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RUSSIA-UKRAINE: Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox priests against the war

Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox priests against the war

In many Ukrainian churches of the Moscow Patriarchate, the name of Patriarch Kirill was not mentioned during Sunday liturgies. The Moscow Orthodox hierarchy allegedly did not approve of the invasion. From the conflict a possible push for the reunion of all the Churches of Ukraine.

by Vladimir Rozanskij

AsiaNews (28.02.2022) – <https://bit.ly/36ZP0Pz> – The Russian war against Ukraine is putting a severe strain on the Orthodox Christian faith, to which both peoples in the conflict belong. In many Ukrainian Orthodox Churches belonging to the patriarchate of Moscow, the name of Patriarch Kirill was not recalled during Sunday liturgies, causing many faithful to turn away from the Russian Church.

The Metropolitan of the autocephalous Church Epifanyj (Dumenko) appealed to Kirill to intercede with President Putin to stop the war. The Patriarch of Moscow, in turn, issued an appeal for “the Lord to protect Russian land”, specifying that he was referring to “Kievan Rus’, from which Russia, Ukraine and Belarus originated”.

The website Meduza.ru has gathered the testimony of several priests divided on the military operations, but united in their ecclesial belonging. Proto-priest Nikolai Bandurin is parish priest in the church in the village of Andreevo-Melentevo in the Rostov region, bordering the Donbass, 30 kilometres from the most disputed border. In his opinion, “it was time for some order in Ukraine, President Putin is right... God is with us, and He loves everyone, we must pray and hope that everything will go well”.

Protoierej Aleksej Uminskij, on the other hand, is the parish priest of the Holy Trinity Church in Moscow’s Khokhly (“Ukrainians’”) district, and says he cannot support his country’s military actions. “I pray for peace, I pray that all this ends as soon as possible, and that as few people as possible suffer from it”.

Fr. Aleksej quotes the words of Moscow Patriarch Kirill (Gundjaev) and the Russian Metropolitan of Kiev Onufryj (Berezovskij), who called the Russian invasion a “fratricidal war... our hierarchy has not approved this military action at

all, it is a tragedy without justification or explanation". Uminsky notes with regret that 'there is a strong division among the people with respect to the war, it is a war among us, even among those who come to church and take communion at the one chalice'.

The Orthodox Church in Russia is very disoriented, while in Ukraine the people are rallying around their pastors in the face of aggression. **Protoierej Aleksej Pelevin**, who directs the charitable sector of the eparchy of Kaluga, in southern Russia, recalls the words of the Gospel: "There is no greater love than to give one's life for one's friends".

He maintains that each Russian soldier fulfils this commandment, and the Church "has always blessed those who put themselves at the service of the defence of their homeland: we pray for all our soldiers, as the liturgical litanies also prescribe, in Ukraine as in Syria and throughout the world". Fr Aleksej tries to welcome refugees from Donbass, as Patriarch Kirill has recommended.

Fr. Aleksandr Satomsky, on the other hand, looks after the Church of the Epiphany in Yaroslavl, central Russia, and does not intend to expound his thoughts on the ongoing war, "because it could divide people, and division is the work of the devil, but I know that for God there are no useless people, and Jesus went up on the cross for everyone, without looking at who is right and who is wrong... we pray that the light of reason triumphs!".

The Metropolitan of Belgorod, Ioann (Popov), who leads his Church in a region bordering Ukraine, says that "when there is a war, priests should only pray for peace. We do not understand what happens, and in these cases we must pray that God enlightens our minds, that love wins and peace is restored... there will never be love as long as we continue to destroy one another".

The Metropolitan recalled that the Orthodox liturgy prays for “the multiplication of love” and quoted St Nicholas of Serbia, who said that “when love decreases in people, they feel the need to restore justice, but often they no longer know what it is”.

An important Russian theologian and historian is the **protoierej Georgij Mitrofanov**, according to whom “priests today must help people not to lose their faith journey, regardless of whether they are in a war or peace zone, because in these circumstances it is easy to lose the Christian meaning of life”.

Even those who are engaged in war, like the soldiers, Fr. Georgij recalls, “must not forget to be Christians, trying not to shed the blood of the enemy, not to become instruments of diabolical hatred”. All wars are fratricidal, because all men are brothers: “The Cossacks who returned from the war were forbidden to set foot in church for a year, because they were covered in shame”.

Archbishop Evstratij (Zorja) represents the autocephalous Ukrainian Church, and accuses Putin of “Jesuit thinking”, which in the Russian world is synonymous with hypocrisy: because there are groups of exalted nationalists in Ukraine, then the whole country must be subjected to the “superior force”, but Ukrainians are good people of faith, they do not want to participate in the restoration of “the empire of evil” and “never before have they needed the Church, they seek consolation and spiritual support, even just a word of hope, to be able to believe in the victory of truth”. Evstratij’s hope is that in this task all the Churches of Ukraine can finally be united, driven by mercy towards the suffering people.

HRWF Research Notes

Statement of the Ukrainian Association for Jewish Studies

(28.02.2022)

Patriarch Kirill urges to pray for peace in “Russian Lands”
(28.02.2022)

Head of Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia calls for
“doubling prayers” for peace in Ukraine (28.02.2022)

Pope speaks with Ukrainian President (27.02.2022)

Does the Russian Orthodox Church want peace? (26.02.2022)

Patriarch Kirill calls on conflict parties in Ukraine to avoid
civilian casualties (25.02.2022)

The Jewish community will strengthen charity during the
conflict (25.02.2022)

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: Putin ‘is destroying the
basic principles of peace’ (24.02.2022)

Primate of the UOC MP – Putin: “War with Ukraine is a
repetition of Cain’s sin” (24.02.2022)

How Putin is exploiting Orthodox rivalries in Ukraine
(23.02.2022)

23 February: Patriarch Kirill wished Putin ‘peace of mind’ on
Defender of the Fatherland Day (23.02.2022)

The head of the Assembly of Muslims called Russia’s
recognition of the Donbas’ independence justified (23.02.2022)

The head of the canonical UOC supported Ukraine’s territorial
integrity (19.02.2022)

[Further reading about FORB in Russia on HRWF website](#)

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