

From St. Paul and Carl Schmitt to Alexander Dugin: The Katechon as a Political Category in Empire Building

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1 Introduction

“We Russians don’t need Ukraine. Christ needs it. And that is why we are there”. This theologically explosive statement was written by the Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin regarding Vladimir Putin’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Published on the Neo-Eurasianist website *katehon.com* and entitled “Apocalyptic Realism”, Dugin expounds on his political theology, couching the ongoing conflict as an eschatological collision between good and evil, Christ and Satan.¹ Dugin writes, “the main battle from now on unfolds between ... the Russian Idea, the Katechon, the Orthodox Civilisation, and the world of the Western Antichrist, coming at us”.² From the perspective of Dugin, the struggle for Ukraine is not simply a struggle for an independent country to maintain its sovereignty, nor a proxy war between NATO and the Russian Federation, but rather a struggle for the future of the entire world: the very salvation of the

1 Alexander Dugin, “Apocalyptic Realism”, *Katechon*, 4 April 2022, <https://katehon.com/en/article/apocalyptic-realism>, no longer available on *Katechon.com*.

2 Dugin, “Apocalyptic Realism”. For the purposes of consistency, I will utilise the generally accepted Latinisation of the Greek word *ὁ κατέχων*, spelling it as “katechon”, as opposed to “catechon” or “katehon”. Additionally, the notion of the “Russian World” (*Russkii Mir*) or “Russian Idea”, was first introduced into Russian philosophy by Fyodor Dostoevsky (although it had precedence in the Russian Orthodox Church), to denote the sum totality of Russian-ness, i.e., its culture, history, spiritual matrix, etc. The cultural and political dimensions of the phrase were later developed by the first generation of Eurasianists, such as Nikolay Danilevsky and Yevgeny Trubetskoy, as well as the Russian fascist philosopher, Ivan Ilyin. Post-Soviet Union, the “Russian Idea” is often invoked to express the ideological claim that the Russian “civilisation”, seen as a constitutionally differentiated civilisation from the West, has a unique eschatological mission in world history: to protect the world from decay, degeneration, and collapse into nihilism. As we’ll see, the notion of the “Russian Idea” compliments Dugin’s assertion that Russia today is the new katechon (Restrainer of the Antichrist). See Paul Robinson, *Russian Conservatism* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 181–212.

world is at stake. By locating this struggle within an eschatological framework, Dugin imbues spiritual and existential necessity into Russia's war on Ukraine.

In order to lend this religious and eschatological legitimacy to Putin's "special military operation" in Ukraine, Alexander Dugin turns to a concept originally found in the New Testament, specifically in St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: the "katechon", or "that which restrains".³ In this essay, I will trace the life of this eschatological concept from its origins in St. Paul's letter through its "determinate negation" (*Aufheben*) and secularisation by the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt, to its theo-political usage by Alexander Dugin. I will argue that as a theo-political concept, it gives those who invoke it expansive justification to engage in a "total war" (*Der totale Krieg*) against a civilian population, all in the name of rescuing the world's population from the oncoming apocalypse. In this sense, the invocation of St. Paul's katechon is an ideological cover for war crimes in the name of universal eschatological benevolence. Through the politicization of the theological notion of the katechon, it is transformed from an eschatological hope to an ideology of conquest in the name of a pal-ingenic imperial project: the construction of a new 'Holy Russian Empire' (*Russkii Mir*).

2 St. Paul's Restrainer of the Anti-Christ

The concept of the katechon originally appears in two forms in St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Church of Thessalonica, chapter 2, wherein St. Paul writes,

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness (*anomia*) is revealed, the man doomed to destruction (*apoleia*). He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

3 The Russian President, Vladimir Putin introduced the phrase "special military operation" in his 24 February 2022 speech, wherein he claimed he would launch an invasion of Ukraine to "demilitarise" and "denazify" Ukraine. Putin would later go on to sign a law that could impose a 15-year prison sentence for those referring to the conflict as a "war" or an "invasion", and not a "special military operation".

Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back (τὸ κατέχον, that which restrains), so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness (*anomia*) is already at work; but the one who now holds it back (ὁ κατέχων, the one who restrains) will continue to do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one (*anomos*) will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. (2 Thess. 2.2-9, NIV).⁴

Being a polysemantic hapax legomena, the concept of the katechon is multifaceted as well as unique to St. Paul's letter, not found in any extant text before St. Paul. In the context of first century Greece, wherein the early Christian communities were expecting the apocalypse and thus the imminent return of Christ, the function of Paul's katechon is to diminish the eschatological expectations in the overly zealous Thessalonian Church, who were expecting the return of Christ in their lifetimes.⁵ Paul explains in his letter that something (τὸ κατέχον) or someone (ὁ κατέχων) referred to as the "restrainer", holds back the forces of evil who bring about the lawlessness and disorder associated with the apocalypse. As such, the Christian community must not act as if the "Day of the Lord" (ἡμέρα κυρίου) was imminent, as the Antichrist, or the "Son of Perdition" (ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας), must be revealed prior to Christ's return.⁶ However, the revealing of the identity of the Antichrist is conditioned on the overcoming of what St. Paul called the "restrainer", the "katechon", who holds back the Antichrist and its lawlessness and disorder. The period of the eschaton (the final days), wherein the believers wait for the parousia (coming/presence) of Christ, must be endured with patience, even though that world is saturated by evil, suffering, mendacity, and persecution. It is out of God's abundance of mercy and compassion for humanity that the katechon is instituted, as it will serve as the agent of order and stability despite the anomic and unjust condition brought by the forces of evil. As such, the eschaton is determined by a struggle between the forces of evil, disorder, confusion, and dysgenic decline against the forces of good, order, law, and stability. When the katechon is "taken out of the way", leaving the Antichrist unrestrained, evil

4 The Greek and Latinised Greek terms were included by the author, as well as the italicisation.

5 Ian Almond, *The Antichrist: A New Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 20; Maarten J.J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians* (London: Routledge, 1994), 96–124.

6 Jn. 7.12; 2 Thess. 2.3.

envelops the world, thus bringing about a chaotic and violent condition that will reign until the second coming of Christ.

There are three pertinent issues that must be understood when examining St. Paul's concept of the katechon: first, St. Paul's notion of the katechon is eschatologically ambiguous. Due to its restraint of the forces of disorder and chaos, it restrains the eschatological conditions that would bring about the triumph of the Antichrist. In doing so, it delays the second coming of Christ that would occur in response to the Antichrist's triumph. Because of the resulting "parousia (Παρουσία) delay" (delay to the coming of the presence of God), the katechon inadvertently prolongs the existential suffering that is inherent within the human condition. Without the second coming of Christ, humanity must continue to suffer its beleaguered fate in this world, including the ravages of aging, sickness, childbirth, and death. In this way, the katechon is both the agent of civilisational stability, a necessary entity for human flourishing, but also the means by which humanity's miserable existence is extended in perpetuity. It is inherently reactionary and conservative. As long as the katechon performs its function and restrains the triumph of evil in the world, humanity will not witness the second coming of Christ nor Christ's ultimate triumph over evil: an evil best personified by the Antichrist.⁷

Secondly, the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians is ambiguous as to the identity of the katechon. Both variations of the term restrainer in Paul's letter to the Thessalonian Church fail to positively identify who the force restraining the Antichrist is. It is possible that St. Paul understood the katechon to be the Roman Empire and/or Roman Emperors, as he implores the Christian community in Rome to "subject themselves to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Rom. 13.1). This view was shared by Tertullian, John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine, who understood the first of the two variations of the katechon (τὸ κατέχον, that which restrains) as the Roman Empire, and the second mention of the katechon (ὁ κατέχων, the one who restrains) as the Roman Emperor. For example, Tertullian, often referred to as the 'father of Latin Christianity', wrote the following in his Apology,

There is also another need, a greater one, for our praying for the Emperors, as for the whole estate of the empire and the interest of Rome. We know that the great force which threatens the whole world, the end of the age itself with its menace of hideous suffering, is delayed by the respite which

⁷ Almond, *The Antichrist*, 23–5.

the Roman Empire means for us. We do not wish to experience all that; and when we pray for its postponement are helping forward the continuance of Rome.⁸

As for the Eastern Orthodox Church, it has been suggested that the katechon is a Grand Monarch or an Orthodox Emperor, while others believe that the katechon refers to a palingenetic Holy Roman Empire.⁹ Additionally, it has been suggested that the katechon is the Holy Spirit, the Archangel Michael, the name of God, or the Institution of the Church itself.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the inherent ambiguity of St. Paul's usage of the term katechon allows the biblical concept to be utilized by all those who wish to claim divine authority and prerogatives and/or to assign such divine authority and prerogatives to earthly institutions and individuals. To claim that such entities are that which holds back the forces of evil, disorder, and lawlessness, and thus restrains the apocalypse, is to give that them a level of existential power and authority beyond the mere political. Once adorned by the power of the divinely instituted katechon, the individual or institution becomes a necessity for the continual existence of humanity and society. It is that which guarantees that the world does not succumb to the Antichrist – the personification of all things evil and destructive. Thus, the fate of the katechon is likewise the fate of humanity.

Third, the “lawless one” shares the same ambiguous identity as the katechon. Considering that St. Paul does not positively identify who it is, it would be pertinent to explore who the “lawless” were in recent Jewish history, as that may provide insights into how St. Paul was framing his concept.¹¹ As

8 Tertullian, *Apology*, trans. Terrot R. Glover (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 154–5.

9 One should bear in mind that traditional Orthodox teachings see Moscow as the ‘Third Rome’, the inheritor of Roman/Christian authority after the fall of the Roman Empire and later the Byzantine Empire. This is based on the Byzantine concept of *Roma Mobilis*, or the “floating Rome”, which justified the idea of Constantinople and later Moscow as having the Christian authority of Rome. As such, an Orthodox Emperor as the katechon is the logical extension of the claim that the Roman Empire was the original katechon, having then passed that mantle on to its successors in Constantinople and Moscow. See Cyril Toumanoff, “Moscow the Third Rome: Genesis and Significance of Politico-Religious Idea”, *The Catholic Historical Review* 40, no. 4 (1955): 411–47.

10 Jens Meierhenrich and Olivet Simons, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 47; Dennis Eugene Engleman, *Ultimate Things: An Orthodox Christian Perspective on the End Times* (Indiana: Conciliar Press, 1995).

11 Almond, *The Antichrist*, 21–2. Also see Colin R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

such, St. Paul could have had in mind the Hellenistic Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (c. 215–164 bce), who scandalously installed an idol of Zeus in the Temple of Jerusalem—the holiest of holies—and performed the blasphemous sacrifice of a pig on the temple altar.¹² Some Jews and Christians believe that the prophet Daniel condemned Antiochus IV Epiphanes' desecration of the Temple in his "prophecy,"¹³ thus giving this event significance beyond mere history.¹⁴ Nevertheless, this imperial attempt to disturb the divinely instituted order of the Jewish world within which St. Paul lived marks Epiphanes as a potential agent of lawlessness, chaos, and destruction. It is also possible that St. Paul saw himself, prior to his conversion, as an agent of evil and chaos, as he bitterly opposed the emergence of the Jesus movement that he would later lead.

Whatever is the case, these historical figures give us a picture as to what kind of lawlessness, chaos, and evil St. Paul would have been familiar with, and who he could have modelled his "Antichrist" on. Such historical memories of anomic figures in Jewish history appear to have migrated into the Christian tradition with St. Paul's conversion to Christianity, and later Christians amalgamated the image of the "lawless one" with the Gospel of John's notion of the "Antichrist" as well as with the image of the eschatological "beast" that persecutes the faithful and speaks blasphemously about God, found in St. John of Patmos' Book of Revelation.¹⁵ Combined, it produced the familiar image of the Antichrist that spreads evil in the world, which was only "restrained" by the work of the katechon. Just like the katechon, the precise identity of the Antichrist remains up for debate. However, in each epoch of Christian history, someone or something has been identified as being the Antichrist or the agent

12 Almond, *The Antichrist*, 22; Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus: The Jewish Struggle Against the Seleucids* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

13 Dan. 11.29–35

14 Daniel 11.29–35 reads as follows: "At the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart. Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant. He will return and show favour to those who forsake the holy covenant. His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time".

15 Almond, *The Antichrist*, 25–31; Rev. 13.1–10, 16.13–16.

of the Antichrist due to their perceived wickedness. This is true even in the twentieth century, wherein the Nazi jurist, Carl Schmitt, positively identified the Antichrist as well as the katechonic force that opposed it.

3 Carl Schmitt's Transhistorical Katechon

The notion of the katechon in Carl Schmitt's thought is subterranean, although it surfaces often to legitimate his expansive concept of political sovereignty. It first appears in his work in the mid 1940s, during his enthusiastic support for Nazism, and later reappears in the postwar years of 1950–1957, wherein he looks back at the war years and offers what can only be called an 'apology' for his juridic work in service to the Third Reich, and by extension, World War II and the Holocaust.¹⁶ He mentions the katechon for the last time in 1970, when his book, *Political Theology II*, was published.¹⁷ Despite the defeat of German fascism, Schmitt's influence has not ceased to be a potent factor in contemporary political philosophy. Rather, today, especially among Russian intellectuals, Schmitt's geopolitical thought, as well as his political theology, is being rediscovered, adapted, and appropriated into the Neo-Eurasianism that saturates Putin's Kremlin.¹⁸ Most profoundly, Schmitt has influenced Alexander Dugin, whose own version of Neo-Eurasianism, as well as his 'Fourth Political Theory', is partially rooted in Schmitt's geopolitics and political theology. Ironically, the theoretical work that built much of the juridical scaffolding of Nazi ideology and the Nazi state—responsible for the death of 27 million Soviets—is itself given refuge in contemporary Russia, wherein it has found a heartfelt welcome among intellectuals and their counterparts in the Russian military hierarchy and state.¹⁹

Best known as a 'political theologian', Carl Schmitt "determinately negated" (*Aufheben*) Christian concepts, wherein theological notions migrated from the depth of the religious mythos into secular semantics, thus losing their

16 Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (New York: Verso, 2000). Also see Jan Werner Müller, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

17 Meierhenrich and Simons, *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, 47.

18 For a thorough exposition of Schmitt's influence on Putin's regime, see David G. Lewis (1989), *Russia's New Authoritarianism: Putin and the Politics of Order* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press). Also see Stefan Auer, "Carl Schmitt in the Kremlin: The Ukraine Crisis and the Return of Geopolitics", *International Affairs* 91, no. 5 (2015): 953–68.

19 Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 178, 180, 239, 283; Lewis, *Russia's New Authoritarianism*.

religious veneer while maintaining their underlying logic as concepts. For Schmitt, St. Paul's notion of the katechon was a concept saturated with political potential, as it was essential for the growth, maintenance, and perpetual meaningfulness of the Christian tradition itself. Testifying to the importance of the katechon in his political theology, he wrote to his friend Hans Blumenberg on October 22, 1974, that "for more than 40 years I have collected materials on the problem of the κατέχων or κατέχον (2 Thess. 2.6); and during these years I have looked for a human ear that would listen to this question and understand it. For me, it is the most important question (*Kernfrage*) of my political theology".²⁰

Schmitt first invoked the concept of the katechon in his article of 19 April 1942 entitled "Unintentional Accelerator" (*Beschleuniger wider Willen*), published by the journal *Das Reich*, wherein he identifies the United States as a "delayer of world history" (*Verzögerer der Weltgeschichte*).²¹ However, for Schmitt, it was the United States under President Franklin D. Roosevelt who dislodged the "paralyzed" or "spellbound" (*wie Festgebannet*) British Empire from their katechonic imperial state, thus transforming the United States, although reluctantly, into a "restrainer" (*der Aufhalter*) as opposed to an "accelerator" (*Beschleuniger*) of history.²² Later that year, Schmitt invokes the katechon in his famous essay *Land and Sea*, which will later have a profound effect on Alexander Dugin's own geopolitical thought.²³ In this essay, Schmitt argues that the Byzantine Empire served as a katechon—a "rampart"—against the growing assertiveness of Islam.²⁴ Likewise, the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (1552–1612) served "not as an active hero, but rather a brake, a delaying factor", since he stalled a divided Europe's historical drive towards the Thirty Years War by decades.²⁵ Schmitt, writing in agreement with Nietzsche, even identifies Georg W.F. Hegel as being a philosophical instantiation of a katechonic force—restraining Europe's march toward theomachist atheism by his theologically saturated philosophy of history. Schmitt writes, "Nietzsche furiously

20 Alexander Schmitz and Marcel Lepper, eds., *Hans Blumenberg, Carl Schmitt: Briefwechsel 1971–1978 und weitere Materialien* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2007), 120. My translation.

21 Carl Schmitt, "Beschleuniger wider Willen", *Das Reich*, 19 April 1942.

22 Schmitt, "Beschleuniger wider Willen". Schmitt would come to believe that the United States of America as a Katechon was not an entirely good thing, especially since it opposed the world-historical project of the Third Reich, which held back the chaos and disorder of Bolshevism.

23 Carl Schmitt, *Land and Sea: A World-Historical Meditation*, trans. Simona Draghici (Washington D.C., Plutarch Press, 1997).

24 Schmitt, *Land and Sea*, 8.

25 Schmitt, *Land and Sea*, 43.

identified Hegel as the sixth sense of the Germans, i.e., the historical sense, as the great deferrer on the way to expressed atheism”.²⁶ Hegel’s World Spirit (*Weltgeist*), working its way towards the realm of absolute freedom, in a sense was a reiteration of God’s presence and activity in the world, even in catastrophe. Thus, even in the highly abstract philosophical language of Hegel, a katechonic force is identifiable, as Hegel’s theo-philosophical language restrains Western Christendom from collapsing into its own civilisational nihilism via the modern pillars of atheism: instrumental reason, natural science, and positivism.²⁷

Unlike the Christian theologians before him, who understood an individual, institution, or even the Holy Spirit to be the divinely appointed delayer of the apocalypse, Schmitt accelerates the process—already started by John Calvin’s own depersonalized interpretation of the katechon—to divorce the concept from a divinely appointed position in the singular, to a “metahistorical” force in the plural, one that structures the dialectic of history within each epoch.²⁸ In Schmitt’s *Glossarium*, dated December 17, 1947, he states the following:

I believe in the Katechon: it is for me the sole possibility as a Christian to understand history and its meaning. ... We must name the Katechon for every epoch for the last 1,948 years. The position [of the Katechon] has never been vacant, if it had, we would not be present anymore. ... There are temporary, transient, splinter-like fragmentary bearers of this task.²⁹

From this passage, we see Schmitt’s divorce of the katechon from St. Paul’s rendering as a singular divinely-appointed force, to a generalised force—or even individuals—that emerges routinely from the dynamics of history to hold back

26 Carl Schmitt, “Drei Stufen historischer Sinngebung”, *Universitas* 5, no. 8 (August 1950), 929–30.

27 Reinhard Mehring, *Carl Schmitt: A Biography*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2022), 442–3.

28 John Calvin believed that the katechon was not an individual, institution, or the Holy Spirit, but rather thought that it was the process of evangelisation, i.e., the “universal call of the Gentiles”. In other words, the eschaton would not come until the whole of the world had heard the Gospel of Christ. Only then would the apocalypse come to fruition. This interpretation detaches the concrete particularity of the katechon, as it seems to have been formulated in St. Paul’s Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, to Christian praxis. See John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976).

29 Carl Schmitt, *Glossarium. Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947–1951* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1991), 63. My translation.

the forces of chaos. When Schmitt states that “we must name the katechon for every epoch”, he assumes that the katechon is not singular, and thus must be identified within each epoch, for the katechonic force is born of the historical particularities of each epoch, and therefore is also a history-bound force. As such, that which “restrains” the forces of evil, instability, and chaos could not simply be a singular individual, institution, or even the Holy Spirit, somehow traversing throughout time, but rather a historical agent that corresponds to the historical dialectic of the epoch, even if only in a “splinter-like fragment”. Thus, St. Paul’s singular “restrainer”, bound to the Roman Empire, gives way to Schmitt’s reformulation: the katechon is an historical force that emerges out of the particularities of each historical epoch in response to each threat to order, stability, and goodness. As such, Schmitt can identify various katechons by examining the world-historical forces that held evil—or what he perceives as evil—in abeyance.

In his book *The Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt, much like Tertullian, John Chrysostom, and Augustine, identifies the katechon in early Christian history as being the Roman Empire. However, Schmitt includes, and emphasises, the later Christianized Roman Empire, especially as it was substantiated in its *Imperium* (empire), which it inherited from the pagan Roman Empire, and its “priesthood” (*sacerdotium*), in its uniquely Christian form.³⁰ He writes:

This Christian empire was not eternal. It always had its own end and that of the present eon in view. Nevertheless, it was capable of being a historical power. The decisive historical concept of this continuity was that of the restrainer: *Katechon*. “Empire” in this sense meant the historical power to restrain the appearance of the Antichrist and the end of the present eon; it was a power that withholds (*qui tenet*), as the Apostle Paul said in his letter to the Thessalonians ... The empire of the Christian Middle Ages lasted only as long as the idea of the Katechon was alive.³¹

Schmitt here admits that that which is at one time a katechonic force can lose such status when it no longer believes in itself as a katechonic force (or believes in the katechon at all). He makes a point to distinguish between empires that maintain their katechonic charge and those that do not; the latter devolve into Caesarism (monarchic absolutism).³² When such empires foreclose on their

30 Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*. trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2006), 59.

31 Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 59–60.

32 Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 62–6.

katechonic task, they can no longer “restrain” the Antichrist, and evil pervades the world. Indeed, they may become part or even a source of that pervasive evil. As such, the weakening or absence of the katechon is dysgenic for the world. The more its power to restrain the Antichrist fades away, the more anomie grows; the more anomie grows, the more the world reflects the chaos and lawlessness of the Antichrist.

From a dialectical perspective, the collapse of the katechonic force creates the conditions wherein a new katechonic force is called for and is ultimately brought into existence to restrain the anomie that has become normative amidst the lack of restraints. This new katechonic force will last, according to Schmitt’s logic, as long as it understands itself as being the katechon and fulfils that law-giving and order-maintaining function. Additionally, while such a katechonic force substantiates itself within a still-religious context, wherein religion remains determinate in social ethics and morality, such a katechon should appear religious in nature. However, in the modern period, in which ethics and morality have generally migrated from the religious tradition into secular articulations, the katechon(s) may take a secular rendering, for even the secular katechon can hold back the emergence of the Antichrist in the world, as it can be a force of stability, order, and traditional morality. However, within a globalized world that is increasingly secularised, cosmopolitan, and culturally liberal, the return to the concept of the katechon is most likely to be expressed via religious language, especially through a seemingly religious empire that is attempting to stem the tide of postmodernity, which is often identified as the source of today’s “evil” in the world. We will return to this point later.

Remembering that Carl Schmitt lent his juridical and theological talents to the Third Reich, which from a historical perspective appears to be a genuine source of disorder, chaos, and outright evil, we must ask why Schmitt is interested in secularising St. Paul’s theological concept of the katechon. What did the identification of the katechon in Schmitt’s time do for Schmitt and the political order he supported: Hitler’s Third Reich?

Considering the various instances wherein Schmitt invokes the katechon, we can first see that Schmitt utilizes it to explain the dialectics of history: the ebb and flow between the forces of order and good against the forces of disorder and evil. This structuring of history between the forces of the Antichrist that bring forth the *eschaton* (ἔσχατον) and the katechon that restrains that anomic force delivers a world historical and apocalyptic importance to that which is identified as the katechon. As such, St. Paul’s notion of the katechon, now translated, for Schmitt, into a metahistorical entity materialising within each epoch of history, becomes a way of legitimising Schmitt’s concept of sovereignty and the totalitarian state.

For Schmitt, the sovereign is the one who determines the “state of exception” (*Ausnahmezustand*), wherein the will of the ruler is no longer bound to constitutional norms, legal restraints, and other socially recognised restrictions, but rather can act in such a way that would violate all constitutional/legal norms in the name of “suppressing” (*niederhaltend*) the chaos and evil that threatens the order of the status quo.³³ In such a totalitarian state, the authoritarian leader is the new giver of law (*nomos*), which corresponds to their unbridled will. As such, the totalitarian state and its leaders are identified as katechonic forces that restrain the Antichrist, allowing no revolutionary (or counter-revolutionary) movement to disturb or overcome the given order. Since peace and stability are needed for human flourishing, all of humanity becomes dependent on the success of the katechon to hold back the chaos of the Antichrist. Without the authoritarian state, the forces of chaos would reign, and humanity would come to its demise. Whether the world’s population knows it or not, that which is designated as the katechon makes their lives possible, as it is the katechon that delivers the possibility of ataraxia (ἀταραξία, stability, calmness, lucidity). In the end, the katechon in Schmitt’s analysis is a means of bestowing divine legitimacy and world-historical importance to the totalitarian state ruled by the authoritarian ruler, making their expansive rule the basis of the world’s ability to continue without being enveloped by evil. It is the eschatological politics of the present in the cause of maintaining the already established.

It is clear that Schmitt developed this Third-Reich-as-katechon line of thinking in the 1940s as a way of justifying the establishment of the totalitarian fascist state, which wrestled state and social control from the liberal chaos of Weimar democracy, as well as barricading Germany from the growing communist threat emanating from the Soviet Union. The dual forces that threatened world order for Schmitt were culture destroying American-style laissez-faire democratic capitalism, and the overthrow of the aristocratic principle of nature in the name of egalitarianism that animated Marxism.³⁴ Much like the early Christian writers who interpreted the katechonic forces as being “that which restrains” (τὸ κατέχον) as the Roman Empire, and “the one who restrains” (ὁ κατέχων) as being the Roman Emperors, Schmitt saw the Third Reich as “that which restrains” and Adolf Hitler as “the one who restrains”.

33 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5–15.

34 Hitler had much to say about the perversion of nature associated with Jewish, Christian, and Marxist forms of egalitarianism. See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 65.

Nazism, in Schmitt's view, was the ideology of the "restrainer": a conservative ideology that held back the forces of dysgenic modernity, cultural degeneracy, miscegenation, and racial equality. It was a way of not only winning the "culture war" (*Kulturkampf*) in Germany (and Europe in general), but a means of reversing the dialect of history. Through Nazism, those aspects of German national identity that were waning or had already been determinately negated by cultural modernity could be reinstated, augmented, and turned into an ideology of "authenticity" (*Eigentlichkeit*): a hermetically sealed notion of what it meant to be a German, which was responsible for making the "non-identical" into life-not-worthy-of-life.³⁵ In the end, an expansive German "Third Reich" (*Imperium*), born from the chaos of the Weimar Republic, pushed itself westward in the name of "living space" (*Lebensraum*) as a means of establishing itself as the dominant power in a Western world, standing alone against the power of the ever-metastasising modern form of anarchy determined by Western nihilism and accompanied by a triumphant Soviet theomachism. Having inherited this soteriological charge from the empires before it, the Third Reich was for Schmitt the new katechonic empire, and it understood itself as such, much like the Christian Empires of old.³⁶

4 Alexander Dugin: Putin's Russia as the New Katechon

The Russian philosopher Alexander Dugin has been called many things: "Putin's brain", "Putin's Rasputin", "Putin's special representative", "the Putin Whisperer", "the most dangerous philosopher alive", and even the "St. Cyril and Methodius of Fascism".³⁷ He is the most influential philosopher in the Neo-Eurasianist movement. However, Alexander Dugin's Fourth Political Theory or Neo-Eurasianism, has older roots, much of which can be found in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the neo-fascist New Right (*Nouvelle Droite*) in post-World War II France, as well as the original anti-Soviet Eurasianist movement in Russia.³⁸ From Nazi Germany, the writings of Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Edgar Julius Jung, Oswald Spengler, Othmar Spann, Ernst Niekisch, Karl Haushofer, and Carl Schmitt have all

35 Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (New York: Routledge, 2003); Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962).

36 Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 59–66.

37 Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow*, 174.

38 Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, trans. Mark Sleboda and Michael Milleran (London: Arktos Media Ltd, 2012).

been highly influential on Dugin.³⁹ From Fascist Italy, the works of Julius Evola are especially important, and from post-World War II France, the work of the Far Right identitarian thinker, Alain de Benoist, cannot be underestimated. The “traditionalist” strain of Dugin’s thought is thoroughly grounded in the anti-modernist work of the French mystic Sufi René Guénon, while the form of ultra-conservative Orthodox Christianity he follows is decidedly the “Old Believers” sect, who rejected the seventeenth century reforms of the official Orthodox Church.⁴⁰

As for the Eurasianist basis upon which Dugin’s philosophy stands, he appropriated the works of Nikolai Yakovlevich Danilevsky, especially his book *Russia and Europe*, wherein it is argued that Russia is not Europe, but rather its own unique civilisation, a Eurasian civilisation. This Eurasianist strain of thought is also grounded in the founding generation of anti-European, anti-Bolshevik, and ultra-conservative monarchist thinkers, namely the Russian exiled Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy and his co-Eurasianists: Petr Savitsky, Petr Suvchinsky, and Georges Florovsky.⁴¹ The latter group of monarchist intellectuals formulated much of their work in response to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, as well as against the growing influence of European culture within Russia. The Soviet ethnologist and Neo-Eurasianist, Lev Gumilev, and his concept of “passionarity” (пассионарность), an obscure word akin to “civilisational force”, has played a major role in Dugin’s ethnological thought.⁴² The Russian philosopher, Ivan Alexandrovich Ilyin, exiled from the Soviet Union due to his fascist philosophy, has also been influential on Dugin.⁴³ However, Ilyin’s influence on Vladimir Putin may be even more pronounced, so much so that Putin repatriated Ilyin’s

39 Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow*, 178.

40 Peter T. De Simone, *The Old Believers in Imperial Russia: Oppression, Opportunism and Religious Identity in Tsarist Moscow* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

41 Nikolai Iakovlevich Danilevskii, *Russia and Europe: The Slavic World’s Political and Cultural Relations with the Germanic-Roman West*, trans. Stephen M. Woodburn (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2013); Jafe Arnold and John Stachelski, eds., *Foundations of Eurasianism Vol. I* (Prav Publishing, 2020). For an early critique of Danilevsky and Eurasianist thought, see Robert E. MacMaster, *Danilevsky: A Russian Totalitarian Philosopher* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

42 Mark Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Alexander Dugin, *Ethnos and Society*, trans. Michael Millerma (London: Arktos Media Ltd, 2018); Alexander Dugin, *Ethnosociology*, trans. Michael Millerma (London: Arktos Media Ltd, 2019).

43 Andrew Stuttaford, “The (Re)birth of Ivan Ilyin”, *National Review*, 19 April 2014, <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/rebirth-ivan-ilyin-andrew-stuttaford/>.

writings back from the United States in 2006 and frequently quotes him (or his main ideas) in his speeches.⁴⁴

According to Charles Clover, the author of *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism*, which chronicles the development of the Fourth Political Theory and its influence in Putin's Kremlin, it was *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right) author Alain de Benoist who first introduced Dugin to the fascist thinkers that would ultimately define his political philosophy and geopolitics.⁴⁵ In Russia's post-Soviet chaos, such fascist thinkers were an intellectual goldmine to Dugin, offering him theological, cultural, and geopolitical analyses that had been officially suppressed in the Soviet Union. While communism stressed egalitarianism and internationalism, these thinkers proposed the opposite: nationalism, anti-modernism, anti-mondialism, and a critique of the West and its perceived nihilism.

Although De Benoist rejected the idea that he introduced Dugin to the work of Karl Haushofer, the "father of Nazi geopolitics", he readily admits he introduced Dugin to the works of Carl Schmitt during one of Dugin's visits to Paris in the 1990s.⁴⁶ This encounter between the anti-1968 reactionary intellectual, Alain de Benoist, and the eccentric Russian theorist who would soon have the ear of the Russian military and the Kremlin, was decisive for the twenty-first century, as it married Slavophile thought with European reactionary conservatism. From that point on, Dugin would develop out of these many disparate influences his neo-Eurasianist Fourth Political Philosophy, which animates much of the geopolitical thought of the Kremlin today.⁴⁷

44 Ilya Budraitskis, *Dissidents among Dissidents: Ideology, Politics and the Left in Post-Soviet Russia* (New York, Verso, 2022); Michel Eltchaninoff, *Inside the Mind of Vladimir Putin*, trans. James Ferguson (London: Hurst & Co, 2017); "Michigan State University returning papers of late dissident Russian philosopher Ivan Il'in", *MSU Today*, 19 May 2006, <https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2006/michigan-state-university-returning-papers-of-late-dissident-russian-philosopher-ivan-il>.

45 Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow*, 180.

46 Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow*; Holger H. Herwig, *The Demon of Geopolitics: How Karl Haushofer "Educated" Hitler and Hess* (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016). Also see Jan Werner Müller's discussion of Carl Schmitt's influence on the *Nouvelle Droite* in his book, *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought*, 207–218.

47 Dugin claims that his "Fourth Political Theory" is not liberalism, communism, or fascism, but a new hybrid of these theories, thus creating a *fourth* great political theory. As is often the case with Dugin's eclectic theories, he mistakes a philosophical species for a philosophical genus. While his Fourth Political Theory is a separate species from Italy's fascism and Hitler's National Socialism, it is clearly within the same genus as these two political philosophies. As such, the Fourth Political Theory is merely a Russian form of fascism, cobbled together out of earlier forms of fascism with a smattering of Russian enculturation. In fact, in 1997, Dugin explained his philosophy and referred to it as, "Fascism—Red

While Carl Schmitt's influence on Dugin appears throughout the latter's work in numerous ways, including the binary struggle between "sea power" (*Thalassocracy*) (the West) versus "land-based power" (*Tellurocracy*) (Russia/Eurasia), as well as his "friend/enemy distinction" as the "essence of politics", it is his appropriation of the concept of the katechon that is most poignant.⁴⁸ As we shall see, the concept of the katechon has become an integral part of Dugin's ideology justifying Russia's claim to being a resurgent superpower, determined to break the neoliberal hegemony of the West, especially the United States, with the goal of creating a "multipolar world", one in which the U.S. is no longer an international hegemon and nations are free to resist liberalisation and charter their development and politics outside of the current global world order.

In none of Dugin's major books does he deliver an extensive study of the katechon. Rather, it is invoked often, but sporadically, throughout several his books, articles, and social media postings.⁴⁹ Despite this, it remains at the core of his political theology. In his writings and speeches, Dugin has returned the notion of the katechon back to St. Paul's religious sphere, and thus away from Schmitt's secularisation. However, Dugin's rendering of the concept is not entirely identical with the anonymous restraining force that St. Paul proposed in his letter to the Thessalonian Church. Rather, Dugin restores the religious nature of the concept but combines it with Carl Schmitt's notion that worldly individuals and institutions can be identified as a katechon well after the historical collapse of the Roman Empire. Thus, the katechon is not merely the Roman Empire or the Emperors, but is a transhistorical force that delays, arrests, and reverses the triumph of the Antichrist (in St. Paul's religious language), or the triumph of chaos (in Schmitt's secular language).

In Dugin's aforementioned article, he discusses Russia's "special military operation", that is, its 2022 war of aggression on Ukraine, by placing the conflict

and Borderless". Only later did he name his philosophy the "Fourth Political Theory". See Andreas Umland, "Russia's Creeping Fascism", *Open Democracy*, 15 May 2009, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/russia-s-creeping-fascism/>.

48 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 35; Schmitt, *Land and Sea*.

49 Dugin himself did not introduce the concept of the Katechon into the contemporary Russian political sphere. Rather, he radically politicised and amplified the theological concept, which had already returned with the "conservative turn" in post-Soviet Russian politics and national security policy. See Maria Engström, "Contemporary Russian Mesianism and New Russian Foreign Policy", *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 3 (2014): 356–379. Also see Alicja Curanović, "Russia's Mission in the World: The Perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church", *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, no. 4 (2019): 253–267.

within the spiritual binary of the Russian katechon versus the Antichrist West. He writes,

Either this area of the world will come under the omophorion of Christ and His Immaculate Mother, or it will remain under the dominion of Satan, who will immensely strengthen his dominion over what is, in fact, the cradle of our Russian statehood, Church and culture, our people. The fight for Donbass, for Odessa, for Kiev, and even for Lviv is part of the great eschatological battle. Reality precedes dreams – including imperial eschatological dreams. The era of materialism, economics, rational analysis, experts, technocrats, managers is over. Ideas are returning to our world.⁵⁰

He then reminds his reader of the eschatological role Russia is playing in his fight:

And the main battle from now on unfolds between them [ideas vs. “the era of materialism ...”]. Between the Russia Idea, the *Katechon*, the Orthodox Civilisation, and the world of the Western Antichrist, coming at us. It is not us Russians who need Ukraine. It is Christ who needs it. And that is why we are there. And that is why we are not leaving it.⁵¹

Dugin’s move here is to give the Russian “special military operation” a soteriological meaning and mission: Russia’s 24 February 2022 “Blitzkrieg”, which quickly transformed into a “totalen Krieg” after Ukraine showed its determination to resist the invasion, was meant to bring the wayward Ukrainian people, who have been spellbound by the Satanic West, back into the fold of God’s katechonic empire: Putin’s Russia. In this sense, Moscow’s war is an attempt to fulfil its eschatological role on earth, bestowed upon it by the privilege of being the “Third Rome”—the rightful inheritor of the Roman Empire’s katechonic task, as understood by St. Paul.

In Dugin’s book, *Putin vs. Putin: Vladimir Putin Viewed from the Right*, Dugin explains that Moscow “always played a significant eschatological role in Orthodox Russia”, because it is the inheritor of Imperial Rome’s authority (after the fall of Constantinople to the Muslim Turks in 1453).⁵² As such, the “meaning

50 Alexander Dugin, “Apocalyptic Realism”.

51 Dugin, “Apocalyptic Realism”.

52 Alexander Dugin, *Putin vs. Putin: Vladimir Putin viewed from the Right*, trans. Gustaf Nielsen (London: Arktos Media Ltd, 2014), 11. The famous saying by the Russian Orthodox

of the Tsardom was that of a state which recognizes the truth of the Orthodox church in its entirety”, including the idea that Orthodox Moscow is “a barrier in the way of the son of perdition, the Antichrist, the Katechon, ‘the one who withholds.’”⁵³ If this designation of Russia as the new katechon is applied to the current war on Ukraine, Russia is transformed from aggressor to Ukraine’s eschatological saviour. The logic is as followed: if Ukraine follows the Western/EU/NATO model, with free-market capitalism, democracy, fair elections, political accountability, human rights, including the freedom of speech, expression, and political association, as well as legal rights for LGBTQ+ citizens, it will inevitably lead to the “domination of Satan” in the historic heartland of the Rus’. In other words, Kyiv would succumb to the trappings of the Antichrist, exported by the West, the “civilisation of chaos”.⁵⁴ If the West prevails, Kyiv, the “mother of all Russian cities”, would no longer be distinguishable from London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome, or any other European capitol, wherein secular liberalism, globalism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, individualism, humanistic themachia, and every other form of “cultural degeneracy” reign supreme. Additionally, a Westernized Kyiv would fall within the military protection of NATO, thus ensuring the “satanization” of the heartland of the Rus’. Such is unthinkable from Dugin’s perspective, and thus the God-bearing Russian people must rescue Ukraine for Christ.⁵⁵

monk Hegumen Filofei (Филофей) of Pskov in 1510, was “All Christian kingdoms have come together in you alone: two Romes have fallen, the third stands, and a fourth there will never be; your Christian kingdom will not be replaced by another”. This underlies the logic of the supposed Third Rome’s historical responsibility to fight the forces of the Antichrist. There will be no fourth Rome if the Third falls to the Antichrist. Thus, the choice is either support the Third Rome or face the apocalypse. See Serhii Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom: A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to Vladimir Putin* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 24.

53 Dugin, *Putin vs. Putin*, 11–12.

54 Alexander Dugin, “The Order of Katechon”, *Katechon*, 22 December 2022, no longer available on Katechon.com.

55 Russian has a long history of seeing itself as having a messianic role in world history. Explaining this phenomenon, the Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev argued that messianism was an integral part of Russia’s identity. In his seminal book, *The Russian Idea*, he wrote: “Messianic consciousness is more characteristic of the Russians than of any other people except the Jews. It runs all through Russian history right down to its communist period. In the history of Russian messianic consciousness great importance is attached to a conception which belongs to the philosophy of history, that of Moscow as the Third Rome”. See Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, trans. R.M. French (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1992), 26. Even before Berdyaev, the nineteenth century Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, argued that Russians were among the nations that had “an awakening of their national consciousness” which disclosed a “conviction of the special advantage

For Dugin, if Ukraine will not save itself from the Antichrist, in fraternal solidarity, Russia will rescue it and return it back to the fold of the faithful. As Dugin wrote, “We Russians don’t need Ukraine. Christ needs Ukraine. And that is why we’re there”. It is on behalf of Ukraine’s eternal salvation that Russia invades, and it is on behalf of the world that the Russian katechon restrains the Western Antichrist in Ukraine. Being the katechon is, nevertheless, no easy task; Russia suffers due to this inherited burden, as Dugin writes:

Russia, which today enters the final battle against chaos, is in the position of one who fights against the antichrist himself ... As long as there is a Cross on the throne, it is the Russian Cross, Russia is crucified on it, she bleeds her sons and daughters and all this for a reason ... We are on the right path to the resurrection of the dead. We will play a key role in this world mystery, because we are the guardians of the throne, the inhabitants of Katechon.⁵⁶

For Dugin, Putin’s Russia must embody the katechonic responsibility to subdue chaos in its foreign policy, especially in its neighbouring states, most poignantly Georgia and Ukraine, but it also has a responsibility to suppress such chaos within its own borders. Therefore, being the katechon is both a legitimation for external expansion as well as for internal repression. For example, Dugin writes:

Russia must quickly affirm *internally* the beginnings of the sacred katechetical order, which was established in the 15th century in the continuity of the Byzantine heritage and the proclamation of Moscow as the Third Rome.⁵⁷

With this emphasis on internal transformation, Dugin makes clear that being the katechon is not simply about reintegrating the wayward remnants of the old Russian Empire into Putin’s empire, but also about identity production *within* Russia, especially the protection of Russia’s Orthodox Christian identity,

of the given people, as the chosen bearer and perpetrator (*Sovershitel’*) of the historical fate of mankind”. See Peter J.S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism, and After* (London: Routledge, 2014), 7.

56 Dugin, “The Order of the Katechon”.

57 Dugin, “The Order of the Katechon”. In Orthodox thought, Constantinople was the katechon that held back the anti-Christ forces of Islam, thus denying the Ottoman Turks the ability to threaten Christendom. In 1453, when Mehmet II finally conquered Constantinople, the katechonic force moved northward to Orthodox Russia.

which means the suppression of all forms of culture that are associated with the West, most vividly freedom of the press, free speech, human rights, and the rights of LGBTQ+ citizens.⁵⁸

One should bear in mind that Alexander Dugin blames the post-Soviet Russian state of being a “carbon copy of the secular-European model”, which nurtured its own ontology independent of the Russia people, whom he believes have been “chosen by Divine Providence for a special mission”.⁵⁹ To rectify this historical mistake, the state must engage in an “anagogic” process, wherein it elevates itself to “serve the people and the Church instead of forcing them to serve the state”.⁶⁰ To attain this, Dugin seeks to “eradicate the state and replace it with the Holy Empire, a *basileus* [king], a comprehensive catechonic tsardom, where the divine rays directly fuse with the great God-bearing people”.⁶¹ This removal of the secular-European “carbon copy” state in exchange for an authoritarian Orthodox-infused state, commanded by a Tsarist sovereign, who has the power to determine the “state of exception” both domestically and internationally, has increasingly become the reality of Vladimir Putin’s rule over Russia. State power has become more centralised within the office of the President, as substantive opposition is neutralized, no matter what form it comes in: rival politicians, independent media, oligarchs, dissidents, etc.

In a *60 Minutes Overtime* interview with Leslie Stahl, filmed in 2017 but aired in 2022, Dugin reminded Stahl that Putin is in an “absolute position of absolutist power” because Russia is a “monarchist society from below”.⁶² Thus, from Dugin’s perspective, it is not Putin who imposes “monarchism or authoritarian rule” upon the Russian people, but rather he says, “we demand from him to be much more authoritarian than he is. He, a little bit disappoints us, because

58 In June 2013, the Russian State Duma unanimously passed federal legislation entitled, “For the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values”, which was signed into law by Vladimir Putin soon after. This law, commonly called the “gay propaganda law” in the West, criminalized any attempt to normalize homosexuality among minors in the Russian Federation, whether that be through the media or person-to-person communication. The law was extended in November 2022 to cover all age groups, and falsely associated homosexuality with paedophilia. See Human Rights Watch, “Russia: Expanded ‘Gay Propaganda’ Ban Progresses Toward Law”, 25 November 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/25/russia-expanded-gay-propaganda-ban-progresses-toward-law>.

59 Dugin, *Putin vs. Putin*, 61–2.

60 Dugin, *Putin vs. Putin*, 63.

61 Dugin, *Putin vs. Putin*, 63.

62 60 Minutes Overtime, “Aleksandr Dugin: The Far Right Theorist Behind Putin’s Plan”, 12 April 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dur7fOoW_euE&t=275s.

it takes too long”.⁶³ Thus, to be the katechonic force both *within Russia* and *outside of its internationally recognised borders*, Putin must consolidate governmental, economic, cultural, and religious power into a neo-Tsarist state, one that can dissolve the vestiges of post-Soviet democracy and liberalism, and reject the Westphalian concept of states’ sovereignty, especially in former Soviet Republics.

Following Dugin’s logic, this consolidation of power is how Putin can most emphatically embody the soteriological role of Russia as the world’s present katechon. To democratize or to Westernize Russia is to shirk what Dugin thinks is Russia’s God-given eschatological responsibility. To deliver the people “chosen by Divine Providence for a special mission” over to egalitarian liberalism is to abandon the Orthodox world’s responsibility to “restrain” the Antichrist – their “special mission”, which Russia has had since the fall of the Second Rome, Constantinople. Thus, to not become a neo-Tsar, to not create an authoritarian state, to not reintegrate the post-Soviet Union states back into a Eurasian empire, would be to capitulate to the Antichrist.

That which horrifies Putin’s Western critics—his increasing authoritarianism, disregard for international law and international standards, his unprovoked war against Ukraine and Georgia, his assassination of political opponents, his silencing of independent journalists, and so forth—is that which seemingly must be done if his katechonic position is to be realised and maintained. Thus, the more the West pushes back against Russia, the more it impedes Russia’s plans for Ukraine and its other post-Soviet neighbours, the more it creates a self-enforcing narrative: the West is the “civilisation of chaos”, that is, a liberal “open” society, attempting to undermine and defeat God’s traditionalist katechonic force and win the *Russkii Mir* (Russian World) for Satan.⁶⁴ Following

63 60 Minutes Overtime, “Aleksandr Dugin”.

64 The notion of the “*Russkii Mir*” dates to the eleventh century, when first introduced by Iziaslav I of Kyiv to denote the lands of the Russ. The idea continued to exist throughout the Romanov dynasty and even into the Soviet Union, although highly diminished. However, it was resurrected again in the post-Soviet 1990s by conservative scholars, politicians, and clergy rediscovering the historic roots of Russia and forging a new religious identity. In 2009, Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow gave the concept new life by defining the “*Russkii Mir*” as a “common civilisational space” situated on three pillars: Eastern Orthodoxy, Russian culture (especially language and historic memory), and a “common vision” for future social development. This definition not only comes strikingly close to what Nazi Germany described as a *Volksgemeinschaft* (ethnic people’s community), but also has come to serve as a key component to Putin’s regime, as it marries Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianist ideology and Putin’s authoritarianism with the authority of the Orthodox Church. See Patriarch Kirill, “Выступление Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на торжественном открытии III Ассамблеи Русского мира” [“Speech by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at

that logic, the more Russian soldiers are killed in Ukraine, the more Putin and Dugin can attest to the ferocity of the Antichrist and the growing need for the katechonic force to do whatever is necessary to defeat the forces of evil, disorder, and chaos that are threatening to unleash the apocalypse.

Dugin's reintegration of Schmitt's formerly secularised katechon back into a religious sphere imbues the "restrainer" with the authority of one appointed by God, thus elevating the force that "restrains" the Antichrist into a cosmic confrontation that takes place within history between the forces of good and evil. It is no longer a matter of an ambiguous force working to delay the apocalypse, as it was with St. Paul; it is no longer a matter of a historical empire or extraordinary individuals working to maintain stability and order in an increasingly chaotic world, as it was with Schmitt's secularisation of the katechon; it is now a combination of both: Russia is the historical empire—the Third Rome—and Vladimir Putin is the new tsar, both of which are active within the earth-bound but cosmic struggle between the heavenly forces of good that restrain the Satanic forces of evil.

Putin's Russia, being identified as the new katechon by Alexander Dugin, has been handed a convenient and powerful political theology. In his role as the new tsar, acting as the head-of-state of the holy palingenetic and katechonic empire, Putin assumes the ultimate authority to determine the "state of exception", not only within the borders of his own country, but also within the post-Cold War world order. Utilising Schmitt's political logic wedded to Dugin's Orthodox eschatological framing, Putin has seized the authority to suspend legal norms, to violate international laws (including laws against aggressive warfare), and forcibly reintegrate the former Soviet Republic of Ukraine, which was also a vital piece of the historic Russian Empire, back into the fold of Holy Russia, precisely because he is acting as the divinely legitimated sovereign who unilaterally determines the limits of his earthly power, as the eschatological circumstances require of him.

No constitution, nor domestic law, nor international law, can challenge the authority of this sovereign, if the sovereign is acting in accordance with his katechonic role. Earthly restrictions on the actions of states matter not at all; what matters for Dugin and Putin is that the eschatological confrontation between katechonic Russia and the Antichrist West be won by the former, for the whole world has become dependent on the katechon's success. As such, the Russian forces in Ukraine bear divinely-sanctioned authority to inflict whatever kind of harm deemed necessary to win Ukraine for Christ, for God is on the side of

the grand opening of the Third Russian World Assembly"], the Moscow Patriarchate, 3 November 2009, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/928446.html>.

the katechonic sovereign.⁶⁵ That harm includes: systematic rape of Ukrainian women and girls (and in some cases boys); mutilation and execution of prisoners; the kidnapping of Ukrainian children; torture of captives; the mass execution and deliberate targeting of civilians, including civilian infrastructure (schools, hospitals, energy facilities); and the use of banned weapons, such as cluster munitions and white phosphorus.⁶⁶

5 Conclusion

What Alexander Dugin has created out of the idea of the katechon is an imperial ideology that not only legitimates conquest, but also sanctifies war crimes in the name of St. Paul's "restrainer". While the Apostle Paul's katechon is meant to *restrain* the supposed forces of chaos, destruction, and disorder (*anomos*), Dugin's katechonic ideology paradoxically *unleashes* the forces of chaos, destruction, and disorder, in the name of defeating the Schmittian "enemy", the assumed Antichrist, i.e., the modern West. Dugin's oft-repeated claim, that he seeks a "multipolar" world, wherein other global spheres of influence can determine their own historical trajectory free from the hegemony of the West, is meant to imbue virtue into Putin's acts of aggression against its neighbours, as well as his internal critics and rivals. What Putin seeks, i.e., the reintegration of the former Russian Empire, is what Dugin's Neo-Eurasianist ideology envisions: a reconstructed "Holy Russian Empire", a palingenetic "second chance" inheritor of Christianity, nestled within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union: A Christian empire at war with the Antichrist and Ukrainian "satanism".

Dugin would like to have Russia once again at the forefront of history—a "return to history" that would propel Russia back into being a world-historical force—as opposed to being a mere disruptive force within the neoliberal world order.⁶⁷ Marrying the concept of the katechon to that geo-political desire serves to legitimate and sanctify the military actions taken in Ukraine. For Dugin, the God-bearing katechonic Russian Empire will seize the moral, spiritual, and civilisational high ground and fight for all that is good and holy in

65 United Nations, "War Crimes have been committed in Ukraine conflict, top UN human rights inquiry reveals", *United Nations News*, 23 September 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1127691>.

66 See Human Rights Watch, "Ukraine: Events of 2022", no date, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/ukraine>.

67 Budraitskis, *Dissidents among Dissidents*, 24–27.

the world, while the declared enemy, the West, that which “restrains” Russia’s imperial vision, will remain the earthly incarnation of evil in Dugin’s ideology.

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