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WAR IN UKRAINE

THEOLOGICAL, ETHICAL AND HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Aschendorff Verlag

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 7
Christina Dietl, Khrystyna Fostyak, Thomas Schulte-Umberg, Olha Uhryn and Noreen van Elk (Eds.)
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25100-3

A Logical Experiment in Politics: Second Scholasticism in Creating Russian Imperialism 13
Volodymyr Shelukhin
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25101-0

The Tools of Modern Russian Colonization: The Case of the Bakhchysarai Khan's Palace 30
Elmira Ablialimova-Chyihoz
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25102-7

Central and Eastern Europe in the Age of the First World War: Revolution, Counter-Revolution, Containment 44
Dmytro Bondarenko
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25103-4

The Idea of a Federation of Poland and Ukraine in the Light of the Correspondence of the Greek Catholic Priest Prelate Tyt Voinarovsky with the Polish Diplomat Jan Stanisław Łoś 58
Paulina Byzdra-Kusz
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25104-1

The Gender Aspect of Political Rhetoric and its Origins: The Case of Ukraine 71
Mariana Myrosh
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25105-8

New Icons of War: Religious Motifs in Ukrainian Digital Popular Art During the Russo-Ukrainian War 89
Alina Mozolevska
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25106-5

Religion as a Key Front of Russian Aggression Against Ukraine 110
Maksym Vasin
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25107-2

Muslims in the Struggle for the Ukrainian Cause and Statehood 128
Andrii Zhyvachivskyi
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25108-9

Certain Aspects of Church-State Dynamics: Legal Naming Issues within Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian War 148
Mechyslav Yanauer
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25109-6

Patriarch Bartholomew's Position Towards the War Against Ukraine 164
Patrice Hrimle
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25110-2

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Russo-Ukrainian War 175
Kateryna Budz
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25111-9

Europeans Lost in Translation 189
Roman Sigov
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25112-6

Friends or Foes? Religious Organizations and European Institutions in the Face of Russia's War on Ukraine 200
Iuliia Korniichuk
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25113-3

Punish Russian War Crimes Already Now! 213
Oleksandra Matviichuk
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-25118-8

List of Contributors 216
List of Editors 219

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Introduction

Christina Dietl, Khrystyna Fostyak, Thomas Schulte-Umberg, Olha Uhryn and Noreen van Elk (Eds.)

We have to be clear about our common European goal now. It is the same as it was from the beginning. Putin's system must lose in this war against Ukraine. This is Russia's war not only against Ukraine, but against all of us, against your countries as well, against our entire Europe and the European way of life.[1]

(Volodymyr Zelenskyi)

For nearly three years now, Russia's full-scale war of aggression has been a central matter of concern in the political, public and academic sphere. The war of aggression has sparked intense debates on ethical, legal and political questions as well as on the war's global consequences and backlashes. In many Western European countries in particular, the war is perceived as a turning point in defense and security policy, which in a way seals the "end of peace in Europe". The talk of "peace in Europe" however fails to recognize that even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there certainly wasn't a peaceful order in Europe.[2] Nonetheless, Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine has awakened the Western European countries from their slumber and heralded a so-called *Zeitenwende* which resulted in far-reaching changes in Western Europe's defense and security agenda and strategy. Nevertheless, there are sometimes chasms between the words and actions of Western European countries. One example is the discussion about the necessary armament efforts on the one hand and the slow, inadequate implementation up until now on the other.

1 Volodymyr Zelenskyi, Address at the European Council Meeting (21 March 2024). URL: https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/nashij-yevropi-potribna-realna-oborona-samodostatnist-vistu-89793 (last access: 27 June 2024).

2 Cf. Ralph Rotte, Welche Zeitenwende? Zur Kontinuität einer vermeintlich neuen Realität, in: Indes 10/1–2 (2022) 9–16.

Despite a lot of disputes over concrete measures and actions, no one doubts that the current war poses a serious threat to international security. As expressed already in the opening quote from Zelenskyi from May 2024, it is not only the security of Ukraine that is at stake, but indeed the future of a free and democratic Europe. Supporting Ukraine and strengthening its defense capability is therefore a pan-European task and a question of the future viability of the European idea.

In many of the public and political debates since the start of the full-scale war of aggression in February 2022, security and defense policy issues have been central. This state-oriented focus often obscures an equally, if not more important, point of view, namely that of those directly affected by the horrors and evils of this war. In contrast, the academic discussion of the war of aggression reveals a somewhat broader perspective. The war has fuelled research interest in Ukraine, its history, people, culture, churches and religions. The academic discourse has clearly shown that the war of aggression not only touches upon political and political-ethical issues, but also requires an interdisciplinary and comprehensive examination of the multifaceted causes, dynamics and consequences of the war.

This book is the result of a postgraduate symposium organized and conducted by the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Vienna from 13 to 17 February 2023 on the topic "*War in Ukraine. Theological, Ethical and Historical Reflections*". The idea of organizing the symposium arose as a direct reaction to the beginning of Russia's full-scale war of aggression in February 2022. On the initiative of Alexandra Palkowitsch and Noreen van Elk, a working group *"KTF4Ukraine"*[3] was formed at the aforementioned faculty, which set itself the goal of discussing how the faculty could contribute to the ongoing debates and, more importantly, how it could support early-career Ukrainian scholars who are directly affected by the war. In the course of 2022, these initial considerations gave rise to the idea of organizing a postgraduate symposium for Ukrainian scholars doing research on the topic of the war of aggression from the perspective of various disciplines. The objective of the symposium was to bring together theological research, historical accounts and philosophical-ethical questions against the backdrop of the current situation in Ukraine as well as to reflect on the challenges that go along with the war and its containment.

3 Documentation of the symposium and further information can be found on the website https://ktf4ukraine.univie.ac.at/ (last access: 27 June 2024).

The symposium took as its starting point the above-mentioned observation that the public political and academic debate on Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine should be diverse and interdisciplinary. As a theological faculty we placed the focus on religious policy, religious studies, theology and theological-historical issues. A central theme of the symposium relates to the challenges that the war poses to the churches and religious institutions in Ukraine and to the questions what role the churches and religious institutions (can) play in the genesis of and fight against the war and what problems arise for religious representatives in reaction to Russia's war of aggression. Behind all these questions stands the firm belief that the inclusion of the perspective of churches and religious institutions is a prerequisite for a profound understanding of the origins of the war of aggression, its dynamics and lines of conflict and the further course of the war. Finally, the positioning of the churches and religious institutions and their willingness to act in the context of the war will play a decisive role in the restoration and maintenance of a lasting just peace in Europe.

To this end, the symposium has taken up the cause of providing a stage for and giving a voice to those who are directly affected by the war and who are rarely given a voice in the discourse. The symposium intended to create a place where the perspective of Ukrainian researchers was given priority in order to offer a safe space for analysis and reflection, the exchange of ideas and knowledge, for getting to know each other and for valuable encounters. The explicit decision not to let "outsiders" speak about Ukraine at the symposium, as is all too often the case, but to give preference to listening to the voice, opinions and contributions of Ukrainians, was a unique feature of the symposium, which was positively perceived and praised by the participants.

On the one hand, the contributions collected in this book reflect the plurality of questions that arise in the context of the current war of aggression against Ukraine. On the other hand, the articles also reveal the complexity of the historical conditions under which the war of aggression came about and the depth of the impact that the war will have on the history, culture, people and politics of Ukraine. A glance at the table of content bears witness to this plurality. The role of the churches and religious institutions, their positioning and their actions are critically examined, and the effects of the war of aggression on the cultural and spiritual heritage of Ukraine are discussed. In addition, the question of dealing with and processing the war through visual art will be addressed. The war narratives will be reflected upon and the role of language and gender

in this context will be examined. Finally, historical and historical-ideological aspects of the war of aggression will be examined and discussed.[4]

The variety of topics in this book is intended to provide some initial insights into the diverse effects of the current war and the importance of an interdisciplinary perspective on it. Especially with its focus on issues at the nexus of religion and politics, the volume seeks to highlight the importance of religion, theology, churches and religious communities in the public sphere and bring them into the debates. Through its interdisciplinary approach, the editors hope to promote interdisciplinary and international exchange on the war of aggression, its origins and its consequences, which will continue to be a matter of concern for a long time to come. Finally, with the symposium and this book the editors hope to contribute to a better understanding of Ukrainian perspectives on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine from the viewpoint of early-career Ukrainian scholars.

Over the past two and a half years, many people have been involved in the realization of the entire project "*KTF4Ukraine*", the organization of the symposium and the editing of this book.[5] A special thanks however goes to the organizing team of the symposium as well as the sponsors who supported the symposium and this volume and/or made its realization financially possible: the City of Vienna, Renovabis, Stiftung Zusammenleben, the University of Vienna, the Austrian Research Association (ÖFG), the Research Center Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society (RaT), the Vienna Doctoral School of Theology and Research on Religion, Studienvertretung Doktorat Katholische Theologie and Studienvertretung Katholische Theologie, the Department of Church History and the Department of Theology and History of Eastern Churches at the University of Vienna. Furthermore we want to thank Thomas Németh and Thomas Prügl for their substantial contributions, Alexandra Palkowitsch for her exceptional organizational help and Emily Strickland and Lauryssa Toews for proofreading.

Last but not least, we would like to say a heartfelt "Thank you!" to all who have contributed to the symposium as well as the authors of the articles collected in this volume. Their perspectives and voices are of considerable importance in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. If this volume

4 The contributions in this book refer to the state of affairs up to August 2024. Developments that occurred after the editorial deadline could not be considered. Each author presents an original contribution based on their own research and individual academic endeavours.

5 For the organizing team see https://ktf4ukraine.univie.ac.at/organizing-team/.

should make one thing clear, it is that war affects us all, leaving its mark not only where it rages, but in the hearts and minds of each and every one. We must not despair in the fight for a lasting, just peace.

Vienna, December 2024, the editors