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

KORINNA ZAMFIR¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LIUDMYLA FYLYPOVYCH¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Society

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Power

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Church

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

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

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

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

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

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

The main milestones in this story were:

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

2. The canonical status of Orthodox churches has changed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

PAVLO SMYTSNYUK²

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-vernix-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' 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 *russkii 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 Sylvester of Bilhorod (Silvestr 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-beatitudo-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 *russkii 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; КУМАНКОВ, “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. FІЛІПОВІТІН and Oksana V. HОRKUSHА (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. NÉMETH, 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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STILL STICKING TO THE BIG BROTHER HISTORY, GERMAN PROTESTANTISM AND THE UKRAINIAN WAR

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Abstract. This article examines statements on church policy by leading representatives of the Protestant Church in Germany and the World Council of Churches in the first year of the Ukraine war (2022/23) and places them in a church-historical perspective. Ahistorical appropriations and peculiarities become clear, such as an anachronistic use of Ostpolitik, a Russia-friendly assessment and a largely secular evaluation of the situation in Ukraine.

Keywords: Protestant Church in Germany, World Council of Churches, General Assembly World Council of Churches Karlsruhe 2023, Russian Orthodox Church, Ukraine, Ostpolitik, Zeitenwende.

One year after the start of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, temporary and momentary perceptions in Europe have become more tangible and, in some cases, have been confirmed as deeper historical-political constructions. While everyday lives are saved or destroyed in war-torn Ukraine, there are those who are privileged to live outside the war in Ukraine: in freedom, geographically far enough away from the war front – and despite all the lamentations about rising energy costs – in a warm, secure, and stable country: in Germany. Here, even a year after the start of the war, people can still afford to write manifestos against weapons supplies to Ukraine and to call for an immediate ceasefire. They can organise demonstrations and go to them, and contemplate their own peace ethics positions, often gained in the peace movement of the 1980s.

Germany often has its own pace; people like to ponder, “gründlich” and with dogmatic aspirations. Timothy Garton Ash’s recent creation of the word “scholzing” reflects this German character.² The Protestant Church in Germany is a representative

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² Timothy GARTON ASH, “I Went Viral in Germany for a Meme about Scholzing – But the Chancellor’s Hesitancy over Ukraine is No Joke”, *The Guardian* (3.02.2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/03/germany-olaf-scholz-twitter-ukraine>, last accessed 2nd May 2023.



part and mirror of this attitude. This has to do with a specific historically developed state-church relationship in Germany. Despite secularisation, almost 20 million Germans are still members of the Protestant Church; the German church tax contributes to the fact that the Protestant Church is not only one of the financially strongest churches in the world, but it is also a public body well anchored in German society.

It has often been revealed in the great historical upheavals of contemporary history that quick, situational ad-hoc assessment and reaction is not the strength of German Protestantism: This was the case after the collapse of Imperial Germany (*Kaiserreich*) and the sovereign church regiment (*Landesherrliches Kirchenregiment; summus episcopus*) in 1918, as well after the end of the Second World War, when German Protestantism was long at odds with democracy and Adenauer's ties to the West.³ The Peaceful Revolution in the GDR in 1989 (as the civic uprisings of 1989/90 in the other Central European countries) also surprised the leaders of the Protestant Church in West Germany and left them for a time speechless.⁴ An unexpected political outbreak has a paralysing effect on the otherwise so eloquent German Protestantism. Part of it – and this seems to be a historical continuity at least in the 20th and early 21st century – is that at the moment of change, the past is idealised and gilded. Only after a while is the new present accepted.

Reluctant Protestant Reactions to 24 February 2022

All these elements could also be observed a year ago, with the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.⁵ On 24 February, Annette Kurschus,

³ Further Siegfried HERMLE and Harry OELKE (ed.), *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte _evangelisch: Protestantismus in der Nachkriegszeit (1945–1961)* (CuZ, 9), Leipzig: EVA, 2021; Katharina KUNTER, “Die protestantischen Kirchen und „Europa“ nach 1945”, in *Die europäische Integration und die Kirchen IV. Versöhnung und Ökumene, Ethik und Recht*, edited by Irene DINGEL, Jan KUSBER and Małgorzata MORAWIEC, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020, 31–41; Martin GRESCHAT, *Protestantismus im Kalten Krieg. Kirche, Politik und Gesellschaft im geteilten Deutschland 1945–1963*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010.

⁴ Katharina KUNTER, *Erfüllte Hoffnungen und zerbrochene Träume. Evangelische Kirchen in Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von Demokratie und Sozialismus 1980–1993*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006.

⁵ When I look at the ecumenical foreign policy of the Protestant Church in Germany in the following, it must of course be borne in mind that Protestants have been working with

head of the Protestant Church in Germany, immediately issued an official statement. She expressed shock at the attacks on Ukraine, the shifting of borders, the disregard for Ukraine's state sovereignty and the violation of international law.⁶ However, at the same time, she declined to call Russia the aggressor, warned against further military escalation and armed violence and "refused to believe that there is no longer a chance for mutual understanding and for a just peace".⁷ The statement of the Church Conference of 23–24 February followed this line, but presented the war more outspokenly as an act of violence by the Russian President and emphasised, on the other hand, the "polyphony within the Russian Orthodox Church and the hope that the Russian Orthodox Church will be still a bridge for mutual understanding."⁸ Both statements already formulated the future ecumenical and church-political guideline in the Protestant Church at this time: No clear condemnation of the Russian war of aggression and its religious and historical political stepping-stone, the Moscow Patriarchate led by Patriarch Kirill. In parallel, the head of the Protestant Church's Department for Eastern Europe, Oberkirchenrat Martin Illert, highlighted in an article for the church magazine "Zeitzeichen", aimed at a broad Protestant audience, that the "ecclesiological vision of the Moscow Patriarchate is not a national one" and insisted on its own Russian Orthodox spiritual perception and acceptance by its ecumenical partners in Germany.⁹ Even when the religious-nationalist legitimisation of the war by Patriarch Kirill became increasingly clear in the spring of 2022 and all appeals

great commitment, effort and passion at all levels for the Ukrainian refugees arriving in Germany and in Ukraine via humanitarian support in many ways. As for the Protestant Church in Germany I refer primarily to the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD).

- ⁶ Statement (Wortlaut) der EKD-Ratsvorsitzenden zum russischen Angriff auf die Ukraine: Annette Kurschus, Präses der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen, Ratsvorsitzende der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, <https://www.ekd.de/statement-kurschus-zum-angriff-ukraine-71680.htm> (last accessed 4.03.2023).
- ⁷ Statement, <https://www.ekd.de/statement-kurschus-zum-angriff-ukraine-71680.htm> (last accessed 4.03.2023).
- ⁸ "Gewalt beenden, dem Hass entgegenreten. EKD-Kirchenkonferenz zum Krieg in der Ukraine", <https://www.ekd.de/kiko-ekd-gewalt-beenden-dem-hass-entgegenreten-72457.htm> (last accessed 4.03.2023).
- ⁹ Martin ILLERT, "Monströses Fremdbild. Warum die russisch-orthodoxe Kirche keine, Putin-Kirche ist", *Zeitzeichen* (26.02.2022), <https://zeitzeichen.net/node/9599> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

at mediation by the World Council of Churches failed, the Protestant Church in Germany continued to emphasise the polyphony of Russian Orthodoxy and maintained that the dialogue should be conducted with the Moscow Patriarchate. As before, its foreign policy and public focus was primarily oriented towards the Moscow Patriarchate as an essential door opener for peace in Ukraine.

In face of this primary concern the ecumenical expression of empathy and solidarity for the church and Christians in Ukraine fall short – and this is not about the great humanitarian church commitment to Ukrainian refugees in Germany and through the *Diakonie* in the Ukrainian war zones. It relates to the geopolitical ecclesiastical interpretation patterns, around collectively represented ecclesiastical and theological narratives. This was also apparent from the public reaction of Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber, responsible for the international church relations of the Protestant Church in Germany, to an open letter of 3 June to the Protestant Church in Germany and the World Council of Churches. I co-initiated this letter with over 60 signatories from church, society and politics.¹⁰ We called not only for a moratorium on all church-leading contacts with the Patriarchate in Moscow, but also for a change in current German and ecumenical church policy: away from the focus on the church-leadership dialogue with the perpetrator, towards genuine solidarity with the victims. Shortly after the letter was published in the media, the press department of the Protestant Church had already framed it on their website, in the direction that the letter was solely about the exclusion of the Russian Orthodox Church from the World Council of Churches.¹¹ In the press statement, Bosse-Huber didn't address the central demand of the letter to intensify contacts with all churches and religions in Ukraine and focus in its public communication on the suffering of the people in Ukraine – and worry less about the bad image of Russian Orthodoxy. Instead, Bosse-Huber again pointed to the ecumenical importance of the Russian Orthodox Church and opposed a blanket perception of it. For the first time, at least the blasphemous speech of Kirill was mentioned,

¹⁰ Brief an die EKD und ÖRK: Klare Zeichen gegenüber dem Moskauer Patriarchat setzen (3.06.2022), *Nachrichtendienst Östliche Kirchen*, <https://www.noek.info/hintergrund/2482-brief-an-die-ekd-und-oerk-klare-zeichen-gegenueber-dem-moskauer-patriarchat-zu-setzen> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

¹¹ EKD-Auslandsbischofin reagiert auf Offenen Brief. Evangelische Theologen und kirchennahe Politiker fordern den Ausschluss der russisch-orthodoxen Kirche aus dem Weltkirchenrat (3.06.2022), <https://www.ekd.de/ekd-auslandsbischoefin-reagiert-auf-offenen-brief-73643.htm> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

but in view of the “inner plurality of Russian Orthodoxy”, the Protestant Church must support the “efforts to maintain bridges of dialogue”, which could “open up paths that will be of great importance for a peace process”. No more, and no single word about Ukraine.

This was along the same lines which had been publicly advocated several times by the Bavarian Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, the previous head of the Protestant Church in Germany.¹² He too stated that building bridges with the Russian Orthodox Church was central and had to take place at the upcoming General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe from 31 August to 8 September 2022. At the same time, he spoke in favour of supplying weapons to Ukraine, but emphasised that Ukraine was not the only country in a humanitarian catastrophe now. Again, there was no room for the victims’ perspective, for the suffering of Ukraine and for words against the brutal attacks on the Ukrainian civilian population. Another aspect ran through various protestant public statements in the summer of 2022: Leading personalities in the Protestant church condemned Kirill’s blasphemous preaching. However, at the same time, this was followed by the explicit rejection of the political narrative that Ukraine with its resistance against the Russian aggressor, is waging a fight for independence, for freedom for Europe and for Western values. On several occasions, Annette Kurschus publicly emphasised that “scepticism is called for when the war in Ukraine is idealised as a defence of Western values”.¹³

One could analyse further examples: For example, the consistent voices in the Protestant Church that advocate radical pacifism, speaking out against any arms supply for Ukraine and the partly shared political positions of the German post-communist party *Die Linke*. Especially in the first months of the war, prominent voices were protagonists, such as Ralf Becker of the network “Rethinking Security” (Sicherheit neu denken) based in the regional church in

¹² Andrea NEUMEIER, Barbara SCHNEIDER, Beim Ökumenischen Rat: Begegnung mit russisch-orthodoxer Kirche (1.06.2022), <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/beim-oekumenischen-rat-begegnung-mit-russisch-orthodoxer-kirche,T7UhiFe> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

¹³ EKD-Ratsvorsitzende zur Ukraine. Kurschus wirft Kyrill Gotteslästerung vor, (22.06.2022) <https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/202556/22-06-2022/kurschus-wirft-kyrill-gotteslaesterung-vor>; Friedensethik und Ukraine-Krieg. Kurschus: „Auch in mir ist diese Zerrissenheit“ (7.06.2022), <https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/202007/07-06-2022/kurschus-auch-mir-ist-diese-zerrissenheit> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

Baden (Badische Landeskirche)¹⁴, Bishop Friedrich Kramer, the official peace representative of the Protestant Church¹⁵, but also prominent Protestants such as the former Bishop and head of the Protestant Church Margot Kässmann¹⁶ or the Theologian and Politician Antje Vollmer¹⁷ of the Party *Die Grünen*. The latter two have also signed the current and controversial manifesto “Für den Frieden” (For Peace) by Sara Wagenknecht of *Die Linke* and the feminist Alice Schwarzer – now signed by more than 700,000 people.¹⁸ They may not represent most of the German protestants, but they are part of a new, and at the same time old, German exceptionalism. Although this understands itself from contemporary German history and justifies its positions with the experiences of the Second World War and the Cold War, it is reminiscent of older traditions of national German Protestantism in its anti-Western and anti-American arguments.

German Protestantism’s Historical Friendliness Towards Moscow

The ability to deal with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), thus coming to terms with the dark sides of one own’s history, is part of today’s German identity and thus also of German Protestantism.¹⁹ Officially, the legacy of the

¹⁴ <https://www.sicherheitneudenken.de>, <https://www.ekiba.de/infothek/arbeitsfelder-von-a-z/frieden-gerechtigkeit-2/kirche-des-gerechten-friedens/szenario-sicherheit-neu-denken/> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

¹⁵ Landesbischof Kramer: Ukraine hat mit Korruption zu kämpfen, *Idea* (2.02.2023), <https://www.idea.de/artikel/landesbischof-kramer-ukraine-hat-mit-korruption-zu-kaempfen> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

¹⁶ Margot Käßmann diskutiert mit SPIEGEL-Abonnentinnen und -Abonnenten »Waffen schaffen keinen Frieden!«, <https://www.spiegel.de/backstage/margot-kaessmann-ueber-den-ukrainekrieg-waffen-schaffen-keinen-frieden-spiegel-deep-dive-a-19a7757f-dfe7-40ca-b80c-4df05de0bcf9> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

¹⁷ Antje Vollmers Vermächtnis einer Pazifistin: „Was ich noch zu sagen hätte“, *Berliner Zeitung* (23.02.2023), <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/ein-jahr-ukraine-krieg-kritik-an-gruenen-antje-vollmers-vermaechtnis-einer-pazifistin-was-ich-noch-zu-sagen-haette-li.320443> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

¹⁸ Manifest für Frieden, <https://www.change.org/p/manifest-f%C3%BCr-frieden> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

¹⁹ Susan NEIMARK, *Learning from the Germans. Race and the Memory of Evil*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.

Nazi-critical Confessing Church, the heritage of courageous Theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Martin Niemöller, has prevailed in the Protestant churches of Germany. However, in the post-war period, this theological heritage repeatedly clashed with the hierarchical, top-down thinking and management of the Protestant Church in Germany. Against this background, it was not surprising that the solidarity document “A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii Mir) teaching” of 13 March 2022, which was written in the style of the Barmen declaration of the Confessional Church 1934 and gained worldwide resonance, evoked mixed reactions..²⁰

To understand why the Protestant Church in Germany finds it so difficult to break its Moscow-friendly course of dialogue, one must look back into history. It was the upright Protestant Martin Niemöller, Hitler’s personal prisoner in the concentration camp, who in 1952 travelled to Moscow and met Patriarch Alexij, at his invitation.²¹ This trip caused an outcry in Adenauer’s Westward-looking Germany: Niemöller was seen by many as a traitor, naively instrumentalised by Moscow. However, his trip became the trailblazer for German Protestantism and marked the beginning of a social-democratic policy of reconciliation with the Soviet Union. It had the Russian Orthodox Church as its main partner and was embedded in the German Ostpolitik of the 1960s and 1970s.²² Its Credo was dialogue, a concept that was also made attractive to non-political actors, such as the churches, with the soviet propagation of peaceful coexistence during the détente phase.²³ The German Ostpolitik was carried out

²⁰ A Declaration on the “Russian World” (Russkii mir) Teaching (15.03.2022), <https://www.ethos.org.ua/en/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/>; further A Statement of Solidarity with the Orthodox Declaration on the “Russian World” (russkii mir) teaching, and Against Christian Nationalism and New Totalitarianism”, *Religion in Praxis*, <https://religioninpraxis.com/a-statement-of-solidarity-with-the-orthodox-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching-and-against-christian-nationalism-and-new-totalitarianism/> (last accessed 4.03.2023). Oral information by Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Volos.

²¹ Martin GRESCHAT, „Er ist ein Feind dieses Staates!“ Martin Niemöllers Aktivitäten in den Anfangsjahren der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 114 (2003) 333–356.

²² Martin GRESCHAT, *Der Protestantismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1945–2005) 60 Jahre Kirche und Staat* (Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen), Leipzig: EVA, 2010, especially chapter 3.

²³ Katharina KUNTER, *Die Kirchen im KSZE-Prozess 1968–1978*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000.

politically and religiously by leading Protestant presidents such as Gustav Heinemann in the early years of the Federal Republic or later Johannes Rau and for example, by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, today's German Protestant President. The Protestant variant of the *Ostpolitik*, the *Ostpolitik* of Reconciliation, for which the 1965 published *Ostdenkschrift* was a milestone, claimed the reconciliation with the Eastern peoples. That included *Realpolitik*, the acceptance of the existing borders in Europe and a renunciation of the German Eastern territories, for which there had been no peace treaty since the Potsdam Conference in 1945. As a consequence, the *Ostpolitik* was mainly oriented towards Poland and the Soviet Union, and less towards the other Central and Eastern European states and their Protestant Christians.²⁴ The basic lines of this *Ostpolitik* continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the reorientation of Europe. After the 2+4 Treaty 1990, which had now secured the Oder-Neisse border in Poland under international law, the *Ostpolitik* concentrated on Russia. Here, too, the Protestant Church was again a soft factor of the so-called new *Ostpolitik*, which now focused primarily on economic – and thus also political – interdependence between Germany and Russia. However, due to visible erosion processes and the accompanying clericalization in the Protestant church, it was no longer as socially and intellectually representative and politically influential as it had been in the 1960s. From time to time, tensions arose over content, for example when the Russian Orthodox Church in 2009 refused to recognise Margot Käßmann as the first female and ordained head of the Protestant Church and then suspended any official relations.²⁵ But after Käßmann's resignation, the bilateral encounters were continued in different places, for example in the Working Group of Churches of the Petersburg Dialogue²⁶ or in new, bilateral dialogues between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Protestant church. During these gatherings, issues such as the Crimean occupation of 2014 or the war in the Ukrainian eastern territories were left out.²⁷ The

²⁴ Hartmut LENHARD, *Versöhnung und Frieden mit den Völkern der Sowjetunion: Herausforderungen zur Umkehr. 8 Thesen*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1987; Dietrich GOLDSCHMIDT (ed.), *Frieden mit der Sowjetunion – eine unerledigte Aufgabe*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1989.

²⁵ Russisch-Orthodoxe Kirche boykottiert Bischöfin Käßmann, *Spiegel* (12.12.2009), <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/vorab/a-666683.html> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

²⁶ Petersburger Dialog, <https://petersburger-dialog.de/arbeitsgruppen/kirchen-in-europa/> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

²⁷ Petra BOSSE-HUBER and Martin ILLERT, *Theologischer Dialog mit der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche: Die Begegnungen 2008-2015*, Leipzig: EVA, 2016.

only exception in these circles was Joachim Gauck, the protestant pastor and GDR civil rights activist, whose sympathies were never with Putin's Russia, but always with the Central European post-Soviet countries and their revolutions of freedom. But Gauck remained a foreigner in his own church, the Protestant Church of Germany.²⁸

However, today one must critically ask whether the commitment of German Social Democracy and the German Protestant Church to the *Ostpolitik* of the 1970's has turned into an anachronistic and contextless doctrine. A central prerequisite for the rapprochement and the dialogues resulting from the policy of détente was the validity of the Helsinki Final Act, which the Soviet Union had also signed. Today, Russia has not only broken all the principles of the Helsinki Final Act but has also thrown away all efforts at diplomacy and multilateralism. As the current situation and mood in Germany shows, the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church (represented by their leadership) have found reliable partners in both milieux (incidentally, this also applies to former chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who is also a member of the Protestant Church in Hannover, where the Protestant Church has its headquarters). The *Zeitenwende* proclaimed by Olaf Scholz has been visibly deepened by the German chancellor's recent visit to the United States in March 2023. Whether this will also take root in the Protestant Church in Germany remains to be seen. In any case, the reflection on peace ethics announced at the synod of the Protestant Church in September 2022 is only taking small, very slow steps.²⁹ The Protestant Church is not in a hurry; the final text should be available by the end of 2024. Meanwhile, the current discussions have long been going on elsewhere.

Lack of Interest in the History of Freedom in Central and Eastern Europe

Another topic that is partly linked to the *Ostpolitik* and the Détente-period in Cold War's Europe is the historical preference for the concept of "peace" which in German Protestantism – and perhaps in Germany itself – is generally more valued than the concept of "freedom". One can attribute this to the specific historical German nation building process, which apart from the Peaceful

²⁸ Stephan DETJEN, "Joachim Gauck. Der außenpolitische Präsident", *Deutschlandfunk* (2.09.2014), <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/joachim-gauck-der-aussenpolitische-praesident-100.html> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

²⁹ Evangelische Kirche will Friedensethik überarbeiten, *EPD* (7.11.2022), <https://www.ekmd.de/aktuell/nachrichten/evangelische-kirche-will-friedensethik-ueberarbeiten.html> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

Revolution in the GDR had no successful revolution from below. This also applies to the Reformation in the 16th century, which was pushed close to a revolution only from the outside, as shown for example by English historian Timothy Garton Ash with his neologism *refolution*.³⁰ For the German mind set, and as stated before, for the Protestant Church as a reflection of that: peace and peace policy promised the secure stability of the status quo in post-war-Europe. On the other hand, the commitment to freedom and / or human rights had been seen by most German protestants for a long time as a danger of unrest and destabilisation, something that German Protestantism had shied away from since the French Revolution of 1789 at the latest.³¹ The political status quo orientation as a consequence of the *Ostpolitik* was one reason why the leading representatives of the Protestant Church sided in the Cold War with church leaders in Central and Eastern Europe who were loyal to the state, together with the World Council of Churches. Therefore, they found it difficult to give Christian dissidents and opposition figures from Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s public space and a voice – and this also referred to the opposition in the GDR. The fear that visible support for the Christian dissidents could upset the existing conditions in Europe was too strong. Hence the Protestant Church in Germany then and now relied on Track 1 high-level diplomacy between prominent church representatives and the establishment of official bi- or trilateral theological dialogues.³² The lack of a corresponding backing for the church base at the grassroot level had consequences; the collapse of the socialist regimes in Middle and Eastern Europe 1989/1991 came as quite a surprise to them.³³

³⁰ Timothy GARTON ASH, “Refolution: The Springtime of Two Nations”, *New York Review of Books* (15.06.1989), 3–10.

³¹ Katharina KUNTER, “Christianity, Human Rights, and Socio-Ethical Reorientations”, in *History of Global Christianity* vol. 3: *20th Century*, edited by Jens Holger SCHJØRRING, Norman A. HJELM, Kevin WARD, Leiden: Brill, 2018, 127–146.

³² Heiko OVERMEYER, *Frieden im Spannungsfeld zwischen Theologie und Politik: Die Friedensthematik in den bilateralen Gesprächen von Arnoldshain und Sagorsk*, Frankfurt: Lembeck Otto, 2005; Martin ILLERT, *Dialog-Narration-Transformation. Die Dialoge der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und des Bundes der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR mit orthodoxen Kirchen seit 1959*, Leipzig: EVA, 2016.

³³ Katharina KUNTER, “Osteuropa – ein ökumenischer Fremdkörper? Der Zusammenbruch der sozialistischen Regime und Wahrnehmungen in der europäischen Ökumene 1989/90”, in *In Grenzen leben – Grenzen überwinden. Zur Kirchengeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts in*

However, the strong orientation towards Russia is not only a distortion of perception within the ecumenical movement or the Protestant churches in Germany, but also within academic confessional studies dealing with Orthodoxy and Eastern Europe.³⁴ The dominance of Russia and their so-called “justified security interests” in public opinion leads in turn to a neglect of the Central European countries and churches and their geopolitical situation. This also means ignorance of their consciously chosen political security decisions, which are oriented towards the West, towards the EU and NATO, and not towards Russia. This can only be understood by those who look with a historical perspective at the cruel experiences and sufferings of these countries and their people at the hands of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, one must realise that the historical knowledge about this is no longer present in current church leadership in Germany. The extent to which such perceptions make people biased could already be seen in 2014, after the Russian annexation of Crimea, when the Protestant Church in Germany remained relatively silent. In their prayer proposal of 3 March 2014, they only talk of “strife and [...] discord in Ukraine”. Russia and its annexation of Crimea and the violation of international law were not mentioned at all, not even in the statement accompanying the prayer proposal,³⁵ which only spoke of “escalation and tensions in Ukraine” and of “military movements, mobilisation and bellicose rhetoric” and called for “dialogue and negotiations”.³⁶ Ralf Haska, the courageous pastor of the German-speaking Lutheran congregation of St. Catherine in Kyiv, can also be

Ost-Mittel-Europa, edited by Christian ERDMANN-SCHOTT, Münster: LIT, 2008, 93–104; EAD., “Kirchen und Ökumene im Kalten Krieg: Ein Beitrag zum aktuellen Diskussions- und Forschungsstand”, in *Die Ökumene und der Widerstand gegen Diktaturen. Nationalsozialismus und Kommunismus als Herausforderungen an die Kirchen*, edited by Joachim GARSTECKI, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007, 191–202.

³⁴ See the joint article with Gisa Bauer in June 2022, “Durchkomponierte Einseitigkeit. Warum die EKD ihre kirchenpolitisch-ökumenische Haltung im Hinblick auf die Russisch Orthodoxe Kirche aufarbeiten sollte”, <https://zeitzeichen.net/node/9805> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

³⁵ Forum Friedensethik in der Evangelischen Landeskirche in Baden, „Zu Gespräch und Verhandlungen zurückkehren“, EKD-Auslandsbischofin Bosse-Huber zur Lage in der Ukraine (4.03.2014), in *Rundbrief 2/2014* (März 2014), p. 6: https://www.ekiba.de/media/download/variant/157407/ffe_rundbrief_2014_2.pdf (last accessed 4.03.2023).

³⁶ Bosse-Huber: „Zu Gespräch und Verhandlungen zurückkehren“. EKD-Auslandsbischofin zur Lage in der Ukraine (4.03.2014), <https://www.presseportal.de/pm/55310/2678548> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

remembered in this context. Haska stood between demonstrators and police on the Maidan and prevented violence. Shortly after this, he was recalled from his ministry by the Evangelical Church in Germany, because as it was reported in the media, he had broken a taboo, by saying in an interview: “Nobody likes to hear or say it, but under certain circumstances freedom and peace must be defended by force of arms.”³⁷

Reality Check: the 2022 General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe

The experiences and narratives briefly touched on here led to many believers and church members being disappointed by the public statements of the Protestant Church in Germany on the Ukraine war. They had hoped for clearer and more explicit statements expressing solidarity in Ukraine. This also referred to the World Council of Churches and its General Assembly meeting in Karlsruhe in late summer 2022. There had already been controversy in the run-up to the central committee meeting in June 2022.³⁸

Now, at this church world assembly in Germany, to which over a million Ukrainians had fled, should representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church as members of the World Council of Churches have the right to speak and participate, while Ukraine had no representatives? Behind the scenes unrest was arising. The presence of the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate in Germany undermined German foreign policy. Should the promise of subsidies for Karlsruhe still be kept? The lack of clear and public communication caused resentment up to the highest political levels in Germany.³⁹

³⁷ Roman GONCHARENKO, “Der mutige Pastor von Kiew”, *Deutsche Welle* (7.11.2019), <https://www.dw.com/de/der-mutige-pastor-von-kiew/a-51155558>; Frank HOFMANN, “Maidan pastor Leaves Ukraine”, *Deutsche Welle* (7.05.2015), <https://www.dw.com/en/lutheran-pastor-ralf-haska-leaves-ukraine/a-18562935> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

³⁸ Martin HOEGGER, “Why did the World Council of Churches refuse to suspend the Russian Orthodox Church?”, *Réformés.ch* (26.06.2022), <https://www.reformes.ch/blog/martin-hoegger/2022/06/why-did-world-council-churches-refuse-suspend-russian-orthodox-church> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

³⁹ Reinhard BINGENER, “Steinmeier beim Weltkirchenrat: Eine Chance, die Haltung des Westens zu erklären”, *FAZ* (1.09.2022), <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/steinmeier-beim-weltkirchenrat-auftritt-trotz-heikler-themen-18282715.html> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

In her welcome address in Karlsruhe, Annette Kurschus made a strong theological statement: “Christ’s love does not tolerate a war of aggression.”⁴⁰ This was followed in the afternoon by a speech by German President Steinmeier. As he was an active member of the Protestant church and one of the former main promoters of the pro-Russia social democratic foreign policy of the past years, his speech was eagerly awaited. He positioned himself clearly, confronted the attending representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church leadership which had aligned itself with the war crimes against Ukraine and represented a totalitarian ideology dressed up as theology.⁴¹ The Assembly shouldn’t remain silent to the Russian representatives about the “truth about this brutal war” and the role of the Russian Orthodox leadership in this war, he continued. He also sharply differentiated between the general church talk of the mission of dialogue and bridge-building:

But building bridges requires willingness on both sides of the river; a bridge cannot be constructed if one side tears down the pillars that support it. In the run-up to the Assembly, the opinion was expressed that dialogue at least should be made possible. Yes, but dialogue is not an end in itself. Dialogue must bring to light what is happening. Dialogue must draw attention to injustice, must identify both victims and perpetrators – and their henchmen. Yet dialogue that does not move beyond pious wishes and vague generalisations can, in the worst case, become a platform for vindication and propaganda. What sort of dialogue will we engage in here?⁴²

Steinmeier’s speech and Kurschus’ statement were the clearest public statements of German Protestantism unequivocally condemning the Russian aggressor up to this point. After a tough spring in which Steinmeier had faced harsh

⁴⁰ Kurschus begrüßt weltweite Christenheit in Deutschland (EKD (31.08.2022), <https://www.ekd.de/kurschus-begruesst-weltweite-christenheit-in-deutschland-74837.htm> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁴¹ Speech at the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Karlsruhe, 31 August 2022 <https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2022/220831-VV-OeKR.html>, also Address of the Federal President of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, much later after the Assembly included also at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/german-federal-president-frank-walter-steinmeiers-address-at-the-wcc-11th-assembly> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁴² Ibid.

criticism for his earlier pro-Russia *Ostpolitik* and after the brutal massacres in Bucha, he finally seemed to have arrived in the new reality of war in Europe. With his Karlsruhe speech, he took over responsibility for mistakes in his previous Russia policy. Hardly anyone could have warned more credibly than he against just relying on dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church for the sake of dialogue in Karlsruhe.

But the leading representatives and delegates of the Protestant Church in Germany and the World Council of Churches were perplexed. They had struggled to get president Steinmeier for a speech in Karlsruhe, but now his warning words did not fit into their concept and worldview. The church press departments of the Protestant Church in Germany and the World Council of Churches reacted and simply made no reference at all to the critical words of Steinmeier and omitted his speech parts about the Ukraine war in the public announcement.⁴³

German professor Fernando Enns, member of the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, expressed frustration about Steinmeier's speech and criticised Steinmeier because he "did not help dialogue",⁴⁴ stressing he would have liked to hear words contributing to bridge-building with the Russian Orthodox Church.⁴⁵ That seemed to correspond with the assessment of other German and ecumenical representatives, as shared on (social) media or in talks.⁴⁶ In a rhetoric familiar from the Cold War, Metropolitan Antony, head of the Russian Orthodox delegation in Karlsruhe, also strongly condemned Steinmeier's speech in Karlsruhe

⁴³ German President Extends Wishes for Fruitful WCC 11th Assembly Characterised by Hope, WCC, 31.08.2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/german-president-extends-wishes-for-fruitful-wcc-11th-assembly-characterised-by-hope> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁴⁴ Digitales Austauschtreffen nach der 11. ÖRK-Vollversammlung in Karlsruhe – „am Ball bleiben!“, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland, <https://www.oekumene-ack.de/aktuell/nachrichtenarchiv/artikel/artikeldetails/digitales-austauschtreffen-nach-der-11-oerk-vollversammlung-in-karlsruhe-am-ball-bleiben/> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁴⁵ „Die Liebe Christi bewegt, versöhnt und eint die Welt“, *Die Brücke* (6/2022), <https://www.theologie.uni-hamburg.de/einrichtungen/pdf-dateien/oerk-text-enns.pdf> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁴⁶ Reaction of the Evangelical Church of Germany to Steinmeier's Statements on the Church of Russia, *Orthodox Times* (1.09.2022), <https://orthodoxtimes.com/reaction-of-the-evangelical-church-of-germany-to-steinmeiers-statements-on-the-church-of-russia/>; <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/moskauer-patriarchat-weist-steinmeiers-kritik-zurueck-18285202.html> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

and called on the WCC not to respond to his provocation. Steinmeier's call was an example of "blatant pressure" from the state and an "interference in the internal affairs" of the World Council of Churches, which has a "peacekeeping and politically neutral character".⁴⁷

Historians will hopefully later be able to research exactly what was discussed behind the scenes in Karlsruhe, Geneva and Hannover, from when and how the inclusion of Ukrainian guests was planned. However, the invitation and the presence of a twelve-member Ukrainian delegation of mostly younger participants was the first visible expression of ecumenical solidarity with the victims of the war after the World Council of Churches' humble attempts at mediation with Patriarch Kirill. At the same time, the Ukrainian contributions showed painfully how strong the imperial grip of the Russian Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement had been in the past, because Ukraine, apart from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church which belonged to and was represented by the Moscow Patriarchate, had (and still has) no church representatives of its own in the World Council of Churches. Hence, Ukrainians could only participate in Karlsruhe as guests, without voting rights. Only now, with the outbreak of war, is the Orthodox Ukrainian Church's application for membership being endorsed.

The bilateral Ukrainian-Russian dialogue that General Secretary Ioan Sauca and others had promoted at the beginning of the Assembly did not happen. Obviously, the participants of the Russian delegation were treated with respect and had conversations in Karlsruhe, benefiting from the lack of knowledge of most of the participants in Karlsruhe. They were able to speak freely everywhere and communicate the Russian war narrative. No one from the Russian delegation approached the Ukrainian participants on their own initiative.⁴⁸

There was a moment of shock at the assembly when the statement on the war in Ukraine was discussed in the business plenary on Europe and Russian delegate

⁴⁷ Comments of Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk on the Adoption of the WCC statement 'War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region (8.09.2022), <https://mospat.ru/en/news/89613/>, Comments Made by the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church's Delegation at the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (31.08.2022), <https://mospat.ru/en/news/89580/> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁴⁸ Roman Sigov in an interview after the assembly: "The Ukrainian Voice in the World Council of Churches 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, Religious Information Service of Ukraine" (9.09.2022), https://risu.ua/en/the-ukrainian-voice-in-the-world-council-of-churches-11th-assembly-in-karlsruhe-germany_n132139 (last accessed 4.03.2023).

Archimandrite Philaret Bulekov launched into a six-minute speech (the allotted time was one minute, but he was not interrupted by the moderator), declaring, that the discussed statement about Ukraine – which was even better than he had expected – had the importance of a statement given “by McDonald’s and Starbucks” and was an example of “the information warfare”.

Against this background the claims of Bishop Bedford-Strohm sound like odd whitewash and apologetics when he in his later reviews of Karlsruhe regularly emphasizes that it was appropriate to have the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in Karlsruhe, that he encountered much thoughtfulness in his discussions with their representatives and that there was no war propaganda in Karlsruhe.⁴⁹ His statement that Russian Orthodox and Ukrainian Christians spoke with each other in Karlsruhe⁵⁰, does not match with various statements by Ukrainian participants such as Roman Sigov and others.⁵¹ In this respect, it looks like Bedford-Strohm is bending reality to suit himself and the World Council of Churches in order to keep the dialogue dogma and the ecumenical relationship with the Moscow Patriarchate going on. In addition, all Ukrainian participants in Karlsruhe emphasised that a dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church was not possible for them in this terrible war started by Russia. In view of this clear Ukrainian vote, it is a paternalistic intrusion of the World Council of Churches, but also of the Evangelical Church in Germany, to keep imposing from above on the Ukrainians a dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Karlsruhe Statement: War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region

After the discussion of the *Statement on War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region* in the plenary on 7 September, a small working group revised the text. This working group was led by Peter Prove, director of the World Council of Churches’ Commission on International Affairs and included a Russian delegate

⁴⁹ Bedford-Strohm: „Viel Nachdenklichkeit bei Russisch-Orthodoxen“, *PRO. Das christliche Medienmagazin* (28.09.2022), <https://www.pro-medienmagazin.de/bedford-strohm-viel-nachdenklichkeit-bei-russisch-orthodoxen/> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁵⁰ Markus SPRINGER, “Heinrich Bedford-Strohm über seinen neuen Ökumene-Spitzenjob”, *Sonntagsblatt* (16.09.2022), <https://www.sonntagsblatt.de/artikel/kirche/heinrich-bedford-strohm-ueber-seinen-neuen-oekumene-spitzenjob> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁵¹ “The Ukrainian Voice”, *RISU*, https://risu.ua/en/the-ukrainian-voice-in-the-world-council-of-churches-11th-assembly-in-karlsruhe-germany_n132139 (last accessed 4.03.2023).

but no Ukrainian delegate. The final version was accepted by the general assembly on 8 September 2022.⁵²

The statement was based on the earlier statement of the Central Committee from June 2022.⁵³ Compared to the final statement of the general assembly in Karlsruhe, the one of the Central Committee was much more shaped by Russian propaganda language. The new statement was less strongly influenced by the Russian view in this respect, but by no means independent of it: it named the war a “war” and Russia as the aggressor. As in the previous text it called the Russian invasion “illegal and unjustifiable” and sharply rejected “any misuse of religious language and authority to justify armed aggression and hatred”. It expressed compassion for the “suffering people of Ukraine”. However, since it is rather a statement on an international conflict, it cannot be called a declaration of solidarity for Ukraine. It is a declaration that makes a vicarious claim for all parties involved (“We appeal to all sides in the conflict to respect”). It suggests that if both sides – Russia, Ukraine, and their churches – struggle for dialogue, understanding and prayer, this “conflict” could reach a peaceful solution. This indeed undercuts the fact that the war was started unilaterally by a known aggressor – and that this aggressor, Putin, could end the war immediately at any time. Therefore, the statement which appeals in general terms to both sides trivialises the war of aggression on Ukraine: “We renew the call for an immediate ceasefire”. The correct and more appropriate demand would be to call on Russia for a ceasefire.

It is interesting to note that despite these Russia-friendly formulations in the text, and although a Russian delegate was involved in the formulation of the statement, the Russian delegation finally publicly and vociferously rejected the statement, and the statement was defamed by the head of the delegation on the website of the Moscow Patriarchate.⁵⁴

⁵² “War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region”. Statement by the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, WCC (8.09.2022), <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/war-in-ukraine-peace-and-justice-in-the-european-region> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁵³ WCC Central Committee Statement on the War in Ukraine (WCC Central Committee meeting, 15–18 June 2022), WCC (18.06.2022), <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-central-committee-statement-on-the-war-in-ukraine> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

⁵⁴ Comments of Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, <https://mospat.ru/en/news/89613/> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

In addition, some problematic formulations from the previous statement were carried over into the statement. For example, the term “war” is not used consistently, but several times, as in the previous declaration, it speaks of “conflict” or “tragic conflict”. It is also inappropriate that the Ukrainian people are denied the right to have their suffering recognised on its own in a declaration about Ukrainians but only alongside (i.e., Russia, as in the previous text) and the whole world. This makes everyone a victim and thus levels the suffering of Ukraine. The sentence calling on believers and church leaders in Russia and Ukraine to raise their voices against the death, destruction, displacement and dispossession of the people of Ukraine also fits in with this. Again, the realities of perpetrator and victim are distorted when both are addressed on the same level. And of course, voices against the war and destruction are raised every day in Ukraine, while not a single public voice against the war was heard from the church leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church, even after Karlsruhe.

Two concluding observations are required on the lack of theological substance. The recurring use of the term “tragically” or “tragic” must be mentioned, which is part of the official Kremlin vocabulary when talking about the Donbass and Ukraine. Kirill also refers in his letter to Sauca (as in previous statements) to the war in Ukraine as “tragic conflict”.⁵⁵ It is a strange expression for an ecclesiastical document, a word that again obscures the distinction between perpetrators and victims. It emerged from the Greek tragedy in which a higher power is dragging people to their doom; in the world of Kirill and Putinism, this is either the NATO, the West, or the United States. The description of the war in the Donbass since 2014 and against Ukraine since 2022 and the suffering of the Ukrainian people as “tragic” also reflects therefore a profoundly anti-Christian image and thinking because the Christian God is an anti-thesis to the Greek gods.

Another point: It is striking that the whole statement speaks neither of God, nor of Christ (only affirmatively in the last sentence). Instead, a strong anthropological narrowing pervades the document: It is the assembly and an indeterminate “we” – presumably the governing bodies of the World Council of Churches and the assembly – that has everything in hand in this war. It is the assembly that knows the true way for Christianity in this war: that of unity, dialogue, an un-specific

⁵⁵ Response by H.H. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, WCC (10.03.2022), <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/response-by-hh-patriarch-kirill-of-moscow-to-rev-prof-dr-ioan-sauca-english-translation> (last accessed 4.03.2023).

peace. God, without even appearing in the statement, is taken for granted for this strategy and goal. This is historical theology (*Geschichtstheologie*), and it is the same thinking, under reversed auspices, that Kirill applies with regard to justifying the war against Ukraine. What, if God is very different from what the dialogue advocates in the ecumenical movement think? If God wants revenge for his people in Ukraine, if God is lying on the ground as Christ in the blood of the soldier shot or the woman raped in Ukraine? If God is enraged and wants to condemn the perpetrators? If God expects confessions of guilt before granting reconciliation?

In this extraordinary situation for Europe, one could have expected more theological substance from a church world assembly in Germany. Thus, Kurschus' sentence, "God's love does not tolerate a war of aggression", remained the only theological statement from Karlsruhe.

Outlook

The Karlsruhe Statement served as a template for the upcoming Synod of the German Protestant Church in autumn 2022 for an intensive and differentiated discussion on its peace ethics position with regard to arms deliveries to Ukraine. It remains to be seen which position German Protestantism will take in the near future. A large proportion of Protestants in Germany are currently in favour of supplying arms to Ukraine and supports that. The official line of the Protestant Church in Germany at the moment seems to be supplying weapons to Ukraine, pointing out at the same time that this also means becoming guilty and that this action must be accompanied by a dialogue for peace with the Russian Orthodox Church. This has recently been expressed publicly by both the head of the Protestant Church in Germany (Kurschus) as well as by Bedford-Strohm at the World Council of Churches on various occasions.⁵⁶

Looking back on the first year of the Ukraine war, the position of the churches has changed slightly. On 24 February 2023, memorial services and prayers were called for throughout the country, and the church launched a campaign with seeds of hope for Ukraine. On behalf of the World Council of Churches, Bedford-Strohm and the new General Secretary Jerry Pillay released a message expressing their

⁵⁶ Kurschus: Waffen liefern und um Gespräche mit Russland bemühen, <https://www.ekd.de/kurschus-waffen-liefern-und-um-gespraechе-mit-russland-bemuehen-77727.htm> (last accessed 6.03.2023).

grief over the war in Ukraine and calling for an end to the war, albeit without mentioning Russia or Russians by name in the entire statement.

In the Protestant Church in Germany there is no longer any talk of polyphony in the Russian Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, the importance of continued contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church is emphasised, especially for a post-war perspective. Why and for what it remains unclear, and the same pattern of thought continues: in this mindset peace in Europe can only be achieved through Russia. In contrast, one hears hardly anything about Ukraine, the contacts with the Ukrainian churches, Christians and civil society in the public church statements. While the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Europe is pushing for Ukraine's rapid EU membership, nothing has been heard of this from the Protestant Church in Germany so far, nor of Ukraine's long-term admission to NATO. While a small part of the German Social Democratic Party has demanded a critical reappraisal of the *New Ostpolitik* and is painfully carrying this out in public, nothing has yet been heard from the Protestant Church in Germany in this direction. In this respect, the *Zeitenwende* has not yet taken place in the Protestant Church in Germany.

To conclude: the Ukraine war is a clear failure of the Church's Track I diplomacy. This applies to the World Council of Churches as well as to the Vatican and Pope Francis. Because there is no longer an independent civil society in Russia, it may also be doubted if contacts with Russian civil society, i.e. with organisations that can still influence public opinion, emphasised by the Protestant Church in Germany actually exist. Even experienced diplomats in peacebuilding strategies now admit that Track II diplomacy and even Track III diplomacy are no longer possible in Russia. They point to the unobtrusive and very long-term support of individuals in the local, neighbourhood environment, which must be developed from the bottom up – over a very long timeframe.

Against this background, the dialogue diplomacy of the World Council of Churches and the Evangelical Church in Germany can be regarded as a failure. It also raises the serious question of the extent to which the ecumenical movement is actually capable of professional peacebuilding in the Ukraine war.

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POPE FRANCIS AND RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

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Abstract. This article aims at analysing and commenting the approach and position of Pope Francis and the Holy See in the issue of Russia's war against Ukraine (2014–) since the full-scale invasion of 2022. Statements and gestures of the Pope that joined Russia and Ukraine together, were often received negatively in Ukraine. The encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, Vatican neutrality and Ostpolitik raised questions concerning peace ethics and reconciliation. The article presents guiding principles and ideas of the Catholic Church leadership on these issues and shows that there is a demand for active involvement of the Ukrainian side in the discussion process.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, Pope Francis, Vatican Policy, Greek Catholic Church, Peace Ethics, Just War, Pacifism

Russia's war against Ukraine affects not only the relationship of the churches in Ukraine to each other and to the Moscow Patriarchate, but also the way other churches face the situation. At the time of writing in April 2023, the approach of Pope Francis and the Holy See to Ukraine is still perceived as quite problematic. While Ukraine is a country with an overwhelming Orthodox majority (according to a survey conducted in November 2022 63%), the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which stands at 10% of the population, and the Roman Catholic Church, at 2%, make up the second largest denomination in the country.² But even

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² Razumkov Centre, *War and Church. Church and Religious Situation in Ukraine 2022 (Information Materials)*, Kyiv, 2022, 24, https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/02/13/2022_Religiya_ENGL.pdf (8.04.2023). Other surveys show around 70% Orthodox believers. For more data, the war against Ukraine as a theological challenge and the problems of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, see Thomas Mark NÉMETH, "Der Krieg gegen die Ukraine und die Kirchen. Anfragen an die Theologie", *Limina* 6.1 (2023) 235–256, <https://limina-graz.eu/index.php/limina/article/view/182/192> (13.05.2023); ID., "Russlands Krieg gegen die Ukraine – Eine Herausforderung für die Orthodoxie", in „*Nicht Konkurrenten, sondern Brüder ...*“ *Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen Miteinander von orthodoxer und*



apart from religious affiliation, special attention is paid to the Pope as a global player who has commented on events in Ukraine more than a hundred times since the full-scale invasion began in 2022.³

Statements and Gestures of Pope Francis

Pope Francis' approach to the war of aggression against Ukraine can be described as ambivalent – at the very least – according to public opinion there. It was seen as a positive thing that Francis, in deviation from protocol, personally visited the Russian embassy at the Vatican as early as February 25, 2022, to advocate for peace, and sought to explore possibilities of a meeting with Putin.⁴ As Pavlo Smytsnyuk noted in his analysis of Francis' words and deeds, he has spoken out much more frequently and explicitly about Ukraine than he has about any other recent conflicts.⁵ After the atrocities of Bucha became known, he kissed a flag from there and expressed his sympathy and solidarity with the victims. At the same time, the Holy See is trying to stay out of the political sphere of this war. Although his statements have become more direct over time, Francis avoids directly calling Putin or Russia the aggressor.

In Ukraine – and in Orthodoxy in general – the consecration of Russia and Ukraine to the Heart of Mary on March 25, 2022, was seen as problematic. Even though the Catholic bishops of Ukraine participated in this act, it caused criticism in the churches and society, both because of joining these two countries together and because of the use of the Roman Catholic idea of Russia's conversion

katholischer Kirche, edited by Dietmar SCHON (Schriften des Ostkircheninstituts der Diözese Regensburg 9), Pustet: Regensburg (forthcoming). Translations in this paper are by the author or translator.

³ “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), <http://ilsismografo.blogspot.com/2023/01/vaticano-dopo-la-orrenda-strage-di.html> (3.04.2023).

⁴ “Exclusive: Pope Francis Discusses Ukraine, U.S. Bishops and More”, *America* (28.11.2022), <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/11/28/pope-francis-interview-america-244225> (1.04.2023).

⁵ Pavlo SMYTSNYUK, “Католицька реакція на російсько-українську війну” [The Catholic Response to the Russia-Ukraine War], *Наукові записки УКУ: Богослов'я* 10 (2023) 193–224 (forthcoming).

within an Orthodox context.⁶ Resentment in Ukraine was intensified not only by the Francis' Twitter messages about a general guilt in the face of concrete crimes, but especially by the stations of the cross in the Colosseum on Good Friday 2022, where a Ukrainian and a Russian woman carried the cross together.⁷ See head of the UGCC, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk expressed clearly his negative view on this initiative: "For the Greek Catholics of Ukraine, the texts and gestures of the 13th station of this Way of the Cross are incoherent and even offensive, especially in the context of the expected second, even bloodier attack of Russian troops on our cities and villages."⁸

The Kyiv nuncio Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas also supported this criticism: "Reconciliation must come when aggression is stopped. When Ukrainians will be able not only to save their lives but also their freedom. And, of course, we know that reconciliation occurs when the aggressor admits their guilt and apologizes"⁹

In the face of protests, the stations of the cross were held without the originally planned texts. Myroslav Marynovych, a former dissident and vice rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, expressed theological criticism. According to him, a distinction must be made between the one cross of Jesus and the different crosses of a victim and a

⁶ Katherine KELAIDIS, "Holy Father, You're Not Helping: The Problem with the Pope's Plan to Consecrate Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary", *Religion Dispatches* (28.03.2022), <https://religiondispatches.org/holy-father-youre-not-helping-the-problem-with-the-popes-plan-to-consecrate-russia-and-ukraine-to-the-immaculate-heart-of-mary/> (8.04.2023).

⁷ See Thomas Mark NÉMETH, "Rom und die Ukraine. Welche Taktik verfolgt der Papst?" Ein Stand.Punkt, *Katholische Kirche Österreich* (14.04.2022), <https://www.katholisch.at/standpunkt/nemeth/ukraine-rom-krieg-karwoche> (8.04.2023) ; Pope Francis, We need to cry ... (4.04.2022), <https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/1510942761381367809> (8.04.2023); Way of the Cross, https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/documents/index_via-crucis_en.html (8.04.2023).

⁸ "An Untimely Idea: Ukrainian Catholic Leader Concerned by Format of Pope's Good Friday Via Crucis" (12.4.2022), <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250955/an-untimely-idea-ukrainian-catholic-leader-concerned-by-format-of-pope-s-good-friday-via-crucis> (1.04.2023).

⁹ "I conveyed the reaction from Ukraine to the Vatican' – Apostolic Nuncio on Ukrainian and Russian Standing Under the Cross Together", *RISU* (12.04.2022), https://risu.ua/en/i-conveyed-the-reaction-from-ukraine-to-the-vatican---apostolic-nuncio-on-ukrainian-and-russian-standing-together-under-the-cross_n128281 (1.04.2023).

perpetrator.¹⁰ However, a quite similar action took place again at the 2023 stations of the cross in Rome, linking the testimony of a Ukrainian boy and a Russian boy, the former of whom faced the death of relatives, the latter displacement:

At the tenth station, the meditations are by a young Ukrainian and a young Russian. The former recounts his flight from Mariupol to Italy, with his father stranded at the border, and his return to Ukraine. There is war on all sides, the city is destroyed. The latter remembers his oldest brother who died and his father and grandfather who disappeared: 'Everyone told us we should be proud, but at home, there was only much suffering and sadness.' They ask the Lord for purification from 'resentment,' 'bitterness,' 'violent words and reactions.'¹¹

With good reasons, many Russian intellectuals who distance themselves from the war of aggression are wary of conflating the suffering caused by the war on the Russian and Ukrainian sides, while the Holy See here gives the impression of being "above these things". It is strange in view of church abuse scandals that there is not enough awareness of how easily expressions like "forgiveness," but also the appeal to the cross, can be instrumentalized. Even if this "well-intentioned" action had primarily in mind affected individuals and not countries, this non-differentiating view and the symbolizing use of fates testifies to blind spots and has again triggered negative reactions in Ukraine. The Vatican still does not seem to understand this problem.

The pope's statement of November 22, 2022, about the cruelty of Russian troops in Ukraine also caused criticism:

When I speak about Ukraine, I speak of a people who are martyred. If you have a martyred people, you have someone who martyrs them. When I speak about Ukraine, I speak about the cruelty because I have much information about the cruelty of the troops that come in. Generally, the cruelest are perhaps those who are of Russia but are not of the Russian tradition, such as the Chechens, the Buryati and so on. Certainly, the one who invades is the Russian state. This is very clear. Sometimes I try not to specify so as not to

¹⁰ Myroslav MARYNOVYCH, "The Cross of Abel and the Cross of Cain are Different Crosses", UCU (13.04.2022), <https://ucu.edu.ua/en/news/hrest-avelya-i-hrest-kayina-tse-rizni-hresty/> (8.04.2023).

¹¹ "Way of the Cross: 'Voices of Peace in a World at War'", <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-04/way-of-the-cross-meditations-rome-colosseum-pope-francis-2023.html> (8.04.2023).

offend and rather condemn in general, although it is well known whom I am condemning. It is not necessary that I put a name and surname.¹²

That negative reactions came from the Russian side is hardly surprising. Also, according to Stefan Kube these statements “reflect racist stereotypes.”¹³ Members of certain ethnic groups are made scapegoats, as it were, while the actual aggressor was not named at all. The criticism was followed by an apology from Rome to Russia.¹⁴

Peace Ethics and Reconciliation

The war against Ukraine confronts European states and societies with the need to fundamentally question their own positions. Churches are also discussing how to deal with the war across denominational boundaries.¹⁵ Advocates of nonviolent resistance are often shockingly ignorant not only of the motivation of those affected, who are resisting for the sake of a life perspective, but also of the political situation.¹⁶ Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, for example, has pointed out that by invoking the theory of civil resistance, it is precisely civil society experiences with state violence

¹² “Exclusive: Pope Francis Discusses Ukraine”, *America*.

¹³ Carlo MERTENS and Raphael RAUCH, “Stefan Kube: Pope’s Remarks Reflect Racist Stereotypes”, (1.12.2022), <https://www.kath.ch/newsd/stefan-kube-aeusserungen-des-papstes-spiegeln-rassistische-stereotypen-wider/>, (8.04.2023).

¹⁴ “Russian Foreign Ministry Says the Vatican Apologised for Pope Francis’s Remarks About Cruelty of Chechens and Buryats”, *Novaya Gazeta* (15.12.2022), <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/12/15/russian-foreign-ministry-says-the-vatican-apologised-for-pope-franciss-remarks-about-cruelty-of-chechens-and-buryats-en-news> (13.04.2023).

¹⁵ See, e.g. “Evangelische Kirche will Friedensethik überarbeiten”, *EKD* (7.11.2022), <https://www.ekd.de/evangelische-kirche-will-friedensethik-ueberarbeiten-76071.htm> (8.04.2023). Other recent publications for consideration: Themenheft: Der Ukraine-Krieg als theologische Herausforderung, *Theologische Quartalschrift* 203.1 (2023); Noreen VAN ELK, “60 Jahre Pacem in Terris: Relevanz angesichts des Russischen Angriffskriegs gegen die Ukraine” (24.04.2023), <https://www.feinschwarz.net/pacem-in-terris-angesichts-russischer-angriffskrieg-in-ukraine/> (4.05.2023).

¹⁶ E.g. “Theologe Spiegel: Ukraine soll weiße Fahne hissen”, *katholisch.de* (13.04.2022), <https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/33901-theologe-spiegel-ukraine-sollte-weiße-fahne-hissen> (8.04.2023).

in the post-Soviet space that are being overlooked.¹⁷ The German Commission *Justitia et Pax* also clearly justifies arms deliveries to Ukraine:

The right to self-defense, affirmed in the teachings of the Church and enshrined in international law, is completely undisputed in the case of Ukraine. Accordingly, wisely chosen arms deliveries are also legitimate, if not ethically required. It goes without saying that the imperatives of proportionality and international humanitarian law must be observed here as well.¹⁸

The fact that Catholic social teaching has evolved from a theory of just war to one of just peace is evident in Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli tutti*.¹⁹ In no. 258, he addresses it as a great difficulty to be able to rely on the doctrine of just war today, since its criteria – which remain fundamentally valid – have been repeatedly abused. In nos. 240 and 241, a right to self-defense seems to be recognized, but without explicitly addressing the use of weapons. It is also clear that Francis never questioned Ukraine's right to self-defense, but his stance on this was initially ambiguous. Smytsnyuk also notes a war-related change in attitude at the Vatican on this point by acknowledging “that arms deliveries to Ukraine can be ethically justified.”²⁰ However, according to him, Francis also made clear in an interview that he places the justification of the right to defense outside the concept of just war.²¹

¹⁷ Heinz Gerhard JUSTENHOVEN, “Zum Krieg in der Ukraine: Der Drang nach Freiheit”, *Herder Korrespondenz* 4 (2022) 12–15 (15).

¹⁸ Erklärung der deutschen Kommission Justitia et Pax zum Krieg gegen die Ukraine (26.03.2022), <https://www.justitia-et-pax.de/jp/aktuelles/data/2022-maerz-Justitia-et-Pax-Russland-Ukraine-Erklaerung.pdf> (3.04.2023).

¹⁹ Encyclical Letter “Fratelli tutti” of the Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship (2020), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (8.04.2023).

²⁰ “Ukrainekrieg: Vatikan und Konstantinopel agieren unterschiedlich”, *Information Orthodoxie* 134 (28.02.2023), 6-7 (6) <https://redaktion.kathpress.at/action/kpprod/download?&p=13626&c=98f9> (10.05.2023).

²¹ 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, referring to Bernarda LLORENTE, “Interview to Pope Francis: ‘We do not come out from a Crisis on Our Own: We Need to Take Risks and Take Each Other’s Hands’” (1.07.2022), <https://www.telam.com.ar/pope-francis> (8.04.2023).

The encyclical offers a thoroughly impressive humane vision of peace but does not unfold a systematic doctrine of war and peace. The war against Ukraine has made weak points visible. According to Smytsnyuk, there is an “unresolved tension [...] between just war and nonviolence”,²² which is also evident in the pope’s attitude toward the war against Ukraine. Markus Vogt also noted that Francis’ “pacifist rejection of any kind of warfare does not stand up to the necessity of defensively opposing the excesses of armed violence and aggression.”²³

The slogan “never again war” invoked in *Fratelli tutti* no. 258 would certainly be signed by the vast majority of those affected by war today. This ethical paradigm reaches its limits when faced with an aggressor who is only willing to begin talks if his demands are unconditionally met. The churches must also be careful that their statements do not serve those who want to realize their purposes through violence.

Guiding Principles and Ideas

The pope’s statements and gestures are determined by ideological and geopolitical guiding principles, some of which are anchored in the Roman Curia and some of which are shaped more by the pope’s personality.

The former includes a diplomatic tradition of Vatican “Ostpolitik” (Eastern policy) that goes far back into the 20th century and, consequently, also to the Soviet era.²⁴ This includes contacts with the Russian regime, but also with the MP, to which the Holy See assigned a role in world Orthodoxy, which has been continuously questioned by the Ukrainian side. But only the attacks of 2022 have allowed a broader discourse on this and have shown the problematic nature of this fixation. However, in 2022 it took Rome a long time to counteract the instrumentalization by the MP, which presented itself as a force for peace

²² SMYTSNYUK, “The Holy See”.

²³ Markus VOGT, “Being Christian in a Fragile World. Revisions of Peace Ethics in the Face of the Ukraine”, *Ordo socialis* (6.03.2022), https://ordosocialis.de/wp-content/uploads/War-in-the-Ukraine-Being-Christian-in-a-Fragile-World_09.03.2022-.pdf (3.04.2023).

²⁴ See “Ostpolitik: Historical Background and Contemporary Challenges” – UCU Hosts Scholarly Conference with Participation of Ambassadors to the Holy SEE, *RISU* (21.07.2022), https://risu.ua/en/ostpolitik-historical-background-and-contemporary-challenges--ucu-hosts-scholarly-conference-with-participation-of-ambassadors-to-the-holy-see_n131024 (8.04.2023).

and claimed Rome on its side.²⁵ In any case, Francis has distanced himself from Patriarch Kirill with the reference to him as “Putin’s altar boy” and the cancellation of the meeting planned with him in Jerusalem for June 14, 2022.²⁶

Another guiding principle of the Holy See, which has long determined its diplomatic policy, is its neutrality. There are examples of this form of diplomacy being fruitful, for example, the restoration of diplomatic relations between the USA and Cuba in 2014–2015.²⁷ As Archbishop Paul Gallagher recently emphasized, the Holy See is “neutral but not ethically indifferent”:

The Vatican’s chief aim in the Ukraine conflict was to work towards peace and possibly to act as a mediator between the two warring sides. [...] I can understand that people always want one to take sides in a conflict – but that has never helped anyone in the course of history. The Vatican has offered to help and especially to help Ukraine – but we must reserve a certain amount of openness on all sides as far as ecumenical and political dialogue is concerned. The aim must always be peace. That is a fundamental part of our Christian faith and our Christian ethic.²⁸

Contacts were maintained with both Russia and Ukraine, and the pope wishes “to go to both parties of this conflict.”²⁹ Therefore, a visit to Kyiv seems out of the question for the pope, if it would make a journey to Moscow impossible. From Rome’s point of view, neutrality serves the purpose of maintaining communication and the possibility of interaction with Russia, which is why Rome refrains from

²⁵ See Thomas BREMER, Regina ELSNER, Massimo FAGGIOLI, Kristina STOECKL, “To Stop Russian Manipulation, Francis Must Make Vatican’s Stand on Ukraine Clear”, *National Catholic Reporter* (9.05.2022), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/stop-russian-manipulation-francis-must-make-vaticans-stand-ukraine-clear>. (10.5.2023)

²⁶ Mario GALGANO and Salvatore CERNUZIO, “Papst geht in Ostergrüßen an Kyrill auf Krieg in der Ukraine ein” (25.4.2022), <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2022-04/papst-franziskus-ostern-russland-patriarch-kyrill-krieg-ukraine.html> (8.04.2023).

²⁷ See СМΥТСНУК, СВЯТИЙ Престол, 210.

²⁸ Christa PONGRATZ-LIPPITT and Jonathan LUXMOORE, “Gallagher Defends Vatican Neutrality in Ukraine Conflict”, *The Tablet* (4.08.2022), <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/15731/gallagher-defends-vatican-neutrality-in-ukraine-conflict> (8.04.2023).

²⁹ “Archbishop Gallagher Stresses the Need to End War in Ukraine”, *Vatican News* (25.02.2023), <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-02/archbishop-gallagher-stresses-need-to-end-war-in-ukraine.html> (1.04.2023).

formally condemning Russia. Smytsnyuk argues that Rome’s handling of military conflicts is also characterized by the fact that Rome “prefers to use abstract and hortatory language, usually opts not to ‘name names’ and does not see deliberating on the morality of every war occurring in the world as its task.”³⁰

The Holy See’s stance can be classified as one of “positive neutrality,” which is linked to other principles, such as peacebuilding. This approach is often met with incomprehension in Ukraine. Anatolii Babynskyi writes: “I would not say that the Vatican does not support Ukraine. But approaches of the Vatican are not always read correctly here, in Ukraine.”³¹

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav also recently tried to convey a more positive view: it was thanks to the neutrality of the Holy See that thousands of prisoners of war were released: “So the service of the supreme mediator benefits us all.”³² At the same time, he pointed out the difference between the diplomatic role and that of the chief shepherd, saying, “Let the Holy Father fulfill his duty as the supreme arbiter, because we can also benefit from his position as mediator.”³³

Political backing behind the scenes should not be underestimated either. For example, Ukraine’s ambassador to the Holy See, Andriy Yurash, confirmed to me that the pope had strongly supported Ukraine’s EU integration process vis-à-vis the European Commission.

Behind the pope’s behavior – but also that of the Roman Curia – there are also romantic and idealistic ideas about Russia, which – especially in the case of Francis – go hand in hand with a distancing from a “Western view”. A spiritual dimension has long been attributed to Russia, which also makes it appear as a European antithesis to the West. For decades, people in Rome have also seemed to be under the spell of a – real or supposed – “greatness” of Russia, while the authoritarian and repressive character of the state leadership – which has existed not only since the Soviet era – is not sufficiently recognized. Moscow has managed for decades to establish good relations with the Vatican, and some curial statements give the

³⁰ SMYTSNYUK, “Католицька реакція”.

³¹ Iryna MATVIYISHYN and Joseph ROCHE, “What Has Gone Wrong With Pope Francis’s Policy on Ukraine, and How He Can Fix It”, *Ukraine World* (23.08.2022), <https://ukraineworld.org/articles/opinions/pope-policy-ukrain> (1.04.2023).

³² “Kiewer Großerbischof erklärt Haltung des Papstes im Ukraine-Krieg”, *Kathpress Tagesdienst* 68. 17–18 (17) (17.03.2023), <https://www.kathpress.at/goto/meldung/2246421/kiewer-grosserzbischof-erklaert-haltung-des-papstes-im-ukraine-krieg>.

³³ *Ibid.*

impression that the idea is, that the war is a kind of family conflict, that can be resolved through talks and compromises.

The following statements by Francis on a flight in November 2022, for example, testify to an approach which raises questions:

What strikes me – that's why I use the word 'tormented' for Ukraine - is the cruelty, which is not of the Russian people, perhaps... because the Russian people are a great people. It is of the mercenaries, of the soldiers who go off to war as an adventure, mercenaries... I prefer to think of it this way because I have 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.³⁴

A little later, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav met him and wrote in this regard: "During the audience, I asked Pope Francis: 'Do you know what they say about you in Ukraine?' He asked, 'What?' I answer: 'That you have not read Dostoevsky properly.' 'But why?' he was surprised..."³⁵ Sviatoslav said he would explain in Rome and especially to the pope "that very often the Western world, the Roman world, the ecclesiastical, intellectual world, has romantic ideas about Russia, which were formed over the years..."³⁶

This was also reflected in the pope's letter to the Ukrainian people. The text, written in an empathetic tone, focuses on the suffering of the victims, but also mentions the defenders:

I think too of you, young people, who in courageous defense of your homeland have had to take up arms rather than pursue your cherished dreams for the future. I think of you, wives who have lost your husbands, gritting your teeth and quietly carrying on with dignity and determination, and making every sacrifice possible for your children.³⁷

³⁴ Pope Francis: "Three World Wars in One Century: Be Pacifists!", *Vatican News* (6.11.2022), <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-11/pope-flight-three-wars-century-pacifist-interview-bahrain.html> (1.04.2023).

³⁵ "UGCC Patriarch in Rome Dispels 'romantic ideas about Russia'", *RISU* (2.12.2022), https://risu.ua/en/ugcc-patriarch-in-rome-dispels-romantic-ideas-about-russia_n134534 (1.04.2023).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ "Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of Ukraine Nine Months after the Outbreak of the War", *Vatican* (24.11.2022), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/>

This letter also referred to the Holodomor, the famine of the 1930s artificially induced by Stalin's regime, as genocide, which led to protests on the Russian side. At the same time, Francis classified the war of aggression quite generally as an "absurd folly of war" without mentioning aggressors.

While the relationship to Russia in papal statements is clearly also determined by the Vatican's environment, the geopolitical statements indicate his own views. The Latin American background combined with a negative image of the USA is evident, for example, in the criticism of Western hegemony and the call for a "view from the periphery". Francis' suggestion about "NATO barking at Russia's gate"³⁸ might have been a contributing factor in the Kremlin's reaction and unleashing the invasion, is also related to this. Although this statement was somewhat later softened by curial sources, the pope again made a similar remark in an interview for the Italian-language Swiss radio station RSI broadcast on March 12, 2023: "But there are imperial interests there, not only those of the Russian empire, but also those of empires elsewhere. It is precisely the empire that puts nations second."³⁹

By the end of 2022, he had already stated: "This one is a world war, because it is true that when empires, either on one side or the other weaken, they need to make a war in order to feel strong - and also to sell weapons! I believe that today the greatest calamity in the world is the arms industry."⁴⁰

In dealing with the war, however, it is not only the pope's cultural context and his environment's image of Russia that shine through, but also his lack of expertise on Eastern Europe or of listening to experts. Anatolii Babynskyi noted "that one of the reasons why Francis has missed the mark in his reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine lies in his misunderstanding of the nature of this war, as well as the situation in Europe."⁴¹ Although as of June 2022, Rome had also seen more clearly "that Putin will not sit down at the negotiating table but will fight to

en/letters/2022/documents/20221124-lettera-popolo-ucraino.html (1.04.2023).

³⁸ Luciano FONTANA, "Pope Francis: 'I Am Ready to Meet Putin in Moscow'", *Corriere* (3.05.2022), https://www.corriere.it/cronache/22_maggio_03/pope-francis-putin-e713a1de-cad0-11ec-84d1-341c28840c78.shtml (8.04.2023).

³⁹ Mario GALGANO and Paolo RODARI, "Papst im Interview mit Tessiner TV: Die Kirche ist für alle da", *Vatican News* (10.03.2023), <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2023-03/papst-franziskus-itv-rsi-tessin-schweiz-kirche-krieg-krankheit.html> (8.04.2023).

⁴⁰ Pope Francis: "Three World Wars in One Century: Be Pacifists!"

⁴¹ MATVIYISHYN and ROCHE, "What Has Gone Wrong".

the last Russian,⁴² the long-lasting overlooking of Russia's hegemonic interests is astonishing in the face of a state that "in reality, failed to guarantee security, personal safety, dignity and peace for its own population and for neighboring countries for over two decades."⁴³ It is counterproductive in this context to contribute to the narrative of the alleged violation of Russia's legitimate security interests. In this regard, Regina Elsner stated: "When the Vatican agrees to give part of the blame to the West and part of the truth to Russia, it contributes precisely to these myths, it admits that it has no idea about the situation in Ukraine and is unable to differentiate information."⁴⁴

Concluding Remarks

The war against Ukraine confronts the Holy See with new challenges. On the one hand, it is situated in an extremely complex network of relationships, on the other hand, the difficulty lies in the collision of different functions, since the pope acts simultaneously as head of a church and head of a state, as a pastor and a diplomat. While Francis has repeatedly sought to signal empathy toward Ukraine, in doing so he listens little to views from Ukraine, as the 2022 and 2023 stations of the cross show. Therefore, he has probably lost much of his moral authority in Ukraine. The ambivalent assessment of the current pontificate is widespread, irrespective of church-political standpoints, connected to a seeming resistance to criticism. The initial enthusiasm for his spontaneity as an expression of humanity and his global visions has given way to disillusionment regarding Church issues in both the conservative and liberal camps. Andrea Gagliarducci's criticism that "Pope Francis seems to fail to understand that he no longer speaks in a personal capacity but in the name of the Church",⁴⁵ can also be applied to the "pastorally determined" handling of Ukraine.

Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, pointed out that the international activity of the Holy See is

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ BREMER, ELSNER, FAGGIOLI, AND STOECKL, "To Stop Russian Manipulation".

⁴⁴ "Osteuropa-Expertin: Papst lässt die Ukraine immer wieder im Stich", *Katholisch.de* (26.08.2022), <https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/40729-osteuropa-expertin-papst-laesst-die-ukraine-immer-wieder-im-stich> (12.04.2023).

⁴⁵ Andrea GAGLIARDUCCI, "Pope Francis and the Missionary Church", *MondayVatican* (10.04.2023), <http://www.mondayvatican.com/vatican/pope-francis-and-the-missionary-church> (10.04.2023).

not based on political but on moral authority.⁴⁶ However, it is precisely here that it might be a problem when at certain moments in history tactical considerations must be weighed against clear testimony. Neutrality can make mediation possible, but it can also cost moral legitimacy, as the discussions surrounding the evaluation of the role of Pius XII demonstrate. For all the appeal to diplomatic tradition, the question arises as to its value when instrumentalities reach their limits. This is not least true for the leadership of the Catholic Church, which is currently going through a global crisis of confidence or, to put it more positively, a process of transformation. The tendency to view the MP as an important partner until recently is a relic from the earlier attempts at a strategic alliance with conservative forces. It is unclear whether this idea already is a thing of the past following Patriarch Kirill's legitimization of the war, or if it is awaiting revival in Vatican circles, whose attitude to Ukraine seems also to be significantly influenced by the relations to the MP. Particularly in view of internal Catholic scandals, it would be good to take the victim's perspective more clearly into account and opt for truth and justice and to better listen to the voices of local Christians instead of being aloof. This is a learning process for all involved. Despite unity in faith, the Catholics of Ukraine can also learn to better understand church authority in its contextuality and to take their own initiative. Major Archbishop Sviatoslav has made this clear in his video messages since February 2022. For example, on March 8, 2022, on the Sunday of Reconciliation, he spoke about the difficulty of "speaking of forgiveness in the midst of war," but that this was "the secret of victory".⁴⁷

As Oleh Turiy stated, "this war has destroyed not only the order of world security but also the former system of interchurch and church-state relations, so they need re-thinking. We Ukrainians need to stop being objects. Instead, we need to take the initiative, to offer concrete proposals".⁴⁸

Yuriy Avvakumov pointed out difficulties with a "strong structure [in the Catholic church] which has now existed for centuries and so is not flexible. I

⁴⁶ Renato Raffaele MARTINO, "Les objectifs du Saint-Siège: personne humaine, justice et paix", in *The Catholic Church and the International Policy of the Holy See/ L'Église catholique et la politique internationale du Saint-Siège*, edited by Franco IMODA and Roberto PAPINI, Milano: Nagard 2008, 23.

⁴⁷ Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, Звернення Глави УГКЦ, 6 березня 2022 року [Address of the Head of the UGCC, 6 March 2022], <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=291709113074758> (8.04.2023).

⁴⁸ "Ostpolitik: Historical Background and Contemporary Challenges."

consider it our task to call those who have authority in the Catholic world to help discuss this with the Pope and bishops of other countries".⁴⁹

Pope Francis' policy on Ukraine also highlights the dilemma that nonviolence cannot protect the weak and that pacifist approaches to aggressors often do not help. There is a need for critical evaluation, especially regarding the relationship between peace and justice. This is something the pope also wrestles with, but his handling of the war reveals his personal style, experience, and limitations. Important as he may be as an authority, his actions should not be equated with those of the Church which he heads. Both the churches and their representatives move "between worlds" and in the tension between different principles. This ambivalence leaves open the question of ethical considerations on different levels. Therefore, today's view also requires the questioning of guiding principles and ideas. It is to be hoped that the churches, in a reflective perspective and in exchange with academy and society, will succeed in promoting justice, peace and respect for human dignity.

(Translated from German by David Heith-Stade)

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⁴⁹ Ibid.

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POST-SOVIET CIVIL RELIGION AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

SERGEI CHAPNIN¹

Abstract. The religious revival in post-Soviet Russia resulted in a new, more intimate than ever before, alliance between the Russian Orthodox Church and Putin’s autocratic regime. Three key elements were essential in shaping this unholy alliance: a) re-establishing the Russian Orthodox Church under Stalin’s decree in 1943, b) the constant support of local Orthodox Churches and the ecumenical movement, and c) the formation of a specific religious-based ideology.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, War in Ukraine, Post-Soviet Civil Religion, Church and State, Religion and Politics.

The Russian Orthodox Church’s (ROC’s) justification for the Russian invasion of Ukraine raises the questions of how and why the official Church and Patriarch Kirill, in particular, have become an essential ideological tool of Putin’s regime. These questions are vital: a) for the ROC itself, as further reforms will be shaped by this dynamic, b) for the local Orthodox Churches, as they should be aware of this hook in church-state relations, and c) for the entire Christian world, as the myth of the ROC as a mega-Church is powerful, especially in conservative groups and organizations.

Among the concerns that merit examination, and, perhaps, the approaches of previous years, which must be revised, three stand out: 1) the origins of the ROC: what is fundamental to its formation in the 20th century; 2) the place of the ROC in the Christian world and, in particular, in the ecumenical movement; and 3) the views and ideas preached by the ROC, and their relevance to the Gospel and the Christian tradition.

I will briefly discuss the first two points and elaborate on the third.

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Formation of ROC in the 20th Century

A period of religious revival began in 1988 with public celebrations of the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus' in many regions of the Soviet Union. This celebration was a declaration of the continuity of Christian tradition not only from Kyiv to Moscow, but through the centuries, spanning Kyiv Rus', the Moscow Tsardom, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union. Later, post-Soviet Russia was also included in this single orbit.

As a result, a new robust myth was born. This narrative, not only sought to explain unobvious historical connections, but also sought to build a narrative, in which the history of the Church and the state in Russia and post-Soviet space was tightly intertwined.

The war in Ukraine questioned the continuity of the Kyiv and Moscow Rus' traditions. In this war, the Russian Federation looks and acts more like a Golden Horde, than a European state. The establishment of the autocephalous Church of Ukraine and the break between the Ukrainian Church and the Moscow Patriarchate, which followed as a result of the war, indicated that the Kyiv and Moscow church traditions were diverging and would not continue to co-exist. They have separated and will continue to evolve independently of each other.

However, this is not the only historical rupture that has recently become evident. No less severe is the gap between the church tradition of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the Orthodox Church of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) that Stalin "permitted" in 1943. This Church is today known as the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). To what extent is it a blend of the Soviet era, and what exactly does it inherit from the Russian Greek Catholic Church of the Russian Empire?

The "peculiar character" of the Church, which fully adapted to life in an atheistic state and even received regular benefits from the Communist authorities, must now be described anew from the tragic perspective of war between Christian nations. The criticisms of the ROC from the standpoint of the Russian emigree community in the 20th century should not be forgotten, but rather must be revisited.²

² Of the new studies on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, the books, articles, and lectures by Archpriest Georgy Mitrofanov, professor at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, are especially noteworthy.

Among the principles on which the life of the Church was redesigned during the Soviet era, many remain relevant today. They continue to be a tool for control and manipulation by the Church hierarchy. These are the withdrawal of the autonomy of parish communities, the formation of an authoritarian top-down order, the recognition by the state of the representatives of this vertical as the only legitimate representatives of the Church, the rejection of synodality as a principle of Church governance (imitation of synodality), the willingness to follow the ideological guidelines set forth by the state, and the habit of working “under control” and receiving instructions from state officials.

The ROC’s bishops and top administrative officials are still very comfortable with these principles. The critique heard from voices at the grass-root’s level are fairly weak and often ignored.

The Role of ROC in the Christian World

The Russian Orthodox Church was isolated from the Christian world for decades. At first glance, this statement may seem like an exaggeration. There is a rich history of ROC representatives participating in ecumenical gatherings at various levels and in bilateral dialogues with various churches. Even Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev) was involved in the ecumenical movement. These were educated men and women, and experienced diplomats. However, they represented not so much the Church, but rather the interests of the Soviet state. Cooperation on a broader scale was impossible because it would have compromised the foundation of the state’s official atheist ideology.

Later, in the post-Soviet period, this isolation did not cease; it continued intellectually and culturally. A relatively small group of staff in primarily the Department for External Church Relations has retained a monopoly on all contacts with other churches and ecumenical organizations. With very few exceptions, the ROC consistently refuses to cooperate with other churches in the domains of theology, religious education, and youth work.

In the last two decades, inter-Christian and even inter-religious dialogue was focused on promoting the ROC, and specifically Patriarch Kirill, as leading defenders of traditional values on a global scale. That approach limited dialogue to conservative Christian organizations. Official theological discussions also continued, but as in Soviet times, it was open only to official Church diplomats and a few experts usually appointed directly by the Holy Synod.

In 2018, the ROC took a new step in self-isolation. Due to his highly unsuccessful policy in Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill forced the Holy Synod to break off eucharistic communion with local Orthodox Churches – the Ecumenical and Alexandrian Patriarchates, and the Churches of Greece and Crete – that had supported the creation of the autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine.³

By supporting the war in Ukraine, the ROC has taken another step toward self-isolation, exposing itself to harsh criticism from other Orthodox churches, as well as the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.

Throughout the war in Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill, have captured global media attention as never before. Unfortunately, this is not because Patriarch Kirill is taking a stand against the war and denouncing the aggressor. Instead, a scandal has erupted: the Patriarch pays lip service to peace, while at the same time justifying the war. In addition, not a single bishop within Russia has condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Priests who deliver antiwar sermons are subjected to repression, and most clergy and laypeople are now silent. Quite possibly, this could be the most shameful page in the thousand-year history of Russian Orthodoxy.

One big question remains: how did it happen that the commandment “thou shalt not kill!” was forgotten in Russia, and how is it that military chaplains are quoting lines from the Gospel like “greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15, 13) as they bless soldiers being sent to fight and loot a neighboring country?

Yet we should also ask another question: why do Christians all over the world – neither the Churches, nor their affiliated organizations, when condemning the invasion, say almost nothing about the non-Christian nature of statements heard from Patriarch Kirill and other bishops and priests, who preach “to kill with a prayer on the mouth”? Their approach contradicts the Gospel, and yet many Christians are silent on this matter.

Post-Soviet Civil Religion

Unfortunately, within the post-Soviet context, this cannot be viewed as an accident. Religion and atheism in Russia have made the leap from opposition to synthesis. After the collapse of the Soviet Union – when the Church was said to be

³ Sergei CHAPNIN, “Post-Soviet Civil Religion Instead of Orthodoxy”, *Russia.Post* (21.06.2022).

witnessing a revival – the focus was entirely on restoring churches and monasteries, founding new dioceses and forming a new administrative model.

The successes in expanding and strengthening the Church looked impressive, but was in no way a reflection on the content of the faith that took shape in the 1990s and 2000s. Calling the revived faith in Russia “traditional Orthodoxy” was rather naive, despite the fact that over the past few decades it has become commonplace to say so.

The main problem is attributable to the fact that the ROC reluctantly and extremely ineffectively approached catechesis and religious education. The overwhelming majority of those who had joined the Church and were baptized, retained both the worldview and habits of the Soviet era. Thus, a synthesis of Orthodoxy and Soviet emerged. In 2011, in a public lecture on the occasion of the 21st anniversary of Archpriest Alexander Men’s murder, I termed this phenomenon “post-Soviet civil religion.”⁴ This trend combines elements of the Orthodox tradition, usually superficial and formal, with everyday Soviet content, and a passionate desire to revitalize the empire.

This synthesis was rather organically accepted by the state bureaucracy and a significant section of both society and the ROC itself.

There is an element of chance that this synthesis was successful. However, one cannot deny that overall, post-Soviet civil religion turned out fundamentally well-constructed, providing reliable mechanisms to channel religious ideas and historical myths into a deeply secular post-Soviet society. The Commandments, which serve as guidelines for the life of a Christian, have been replaced by so-called “traditional values”. At the same time, the struggle for traditional values in Russia and worldwide has assumed the significance of an apocalyptic battle. The defense of traditional values has become the *raison d’être* for many Christian organizations in Russia and the content of their activities, as well as an essential element of domestic and foreign policy.

The concept of Holy Rus’ is no less compelling. In the secular context, it was successfully transformed into the *Russian World*. At the level of cultural communication, the Russian language plays the central role in this concept, but in

⁴ Sergei ЧАПНИН, “Soviet and Post-Soviet in Contemporary Church Culture: Personality of a Pastor, Evangelism and Ministry” [Советское и постсоветское в современной церковной культуре: образ пастыря, свидетельство, служение], *Bogoslov.ru*, (11.09.2011), <https://bogoslav.ru/article/2005170> [date accessed: 02.11.2022].

determining the general geopolitical contours of the Russian World, an essential contribution belongs to the ROC. The “canonical territory” of the ROC has turned out to most closely resemble the contours of the new empire that Vladimir Putin aspires to rule directly and indirectly.⁵

The State Takes the Place of a Deity⁶

The government unquestionably incorporated both concepts of traditional values and the Russian World into its neo-imperial ideology, and showed gratitude to the Church, which had been directly involved in their development and shaped the worldview of state officials.

With respect to the religiosity of Vladimir Putin, we can draw parallels to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine the Great. At the beginning of the 4th century, Constantine declared Christianity the state religion, replacing the polytheistic content of Roman civil religion with monotheism. Meanwhile, at the beginning of the 21st century, Putin took the next, no less radical step: he de facto removed the actual religious content of post-Soviet civil religion and made it a pure form of state ideology, in which the state takes the place of a deity, but without a link to any conception of the divine – be it polytheism or monotheism. Putin’s empire does not need any gods – old or new – the divine miracle is the revival of the empire after, as Putin himself put it, the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe.”

This is precisely the meaning of the phrase about Russia as “rising from its knees”. These words were first spoken by Boris Yeltsin, when he became president of Russia as a constituent republic of the Soviet Union. However, they took on their contemporary meaning much later, in one of Putin’s speeches eight years later: “Russia might rise from its knees and whack [someone] good.”⁷

Putin’s Russia affirms itself not through a convincing vision of the future, but by justifying itself through history. A powerful source of self-justification from the 20th century was the Victory in World War II. However, the idea of war as a tragedy, as a crime against humanity, is nonexistent in the new myth. Under Putin, Victory Day celebrations have become a lavish demonstration of Russian

⁵ CHAPNIN, “Post-Soviet Civil Religion Instead of Orthodoxy”, *Russia.Post*.

⁶ CHAPNIN, “Post-Soviet Civil Religion Instead of Orthodoxy”, *Russia.Post*.

⁷ “Who Started to Raise Russia from Its Knees?” *Rosbalt News Agency* (27.11.2013). <https://www.rosbalt.ru/blogs/2013/11/27/1204714.html> [accessed: 02.11.2022]

exceptionalism. An important element of this ritual is the entirely pagan worship of the Eternal Flame and the “Immortal Regiment” mass march (a secular “cross procession”), with portraits of those who died in the war paraded through the streets, representing a cult of heroic ancestors, instead of the cult of venerating saints more familiar to the Orthodox tradition.⁸

Back in 2005, Archpriest Georgy Mitrofanov, a leading Christian publicist in Russia, called this cult of the Victory “*pobedobesie*” (“Victory obsession”).⁹ However, his warnings went unheeded.

The para-religious justification for the war, that it will bring victory over evil, remains an important element of “patriotic” journalism within Russia. Thus, the idea that Russia is always right and fights ‘for the truth’ is automatically transferred from World War II to any other war, and now to the war in Ukraine.¹⁰

Alexander Prokhanov, editor-in-chief of the conservative *Zavtra* newspaper, wrote this piece on Easter 2022:

Today Russia is leading an Easter procession around Mariupol. Lighting lamps in Donetsk and Lugansk. Putting out Easter candles near Kharkov. Hanging lights near Kherson and Nykolaev. Merging with the Easter choir is the roar of long-range guns, the whistle of Hurricanes [Uragan rockets], the roar of diving bombers.¹¹

Prokhanov is not interested in the fact that as a result of the “Easter procession around Mariupol”, the city was almost destroyed. His task is to support Russian military propaganda and form a new myth cloaked in Christian imagery. This task can hardly even be called hypocritical. There is something frankly demonic about it.

Contemporary Russian theology and religious thought were caught completely off guard by these developments, and the attempts to substitute the Gospel with a “national-Christian ideology” received the full support of the official Church. Here

⁸ CHAPNIN, “Post-Soviet Civil Religion Instead of Orthodoxy”, *Russia.Post*.

⁹ In 2022, links to Russian sources were blocked, but the reference to Archpriest Georgy Mitrofanov as the author of this pejorative still could be found on Ukrainian Wikipedia: <https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Победобесие> [accessed: 02.11.2022]

¹⁰ CHAPNIN, “Post-Soviet Civil Religion Instead of Orthodoxy”, *Russia.Post*.

¹¹ Alexander PROKHANOV, “Truly!” [Воистину!], *Zavtra Newspaper* (25.04.2022), <https://zavtra.ru/blogs/voistinu> [accessed: 02.11.2022]. [Note of the editor: The quote reflects the Russian spelling of the names of the Ukrainian cities of Luhansk, Kharkiv and Mykolaiv.]

is what Alexander Schipkov, the Deputy Chairman of the Synodal Department for the Church's Relations with Society and Mass Media, a close adviser to Patriarch Kirill, wrote during the war:

Russophobia in its current political forms is a set of both discriminatory and repressive practices and has a specific goal: the violent de-Russification of Russians on their own historical territory... This is a hybrid war being waged against Russia and Russians by representatives of the contemporary liberal and Nazi political consensus.¹²

Schipkov's article was published in the official newspaper of the Duma and reprinted without any comments on the official website of the ROC. It fully conforms to the general line of Russian propaganda – that the war is not being waged by, but against Russia, that it was not Russia that attacked a neighboring state, but the forces of the collective, openly “Nazi” West, that are waging a hybrid war on Russian territory.¹³

Such a plunge into darkness could not help but trigger rejection by the dioceses and self-governing Churches that had been more open to the West, or were weighed down by constant ideological pressure from ROC officials. Since the war began, several parishes in Western Europe have broken up with the ROC and joined the Ecumenical Patriarchate (EP). In Lithuania, a group of five priests was received into the Ecumenical Patriarchate after they were defrocked by a local metropolitan for their consistently anti-war stance. Furthermore, another two Belarusian priests emigrated to Lithuania and were received by the EP to serve the local community of Belarussian emigres. A substantial number of parishes outside Russia have stopped commemorating the name of Patriarch Kirill at services – all this being a sign of categorical disagreement with the ROC's position concerning the war in Ukraine.¹⁴

Judging by the speeches of Patriarch Kirill, he refuses to take this disagreement seriously: Ukraine has become something abstract for him, a distant land where a people that is “one with the Russians” lives. Yet for him, this people is not worthy

¹² Alexander SCHIPKOV, “Derussification and Theological Warfare” [Дерусификация и теологическая война], *Patriarchia.ru* (13.05.2022), <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5925379.html> [accessed: 2.11.2022].

¹³ ШИПКОВ, “Post-Soviet Civil Religion Instead of Orthodoxy”, *Russia.Post*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

of support, sympathy or love. The Patriarch could not find a single warm word for the victims of the war and has not expressed condolences to the families of dead Ukrainians. Moreover, in early May, when Russia's aggression against Ukraine had been going on for more than two months, Patriarch Kirill preached:

We don't want to fight with anyone. Russia has never attacked anyone. It's amazing that this great and powerful country never attacked anyone – it's only defended its borders. God grant that until the end of the century our country will be like this – strong, powerful and at the same time loved by God.¹⁵

Three weeks after this sermon, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which for three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union had remained an integral part of the ROC, convened a Council, the highest institution in the Church, expressed its disagreement with the position of the Patriarch, and declared its independence from the ROC. Patriarch Kirill has lost Ukraine, and has lost it exclusively by his own choice.¹⁶

Kirill failed to take the risky yet essential step of calling on Putin to end the war. On the contrary, Patriarch Kirill has actually supported the war and chained himself to the Putin regime.

EU sanctions against Patriarch Kirill could have become an important indication that the global community understands his role in justifying the war. However, Patriarch Kirill has influential allies – Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán vetoed the move. Still, the UK took the first step in mid-June, announcing sanctions against Patriarch Kirill “for his prominent support of Russian military aggression in Ukraine”,¹⁷ and later Canada also sanctioned Patriarch Kirill.

Perhaps with the help of state-controlled media, Patriarch Kirill has some tactical achievements to his name. However, this won't help either him or the “official Church” to solve the main strategic problem – the substitution of Gospel

¹⁵ Patriarch KIRILL, Sermon after the Liturgy in the Arkhangelsky Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin, *Patriarchia.ru* (3.05.2022), <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5922848.html> [accessed: 02.11.2022].

¹⁶ CHAPNIN, “Post-Soviet Civil Religion Instead of Orthodoxy”, *Russia.Post*.

¹⁷ Press release “UK sanctions Russian linked to forced transfers and adoptions”, *Gov.uk*, June 16, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-russian-linked-to-forced-transfers-and-adoptions> [accessed: 02.11.2022].

teachings for a religious ideology designed to serve the political interests of an authoritarian regime.

The retrieval of the Russian Church to its true mission will only arise through a crisis. That crisis will be protracted, profound, and severe. Moreover, getting over it will be possible only after the radical change of the political regime in Russia.¹⁸

It bears noting that Russia is not the only nation suffering from post-Soviet civil religion. Christian churches and communities worldwide are too tolerant of various justifications for war and violence. Their attempt to remain silent while Patriarch Kirill, day after day, preaches about Russia as a force of light fighting the corrupted West, is a sign of moral bankruptcy. There is no simple way out, but there is a way to witness the peace and love God has given us, and proclaim a truth that does not conform to any ideology that justifies war and hate.

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¹⁸ ЧАПНИН, “Post-Soviet Civil Religion Instead of Orthodoxy”, *Russia.Post*.

THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH BETWEEN THE ALLIANCE FOR THE UNION OF ROMANIANS AND THE PUTINIST TEMPTATION: ULTRANATIONALIST PROPAGANDA AMONG ORTHODOX CLERGYMEN AND THE RUSSIAN WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

IONUȚ BILIUȚĂ¹

Abstract. The present essay details the intricate relationship between the Romanian Orthodox hierarchy and the conflict in Ukraine on various levels (philanthropic, social, ecclesiological, political). While most of the Orthodox bishops in Romania continue to voice their concern about the war, few condemn the complicity of the Russian Orthodox Church in endorsing the military involvement of Russia in Ukraine. Another factor that contributed to the moral anaesthesia of the Orthodox bishops has to do with the silent political preference for the pro-Russian, ultranationalist Alliance of the Union of Romanians party (AUR). While the Romanian Patriarchate condemned vehemently the political instrumentalization of Orthodoxy, against the official position of the hierarchy, a part of the regular and monastic clergy still nurtures admiration for Vladimir Putin, seen as the main benefactor of the Orthodox Church worldwide and his pro-Christian policies.

Keywords: War in Ukraine, Romanian Orthodox Church, war theology, philanthropy, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians, Russian Orthodox Church, autocephaly.

The public statements of Archbishop Teodosie (Petrescu) of Constanța at the local radio in support of President Putin depicted the Russian leader as the most important Orthodox donor for the Holy Places of the Orthodox world.²

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² “ÎPS Teodosie, osanale pentru Putin: «M-am minunat câte jertfe au făcut Putin și Medvedev, și noi îi judecăm ca pe niște răufăcatori»”, *Digi24* (9.02.2022), <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/ips-teodosie-osanale-pentru-putin-m-am-minunat-cate-jertfe-au-facut-putin-si-medvedev-si-noi-ii-judecam-ca-pe-niste-raufacatori-1831149> (accessed 15.01.2023). For the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate’s reaction, see Andreea PAVEL, “BOR, reacție după ce ÎPS Teodosie l-a laudat pe Vladimir Putin: ”Nu reprezintă poziția



Archbishop Teodosie's remarks sparked uproar among the Romanian public. For the Orthodox archbishop, it was not the first time he sided with the Russian Orthodoxy or openly supported important representatives of the Putin regime to expand their influence among Romanian Orthodox clergymen. A few years back, the press reported about the whereabouts of Aleksandr Dughin in Romania, the main ideologue of Eurasianism, as guest of Archbishop Teodosie in his private nunnery in Dorna Arini.³

The present contribution aims to provide some tentative answers to several poignant questions regarding the affinities of the Orthodox clergy with the Russian Orthodoxy and the pro-Orthodox policies of the Russian state. The main argument relates to the clandestine nature of these sympathies, not because of fear of reprimand from the church hierarchy, but rather from the state and its authorities. As a form of covert fundamentalist Orthodoxy inspired by the political and cultural practices of interwar fascism and national Communism, the ultranationalist, pro-Russian minority inside Romanian Orthodoxy gains traction among some part of Orthodox clergymen especially in Eastern Romania.⁴ As a form of religious “underground within”, the ultranationalist leanings and the anti-Ukrainian feelings of the Romanian Orthodox clergymen constitute a fundamentalist sub-culture inside the Romanian Orthodox Church.⁵ What was the top-down reaction of the Romanian Patriarchate to the war in Ukraine? How did Orthodox priests still favor Putin and Russia over Ukraine despite the

Bisericii, vorbește în nume strict personal/ Obişnuieşte să se exprime atipic inclusiv pe teme extra-bisericeşti”, *G4Media* (9.02.2022), <https://www.g4media.ro/bor-reactie-dupa-ce-ips-teodosie-l-a-laudat-pe-vladimir-putin-nu-reprezinta-pozitia-bisericii-vorbeste-in-nume-strict-personal-obisnuieste-sa-se-exprime-atipic-inclusiv-pe-teme-extra-bise.html> (accessed 15.01.2023).

³ Albert PĂTRU, “Patriarhul Daniel i-a luat lui Teodosie mănăstirea cu hotel și SPA de fițe de la Dorna Arini”, *Jurnalul de Constanța* (16.01.2021), <https://jurnaluldeconstanta.ro/2021/01/16/patriarhul-daniel-i-a-luat-lui-teodosie-manastirea-cu-hotel-si-spa-de-fite-de-la-dorna-arini/> (accessed on 15.01.2023).

⁴ Ionuț BILIUȚĂ, “Constructing Fascist Hagiographies: The Genealogy of the Prison Saints Movement in Contemporary Romania,” *Contemporary European History* 31.3 (2022) 435–455; Monica GRIGORE-DOVLETE, *À la recherche de miracles: Pèlerines, religion vécue et la Roumanie postcommuniste*, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2020.

⁵ Anca ȘINCAN and Ionuț BILIUȚĂ, “Introduction,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 14.2 (2022) 193–197.

obvious anti-Russian feelings of the Orthodox clergy? What were the main vectors of Russian influence in Romanian society in general and inside the Orthodox Church in particular?

The Romanian Patriarchate and Its Attitude Towards Russia and the War in Ukraine

Confronted with a wave of criticism for their passivity during the pandemic, when several bishops openly criticized the state or the vaccination process or, in private, the restraint shown by Patriarch Daniel to the unpopular confinement rules imposed by the state, which interfered with the normal schedule of divine offices, the Patriarchate found in the exercise of war-time philanthropy the much-needed respite. Practiced from the bottom to the top of the institution, charitable actions fended off the criticisms from within or outside the church. The humanitarian initiatives of priests and associations on behalf of the Ukrainian refugees swept through the church at all levels. By setting in motion its proverbial system of collecting donations from the state institutions, private entrepreneurs, and the everyday parishioners, the Romanian Orthodox Church allowed itself a moment of respite after being criticized vehemently for building mostly out of public funds the Cathedral for the Salvation of the Nation and mismanagement of public money.⁶

While most of the private donors and the priests who joined hands with volunteers were genuine in their desire to alleviate the sufferings of Ukrainian refugees, through its media channels the hierarchy instrumentalized and channeled the collective wave of solidarity with the Ukrainian refugees as a reassuring blank check, meant to silence the opposition from the civil society that unmasked its moral and pecuniary corruption.⁷ Except but a few hierarchs (Bishop Ignatie of

⁶ Giuseppe TATEO, *Under the Sign of the Cross: The People's Salvation Cathedral and the Church Building Industry in Postsocialist Romania* (Space and Place 18), New York: Berghahn Books, 2020, 117–143.

⁷ Sorin IONIȚE, Ajutoare de aproape 24 milioane de lei din partea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române pentru victimele războiului din Ucraina, *Basilica* (21.03.2022), <https://basilica.ro/ajutoare-de-aproape-24-milioane-de-lei-din-partea-bisericii-ortodoxe-romane-pentru-victimele-razboiului-din-ucraina/>; Ștefana TOTORCEA, Comunicat: Biserica a oferit ajutor umanitar de peste 5 milioane euro de la declanșarea războiului în Ucraina, *Basilica* (30.03.2022), <https://basilica.ro/comunicat-biserica-a-oferit-ajutor-umanitar-de-peste-5-milioane-euro-de-la-declansarea-razboiului-in-ucraina/>; Iulian Dumitrașcu, 6 milioane euro, valoarea

Huși, Archbishop Calinic) who personally took the lead in assisting the refugees with basic commodities, visited them at the border to provide them spiritual assistance and comfort, or sheltered them in their monasteries, the leadership of the Orthodox Church headed by Patriarch Daniel Ciobotea preferred the comfort of their residential palaces rather than facing the cold at the border, and urged their clergy and flocks to collect money, foodstuff, or cloathing for Ukrainian refugees.⁸

As in other circumstances where the hierarchs felt undecided which course of action to pursue, the bishops headed by Patriarch Daniel practiced initially ambiguity towards the reality of war and the presence of Ukrainian refugees, the policy of empty words in condemning the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the complicity of the Russian Patriarchate with the Kremlin regime, and voiced a feeble and hesitant compassion towards the refugees.⁹ Through their appeals in sermons and pastoral letters, the hierarchs attempted to control and stir

sprijinului material oferit până acum de Biserică pentru victimele războiului, *Basilica* (4.04.2022), <https://basilica.ro/6-milioane-euro-valoarea-sprrijinului-material-oferit-pana-acum-de-biserica-pentru-victimele-razboiului/>; Ștefana TOTORCEA, Comunicat: Ajutorul oferit de Biserică refugiaților a ajuns la 6,5 milioane euro. Bilanțul perioadei 1-14 aprilie (21.04.2022), <https://basilica.ro/comunicat-ajutorul-oferit-de-biserica-refugiatilor-a-ajuns-la-6-milioane-si-jumatate-euro-bilantul-perioadei-1-14-aprilie/>; Sorin IONIȚE, Ajutorul oferit de Biserică pentru victimele războiului din Ucraina a depășit 7 milioane de euro: Comunicat, *Basilica* (25.05.2022), <https://basilica.ro/ajutorul-oferit-de-biserica-pentru-victimele-razboiului-din-ucraina-a-depasit-7-milioane-de-euro-comunicat/>; Iulian DUMITRAȘCU, Ajutorul oferit de Biserică pentru refugiați a ajuns la 7,6 milioane euro. Bilanț 16 mai – 1 iulie, *Basilica* (06.07.2022), <https://basilica.ro/ajutorul-oferit-de-biserica-pentru-refugiati-a-ajuns-la-76-milioane-euro-bilant-16-mai-1-iulie/>.

⁸ Arhiepiscopul Sucevei și Rădăuților, ÎPS Calinic, a fost alături de refugiații din Ucraina care trec prin vama Siret Publicat (26.02.2022), <https://www.ziarelive.ro/stiri/arhiepiscopul-sucevei-si-radautilor-ips-calinic-a-fost-alaturi-de-refugiatii-din-ucraina-care-trec-prin-vama-siret.html>; Iulian Dumitrașcu, Ajutorul umanitar actual al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române pentru victimele războiului din Ucraina, *Basilica* (14.03.2022), <https://basilica.ro/ajutorul-umanitar-actual-al-bisericii-ortodoxe-romane-pentru-victimele-razboiului-din-ucraina/> (accessed 23.01.2023).

⁹ “Pastorală Patriarhului Daniel de Sfintele Paști 2022”, <https://basilica.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Pastorală-Paști-2022-a-Patriarhului-Daniel.pdf>; IPS Teofan, Mitropolitul Moldovei și Bucovinei: „Nașterea lui Hristos – pământul devenit Cer” (Scrisoare pastorală, 2022), <https://doxologia.ro/ips-teofan-mitropolitul-moldovei-bucovinei-nasterea-lui-hristos-pamantul-devenit-cer-scrisoare> (accessed 23.01.2023).

collective philanthropy in their interest, to demonstrate before state authorities and the secular critics that national Orthodoxy proved its relevance at the social level.¹⁰ Furthermore, the bishops were at the forefront of these initiatives and their communion with the Orthodox sister-church of Ukraine had to be shown through humanitarian aid to those in need.

The 2022 Easter Pastoral Letters of the Romanian Patriarchate spoke about the need to pray for peace and encouraged the extension of charity toward Ukrainian refugees to an unforeseeable future.¹¹ Veiled condemnations of the war were made by many of the bishops. Except for Patriarch Daniel, who condemned adamantly the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and Bishop Ignatie of Huși who also voiced criticism regarding the nefarious role of the Russian Orthodox Church that departed from its role in consolidating Christ's love among its believers, no other bishop dared to criticize the support of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy to the war in Ukraine and the atrocities committed by the Russian occupying forces against the civilian population.¹² Nevertheless, in the pastoral letters and the decisions of the Holy Synod in Bucharest there was no mention of an official acknowledgement of the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, nor a condemnation of the Russian military aggression and the complicity of the Moscow Patriarchate in perpetrating war against their Ukrainian Orthodox brethren.

¹⁰ Daniela MICUȚARIU, „Uniți pentru pace”, platformă lansată de Arhiepiscopia Sucevei și Rădăuților, pentru ajutorarea refugiaților din Ucraina, *Monitorul de Suceava* (30.03.2022) <https://www.monitorulsv.ro/Ultima-ora-local/2022-03-30/Uniti-pentru-pace-platforma-lansata-de-Arhipiscopia-Sucevei-si-Radautilor-pentru-ajutorarea-refugiatilor-din-Ucraina>; Alexandru BOBOC, IPS Nifon a vorbit în Comisia Europeană despre modul în care Biserica a ajutat milioane de refugiați ucraineni (28.01.2023), <https://basilica.ro/ips-nifon-a-vorbit-in-comisia-europeana-despre-modul-in-care-biserica-a-ajutat-milioane-de-refugiati-ucraineni/> (accessed 23.01.2023).

¹¹ Pastorală Patriarhului Daniel de Sfintele Paști 2022, <https://basilica.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Pastorală-Paști-2022-a-Patriarhului-Daniel.pdf> (accessed 23.01.2023).

¹² Simona VOICU, “Episcopul Hușilor: «Patriarhul Kirill al Rusiei are îndatorirea morală să îi amintească liderului pravoslavnic de la Kremlin că Ortodoxia este întotdeauna de partea iubirii, nu a războiului»”, *Libertatea* (24.02.2022), <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/episcopul-husilor-patriarhul-kirill-al-rusiei-are-indatorirea-morala-sa-ii-aminteasca-liderului-pravoslavnic-de-la-kremlin-ca-ortodoxia-este-intotdeauna-de-partea-iubirii-nu-a-razboiului-3997724> (accessed 23.01.2023).

This dishonorable silence has multiple explanations. On the one hand, the Romanian Orthodox Church still lacks a war theology or a set of clear-cut rules how its clergy and Orthodox communities must behave during a regional conflict in a neighboring state such as Ukraine.¹³ Except for common prayers and special litanies introduced in the liturgical offices and public messages urging believers to alleviate the sufferings of the Ukrainian refugees, the Orthodox bishops seemed to be completely overwhelmed by the scale of the conflict and its ecclesiological implications for the Orthodox Church in its entirety.

While the response at the grassroots level of the Orthodox communities focused mainly in providing Ukrainian refugees with shelter and necessities, the hierarchy grappled with the issue of acknowledging the Orthodox Church of Ukraine's autocephaly from Moscow Patriarchate or issuing a public statement condemning the Russian Orthodox Church for its participation and backing of the Putin-regime in the war against Ukraine. The restraint displayed by the hierarchy towards the Russian Church stems from the long history of ecclesiastical diplomacy based on ambiguity and abstaining from taking sides, even in the ecumenical movement, professed by the Romanian Church since the days of the communist regime. In their dialogues with other Orthodox Churches and secular institutions such as the Romanian state or the European Union, the diplomats of the Romanian Orthodoxy boasted with the financial help provided by the parishes and monasteries rather than a condemnation of the Russian Patriarch and his Synod for their role in endorsing the war.

The Orthodox Clergy and their Behavior during the War: Philanthropy and Social Mobilization towards the Ukrainian Refugees Arriving to Romania

Another explanation for the fact that the hierarchy with Patriarch Daniel at its head took over the control of the public message about the war and the humanitarian aid towards Ukrainian refugees had to do with the state of mind of the Orthodox priests regarding Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in

¹³ For a traditional account of a Byzantine/Orthodox war theology, see Alexander K. KYROU and Elizabeth H. PRODROMOU, "Debates on Just War, Holy War and Peace: Orthodox Christian Thought and Byzantine Imperial Attitudes Towards War", in *Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War*, edited by Perry T. HAMALIS and Valerie A. KARRAS, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017, 215–251.

particular. The fall of communism in Romania in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1992 led to a gradual warming up of the Orthodox clergy's relations with Russian Orthodoxy.¹⁴ Despite the canonical war over the jurisdiction of Bessarabia, where up to the present day there are two parallel hierarchies (one dependent on Bucharest, another dependent on Moscow), many Orthodox believers, priests, monks, and even bishops undertook pilgrimages to the holy places and monasteries in Russia.¹⁵

Furthermore, theological dialogue sparked a wave of translations of Russian theologians, contemporary or ancient spiritual fathers, and Russian intellectuals in the official and independent publishing houses, an initiative that ensured the dissemination of a fictional and idealized account of Russian Orthodoxy that had nothing to do with reality. Through the lens of the Russian theologians of the Paris or American diasporas and the Western theologians enamored with Russian Orthodoxy, along the ultra-traditionalist and conservative Greek spiritual fathers (elders) Russian theology and the Russian Orthodox Church appeared for Romanian theologians and clergymen as a model to live up to both regarding the institutional relationship with the state and theological endeavors.¹⁶

Another bone of contention shared with the Russian Orthodox Church has to do with the European trajectory Romania embraced in the late 2000s. The 2007 admission of Romania to the European Union, although hailed initially by the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church as a national step forward toward the West, failed to garner support among the regular priests, the monks, and the ultranationalists. Nor did it strengthen the pro-Western sentiments of the Romanian clergymen.¹⁷ On

¹⁴ Gavril FLORA and Georgina SZILAGYI, "Church, Identity, Politics: Ecclesiastical Functions and Expectations Towards Churches in Post-1989 Romania", in *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the 21st Century*, edited by Victor ROUDOMETOF, Alexander AGADJANIAN and Jerry PANKHURST, Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005, 144–160; Lucian LEUȘTEAN, "The Orthodox Churches Beyond the Iron Curtain," in *Eastern Christianity and the Cold War, 1945-91*, edited by Lucian LEUȘTEAN, London: Routledge, 2010, 314–322.

¹⁵ *Adevărul despre Mitropolia Basarabiei*, Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1993; Lavinia STAN and Lucian TURCESCU, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 54–56.

¹⁶ Kristina STOECKL, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, London: Routledge, 2014, 10.

¹⁷ Adrian VELICU, *The Orthodox Church and National Identity in Post-Communist Romania*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2020.

the contrary it brewed resentment towards the Western values and foment dissent among Orthodox fundamentalist members of the clergy towards their bishops. One Romanian spiritual father even said that joining the European Union means the demise of the Romanian nation and the Orthodox Church.¹⁸

Confused by the rapid change and modernization of Romanian society associated with the increasing secularization of the public sphere and the gradual exclusion of religion from state business, dissatisfied with the hierarchy, the regular clergy looked for new guiding lights that confirmed their anti-Western dystopian views and presented the West as a place of apocalyptic atheism. Whether through the cultivation of the most radical anti-Western figures of the Athonite tradition or the recurrence of apparently functioning Russian *symphonia* between Church and state, the priests felt confirmed in their displeasure with the European Union, the secularization of the state, and the wave of increasing dissatisfaction with the meddling of the church in public finances.¹⁹

A further issue that confirmed some Romanian Orthodox priests in their anti-Western feelings had to do with the aggressive “ecumenism” propagated by the Romanian Orthodox hierarchy and perceived as treason of the Patristic legacy of the Orthodox Church. Revamping apocryphal texts from the Church Fathers and contemporary Orthodox theologians (Dumitru Stăniloae, Justin Popovič, Russian theologians of the Parisian exile), these priests condemned Christian dialogue and looked for confirmation at the anti-ecumenical position of the Russian Church.²⁰ On the same page, the 2016 Council of Crete rekindled the ecumenical debate with some priests reading into the withdrawal of the Russian Church from the

¹⁸ Vasilios N. MAKRIDES, “Orthodox Anti-Westernism Today: A Hindrance to European Integration?” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9.3 (2009) 209–224.

¹⁹ Julia Anna LIS, *Antiwestliche Diskurse in der serbischen und griechischen Orthodoxie: Zur Konstruktion des «Westens» bei Nikolaj Velimirovič, Justin Popovič, Christos Yannaras und John S. Romanides*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2019; Bogdan LUBARDIĆ, “Revolt Against the Modern World”: Theology and the Political in the Thought of Justin Popovič”, in *Political Theologies in Orthodox Christianity: Common Challenges - Divergent Positions*, edited by Kristina STOECKL, Ingeborg GABRIEL and Aristotle PAPANIKOLAOU, London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 207–220.

²⁰ Cyril Hovorun, *Political Orthodoxies: The Unorthodoxies of the Church Coerced*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018, 77–80; Regina ELSNER, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Modernity: A Historical and Theological Investigation into Eastern Christianity between Unity and Plurality* (New York: ibidem Press, 2022), 243–250.

council a sign of Orthodox normalcy and opposition to the “heretical” dogma of ecumenism.²¹

Furthermore, through channels within the church, the Moscow Patriarchate fueled the discontent present in the Orthodox Church and sponsored the translation of brochures, manifestos, and leaflets against the promulgation of the decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete.²² Unknowingly, the Russian Orthodoxy enlarged the gap that separates the traditionalist anti-ecumenists and the modernizers in the Romanian Orthodox Church, siding with the former.

Another important issue that contacts with Russian Orthodoxy helped with was the importance of nationalism for the Orthodox clergy.²³ While the hierarchy maintained a moderate claim to the fact that religion had a pivotal role within the state in legitimizing the state’s authority as deriving from God, some of the priests and the monks revived – sometimes unconsciously – the interwar fascist ideas of the Iron Guard that exhorted the interchangeable relation between nationalism/national specificity and Orthodoxy.²⁴ Moving to the wrong side of history, despite their visceral anti-Slavic feelings some of the most important and relevant spiritual fathers of Romanian Orthodoxy and their followers used the Russian example as a card to counter the need to accept the European ideal of unity in diversity, the importance of multiculturalism, or the protection of minorities of any kind. Paradoxically, the illiberal Russian Orthodoxy and its privileged status within the Russian state, its fortune, and direct access to the political factor developed into the model of state-church relations yearned for Orthodox nationalists in Romania. The “seduction of unreason” led to the glorification of strong men such as Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán as true leaders that opposed the wave of anti-

²¹ Hieromonk Lavrentie CARP, *Ortodoxia rănită sinodal. O critică a deciziilor luate în Creta*, Oradea: Astradom, 2019, 98–99.

²² Archimandrite Iustin Pârvu, *Biserica și noile erezii*, Petru Vodă: Petru Vodă Monastery, 2016; *Un an de luptă împotriva ecumenismului după “sinodul” din Creta. Carte document*, Bucharest: Glasul strămoșesc, 2017.

²³ Vasilios N. MAKRIDES, “Orthodox Christianity, Change, Innovation: Contradiction in Terms?” in *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*, edited by Trine STAUNING WILLERT, Lina MOLOKOTOS-LIEDERMAN, Abingdon: Ashgate, 2012, 19–53; HOVORUN, *Political Orthodoxies*, 165.

²⁴ Corneliu SIMUȚ, “Ideological Attempts to Build a Sustainable Program of Ecodominical Decommunization in Post-1989 Romania by Promoting the Notion of National Identity,” *Expository Times* 130.4 (2018) 146–147.

Christian destruction brought by Western decayed and depraved culture in Eastern Europe.²⁵ Ultrationalism associated with illiberalism constituted for a part of the Romanian Orthodoxy a spiritual bulwark against atheism and irreligiosity.²⁶

Subjects of cognitive dissonance, the exponents of this trail of thought helped and commiserated with Ukrainian refugees at the same time as hailing Putin as the savior of Orthodox civilization. Furthermore, once the conflict commenced, Orthodox nationalists uncovered the abuses suffered by the Romanian population in Bukovina and Southern Bessarabia, the restrictions imposed by the Ukrainian government on the teaching of Romanian in schools, and the denationalization policies implemented by the local and central Ukrainian authorities against the Romanian minority and the Romanian Orthodox priests in particular.²⁷ A reputed professor of Orthodox Dogmatic confided that “we Romanians are stupid: we helped the Ukrainians now in times of war while they do everything, they can turn our brothers away from their Romanian identity.” Rediscovered nationalism in Orthodox style led astray several priests and clergymen who thought that Ukrainian refugees should be left to their fates, and Romania should keep itself neutral from the conflict.

A Clerical Party?

Orthodox ultrationalists found a political outlet in the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR). Supported by the regular and monastic clergy, in the 2020 general elections held on 6 December 2020, the party won 9.2% of the general vote, a surprise to all the commentators of the Romanian public life. Headed by Claudiu Târziu and George Simion, the ideology of the political movement combines

²⁵ Anja HENNIG, “Political Genderphobia in Germany: How Opposition to Gender-sensitive Education Reforms Unites Political and Religious Right-wing Actors”, in *Illiberal Politics and Religion in Europe and Beyond: Concepts, Actors, and Identity Narratives*, edited by Anja HENNIG and Mirjam WEIBERG-SALZMANN, Frankfurt-am-Main: Campus Verlag, 2021, 379–406 (402).

²⁶ STAN and TURCESCU, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania*, 180; VELICU, *The Orthodox Church and National Identity in Post-Communist Romania*, 27.

²⁷ Claudia POPOVICI, ÎPS Teodosie, despre cum sunt tratați preoții români din Ucraina: “I-am primit cu atâta căldură și primim o asemenea palmă? Este de neacceptat!” <https://www.antena3.ro/actualitate/ips-teodosie-despre-cum-sunt-tratati-preotii-romani-din-ucraina-663648.html> (accessed 23.01.2023).

xenophobia, fascist ultranationalist, the cult of the saints of the Communist prisons, economic autarchy, anti-EU policies, discrimination against minorities, pro-life and pro-Orthodox views.²⁸

From the beginning, the press unmasked the link between the conservative and ultranationalist party and Russia's interests in Romania. Some journalists even implied that Russia had some of the leaders on pay. As a parliamentary party, AUR embarked on a large-scale electoral quest to seduce the representatives of the Orthodox clergy. Bishops were approached and asked to take part in the AUR's meetings. Priests received by mail invitations to join the party and attend events. Furthermore, the party did little to hide its interwar sympathies with the fascist Legionary movement and the Orthodox priests who belong to it.²⁹ Since the war started in Ukraine, the leaders of the party expressed restraint and asked for Romania to remain neutral in the conflict, contrary to the policies implemented already by the Romanian state. A delegation of four members of the Romanian Parliament headed by senator Diana Ivanovici-Șoșoacă (ex-AUR) visited the Russian embassy in Bucharest to voice their displeasure towards Romania's hardline policy towards Russia and their sympathy towards President Putin's brutal policies.³⁰ However on 4 February 2022 the spokesperson of the Romanian Patriarchate, Vasile Bănescu, delivered the press an official statement that condemned the ideology of ultranationalism as allegedly quintessentially associated with Orthodoxy and the uncritical association between Orthodox values

²⁸ For Orthodox fundamentalism, see Anastasia V. MITROFANOVNA, "Orthodox Fundamentalism: Intersection of Modernity, Postmodernity, and Tradition," in *Orthodox Paradoxes: Heterogeneities and Complexities in Contemporary Russian Orthodoxy*, edited by Katya TOLSTAYA, Leiden: Brill, 2014, 93–106. For AUR's religious undertones, see Claudiu TĂRZIU, *Rostul generației noastre. O perspectivă conservatoare asupra României postcomuniste*, Bucharest: Rost, 2019; ID., *Cei 13 care m-au salvat*, Bucharest: Rost, 2018. See also Radu CINPOEȘ, "The Christian Orthodox Church and Illiberal Politics in Romania," in *Illiberal Politics and Religion in Europe and Beyond: Concepts, Actors, and Identity Narratives*, edited by Anja HENNIG and Mirjam WEIBERG-SALZMANN, Frankfurt-am-Main: Campus Verlag, 2021, 407–433.

²⁹ Sergiu GHERGHINA, Sergiu MIȘCOIU, "Faith in a New Party: The Involvement of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the 2020 Election Campaign," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 23.2 (2022) 226–242.

³⁰ <https://republica.ro/soșoaca-si-inca-trei-parlamentari-s-au-dus-la-ambasada-rusiei-sa-negocieze-pacea-de-la-bucuresti-si-neutralitatea> (accessed 23.01.2023).

and nationalism.³¹ In a second message on his Instagram account, Bănescu went even further and described Patriarch Kirill of Moscow as “man of the Antichrist, who mimics the faith in God and nationalism.”³²

The clear message voiced by the Romanian Patriarchate through the voice of Vasile Bănescu failed to convince the Orthodox clergy to distance itself from the ultranationalist and xenophobic values promoted by the Romanian (neo-)fascist party in its ranks. The pro-Russian agitation carried by AUR echoed in the milieu of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Perceived by some priests as a clerical party or as a political organization defending Orthodoxy in front of the dissolving tendencies and ideas stemming from the West, some priests and monks considered the war a farce, as something that did not exist, and asked for Romania to remain neutral in the conflict. An interesting paradox occurred: while the interwar and post-Communist nationalist intelligentsia nurtured deep-seated anti-Russian feelings, during the war in Ukraine, they stood in support of Russia instead of Ukraine because of the delicate situation of the Romanian minority there, deprived of the right to pursue school in their language,

Conclusions

1. The solidarity of Orthodox Romanians with their Ukrainian brothers remains up to this day from the bottom-up. The bishops only instrumentalized the efforts of their priests and Orthodox communities to gain respite from the public and press criticism.

2. There is a critical mass of Orthodox priests, monks, ordinary believers, ONGs, monasteries even bishops who consider the help provided by the Romanian state and the Orthodox Church a mistake. They dislike, fear, and, at the same time, stand with Russia rather than Ukraine.

3. Except for a handful of cases, the Romanian Orthodox hierarchy practices ambiguity towards the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the masses of refugees crossing Romanian borders. At the same time, while the bishops opened

³¹ “Biserica Ortodoxă, critici la adresa AUR: Amestecarea nătângă a religiei cu politica a făcut deja prea multe victime în istorie”, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-25347339-biserica-ortodoxa-critici-adresa-aur-amestecarea-natanga-religiei-politica-facut-deja-prea-multe-victime-istorie.htm> (accessed 23.01.2023).

³² <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/patriarh-daniel-mesaj-refugiati-ucraina/31741809.html> (accessed 23.01.2023).

monasteries and social institutions to shelter and feed the displaced, they have also kept silent about the barbaric war in Ukraine waged by the Russian troops and failed to condemn in strong words the complicity of the Russian Patriarchate to such horrendous crimes.

4. The presence of the Russian-backed party in Romania that gains traction among Orthodox believers and clergymen alike should be perceived as a form of lingering ecclesiastical anti-Western and quasi-fascist ideas, with unforeseen consequences in the future both for the Orthodox Church and the conflict in Ukraine.

5. There is a great need for canonical and theological clarity in Romanian Orthodoxy regarding the status of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church(es). While the Romanian Patriarchate continues to procrastinate and send appeals for peace to deaf ears, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine struggles with its ambiguous status, with its autocephaly still unrecognized by other Orthodox Churches except the Patriarchal See of Constantinople and a few other Churches (the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Church of Greece, and the Church of Cyprus).³³

The massive solidarity displayed by the Orthodox clergy and the many donations for Ukrainian refugees should not deter the observer from noticing the questionable fashion in which Romanian Orthodox embrace the other. While Orthodox Ukrainians were welcomed, Muslim refugees remain up to the present day unwanted.

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³³ Cyril HOVORUN, “The Cause of Ukrainian Autocephaly”, in *Religion During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict*, edited by Elizabeth CLARK and Dmytro VOVK, London: Routledge, 2019, 180–192.

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