

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AS A CHALLENGE FOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES: ORTHODOXY, CATHOLICISM AND PROSPECTS FOR PEACEMAKING¹

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Abstract. This article shows how war is restructuring the configuration of religious life in Ukraine as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion. Following a short introduction, which documents churches' initial reactions to the war, I focus on three issues. First, I examine the ways in which the war exacerbates existing tensions within Ukrainian Orthodoxy, echoing the divide within world Orthodoxy. Second, I analyse the challenges faced by Ukrainian Catholics in relation to the Holy See's position on the war, which is marked by neutrality and a propensity towards nonviolence. Third, I delineate a few trajectories, which could allow churches to be more proactive in playing a role in peacemaking and future reconciliation.

Keywords: Russo-Ukrainian war, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, peacebuilding, reconciliation.

Introduction

The Russo-Ukrainian war¹ is an unprecedented tragedy in recent world history. It presents challenges for the Ukrainian government, the military, diplomacy, medical services, charities, and universities. In a globalized world, the war in Ukraine represents a problem that reaches far beyond Ukraine. The invasion of a sovereign

¹ Various parts of this article have been presented at conferences at the University of Toronto (March 2022), Babeş-Bolyai University (June 2022) and Georgetown University (March 2023). I am grateful to Helen Haft, Dmytro Vovk, Natallia Vasilevich, Taras Kurylets, Thomas Mark Németh, Korinna Zamfir and Andrii Smirnov for their feedback and suggestions. I am particularly indebted to Paul Airiau, Catherine Marin and Luc Forestier for their help with my section on France.

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¹ By this term I mean the full-scale invasion, which started on February 24, 2022, which followed the military conflict between Ukraine and Russia in and around Donbas region.



country by a UN Security Council member is an affront to the international world order. It is also a test for the churches, who attempt to help, encourage and assist the millions of refugees and victims of this war. The legitimization of this invasion by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), is a provocation for global inter-church relations, and ecumenical institutions, built on the values of dialogue and reconciliation. Finally, the asymmetry of combatant powers is notable. On the one hand, we have the largest country in the world, in possession of nuclear weapons, and on the other hand, its small non-nuclear neighbour. This power imbalance constitutes a test for Christian social doctrines, which, over the last decades, have been moving towards non-violence.

This article will analyse the reaction of Ukrainian Churches to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. After a short introduction, documenting the first responses, I will focus on three issues: the ways in which war affects Ukrainian Orthodoxy, the challenges of Ukrainian Catholics as they relate to the Holy See's position on the war, and the prospects of churches playing a role in peacemaking. For reasons of space, I will not focus on the processes occurring in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine [OCU], created in 2019, which considers the current situation as an opportunity to achieve the unity of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, nor on Protestant denominations, some of which have modified their traditionally pacifist approach in the context of the war.

Initial Reactions to the War

The 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine directly affected Ukrainian religious communities⁴. Thousands of Ukrainian citizens – members of churches – have been murdered or forced to leave their homes. Church buildings have been destroyed, theological seminaries sacked, and priests killed and captured⁵. From

⁴ On the institutional and sociological situation of Ukrainian churches, see Catherine WANNER, *Everyday Religiosity and the Politics of Belonging in Ukraine*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022.

⁵ See the report prepared by the Institute of Religious Freedom: Maksym VASIN *et al.*, *Russian Attacks on Religious Freedom in Ukraine: Research, Analytics, Recommendations*, Kyiv: Institute for Religious Freedom, 2022; “Almost 500 Religious Sites Were Destroyed in Ukraine as a Result of Russian Aggression”, *Institute for Religious Freedom* [IRF], (2023), <https://irf.in.ua/p/105>. For the list of killed clergy, see “Список погибших священнослужителей и церковнослужителей христианских церквей Украины” [List of Deceased Priests

the very first days of the war, Ukrainian churches, often with the assistance of their sister churches abroad, were engaged in helping those affected by the war. “Being with people, praying with people, praying for people”, as Archbishop Borys Gudziak has put it, was the key thing churches did for those affected by the war⁶. One third of the Ukrainian population, ca. 13 million people, have been forced to leave their homes, becoming refugees in various Western countries or internally displaced. Many of them have been helped by churches on both sides of the border. This humanitarian assistance often has an ecumenical aspect. People fleeing from Kyiv or Kharkiv – most of whom are Orthodox – have been hosted in Western Ukraine and Galicia, which is predominantly Catholic. The Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv has dedicated several of its facilities to host these IDPs. Protestants, who have a highly developed community network across the whole country, were among the first to use their church resources to assist people escaping from combat zones in the East and South.

Ukrainian churches have shown an unseen unity in condemning Russia’s aggression since the very first days of the war. The churches have reacted both jointly and individually. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations [AUCCRO], which unites 16 churches and religious organisations, including Jews and Muslims,⁷ issued a statement with words of support for the

and Church Ministers of the Christian Churches of Ukraine], *Христиане проти війни* [Christians Against War, KPV] (2023), https://shaltnotkill.info/spisok-pogibshih-svyashhennosluzhitelej-i-czerkovnosluzhitelej-hristianskih-czerkvej-ukrainy/?fbclid=IwAR2x5WD3ZJcb8n0BSbZCUBRQWUrKKItWS-0wH56yVs3T4-lpuK7jd_eu81o.

⁶ Patrick BRISCOE, “Archbishop Denounces ‘Completely Amoral’ Russian War in Ukraine on Anniversary of Invasion”, Interview with Borys Gudziak, *Our Sunday Visitor* (2023), <https://www.oursundayvisitor.com/archbishop-denounces-completely-amoral-russian-war-in-ukraine-on-anniversary-of-invasion/>.

⁷ The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations [AUCCRO], “Information about UCCRO”, (2021), <https://vrciro.org.ua/en/council/info>. On the AUCCRO, see Andrii KRAWCHUK, “Constructing Interreligious Consensus in the Post-Soviet Space: The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations”, in *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-reflection, Dialogue*, edited by Andrii KRAWCHUK and Thomas BREMER, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; José CASANOVA, “The Three Kyivan Churches of Ukraine and the Three Romes”, *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 9.1 (2022) 218–220. According to Cyril HOVORUN, the AUCCRO is “one of the most successful examples of inter-Christian and inter-faith

Ukrainian Armed forces and a blessing to the soldiers, asking the international community to help stop Russia's invasion. They also wrote a letter to President Putin asking him to stop the war before it is too late. Metropolitan Epiphany Dumenko, the Primate of the OCU and the Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, Primate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church [UGCC], called upon all people of good will to pray for peace, but also highlighted the duty of citizens to protect Ukraine. They both asked the international community for their support. Protestants too were outspoken in their condemnation of Russia's aggression. The German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine insisted that the peace we must search for, should be "a just peace, which will result in the expulsion of the aggressor from all occupied territories and a fair punishment for the crimes committed"⁸. It called on those who can serve in the armed forces to join the defence of their country and invited their brothers abroad to support Ukraine with humanitarian aid and diplomacy. The Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches – arguably the biggest Protestant denomination in Ukraine – took a more pacifist stance: Pastor Valerii Antonyuk asked communities to be engaged in prayer, "our weapon in times of war", and to be hospitable to the refugees.⁹

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church [UOC], which when the war began, was an autonomous part of the Russian Orthodox Church, sharply condemned the Russian invasion. While President Putin in his speech on February 21, 2022, listed among the reasons for his annexation of the Donbas regions the Ukrainian government's plans to proceed with "the destruction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate",¹⁰ the head of this church, Metropolitan Onuphriy of Kyiv,

cooperation in Europe" ("War and Autocephaly in Ukraine," *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal* 7 (2020) 1–25 [4]).

⁸ Німецька Євангелічно-Лютеранська Церква України [German Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Ukraine, NELTSU], "Настав час молитов за справедливий мир" [It Is Time to Pray for a Just Peace], (2022), <https://nelcu.org.ua/nastav-chas-molytov-za-spravedlyvyj-myr/>. If not otherwise specified, all translations from Ukrainian and Russian are mine.

⁹ Valerii ANTONYUK, "Звернення до служителів і церков у зв'язку з початком війни" [Appeal to ministers and churches regarding the beginning of the war], *Всеукраїнський союз церков євангельських християн-баптистів* (2022), <https://www.baptyst.com/zvernennya-v-antonyuka-do-sluzhyteliv-i-tserkov-u-zv-yazku-z-pochatkom-vijny/>.

¹⁰ Vladimir PUTIN, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation", *President of Russia* (2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

called the invasion “a repetition of the sin of Cain, who out of jealousy killed his own brother. Such a war can have no justification either before God or before people”.¹¹

Russkii mir (the ‘Russian World’) and the Russo-Ukrainian War

The UOC’s condemnation of the war stood in stark contrast with the ROC’s justification of it.¹² On Palm Sunday 2023, Patriarch Kirill gave the following explanation for the Russo-Ukrainian war:

The task was set to take us with bare hands, without any war, to fool us, to draw us into their world, to implant in us their values. But our people and our leadership realized that these values contradict ours, because Holy Rus’, thank God, preserves Christian values, which were included in the system of national values. When it became clear that there was nothing in common anymore, all this led to a military confrontation. And we must remember that *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (see Eph. 6:12). I say this boldly, with full confidence that Russia is on the side of light.¹³

This brief statement by Kirill brings together elements, which are present in dozens of statements made by members of the ROC’s leadership in the last months: Russia is protecting Christianity from the demonic powers of the West, by waging not simply a just and defensive war, but a war of liberation.¹⁴

¹¹ Onufriy VEREZOVSKY, “Звернення Блаженнішого Митрополита Київського і всієї України Онуфрія до вірних та до громадян України” [Address of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy of Kyiv and All Ukraine to the faithful and citizens of Ukraine], *Українська православна церква* (2022), <https://news.church.ua/2022/02/24/zvernennya-blazhennishogo-mitropolita-kijivskogo-vsijeji-ukrajini-onufriya-virnix-ta-gromadyan-ukrajini/#2023-04-25>.

¹² On the ROC’s attitude to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine during the initial months, see Kathy ROUSSELET, *La Sainte Russie contre l’Occident*, Paris: Salvator, 2022, 127–170.

¹³ Kirill GUNDYAYEV, “Россия стремится сохранить свою самобытность, свою веру, свою систему ценностей” [Russia is seeking to save its originality, faith and value system], *Русская Православная Церковь* (2023), <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6017763.html>.

¹⁴ Cf. Natallia VASILEVICH, “Социальная концепция РПЦ и богословское обоснование войны в Украине” [The Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church and Theological

The ROC's militarism, not unlike the expansionism of the Russian Federation, did not appear out of nowhere but has been slowly developing over the past decades.¹⁵ *Russkii mir* – a modern re-elaboration of Third Rome ideology – first appeared as an arguably pluralistic ideal.¹⁶ In his speech at the opening of the Third Assembly of the Russian World on November 3, 2009, Kirill described *russkii mir* as a “civilizational space” and “supranational project”, built on Orthodox faith, Russian culture and language, as well as a shared understanding of history and social development.¹⁷ On that occasion, Kirill pointed to an aspect of *russkii mir*, that would gradually disappear from the ROC's rhetoric, i.e. the multinational or even pluralistic character of this entity. The Patriarch stated that *russkii mir* “is not connected with the interests of one state [...] [and] is not an instrument of political influence of the Russian Federation”.¹⁸ He also claimed that “the existence of sovereignty [of the post-Soviet countries] can help us take a more responsible approach to preserving our own identity and build new forms of community based

Justification of the War in Ukraine], *Христиане против войны* (2022), <https://shaltnotkill.info/soczialnaya-konceptziya-rpcz-i-bogoslovskoe-obosnovanie-voyny-v-ukraine/>.

- ¹⁵ Cf. Boris KNORRE, “The Culture of War and Militarization within Political Orthodoxy in the Post-soviet Region”, *Transcultural Studies* 12.1 (2016) 15–38; Boris KNORRE and Arseny KUMANKOV, “Богословие войны в постсоветском российском православии” [‘The Theology of War’ in Post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy], *Политическое богословие*, edited by Алексей Бодров and Михаил Толстолуженко, Москва: Издательство ББИ, 2019, 52–76.
- ¹⁶ On the *russkii mir* ideology, see Cyril HOVORUN, “Interpreting the ‘Russian World’” *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-reflection, Dialogue*, edited by Andrii KRAWCHUK and Thomas BREMER (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 163–172; Pavlo SMYTSNYUK, “Православное антизападничество на службе национализма: идеи Христа Яннараса и Россия” [Orthodox Anti-Westernism at the Service of Nationalism: Christos Yannaras’ Insights for Russia], *Религия и национализм*, edited by Алексей Бодров and Михаил Толстолуженко, Moscow: ББИ, 2021, 82–89. Cf. a recent condemnation of the *russkii mir* by a group of Orthodox theologians, Brandon GALLANER, Pantelis KALAITZIDIS, and the Drafting Committee, “A Declaration on the ‘Russian World’ (Russkii Mir) Teaching”, *Mission Studies* 39 (2022) 269–276.
- ¹⁷ Kirill GUNDYAYEV, “Слово на открытии III Ассамблеи Русского мира” [Speech at the opening of the 3rd Assembly of the Russian World], in Патриарх Московский и всея Руси Кирилл, *Собрание трудов* vol. V/1, Moscow: Издательство Московской Патриархии РПЦ, 2021, 125–134.
- ¹⁸ GUNDYAYEV, “Слово”, 130.

on equality and mutual respect”, avoiding “any paternalism, any attempt to play the role of ‘big brother’”.¹⁹ Some months later, on the eve of his visit to Ukraine, the Patriarch reiterated the difference between *ruskii mir* and the Russian state: “The Russian world does not mean *rossiyski*. Moreover, it is not the world of the Russian Federation”.²⁰ One could wonder whether the pluralism of *ruskii mir* was lost during the conceptual evolution of the idea, or if it was an instrument of deception from the very beginning. Regardless of initial intent, today there are no traces of this former pluralism in the ROC’s rhetoric.²¹ The ROC now openly justifies Russia’s aggression against Ukraine in no uncertain terms (Borys Gudziak describes the ROC’s rhetoric as “Jihadist language”²²), thus clearly siding with the aggressor in the conflict. Moreover, the ROC has been publicly cooperating with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and military, to a degree to which it never cooperated with any other country of their “canonical territory”. *Ruskii mir* became (or has always been) a political instrument of the Kremlin, an instrument of aggression.

One of the ways in which the instrumentality of *ruskii mir* realizes itself, is by crafting theological variants of political doctrines, which the Kremlin promotes.²³ I would like to focus on the ROC’s anti-Westernism and its denial of Ukrainian identity as a separate and unique entity independent from the Russian nation.

First, political narratives of the West and NATO as threats to Russia are echoed by the ROC’s condemnation of Western decadence. Both the Russian Federation and the ROC present Russia as a centre for so called traditional values, to be

¹⁹ GUNDYAYEV, “Слово”, 127 and 133.

²⁰ Kirill GUNDYAYEV, “Интервью украинским тележурналистам” [Interview with Ukrainian television journalists], *Русская Православная Церковь* (2010), <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1223635.html>. In Russian, there are two words which translate into English as “Russian”: *rossiyski* – which refers to the Russian empire, Russian republic within the USSR and the modern Russian Federation, and *ruskii* – which is used to delineate a link to the medieval Kyivan Rus’ state, the ROC, as well as the modern Russian nation (but not the state) or language.

²¹ On *ruskii mir* acquiring different meanings over the last few decades, see Mikhail SUSLOV, “Russian World” concept: Post-Soviet geopolitical ideology and the logic of “spheres of influence,” *Geopolitics* 23.2 (2018) 330-353.

²² BRISCOE, *Archbishop Denounces ‘Completely Amoral’ Russian War* (note 6 above).

²³ I do not wish to suggest that the ROC is a mere instrument of the Kremlin. There is, rather, an overlapping consensus, to use a Rawlsian concept, between the two institutions: although their arguments are based on different presuppositions, they are profoundly symbiotic and reinforce each other.

defended against Western liberalism, in particular individualism and secularism, and work globally to create networks of partners, who undermine liberal approaches to ethics – networks described by Kristina Stoeckl and Dmitry Uzlaner as the “Moralist International”.²⁴ I would suggest that this contraposition between the morally virtuous Russia vs. the decadent West (and thus Kirill’s justification for the war against Ukraine as a “metaphysical” battle²⁵) is deeply incorrect for a number of reasons. The ROC’s stance seems to ignore the fact that the position of the biggest Western denomination, the Catholic Church, on reproduction and gender issues does not differ much from the Orthodox one, and that NATO and the EU include several Orthodox majority countries (e.g. Greece, Bulgaria and Romania). Moreover, if one follows the very criteria of “decadence” – connected to sexuality and reproduction – that is prevalent in Russia, one can reach quite the opposite conclusion, i.e. that Russia’s moral superiority is a myth. Russia has one of the highest abortion²⁶ and divorce²⁷ rates in Europe, while churchgoing is very low compared to other countries on the continent.²⁸ A ROC priest and famous blogger Pavel Ostrovsky wrote in a Telegram post in April 2022:

²⁴ Kristina STOECKL and Dmitry UZLANER, *The Moralist International: Russia in the Global Culture Wars*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2022.

²⁵ See Kirill’s homily on 6 March 2022, where he calls to defend the “truth of God” against sin, in particular homosexuality (Kirill GUNDYAYEV, “Патриаршая проповедь в Неделю сыропустную после Литургии в Храме Христа Спасителя” [Patriarchal sermon on Forgiveness Sunday after the Liturgy in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior], *Русская Православная Церковь* (2022), <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5906442.html>). The anti-Western rhetoric existed long before the war. For Patriarch’s Kirill pre-war criticism of Europe, see Kirill GUNDYAYEV, “Выступление на X ВРНС” [Speech at 10th World Russian People’s Council], *Всемирный Русский Народный Собор* (2006), <https://vrns.ru/documents/63/1190>.

²⁶ Vyacheslav KARPOV and Kimmo KÄÄRIÄINEN, “‘Abortion Culture’ in Russia: Its Origins, Scope, and Challenge to Social Development,” *Journal of Applied Sociology* 22.2 (2005) 13–33; Viktoria I. SAKEVICH and Boris P. DENISOV, “Репродуктивное здоровье населения и проблема аборт в России: новейшие тенденции”, [Reproductive health of the population and the problem of abortion in Russia: the latest trends], *Социологические исследования* 11 (2019) 140–151.

²⁷ Dimitri MORTELMANS (ed.), *Divorce in Europe: New Insights in Trends, Causes and Consequences of Relation Break-ups*, Cham: Springer, 2020, in particular chapters 4 and 8.

²⁸ Marlène LARUELLE, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia*, New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009, 161.

Some argue that Russia is a stronghold of everything noble and good, which is fighting against world evil, satanism and paganism. What is all this nonsense? How can one be a noble stronghold with a 73% rate of divorces in families, where drunkenness and drug addiction are rampant, while theft and outright godlessness flourish? How many people will we see in [...] the churches at the Easter service? [...] minuscule crumbs from the whole nation.²⁹

Notwithstanding the fact that Russia's moral superiority is a myth, it has become a high ground, from which the war in Ukraine is being justified – as is clear from the Palm Sunday Patriarchal address, cited above.

The second deeply problematic aspect of *russkii mir*, with imperialistic implications, is its rejection of Ukraine as a nation. The ROC has been propagating the idea that Ukrainians, Belarusians, and other heirs to Kyivan Rus', do not constitute independent nations, but are, and should remain, part of the Russian people and nation – also described as Holy Rus' or *russkii mir*.³⁰ From this point of view, the Russo-Ukrainian war is an attempt to save the unity of the Russian nation from external adversaries (the West), as Patriarch Kirill claimed on the Annunciation Day of 2022.³¹

The ROC's "theological" denial of the Ukrainian people as a nation, has profound political consequences. Shortly before the full-scale invasion, President Putin argued – similarly to the ROC – that since Ukrainians and Russians constitute the same nation, Ukraine's existence as a sovereign state is a mistake, which should

²⁹ Pavel OSTROVSKY [@pavelostrovski], "Иерусалим, Иерусалим..." [Jerusalem, Jerusalem...], Telegram, (17.04.2022), <https://t.me/s/pavelostrovski>.

³⁰ Although the ROC is often referring to a common "Russian people" (*russkii narod*), the Patriarch also uses the term "Russian nation" (*russkaya natsiya*). See e.g. Kirill GUNDYAYEV, *Семь слов о русском мире* [Seven lectures on the Russian world], Москва: Всемирный Русский Народный Собор, 2015, chapter 4. However, the terminology seems to be used in an inconsistent way, since the term "nation" is also applied to the modern Russian nation-state, as in Kirill's statement that "the Russian nation [*russiiskaya natsiya*] is formed around the Russian people [*russkii narod*]" (GUNDYAYEV, *Семь слов*, 73).

³¹ Kirill GUNDYAYEV, "Патриаршая проповедь в праздник Благовещения Пресвятой Богородицы после Литургии в Храме Христа Спасителя" [Patriarchal Sermon on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary after the Liturgy in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior], *Русская Православная Церковь* (2022), <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5915151.html>.

be rectified.³² Now, in issues related to self-determination, religious and political arguments are strictly interrelated. We live in a world where only nations have the right to sovereignty.³³ In fact, the Charter of the United Nations contemplates “self-determination of peoples”, not of any groups of individuals.³⁴ Although there are no universally applicable rules on what constitutes a nation, common religion, language and ethnicity are generally recognised as important elements, which bond individuals and groups into a nation. Even more importantly, the nation is constituted by a shared belief among members of a community, that they belong to a given nation.³⁵ By manipulatively stressing common history and religious tradition – over and against other arguments, including self-determination – and propagating the idea that Ukrainians are part of the Russian nation, the ROC implicitly defies the sovereignty of the Ukrainian nation-state.

The War and Ukrainian Orthodoxy

Both Russia’s invasion and its justification by the Russian Orthodox Church, represents a major challenge for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which – at least until 2022 – has been part of the Patriarchate of Moscow. This church has been, to a large degree, a part of the *ruskii mir* project. Not only did it engage in narratives promoting the “common Russian people” and anti-Westernism, but also, through exaggerated narratives of persecution, it provided Russia with some of the arguments that have been used to justify the invasion. The mistrust between the UOC, and large parts of Ukrainian civil society, has been mounting for several decades³⁶.

³² Cf. Vladimir PUTIN, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”, *President of Russia* (2021), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

³³ Cf. Eric HOBBSBAWM, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 177–178.

³⁴ UN, “Charter of the United Nations”, *Law and Practice of the United Nations: Documents and Commentary*, edited by Simon CHESTERMAN, Ian JOHNSTONE, and David M. MALONE, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, Art. 1.2 [p. 665], Art. 55 [p.] 676.

³⁵ Cf. Stephen NATHANSON, “Nationalism and the Limits of Global Humanism”, in *The Morality of Nationalism*, edited by Robert McKIM and Jeff McMAHAN, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 176–187.

³⁶ Cf. Thomas BREMER and Sophia SENYK, “La situation ecclésiastique orthodoxe actuelle en Ukraine: Quelques remarques critiques,” *Istina* 64.1 (2019) 25–50; Dmytro VOVK, “Dynamics of Church-State Relations in Ukraine and the Military Conflict with Russia”,

As Sergii Bortnyk argues, the war in Eastern Ukraine, which began in 2014, “has led to the intensification of the process of unity within Ukrainian society, and, at the same time, has pushed for a distancing from Russian influence”.³⁷ The war has imposed a radical dilemma upon the UOC – “to choose between a Ukrainian identity [...] or the preservation of deep-rooted ties with the Russian church”.³⁸ During the Donbas war, the UOC decided not to make any choice, and claimed to be neutral, though its interpretation of events often mirrored Russia’s.³⁹ The 2022 full-scale invasion has made the fissure between the UOC and the majority of Ukrainian society even greater. Attempts by the UOC to assure Ukrainian civil society and the government of its absolute independence from Russian influence, were not particularly successful, and calls to ban the UOC became more pronounced. Initially, President Zelensky and his government were critical of these initiatives. However, during months following the Fall of 2022, after several cases of UOC clergy collaboration with Russia emerged, the government changed its approach, ordering searches of UOC properties, terminating the UOC lease of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, revoking citizenship to the UOC clergy found in possession of Russian passports, putting several bishops under house arrest, imposing economic sanctions against ROC and UOC clerics, and, perhaps most importantly, drafting a law proposal, prohibiting religious organisations with an affiliation in Russia.⁴⁰

The UOC has decided to anticipate this course of action by making itself (more) independent from the ROC. A key step in this direction has been accomplished

in *Religion During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict*, edited by Elizabeth A. CLARK and Dmytro VOVK, London; New York: Routledge, 2020, 32–53.

³⁷ Sergii BORTNYK, *Стратегії примирення. Роль Церков в Україні* [Reconciliation strategies. The role of churches in Ukraine], Kyiv: ‘Ріджи’, 2021, 182.

³⁸ Sergii BORTNYK, *Стратегії примирення*, 196. Cf. Oleksandr SAGAN, “Orthodoxy in Ukraine: Current State and Problems”, in *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova*, edited by Adam HUG, London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2015, 19–20.

³⁹ Cyril HOVORUN argues that the OCU “refused to acknowledge Russian aggression and instead systematically used euphemisms to avoid calling it such” (“War and Autocephaly”, 6). On the UOC’s bishops, who took an openly pro-Russian position, see Sergii BORTNYK, *Стратегії примирення*, 149.

⁴⁰ Dmytro VOVK, “Draft Law Better than Others, Freedom of Religion or Belief Concerns Remain”, *Forum 18* (2023), https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2807. On previous legal initiatives meant to limit UOC’s influence, ID., “Dynamics”, 32–53.

by the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, held on May 27, 2022 in Kyiv. According to the official statement, the Council “adopted appropriate amendments to the Statute with regards to the Administration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), all of which testify to the full independence and autonomy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church”.⁴¹ The UOC Statute was amended accordingly, deleting any mentions of the subordination of the UOC to the ROC.⁴² The UOC resumed blessing its own chrism (as opposed to receiving the chrism from Moscow) and opening parishes abroad which may be read as steps indicating its independence.⁴³

Did the Council’s decisions make the UOC independent from the ROC? This is debatable. The UOC’s representatives claim that since the May 27 Council, the UOC is independent (from the ROC) Orthodox church. However, the *Expert Opinion* by Ukrainian scholars of religion, commissioned by the Ukrainian government, concluded that the new redaction of the Statute did not lead to a substantive modification of the UOC’s status vis-à-vis the Russian Orthodox Church, and therefore, it “continues to be subordinate to the Russian Orthodox Church. It does not act as an independent (autocephalous) Church and has not proclaimed its own independence (autocephaly)”.⁴⁴

⁴¹ UOC, “Resolutions. May 27, 2022”, UOC – *The Synodal Information and Educational Department* (2022), <https://news.church.ua/2022/05/28/resolutions-council-ukrainian-orthodox-church-may-27-2022/?lang=en>.

⁴² UOC, “Статут про управління Української Православної Церкви (з доповненнями і змінами) від 27 травня 2022 року” [Statute of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (with additions and changes) from May 27, 2022], ДЕСС (2022), <https://dess.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/1.2-Statut-UPTS.pdf>. Notwithstanding the UOC’s refusal to make the Statute public, it became available on the website of the State Service for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience (DESS). This fact has strengthened the suspicion that the UOC is trying to deceive public opinion.

⁴³ Natallia VASILEVICH has called the blessing of chrism “the sacrament of autocephaly” (“Почему я считаю, что УПЦ действительно пошла на разрыв с Москвой” [Why do I think that the UOC really broke with Moscow], Telegram, April 19, 2023, <https://t.me/burbalka/981>). However, some autocephalous churches, e.g. the Church of Greece, do not consecrate their own chrism, while some non-autocephalous do (e.g. the Kyiv Metropolia before the 1917 Revolution). Similarly, many Greek-speaking autocephalous churches do not create their dioceses abroad but rely on Constantinople to cater to their immigrants in diaspora.

⁴⁴ State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, [DESS], “Висновок релігієзнавчої експертизи Статуту про управління Української Православної Церкви

I would argue that the matter is more complex, and that the textual analysis of the May 27 Council decisions and the updated Statute alone does not permit us to reach any definitive conclusion on this matter. Both texts have been deliberately written in a manner which allows for an interpretation either way – of the UOC remaining part of the ROC, and being independent. The *Expert Opinion* rightly emphasises the fact that the term “autocephaly” was not used, and that the UOC’s recent decisions were not submitted for reception to the ROC and other autocephalous churches. One could argue, however, that the decisions do not contain any mention of “autocephaly” due to the fact that the term and concept of autocephaly has become derogatory in the UOC leadership’s rhetoric over the past decades (as e.g. term “ecumenism”), and that the absence of a term does not *ipso facto* imply that the reality behind the term is being rejected. One could also argue, that since Orthodoxy lacks an agreed upon protocol for the proclamation and recognition of an autocephaly,⁴⁵ the UOC is free to choose the path it prefers and may decide to delay submitting its decisions to other Orthodox churches. In other words, what the UOC did at its May 27 Council may well be a proclamation of autocephaly – but the ambiguous wording of the decision makes any textual analysis of the decisions *a priori* inconclusive.

One of ambiguous moments in the UOC’s relationship to the ROC has been its attitude towards Russia-occupied Crimea, which remained part of the UOC’s jurisdiction until the decision of the Holy Synod of the ROC on July 7, 2022 to subject the dioceses of the peninsula directly to the ROC, as a separate Metropolia.⁴⁶

на наявність церковно-канонічного зв'язку з Московським патріархатом” [Expert Opinion on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Administration Statute with Regard to its Ecclesial and Canonical Relations with the Moscow Patriarchate], ДЕСС (2023), <https://dessa.gov.ua/vysnovok-relihiieznavchoi-ekspertyzy-statutu-pro-upravlinnia-ukrainskoi-pravoslavnoi-tserkvy/>. The *Expert Opinion* has legal consequences. The UOC has questioned these scholars’ independence and the legality of commissioning the *Expert Opinion*.

⁴⁵ This argument has been advanced by the UOC’s Archbishop Sylvestr of Bilhorod (Sylvestr Стоїснев, “Церковные вопросы требуют спокойного и вдумчивого обсуждения” [Church issues require a calm and thoughtful discussion], Interview by Yulia Kominko, *Діалог Тут* (2023), <https://www.dialogtut.org/czerkovnye-voprosy-trebuyut-sпокоjnogo-y-vdumchyvogo-obsuzhdenyya/>).

⁴⁶ When Russia occupied Crimea in 2014, Patriarch Kirill did not attend the official annexation ceremony, and did not include the dioceses of Crimea directly under the ROC’s jurisdiction – it remained part of the ROC indirectly, through the UOC. This was

The UOC did not react in any way to this, thus implying that it does not question the ROC's right to take any decisions concerning UOC dioceses.⁴⁷

Be this as it may, the UOC church has not yet acknowledged, repaired, or apologized for its complicity in propagating narratives, which served as ideological sources of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This church might need to engage in a serious examination of its "conscience". We will see whether it will have enough spiritual and intellectual resources, and courage to find its way out of this impasse.

At the same time, if the pressure which Ukrainian society, the government and other churches exert upon the UOC will exceed reasonable limits, it would violate religious freedom of the UOC's members and, possibly, push this church into isolation. The Primate of Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Sviatoslav Shevchuk has questioned the wisdom of banning the UOC, suggesting that it would be both

often interpreted as a sign that the ROC respects Ukrainian territorial integrity, is *super partes* in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, and capable of being aware of different national interests (not only those of the Russian Federation). The 2022 ROC decision on Crimea shows the identification of church and state interests in Russia. For the text of the decision, see ROC, "Журналы Священного Синода от 7 июня 2022 года" [Journals of the Holy Synod of June 7, 2022], *Русская Православная Церковь* (2022), <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5934527.html>. In October 2022, the ROC also incorporated the Rovenky diocese while in May 2023 it absorbed the Berdiansk diocese.

⁴⁷ The decision on Crimea is also curious, since it defies the logic previously invoked by the ROC to deny autocephaly for Ukrainian Orthodoxy. To the Ukrainian argument that an independent country should have an independent church, the ROC answered that the ecclesiastical borders must not necessarily follow national borders: state borders change, but ecclesial borders do not, they are sacred. See, e.g. ROC spokesman's claim, following the annexation of Donbas, that the change of state borders does not lead to an alteration of canonical borders ("Легойда: изменения границ государств в пределах РПЦ не влияют на церковное единство" [Legoida: Changes of State Borders within the Bounds of the Russian Orthodox Church Do Not Affect Church Unity], *TASS* (2022), <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/13808355>). With its 2022 decision on Crimea, the ROC has changed ecclesial borders in accordance with official mapping of the Russian Federation. Moreover, the reason, invoked by the ROC, to take the dioceses of Crimea under its direct control, was "the practical impossibility of regular communication between these dioceses and the Kyiv Metropolia" (ROC, *Журналы Священного Синода от 7 июня 2022 года*). I would suggest that this argument could be used in favour of the UOC's autocephaly: since, due to the war, communication between the UOC and ROC became problematic, the UOC should enjoy an autocephalous status.

a violation of religious freedom and an ineffective measure in the struggle with *ruskii mir*:

the [Ukrainian Orthodox] Church is comprised of people who also have constitutional rights. As long as there will be people who are oriented towards Russian Orthodoxy in Ukraine, this church will exist. Even if, according to state law, it would be illegal. To ban this church means to give them the palm of martyrdom. [...] But, on the other hand, the state has the right to take care of its national security. [...] You should not be persecuted for belonging to some ecclesial jurisdiction. But you can be prosecuted for crimes against our country. All should be equal in this regard [...]. [Russia] should be prevented from using any church for its geopolitical purposes.⁴⁸

The illegality of certain decisions by Ukrainian authorities against the UOC has been pointed out both by experts on religious freedom⁴⁹ and by governmental officials.⁵⁰ Although it is understandable that in exceptional times, imposed by the war, the government has other priorities towards which to channel its legal and intelligence resources, any action involving religious freedom should occur within the rule of law.⁵¹ What is needed is, as Sviatoslav Shevchuk suggests, de-politicization of the

⁴⁸ Sviatoslav SHEVCHUK, “Чи гріх бажати смерті Путіну?” [Is it a sin to wish Putin’s death?], Interview by Roman Kravets, Nazariy Mazyliuk, *Українська правда* (2023), <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2023/01/19/7385485/>.

⁴⁹ Dmytro VOVK, “Kyiv Pechersk Lavra Conflict, Draft Law, Impact on Freedom of Religion or Belief”, *Forum 18* (2023), https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2823.

⁵⁰ Viktor YELENSKY, the Head of the State Service for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience (DESS) has stated that the ban of the UOC by local authorities – as those that happened in Ivano-Frankivsk and Khmelnytsk – is “unlawful” (“Чи можливий ‘церковний компроміс’ у Києво-Печерській лаврі?” [Is an ‘ecclesial compromise’ possible in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra?], Interview by Lilia Rzheutska, *Deutsche Welle* (2023), <https://www.dw.com/uk/superecka-navkolo-upc-mp-ci-mozlivij-cerkovnij-kompromis-u-lavri/a-65240490>). Yelensky, however, supports legislative and judicial bans on religious organizations affiliated with the Russian Federation.

⁵¹ See the following recommendation of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s guidance on religious freedom: “Where individual believers or groups of believers are involved in criminal or illegal activities, participating States should not attribute blame to the community as a whole and should sanction only the individuals concerned” (OSCE, *Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance*, Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions, 2019, 35).

UOC. Although the prosecution of concrete UOC clergymen, accused of collaboration with Russia during the war, would appear to be a relatively simple task, to purge an institution on ideological grounds, e.g. for complicity with *russkii mir*, is, from a legal point of view, a difficult if not impossible endeavour.⁵²

Yet history provides us with some examples of how to deal with issues of this sort. I would suggest that it would be worthwhile to look at the way France and the Catholic Church dealt with clergy who collaborated with the Nazis and the collaborationist Vichy regime, led by Marshal Pétain, during the Second World War. On the one hand, there were aspects of Pétain's regime that attracted the Church, e.g. attention to discipline and order, family-based rhetoric, and the state's subsidies for confessional schools and other financial benefits, as well as the regime's assurance of support for some clergy and laity⁵³. In a way, Vichy policies on religion contrasted with the *laïcité*-oriented ones of the Third Republic. Thus, most Catholics, as the majority of the French population until 1942-43, supported the Vichy regime. On the other hand, however, only a minority of French Catholics supported the Nazis, and a few participated in the resistance. Several French bishops gradually came to oppose the Vichy government, in particular, due to its accommodation of the Nazis' desire to eliminate the Jews.⁵⁴

⁵² Cf. VASILEVICH, who points out the difficulty of distinguishing different aspects within the category of *russkii mir* ("Русский мир есть? А если найду?" [Is there a Russian world? What if I find it?], Telegram, April 9, 2023, <https://t.me/burbalka/964>).

⁵³ On Catholic cooperation and resistance to the Vichy regime, as well as the subsequent *épuration* (purification) of the Church under de Gaulle, see W.D. HALLS, *Politics, Society and Christianity in Vichy France*, Oxford: Berg, 1995, 223–225. Frédéric LE MOIGNE, *Les évêques français de Verdun à Vatican II: Une génération en mal d'héroïsme* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005). Nicholas АТКИН, "Catholics and the Long Liberation: The Progressive Moment", in *The Uncertain Foundation: France at the Liberation 1944–47*, edited by Andrew КНАПП, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 121–138 (125–127). For some of the reasons that led certain clergy to support the Vichy government, see Christophe's work on cardinal Baudrillart, who became a fervent supporter of Hitler and Pétain: Paul CHRISTOPHE, "Le cardinal Baudrillart et ses choix pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale", *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 78.200 (1992) 57–75. At the same time, some traits of Pétain's personality were detested by Catholics.

⁵⁴ Although the Church issued no public protestation against the discriminatory measures against the Jews, some bishops publicly condemned the mass arrests of the French Jews who were sent to what was revealed to be the extermination camps. Archbishop of Toulouse Jules-Géraud Saliège was one of the most proactive in helping the Jews.

When the government of Charles De Gaulle came to power after the liberation, it demanded that the Vatican remove 25 bishops, whose reputations were tainted by collaboration.⁵⁵ Although the Vatican did not find the evidence regarding the majority of bishops on the list convincing, it engaged in negotiations. The man chosen for this task was Archbishop Angelo Roncalli, who later became Pope under the name of John XXIII.⁵⁶ He replaced Nuncio Valerio Valeri, whom de Gaulle wanted recalled, since he represented the Holy See under the previous government. Roncalli managed to establish a trusting relationship with the French government, including with anti-clerical members, and accepted a series of provisions to accommodate authorities' requests, comprising the resignation of seven bishops (four in France and three in the colonies). It is highly likely that this

⁵⁵ The backing of the request came mainly from Georges Bidault, a Christian democrat at the ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other Catholics associated with the resistance, who wanted to punish the bishops they considered to be too much *pétainistes* or *vichystes*. The request of a mass resignation was not something extraordinary. Napoleon Bonaparte, a century and a half earlier, was successful in requesting the resignation of all French bishops, and the acceptance of the loss of ecclesiastic property from Pope Pius VII during the French Revolution Cf. Ambrogio CAIANI, "Napoleon and the Church", *The Cambridge History of the Napoleonic Wars*, vol. 1: *Politics and Diplomacy*, edited by Michael BROERS and Philip DWYER, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 253–271. Paradoxically, these acts, "creat[ed] a more cohesive and integrated clergy [...], encouraged the development of more close-knit relationships between the clergy and the faithful [...] [and] narrowed what had once been a vast wealth gap between the upper and lower clergy", and thus led to an earnest renewal of the French Church (Christopher CLARK, "The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars", *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, edited by Christopher CLARK and Wolfram KAISER, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 13–15). I am indebted to Catherine Marin for having pointed out to me the importance of Napoleon's case for the argument of my article.

⁵⁶ On Roncalli's negotiations with the French government, see Angelo Giuseppe RONCALLI, *Journal de France*, Vol. 1: 1945-1948, trans. Jacques MIGNON, ed. Étienne FOUILLOUX (Paris: Cerf, 2006). André LATREILLE, *De Gaulle, la Libération et l'Église catholique* (Paris: Cerf, 1978). Latreille was the Deputy Director for religious affairs (*sous-directeur des cultes*) at Ministry of Internal Affairs, whose task was to negotiate with Roncalli. Cf. also Peter HEBBLETHWAITE, *Pope John XXIII, Shepherd of the Modern World*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday Books, 1985, chapter 10; Greg TOBIN, *The Good Pope: The Making of a Saint and the Remaking of the Church. The Story of John XXIII and Vatican II*, New York, NY: HarperOne, 2012, chapter 6.

“internal” purification of the Church reduced recourse to other available avenues of dealing with these issues, e.g. judicial processes and lynching.⁵⁷

Three points in the French case are worth emphasizing. *First*, the difficulty of defining instances of “collaboration”. In France, according to W.D. Halls, “[t]he legal basis for action was shaky”.⁵⁸ As de Gaulle’s Foreign Minister Georges Bidault argued, the fault of the bishops was not treason – legally defined – but rather “a blinding lack of common sense, as demonstrated in their over enthusiasm for the Vichy regime, in making utterances useful to German propaganda, and promoting a new Moral Order partly to give advantages to the Church”.⁵⁹ In other words, the clergy’s responsibility was mostly of moral, rather than juridical order. This leads to the *second* point, finding the right way to deal with cases of that nature. In the French case, the issue was solved through negotiations, which led to a compromise. The Church accepted some episcopal resignations, but not the entire list proposed by the government. The government even considered paying the pensions of bishops who would lose their bishoprics.⁶⁰ The Church took into consideration a “whitelist” proposed by the government, thus promoting to the rank of bishops and cardinals, clergy that had shown resistance toward the Nazi and Vichy regimes. *Third*, searching for a win-win solution, both parties negotiated in the spirit of mutual respect, avoiding publicly humiliating their counterpart. De Gaulle, for whom a peaceful solution was important, accepted the need to interact with bishops, of whom he was (previously) suspicious. The Holy See did not shout loudly about religious rights, separation of church and state, and non-interference of politicians in the life of the Church, but quietly acted, listened, and took decisions in order to help the mission of the Church. Although the process itself was not without tension and regrets, the matter was settled to the benefit of both parties. This has allowed the Church to remain an important part of social life in France⁶¹.

⁵⁷ Here I draw on Cointet, who distinguishes between *l’épuration sommaire* (public violence), *l’épuration judiciaire* (cleansing via courts and public chambers) and *l’épuration interne* (a purge by groups themselves). All the three types were practised in post-war France. See Michèle COINET, *L’église sous Vichy: 1940-1945: La repentance en question*, [Paris]: Perrin, 1998, 346–358. Some priests were lynched, but no bishops were.

⁵⁸ HALLS, *Politics*, 373.

⁵⁹ Bidault’s argument synthesized by HALLS, *Politics*, 369.

⁶⁰ HALLS, *Politics*, 377–379.

⁶¹ ATKIN, “Catholics and the Long Liberation”, 122.

I would suggest that these three points can help us to think about the ongoing situation in Ukraine, and perhaps, even about the Church in a post-Putin Russia. The state should act within the legal framework, but one should be aware that the legal instruments at its disposal might not be suitable to resolve existing tensions. While individual collaborators can be judged in the court of law, the institutional complicity of the Church is a matter of ethical responsibility and could be addressed more efficiently in a different forum, which would include practices, such as acknowledgement, apology and forgiveness.⁶² A purification, internal to the Church itself and at the Church's initiative, would limit recourse to the courts, and eliminate extrajudicial assaults on religious property. The UOC's rigidity towards calls – coming from both civil society and the government – to purge its ranks from the most odious members of its hierarchy is a zero-sum game.⁶³ It is not only harmful to the image of the Ukrainian government and the UOC's leadership, but is detrimental to the mission of this Church within Ukraine. The latter is contingent on the UOC's openness to sincere, rather than declarative, dialogue with the government and larger society.⁶⁴

The Holy See and Ukrainian Catholics: In search of Convergence

Although the Holy See has been particularly outspoken regarding the war in Ukraine, many of the statements and actions coming from Rome were badly received by Ukrainians. On the one hand, Pope Francis was intensely focused on Ukraine (there have been more than one hundred statements on Ukraine during the first year of the war by Pope Francis himself – much more than during any other military conflict in recent history).⁶⁵ He unequivocally condemned the war,

⁶² Cf. Daniel PHILPOTT, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁶³ For a theological approach to the zero-sum game, see Myroslav MARYNOVYCH, *Митрополит Андрей Шептицький і принцип 'позитивної суми'* [Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky and the principle of 'positive sum'], Lviv: Видавництво Старого Лева, 2019.

⁶⁴ This is also the advice of OSCE guidance, cited earlier: "Religious [...] communities are encouraged to contribute to efforts to ensure security in their societies by engaging in open, constructive and trustful dialogue with state authorities and other relevant stakeholders" (OSCE, *Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance*, 36).

⁶⁵ "Dopo la orrenda strage di Dnipro in Ucraina si attendono con partecipazione addolorata le parole del Santo Padre oggi nel corso dell'Udienza generale", *Il Sismografo* (18.01.2023), <https://ilsismografo.blogspot.com/2023/01/vaticano-dopo-la-orrenda-strage-di.html>.

expressed his solidarity with the people of Ukraine and – what is quite unusual for a Pontiff – stated the right of Ukraine to defend itself with force and receive military aid. He ceaselessly called for peace and offered his mediation to both Ukraine and Russia. On the other hand, however, Francis attempted to keep neutrality regarding this war, rather than siding unilaterally with Ukraine. On this point, one sees a contrast not only with the Western political leaders, but also with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who has clearly taken Ukraine's side, and condemned *ruskii mir* as an “an instrument of legitimization of Russian expansionism”.⁶⁶

During the initial stages of the Russian invasion, the Holy See has been very reserved regarding the causes of the war in Ukraine, and the right of Ukraine to defend itself.⁶⁷ This initial approach was in symphony with the stance taken by the Vatican during the war in Eastern Ukraine, which started in 2014. Pope Francis was rarely specific about the fact that it was Russia and President Putin who initiated the aggression against Ukraine. Later, Francis accused NATO of provoking the war, and put the blame for war crimes on mercenaries, as well as ethnic minorities (Buriats and Chechens) within the Russian Army, rather than on ethnic Russians – described as “a great people”.⁶⁸ He refused to consider Russia

⁶⁶ Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, “Speech in Abu Dhabi”, (2022), https://risu.ua/en/speech-by-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-in-abu-dhabi_n134828. Cf. Tasos KOKKINIDIS, “‘We Stand by Ukraine’ Patriarch Bartholomew Says in Easter Message”, *Greek Reporter* (2022), <https://greekreporter.com/2022/04/21/patriarch-bartholomew-ukraine-easter/>.

⁶⁷ On Francis' statements regarding the war in Eastern Ukraine, which started in 2014, see HOVORUN, “War and Autocephaly,” 9–10. Hovorun critiques Francis for using “vague to ambiguous” language, in particular when referring to the war as “fratricidal”, which echoes the Russian description of the conflict in terms of “civil war”. According to Victor GAETAN, “[Francis] refused to affirm Ukraine's version of events in its contest with Russia” (*God's Diplomats: Pope Francis, Vatican Diplomacy, and America's Armageddon*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021, 6, cf. chapter 6, entirely dedicated to the Vatican's position on the Donbas war). Cf. also Adriano ROCCUCCI, “Vaticano e Mosca mai così vicini”, *Limes – Rivista italiana di geopolitica* 6 (2018) 228–229. At the same time, the Holy See has called for the respect of international law and Ukraine's sovereignty (Pasquale FERRARA, *Il mondo di Francesco: Bergoglio e la politica internazionale*, Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2016, 166–167).

⁶⁸ Hugues LEFÈVRE, “Vatican Apologizes to Russia after Pope's Remarks”, *Aleteia* (2022), <https://aleteia.org/2022/12/15/vatican-apologizes-to-russia-after-popes-remarks/>. Francis confessed that he has “a high esteem for the Russian people, for Russian humanism. Just think of Dostoevsky, who to this day inspires us, inspires Christians to think of Christianity”.

as an absolute evil and encouraged gestures of reconciliation – as those during the 2022 and 2023 Via Crucis in Rome, giving space to both Ukrainian and Russian voices – which provoked understandable critiques of equating the victim and the aggressor. How to explain such an attitude from the Holy See? I would like to propose four reasons.

First, the shift, within Catholic social teaching, from just war theory to the presumption against the war. As I have shown elsewhere, this shift has created a tension between the principle of legitimate defence and pacifist ideals in the pontifical magisterium over the past six decades⁶⁹. Pope Francis' *Fratelli tutti* – which questions the rationale behind just war thinking (grounded on “allegedly humanitarian, defensive or precautionary excuses”) – is a culmination of this process, and a lens, through which the Pontiff reads the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Second, the Holy See's tradition of neutrality. The 1929 Lateran Treaty, signed as part of the re-establishment of the Holy See's sovereignty over the Vatican, emphasizes both the neutrality of the Holy See and its ability to engage in conflict resolution between states.⁷⁰ Quite similar language is used in the 1993 Fundamental Agreement Between the Holy See and the State of Israel, according to which the Vatican “is solemnly committed to remaining a stranger to all merely temporal conflicts”.⁷¹ The Holy See followed – for good or bad – the neutrality principle in both World Wars, while, during the Cold War, its relative alignment with the West was counterbalanced by its *Ostpolitik*.

Third is the de-centering of the West under the first Latin American Pope. Vatican diplomats and scholars of international relations have pointed out Francis' unwillingness to be “the chaplain of NATO”. Francis' reading of the Russo-Ukrainian war is conditioned by his Argentinian background and by his desire to represent (for lack of a better term), the global South. Dario Fabbri might be going too far when he describes Francis' project as “blatantly hostile to the United

⁶⁹ PAVLO SMYTSNYUK, “The Holy See Confronts the War in Ukraine: Between Just War Theory and Nonviolence”, *ET-Studies – Journal of the European Society for Catholic Theology* 14.1 (2023), 3–24.

⁷⁰ “Trattato fra la Santa Sede e l'Italia,” AAS 21 (1929) art. 24 [p. 220]. English translation in Hyginus Eugene CARDINALE, *The Holy See and the International Order*, Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1976, 326.

⁷¹ “Fundamental Agreement Between the Holy See and the State of Israel,” AAS 86 (1994) art. 11, § 2 [p. 724].

States”,⁷² but there is no doubt that the Pope is in favour of a multipolar world, where the interests of other important emerging players, such as China and Russia, should be taken into account.⁷³

The fourth aspect we must examine is the difficulty in deciphering Francis’ pastoral and prophetic style. Drew Christiansen rightly observes that “[a]gainst the just war [Francis] does not offer the biblical arguments of a Christian pacifist but rather the experience of a pastor who ministers to the suffering and maimed victims of war”.⁷⁴ I would suggest that the logic behind the gestures of the two Via Crucis ceremonies should be read through this perspective: Here Francis is not concerned with two belligerent parties, but with human beings who suffer on both sides. This pastoral touch is noticeable in the vision that Francis has of Vatican diplomacy. In his 2013 message to the Holy See’s representatives, Francis said: “we are Pastors! And we must never forget it! Dear papal representatives, you are a presence of Christ, you are a priestly presence, a presence of pastors. [...] You are also pastors in your relations with civil authorities and your colleagues: always seek good, the good of all, the good of the Church and of every individual person”⁷⁵. In 2020 Francis introduced a “missionary year” as an obligatory requirement for the formation of Vatican nuncios, thus indicating what he considers this to be a key aspect of diplomacy at his service.⁷⁶ The pontifical approach to foreign relations is unique with respect to other international players, but it also may cause trouble, when geopolitical and pastoral aspects are not easy to harmonize.

What is important here is not only the position of the Holy See on the Russo-Ukrainian war, but the reaction it has provoked in Ukraine. Dmytro Kuleba, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, expressed Ukrainian discomfort with

⁷² Dario FABBRI, “Prefazione”, in Matteo MATZUZZI, *Il santo realismo: il Vaticano come potenza politica internazionale da Giovanni Paolo II a Francesco*, Roma: Luiss University Press, 2021, 7–9 (7).

⁷³ Cf. Roberto MOROZZO DELLA ROCCA, “La diplomazia pontificia soffre il protagonismo del papa latinoamericano”, *Limes – Rivista italiana di geopolitica* 6 (2018) 115–122 (121); ROCCUCCI, “Vaticano e Mosca”, 230–232.

⁷⁴ Drew CHRISTIANSEN, “Fratelli tutti and the Responsibility to Protect,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 18.1 (2021) 5–14 (9).

⁷⁵ FRANCIS, “Address to Participants in the Papal Representatives’ Days”, *The Holy See* (2013), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130621_rappresentanti-pontifici.html.

⁷⁶ GAETAN, *God’s Diplomats*, 71.

the Holy See's neutrality in the following way: "Do not try to use the following argument: 'I am trying to fix this issue, therefore, I cannot call a spade a spade, I have to be neutral in my public comments, otherwise, it will scare off the Russians'. [...] This is what we don't accept".⁷⁷ He delicately criticised the Pope for giving the "impression that both sides are guilty".⁷⁸ Ukrainian Ambassador to the Holy See Andrii Yurash has used similar arguments while commenting on the Via Crucis in both 2022 and 2023: by liturgically associating Ukrainians with Russians, Francis situates the victim and aggressor on the same moral level.

The criticism of Francis' approach to the war was joined by Ukrainian Catholic hierarchs and lay intellectuals. The Leader of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics, Sviatoslav Shevchuk, has decried the 2022 Via Crucis setting as "untimely, ambiguous, and such that does not take into account the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. For Ukraine's Greek-Catholics, the texts and gestures of the 13th Station of the Via Crucis are incomprehensible and offensive".⁷⁹

The Latin rite Bishop of Kyiv-Zhytomyr, Vitaliy Krivitskiy, has questioned the wisdom of an eventual visit of Francis to Ukraine: "a part of the population did not welcome some of the Pope's words [concerning the war in Ukraine], which were considered wrong. It is thus necessary to reconstruct a 'consensus' around his journey. [...] some [people] here no longer consider him [as being] *super partes*".⁸⁰ Such an answer reveals the difficulty that Catholics in Ukraine face in making Pope Francis' position on Ukraine understood and appreciated by wider society.

⁷⁷ Dmytro Kuleba, cited in Christopher WHITE, "Ukraine's Foreign Minister: Vatican Must 'Call a Spade a Spade' when Speaking on Russia", *National Catholic Reporter* (2022), <https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/vatican-news/ukraines-foreign-minister-vatican-must-call-spade-spade-when-speaking-russia>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ [UGCC], "Думаю, що це невчасна ідея, – Блаженніший Святослав прокоментував задум цьогорічної Хресної дороги у Колізеї" ['I think this is an untimely idea,' His Beatitude Sviatoslav commented on the idea of this year's Via Crucis in the Colloseum], *Синод Єпископів УГКЦ* (2022), <https://synod.ugcc.ua/data/dumayu-shcho-tse-nevchasna-ideya-blazhennishyy-svyatoslav-prokomentuvav-zadum-tsogorichnoy-hresnoy-dorogy-u-kolizey-8752/>.

⁸⁰ Vitaliy KRIVITSKIY, "Il vescovo di Kiev: non ci sono le condizioni per la visita del Papa", Interview by Giacomo Gambassi, *Avvenire* (2022), <https://www.avvenire.it/chiesa/pagine/papa-francesco-pace-in-ucraina-intervista-vescovo-kiev-krivitsky>.

Catholic intellectuals have also been critical of the Holy See's position. Ukrainian Soviet dissident Myroslav Marynovych was critical of the Vatican's usage of hortatory language and unwillingness to clearly name the aggressor.⁸¹ Church historian Anatolii Babynskyi and philosopher and the head of the synodal commission dealing with issues of justice and peace, Yuri Pidlisnyi, have deplored the "insufficient sensitivity or lack of information on the part of those who make decisions on the Vatican hills regarding the Ukrainian issue".⁸² Both Babynskyi and Thomas Nemeth have called on the Vatican to abandon its *Ostpolitik* approach as a framework through which to address Russian aggression against Ukraine.⁸³ Ecumenist Taras Kurylets concluded that "Pope Francis and the Roman Apostolic See, which enjoyed considerable moral authority in Ukrainian society, significantly lost their positions as a result of ambiguous and controversial statements".⁸⁴ Many of these critiques have been echoed by prominent Ukrainian Orthodox thinkers.

I would suggest that although there has been a general tendency by the Ukrainian Catholic episcopate to give Francis' actions the most generous interpretation possible, emphasising his solidarity with Ukraine, they have also undertaken the difficult, if not impossible task, of glossing over any ambiguities, and underplaying the neutrality of the Holy See on this matter. Moreover the hierarchs of both rites often felt obliged to distance themselves from the Holy See's position, in order not to be identified with it. While the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church has a long history of uneasy relations with the Pope and the Holy See, reproaches of the

⁸¹ Myroslav MARYNOVYCH, "Фатіма як тест" [Fatima as a test], *РІСУ* (2022), https://risu.ua/fatima-yak-test_n127625.

⁸² Anatolii BABYNSKYI and Yuri PIDLISNYI, "Antonio Spadaro and His Seven Paintings from the Hermitage", *ibid.*, https://risu.ua/en/antonio-spadaro-and-his-seven-paintings-from-the-hermitage_n130752.

⁸³ Thomas Mark НЕМЕТН, "Рим та Україна. Розважання над Страсним тижнем" [Rome and Ukraine. Reflections on the Holy Week], *Патріархам* (2022), <http://www.patriyarkhat.org.ua/rym-ta-ukrajina-rozvazhannya-tomasa-marka-nemeta-nad-strasnym-tyzhnem/>; Anatolii BABYNSKYI, "Кінець Ostpolitik" [The end of Ostpolitik], *Патріархам* (2022), <http://www.patriyarkhat.org.ua/statti-zhurnalu/kinets-ostpolitik/>.

⁸⁴ Taras KURYLETС, "Прозріння' щодо Патріарха Кирила та РПЦ у Ватикані. Коментар на інтерв'ю кардинала Курта Коха" [Change of heart on Patriarch Kirill and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Vatican. Commentary on an interview with Cardinal Kurt Koch], *РІСУ* (2022), https://risu.ua/prozrinnya-shchodo-patriarha-kirila-ta-rpc-u-vatikani-komentar-na-intervyu-kardinala-kurta-koha_n131050.

Pontiff by the Latin-rite church are rare events – which illustrates bi-ritual Catholic consensus on the way certain Pope’s statements and gestures are perceived.⁸⁵

It is difficult to foresee the consequences of the Vatican’s handling of the Russo-Ukrainian war upon Ukrainian Catholicism, but one cannot exclude some problematic outcomes. Referring to 20th century France and Czechia, Patrick Cabanel suggests that one of the reasons both nations opted to disassociate themselves from the Catholic Church (both have “de-Catholicised and secularised” their identity), was the Catholic Church’s international nature, its reliance on supra-national religious orders, the fact that their citizens depend religiously upon a foreign centre, which escapes national control.⁸⁶ One could argue, that with their criticism of the Holy See, the Ukrainian episcopate is attempting to avoid a scenario similar to that which happened to the French and Czech Catholics. What is needed is more dialogue between Kyiv and Rome, where both parties can learn from each other, and synchronise their positions as much as possible.

Peacemaking: Preparing the Terrain

A particular challenge, common to all Ukrainian religious communities, is to be a prophetic voice in the midst of war. At the beginning of the Second World War, Andrei Sheptytsky, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Archbishop of Lviv, renowned for his efforts at saving the Jews during the Nazi occupation, issued a message to the Ukrainians, where he said: “Wartime makes it difficult for a person to follow the instructions of a sober, clear mind, enlightened by faith. Feelings, vulnerability,

⁸⁵ Among the most explicit cases of Ukrainian Greek Catholic tensions with the Vatican, one could cite Cardinal Josyph Slipyi’s polemics with Paul VI in 1960–70’s and Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk’s disapproval of the Havana Declaration in 2016. Augustyn BABIAK, *De la légitimité d’un Patriarcat ukrainien*, Lyon; Lviv: Missioner, 2004; Sviatoslav SHEVCHUK and Ihor YATSIV, “Two Parallel Worlds”, *RISU* (2016), https://risu.ua/en/two-parallel-worlds-an-interview-with-his-beatitute-sviatoslav_n78261. Cf. Sviatoslav SHEVCHUK and Krzysztof TOMASIK, *Діалог лікує рани* [Dialogue heals wounds] Lviv: Svichado, 2019, 123–132. The Latin rite Bishops have expressed some dissatisfaction with Pope Francis’ comments on gender issues. Cf. Vitaliy KRIVITSKIY, “Єресь в церкві. Як реагувати?” [Heresy in the church: How to react?], Interview by Oleksiy Pohorielov, *Kyivsko-Zhytomyrska Dietseziya* (2020), <https://kzd.org.ua/en/node/1074>.

⁸⁶ Patrick CABANEL, “Protestantism in the Czech Historical Narrative and Czech Nationalism of the Nineteenth Century,” *National Identities* 11.1 (2009) 31–43 (32–33).

passion take over”.⁸⁷ Today, as eighty years ago, Christians are called to enlighten this war with their faith.

Over the past three decades, the Ukrainian churches focused on (re-)building their structures after the communist religious repression, and thus channelled their resources into construction of parishes, seminaries, monasteries, retreat houses and the like. At the same time, the churches were learning to effectively articulate their theological argumentations in the public sphere. As I have mentioned above, with the start of the war, the churches engaged in humanitarian work and advocated for the Ukrainian cause abroad. They also need to focus on peacebuilding.⁸⁸ There are at least two conflicts where religious peacebuilding could take place: at the intra-Orthodox level, and between Ukraine and Russia. The two conflicts are strictly related, yet clearly distinguishable. While at this stage of the war, any active peacebuilding and reconciliation between Ukraine and Russia might be precocious, Ukrainian Churches can prepare the ground for it. However, a domestic reconciliation between the Orthodox Church (formerly) affiliated with Moscow, on the one hand, and the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine [OCU] and other parts of Ukrainian civil society, on the other, should start as soon as possible. Peacebuilding preparations could relate to the following areas: dealing with collective blaming and dehumanizing language, development of reflection on just peace, reconciliation and healing, and maintaining ecclesial autonomy from the state.

First, the churches must assist in preventing hatred – a natural companion of every war. Ukrainian churches and intellectuals can help resisting both the collective blaming of all Russians for the aggression against Ukraine, and dehumanisation of the adversary. Many Ukrainians tend to accuse the entire UOC for collaboration with Russia. While the UOC hierarchy bears institutional and not only personal responsibility on different accounts,⁸⁹ many of its members have

⁸⁷ Andrei ШЕРГУТСКУ, *Церква і суспільне питання: Пастирське вчення та діяльність* [Church and social question: Pastoral teaching and activity], vol. 2/1 edited by Андрій Кравчук, vol. 2/1, Lviv: Вид-во Отців Василіян ‘Місіонер’, 1998, 506.

⁸⁸ Cf. Thomas Mark NÉMETI, “Der Krieg gegen die Ukraine und die Kirchen. Anfragen an die Theologie”, *Limina* 6.1 (2023) 235–256 (250), <https://limina-graz.eu/index.php/limina/article/view/182/192> (13.05.2023).

⁸⁹ Cyril Hovorun compares the institutional complicity of the UOC with Russia to institutional responsibility of the Catholic church for clerical sex abuse. See Isobel KOSHIV, “The Enemy within? Ukraine’s Moscow-affiliated Orthodox Church Faces Scrutiny”, *The Guardian*

been supporting and participating in the defence of their country.⁹⁰ Similarly, Ukrainians consider Russians to be collectively guilty for the ongoing aggression. There are good reasons for that. According to the available statistics, the majority of the Russian population has been supportive of the war.⁹¹ Very few Russians have protested. No bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church within Russia has raised his voice in critique of the invasion and countless war crimes. Russian citizens – as citizens of any country, whose existence is dependent upon political consensus – are, to different extents, responsible for this war. Hanna Arendt in her *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship* has argued that under oppressive regimes, there is no job of social significance, from kindergarten teacher to a football player, which is not implicated in one way or another by what the regime is doing.⁹² Moreover, the war is sustained by every citizen, who pays her taxes.⁹³ But it does not follow that every Russian is guilty for the war, or every UOC member guilty of supporting *ruskii mir*. To blame everybody means depriving people of their agency. To fail to distinguish between those, on the one hand, who have spoken against the war (often at risk to their own freedom), or who have fled Russia, and those, on the other hand, who actively or tacitly support the regime, or use Russian culture or the church to legitimise this war – to confuse these two categories makes the concept of responsibility meaningless. The same is true about the UOC, which hosts both

(2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/25/the-enemy-within-ukraines-moscow-affiliated-orthodox-church-faces-scrutiny>.

⁹⁰ Cf. arguments advanced by Olena BOHDAN, the former Head of the State Service for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience of Ukraine (“Яким є справжнє обличчя духовної незалежності?” [What is the true face of spiritual independence?], *Діалог Тут* (2023), <https://www.dialogtut.org/yakym-ye-spravzhnye-oblychchya-duhovnoyi-nezalezhnosti-olena-bogdan-pro-sytuacziyu-z-lavroyu/>).

⁹¹ See Arseniy KUMANKOV, “Nazism, Genocide and the Threat of The Global West. Russian Moral Justification of War in Ukraine”, *Etikk i praksis – Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics* [early view] (2022) 1–21 (15–17). Kumankov invites caution when interpreting statistics gathered in the context of an authoritarian regime in a state of war. Cf. also Kirill ROGOV, “Having It Both Ways: Russians Both Support and Oppose War”, *Wilson Center* (2023), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/having-it-both-ways-russians-both-support-and-oppose-war>.

⁹² Hanna ARENDT, *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken Books, 2003, 33.

⁹³ Cf. Robert W. MCGEE, “Three Views on the Ethics of Tax Evasion”, *Journal of Business Ethics* 67.1 (2006) 15–35.

Russian collaborationists and Ukrainian patriots. As Arendt puts it, “where all are guilty, no one is”.⁹⁴ When, during the Ukrainian-Polish conflict during the 1930s, the Polish authorities blamed all Ukrainians for acts of sabotage and terrorism, Sheptytsky with other Ukrainian bishops spoke against collective responsibility: a whole nation should not be deemed responsible for what certain individuals do.⁹⁵ Today we are in a very different situation – given that the war on Ukraine is an act of the Russian Federation as a *corpus politicum*, to use a Hobbesian image, rather than a private initiative. However, the principle still holds. Responsibility might not always be a matter of individual choice, since we are all social beings, but it is not automatic. However, when one lives in a society where aggression is part of the official ideology, then failing to struggle against the system is already an act, which binds people with responsibility.

The ongoing war – as every other war – brings about moments in which the adversary is demonised and robbed of their humanity. Russians describe Ukrainians as fascists, satanists and “ukry” (a reimagining of the Tolkienian “orcs”).⁹⁶ Ukrainians have recourse to similar tactics. What we are facing here is the mechanism through which one party to a conflict attempts to position itself as representing “the world”, “humanity” and “Christian values”, while at the same time, de-humanizing the adversary. This dynamic has been conceptualized by Carl Schmitt, who pointed out that when a state claims to be waging a war in the name of humanity, this state thereby “usurp[s] a universal concept against its military opponent”, “den[ies] the enemy the quality of being human and declar[es] him to be an outlaw of humanity”.⁹⁷ In this way, it proclaims its monopoly on justice and civilisation, while denying the same to its enemies.⁹⁸ I would suggest

⁹⁴ ARENDT, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 21.

⁹⁵ ШЕПТИТСЬКИЙ, *Церква і суспільне*, 466–467. For the context, see LILIANA HENTOSH, *Митрополит Шептицький: 1923–1939. Випробування ідеалів* [Metropolitan Sheptytsky, 1923–1939: A Trial of Ideals], Lviv: ВНТЛ-Класика, 2015, 73–75.

⁹⁶ Cf. EWA KAPELA, “Neologizmy polityczne w nagłówkach rosyjskich tekstów medialnych,” *Przegląd rusycystyczny* 1161 (2018) 143–153; KUMANKOV, “Nazism, Genocide”, 1–21.

⁹⁷ CARL SCHMITT, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 54.

⁹⁸ On rhetorical dehumanization see also GEORGE L. MOSSE, “Fascism and the French Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 24.1 (1989) 5–26; GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell, Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 3–4; EMILIO GENTILE, *God’s Democracy: American Religion after September 11*. transl. Jennifer Pudney and Suzanne D. Jaus,

that Ukrainian Christians should be vocal regarding the dignity of every human being, enemy included. By theologically safeguarding the individual agency and humanity of the adversary, churches can contribute to the future of reconciliation.

Second, churches and intellectuals need to deepen their reflection on peace-building and healing. The full-scale invasion came as a tragic shock, which found Ukrainian churches intellectually unprepared. This is especially striking taking into consideration the fact that since 2014, the country has been involved in the war in the East, and engaged in the processes of reconciliation linked to the history of Ukrainian-Polish and Ukrainian-Russian conflicts, the Holocaust, and inter-Christian clashes related to the Union of Brest, liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in 1946 and the return of religious freedom in the 1990's.⁹⁹ Among the issues pertaining to the domain of social ethics, with which religious communities engaged over the last decades, questions regarding sexuality and reproduction have often been prioritised, to the detriment of questions of social justice, war ethics, and peacemaking. This *reductio ad sexum* of Ukrainian moral theology should be rectified and churches need to acquire more competencies and a vocabulary of peacemaking. Let me provide an example. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) has been the primary platform for religious communities to speak with one voice. In mid-2021, AUCCRO's Secretariat published a volume containing most of the statements of the Council, to commemorate the 25th anniversary since its creation. The volume covers the period from 1996–2021 and contains approximately 150 documents. About one-third of the documents call for the need to protect family values. At least 25 documents are directed against “gender ideology”, LGBT+ rights and the possibility of the juridical recognition of same-sex marriage. “Gender ideology” is deemed to constitute “a threat to the national security of Ukraine” and to public morality.¹⁰⁰ Only three documents deal

Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008, 85; Mark JUERGENSMEYER, “Martyrdom and Sacrifice in a Time of Terror”, *Social Research* 75.2 (2008) 417–434. Juergensmeyer speaks of the “satanization” of the enemy, which can be also observed in the Russo-Ukrainian war.

⁹⁹ As Thomas ΝΕΜΕΤΗ suggests, the ability to be critical towards one’s own history is an important resource for reconciliation (“Krieg”, 250). For the UGCC’s proposal to the ROC on the healing of memory, see [UGCC], *The Ecumenical Position of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church*, Lviv: Koleso, ²2022.

¹⁰⁰ Maksym S. VASIN (ed.), *Всеукраїнська Рада Церков і релігійних організацій. Збірник документів. 1996–2021* [All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Collection of documents. 1996–2021], Kyiv: Медіа світ, 2021, 139, 237, 254–261.

with issues of peacebuilding and two with reconciliation¹⁰¹. If one compares the focus on family, sexuality and reproduction to the space dedicated to questions of peace and social justice, we see an important asymmetry between the former and the latter. Ironically, though Ukrainian religions' approach to issues of reproduction and sexuality is to a large extent identical to that of the ROC,¹⁰² the latter has cited gender issues as one of the key reasons for why the war in Ukraine is necessary.¹⁰³ The tragedy is that this vision is shared even by some Catholics. As Archbishop Borys Gudziak has observed, "there are many conservatives [in the US] who care for family life, for the sacredness of life, for Christian principles, who are now moving away from supporting Ukraine. Some even, unbelievably, think that President Putin is a defender of traditional values".¹⁰⁴

The churches in Ukraine enjoy amazing levels of popular trust and could use this advantage to push forward a peacebuilding agenda. Let me illustrate this point by a reference to the protests against President Viktor Yanukovich's regime in 2013–2014, known as Euromaidan or the Revolution of Dignity¹⁰⁵. The demonstrators, who

¹⁰¹ I would like to draw the reader's attention to the *Strategy Paper on the Participation of Churches and Religious Organizations in Peacebuilding 'Ukraine is Our Common Home'*, a well thought-out and profound paper (VASIN, *Всеукраїнська Рада*, 330–340).

¹⁰² NÉMETH, "Krieg", 248–249. Cf. also Heleen ZORGDRAGER, "Churches, Dignity, Gender: the Istanbul Convention as a Matter of Public Theology in Ukraine," *International Journal of Public Theology* 14.3 (2020) 96–318; Regina ELSNER, "Ukrainian Churches and the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Ukraine: Being Europe Without Accepting 'Gender'," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 20.3 (2022) 63–76; Denys BRYLOV, Tetiana KALENYCHENKO, and Pavlo SMYTSNYUK, "Ukraine's Far-Right Movements and Their Connections to the Religious World", in *The Christian Right in Europe: Movements, Networks and Denominations*, edited by Giovanni LO MASCOLO, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, forthcoming.

¹⁰³ On March 6, 2022, just a few weeks after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill argued that the war is waged in order to defend the Donbas region from "gay-parades", which constitute a "test of loyalty to the [world] powers" (GUNDYAYEV, "Патриаршая проповедь в Неделю сыропустную").

¹⁰⁴ BRISCOE, *Archbishop Denounces 'Completely Amoral' Russian War*.

¹⁰⁵ On Maidan, see Mychailo WYNNYCKYJ, *Ukraine's Maidan, Russia's War: A Chronicle and Analysis of the Revolution of Dignity*, Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2019; Pavlo SMYTSNYUK, "Revolution, Glory and Sacrifice: Ukraine's Maidan and the Revival of a European Identity", in *Europa (neu) erzählen: Inszenierungen Europas in politischer, theologischer und kulturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive*, edited by Martin KIRSCHNER, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2022, 215–236.

gathered at Maidan Square had a certain “deliberative” role, as is not uncommon for revolutions. Politicians, church leaders, public intellectuals and diplomats spoke from the Maidan stage, and engaged in improvised dialogues with the crowd, which would sometimes take the form of an approval or disapproval of certain proposed courses of action. Towards the end of January 2014, protesters at Maidan were convinced that dialogue between the opposition and Yanukovich was leading nowhere. On one of the most critical days of the protest, religious leaders met with the opposition and asked them to continue to negotiate. When the opposition politicians argued that they lacked a “mandate” from the crowd for resuming dialogue, religious leaders told them: you go and negotiate, and we will go to Maidan – and will convince the square. And they did. Here is how Sviatoslav Shevchuk has commented on this episode: “This moment was delicate, since the authorization of the opposition [to negotiate] was based on the authority of the Churches. Churchmen took responsibility to almost force the opposition to continue this dialogue. And when the protesters realized that their pastors had protected their lives that day, they started chanting ‘thank you’”¹⁰⁶. This anecdote shows how churches, when endowed with trust, can successfully promote ideas and actions, which are otherwise unpopular in the eyes of public opinion.¹⁰⁷ Peacebuilding, reconciliation, ethics of war and international humanitarian law, can be some of these topics.

Third, the churches must remain churches, be in the world, but not of the world (cf. John 17,14-15). One of the implications is that the churches remain autonomous from state power.¹⁰⁸ The war created a context in which Ukrainian society united as

¹⁰⁶ [UGCC], “Уповноваження опозиції на переговори з Президентом засновувалося на авторитеті Церков...” – Глава УГКЦ” [“The authorisation of the opposition to negotiate with the President was based on the Churches’ authority...” – Head of the UGCC], *Медіаресурс УГКЦ* (2014), <https://www.ugcc.tv/ua/media/68962.html>. My narrative of the episode is based on Shevchuk’s account. Cf. Lyudmila O. ФІЛІПОВИЧ and Oksana V. НОРКУША (eds.), *Майдан і Церква: Хроніка подій та експертна оцінка* [Maidan and the Church: Chronicle of events and expert assessment], Kyiv: Самміт-Книга, 2014, 471–473.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. William BOLE, Drew CHRISTIANSEN and Robert. T. HENNEMEYER, who argue that “[i]n spite of their often compromised stance, local religious groups frequently enjoy a degree of influence and credibility that eludes their political counterparts” (*Forgiveness in International Politics: An Alternative Road to Peace* 5, Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2004, 185).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. NÉMETI, who emphasises the “critical function” of theology in times of war (“Krieg”, 250). This critical function should concern the work of civil authorities as well as other domains.

never before – and this unity became one of the key factors of the nation’s resilience in facing Russian aggression. The churches also joined in supporting the country, helping the government in many different ways. However, it is important that the churches keep their independence vis-à-vis the state, conscious of uniqueness of their mission. Ukrainian churches should learn from the mistakes of the ROC, which cherishes too strong a link to the state and political interests. Due to the current context of war, such a distinction between church and state interests might not be self-evident, and thus should be articulated with particular care, reflecting on the recent history of church-state relations in Ukraine.¹⁰⁹ Independence from state power will benefit religious peacebuilding. Daniel Philpott, drawing on various cases of post-war reconciliation attempts, concluded that the possibility for religious actors to robustly influence the reconciliation process depends on their autonomy from the state during and after the war.¹¹⁰ In this sense, Sviatoslav Shevchuk’s critical remarks on the banning of the UOC, mentioned above, are an important conceptual moment in keeping ecclesial autonomy in relation to the state.

Ukrainian faith communities, being part of global Christianity, can creatively implement in Ukraine some of the expertise on conflict resolution from the Balkans, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa – to which other parts of Ukrainian civil society do not have direct access. In this regard, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant communities worldwide, global ecumenical players, such as the Conference of European Churches, but also non-religious actors, can play an important role in supporting the peacebuilding efforts of their Ukrainian partners and enhancing religious freedom.¹¹¹ However, one should keep in mind

¹⁰⁹ While in 2019, most Ukrainian Catholics and Protestants welcomed the creation of the Orthodox Church, independent from Moscow, they were also critical of the idea of this church becoming a *de facto* state church. See Anatolii BABYNSKYI, “The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC): A Meeting after the Tomos,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 62.3–4 (2020) 488–496 (491); Pavlo SMYTSNYUK, “The New Orthodox Church in Ukraine: Ecumenical Aspects and Problems,” *Orthodoxy in Two Manifestations?: The Conflict in Ukraine as Expression of a Fault Line in World Orthodoxy*, edited by Thomas BREMER, Alfons BRÜNING, and Nadieszda KIZENKO, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022, 315–317.

¹¹⁰ Daniel PHILPOTT, “What Religion Brings to the Politics of Transitional Justice,” *Journal of International Affairs* 61.1 (2007) 102–107.

¹¹¹ See the initiative “Pathways to Peace”, launched by CEC in late 2022 ([CEC], “Pathways to Peace: CEC to Implement Peace Initiatives in Europe”, *Conference of European Churches*

that the discourse of peace is not unbiased. Peace (and religious freedom for that matter), as a discursive category, has been used as an instrument of both Western colonialism¹¹² and Russian propaganda.¹¹³ If Ukraine's partners take a paternalistic approach rather than listen to the victims, Ukrainians will quickly develop an aversion towards Western peacemaking mentoring. As the debate around the 2022 and 2023 Via Crucis in Rome shows, any reconciliation which bypasses the victims, and is imposed from above, risks being not only ineffective, but, worse, counterproductive. Pope Francis outlines this very clearly in his *Fratelli tutti*: “[o]f those who have endured much unjust and cruel suffering, a sort of ‘social forgiveness’ must not be demanded. Reconciliation is a personal act, and no one can impose it upon an entire society [...]. Who can claim the right to forgive in the name of others?”¹¹⁴ The Russo-Ukrainian war is a conflict with global repercussions, such as the possibility of nuclear excesses, and therefore is not merely Ukraine's problem. Even so, Ukraine should not be forced into a “peace at any cost” solution. As Hans-Herbert Kögler has rightly pointed out, a peace or ceasefire, which would leave parts of Ukraine under Russian rule, would lead to Ukraine abandoning parts of its population to reprisals by the totalitarian regime imposed in those territories, as well as attempts to wipe-out Ukrainians' national identity. In other words, to be left to a “naked life”, where only a biological existence could be guaranteed, if that.¹¹⁵ What Ukraine needs is a just peace. The

(2022), <https://ceceurope.org/pathways-to-peace-cec-to-implement-peace-initiatives-in-europe/>).

¹¹² Cf. Atalia OMER, “Religion and the Study of Peace: Practice without Reflection”, *Religions* 12.12 (2021) 1–18.

¹¹³ At the time of John XXIII's *Pacem in terris*, “peace” was part of the Communist toolkit, while more recently Francis' description of the war in Eastern Ukraine as “fratricide” was interpreted by Russian propaganda as an acknowledgement of the civil character of that war. Putin cited religious freedom of the UOC among reasons for invading Ukraine.

¹¹⁴ FRANCIS, “Fratelli Tutti: Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship”, *The Holy See* (2020), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, n. 241. Cf. also BOLE, CHRISTIANSEN and HENNEMEYER, who argue that “[v]ictims of political crimes should never feel pressured to forgive. [...] forgiveness in politics is a process that allows victims and societies to express their anger and share their memories of offence” (*Forgiveness*, 183).

¹¹⁵ Hans-Herbert KÖGLER, “Democracy or Dictatorship? The Moral call to Defend Ukraine”, *European Journal of Social Theory* [Onlinefirst] (2023) [1–29].

latter does not exclude reconciliation. On the contrary, restoration, repentance and even punishment are integral parts of a process that could eventually lead to reconciliation and forgiveness.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Greek philosopher Heraclitus said: “War [*polemos*] is the father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free”.¹¹⁷ In other words, war is a game changer. It creates a new order and re-structures society, including its religious component. War is a moment when people and churches are called to “choose sides”, and a state of ambiguity becomes intolerable. In this article, I analysed what I believe to be the biggest challenges for Ukrainian churches amidst the Russo-Ukrainian war. The tension between the two Ukrainian Orthodox jurisdictions, which echoes the divide within world Orthodoxy, has been exacerbated due to Russian aggression. The UOC, which has taken some steps towards independence from Moscow, struggles to adequately address its complicity in *ruskii mir* narratives, and to embark on a journey of purification and dialogue with the Ukrainian government and wider society. However, some of the steps undertaken by the Ukrainian government and local authorities in this regard have a questionable legal basis, and risk undermining the rule of law. The best solution, from an ecclesiological perspective, would be the unity of two jurisdictions. However, pressure on the UOC to join the ranks of the OCU might turn out to be counterproductive, and make reconciliation between the two more difficult.

Ukrainian Catholics have difficulty in making the position of the Holy See acceptable or even understandable to the government and public opinion. The Vatican’s neutrality and recent shift towards nonviolence – which, as I argue, define its attitude towards this war – are dissonant with the desire of Ukrainians to have the Catholic Church unambiguously on its side. While the local hierarchs tried to picture the Holy See as a friend and ally, the loss of confidence by Ukrainians in the leadership of the Catholic Church might ultimately have negative consequences for the future of the Church in the country.

¹¹⁶ Cf. PHILPOTT, *Just and Unjust Peace*.

¹¹⁷ Heraclitus, Fragment LXXXIII (D. 53), in Charles H. KAHN (ed.), *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 66–67.

Finally, I have pointed out that a common challenge for Ukrainian churches consists in being proactive in facilitating reconciliation with the UOC, and dedicating more attention to the topic of peacebuilding. Even if the churches believe that at this stage in the war they should be focusing on Ukrainian victory rather than on reconciliation with the Russians, they should redirect the focus of their social engagement from issues of sexuality and gender towards the existential questions raised by war and peace.

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