

The Great Powers and Orthodox Christendom

**The Crisis over the Eastern Church in the
Era of the Crimean War**

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palgrave
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1

Reason in Exile: The War for Orthodox Christendom

It seems almost incredible, in this enlightened age, that the quarrels of a few ignorant Latin and Greek monks . . . should have been able to light up the torch of war, and to involve the most powerful nations in the world in a deadly strife; . . . but the fraud on the credulity of mankind is so completely established, that these monks have succeeded in *enlisting both Europe and the East under their banners*, carrying havoc and destruction in their train, perhaps unparalleled since the Crusades.¹

George Fowler, 1855

The Crimean War was one colossal Comedy of Errors, in which one constantly asks oneself: *Qui trompe-t-on ici*, which is the dupe? But this comedy cost countless treasures and over a million human lives.²

Friedrich Engels, 1890

Deus vult? The Crusader spring of 1854

In the spring of 1854, a wave of martial religiosity such as Europeans had not seen since the great wars of religion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries swept over the continent from Britain to Russia and the Ottoman Empire. 'It seemed', recalled one French observer, 'as though all the religious fervour left in the world had become concentrated on the Eastern Question'.³ The crisis at the centre of this religious ferment began a year earlier. At the beginning of 1853, Tsar Nicholas I had astonished the world by making an abrupt demand that the

Ottoman sultan provide him with binding guarantees that the ancient rights and privileges of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire would remain unchanged, without exceptions and in perpetuity. This unexpected intrusion into Ottoman religious affairs had taken Sultan Abdülmecid aback, but he reassured 'his brother', the tsar, that there were no plans to abrogate any of the privileges of the Orthodox Church. He conspicuously refused to sign any formal engagement to this effect, however. A written guarantee, he objected, would turn concessions that the Ottoman dynasty had made of its own free will into capitulations imposed by a foreign power. The Russian government rejected this answer and had retaliated by withdrawing its entire embassy from Istanbul.

The swells of this diplomatic crisis in the Middle East had surged outwards, affecting all of Europe, as the Russian government used every means at its disposal to secure the binding guarantee of Orthodox rights that it desired. On 2 July 1853, Nicholas I took the momentous step of sending an army across the Prut river that separated Russia's south-western frontier from the Ottoman dependencies of Moldavia and Wallachia. He assured the rest of Europe that this was to be only a temporary occupation and that the treaties of Adrianople (1829) and St Petersburg (1834) entitled Russia to carry out such an action. As soon as the sultan had come to his senses, Russia would vacate the Danubian Principalities without any prejudice to Ottoman sovereignty over them. These promises convinced neither the Ottomans nor most of the courts of Europe of Nicholas's peaceful intentions and international tensions quickly escalated. Despite repeated expressions of goodwill from both parties to the dispute, events drifted inexorably over the autumn and winter of 1853 towards what *The Times* predicted would be 'a sacred war' in the East between Nicholas at the head of a militant Orthodox Christendom and an Islamic world led by the Ottoman sultan and caliph.⁴

In St Petersburg, the Russian government made no bones about the religious character and origins of the approaching conflict. Nicholas I loudly insisted upon the piety of his motives and claimed that it was Russia's legal right, by one reading of the ambiguous terms of the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, to intervene with the Ottoman government on behalf of his co-religionists in the East. Russian newspapers carried declarations of the emperor's resolve not to shrink from his religious duty when the rights of the Orthodox Church were being trampled upon in the lands of its birth. Holy Russia had no choice but to take up arms in a spirit of piety and charity to protect fellow Christians living

under the Ottoman yoke. 'Russia has not forgotten God!' Nicholas thundered in one such manifesto.⁵ 'We march', he declared in another, 'to the defence of the Orthodox Faith'.⁶

Most Russians – and the lower classes in particular – greeted these manifestos and Russia's formal declaration of war on 1 November with what one foreign correspondent described as 'fanatical enthusiasm': 'When the manifesto became publicly known here, numerous Russians were seen to fall on their knees in the open street and pray for blessings on their great Czar, the defender of the Orthodox Faith, the war-like champion of their holy Russia.'⁷ Another foreign visitor noted that: 'The Greek cross appears everywhere as the sanctifying symbol of the present war; and on every side we hear the words repeated of "Orthodox Faith", "Holy Confidence", "Holy Russia", etc. Texts from the scriptures have come to be mingled with the jargon of the fashionable saloons.'⁸ Newspapers and sermons preached from pulpits across the country reminded Russians that the Turks were 'persecutors of the Christian faith' and 'insulters of the Holy Places'.⁹ Such rhetoric stiffened the resolve of enlisted soldiers and produced a flood of peasant volunteers who, much to the horror of the Russian government, abandoned their fields in order to enlist.¹⁰

The Russian upper classes approached the coming war with a greater sense of foreboding, but they too considered the struggle a duty imposed by religion and honour. Conservatives, such as the 'Old Russian Party' within the bureaucracy and the Slavophiles in literary circles, went further and embraced the conflict as a God-given opportunity to change Russia itself. Officially, Russian policy aimed merely to safeguard the rights of Orthodoxy in the Near East. Russian nationalists, however, wanted to cast aside the limitations that Russia had imposed upon its own foreign policy since the Napoleonic Wars and to advance manfully towards its rightful place as master of the Mediterranean. Conquest of the Balkans was, they felt, part of a world-historical mission. Mikhail Pogodin, the most important Russian journalist of the period, argued forcefully to both his sovereign and to the reading public that Russia's moment had come to advance interests that were at one and the same time 'Russian, Slavic, European, Christian!':

As Russians, we must seize Constantinople for our own security. As Slavs, we must free millions of our elder kinsmen, coreligionists, enlighteners, and benefactors. As Europeans, we must drive out the Turks. As Orthodox Christians, we must preserve the Eastern Church and return to Hagia Sophia her ecumenical cross.¹¹

Other prominent writers lent their pens to this messianic vision. The Slavophile Alexei Khomiakov thus urged his countrymen to humble their pride, repent, and become fit instruments of God's work in the coming conflict. In a poem from 1854 entitled simply *To Russia*, he exhorted Russians to embrace the war as a cleansing fire:

Arise then, faithful to your mission,
And rush into the flames of bloody battle!
Fight with cunning for your brethren,
Holding aloft the banner of God with a firm hand.
Smite with the sword – the sword of God!¹²

The nations of the earth were all waiting for Russia to sally forth as an avenging angel, with 'love in her soul, thunder in her right hand', to free the suffering Christians of the Balkans.¹³

In the Balkan Peninsula itself, many ordinary Orthodox Christians shared this apocalyptic vision of the confrontation between Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and the latter's Western allies, even as the Serbian, Greek, and Montenegrin governments professed their official neutrality. Greeks noted that exactly 400 years had elapsed since the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Surely, Providence had chosen this historic anniversary to set a term to the humiliation of Orthodox Christendom. Pamphleteers in the Kingdom of Greece breathlessly predicted a Russian invasion of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of a united Orthodox front against the manifold enemies of Christ – a motley group that one writer identified as 'Mohammed and the Pope, Luther and Calvin, Voltaire and Copernicus'.¹⁴ 'Despotism is finished', he predicted, 'freedom, the Church of Christ and Orthodoxy shall shine forth!'¹⁵

Inspired by such hopes, thousands of Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Romanians began as early as the summer of 1853 to ask the Russian government for permission to enlist under the banner of their common faith.¹⁶ Greek volunteers in Iași, the capital of Moldavia, petitioned the tsar to accept them into his army since, as right-believing Christians, they could no longer 'remain mere onlookers in this contest for the Faith'.¹⁷ The Russian government responded by creating the Nicholas I Legion, composed entirely of Balkan Christian volunteers. Over the next two years, these Orthodox legionnaires would fight against the forces of their own sultan on the Danubian front and in the Crimea.¹⁸

Spirits ran especially high in the Kingdom of Greece, where both government and populace entertained unrealistic expectations that

the time had come to transform their tiny state into the nucleus of a resurrected Byzantine Empire. The Greek government sponsored the formation of paramilitary bands and fomented insurrections all along its border with the Ottoman Empire in Thessaly, Epirus, and Macedonia. The captain of one such band told local Christians that Ottoman rule was finished; every able-bodied man must take up arms and go to meet the conquering Russian army. The tsar himself would come

to meet us with all his compatriots bearing laurels in their hands, and the priests will bless us and our banners with the cross. The little Father of Olympus will prepare lambs and fresh water for us, and after having eaten and drunk the following day we will go to chant the liturgy in the church of Hagia Sophia [in Istanbul].¹⁹

When the French and British ambassadors to Athens tried to convince King Otto of Greece and his queen to disavow these provocations, they were shocked to find the royal couple stubbornly defiant. Otto proved impervious to all their arguments and countered that: 'I am a Christian! I cannot but sympathize with my people and with the Christians who labour under the yoke of the natural enemies of Christianity, and I would hope that every Christian government and people shared the same sentiments'.²⁰

This crusading mood in the Orthodox world was mirrored among Muslims, who responded to the developing crisis with an enthusiasm strongly tinged by religious fervour.²¹ Beginning in the fall of 1853, tens of thousands of conscripts and volunteers of every age made their way to the Ottoman capital from every corner of the empire: Arabs from the Middle East, Berbers from North Africa, Türkmén from the Anatolian plateau, Albanian mountaineers from the Balkans, and Circassian refugees impatient to avenge the Russian conquest of their homelands in the northern Caucasus.²² The constant parade of exotic arrivals made it seem as though the Muslim world had risen as one. Even old men were caught up in the spirit of volunteerism, as grey-bearded elders showed up for duty equipped with antique lances, kettledrums, and flintlocks. The fancy of the public was particularly struck by the arrival from the wilds of Cilicia of a mounted band of Kurds, who had put aside their feud with the Ottoman state to fight under the banner of the Prophet against the Russian infidels. Their aged chieftainess, Kara Fatma Hanum, caused a sensation by riding into Istanbul at the head of her men on an Arab charger, armed and unveiled.²³ As one English reporter reported breathlessly: 'the Turkish invasion of Europe has been repeated anew'.²⁴

European statesmen rightly feared that the jihadist enthusiasm of ‘Turks of the Old School’ would render the search for peace more difficult.²⁵ From the end of September 1853, volunteers thronged the streets of Istanbul in high spirits, demanding to be led out against the foe.²⁶ Discontented teachers and students from the religious colleges of the capital leavened this inchoate movement and helped to articulate its complaints. In the lead-up to the festival of *Eid al-Adha* on 10 September 1853, a group of 35–40 members of the religious establishment submitted a formal petition to the Ottoman Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances (*Meclis-i Vâlâ*).²⁷ The petitioners confronted the council with a collection of scriptural references, which they used to recall the sultan and his ministers to their duty of avenging the insults that Russia had heaped upon Islam. The demeanour of the volunteers and their supporters threatened serious unrest should the government not commit itself in short order to a declaration of war. The council of ministers bowed under these pressures and recommended that the sultan open hostilities.

In the official Ottoman proclamation of war on 26 September, however, the government was careful to justify this act on the grounds of political principle rather than faith.²⁸ It pointed out that the sultan had met all of Russia’s *legitimate* requests, that Russia’s interpretation of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca was incorrect, and that the tsar’s demands were an affront ‘to the sovereign rights and independence’ of *all* the diverse peoples of the empire – Christians and Jews as much as Muslims.²⁹ The Ottoman government, in other words, emphasized that it was going to war in defense not of Islam but of modern, secular norms of international relations. The sultan’s ministers therefore expressed their hope that other states would look past any sectarian differences and come to the assistance of a neighbour who had been wronged.

While the Ottoman government thus sought to present the war to Europe as a purely political dispute, it used Islam at home and in the rest of the Muslim world to mobilize support.³⁰ Around the same time as their secular declaration of war, for example, the council of ministers pointedly requested a legal opinion on the righteousness of the conflict from the highest Islamic authority in the empire, the şeyhülislam.³¹ The latter, Arif Hikmet Bey Effendi, responded with a *fatwa* declaring it a religious duty (*farz*) incumbent on all Muslims ‘to strive and do battle’ against the unbelieving tsar who ‘violated the borders of the lands of Islam with ruinous intent’.³² The response of the Islamic world to this appeal was mixed. On the one hand, most rulers from Morocco to Bukhara declared their neutrality, but ordinary Muslims as far away

as the Caucasus, India, and Southeast Asia were clearly sympathetic to the Ottoman cause.³³ Reports from Mecca indicated that support was nearly universal among *hajj* pilgrims, and one *Times* correspondent warned that 'religious fanaticism had not risen so high for centuries' in the Holy Cities.³⁴ Some political rivals such as Abbas Pasha of Egypt even agreed to put aside their differences with the Ottomans in order to present a united front against the Russian threat. The bey of Tunis, only nominally a vassal of the sultan, felt so strongly that he sent an expeditionary force to Istanbul of 4,000 infantry, cavalry, and artillery troops at his own expense.³⁵ Clearly, for most Muslims the conflict with Russia was indeed a struggle *fi sabīl Allāh* – in the way of God.

The religious aspect of the conflict aroused considerably cooler reactions in Western Europe, especially at the state level. Indeed, it was the religious aspect of the conflict that Western statesmen most deplored. The Austrian foreign minister, Count Buol, thus issued a statement in the summer of 1853 specifically deploring the manner in which the Russian government had turned its quarrel with the Ottomans into 'a crusade in favour of the Anatolian Church – a crusade for which there is no assignable motive, as in recent times there have been no instances of the Greek Christians in Turkey being oppressed by the Porte'.³⁶ The British and French allies of the sultan were even more explicit on this point. Queen Victoria was careful to specify in the British declaration of war on 28 March 1854 that her government was not taking up arms for any religious purpose but 'in defence of an ally whose territory is invaded, and whose dignity and independence are assailed'. The queen further expressed her hope that all combatants would refrain from making faith-based appeals and that time would confound and expose the true motives of those who were abusing Christianity to conceal 'an aggression undertaken in disregard of its holy precepts, and of its pure and beneficent spirit'.³⁷ In Paris the foreign minister of the day, Drouyn de l'Huys, could barely master his exasperation at the manner in which 'fanaticism' had magnified a minor squabble into an international crisis. He lamented in a circular to the French diplomatic corps:

Our epoch, however troubled, had at least been exempt from one of the evils that most afflicted the world in former days – I mean the wars of religion. Now, however, an echo of these disastrous times is made to resound in the ears of the Russian people. There is an affectation of opposing the cross to the crescent, and an appeal is made to fanaticism for that support which cannot be obtained from reason.³⁸

The sheer fact of the alliance after 28 March between Catholic France, Protestant Britain, and the Ottoman Caliphate seemed to prove that the conflict was not a new incarnation of the age-old struggle between Cross and Crescent. Western statesmen were apprehensive, however, that a war begun for secular motives might still mutate into a religious one. In Britain, for example, conservatives worried that British troops might end up on the wrong side of a war of Christian liberation against Muslim oppression. Were British soldiers really ready, several MPs asked, to fire on fellow Christians who sought only to escape Ottoman tyranny?³⁹

Outside the confines of parliament and chancery, Western Christians were more willing than their leaders to embrace the religious dimensions of the coming war. The conflict was thus popular among French Catholics for reasons that went well beyond Napoleonic grudges or *raisons d'état*. In the words of Bishop Antoine de Salinis of Amiens, Russia was 'the born enemy of Christian Europe' and of the values that all Catholics held dear.⁴⁰ He therefore directed his clergy to pray for the victory of French arms, as 'this war is from God'.⁴¹ In Paris, Archbishop Marie-Dominique-Auguste Sibour called for a crusade against the 'new barbarism' emanating from the Orthodox world. He urged French soldiers to adopt the crusading battle cry *Deus vult* – God wills it – in self-conscious imitation of their countrymen from the eleventh century.⁴² Among the French laity, the conservative authors of books with such provocative titles as *Russia under the Ban of the Universe and of Catholicism* and *Catholicism or Barbarism* pointed out that even if France was not going to war officially in the name of Catholicism, the interests of France and of global Catholicism in this case were indistinguishable.⁴³ In the Middle Ages, as one such writer noted, the Crusaders had pursued religious ends and, in the process, had advanced French political interests. In the present war, those dynamics were reversed but 'at bottom...the two interests are always united': 'Thus the Eastern War is to some extent a holy war, if not in the eyes of diplomats, then in the eyes of the people'.⁴⁴

Even opponents of Napoleon III and of the clerical party in French politics readily accepted that there was something objectionable and dangerous in Russia's connection with the Christians of the Ottoman Empire. This attitude was rooted in French understandings of Orthodoxy itself as an artificial creation of the Russian state – something akin to a pseudo-religious 'special section' of the tsarist autocracy, rather than a proper religion in its own right. Liberals thus had little difficulty agreeing with conservatives that *l'Église greco-slave* and *la Russie sainte* were authoritarian institutions antithetical to the most deeply held values

and beliefs of Frenchmen. As one professor at the *École préparatoire de Médecine* in Tours declared in a piece of doggerel on the outbreak of war:

The tsar of Russia, as both pontiff and king,
Is the enemy of our Christendom.
His Orthodoxy is despotism, whereas
God gave us holy liberty.⁴⁵

The one voice strikingly absent from this chorus was that of the Papacy itself. In an encyclical issued on 1 August 1854, Pope Pius IX limited himself to calling for prayers that God ‘banish war to the ends of the earth and remove all disagreements from Christian princes, [granting] peace and tranquillity’.⁴⁶ At first glance, the pope’s reluctance to assume leadership of this new crusade seems strange. The explanation lies in the Vatican’s desire to maintain good relations with Tsar Nicholas, who held in his hands the fate of millions of Polish, Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian Catholics. The emperor’s personal hostility towards Catholicism made the need for papal circumspection all the more acute. Nicholas had already outlawed Byzantine-rite Catholicism throughout most of his empire in 1839 and had placed various restrictions and impositions upon Latin-rite Catholicism in Congress Poland.⁴⁷ Relations between St Petersburg and Rome improved with the signing of an *accomodamento* between the two in 1847, but there was no telling how the tsar would react should the Papacy openly endorse a war against him. Another consideration for Pius IX was the internal fragility of the Papal States following the upheavals of 1848–49, when the short-lived Roman Republic of Giuseppe Mazzini had briefly caused the papal government to flee into exile. Pius IX thus had no interest in promoting fresh disturbances. For the duration of the Crimean War he would mirror the stance of Austria by maintaining watchful neutrality and calling for peace.⁴⁸ Jesuit periodicals like *Civiltà Cattolica* were more candid, however, in expressing a sympathetic view of the conflict that most Catholics assumed was closer to the true feelings of their pontiff.⁴⁹

Protestants on either side of the Atlantic were more sharply divided than Catholics on the religious significance of the war. Some – particularly in America – questioned the righteousness of any alliance with ‘the Turk’ and expressed concern for the welfare of Ottoman Christians.⁵⁰ In general, however, the majority of English-speaking Protestants viewed the war as being ‘religious’ in a broader, moral-ethical sense. As the aggrieved party, in other words, it was the sultan

who was truly righteous, while the tsar, by his aggression, was acting the infidel. In such a contest, Providence called the Anglo-Saxon race to bring a higher standard of morality to international affairs by rebuking the Russian bully and defending the weak.⁵¹ In this spirit of manly rectitude, the British Parliament declared an official day of 'Solemn Fast, Humiliation and Prayer' on 26 April 1854, during which churches and chapels across the land were packed to overflowing. The archbishop of Canterbury carefully avoided calling this war holy; yet he warmly assured the crowds that there had never been a time 'when we could more justly and with a safer conscience invoke the blessing of God upon Her Majesty's arms'.⁵²

Other Protestant clergymen sought to assuage the consciences of their compatriots about the coming war. In a sermon upon the embarkation of the Coldstream Guards, for example, the Anglican minister George Croly reassured his countrymen that there was little about Eastern Orthodoxy to excite their sympathy. The Orthodox Church, he declared, had long ago fallen into the extremes of theological error and priestcraft. It 'had since run a race of superstition, side by side with Rome'.⁵³ Many preachers characterized Orthodoxy as 'essentially a persecuting religion', hostile to the Word of God, to political liberty, and to religious tolerance.⁵⁴ In contrast to the Ottoman sultan who allowed missionaries to operate relatively freely in the East, tsarism notoriously opposed the diffusion of the Word of God in Russia. Missionaries even speculated that an Allied victory might open up dazzling new prospects for the dissemination of the Gospel – perhaps the evangelization of the entire Eurasian continent. One Evangelical writer thus exulted to see that:

The car of freedom, drawn by the British lion, is in motion. May it never stop till it has run over and conquered all the nations of the earth! . . . Go on, Britannia, go on! March through the nations in the greatness of thy strength; victory shall go before thee, justice, mercy and truth shall follow after; blow the trumpet of liberty; trample in the dust the tyrant and the oppressor; crush them beneath thy chariot wheels, never more to rise; proclaim deliverance to the people; chase away error, superstition, and ignorance, and in every city and hamlet set up an altar of pure worship to God.⁵⁵

Debating the 'Northern sin': Why the Crimean War?

Observers both at the time and since have wondered how affairs had reached such a pass: how had Europe become caught up in what the

historian Orlando Figes has recently dubbed its 'last Crusade'?⁵⁶ Alfred Tennyson, having invited a close friend to visit him on the Isle of Wight in January 1854, imagined in an anticipatory poem that their 'honest talk' must naturally turn to this very question as they observed British warships slipping in and out of the Solent from his home overlooking the strait:

We might discuss the Northern sin
Which made a selfish war begin;
Dispute the claims, arrange the chances;
Emperor, Ottoman, which shall win:
Or whether war's avenging rod
Shall lash all Europe into blood⁵⁷

The mystery was all the more vexing for the fact that 40 years of peace had made war between the Great Powers of Europe – let alone between its great religious faiths – seem an apparition from the distant past. As one British journalist lamented shortly after the outbreak of hostilities:

We had begun to flatter ourselves that [wars and plagues] were incident to a phase of civilization which we had outgrown, and would in future be confined to the semi-barbarous East, or the yet untamed West . . . [We] have seen imbroglio after imbroglio, in which war seemed absolutely inevitable, solved by diplomacy instead; revolution after revolution, pregnant with the seeds of universal conflict, terminated either entirely without fighting, or with only a temporary and partial campaign; . . . till an almost universal feeling has grown up that *some* peaceful way will be found out of every quarrel, *some* peaceful solution of every dilemma.⁵⁸

It was particularly difficult to understand why, of all the quarrels confronting Europe in 1853, *this* one alone should have proved insoluble. The public was dimly aware that trouble had been simmering for years in Jerusalem between the Orthodox and Catholic churches over the holiest of Christian shrines, but such squabbles had plagued the Holy Land for centuries without requiring the intervention of Europe. The conflict was all the more perplexing for the fact that the main points of contention in Jerusalem had all been settled by May 1853 and both Russia and France had declared the Holy Places dispute resolved. It was also true that the Ottoman Empire had placed considerable strains on its relations with Austria and Russia, first by granting asylum to the

defeated supporters of the Hungarian Republic in 1849 and then by invading the tiny principality of Montenegro in 1852. But these problems also had been resolved through diplomacy. The sole issue that remained outstanding in 1854 was the Russian government's demand that the Ottomans promise to preserve the rights of the Orthodox Church unaltered and most Europeans were at a loss to understand why this particular demand required recourse to violence. Russia demanded little more, after all, than the preservation of the status quo and the rights of Christians in the Ottoman Empire – goals that most Europeans could hardly fault.

Speaker after speaker thus rose in the Houses of Commons and Lords over the course of February and March 1854 to demand that the British government clarify why war was necessary and what specific goals it would achieve. The most popular answer, concisely expressed by the Earl of Shaftesbury to the House of Lords, was that Britain and France were acting vigorously in the East to prevent Russia from violating the sovereignty of the Ottoman sultan. The Allies would fight to 'assert the rights of a weaker State, maintain the independence of nations, and endeavour to assign a limit to the encroachments of a Power that seems bent to darken all that is light, and subjugate all that is free, among the nations of mankind'.⁵⁹ So long as the government gave its answer in such broad terms, it received broad approval. Britons had long expected, if not a major war, then some sort of political reckoning with Russia. They had waited in recent years with bated breath to see whether the smouldering embers of 1848–49 would throw up new flames in a confrontation between the great political principles of the age – of peoples against monarchs, of democracy against autocracy, and of liberal France and Britain against the conservative Northern Courts of Russia, Austria, and Prussia. It was therefore easy and satisfying for British and French statesmen to frame the conflict in terms that most of their citizens understood and for which they could muster genuine enthusiasm.

This explanation, however, could not withstand examination. The diplomacy of the crisis had nothing to do with modern political rivalries or ideas. It revolved entirely around the rights of an antique and, to most Westerners, obscure religious institution: the Orthodox Church. So inescapable was this discomfiting fact that when the Foreign Office published a massive collection of documents on the origins of the conflict for the edification of the Houses of Parliament, it entitled the blue book *On the Rights and Privileges of the Greek and Latin Churches*. One dismayed MP, Henry Drummond, pointed out that the very title gave the lie to any assertion that Russo-Ottoman relations had broken down over the

occupation of the Danubian Principalities. Nor did it appear that the war was about commerce in the East, geopolitics, or any of the other issues the House had spent most of the last several months debating. Drummond asked rhetorically:

Where were those blue books about what was now called the balance of power? Nowhere; . . . The Latin and Greek Churches were the whole subject of the blue books; and they constituted the matter with which the House had now to deal . . . the question of the balance of power was altogether an afterthought which had nothing to do with the real cause of quarrel.⁶⁰

The uncomfortable truth that the House had to confront, Drummond concluded, was that it was embarking upon a war in pursuit of explicitly religious objects. The other issues associated with the conflict in parliamentary debates and the popular mind were purely adventitious.

The thought of going to war over an issue as arcane as religious privileges scandalized statesmen on both sides of the English Channel.⁶¹ It seemed incredible, wrote one member of Napoleon III's court, 'that for matters like a key, a lamp, a passage, a dormer window, two nations such as Russia and France, with so many common interests and mutual sympathies, could come to blows and shed torrents of blood. To sensible men such a hypothesis seemed a criminal absurdity'.⁶² In London, the Marquess of Clanricarde echoed these sentiments: 'I hope', he declared in the House of Lords, 'it is not for the privileges of the Greek and Latin Church we are going to war. I, for one, will not consent to enter into a conflict for such an object'.⁶³

The reasons given for the crisis seemed so absurdly at variance with the spirit of the age that most contemporaries concluded that the unseemly row over religion must be a façade, behind which lurked gross ministerial incompetence and other, darker motivations that would not bear the light of day. Modern historians have tended to agree with this assessment that the official *casus belli* was not a sufficient cause in and of itself. As David Goldfrank has concluded in the best and most detailed study of the origins of the conflict to date, 'only an irrational impulse, one sufficiently powerful to override simple considerations of other states' interest and the balance of Power' could have led to war under the political circumstances of 1853–54.⁶⁴ Contemporaries of the war proposed *true* causes for it that ran from the plausible to the absurd. Informed speculations in *The Times* about Russian plans to partition the Ottoman Empire thus jostled for attention with the bizarre claims of

an evangelical pamphleteer that the Oxford Movement had instigated the war in order to decimate their opponents within the Anglican Church.⁶⁵ Historians down to the present have continued in a similar vein to debate the ultimate causes of the war, with particular discussion on whether economic, social, diplomatic, or strategic factors were most important. There is broad agreement, however, that a combination of causes was at play. The list of causes normally given for the Crimean War is long and invariably includes: 1) economic competition between the Powers in the Near East; 2) the 'Great Game' between Britain and Russia for control of the strategic swath of Western and Central Asia between the Turkish Straits and the Himalayas; 3) the spread of Russophobia among the British and French publics; 4) Napoleon III's search for a foreign adventure to boost his popularity at home; 5) the pride and incompetence of Tsar Nicholas I; and 6), last but not least, a general breakdown in the European Concert system of diplomacy.⁶⁶

The one factor that is generally left unexamined is, oddly enough, the immediate pretext for the crisis in 1853: the struggle over the rights and privileges of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire. Histories of the war provide little or no information on this aspect of the struggle and explore neither its prehistory nor its long-term consequences. To the extent that historians deal with the Orthodox Church at all, it is to dismiss the debate over its status and rights as an essentially trivial and anachronistic disagreement – the sort of thing that made the Crimean War, in the words of one writer, 'history's most unnecessary struggle' and 'a medieval conflict fought in a modern age'.⁶⁷ Such a view is manifestly incomplete and a new account is needed to restore the conflict over Orthodox rights to its rightful place as a central part of the story. The following section of this chapter will present the dissenting and all-but-forgotten opinion of one contemporary observer in the spring of 1854 who regarded the dispute over the Orthodox Church as neither anachronistic nor a peripheral factor in the dramatic contest then unfolding along the shores of the Black and Baltic seas.

'The fabric of theocracy': Marx on the origins of the war

From his place of exile in London, the frustrated Prussian revolutionary Karl Marx was just one of the many journalists and political commentators struggling to understand events in the East. Marx's first impulse had been to place the blame for the crisis entirely on Nicholas I, the notorious 'Gendarme of Europe' whose hands were still bloody from the violent suppression of every liberal uprising in eastern and central

Europe since 1830.⁶⁸ In doing so, Marx was merely reflecting conventional wisdom in Britain. Russophobia there had reached fever pitch during the months following the ‘massacre’ of the Ottoman Black Sea fleet at Sinope by Admiral Pavel Nakhimov on 30 November 1853. It was widely agreed that Russia’s annexation over the previous decades of first Poland, then the Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Central Asian steppes had failed to sate that empire’s ravenous appetite for territory. The Russian Bear was roaming abroad for fresh victims and thought it had found a suitable pretext for acquiring control over the Straits leading from the Black Sea to the eastern Mediterranean in its claim that the 10 million-odd Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire needed protection from their own lawful sovereign.

In England, the prospect of seeing Russia established at one entrance to the Mediterranean brought about an unwonted unanimity of opinion among revolutionaries, conservatives, and free traders, all of whom wanted tsardom kept as far as possible from the sea routes to the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. This common concern moved Marx in 1854 to contact the eccentric MP and publicist David Urquhart in hopes of learning more about the East. Whereas Marx knew about the Ottoman Empire only from his wide readings, Urquhart had expert, first-hand knowledge of the East.⁶⁹ As a young man with pronounced romantic leanings, Urquhart had volunteered in the 1820s to fight on the side of the Greek insurgents against the Ottoman state, and he had then travelled extensively throughout the Near East on behalf of the British embassy in Istanbul. His positive experiences with the Ottomans had converted the young Scot into one of that empire’s most outspoken Western supporters and a vociferous opponent of Russian expansionism. So embarrassingly partisan did Urquhart become that the Foreign Office finally dismissed him from its service in 1837 after the Russian navy intercepted a schooner that Urquhart had chartered to smuggle arms and supplies to insurgents resisting Russian rule in Circassia.⁷⁰ Returning home, Urquhart dedicated the rest of his life to promoting all things Ottoman – including the construction in England of the first ‘Turkish’ steam baths since Roman times. As publisher of the *Free Press* and Conservative MP for Stafford from 1847 to 1852, Urquhart used whatever influence he could muster to fulminate against Russia and against Lord Palmerston, whom he blamed for his dismissal from the Foreign Service.

Marx began reading Urquhart’s books and articles in March 1853 in order to learn more about the Ottoman Empire.⁷¹ He found these stimulating and was bemused by Urquhart’s insistence that the notoriously Russophobic Palmerston was secretly a paid agent of the tsar. Under

the influence of Urquhart and his own 'careful study of Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates* and the diplomatic *Blue Books*', Marx eventually came to embrace this conspiracy theory to the point of publishing new evidence 'proving' that a secret agreement had existed between St Petersburg and Whitehall since the times of Peter the Great.⁷² If shared enemies attracted the two men to each other, they quickly found upon meeting in early February of 1854 that they disagreed on every other topic. Urquhart was horrified to learn that Marx was a revolutionary, while Marx wrote to Engels that Urquhart was 'an utter maniac'.⁷³ The two men mastered their mutual dislike enough to cooperate fitfully over the next decade, with Marx writing anti-Palmerstonian articles for Urquhart's *Free Press* and Urquhart providing Marx with first-hand information about the East.

Marx's research led him to conclude that the recent 'sacred rows' in Jerusalem and Istanbul were neither as anachronistic nor as trivial as other commentators made them out. Religion was instead an integral part of the all-too-contemporary struggle between the European Powers for hegemony in the Near East.⁷⁴ Marx reminded his readers in an article for the *New-York Daily Tribune* that 'like all Oriental states' the Ottoman Empire was founded upon 'the most intimate connection, we might almost say, the identity of State and Church, of Politics and Religion. The Koran is the double source of faith and law for that Empire and its rulers'.⁷⁵ What was true of the empire as a whole was even more so of its non-Muslim communities. The Ottomans had expanded the temporal authority of the Orthodox clergy over their co-religionists to such a degree that:

the parson of a parish is at the same time the judge, the mayor, the teacher, the executor of testaments, the assessor of taxes, the ubiquitous factotum of civil life, not the servant, but the master of all work. The main reproach to be cast upon the Turks in this regard is not that they have crippled the privileges of the Christian priesthood, but, on the contrary, that under their rule this all-embracing oppressive tutelage, control, and interference of the Church has been permitted to absorb the whole sphere of social existence.⁷⁶

Ottoman Christians thus lived under a twofold 'fabric of theocracy', being subjugated in the first place to their Muslim conquerors and secondly to their own clergy.⁷⁷

The unique structure of Ottoman society dictated that Europeans who wished to do business or exercise influence in the East had little choice but to identify with one or more of the different religious communities.

Such identification provided foreigners with a ready-made network of local supporters and access to the considerable temporal and spiritual authority wielded by the clerical elites. To swim against the current by remaining unaffiliated was always an option for non-Muslim foreigners, but meant foregoing the most obvious levers of power and influence available to them. In practice, therefore, most Europeans sought to bolster their influence in the Near East through the vehicle of religion. France, Austria, and Spain had vied with one another for centuries over the right to act as protector of Catholicism in the East, while Russia claimed a similar status with regard to the Orthodox and Armenian churches. Britain and Prussia, having come late to the region, were left to court smaller minorities such as the empire's few Protestants, Jews, Nestorians, and Druze.

These religious protectorates brought immediate advantages, but they also embroiled the Great Powers in what Marx disparaged as 'desperate Irish rows' that regularly broke out between and within the different communities.⁷⁸ Ottoman clients expected their European patrons to weigh in and determine the outcome of these disputes in their favour. As much as European representatives resented such demands, they invariably rose to the occasion and expended considerable effort living up to the expectations of their clients. Failure to do so meant not only loss of face and influence, but the eventual defection of local clients to more potent protectors. It was precisely this sort of intervention in support of local clients that had led to the initial dispute in the 1850s between Russia and France over the Holy Places – and would likely continue to cause fresh problems for the foreseeable future.

The outbreak of war had, however, focused international attention on these protectorates and the disadvantages of a socio-political system that discriminated against non-Muslims. The British and French governments, in particular, declared their intention of striking at the root of the current crisis by making their alliance contingent upon the Ottoman government undertaking significant social reforms. In particular, the Ottomans would be forced to place all religious communities on the same legal footing. Civil equality would emancipate Ottoman Christians and sever the Gordian knot that bound up their religious institutions with temporal privilege and political influence.

Marx scoffed at the idea that the Powers could hope to escape their conundrum so easily.

We are told explicitly [Marx observed] that the great end aimed at by the western Powers is to put the Christian religion on a footing of

equal rights with the Mahometan in Turkey. Now, either this means nothing at all, or it means the granting of political and civil rights, both to Mussulmans and Christians, without any reference to either religion, and without considering religion at all. In other words, it means the complete separation of State and Church, of Religion and Politics.⁷⁹

Marx was no friend of theocracy, but in this case he feared that the aggressive program of secularization proposed by the Allied Powers would work serious mischief on the domestic order of the Ottoman Empire – so serious that he did not believe they could be contemplating such a measure in earnest. What the British and French governments were suggesting, he insisted, was nothing less than ‘abolishing Mahometanism’ in its current form and ‘breaking down the framework of Turkish society [in order to] create a new order of things out of its ruins’. Such emancipation, ‘whether effected by peaceful concession or by violence, [would] degrade Islamism from a political authority to a religious sect, and utterly uproot the old foundations of the Ottoman Empire’.⁸⁰

In particular, Marx insisted that full religious equality would turn clerical rule among the non-Muslim minorities into a doomed legal anomaly. The secularization of Muslim society would therefore be followed by revolts against clerical regimes that, for all their drawbacks, had kept Christians relatively quiescent for centuries.⁸¹ Once the peoples of the Near East had escaped the stupefying tutelage of their clergy, he predicted, they would come under the sway of incendiary political influences ranging from Greek and Serbian nationalism to Russian imperialism. What the French and British were proposing thus ran directly counter to their stated war aims, chief among which was the preservation of the Ottoman state. The risks were too great for the Allies’ talk of separating church and state in the Ottoman Empire to be anything but empty propaganda. Marx concluded by scornfully asking his readers:

Can any one be credulous enough to believe in good earnest, that the timid and reactionary valetudinarians of the present British Government have ever conceived the idea of undertaking such a gigantic task, involving a perfect social revolution, in a country like Turkey? The notion is absurd. They can only entertain it for the purpose of throwing dust in the eyes of the English people and of Europe.⁸²

As will be demonstrated later in Chapter 6, Marx was entirely mistaken on this point – the British and French governments were indeed intent on carrying out just such a revolution. His assessment of the causes and long-term consequences of this decision was, however, essentially correct. The international debate over the structure of Orthodox Christendom in the Near East had not appeared *ex nihilo* in 1853 nor would it dissipate into irrelevance with the outbreak of war. At the heart of the crisis were questions regarding the place religion was to occupy, both in the domestic socio-political order of the Ottoman Empire and in the system of international relations that the Ottoman Empire was in the process of joining.

Charting a course

This book picks up where Marx's analysis leaves off by attempting to answer two questions regarding the nineteenth-century political history of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The first is a simple question of fact: did European states other than Russia take an active interest in the affairs of Orthodox Christendom in the Near East? The second question is a more qualitative one: what practical effects did such involvement have on Orthodox Christendom and on European states?

It will be argued here that all of the Great Powers took an active interest in Orthodox affairs, and that their rivalries over such involvement would spark an international crisis in the early 1850s. The resulting war in 1853–56 fatally disrupted the status quo that the Congress of Vienna had established in Europe since 1815 and cleared the way for sweeping changes ranging from the emancipation of the Russian peasantry (1861) to the emergence of new national states in Romania (1859), Italy (1861), and Germany (1871).

The same encounter that transformed Europe also transformed Orthodox Christendom. Beginning in the 1830s, European diplomacy encouraged a wider questioning of the place of the Orthodox Church in the East, from the social role of the clergy to the political interests they should serve. Was the patriarchate of Constantinople, for example, to remain an international figure – an Orthodox papacy of sorts – or should its sphere of activity be limited to a single state? Should the Orthodox clergy wield temporal powers or was their authority purely spiritual? And who should the church serve: a temporal ruler, a particular nation, or foreign imperial interests? All governments and political groups involved in the affairs of the Near East took an interest in these questions, and their competing efforts from the 1820s to the 1870s to

reshape the Orthodox Church produced effects that ranged from petty wrangling over liturgics to serious diplomatic disputes. The following chapters will provide an outline narrative of this process, beginning with the origins of the crisis over Ottoman Christendom in the 1820s–30s and tracing its progression through the heightened tensions of the 1840s to its partial resolution with the Crimean War and the promulgation of new reforms in the 1850s.

It will also be argued here that European policies towards the Orthodox Church were part of a broader movement during the nineteenth century towards the secularization of international relations. The same Great Powers, in other words, that sought to restrict the powers of the Orthodox Church in the Near East also sought generally to construct an international order in which religion occupied a distinctly marginal place and ecclesiastical figures and institutions were firmly subordinated to temporal authorities. The history of relations between European states and the Orthodox Church thus deserves to be placed alongside the history of the former's relationships with the Catholic Church, with Islam, and with any other religion that claimed a place on the international political stage.

The preceding assertions are by no means uncontroversial for historians whether of the nineteenth century, of diplomacy, of the Crimean War, or of the Ottoman Empire. In part, this is because scholars are familiar with the individual components of this story, but have rarely viewed them as interrelated pieces of a single whole. Historians of the Balkans have, for example, written extensively on the struggles over ecclesiastical reform between Greeks and Slavs, clergy and laity, the Ottoman state and its Orthodox subjects. Their focus, however, has been on the internal history of these communities and their relations with the Ottoman state.⁸³ More specifically, these histories have focused on the role of Orthodoxy in advancing or retarding the development of ethnic nationalism on the one hand and loyalty to the Ottoman state on the other.⁸⁴ That the Powers played some role in the internal struggles of the Orthodox Community is acknowledged, but without any corresponding effort to examine the policies of these states towards the Orthodox Church in detail.⁸⁵ The larger Ottoman and European political context for events within the Orthodox Community is also rarely examined, an omission that is particularly striking in the case of the Crimean War. A symptom of this is the fact that historians have written monographs on Catholic and Anglican responses to the Crimean War, but not on the responses of those Ottoman Orthodox Christians who were at the centre of it.⁸⁶

Ottoman historians, for their part, have approached the impact of the Tanzimat reforms on the non-Muslim minorities from the perspective of the imperial centre.⁸⁷ Like Balkan historians, much of their work has been carried out under the shadow of the inter-communal slaughter that attended the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and is therefore motivated by a desire to understand ‘what went wrong’.⁸⁸ Ottoman historians are also broadly agreed with Balkanists that the Tanzimat era marked a fundamental shift in the socio-political role of religion across the empire. Selim Deringil has described this shift as ‘the “cracking of the shell” of the traditional [Ottoman] religious structure’, with religion becoming ever more politically charged and tied to ethnic and – eventually national – identity over the course of the nineteenth century.⁸⁹ Ottomanists trace the roots of this politicization to the steady knitting together of the Ottoman and European economies, a development which in turn is supposed to have fuelled the rise of Christian bourgeois elites who proved adept at turning religious and cultural ties with Europe to their economic and political advantage. The Ottoman state further empowered these groups during the 1830s–70s by embracing a discourse of equality and modernization that was *supposed* to strengthen links between the central government and ordinary subjects. Ussama Makdisi argues that by the 1830s these developments had turned Ottoman religion into the site par excellence of:

a colonial encounter between a self-styled ‘Christian’ West and what it saw as its perennial adversary, an ‘Islamic’ Ottoman Empire. This encounter profoundly altered the meaning of religion in the multi-confessional society of Mount Lebanon because it emphasized sectarian identity as the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims.⁹⁰

Ottomanists are thus broadly agreed in identifying religion as a critical flashpoint for conflict between Ottoman communities, between the central state and its subjects, and between the empire and its European neighbours. They have also the best understanding of the extent to which Ottoman religion served as a flashpoint for conflict *between* the European powers. Historians such as Bruce Masters and Ussama Makdisi have shown how Ottoman religious communities and shrines in the Levant served as venues for ‘a cultural war wherein European powers sought proxies’ among their local co-religionists.⁹¹ Moving from the provinces to the capital, Roderic Davison has argued that such competition moved the Great Powers to encourage a thorough reform of the

empire's religious communities at the end of the Crimean War. Davison even went so far as to declare the Reform Decree of 1856 'in many ways the magnum opus of [the British ambassador] Lord Stratford'.⁹² Davison did not investigate, however, whether this involvement predated the Crimean War and specifically warned that he would 'slight' the details of 'great-power maneuvering' in order to focus on the reforms 'as a domestic problem'.⁹³ Ottoman historians since have tended to accept Davison's assertion that European diplomacy played some role in the drafting of religious reforms, while differing over the significance of that role. At one extreme, Kemal Karpat has described the Reform Edict of 1856 as a reform 'prepared by the English, French and Austrian governments' and 'imposed upon the Ottoman government'.⁹⁴ Deringil, by contrast, is more typical in his insistence that the Ottoman government bore sole responsibility for its own reforms and that it 'retained ultimate political agency' until the end of the Empire.⁹⁵ In either case, the history of the 'cultural war' carried out by the Powers on Ottoman soil has yet to be written – as has serious investigation into Karpat's assertion that 'the Orthodox Church was, in fact, the primary target of the European-inspired millet reform'.⁹⁶

Similarly, while there is an extensive literature on the Eastern Question in European diplomacy, little of it specifically examines the Orthodox Church as a strategic vehicle for imperial competition in the eastern Mediterranean.⁹⁷ Diplomatic historians have treated disputes over even such explicitly religious matters as the Holy Places or ecclesiastical privileges in isolation from each other and from the history of the Orthodox Church as a whole. Was, for example, Menshikov's insistence on a protectorate that included the temporal privileges of the Orthodox clergy a new demand or a long-standing one? An index of the degree to which the Orthodox Church has been ignored is how few histories of the Crimean War or the Eastern Question discuss events within the Orthodox community or even mention individual clergymen by name.⁹⁸ The resulting accounts suffer from drawbacks comparable to any history of the Opium Wars that omits the opium trade or a history of the First World War that knows nothing of Bosnian Serbs.

To leave Orthodoxy on the neglected margins of the Eastern Question is also to overlook one of the most outstanding examples of the intimate connections between Ottoman domestic events and the mainstream of European history. This book will attempt to highlight these connections by organizing each chapter loosely around the perspectives of several central figures – diplomats, officials, or clergymen – who served as points of contact between the Ottoman and European worlds.

Chapter 2 thus begins with the early life and career of a key figure in the nineteenth-century history of the Orthodox Church: Patriarch Grigórios VI of Constantinople. The story of his rise through the hierarchy serves to provide an overview of the unique structure and functioning of the Orthodox Church as an Ottoman institution in the mid-1800s, from its highest office down to the parish level. The resulting picture of the patriarchate of Constantinople is completed by a review of the many problems that confronted the church in the 1830s: chronic institutional indebtedness, territorial losses, abuses of power, the first stirrings of nationalism, and the incursions of foreign missionaries. Counterbalancing these problems were the substantial privileges that the clergy enjoyed and the determination of many Orthodox Christians, with Grigórios VI at their head, to revitalize their community.

The third chapter uses the correspondence of ambassador John Ponsoy and other European representatives in the Near East to examine why and how Western governments began to take a new interest in Orthodox affairs during the 1820s–30s. It is argued here that Western fears of an imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of Russian influence in the region gave new significance to the religious protectorates that European states had acquired in previous centuries over the various non-Muslim religious communities. Under the changed conditions of the 1830s, British and French diplomats felt that the advantages Russia enjoyed as a result of its connections with the Orthodox Church could no longer be tolerated. British diplomacy, in particular, encouraged the Ottoman Empire and the new Balkan states to exercise tighter state supervision over the Orthodox Church within their borders so as to prevent the emergence of anything like a transnational Orthodox ‘papacy’ in the eastern Mediterranean. Such policies clashed directly with the efforts of Patriarch Grigórios VI to reassert the authority of his see over the Orthodox churches of Greece and the British-controlled Ionian Islands. The result was a confrontation between the patriarchate and the British government that ended with the removal of Grigórios from power and the establishment of an important precedent in regional affairs. Thereafter, the emerging consensus among Western states was that the authority of Orthodox hierarchs – and that of Constantinople in particular – should be restricted within clear territorial limits.

Chapter 4 reconstructs the attitude of the Ottoman government towards the Orthodox Church through the lens of the career and policies of the great Ottoman statesman Koca Mustafa Reşid Paşa, and, to

a lesser extent, those of his protégés, colleagues, and rivals in Ottoman state service. It briefly reviews the ambitious program of reforms known as the Tanzimat that Reşid helped to launch in the 1840s and discusses the potential implications of those reforms for Ottoman Christians. Reşid personified a new tendency among Ottoman statesmen during the late 1830s–40s to see the difficulties of the Orthodox Church as a political danger requiring state-imposed solutions, rather than as an ethical or administrative problem best left to Ottoman Christians to resolve. In other words, the question of what to do with the Orthodox Church was posed for the first time in Ottoman political discourse, with Reşid and his circle urging a reduction in the powers and autonomy of the clergy as the answer. The British and French embassies wholeheartedly approved of such policies and pressed the Ottoman government to be even more radical. All Ottoman attempts to reform the structure of the Orthodox Community in the 1840s foundered, however, against the entrenched opposition of the Orthodox clergy and the Russian legation. Ottoman ecclesiastical policy thus failed to achieve its objects, but it inadvertently laid the foundations for a serious crisis by convincing the Russian government that Russian influence and the privileges of the Orthodox Church were under sustained attack from the Ottoman government and its British and French supporters.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how Russian anxieties over the Orthodox Church transformed a diplomatic incident into a war. It begins by reviewing the competition that had been brewing for two decades in Palestine among the Catholic, Armenian, and Orthodox churches over control of such sites as the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The French embassy succeeded in wringing a few concessions from the Ottoman government, but such successes also stoked the wrath of the Russian government, which saw these as yet further attempts to undermine the position of Orthodoxy in the East. The chapter focuses in particular on the mission of Prince Alexander Menshikov, the special envoy dispatched by Tsar Nicholas I to Istanbul in 1853 to bring home a victory for Orthodoxy in the Holy Places dispute. In light of the two decades of struggle over the position of the Orthodox Church described in previous chapters, the obsession of the Russian government with explicit guarantees for the rights and privileges of the Orthodox Church becomes both more intelligible and more significant – as does the corresponding refusal of the Ottoman government to give such guarantees. The Russian government came to the conclusion that it was facing a direct challenge to its position in the Near East and that aggressive action was needed to set things right.

The degeneration of the Russo-Ottoman dispute into a rupture of diplomatic relations brought the problem of Orthodox ecclesiastical privilege to the attention of European statesmen and convinced them of the need to impose a resolution.

The sixth chapter looks at relations between the Great Powers and the Orthodox Church during the years of the Crimean War primarily through the reports and activities of the French ambassador to Istanbul, Édouard Thouvenel, and those of his British and Austrian colleagues (Stratford Canning de Redcliffe and Anton Prokesch von Osten). With the Powers at war and the Russian embassy temporarily absent, the British ambassador briefly attempted to take over Russia's traditional role and to pose as the protector of the Orthodox Church. When this experiment failed in 1855, the British embassy joined with its French and Austrian counterparts in insisting upon a thoroughgoing reform of the Orthodox Community. Together, the representatives of the three Powers worked in concert to ensure that the Ottoman government imposed a new, laicized model of communal organization on the non-Muslims of the empire. The culmination of this process came in the spring of 1856 with the Constantinople Conference and the promulgation of the great Reform Edict, a milestone in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Although officially this edict was a free act of the Ottoman government, it was drafted with direct European involvement and went much further than the Ottoman ministry of the day thought wise or feasible. The implementation of these reforms was to put an end to the problem of religious protectorates in the Near East by removing most of the powers of the clergy, undermining the stability and coherence of the religious communities, and formally abolishing the old system of protectorates. The chapter concludes by showing how the Great Powers further sought to prevent the Ottoman government from renegeing on its commitment to reform by mentioning the new edict, albeit obliquely, in the articles of the Peace of Paris that ended the Crimean War in 1856.

The concluding chapter uses the second patriarchate of Grigórios VI Fourtouniádis to reflect upon the profound changes that had occurred since his first term on the ecumenical throne. In the aftermath of 1856, the process of drawing up a new constitution for the Orthodox Community proved exceptionally difficult and delays, obstacles, and internal disputes dogged the work. The new regulations that Sultan Abdülaziz promulgated in 1863 did not reflect the interests of the Ottoman government particularly well nor did it bring peace to the Orthodox Community. Instead, Orthodox communal affairs in the late 1850s–60s became ever more

mired in disputes between the clergy, lay notables, and representatives of the non-Greek ethnic groups. Although the reforms did not match the guidelines laid down in the Constantinople Congress, European governments could nevertheless afford to watch sanguinely during the 1860s–70s as the Russian legation struggled to patch over the damage that a decade of war and reform had done to pan-Orthodox solidarity in the Balkans.

This chapter also argues that the history of the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire illustrates an important aspect of the changing relationship between religion and politics everywhere in the nineteenth century. It is commonly accepted that in Western Europe the modern state system had to be built on the ruins of an older, religiously inspired system underpinned by ecclesiastical principalities, papal authority, and the Holy Roman Empire. The expansion of the European state system into the Balkans and Middle East involved a similar process of domestication – this time of the Eastern Orthodox Church and Islam – and the suppression of the temporal powers of the clergy. These developments were not merely brought about by changing attitudes among ordinary people but were the product of deliberate efforts by states and individual statesmen. The Great Powers of Europe, in particular, played a critical role in this process – a role that they were afterwards only too happy to forget.