

**BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**



**THE ROLE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE  
WAR**

By

Byron Maforo (B224082B)

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Supervisor: DR D.N. Mahuku

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## ***Abstract***

*The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of the Russian-Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war assessing whether it is promoting conflict or peace. The study used the functionalist theory of international relations and neo-classical realism. A qualitative research methodology was used together with a case study research design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The data was collected from Orthodox Church Priests, Russian Community members domiciled in Zimbabwe, and political scientists. The findings of the study show that the ROC coexists with the Russian state. The ROC plays a key role in the geopolitics and foreign policy of the Russian state. The ROC sanitised the Russian invasion of Ukraine calling for the Russian victory in the war with Ukraine. Priests who sympathised with the Ukrainians and called for peace were defrocked by the ROC leadership. The global ecumenical fellowship of churches has ostracised the ROC over its support for the state. The ROC has influenced suspicion about the efficacy of the church in enabling peace among peace practitioners. The study recommended the ROC to be independent from the state so that it can objectively advise, applaud or critic the state. The Russian state must allow the ROC to be independent from the state. The ROC to consider standing for peace in a war situation because the greatest sanity and role of the church is the preservation of human life, as such the church must not be an instrument of destruction.*

**Declaration Form**

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**BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF PEACE AND GOVERNANCE**

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (MIR)

Name of Student : MAFORO BYRON

Student Registration Number : B224 082 B

[Signature] : 07/10/24  
(Signature of Student) Date

[Signature] : 07/10/24  
(Signature of Supervisor) Date

[Signature] : 07/10/24  
(Signature of Chair) Date

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, siblings and my late parents souls rest in eternal peace.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the almighty God for a gift of life and opportunity without which I could not have reached this far.

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Friends, relatives and comrades I thank you all for being there for me.

## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

A.D: Anno Domini

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer

RENAMO: Mozambican National Resistance Movement

ROC: Russian Orthodox Church

USA: United States of America

WWII: World War Two

## Table of contents

### PRELIMINARY PAGES

<i>Abstract</i> .....	ii
Declaration Form .....	iii
Dedication .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms .....	vi
Table of contents .....	vii
List of Tables and Figures .....	x
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background of the Study .....	1
1.2 Purpose of the Study .....	4
1.3 Statement of the Problem .....	4
1.4 Objectives of the Study .....	5
1.5 Research Questions .....	5
1.6 Assumptions of the Study .....	5
1.7 Significance of the Study .....	6
1.8 Delimitations of the Study .....	7
1.9 Limitations of the Study .....	7
1.10 Definition of Keywords .....	8
1.11 Chapter Outline .....	9
1.12 Proposed Timeframe .....	9
Summary .....	10
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2. Introduction .....	11
2.1 Theoretical Frameworks .....	11
2.1.1 Functionalist Theory of International Relations .....	11
2.1.2 Neo-classical Realism .....	12
2.2 Overview of Church-State relationship .....	14
2.3 Perspectives on the relationship that must be between church and state. ....	16
2.4 Church-state relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State. ....	22
2.5 Roadmap for the Russo-Ukraine War .....	25
Summary .....	26

<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>28</b>
3. Introduction.....	28
3.1 Research Philosophy .....	28
3.2 Research Methodology .....	29
3.3 Research Design.....	30
3.4 Population and Sample .....	30
3.5 Sampling Methods .....	31
3.6 Data collection methods.....	31
3.6.1 In-depth Interviews .....	32
Advantages of in-depth interviews .....	32
Disadvantages of interviews .....	33
3.6.2 Document Analysis.....	34
Advantages of document analysis.....	34
Disadvantages of document analysis .....	35
3.7 Validity and reliability .....	36
3.8 Data presentation and analysis.....	36
3.9 Ethical considerations .....	37
Summary .....	37
<b>CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>38</b>
4. Introduction.....	38
4.1 Presentation of findings, discussion and analysis .....	38
4.2 The role of the church in politics. ....	39
4.3 The relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state.....	43
4.4 The Russian Orthodox Church and the Russia-Ukraine War. ....	52
4.5 The Russian Orthodox Church: Enabler of peace or conflict in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.....	56
4.6 <i>Religio</i> -political impacts of the ROC's role in the Russia-Ukraine war.....	61
Summary .....	63
<b>CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>64</b>
5. Introduction.....	64
5.1 Summary .....	64
5.2 Conclusions.....	67
5.3 Recommendations.....	68
5.4 Areas for further research .....	68

<b>References.....</b>	<b>69</b>
Bible References .....	73
Document Analysis Sources .....	74
Websites .....	74
Oral Sources.....	75
Interviews.....	75
APPENDIX 1 .....	76
APPENDIX 2.....	77
APPENDIX 3.....	78
APPENDIX 4.....	80

## **List of Tables and Figures**

- (i) Table 1: Interview Response rate
- (ii) Figure 1: A picture showing a Russian Orthodox Church Priest blessing a Russian military SU-27 fighter jet in Crimea.
- (iii) Figure 2: A picture showing the Russian President Vladimir Putin visiting one of the Russian Orthodox Church projects.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER**

### **1. Introduction**

The study seeks to interrogate the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russo-Ukraine war with the thrust of investigating religion as an enabler of war or conflict. To exhaustively interrogate the research thrust this chapter introduces the research thrust and technical aspects used in undertaking the research. Furthermore, the chapter covers the background of the study, purpose of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, assumptions of the study, significance of the study, preliminary literature review and theoretical framework, research methodology, delimitations and limitations of the study, ethical considerations, chapter outline, proposed timeframe and a chapter summary.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The relationship between church and state from time immemorial was a complex one. From a Biblical and Christian perspective and arguing from Romans 13 God instituted the state to maintain civil order and peace necessary for human flourishing. According to Chia, (2018), the state is God's servant as long as it fulfils its God-given mission to ensure that justice and peace prevail for the common good of human society. In the Old Testament, the prophet intervened in politics as a way of expressing the embodiment of church and politics. The prophets unequivocally played a part as they engaged with kings and affairs obtained in their contexts, (Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022). Prophets were moral reformers who stood for what was right in the eyes of God without fear of favour for the political leaders of their time. For example Elijah 1 Kings 21: 17-29 social injustice by King Ahab who was forcefully taking land from Naboth through the influence of her wife Jezebel. Prophet Micah confronted political leaders to consider justice in human society Micah 2-5. Prophet Amos too raised the voice against social injustices

in society and the political context of his time. There are other instances where prophets had a voice in war either to support a just war or advise leaders not to fight, (Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022). Prophet Jeremiah recommended the surrender of Israel to Babylon which was a much clearer political activism which controlled the king and his policy. The roles of prophets in political issues of their states can also be identified in the ministry of Isaiah, Samuel, and Nathan among others, (Azomo & Tambiyi, 2020). The biblical views point to the view that, having realised the excesses of rulers, misuse of power and conduct of some rulers, God occasionally intervened by instructing his prophets and priests to call political rulers to order, so has been the role of the church in the international system. The church is therefore expected to be a vehicle for promoting peace in states and among states in the international system rather than being instruments of fomenting disorder and destruction (Chia, 2018). When wars are fought between or among states, churches must be pacifiers and work for peaceful resolutions to the obtaining wars or crises. The Church is a critical player in the promotion of global peace and security. On that note, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has an ecclesiastical mandate to consider the expected role of the church towards promoting global peace and security.

In the Ukrainian context, the ROC remains the most dominant Christian church and shares the religious market with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church and other Christian movements (Surzhko Harned, 2022). The other churches have been calling for peace and the ending of war in Ukraine to avoid more losses of human life and destruction of property and infrastructure. The contemporary Ukrainian context views the Russian Orthodox Church as a weapon used for the advantage of politicians in the conflict with Russia, (Vovk, 2019). History has shown that the Church can play both the role of a conflict perpetrator and peace advocate. However, the role of the church either as a conflict perpetrator or peace advocate can be

influenced by the nature of the relationship between the church and the state in the affected context. The research focuses on the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The thrust interrogates the role of the ROC about the Russia -Ukraine war, as an enabler of peace or war. History proves that the ROC has been part of the most influential social institutions in Russia.

From the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Russia began to identify itself as the defender of Orthodoxy and heirs of Byzantine Culture which later developed into philosophical and historical thinking which contributed to the Eurasianist geopolitical views, (Dimitri, 1999). The Russian state traces its sovereign spiritual and temporal roots to Byzantine and Orthodox Christianity. The central pillar and main source of Russian religiosity and Christian spirituality is the Russian Orthodox Church. Putin's presidency is believed to be a God-given mission, (Trenin, 2016). The Russian Orthodox Church as a part of the Eastern Orthodox Church follow social concept, formal training of the clergy and socialisation of the young in Russia in accordance to the Orthodox Faith (Ramet, 2019). Orthodox faith denotes the Christian movement that views themselves as custodians of the right Christian teaching in the global Christian family, (McGrath, 2006). In the Orthodox teaching the church and the state both work in partnership for the good of humanity and society at large (Kalaitzidis, 2018). This is the fundamental teaching that drives the ROC in her relationship with the state. However, it remains a concern to note that in such a nature of a relationship between the church and the state who controls or takes advantage of the other.

The state has political interests that it defends and the church has moral and spiritual interests to defend in human society. On that note, is it the Church that must control the state or vice-versa or the two must independently work in a republic? It seems as if the Russian Orthodox Church is under the control of the state under Putin who has tirelessly worked to re-establish the church in

Russia, (Elsner, 2022). This may have translated to the instrumentalization and weaponisation of the church in the Slavic cultural and political expansion of Russianism (Davis, 2019). While some scholars contend that the ROC is supporting V. Putin others contend that this is wrong since the war is causing a lot of destruction in human lives and physical infrastructure in a conflict that could have been resolved without such casualties and damage. It is in this context that this study examines the role of the ROC in this war. This research therefore researches whether ROC is an enabler of peace or conflict.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

This research investigates the role of the Russian-Orthodox Church in the Russo-Ukraine war assessing whether it is promoting conflict or peace.

## **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The Russo-Ukraine war has resulted in Russia losing lots of soldiers dying in the war. Sanctions have been effected against Russia affecting both imports and exports with the West and her allies. The economy of Russia has been affected making life difficult for Russians (Paffenholz, Bramble, & Poppelreuter, 2023, Statista, 2023). Furthermore, the war has affected Ukraine through the loss of many civilian lives, destruction of property and infrastructure, and displacement of people creating refugees in neighbouring countries (Paffenholz, Bramble, & Poppelreuter, 2023, Statista, 2023). The quest to undertake is ignited by the view that despite this human and infrastructural carnage the war is continuing with weapons being supplied by those who support the two countries while Russians and Ukrainians slaughter each other on the battlefield. The public behaviour of the ROC in the Russo-Ukraine war remains a concern over the moral conscience of the Church against loss of lives, displacements of Ukrainian people, destruction of property and imposition of ROC patriarchate control of Ukraine's ecclesiastical

life. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that many people have been killed others injured and many have been displaced, (Statista, 2023).

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The study shall be guided by the following objectives:

1. To discuss the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State.
2. To examine the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war.
3. To assess whether the Russian Orthodox Church is an enabler of peace in the Russia-Ukraine war.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. How does the Russian state relate to the Russian Orthodox Church?
2. What role is being and has been played by the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war?
3. How is the Russian Orthodox Church being an enabler of peace or conflict in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine?
4. What are the political and religious impacts of the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war?

#### **1.6 Assumptions of the Study**

The study assumes that:

1. The Russian Orthodox Church is supporting the state in the Russia-Ukraine war.
2. The Russian Orthodox Church has been a conflict enabler in the Russia-Ukraine war.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

Studies on Church-state relations have been focusing on the states in the West. The Church in the West is mainly composed of the Roman Catholic Church, Protestants, and Pentecostals among others. However, there is a scarcity of research undertaken in light of the churches in the East and their relations with the state. Churches in the east include the Orthodox Churches the mother church of the Russian Orthodox Church (Kitromilides, 2019). It is important to note that interrogating the state-church relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state explicates interesting issues in the area under investigation. The Church-state relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state reveal a relationship of the church politically working in partnership with the state (Davis, 2019). Whereas the Western perspective emphasises that church and state must work as separate institutions in human society. In essence, the study is significant towards enlightening scholars in the Southern Hemisphere on the effects of a church-state political partnership toward tackling issues of conflict and peace. The Church is viewed as the moral conscience of society. However, if it is a partner of the state, the church's moral consciousness towards promoting peace in human society becomes compromised especially during a war like the Russo-Ukraine war.

The study is important to global peace and security experts in light of giving them a perspective which proves that the Church can be a double-edged sword if it politically partners with the state. In the same vein foreign policy makers will be enlightened by this study on the importance of the church in the state's foreign policy framework and national interests. The church can be a trusted agent of the state for cultural and ideological impartation. The study adds insights to the body of knowledge and the academia will benefit by identifying gaps for further research in the area of church-state relations in the field of international relations. Peace practitioners will be

enlightened by this study on the caution that has to be applied when involving the Church in promoting global peace. When completed the study shall be important towards informing international relations scholars on the need to further interrogate religion and peace or conflict in different global contexts.

### **1.8 Delimitations of the Study**

The focus of this study is limited to assessing the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russo-Ukraine war. There has been a Russo-Ukraine war since 2014. The war resulted in the annexation of the Crimea Peninsula by the Russians. The other war was in Donbas from 2014 to 2022. However, this study will be delimited to the period of the full invasion of Ukraine by Russia from 2022 onwards. The Ukrainian context which has been affected by the war perpetrated by Russia with the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, remains an area where the problem under investigation is taking place. On the other hand, the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Slavic states, United States of America, Britain, France, Canada and other parts of the world will be mentioned but are not the focus of the study. Furthermore, globally the Eastern Orthodox Church has seven patriarchates which include Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia. However, the context of this study will be the Moscow Patriarchate which operates the Russian Orthodox Church.

### **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

The study anticipates potential limitations in collecting data from part of the targeted population. The issue under investigation has some security concerns from the participants as the study unpacks a sensitive issue in Russian politics. However, the researcher will collect some of the primary data through document analysis from grey literature that is accessible in relevant internet

discourses on ROC in light of the Russia-Ukraine war. Furthermore, ethical considerations will be applied to protect the identities of the interview participants. Identities of participants will be concealed and pseudo names will be used. There is also a limitation of propaganda materials written by Western scholars against the ROC in English. However, the researcher shall use Google translator on some grey literature written in Russian or Ukrainian languages. Literature from Russians and Ukrainians assists the researcher in tackling propaganda materials produced by the West.

### **1.10 Definition of Keywords**

**Peace:** is a state of positive tranquillity in a country, (Bachelet, 2019).

**Conflict:** a serious disagreement which can be protracted in a society, (Otobo, 2018).

**War:** is an intense armed conflict between states (Otobo, 2018).

**Church:** is a Christian religious organisation which is made up of believers in God through Jesus Christ, (Naweji, 2019).

**Orthodoxy:** denotes the right Christian doctrine (Baar, Solík, & Baarová, 2022)

**Politics:** can be defined as the use of structural power to organise a society or community of people (Scott & Cavanaugh, 2014)

**State:** is a type of polity that is an organised political community living under a single system of government (Chia, 2018)

### **1.11 Chapter Outline**

Chapter 1: This is the introductory chapter which introduces the technical aspects that guide the study. Chapter 2: The chapter will tackle the theoretical frameworks of the study and present a thematic literature review. Chapter 3: This chapter unpacks a detailed methodology used by the research. The methodological aspects will be presented and explicated to justify their efficacy in the study. Chapter 4: The chapter will thematically analyse and discuss collected data in sync with issues deduced from secondary literature. Chapter 5: This chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

### **1.12 Proposed Timeframe**

Activity	Expected date of submission
Working on the Concept Note	05/05/23
Proposal	08/09/23
Chapter 2	30/09/23
Chapter 3	07/10/23
Chapter 4	27/10/23
Chapter 5	03/11/23
Complete Draft	17/11/23
Submission of Complete Dissertation	30/11/23

## **Summary**

Introduction to the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russo-Ukraine war has been tackled together with the summation of technical aspects used in the study. In essence, the chapter covered the background of the study, purpose of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, assumptions of the study, significance of the study, preliminary literature review and theoretical framework, research methodology, delimitations and limitations of the study, ethical considerations, chapter outline and a chapter summary. The next chapter will focus on expounding theoretical frameworks and literature review.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

### **2. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the introductory and technical aspects of the study. This chapter unpacks the theoretical frameworks of the study. Theoretically, the study uses the international functionalist theory of international relations and neo-classical realism. The use of the theories in sync with the research thrust will enable the research to articulate pertinent issues of the study. Furthermore, the chapter presents a thematic literature review that is guided by the objectives of the study. The following key themes shall be tackled: an overview of church-state relationship in the international system. Church-state relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state. The chapter will further create subthemes under each key theme to further unpack issues from the key theme. Upon tackling the themes the chapter will present a chapter summary.

### **2.1 Theoretical Frameworks**

#### **2.1.1 Functionalist Theory of International Relations**

The study thrives on the use of the functionalist theory of international relations. Ashworth, (2017) states that the proponent, founder and most influential exponent of functionalism is David Mitrany in 1943. Functionalism by David Mitrany can also be called interchangeably called international functionalism (Or Rosenboim, 2013). Mitrany's international functionalism focuses on the needs of individuals, their relations to one another and the arrangements that help to serve their needs (Theiler, 2022). Furthermore, Mitrany assumes that people are best able to cooperate in areas which directly affect them thereby making cooperation an organic process (OrRosenboim, 2013; Theiler, 2022). In Mitrany's perspective individuals not states would be constituents of functional agencies (the church included) whose legitimacy would grow in proportion to which they met individual human needs. Theiler, (2022) further avers that David

Mitrany envisions non-territorial functional agencies (international organisations) to supplant the states because their focus will primarily focus on human needs like peace, development, empowerment, social cohesion and cooperation in human society. International organisations that include the church work to promote cooperation, dialogue, peace, and conflict transformation among others.

From a functionalist perspective, the church is not a homogenous organisation but it is an international organisation with an obligation to facilitate cooperation and influence states (Scott & Cavanaugh, 2014). Furthermore, the church remains an international organisation even if it takes the Orthodox form as emphasised by this study, hence it must promote peace between states. The role of the church is enabling peace, ‘the church supplant the states system and focuses on organically promoting peace because her functionalist focus will primarily address fundamental human needs’ (Theiler, 2022). On that note, the functionalist theory enables this study to explicate whether the ROC is a potential peace enabler in the Russo-Ukraine War. The ROC has the potential to influence dialogue, positive cooperation and coordination in ending the war between Russia and Ukraine. However, the functionalist theory shall be complemented by the neo-classical realism theoretical framework.

### **2.1.2 Neo-classical Realism**

Neo-classical realism is also used in this study to interrogate issues of the research thrust. Firoozabadi & Ashkezari, (2016) states that Gideon Rose in 1998 developed neo-classical realism. Neo-classical realism from a foreign policy thrust analytically combines state and system-level factors when interrogating state behaviour in the international system. Neo-classical realism was developed as a response by scholars who were dissatisfied with the issue that structural realism does not take state-level factors into account to study state behaviour and

foreign policy, (Huck, 2019). The neo-classical realist theoretical framework of a state's behaviour towards other foreign states aims at achieving the preservation of the state's physical survival and political autonomy, maintaining its power position and safeguarding all other ideological, religious, political, social and economic goals that they may possess, (Taliaferro et al, 2018).

Neo-classical realism offers this study the lenses to analyse state behaviour. According to Beach, (2012) neo-classical realism is a form of political analysis in international relations that analyses the behaviour of states in the international system. The international system is anarchic, and conflictual self-interests of states dominate the international system, (Beach, 2012). From a neo-classical realist perspective states respond to constraints and opportunities of the international system when they conduct their foreign and security policies. The structure of the international system determines state behaviour. The church has been used by liberals to further ideological teachings of democracy, human rights, rule of law among others (Elsner, 2022). In a neo-classical realist sense the Russian state has roped in the ROC to be her instrument of spreading Slavic culture, intelligence, a Russian blended form of Christianity and nationalist values. ROC has vehemently stood as a force against Western Christianity (Roman Catholic Church, Protestants and Pentecostals) further supporting the position of Russia in the Russo-Ukraine war. From a neo-classical perspective the subjective structures of the state like the ROC are important in analysing state behaviour, (Firoozabadi & Ashkezari, 2016).

## 2.2 Overview of Church-State relationship

Church-state relations can be identified in two distinct models. Ponomariov, (2017) states that,

“Church-state relations take place within two basic models or poles which are coexistence and independent actors. Independent actors denote a complete separation of the two institutions while coexistence points to a complete unity between the Church and the state. However, the unity results in the subjugation of one by the other, when either religion controls the state or the state controls religion.”

Relations between the church and the state in light of the contemporary state power is an issue of interest in international relations discourses. According to Girling, (2018) in the eastern political context like Russia, China, Belarus and Estonia among others the church has been coerced to foster an amicable working relationship with the state in order to be able to benefit effective ecclesiastical operations with limited state persecution.

History has it that Church-state relations have been a complex issue from the medieval to the contemporary era. The contentious issue in church-state relations is located in the boundaries of authority between the two bulwarks of authority in human society. Kent, (2022) argues that states which contribute to the establishment of a Church tend to dominate the Church. Such states use the Church as an instrument in policy-making, foreign policy, and ideological propagation in support of its national interests (Kitromilides, 2019). Ramet, (2019) maintains that, in communist states like Russia and China there is recognition of state-established church as an official Church, the state instructs Christian believers to congregate in the recognised church and other churches have limited religious freedoms to operate in such contexts. For example, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Protestant Churches, Pentecostal Churches, and Charismatic Movements are not allowed to operate in Russia and China. The banned churches are viewed by realist-led Russian and Chinese states as ideological weapons of the liberal USA, British and their allied states. Ramet, (2019) further notes that countries that dominate the operations of the Church with

an affinity of favouring one state-recognised church also suffer interreligious or interdenominational wars.

Contemporary existential relations between the church and the state also prove that churches often find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. Vovk, (2019) argues for the veracity of the church's authority towards addressing the conscience of the state through teaching ethical heritage and speaking out prophetically in defence of justice, human dignity and human welfare. Snyder, (2022) opines that the voice of the church to the state may not be immune to criticism and that may result in the church to publicly keep quiet while seeking to change government policy by persuasion behind the scenes. For example Catholic Bishops, Evangelical Fellowship, Council of Churches' efforts in governance issues of states. However, Manyonganise, (2022) avers that in some contexts like Zimbabwe to dilute the influence of the church in public life, the state co-opts certain religious leaders. Kent, (2022) further expounds that co-opting religious leaders results in political leadership playing religion to gain religious capital while religious leaders play politics for political capital. In this case, the church and politics invest in each other for mutual benefit. The perspective presented by Manyonganise, (2022) resonates with the relationship that is between the ROC and the state. According to Skladanowski, (2023), the ascendancy of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to lead the ROC after serving together with Putin in the KGB (a state security arm of the Russian security apparatus) proves an investment of both parties for mutual benefit. Perceptions on the ideal relationship that can be expected between the church and the state remains a contentious issue among scholars.

### **2.3 Perspectives on the relationship that must be between church and state.**

Church-state relations are contentious in contemporary works. Majawa, (2020) argues that in modern democracy the weak wall of separation between the church and state is a concern in human society. Majawa, (2020) maintains that the relationship of the contemporary church and state is like a double-edged sword cutting divine and human realities and both entities continue to politically survive on each other's support. Iheanacho, (2018) avers that in the ancient Roman Empire, the church by its connection with the state gained in power and riches but lost in virtues. However, that does not disqualify the view that the church and state have two particular mandates in common which are peace and order in a nation.

In essence, the Church as an institution has a mission and purpose to shape individual lives and intentions. Iheanacho, (2018) states that the Church is fundamental in shaping the lives and intentions of individuals and extends to their social, political and economic intentions. The assumption is that if the leaders of the state are religious they are bound to listen to the advice given by the clergy. If they are not religious they always try to manipulate the church for their interests. Iheanacho, (2018) the mission of the church in the world focuses on another dimension of responding through God's grace to the needs of each society which includes social, political and economic needs. Humanity thrives in a nation that has opportunities which empower them to live a good life. Society structurally encompasses political, economic and social structures stretching even to the echelons of power where the state is located. Olorunnisola, (2015), states that the Church brings ethical, moral and rights conscience into the political space. That approach compliments the work of Jesus Christ believed in by the church who advocated for justice and peace indiscriminately, (Olorunnisola, 2015). According to Majawa, (2020) the Church as the living presence of Jesus in the world ought to actively involve itself and participate

theologically in the political arena. God's concern is about justice to humanity hence in that vein the Church must not be silent about political, social and economic justice. However, if the Church loses its prophetic role within the political corridors of power, it ends up preserving rather than challenging the status quo, (Majawa, 2020). Scholarship continues to advocate for the need for a politically liberating motif by the church as she engages the state in policy, governance and administration of society. Kalaitzidis, (2018) expounds that liberating socio-political aspects towards transforming unbecoming social structures and shortfalls by the state are expected roles of the church in human society. The place of the Church in the political space is more focused on the promotion of the common good for all humanity as she engages the state, (Kalaitzidis, 2018). A critical example can be deduced from the church-state relations in France under Napoleon, post WWI in Germany under Hitler leading to the WWII, Italy under Mussolini and Russia under Stalin.

Before the ascendancy of Napoleon to power in France, the church had suffered immense persecution. According to Caiani, (2022) the French state controlled the Church from 1790-1792 making the church a state institution. However, from 1792 until 1799 the church was persecuted under the 'reign of terror'. Anti-church laws were passed and religious freedoms gained under the Bill of Rights were suspended. However, Caiani, (2022) further notes that when Napoleon Bonaparte came to power in 1799, he brought the Church back to the control of the state. Under Napoleon, the church became a tool used to cement society together. Napoleon signed the Concordant of 1801 which addressed all religious differences. The church regained freedom of worship under the condition to be controlled by the state, (Caiani, 2022). This example is a clear indication pointing out that politicians tend to control the church to use religion to gain control of society. A similar tendency can be deduced in Germany under Hitler.

During the time of Adolf Hitler relations between the church and the state were characterised by the latter intending to use the former as an instrument to manipulate the society. Nicolaides, (2018) when the political situation in Germany had shown signs of brewing an evil plan against the social, economic and political good of humanity, the Church in its homogeneity had a task to embark on its transformational responsibilities. Nicolaides, (2018), further opines that the conditions that were set for the German society by its leader Adolf Hitler in 1933 undermined all forms of freedom, human rights, freedom of worship and democratic politics in the land. According to Weir, (2018) Hitler's control of the Church meant control of society since most of the population were Christians. Catholics and Protestants gave in to Hitler's bait and took the side of a dictator, an action which compromises the significance of the Church as a peace enabler in society.

The swaying of the Church by the state under Hitler created room for the selfish instrumentalization of the Church by the German state. Hollerich in Scott & Cavanaugh, (2014), disputes the conjecture of Carl Schmitt, the political theologian who at first was Nazi and supported the instrumentalization of the Church and thus purports that the church should be an instrument of facilitating propaganda by policymakers and the government. In this case, Scott & Cavanaugh, (2014) contends that the Church is the conscience of society, an ethical and moral institution that guides human society in all activities. Weir, (2018) contends that Politics is also not an exception, it is an area which requires maximum attention of the Church if peace is viewed as central in society. If politics is divorced from a moral foundation, it breeds greater harm to humanity. Spencer, (2016) avers that the Church is not to be ignorant towards the evils, oppression, injustices, violation of human rights and polarization perpetrated due to political

crises in human communities. The case of Hitler in Germany presented here proves that political leaders tend the church for their political benefits.

During Fascism Benito Mussolini the Italian leader also needed the support of the church. Madigan, (2021) notes that Mussolini found huge support from the evangelicals during the fascist regime. The Catholics and Fascists had a very complex relationship. The complexity of the relationship between the Fascists and the Catholic Church resulted in the labelling of Evangelicals as heretics. The Balilla Oath which deified Mussolini was made a compulsory affirmation for the Italian populace. The Catholic Church in 1931 responded by labelling the Balilla a blasphemous document while evangelicals seemed passive on the matter, (Madigan, 2021). Gundle, (2022) also notes that the Evangelical churches were used by Mussolini to convince the Italian society that he was a leader who had a deep connection with God. The teachings would make the Italian populace respect and submit to fascism. The church became an ideological and cultural instrument for Fascism. During the late 1930s Fascism managed to use the Catholic Church to reinforce their beliefs and serve their ends, (Gundle, 2022). Madigan, (2021) maintains that the church was viewed as a custodian of morality and ethics by the Italians. However, Fascism maximised on that maxim and managed to use the Church in various instances as its mouthpiece of legitimacy, authentication of ideologies and a policy-making support instrument. In other contexts like the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics leaders like Joseph Stalin would ignore and warn the churches not to get involved in politics.

Joseph Stalin's stance of ignoring and driving to warn the church from participating in politics had complex elements which underpinned the motive. Miles, (2018) notes that in as much as Stalin is regarded as a leader who did not want the Church to have space in the political context of USSR. However, Stalin borrowed some teachings of the ROC such as iconology though he

made himself the icon of the USSR who was viewed the same as a saint or a figure equated to Jesus. According to Boer, (2018) Stalin himself was a trained theologian though he did not sit for his final examinations during his seminary training. From the theological training gained Stalin tended showing support for the church as long as it had no room to question his political control of the Russian state. As a Marxist with theological understanding, Stalin's name was religiously promoted to be powerful such that some military servicemen died during the war proclaiming the name of Stalin, (Boer, 2018; Miles, 2018). Miles, (2018) declares that the myth around the name of Stalin made Joseph Stalin a figure of exception in the Russian context. That does not disqualify the role played by Stalin in the reviving of the Russian Orthodox Church which had suffered at the hands of the previous regimes. However, Boer, (2018) declares that Stalin became an exception such that he would declare whatever he politically wished using theological overtones or biblical scriptures and there was no challenge from society because he had managed to silence the voice of the church in political matters, (Boer, 2018). Boer, (2018) further notes that the Bible was used to promote socialism, political slogans and a positive work ethic in the Stalin-led USSR. According to Stalin supporters, the church can impede the authority of a statesman due to her tendency to question issues of exception that accord leaders total control of their states. Schmidt, (2002) articulates that the church believes that the only of exception is God who is sovereign and no human qualifies to embrace such an attribute. In the Western context, the Church had a voice during the USA-Vietnam war.

The church vehemently condemned the USA versus Vietnam War. Cajka, (2021) notes that:

“Despite Martin Luther King Junior’s role in uniting the church especially the Protestants in the United States of America to rise against racism, classism and sexism. On 04 April 1967 Martin Luther King Junior delivered a sermon at New York City’s Riverside Church criticising America’s foreign policy in Vietnam and connecting the war to racism at home.” Luther preached that “I speak for the poor in

America who are facing the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam” (Cajka, 2021).

The influence of Martin Luther King Junior resulted in an anti-war march in New York City which was complimented by a similar march in San Francisco. Seresella, (2018) states that in the Vatican, the Catholic Church compelled the Catholic Church in the USA towards invoking the end of the conflicts and also undertook evaluations on the choices made in international politics by the warring states. Furthermore, Seresella, (2018) maintains that:

“In December 1965 the papacy sent a message of peace to the government figures involved in the Vietnam issue these included Mao Zedong, Podgornij, Johnson, Ho Chi Min and Nguyen Van Thieu. Pope John Paul VI asked the government figures of the warring states to make every effort to end the conflict and suggested that Vatican diplomacy should take an interest in negotiating a peace agreement, in the belief that fair rules from the Holy See might be accepted by all parties.”

The Catholic Church in Vietnam also heeded the word of the Vatican and stood for the end of the War between the West and Communism in their context. Vaupot, (2019) further posits that the Catholic Church adopted a policy of dialogue and cooperation towards enabling peace with the Vietnamese communists despite diplomatic isolation with the West during the war. In Africa, it is critical to note the efforts of the Church in the Mozambican civil war which enabled the success of independence in the former Portuguese colony.

The Mozambican post-independence conflict which lasted for sixteen years was successfully resolved by the intervention of the church in conflict transformation and achieving peace. According to Darch, (2018), the Mozambican government fought against the Alfonse Dhlakama-led RENAMO rebels from 1976-1992. Many lives were lost, infrastructure destroyed and human rights violated. However, the intervention of the Church through the Rome-based Community of Sant'Egidio achieved to help end the civil war in Mozambique in 1992. Vilanculos, (2015) avers that the Community of Sant'Egidio from its Catholic standing and the Christian Council of Mozambique contributed immensely to the 1990-92 peace process. The political dialogue

facilitation efforts of the Church led to the 1992 Peace Accord signed in Rome which ended the Mozambican civil war. Darch, (2018) articulates that:

“The process leading to the Mozambican Peace Agreement 1992 was unusual. It was not a single linear process but consisted of multiple initiatives by potential intermediaries, including state and religious actors and lay persons. Eventually, one of the Catholic Sant’Egidio community ended up unusually at that time winning the confidence of both sides and facilitating a lengthy and fraught process of negotiation with plenty of drama from all participants.”

The Mozambican 1992 peace agreement proves the efficacy of the church or faith-based organisations towards enabling peace. Vilanculos, (2015) adds that the peace agreement was a collective effort between the Catholic Sant’Egidio Community, the Christian Council of Churches and the international community. According to Nsengimana, (2015), faith-based peace-building measures are also an activity that the Church in the 21st century is embarking on to transform society. Peace-building has been carried out by the Church through workshops that engage grassroots levels of communities up to the leaders.

#### **2.4 Church-state relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State.**

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) can be historically traced from the early church historical document. However, Baar, Solík, & Baarová, (2022), Kent, (2022) notes that the ROC orthodox identity is traceable from the 1054 AD schism that created the Western Church (Roman Catholic Church or Western Christianity which later birthed Protestants and others) and the Eastern Church (Orthodox Churches or Eastern Christianity). According to Baar, Solík, & Baarová, (2022), the ROC declared itself independent and autocephalous in 1448 AD and was recognised by the main international Orthodox authorities (head of the Byzantine Church or Eastern Christianity) in 1589 AD. However, Kent, (2022) adds that before the end of the Cold War, the relationship between ROC and the state swung from positive cooperation with the state to

negative resentment with the state due to percussions perpetrated by various Russian leaders. According to Heisbourg, (2023), “Russia’s own ideology is a brew of neo-imperialism, religious nationalism and rejection of democracy and individual freewill that includes disavowals of Satanism and LGBTQ rights as well as wholesale antagonism against the west.” The ideology has been supported by the ROC culminating into the justification of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Heisbourg, 2023). In essence, the end of the Cold War brought along a revival of positive church-state relations in Russia. Baar, Solík, & Baarová, (2022) states that:

“With the collapse of the USSR the ROC began to gain ground in the political, social and economic life of the Russians. The communist ideology made space for religion in the form of ROC. The ROC became part of the state instrument of influence towards reasserting geopolitical influence in the communist region and post-soviet context. The support of the ROC enhanced the influence of Russia in Abkhazian, South Ossetia, Belarus and even the military aggression against Georgia in 2008. The ROC further sanitised and assisted the Russian state in the unprecedented annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea and military support for Donbas separatists in Eastern Ukraine in 2014” (Baar, Solík, & Baarová, 2022).

The revival of the ROC under Putin enabled the Russian state to gain geopolitical influence through the sanitisation of the Church. Military chaplains increased who would offer counsel and support in military invasions, (Ponomariov, 2017).

Putin-influenced reforms of the Russian Orthodox Church politically cemented relations between the church and the state in Russia. Skladanowski & Smuniewski, (2023) asserts that,

“During Vladimir Putin’s time in power, significant changes have occurred in both the church-state relationship and in the religiosity of Russians, which can be interpreted as the result of internal policy pursued by the authorities. The policy aims to subordinate all social organisations, including religious ones to the set goals by the state, as well as to eliminate or marginalise those organisations that retain independence from the state e.g. Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

The ROC has remained a partner of the state that gives religious and theological support to the foreign policy of the state. Mabile, (2022) notes that Putin has adopted a broader view of security than military security alone and has made use of the influence of the ROC. ROC falls

within the objective of cultural protection and promotion, and provide moral support for both the army and the regime. Indirectly and ideologically the Moscow Patriarchate shares responsibility for the ongoing events, (Mabille, 2022). From that perception, the ROC has also maintained a grip in the ecclesiastical affairs of Ukraine complementing the geopolitical strategy of the Russian state.

Ecclesiastical feuds between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Church have been an issue that has thrived on the political terrain between the two countries. Leustean & Samokhvalov, (2019) the ROC has maintained control the Orthodox Christianity in Ukraine. This has resulted in splits among the Ukrainian Church. Furthermore, the ROC has been in the habit of supporting the state's foreign policies against Ukraine so as to be able to maintain her ecclesiastical control of the region, (Leustean & Samokhvalov, 2019). Nicolai, (2019) adds that after Russia's takeover of Crimea the Moscow Patriarchate significantly expanded its direct control over the Crimean eparchy. The atrocities committed by Russian cannot disqualify the complicity of the Church According to Paffenholz, Bramble, & Poppelreuter, (2023):

“Since the start of the inter-state war in Ukraine which began on 24 February 2022 with Russia's military invasion. Over 13 million people have been displaced internally and across borders, a verified 9369 civilians have died and 16 646 or more have suffered life-changing injuries. Unverified estimates in leaked US intelligence documents hold that by April 2023 the war had resulted in the killing or wounding of around 130 0000 Ukrainian soldiers and around 200000 Russian troops (the military casualties from both sides could be significantly higher). The war has so far caused USD\$47, 5 Billion in damaged infrastructure in Ukraine, in addition to significant environmental destruction.” (Paffenholz, Bramble, & Poppelreuter, 2023)

Despite the issues deduced from reviewed literature by various scholars there is room for a roadmap that may assist in bringing peace in the Russo-Ukraine war.

## **2.5 Roadmap for the Russo-Ukraine War.**

The relationship between the Russian state and the ROC is presented as a hand-and-glove kind of relationship by scholars. According to Hovorun, (2023), the contemporary Russian state has played a critical role in the reestablishment of the ROC. In essence, the relationship between the Russian state and the ROC is characterised by the two entities working together as partners in the governance of Russia, (Hovorun, 2023). Baar, Solík, & Baarová, (2022) notes that the ROC is a critical player in Russian politics in which it is assigned the role of sanitising the activities of the Russian state. Landrum, (2023), notes that the ROC plays a role in Russia's contemporary foreign policy by helping to illuminate why Putin is willing to engage in a war with Ukraine. The ROC as a player in Russian politics has been silent about the massive human carnage in the Russia-Ukraine war, (Landrum, 2023).

The Russo-Ukraine has affected the warring states. According to Heisbourg, (2023), Russia has been diplomatically, socially, economically and politically affected by the war. Ukraine has also suffered huge life and infrastructural losses but with limited options to stop the war since it must defend its sovereignty (Heisbourg, 2023). The roadmap to be presented in this literature review is deduced from views by scholars, whose views may enhance the ideas of this study. The road map consists of the following steps dialogue, mediation by trusted facilitators, a call for allies to stop military support for the fighting parties to enable peace talks, immediate cessation of hostilities, unconditional withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine, immediate cessation of propaganda from both sides and their allies and establishment of peace building mechanisms from grassroots level.

In the Russo-Ukraine war, a constructive dialogue is needed. The dialogue must practically focus on ending the war. Paffenholz, Bramble, & Poppelreuter, (2023) maintains that dialogue must be

undertaken through mediation by trusted actors. Trusted actors have a moral obligation to facilitate peace with a good moral conscience. Paffenholz, Bramble, & Poppelreuter, (2023) further asserts that: “Comparative evidence indicates that since 1800 AD, negotiations have been the most common way to end wars between states: 38 (or 68%) of interstate wars that were fought between 1800 and 1980 ended through negotiation. From 1989 to 2010 four of the eight interstate armed conflicts resulted in a peace agreement.” Bramble, Kadayifci-Orellana and Paffenholtz, (2023) negotiations for peace have been successfully facilitated by the church as an issue that the ROC must consider to be pertinent in the Russia-Ukraine war. However, Paffenholz, Bramble, & Poppelreuter, (2023) further aver that the facilitation of peace requires calling on allies of warring parties to stop giving military support for the fighting parties to enable peace talks to succeed. The process of peace talks in itself must call for the cessation of hostilities between the states warring and involved in the conflict. Paffenholz, Bramble, & Poppelreuter, (2023) declares that as a measure to enable peace talks to succeed the Russian state must withdraw her forces from Ukraine soil as a gesture of positive cooperation to peace talks.

## **Summary**

In summation, the chapter presented the functionalist and neo-classical realism theories used by the study. However, church-state relations have been established as taking place within two basic models or poles which are coexistence and independent actors. When the church is an independent actor it can be able to act as a restraining mechanism for excesses done by politicians. However, when the church coexists with the state it becomes a weapon used by the state to further interests. Challenges of conscience of the church and state have been established by the chapter in the cases of state leaders such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Joseph Stalin. The positive impact of the church as a voice of peace has been

established in the USA versus the Vietnam War and the Mozambican post-independence civil war. Relations between the ROC and the Russian state have been established to manifest coexistence by scholars in this chapter. However, a road map for peace through negotiation has been proposed by scholars in the reviewed literature.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3. Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology used by the research during the undertaking of this study. The methodological procedures employed by this study were informed by the following research objectives: to discuss the church-state relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State. To examine the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war. To assess whether the Russian Orthodox Church is an enabler of peace in the Russia-Ukraine war. The objectives augur with a qualitative methodology. In essence, issues to be tackled by the chapter include presenting the research philosophy, research methodology, research design, population and sample, sampling methods, data collection methods, validity and reliability, data presentation analysis and ethical considerations. Upon presenting the key aspects of the methodology a summary shall be presented at the end of the chapter.

#### **3.1 Research Philosophy**

Due to its qualitative nature, the study uses interpretivism research philosophy. Kivunja, (2017) notes that interpretivism emphasises the need for the researcher to understand the individuals under interrogation and deduce an interpretation of the world around them. Kivunja, (2017) & Golder, (2018) avers that the central endeavour of interpretivist philosophy is to understand the subjective world of human experience these experiences can positively or negatively affect people. The individuals of a special focus in this research are those located in the context of the Russo-Ukraine war. These include primarily include those from the church whose role in the Russo-Ukraine war is of huge concern in this study. The reality of the case and the situation in the Russo-Ukraine war versus the anticipated role of the church in the conflict socially constructed reality. The ideological position of Russia has coloured the views of the ROC which

has been nationalised and instrumentalised by the state. Interpretivism is ideal towards analysing the ROC as an enabler of either peace or conflict in the Russo-Ukraine war.

### **3.2 Research Methodology**

The nature of the area under investigation involves studying people's experiences, behaviours, attitudes and interactions under a conflict. On that note, the appropriate research methodology is the qualitative methodology. According to (Haradhan, 2018) the qualitative methodology is inductive and the researcher generally explores meanings from a studied case. Qualitative methodology is also a range of data collection and analysis techniques that use purposive sampling and semi-structured open-ended interviews, (Haradhan, 2018). Rosen, (2019) explains that the qualitative research design focuses on generating meanings on how particular people make proper sense of the world that they live in. Qualitative methodology further encompasses how participants experience events in their perspectives. Bhattacharjee, (2012), claims that by using the qualitative research design the researcher engages with issues that matter and ways that matter further exploring communities, society, experiences, feelings and beliefs. The qualitative methodology gave the researcher a methodological set of tools to explore the Russo-Ukraine war, in light of the role played by the church as an enabler of peace or conflict. The role of the church has been qualitatively investigated from her relationship with the state as presented by secondary literature.

The issue under interrogation involves religious beliefs, ideology, culture, political experiences and conflicts as deduced from the ROC engagement with the Russian state. In this study, the qualitative research methodology presents quality data in the form of descriptive and analytical statements. However, the requested data requires philosophical interpretation. According to Haradhan, (2018), the qualitative methodology interprets data through discourse analysis,

conversation analysis and narrative analysis which are aspects that are awash in the Russo-Ukraine war and the role played by the church in the conflict (Rosen, 2019). The efficacy of the qualitative methodology was enhanced by the case study research design.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The study complements the qualitative research methodology using the case study research design. According to Haradhan, (2018), case study denotes the exploration of an individual group or phenomenon. The group under interrogation in this study encompasses people of faith and their behaviour towards a violent conflict ravaging two particular countries Russia and Ukraine. Under the case study, the researcher explores the ROC. Using the case study the researcher explores the Russo-Ukraine war with a special focus on how the church is behaving as an enabler of war or conflict. There are multiple perspectives to be studied in the case under interrogation. This is because a case study research design entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case (Sileyew, 2022). In essence, the case study is in-depth in nature and that enhances its suitability for qualitative study of social phenomena.

### **3.4 Population and Sample**

The selected population for this study was made up of participants who are familiar with and knowledgeable to the issue under interrogation. According to Babbie, (2014) a population in a research means characteristics of a particular group. The targeted population is the totality of people, sampling units, or elements with which a particular research problem is concerned, (Rosen, 2019). The researcher selected 10 participants. Of the 10 participants, 4 were Orthodox Priests, 3 Russian community members residing in Zimbabwe and 3 political scientists. These participants were selected using both purposive sampling.

### **3.5 Sampling Methods**

The selection of the population relevant to this study used a purposive sampling method. Sampling of a population during research is critical as it enables proximity of participants when collecting data from a controlled selected people, (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021). According to Creswell, (2014), purposive sampling enables the researcher to seek individuals and sites that can best answer the raised questions. Purposive sampling is the dominant strategy in qualitative research because it enables the researcher to extract relevant primary data from the participants, (Haradhan, 2018). Using purposive sampling the researcher managed to sample participants who are familiar with conflict and peace issues involving the ROC in the Russia-Ukraine war.

The selected population participated in the research under purely qualitative research instruments or data collection tools. Purposive sampling drives the researcher towards maximising on people of expertise to the study, (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021). The sampled population included members of the Russian Community in Zimbabwe, Orthodox religious practitioners, political scientists and international relations experts. The sampled population was interviewed using in-depth interviews that had open-ended questions. The findings from the sample were validated by document analysis as another critical data collection method for the study.

### **3.6 Data collection methods**

The data collection methods for this study are in-depth interviews and document analysis. According to Haradhan, (2018), when a researcher uses a case study thriving under a qualitative research methodology, qualitative methodology instruments should be used. Data collection tools for this research are interviews and document analysis. The researcher has imported qualitative research instruments in the form of in-depth interviews and document analysis for this study.

### **3.6.1 In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews were selected as a data-gathering instrument. According to Chivanga & Monyai, (2021) in-depth interviews permit qualitative data to be collected from individuals and answer sessions with people involved. In essence, Creswell, (2014) defines an interview is defined as a professional conversation aimed at enabling participants to talk freely about their experiences and perspectives. The use of interviews enabled the researcher to be able to engage in a conversation with the participants selected for the research thrust. The researcher captured the views of the participants which relate to the research thrust, (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The researcher asked questions and participants responded with perspectives embedded with primary data for the research. The researcher also used unstructured interviews because this gave room for flexibility. The researcher thoroughly interviewed participants about the ROC as a peace or conflict enabler in the Russo-Ukraine war using unstructured interviews. To stick to the fundamentals of the research thrust the researcher controlled the interviews to avert digression to unnecessary discourses which are irrelevant for the research. In-depth interviews have their advantages and disadvantages during data collection.

#### **Advantages of in-depth interviews**

- In-depth interviews helped the researcher to establish personal contact with the participants. Such participants in this study are the Russian Community in Zimbabwe, Orthodox Church priests, political scientists and international relations experts.
- The data obtained through interviews was assumed to be accurate, reliable and valid. This is hinged on the direct access that a researcher has to a participant.

- The researcher had room to discern responses from participants' facial and bodily expressions as these enhanced the determination of the quality of data extracted from a participant.
- The use of in-depth interviews has a higher response rate from participants than other data collection tools.
- In-depth interviews enable probing of answers that are not clear.

### **Disadvantages of interviews**

- In-depth interviews can be time-consuming as the researcher sometimes fumbled to access participants.
- It is also costly to engage in an interview with a participant. Costs are incurred for online and telephone interviews.
- Possibility of collecting false data as participants can be conditioned by circumstances to respond in a manner deemed safe for their community ethos.
- There is also limited use of standard interviews thereby compromising the relevance of the collected data.
- Interviews can be controlled and directed to satisfy the assumptions of the researcher.

Aware of the given disadvantages and their effects on the study. The researcher allocated time for an interview and managed to control the allocated time per interview. Cost-cutting measures in the form of using workplace Wi-Fi access for both online calls and chatting. The researcher probed follow-up information seeking questions to mitigate control falsifications. Interviews were standardised so that relevant data was collected. The researcher allowed the participants to articulate issues from their understanding.

### **3.6.2 Document Analysis**

Document analysis contributes to the extraction of primary data that can be critical to the study. Such primary data can be obtained from video recordings, pictures, internet virtual discourses, and grey literature in the form of comments and discussions of internet platforms among others. Rapley, (2017) explicates that document analysis involves the process of collecting data from recorded materials which can be in the form of videos, pictures, journal articles, and reports among others. Cohen, Manion & Morrison, (2018), posits that document analysis can be defined as the process whereby the researcher accesses relevant documents and extracts data relevant to the area under investigation. Furthermore, when using document analysis meaning of data is deduced from the insights drawn from the recorded materials, (Rapley, 2017). As a religious practitioner, the researcher had access to various recorded materials and videos from the Russo-Ukraine war about how the ROC is enabling peace or conflict during the war. The researcher had access to satisfactory Wi-Fi such that some YouTube videos and other internet live recordings were easy to access and download. Access to grey literature was also easier due to the reliable internet connectivity available to the researcher.

#### **Advantages of document analysis**

- The recorded materials give the researcher a broad view of data since some of the recorded cases can be in different places related to the case under study.
- It gives easy access to data usable in the research.
- Does not consume time when looking for data from recorded materials.
- Familiarises the researcher with online current data on the area under investigation eg YouTube Videos, live virtual programs, Journal Publications and current reports accessed online.

- Can contribute original relevant data as occurrences in recorded materials will not be under the influence or control of the researcher.

### **Disadvantages of document analysis**

- Some websites were accessible for a limited period after which I was blocked eg the Russian President's website.
- Access to excessive data on YouTube consume time for the researcher to decipher the relevant data.
- Some recorded materials were edited to advance a narrative a different narrative and the researcher would establish after consuming time downloading and watching the recording.
- Electricity power cuts affected watching and collecting recorded video data.
- Workplace WI-Fi underwent maintenance and it impeded access to YouTube videos.
- Can confine the researcher to desk research with a minimal quest to embark on fieldwork.

The researcher accessed various documents and pre-recorded video materials online which enhanced the collection of data for the researcher. The researcher had to contextualise some of the collected data to suit the insights of the research thrust. Reports attached to online videos were used as a way to establish the authenticity of recorded data. The researcher accessed Wi-Fi to counter the costs of watching YouTube videos. When Wi-Fi was under maintenance the researcher bought mobile data bundles to mitigate the challenge. With other complementary data collection tools the researcher countered desk research limitations perpetrated by document analysis.

### **3.7 Validity and reliability**

The study uses triangulation as the strategy for the validity and reliability of the data. According to Bryman, (2012), triangulation denotes the use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked. Using in-depth interview questions enhances the cross-checking of collected data from document analysis (Rosen, 2019). The use of both in-depth interviews and document analysis directed the researcher to critical issues about the ROC in the Russo-Ukraine war. The researcher managed to collect adequate data to be thematically analysed and discussed.

### **3.8 Data presentation and analysis**

Data presentation and analysis shall be in the form of a thematic analysis. Data collected through using the instruments adopted by the study were presented, analysed and discussed using themes. The thematic presentation, analysis and discussion of data were drawn from the objectives of the research. Using the Braun and Clark model's six steps the researcher managed to familiarise with data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review the themes, define and name themes and produce a report, (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Audio and video recorded data were transcribed to enhance conformity to other collected data. From the understanding that this research is a qualitative methodology, the data was inductively organised into thematically relevant categories. The data analysis was handled to enhance the development of solutions to the problem under investigation.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

The researcher obtained a letter from Bindura University of Science Education to undertake the research. The letter enabled the researcher to penetrate contexts, organisations, Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Russian Community in Zimbabwe and public bodies for the undertaking of the study. The researcher interviewed adults and no children were involved in the study. An intercultural approach that tolerates both religious persuasions and cultural practices was used by the researcher. Names of participants were used upon seeking informed consent and for those who refused to have their identities divulged, permission to use pseudo-names was sought. Participant privacy and confidentiality were central to the research. Participants were allowed to disengage from the research when they felt uncomfortable with the process involved in the study.

#### **Summary**

The chapter presented the interpretivist research philosophy that was used by the researcher. Qualitative methodology was used for this study due to its efficacy in interrogating issues underpinning the research thrust. A case study research design was used to complement the qualitative research design. The purposive sampling method was used to sample a population of ten participants for the study. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The researcher further used triangulation as the strategy for the validity and reliability of data. A thematic presentation and analysis of data were adopted for the study to suit its qualitative methodological form. Ethical considerations remained the primacy of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **4. Introduction**

The previous chapter tackled the methodology of the research. This chapter thematically presents, analyses and discusses findings collected using in-depth interviews and document analysis. The themes to be presented include the role of the church in politics, the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state, the role being played by the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war and an assessment of whether the Russian Orthodox Church plays a role as an enabler of peace or conflict in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. After presenting, analysing and discussing the findings a chapter summary will be presented.

#### **4.1 Presentation of findings, discussion and analysis**

The researcher successfully collected data from in-depth interview respondents to interpret the data according to the presented themes. The response rate is presented below:

**Table 1: Interview Response Rate**

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage Response Rate</b>
Successful	9	90%
Failures	1	10%
Total	10	100%

The table above indicates that a total of 10 interviews were scheduled with the selected participants. The researcher selected 4 Orthodox Priests, 3 Russian community members and 3 political scientists. However, out of the scheduled 10 about 9 were successfully carried out. This gave the research a 90% successful response rate in interviews. Of the selected participants for

interviews 1 (a political scientist) failed to be successful giving the research a 10% failure rate. The researcher had to use collected data from other participants and document analysis sources.

#### **4.2 The role of the church in politics.**

The first question that was asked to interviewees sought their views on whether the church has a role to play in politics or not. From the responses of the participants, they all agreed that the church has a role to play in politics. The church has human members who are also a critical mass for politics. An interviewed political scientist explicated that, “indeed the church has a role to play in politics. The church has a bigger constituency in human society in the form of its congregants. Congregants are a critical mass in terms of politics.” Biblical narratives point to the view that the Old Testament prophets were involved in the politics of their day. An Orthodox Church Priest said the following:

The church by nature is a political organisation, since time immemorial and even in the Biblical times. Old Testament religious leaders played a critical role in the political affairs of their time and in their kingdoms. The only blunder made by the church from her inception is to claim authority over heavenly things and allow politicians to uncontestedly claim authority over earthly activities. Resultantly, the church now needs allegiance to political leaders for its survival and missionary work. That then clearly reveals that in the contemporary context, the church has a role in politics but in most cases limited to authenticating agendas for political elites.

However, the theology about a better life in heaven of the contemporary church at times impedes her focus on crucial political issues that affect society in the present world. That does not disqualify the view that the church teaches about day-to-day living issues of life. The same issues underpin the fundamental thrust of politics. Politics characterise human interactions in both the generality of society and the church. Historically in Europe there used to be a symbiotic relationship between the Church and the state (kings). The clergy had a special place in the governance and administrative processes of monarchs in Europe. For example in France when a revolution occurred the church also got into trouble because she was an accomplice of the state.

From the findings obtained Church-state relations are very crucial towards understanding how the state and church operate in society. According to Ponomariov, (2017), church-state relations take place within two basic models or poles which are coexistence and independent actors. Despite the emphasis on the two basic models, the fundamental proposition underpinning this perspective is the view that the church plays a role in politics. The role can either be in the form of coexistence or independent acting but both do not exempt the church from politics. CM, (10/11/23) explicated that, “the church has a bigger constituency in human society in the form of her congregants. Congregants are a critical mass in terms of politics. Due to the critical mass for politics that the church controls, she cannot operate outside a political consciousness. From a biblical standpoint, the church had a role to play in politics and continues in the same role to date.

The church cannot avoid intervening in politics as that can be a negation of the needs of her constituency. EM, (11/11/23), “Religion and politics have always been intertwined from time immemorial. Remember in the Old Testament prophets like Amos, Jeremiah, Moses, Joshua etc. were involved in the politics of their day”. TG, (16/11/23) averred that Old Testament religious leaders played a critical role in the political affairs of their time and in their kingdoms. Politics during the Old Testament prophets’ context demanded religion to play a role in the enthronement of monarchs, war, relations with other states, and governance among others. From a typological perspective, the Old Testament context remains a model of the church today. However, distinct from the Old Testament life of the faithful the contemporary church acts sacerdotal and apocalyptic beliefs precede involvement in politics. According to Scott & Cavanaugh, (2014), the church involves itself in politics in some cases without openly coming out as a participant in politics. The claim that the church focuses on spirituality while the state zeroes in on worldly

matters is a façade considering how churches raise a voice in politics. TG, (16/11/23) argues that the church at times acts like she is a servant of political elites while claiming theological efficacy at the same time. Serving the state for favours makes the church an ideological, foreign policy, a geopolitical and strategic weapon for politicians.

The church by nature is a political institution. According to CM the teachings of the Church themselves have something to do with day-to-day living. Such teachings address even issues of basic needs of humanity, which is also an area under which politics thrives to address making the two either clash or unite for such a cause. The moment one talks about day-to-day issues of basic needs affecting people you will be stamping on a political landscape, (CM, 10/11/23). Both institutions, the church and state, strive to address human needs some of which are economic and political. The clash of church and state over issues of addressing the needs of society is an indication of the political engagement of the two institutions. Snyder, (2022) notes that the voice of the church to the state may not be immune to criticism and that may result in the church publicly quite while seeking to change government policy by persuasion behind the scenes. The silence of the church under circumstances of heavy criticism from the state does not amount to justify that the church has no role in politics. CM further expound that: “Anything that affects the congregants will certainly compel the church to raise her voice to defend her big constituency. The church speaks vehemently on the political platform despite criticisms from the state (CM, 10/11/23).

The voice of the church contributes to the governance of society. According to DM, (09/11/23) historically the church has a special place in the governance and administrative processes of monarchs in Europe. Apparently, the church is a stakeholder in the politics of a nation. The church is a body formed by citizens who in turn are part of the body politic. This means people

of different political persuasions find themselves in the same church or form churches based on political ideologies, affiliations and sympathies, (RC, 15/11/23). Trying to separate the church from politics can be complex such that, by the time one thinks he/she has separated the institutions in real terms the conclusion will have logically united the two in the political fora.

The church has a role in politics but it must not participate in politics as a weapon or instrument of the state. The church must keep its moral consciousness to be able to influence fairness, ethical leadership, and peace and conflict transformation in society. When the church lacks a moral consciousness in the political space its role in politics becomes that of an accomplice of the state in suppressing, dehumanising and oppressing people (Lalík, 2017). In the interest of this study, the Russian Orthodox Church plays a role in Russian politics. The role which the study presents involves partnering with the state in her foreign policy and geopolitics. The ROC is the largest Non-Governmental organisation in Russia and plays a soft power role for the state. The soft power role can be seen in the cases of strengthening and repairing relations with other states eg the 2008 Georgian war after dialogue with the Georgian Orthodox Church (Lalík, 2017). In light of that role indeed there are issues of interest to this study about the relationship between the ROC and the Russian state.

### **4.3 The relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state.**

The Russian state tends to be affinitive of working with the church in a coexistence that serves her interests. A member of the Russian community in Zimbabwe said the following:

“...my experience in the former Soviet Union which espoused scientific atheism as concomitant to scientific socialism, the then state ideology. The Russian Orthodox Church was deemed a Tsarist and pre-communist religion and was therefore antithetical to communism. Its existence was then minimally permitted as a vestige of history confined to museums. However, there was a policy shift after the Cold War which resulted in the so-called reestablishment of the Russian Orthodox Church especially under President Putin. Under Putin, billions of dollars have been invested towards the reestablishment of the Russian Orthodox Church. All I can say is what we have in Russia today as the Russian Orthodox Church is a Putin project that am yet to understand if it qualifies to be a church”.

To a greater extent, the Russian state has become the main actor in the reestablishment of the ROC through funding and giving land to the church. The state supports the ROC in the Russian context. However, the relationship of the ROC and the Russian state works to the advantage of the Russian state. According to an interviewed political scientist,

“The relationship between Putin and the ROC blurs church-state difference. The church and the state have become essentially one organism. The ROC is being used by Russia to extend Russian influence near and abroad. The ROC itself has also become rich as a result of this alliance. Putin is now using the church to further his narrative that the West has lost Christian values because of too much liberty and freedom.”

The relationship between the ROC and the Russian state has been proven by findings to be a shrewd one. According to an interview Orthodox Church Priest,

“There is a close shrewd relationship between ROC and Putin. Shrewd in the sense that ROC’s expansion and missionary activities are funded by the Putin-led government and this compromises the church’s effectiveness in keeping the political elites accountable. For Putin, ROC was a perfect ideological dilution of extreme communism. ROC has become a player in Putin’s geopolitics. With the faster growth and spread of secularism in East and Western Europe Putin uses ROC to counter thereby creating a loyal and passive state.”

The coexistence relationship between the ROC and the state has made the church a critical player in Russian politics. When the church becomes a player in national politics her role will serve the interests of the state. According to Landrum, (2023) the ROC is a critical player in the Orthodox

world which includes the following patriarchates Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Georgia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria. Landrum, (2023) further notes that ROC theologians claim that the Patriarchate of Moscow is the third Rome after the so-called corrupted Second Rome (Vatican) and Byzantine. It is from the third Rome that the kingdom of God shall flow to the world. However, DM, (09/11/23) averred that the current ROC is a reincarnated version of the Tsarist ROC and state relationship. In essence, history reveals that both Tsarist and contemporary regimes in Russia used the ROC as a strategy to provide policy legitimisation for territorial acquisition, including the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The ROC plays a role in Russia's foreign policy this helps to illuminate why Putin is willing to engage in a war with Ukraine, (Landrum, 2023). The earlier periods of communism had issues with the ROC because they viewed the church as an accomplice of Tsarist monarchs that was used to oppress people. Due to the dynamism of politics Russia moved to a capitalistic form of market economy after the Cold war. The post-Cold-war era compelled the communist-substantiated Russian government to reconsider the role of the church in her politics, foreign policy and national interests. According to former Russian President Dimitry Medvedev, "We (Russians) listen to the words of the creator in our hearts and obey them. These words give us sacred purpose. The goal is to stop the supreme lord of hell, Satan or Lucifer" (Hovorun, 2023). Medvedev was commenting and justifying the Russian invasion as a divine mandate towards overthrowing the satanic West. The sentiments of Medvedev also reveal a theological underpinning behind the Russianisation of the region using the church. In essence, in the post-Cold War era, the relationship between the Church in Russia and the state has become complex.

The complexity is on the unison element of the two institutions which has become a concern for this study and other players who are concerned with the end of the Russian-Ukraine war. Such an

end must translate to a lasting peace between the two states. However, Putin has been strengthened by the church such that anything less than a victory in Ukraine is a non-event. According to RC, (15/11/23) the relationship between Putin and the ROC blurs the church-state difference making the two one organism. Putin is now using the church to further his narrative that the West has lost Christian values because of too much liberty and freedom. To a greater extent, the ROC has acted like a mouthpiece of the Putin-led regime. Theologically Patriarch Kirill a former KGB Security Agent and ROC clergy justify Russia's position in the war in Ukraine as a divine mandate for Russia to defend orthodox Christian dogma and values in society, (Hovorun, 2023). The shift from persecuting the church to making the church a political weapon by the Russian state cannot be justified if it justifies war and disrespects the sanctity of life. In essence, the church (ROC) was re-established to gain supporters for the Russian Communist Party. The mission does not take into consideration the ethical expectations of a church.

After decades of militant atheism that characterised early communism in Russia under Lenin, Stalin, Gorbachev and others the Russian Communist Party turned to a religious (ROC) establishment to gain supporters.

‘In the Post-Cold War era, the Russian State has considered it a socio-political advantageous move to partner with the church in its administration of human society. The close relationship between the church and the state has resulted in the state funding the re-establishment of the ROC. The state has also restored billions of dollars worth of real estate to the church that was once confiscated by the previous regimes. Christ the Saviour Cathedral has become the place where Putin attends Mass and Patriarch Kirill also worships, but the place has a lot of questionable activity rooms in the basement, (Aljazeera, 09/11/23).

It is clear in the policy shift of the Russian Communist Party that their focus on the re-establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church has ulterior motives. The same perspective was averred by SM who argued that ‘what we have now in Russia that seems to be a resurrected ROC

is a Putin project that we as the Russians are yet to understand' (SM, 09/11/23). In the same vein, CM argued that 'indeed Putin has an agenda which he is advancing from a political perspective using the military and the church. The ROC has become an avenue for Putin to recruit people who are patriotic and indoctrinated in the Russian ideology', (CM, 10/11/23). 'During the Soviet era the church was forbidden to freely operate and in contemporary Russia for the ROC to operate freely it must support the government' (YouTube 09/11/23). The ROC has been offered both a religious and political space to serve the interests of the state. That becomes a negative function, especially with her role in the support of the state even in special military operations that include the Russia-Ukraine war. ROC has become an accomplice of the Russian state towards undermining the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state. As a benefit for her support of the state. The contemporary ROC supports Putin and his government and in turn, it has been funded by the state such that she (ROC) cannot bite the hand that feeds her.

Findings have proven that the ROC is characterised by openly supporting the Russian state in her foreign policy, interests and plans for re-Russianisation of their region. CM further maintained that "... the Russian Orthodox Church supports Putin and his government. The ROC is following the ancient fundamental belief of divine right rule by the kings. In the old Russia Tsarist states used the same fundamental belief and the church was central in the administration of society. Under divine rule by the king, what Putin and Russia are doing in Ukraine is viewed as part and parcel of the divine plan. (CM, 10/11/23). The Kremlin has a long history of using the Russian Orthodox Church to legitimise centre control and regional dominance in central Europe, (Landrum, 2023). From the Tsarist era, the ROC was a weapon used to control the Russian society which included the contemporary Ukraine. However, the intelligent inclusion of the church in the Russian political infrastructure has a shrewd element initiated by the political

elites. TG, (16/11/23) argued that there is a close shrewd relationship between ROC and Putin. Shrewd in the sense that ROC's expansion and missionary activities are funded by the Putin-led government and this compromises the church's effectiveness in keeping the political elites accountable. ROC has become a player in Putin's geopolitics.

To a larger extent, Putin has managed to successfully use the church for his state's political interests. The church has become a partner in foreign policy, spying, geopolitics and ideological expansion of a Slavic cultured blend of political ideology. Regional and geopolitical dominance gained efficacy through the ideological blended teachings of the ROC. The challenge in contemporary Russia is that the ROC is failing to live the praxis of the United Nations Sustainable Development (SDG) Goal number 16. SGD number 16 first part calls the church to, 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development...' (UN, 2020). Churches are trusted ethical institutions towards the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies as the international system strides towards a better peaceful world. However, the activities of the ROC in support of the state undermine the ethos of SDG 16. The ROC has become the source of chaplaincy in the Russian army such that ROC priests at times are filmed blessing warplanes and missiles before the Russian state strikes targets. Fig: 1 of Appendix 1 a Russian Orthodox Church priest is pictured blessing a Russian military SU-27 fighter jet in Crimea.

Blessing war-planes, artillery and battalions for special military operations are considered a holy duty of the church by the fundamentalists in the Russian Communist Party. The unity of the church and the state has been sanitised by the communist political elites. 'It is a holy duty of communists and the Orthodox Church to unite' Gennady Zuyganov Chairman of Russia's Communist Party. The unity resulted in the blessing of Saturn and ballistic missiles etc, (Aljazeera 09/11/23, YouTube, 13/11/23). The political theological formulations to justify the

coexistence of the church and the state in Russia has made the church and the state rogue political animals in the region. From a Russian Communist Party apologist, “Jesus Christ was the first communist because Jesus said, ‘Do not collect earthly wealth, you won’t take it with you after death (Matthew 6:19-21), and communists thought the same’ Tamara Lavrischeva (Aljazeera, 09/11/23). However, realities on the ground dismiss sound theological underpinnings in some of these skewed theological hermeneutics used by communist apologists. In reality, the ROC has become a faithful servant for ideological propagation for the Russian state in all the areas that she has interests towards Russianisation. The ROC now spreads Slavic culture tinted in Putinism for the Russianisation of the region.

The ROC has become a weapon or tool for Russian ideological influence in Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and other contexts in the region. DM maintained that ‘the Putin-led government has managed to weaponise the ROC such that it has become a conflicted player in any conflict transformation or peace program in the region’ (DM, 12/11/23). Orthodox teachings through the ROC are viewed by the Russian state as an ideological influencer that will make the Russians rally behind their political leadership. However, the shenanigans of the church and state have in some cases resulted in the attacks and persecution of those people who criticise the relationship between the ROC and the Russian State, (Aljazeera, 09/11/23). Father Iakov Voronstov was defrocked as one of the three hundred priests who signed a letter condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The state continues to control the affairs of the ROC such that opposition against the state is considered an anathema against the church, (YouTube, 13/11/23). Rev Ioann Koval was defrocked after President Putin ordered the church to pray for victory in the war in Ukraine. Instead of using the word ‘victory’ Rev Ioann Koval used the word peace and that resulted in him being defrocked by the ROC leadership, followed by persecution from the state

such that he had to flee to Turkey where he found asylum, (YouTube, 13/11/23). The relationship between the ROC and the state has become toxic even among the Russians themselves. Serving in the ROC equates to serving in a state institution. It then remains a concern to consider the funding of the re-establishment of the church by the state to be a genuine cause. President Putin a member of the ROC has become a frequent figure in both mass, church ceremonies and visits to church projects. In Fig 2 of Appendix 2 the Russian head of state Putin is pictured visiting one of the completed church projects, (Kremlin, 09/11/23).

A new lease of life realised by the ROC has come at a political price. The Church's new love affair with the state has come with its own merits and demerits, about open support for Putin's government. 'The ROC leader Patriarch Kirill has called the support of the church by the Putin government a miracle of God. The ROC gets support from the state and in turn advances the policies of the state,' (YouTube, 13/11/23). Further, confirming the political intimacy between the ROC and the state Patriarch Kirill the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church said, "...all political forces should be together when it comes to values of faith, morals, culture and our nation's unity. This was said when Patriarch Kirill was handing Zuyganov the Chairman of the Russian Communist Party a medal of Glory and Honour the top award from the Church on his seventieth birthday," (Aljazeera, 09/11/23). In light of the war in Ukraine, the ROC has even developed a theology that justifies participation in the war. Priests are now teaching that dying in the war will guarantee one to enter the Kingdom of God (heaven) (YouTube 13/11/23). Such homilies aim to influence more voluntary sacrifice to participate in the war or join the army from the citizenry. In this case, the church has become the weapon to whip Russian society to a magnified superficial and heretical hope.

National interests and the quest to support the foreign policy of the state have made the church a slave of the state. The Russian state has managed to weaponise the church for her national interests in the Slavic context and foreign policy targets, (CM, 10/11/23). Putin uses the Tsarist era cultural and theological claims to justify his imperialistic war against Ukraine, (Landrum, 2023). “We must understand that the Russian Orthodox Church influences the V. Putin-led government in the same way the Roman Catholic Church influences the politics of Rome or the Church of England (Anglican Church) influences the politics of Britain or the Lutheran influence in the politics of German. These are traditional churches with deep roots in the politics of these countries” (EM, 11/11/23). The church is a critical ideological tool since it thrives on teachings that have a strong effect on the minds of the believers.

Theologically the Russian Orthodox Church has managed to live up to the expectation of ideological propagation and Slavic cultural expansion. According to Father Cyrill Hovorun a former theological adviser to Patriarch Kirill, “The Church is the main supplier of President Putin’s ideology. The war in Ukraine has a simple formula war equals to guns plus ideas. The guns are supplied by the Kremlin while ideas come from the church. Putin sees this war as a sacred operation to purge the world from impurity of the Western ideas and values” (YouTube 09/11/23). The church further convinces believers that obeying the word of the head of state is equal to obeying the authority of one sent by God. Putin is viewed as God send and ideologically the ROC teaches a theology that justifies such a position, (YouTube, 13/11/23). In return, the Putin-led state has been pouring billions of dollars into the church to secure both the support and social control of Russian society through the ROC. The wealth of the Moscow Patriarchate has managed to attract considerable bishopric support which geopolitically works in favour of Russia.

Belonging to the Putin-funded Moscow Patriarchate has made priests who affiliate to the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC) rich. The Russian Orthodox Church now boasts of a large territory controlled by Bishops aligned to its patriarchate in the following countries: Bishops of the Moscow Patriarchate from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Estonia as well as other countries with affiliations to the dioceses of the ROC, (Kremlin 09/11/2023). “The ROC is the only Moscow-centred institution that has managed to continue operating across the entire expanse of the former Soviet Union since its collapse. It traces its lineage to the pre-Revolutionary ROC, making it bigger and older than the state” (EM, 11/11/23). According to President V. Putin, the ROC has been a critical player in the moral and cultural identity of the Slavic people. Hence the need to have it central towards continuity of influence in the Slavic cultured people, (Landrum, 2023). The role of the ROC towards supporting President Putin led state has become clear in the relations between the ROC and the state. However, it is significant to interrogate the role that is currently played by the ROC in the 2022 onward Russo-Ukraine war.

#### **4.4 The Russian Orthodox Church and the Russia-Ukraine War.**

The ROC has been sanitising the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This sanitisation is anchored on the quest to please the Russian state that pampers the ROC. According to an Orthodox Church Priest,

“The ROC is playing a major role in stamping the decisions of the political elites. This emanates from the view that the ROC benefits from the government and it has been made a state religion. In paying back the ROC peddles propaganda for the Putin-led government. Now that there is a crisis in Ukraine, the ROC is capitalising on this crisis to evangelise (shrewd evangelism/evangelism of crisis).”

The ROC openly gave support to the Russian state in her invasion of Ukraine. Another Orthodox Church Priest averred that,

“...the ROC did not hesitate to throw its support behind the Kremlin’s war against the Orthodox-dominated neighbouring nation Ukraine. The reason is not just that the church is used to giving her blessings to any actions taken by the country’s leadership. Quite simply, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, head of the ROC is betting on Putin’s tanks to preserve the institution of the Russian Orthodox Church in the fallen Soviet empire.”

The ROC has embarked on biased humanitarian work in Ukraine. This biased humanitarian work in Ukraine involves giving humanitarian aid to Russian-controlled areas and leaving the Ukrainian-controlled ones. This is despite the view that the ROC has many parishes in the whole of Ukraine. The Russian Presidium appointed a religious affairs committee under which the humanitarian work of the church and other activities are reported.

Considering the efficacy of the view that the ROC has become a political weapon for the Russian state. It is critical to interrogate the political effect of the ROC in the Russo-Ukraine war. According to Hovorun, (2023), the ROC led by Patriarch Kirill who is a Putin close ally theologically gives the state immense support to fight in Ukraine. TG, (16/11/23) maintains that “the ROC benefits from the government and it has been made a state religion. In paying back the ROC peddles propaganda for the Putin-led government.” As has been alluded to in the previous

theme, the ROC has become the state's ideological and foreign policy weapon. The ROC has managed to control a population of the Russian society towards supporting the state's interests. According to President Putin "...the role of the church (ROC) in the life of society is growing and it has become very important in recent years. Everything you are doing to promote peace and harmony in Russia, in our country, and to maintain social well-being in society is extremely important for our country," President Putin February 2022 Celebrating Enthronement Day Holiday and meeting Patriarch Kirill (Kremlin, 09/11/23). Putin has become a regular guest in important ROC events which he also belongs to as a believer. Putin's membership in the ROC is deduced from his participation in the liturgical, ceremonial and ritual practices of the ROC (YouTube, 14/11/23). Based on Putin's loyalty to ROC Christian beliefs the church has rallied behind him. Furthermore, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, head of the ROC is betting on Putin's tanks to preserve the institution of the Russian Orthodox Church in the fallen Soviet empire." (EM, 11/11/23). Failure by the church to openly support the state may result in the state turning against the church. The ROC cannot afford to go back to the bitter Soviet communist persecution era. The church has enslaved itself to the state in the quest to gain support for permission to have free worship space.

The support of the ROC for the state has been considerably clear in the political context of Russia.

"...the ROC has expressed support for Russia's military operation in Ukraine. The church has historically been closely aligned with the Russian government, especially during the Tsarist era. The ROC has the Russian state as a defender of orthodox (right Christian teaching) in the Russia-Ukraine war. The Western liberal Christianity that comes along with NATO Western ideology in Ukraine is deemed to result in immoral approvals such as giving rights to gays and lesbians and approval of same sex-marriages. That has been the teaching of the ROC and it has been used to qualify the special military operation in Ukraine as a divine mandate" (TK, 14/11/23)

In the contemporary context liberalism is labelled evil in Russia through theological formulations by the ROC. Everything Western is viewed as evil or ungodly and must not be tolerated in the vicinity of Russia. Geopolitically the ROC has embarked on spreading the message that labels the West an evil people. RC supports the view by averring that, the church is now controlled by the Russian state to spread Russian foreign policy interests. Today the ROC is now constructing cathedrals in North Korea as a way of extending Russian influence, (RC, 15/11/23). On the contrary, emphasis is given to the effect that what the ROC is doing in other countries reveals that Christianity has become the religion of Russia. “We live now in Russia in the period of Christianity triumphing to be the religion of our society. The West has become less and less religious and their losing any value of being moral beings. Democracy and liberalism are satanic ideas that spell a death sentence for humanity. Those that rule USA and Western Europe are part of a satanic army trying to corrupt Ukraine” (YouTube 14/11/23). Christianity that condones democracy is not acceptable to the Russians as per the influence of Putin. Christianity formulated in an ROC dogma is now promoted to the acceptable one for Russia. To further strengthen the conviction that Russia is now religiously Christian. The Russian state has established a committee that administers religious affairs from the office of the Russian President.

The committee that administers religious affairs from the office of the Russian President has been involved in the Russia-Ukraine war. This committee directs the church to offer humanitarian aid and development to Russian-controlled Ukrainian territories. Presidential Council for Coordination of Religious Affairs reports during the special military operation of the Russian Armed forces in Ukraine reported that,

‘During the special military operation by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine religious organisations (ROC being the major one) implemented social and charity projects during the war. Religious organisations have collected over 4,484 tonnes of humanitarian aid and delivered it to the Lugansk, and Donetsk People’s Republics, the

Kherson and Zaporozhye regions. In all they have provided support for over 614, 000 people, providing those in need with hot meals and medical treatment continuously. Water filtration systems and electric power generators have been purchased and delivered to these territories, and water wells have been drilled there. Solid-fuel and gas boilers, heaters, petrol generators and gas convectors have been installed. Some other projects aiming to resume peaceful life in the new regions of the Russian Federation have been implemented' (Kremlin, 09/11/23).

Despite the humanitarian work that the ROC is undertaking in some war-ravaged parts of Ukraine that have turned Russian, her role towards promoting peace remains soiled. Does the ROC have the political will to call a spade a spade and be able to bring conscience to the Russian state? Indeed that is impossible with the current development of events in the Russo-Ukraine war, (CM, 10/11/23). There are priests on the war front, others are chaplains while others are soldiers fighting. The priests fighting have a conviction that Ukraine is important to the ROC because of the conversion of Russ which resulted in a fundamental baptism to Russia and was undertaken in Ukraine. Hence the need to recover the land of religious significance to ROC and the state, (YouTube, 14/11/23). The ROC has continued to strengthen its priests and parishes in Ukraine. These parishes and cathedrals have also become storehouses for weapons used in the war against Ukraine. Priests are mandated to bless artillery, missiles and warplanes that should fight and kill in Ukraine. These issues conflict with the role of the ROC as a peace enabler. The ROC is a powerful propaganda agency in the Russian society on behalf of the state, (YouTube, 15/11/23). The propaganda of the ROC goes on to sanitise every action of the state. The propaganda includes constructing theologies that justify the special military operation in Ukraine. These theological formulations are peddled among the ROC believers and in turn impact the society. Such actions from the church fit the ROC in Russian foreign and national policy. The national interests of the Russian state are also furthered by the actions of the ROC.

#### **4.5 The Russian Orthodox Church: Enabler of peace or conflict in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.**

Findings have pointed to the view that the ROC is a conflict enabler in the Russia-Ukraine war. The Russian state has maintained a strong relationship with the ROC, such that the state controls the church. On that basis, the ROC has become the state's partner for conflict. Ecclesiastically the ROC is conflicted even in the way she operates in Ukraine. An interviewed political scientist argued that "Considering the perspective that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has frost her relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church over the latter's strong relationship with the state. The ROC is now a conflicted player to initiate any meaningful and constructive dialogue towards peace in the Russo-Ukraine war." Rhetorics of the Patriarch Kirill the leader of the ROC do not shun enabling conflict in Ukraine. The ROC has further played a role for the Russian state towards promoting Slavic culture of reRussianisation in the Slavic region. To a greater extent the role of the ROC in the Russia-Ukraine war soils the trust for her to play a prospective peace enablement role. According to one interviewee a political scientist,

"There was a time when there was a small avenue for an opportunity to initiate dialogue and promote peace in the Russo-Ukraine war for the ROC. This was at a point when the hostilities between Russia and Ukraine had not reached a point of war. However, the ROC is now compromised and has become a stakeholder of the Russian state in war, such that her rhetoric for peace in Ukraine becomes elusive,"

The relationship between the ROC and the state conflicts with the chances of the ROC as an enabler of peace in the Russia-Ukraine war. The nature of the ROC and the Russian state is toxic towards formulating a peace plan that includes the ROC. From the Russian Orthodox political theology, the church and state must act in harmony with one another (Nicolai, 2019). The emphasis on harmony between the ROC and the state has resulted in the ROC becoming a central power in Russian politics in areas of legislation, policy-making, security, foreign policy and social life, (YouTube, 15/11/23). The influence of the ROC has even triggered controversial

bills some of which sailed through to decriminalise domestic violence in the home and at the family level. From a ROC-influenced position beating a wife is a measure of enforcing control by a man in the home. Such socially immoral influences of the ROC in Russian politics and legislation have made liberal thinkers view the ROC as evil. That perception has also crept into the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been viewing the ROC as an influential perpetrator even in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. “Considering the perspective that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has frost her relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church over the latter’s strong relationship with the state. The ROC is now a conflicted player to initiate any meaningful and constructive dialogue towards peace in the Russo-Ukraine war.” (CM, 10/11/23). The soured relations between the ROC and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church fundamentally blur any possibility of including the ROC in any Russia-Ukraine war peace process. This emanates mostly from the rhetoric of the ROC leader in line with the war in Ukraine.

The leader of the ROC Patriarch Kirill has been speaking vehemently in support of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The comments from Patriarch Kirill have a theological underpinning that influences the conviction of the Russian state in her invasion of Ukraine. According to Patriarch Kirill, “In the Ukraine war we are talking about human salvation. This salvation from the challenges of excess consumption and gay pride parade.” (Youtube 09/11/23). The comment of the Patriarch lacks a moral consideration of the sanctity of human life. It is crystal clear to note that such a theological justification and influence towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine has resulted in massive loss of human life, destruction of infrastructure and displacements of people.

Both civilians and servicemen have died in number due to the war. On the then wonders where in the conscience of the church (ROC) in human society in the Russo-Ukraine war. Should the

church approve a war for her selfish interests in the affairs of the state? An approval of war by the ROC deems it a conflict enabler. According to GD “there is a tacit approval from the ROC on what the Russian state under Putin is doing in Ukraine. Clearly, that reveals the involvement of the church as a conflict enabler in the Russo-Ukraine war. The ROC has openly supported a regime that has gone to attack a sovereign state,” (GD, 16/11/23). Furthermore, TG, (16/11/23) argued that, “the ROC cannot be a peace enabler in the Russia-Ukraine war. The ROC supported the oppression and suffering of innocent souls. ROC has also involved herself in spying on behalf of the state. The ROC chaplains are awash in the Ukrainian battlefield. Clearly, that makes the ROC an enabler of conflict. RC, (15/11/23) added that “the ROC cannot be a peace enabler in a conflict in which it has become an active participant. In the areas annexed by Russia in Ukraine, new Bishops are being imposed and prayers for the victory of Russia in the war are being made in the ROC parishes. The ROC is complicit in Russia’s war crimes in Ukraine because it is part of Putin’s system.”

Findings have shown that in these areas annexed by Russia, the ROC is undertaking a lot of charity, humanitarian and philanthropic work. Such a biased humanitarian service is a clear message to the Ukrainians that the Patriarchate of Moscow is not a saint in the Russia-Ukraine war. “The ROC is viewed by the Ukrainians as an ideological weapon of the state used to spread the Slavic culture and promote the reRussianisation of the Slavic region. Putin is trying to unify the Slavic people using the ROC without respect for the sovereignty of the state in a post-Cold War era. That makes the ROC a weapon for Russian foreign policy.” (CM, 10/11/23). ROC is a culprit who must be accountable for her unbecoming volatile behaviour and an arm of Russian volatile foreign policy goals. The interests that she serves remain those of the Russian state and none of her own as a peace enabler. On the worst plane, “Patriarch Kirill is using force to try to

keep the splintering parts of the once unified ROC together, but it appears that the Patriarch is only driving them away” (ZM, 11/11/23). The Moscow Patriarchate controls many parishes in Ukraine. Some of the Parishes and parishioners are not in support of the actions of Russia. As they expected restraint through the moral counsel of Patriarch Kirill the opposite was done by the church leader. The displeased have been moving away from loyalty to the ROC and crossing to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that has sour relations with the ROC and are also speaking loudly against the war. Patriarch Kirill thought using political muscle and force would solve the disintegration of the church but it further worsened the issue, (Hovorun, 2023). ROC priests who sympathise with Ukrainians and speak anything against the Russian invasion of the war have been severely punished by the hand of the Patriarch which controls the ROC.

Numerous priests of the ROC have been defrocked because of their call for peace and the conscience of the church in human society. Father Rev Ioann Koval was defrocked by the ROC after he was asked to pray for the victory of Russia in Ukraine and instead of using the word victory, he used the term peace. That resulted in him being defrocked by the ROC. The same orders are also applying abroad where the ROC has branches Father Rev Andei Kordochkin was defrocked in Spain ROC. So far about 30 Priests have faced immense pressure to conform to the ROC stance on the war or face excommunication from the church, (euro news, 09/11/23) Priests have been given a homiletical and liturgical narrative to theologially articulate which augurs well with the Russian state’s stance in Ukraine. The altar of the ROC has at every cost an unethical responsibility to show support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine. To a greater extent, “the ROC is operating using the strategies of the old ROC under Tsarist rulership in the old Russia. Where the church was part of the Tsarist system of governance. The contemporary ROC is nostalgic like the old ROC under Tsars” (CM, 10/11/23). Tsarist ecclesiastical behaviour

drives the ROC to be an arm of the state. However, that makes it difficult for the ROC to be trusted as a peace enabler.

The role of the ROC has made it difficult for her to be deemed a peace enabler. Peace has become elusive if it is going to be served on the ROC platter. RC argues that the ROC is now too deep in her alliance with Putin. Even the oligarchs like Prigozhin have died as a result of confrontation with the Russian government. The ROC will continue clapping for Putin until there is a bit of independence and separation of the two, (RC, 15/11/23). Putin's control of the ROC makes the church a realist arm that views the encroachment of the liberal West as a threat to her and the state. To a greater extent, Putin has managed to breed a religious movement that serves the interests of his state and foreign policy goals. Commenting on the ROC as an untrusted player to promote peace in Ukraine. ZM averred that the ROC did not openly condemn the war hence she has no moral base to call or be involved in the promotion of peace, (ZM, 11/11/23). To call for peace is now a toll order for the ROC. Even her conscience will haunt her in the face of the Ukrainian victims of war. CM, (10/11/23), opines that "before hostilities reached a point of war an opportunity to initiate dialogue and promote peace in the Russo-Ukraine war for the ROC was possible. The actions of the ROC have political and religious impacts that will leave an indelible mark on the role of the church as a peace or conflict enabler. In this case, the church has proved to be an enabler of conflict hence a double-edged sword in war situations.

#### **4.6 Religio-political impacts of the ROC's role in the Russia-Ukraine war**

The ROC supports the Russian state to the point of exacerbating conflict. On that note, the ecumenical church globally has at various points spoken against the actions of the ROC in light of the Russia-Ukraine. However, the ROC has reverted to supporting her state instead of positively responding to the ecumenical calls for peace in Ukraine and the need for the ROC to desist from supporting the state in attacking a sovereign state. Furthermore, the ROC has destabilised the International Orthodox Churches. This emanates from her refusal to support the granting of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church an autocephalous. When Patriarch Bartholomew as a senior Patriarch in the International Orthodox Churches played a role in granting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church autocephalous. The ROC pulled out of the grouping of the Orthodox Church and began to expand the Moscow patriarchate as independent from the fellowship of other patriarchates. It is now the ROC and the Russian state furthering Russianisation interests in the region and globally.

Political and religious impacts of the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war will result in the demeaning of the functionalist role of the church in society. To be positively functional the church supplants the political behaviour of the state and focuses on organically promoting peace because her functionalist focus will primarily address fundamental human needs, (Theiler, 2022). Rhetoric from Patriarch Kirill said that ‘... those who oppose the Russian position in the war in Ukraine are forces of evil (YouTube, 13/11/23). Kirill in other words gave his blessings to Putin to kill his fellow Slavs. By the end of 2022 about 92 churches in Ukraine were already destroyed by the war (Statista, 2023). Kirill rebuked those who did not support the state in her special military operation in Ukraine. The Patriarch went on to declare that we will never make peace with those who violate the law of God referring to Ukraine due to

the liberal support coming her way. In essence, “the ROC ideologically validates the policies and interests of the state cementing a very close relationship with the state. Ukrainians view the ROC as a perpetrator in their pain. This comes from the understanding that the ROC is supporting a murderous regime which has killed thousands of Ukrainians. Also according to Ukrainians Putin is a murderous individual and having a church that supports him makes that church a perpetrator” (CM, 10/11/23). However, the ROC’s role cannot be morally justified. It was supposed to tell Putin to stop his unprovoked war against an independent and sovereign state. ROC was supposed to be speaking as the conscience of the nation to reign in Putin’s excesses and also side with the suffering masses of Ukraine, (RC, 15/11/23). The ROC has created a conflicted image for herself in the war between Russia and Ukraine. That conflicted image will present a negative understanding of the church as a peace enabler.

Viewing the ROC as a conflict enabler can also be deduced by deciphering issues from the Putin-ROC relationship. Putin has all of a sudden become a regular speaker who fuses some Christian and theological elements in his speeches. According to Putin, the West cannot be tolerated in the Russian vicinity, ‘we see that many Euro-Atlantic (the West) states have taken the way where they deny or reject their roots, including their Christian roots which form the basis of Western civilization. In those countries the moral basis and any traditional identity are being denied-national, religious, cultural and even gender identities are being denied or relativized’ (YouTube, 15/11/23). The ideological rhetoric in Putin’s dictum influences hatred against the West by Russians. It arms the church with an ideology that labels the West as evil and theologically apostate. Politically the rhetoric reveals the element of weaponising the church for Putin’s ideological interests. The political weaponisation of the ROC by the Russian state confirms continuity of the use of the church by the Russian state to justify hegemonic claims in the region.

These church-state relations in the Russian context are not healthy against imagining the ROC as a peace enabler.

### **Summary**

The chapter managed to present, discuss and analyse the findings of the study. From the findings, the study managed to establish that the church plays a role in politics. This view is supported by the Old Testament's roles in politics played by prophets with monarchs. However, the role of the church in politics must not be towards supporting the state on issues that promote war and conflict. The ROC and the Russian state coexist in support of each other. The relationship of the ROC to closely relate to the state emanates from the huge financial and real estate support that the ROC benefits from the state. The ROC has openly been supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine. That has made the ROC a conflict enabler in the Russia-Ukraine war. Ecclesiastically the ROC has lost trust from other Churches globally. Politically the actions of the ROC have proved that the church can be an evil lieutenant of the state in her conflict and war interests.

## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **5. Introduction**

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions, recommendations and areas for further research. On that note, the chapter summarises the whole study. Conclusions shall be drawn in sync with the objectives, literature and primary findings of the study. Furthermore, the study gives recommendations on how the church can promote peace. Areas for further research will be presented at the end of the chapter.

### **5.1 Summary**

Chapter one tackled the introductory technical aspects of the research thrust. The research aimed to investigate the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war assessing whether it is promoting conflict or peace. The objectives of the study are: To discuss the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state. To examine the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war. To assess whether the Russian Orthodox Church is an enabler of peace in the Russia-Ukraine war. The research questions of the study are: How does the Russian state relate with the Russian Orthodox Church? What role is being and has been played by the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war? What are the political and religious impacts of the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war?

Chapter two presented theoretical frameworks and a literature review. The study used the international functionalist theory of international relations and neo-classical realism theories. Two theories were used as the researcher established that the research thrust cannot be tackled using one theory. The two theories used enhanced the unpacking of church-state relations. From

scholarly views, church-state relations can be in the form of coexistence or the church operating independently from the state. When the church coexists with the state it falls under the control of politicians as witnessed under Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Joseph Stalin. However, when the church is independent from the state it can be able to raise its voice against conflict, and bad governance and restrain excesses of power by politicians. This has been witnessed in the condemnation of the USA-Vietnam war by the Church. The successful negotiation towards peace ended the Mozambican civil war by the Catholic Church. The ROC has coexists with the state and that has resulted in the weaponisation of the ROC by the state. Scholars explicated that the ROC has become the means to spread the ideology of the Russian state and to theologically sanitise the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Chapter three presented and discussed the research philosophy, research methodology, research design, population and sample, sampling methods, data collection methods, validity and reliability, data presentation analysis and ethical considerations. The presented methodological aspects of the study were philosophised using interpretivism. The interpreted phenomena were deduced using a qualitative research methodology and case study research design. The case under investigation is the role of the ROC in light of the Russo-Ukraine war. The population that was purposively sampled included people who are familiar with the ROC-state relations and her role in the Russia-Ukraine war. The population included local Orthodox Priests, local Russian Community members and political scientists. The data was collected using in-depth interviews and document analysis. Ethical considerations were not only mentioned but were applied during the data collection process.

Findings were presented, discussed and analysed in chapter four. Findings show that the ROC coexists (partners) with the Russian state. The ROC plays key role in the geopolitics and foreign

policy of the state. These roles are spreading the Russian ideology and Slavic cultures for the re-Russianisation of the region. The ROC is theologically sanitising the Russian invasion of Ukraine offering full support towards the Russian victory in the war with Ukraine. Patriarch Kirill openly declared the ROC support for the Russian state in the invasion of Ukraine, such that priests who sympathised with the Ukrainians and called for an end to the war were defrocked by the ROC. The role of the ROC in the form of supporting its state has resulted in the ostracising of the ROC by the global ecumenical fellowship of churches. The ROC has influenced suspicion among peace practitioners on the efficacy of the church towards enabling peace.

In the fifth chapter, the researcher dealt with the summary of the study, conclusions, recommendations and areas for further study. The summary summed up all the chapters of the research. The study concludes that the ROC coexists with the state. The ROC supports the state in the Russia-Ukraine war. The ROC is an enabler of conflict in the Russia-Ukraine war. The study recommended that The ROC ought to be independent of the state so that it can objectively advise, applaud or critic the state. The Russian state must allow the ROC to be independent from the state so that the church can be able to meaningfully contribute constructive counsels that help in the governance of the state and society. The ROC to consider standing for peace in a war situation because the greatest sanity and role of the church is the preservation of human life, as such the church must not be an instrument of destruction.

## 5.2 Conclusions

The study concludes that the ROC coexists with the Russian state. The coexistence between the ROC and the Russian state has resulted in the support of the Russia-Ukraine war by the state. Findings show that the current ROC is a weapon of the state in her ideological and foreign policy agendas. The ROC's role has been that of abating the war being fought between Russia and Ukraine. The leadership of the ROC have openly supported Putin's aggression through their statements. The Russian leader Putin complementing the support of the ROC for the state said, "...the role of the church in the life of society is growing and it has become very important. Everything you are doing to promote peace and harmony in our country and to maintain social well-being in society is extremely important." The ROC has also enhanced the geopolitical aspirations of the Russian state. This is in line with Ponomariov's (2017) findings. The role played by the ROC in the Russia-Ukraine war serves the interests of the state. The ROC has been the ideological, cultural and religious weapon of the Russian state in its political undertakings (Vovk, 2019). ROC has been used by the state to spread Slavic culture in the Slavic region. Political ideas for the Russian state in both local and foreign policy areas have been sanitised by the ROC. This includes the special military operation in Ukraine or the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Kent, 2022, Skladanowski & Smuniewski, 2023).

From the perspectives of literature and findings, the study concludes that the ROC is playing a political role that supports the position of the Russian state in the Russia-Ukraine war. Findings show that the ROC has been blessing weapons used in the war, peddling theological teachings that declare the victory of Russia in her war with Ukraine. The ROC has been found to be a weapon of the state in her political affairs. In light of the Russia-Ukraine war, the ROC has partnered with the state taking the position of the state (Walenty & Doroshko, 2023). Findings

further show that the ROC is an enabler of conflict in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The ROC has been enabling the conflict through blessing weapons for the warfare, priests serving as chaplains for the Russian army, priests fighting in the war front under the conviction of defending a sacred baptismal site of the Russ located in Ukraine, offering humanitarian and developmental support to Russian controlled parts of Ukraine and defrocking ROC priests who call for peace in Ukraine.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The study recommends that:

1. The ROC ought to be independent from the state so that it can objectively advise, applaud or critic the state.
2. The Russian state must allow the ROC to be independent from the state so that the church can be able to meaningfully contribute constructive counsels that help in the governance of society.
3. The ROC to consider standing for peace in a war situation because the greatest sanity and role of the church is the preservation of human life, as such the church must not be an instrument of destruction.

### **5.4 Areas for further research**

The study interrogated the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russo-Ukraine war. In essence, it was an investigation of the role of religion towards promoting either peace or conflict. It would be of academic interest if the same study is undertaken in African contexts that have undergone coups such as Gabon, Niger, Sudan, and Burkina Faso among others.

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DM. Interview: (Not real name) 09/11/23

EM. Interview: (Not real name) 11/11/23

GD. Interview: (Not real name) 16/11/23

RC. Interview: (Not real name) 15/11/23

SM. Interview: (Not real name) 09/11/23

TG. Interview: (Not real name) 16/11/23

TK. Interview: (Not real name) 14/11/23

ZM. Interview: (Not real name) 11/11/23

## APENDIX 1

**Fig: 1**



*In the picture figure 1 above a Russian Orthodox Church priest is pictured blessing a Russian military SU-27 fighter jet in Crimea*

## APPENDIX 2

Fig 2



*Russian President Vladimir Putin visiting the Church of the Resurrection at the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo state museum preserve. The director of the museum preserve Olga Taratynova gives explanations. 2019 visit by the Russian President to inspect one of the many restoration works of the ROC.*

## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### **BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**



My name is Byron Maforo Student Number B224082B a Master of Science in International Relations student at **Bindura University of Science Education**. I am doing a research project on the: **The role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war**. Your participation in responding to the interview question stays anonymous and your responses will be used purely for academic purposes. You are assured that ethical considerations are the researcher's top priority. Thank you for your participation.

1. a. In your view does the church have a role to play in politics? **YES/NO**
  - b. Briefly explain your answer.
2. How do you view the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Putin-led state? Explain briefly.
3. a. Is the Russian Orthodox Church playing any significant role in influencing the decisions being made by politicians in Russia? **Yes/No**
  - b. Briefly explain your answer.
4. a. Is the Russian Orthodox Church an enabler of peace in the Russia-Ukraine war? **Yes/NO**
  - b. Explain your answer.
5. a. In your view does the Russian Orthodox Church influence Russian foreign policy in any way? **Yes/NO**

b. Explain your answer.

6. a. Is the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russia-Ukraine war morally justified?

**Yes/NO**

b. Explain your answer.

7. Can you suggest ways that you think the Russian Orthodox Church must adopt to be a peace enabler?

Thank you for your time and your willingness to offer your feedback.

## APPENDIX 4

DEPARTMENT OF PEACE AND GOVERNANCE

P. Bag 1020  
BINDURA, Zimbabwe

Tel: 263 - 71 - 7531-6, 7622, 7624  
Fax: 263 - 71 - 7534



BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

Date: 28/09/23


TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH PROJECT IN YOUR ORGANISATION

This serves to introduce the bearer, Byron Maforo, Student Registration Number B224082B, who is a Master of Science in International Relations student at Bindura University of Science Education and is carrying out a research project in your area/institution.

May you please assist the student to access data relevant to the study, and where possible, conduct interviews as part of a data collection process.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
D. Makwerere (Dr)

