

"I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). The Geopolitics of Spiritual Securitization: Christian Denominations in the Ruso-Ucrainian Conflict

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Rezumat: Evoluția relațiilor internaționale a găsit adesea religia, (geo)politica și războiul la intersecția intereselor cercetătorilor din științele sociale. Dacă aceasta nu este neapărat o noutate, ceea ce a atras atenția în ultimii ani în rândul cercetărilor de relații internaționale și studii de securitate, este un conflict convențional major pe teritoriul european între două state aparținând aceleiași confesiuni religioase: Creștinismul Ortodox Răsăritean. Studiul de față urmărește identificarea, descrierea și explicarea narațiunilor securitizării spirituale prezente atât în discursul liderilor politici și religioși, dar și discursul credincioșilor creștini ortodocși, catolici și protestanți, față de amenințarea valorilor moral-spirituale și dogmatice, dar și a comunităților religioase, în contextul războiului dintre Rusia și Ucraina. În acest sens, cercetarea de față propune un design de cercetare calitativ, bazat pe selecția documentelor ca metodă de colectare a datelor și analiza narativă ca metodă de interpretare a datelor. Rezultatele au evidențiat prezența mai multor tipuri de procese de securitizare spirituală, particulare comunităților religioase analizate.

Cuvinte cheie: Securitizare spirituală, Rusia, Ucraina, Biserica Ortodoxă, Biserica Catolică, Protestantism, Război

Abstract: The evolution of international relations have often found religion, (geo)politics and war at a crossroads. If this is not necessarily a novelty, what gained attention within the international relation and security studies literature is a major conventional conflict on European territory between two states belonging to the same religious denomination: Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The current study seeks to identify, describe and explain the narratives of spiritual securitization

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in the discourse of political and religious leaders and the discourse of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christian believers, towards the threat of spiritual and dogmatic values, but also of religious communities in the context of the war between Russia and Ukraine. In this regard, the research uses as data collection method the selection of documents and narrative analysis to interpret the data. The results highlighted the presence of several types of spiritual securitization processes, specific for the analyzed religious communities.

Keywords: Spiritual Securitization, Russia, Ukraine, Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, Protestantism, War

Introduction

History emphasize that religion, geopolitics and war meet often at the crossroads of international relations through conflicts that have come to even define the very nature of international systems: the 30-year war, the Crusades, the Hussite Wars, the Reconquista and the Balkan conflicts of the 90s are just a few of such examples.¹ Despite these wars, never in the last 30 years have two Orthodox states fought a war, on the European continent, on the scale of the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. At the same time, while spiritual securitization became known especially in the efforts to protect religious values and dogmas in the context of secularization and globalization², there are no cases in which spiritual securitization is discussed in the context of a conventional war, from the perspective of Christianity.

Thus, the study aims to identify the narratives that underlie the securitization discourse of political and religious leaders, as well as believers, when it comes to the survival and protection in particular of religious values

¹ Mark Konnert, *Early Modern Europe: The Age of Religious War, 1559-1715* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Mitja Velikonja, "In Hoc Signo Vincas: Religious Symbolism in the Balkan Wars 1991-1995," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): pp. 25-40; Tal Dingott Alkopher, "The Social (and Religious) Meanings That Constitute War: The Crusades as Realpolitik vs. Socialpolitik," *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2005): pp. 715-738.

² Christopher Marsh, "Eastern Orthodoxy and the Fusion of National and Spiritual Security," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security*, ed. Chris Seiple, Dennis R. Hoover, and Pauletta Otis (London: Routledge, 2012); Daniel P. Payne, "Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?," *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 4 (2010): pp. 712-727; Georgios Karyotis and Stratos Patrikios, "Religion, Securitization and Anti-Immigration Attitudes: The Case of Greece," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 1 (2010): pp. 43-57; Isidora Stakić, "Securitization of LGBTIQ Minorities in Serbian Far-Right Discourses: A Post-Structuralist Perspective," *Intersections East European Journal of Society and Politics* 1, no. 1 (2015): pp. 183-206.

associated with the nation, the spiritual and dogmatic values of Churches and communities of believers that they represent, in the context of the war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. In this regard, the current research looks at the Christian Faith, from the point of view of the three major denominations active in Ukraine: Orthodox Christians, Roman and Greek Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians. From the methodological perspective, data collection is based on a selection of online documents available in English (e.g. World Evangelical Alliance's website, Vatican News, Angelus, Reuters). Data interpretation will be done by applying the narrative analysis method. Details can be found in the methodological section of this article.

From the point of view of the structure, the present study includes an introduction section followed by a section dedicated to the literature review that presents both the main concepts and debates about war, religion and geopolitics. This review section is followed by the methodology and next by the analysis section which comprises three major parts: the first dedicated to the Russian Federation and Ukraine and the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, the second dedicated to the analysis of the position of the Vatican and the Roman and Greek Catholic Churches, and the third section in where are analyzed data on Protestant denominations. The final part is dedicated to the conclusions and the bibliography.

Frameworks in the study of war, religion and geopolitics: concepts and debates

Among the objectives of this section, one is to build a theoretical and conceptual framework that provides a thorough understanding of the concepts of war and securitization, religion and politics in relation to contemporary developments within the international system. At the same time, this framework examines how religion can both contribute to and mitigate conflict, exploring its role in justifying, motivating, and even resolving wars and political issues³. Studies on religious doctrines and war⁴ highlighted three major conceptual

³ Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Dialogue, 2005); Hanna Staehle, "Seeking New Language: Patriarch Kirill's Media Strategy," *Religion, State and Society* 46, no. 4 (2018): pp. 384–401.

⁴ Robert Jackson, "Doctrinal War: Religion and Ideology in International Conflict.," *The Monist* 89, no. 2 (2006); Ardalan Rezamand, "Use of Religious Doctrine and Symbolism in the Iran-Iraq War," *Illumine: Journal of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society Graduate Students Association* 9, no. 1 (2011): pp. 83–107.

approaches when it comes to analyzing how religious faith and spirituality intertwine with war. Many religious traditions have developed doctrines to justify war under certain conditions. Among them, Christianity emphasize the "Just War Theory" outlining criteria like legitimate authority, just cause, right intention, and proportionality when involving in a war.⁵ Before the just war theory some religions endorse towards political war the concept of "Holy War," where violence is considered divinely mandated, examples being both The Crusades in Christianity and The Jihad in Islam⁶. Finally, conversely, some religious traditions such as certain interpretations of Buddhism and Christianity, emphasize non-violence and advocate for pacifism.⁷

When considering war as a socio-political outcome and religion, one other important concept is that of religious identity. Religion often serves as a core component of individual and collective identity. It provides a framework for understanding the world, moral guidelines, and a sense of belonging within a community.⁸ But because of all the above, same Faith in the form of religious narratives can strengthen the divide between "us" and "them," leading to dehumanization of the out-group and justifying violence against them⁹. Furthermore, religion can create symbolic boundaries that distinguish "us" from "them." These boundaries can foster a sense of unity within a religious group but also can exacerbate divisions between different groups, especially

⁵ Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, "The Concept of Just War in Christianity," in *The Concept of Just War in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Georges Tamer and Katja Thörner (De Gruyter, 2021).

⁶ Jonathan Fine, *Political Violence in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. From Holy War to Modern Terror* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

⁷ Daniel A. Dombrowski, "Christian Pacifism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pacifism and Nonviolence*, ed. Andrew Fiala (London: Routledge, 2018), 11; Iselin Frydenlund, "'Buddhism Has Made Asia Mild' The Modernist Construction of Buddhism as Pacifism," in *Buddhist Modernities Re-Inventing Tradition in the Globalizing Modern World*, ed. Hanna Havnevik et al. (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 316.

⁸ Pninit Russo-Netzer and Ofra Mayseless, "Spiritual Identity Outside Institutional Religion: A Phenomenological Exploration," *Identity* 14, no. 1 (2014): pp. 19–42.

⁹ Dragoș Șamșudean, "Conspiracy Theories and Faith in Romania. What the Orthodox Bloggers Say?," *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Studia Europaea* 68, no. 2 (2023): pp. 175–208; Dragoș Șamșudean, "Populism Religios În Federația Rusă. Analiza Discursurilor Online În Perioada 2008-2020," *Sfera Politicii* 28, no. 3–4 (2020): pp. 53–62; Cyril Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies. The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018); Cyril Hovorun, "Orthodox Political Theology," in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. et. all Wolfe, 2023.

when religious identity is tied to political or ethnic identity¹⁰. A particular and relevant example to be discussed in the assembly of this research, taking into account the previously described, is the concept of spiritual securitization. Against the background of religious identity and some real or perceived conflicts, religious identity is put on the security agenda while religious dogma is transformed into an object of reference in the security area. The most eloquent case is that of the Russian Federation, which, in its defense and security strategies, identifies the Orthodox Faith and traditional moral-spiritual values as being directly threatened by the Western way of life.¹¹ All this highlights the mobilizing nature of the religious factor, in particular when it comes to war, political and societal changes.¹²

Religious leaders and institutions can play a significant role in mobilizing followers for war, using religious rhetoric to frame conflicts in terms of good vs. evil or divine will. Sacred texts and religious symbols are often invoked in order to legitimize war efforts, providing a powerful source of motivation and justification for combatants.¹³ An eloquent example of religious mobilization through leaders is that of the Catholic Church which, over the centuries, through the voice of the Pope, called the Catholic Christian peoples to Crusades.¹⁴ Another religious leader in the person of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow mobilizes Orthodox Christians from the Slavic world towards an ideological project of the Russian World¹⁵, while the regime of the Ayatollahs in Iran interprets Shiite Islam in ways that mobilize the population towards support of permanent regional disputes with Israel and

¹⁰ Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies. The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced*; Bruce Heilman and Paul J. Kaiser, "Religion, Identity and Politics in Tanzania," *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2002): pp. 691–709.

¹¹ Payne, "Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?"; Marsh, "Eastern Orthodoxy and the Fusion of National and Spiritual Security."

¹² R. R. Valić-Nedeljković, D., Ganzevoort and S. Sremac, "The Patriarch and the Pride: Discourse Analysis of the Online Public Response to the Serbian Orthodox Church Condemnation of the 2012 Gay Pride Parade," in *Lived Religion and the Politics of (In)Tolerance*, ed. R. Ganzevoort and S. Sremac (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 85–109, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-43406-3>.

¹³ Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies. The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced*; Hovorun, "Orthodox Political Theology."

¹⁴ H. E. J. Cowdrey, "Pope Urban II's Preaching of the First Crusade," *History* 55, no. 184 (1970).

¹⁵ Șamșudean, "Populism Religios În Federația Rusă. Analiza Discursurilor Online În Perioada 2008-2020."

Saudi Arabia.¹⁶ While all of the above highlight an approach from religion towards (geo) politics and war, some studies focus on the inverse relationship of the concepts discussed.

Some of the recent studies in the field of international relations highlight religion as a tool of geopolitics from the perspective of what the specialized literature calls soft power.¹⁷ Religion can be used as a tool of soft power, where nations utilize religious influence to extend their geopolitical reach. For example, Saudi Arabia has used its status as the custodian of Islam's two holiest sites to wield influence in the Muslim world.¹⁸ The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) often supports Russian foreign policy initiatives, framing them in terms of defending Orthodox Christians or promoting traditional values. For instance, the Church has backed Russian actions in Ukraine and Syria¹⁹, portraying them as protective measures for Orthodox communities. The ROC plays a central role in promoting the Russian World by emphasizing the spiritual and cultural unity of Russian-speaking Orthodox Christians.²⁰

In many countries, religion forms a core part of national identity. The Islamic Republic of Iran for instance, derives part of its legitimacy from Shia Islam, influencing both its domestic policies and foreign relations, especially with Sunni-majority countries.²¹ Within the Christian World, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches often are involved in shaping societal and cultural policies towards the rights of sexual minorities and religious

¹⁶ Kamran Taremi, "Iranian Strategic Culture: The Impact of Ayatollah Khomeini's Interpretation of Shiite Islam," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 1 (2014): pp. 3–25.

¹⁷ Zikun Yang and Li Li, "Positioning Religion in International Relations: The Performative, Discursive, and Relational Dimension of Religious Soft Power," *Religions*, 2021; Gregorio Bettiza and Peter S. Henne, "Religious Soft Power: Promises, Limits and Ways Forward," in *The Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power. How States Use Religion in Foreign Policy*, ed. Peter Mandaville (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

¹⁸ Michele L. Kjørlién and Michele L. Michele, "State and Religion in Saudi Arabia," *The Arab Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (1994): pp. 36–43.

¹⁹ Alar Kilp and Jerry G. Pankhurst, "Soft, Sharp and Evil Power: The Russian Orthodox Church in the Russian Invasion of Ukraine," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 42, no. 5 (2022): 1–21.

²⁰ Alicja Curanović, "Russia's Mission in the World: The Perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church," *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, no. 4 (2018): pp. 253–267.

²¹ Simon Mabon and Edward Wastnidge, "Transnational Religious Networks and Geopolitics in the Muslim World," *Global Discourse* 9, no. 4 (2019); A.R Norton, "The Geopolitics of the Sunni-Shia Rift," in *Regional Insecurity After the Arab Uprisings. New Security Challenges Series*, ed. E Monier (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

education.²² A particular example comes from Romania, where, despite the minimal use of deliberative mechanisms such as the referendum, the religious organizations behind which the local Christian churches have organized a referendum to change the constitution in the context of expanding the rights of LGBTQ+ people.²³ Poland is another case in which the Catholic Church has expanded its discursive coverage of health policies such as abortion.²⁴ While the discussion about religion, (geo) politics and war can be extended to other levels of study, based on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks above, the present article identifies two large areas of analysis in relation to the research problem proposed by the study: the concepts that explain religious identity in a geopolitical context and those that highlight the political nature of religion in the context of war and the nation-state. As a second objective of this section and before entering the data analysis regarding the research problem, alongside the conceptual framework, a review of the main debates that define the literature on ethno-religious conflicts in general and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in particular, is required.

When it comes to the ethno-religious type of war, different strands of literature arise. On the one hand, there are studies that emphasizes the key features that define such a war and turn it into a stand-alone category in the broader studies of war. Thus, there are studies that advocates the identity-based nature of such conflicts explaining that such wars are driven by a strong sense of identity, with religion and ethnicity playing a core role to the group's self-perception, the "us vs. them" mentality being prevalent.²⁵ In parallel with the previous idea, some studies highlight the historical nature of such conflicts and grievances. Many of the ethno-religious wars have deep

²² Stakić, "Securitization of LGBTIQ Minorities in Serbian Far-Right Discourses: A Post-Structuralist Perspective"; Mary S. Ford, "By Whose Authority? Sexual Ethics, Postmodernism, and Orthodox Christianity," *Christian Bioethics* 26, no. 3 (2020): pp. 298–324, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbaa010>.

²³ R. Dima, "Trends of Homophobic Activism in Romania, or 'How to Turn Religious Convictions into a Referendum and Still Fail,'" in *LGBTQ+ Activism in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. R. Buyantueva and M Shevtsova (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

²⁴ Dorota Szelewa, "Killing 'Unborn Children'? The Catholic Church and Abortion Law in Poland Since 1989," *Social and Legal Studies* 25, no. 6 (2016): pp. 741–764.

²⁵ Daniel Egiegba Agbibo, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Elusive Quest for National Identity in Nigeria," *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013): 3–30; Vyacheslav Karpov, Elena Lisovskaya, and David Barry, "Ethnodoxy: How Popular Ideologies Fuse Religious and Ethnic Identities," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 4 (2012): pp. 638–655; Sumit Ganguly, "Ethno-Religious Conflict in South Asia," *Survival* 35, no. 2 (1993): pp. 88–109.

historical roots where past injustices, both perceived by the parts or real, fuel contemporary tensions between social groups and even national states.²⁶

Other strands of literature focused on ethno-religious conflicts are closed more to the theological debates of the issue, emphasizing that differences in religious practices, beliefs, and cultural norms can lead to tensions, especially when one group tries to impose its beliefs on another.²⁷ The tensions due to ethno-religious differences can be traced in the case of Transylvania, as an example of historical disputes as mentioned in the previous paragraph, but also dogmatic inter- and intra-confessional ones.²⁸ Another example of intra-religious tensions and even conflict in some cases, between two national churches, is the one between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church over the canonic territory of the Republic of Moldova.²⁹ The canonical territory can be, at least in the Orthodox world as the research conducted by Kormina and Naumescu also highlights, a major conflict factor especially in the context of Eastern Orthodoxy and Eastern European Christianity.³⁰

From the perspective of the present study, the current conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and continued as a conventional war through the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, is addressed in the specialized literature on international relations from the perspective of two major debates. On the one hand, there are the studies that follow the historical, geopolitical and military conflict entering into the wider research of conflict studies, international relations and security. From this perspectives, a recent research

²⁶ C. A. Bayly, "The Pre-History of Communalism Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860," *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1985): 177–203; Lucas Luoma-Uhlik, "Reframing the Present: An Analysis of Competing Russo-Ukrainian Historical Narratives and Their Role in the Ongoing Ukrainian Crisis," *The General Assembly* 2, no. 1 (2021).

²⁷ Dragoș Șamșudean, "Digitalising the Church: Clergy's Attitudes towards the Church's Mission Online," *Culture and Religion* 00, no. 00 (2023): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2023.2296087>; Miloš Jovanović, "Silence or Condemnation: The Orthodox Church on Homosexuality in Serbia," *Družboslovne Razprave* 29, no. 73 (2013): pp. 79–95.

²⁸ Greta Monica Miron, "Confessional Coexistence and Conflict in Eighteenth-Century Transylvania. Case Study: The Movement Led by The Monk Sofronie in Dăbâca County," *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Historia* 58, no. 1 (2013).

²⁹ Mihai-Dumitru Grigore, "»Orthodox Brothers«: Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, National Identity and Conflict between the Romanian and Russian Orthodox Churches in Moldavia," in *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. John C. Wood (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

³⁰ Jeanne Kormina and Vlad Naumescu, "A New 'Great Schism'? Theopolitics of Communion and Canonical Territory in the Orthodox Church," *Anthropology Today* 36, no. 1 (2020): pp. 7–11.

made by Viktor Kakupec underlines the relevance of some moments such as 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the NATO 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration and "the Minsk I Agreement ratified in 2014 as a critical factor in international discussions aimed at resolving the long-simmering conflict in eastern Ukraine, and Minsk Agreement II signed in 2015 and its impact on Ukraine's sovereignty".³¹ In particular, the last two documents from Minsk are highlighted by the author as a partial political failure in relation to the geopolitical stabilization of Eastern Europe.³² Asmaa Elsherbiny better highlights the geopolitical and systemic component of the conflict. While its study focuses on the identification of the causes of the war, continuing the causal idea that Jakupc above also pursues, the research separates both towards the economic implication and the role of actors such as China and NATO as well.³³ Finally, the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation is treated from the perspective of international law with a focus on the humanitarian component. Kyo Arai explains that the conflict in Ukraine highlights once again the need for harmonious application and in accordance with all international humanitarian legislation. At the same time, from the perspective of security, the author notes the role that narrative constructs can influence the application of international norms. The author adds that: "Russia justifies its own use of force as 'special military operations' and criticizes self-defense actions by Ukraine as 'acts of terrorism' showing that such self-characterisation of the use of force is easily apt to be misused as an excuse for a serious breach of international law".³⁴

On the other hand, research on the geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe and on the Russian-Ukrainian war, treats the conflict from the perspective of religious studies. Thus, as I mentioned before, the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine is seen as a historical ethno-religious conflict.³⁵ Another

³¹ Viktor Jakupc, *Political Complexities and Problematics of the Russo-Ukrainian War, Dynamics of the Ukraine War. Diplomatic Challenges and Geopolitical Uncertainties* (London: Springer Cham, 2024), p. 25.

³² Jakupc, *Political Complexities and Problematics of the Russo-Ukrainian War*.

³³ Asmaa Elsherbiny, "Europe on Fire The Russo-Ukrainian War, Its Causes and Consequences," *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration* 10, no. 4 (2022).

³⁴ Kyo Arai, "Equal Application of International Humanitarian Law in Wars of Aggression: Impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian War," in *Global Impact of the Ukraine Conflict. Perspectives from International Law*, ed. Shuichi Furuya, Hitomi Takemura, and Kuniko Ozaki (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2023), p. 253.

³⁵ Duyile William Abiodun, "Ethno- Religion Cum Geo-Political Background to the Russo-Ukraine War," *Lakhomi Journal Scientific Journal of Culture* 4, no. 3 (2023): pp. 102–110.

author, Richard Gorban, believes that granting the Tomos of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, even if a religious, ecclesial act in its nature, represents the first step towards Ukraine's political victory in the conflict with Russia.³⁶ Other debates frame the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in theological terms describing it as: "A muddy torrent of quasi-theological apocrypha, dicta, narratives, and sermons" all of this contributing "to what the Russians euphemistically call the "special military operation" in Ukraine".³⁷ Against this background, in contrast to the image of the war defined by Hovorun, Viorel Coman claims precisely the need for the intervention of theologians and religious studies scholars to explain and deconstruct the religious narratives that argue and support a war like the one in Ukraine.³⁸

Finally, from the perspective of geopolitics, religion and the ongoing war in Ukraine, few studies follow the impact of the conflict and the role that local Christian denominations have towards the conflict. One of the studies that deals with such issues is that of Pavlo Smytsnyuk. The author explains that on the one hand, the war exacerbates the tensions within the Orthodox world, while on the other hand the position of neutrality of the Holy See puts both Roman and Greek Catholic Christian communities of Ukraine in difficulty.³⁹ On the same debate of Christian denominations and war in Ukraine, Valentyna Kuryliak emphasize that "after February 22, 2022, Ukrainian Protestantism (Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists) left all Eurasian unions" highlighting the national character of Ukrainian Protestantism, beyond any Slavic geopolitical project.⁴⁰ Thus, although there several studies and debates dealing with the war in Ukraine both from a geopolitical and religious stand, few studies focuses the character and role of Christian denominations in Ukraine in relation to the ongoing conflict.

³⁶ Richard Gorban, "Ethnic-Religious Identity in the Context of the Ukrainian-Russian War," in *Problem Space of Modern Society: Philosophical- Communicative and Pedagogical Interpretations. Part II*, ed. Lyubomira Simeonova Popova et al. (Varşovia: BMT Erida, 2019).

³⁷ Cyril Hovorun, "Deus Ex Machina of the War in Ukraine," *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 15, no. 3 (2023): p. 538.

³⁸ Viorel Coman, "Critical Analysis of the Moscow Patriarchate Vision on the Russian-Ukrainian Military Conflict: Russkiy Mir and Just War," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 76, no. 4 (2023).

³⁹ Pavlo Smytsnyuk, "The War in Ukraine as a Challenge for Religious Communities: Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Prospects for Peacemaking," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Theologia Catholica Latina* 68, no. 1 (2023).

⁴⁰ Valentyna Kuryliak, "The Position of Ukrainian Protestants Regarding the War in Ukraine: Rebuttal of False Accusations of Eurasianism," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 43, no. 7 (2023).

This article aims to identify the main narratives in the discourse of Christian political and religious leaders from the Russian Federation and Ukraine in order to find out how religion is used as a tool in both conducting war and peacemaking. The innovation of this study is brought by the fact that it considers the Christian denominations in Ukraine as a set of actors acting in a unitary whole of the Christian world towards particular political aims such as spiritual securitization.

Methodology

The conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine is a representative case⁴¹ for Eastern Orthodoxy and Orthodox states in conflict for several reasons. First of all, it stands out as a war between two states that share to a large extent the same identity and religious family, namely Slavic Orthodoxy. At the same time, historically both Ukraine and the Russian Federation shared the political borders of the same state for long periods, whether it was the Tsarist Empire or the Soviet Union. Thus, both parties involved in the conflict share a social, political and identity memory that goes beyond the simple linguistic similarities of the Cyrillic alphabet.⁴²

Secondly, among the causes of the conflict between the two states there is one that is less common and particular: the declaration of independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Moscow Patriarchate. Although the roots of the conflict are political and found in the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, the independence of UOC is considered to be a factor that contributed to the escalation of the conflict.⁴³ At the same time, continuing the religious argument, the war in Ukraine involves most of the main Christian denominations and even branches of the same Faith as is the case of the Greek and Roman Catholic Churches.⁴⁴

Finally, the Russian-Ukrainian war represents the first major conflict on the European continent after the Second World War and after

⁴¹ Jason Seawright and John Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options," *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2008): pp. 294–308.

⁴² Serhii Plokyh, *Ukraine and Russia: Representations of the Past* (University of Toronto Press, 2008).

⁴³ Cyril Hovorun, "War and Autocephaly in Ukraine," *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal* 7 (2020): pp. 1–25.

⁴⁴ Smytsnyuk, "The War in Ukraine as a Challenge for Religious Communities: Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Prospects for Peacemaking"; Kuryliak, "The Position of Ukrainian Protestants Regarding the War in Ukraine: Rebuttal of False Accusations of Eurasianism."

the fall of the Soviet Union. Despite the tensions and ethnic wars in the Balkans⁴⁵, the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation opened a page of conventional war between two sovereign states. At the same time, although a conventional war, the post-modernity of the conflict imprint particularities in its turn: the presence of a major informational and hybrid warfare enhanced by social media and Internet⁴⁶, the diversity of actors (state and non-state actors)⁴⁷ involved in the conflict and the international dimension despite the regional character⁴⁸.

Given the significant religious dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the current study aims to identify the narratives through which religious actors part of the conflict or caught in the middle of it, securitize the three different major Christian beliefs (Orthodox, Greek and Roman Catholic and Protestant) for the benefit of nation states or their own confessional survival. In other words, I highlighted how spiritual securitization becomes a tool in shaping the informational warfare for both political and faith survivor. In this regard, from the perspective of the data collection method I apply the selection of online documents, among which I list press articles, statements of the leaders of religious cults and political declarations from various leaders of the two states in conflict. As for the analysis method, in order to interpret the collected data, I will use the method of narrative analysis.⁴⁹ Table 1 below shows the coding procedure of the narratives selected within the dataset.

⁴⁵ Victor Roudometof, *Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy: The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ Sascha Dominik Dov Bachmann, Dries Putter, and Guy Duczynski, "Hybrid Warfare and Disinformation: A Ukraine War Perspective," *Global Policy* 14, no. 5 (2023): pp. 858–69.

⁴⁷ Johan Richter, "Milbloggers, Telegram, and the Russo-Ukraine War: The Role of Non-State Actors in Shaping Strategic Narratives during Global Conflicts" (Malmo, 2024), accesat la data de 13.09.2024, disponibil online la: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1867594&dswid=-3512>.

⁴⁸ Adib Farhadi, Mark Grzegorzewski, and Anthony J. Masys, *The Great Power Competition Volume 5. The Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Implications for the Central Region* (Cham: Springer Cham, 2023).

⁴⁹ Anna De Fina, "Narrative Analysis," in *Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide* (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), pp. 327–342.

Table 1. Narratives of spiritual securitization in the Russian-Ukrainian war

Russian Orthodox Church Russian Federation	<p>Those who opened fire still seeking to spread it to all the countries of the "Russian world", throughout the canonical territory of our Church</p> <p>Ukraine is not just a neighboring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space</p>	<p>Kiev continues to prepare the destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate</p> <p>The Ukrainian authorities have cynically turned the tragedy of the schism into an instrument of state policy</p>
Ukrainian Orthodox Church Ukraine	<p>They wash the brains of people with Russian support, and they are very dangerous for Ukraine.</p> <p>They sing songs in support of Russia, and that's horrible, here, in the center of Kyiv</p>	<p>strengthen our Ukrainian spiritual independence</p>
Greek Catholic Church of Ukraine / Vatican	<p>Please don't give up Ukraine</p>	<p>The Holy Father is not neutral in the moral level. This neutrality was given as an instrument of searching to alleviate the suffering of the people, and probably in the future some sort of channels of communication for a possible peace agreement</p>
Roman Catholic Church of Ukraine / Vatican	<p>Negotiate in time; look for some country that can mediate. Today, for example in the war in Ukraine, there are many who want to mediate</p>	<p>This visit is yet another expression of the Holy Father's concern for Ukraine and of his great hopes for peace</p>

Protestant Churches in Ukraine	<p>Dear brother, we have a war going on. A terrible war. And so many believers, brothers and sisters, are being killed. Little children are being killed. Help is very important to us</p>	<p>Among the Russian occupiers' most brutal assaults is the martyrdom of Pentecostals in Sloviansk</p> <p>World Evangelical Alliance-TRUST provides support for Ukrainian religious leaders and their local churches by: funding their relief work; strengthening grassroots leadership and national alliances and fostering and displaying the unity of the Body of Christ</p>
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Acting for the flock and nations: Christian denominations in Ukraine and their path to securitization during times of war

As stated before, within this article I want to find the narratives that are present within different political and religious leaders public discourses as well as believers' thoughts, aiming to securitize values, faiths and cultures in times of war. From Russia's violent securitization of the Russian World to Ukraine's normative shield towards that and from Vatican's neutrality to Protestant's cry for help, different types of spiritual securitizations unfold within the war in Ukraine.

A violent spiritual securitization: Russian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian Orthodox Church

When it comes to spiritual securitization on the part of the two Orthodox Churches representing the belligerent states in the Ruso-Ukraine war, both witnesses intrusive and even violent actions in some places, in order to protect and secure their own believers, nations and spiritual values. On the one hand, the Russian Orthodox Church stands out for its encouraging narrative towards the mobilization of citizens for war. The leader of RuOC, Patriarch Kirill, does not back down from emphasizing that:

"The Church realises that if somebody, driven by a sense of duty and the need to fulfil their oath... goes to do what their duty calls of them, and if a person dies in the performance of this

duty, then they have undoubtedly committed an act equivalent to sacrifice. They will have sacrificed themselves for others and therefore, we believe that this sacrifice washes away all the sins that a person has committed"⁵⁰

This narrative is violent in two regards: firstly, because it instigates armed and physical violence, and secondly it is a form of violence against the very dogma of the Orthodox Faith by justifying killing and associating death in battle with martyrdom, which would ensure the washing away of all sins. However, from the perspective of securitization, the narratives indicate the justification of both the political act and the spiritual salvation for those involved in the war. Furthermore, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church introduced special pro-war prayers asking God to "to help [Russian] people and grant [Russia] victory" against "those who want to fight [and] have taken up arms against Holy Rus, eager to divide and destroy her one people."⁵¹ Finally, according to Al-Jazeera data, "Kirill instructed some 20,000 clerics from the Baltic to the Pacific to deliver a prayer "for peace" – and urged their parishioners to complain about any sermon they considered pro-Ukrainian."⁵² This again shows the violent nature of the securitization narratives even at the dogmatic and liturgical dimension of the Russian Orthodoxy.

Alongside the religious dimension of the narrative of spiritual securitization led by the Russian Federation, there is also a narrative of religious geopolitical securitization practiced by the Kremlin regime. At the geopolitical level, Patriarch Kirill emphasizes the spiritual danger of expanding the war, stating: "Those who opened fire on the population of Ukraine sought and are still seeking to spread it to all the countries of the "Russian world", throughout the canonical territory of our Church: over Russia, Belarus, the Baltic states, over the Republic of Moldova, the Transcaucasian countries and those of Central Asia".⁵³ At the same time, as in the previous

⁵⁰ Adrian Hilton, *Kirill's crusade against Ukraine is more jihadi than Christian*, accessed on 06.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/kirill-s-crusade-against-ukraine-is-more-jihadi-than-christian/>.

⁵¹ *Russian church introduces pro-war prayers in liturgy*, accessed on 06.09.2024, available online at: <https://df.news/en/2024/04/01/russian-church-introduces-pro-war-prayers-in-liturgy/>

⁵² Mansur Milovalev, 'God of war': Russian Orthodox Church stands by Putin, but at what cost?, accessed on 06.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/9/far-from-harmless-patriarch-kirill-backs-putins-war-but-at-what-cost>.

⁵³ Cristina Mirca, *Patriarhul Kiril al Rusiei, declarații halucinante la adresa Republicii Moldova*, accessed on 13.09.2024, available online at: <https://tvrmdmoldova.md/article/843ea35c0c632891/>

statement, Vladimir Putin in turn, does not hesitate to call Ukraine part of the "Russian World", legitimizing both politically and spiritually (Ukraine as part of the canonical territory) the war. He emphasized in the broadcast immediately after the February 2022 invasion that "Ukraine is not just a neighboring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space."⁵⁴ Finally, in the same speech, regarding the geopolitical and religious dimension, Vladimir Putin states in order to justify the war:

Kiev continues to prepare the destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. This is not an emotional judgement; proof of this can be found in concrete decisions and documents. The Ukrainian authorities have cynically turned the tragedy of the schism into an instrument of state policy. The current authorities do not react to the Ukrainian people's appeals to abolish the laws that are infringing on believers' rights.⁵⁵

As mentioned, the "schism", from the perspective of the RuOC or the granting of the Tomos of Autocephaly by the Patriarchate of Constantinople⁵⁶ from the perspective of the UOC, represents a sufficient narrative to securitize, even through armed force, the canonical territory in Ukraine. Thus, the spiritual securitization and justification of the war at the same time, from the perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church, implies on the one hand a theological narrative dimension and on the other hand a religious geopolitical dimension based on the concept of the canonical territory and the intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as a spiritual and political actor within the space of Slavic Orthodoxy.

On the other hand, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, together with the political authorities in Kiev, seeks too to spiritually securitize both the conflict and especially the nation and the community of Orthodox believers. In this regard, different from the predominantly discursive spiritual securitization

patriarhul-kiril-al-rusiei-declaratii-halucinante-la-adresa-republicii-moldova.html?fbclid=IwAR1CiXShAHi9uUTJK9mrWJk-HFDSPsRvCgwO4kEZVamgJgXg_fXj9jj2pk4.

⁵⁴ Knox Thames. *Defending religion in Ukraine – Russia's Putin distorts shared Christian roots to justify war*, accessed on 13.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/defending-religion-ukraine-russia-putin-knox-thames>.

⁵⁵ Knox Thames. *Defending religion in Ukraine – Russia's Putin distorts shared Christian roots to justify war*, accessed on 13.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/defending-religion-ukraine-russia-putin-knox-thames>.

⁵⁶ James Sherr, *A Tomos for Ukraine's Orthodox Church: the Final Schism?*, accessed on 13.09.2024, available online at: <https://icds.ee/en/a-tomos-for-ukraines-orthodox-church-the-final-schism/>.

practiced by Russia, a normative spiritual securitization is noticeable on the part of Ukraine. This is often based on the outlawing of religious entities allegedly affiliated with the RuOC and the arrest of Orthodox priests, as well marked as alleged collaborators or supporters of the invasion, the Russian Federation and Patriarch Kirill. The most eloquent example is that of the total ban on the activity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - the Patriarchate of Moscow. Towards this, President Volodymyr Zelensky declared: "I have just held a meeting -- a preparatory one -- regarding a decision that will strengthen our Ukrainian spiritual independence. We must deprive Moscow of the last opportunities to restrict the freedom of Ukrainians."⁵⁷ Thus, as the president of Ukraine himself expresses, the freedom of Ukrainians is also about spiritual independence from the Russian Federation. This was not a rush decision, President Zelensky speaking about the need to protect from internal enemies as early as 2022-2023, coinciding with the request of the Ukrainian authorities to the monks of the Pechersk Lavra monastery (belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate) to leave the Lavra. This monastery is considered to be the spiritual center of Slavic Orthodoxy.⁵⁸

The normative spiritual securitization coming from Ukrainian authorities often embrace other practices than legislative one. Metropolitan Pavel, the head of Pechersk Lavra monastery, was put under house arrest "after Ukraine's top security agency said he was suspected of justifying Russian aggression, a criminal offense".⁵⁹ Also, the normative spiritual securitization of Ukraine gains common peoples support. On a protest in front of Pechersk Lavra monastery, an Ukrainian protester claims about the monks of the Lavra: "They wash the brains of people with Russian support, and they are very dangerous for Ukraine. They sing songs in support of Russia, and that's horrible, here, in the center of Kyiv."⁶⁰ According to data collected in 2024

⁵⁷ Reuters, *Zelenskiy suggests moves towards banning Orthodox church with Moscow ties*, accessed on 13.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraines-zelenskiy-suggests-moves-towards-banning-orthodox-church-with-moscow-2024-08-10/>.

⁵⁸ Isobel Koshiw, *The enemy within? Ukraine's Moscow-affiliated Orthodox Church faces scrutiny*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/25/the-enemy-within-ukraines-moscow-affiliated-orthodox-church-faces-scrutiny>.

⁵⁹ PBS News, *Orthodox leader in Kyiv ordered under house arrest by Ukrainian court*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/orthodox-leader-in-kyiv-ordered-under-house-arrest-by-ukrainian-court>.

⁶⁰ PBS News, *Orthodox leader in Kyiv ordered under house arrest by Ukrainian court*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/orthodox-leader-in-kyiv-ordered-under-house-arrest-by-ukrainian-court>.

"82% of Ukrainians don't trust Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate while 63% want it banned".⁶¹ While the data above may not be representative for all the believers, the narrative of the protester expressed also above emphasized that, to some extent, not only the Ukrainian state but even the common Ukrainian Orthodox believers are involved in and need a spiritual securitization towards Russian Orthodoxy. While the Orthodox "brothers" are at war and propose a proactive securitization, others look towards other means in order to protect their faith and religious values in time of war.

Maintaining the balance: Vatican's neutrality as a form of spiritual securitization

Neutrality, was for a long time, a way of protecting values, people and countries facing war.⁶² Thus, Pope Francis chose to use this instrument of international relations as a form of mediation between the two Orthodox Christian brothers who are in conflict, but also as a form of protecting the interests of the Holy See in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. In this sense, in March 2024 His Holiness stated:

"On the occasion of a commemoration where I had to speak about peace and release two doves, the first time I did it, immediately a crow present in St. Peter's Square rose up, grabbed the dove, and took it away. It's harsh. And this is somewhat what happens with war. Many innocent people cannot grow, many children have no future. When you see that you are defeated, that things are not going well, it is necessary to have the courage to negotiate. You may feel ashamed, but with how many deaths will it end? Negotiate in time; look for some country that can mediate. Today, for example in the war in Ukraine, there are many who want to mediate. Turkey has offered itself for this. And others. Do not be ashamed to negotiate before things get worse."⁶³

⁶¹ Ukrainska Pravda, *82% of Ukrainians don't trust Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate, 63% want it banned*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2024/05/7/7454637/>.

⁶² Leos Müller, *Neutrality in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁶³ Devin Watkins, Vatican News, *Pope on war in Ukraine: 'Do not be ashamed to negotiate'* accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-03/pope-francis-swiss-tv-interview-gaza-ukraine-wars.html>.

His references to the war and the innocent (children) alongside the present narrative of the need for negotiation and the identification of a mediator highlight the neutral nature of the spiritual securitization that the Holy See carries out in relation to the conflict in Ukraine. In other words, we must protect others, but through negotiation and mediation that others (eg: Turkey) or maybe even us (n. Holy See) can do.

This reiteration of peace was also made by Cardinal Parolin, the Secretary of State of the Vatican. He states in connection with his visit to Ukraine and the fate of the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation: "This visit is yet another expression of the Holy Father's concern for Ukraine and of his great hopes for peace. We talked about this at the recent Peace Summit in Bürgenstock [in Switzerland, ed.]. Therefore, closeness, prayer and hope that ways may be found to end this conflict as soon as possible".⁶⁴ He further was cited by Vatican News: "On behalf of Pope Francis and the Holy See, Cardinal Parolin once again expressed his concern for the situation in Ukraine and reiterated his commitment to find a solution to attain this just peace".⁶⁵

At Church level, Greek-Catholics also emphasize the need for spiritual securitization. Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych, head of the worldwide Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church pleaded within a television intervention: "Please don't give up Ukraine! Each day, probably 200 Ukrainians are killed and any delay of the capability to receive the help to protect those people is paid with their blood". He also emphasized that "Ukrainian Catholic Church is a main actor in humanitarian action of assistance to the Ukrainian people, and I can testify that aid cannot be delayed."⁶⁶ This shows the fact that, at least in the field of humanitarian and social assistance, the Catholic Church has not remained completely neutral towards the material needs of its own believers. Despite this aspect, the narratives, including at the level of the Greek-Catholic Church in

⁶⁴ Mariusz Krawiec and Lisa Zengarini, Vatican News, *Cardinal Parolin: Holy See committed to just peace in Ukraine*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-07/cardinal-parolin-holy-see-committed-to-just-peace-in-ukraine.html>.

⁶⁵ Mariusz Krawiec and Lisa Zengarini, Vatican News, *Cardinal Parolin: Holy See committed to just peace in Ukraine*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-07/cardinal-parolin-holy-see-committed-to-just-peace-in-ukraine.html>.

⁶⁶ Peter Pinedo, *Head of Ukrainian Catholic Church: 'Please don't give up Ukraine'*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://angelusnews.com/news/world/shevchuk-catholic-church-ukraine/>.

Ukraine, align themselves with the message of peace that does not choose one side and that has even created some disturbances among believers:

"The Holy Father is not neutral in the moral level. He is with us and he confirmed that many times. This neutrality was given as an instrument of searching to alleviate the suffering of the people, and probably in the future some sort of channels of communication for a possible peace agreement," he added. "So, in a certain sense, we do have a good ally."⁶⁷

According to Angelus Agency, "Shevchuk praised the pope for using his neutrality to help gather humanitarian aid and to work toward peace between Russia and Ukraine. He said that when speaking to Ukrainians about the Vatican's decision to remain neutral he makes the distinction between diplomatic and moral neutrality."⁶⁸ Thus, at the level of the Catholic Church in Ukraine, there is a spiritual securitization through neutrality. The public discourses of both Roman-Catholic and Greek-Catholic leaders highlight the need for protection through calls for peace, negotiation and diplomacy, the proactive involvement appearing only at the social and material level towards the physical needs of their believers.

Relating on others: Protestant Churches and their need for being securitized

Finally, while Orthodox Churches and Catholic ones can take care of themselves securitizing their own values, dogma and believers, there are also those who call for a securitization through assistance. In this case, it is about the Protestant churches that, in the absence of power centers to represent them and in the absence of communities well rooted in Ukrainian culture and society compared to the Orthodox and Catholics, call for external aid from Christian networks across the World. One such example is the Evangelical Church that established "The Response – Ukraine Special Taskforce (TRUST) to coordinate efforts with Evangelical communities and strengthen responding churches in Ukraine and neighboring countries." According to World Evangelical Alliance's website, TRUST provides support for Ukrainian religious leaders and their local churches by: funding their relief work; strengthening grassroots leadership and national alliances and fostering and displaying the unity of

⁶⁷ Peter Pinedo, *Head of Ukrainian Catholic Church: 'Please don't give up Ukraine'*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://angelusnews.com/news/world/shevchuk-catholic-church-ukraine/>.

⁶⁸ Peter Pinedo, *Head of Ukrainian Catholic Church: 'Please don't give up Ukraine'*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://angelusnews.com/news/world/shevchuk-catholic-church-ukraine/>.

the Body of Christ". World Evangelical Alliance stated that: "We are currently working with 10 Ukrainian partners (7 denominations and 3 NGO networks) and 10 partners in the neighbouring countries".⁶⁹

The same situation is the same with other Protestant denominations. According to a Christian website dealing with Christians in Ireland and UK, The Baptist Union of Great Britain has a web page with information for those interested in sponsoring Ukrainian refugees, including a response form to enable the organisation to keep in touch with Baptists exploring refugee sponsorship/support.⁷⁰ A Baptist believer delivering a speech to the US Congress stated:

"Dear brother, we have a war going on. A terrible war. And so many believers, brothers and sisters, are being killed. Little children are being killed. Help is very important to us. Especially military help because if there were a missile to shoot down that drone, the drone wouldn't have flown in our house,"⁷¹

Data shows aggression towards Pentecostals too by the Russian Authorities. According to The Hill News Agency:

"Among the Russian occupiers' most brutal assaults is the martyrdom of Pentecostals in Sloviansk. In June 2014, four members of the Transfiguration of the Lord Church, including two deacons, were captured and executed by fighters aligned with Russia. There is also the near-fatal beating of Pastor Oleksandr Salfetnikov, who had remained in occupied Balaklia to assist several church members who were unable to relocate."⁷²

As the data shows, differentiated from Orthodox and Catholics, Protestants rely on external securitization, whether it is physical protection against the violent Russian Federation and famine, or whether it is protecting religious identity.

⁶⁹ World Evangelical Alliance's website, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://worldea.org/crisis-response/>.

⁷⁰ Churches Together, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://ctbi.org.uk/church-response-to-russian-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

⁷¹ Tatiana Vorozhko, *Statistics, prayer, personal stories: How Protestants helped bring Ukraine aid to US House floor*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/statistics-prayer-personal-stories-how-protestants-helped-bring-ukraine-aid-to-us-house-floor-/7597424.html>.

⁷² Andriy Yermak, *Ukraine's evangelicals need US support*, accessed on 22.09.2024, available online at: <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4574352-ukraines-evangelicals-need-us-support/>.

Results and Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the narratives of spiritual securitization in the case of the three major Christian denominations in Ukraine: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. Following the analysis of the data, three major types of spiritual securitization emerged that the nation states (Ukraine, Russia, Vatican) and religious actors such as the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Roman and Greek Catholic Churches and the various Protestant Churches, propose and apply in order to protect their own believers, dogmas and values, in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Table 2 below summarizes these types of spiritual securitization.

Table 2. Types of Spiritual Securitization in the Russia-Ukrainian War

Russian Federation Russian Orthodox Church	Violent Spiritual Securitization	Violent securitization due to the use of the Orthodox Faith, as dogma and canonical space, to justify the invasion of Ukraine
Ukraine Ukrainian Orthodox Church	Normative Spiritual Securitization	Normative securitization through the attempts of the Ukrainian state to outlaw the priests and the Churches affiliated to the Moscow Patriarchate
Vatican Ukrainian Roman Catholic Church Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church	Spiritual Securitization Through Neutrality	Spiritual securitization through neutrality considering the Vatican's calls in majority, for negotiation and diplomatic peace missions.
Protestant Churches in Ukraine	Spiritual Securitization Through Assistance	Spiritual securitization through assistance considering the need to involve other actors (Churches outside Ukraine, NGOs) to ensure physical and spiritual protection.

Thus, this article primarily contributes to the explanation of the meanings of the concepts of securitization in general and spiritual securitization in particular, in the specific context of a conventional military conflict marked by Christian plurality of actors.

From a geopolitical stand, the contributions of this study lie with the presence of a mosaic of actors trying to wage an unseen war within a war. The different types of spiritual securitization bring to light a wide range of actors involved. On the one hand, the duality of the Vatican as both a political and religious actor wanting to be involved both in protecting the faithful, but also in identifying a way of peace and ending the war. On the other hand, the Russian Federation and the Russian Orthodox Church whose missionary (Moscow the Third Rome) and political (Russian World) interests are threatened by the political-military and spiritual resistance in turn (by the declaration of autocephaly and the support of the Patriarchate of Constantinople) of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Finally, as important geopolitical actors stand out the European Christian networks and not only that collaborate to support philanthropically and religiously the Protestant Christians in Ukraine. More than that, the fact that the religious actors and their believers and leaders leave the dogmatic and theological discourse traditional for their mission and approach notions of "just peace", "need for military aid" "borders", "Holy Rus" and "negotiations" shows the geopolitical character of the Churches and their leaders and followers.

It is difficult to predict what will be the result of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, but the collected data highlight the presence of an informational warfare for the spiritual securitization of faiths, waged by both political and religious actors in the name of their nations and Churches. While the current article has only scratched the surface regarding securitization and geopolitics, future research may look at each denomination separately. Also, studies can be carried out on the regional implications of spiritual securitization or even research the theological level of the securitization process, an issue treated little within this study.

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