

**Zeitschrift:** Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie  
**Band:** 113 (2023)  
**Heft:** 1  
  
**Artikel:** The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in the face of the challenges posed by the Russo-Ukrainian war  
**Autor:** Horyacha, Mariya  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1074534>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 08.02.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

---

# The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in the Face of the Challenges Posed by the Russo-Ukrainian War

*Mariya Horyacha*

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Many people count the days of the Russo-Ukrainian war from 24 February 2022, when the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine broke. However, the Russo-Ukrainian war began much earlier. Ukraine has been at war with Russia since 2014, when Russian troops invaded Crimea and occupied the peninsula and part of Donbas. However, after a period of active hostilities in 2014, the conflict experienced a hiatus during the phase of the Minsk agreements, which neither side intended to fulfil. It was clear to everyone that this period was simply a respite, allowing for a temporary halt to the war and its bloodshed. Nonetheless, when the full-scale invasion broke on 24 February 2022, it still was shocking for most Ukrainians. Most were not prepared for these events, even though international intelligence and the media had warned of Putin's plans. The outcome of the first days of invasion and the Ukrainians' will to resist came as a surprise to the Western world. The horror of the war could no longer go unnoticed or be ignored, and everyone had to face the painful dilemmas that any full-scale war evolved. The Churches in Ukraine could not distance themselves from these dramatic events, but had to meet the challenges of the war and react to them. In this article, I will explore the response to the war of one of the traditional Ukrainian Churches, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church [= UGCC]. First, I will consider the activity of this Church during the latent period of the war, starting from 2014. Then I will present the external challenges faced by the UGCC in its ecclesiastical life after 24 February 2022 and how it coped with the challenges of the information war. Finally, I will consider the UGCC's responses to problems within Ukrainian society and the Church caused by the war. This analysis

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written and presented during my internship at the Institute for Old Catholic Theology of the University of Bern in March and April 2023. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Angela Berlis and all her colleagues at the Institute for their support and solidarity in this difficult time of war.

will show the main focuses of the mission and activity of the UGCC during this time of war and its contribution to the range of active responses which has emerged in the ecclesiastical landscape of Ukraine.

## **2. The Latent Period of the War (2014–2022)**

From the earliest days of the war, the UGCC became one of the centres of assistance to those in need. Its various structures were active in providing support to the defenders of Ukraine, including the injured, prisoners of war, families of the fallen and missing, and internally displaced persons. The UGCC sought to respond to the questions of its faithful, who were looking for guidance in the difficult and traumatic time of war.

During the latent period of the war (2014–2021), the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC issued a number of appeals to various groups of people who were suffering in one way or another as a result of the war. Thus, on 5 February 2015, the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC issued an “Appeal to Priests on Pastoral Care in War,” in which it provided practical guidance for pastors and military chaplains on the specifics of spiritual support for the faithful and combatants.<sup>2</sup> In a series of appeals, the UGCC expressed words of support and love to the defenders of the homeland (7 September 2015)<sup>3</sup> and to all Ukrainians affected by the occupation of Crimea and Donbas (12 September 2016).<sup>4</sup>

In the period from 2014 to 2021, the UGCC’s response was focused on developing the institution of chaplaincy. The need for priests in the army had become acute, and at the request of the state, the Church began to send priests to military units to provide a pastoral ministry to Ukrainian soldiers. Initially, this chaplaincy ministry was carried out on a volunteer basis by priests. During the first three years of the war, until

---

<sup>2</sup> Zvernennia Synodu Yepyskopiv UHKTh do tykh, khto fizychno i moralno postrazhdav vid okupatsii Krymu ta viiny na Skhodi Ukrainy [= Appeal of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC to those who suffered from the occupation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine], *Official Documents of the UGCC*, 12 September 2016, <https://docs.ugcc.ua/161/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>3</sup> Zvernennia Synodu Yepyskopiv UHKTh do zakhysnykiv Batkivshchyny 2015 roku [= Appeal of the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC to the defenders of the homeland], *Official Documents of the UGCC*, 7 September 2015, <https://docs.ugcc.ua/165/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>4</sup> Zvernennia Synodu Yepyskopiv (as note 1).

December 2017, UGCC clergy made about 650 visits to the war zone.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of 2016, a legal framework was developed to regulate the interaction between the Church and the army, and in 2017, military chaplaincy received official status. Chaplains became full-time employees in military units and in the army's educational and medical institutions and were able to serve in the army on a permanent basis.<sup>6</sup>

On 27 April 2020, the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC issued an "Appeal to the clergy on healing the wounds of war," which sets out the main guidelines for pastoral work with soldiers, war veterans, and other victims of war, including those experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It calls on priests, seminarians and monastics "to make the most of the developments in the field of spiritual support for war-affected persons, to acquire the necessary skills, to conduct useful formation courses that would contribute to the active and effective participation of our Church in healing the wounds of the Ukrainian people."<sup>7</sup>

On the first day of the full-scale war, the head of the UGCC, His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, appealed to the Ukrainian people and called them to defend their homeland. Since then, he has addressed the defenders of Ukraine and all the faithful every day with a short word of support and guidance. Like other denominations, the UGCC has implemented various urgent humanitarian projects to support victims of the war. Local eparchies and other sections of the Church are active. Various volunteer humanitarian aid centres have started operating in parishes and church structures. The Ukrainian Catholic University has launched a number of humanitarian and information initiatives.

---

<sup>5</sup> V UHKTs poiasnyly status viiskovoho kapelana [= UGCC explains the status of a military chaplain], *RISU: Religious Information Service in Ukraine*, 20 December 2017, [https://risu.ua/v-ugkc-poyasnili-status-viyskovogo-kapelana\\_n88305](https://risu.ua/v-ugkc-poyasnili-status-viyskovogo-kapelana_n88305) (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>6</sup> Zvernennia Rady u spravakh dushpastyrskoi opiky pry Ministerstvi oborony Ukrainy do osobovoho skladu Zbroinykh Syl Ukrainy [= Appeal of the Council for Pastoral Care under the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine to the Personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine], *Ministry of Defense of Ukraine*, [https://www.mil.gov.ua/content/gromadska-rada/zvern\\_paster06042017.pdf](https://www.mil.gov.ua/content/gromadska-rada/zvern_paster06042017.pdf) (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>7</sup> "Yoho ranamy my ztsileni ..." (Is 53, 5): Zvernennia Synodu Yepyskopiv Kyievo-Halytskoho Verkhovnoho Arkhyepyskopstva Ukrainskoi Hreko-Katolytskoi Tserkvy do dukhovenstva UHKTs pro ztsilennia ran viiny [= By his wounds we are healed ...] (Is 53, 5): Appeal of the Synod of Bishops of the Kyiv-Halych Archeparchy of the UGCC to the clergy of the UGCC on healing the wounds of war], *Official Documents of the UGCC*, 27 April 2020, <https://docs.ugcc.ua/1428/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav also supported the initiative of Ukrainian volunteers, “Come back alive from Ukraine,” which was aimed at Russian soldiers. In particular, against the background of the Russian authorities’ silence about their losses and their unwillingness to accept the bodies of their fallen soldiers, the UGCC leader addressed the Russians with the words: “We want to help you find the bodies of your sons and husbands who came to Ukraine to kill.”<sup>8</sup> On 28 February, he condemned the crimes of Russian troops against the civilian population: “They put children and women on tanks as a human shield and hide behind them to bring death and destruction even deeper into the heart of Ukraine.”<sup>9</sup>

### **3. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and the Vatican: an information war**

The information front was of great importance in this war. At the beginning of the aggression, it became clear that the world was saturated with Russian propaganda and did not always understand the nature of this war. Against the backdrop of the provocative statements in support of the war by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, of the Russian Orthodox Church, Greek Catholics closely observed the position of the Pope and the Vatican and expected their support and condemnation of the war. However, they were deeply disappointed when they did not hear even the word “war” from the Pope’s lips. The Vatican’s position was rather restrained. On the first day of the war, Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Vatican City, said that “the Pope spoke of ‘great sorrow,’ ‘anguish,’ and ‘concern’. He also urged all the parties involved to ‘refrain from any action that would cause even more suffering to the people, destabilizing coexistence between nations and bringing international law into disrepute’.”<sup>10</sup> In this statement, Parolin used the most cautious language possible, avoiding the words “aggression” or “invasion” and instead speaking of “tragic scenarios” and even

---

<sup>8</sup> Zvernennia Hlavy UHKTs, 28 February 2022 [= Appeal of the Head of the UGCC], video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=536IZgA-WP4>; text: <https://credo.pro/2022/02/313479> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Parolin: May those who hold the fate of the world in their hands spare us from the horrors of war’, *Vatican News*, 24 February 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-02/parolin-may-those-who-hold-the-fate-of-the-world-in-their-hands.html> (accessed 15.5.2023).

using Russian terminology of “Russian military operations in Ukrainian territory”. Although gradually terms such as “aggression,” “invasion,” and “war” also appeared in the Pope’s rhetoric, Pope Francis avoided calling the aggressor by name or openly condemning the aggression. He consistently followed the line set out by Parolin, calling on the parties to negotiate and expressing solidarity with the victims of the war.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, the Pope tried to explain this silence,<sup>12</sup> but his arguments were not satisfactory for Ukrainians.

This was clearly not enough for Ukrainian Catholics. They were quite disappointed by the actions and declarations of Pope Francis, as they had expected much more support from him and more decisive condemnation of the Russian aggression. Instead, they heard only uncertain appeals to the reconciliation of both sides of the conflict, as if the two sides were equally responsible for this war. Both Pope Francis’ desire to visit Russia and meet Putin and his ecumenical overtures to Patriarch Kirill, who supported Russia’s aggression, were received in Ukraine with fierce criticism and hefty debate. Some were offended or discouraged by Vatican efforts; others believed that the Holy See was not well informed and needed better communication from Ukrainians.<sup>13</sup>

The Pope’s “quiet diplomacy,” his visit to the Russian embassy on the first day of the war, his advocacy of humanitarian support for the victims,

---

<sup>11</sup> Anatolii Babynskyi, ‘The Stance of Pope Francis in the Context of Russian Aggression Against Ukraine (July 2022)’, *Essays on Religious Studies* 12 (2022) 205–124.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Papa: Koly ya hovoriu pro Ukrainu, to hovoriu pro narod-muchenyk’ [= ‘Pope: When I speak about Ukraine, I speak about a martyred people’], *Vatican News*, 28 November 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/uk/pope/news/2022-11/papa-koly-govoryu-pro-ukrayinu-govoryu-pro-narod-muchenyk.html> (accessed 15.5.2023); ‘Papa poiasnyv, chomu vin inodi obtichno hovoryt pro Putina, Rosiiu ta yii ahresiiu proty Ukrainy’ [= ‘The Pope explains why he sometimes speaks vaguely about Putin, Russia and its aggression against Ukraine’], *RISU: Religious Information Service in Ukraine*, 28 November 2022, [https://risu.ua/pid-novoyu-kahovkoyu-znajshli-vbitimi-diyakona-miscevoyi-cerkvi-yevangelistiv-ta-jogo-sina-vikradenih-okupantami\\_n134320?fbclid=IwAR0FCHAtIzYqrwXXYnKVNJIr14i3XSSOLCKnjXcrC8-DidGhB12LVs\\_kuvM](https://risu.ua/pid-novoyu-kahovkoyu-znajshli-vbitimi-diyakona-miscevoyi-cerkvi-yevangelistiv-ta-jogo-sina-vikradenih-okupantami_n134320?fbclid=IwAR0FCHAtIzYqrwXXYnKVNJIr14i3XSSOLCKnjXcrC8-DidGhB12LVs_kuvM) (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>13</sup> Anatolii Babynskyi, ‘“A strange type of ecumenism” – Francis faces criticism in Ukraine’, *The Pillar*, 2 May 2022, <https://www.pillarcatholic.com/a-strange-type-of-ecumenism-francis/?action=share> (accessed 15.5.2023).

and his attempts to mediate between the parties to the conflict, all seemed to Ukrainians insufficient and did not meet their expectations. Despite all his efforts in peacebuilding, Francis failed “to become a second John XXIII” and to bring about reconciliation.<sup>14</sup> The warring parties turned out to be absolutely irreconcilable.

However, the Vatican continued to proceed in the same direction by inertia without any change of course. A symbolic gesture of that diplomacy was the act of consecration of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God on 25 March 2022. This event caused a lot of questions and confusion. It might be important for the Roman Catholics in the West, but neither Russians nor Ukrainians appreciated this gesture. They rather viewed it critically. For the Russian people, the Pope’s consecration lacked sensitivity to the religious feelings of most of the Orthodox faithful in Russia, since devotion to the immaculate heart of Mary is completely foreign to Orthodox liturgical tradition. For the Ukrainians, the Pope’s act of consecrating both Russia and Ukraine together evoked more disgust than gratitude. Moreover, the prayer composed for this occasion sounds offensive to the Ukrainians due to its lack of distinction between the aggressor and the victim and because it attributes equal responsibility for the war to both sides. In the Pope’s prayer, Russia’s war of aggression was presented as a “fratricidal war”. In reality, however, to stop the bloodshed, it is not necessary to stop both sides, but only one of them: the Russian aggressor.

Ukrainians were even more outraged by the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, 15 April 2022. According to the liturgical plan, at the thirteenth station, two women, a Ukrainian and a Russian, would jointly carry a cross as a symbol of reconciliation between the two peoples. When the text of the Via Crucis was published, it caused such indignation among Ukrainian Catholics that the Church could not help but react. His Beatitude Sviatoslav said that such a scenario of the Way of the Cross is deeply offensive to Ukrainians:

I consider such an idea untimely, ambiguous, and a failure to take into account the context of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine. For the Greek Catholics of Ukraine, the texts and gestures of this Way of the Cross are incomprehensible and even offensive, especially in the context of the second,

---

<sup>14</sup> Kateryna Shchotkina, ‘Ubyti blahoslovenniam’ [= Killed by the Blessing], *Mirror of the Week*, 29 March 2022, <https://zn.ua/ukr/article/print/church/ubiti-zablahoslovennijam.html> (accessed 15.5.2023).



even more bloody attack by Russian troops on our cities and villages that we are currently expecting. I know that our Roman Catholic brothers share these thoughts and feelings.<sup>15</sup>

According to Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, gestures of reconciliation between Russians and Ukrainians will be possible only when the war is over and those responsible for crimes against humanity have been given a fair trial and convicted. The UGCC leader was clear: “Our position is that we cannot talk about reconciliation because they are killing us. In order for the ideal state of reconciliation to be achieved in relations between people and nations, the war must be stopped. The second step is the disclosure and just condemnation of crime, because there is no peace without justice.”<sup>16</sup>

His voice was not the only one. Protests came not only from Greek Catholics but also from Roman Catholics, including clergy, secular statesmen, and diplomats. The protests were heard, and the planned text of the thirteenth station was replaced by a silent prayer at the last minute.<sup>17</sup> However, even in this mitigated form, this station was perceived by Ukrainians as very painful.

---

<sup>15</sup> “Dumaiu, shcho tse nevchasna ideia,” – Blazhennishyi Sviatoslav prokomentuvav zadum tsihorichnoi Khresnoi dorohy u Kolizei’ [= “I consider such an idea untimely,” His Beatitude Sviatoslav commented on the idea of this year’s Cross Procession in the Colosseum], *Synod of Bishops of the UGCC*, 12 April 2022, <https://synod.ugcc.ua/data/dumayu-shcho-tse-nevchasna-ideya-blazhennishyy-svyatoslav-prokomentuvav-zadum-tsogorichnoy-hresnoy-dorogy-u-kolizey-8752/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>16</sup> Olena Bohdaniok, ‘Shchob myrytysia, treba buty zhyvymy – Hlava UHKTs pro sproby Vatykanu prymyryty ukraintsiv ta rosiian’ [= To reconcile, we must be alive – Head of the UGCC on Vatican’s attempts to reconcile Ukrainians and Russians], *Suspilne. Novyny*, 15 April 2022, <https://suspilne.media/229002-sob-miritisa-treba-buti-zivimi-glava-ugkc-pro-sprobi-vatikanu-primiriti-ukrainciv-ta-rosian/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>17</sup> Volodymyr Moroz, ‘Holova UHKTs pro vyklyky viiny i dukhovnu borotbu. Interviu z Blazhennishym Sviatoslavom Shevchukom’ [= Head of the UGCC on the challenges of war and spiritual struggle. Interview with His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk], *Patriyarchat* 5 (2022), <http://www.patriyarkhat.org.ua/statti-zhurnalu/hlava-uhkts-pro-vyklyky-vijny-i-duhovnu-borotbu/>; or: <https://ugcc.ua/data/glava-ugkts-pro-vyklyky-viiny-i-duhovnu-borotbu-v-intervyu-dlya-patriyarhatu-1234/> (accessed 15.05.2023); also: Zbigniew Nosowski, ‘Gdy prorok staje się dyplomatą. Papież wobec rosyjskiej wojny’ [= When a prophet becomes a diplomat. The Pope in the face of the Russian war], *Wież*, 23 March 2022, <https://wiesz.pl/2022/03/23/gdy-prorok-staje-sie-dyplomata-papiez-wobec-rosyjskiej-wojny/> (accessed 15.5.2023).



A new surge of emotions was caused by the Pope's interview with the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* in May 2022, in which Pope Francis spoke of "NATO barking at Russia's door" as one of the reasons for the war in Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> This interpretation indicates the false premises on which the Pope was working: he understood the war as a confrontation between NATO and Russia and perceived Ukraine as a victim of that struggle between the two superpowers. In Ukraine, this interview provoked a sharp reaction. On the other hand, the interview also showed that the Pope was frustrated by the failure of his diplomatic gestures, which had not led to the desired result. He had hoped that he could persuade Putin, but all his attempts to reach him failed. Despite this failure, the Pope is still trying to keep this channel open. Although he has become rather pessimistic, Pope Francis consistently adheres to the main principle of Vatican diplomacy: impartiality or, as Cardinal Parolin called it in 2019, the principle of positive neutrality. The Vatican does not take any side, but works for peace and offers a positive agency.<sup>19</sup>

However, the Pope himself has not always been consistent in applying this principle of impartiality, probably due to a lack of awareness of the situation. On Ukraine's Independence Day, 24 August 2022, he made a scandalous statement relating to the death of the daughter of Kremlin ideologue Alexander Dugin, Daria, whom he called "an innocent victim of war". Such a statement could hardly be called impartial. In the ears of Ukrainians, it sounded like a narrative driven by Russian propaganda, and it caused a severe reaction not only within Ukrainian society but also from diplomats throughout the world. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

---

<sup>18</sup> Luciano Fontana, 'Intervista a Papa Francesco: Putin non si ferma, voglio incontrarlo a Mosca. Ora non vado a Kiev', *Corriere della Sera*, 22 May 2022, [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/22\\_maggio\\_03/intervista-papa-francesco-putin-694c35f0-ca57-11ec-829f-386f144a5eff.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/22_maggio_03/intervista-papa-francesco-putin-694c35f0-ca57-11ec-829f-386f144a5eff.shtml) (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>19</sup> See: Massimo Faggioli, 'Pope Francis and Vatican Sovereignty', in: Marshall J. Breger / Herbert R. Reginbogin (eds), *The Vatican and Permanent Neutrality* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2022), 161–178; Anatolij Babynski, 'Czemu papież czyni, jak czyni i mówi, co mówi? Gorzka prawda o "watykańskiej Ostpolitik"' [= Why does the Pope do as he does and say what he says? The bitter truth about 'Vatican Ostpolitik'], *Wprost*, 2 May 2022, <https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/10699570/czemu-papiez-czyni-jak-czyni-i-mowi-co-mowi-gorzka-prawda-o-watykanskiej-ostpolitik.html> (accessed 15.5.2023).

Ukraine responded on 25 August by summoning the Apostolic nuncio Visvaldas Kulbokas for explanations and expressing disappointment with the Pontiff's words. On 28 August, the Vatican responded to this criticism, pointing out that the Pope's words should be interpreted symbolically as articulating values, not as a political position. The Holy See's explanatory communiqué stated explicitly: "As for the large-scale war in Ukraine, initiated by the Russian Federation, the Holy Father Francis' interventions are clear and unequivocal in condemning it as morally unjust, unacceptable, barbaric, senseless, repugnant, and sacrilegious."<sup>20</sup>

Yet the Pope's scandalous statements did not end there. In response to journalists' questions on 6 November 2022, the Pope said that the cruelty of the Russian occupiers in Ukraine "is not inherent in the Russian people" and that he honours "Russian humanism," shifting the blame for the cruelty to unknown mercenaries, Chechens, Buryats, and others. He also mentioned the Russian writer Fedor Dostoevsky, who allegedly "inspires Christians to understand Christianity."<sup>21</sup> Ukrainians were outraged by the Pope's statements and considered them to be a mockery of common sense.<sup>22</sup> Ambassador Andriy Yurash reacted by saying that "it is enough to visit Ukraine to see the consequences of this Russian humanism." Ukraine's Ambassador to the United States also responded to the Pontiff's statement: "The Pope did not read Dostoevsky thoroughly, otherwise he would not have been surprised at the cruelty of Russians, which is just naturally inherent in them". The Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov reacted negatively to this statement by the Pope, as did Buddhist and Muslim spiri-

<sup>20</sup> 'Ukraine, the Holy See: Pope defends life rather than taking political positions,' *Vatican News*, 28 August 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-08/ukraine-the-holy-see-pope-defends-life.html> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>21</sup> 'Papa: "Ya nakhozhush sredi dvukh narodov, kotorye lyublyu"' [= 'Pope: "I am between two people I love"'], *Vatican News*, 6 November 2022, <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/pope/news/2022-11/press-konferenciya-papy-franciska.html> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>22</sup> Dmytro Redko, 'Chy vidverne rosiiska mina Papu Frantsyska vid sokyry Raskolnykova. Try prychny, chomu holova Katolytskoi Tserkvy vkotre obrazyv ukrainsiv' [= Will the Russian mine divert Pope Francis from the axe of Raskolnikov. Three reasons why the Head of the Catholic Church offended Ukrainians once again], *IPress*, 8 November 2022, [https://ipress.ua/articles/chy\\_vidverne\\_rosiyska\\_mina\\_papu\\_frantsyska\\_vid\\_sokyry\\_raskolnykova\\_3\\_prychny\\_chomu\\_golova\\_katolytskoi\\_tserkvy\\_vkotre\\_obrazyv\\_ukrainsiv\\_335718.html](https://ipress.ua/articles/chy_vidverne_rosiyska_mina_papu_frantsyska_vid_sokyry_raskolnykova_3_prychny_chomu_golova_katolytskoi_tserkvy_vkotre_obrazyv_ukrainsiv_335718.html) (accessed 15.5.2023).

tual leaders of the Russian Federation.<sup>23</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation also registered an official protest.<sup>24</sup>

During the first year of this phase of the war, the Pope spoke more than hundred times in various contexts about the war in Ukraine. Some of his statements deeply hurt and offended Ukrainians. Given that negative aftertaste, all the Pope's diplomatic efforts and the Vatican's humanitarian initiatives to support Ukrainians (refugees, soldiers, prisoners of war) simply fade into the background. There have been many attempts to explain why the Pope speaks and behaves the way he does. Attention has been drawn to the Pope's personal character and background, the Argentine experience of living under a dictatorship, his isolation from European history, his tendency to leftist views, the influence of the Jesuit order, the inertia of Vatican *Ostpolitik*, and the successful work of Russian agents in the Vatican. All of these factors are plausible and probably played a role.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Hlava buddystiv i muftii vidpovily na slova papy pro zhorstokist voyniv RF [= Head of Buddhists and Mufti respond to Pope's words on the cruelty of Russian soldiers], *UOJ: Union of Orthodox Journalists*, 30 November 2022, <https://spzh.news/ua/news/69867-hlava-buddystiv-i-muftij-vidpovili-na-slova-papi-pro-zhorstokist-voyniv-rf> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>24</sup> Vslid za Zakharovoiu posol Rosii u Vatykani oburyvsia slovamy Papy pro zhorstokist rosiiskikh soldat v Ukraini [= Following Zakharova, the Russian ambassador to the Vatican is outraged by the Pope's words about the cruelty of Russian soldiers in Ukraine], *RISU: Religious Information Service in Ukraine*, 30 November 2022, [https://risu.ua/vslid-za-zaharovoyu-posol-rosiyi-u-vatikani-oburivsyia-slovami-papi-pro-zhorstokist-rosiiskikh-soldat-v-ukrayini\\_n134371](https://risu.ua/vslid-za-zaharovoyu-posol-rosiyi-u-vatikani-oburivsyia-slovami-papi-pro-zhorstokist-rosiiskikh-soldat-v-ukrayini_n134371) (accessed 15.5.2023). Also the Ukrainian community in Switzerland reacted to Francis' declarations. In November 2022, bishop's delegate for Ukrainians in Switzerland met with Apostolic nuncio Archbishop Martin Krebs and passed him the letter from the Ukrainian faithful in Switzerland to Pope with the expression of their position concerning the Pope's words and comments. See: Yepyskopskyi delehat dlia ukrainsiv u Shveitsarii zustrivsia z Apostolskym Nuntsiiem Arkhiiepyskopom Martinom Krebsom [= Episcopal delegate for Ukrainians in Switzerland meets with Apostolic nuncio Archbishop Martin Krebs], *Éparchie Saint-Volodymyr le Grand de Paris des Ukrainiens pour la France, le Bénélux et la Suisse de l'Église gréco-catholique ukrainienne*, 19 November 2022, [https://ugcc.fr/news/yepyskopskyj-delehat-dlya-ukrayintsyv-u-shveitsariyi-zustrivsyia-z-apostolskym-nuntsyyem-arhyiepyskopom-martynom-krebsom/?fbclid=IwAR3\\_AhLuXgz6gWy1-3kQk9KK5F7EqhW6MD3XJL4XXspnh4X1XUZ6PQ7TeJs](https://ugcc.fr/news/yepyskopskyj-delehat-dlya-ukrayintsyv-u-shveitsariyi-zustrivsyia-z-apostolskym-nuntsyyem-arhyiepyskopom-martynom-krebsom/?fbclid=IwAR3_AhLuXgz6gWy1-3kQk9KK5F7EqhW6MD3XJL4XXspnh4X1XUZ6PQ7TeJs) (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>25</sup> Pavlo Smytsnyuk, 'The Holy See Confronts the War in Ukraine: Between Just War Theory and Nonviolence', *Journal of the European Society for Catholic Theology* 14:1 (2023), 3–24; or: Pavlo Smytsnyuk, 'The Catholic Response to the Russo-Ukrainian War: Pope Francis and the Holy See Interpret the Church's Social

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav also gave his explanation for this position, noting that “the Pope would be offended by the perception that he is playing into Moscow’s hands.”<sup>26</sup> The Pope himself, in a conversation with a Ukrainian journalist, admitted: “(...) I understand that I am criticized by Ukrainians, I understand because you are in pain. You can go there and tell them that I am a cretin, an idiot, you can tell them that I am insane or I am a sinner. But you have no right to say one thing: that I do not love Ukraine, because it is not true.”<sup>27</sup> Major Archbishop Sviatoslav explains all these scandalous statements of the Pope in this way:

(...) the war in Ukraine is being waged in very different forms and on different fronts, the information war is an integral part of Russian aggression, and in my opinion, the Holy See was drawn into the information war by Russia, perhaps without even fully realizing it, perhaps not even fully prepared for it. (...) Indeed, we feel that the Holy See has certain failures on the information front, it directly lacks a spokesperson who, in case of any doubts or misunderstandings, in particular, various media manipulations, could refute Moscow’s lies.<sup>28</sup>

All this shows that Moscow’s propaganda tentacles have penetrated deeply into the offices of the Curia and the Vatican, and Ukrainians would need to work hard to counter the Russian perspective on Ukraine. However, they did through all possible channels. After a series of Pope Francis’

---

Teaching’, *Analecta of the UCU: Theology* 10 (2023), 193–224; Roman Zaviiskyi, ‘Vid tyshi do tyshi papy Frantsyska. Abo chomu ne varto topyty istynu v myloserdi’ [= From silence to silence of Pope Francis, or Why we should not drown the truth in mercy], *LB: Livyj Bereh*, 4 May 2022, [https://lb.ua/society/2022/05/04/515701\\_vid\\_tishi\\_tishi\\_papi\\_frantsiska\\_abo.html](https://lb.ua/society/2022/05/04/515701_vid_tishi_tishi_papi_frantsiska_abo.html); (or: *RISU: Religious Information Service in Ukraine*, 4 May 2022, [https://risu.ua/vid-tishi-do-tishi-papi-frantsiska-abo-chomu-ne-varto-topiti-istynu-v-miloserdi\\_n128940](https://risu.ua/vid-tishi-do-tishi-papi-frantsiska-abo-chomu-ne-varto-topiti-istynu-v-miloserdi_n128940) (accessed 15.5.2023); Anatolii Babynskyi, ‘The Stance of Pope Francis in the Context of Russian Aggression Against Ukraine’ (as note 10).

<sup>26</sup> Sviatoslav Shevchuk, ‘Nasha Tserkva vzhe hotuietsia do dovhoho periodu likuvannia ran’ [= Our Church is already preparing for a long period of wound healing], Interview by Lana Samochvalova, *Ukrinform*, 31 May 2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3496553-svatoslav-sevcuk-predstoatel-ukrainskoi-grekokatolickoi-cerkvi.html> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>27</sup> Yuriy Panchenko, ‘Taynaya pomoshch Papy Rimskoho. Chto ne zametyla Ukraina za skandalnymi zayavleniyami pontifika’ [= The Pope’s secret help. What Ukrainians have not noticed behind the scandalous statements of the Pontiff], *European Pravda*, 25 November 2022, <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/articles/2022/11/25/7151320/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>28</sup> Sviatoslav Shevchuk, ‘Nasha Tserkva vzhe hotuietsia do dovhoho periodu likuvannia ran’ (as note 23).

ambiguous statements, the Vatican's rhetoric and position have gradually changed. This change was prompted not only by the strong reaction of Ukrainian Catholics and Ukrainian society as a whole, including diplomats, social and political leaders, but also by the Pope's special representatives, Cardinals Michael Cerny, Konrad Krajewski, and Archbishop Paul Gallagher, who visited Ukraine several times.

A turning point for such a change of opinion was the meeting between the UGCC's Major Archbishop Sviatoslav and Pope Francis in the Vatican on 7 November 2022. The purpose of Sviatoslav Shevchuk's visit to the Apostolic See was "to convey the pain and suffering of the Ukrainian people to the Pope and his collaborators". As a gift to the Pope, the UGCC leader brought a piece of the Russian bomb that damaged the facade of the Greek Catholic church in Irpin, explaining that similar pieces had been removed from the bodies of military and civilians, including children. This was a visible sign of the destruction and death that war brings every day. He discussed the situation in Ukraine with the Pope, pointing out the colonial dimension of Russia's war against Ukraine, emphasizing the unacceptability of peace proposals that deny the right of existence to the Ukrainian people and which refuse to recognize the existence of the Ukrainian state within its internationally recognized borders. Major Archbishop Sviatoslav shared his personal testimony of what he had seen during his pastoral visits to parishes in East, South and Central Ukraine – the territories most affected by Russian aggression – and asked the Pope to write a letter to the Ukrainian people expressing his support and solidarity. Francis did this on 24 November 2022. In the letter, after nine months of war, the Pope for the first time expressed clearly his support for the Ukrainians' armed struggle against the Russians. This was contrary to the pacifist line still professed by almost all Italian Catholic associations, including the Community of St. Egidio and its leader Andrea Ricardi, who have said that they feel sympathy with Ukraine but reject the proposal of giving weapons to Ukraine, arguing that it is important to avoid escalation.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Ukraina, perelom u stavlenni Papy Frantsyska do zbroinoi borotby narodu muchenyka' [= Ukraine, a change in Pope Francis' attitude to the armed struggle of the martyr's people], *RISU: Religious Information Service in Ukraine*, 7 December 2022, [https://risu.ua/ukrayina-perelom-u-stavlenni-papi-franciska-do-zbrojnoyi-borotbi-narodu-muchenika\\_n134613](https://risu.ua/ukrayina-perelom-u-stavlenni-papi-franciska-do-zbrojnoyi-borotbi-narodu-muchenika_n134613) (accessed 15.5.2023).



In the letter, the Pope wrote:

Dear brothers and sisters, in all this sea of evil and pain, ninety years after the horrific genocide of the Holodomor, I admire your good spirit. (...) I continue to be with you with my heart and prayer, with human care, so that you feel accompanied, so that you do not become accustomed to war, so that you do not remain alone today, and especially tomorrow, when we may be tempted to forget your suffering. In these months, when the harsh climate makes your experiences today all the more tragic, I want you to feel on your faces the tender touch of the Church, the power of prayer and the love with which many brothers and sisters around the world embrace you.<sup>30</sup>

This letter showed that the Vatican had begun to develop a better understanding of the extent of the Ukrainian people's suffering, and also of their expectations of the Apostolic See. Despite the indifferent reception of this letter in the Western world, Ukrainians received it with enthusiasm: they had been waiting for such a letter and such words of support for a long time and they were sorely needed. This letter represents the fruits of a huge amount of information work over the past year which has attempted to move the Vatican away from the framework of *Ostpolitik* thinking and rhetoric.

Pope Francis' various controversial declarations not only provoked reactions from Ukrainians, but also gave rise to a broader discussion about the feasibility of traditional theories of just war, just peace, and pacifism. These debates raised a number of moral questions: Is it possible to remain neutral in moral matters and impartial to the detriment of the truth? Is moral relativism permissible in the desire to reconcile the victim and the offender without prior recognition of the offense? Is pacifism appropriate in the face of a brutal war, nuclear threat, and terrorism against civilians? Is the Vatican's position morally justified?<sup>31</sup> Many believe that it is not. At

---

<sup>30</sup> 'Lyst Svyatishoho Ottsia do ukrainskoho narodu u deviatyi misiats pislia pochatku viyny' [= The Letter of the Holy Father to the Ukrainian People in the Ninth Month after the Beginning of the War], <https://ugcc.ua/data/lyst-svyatishoho-ottsya-do-ukraynskogo-narodu-u-devyatyy-misyats-pislya-pochatku-viyny-1506/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>31</sup> For example, see: Paul S. Peterson, 'The Russian War of Aggression against Ukraine: An Analysis of the Dilemmas from an Ethical Perspective', *Ethik und Gesellschaft* 2 (2021), 1–23 (available online: <https://open-journals.uni-tuebingen.de/ojs/public/journals/5/dm/EuG-2-2021/EuG-2-2021-art-7.pdf>); Edward Feser, 'Just War Theory and the Russo-Ukrainian War', *The Catholic World Report*, 5 March 2022, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/03/05/just-war-theory-and-the-russo->



the very least, the unfortunate statements and the inability to name the aggressor have led to a decline in the moral authority of the Pope in the eyes of Ukrainians.

#### 4. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and internal challenges

Along with its efforts outside Ukraine, the UGCC had to face the internal challenges posed by the war. According to intelligence reports, the main figures of the UGCC and its Primate were on Russian lists of persons to be killed. Despite this danger, most of the clergy remained in their places even in the occupied territories.<sup>32</sup>

---

ukrainian-war/ (accessed 15.5.2023); Edmund Waldstein, 'The War in Ukraine in the Light of Just War Principles', *Sancrucensis*, 20 March 2022, <https://sancrucensis.wordpress.com/2022/03/20/the-war-in-ukraine-in-the-light-of-just-war-principles/> (accessed 15.5.2023); Paul D. Miller, 'Pope Francis on Just War and Ukraine', *Providence*, 23 March 2022, <https://providencemag.com/2022/03/pope-francis-just-war-ukraine> (accessed 15.5.2023); Monica Miller, 'Pope Francis and the Scrapping of the Just war Doctrine', *Crisis Magazine*, 24 March 2022, <https://www.crisismagazine.com/opinion/pope-francis-and-the-scrapping-of-the-just-war-doctrine> (accessed 15.5.2023); Charles Russo, 'Pope Francis, Just War Theory, the Ukraine, and Beyond: Can War Be Just?', 4 May 2022, <https://canopyforum.org/2022/05/04/pope-francis-just-war-theory-the-ukraine-and-beyond-can-war-be-just/> (accessed 15.5.2023); Christian Nikolaus Braun, 'Quo vadis? On the Role of Just Peace within Just War', *International Theory* 15:1 (2023), 106–128; Jerry J. Pokorsky, 'Ukraine and Question of Just War', *The Catholic World Report*, 24 May 2022, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2022/05/24/ukraine-and-questions-of-just-war/> (accessed 15.5.2023); Gabriel Ingeborg, 'The End of Christian Pacifism? A Reflection on the Church's Ethics of Peace in Reference to the War in Ukraine', *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, 1 June 2022, <https://catholicethics.com/forum/the-end-of-christian-pacifism/> (accessed 15.5.2023); Tobias Winright/Maria Power, *Current Roman Catholic Ethics on War and Peace vis-à-vis the Ukraine-Russia War* (Temple Tracts, Book No. 26, s. 1.: William Temple Foundation 2023), available online: <https://williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Current-Roman-Catholic-Ethics-on-War-and-Peace-vis-a-vis-the-Ukraine-Russia-War-Maria-Power-and-Tim-Winright-Temple-Tract.pdf>; Tobias Winright, 'The Possibility of a Just War: Is the use of armed force ever the right thing to do?', *Commonwealth Magazine*, 10 May 2023, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/possibility-just-war> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>32</sup> Hlava UHKTs do frantsuzkykh zhurnalistiv: "Diakuemo, shcho vy ne baiduzhi do kolonialnoi viiny tretoho tysiacholittia na Skhodi Yevropy" [= 'Head of the UGCC to French journalists: "Thank you for not being indifferent to the colonial war of the third millennium in Eastern Europe"'], *Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 11 February 2023, <https://ugcc.ua/data/glava-ugkts-do-frantsuzkykh-zhurnalistiv->

Since the beginning of the war, the UGCC has been actively involved in various humanitarian initiatives to support and help the victims and the military. In the face of a powerful full-scale humanitarian crisis caused by the war, the whole Church began to save lives. A report by Major Archbishop Sviatoslav affirmed that “Kharkiv, Sumy, Chernihiv, northern Kyiv region, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, all places where the UGCC priests were, immediately turned into powerful centres of humanitarian aid.”<sup>33</sup> However, the occupation authorities refused to tolerate these activities, and over time, the clergy of the UGCC were either expelled or arrested or forced out of ministry in other ways. According to the Apostolic nuncio Visvaldas Kulbokas, two UGCC priests from Berdiansk are currently in captivity, and not a single Catholic priest remains in the occupied regions of Ukraine. The total area of these territories without a single Catholic priest is about 60,000 km<sup>2</sup>, which is larger than the territory of, for example, Croatia.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to various humanitarian initiatives, the UGCC is actively working on the spiritual front. Given that almost 80% of people in Ukraine are in need of rehabilitation to a greater or lesser extent, the Church in its pastoral ministry pays great attention to healing the physical and mental wounds caused by the war. As Major Archbishop Sviatoslav has said: “We, as a Church, are trying to give people hope, to help them survive, to find inner strength and resilience to fight, to find meaning in senseless situations. We often hear that our people expect from the Church not only food and clothing, but also words of hope. Therefore, pastoral care for people is the number one task.”<sup>35</sup>

In response to this need, at the episcopal synod which took place in Przemyśl from 7 to 15 July 2022, the Bishops of the UGCC adopted a pastoral plan, “The Hope to which the Lord calls us,” which will run until 2030, and also approved the “Strategy for the Development of Social

---

dyakuemo-shcho-vy-ne-bayduzhi-do-kolonialnoy-viyny-tretogo-tysyacholittya-na-shodi-evropy-2112/ (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> “My namahalysia ne prosto vyzhyty, a y sluzhyty”, – Hlava UHKTs pro rik zhyttia u dramatychnykh obstavynakh viiny [= “We tried not only to survive but also to serve”. – Head of the UGCC about a year of life in dramatic circumstances of war], *Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, 14 February 2023, <https://ugcc.ua/data/my-namagalysya-ne-prosto-vyzhyty-a-y-sluzhyty-glava-ugkts-pro-rik-zhyttia-u-dramatychnykh-obstavynakh-viyny-2138/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Service of the UGCC” (Resolution No. 3).<sup>36</sup> In addition, the next Synod, which took place on 1 and 2 February 2023, adopted a separate strategy for the development of pastoral care for healing the wounds of war. A complete programme was conceived and implemented which provides measures for formation and rehabilitation at different levels of the Church’s activities: across the whole church, in the eparchies, and in the parishes. In particular, it is planned, in cooperation with the Ukrainian Catholic University, to develop a comprehensive educational programme for clergy and the religious which will help them to provide effective pastoral care for those wounded by war; this will be offered to the maximum number of pastors and consecrated persons who can potentially provide specialized professional medical, spiritual and psychological assistance to war victims, plan and lead retreats and other church-wide programmes of spiritual rehabilitation, organize spiritual camps, and create psychological support groups in cooperation with specialists, local health care structures, rehabilitation centres, and other similar institutions.<sup>37</sup>

The UGCC also continues to cooperate actively with the state in the field of chaplaincy service to the Ukrainian military. The Synod of Bishops of the UGCC, held on 10–11 May 2022, paid special attention to this issue, appealing in a special message to priests and seminarians that they should respond to the deep internal needs of Ukrainian soldiers and their families and enlist in the ranks of the Ukrainian armed forces to serve as military chaplains.<sup>38</sup> In order better to establish military pastoral care, a number of measures were taken intended to establish military chaplaincy centres in the eparchies, develop a chaplaincy training programme and mechanisms

---

<sup>36</sup> Dushpastyrskyi plan na period do 2030 roku “Nadiia, do yakoi nas klyche Hospod” [= Pastoral plan for the period up to 2030 “The hope to which God calls us”], *Official Documents of the UGCC*, 13 October 2022, <https://docs.ugcc.ua/1622/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>37</sup> Postanovy 93-yi sesii Arkhyiereiskoho Synodu UHKTs v Ukraini [= Resolutions of the 93rd session of the Archbishops’ Synod of the UGCC in Ukraine], 1–2 February 2023, Lviv – Briukhovychi, *Official Documents of the UGCC*, 6 February 2023, <https://docs.ugcc.ua/1635/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>38</sup> Narod muchenykiv Rusy-Ukrainy svoim tilom znovu zupyniaie zlo, shchob vono ne poshyrylosia na ves svit. Zvernennia Arkhyiereiskoho Synodu UHKTs v Ukraini [= The nation of martyrs of Rus-Ukraine again stops evil with their bodies, so that it does not spread to the whole world], *Ethos*, 16 May 2022, <https://www.ethos.org.ua/narod-muchenykiv-rusy-ukrayiny-svoyim-tilom-znovu-zupynyaye-zlo-shhob-vono-ne-poshyrylosya-na-ves-svit-zvernennya-arhyierejskogo-synodu-ugkc-z-v-ukrayini/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

for selecting candidates for such ministry, and to regulate cooperation with the state authorities to organize the deployment of clergy for military service.<sup>39</sup> The focus was not just on clergy. In December 2022, the Synod of the UGCC issued a special message on patriotism, presenting a theological understanding of patriotism and a justification of the right of the Ukrainian people to defend themselves against the enemy.<sup>40</sup>

Another important innovation of the UGCC expedited by the war has become the recent reform of the liturgical calendar, proclaimed on 6 February 2022. Admittedly, such a reform was long overdue, but in the past, the Church's leadership was rather reluctant to implement it for fear of divisions and the loss of believers to the Orthodox Church. In recent years, however, the voice of the laity has become increasingly loud in favour of the transition from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, not least so that the faithful can celebrate the principal immovable Christian feasts (i.e. those with fixed dates) with the rest of the world rather than thirteen days later. One of the arguments of the supporters of that reform was the desire to disrupt the last traces of Moscow's influence. However, the hierarchy of the UGCC was not sure that this voice was supported by the majority of the faithful and was initially in no hurry to implement the reform, considering the voice of laity as pressure from secularized elements of society. This impasse had lasted for a quarter of a century and could have lasted for quite some time, but the war became the catalyst that awoke the UGCC leadership from its slumber and prompted radical decisions. The war created a situation in which the whole of Ukrainian society, even conservative members of the Church, could accept this reform without much resistance. The reform was prepared through explanatory work, such as surveys in the parishes and monasteries of each eparchy. The calendar question has always been a sore point, among the faithful, discussed by many, during the Advent season (in November and December) in anticipation of the celebration of one of the most important holidays, the celebration of the Incarna-

---

<sup>39</sup> Postanovy 91-oi sesii Arkhyiereiskoho Synodu UHKTs v Ukraini [= Resolutions of the 91st session of the Archbishops' Synod of the UGCC in Ukraine], *Synod of Bishops of the UGCC*, 17 May 2022, <https://synod.ugcc.ua/data/postanovy-devyanostopershoy-sesiy-arhyreyskogo-synodu-ugkts-v-ukrayni-9085/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>40</sup> Pastyrskie poslannia Arkhyiereiskoho Synodu UHKTs v Ukraini pro patriotyzm yak liubov do ridnoho narodu ta Batkivshchyny [= Pastoral letter of the Archbishops' Synod of the UGCC on patriotism as love for the native people and the Motherland], *Official Documents of the UGCC*, 5 December 2022, <https://docs.ugcc.ua/1628/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

tion of the Son of God. At their synod in November 2022, the bishops of the UGCC raised this issue with the intention of reform. However, the UGCC did not want to initiate the reform alone, but in agreement with the Orthodox. In order to coordinate these actions with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), in December 2022, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav met Metropolitan Epiphanius to discuss this question and proposed to him creating a joint working group to work on the calendar reform.<sup>41</sup> Although such a group has not been established, the leadership of the OCU has declared its readiness to move towards changing the calendar and has given permission to those parishes that wished to celebrate Christmas according to the new style, that is, on 25 December, not on 7 January<sup>42</sup>. This was a good signal. In February 2023, the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC finally proclaimed the long-awaited reform of liturgical calendar. According to the decision of the Synod, on 1 September 2023, which is the beginning of the liturgical year, the UGCC in Ukraine switched to the so-called New Julian calendar, which is followed by most Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches, and will celebrate all fixed feasts according to the new style while preserving the old Paschalia. Given the possible unpreparedness of some parishes for such a drastic change, the bishops provided for a transition period until 2025, during which local communities, with the blessing of the bishop, will be able to keep the Julian calendar.<sup>43</sup> After the proclamation of this reform, the OCU announced that it would consider the issue of calendar reform at its next Synod in May 2023.<sup>44</sup> It is to be hoped that most religious organizations in Ukraine will follow the lead of the UGCC and OCU and switch to the new style.

---

<sup>41</sup> Yevhen Kizilov, 'PTsU tezh podumaie pro zminu kalendara: rishennia ukhvaliat u travni' [= OCU will also consider calendar change: decision to be made in May], *Ukrainska Pravda*, 6 February 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/02/6/7388193/> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>42</sup> Pro kalendarnu reformu UHKTs, [= On the calendar reform of the UGCC], *Vidkryta Tserkva*, 6 February 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juYSePhWgZw> (accessed 15.5.2023).

<sup>43</sup> Postanovy 93-yi sesii Arkhyiereiskoho Synodu UHKTs v Ukraini (as note 32).

<sup>44</sup> Yevhen Kizilov, 'PTsU tezh podumaie pro zminu kalendara: rishennia ukhvaliat u travni' (as note 36). On 24 May, the Bishops' Council of the OCU approved the transition to the New Julian calendar from 1 September 2023. See: 'Postanovy Arkhyiereiskoho Soboru vid 24 travnia 2023 roku' [= Resolutions of the Council of Bishops of 24 May 2023], <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/202245/> (accessed 5.11.2023).



## 5. Conclusion

Russia's war of aggression catapulted Ukrainian society into a new reality for which most people were not ready. It required a rapid reaction to the challenges of the war not only from the state authorities but also from the churches. The UGCC additionally faced the challenge of misunderstanding and lack of support from its religious centre in the Vatican. Pope Francis' ambiguous declarations and gestures concerning the war in Ukraine disappointed the faithful, the leadership of the UGCC, and indeed the whole Ukrainian society. They showed a lack of understanding of what kind of support the Ukrainian people had expected from the Pope and also revealed the need for careful information work on the part of the UGCC to elicit the expected message from the Pope. Moreover, Francis' peace initiatives were ineffective in face of aggressive policy of Putin and in turn raised a number of moral questions. Indeed, the war in Ukraine has prompted moral theologians seriously to rethink traditional theories of just war, just peace, and pacifism. It has shown that in the face of a nuclear threat, not all previously formulated principles are easily measurable and applicable to moral decisions. These discussions have already begun, and it is to be hoped that they will result in a new balanced moral view that responds to the challenges and questions posed to humanity by this war.

At the same time, the war also pushed the UGCC to reconsider some aspects of its own engagement and to switch its priorities from the needs of a peaceful society to those of a country at war. It had to intensify its involvement in the field of military chaplaincy and to provide various kinds of support for the victims of the war, from material aid to refugees to psychological assistance for people coping with post-traumatic stress. The urgent need for the latter stimulated the Church to provide training and guidelines for those able to provide such a service. The war also brought the UGCC to the long expected – and long delayed – reform of the liturgical calendar as a further sign of the definite break with Moscow's influence on the ecclesiastical life in Ukraine. These responses to the challenges of war testify that the UGCC has tried to react quickly to the needs and expectations of Ukrainian society and to adapt its ministry to new realities of the war. Much work remains still to be done, but the projects and programmes that have been initiated by the UGCC clearly show the direction which the Church has chosen to go and the priorities of its mission in the near future.



*Mariya Horyacha (\*1974 Chervonohrad, Ukraine) is currently a research fellow of the New Europe College in Bucharest (Romania), for the academic year 2023–2024. She studied history and political science at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (1991–1999) and theology at the Catholic University of Leuven (2002–2004 and 2006–2012). She defended her PhD in political sciences in 2002 and her PhD in theology in 2012. Between 2013 and 2023, she was Professor of Patristics at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv and editor-in-chief of the journal *Analecta* of the Ukrainian Catholic University: Theology. She is the head of the Sectoral Council of Experts in Theology at the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (Kyiv) and expert ad hoc for the Theological Department at the Patriarchal Curia of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. She is the author of many books and articles in Patristics and in Church History more generally.*

*Address: Dzherelna Street 79/27, Lviv, 79009, Ukraine  
E-mail: horiacha@yahoo.com*

### *Zusammenfassung*

Dieser Beitrag behandelt die Reaktion der ukrainischen griechisch-katholischen Kirche (UGKK) auf den russischen Angriffskrieg gegen die Ukraine und ihren Umgang mit den Herausforderungen des Kriegs. Es wird aufgezeigt, wie die Kirchenführer während der latenten Phase des Kriegs (2014–2022) bereits eine bestimmte Position bezogen hatten und wie sich die UGKK nach der russischen Invasion in die Ukraine ab Februar 2022 verhalten hat. Die Autorin verfolgt ausserdem die Entwicklung der Haltung des Vatikans in Bezug auf den internationalen Informationskrieg und verschiedene Initiativen, welche die inneren Herausforderungen der Kirche betreffen. Dazu gehören der Aufbau einer Militärseelsorge für die ukrainischen Streitkräfte und verschiedener Programme zur Rehabilitation und zur Unterstützung von Kriegsopfern sowie die im Jahr 2023 durchgeführte Reform des liturgischen Kalenders. Die schnelle Reaktion der UGKK auf die Bedürfnisse der ukrainischen Gesellschaft belegt das Engagement dieser Kirche für die Bevölkerung sowie ihre wichtige Rolle bei der Bewältigung der durch den Krieg verursachten Probleme.

### *Keywords – Schlüsselwörter*

Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church – Pope Francis – war – chaplaincy – liturgical reform