

The background of the cover features a stylized, abstract representation of the Ukrainian national flag. It consists of a blue upper half and a yellow lower half, separated by a thick, black, irregular diagonal line that suggests a torn or draped fabric. The colors are rendered with some texture and blending, giving it a painterly or digital-art feel.

CHRISTINA DIETL, KHRYSTYNA FOSTYAK,
THOMAS SCHULTE-UMBERG, OLHA UHRYN,
NOREEN VAN ELK (EDS.)

WAR IN UKRAINE

THEOLOGICAL, ETHICAL
AND HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Christina Dietl – Khrystyna Fostyak – Thomas Schulte-Umberg –
Olha Uhryn – Noreen van Elk (Eds.)
War in Ukraine.
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The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Russo-Ukrainian War¹

Kateryna Budz

This article looks at official statements of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) during the first one and a half years of the full-scale invasion. By referring to the daily video messages of the head of the UGCC, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, and the documents of the Synod of Bishops, the author analyses the hierarchy's views on the Russo-Ukrainian war and the church's initiatives during wartime. Moreover, the article argues that the head of the UGCC assumes the role of a mediator between the Vatican and Ukrainians. Finally, it offers to view the Major Archbishop's attitude to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in the light of the UGCC's experience of underground existence in the Soviet Union. Overall, both the public statements of the Greek Catholic hierarchy and the church initiatives show that the UGCC transcends denominational boundaries and reaches out to the whole of Ukrainian society.

1 This article results from a research project conducted in the framework of the Petro Jacyk Non-Resident Fellows Program at the University of Toronto. Earlier versions of the paper were presented at the Postgraduate Symposium "War in Ukraine. Theological, Ethical and Historical Reflections" (Vienna, February 2023), and at the Petro Jacyk Non-Resident Fellows seminar (online, March 2023). I am grateful to the participants of both events for their useful questions and comments. The revised article extends chronologically up to October 2023. I am grateful to the Petro Jacyk Program for the study of Ukraine for supporting this research project. I also express my gratitude to the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh for providing me sanctuary during the war, as well as to the Ecclesiastical History Society, the British Academy, and the Council for At-Risk Academics for supporting my research stay in the United Kingdom. Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to a peer reviewer whose feedback helped me to improve this paper.

1. Introduction

Since the start of the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), which is a Byzantine-rite Church in union with Rome, has been addressing the challenges of the war on both theoretical and practical levels. On the very first day of the full-scale invasion, the head of the UGCC, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, declared defending one's land, people and state a "natural right and sacred duty."² Between 25 February 2022 and 24 February 2023, the Church leader appealed to the public with daily video-messages on YouTube, switching after a year to weekly addresses.³ These videos were published by different media outlets, including the Ukrainian Catholic Crisis Media Center, the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, and Zhyve TV. In a short video, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav would usually summarize the events of the previous day and then touch upon some important question, be they of theological or socio-political significance. Many of these addresses were provided with English subtitles, or a transcript. Due to translations of the video-messages into English and other languages, the recordings reached a much broader audience than the Ukrainian Greek Catholics in Ukraine.

This article focuses on the official responses of the UGCC to the Russo-Ukrainian war since 24 February 2022, as expressed by the head of the Church and the Synod of Bishops. First, the study analyses how the Greek Catholic Church views the current war and fulfils her role during the wartime. Second, the article looks at how the UGCC, as a part of the Catholic Church, responds to the Vatican's initiatives. Third, it examines the position of the head of the UGCC in the recent debates on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC).

2. The Response of Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk to the Full-Scale Invasion

In the context of the current Russo-Ukrainian war, the head of the UGCC paid particular attention to the theological aspects of just war.⁴ Thus, in his

2 Appeal of His Beatitude Sviatoslav on Outbreak of War (24 February 2022). URL: https://archives.ugcc.ua/en/articles/appeal_of_his_beatitude_sviatoslav_on_outbreak_of_war_95772.html. All internet links in this article were last accessed on 5 June 2024.

3 As of April 2024, the weekly addresses still appear on the YouTube channel of Zhyve TV.

4 For an overview of just war and just peace approaches in the Catholic teaching, see: Pavlo Smytsnyuk, *The Holy See Confronts the War in Ukraine: Between Just War The-*

video-message on 22 August 2022, the Major Archbishop emphasized that, according to the teaching of the Church, “any aggressive war is inherently immoral,” but, once the war started, “the leaders of states, particularly those that have been attacked, have the right and duty to defend their country.”⁵ In particular, a military response is justified if, first, the damage caused is “long-lasting, severe, and indisputable,” second, the alternative ways to stop the war “have proved impossible or unsuccessful,” third, victory is possible, and, finally, the use of arms would not lead to worse consequences than those to be averted.⁶ Since even a just war can pose moral challenges, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav warned against the possible abuse of power in the army. In particular, the Church leader emphasized that violations of human rights and international humanitarian law cannot be justified, even if they result from “orders of management.”⁷

As follows from Major Archbishop Sviatoslav’s video-messages, he usually uses the term “war” to describe the full-scale invasion and is clear about Russia as its instigator. The head of the UGCC frequently defines this war as unjust and sacrilegious, highlighting its aggressive character. He, for example, spoke of the “patriotic war against the Russian aggressor,”⁸ the “murderous Russian aggression against our people,”⁹ the “great, unjust, senseless, and sacrilegious war,”¹⁰ as well as the “unequal, bloody battle with the Russian aggressor.”¹¹ In some cases, more emotional designations, as, for example, “this madness”¹² or “this bloodshed,”¹³ were used. In the video-message from 18 October 2022,

ory and Nonviolence, in: *ET Studies – Journal of the European Society for Catholic Theology* 14.1 (2023) 3–24. For different approaches in the just war tradition, from Cicero to John Paul II, see: Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven/ William A. Barbieri (eds.), *From Just War to Modern Peace Ethics*, Berlin – Boston 2012.

5 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav. August 22nd, 180 Day of the War (22 August 2022). URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JAcJ4sxFko>. Since the addresses quoted in this article can be found on YouTube, usually by typing “Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav”, in the following references only a date of the video-message will be provided. Moreover, the transcripts of the video-messages are now available in print: His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, *Україна стоїть! Україна бореться! Україна молиться!* [Ukraine is standing! Ukraine is fighting! Ukraine prays!], Kyiv 2024.

6 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (22 August 2022).

7 Ibidem.

8 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (1 April 2022).

9 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (2 April 2022).

10 Video-message of his Beatitude Sviatoslav (5 August 2022).

11 Video-message of his Beatitude Sviatoslav (17 August 2022).

12 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (8 March 2022).

13 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (14 March 2022).

Major Archbishop Sviatoslav compared the Russo-Ukrainian war to the battle of David against Goliath, defining it as an “unequal but indomitable battle.”¹⁴

On the one hand, the Church leader portrays Ukraine as an “innocent victim,” while presenting Russia as a threat to the global order. Thus, on 28 March 2022, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav appealed to the world leaders, among others, with the following words: “Make your choice. Stand on the side of the innocent victims of unjust aggression of someone who planned to dictate their new rules not only for Ukraine but also for the whole world and threatens to begin a third World War.”¹⁵ On the other hand, by portraying Ukraine as a defender of the whole world, the head of the UGCC emphasizes the country’s agency, as in his appeal on 26 May 2022: “Today, we must do everything we can to ensure that Russia’s war crimes do not spread throughout the world. And today Ukraine is at the forefront of this struggle. We are stopping this evil.”¹⁶

The above reference to “evil” reveals a more general tendency to depict the current war not only as a geopolitical conflict, but also as a spiritual struggle. Thus, in his appeal on 14 March 2022, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav encouraged “everyone to pray and fast in order to cast out the evil spirit of war in Ukraine.”¹⁷ In turn, on 1 April 2022, the Church leader explicitly defined this war as a “spiritual struggle with the devil and his servants.”¹⁸ For this reason, the UGCC places a significant emphasis on prayer, fasting, and works of mercy.

It should be noted that many war-related initiatives (for example, relevant litanies in the liturgy, continuous fasting in the eparchies, or singing “Prayer for Ukraine” (*Bozhe Velykyi Iedynyi*) after the liturgy) were introduced after the war started in 2014. However, the war-related initiatives have amplified since 24 February 2022. To illustrate this, the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC designated 2 April 2022 as the all-Church day of prayer for the victims of war.¹⁹ In addition, the Greek Catholic bishops declared the first anniversary of the full-scale invasion, i. e. 24 February 2023, a day of fasting, prayer, and works of mercy.²⁰

14 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (18 October 2022).

15 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (28 March 2022).

16 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (26 May 2022).

17 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (14 March 2022).

18 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (1 April 2022).

19 Cf. Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (2 April 2022).

20 Cf. The UGCC Declared a Solemn Day of Fasting, Prayer, and Almsgiving (24 February 2023). URL: <https://ugcc.ua/en/data/the-ugcc-declared-a-solemn-day-of-fasting-prayer-and-alms-giving-220/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CLet%20this%20day%20be%20an,but%20also%20works%20of%20mercy>.

The official discourse of the UGCC since the start of the full-scale invasion has also focused on the risks of hatred and dehumanization. In his appeal from 24 February 2022, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav described Ukrainians as a “peaceful nation that loves children of all nations with Christian love.”²¹ In turn, in his video-message on 1 March 2022, the Church leader emphasized: “We see that it is not hatred but love that wins. Love creates heroes, and hatred creates criminals.”²² In a similar vein, the post-synodal epistle of the Greek Catholic bishops entitled “Overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21) (15 July 2022) warned against hatred: “Love creates heroes, and hatred creates criminals. The cruelty of war dehumanises, so we, as a defending nation and the Church, which unites people in the family of Christ, must make every effort to preserve our dignity and humanity, and in no way stoop to the inhumanity and atrocities of the aggressor.”²³

Already at the beginning of the war, on the Sunday of Forgiveness, which precedes Lent in the Eastern Churches, the head of the UGCC reminded the viewers about the need to forgive: “It is difficult to speak of forgiveness in the midst of war. It is difficult to speak of forgiveness when looking into the eyes of an enemy who has no moral framework and is killing the peaceful population. But forgiveness is the secret to victory.”²⁴

At the same time, the anti-Russian sentiment, sparked by the war, helped to resolve some of the long-standing issues in the church. For example, the debates about the transfer to the new calendar went on within Greek Catholic circles for more than a century. Thus, in 1916, Bishop Hryhorii Khomyshyn even introduced the Gregorian calendar in the Stanyslaviv Eparchy.²⁵ However, in 1917, upon his return to Galicia from the Russian exile, Metropolitan Shep-

21 Appeal of His Beatitude Sviatoslav on Outbreak of War.

22 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (1 March 2022).

23 This is my translation (K.B.), see in the original: “Перемагай зло добром!” (Рим. 12, 21). Послання Синоду Єпископів УГКЦ 2022 року [“Overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). Pastoral Letter of the 2022 Synod of Bishops of the UGCC”] (15 July 2022). URL: <https://docs.ugcc.ua/1591/>.

24 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (6 March 2022).

25 Cf. the protocol of the March 1916 meeting of the General Ukrainian Council (*Zahal'na Ukrain's'ka Rada*, ZUR). As follows from the protocol, ZUR strongly opposed the bishop's innovation. Cf. Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України (ЦДАВО України) [Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (TsDAVO of Ukraine)], f. 3807, op. 2, spr. 3, ark. 214.

tytsky reverted this change.²⁶ Following the Soviet ban on the UGCC during the post-war period, the calendar reform was not a priority in the underground, but the debates in the diaspora continued. As highlighted by Andrew Sorokowski, the Gregorian calendar was adopted by most Ukrainian parishes in the USA back in the 1960s.²⁷

Despite the longevity of the problem, the Church leadership seemed to prefer accommodating different approaches rather than introducing a new calendar. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, however, the impetus to switch to the new calendar came from below. According to Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, the surveys in the Greek Catholic parishes have demonstrated that over 90 % of people supported the calendar reform.²⁸ Thus, on 1–2 February 2023, the Synod of Bishops of the UGCC in Ukraine voted for the introduction of the new liturgical calendar with the beginning of the new church year on 1 September 2023.²⁹ The change in the dates affects only Christmas and other fixed feasts, while the Paschal Cycle remains unchanged.³⁰

Similarly, a popular wish to abandon the Julian calendar in connection to the ongoing war was felt by the leadership of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU).³¹ Thus, on 18 October 2022, the Holy Synod of the OCU allowed certain church communities that wished to celebrate Christmas on 25 December 2022 to do so.³² Then, on 2 February 2023, the Holy Synod allowed 103 parishes of the OCU to switch to the “new Julian” calendar.³³ Finally, on 24 May 2023,

26 Cf. Andrew D. Sorokowski, *The Greek Catholic Parish Clergy in Galicia, 1900–1939*. Ph. D. thesis at the University of London School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1991, 212–214.

27 Cf. УГКЦ міжвоєнного періоду [UGCC of the Interwar Period] (10 January 2016). URL: <https://zbruc.eu/node/46036>. This publication summarizes the discussion points of the seminar on the Greek Catholic Church during the inter-war period, which was held on 27 October 2015 at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv.

28 Cf. Historical Decision: the UGCC in Ukraine Switches to a New Calendar (6 February 2023). URL: <https://ugcc.ua/en/data/historical-decision-the-ugcc-in-ukraine-switches-to-a-new-calendar-232/>.

29 Cf. Декрет проголошення переходу УГКЦ на новий стиль для нерухомих свят [Decree Proclaiming the Transition of the UGCC to a New Style for Fixed Feasts] (9 February 2023). URL: <https://docs.ugcc.ua/1639/>.

30 Cf. *ibidem*.

31 Cf. Про врегулювання календарного питання в Православній Церкві України [On the Resolution of the Calendar Issue in the Orthodox Church of Ukraine] (24 May 2023). URL: <https://www.pomisna.info/uk/document-post/202245/>.

32 Cf. *ibidem*.

33 Cf. *ibidem*.

the Bishops' Council of the OCU announced the transfer to the new calendar, starting with 1 September 2023.³⁴

Thus, two Ukrainian Churches of Kyiv tradition, the UGCC and the OCU, switched to the new calendar in September 2023. In both cases, the liturgical reform appeared to be democratic, as it corresponded with the wishes of believers.

3. The War, the UGCC, and the Vatican

The Roman Pontiff has paid significant attention to the Russo-Ukrainian war in his speeches and actions.³⁵ Pope Francis declared Ash Wednesday on 2 March 2022 a day of prayer and fasting.³⁶ On 25 March 2022, the Pontiff consecrated Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Moreover, since the start of the full-scale invasion, the Vatican has played a pivotal role in the release of prisoners of war.³⁷ Despite being a proponent of the just peace rather than the just war approach, Pope Francis recognizes Ukraine's right to protect itself.³⁸

Yet some of the Pope's statements and initiatives stirred the public opinion in Ukraine. The first serious outcry of public dismay happened before Easter 2022, soon after the de-occupation of Bucha, when news spread that two female friends, a Ukrainian and a Russian, were to carry a cross during the Way of the Cross on Good Friday in Rome's Colosseum. The critique was voiced by

34 Cf. *ibidem*.

35 According to an estimate by the Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops, Pope Francis voiced solidarity with the people of Ukraine at least 227 times. Cf. Nicole Winfield, *Ukraine's Catholic Bishops Tell Pope that His Praise for Russia's Imperial Past 'Pained' Ukrainians* (6 September 2023). URL: <https://apnews.com/article/pope-russia-ukraine-war-9d67a223d69e070041a5fa0c1a5f6a82>.

36 Cf. *Pope Announces 2 March as Day of Prayer and Fasting for Ukraine* (23 February 2022). URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-02/pope-announces-2-march-as-day-of-prayer-and-fasting-for-ukraine.html>. As the publication date suggests, the Pope's intention preceded the start of the full-scale invasion, so the initial idea was to fast in order to avert the war.

37 Cf. Mykola Pidveziany/Mykhailo Hlukhovs'kyi/Stanslav Hruzdiev, *На чиєму боці Ватикан? Велике інтерв'ю з предстоятелем УГКЦ Святославом [Whose Side is the Vatican On? A Long Interview with the Head of the UGCC Sviatoslav]* (23 June 2023). URL: <https://glavcom.ua/longreads/na-chijemu-botsi-vatikan-velike-intervju-z-predstojatelem-uhkts-svjatoslavom-936149.html?fbclid=IwAR2ocs6Wdx-DQVVyP4JotPF4UVIBvElVxurh28WfLlo-MvEf9KBQl9KU8HA>.

38 Cf. Thomas M. Németh, *Pope Francis and Russia's War Against Ukraine*, in: *Studia UBB Theol. Cath. Lat.*, LXVIII, 1 (2023) 92–109, here: 97; Smytsnyuk, *The Holy See Confronts the War in Ukraine*, 7, 17.

Ukraine's Ambassador to the Holy See, Andrii Yurash, and some well-known public opinion leaders, who generally agreed that the perpetrator and the victim could not go side by side, at least not before the former repented of their crimes.³⁹ Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk's reaction was also negative. Thus, the head of the UGCC called this initiative "untimely" and "ambiguous," while describing the text of the meditation as "incoherent and even offensive."⁴⁰ Eventually, even though the Vatican proceeded with the initial plan, the text of the meditation was replaced by a call to keep silence while both women were holding a cross.⁴¹

As Major Archbishop Sviatoslav explained in his interview to *Novoie Vremia* on 21 April 2022, the Vatican wishes to stay neutral in order to enable a dialogue between Ukrainians and Russians in the future.⁴² According to the head of the UGCC, the idea of reconciliation is Christian at its core and should not be dismissed; however, justice should come first.⁴³

Another milestone was 24 August 2022, when, during the general audience, the Pope referred to the death of 29-year old Darya Dugina, a daughter of the Russian ideologist Alexandr Dugin, in a car accident near Moscow with the following words: "The innocent pay for war, the innocent!"⁴⁴ Given the Dugins'

39 Cf. Myroslav Liskovych, Хресна хода в Римі: спочатку покаяння, прощення і лише тоді – примирення [The Cross Procession in Rome: First Repentance, Forgiveness and Only Then Reconciliation] (13 April 2022). URL: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3456669-hresna-hoda-v-rimi-spocatku-pokaanna-prosenna-i-lise-todi-primirena.html>. This publication quotes Ukrainian opinion makers, including philosophers and historians, on the inadmissibility of equating a perpetrator and a victim.

40 Philip Pullella, Text at Pope's Good Friday Service Scrapped After Ukrainian Protest (16 April 2022). URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/text-popes-good-friday-service-scrapped-after-ukrainian-protest-2022-04-15/>.

41 Cf. Vatican Adapts Good Friday Way of The Cross After Outcry in Ukraine (16 April 2022). URL: <https://ewtn.co.uk/article-vatican-adapts-good-friday-way-of-the-cross-after-outcry-in-ukraine/>.

42 Cf. Natalia Rop, "Ми не можемо робити жести примирення". Глава УГКЦ – про поведінку Ватикану, священика-героя зі Славутича та три зони роботи церкви на війні ["We Cannot Make Gestures of Reconciliation." Head of the UGCC Speaks about the Vatican's Behaviour, a Heroic Priest from Slavutych and Three Areas of the Church's Work in War] (21 April 2022). URL: <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/politics/glava-ugkc-pro-rosiyanku-y-ukrajinku-u-vatikani-ta-svyashchenika-geroya-zi-slavuticha-novini-ukrajini-50235527.html>.

43 Cf. *ibidem*.

44 Pope Prays for War Victims as Ukraine Conflict Marks Six Months (24 August 2022). URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-08/pope-prays-for-war-victims-as-ukraine-conflict-marks-six-months.html>.

support of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the Pontiff's statement evoked a negative reaction in Ukraine, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.⁴⁵ In his letter to the Pope, Denys Koliada mentioned that the Pontiff's statement on Dugina came as a heavy blow to Ukrainians, especially given its timing, namely Ukraine's Independence Day. The Pope answered Koliada that the Italian newspaper he had seen before referred to Darya Dugina as "the innocent victim of war" and that he was unaware of Dugina being a propagandist herself.⁴⁶ About a week later, on 30 August 2022, in response to the above critique, the Vatican issued a communiqué emphasizing that the Pope had consistently condemned the Russian invasion as "morally unjust, unacceptable, barbaric, senseless, repugnant and sacrilegious."⁴⁷

The next milestone was 6 November 2022, when, in the interview to the Bahrain News Agency on his flight from Bahrain, Pope Francis mentioned his appreciation of Russian humanism: "I prefer to think of it this way because I have high esteem for the Russian people, for Russian humanism. Just think of Dostoevsky, who to this day inspires us, inspires Christians to think of Christianity."⁴⁸

During his meeting with the Pope on 7 November 2022, the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics informed Pope Francis that many Ukrainians resented his statement on Dostoevsky. Major Archbishop Sviatoslav also asked the Pontiff to write a letter to the Ukrainians. On 24 November 2022, Pope Francis issued the requested letter, which, among other things, described Ukrainians as "a noble people of martyrs."⁴⁹

45 Cf. У зв'язку з висловлюваннями Папи Франциска до МЗС України був запрошений Апостольський Нунцій в Україні [In Connection with the Statements of Pope Francis, the Apostolic Nuncio in Ukraine Was Invited to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine] (25 August 2022). URL: <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/u-zvyazku-z-vislovlyuvannyami-papi-franciska-do-mzs-ukrayini-buv-zaproshenij-apostolskij-nuncij-v-ukrayini>.

46 Cf. Yuriy Panchenko, Таємна допомога Папи Римського. Що не помітила Україна за скандальними заявами понтифіка [The Pope's Secret Help. What Ukraine Failed to Notice Behind the Pontiff's Scandalous Statements] (25 November 2022). URL: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2022/11/25/7151320/>.

47 Holy See Communiqué (30 August 2022). URL: <https://press.vatican.va/content/sala-stampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/08/30/220830a.html>.

48 Pope Francis: "Three World Wars in One Century: Be Pacifists!" (6 November 2022). URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-11/pope-flight-three-wars-century-pacifist-interview-bahrain.html>.

49 Cf. Pope Francis, Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of Ukraine Nine Months After the Outbreak of the War (24 November 2022). URL: <https://www.vatican>.

When asked in an interview to *Glavkom* in June 2023⁵⁰ about the prospect of Greek Catholics leaving the Church as a result of the Pope's statements, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav underlined the ecclesiastic nature of the UGCC's relation to Rome: "We are Catholics not because Francis is the Pope; we are Catholics not because the Pope speaks rightly or wrongly on international issues. We are Catholics because we believe that the Apostle Peter in the College of Apostles and the successors of the Apostle Peter have some special role in the Church."⁵¹ Yet the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics acknowledged that "the Pope does not fully understand the pain of Ukraine, and Ukraine does not understand the Pope."⁵²

About two months later, this lack of common ground became apparent again. Thus, during a teleconference on 25 August 2023, Pope Francis addressed the Catholic youth in Saint Petersburg as "heirs of great Russia: the great Russia of saints and rulers, the great Russia of Peter I and Catherine II – that empire, great, enlightened, of great culture and great humanity."⁵³ In response to the Pontiff's statement, on 28 August 2023, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav noted "a danger that these words could be taken as supporting the very nationalism and imperialism that has caused the war in Ukraine today."⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the head of the UGCC expressed readiness to "await a clarification of this situation from the Holy See."⁵⁵ The clarification that followed warned against the misinterpretation of the Pope's words. In particular, in the press release from 28 August 2023, the Apostolic Nunciature in Ukraine stated that "Pope Francis has never endorsed imperialistic notions," pointing to the Pontiff's anti-impe-

[va/content/francesco/en/letters/2022/documents/20221124-lettera-popolo-ucraino.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2022/documents/20221124-lettera-popolo-ucraino.html).

50 Cf. Pidveziany, На чиєму боці Ватикан?

51 This is my translation (K. B.), see in the original: Pidveziany, На чиєму боці Ватикан?

52 This is my translation (K. B.), see in the original: Ibidem.

53 Jonathan Luxmoore, 'Confusion and Pain' over Pope's 'Imperialist' Message to Russian Youth (31 August 2023). URL: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/1-september/news/world/confusion-and-pain-over-pope-s-imperialist-message-to-russian-youth#:~:text=In%20his%20address%2C%20Pope%20Francis,of%20the%20seeds%20of%20reconciliation%E2%80%9D>.

54 Head of the UGCC Responds to Controversy Over Pope Francis' Comments During the Meeting with Catholic Youth in Russia (28 August 2023). URL: <https://ugcc.ua/en/data/head-of-the-ugcc-responds-to-controversy-over-pope-francis-comments-during-the-meeting-with-catholic-youth-in-russia-578/>.

55 Ibidem.

rial and anti-colonial stance.⁵⁶ In turn, on 29 August 2023, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni stated that Pope Francis did not mean to promote imperialism.⁵⁷

Thus, the head of the UGCC clearly articulated his position on those occasions when the Pontiff's words or initiatives evoked negative responses in Ukraine. While speculations about the Greek Catholics leaving the Catholic Church *en masse* because of the Pope's public statements did not materialise, the UGCC faces the challenge of having to navigate two important cornerstones of her identity, being Ukrainian and being Catholic. On the one hand, as Major Archbishop Sviatoslav argued in his address on 8 March 2022, "the Church is and will be with her people."⁵⁸ On the other hand, the UGCC's martyrdom in the 20th century followed, among other things, from the refusal of the Greek Catholic hierarchy and many priests to repudiate the Pope. Thus, the role of the UGCC as a mediator between the Ukrainians and the Pope is particularly important.

4. The Head of the UGCC on the UOC

As noted by Thomas Németh, virtually all religious denominations in Ukraine unequivocally condemned the Russian full-scale invasion.⁵⁹ More complicated is the situation with the Moscow-affiliated UOC, which arguably remains the largest church in Ukraine in terms of the number of parishes. Even though this Church formally severed its ties with the Moscow Patriarchate in May 2022, neither the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) nor other Orthodox Churches consider the UOC autonomous.⁶⁰ Moreover some of the UOC priests collaborated with the Russian occupation forces. Thus, the Ukrainian authorities and a significant segment of the Ukrainian population view the UOC as a threat to national security. On 29 March 2023, the Ukrainian state terminated the UOC's

56 Press Release from the Apostolic Nunciature in Ukraine (28 August 2023). URL: <https://nunciaturekyiv.org/2023/08/28/press-release-from-the-apostolic-nunciature-in-ukraine/>.

57 Cf. Philip Pulella, Pope Did not Aim to Glorify Imperialism in Remarks on Russian Tsars – Vatican (29 August 2023). URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pope-had-no-intention-glorify-russian-imperialism-vatican-2023-08-29/>.

58 Video-message of His Beatitude Sviatoslav (8 March 2022).

59 Cf. Thomas M. Németh, *Der Krieg gegen die Ukraine und die Kirchen. Anfragen an die Theologie*, *Limina* 6.1 (2023) 234–255, here: 237.

60 Cf. *ibidem*.

lease agreement in regard to Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.⁶¹ In turn, on 19 October 2023, the Ukrainian parliament voted for the ban of religious organizations associated with the Russian Federation, with 267 votes supporting the draft law No. 8371 in the first reading.⁶²

In his interview to *Ukrainska pravda* (January 2023), Major Archbishop Sviatoslav recognized the right of the Ukrainian state to prosecute individuals who present a threat to its security, regardless of their religious affiliation. At that time, however, the head of the UGCC did not support the idea of banning the UOC.⁶³ The Major Archbishop's position can be better understood in the light of the UGCC's recent history. In the same interview, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav mentioned "historically difficult" relations between the UGCC and the ROC, referring to the former's merger with the latter at the L'viv pseudo-council (1946).⁶⁴ Then, in the aftermath of the Second World War, during which the Soviet Union annexed Western Ukraine, the Soviet regime liquidated the UGCC through its allegedly voluntary "reunion" with Russian Orthodoxy. In this context, support of the UOC's prohibition by the head of the UGCC may have appeared as originating from a historically grounded resentment of the Greek Catholics towards the Moscow Patriarchate. Yet Major Archbishop Sviatoslav's main argument evolves around the eventual futility of state bans on ecclesiastic institutions, with the UGCC being a bright example: "We survived the underground. Moreover, the very fact that we were a martyred church that did not become a church collaborating with the Soviet authorities saved our moral authority. It is important to understand that the prohibition of a church does not mean the cessation of her existence."⁶⁵ Also, the head of the UGCC

61 Cf. Alya Shandra, Passions in the Lavra: Why the Ukrainian State Broke Its Patience with the Moscow-Aligned Orthodox Church (2 April 2023). URL: <https://euromaidanpress.com/2023/04/02/passions-in-the-kyiv-pechersk-lavra-why-the-ukrainian-state-broke-its-patience-for-the-moscow-patriarchate-aligned-orthodox-church/>.

62 Cf. Проект Закону про внесення змін до деяких законів України щодо діяльності в Україні релігійних організацій [Draft Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine on the Activities of Religious Organisations in Ukraine] (19 January 2023). URL: <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/41219>.

63 Cf. Roman Kravets'/Nazariy Mazyliuk, Чи гріх бажати смерті Путіну? Інтерв'ю з главою УГКЦ Святославом Шевчуком [Is it a Sin to Wish Putin Death? Interview with the Head of the UGCC Sviatoslav Shevchuk] (19 January 2023). URL: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2023/01/19/7385485/>.

64 Cf. *ibidem*.

65 This is my translation (K. B.), see in the original: *Ibidem*.

voiced his concern that the ban of the UOC would “give this church the palm of martyrdom.”⁶⁶

The memory of the contemporary UGCC builds upon the martyrdom of those Greek Catholics who fell victim to the communist regime, both during WWII and the underground period. During the post-war period, many Greek Catholic hierarchs and priests served sentences for “treason against the Motherland,” to use the wording of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR. In other words, the Soviet regime used political charges to arrest the opponents of “reunion” and to ban the entire religious institution.

While the majority of the Greek Catholic priests and, consequently, their parishes, “reunited” with the ROC back in 1945–1946, this process was rather formal. Despite the attempts of both the state and the Orthodox hierarchy to eradicate the “remnants of Uniatism” in church liturgy and interior, the adherence to the Greek Catholic tradition in the “reunited” parishes persisted for decades. Moreover, as demonstrated by Natalia Shlikhta, the incorporation of the UGCC into the Moscow Patriarchate led to an unintended result, namely the Ukrainization of the Ukrainian Exarchate of the ROC.⁶⁷

Overall, despite the best efforts of the Soviet regime to annihilate the UGCC, the latter not only survived several decades of communist rule but also re-emerged from the underground, moved its seat to Kyiv (2005) and became one of the most numerous and influential Churches in post-Soviet Ukraine. The UGCC’s experience under the Soviets thus provides at least three important points to consider. First, banning the UOC based on political charges against some clergy may invoke undesired parallels with the post-war abolition of the UGCC. Second, a liquidation of the Church by the state may lead to the opposite result, rendering the aura of martyrdom to the UOC. Third, the transfer of the UOC priests to the OCU, if forced, would hardly change genuine religious and political views of either clergy or parishioners of the Church affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate.

However, in April 2023, the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations issued a statement which deemed it inadmissible for any organization with a direction centre in the Russian Federation, including religious

66 This is my translation (K. B.), see in the original: *Ibidem*.

67 Cf. Natalia Shlikhta, *Церква тих, хто вижив. Радянська Україна, середина 1940-х – початок 1970-х рр.* [The Church of Those Who Survived. Soviet Ukraine, Mid-1940s–Early 1970s], Kharkiv 2011.

ones, to operate in the territory of Ukraine.⁶⁸ Since the UGCC has a membership in the Council, it thus expressed solidarity with other Council members, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, in condemning Russia's instrumentalization of religion.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that since the start of the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, the UGCC has unequivocally sided with Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian war. The official discourse of the UGCC describes the current hostilities as Russia's war on Ukraine, or, more abstractly, as a struggle of evil and good. The Greek Catholic hierarchs call for prayer, fasting, and works of mercy as an effective means to overcome evil. While Ukraine's struggle is recognized as a just war, the believers are warned against hatred and the dehumanising effects of war.

Whereas some of the Pope's statements caused the dismay of many Ukrainians, the head of the UGCC played the role of a mediator between the Pope and the Ukrainians, explaining the intricacies of the Vatican diplomacy to fellow Ukrainians and conveying the latter's discontent to the Pope. In particular, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav's visit to Rome in November 2022 resulted in Pope Francis' letter of support to the Ukrainian people. As for the debates over the expediency of the UOC's ban in Ukraine, the head of the UGCC warned against the unintended consequences that the Church's liquidation could bring about.

Overall, the UGCC's distinctly Ukrainian character and its experience of martyrdom under communism allow the Church leadership to communicate from a position of moral authority, not only to Greek Catholics but also to Ukrainians at large.

68 Cf. The Council of Churches Condemns Russia's Abuse of Religious Sentiments in Its Aggressive and Unjust War Against Ukraine (12 April 2023). URL: <https://vrciro.org.ua/en/events/rada-tserkov-zasudzhue-zlovzhivannya-rosiyskoyu-federatsieyu-religynimi-pochuttyami-v-agresivniy-i-nespravedliviy-viyini-proti-ukraini>.