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Russian Orthodox Church Demands Apology From Constantinople Over Ukraine

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Igor Palkin / foto.patriarchia.ru

The Russian Orthodox Church has called on the Constantinople Patriarchate to apologize for dividing the Orthodox world by supporting Ukraine's bid for an independent church, a church spokesman said Monday.

Last week, The Russian Orthodox Church said it had decided to sever all relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople over its endorsement of Ukraine's request for an "autocephalous," or independent, church. Critics of Ukraine's plan for an independent church say it could lead to violence and forced takeovers of churches loyal to the Russian church.

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The spokesman for Patriarch Kirill of Moscow said Monday that the Russian church would be

willing to restore dialogue if Constantinople "recognizes the fallaciousness of its actions and decisions and apologizes for causing significant damage to the entire Orthodox world."

“If a single drop of blood is shed in Ukraine, then the guilt and responsibility for that drop of blood will be entirely on Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew,” he was cited as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

Earlier, President Vladimir Putin vowed to defend Russian church believers in Ukraine from any illegal activity against them following Kiev's move toward a historic split from the Russian Church.

The struggle over Ukraine's spiritual future comes on the back of deteriorating relations between Kiev and Moscow after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and support for pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Reuters contributing reporting.

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