

CHALLENGES TO THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES  
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE.  
AN INTRODUCTION

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This issue has emerged from the online conference on *Religion and Politics in the Context of the War Against Ukraine*,<sup>2</sup> organised by the Centre for Biblical Studies, a research centre of the four theological faculties of the Babeş-Bolyai University, on 24–25 June 2022, within an interdisciplinary project on *Religion, Politics and Human Rights in Central and Eastern Europe*. Following the conference, some papers were rewritten to address recent developments, some were published in other volumes, and further contributors were invited.

At the time of the application for the project many potential challenges were envisaged, but we did not imagine that by the end of the program, in 2022, a full-scale war would be launched against a European country. We did not foresee the existential threats posed by ideologies like the *Russkij mir* and the Holy Rus that would bring destruction and so much suffering to Ukraine and would threaten global stability.

This brutal war has confronted the churches with serious challenges. The leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church chose to back the military aggression and portray it as a metaphysical war, claiming to defend Christian values but disregarding the fundamental principles of Christianity, – the sanctity of human life and the commandment to love fellow humans. Over the past fifteen months the war also challenged the churches in Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe, as well as major ecclesial bodies, like the World Council of Churches. The papers in this volume explore the response of the churches to the war, the way they were compelled to reconsider ethical perspectives on war and peace, the struggle of the Orthodox churches in Ukraine to redefine themselves. They also reflect on the failure of churches to name the aggressor and/or stand by the victim.

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  - 2 Program; Recordings: June 24: <https://www.facebook.com/CentreBiblicalStudies/videos/382775637251815>; June 25: <https://www.facebook.com/CentreBiblicalStudies/videos/771759190922584>.

This issue gives priority to the insights of Ukrainian scholars Liudmyla Fylypovych and Pavlo Smytsnyuk. Subsequently, due to the impact of the war on all churches in Europe, historians and scholars of religion – Katharina Kunter, Thomas Mark Németh, Sergei Chapnin and Ionuț Biliuță – discuss the challenges that confront Christian denominations and the interrelation between religion and politics.

The conference and this issue are a small piece within a web of international initiatives linked to the response of the churches to the war against Ukraine. To mention only those to which contributors to the issue are associated, such was the open letter of German Protestant scholars to the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) and the World Council of Churches (3 June 2022),<sup>3</sup> the appeal of an international network of scholars (theologians, religious studies scholars, historians, sociologists of religion) to the World Council of Churches to address the responsibility of the Russian Orthodox Church in this war (23 July 2022),<sup>4</sup> and the symposium organised at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vienna on *War in Ukraine: Theological, Ethical and Historical Reflections* (13–17 February 2023).<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, the theological reflection proper is far from being completed. The profound question scholars and faith communities will face regards the mystery of evil and the (im)possibility of doing theology after Mariupol, Bucha, Irpin or Bakhmut.

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3 Brief an die EKD und ÖRK: Klare Zeichen gegenüber dem Moskauer Patriarchat setzen, NÖK (3.06.2022), <https://www.noek.info/hintergrund/2482-brief-an-die-ekd-und-oerk-klare-zeichen-gegenueber-dem-moskauer-patriarchat-zu-setzen>.

4 English: Centre for Biblical Studies and RISU (27.07.2022); translations into Ukrainian: RISU (27.07.2022) and Credo (27.07.2022), German: NÖK (2.08.2022) Czech: *Forum 24* (1.08.2022), Polish: eKAI (25.07.2022); Andrew LOUTH, “Should the WCC Expel Patriarch Kirill?”, *Public Orthodoxy* (26.08.2022); Jonathan LUXMOORE, “WCC Again Urged to Suspend Russian Orthodox, As Conditions Worsen in Ukraine”, *Church Times* (29.07.2022).

5 War in Ukraine. Theological, Ethical and Historical Reflections – Vienna Postgraduate Symposium, <https://ktf4ukraine.univie.ac.at/>.