes a secondary vocation. Yet as the Declaration states, we are called to 'make peace'.

- ❖ What then does it mean to put the call to be peacemakers at the centre of our preaching and teaching ?
- ❖ How can peacemaking become central to our vocation as churches and individuals ?
- ❖ What does it mean to be peacemakers in your context, both as an individual and as part of your church community ?

Study Six

Article Six

6. "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31-32).

We affirm that Jesus calls his disciples not only to know the truth but to speak the truth: "Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one." (Matthew 5:37). A full-scale invasion of a neighboring country by the world's second largest military power is not just a "special military operation", "events" or "conflict" or any other euphemism chosen to deny the reality of the situation. It is, rather, *in fact* a full-scale military invasion that has already resulted in numerous civilian and military deaths, the violent disruption of the lives of over forty-four million people, and the displacement and exile of over two million people (as of March 13, 2022). This truth must be told, however painful it may be.

We therefore condemn as non-Orthodox and reject any teaching or action which refuses to speak the truth, or actively suppresses the truth about evils that are perpetrated against the Gospel of Christ in Ukraine. We utterly condemn all talk of "fratricidal war", "repetition of the sin of Cain, who killed his own brother out of envy" if it does not explicitly acknowledge the murderous intent and culpability of one party over another (Revelation 3:15-16).

We declare that the truths that we have affirmed and the errors which we have condemned as non-Orthodox and rejected are founded on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Christian faith. We call all who accept this declaration to be mindful of these theological principles in their decisions in church politics. We entreat all whom this declaration concerns to return to "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

Truth-Telling

*Like the Old Testament prophets, he [Jesus] called "injustice" "injustice", "wrong" "wrong", and "sin" "sin". And his calling such things by name he passed on to his disciples, to Christians, to the church as our mission.*¹²

In its final Article, the Declaration condemns the misuse of language which describes the Russian invasion of Ukraine in terms which conceal rather than reveal. What is happening is not a "special military operation" or just an "event" but rather a 'full-scale military invasion'.

This is just one example of the way in which language can be used to conceal the truth rather than to reveal it. The sermon quoted from above was preached by German pastor and theologian Gerhard Ebeling at the Memorial Service for a man who had been murdered by the Nazis under their Aktion T4 programme of involuntary euthanasia of those who were considered "unworthy of life". Hidden as it was under a veil of euphemism, for Ebeling the murder of this man compelled him to speak up about God's love for the "little ones" and God's call to stand with them.

In the church, too, we sometimes use language which conceals rather than reveals. Many are becoming increasingly concerned about the ways in which religious language can be used to conceal violence and injustice. Somehow the mention of "God" can be used to justify all sorts of things that on their own would be seen for what they are - unjust, oppressive, dehumanising.

Think about the word "sacrifice" for example: Women involuntarily sacrifice careers for partner and family by whom no such sacrifice is recognised; young men and women are

propelled involuntarily into war at the behest of those for whom international conflict provides a convenient distraction from more pressing matters of justice and equality; more generally, the language of "sacrifice" very often serves as a way of silencing those who are merely asking for what is due to them.

Truth-Telling: about our World, our Churches, our History, our Selves

The Declaration concludes, therefore, with a call to Truth-Telling, a call that we would do well to heed as well. It is important not to let the powers that be get away with using language that conceals reality, but at the same time it is also vital that the church identifies its own use of such language. But truth-telling doesn't end there. It impacts how we see history and how we understand our own lives. Our relation to discussion of empire in Article One (above) raises the question of truth-telling in history – will we acknowledge our complicity in oppression and injustice? What about our own personal complicity?

- ❖ Can you think of any theological or religious words which might serve to conceal reality rather than reveal it? What should we do with them?
- ❖ How might we make our religious language more truthful and honest?
- ❖ What about truth-telling in relation to the history of our nation or church, or our own lives?

*In the current situation, the churches need to witness to the truth by speaking up for those who are not Christians and who are not middle-class; in short, for those who do not seem to matter, those paid no attention by those in power.*¹³

- ❖ Can you think of situations in your context where there is a need for truth-telling?
- ❖ How might the church contribute to this?
- ❖ What about truth-telling in relation to the history of our nation or church, or our own lives?

Sources Cited

- ¹ <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/>
- ² Jurgen Moltmann, "Jesus & The Kingdom of God", *Asbury Theological Journal*, Vol 48: 1, pp. 5 ff
- ³ Shaye I.D. Cohen <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/why/legitimization.html>
Image:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christ_treading_the_beasts_-_Chapel_of_Saint_Andrew_-_Ravenna_2016.jpg
- ⁴ Alistair Kee, *Constantine Versus Christ* (SCM, 1982), pp. 174, 168
- ⁵ Barmen Declaration (1934) in Robert McAfee Brown, *Kairos : Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (Eerdmans,1990), p. 156
- ⁶ 44. 'Twenty-Five Points of the German Religion: Professor Ernst Bergmann's Catechism for "Positive Christianity"' in Louis Snyder (ed) *Hitler's Third Reich: A Documentary History* (Nelson Hall, 1981), pp. 167 – 169
- ⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Penguin, 1972) Introduction
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm>
- ⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace* (Abingdon, 1996), p. 51
- ⁹ Helmut Gollwitzer, 'A Sermon about Kristallnacht' (November 16, 1938) in Dean G Stroud, *Preaching in Hitler's Shadow* (Eerdmans, 2013) p. 126
- ¹⁰ David M. Elcott *et al*, *Faith, Nationalism and the Future of Liberal Democracy* (University of Notre Dame, 2021), p. 131
- ¹¹ David Tombs, 'Public Theology and Reconciliation' in Sebastian Kim and Katie Day (eds), *A Companion to Public Theology* (Brill, 2017), p. 140.
Chapter available as a free PDF at: <https://brill.com/view/title/34136>
- ¹² Gerhard Ebeling, 'A Sermon for a Victim of Aktion T4' (July 17, 1940, Berlin-Hermsdorf,) in Stroud, p 140
- ¹³ Jan-Olav Henriksen, 'Taking Responsibility for Truth' in *Truth-Telling and Other Ecclesial Practises of Resistance* (Fortress Academic, 2021)