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RUSSIA-UKRAINE: Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and Putin's war against Ukraine

**Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church:
Putin is "destroying the basic
principles of peace"**

Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk calls the Russian actions "a new wave of armed aggression."

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (24.02.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3tqto6v> – Yes, there are Roman Catholics in Ukraine. Quite a few of them. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has some 5 million members in a country of 44 million, and may have more than eight million parishioners if one adds the Ukrainian diaspora throughout the world. It is in full communion with the Pope but follows a different rite (Byzantine). In fact, after the Latin Church, the Ukrainian Church is the second largest within the global Catholic communion. While there is a small percentage of Latin Catholics (around 400,000) in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church has traditionally been the voice of Catholicism in the country.

The message of Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, released on February 22, 2022, accordingly, is the most authorized and official comment by the Ukrainian Roman Catholic authorities on the current events. Although released before the invasion, the statement already predicts it and spells out the Catholic answer to the aggression.

The Patriarch writes that “The recognition of the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk ‘People’s Republics’ as ‘independent and sovereign’ by the President of the Russian Federation seriously challenges and threatens the international community and international law. It inflicts irreparable damage to the very logic of interstate relations, which are designed to ensure peace and a just society, the rule of law, accountability, protection of human beings, their lives, and natural rights.” The problem, Shevchuk says, does not concern Ukraine only. “Today, all humanity is in danger that the right of the strong will impose itself on everyone, ignoring the rule of law.”

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church does not believe that both parties are to blame for what happened. There is a party that aggressed and one that was aggressed. “By their decision, the Patriarch writes, the authorities of the Russian Federation

unilaterally withdrew from the long peace process.” Instead, a “Russian armed aggression” continued. Indeed, the war started with the occupation of Crimea in 2014. “The war against our people, Shevchuk notes, in 2014 left deep wounds on the lives of many of our compatriots: thousands were killed, or left wounded and lonely.”

But now, according to the Patriarch, something even worse happened. “Yesterday’s step by the President of the Russian Federation destroyed the basic principles of the long process of restoring peace in Ukraine, created opportunities for a new wave of armed aggression against our state, and opened the door to a full-scale military operation against the Ukrainian people.”

Christianity is a religion of peace, the Patriarch explains, and the Church always tries to “prevent war,” but on the other hand Catholic moral theology allows for resistance against an unjust aggression. “Today, he writes, we consider the protection of our native land, our memory and hope, our God-given right to exist, to be a personal responsibility and a sacred duty of the citizens of Ukraine.

Defending the Motherland is our natural right and our civic duty. We are strong when we are together. Now is the time to unite our efforts to defend the independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of the Ukrainian State.” “We are a people who love peace. And that is why we are ready to defend it and fight for it strenuously.”

The crisis, the Patriarch believes, is international. “We are convinced, he writes, that the world cannot evolve and find answers to the challenges of our time by resorting to force and violence, neglecting universal values □□and Gospel truth. We call on all people of good will not to stand aside from the suffering of the Ukrainian people caused by the Russian military aggression.”

The Church wants peace, Shevchuk writes, but it should be a “just peace.” When injustice is vested on the country, the Catholic Church is with the “defenders of Ukraine, who these days are an example of sacrificial love and devotional service to our people. May the merciful Lord protect them from all dangers and endow their efforts with the ultimate victory of truth and goodness,” the Patriarch prays.

Photo: *The Cathedral of St. George in Lviv, Ukraine, the mother church of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Credits.*

Massimo Introvigne (born June 14, 1955 in Rome) is an Italian sociologist of religions. He is the founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), an international network of scholars who study new religious movements. Introvigne is the author of some 70 books and more than 100 articles in the field of sociology of religion. He was the main author of the *Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia* (Encyclopedia of Religions in Italy). He is a member of the editorial board for the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* and of the executive board of University of California Press' *Nova Religio*. From January 5 to December 31, 2011, he has served as the “Representative on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, with a special focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions” of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). From 2012 to 2015 he served as chairperson of the Observatory of Religious Liberty, instituted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to monitor problems of religious liberty on a worldwide scale.

Further reading about FORB in Russia and Ukraine on HRWF website

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