

THE REALITIES OF CURRENT ORTHODOX LIFE IN UKRAINE DURING THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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Abstract. The article analyses the current situation in Ukrainian Orthodoxy that developed during the Russian-Ukrainian war. War exacerbated the existing confrontation between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, between church and state. The attitude of society, the state, and the churches to the intra-Orthodox conflict is extremely polarized. The escalation of the crisis is accompanied by the absence of a unified position of the churches, the state, and society on the issues of war. Relations between the State and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have deteriorated significantly. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church does not engage in dialogue with the authorities, accusing them of persecuting the Orthodox faith and institutions. Society is waiting for an adequate conflict resolution between church and state, between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Keywords: Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), inter-Orthodox conflict, state-church relations, Russian-Ukrainian war.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 actualized many problems in the relations between Ukraine and Russia. The economic, political, cultural, and foremost mental-ideological contradictions between these two countries, which have always existed latently, have been extremely heightened since the large-scale Russian aggression. A lot of painful questions for Ukrainians, many clichés about Russia and Ukraine are articulated more intensively: the alleged primogeniture or priority right of Russians and the claimed insignificance of Ukrainians, the purported greatness of the Russian language and culture against the supposed underdevelopment, derivativeness and primitiveness of Ukrainian literature and art; the often-stated global success of Russians in all spheres of life versus the

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apparent rural level/locality of Ukrainian achievements; the boasting with the political genius of Russian kings / emperors and the claim about the failure of the political leadership of the Ukrainian territory (not state!), and so on.

One of the important markers of the historical and current confrontation between the two states, which demonstrated the diversity and depth of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, was religion. This applies mainly to Orthodoxy.² Besides the Orthodox Church, other churches and religions in Russia, in Ukraine, and in other countries have faced a challenge: how to treat the war - to condemn or support it, and who to blame or sustain, - Russia or Ukraine?

In Russia, the lack of freedom and state totalitarianism put religious organizations in a difficult position. To stay in the Russian Federation, these need to position themselves cautiously, considering the attitude towards them from both the State and the dominant church.

For the same reason no one in Russia is writing the truth about the real religious situation there. But we know from various independent sources, e.g. Human Rights Without Frontiers, that Catholics who live in Russia do not feel comfortable. They were just allowed to exist in Russia, but they are continuously reminded that their presence is undesirable on the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Protestants are considered a non-Russian entity and Protestantism is thought to be a foreign doctrine that tears the soul of the “Russian people”. Protestants in Russia are called sectarians and American spies. Witnesses of Jehovah and some new religious movements were banned by the order of the President of the Russian Federation. Jews are the first candidates for merciless pogroms by Russian right-wing “patriots”, who believe that the Jews are to blame for all of Russia’s troubles. Buddhists are isolated in their distant datsans. The only ones disingenuously praised by the Russian authorities are Muslims. The Russian state takes into account their number, the economic power of non-Russian businessmen and the servile praise of religious leaders of Islamic associations.

² Nicholas E. DENYSENKO, *The Orthodox Church in Ukraine. A Century of Separation* (NIU Series in Orthodox Christian Studies) ch. 5: “Orthodoxy in Ukraine: The Late- and Post-Soviet Period (1989–2015)”, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501757846>; an earlier version (2015) is available at https://www.academia.edu/21698735/Orthodoxy_in_Ukraine_the_Late_and_Post_Soviet_Period_1989_2015.

In Ukraine, the religious situation is fundamentally different.³ On the one hand, while both belong to the Eastern Christian tradition,⁴ Orthodox Ukrainians and Russians are in antagonistic relations, moreover they can be regarded as ontological antagonists.⁵ On the other hand, the natural disposition of the people and the specific circumstances of the social development of the Ukrainian lands, which have belonged to different states/empires, created an atmosphere of relative freedom of religion and religious pluralism.⁶ In Ukraine, except during the Soviet era, no religion or church was dominant or had the status of state church.⁷ This allowed the relatively free coexistence of different religions and denominations. A Jewish synagogue could be found next to a Lutheran or a Catholic church, a Protestant prayer house, and an

³ Olga BALAKIREVA and Iuliia Sereda, “Religion and Civil Society in Ukraine and Russia”, in *Religion and Civil Society in Europe*, edited by Joep DE HART, Paul DEKKER and Loek HALMAN, Dordrecht – Heidelberg –New York – London: Springer, 2013, 219–250.

⁴ Zenon V. WASYLIW, “Orthodox Churches in Ukraine”, in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Lucian N. LEUSTEAN, London: Routledge, 2014, 312–333.

⁵ “Русский Мир” Кирила не для України. Збірка наукових статей [Kirill’s “Russian World” is Not for Ukraine. A Collection of Scholarly Articles], edited by Anatoliy KOLODNYI. Kyiv: UARR, 2014; Релігійна безпека/небезпека України: збірник наукових праць і матеріалів [Religious Security/Danger of Ukraine. Collection of Scholarly Works and Materials], edited by Anatoliy KOLODNYI, Kyiv: UARR, 2019.

⁶ Україна поліконфесійна [Ukraine is Pluriconfessional], edited by Anatoliy KOLODNYI and Pavlo PAVLENKO, Kyiv: Interservice, 2021; Релігійні ідентичності в їх сутності і конфесійних вимірах: український контекст [Religious Identities in Their Essence and Denominational Dimensions: The Ukrainian Context], edited by Anatoliy KOLODNYI, Liudmyla FYLYPOVUCH and Alla ARISTOVA. Kyiv: UARR, 2021; Український світ в його релігійних вимірах [The Ukrainian World in Its Religious Dimensions], edited by Liudmyla FYLYPOVUCH and Alla ARISTOVA, Kyiv: UARR, 2022; José CASANOVA, *Global Religious and Secular Dynamics: The Modern System of Classification*, Leiden: Brill, 2019, 30–34; Alla ARISTOVA, Релігія. Конфесіональний ландшафт України [Religion. Confessional Landscape of Ukraine] in *Україна. 30 років незалежності. Стислий довідник [Ukraine. 30 Years of Independence. Concise Guide]*, edited by Alla M. KYRYDON, Kyiv: State Scientific Institution Encyclopedic Publishing House, 2021, 42–45.

⁷ Victor YELENSKY, “The Ukraine Church and State in the Post-Communist Era”, in *Church–State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Irena BOROWIK, Krakow: NOMOS, 1999, 136–152 (146–147); ID., “The Ukraine Church and State Relations in the Post-Communist Era: The Case of Ukraine (with Special References to Orthodoxy and Human Rights Issues)”, *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2 (2002) 453–488.

Orthodox cathedral. Catholics in Ukraine, unlike in Russia, are not merely tolerated, but are equal participants in religious life. The fulness and intensity of the Christian presence are complemented by Protestants, who are not considered an anti-Ukrainian phenomenon, but actively fit into the Ukrainian Christian landscape. Small, but notable for their specificity, the Jewish communities, which have always sought to create secure conditions for their lives in the Orthodox or Greek Catholic Ukrainian environment, are common and natural. Thanks to the Tatars – Crimean Tatars, the indigenous people of Crimea, and Volga Tatars as immigrants to boost the country's economy – Islam is perceived by ethnic Ukrainians as an equal religion in Ukraine. Here Jehovah's Witnesses, Krishnaites, Buddhists, Karaites, Scientologists, Mormons, pagans, and many other faiths feel free.⁸ During the 30 years of independence, the Ukrainian state did not persecute anyone for their faith, did not ban any religion without reason. There were cases of restrictions on the activities of individual religious organizations, e.g. the Great White Brotherhood, when the courts in 1996 considered them a danger to the life and health of Ukrainian citizens.

Even now, during the war, when noticeable changes in religious life go on, the Ukrainian state strives to ensure the right to free existence of all religions. This applies to the territories under the control of Ukraine, because in the annexed Crimea and the occupied regions the law of the Russian Federation is in force, according to which the existence of denominations undesirable for Russia is strictly controlled by the local authorities.⁹

Recently, due to the latest events in the Orthodox life of the country,¹⁰ which cause concern among the world public regarding the observance of the principles

⁸ Andrii KRAWCHUK and Thomas BREMER (eds.), *Churches in the Ukrainian Crisis*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

⁹ Anatoliy KOLODNYI and Liudmyla FYLYPOVYCH, Трансформації конфесійного життя в Україні під час російсько-української війни [“Transformations of the Confessional Life of Ukraine During the Russian-Ukrainian War”], in *Авраамічні релігії в Україні в контексті війни з російською федерацією [Abrahamic Religions in Ukraine in the Context of the War with the Russian Federation]*, Materials of the Conference in Halych, November 4, 2022, Halych: Information and publishing sector of the National Reserve “Давній Галич [Ancient Halych]”, 2022, 63–72.

¹⁰ The decision of the National Council of Security and Defence to inspect the documents and activities of those religious organizations whose centres are located in Russia as aggressor country, including and the UOC, which led to a confrontation between the UOC and the state.

of freedom of religion in Ukraine,¹¹ the Orthodox theme has aroused considerable interest in the Orthodox environment itself, in the Christian segment of the religious life of Ukrainians, in expert circles (religion scholars, lawyers, historians, linguists, psychologists, political scientists, etc.), in the state and society in general, both locally and globally. With regard to the assessment of the events taking place nowadays, in the forecast of the situation in the near future, there is no single position. There is a long way to go before reaching any ecclesiastical, expert, social understanding, let alone consensus. At the beginning of 2023, the Orthodox situation in Ukraine is in the stage of escalation, which is being accelerated by the Russian-Ukrainian war, especially in its hot phase, the destruction of not only the living space (housing, social and industrial structure, educational, medical, and cultural facilities etc.), but also the spiritual and religious life of Ukrainians.

There is a danger that the measures taken by the Ukrainian state at the end of 2022 regarding religious organizations whose centres are in Russia will worsen state-church relations unless a productive dialogue between the state and the church begins. Society expects a constructive result from such dialogue.

But for now, I propose to consider all the diversity of the Ukrainian's reactions to this situation, in particular the inter-Orthodoxy conflict, in three dimensions: societal (politicians, experts, mass media, public organizations), magisterial (power structures), religious (church).

Society

Since 24 February Ukrainian society's position has significantly changed in its attitude towards Russia and Russians. It has become the most radical and extremely polarized issue. As Olena Zelenska, the wife of the President of Ukraine, said in Davos 2023,¹² Putin with his military aggression made all future Ukrainians nationalists. And this means that nowadays everything connected with Russia one way or another causes protest and indignation of the society – from food “made

¹¹ Elizabeth A. CLARK, “Civil Religion and Religious Freedom in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict, in *Religion During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict*, edited by Elizabeth CLARK and Dmytro Vovk, London: Routledge, 2019, 15–31 (25–26).

¹² “Росіяни своєю агресією досягли того, що всі наші діти будуть націоналістами - Зеленська” [Zelenska: The Russians have achieved that all our children will be nationalists], *Ukrinform* (17.01.2023), <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3654459-rosiani-svoeu-agresieiu-dosagli-togo-so-vsi-nasi-diti-budut-nacionalistami-zelenska.html>

in Russia” to Russian literature, culture and Russian spirituality, religiosity, and church. That is why the demands to ban the Russian Church in Ukraine – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), – sound so loudly. Due to the understandable excessive politicization, Ukrainian society is characterized by clear bipolarity: you are either *for* Ukraine or *against* it, either *for* the Ukrainian *svit* (world) or *against* it – for the Russian *mir* (world).¹³

In the religious sphere the situation is similar. As evidenced by posts in social networks, the most radical part of Ukrainian society demands to ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), deregister all congregations of this church, conduct a lustration of all priests and the episcopate, take away all cathedrals from this church, take all priests with their parishes to Russia or imprison them. That is, to act decisively, using forceful methods to end the existence of this church in Ukraine, whose clerics are considered agents of the Kremlin, working against Ukraine. This part of society is mainly represented by people who are patriotic, but usually not churchgoers, who have little knowledge of the history of the church, are not familiar with the specifics of religious life, do not understand the nature of the church, considering it a political institution that serves not God, but some politicians or states. Some members of the Verkhovna Rada (the parliament), inspired by those people, submitted relevant draft laws¹⁴ directed against those religious organizations that are affiliated with the religious organizations of the

¹³ *Український світ в його релігійних вимірах* [The Ukrainian World in Its Religious Dimensions], edited by Liudmyla FYLYPOVYCH and Alla ARISTOVA, Kyiv: UARR, 2022, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FhWP6mH_76WKJ6tzoMtQrxsEevx6KLVu/view.

¹⁴ Draft 7213 of the Law on Amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” regarding the prohibition of the activities of religious organizations (associations) that are part of the structure (are part of) a religious organization (association), the management centre (management) of which is located outside of Ukraine in a state recognized by law as having carried out military aggression against Ukraine and/or temporarily occupied part of the territory of Ukraine. <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/39269>; Draft 8221 of the Law on ensuring the strengthening of national security in the sphere of freedom of conscience and activities of religious organizations; <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/40832>; Draft 8262 of the Law on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Improving the Legal Regulation of the Activities of Religious Organizations, <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/40938>; Draft 8012 of the Resolution on the appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine regarding the transfer to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine of the

aggressor (Moscow). According to some experts, these laws are hasty and populist. War does not create circumstances and does not leave time for proper decisions.

Another part of society opposes the current government, being against the war with the fraternal people, against the chaos into which democracy has allegedly led everyone. Regarding church issues, these people, who traditionally consider themselves Orthodox, live in memories of peaceful life in the USSR. They want to return to that past, restore the Soviet reality, do not approve such radical approaches to solving church issues. They are not ready for radical changes, even for any changes at all. They respect church leaders, even worship them, consider them saints, honor their iconic image, believe in their infallibility, treat them as indisputable authorities. Their voice¹⁵ is heard in the public sphere, although not as powerfully as that of the supporters of decisive measures.

In addition to such opposing points of view, there is a small but influential part of Ukrainian society that has moderate positions regarding the current situation in the Orthodox life of the country. As a rule, it is represented by experts on religious issues who realize the inadmissibility of banning the church, by either a willful individual (presidential) or even collective (parliamentary) decision. A society that considers itself democratic and is built on legal foundations cannot act illegally even in case of danger to its existence. According to Ukrainian legislation, the activity of any religious organization may be terminated in the event of its reorganization (division, merger) or self-liquidation. If a religious organization that is a legal entity violates the provisions of the 1991-Law and other legislative acts of Ukraine, its activities may also be terminated by a court decision.¹⁶ Appropriate evidence must be collected for an adequate court ruling. The basic Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” (1991) establishes that the church as such is not a legal entity; such are its structural units – parishes, monasteries, diocesan administrations, etc.¹⁷ (Therefore, the church as an institution cannot file lawsuits; cathedrals are not owned by the church, but by individual parishes.) Court proceedings can be directed against a citizen – a member or leader of a

complexes of buildings of the Pochaiv Assumption Lavra and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra for free use, <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/40437>.

¹⁵ Union of Orthodox Journalists; ЦІЖ, <https://spzh.news/ua/news>.

¹⁶ The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, art. 16. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/987-12#Text>

¹⁷ The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, art. 13. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/987-12#Text>

religious community/organization. Experts understand that it is impossible to ban a religious organization, in our case the UOC, even in court.

Thus, the demands of the radical part of society to prohibit the UOC cannot be fulfilled either in theory or in practice. It is possible to remove a religious organization (RO) from state registration. But according to the law, ROs can operate in Ukraine without registration. It is possible to suspend the activity of some structure based on its violation of the legislation, but only if there is irrefutable evidence against a specific person or group of persons, and not the entire church organization. The moderate part of society is looking for civilized ways to resolve the conflict situation when the Ukrainian Orthodox Church does not want to implement the laws adopted by the state in wartime regarding the status of the church in society.

Power

Society in all its segments affects the authorities, that must respond to public sentiment. Due to the multi-vector moods in society, the state has not yet announced a single scenario for the conflict resolution around the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Both society and experts strive to find painless solutions to the problem by conducting various consultations, and discussions at various levels. Under the pressure of society, there have appeared draft laws mentioned above that limit the presence and activity not only of the UOC, but of all religious organizations whose administrative centers are located in the country that is recognized as an aggressor state against Ukraine, and which retain their canonical, organizational, and mental ties with Russian structures through joining the governing bodies of Russian religious organizations, through the implementation of joint projects in various spheres of life. In addition to the draft laws in the field of freedom of conscience previously submitted to the Parliament of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers recently presented its own draft law¹⁸ aimed at limiting the anti-Ukrainian activities of religious organizations. Laws have not yet been discussed in the parliament, they are not yet put on the agenda, because there are much more important issues. But they are already discussed and analyzed in society. They are criticized and they really deserve criticism from a certain point of view. We do not know if these draft laws will be passed.

¹⁸ Draft 8371 of the Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Activities of Religious Organizations in Ukraine, <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/41219>.

The president and his office also got involved in the difficult religious situation. President Zelenskyi is compelled to take unpopular steps in the sphere of state-church relations, checking those ROs that are working against Ukraine in wartime conditions. Religion in the conditions of war becomes a powerful tool of enemy influence. National security dictates decisive measures of the authorities, which are sometimes connected with violations in the sphere of freedom of conscience. Such steps are unacceptable in peacetime but can be justified in a situation of national security, which is Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

By the decision of the National Security Council of December 1, 2022, put into effect by the Presidential Decree "About certain aspects of the activity of religious organizations in Ukraine and the application of personal special economic and other restrictive measures (sanctions)"¹⁹ a special expert group evaluates the Statute of the UOC with the purpose of identifying the connection with the ROC. A religious examination was conducted,²⁰ based on which the government, in particular the State service of ethnopolitics and freedom of conscience (DESS), make recommendations aimed at limiting the presence and activities of the UOC in Ukraine. The state is not interested in the aggravation of state-church relations, but it cannot allow the presence in wartime of obvious agents of the "Russian world" who work against an independent and sovereign state and sow discord in society.²¹ These measures (verification of documents of the residents of monasteries, identification of citizens of Russia and other countries, audit of financial transactions, searches in churches, familiarization with correspondence, identification of anti-Ukrainian literature and periodicals, listening to sermons that contain calls for the overthrow of the political system in Ukraine, carry a religious enmity, etc.) in no way indicate persecution for

¹⁹ On Certain Aspects of the Activities of Religious Organizations in Ukraine and the Application of Personal Special Economic and Other Restrictive Measures (Sanctions), <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/n0021525-22#Text>.

²⁰ Conclusion of the Religious Expert Examination of the Statute on Governance of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for the presence of ecclesiastical and canonical ties with the Moscow Patriarchate, *RISU* (3.02.2023), https://risu.ua/en/conclusion-of-the-religious-expert-examination-of-the-statute-on-governance-of-the-ukrainian-orthodox-church-for-the-presence-of-ecclesiastical-and-canonical-ties-with-the-moscow-patriarchate_n136436.

²¹ Liudmyla FLYPOVYCH, Anatolii KOLODNYI, "The Russian-Ukrainian War of 2014–2022: Monitoring of State-Confessional Relations in Ukraine", *Skhid* 3.4 (2022) 17–22. [https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2022.3\(4\).268686](https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2022.3(4).268686).

faith, because the state does not check the religion, subjecting its position to criticism, but the political views and ideological priorities of the bearers of a certain religious teaching. And if these views threaten the security of the state and its citizens, then the state has the right to suspend the activities of such organizations and their members, without violating the freedom of religion, the right to perform rituals and membership in the organization.

The state seeks peace in the religious life of the country and recognizes the equal right to the existence of different Orthodox jurisdictions by carrying out the state registration of a religious organization. The state has the right to demand from various religious structures the implementation of the Constitution and laws.

Church

The church environment reacts differently to the situation in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. From the very beginning of the independent Ukraine (1991), the churches demonstrated a multi-vector orientation²².

1. Part of the Orthodox believers showed a conscious strategy towards autocephaly. The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), which was reconstituted in Ukraine in 1989 as an independent self-governing church, supports this principal most consistently.

2. Some believers wanted to preserve the Orthodox Soviet Union. They united in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which emerged because of the Kharkiv Council of May 1992, initiated by Moscow and the ROC. Russia could not allow the emergence of a church independent of Moscow, which for a long time (and even now) was in the orbit of its influence.

3. The legitimate protest intentions of a large church group led by Metropolitan Filaret, who advocated independence from the ROC, culminated in the creation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP). This church emerged in June 1992 because of the merger of a part of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, which did not follow the Kharkiv Cathedral, with a part of the UAOC.

²² Oleksandr SAGAN and Nataliia ISHCHUK, "Confrontation of Orthodox Churches in Modern Ukraine: Reasons, Trends and Prospects of Reconciliation", *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 40.3 (2020) 8–33, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss3/4>.

The heartbreaking story that shook the ordered Orthodox life of Ukrainians in the USSR as a subordinate part of the ROC is not over yet. Though many changes have taken place for these thirty years of Orthodoxy's existence in Ukraine.

The main milestones in this story were:

1. The development of parish life and church institutions of the UOC, UAOC and UOC KP (until 2018) and of the OCU (from 2019). Compared with the pre-independence period, Orthodox life in Ukraine has significantly changed and improved in terms of quantity and quality.²³

2. The canonical status of Orthodox churches has changed.

The UAOC ceased to exist as a result of the Orthodox unification council of 2018, merging with all its parishes and structures with the OCU.

The OCU received the Tomos (Decree) for autocephaly from the Ecumenical Patriarch. It was inscribed as the 15th church in the Orthodox Diptychs and recognized as the only canonical structure in Ukraine by five Orthodox Churches (the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Church of Greece, the Church of Cyprus and the OCU itself), respectively by 16 churches belonging to the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, referring to the amended Statute at the council of May 27, 2022, claims self-determination and independence in governance (“самостійна і незалежна в управлінні”). But such a status is not provided by any Orthodox canons. The self-declaration of such independence in management without documentary confirmation from the mother church (ROC) is not actually autocephaly. The 1990 Charter of Alexius II, to which the Statute of the UOC refers, is not a Tomos for autocephaly, but only a promise of granting autocephalous status in the future. Alexius' Charter was not given to the UOC, which was established in Kharkiv. It was issued to Metropolitan Filaret,²⁴ the head of the Ukrainian

²³ Anatolii KOLODNYI, “Кількісні і територіальні показники конфесійної мережі нинішньої України” [Quantitative and Territorial Indicators of the Confessional Network of Current Ukraine], in *Україна поліконфесійна [Ukraine is Pluriconfessional]*, edited by Anatolii KOLODNYI and Pavlo PAVLENKO, Kyiv: Interservice, 2021, 38–55; Religious Network of Ukraine 1992–2016, *Religious Freedom* 20 (2017) 161–170, https://uars.info/index.php/rs/issue/view/2017_20.

²⁴ Point 6.2. Conclusion of the Religious Expert Examination of the Statute on Governance of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church for the presence of ecclesiastical and canonical ties with the Moscow Patriarchate. <https://risu.ua/en/conclusion-of-the-religious-expert->

Exarchate, who appealed to the Moscow Patriarchate to grant his part of ROC the autocephaly.

The ROC does not release the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, considering it as its part (see the Statute of the ROC, Chapter X²⁵). Therefore, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is a complex of dioceses of the ROC in Ukraine. Russian President Putin and Kremlin spokesman Peskov have repeatedly asserted it.²⁶

The UOC KP, part of the church headed by Patriarch Filaret, withdrew its decision to dissolve to merge with the UOC and create the OCU. It has an undefined and unrecognized status but continues to operate in a limited way.

3. In addition to these main actors in the Orthodox field in Ukraine, there are other Orthodox churches (the Apostolic Orthodox Church, the Old Believers, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, etc.)²⁷ that do not play any significant role in the confrontation between these two Orthodox forces. The small-numbered Orthodox organizations create a situation of Orthodox pluralism,²⁸ undermining the monopoly of any dominant Orthodox churches.

4. Despite constant intra-Orthodox confrontations, the public authority of church structures as institution has increased, as reflected by the level of trust of Ukrainians in the Church.²⁹ The church is not just present at solemn national events, it is active in social life, in education, in cultural events, even in business.

examination-of-the-statute-on-governance-of-the-ukrainian-orthodox-church-for-the-presence-of-ecclesiastical-and-canonical-ties-with-the-moscow-patriarchate_n136436.

²⁵ Устав Русской Православной Церкви, Глава X. Украинская Православная Церковь [Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, Chapter X. Ukrainian Orthodox Church], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5082273.html>.

²⁶ Peskov commented on the searches in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, <https://www.5.ua/svit/pieskov-prokomentuvav-obshuky-v-kyievo-pecherskyi-lavri-faktychno-vyznavshy-shcho-tam-nyni-sydyt-rpts-293177.html>.

²⁷ Report on the network of religious organizations in Ukraine as of January 1, 2021. By denominations. URL: <https://dessa.gov.ua/statistics-rel/>.

²⁸ Among 19,860 Orthodox organizations, the vast majority belong to the two main churches, but state statistics also record the communities of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (36), the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (39), the Old Believers (76), the True Orthodox Church (36), and independent Orthodox churches (79). <https://dessa.gov.ua/statistics-rel/>.

²⁹ <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3392095-ukrainci-najbilshe-doviraut-armii-volonteram-i-cerkvi.html>

Diakonia has become a business card of any church. Ukrainians associate various humanitarian projects, charitable foundations, the phenomenon of chaplaincy – military, medical, prison, etc., and active volunteering with the church.

5. The state generally seeks to maintain equal treatment of different religions. It declares that it defends freedom of conscience and belief in church-denominational relations, adheres to democratic principles of equality in this sphere, guarantees freedom to all believers and non-believers, equal treatment of all religious organizations. The government is trying to build partnerships with religious organizations. But still the most difficult for the authorities are the relations with the Orthodox churches.

6. With the emergence of the OCU, the confrontation between the two main Orthodox churches became less open and traumatic.³⁰

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church closed on its internal church life. After changing the political power in 2014, it limited its contact with society and the state, as well as with other churches. At the same time, it remains a member of the Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. This closed way of life (with the loss of their believers and parishes, either forcibly annexed by Russia, or voluntarily transferring to OCU) suited this church until the state and society began to be interested in what this church was doing during the war.

The authority of OCU is gradually growing. According to statistics,³¹ the number of OCU and UOC parishes almost equaled, and the number of believers increased significantly: more than 50% of Ukrainians declare their support to the OCU.³² The OCU continues to call believers of the UOC to join the single canonical

³⁰ Not all experts think so: SAGAN and ISHCHUK, “Confrontation of Orthodox Churches”, 8–33.

³¹ According to DESS data, as of January 1, 2020, the UOC had 12,406 and the OCU had 7,188 religious organizations. But the statistics of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine for 2022 give different figures. The UOC registered 9107, and the OCU - about 5194. That is, the difference in the number of parishes of the two churches is decreasing. See *Religious organizations: generalization according to the data of the UDR*. As of October 20, 2022. URL: <https://dess.gov.ua/statistics-rel/?fbclid=IwAR0b6pTk0r-Nmuci8IleDDHzVx7wrqglxcsXIkEZJeiR2CR6WDCEwegCUCA>.

³² According to data from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) as of June 2021, the number of supporters of the OCU in Ukraine increased from 42 to 52% during the year. 25% of Orthodox declared belonging to the UOC-MP. <https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=1052&page=1>.

Orthodox Church, saying that the doors of this church are open to all who wish and does not set any conditions for such a transition.³³ The process of transitions continues, although the intensity has not fundamentally increased. It is due to the complexity of the procedure, the preparation of documents, the opposition of the UOC and even local authorities. They often lobby for the interests of the UOC instead of having a neutral position. The UOC accuses the OCU of raiding and taking over cathedrals by force, but often ignores the will of its parishioners who do not want to belong to the UOC and resolve their issues in a legal way.

In general, the situation in Orthodoxy of Ukraine worsened during the war. The main source of conflict in the religious sphere is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. It has fallen into a systemic crisis after 2014 which it does not know how to get out. The biggest problem is that there is no monolithic unity in the ranks of the UOC regarding overcoming the crisis. It clearly has different opinions about the current situation and its future. The most tangible and obvious confrontation is disagreement between the leadership of the church, the synod, the episcopate, and the laity, led by their parish priests. Knowing the mood of their parishioners, some of the ordinary priests led by archpriest Andrii Pinchuk appealed to the church synod and asked it about the status of the UOC.³⁴ They desired to understand whether it was indeed independent from Moscow and whether the UOC had any documents proving its independence.

The Church is divided not only in the assessment of its status, but also in its predictions for its future. It is still not clear for the believers what will happen to

³³ Since 2018, Metropolitan Epiphany constantly calls on all Orthodox believers to unite: “The Doors of Our Church are Open to Everyone”, *Interfax – Україна* (15.12.2018), <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/553648.html>; Заява Священного Синоду Української Православної Церкви (Православної Церкви України) [Statement of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Orthodox Church of Ukraine)], ПЦУ (16.05.2022), <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/vsi-novyny/zayava-svyashhennogo-synodu-ukrayinskoyi-pravoslavnoyi-tserkvy-pravoslavnoyi-tserkvy-ukrayiny-3/>, etc.

³⁴ “10 Questions to the Episcopate and the UOC Synod from the Clergy and Laity” [with English translation] Εσωτερικό ρήγμα στην παράταξη Ονουφρίου – Καταδίκη της Μόσχας ζητούν οι πιστοί (17.01.2023), <https://fosfanariou.gr/index.php/2023/01/17/na-katadikastei-i-mosxa-zitoun-oi-pistoi-tis-parataxis-onoufriou/>.

it next? Will it remain in this undefined and unrecognized status of “independent and self-governing” structure, which will not be recognized by anyone but the church itself, not even the ROC?

There is no complete solidarity regarding the strategy and tactics of the church among its leadership, which includes those who are clear supporters of preserving the canonical, eucharistic, organizational, and mental union with the ROC (Antonii Pakanych, Pavlo Lebid), and the more moderate ones (Metropolitan Onufriy himself).

It must be admitted that the majority of the UOC communities remain loyal to their leadership.³⁵ They are convinced that they have freed themselves from the ROC, that they are autocephalous. The UOC defends the opinion that its status is even more independent than the autocephaly of the OCU granted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, because they prepare myrrh and establish parishes abroad. They do not delve into the canonical subtleties of their status but consider themselves canonical and independent.

Part of the Orthodox believers realized, especially during the war, their structural and organizational dependence on the Moscow Patriarchate (MP) and want to get rid of it. Ukrainian Orthodox believers do not want to go to churches which are part of the Russian Church – the church of the aggressor country. But again, there is no single position on how to dispense with such dependence.

One of the ways is to change one’s legal affiliation and to move from the UOC (former MP) to the OCU. About 1,500 transitions have already taken place.³⁶ And again, among these parishes there are those who moved together with their priest. This is a simpler way, but it still requires some organizational efforts. But there are parishes where the priests refused to join the OCU with their parishioners. In such cases, additional problems arise because the priest, for example, does not hand over the keys to the church that belongs to the community, sues the community etc.

³⁵ Address of the Monks of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Regarding the Last Statements of Epiphanius (Dumenka) Regarding the Fate of the Monastery, (26.01.2023), <https://lavra.ua/uk/z-privodu-ostannih-zayav-yepifaniya-dumenka-shhodo-doli-monastirya/>.

³⁶ Map of transitions (evidence of the Spiritual Front of Ukraine). Скільки парафій УПЦ МП перейшли до ПЦУ у відсотковому співвідношенні, <https://df.news/2022/07/25/skilky-parafij-upts-mp-perejshly-do-ptsu-u-vidsotkovomu-spivvidnoshenni-karta/> (as of 23.07. 2022); List of communities that changed church jurisdiction from UOC (MP) to OCU (2022).[https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Перелік_громад,_що_змінити_церковну_юрисдикцію_з_УПЦ_\(МП\)_на_ПЦУ_\(2022\)](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Перелік_громад,_що_змінити_церковну_юрисдикцію_з_УПЦ_(МП)_на_ПЦУ_(2022))

Some of the believers are re-registered as communities of the Orthodox faith independent of either Moscow or Constantinople, and therefore do not want to be part of the structure of either the UOC or the OCU. Local authorities have begun to register such independence charters, but such communities condemn themselves to an unrecognized status, to the status of schismatics or sectarians.

Recently, the State as a guarantor of national security in the religious sphere as well, has voiced its specific expectations from religious organizations, including Orthodox churches. And such activity of the state is not welcomed by the UOC, that protests the adoption of (in their opinion) anti-religious laws and actions carried out by the state. It criticizes these laws, ignores their implementation, appeals to the authority of international structures, spreads disinformation about the discrimination of Orthodox Christians of Ukraine for their faith.³⁷ The UOC intends to sue the state to “protect the church from persecution”. The church leadership does not seek an understanding with the state and is in strict opposition to the state, without trying to find out what the state’s claims to the church actually are. Many complaints of the state are justified. There are many examples of cooperation of individual bishops and priests of the UOC with the occupation authorities, cases of direct treason, disclosing positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, compiling lists of ATO (anti-terrorist operation) participants and active patriotically minded citizens who were thus arrested, tortured, and killed by Russian occupiers. All these cases should be carefully checked. A Temporary Investigative Commission will be created in Ukraine to investigate the cases of the cooperation of religious organizations with the occupying regimes and the Russian military.³⁸

³⁷ The Brotherhood of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra appealed to the Monasteries of the Local Orthodox Churches about “protection against persecution, persecution and discrimination of Orthodox Christians of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which are currently taking place in Ukraine” (31.01.2023), <https://news.church.ua/2023/01/31/bratiya-kijevo-pecherskoji-lavri-zvernulasya-monastiriv-pomisnix-pravoslavnix-cerkov/>

³⁸ Polina HORLACH, В Україні створять ТСК, щоб розслідувати факти колаборацій релігійних організацій [Commission of Inquiry to be set up in Ukraine to Investigate Cases of Collaboration between religious Organizations], *Suspilne* (17 June 2022), <https://suspilne.media/251111-v-ukraini-stvorat-tsk-sob-rozsliduvati-fakti-kolaboracij-religijnih-organizacij/>

Conclusion

Religious life in contemporary Ukraine is extremely dynamic. Experts do not always have time to comment or analyze the changes taking place there. The biggest problem for Ukrainian society, for the state and for the Church is the Orthodox division, which was only partially overcome during 30 years of Ukraine's state independence. The choice that society faced in the early 90s is again on the agenda, but on a new spiral of social development. This anxiety is again induced by Moscow, with its imperialist appetites – aiming to revive the USSR at any cost, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of casualties in the military confrontation, at the cost of destroying Ukraine as a state and Ukrainians as a nation. To do this, in addition to military weapons (missiles, tanks, planes, soldiers), Moscow is putting religious weapons into action – the Moscow Patriarchate, which will not let the UOC out of its orbit of influence.

Unlike Russia and the ROC, which have a single strategy for the spiritual subjugation of Ukrainians, Ukrainian society, the state, and the Church do not have a single strategy for getting out of the Orthodox crisis. The development of such a strategy is hindered by some peculiarities and internal factors of Orthodox life. Every Orthodox faithful who believes in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Orthodox Church, finds the existence of several Orthodox jurisdictions as an abnormal situation, remembering the instructions of Jesus Christ that “all should be one”. In my opinion we are still very far from achieving the Orthodox unity of the Ukrainian people, in one local autocephalous church. But we should all bring this unity closer with our thoughts and actions, overcoming the constant challenges of time, corporate interests, and private ambitions.

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