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Controversy about the bill on property transfer of Kyiv-Pechersk & Pochaiv Lavras

By Willy Fautré, director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (12.09.2022) - On 8 September 2022, a draft resolution proposing the transfer of [the Pochaiv Dormition Lavra and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra](#) from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate (UOC) to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) was registered.

People's deputy from the "Servant of the People" faction Andriy Bohdanets [registered](#) draft resolution No. 8012 on the appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

If the bill is adopted, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine must inform the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine about the implementation of this resolution within three months.

The Legal Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate stated that [the OCU has no right to claim the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra](#). It argued that the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra is under the legal ownership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate and since 1988, their monks have restored the ancient Ukrainian traditions of the Lavra life and also a large number of churches and cells.

The Pochaiv Dormition Lavra and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra

Orthodox Christianity was introduced in the current territory of Ukraine by Vladimir the Great or Volodymyr the Great, Prince of Novgorod, Grand Prince of Kyiv and ruler of Kyivan Rus from 980 to 1015. Originally a follower of [Slavic paganism](#), he converted to [Christianity](#) in 988 and [christianized his people](#). He is thus also known as Saint Vladimir.

The Holy Dormition Kiev-Caves ("Kiev-Pechersk") Lavra is the first and the most ancient monastery on the territory of contemporary Ukraine. The monastery was founded in

1051 while the existence of Moscow was only first documented in 1147. Today, it is the center of Orthodoxy, one of the most important monasteries of the Christian world.

Since its foundation as the [cave monastery](#) in 1051, the Lavra has been a preeminent center of [Eastern Orthodox Christianity](#) in Eastern Europe. Together with the [Saint Sophia Cathedral](#), it is inscribed as a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#). The monastery complex is considered a separate national historic-cultural preserve (sanctuary), the national status to which was granted on 13 March 1996.

Currently, the jurisdiction over the site is divided between the state museum, National Kyiv-Pechersk Historic-Cultural Preserve, and the [Ukrainian Orthodox Church \(Moscow Patriarchate\)](#) as the site of the chief monastery of that Church and the residence of its leader, [Onufrius, Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine](#).

According to the [Primary Chronicle](#), in the early 11th century, [Anthony](#), a Christian [monk](#) from [Esphigmenon monastery](#) on [Mount Athos](#), originally from [Liubech](#) of the [Principality of Chernigov](#) (in the current territory of northern Ukraine), returned to Kyivan Rus and settled in the city of Kyiv as a [missionary](#) of monastic tradition. He chose a cave at the Berestov Mount that overlooked the [Dnieper River](#) and a community of disciples soon grew. [Prince Iziaslav I of Kyiv](#) (1024 – 1078) ceded the whole mount to the Anthonite monks who founded a monastery built by architects from [Constantinople](#).

Photo : The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Photo: kurs.com.ua

Independence Day celebrated by religious leaders in St Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv

HRWF (29.08.2022) - On Ukraine's Independence Day celebrated on 24 August, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his wife Olena took part in the solemn event "Prayer for Ukraine", which took place in St. Sophia's Cathedral in Kyiv.

The chamber choir performed "Our Father". After that, heads of churches and religious organizations prayed for Ukraine and delivered speeches. They wished peace to come as soon as possible, as well as strength to the Ukrainian people to endure in times of ordeals.

After the speeches, the choir performed the spiritual hymn "God, the great one! Save Ukraine for us".

The Head of State congratulated heads of churches and religious organizations and thanked them for the spiritual support of the Ukrainian people.

The Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Onufry, accompanied by Metropolitan Anthony, the UOC Chancellor, Metropolitan of Boryspil and Brovary, took part in the solemn event. His press department issued a specific [press release](#) about his participation as a sign of autonomy from the Russian

Orthodox Church and about his congratulations on the 31st anniversary of Ukraine's independence.

Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church who supports Russia's war on Ukraine did not make any public comment about the dissenting position of Metropolitan Onufry and, as expected, did not spare a single thought for the Ukrainian Orthodox victims of the war. At the end of July, he had described "[all Orthodox Ukrainians as children of Russian Orthodox Church](#)", a sort of forced spiritual adoption ignoring the free will of millions of Ukrainian Orthodox rejecting his authority and his grip on them. In the same press release of Interfax, he was quoted as saying:

"Everything that concerns Donbass, the Lugansk Region, the Kharkov Region - those places where people are suffering today - is very disturbing and hurts my heart, because all the Orthodox people who live there are children of the Moscow Patriarchate," the patriarch said at a meeting with children who had come to Moscow from Donbass and Ukraine. (Emphasis added by HRWF).

After all speeches celebrating Ukraine's Independence Day, the choir sang the spiritual anthem "God, the Great One, Save Ukraine for Us!"

The Head of State thanked the heads of the various religious denominations and organizations for their spiritual support.

Photo : [newschurch.ua](#)

400 Baptist churches lost in Russia's war

Ukrainian Baptists rebuild leadership as war closed hundreds of churches. The Baptist Theological Seminary cooperates with care centers to serve the community and "bring hope to the hopeless".

Evangelical Focus (17.08.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Q0Dgg9> - According to Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary (UBTS) President and pastor of Journey church in Lviv, Yaroslav Pyzh, "since the war started, six months already, we lost about 400 Baptist churches".

The **Baptist** volunteers help internally displaced people to prepare their houses for the winter by renewing roofs, windows and doors.

However, "the real challenge is similar to Nehemiah's challenge. It's not only rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. It's rebuilding the nation of Israel, of worshiping God. ... That's the same thing here in Ukraine", Pyzh told *Baptist Press*.

Rebuilding leadership

The All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists has reported that **dozens of pastors of the around 2300 Baptist congregations in Ukraine were forced to leave** many areas destroyed by the war.

That is why, “our main challenge in the future, when the war will be over, is to **bridge the gap in leadership that we lost**. Sadly, the longer the war goes, the more the gap is going to be”, pointed out Pyzh to Baptist Press.

“The real build is the **rebuilding of leadership capacity**, because if you rebuild buildings and you have no pastors to lead churches, I don’t think it’s going to do any good”, he added.

We Care centers

The data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees show that **a third of Ukrainians have been displaced**, but **many pastors and around 150 UBTS graduates and students have stayed** to help those in need.

Pyzh believes that “the biggest thing the community has in these moments of being bombed is **fear and hopelessness**”, so that “the only ones who can relieve and bring hope to the hopeless are pastors, churches and Christians”.

In order to **be more effective**, the **UBTS is not directly dealing with humanitarian relief**, as they did in the initial months of the war, **but supporting the work of six We Care centers** across the country.

“The basic idea of the We Care centers is to provide **a platform for churches to cooperate with each other to serve the community**. It’s not only responding to the needs of the war, but actually creating something that can stay within the community for a long time”, explained Pyzh.

The centers emerged from local church ministries established in concert with local governments, which have provided the buildings where they are now housed for free.

The Seminary is also using part of the Southern Baptist donations they receive to support the centers, “but overall, **donations are dropping down big time**, not like we had two or three months ago. People are just tired of the war”, said Pyzh.

Free education during the war

UBTS is providing education free of charge to students during the war, and expects to work with twice the number of care centres by the end of the year.

It has suspended tuition fees because of **an almost 30 % Ukrainian inflation rate** and is focusing on raising funds to support its educational programs and scholarships.

Furthermore, they are **training volunteers to be counselors** for internally displaced residents and those who have remained.

Prayer and hope

The President of the Seminary called on Christians to “**pray for a miracle of peace and victory**, pray specifically **for the rebuilding of church leadership**, and that people **continue giving to humanitarian relief efforts** in Ukraine”.

“The same God that was faithful in the past will be faithful in the future. So **in the midst of all the struggle** that we are going through right now, **we are looking forward with great hope, knowing that God is with us**”, concluded Pyzh.

Evangelical help

Many times, it is not easy for Christians to help those in need in Ukraine. Recently, 10 volunteers of Orphan's Promise ministry were [released](#) after being beaten by the Russian military in the city of Berdyansk.

Despite the difficulties, [Mariana Laskava](#), an Ukrainian missionary who works in the Word of Life Bible institute based near Kyiv, stressed that **"God is glorified even in the midst of Ukraine's darkest hours"**.

Evangelical churches, ministries and individuals are also **helping Ukrainian refugees in bordering countries such as [Poland](#) or [Romania](#), as well as in the rest of [Europe](#).**

Photo : Lviv, Ukraine. / Photo: Євгенія Височина, Unsplash, CC0

Gap widening between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

HRWF (22.08.2022) – The Ukrainian authorities have allowed Metropolitan Onufry, the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate, to meet Russian prisoners of war. He gave them a message to share with their families when they are back home: "Tell them we do not want the war being waged in Ukraine today. It must be stopped, and it can be stopped. We do not want mothers in Ukraine or Russia to meet their dead sons."

This is however not the message of Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church who prioritizes his condolences in connection with the loss of lives in the road accident in the [Turkish Gaziantep](#) and the explosion of a shopping center in [Yerevan](#)", choosing to ignore the innumerable Orthodox Ukrainian victims of the Russian shelling in the last six months and to keep silent about President Putin's war of aggression. Instead, he claims that "all Orthodox Ukrainians are children of the Russian Orthodox Church."

His Beatitude Onufry addresses Russian prisoners of war

By Yaroslav Nivkin

Union of Orthodox Journalists (20.08.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3K97IJm> - The UOC Primate received Russian prisoners of war in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and urged them to tell their families that the war must be stopped and peace established.

On August 18, 2022, [His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry](#) received a group of Russian prisoners of war at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, who were brought by the initiative and assistance of journalist and blogger Vladimir Zolkin. The video of the meeting was published on Zolkin's [YouTube channel](#).

His Beatitude Onufry led a prayer service in one of the Lavra churches, after which he addressed the RF prisoners.

"I wish the Lord will return you to your homeland, families so that you can see mothers, sisters, wives, children, brothers, friends. I would like you to tell them the following

words: we do not want the war being waged in Ukraine today. We do not want our cities and villages to be destroyed, our people and your people to perish. We do not want mothers in Ukraine or Russia to meet their dead sons and cry bitter, inconsolable tears over them. It must be stopped, and it can be stopped," said His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry.

His Beatitude said it is possible to stop the war, but not by the force of arms, not by the force of human truth, but by the force of divine love.

"We need to find a word of love that could silence the guns and stop the rockets. We want peace," the Metropolitan said. "Our Ukrainian Orthodox Church did everything to ensure that the Russian and Ukrainian peoples lived in peace, harmony and love. It turned out the way it did. But even if evil happened, it must be stopped. May the Lord give our rulers the courage, reason, and wisdom to find the word of love that stops all evil. I want to wish that God protects you and all people who are on the battlefield. War is not the means by which unity between peoples and families can be achieved. Violence cannot create unity, unity is created through love, which is God. The one who prays and fulfills divine commandments is a man of God. May God bless our lands with peace."

"I don't know if you understand it or not, but it shouldn't be like that (participation in the war – Ed.). You can't kill each other. Death brings no benefit to anyone, but only grief to every home. It is a shame that peoples who came out of a single baptismal font should fight each other. And we must do everything to stop this insanity," His Beatitude concluded.

All Orthodox Ukrainians as children of Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill says

Interfax (28.07.2022) - <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=16647> - Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has dismissed reproaches that the Russian Orthodox Church exists only for Russians and noted that all Orthodox Ukrainians, including those who have gone into schism, are children of the Russian Orthodox Church.

"Everything that concerns Donbass, the Lugansk Region, the Kharkov Region - those places where people are suffering today - is very disturbing and hurts my heart, because all the Orthodox people who live there are children of the Moscow Patriarchate," the patriarch said at a meeting with children who had come to Moscow from Donbass and Ukraine on Thursday.

"Some acknowledge this, gladly confess and participate in the life of our Church, some have gone down the path of illegal schismatic separation from our Church, but God is the judge of everyone, and for the patriarch, all Orthodox people in Ukraine are his children, those close to his heart," he said.

Photo : Metropolitan Onuphry urged the Russians to stop the war. Photo: screenshot of V. Zolkin's YouTube channel

Clergy say Russian occupiers target them with threats and violence

Priests say they face assaults if they refuse Russian demands to collaborate and influence the local population

Wall Street Journal (16.08.2022) - <https://on.wsj.com/3A1jpru> - The Russian soldiers who showed up at Rev. Sergey Chudinovich's church put a bag over his head, took him to the police station, then made him an offer.

Let us distribute aid at your church, they said, which is located in [Russian-occupied Kherson in the south of Ukraine](#). Or make a video telling residents to accept Russian aid. Fr. Chudinovich refused. The Russians tied him up, tossed him in the basement and tortured him for the next two days, he said.

In Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine, clergy members are targets.

Dozens of priests from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the country's largest denomination, have been kidnapped or killed since the invasion began, according to church officials. Still more pastors from other denominations have been chased from their pulpits and imprisoned. Some have had their church property seized. One priest trying to leave occupied territory was asked whether he knew several other clergy members in the region.

The Russians have accused detained clergy of organizing protests, working as U.S. agents or aiding the Ukrainian military. But as Moscow worked [to consolidate its hold on occupied territory](#), priests say it was their influence within the local population that made them targets for Russians to try to turn to their side—or eliminate.

"They've tried to find those who have power and authority among the local people—who are able to be leaders of resistance," said Archbishop Evstratyy of Chernihiv, a spokesman for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. "Clergy of the Ukrainian church, unfortunately, are in the first row."

Russia has made religion a central pillar of its war effort. Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, [has called the war a metaphysical conflict](#) between the faithful of God and a decadent West. Both he and Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) have assailed [the establishment of the autonomous Orthodox Church of Ukraine](#) in 2019 as a devious Western scheme to divide the two countries. The new church quickly overtook the local arm of the Russian Orthodox Church as the most popular.

Archbishop Evstratyy said the hunt for Ukrainian Orthodox priests began in the first days of the war.

[In the Kyiv suburb of Bucha](#), he said, neighbors of one priest said Russians showed up at his house asking for him the same day they arrived in town. The priest had already fled, Archbishop Evstratyy said, but another priest in the town was killed at a checkpoint.

In Ivankiv, north of Kyiv, a priest wearing his cassock was pulled out of his car and shot at a checkpoint where his body lay for several days, Ukrainian Orthodox officials said.

In Bohdanivka, a village east of the capital, Russian troops put bullet holes through a cross along the main road, and broke another cross inside Rev. Antony Pyasetskiy's Orthodox church. Fr. Pyasetskiy, who fought in the Soviet army in Afghanistan, said he and another priest were detained while checking on a local resident. The soldiers told them to strip and searched them for tattoos in the street, beat them and forced them to walk two hours to a Russian base.

When allowed to leave later that day, Fr. Pyasetskiy said he had several teeth missing. The other priest, who had been beaten so severely that Fr. Pyasetskiy said his face was unrecognizable, had to walk home naked.

"They kept saying, 'Where is your God? Why isn't he helping you,'" Fr. Pyasetskiy said of the soldiers. "It was just a show of disrespect to damage the cross."

Ukrainian clergy from other denominations have also run afoul of Russian forces—particularly in the south, which [has now been occupied for five months](#). Many of their encounters with the Russians began with an alleged transgression and ended with demands to collaborate.

Viktor Sergeev, the pastor of a Pentecostal Baptist church in Melitopol, said dozens of soldiers woke him around 5 a.m. one day in early March and pulled him, his adult sons and some neighbors from their homes.

The soldiers battered their way into the church where they interrogated them and smashed the windows. They asked whether the men had helped organize anti-Russian protests and where they got money for the church—a large building with a recording studio and a gymnasium—and insisted they must be getting funding from foreigners.

"The Russians said, 'You're an American sect. You train partisans here. Sects like yours are illegal in Russia,'" Mr. Sergeev said.

Mr. Sergeev told them he had only held prayer vigils for peace at his church, but they had more demands. They asked him to make a video in front of the church chanting "Russia, Russia," plus another video criticizing the Ukrainian government. They also asked for a list of businessmen who came to the church. Mr. Sergeev said he would.

"The Russians realize we can influence people—that we're opinion leaders in the city," said Mr. Sergeev, whose church had 1,500 members before the war. "They were looking for us to collaborate."

Two days later, [the mayor of Melitopol](#), a southern port city in the Zaporizhzhia region, was detained by Russians. The Sergeev family fled to Ukrainian-held territory the next day, without recording a video.

In late July, a group of Russians showed up at the church and told the people there that it was illegal and that the building was being seized, Mr. Sergeev said.

In the first month of the war, Fr. Chudinovich turned his Kherson church into a local aid center, where he and his members offered haircuts, medicine and food. A sign on the wall advertised two-tiered coffee prices: 1,000 hryvnia, equivalent to about \$27, if you ordered in Russian, no charge if you spoke Ukrainian. A photo of the sign wound up on social media in late March. The Russians showed up at the church the next morning.

After Fr. Chudinovich declined to let them distribute aid at his church, he said, they found some numbers of Ukrainian soldiers and policemen in his phone. They blindfolded him, he said, and took him to the basement.

Over the next two days, Fr. Chudinovich said, the Russians grilled him about his acquaintances. They left him in the cold without shoes, beat him in the knees and chest with a police baton, choked him until he passed out, and taunted him, saying: "Your God doesn't exist." At one point, he said, they tried to rape him with a stick.

On March 30, they released him after forcing him to make two videos, in which he said he was treated well by the Russians, and he pledged to make another one once home and post it on social media.

He did so, then fled to Ukrainian territory, where his family had been since the start of the war. A few weeks later, he posted another video to Facebook, detailing what had really happened to him in Russian captivity.

Fr. Chudinovich said he has tried to continue his work sending humanitarian aid to Kherson. But the videos have shaken associates' trust in him—a common reaction after locals in the south are picked up by Russians. He now struggles to raise money for his church and his family.

"I have no job. I had partners in Mykolaiv who I used to work with to get medicine. After the interrogation, 80% of them stopped working with me," he said. "I understand. Once someone is picked up, who knows what they will say."

Photo 1: Fr. Chudinovich shows a video he said was taken when he buried Ukrainian soldiers killed in Kherson in the early days of Russia's invasion.

Photo 2: Fr. Chudinovich said the videos he was forced to make shook his associates' trust in him, and he now struggles to raise money.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) and the war

The UOC in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate is also a victim of Russia's aggression of Ukraine



St. Nicholas's Church in Borovskoye village. Photo: Telegram channel of the Severodonetsk Eparchy Churches and chapels are destroyed due to military actions.

Bishop Victor of Baryshivka of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) condemns Russia's war on Ukraine

Union of Orthodox Journalists (13.07.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3z5kbb1> - In an interview with the Greek-language resource news-politics.com, **Bishop Victor of Baryshivka** said that due to the invasion of Russian troops, Ukraine will never be the same again.

"Thousands of our fellow citizens died defending their homeland, the infrastructure is destroyed, and the economy is in a disastrous state. We have been put on the brink of survival, and the likelihood of a humanitarian catastrophe is quite high. But even if one does not take into account all these terrible factors, but only considers the fact that almost five thousand civilians of Ukraine, including nearly three hundred children, died during the five months of warfare, it becomes obvious this war cannot be called otherwise than insanity, and there is no reason to justify it," said the bishop.

Severodonetsk Eparchy publishes photos of destroyed UOC temples

Union of Orthodox Journalists (13.07.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Pujel8> - On July 12, 2022, the press service of the Severodonetsk Eparchy posted photos of destroyed UOC churches and chapels on its [Telegram channel](#).

Many churches of the eparchy have been completely or partially destroyed because of shelling and fires caused by them. Among those affected are

- St. Nicholas's Church in Borovskoye;
- St. Nicholas's Chapel and the Chapel of St. Seraphim of Sarov at the entrance to Severodonetsk;
- the Church "Tenderness" Icon of the Mother of God in Severodonetsk;
- the Chapel of St. John the Warrior Martyr in Severodonetsk, which is under construction;
- the Church of the Holy Cross in Lesnaya Dacha;
- the Church St. Tabitha of Joppa in Voronovo settlement;

the Church of St. Varlaam of Khutyn in Severodonetsk;
the Church of the "Joy of All Who Sorrow" Icon of the Mother of God in Severodonetsk;
the Chapel of the Apostle Andrew the First-Called;
the Chapel of the "Life-bearing Spring" Icon of the Mother of God on the territory of the Church of the Pochaev Icon of the Mother of God in Rubezhnoye town.

As reported, more than 40 churches in the Severodonetsk Eparchies have been damaged or destroyed. See pictures [here](#).

The Russian Orthodox Church annexes dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in occupied territories

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (10.06.2022) - The Dzhankoy, Simferopol and Feodosia dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) of the Moscow Patriarchate have been annexed by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

This decision was made on June 7 at the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, allegedly "out of the need to maintain an effective canonical and administrative connection with the central church authorities."

It should be noted that after the occupation of Crimea in 2014, the dioceses of the UOC remained in formal subordination to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU)/ Constantinople Patriarchate which had been banned on the peninsula.

Now, by the decision of the Synod of the ROC in Moscow, the Crimean Metropolitanate has been formed on the territory of the peninsula, headed by Metropolitan Lazarus of Simferopol and Crimea.

Why the annexation of UOC dioceses in Crimea, Donetsk and Gorlovka?

In April, [over 400 priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate \(UOC\)](#) signed a [petition](#) condemning the role of Patriarch Kirill in the war. A number of clerics stopped mentioning the Moscow Patriarchate in their church services.

On this occasion, Fr Andrei Pinchuk, Archpriest of the Dnipropetrovsk Diocese of the UOC (some 240 miles southeast of Kyiv), who launched this initiative, gave an [interview](#) which is worth watching.

On 27 May, the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) brought amendments to its charter, confirming and reinforcing its existing independence from Moscow because of "disagreement with the position of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia about the war in Ukraine."

However, several dioceses in occupied territories of Ukraine - the Donetsk, Gorlovka and Crimean dioceses - did not support the amendments to the charter. The ROC immediately jumped on this opportunity to unilaterally annex these dioceses without the approval of the UOC. The clerics in occupied Crimea who had hereby prioritized their faithfulness to the Moscow Patriarchate rather than to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will certainly be kept in place by Patriarch Kirill.

In recent months, a number of local authorities in many regions of Ukraine have banned the activities of the UOC and re-registered their communities in the OCU (Orthodox Church of Ukraine/ Constantinople Patriarchate), sometimes on their request, sometimes on the priest's sole request without the approval of the parishioners, sometimes under pressure of the local parishioners and against the priest's will.

Due to all these fractures inside the UOC, Moscow Patriarchate perceives the UOC as less and less solid and reliable.

In more and more Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia, we may see more annexation cases of UOC churches by Moscow Patriarchate, and their (Ukrainian) priests be replaced by Russian ones if they signed the protest petition in April.

Historic wooden Orthodox church burns down in Donetsk monastic complex

HRWF: See [here](#) the mapping of places of worship of all faiths destroyed by the war as of mid-April

EURONEWS with AP & Reuters (05.06.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Q2tvzp> - Russian and Ukrainian military officers blamed each other for a fire that destroyed a historic wooden church at the Sviatohirsk Lavra monastery, one of Ukraine's holiest Orthodox Christian sites.

The all-wood All Saints Shrine in the village of Tetianivka was reportedly burnt down as a result of shelling, local outlets stated on Saturday.

The sprawling, 17th-century monastic settlement, which sits on the bank of the Siverskiy Donets River, has been hit several times previously during the war, most recently on Wednesday, when two monks and a nun were killed.

In his nightly video address Saturday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused Russia of "deliberately and systematically destroying Ukrainian culture and its historical heritage, along with social infrastructures like housing and everything needed for a normal life."

Zelenskyy said 113 churches have been damaged or destroyed during the invasion, including some that survived the battles of World War II.

Flames could be seen ripping through the timber walls of a church with onion domes in footage posted by Zelenskiy on his official Telegram channel.

"Russian artillery struck the Svyatohirsk Lavra in the Donetsk region again today. Destroyed All Saints Monastery. It was consecrated in 1912. It was first destroyed during

the Soviet era. Later it was rebuilt to be burned by the Russian army," the Ukrainian leader wrote.

Zelenskyy called for Russia to be expelled from the United Nations' cultural agency UNESCO and said there had been no military targets present at the site.

"Every church burned by Russia in Ukraine, every school blown up, every destroyed memorial proves that Russia has no place in UNESCO," calling for Moscow to be expelled from the main cultural body of the United Nations.

Moscow has repeatedly denied targeting civilians and Russia's Defence Ministry denied involvement in the shelling of the church, accusing Ukrainian troops of setting it on fire. The Svyatohirsk Lavra complex belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and lies near Russian positions in eastern Donetsk, one of two regions that the Kremlin is focused on capturing.

The Moscow Patriarchate has been supportive of the war in Ukraine, with its Patriarch Kirill repeatedly backing Russian President Vladimir Putin and his policies.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which remained loyal to Moscow after a 2019 schism, said last month that it would break with Moscow over the invasion of Ukraine and the church's support, stating that Russia has broken the "thou shalt not kill" commandment.

The Svyatohirsk Lavra monastic settlement dates back to 1627. The All Saints church was built from timber in 2009 to replace the one destroyed in 1947.

Further reading and video

[Business Insider](#)

[Ukrinform](#)

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Moscow Patriarchate: split or maneuver?

Is the part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that remained in communion with Moscow really breaking with Kirill—or just pretending to?

By Willy Fautré

Bitter Winter (01.06.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3M9qYHa> - On 27 May, the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) decided to amend the Church Charter concerning its relations with the Moscow Patriarchate due to the current military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and the ensuing internal conflicts and divisions in its midst. **An official resolution was issued.** What does this step really mean and what does it not mean?

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) under existential threat

In recent months, a number of local authorities in many regions of Ukraine have banned the activities of the UOC and re-registered their communities in the OCU (Orthodox Church of Ukraine/ Constantinople Patriarchate), sometimes on their request, sometimes

on the priest's sole request without the approval of the parishioners, sometimes under pressure of the local parishioners and against the priest's will.

These processes began after the OCU received in January 2019 the Tomos, a decree of autonomy, from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeus I of Constantinople and the Eastern Orthodox Church, but Russia's war on Ukraine reinforced and accelerated the transfers of parishes exponentially.

Being almost on the verge of a full ban by the Ukrainian Parliament, which perceived the UOC as a Russian Trojan horse in Ukraine, the UOC decided to convene a Council to amend its Charter.

Moreover, there were rumors that the OCU, with the support of the civil authorities, was going to take away from the UOC the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra Men's Monastery, also known as the Kiev Monastery of the Caves, inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The autocephaly issue

It is in this context that the question of UOC's possible autocephaly was raised but this status can only be granted by the Mother Church, i.e., the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). If there is no agreement of the ROC, the self-proclaimed autocephaly can be interpreted as a church split or schism (as the Kiev Patriarchate of Filaret was once perceived in the Orthodox world).

For the UOC itself, it would also be a risk of losing its canonical status.

The arguments of the "autocephalists" were that the consolidation of the independence in the Charter of the UOC in one form or another minimizes the risks of a complete ban by the Ukrainian Parliament, as well as the transfer of parishes. Especially since some of the parishioners' communities and some clergy also changed their attitude towards the ROC after the outbreak of the war.

Moreover, parts of Ukraine's territories in the East and the South are being (temporarily?) controlled and annexed by Russia, which already imposes its rules, its administration, and its personnel on the remaining local population. In this fluid and unstable situation with an unpredictable future, local UOC priests might stay in place but they might also be quickly replaced with President Putin's blessing by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow who would consider them unreliable.

For all these and other reasons, a move to autocephaly would seem unwise by the UOC at this stage.

What did the UOC Council really decide and not decide?

In their resolution, the members of the UOC Council agreed

1. to condemn the war "as a violation of God's commandment"
2. to "disagree with the position of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus on the war in Ukraine" to adopt appropriate amendments, "all of

which testify to the full independence and autonomy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church”

Noteworthy is that only the words “independence” and “autonomy” appeared in the document, never “autocephaly.” Moreover, there is no reference to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) with which the UOC has been “in communion” for over thirty years.

This omission in the resolution is not a mistake or due to chance. It is intentional and coherent with the objective really pursued: to avoid a ban by the Ukrainian Parliament on the ground of limiting the actions of “church communities with management centers in Russia.”

It means that the changes in the Charter are only meant to consolidate the UOC’s independent status, which dates back to the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1990 when the Church was granted self-government by a decision of then Patriarch Alexy of Moscow and All Russia.

Autocephaly or secession from the ROC is not on the agenda of the UOC and there is no sign of schism inside the family of the Russian Orthodox Church. Religious scholars are not inclined either to consider the resolution of the UOC as going into a split with Moscow Patriarchate.

“The commemoration of Patriarch Kirill by Our Beatitude remains, and through him the canonical connection,” Archpriest Nikolai Danilevich, Secretary of the Department for External Church Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, told “Strana,” an online media now banned in Ukraine.

The future will tell us if this highly political maneuver will be successful or not, in the short term, and if the compromise between the doves and the hawks inside the UOC will hold over time, according to the unpredictable developments of Russia’s war on Ukraine. In case of an apocalyptic scenario, a total invasion and occupation of Ukraine by President Putin followed by the sole recognition of the UOC, all the other Orthodox Churches would become illegal, as it is the case in Crimea, while the UOC could easily restore its “full communion” with the Moscow Patriarchate.

Photo: Metropolitan Onufriy with other UOC dignitaries. [Credits](#)

Ukrainian Orthodox Church breaks ties with the Moscow Patriarchate

Resolution of the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) on 27 May 2022

Ukrainian Orthodox Church (28.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3a67ejj> - The Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (hereinafter – the Council), held on May 27,

2022 in Kyiv, considered issues of Church life that arose as a result of the military operation of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Based on the results of the work, the Council approved the following:

1. The Council condemns war as a violation of God's commandment "Thou shalt not kill!" (Exodus 20:13) and expresses heartfelt condolences to all those who have suffered in the conflict.
2. The Council appeals to the authorities of Ukraine and the authorities of the Russian Federation to continue the negotiation process and to search for a strong and sensible dialogue that could stop the bloodshed.
3. We disagree with the position of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus on the war in Ukraine.
4. 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.
5. The Council approves and confirms the resolutions of the Councils of Bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the decisions of the Holy Synods of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which met after the last Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (July 8, 2011). The Council approves the activities of the various Departments and Synodal Institutions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.
6. The Council considered the restoration of the ritual of confecting Chrism in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC).
7. During the period of conflict, when means of communication between the eparchies and the ecclesiastical centre are complicated or become absent, the Council considered it expedient to grant eparchial bishops the right to decide on certain issues of eparchial life that is usually within the competence of the Holy Synod or the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Subsequently, when the possibility arises and upon restoration of ties to notify the ruling hierarchs.
8. Recently, a new pastoral challenge that is particularly acute for our Church has presented itself. During the three months of the conflict, more than six million Ukrainian citizens were forced to flee abroad. The Ukrainians mostly hail from the southern, eastern and central regions of Ukraine. Many of them are Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) faithful. That is why the Kyiv Metropolia of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has received numerous appeals from the Ukrainian refugees currently residing in various countries with requests that Ukrainian Orthodox parishes be established. It is also obvious that many of our compatriots will return to their homeland, but many will become permanent residents in their chosen countries abroad. In this regard, the Council expresses its deep conviction that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) cannot leave its faithful without spiritual and pastoral care, and must be together with them during their current trials and tribulations, and so must help organise Ukrainian Church communities in the diaspora. It is necessary to further develop the mission abroad among Orthodox Ukrainians in order to preserve their faith, culture, language and Orthodox identity.
9. Recognising the special responsibility before Almighty God, the Council expresses its deep regret over the lack of unity in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. The Council perceives the existence of the schism as a deep painful wound on the Church body. It is especially unfortunate that the recent actions of the Patriarch of

Constantinople in Ukraine, which resulted in the formation of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" (OCU) , only deepened misunderstandings and led to physical confrontation. But even in such crisis situations, the Council does not lose hope of resuming dialogue. In order for the dialogue to take place, the OCU representatives need to:

- stop the illegal seizure of churches and forced transfers of parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC),
- realise that their canonical status, as enshrined in their "Statute of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine" , is in fact non-autocephalous and significantly inferior to the freedoms and opportunities for the implementation of Church activities as compared to those that are provided for in the Statute of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC),
- resolve the issue of canonicity of the hierarchy of the OCU, because for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as for most Local Orthodox Churches, it is quite obvious that to recognise the canonicity of the hierarchy of the OCU, it is first necessary to restore the apostolic succession of its bishops.

The Council expresses its deep conviction that the key to the success of the dialogue must be not only the desire to restore Church unity, but also the sincere desire to build one's life on the principles of genuine Christian conscience and moral purity.

Summing up the results of the work done, the Council offers prayers of thanksgiving to the All-Merciful Lord, that opportunities for fraternal communication may arise and also expresses its hope than an end to the conflict and the reconciliation of opposing sides happens soon. According to the holy apostle and evangelist St. John the Theologian, may "grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love, be with us all, especially brothers and sisters in the Risen Christ" (2 John 1: 3).

Further reading

[The Ukrainian Church of Onoufry announced autonomy from the Patriarchate of Moscow](#)

[Moscow-led Ukrainian Orthodox Church breaks ties with Russia](#)

[Ukraine's Moscow-backed Orthodox church says cuts ties with Russia](#)

[Ukrainian Orthodox Church Council declares total independence](#)

Photo: news.church.ua

Is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate on the side of Moscow or Kyiv?

HRWF (05.05.2022) - The autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in communion with the Patriarchate of Moscow is in a very uncomfortable situation. [Over 430 clerics](#) as of 5 May have signed a petition accusing Patriarch Kirill of support to the Russian World ideology and the war on Ukraine. They are hereby siding with the Ukrainians and with Ukraine.

They have "[filed a suit](#)" to the highest church judicial authority calling to condemn the doctrine spread by the Russian Orthodox Church and its heretical leader – Patriarch.

The head of the UOC, Metropolitan Onufriy is embarrassed by such a situation and did not enter into conflict with them, avoiding an open schism, but for how long. Indeed, at any time, they might drag their parishes into the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople since 2018, and hereby weaken the UOC.

Metropolitan Onufriy has opted for a very diplomatic attitude because in addition, there was a legislative threat of the UOC to be banned by the Ukrainian Parliament. As the Union of Orthodox Journalists in Ukraine has said in a long article, the UOC is helping ALL Ukrainians who are victims of the conflict. Here are concrete actions showing their Ukrainian patriotism that are listed in the article of Konstantin Shemliuk "*Is the Church being dragged into internal strife of security forces?*".

Union of Orthodox Journalists (02.05.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3FeL4HF> - Since the outbreak of the [war in Ukraine](#), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has clearly and unambiguously articulated its attitude to the events. For example, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry was the first religious leader in the country [to call the war a sin](#) and to compare the Russian military action against Ukraine to the sin of Cain. Besides, many UOC spokespersons and officials condemned the war.

Two dozen eparchies of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have [stopped commemorating the name of Patriarch Kirill](#) at all services, thereby expressing their disagreement with his position on the war in Ukraine. At the same time, the UOC is very actively involved in volunteer work, using all its resources for humanitarian aid to people and regions affected by the war.

It is the priests of the UOC who have rescued several thousand people from shelling. For example, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine Anton Gerashchenko said that Archpriest Boris Kovalchuk, rector of the Church of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki in the village of Pilipovichi, helped evacuate over 1,500 civilians during the occupation of the Borodianka district. Archpriest Andrei Pinchuk, a cleric of the Dnipropetrovsk eparchy of the UOC, together with a team of like-minded people saved 725 children from shelling (data as of March 13).

Metropolitan Luke of Zaporizhzhia and Melitopol personally accompanied fifteen buses with evacuees from Mariupol. In response, Alexander Starukh, chairman of the Zaporizhzhia RMA, thanked the bishop and noted: "If you hadn't gone, things would have been much worse... The children, most importantly, were taken away. Thank you."

Furthermore, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry said that "*the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, through the efforts of the episcopate, clergy, monks and believers, is ready to organize a prayer procession from the town of Orikhiv, Zaporizhzhia region, to the Azovstal steelworks in the city of Mariupol to provide emergency aid and withdraw civilians. The procession could also take out the wounded military and pick up the bodies of the dead*". It later became known that the UOC Primate blessed several dozen clergymen who went to Mariupol in order to carry out this mission.

It would not be out of place to say that a great number of UOC believers defend Ukraine with weapons in their hands on the front lines. Almost every day in temples of the UOC they hold memory services for the dead soldiers, most of whom were its parishioners. On 17 April 2022, Metropolitan Luke received the news about the death of his brother Alexander Kovalenko, who was killed in the line of military duty. In other words, today it

is quite clear that the Church, for its part, is doing everything possible to ensure that the Ukrainians have a peaceful sky over their heads as soon as possible

Photo: Are law enforcers trying to use priests in internal confrontation? Photo: UOJ

A bill on sanctions against Patriarch and hierarchs of ROC submitted to Parliament

By Elena Yufereva

Union of Orthodox Journalists (02.05.2022) - The authors of the bill declare "criminal activities" of Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Hilarion, Metropolitan Tikhon and Archpriest Nikolai Balashov.

A draft law on sanctions against Patriarch Kirill and another three representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church has been submitted to the [Verkhovna Rada](#).

The corresponding draft resolution No. 7332 was [registered](#) by the Ukrainian Parliament on April 29.

More than 20 MPs from the parties "Voice", "Servant of the People", "European Solidarity", "Freedom" are submitting the document for consideration by the Verkhovna Rada. Among them are the authors of bills No. [7204](#) and [7213](#) on the prohibition of the UOC.

The bill prescribes to impose sanctions against Patriarch Kirill, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev) of Volokolamsk, Head of the DECR ROC, Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov) of Pskov and Porkhov, and Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, Deputy Head of the DECR MP "for systematic and active support of the war against Ukraine, legitimization of the invasion of troops and the genocide of Ukrainians by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation", as well as support for the "Russian world" ideology.

The sanctions proposed for consideration by the National Security and Defense Council provide, in particular, a ban on entry and blocking of assets, temporary restriction of the right of a person to use and dispose of his property, restriction of trade operations, restriction, partial or complete cessation of the transit of resources, flights and transportation through the territory of Ukraine, prevention of the withdrawal of capital outside Ukraine, suspension of the fulfillment of economic and financial obligations, deprivation of state awards of Ukraine, other forms of honoring, a ban on the acquisition of land plots and others.

As the UOJ reported earlier, the [Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada stated the Parliament does not intend to raise an issue of banning the UOC](#).

Photo: Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Photo: life.ru

Christian mission center blown up, hundreds of Bibles destroyed

By Ryan Foley

The Christian Post (25.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3OCxtht> - The head of a nonprofit organization working to minister to Ukrainian refugees has expressed devastation after one of the ministry's buildings was destroyed in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, with hundreds of Bibles demolished in the process.

Mission Eurasia, a [church-planting organization](#) that "trains, equips, and mobilizes national Christian leaders throughout the former Soviet Union and Israel," is one of several charities working to provide relief to Ukrainians displaced after Russia began its invasion of the Eastern European country two months ago.

Mission Eurasia operates 17 Schools Without Walls in Ukraine, which are designed for "training the next generation" to get to the front line of the crisis ... as volunteers ... in their communities."

In an interview with The Christian Post, Mission Eurasia President Sergey Rakhuba said that his organization's Field Ministries Training Center in Irpin, Ukraine, was destroyed by Russian troops late last month.

"Russians took it over, they used that for whatever purposes," he said. "We've heard reported they used it for their headquarters for their special forces."

Additionally, he asserted that Russian troops used burned Scripture piles as shields during their shooting battles.

"We're very saddened by the loss," he added. "Buildings can be replaced but we are reprinting hundreds and hundreds of copies of new Scriptures available into the hands of these young evangelists we train, these young volunteers we equip that continue reaching out to people who are in need."

While no one who worked with Mission Eurasia was hurt in the blast because staff evacuated at the beginning of the invasion, Rakhuba lamented that "some of the neighbors" lost their lives due to the explosion.

"Dead bodies are right by the premises," he said.

Rakhuba said the Field Ministries Training Center was a "nerve center for new innovations, mission, strategic planning, [and] training" where "thousands and thousands of young leaders went through training."

Rakhuba said "there were lots of tears shed after we got the news" of the building's destruction but remains confident that "God will continue providing." He vowed to continue bringing the Gospel to "tens of thousands of devastated refugee families."

Part of Mission Eurasia's response to the Russia-Ukraine conflict has been to provide "spiritual comfort." The group launched the Ukraine Crisis Prayer Initiative, which consists of a network of people who pray about the situation in Ukraine daily.

"Once a week, we have a Zoom meeting," Rakhuba stated.

"On a weekly basis, we present a number of prayer requests related to this ongoing war and related to our ministry," he continued. "Through this prayer initiative, we're encouraging people to get connected, to continue praying, praying for all the needs related to ... hardships due to this continued invasion, continued war."

Mission Eurasia is also working to provide humanitarian relief to those displaced by the war. The charity organization has established refugee assistance centers in Warsaw, Krakow and Moldova in addition to "four large food distribution hubs in four major locations in western Ukraine."

Rakhuba recently spent nearly two weeks in Ukraine and Poland, returning to the United States ahead of Easter weekend.

As a native of Ukraine who now lives in the U.S., Rakhuba has family members who've evacuated the country. He mentioned that his nieces, who are in their mid-to-late 30s, are "abroad now" after he "helped to evacuate" them and their families.

However, the men in his extended family are still staying in Ukraine because they are "heavily involved in this humanitarian relief."

Rakhuba said food is the greatest need facing Ukrainian refugees at this time because "food supply is totally blocked or paralyzed by the war activity." Rakhuba has a team delivering a large semi-truck with 20 tons of food to "one of the northern Ukrainian cities close to the Russian border."

"We obtained food in large quantities from neighboring countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania and bring them to these large food packaging centers where volunteers mobilized by Mission Eurasia ... put them in family-sized food packages," he announced. It costs Mission Eurasia \$50 to "purchase food, to sort it, to put it packaged in this food package and also include a copy of the Scripture."

Rakhuba estimated one family food package sustains a family of four or five at least for one week, or even longer. He rejoiced that his organization was able to place 20,000 food packages into the hands of needy families. He expressed a desire to compile an additional 50,000 packages in the next three months.

Rakhuba attributed the efforts to provide food to Ukrainian refugees to support from "organizations here in the [U.S.], Canada [and] other countries that share resources."

Rakhuba praised churches for working to accommodate evacuees in need of shelter. He said church sanctuaries on the weekdays turn into shelters but on Sunday, continue to serve as places of worship.

Rakhuba said medical assistance is another need facing Ukrainian refugees. He mentioned that Mission Eurasia has raised \$4.8 million as part of its relief efforts.

Photo: Mission Eurasia's Field Ministries Training Center in Irpin, Ukraine after it was blown up by Russian forces in April 2022. | Sergey Rakhuba

Hundreds of priests of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine condemn the role of Russian Patriarch Kirill in the war

HRWF (15.04.2022) - As of Thursday evening 14 April, three days after the launch of [the petition](#) condemning the role of Patriarch Kirill in the war, over 400 priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) had already signed it. The list of signatories is growing fast and is updated online every day. See this list [HERE](#) at the end of the petition in Russian.

The interview of Fr Andrei Pinchuk, Archpriest of the Dnipropetrovsk Diocese of the UOC-MP (some 240 miles southeast of Kyiv), who launched this initiative is also worth watching [HERE](#).

Text of the "Open request to the primates of local Orthodox churches"

"In these tragic days, when the brutal war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine continues, we, the priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, consider it our pastoral duty to appeal to the fullness of world Orthodoxy.

On February 24, 2022, Russian troops invaded the territory of the sovereign Ukrainian state without declaring war. The military aggression has been going on for more than a month. Russian troops are systematically destroying military infrastructure and residential areas, civilian enterprises, schools, hospitals, theaters, and so on. The Ukrainian economy is suffering heavy losses. But we are most saddened that thousands of civilians have already died during the war. The actions of the Russian army around Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Akhtyrka, Hostomel, Vorzel and especially Mariupol and Bucha have obvious signs of the genocide against the Ukrainian people and cause indignation around the world.

Already on the first day of the war, the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy, condemned the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and addressed the president of Russia. V. Putin's call to end the war. In addition, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy appealed to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to raise his voice against the war. After that, both His Beatitude Onufriy personally and the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church again appealed to Patriarch Kirill to speak out against the war and help end military aggression. However, Patriarch Kirill ignored these appeals.

Moreover, since the beginning of the war, Patriarch Kirill has repeatedly made public statements that contained actual support for the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. On March 13, 2022, during the Liturgy at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Patriarch Kirill presented the commander-in-chief of the National Guard of the Russian Federation, V. Zolotov, the Icon of the Mother of God and gave his blessing to the employees of this state military organization. In a thank-you note to V. Zolotov bluntly said that the National Guard of the Russian Federation troops are taking an active part in the war that Russia has unleashed against Ukraine. At the same time, he called the Armed Forces of Ukraine "Nazis". After listening to Zolotov's words, the Patriarch did not express any objections. Patriarch Kirill's blessing of the Russian National

Guard troops was an unequivocal endorsement of the war that the Russian Federation has unleashed against Ukraine.

Although Patriarch Kirill for many years claimed that he considers the Orthodox Christians of Ukraine his flock, for which he is responsible, in his public statements (including during visits to Ukraine) today, he directly blesses the physical destruction of this flock by Russian troops.

The actions of Patriarch Kirill caused mass indignation among the clergy and faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. At least fifteen dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have officially announced that they are stopping commemorating Patriarch Kirill during divine services. We know that in many other dioceses, the ruling bishops gave oral permission to the clergy not to remember the name of Patriarch Kirill. Thus, bishops, priests and ordinary parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church expressed their unequivocal distrust of Patriarch Kirill.

We fully support the refusal of the bishops and clergy of our church to commemorate Patriarch Kirill during the divine service. But today, this is not enough.

We clearly state that we can't continue to remain in any form of canonical subordination to the Moscow Patriarch. This is a command of our Christian conscience.

"We are witnessing the brutal actions of the Russian army against the Ukrainian people, which are approved by Patriarch Kirill. As pastors of the Church, and simply as Christians, we have always been, are and will always stay with our people, those who suffer and need help. We fully support the Ukrainian state authorities and the Armed Forces of Ukraine in their fight against the aggressor.

Our position fully corresponds to the Gospel and Church tradition. Protecting the motherland from the enemy is one of the main Christian virtues. We would especially like to emphasize that our position also corresponds to the internal legislation of the Russian Orthodox Church. Back in 2000, the foundations of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church were adopted. This document approves Christian patriotism, which is manifested, among other things, "in defense of the fatherland from the enemy" (II, 3). Also, the foundations of the social concept clearly state that "the Church ... does not prohibit its children from participating in military operations, if it is a question of protecting their neighbors and restoring violated justice" (VIII, 2). This document also notes that "during the war, it is necessary to ensure the protection of the civilian population from direct military actions" (VIII, 3).

As citizens of Ukraine, today we act within the framework of these principles. We call for the protection of our homeland from the enemy who came to us with weapons; we support the Ukrainian army, which has come to the defense of our people and is striving to restore the violated Justice; we call for an end to the brutal destruction of the Ukrainian civilian population by the Russian military.

At the same time, Patriarch Kirill (as well as numerous bishops and priests in Russia) directly violate the norms of the basic social concept. In particular, this document clearly states that the Church cannot provide assistance to the state and cooperate with it if the state is waging an aggressive external War (III, 8). Today, the actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine are nothing more than aggressive foreign war. This fact is recognized by the entire international community. In particular, on March 2, 2022, 141 countries supported the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine. But both Patriarch Kirill himself and numerous clergy in Russia continue

to support the aggressive foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Consequently, the position of the Moscow Patriarchate regarding the war against Ukraine does not meet either the norms of Christian morality or even its own regulatory documents.

Reflecting on the origins of the position of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding the war in Ukraine, we must admit that one of the ideological foundations of this war was the doctrine of the "Russian World", which was promoted personally by Patriarch Kirill for many years. This doctrine has been actively formed by Russian political scientists and sociologists since the 1990s. Its goal is to preserve the influence of the Russian Federation on the territory of the former Soviet Union after its inglorious collapse. Ideologists of the "Russian world", in particular within the Moscow Patriarchate, have never hidden the fact that this doctrine should contribute to Russian irredentism, that is, the gradual establishment of Russia's political control over territories that were previously part of the Soviet Union or even the Russian Empire.

Patriarch Kirill is one of the main ideologists of the "Russian World" doctrine. According to Patriarch Kirill, the "Russian World" is a single civilizational space covering territories where Russian culture has historically had a significant impact. He has repeatedly stated that he considers modern Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians "one people", the people of the "Russian World". In particular, in 2014, [in one of his speeches on television](#), Patriarch Kirill said: "The Russian World is a special civilization, which embraces people who today call themselves by different names – both Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians." That is, according to the Patriarch, Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians simply call themselves by different names, but at the same time remain a single people.

In 2021, in an interview on his 75th birthday, [Patriarch Kirill said](#): "For me, as the Patriarch of all Russia, there is no division into peoples and states, but there is a flock of the Russian Orthodox Church." Although Patriarch Kirill has always stressed that he does not question the existing state borders, [he still stated](#) that these borders "create unnecessary obstacles between the peoples of the Russian World."

On March 20, 2022, during the war that Russia launched against Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill, in his sermon at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, said that Russians and Ukrainians are "really one people." He stressed that he considers this to be God's truth, which is not changed because "we live in different countries today." Therefore the [Patriarch said](#) that he will continue to pray "for our united people, who today live in different countries."

All these statements are quite consonant with Russian state propaganda, which rejects the very fact of the existence of the Ukrainian nation and Ukrainian culture, and therefore does not actually recognize the right of Ukrainians to their own statehood. Thus, the "Russian World" doctrine, which Patriarch Kirill has been promoting for many years, today contributes to justifying Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

However, we, Orthodox priests, want to draw special attention to those aspects of the doctrine of the "Russian World" that directly relate to the doctrine of the Church. In particular, Patriarch Kirill persistently identifies the "Russian World" with the so-called "canonical territory" of the Russian Orthodox Church. In particular, in 2009, in its [speech at the Assembly of the "Ruskiy Mir" Foundation](#), Patriarch Kirill said that "the Russian Orthodox church fulfills its pastoral mission among peoples who accept the Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as the basis of their national identity, or at least as its essential part. That's why in this sense we also consider Moldova a part of this Russian World." In his official speeches, Patriarch Kirill repeatedly claimed that according to the Charter of the Eastern patriarchs on the creation of the Moscow Patriarchate (1593), all the territories that were located north of Byzantium were transferred to the jurisdiction of this Patriarchate. For example, on September 24, 2014, while speaking in Moscow at the

VI International Festival "Faith and Word", Patriarch Kirill said that in 1593 The "Christian Oikumene to the north of the Byzantine Empire" was transferred to the Moscow Patriarchate. This is everything located to the North of Byzantium." According to this logic, the Eastern Patriarchs seem to have recognized the extension of the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarch to Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, and Moldova. It is these territories that Patriarch Kirill today declares a zone of his "canonical responsibility" and identifies with the "Russian World". From the point of view of Patriarch Kirill, all churches in these territories do not have the right to church independence (autocephaly). According to his logic, Churches in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltic states are literally doomed to remain part of the Moscow Patriarchate forever.

These statements of Patriarch Kirill come into obvious contradiction with historical facts. But, surprisingly, Patriarch Kirill passes off this false interpretation of history as the position of the entire universal Orthodoxy. Moreover, in the words and actions of Patriarch Kirill, we see obvious distortions of the Orthodox teaching about the Church. Patriarch Kirill's statements regarding the "Russian World" are reminiscent of ethnophyletism condemned by Ecumenical Orthodoxy, where the role of an ethnic group is played by "Russian civilization". Patriarch Kirill's statements that the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate extends to all people who accept "Russian spiritual and cultural traditions as the basis of their national identity" come into obvious contradiction with Orthodox canon law. Such an understanding of the Church order means rejecting the territorial principle of spreading ecclesiastical jurisdiction and replacing it with a national (or cultural-national) principle.

In March 2022, a group of Orthodox theologians issued the [Declaration on the Doctrine of the "Russian World"](#), which has already been supported by over 300 intellectuals worldwide. We believe that this declaration was an important step toward understanding the distortions of Orthodox teaching about the church that occurred in the Moscow Patriarchate.

All these considerations force us to turn to the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches. We declare our loyalty to Universal orthodoxy, our desire for the fullness of our communion with it, and condemn any attempts to limit our communion with it. We also believe that it is the fullness of ecumenical Orthodoxy that should pay full attention and responsibility to the statements and actions of Patriarch Kirill today. "The tragedy unfolding in Ukraine today is also the result of the policy that Patriarch Kirill pursues during his time at the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Obviously, this has already become a challenge for the entire universal Orthodoxy.

Therefore we call on the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches:

1. Clearly and unambiguously condemn the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.
2. Call on the president of the Russian Federation, V. V. Putin will immediately end the war and liberate all the occupied territories of sovereign Ukraine.
3. Review the public statements of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow regarding the war against Ukraine and evaluate them in the light of the Holy Scriptures and the sacred tradition of the Church.
4. Consider at the Pan-Orthodox level the doctrine of the "Russian World", which for many years has been promoted by Patriarch Kirill and which has become one of the ideological justifications for the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and give this doctrine an assessment from the point of view of orthodox teaching and in case of

the condemnation of this doctrine, bring Patriarch Kirill to justice and deprive him of the right to hold the patriarchal throne.

This appeal is open for signing by the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Those clergymen of the UOC who are willing to sign our appeal, please [send me private messages](#) (067-6-333-112 in any Messenger) with the following text: "I sign the appeal. (rank, last name and first name, Name of the diocese) After the collection of signatures is completed, the appeal will be sent to all primates of local Orthodox Churches. It will also be sent to the attention of Moscow Patriarch Kirill."

More reading

Orthodox priests call for patriarchs to depose Kirill, by [Patrick Hudson](#), The Tablet (12.04.2022)

https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/15278/orthodox-priests-call-for-patriarchs-to-depose-kirill?fbclid=IwAR3IOJ_HFDMMOJ_S9T1xcsdDFY_Ie11-ryqT_Wreq1So5G3AGrJZBaRnEO0

OSCE and CoE demand Russia stops attacks on places of worship

Russia must stop aggression and destruction of religious sites and places of worship – joint statement by Special Representatives of OSCE and CoE

The European Times (13/04/22) - <https://bit.ly/3Egweju> – As the Russian military attack against Ukraine continues, we mourn the victims of war and lament the millions forced to leave their homes and their country behind, seeking shelter and safety within Ukraine, in Europe and beyond. Children, women and the elderly are particularly vulnerable. Many victims of the war suffer from profound psychological trauma.

We are appalled at the destruction of religious sites and places of worship: churches, synagogues and mosques. They are vital to the country's diverse religious communities, more than ever in times of crisis.

The Council of Europe was established in the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War II and the OSCE was created at the height of the Cold War, with the promise of maintaining peace and security for the European continent.

As representatives of both organisations committed to promoting peaceful dialogue, we call on Russia to stop the destruction of religious sites and places of worship, which, together with the indiscriminate killing of tens of thousands of civilians, constitute crimes against humanity.

Rabbi Andrew Baker, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Antisemitism

Ambassador Mehmet Paçacı, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

Professor Regina Polak, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of other Religions

Daniel Hölting, Council of Europe Special Representative on Antisemitic, anti-Muslim and other forms of religious intolerance and hate crimes

Source [here](#)

Photo from Twitter

Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate under threat of being banned

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (12.04.2022) - The **Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC/MP)** in communion with the **Russian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate (ROC/MP)** is perceived as a Trojan horse by some political actors in Ukraine who would like to ban it and nationalize all its property because it is in unity with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia, the aggressor country which has attacked, is occupying and waging war against Ukraine. Moreover, Patriarch Kirill blessed this war...

Draft law proposes to ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate (UOC/MP) and nationalize all its property

RISU (08.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/376bpe8> - As RISU has reported two draft laws that propose to stop the functioning of an institution called the UOC/MP have already been registered in the Verkhovna Rada. These are draft laws №7204 and №7213.

Draft law №7204 consists of five articles, one of which defines the norm - all property of the highest governing bodies of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine (**UOC/MP**) is nationalized within 48 hours after the law comes into force. Regarding the possible transfer of parishes of the **UOC/MP** to the **Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU/ Constantinople Patriarchate)**, this bill gives them 14 days to do so. At the same time, the property of church parishes is owned by the community. If these parishes want to remain under the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church, their property is to be confiscated and transferred to the community, and their activities are stopped. The property of all three Lavras (monasteries) - Kyiv-Pechersk, Pochayiv and Svyatoghorsk, shall be returned to state ownership. Also, Bill No. 7204 requires the SBU to conduct an inspection of all institutions of the **UOC/MP** regarding their possible anti-Ukrainian activities or collaboration with the aggressor.

Another bill, **Nº7213**, is much shorter, its text - without the preamble and final provisions - consists of a single sentence. The text does not mention the Russian Orthodox Church here. Instead, it is proposed to ban the activities of any religious organizations that are subordinate or located in the aggressor country.

The well-known Russian TV propagandist Vladimir Solovyov reacted hysterically to the appearance of these bills, urging to stop any negotiations with Ukraine and fight until victory.

Over half of Ukrainians support the ban of the UOC-MP in Ukraine – "Rating" opinion poll

RISU (08.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/38FZuEt> - According to the results of the national survey "Ukraine at war" conducted by the "Rating" sociological group on April 6, there is growing support in Ukraine to sever ties between **the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC/MP)** and the **Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)**.

This is reported by [Interfax-Religion](#).

This initiative was supported by 74% of respondents on the day of the survey, while at the beginning of March this year - only 63%. Only 7% of respondents do not support this initiative.

That said, more than half of the respondents (51%) believe that the state should completely ban the activities of the **UOC/MP** on the territory of Ukraine, but the ban is supported by two-thirds of the respondents in the West of the country and only 29% in the East. 21% of respondents support the withdrawal of benefits and cancellation of lease agreements for church premises.

At the same time, 20% support the non-interference of the state in the Church's affairs - most of all in the East (35%) and South (25%).

During the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews) study, 1,200 respondents aged 18 and over were interviewed in all regions except the temporarily occupied territories. The sample is representative by age, gender, and type of settlement. The study's representativeness error with a confidence probability of 0.95: no more than 2.8%.

Advisor in Office of President opposes ban of Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine

RISU/ Russia Religion News (31.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/37bUebh> - An advisor to the head of the office of the president, Mikhail Podoliak, commented on the draft law for prohibiting the activity of the Moscow patriarchate in Ukraine, noting that, in contrast to the **Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)**, the **Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate (UOC/ MP)** occupies a different position. This was reported by the Department of Information and Enlightenment of the UOC/MP, citing Ukraina-24.

Mikhail Podoliak was critical of the idea of banning the activity in Ukraine of the **Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate (UOC/ MP)** and he emphasized that the positions of the **Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)** and the **UOC/MP** with regard to the war in Ukraine do not correspond: "The **UOC/MP** occupied a different position."

The official urged against speculating on the religion theme: "I would ask that people not speculate on this because we could have an internal conflict, while today we need unity,

which Ukraine has demonstrated to the whole world, which is much more principled and much more important."

The **UOC/MP** also viewed negatively the draft law regarding prohibiting the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. The legal department of this confession notes that law enforcement agencies do not make accusations against the **UOC/MP** with respect to violations of the national security, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of Ukraine. In addition, church attorneys think that a ban on belonging to the **UOC/MP** violates the right to freedom of religious confession, which violates the European Convention on Human Rights and the constitution of Ukraine. [. . .]

A number of Ukrainian experts supported the draft law, stressing that the Moscow patriarchate in Ukraine is the last outpost of Putinist Russia in our state. (tr. by PDS, posted 31 March 2022)

Photo: Metropolitan Onufryi, Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate (UOC/ MP)

Interactive map of churches and religious buildings destroyed by the Russian army

The interactive map is available [here](#)

HRWF (12.04.2022) – During the first month of the war, the Russian army destroyed more than 60 Ukrainian churches and religious facilities in at least eight regions of Ukraine: Kiev, Donetsk, Zhytomyr, Zaporozhye, Lugansk, Sumy, Kharkiv and Chernihiv.

An interactive map of Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and Jewish places of worship and religious structures destroyed on the territory of Ukraine by Russian troops has been created by the [State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience?](#)

Among the destroyed Protestant buildings are the Prayer House of Christians of Evangelical Faith in Boiarok, the Baptist seminary and Eurasian Mission in Irpin, the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary in Pushche-Vodits, and New Life Church of Evangelical Christians Baptists in Iziun, and churches in Mariupol.

See details, location and pictures [here](#):

Ukrainian Orthodox Church in communion/ unity with Moscow Patriarchate (39)

This Orthodox denomination is more prevalent in Kyiv and Eastern Ukraine (Kharkiv – Donbas) where the war was raging during the first month

Orthodox Church of Ukraine/ Patriarchate of Constantinople (5)

This Orthodox denomination was created on 15 December 2018, recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and granted the tomos of autocephaly on 5 January 2019

Protestant communities (5)

Roman Catholic Church (1)

Muslim communities (3)

Jewish communities (3)

Photo: Irpen Bible Seminary (Protestant)

Demands to put Patriarch Kirill and his inner circle on the international sanctions list

Ukrainian activists demand that the "Russian World" ideologists led by Patriarch Kirill are sanctioned

RISU (07.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3v4M7VM> - An action group of representatives of Ukrainian public and scientific institutions, representatives of media and business put forward the initiative to appeal to the governments of the United States, Great Britain, Japan, China, European Union member states, church and public activists who cooperate with the Moscow Patriarchate, with a request to facilitate putting **Moscow Patriarch Kirill** and his inner circle, who is directly involved in the development and promotion of the ideology of the Russian World, on the international sanctions list.

In particular, we are referring to

- **Head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Patriarchal Vicar, Metropolitan Hilarion (Gregory Alfeyev);**
- **permanent member of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, Primate of the UOC-MP Metropolitan Onufriy (Orest Berezovsky);**
- **permanent member of the Synod of the UOC-MP, Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa and Izmail (Oleksiy Savvin);**
- **permanent member of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarchal Exarch of the Belarusian Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate Metropolitan Veniamin (Vitaly Tupeko).**

"The impetus for this appeal was the fact that the role that the hierarchy of the Moscow Patriarchate has played and still plays in justifying and justifying the military aggression of the Russian political leadership (Transdnestria, Georgia, Ukraine) remains out of the attention of the international community," the initiators of the appeal say. "After all, it is the Moscow Patriarchate and personally the current Patriarch Kirill who are the developers and long-term advocates of the Russian World ideology. This ideology has become an effective means of instilling in Russian society the idea of superiority and exclusivity of Russian culture, language, and Moscow Orthodoxy."

This [teaching condemned by the world-famous theologians](#) because it is essentially a neo-imperial geopolitical and ideological doctrine that asserts Russian messianism and imperialism. Therefore, this latest heresy promotes Orthodox ethnophyletic fundamentalism (the superiority of the ethnic over the religious), totalitarianism and chauvinism. Ideology is used as an excuse for Russia's invasion of the territory of other states in order to restore the former Soviet Union.

In fact, the teaching is the current social and political doctrine of Russia and proclaims that there is a certain super – National Russian-speaking space or a separate civilization "Holy Rus" with a political center in Moscow, a common Russian language and a common Church - the Moscow Patriarchate. Its political leader is Putin, and its spiritual leader is Patriarch Kirill.

Such chauvinistic nationalist attitudes do not leave other peoples the right to their own language, culture, religion, or declare the latter to be less valuable, not worthy of development, prospects. A natural consequence of the Russian World policy is the gradual elimination of national languages, cultures, and those Orthodox communities that were not part of the Moscow Patriarchate in the territories occupied by Russia. Cases of harassment and persecution of religious leaders of non-Orthodox faiths who did not support the policy of the political leadership of the Russian Federation are also systemic.

"There are not isolated cases of open or covert cooperation between clergy of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine and Belarus with the occupying Russian troops. Sometimes such cooperation goes beyond not only religious canons, but also common sense or human morality," the initiators of the appeal note. "The chauvinistic Russian World has been and is being promoted with the help of Orthodox clergy. In war context, this poses a significant threat not only to the national security of Ukraine, but also to the world as a whole."

Full text of the appeal and signatories [HERE](#)

Photo: RISU

Over 60 places of worship in Ukraine and sites of cultural heritage attacked by the Russians

By Halya Coynash

KHPG (01.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3jcIA21> - Five weeks into its war against Ukraine, Russia has bombed or shelled over sixty places of worship in at least eight oblasts (Kyiv; Donetsk; Luhansk; Kharkiv; Sumy; Zaporizhyya and Zhytomyr). It has also destroyed or damaged many places of huge cultural significance.

It is for this reason that, instead of running for cover to escape Russia's relentless bombing and shelling of the city, Kharkiv municipal workers and volunteers worked together to protect the famous Monument to the great Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko by totally covering with sandbags. There have been similar moves in Odesa, Lviv and other Ukrainian cities, but nowhere as dangerous as in Kharkiv which Russia has been unable to seize, and instead seems bent on destroying.

The very tall monument is a landmark of the city, which withstood the Nazis, but was in grave danger from the new invading force from the North. Work is also underway to protect the monument to Ukraine's Independence on Constitution Square and Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov [has promised](#) that they will endeavour to protect other monuments as well.

The Russian regime under Vladimir Putin has long demonstrated barbaric disregard for human life, as well as for places of religious and cultural significance. There may, however, be other more sinister motives for the horrific destruction to sites of cultural importance that Russia has caused since it began its invasion of Ukraine on 24 February.

The Russian regime does not recognize Ukraine's right to exist, and may well want to destroy the country's rich historical and cultural legacy, especially since this demonstrates roots that go back far beyond the emergence of Moscow. Russian politicians and the state media have made almost childish attempts to try to appropriate the ancient monument of Chersonese in occupied Crimea as 'Russian', while also inflicting considerable damage on it, the 16th Century Khan's Palace (Hansaray) and other places of significance in Crimea. Ukrainians' valiant resistance to the Russian invaders has spoiled Russia's narrative, and it is quite possible that the blanket destruction to Mariupol and Kharkiv is, at least in part, prompted by the wish for revenge.

Some of the losses are irretrievable. Enormous damage was caused to a museum in Ivankiv, Kyiv oblast, with some of the works of Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko totally destroyed. In Mariupol alone, Russian strikes destroyed the Drama Theatre and a School of Arts, with both these having also been used to provide residents with shelter from the incessant bombing.

While Moscow may well be hoping, through such destruction, to undermine Ukraine's separate identity, the horrific vandalism also gives the lie to all of the excuses that the Kremlin has presented for its war against Ukraine. The claims that it is defending the Russian-speaking population and the Orthodox Church are grotesque in the light of the systematic destruction of the predominantly Russian-speaking cities of Kharkiv and Mariupol, and the huge amount of damage caused to churches, including those which are, at least for the moment, still linked with the Moscow Patriarchate.

The claim that the war is aimed at the so-called 'denazification' of Ukraine has been condemned [by Holocaust survivors, the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine](#) and [international Holocaust remembrance organizations](#). It seems particularly cynical given that it is Russians who [bombed Babyn Yar](#), site of one of the worst Nazi massacres of Jews; another Holocaust memorial in the Kharkiv oblast and who [killed Boris Romantschenko](#), a 96-year-old Kharkiv resident who had survived four Nazi concentration camps, only to die from a Russian missile.

Ukraine's Ministry of Culture and Information Policy has created a special website for documenting war crimes committed by the Russian armed forces against the Ukrainian population and sites of cultural heritage. The material will, hopefully, be used as evidence for criminal prosecution, either under Ukrainian legislation or at the International Criminal Court at the Hague. They invite people to send them information and / or photographic and video evidence regarding the damage of protected buildings; monuments; places of worship, etc, the plundering of museums, libraries and similar and the use of force by the armed forces during the above acts of plunder or destruction.

The considerable evidence already amassed can be viewed here [in Ukrainian](#) and [in English](#) (most easily viewed in 'Gallery').

Photo: Holy Dormition Cathedral, 1778 in the Kharkiv oblast damaged by Russian shelling on 3 March

Odesa Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths unite for Ukraine and against Russian aggression

By Halya Coynash

KHPG (21.03.2022)- <https://bit.ly/3DE0UuF> - Representatives of Odesa's largest Christian churches, as well as the Chief Rabbi of Odesa and Deputy Imam have joined together in a [powerful address](#) in support of peace and against the war that Russia has unleashed on Ukraine. Like the concentrated efforts of Odesa residents to protect the city against Russia's expected attack, the address exposes the lies that Moscow is using to try to justify its invasion. Those who are free do not require 'liberation' and the so-called 'Russian world' that Russia is bringing to Ukraine is evil, and a force only of destruction. It is significant that the five include **Archpriest Pavlo Poleshchuk** from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which at least for the moment remains linked to the Moscow Patriarchate. Although his address is the least openly pro-Ukrainian and / or political, his very participation is important given Russian Patriarch Kirill's fairly open support for Russia's invasion and Russian leader Vladimir Putin's twisted views about Ukraine.

It was Father Pavlo who spoke first, stressing that all nationalities and faiths have always lived in harmony in Odesa and the Odesa oblast, and praying for peace and that Odesa remains unharmed.

Father Teodor Orobets, Secretary of the Odesa Diocese of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, joins in praying for peace for Ukraine. Speaking in Ukrainian, he also says the following:

"The free do not need to be freed and liberated. Odesa is a freedom-loving city, as is all of Ukraine which lives in peace with all its neighbours. <> The Russian world that Russia brings is not peace, but evil which destroys our cities, villages and kills our people."

Rabbi Avraham Wolf, Chief Rabbi of Odesa and Southern Ukraine, calls the "Jewish community of Odesa an example for many Jewish communities around the world."

He says that many rabbis whom he meets are envious of how free the Odesa community is. *"I am proud that I live in such a city where I can talk in Russian and everybody understands me and helps. This is the most loyal city and country for any national where you can freely work and develop. I pray to the Almighty to send peace to our land, so that we can live in peace and harmony"*.

Father Oleksandr Smerechynsky from the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and Chief Chaplain for the Naval Forces in Odesa, calls Odesa a big family, where all are very different, yet united. *"We do not need to be liberated from anything. We need only to be left in peace, to develop our multi-faith, multinational yet united family, a part of Ukrainian soil and of the Ukrainian state. There is no need to liberate us. Go home!"*

Deputy Imam Askar Olegovich Dzhasimov stresses that Ukraine's Muslims want peace for all, and prays to the Creator *"to preserve our country, our beloved Ukraine, <> We are all united in the battle with evil, and evil has no nationality. Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!"*

All of this firmly rejects fundamental elements in Moscow's narrative about Odesa, Ukraine and the supposed reasons for Russia's invasion. In 2014, Putin claimed that Ukraine's post-Maidan leaders were 'fascists' and anti-Semites, and was vehemently contradicted by leading members of Ukraine's Jewish community. There were several fakes (about alleged discrimination, 'pogroms', etc) over the following years which were equally swiftly rejected by the relevant communities. Putin is now claiming that Russia's invasion and the horrific bombing of civilians are aimed at something he calls 'the demilitarization and denazification' of Ukraine, with the latter claim rejected by the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine, by Holocaust survivors, and, now, by the Chief Rabbi of Odesa.

The Kremlin has also claimed that Russia is 'protecting' Russian-speakers against Kyiv's supposed 'genocide', that it is liberating them from a 'fascist' junta. It is not only Odesa's religious figures who roundly reject such myths. Since the first day of Russia's invasion, the predominantly Russian-speaking residents of Odesa have united in showing Moscow and the world that they are Ukrainians who plan to defend their city from the Russian aggressor. Day after day, there have been long chains of volunteers along the sea front filling sandbags to block the invaders' path. Others have been welding iron bars together to block Russian tanks; learning how to use firearms or make Molotov cocktails. Even the Kremlin must have now understand that nobody is about to greet invaders as 'liberators', and hand them flowers, and that the invading forces will be met by barricades, petrol and a huge territorial defence force who will do everything to defend Odesa and Ukraine.

Photo : Odesa is Ukraine in the colours of the Ukrainian flag on sand bags aimed at impeding the Russian invaders Photo Mykhailo Shtekel, RFERL

Evangelical pastor arrested by Russians in Mariupol

Release International (21.03.2022)- <https://bit.ly/3JKf2Vv> - Please pray for the pastor of an Evangelical church in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol, who has been arrested by Russian forces.

Alexander Glushko, the pastor of the Mariupol Evangelical Church 'Light of the World' was arrested at his home a few days ago. A search was made of his house and a diploma from the Theological Seminary of Ukraine was found. A Release International partner says this is one of the reasons for his arrest.

'According to our information, he has already been taken to the territory previously occupied by Russian troops and placed in a prison in the city of Dokuchaevsk, not far from Donetsk,' reported our partner.

His family has no further information as to his whereabouts and his wife has no right or opportunity to see her husband.

Another pastor of a church near Mariupol has told our partner that he was blacklisted for arrest but he managed to escape. However, the church building, where the pastor's family also lived, has been confiscated.

Our partner continued: *'I believe that many other pastors of evangelical churches in Ukraine, known for their patriotic position, are also included in such a "black list". This is also fully in line with reports that were published before the invasion of the Russian army that the "physical liquidation of some religious figures in Ukraine" who openly support their government is expected.*

Shortly after the conflict in Ukraine began, "Release International" reported on the way Protestant churches in the pro-Russian controlled regions of Ukraine have been subject to restrictions on their freedom in recent years.

Our partner added that many Christians have already fled Mariupol – not only because of the current fighting but because of fears of possible persecution for the Evangelical faith.

USCIRF warns of potential for religious oppression in Ukraine

USCIRF (16.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Iq9o9k> - The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom ([USCIRF](#)) is appalled by the incalculable suffering already caused by Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, and warns that religious communities across Ukraine will likely be targeted with violence and oppression under any Russian influence.

"We are horrified by Russia's attacks on Ukraine, the senseless loss of life, and the lack of respect for human rights. There is a direct relationship between religious freedom violations and the dismantling of civil society in and by Russia. The Russian government uses distortions of religious history to support its claim that Ukrainians have no independent ethno-religious identity or state tradition," said USCIRF Commissioner [James W. Carr](#). *"In 2019, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople recognized an independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine, allowing many parishes previously under the jurisdiction of Moscow to sever those ties in a move that infuriated Russian nationalist sentiments. These parishes and their leadership are in jeopardy if Russian control expands."*

For years, USCIRF has documented Russia's increasingly authoritarian policy towards religion and warned of its troubling implications for Russian society and beyond.

"In the areas of Ukraine already occupied by Russia in 2014, we have seen the Russian government use baseless charges of religious extremism and terrorism to silence dissent, justify endless raids and mass arrests, and close religious institutions that do not conform to its narrow interpretation of 'traditional' religion," said USCIRF Commissioner [Khizr Khan](#). *"Indigenous Crimean Tatar Muslims—who oppose the Russian occupation of their homeland—are routinely charged with terrorism based on their ethno-religious identity rather than any substantive evidence. Many of these individuals receive prison sentences of up to 20 years. The Russian government's aggression toward religious freedom is an indicator that much worse will follow, as we certainly see a risk of this pattern being repeated as Russia expands into Ukraine."*

Russian shelling has already damaged numerous religious buildings, including a revered 16 century Orthodox [monastery](#) where close to 1,000 civilians were sheltering, and a [mosque](#) in Mariupol where 80 civilians were sheltering. Although some Russian Orthodox clergy oppose the war, including nearly 300 who signed an [open letter](#) denouncing it, Russian Orthodox Patriarch [Kirill](#) has publicly blessed it and provided supposed religious justification.

USCIRF has documented and explained the Russian government oppression of religious freedom in numerous products, including reports on [The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union](#) and [Religious Freedom Violations in the Republic of Chechnya](#), and episodes of the USCIRF Spotlight podcast, such as Implications of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine – Part 1: [The "Denazification" Narrative](#) and Part 2: [The Religious Regulation Framework](#), and the [Abuses of Traditional Religion in Russia](#). In its 2021 [Annual Report](#), USCIRF again recommended that the U.S. Department of State designate [Russia](#) as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations. On November 15, 2021, the State Department [implemented](#) this recommendation and designated Russia as a CPC for the first time.

Friends and foes of Ukraine among religious leaders in Russia

Russian scholar Roman Lunkin analyzes the attitude of religious leaders about the war in Ukraine: Brief 'rating' of religious leaders in Russia by degree of loyalty to the Special operation in Ukraine. Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the EU, the US and the UK to extend their sanctions to the Russian religious leaders who support the war in Ukraine.

See Black List 2 below.

See HRWF Black List 1 [here](#)

Russia Religion News (14.03.2022) - The Russian religious studies scholar, sociologist, and political scientist Roman Lunkin composed a "brief rating of religious leaders of Russia by degree of their loyalty to the special operation in Ukraine," the Christian megaportal [inVictory](#) reports, citing the Facebook account of the author.

As Lunkin observed, the list includes those whom he noticed and recalled.

Direct support

Director of Ecclesiastical Assembly of Muslims of Russia, Albir Krganov;
Supreme mufti of the Central Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of Russia, Talgat Tadzhuddin;
Chairman of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of the republic of Tatarstan, Kamil Samigullin;
Mufti of Bashkiria, Ainur Birgalin;
Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill (from 11 March, when explanations of the conflict were stated in a letter to the World Council of Churches);
Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Old-ritualist Church Kornily;
Protestant bishop of the Russian Churches of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Pavel Zhelnovakov (Izhevsk);
Pastor of a protestant church in Kostroma, Andrei Gusev;
Orthodox historian and publicist Feliks Razumovsky;
Orthodox historian and publicist, priest Ilia Soloviev;

Between a call for peace and direct support

Bishop Sergei Riakhovsky, head of Pentecostal union of the Russian Affiliated Council of Christian of Evangelical Faith, member of the Public Chamber of the R.F.

Calls for peace only

Head of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of the R.F., Ravil Gainutdin;
Chairman of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of Crimea and Sevastopol, Emirali Ablaev;
Archbishop of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, Ditrikh Brauer;
Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, Ivan Laptev;
Rector of the Moscow Theological Institute, Sergei Yastrzhemsky;
Pastor of Church of Embassy of Jesus in Nizhny Novgorod;
Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia and Archbishop Pavel Petstsi ;
Prayer for peace by Bishop Nikolai Dubinin;
Baptist pastor Evgeny Bakhmutsky (Moscow);

Head of Buddhist Traditional Sangkha of Russia, Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Aiusheev;

Detailed active position for cessation of the conflict

Chief rabbi of Russia, Berl Lazar;
Head of the Union of Baptists of Russia, Petr Mitskevich (he is also head of the Union of Baptists of the whole Eurasian space, Transcaucasus, and Central Asia);
Bishop of Pentecostal Union of the Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Eduard Grabovenko;
286 priests of the Russian Orthodox Church (appeal on 1 March 2022);

Against the military operation and condemnation of Russia and Russian Orthodox Church

Protestant opposition figures, Baptists Yury Sipko and Aleksei Markevich;
Orthodox activists and opposition figures Sergei Chapnin and Konstantin Eggert;
Pastor Albert Ratkin of the video channel Vsqliad s Nebesnoi;
Pastor of the "New Life" church in Ekaterinburg, Viktor Sudakov;
Archdeacon Andrei Kuraev.

Appeal to fellow countrymen by evangelical ministers of 3 March 2022

(as Aleksei Markevich notes, it was signed by about 500 persons, but it is impossible to confirm this now, since all signatures were secret inasmuch as, unlike the Orthodox appeal, the protestants essentially accused the Russian Federation of aggression). Apparently only the signatures of the principal signatories are public:

Yuri Ilchenko, Khabarovsk;
Evgeny Kokora, Novorossiisk;
Andrei Kravtsev, Nalchik;
Roman Nosach, St. Petersburg;
Aleksei Markevich, Moscow;
Pavel Togobitsky, Berdsk;
Viktor Fast, Solnechnyi;
Igor Shaifulin, Novosibirsk;
Mikhail Cherniavsky, Khabarovsk.

(tr. by PDS, posted 20 March 2022)

Photo: War ruins in Ukraine / Getty Images

Ukraine War: The role of the Orthodox Churches

About 75% of Russians and 60% of Ukrainians profess to be Orthodox Christians. How are their churches responding to the war?



Patriarch Kirill (left) has publicly given his support to the war

DW (09.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3DgR8yr> - Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is driving a wedge into the Orthodox Church. While the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, has justified the war in Moscow, it has been condemned in the Ukrainian Orthodox churches, as well as by some priests in Russia.

"The Moscow Patriarchate had been silent about the war for a long time," explains Thomas Bremer in a video interview with DW. The professor of ecumenical theology, eastern European [church studies](#) and peace research at the University of Münster adds that this position has now changed with Patriarch Kirill, who presents Vladimir Putin's war as a legitimate resistance to Western values in his sermons in Moscow.

"He bases this on gay pride parades," explains Bremer, "which he claims were intended to be imposed on the Donbass."

In keeping with Putin's line and in accordance with the president's ban on reporting on the war or even calling it as such, the patriarch also did not use the word "war" for the invasion of Ukraine but spoke of "events" and "military actions."



The independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OKU) is led by Metropolitan Epiphanius

Religious diversity in Ukraine

While the Russian [Orthodox Church](#) is the primary church in Russia, Ukraine is characterized by religious diversity. Orthodox Christianity has had a turbulent history in Ukraine, especially since Ukrainian independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Currently, two Orthodox churches exist in Ukraine. One is the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OKU), led by Metropolitan Epiphanius. This church was recognized by Bartholomew I in Istanbul, who is considered the "spiritual leader" of the approximately 260 million Orthodox Christians worldwide.

On the other hand, there is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOK), which is an autonomous church within the Russian Orthodox Church and has not often expressed itself politically in the past.

What is the position of the Orthodox churches in Ukraine?

Each of the two Orthodox churches in Ukraine has referred to the "war" by name and condemned it emphatically, Bremer said in an interview with DW. He added that while the OKU's reaction was to be expected anyway, even the patriarch of the UOK, which is after all a part of the Russian Orthodox Church, had spoken of an "invasion" of Ukraine on the very first day of the war and [called on Putin to end it](#).

"The synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church even called on the patriarch in Moscow to use his influence on Putin and work for peace," Bremer notes. "But that was left out of the coverage in Russia. The horrors of war are not visible there at all."

Will there be a split in the church?

According to Bremer, the Moscow patriarch's failure to speak out for peace has led to many bishops of the UOK in Ukraine giving instructions to stop mentioning his name in prayer, as is customary. Even in northeastern Ukraine, on the Russian border, that is the case, he says. "In the church, this shows a great movement away from Moscow," Bremer

analyzes. The Moscow patriarch has lost the trust of his brethren in Ukraine — and with it many practicing believers in the country, he said. He explained that about 12,000 of 38,000 parishes of the [Russian Orthodox Church](#) are in Ukraine and are part of the UOK: that is, almost one-third.



Bartholomew I is the ecumenical patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox church and its approximately 260 million followers

Resistance also stirring in Russian Orthodox Church

In early March, Russian Orthodox clergy and priests published an open letter calling for an end to the war. Written in Russian, the letter reads: "We, the priests and deacons of the Russian Orthodox Church, appeal on our own behalf to all in whose name the fratricidal war in Ukraine will end and call for reconciliation and an immediate ceasefire."

They spoke of the "ordeal to which our brothers and sisters in Ukraine are undeservedly subjected" and referring to the future added, "We are saddened to think of the gulf that our children and grandchildren in Russia and Ukraine will have to [bridge to become friends again](#), to respect and love one another." As of March 8, 2022, 286 priests and deacons have signed the letter.

"This is very courageous," Bremer says of these clerics, who make up a relatively small group out of around 36,000 priests in the Russian Orthodox Church. But they are now being subjected to reprisals and persecution by the Russian authorities and the Federal Secret Service (FSB), Bremer adds.

'Russian Orthodox' as a cultural identity

Professing to being part of the Orthodox Church in Russia can be both a religious as well as cultural affiliation. "There are people in Russia who call themselves Orthodox, but at the same time say they don't believe in God," Bremer explains. "This is also a matter of identity."

Orthodox Christianity is historically closely linked to Russia, the theologian elaborates, and Vladimir Putin is taking advantage of that. In a speech justifying "military actions" in

Ukraine, for example, he even referred to the religious dimension when he falsely spoke of Russian Orthodox church members being persecuted in Ukraine.

Both Orthodox churches in Ukraine have rejected this narrative. What impact the war would have on the Orthodox Church, Bremer said, would depend on its further course — and [who would win the war](#). Should Russia take Ukraine, it would mean the end of the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Churches (UOK), he predicts.

But the Russian Orthodox Church would already have lost many believers in Ukraine, and perhaps also some in Russia.

This article was originally written in German.

The Donbass forgotten in invasion of Ukraine

by Vladimir Rozanskij

AsiaNews (03.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/34sWOIs> - **It was the point of tension between Kiev and Moscow before the Russian attack. Since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine has garnered a true sense of national unity. Ukrainian army cleansed of out-of-control militias in Donbass. The Kremlin will not easily achieve victory.**



The war is raging all over Ukraine, Russian troops are storming the big cities and heading for Kiev, to finally crush the Ukrainian capital with the entire leadership barricaded in led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyj. At this point the fate of the Donbass is of little concern, despite only a week ago being flagged as the critical point of confrontation between Russians and Ukrainians, while in reality it has always been a peripheral area

used by the Russians as a pretext to justify the war and the invasion of the whole country.

The Donbass region has a certain symbolic value, because it harks back to the time of Russia's liberation from the Tatar yoke in 1380, when the prince of Moscow managed to achieve the first victory over the Asian invaders at the battle of Kulikovo, near the Don river. That is why Prince Dmitry was called "Donskoj", and the whole Don region has remained a sacred place symbolic of the courage and identity of Holy Russia rising as a nation called to save the whole world.

It is not surprising that such a mystical idea lies at the heart of the Russian offensive in the land of the decisive confrontation between East and West, from medieval times to the present day. Yet it seemed that this was a 'defensive operation' focused on the Donbass, tormented by eight years of 'hybrid war', and that Tsar Putin 'the Terrible' could be content to associate the republics of Lugansk and Donetsk with the annexed Crimea. It had already happened 14 years ago with Georgia's pro-Russian republics of Abkhazia and North Ossetia.

In Meduza, humanitarian activist Varvara Pakhomenko retraced the steps of these long years in the area of the mouth of the Don, where the Donets tributary, which gives its name to one of the two separatist republics, also flows. For eight years the hybrid war has alternated between moments of great tension and relatively quiet periods, and in February of this year everything seemed fairly stable, until Putin launched the campaign of "de-Nazification and de-Militarisation" of the region and the whole of Ukraine, as it is officially called by the Kremlin, which forbids the press from talking about "war" or "invasion".

The Russian recognition of the independence of Donetsk and Lugansk on 24 February, which coincided with the start of Moscow's offensive, has left all the inhabitants of the area rather perplexed: what borders did Putin and the Duma's proclamation refer to? For years, the two regions have been disputed between the local and Ukrainian authorities, who accuse each other of being 'occupiers'. It was clear that the uncertainty of the borders led directly to a widening of military action, even though no one, not even in the Donbass, was thinking of a total invasion.

Parkhomenko says he has worked with the Ukrainian military in recent years on behalf of various humanitarian organisations, with training in international humanitarian law and the defence of the peaceful population. "I have seen how this army has changed, it has become much more professional and motivated, and I don't think the Russians will easily come to victory," Varvara explains, "the whole Ukrainian army has rotated through the Donbass more than once."

Since 2017, the various volunteer battalions have been integrated into Ukraine's official armed forces, and a very sophisticated coordination system has been designed to prepare for the worst.

The fighters who carried out spontaneous and out-of-control actions in the Donbass in recent years have been detained and called to account in court, and it does not seem likely that the Russians will actually succeed in taking control of the territory.

In these eight years Ukraine has learned to feel like a truly united nation, something that had not been possible in eight centuries of history, or even in the 20 years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Donbass is a highly urbanised and advanced region; although pro-Russian sentiments prevail, it is by no means a foregone conclusion, however, that it will lie quietly in Mother Russia's embrace, as was the case with Crimea.

The events of the war may come to a favourable conclusion for Moscow, but the lives of the Ukrainians will not be in their hands.

Orthodox united against Putin

Even the Orthodox Church in communion with the Patriarchate of Moscow called Ukrainians to resistance, comparing the Russian President to Cain.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (02.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3K3ye02> - There is a religious aspect in the war in Ukraine, and some of its features are surprising and paradoxical. Others are not. In his first speech to the nation in which he announced the armed intervention, Putin evoked the link between the "Russian world" and the Orthodox Church led by the Patriarch of Moscow. He also offered as evidence of Western conspiracies in Ukraine the fact that in 2018 the Ukrainian Orthodox Church broke away from the Moscow Patriarchate and joined the other major world Orthodox jurisdiction, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which is based in Istanbul, the ancient Constantinople.

Not all Ukrainian Orthodox accepted this decision. Some remained with the Patriarch of Moscow in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Putin stated that these Ukrainian Orthodox in communion with Moscow are being persecuted by the majority Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the government, and that one of the goals of his troops is to end the persecution.

About sixty percent of Ukrainians adhere to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. A figure variously estimated at fifteen to twenty percent are part of the Church in communion with the Patriarch of Moscow. It should not be forgotten that there are also Catholics in Ukraine: over four million, a little less than ten percent of the population. They follow the Greek rite, meaning they have different traditions, canon law, and liturgical practices, but remain in full communion with the Holy See. There is also a significant minority of Catholics following the Latin rite.

To complete the map of Ukrainian Christians, there are almost ten thousand Protestant communities. There are also over nine hundred Kingdom Halls of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, popularly known as the Mormon Church, has some forty congregations and one of its temples is in Kiev.

Of some relevance to understanding the war is also the religious situation in Russia. Here in polls over 60% of the population claims to be part of the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. However, this figure includes many who are rarely or never active in church activities, and the Moscow Patriarchate views with concern its loss of influence among the younger generations. Invited by political authorities or the Patriarchate itself, I was a speaker in several conferences in Russia on the causes of this phenomenon. My impression is that there are causes common to most European countries, which have been hit by more or less aggressive waves of secularization, and a cause specific to Russia, where many consider the Moscow Patriarchate to look too often like a public relations agency for Putin, a sort of "ministry of religion" of the regime.

Many Orthodox bishops, however, do not accept this analysis, which would require some self-criticism on their part. They attribute their problems to the aggressive competition of religions and “cults” imported from the West, whose numbers, however, are relatively small and statistically cannot explain the hemorrhage of active members that has hit the Patriarchate.

The more conservative bishops believe that this is part of a diabolical plan of the United States and the European Union to destroy the Orthodox soul of Russia. They have entered into an even closer alliance with the Putin regime, guaranteeing it unconditional support and receiving in exchange economic help in various official and unofficial forms, and restrictive laws to get rid of competition. They have led, among other things, to outlaw Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are the victims of a ruthless policy of arrests and violence condemned by all international institutions.

The same Russian Orthodox bishops perceived the move of the majority of Ukrainian Orthodox devotees from the Patriarchate of Moscow to that of Constantinople, which was largely due to the political crisis between Ukraine and Russia following the invasion of Crimea, as a wound caused by the usual American and European conspiracies. In Putin’s pseudo-republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, i.e. in the areas of Eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian separatists, [laws explicitly recognize](#) the national character of the Orthodox Church in communion with the Patriarchate of Moscow, discriminating against the one in communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople and against other Christian and non-Christian communities. Some academic observers have called Donetsk and Luhansk “Orthodox mini-theocracies.”

It is therefore not surprising that Putin, by invading Ukraine, presented himself as the champion of the Russian Orthodox Church. He also presented the conflict as a religious war, one of whose objectives is to bring back all Ukrainian Orthodox into the fold of the Moscow Patriarchate. In recent years, after all, Putin has increasingly resorted to the old Russian rhetoric of Moscow as the “Third Rome,” the only Rome left standing after the fall of ancient Rome (which for Putin’s ideologues is also the moral fall of contemporary Western Christianity) and of Constantinople, thus the only remaining bastion of world Christianity.

Nor is it surprising that the Patriarch of Moscow remained silent for a long time and then made statements that were presented in the West as a call to peace but in Russia and Ukraine were interpreted, perhaps correctly, as expressing an ambiguous position and avoiding any criticism of Putin’s actions. It is also not surprising that some of the harshest words about this crisis have been spoken against Putin, calling the Ukrainian people to resistance, by Metropolitan Epiphanius, primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in communion with Constantinople, and [Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk](#), head of the Greek Catholic Church, that is, of the vast majority of Ukrainian Catholics. Patriarch Shevchuk’s statements contrasted with the much more cautious position of the Vatican, which is concerned with not jeopardizing its ecumenical relations with the Patriarch of Moscow, while also keeping those with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople—which looks like a difficult exercise.

But there is something surprising. Very surprising indeed. It is the fact that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, i.e., according to Putin, the very Church that Russian troops went to defend in Ukraine against the “persecution” of the majority Orthodox Church and the government, not only did not support the invasion but took a very tough stance against it. Metropolitan Onuphrius (Onufriy) of Kiev, primate of the Moscow-connected Church, [said it is time for Ukrainians to put aside religious](#)

differences and unite to resist the invader. Onuphrius said that Putin is repeating "the sin of Cain," who killed his brother Abel, that the invasion "has no excuses," and that the Orthodox in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate must also offer their "special love and support to our soldiers who stand guard and protect and defend our land and our people. May God bless and guard them!" Note that this is a church including a majority of Russian-speaking Ukrainians, giving the lie to the theory that Russian-speaking Ukrainians support the invasion.

Apart from a few local Orthodox figures sold out or terrorized by the bloodthirsty hierarchs of the pseudo-republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, there is no Christian church or authority in Ukraine today that supports Putin. If the aggression aimed at further dividing the Christians of Ukraine into anti-Russians and pro-Russians, it has on the contrary united them in the execration of the Kremlin's "Cain".

Photo : He compared Putin to Cain: Metropolitan Onuphrius (Onufriy) of Kiev, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. [Credits](#).

Priests of the Russian Orthodox Church call for reconciliation and ending the war

RFE/RL (01.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/36Vg0Q5> - "Representatives of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church called for an end to the war in Ukraine by addressing "everyone on whom it depends." In an open appeal, priests and deacons [write](#) that the "brotherly war" will lead to the abyss of relations between Russians and Ukrainians, and declare their grief for the test to which "our brothers and sisters in Ukraine have been undeservedly subjected."

The appeal is distributed online on March 1. At the time of publication, it was signed by more than 130 people. It emphasizes that signatories apply "on their own behalf", that is, not on behalf of the church - this prohibits canon law for priests. In the text, the authors write that they want "the return of all soldiers - both Russian and Ukrainian - to their homes." "We respect God-given human freedom and believe that the people of Ukraine should make their choice on their own, not at the gunpoint, without pressure from the West or the East," the appeal reads.

The text appeared against the background of growing intra-church criticism of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill (Gundyaev). He is accused of not expressing a sufficiently clear anti-war position after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. At the time of publication of the news, there was not a single mention of the war on the main page of the Moscow Patriarchate website.

Against this background, a statement by priests [appeared](#) on the website of the Sumy diocese, located in the heart of the historical ROC, that they stop commemorating the patriarch during church services. In church language, this actually means that priests do not recognize it as part of the church. "We are forced to admit with particular sorrow that in these terrible days His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia did not condemn the aggressive actions of the Russian authorities," their address reads.

They stressed that they continue to consider themselves part of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is part of the Russian Orthodox Church,

and [expressed support for](#) its Primate, Metropolitan Onufry (Berezovsky), who condemned the aggression.

Stop the war.”

List of signatories [here](#) (Automatic update)

194 as of 1 March 2022

Priests and deacons of the Russian Orthodox Church who wish to sign the letter can write to russianpriestsforpeace@gmail.com

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)

How Putin is exploiting Orthodox rivalries in Ukraine

The Russian president says the government in Kiev is repressing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is attached to the Moscow Patriarchate



The Moscow Patriarchate wants to impose itself as the main force of Orthodoxy. (Photo by SDAK SOUICI / LE PICTORIUM/ MAXPPP)

By Marguerite de Lasa

La Croix International (23.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33QXAPi> - Russia's President Vladimir Putin has accused Ukraine's government of repressing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is attached to the Patriarchate of Moscow.

Putin added the religious tensions to the two countries' already explosive political situation on Monday during a televised address in which he acknowledged the independence of the pro-Russian separatist territories in Eastern Ukraine.

"Kiev continues to prepare a crackdown against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate," he claimed.

"The Ukrainian authorities have cynically turned the tragedy of the split in the Church into an instrument of state policy," the 69-year-old strong-arm leader said.

To support his indictment of Ukraine, Putin is exploiting Orthodox tensions in Ukraine, which pit hierarchs and common believers who wish to remain tethered to the Moscow Patriarchate and those who are part of autocephalous (independent) Church attached to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Recognition of a church in Ukraine independent of Moscow

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I granted autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 2019, thereby officializing its independence from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Up until then the 25 million Ukrainian Orthodox believers were canonically dependent on the Moscow Patriarchate.

"Patriarch Bartholomew has thus allowed Ukrainians to be fully Orthodox and fully Ukrainian, without wondering what their link to Moscow is," said Jean-François Colosimo, an Orthodox theologian and editor.

Faced with the autocephalous Church, the Patriarchate of Moscow wants to impose itself as the main force of Orthodoxy, relying on symbolic and material reasons.

"Moscow does not intend to give up its hold on Kiev, which is the place of baptism for all the Russians," Colosimo pointed out.

The first conversions to Orthodoxy from the Slavic world took place in Kiev in the 9th century.

"Ukraine is also a large part of the resources of the Patriarchate of Moscow, in terms of geography, as well as the number of priests and faithful," the theologian said.

"It is clear that in the current situation, the Kremlin considers the Patriarchate of Moscow as a diplomatic instrument," Colosimo noted.

Jivko Panev, another Orthodox theologian and journalist, said these tensions between the two Churches are above all ecclesial in nature.

"For the Ukrainian Church of the Patriarchate of Moscow, what is important is to remain in canonicity," said Panev, who is also the founder of the information website Orthodoxy.com.

Orthodox who've remained faithful to Moscow, an element of destabilization

The Ukrainian government favors the autocephalous Church and "tends to accuse the branch that has remained faithful to Moscow of being an element of destabilization for Ukraine," Colosimo said.

A survey conducted last July by the International Institute of Sociology in Kiev found that 58% of Ukrainians who are Orthodox say they belong to the autocephalous Church, while about 25% identify with the Church attached to the Patriarchate of Moscow.

But that is not the whole story.

"It is possible that there are Ukrainian Orthodox faithful to Moscow, who at the same time feel very patriotic," claimed Colosimo.

Such is the case with Bishop Victor Kotsaba of Baryshivka who is currently the administrator of the Moscow-linked Eparchy of Kiev.

"The Ukrainian Orthodox Church supports our government, our president and all the leaders who currently have a great responsibility," he said on February 16.

He added that his Russian-affiliated Church was ready, "in case of a total war, to bless the people in the defense of (their) homeland" in Ukraine.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/how-putin-is-exploiting-orthodox-rivalries-in-ukraine/15685>

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.](#)
